

8th CONFERENCE ON
MEDIA DEVELOPMENT IN MYANMAR

MEDIA AND ELECTIONS IN MYANMAR

24th - 28th August 2020 |

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ACRONYMS

(AA)	Arakan Army
(ANFREL)	Asian Network for Free Elections
(BNI)	Burma News International
(CEO)	Chief Executive Officer
(DVB)	Democratic Voice of Burma
(IFES)	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
(IMS)	International Media Support
(INGO)	International Non-Governmental Organizations
(JICA)	Japan International Cooperation Agency
(KIA)	Kachin Independence Army
(MoU)	Memorandum of Understanding
(MOI)	Ministry of Information
(MPC)	Myanmar Press Council
(MRTV)	Myanmar Radio and Television
(NGO)	Non-Governmental Organizations
(SB)	Special Branch
(SOP)	Standard Operating Procedure
(UEC)	Union Election Commission
(UNESCO)	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



8th Myanmar Media Development Conference in Nay Pyi Taw

1. HIGHLIGHTS OF 8TH MEDIA DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

The 8th Media Conference on Myanmar Media Development took place from 24th to 28th August 2020 amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The theme of this year's conference is "Media and elections in Myanmar" to reflect the essentiality and the role of the media in elections and focus solely on the forthcoming general election in Myanmar 2020.

Each session of the conference was attended by 100 participants, journalists, civil society organizations, and concerned citizens virtually through Zoom, an online communication platform. There were more than 1,000 viewers on the Facebook live stream on both the Media Development's Facebook page and the Myanmar Press Council's Facebook page as well as the Facebook page of the Ministry of Information.

Unlike the previous conferences, the 8th Media Development Conference was held uniquely in

circumstances surrounded by many challenges. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the majority of the discussions shifted to digital communication platforms as social presence and face-to-face communication are no options.

Even in the times of Covid-19 pandemic outbreak in the country, the opening session was successfully organized in a hybrid combination of online platform and social presence wherein preventative measures were well arranged. The opening session was attended by 70 attendants in person. Union level Ministers, Union level high officials from all government institutions as well as senior and high level representatives of other stakeholders were present socially, gave speeches and actively participated in the opening session and the first panel discussion of the conference.

The role of Institutions, especially the Union Election Commissions, the Myanmar Police

Forces, and the Press Council in safeguarding the safety of Journalists while covering the forthcoming election, and the rights to access information were the dominant discussion points of the conference. There were insightful discussions and questions on how well the institutions are prepared to ensure that the election is free, fair and how well the media and other civil society organizations could reinforce, monitor and inform the voters to make informed decisions and cast their votes.

Safety for Journalists was one of the most dominant issues discussed insightfully and constructively. The discussions stressed the role of the Myanmar Police Force and the Press Council in protecting journalists while doing their duties. The presence of a representative from the Myanmar Police force contributed to a progressive discussion and the opportunity to raise journalists' concerns on safety through productive discussion. Lessons learned from the

 www.facebook.com/Myanmarmediadev

 www.facebook.com/myanmarpresscouncil

 www.facebook.com/MOIWebportalMyanmar/

Philippines were shared. The discussions acknowledged the essentiality of coordination among stakeholders and recommended forming a joint task force to tackle the safety issues faced by Myanmar journalists.

Self-regulation of media and practicing ethical journalism was another hot issue discussed in the conference. The rise of unregistered and unethical so-called online media is a threat to practicing ethical journalism in covering the elections. Some other challenges are observed that due to the financial instability of the mainstream media industry and the Covid-19 pandemic, the mainstream media which practice ethical journalism might not be able to cover the upcoming election fully. Lessons learned from Japan and Indonesia regarding media self-regulation in covering elections were discussed. On the positive side, there are hopes

that journalists would be more ethical in reporting the upcoming election as the impact of capacity building training on election reporting and the experiences they gained from covering the previous elections.

The paradigm shift of news and information consumption in Myanmar, the threat of electoral misinformation, disinformation and hate speech led to heated discussions at the conference as the number of social media users has jumped three times higher compared to 2015 when the last election was held and it eventually became the source of information for most of the users. A senior representative of Facebook explained that the Myanmar Facebook team is well prepared and makes sure that there would be no national and international interference in the election through their platform, countering disinformation and hate speech, and providing transparency about political advertisement on their platform. The lessons learned from Sri Lanka where a parliamentary election was held successfully, and how they countered misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech during the election were shared through vibrant discussions.

The challenges faced by regional and ethnic journalists in terms of financial resources, safety, and technology were brought up in the discussions. Ethnic journalists from currently active armed conflict areas discussed, shared the challenges based on their experiences in the past elections and the current ground situation. The discussions reflected the ground situation, especially in Rakhine State where the second wave of Covid-19 surged and clashes between the Arakan Army and the military regularly occur, and safety is the most concerning issue in the state. The Internet cut in 7 Townships of Rakhine state is one of the biggest challenges for both journalists and voters in the Rakhine State to inform and to get informed.

This report aims to summarize and capture the core discussions of the panellists and the participants throughout the five-day-long conference.

2. OPENING SESSION

KEYNOTE SPEECH:

- **Mr. Moez Chakchouk**
Assistant Director-General
Communication and Information Sector,
UNESCO

Mr. Moez Chakchouk

In his keynote speech, Mr. Moez Chakchouk stressed four core points for consideration, standards and practices based on the role of news media during elections anchored in two relevant and interlinked provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human rights, article 19 on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and article 21 on the right to suffrage.

OPENING REMARKS:

- **H.E. U Hla Thein**
Chairman of Union Election Commission
- **H.E. Dr. Pe Myint**
Union Minister of Information
- **U Ohn Kyaing**
Chairman of Myanmar Press Council
- **H.E. Mr. John Nielsen**
Ambassador of Denmark

The first point for consideration is “The Role of The Media During Elections.” He pointed out the critical role of the media, across all platforms, in providing voters with information that will enable them in making informed choices or decisions.

He also stressed the fact that a free, independent, pluralist and professional media sector is



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key to providing the necessary level playing field, as the growing disinformation across media, especially social media and social messaging platforms have added to the complexity of the role of media in providing voter's education and information.

He also pointed out that professional media are at the front row in addressing these challenges, by debunking disinformation, and by stimulating citizens' critical thinking. Some good practices in this regard are fact-checking, and fostering media and information literacy as a core competence for citizens to engage in the democratic life. He acknowledged the commendable work of the Myanmar Press Council in producing Guidelines for Media During Elections.

The second consideration he mentioned in his keynote speech is "The Politics of Hate Speech". Both traditional and social media can become powerful amplifiers of hate speech, racism, and violent extremism in the reporting campaigns and debates. Media professionalism is key in times of election, so as not to "add fuel" to an emotionally (and politically)-charged setting,

particularly in contexts with a history of violence. He also highlighted the vital role of media self-regulation in that regard, the importance of journalists associations or unions to craft and implement professional standards through code of ethics and mechanisms such as independent press councils.

"The safety of Journalists" was the third consideration point of the keynote speech. He mentioned that the safety and protection of journalists remain vital and is an overriding concern of UNESCO, the lead UN body mandated to coordinate the UN Plan of Action on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity. The last and fourth point of consideration mentioned in the keynote speech is "Media and Information Literacy". "To empower citizens to navigate the information landscapes in times of election Media and information literacy (MIL) is another important way," he stressed. " I am aware that there is a growing, yet strong, media and information literacy constituency in Myanmar consisting of individuals and groups from government, media, civil society organizations, and international agencies," he said.

H.E. U Hla Thein



Giving opening remarks on behalf of the Union Election Commissions of Myanmar, H.E. U Hla Thein said that it has been announced that the general election in Myanmar will be held on November 8 and the Election Commission promised that the election will meet five core principles, Free, Fair, Transparent, Credible and in line with the will of the voters. “ We already made promises that the election will meet the will and expectation of the people,” he said.

He also said that voter’s education-related activities are very important in the electoral period.

The Election Commission already made provisions on the election by law, rules and regulation, electoral systems, and guidelines for the campaign period. The election will be free and fair only when the by-laws, rules, and regulations are abided by, and thus the election commission takes a serious priority.

The Code of Conduct for political parties has also been formulated together with political parties through consultation. To promote transparency the commission hosted round table discussions and questions and answers programs with MRTV.

He also mentioned that the commission organized a press relation working group and press conferences are held bi-weekly. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic meetings with the press had to be canceled. However, the educational program on Radio and MRTV continued, and through its website and Facebook, the commission kept informing voters.

He also highlighted the collaboration with Civil Society Organizations as well as Facebook to promote voter’s education in States and Regions and to counter hate speech, misinformation and disinformation during the election period. While concluding the remarks H.E. U Myint Naing invited the participants to contribute to a successful election by providing assistance for any help and educating the voters.

H.E. Dr. Pe Myint

On behalf of Ministry of Information, H.E. Dr. Pe Myint, the Union Minister gave opening remarks. In his remark, H.E. Dr. Pe Myint highlighted Mol’s activities in promoting voter’s education, collaboration with Union Election Commission, Myanmar Press Council, and planning for activities to promote Media and Information Literacy with UNESCO. He also acknow-

ledged the role and importance of mainstream media in providing election-related information.

More importantly, the Union Minister also highlighted the achievements and progress of media development in Myanmar while reviewing the Media Development Conferences that have been organized since 2012.



H.E. Dr. Pe Myint

“We started the media development conference in 2012 and this is the 8th conference. We had discussed so many topics related to media development during these eight years and provided recommendations and plans we then implemented. We achieved some. However, some are still progressing,” he said.

“Summing up the eight years journey, I have seen the media sector in Myanmar is gradually developing”, he added. He pointed out some highlights of achievements such as the abolishment of the pre-censorship, the re-emergence

of the private Newspaper, the establishment of journalists associations, the formation of Myanmar Press Council and the drafting process of news media law, forums of news and information rights, and the four pillar forums in Myanmar.

The Union Minister also mentioned that apart from an annual press conference the government ministries held press conferences more frequently, and spokespersons are assigned although there is more progress to be made. “I think that those improvements are the impacts of our discussions, recommendations, and actions through the conferences we have organized” he added.

He also observed the emergence of new media and the technological shift in the Myanmar Media landscape as many conventional media can be seen on both print and digital platforms. “I would like to suggest the new media development needs to be more systematic, more dynamic, and in the right direction. I wish the new media development is more systematic and brings more positive outcomes” he said.

In conclusion, the Union Minister said he would like to suggest a focused, insightful and serious discussion in this conference to contribute to the systemic development of new media in Myanmar.

U Ohn Kyaing

In his opening remarks U Ohn Kyaing, Chairman of Myanmar Press Council said that we have to admit that the situation in the media industry has improved as the Union Minister said and it is due to the collaboration and joint efforts of Ministry of Information and the journalists.

He said that he is 90 years old now, became a journalist during the colonial era, and had exper-

rienced many elections throughout the years and the forthcoming election will be unique in his lifetime as criticisms are around even before the election. He acknowledged the Chairman of the election commission for his resilience. He said the commitment of the Election Commission to overcome all the hardship is strong.

U Ohn Kyaing also mentioned the impact of the four pillars meetings wherein a better



understanding among the four pillars has been enhanced, and misunderstanding about journalists by other institutions such as the security forces can be discussed. He also shared one recent improvement on the draft Bill of Rights to Information, Access to information law was resubmitted to Union Parliament after the amendment.

He also mentioned the election reporting guide developed by Myanmar Press Council to guide journalists to be able to report the election with accuracy, impartiality, and responsibility. Contact details of political parties and election commissions were also provided in the guide. He said that the press council will tackle any dispute during the election within three working days.

H.E. Mr. John Nielsen

Speaking on this occasion, H.E. Mr. John Nielsen highlights the importance of the role of Media in Myanmar and other functioning democracies, the need of good and fair working conditions for media, the necessity of sustainable financing, and media and information landscape differences in Myanmar.

He pointed out that the media is expected to fulfill three roles in society such as providing a platform to debate political issues, supporting engagements by providing news and information as well as reporting any abuse of power while functioning as a watchdog.

“In return, the media needs good and fair working conditions to fulfill their roles in society,” he said. They need laws to protect them and allow them to report safely and to be able to gather relevant information and the public should have to re-use the information the media produces.

He also highlighted another key aspect that a

functioning media sector needs sustainable financing. He recognized the impact of Covid-19 on the Myanmar media sector like other business sectors.

The Ambassador also called attention to the exploding social media users in Myanmar that impacted the media and information landscape for good and bad. “This rapid expansion and role of the dominant social media platform in Myanmar Facebook has an important role both in a facilitating role in public debates and in countering disinformation and hate speech”, he mentioned. He also commended all the efforts to counter misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, and the Press Council’s efforts to reflect the challenges better that come with the increase with social media in their recently published election guide book for Myanmar journalists.

He also mentioned the contribution of the Denmark Embassy and the International Media



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Support in promoting accurate information and countering disinformation, misinformation, and Hate speech on social media.

He conducted the remarks by stating “I believe that huge tasks lie ahead. Let us all come

together and each does their parts and acknowledges their responsibilities and tasks ahead of promoting the election coming up to fight misinformation and disinformation and hate speech in Myanmar.”



3. PANEL DISCUSSION SESSION

3.1. SESSION ONE: ROLE OF MEDIA IN ELECTIONS; COMPARISONS AND LESSONS LEARNED IN 2010 AND 2015/2018

This session discussed the role of media in elections through the comparison, experiences, lessons learned and observations on the previous general elections of Myanmar and the international electoral context. The Union Election Commission observed that the relationship with the media has improved and promised that the journalists can cover the election freely. The Myanmar Press Council will stand by on election day to assist journalists. Complaints related to the election reporting will be handled within three working days. ANFREL observed that enthusiasm of the media had declined in the by elections compared to 2015 general election.

Panellists:

- National Panellist 1 :
U Myint Naing
Member and Spokesperson of
Union Election Commission
- National Panellist 2 :
Daw Eih Eih Tin
Member, Myanmar Press Council
- International Panellist 1 :
Mr. Andrea Cairola
Programme Specialist
Communication and Information Sector,
UNESCO
- International Panellist 2 :
Mr. John Reiner Antiquerra
Program Officer
Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL)

Moderator:

Daw Hla Hla Htay
Foreign Correspondent
L'Agence France-Presse (AFP)

Presenting on the topic, U Myint Naing said he respected journalists and highly regarded the media industry. Comparing the previous elections the media were not developed in 2010, 2015 and 2018. The role of media was more expanded in the 2015 election and the Election Commission assigned senior officials for media relations.

Although election-related information was disseminated through television and radio it was less compared to the current situation. As a highlight of development, the media relations team was established in mid-2019 and he was assigned as the spokesperson. However, due to the Covid 19 pandemic, we could not continue the activities. Even though a large group meeting was not an option the team met with groups of 5 to 6 journalists and shared information



as well as teleconferencing with some conventional media.

The UEC launched a Facebook page as well as a website in 2020 as a new development and collaborated with the Myanmar Press Council in revising and publishing an election reporting guide for Myanmar journalists. He said that journalists are the citizens of this country and voters, if they report the election impartially to provide accurate news and information the media industry will be more developed.



The second national panellist, Daw Eih Eih Tin focused her presentation on the Election Reporting Guide for Myanmar journalist and highlighted key points from chapter (1), (2), and (3). She highlighted the importance of impartiality during election reporting, the duty to make corrections, accuracy in reporting the winner, and the role of the Press Council to settle any complaint due to election reporting. She also



Mr. Andrea Cairola

highlighted the high penetration rate of social media. "There were 7 million Social Media users in the last election and the number has jumped to 22 million" she said. She reminded the audience that the ethical guidelines will be applied to both conventional and digital media. "The Press Council will handle election-related complaints within 3 working days instead of 60 working days for regular complaints and the office will be open from 9:00 am to 8:00 pm on the election day", she said. She also mentioned the necessity of bringing identification cards issued by the Election Commission, to abide by the rules and regulations while covering the polling station.



Daw Eih Eih Tin

Presenting on this occasion, the first international panellist of the session, Mr. Andrea Cairola presented three concrete examples, tools, practices, and lessons learned focusing on upholding freedom of expression and media freedom in an electoral context. The first one is the Addis Ababa Declaration that is the result of a global conference held in Ethiopia. There are several detailed recommendations because the topic is Journalism and Elections in times of Disinformation. The second tool is a publication in the UNESCO's series of world trends of freedom of expression and media development and the

third is a policy paper that recommends a hybrid system of co-regulation.

While presenting the first tool, he highlighted the fundamental role of journalism in an electoral context to facilitate peaceful, credible, free, and fair elections. He also pointed out the rise of misinformation and the implications of the Information and Communication Technology and challenges in the second tool. Presenting the third tool, he stressed on how to put in practice these good practices and lessons learned. One example he gave is the importance of the institutional capacity building of all stakeholders that UNESCO is doing in 50 countries. The capacity building training fosters a mutual understanding of the respective roles and challenges and contributes to the duty bearer to be fully prepared to tackle challenges that may arise.



The second international panellist, Mr. John Reiner Antiquerra highlighted in his presentation ANFREL's observation of the 2010, 2015 general election and the by-elections and challenges. He also stressed the role of the media in informing the public and shaping public discourse and monitoring processes against irregularities to ensure a free and fair election.



Mr. John Reiner Antiquerra

ANFREL observed that the media coverage of the 2015 general election was seen largely as usual focusing on the process and outcomes of the elections. But at the same time many media outlets focused heavily on the National League for Democracy and its chances of winning the election. It also observed that there was much less enthusiasm in the media about the 2017 and 2018 by-election.

He also mentioned several challenges faced by the journalists they observed that included the article 66 (D) of the telecommunication law, the survey result that stated the journalists felt more restricted doing their works, the decline of the freedom index of RSF in Myanmar, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Answering the question of what will be the differences, and changes for journalists to cover the 2020 general election compared to the previous elections, U Myint Naing said that in some cases the media did not provide full information on what the commission said. It will be satisfactory even if half of the good things we had done were covered. "Some media said they might be seen as biased toward the Commission if they gave full coverage of the Commission," he added. He also said the media could cover more freely in the forthcoming election in answering follow-up questions.



While answering a question to her comparison of covering election experiences, Daw Eih Eih Tin advised the Union Election Commission to assign a liaison person or communication channel for the faster communication as the Chairman, spokesperson, and other senior officials are occupied full-time. This could help to settle the challenges faced by the journalists during the election period.

Daw Eih Eih Tin said that the Press Council will stand by on the election day to assist journalists on the election day for any possible challenges they might face and will try to coordinate with

Session One Summary of Discussion



Daw Hla Hla Htay

the Union Election Commission. The Internet in Rakhine is bad, only 2G is available as in Naga Hills. We will urge the Union Election Commission for those kinds of challenges to enhance the free and fair election.



U Myint Naing said that the Myanmar Police Force and Special Force will take care of the safety of journalists in responding to the moderator's questions on the safety of journalists from active armed conflict in ethnic areas.



In responding to the moderator's question on what lesson should we learn from elections in conflict affected countries, Mr. Reiner Antiquerra said, "I think there should always have to be a balance between assuring the right of people to vote and the people's safety. Now there has to be a way to identify the risks and plans, how to mitigate such risks so there also has to be balance. People have the right to vote and they also have the right to live so we have to take a balance between these two rights" answering the question on lessons learned from international elections in conflict affected countries.



- The Union Election Commission observes that the relationship with the Media has been improving since the general election of 2010, 2015, and the by-elections. Press release and media relations' team was established and there were regular meetings before the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Several digital platforms were established to disseminate electoral information. The Union Election Commission observes that there were unnecessary incomplete reports by some incompetent journalists. The Union Election Commission recognizes the need for a strong and functional media environment. The media development of Myanmar is crucial for the development of Myanmar. Thus, the Union Election Commission encourages journalists to be impartial.
- The Myanmar Press Council cooperates closely with the Union Election Commission. Elections guides for Myanmar Journalists 2015 was revised and published recently in cooperation with the International Media Support, Fojo Institute, and UNESCO.
- The Myanmar Press Council prepares to assist journalists covering the elections. Complaints related to election news will be tackled within 3 working days instead of regular 60 days.
- The Press Council observes the high rates of Social Media penetration in Myanmar. There were 7 million Social Media users in the last election and the number has jumped to 22 million.

- The danger of Fake accounts that disseminate misinformation, disinformation regarding the electoral information will be remarkable. The safety of Journalists and voters on Election Day will be at the hand of the special forces of Ministry of Home Affairs.

- The Union Election Commission learns from Singapore and South Korean who held elections recently in the time of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Guidelines for safety during Campaign periods and Election day will be based on the guidelines set by the Ministry of Health and Sports and the National Level Committee for Prevention, Control and Treatment of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19).

3.2. SESSION TWO: ELECTIONS AND SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

This session, Elections and Safety of Journalists discussed the preparations and arrangements for the safety of journalists during the election. The Myanmar Police force is fully committed to the safety and security of the election and will reinforce its ranks with special forces. The Philippines's experiences on safety of journalists, the possibility to form a joint task force for the safety of Myanmar Journalists were discussed. There are concerns for the safety and security of journalists in conflicting areas as well as the freelance journalists.

Panellists:

- International Panellist 1 :
Mr.Red Batario
Executive Director
Center for Community Journalism and Development (CCJD), Philippines
- International Panellist 2:
Police Lt. Col. (Ms.) Kimberley Molitas
Public Information Office
Philippine National Police
- National Panellist 1:
Daw Wai Mar Theint
Member, Myanmar Press Council

- National Panellist 2 :
Police Col. Kyaw Linn
Director
Crime Division, Myanmar Police Force

Moderator:

U Toe Zaw Latt
Operations Director
Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB)



Responding to the panellist's question on how the Press Council prepares for the safety of journalists, Daw Wai Mar Theint, the national panellist of the session said that the news media law provided journalists the freedom to do their job. Journalists also need to be ethical and abide by the regulations in terms of security and journalists must have protection from security forces while doing their job to cover riots and conflicts.

"Although there is no specific provision in the news media law in covering elections, the Press Council has been negotiating for journalists no matter who or no matter where to have access and freedom to cover the election," she said. "I am not aware of any negotiations and discussion with the Myanmar Police Force, but we have discussed and negotiated with the election commission for journalists to have full access to cover the election," she added.

The Myanmar Press Council developed the Standard Operating Procedure for the safety of Myanmar Journalists in 2015 in a poster format and published the revised version of guidelines for Myanmar journalists in collaboration with the Union Election Commission to assist the Myanmar journalists for the ethical coverage of the election and safety issues.

Mr. Red Batario focused his discussion on the Philippines' plan of action on the safety of journalists, in response to the question on the Philippines' experiences of covering the election, the lessons learned, and the negotiation with the authorities. The plan of action set out certain ground rules, especially when dealing with the local authorities such as the police forces and the military, and it is not only for the coverage of the election but also for the day to day activities of the journalists while they are doing their jobs on the ground.

One element in the plan of action has been to institutionalize regular dialogues with the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces of



the Philippines in regards to the safety and protection of journalists. "The Philippines journalists have a handbook on covering elections that serves as a safety guide, the do's and don'ts of election coverage are reflected in the handbook" he added.

Col. Kyaw Linn said the Myanmar Police Force will ensure the safety and security of the election during the three periods of the election cycle while answering the questions on the preparations of the Myanmar Police Force on the safety of journalists and access to cover the election. The Police Force will not make any restrictions on journalists and, journalists should work ethnically by abiding by the provisions of Media Law and Media Rules. They need to show their identity card and ask for permissions,



following the rules and regulations of the security forces while covering riots and in conflict areas stated in the article 32 (A) of Media Rules.

The safety and security during the election meant and covered the security and safety of all stakeholders and the electoral process. “We will not work for one particular individual or group so that journalists would get their safety automatically,” he added when he responded to the follow up question on the security arrangement for journalists from conflict affected areas.



Daw Wai Mar Theint added that the journalists in the conflict faced higher risks on their safety and security. The security forces need to take responsibility for them. The news media law safeguards the access and right to gather information from any organization or anywhere. However, the journalist should have situational awareness. The newsrooms should also need to safeguard their journalists’ safety and the journalists must inform the press council for any case that compromises their safety and access to information while covering the election.



Sharing suggestions and experiences for Myanmar journalists working on a conflict area based on the Philippines’ experiences, Mr.Red Batario said that Journalists from the Philippines do a risk assessment before going to a conflict area and this practice is a part of newsroom policy.



U Toe Zaw Latt



Police Lt. Col. (Ms.) Kimberley Molitas

Although this is not being implemented across the board, it depends on the news organization itself, and journalist associations provide guidelines. The local authority and security forces provide protection as it is their duty and responsibility. However, journalists need to understand the dangers they will face.



Sharing the Philippines’ experiences on this occasion and answering the moderator’s question Ms. Kimberley Molitas said that there is a task force called “Task Force Safe” to support the media and the media is a part of the team. During the election period, there is an organized group called the Press Corps where in the media and foreign organizations come and coordinate with the public information office of the Philippines National Police and even the national bureau of investigation is a member of the task force of media security.

Replying to the moderator’s question on the possibilities to form a joint task force in Myanmar, “It is very important to have a relationship with the members of the media because the media and the police have a common goal. The common goal for serving the public in different ways,” she said.

The first possible thing to do is forming a pool of media practitioners like the press corps in the Philippines that is composed of the media from Film, Television to the Internet.

The second approach is to have a joint task force that will facilitate to build understanding between the Police and the media practitioners.

“We sat down together. We drafted a media relation policy. In that policy, it is stated what the duties of the police and what duties of the media are, what are the limitations and what they can do during our police operation,” she added.



Session Two Summary of Discussion

- The Myanmar Press Council developed a Standard Operating Procedure for Safety and disseminated it to media houses and organizations. The Safety and Right to obtain information from authority are safe-guarded in the Media Law. However, the safeguards need to function.
- The goal of the Myanmar Police Force is to protect each citizen. As the journalists are the citizens of Myanmar, there is no specific task to protect journalists. Security forces and media practitioners have a different perspective on security concerns. More collaboration is needed.
- The journalists should bring identification, report to local authorities, and need to be distinct. The Myanmar Press Council should take responsible for the safety of journalists covering elections. Journalists should report any case in terms of security concerns to the Myanmar Press Council.
- As good practices from the Philippines, journalists and media houses should do risk assessments before going to conflict zones.

- In terms of security during the election, the Myanmar Police Force will be reinforced with Special Forces. There is no specific law to counter digital threats and hate speech. However, those kinds of cases will be handled with the existing laws.
- Journalists face physical and psychological threats while doing their jobs. Media houses should pay more attention to safety matters. Freelance journalists face more challenges in terms of legitimacy and safety matters.
- A Joint Task Force consisting of media practitioners, authorities and security forces should be formed to protect journalists and enable them to provide accurate information to the public.
- The Myanmar Press Council requested coordination from the Myanmar Police Forces in the Fourth Pillar Workshop, an event that preceded recently but there was no prompt response.

3.3. SESSION THREE: ETHICAL PRACTICES AND SELF-REGULATION BY MEDIA DURING THE ELECTIONEERING PROCESS

Session Three discussed the continuous dilemma between “news value” and “impartiality” faced by journalists regarding electioneering reporting. “Self-regulation” is important to avoid the restriction of the freedom of expression, experiences from the Japanese media industry show.

The leading state broadcaster MRTV discussed the ongoing collaboration with the Union Election Commission in broadcasting Political party content and practicing the rules and regulations of news reporting in the election period. The Indonesia experience on collaboration and cooperation between institutions; the Press Council, Election Commission, and Police Force to enhance ethical professional journalism, to protect the safety of journalists by creating a prompt response mechanism was shared.

The decreasing number of ethical professional media in Myanmar, the emerging trend of unidentifiable social media-based news outlets, and potential solutions to mitigate their untoward impacts on election were discussed.

Panellists:

- International Panellist 1:
Dr. Keiichi Hashimoto
Senior Advisor on Media/Journalism, JICA
- International Panellist 2:
Dr. Agus Sudibyo
Member, Indonesia Press Council
- National Panellist 1:
Daw Moe Thuzar Aung
Director, MRTV
- National Panellist 2:
U Kyaw Min Swe
Chief-Editor, The Voice Journal
Member, Myanmar Press Council

Moderator:

U Myint Kyaw

Joint Secretary (1), Myanmar Press Council

Presenting on the topic, Dr. Keiichi Hashimoto argues that in the election period, it is unavoidable that more qualified candidates with higher possibilities to win are covered more frequently because information on “serious candidates” could be judged to be more significant for voters in making a political decision. This is why journalists are always faced with a dilemma between the principles of “News Value” and “Impartiality”.

As a general rule, the media should treat all candidates impartially, whereas it is up to each media outlet to define what is “fair” and what is “impartial” because the word “fair” is too ambiguous to define in a specific legal term. He also stresses that, if the authorities or government is in the position to decide what is “fair” and what is “impartial” media will begin to refrain from reporting politically delicate issues, it



Dr. Keiichi Hashimoto

will lead to the restriction to the freedom of expression. Thus, the media should self-regulate themselves to protect freedom of expression and the fundamental human rights of viewers.

Concerning social media-based fakenews and disinformation, he encourages that the election period is a good opportunity for a traditional media organization which has a strong journalistic capability to earn the trust of the voters and viewers by doing a good job, by showing the model of ethical and professional media which disseminate fair, accurate and impartial information.



Being the State-run nationwide coverage free-to-air broadcaster, MRTV (Myanma Radio & Television) performs two responsibilities regarding the electioneering process, Daw Moe Thuzar Aung said. The first is in collaboration with the Union Election Commission, MRTV broadcasts political parties' political views, in a fair and square framework, regardless of their size and target areas. The latter is to cover election news in the event of election days. She mentions that their reporters were also obliged



Daw Moe Thuzar Aung



Dr. Agus Sudibyo

to strictly comply with the guidelines of the Myanmar Press Council, Union Election Commission, and their own MRTV code of ethics and code of conduct which was developed by the partnership with the JICA. In covering election reports, MRTV strictly avoids partisan news and the coverage emphasizes the voices of voters, election observation organizations, and the preparation of the polling stations whether they are convenient for disabled people.



Dr. Agus Sudibyo shared that Press Self-Regulation in Indonesia is rooted in Indonesia Press Law No. 4 (1999), which stipulates the Press is not subject to any regulation from parliament, government, and Military and political parties. The Indonesian Press Council also established an MoU with National Police (Polri) in February 2012. This MoU specifically regulates the coordination mechanism between the Press and the Police Forces to reduce direct criminalization against the press.

In election issues, the Indonesia Press Council signed an MoU with the General Election Commission and the National Broadcast Commission. The MoU regulates the prohibition of political

parties or candidates from intervening in the editorial process, the prohibition of involving active journalists as members of campaign teams, and enforces transparency principles in political advertising. The press council establishes a Code of Ethics that requires every journalist who joins a campaign team or is running as a legislative candidate or regional head candidate to resign or leave their job as a journalist. In practice, politicians or political parties have proven to engage in collusion with media companies or journalists were also targeted to receive harsh criticism on social media. So, social media is a relatively effective instrument to control the partisanship tendency of mass media or journalists.

In responding to a question about the protection of journalists in the election period, he shared that the Press Council set up a 'task force' which consisted of members of journalists associations. That "task force" coordinates between the Press Council and Local Police, and facilitates coordination between the Press Council and journalist associations or journalists groups to ensure a quick response mechanism to help journalists who face violence, especially in remote areas in Indonesia.

If violence happens to journalists in a local area, the Press Council pushes police to conduct meaningful processes, to punish the actors of violence due to the fact there will be recurrent violence if there were no legal action to protect journalists. He also mentioned that this coordination between the Press Council, Election Commission, and the Police Forces is a continuous process which is a never-ending struggle.

Regarding the question of a participant from ZOOM, investigative reporting on sensitive issues and organizations in the election period, he noted that religious issues are the main causes of political hoax and disinformation which spread across social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in Indonesia.



U Kyaw Min Swe added that not only religious issues but also ethnic, interest-protection, corruption issues are sensitive issues in Myanmar. He argued that it is important to carefully analyze the pros and cons, the transitional way forward of the country, especially in making investigative reporting.

On the discussion of the topic, U Kyaw Min Swe reviewed that the 2010 General Election was solely 'sponsored by the Military Government and the 2015 General Elections was organized by a 'semi-civilian' government whereas the upcoming 2020 General Election is very important as it is solely organized by the civilian-elected government. He observed that the professionalism and skill among journalists are improved as there were more opportunities for proper training for election reporting.

On the other hand, there are concerns that the number of mainstream media houses and journalists, who have a positive reputation and history of accountability, integrity, and professionalism, is decreasing as the media industry faces financial challenges, and they might not be able to cover the elections as they did in the past. Another concerning issue is that there is an increasing number of social-media-based



U Myint Kyaw

online-media who are not registered with unknown founders and have a lack of accountability. Their unethical news reports on the election would have a certain degree of intoxicating effects and negative impacts on the public.

The Myanmar Press Council prepared Election Reporting Guidelines in collaboration with the Union Election Commission for journalists since 2014 and distributed them to journalists in the 2015 election period. This year, the Myanmar Press Council added a dedicated chapter on Social Media Usages after several discussions with the UEC. Myanmar Press Council has prepared to solve election reporting complaints and disputes regarding ethical issues within three working days.

He observed that there are alarming reasons to develop a dedicated ethical guideline on reporting elections for social-media platform based online news outlets. Nevertheless, he is optimistic about the self-regulation of the mainstream media news-rooms which have experiences on election reporting, regular news coverage with their inhouse self-regulation practices, in addition to the Myanmar Press Council guidelines.

Session Three Summary of Discussion

- A lesson learned from recent Japan's gubernatorial election, where only 5 candidates out of 22 gained media coverage: One of the defeated candidates claimed that media coverage of the gubernatorial election was biased in favor of the 5 principal candidates. The Japanese government does not intervene in the self-regulatory process. The election commission pays the fees only for the broadcast of political views and personal histories of each candidates to broadcasting media.
- As a state-owned media, Myanmar Radio and Television provide equal air time to every political party and broadcast their statements during the prime time during the campaign period.
- The Myanmar Radio and Television only facilitates technically; the contents and other arrangements are based on the arrangements between the Union Election Commission and political parties.
- The Indonesia Press Council is independent of the government, military, and political parties. Memorandum of Understanding is signed between the Press Council and police forces to protect journalists from direct criminalization.
- During an election campaign period, journalists are obligated to resign as journalists if they decide to work for a political party or campaign process.
- Comparing the general election coverage of general elections of Myanmar 2010, 2015, and the forthcoming 2020, there will be more challenges for an ethical mainstream media due to financial challenges.

- In terms of ethical standards, while covering the 2020 general election, there will be more challenges with the emergence

of online media; there could be more political partisanship, hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation.

3.4. SESSION FOUR: ELECTIONS IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Session 4, Elections in the Age of Social Media discussed awareness regarding the Facebook Political Advertisement, the preparation done by Facebook for the credibility of the election, to protect the election from national and international interference. Myanmar Press Council mentioned that they had identified unethical online media and reported them to the concerned government ministry. The experiences and lessons learned from Sri Lanka in terms of countering disinformation, misinformation, and hate speech on social media during the recently held parliamentary election were shared.

Panellists:

- International Panellist 1 :
Mr. Alex Warofka
Product Policy Manager for Human Rights at Facebook
- International Panellist 2 :
Mr. Nalaka Gunawardene
Advisor to IMS (Sri Lanka)
- National Panellist 1 :
Dr. Zin Mar Kyaw
Professor and Head of Journalism Department, National Management Degree College
- National Panellist 2 :
Daw Thin Thin Thar
member, Myanmar Press Council

Moderator:

Daw Htaike Htaike Aung
MIDO



Mr. Alex Warofka

One of the Panellists, Mr. Alex Warofka, Product Policy Manager for Human Rights at Facebook, said that the Facebook team were fully aware of the important role of social media in this coming Myanmar election. He said, "It will be the first election that is going to be playing out to a large degree on Facebook with wide electronic activities."

Daw Zin Mar Kyaw, Professor and Head of Journalism Department, National Management Degree College, agreed by saying that, "This is the age of social media and the youth generation is what we call 'digital natives'. So, media literacy is crucial to educate new voters in this election." All Panellists fully admitted that the general election of Myanmar 2020 will be different from the previous 2015 general election, especially on the usage of social media as a medium of political communication.



Recalling the recent parliamentary election experience at Sri Lanka, Mr. Nalaka Gunawardene, Advisor to IMS (Sri Lanka), explained “This election relied heavily on remote campaigning because there were restrictions due to Covid-19. Instead of a physical campaign, political candidates turned to Facebook, Instagram and Youtube, the three most popular platforms in Sri Lanka.”

In answering how well-prepared is the organization of each Panellist for the election, Mr. Alex Warofka assured that they are very confident that they do have the resources in place for this.



He said “We have a dedicated team of people and 120 content moderation staff in place for the Myanmar election.”

Daw Thin Thin Thar, member, Myanmar Press Council, said, “The Council office is planned to operate from 8 am to 8 pm during the election period to resolve any issues and complaints related to journalists within three days. The Council will take any necessary action concerning fake news and disinformation within three



days.” In addition, she also revealed the Council’s plan to hold a meeting with the Facebook team to cooperate in combating hate speech and fake news during the election.

Mr. Nalaka Gunawardene reminisced his experience of Sri Lanka that there were good news and bad news. There were some political campaigns making use of social media, however, a lot of bad actors showed bad behavior via social media as well. Therefore, he warned, “Understanding the local context and framing disinformation monitoring accordingly is crucial. We used international available frameworks and



Daw Htaike Htaike Aung

used guidelines of the International Foundation for Electoral System (IFES) but we localized and adapted it.”

All panellists generally agreed that achieving a free and fair election needs coordination between all the stakeholders such as the Ministry of Information, Ministry of Transport and Communications, Press Council, Associations of Journalists, the Police Force and social media groups.

During the discussion, a member of the audience expressed the dissatisfaction of the press council by raising the question why the press council failed to effectively punish any media that spreads fake news, rumors and misleading information. Daw Thin Thin Thar replied, “We have limited authority under the existing law. The press council can only check, monitor and announce a list of unethical journalists, media teams and fake news. We have no power to punish them.”

In response to another question of the audience about the ethnic language speakers inclusion in 120 Facebook staff, Mr. Alex Warofka said, “So, within the 120 content moderation staff that we have now in place. In addition to Burmese, we also have the ability to review content reported to us that is in Shan, Kachin, Rakhine, Karen and Kayah languages. So we do have support in place for review of ethnic languages as well as Burmese.”

Mr. Nalaka Gunawardene reminded everyone of the need for rapid response on social media. He said, “We quickly re-purposed our energy to monitor disinformation on the corona pandemic which itself has political connotation for example demonizing certain ethnic minorities as spreaders of the virus. We responded to the changing reality as the political disinformation just doesn’t end with the election day.”

Session Four Summary of Discussion

- Given the fact that the forthcoming general election of Myanmar 2020 is happening amidst difficult times of a pandemic Facebook has been preparing for the integrity of the election, making sure that there is no interference from both international and domestic actors.
- Since August 2020, Facebook has prioritized transparency in political advertisement. Political Advertisement information can be found in the ad library and will remain for 7 years and there are disclaimers on who is paying for the advertisement.

- Facebook utilizes the Remove, Reduce and Educate approach to counter misinformation and Hate speech and is working with local fact-checkers and other partners.
- The Myanmar Press Council identified 109 digital media that are disseminating misinformation on digital platforms. Those were reported to Ministry of Transport and Communications. No prompt actions are not observed so far.

- The Myanmar Press Council is looking forward to collaborating with Facebook. Unfortunately, the process has been postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- In Sri Lanka, a Network Against Disinformation was formed to counter political disinformation during the election.

3.5. SESSION FIVE: ELECTION REPORTING IN ETHNIC STATES AND REGIONS – CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Session 5, Election reporting in ethnic states and regions – challenges and solutions, discussed the challenges, difficulties, and problems experienced by journalists who are working in different parts of the country, ethnic states, and regions.

The dialogue was followed by searching solutions for those challenges. All panellists agreed that the security forces and authorities should ensure that the journalists have access to information as well as their safety (physical, and psychological) while covering the election.

As lessons learned from the previous elections, journalists should have situational awareness including the existing laws that can compromise their safety while covering an election.

Moreover, journalists should make sure that they are ethical, fair, balanced, and accurate while covering the election. For such a goal of ethical journalism, election reporting training should

reach out to states and regions-based journalists to make sure that journalists are well equipped with professional and ethical standards.

Such a kind of capacity building workshops should be held in different states and regions, not just in Yangon. The Ministry of Information, the Myanmar Press Council, and other NGOs and INGOs should provide financial and technical assistance to state and region based media so that they can have full coverage on the election in times of the Covid-19 pandemic and other challenges.

Another dominant point of discussion is that the authorities should make sure that voters in Rakhine state have access to the Internet so that they are well-informed and make a well-informed decision to cast their votes and the Covid-19 pandemic should not be used to limit the journalist's full access and rights to information while covering an election.

Panellists:

- National Panellist 1 :
U Khaing Mratt Kyaw
member, Myanmar Press Council
- National Panellist 2 :
Salai Kaung Myat Min
Myay Latt Journalist Network
- National Panellist 3 :
U Kaung Myat Naing
Freelance Journalist
- National Panellist 4 :
U Brang Mai
CEO, Myitkyina Journal

Moderator:

Daw Nan Paw Gay
Burma News International (BNI)

The session sheds light on the big picture of challenges faced by journalists from different parts of states and regions in Myanmar. As it can be easily observed, one of the most common challenges stated by all the panellists is the Covid-19 crisis. However, the impact of this pandemic on journalists in this election time varies across different local contexts.



Daw Nan Paw Gay



U Khaing Mratt Kyaw

U Khaing Mratt Kyaw, a journalist from Rakhine and a member of the Myanmar Press Council, revealed what worries him as a journalist in this election period amidst Covid-19. He said “As all of you already noticed, Rakhine has so many challenges. We have ongoing armed conflicts in our state. Besides the conflict, the challenges of the rapid spread of coronavirus in our state and the internet restriction is so huge.”

U Brang Mai, the CEO of Myitkyina Journal, added similar comments. He also recalled what he encountered as a journalist in the previous elections. He mentioned, “In 2015 when we visited the polling station, the SB (Special Branch) police followed and monitored us throughout the reporting of the election. Psychological safety matters in this case. Such action affects the freedom of press reports as we feel hesitant.” He continued, “Because of the Covid-19, press houses are closed. As a result, many news reporters lost their jobs.”

U Khaing Mratt Kyaw and U Kaung Myat Naing, a freelance journalist in Rakhine echoed the same worries as both of them are in Rakhine



U Brang Mai



U Kaung Myat Naing

State. They pointed out the security issue of journalists in their state. They are required to take so many steps to get news in the field, in the worst case, any person can get arrested if the officials find any photo, news, or email attachment which is related to AA (Arakan Army).



Salai Kaung Myat Min, Myay Latt Journalist Network, expressed his concern about the capacity of the region's Election Commission. He uttered, "There are only 6 members in the Election Commission for the whole region. Therefore, we have to lay out a concrete plan to do a fact check with the Commission to combat the swift spread of fake news and misinformation concerning the election." Salai Kaung Myat Min revealed the difficulty of recruiting a journalist as well.



Apart from the challenges of safety and internet restriction in Rakhine, U Kaung Myat Naing mentioned the insufficient electric supply. All the issues raised by the panellists thoroughly address the challenges for election reporting.



With regards to the solutions, in his opinion, U Brang Mai recommends holding all-inclusive capacity building training for the election which includes all actors in the election such as police, election observers, election volunteers, staff, and journalists. As a technical solution, he added, "We are planning a one-stop service level for journalists."



All panellists commonly agreed that the Myanmar Press Council and Union Election Commission should find ways to support the journalists financially with budget and funding. U Khaing Mratt Kyaw expressed his optimism in the election despite such challenges by stating that, "If all the journalists are in unison and discuss, consult in searching ways to overcome those problems, I think we will be fine." In terms of dealing with unethical journalists and press officers, who took tainted money from political parties and interest groups, the panellists were reminded to warn each other about such activity and if necessary, to report to the Press Council.



Salai Kaung Myat Min notified the important role of women in journalism. According to his



Salai Kaung Myat Min

experience, the new women journalists that he recruited and trained did many impressive works. In answering the online audience's question about the problem of internet restriction in Rakhine concerning elections, U Kaung Myat Naing said, "Many parts of the Rakhine State are suffering not only in the election period. If the government ignores to lift the internet ban in Rakhine, I don't see the election as a transparent, fair, and just election."

Session Five Summary of Discussion

- The challenges of election reporting are varied depending on the context of each state and region.
- In Rakhine, 6 townships where more than 30, 000 voters reside could not check the voter list.
- In Kachin State, the levels of freedom of press reports during the election could be correlated to the peace process between KIA (Kachin Independence Army) and the military.
- Many journalists lost their jobs due to Covid-19 pandemic. The Press Council needs to make proactive preparation to mitigate safety issues (Covid-19, threats from all sides of arm forces) that could emerge during the election.
- The State or Regions Election Commission can coordinate with the local journalists to build a mechanism of combating fake news and misinformation.

4. PRESENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATION

Moderators from Session 1,2,3,4 and 5 presented recommendations.

4.1. Section One Recommendation

Daw Hla Hla Htay presented recommendations from session one :

Role of media in elections; comparisons and lessons learned in 2010 and 2015/2018

1. It was stated that the UEC will consult with the Ministry of Health and Sports announce election procedures, the standard of polling stations by following countries that had successfully held elections during the Covid-19 period.

2. The international experts pointed out the main responsibility of the Ministry of Home Affairs to assure the safety of journalists, voters and international election observers which was already mentioned in the discussion as well.
3. The Myanmar Press Council will coordinate with UEC in order to resolve problems that are related to the election. Moreover, journalists need to quickly review fake news, misinformation, and data as well.
4. The journalists need to conduct a risk assessment in advance especially when they do news reporting in conflict-prone areas for the sake of a free and fair election. They also need to be attentive to everything and communicate among each other constantly during the election period.

4.2. Section Two Recommendation

U Toe Zaw Latt presented recommendations from Session Two:

Elections and safety of Journalists

1. It was sincerely recommended to form up a Joint Task Force which includes officials especially the security forces, journalists, and members of press council and election commission. A Joint Task Force which is closely coordinated by a respective stakeholder that can announce accurate news rapidly about the election.
2. It was recommended to supplement the SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) with safety and security matters

published by the Myanmar Press Council. This guideline should reach all journalists and officials.

3. The Myanmar police force encouraged journalists to continuously hold visibly any symbol such as Press card or media card to authenticate as a journalist. Such kind of cards should be carried throughout the election period.
4. It is necessary to find a solution for journalists and the security forces especially the police and special force where they all can coordinate their respective work understandably.

4.3. Section Three Recommendation

U Myint Kyaw presented recommendations from Session Three:

Ethical practices and self-regulation by media during the electioneering process

1. The media should regulate themselves to enhance their influence and there should be no intervention by authorities or the governments on news reporting other than the Myanmar Press Council.
2. Learning from the Indonesia experiences, there should be co-operation between the Myanmar Press Council and the Police Force for the safety and protection of journalists, in accordance with the Myanmar context.
3. A quick-response system should be developed to solve complaints and disputes on election reporting and the public needs to be well-informed about the existence of the system.

4. A dedicated ethical guideline should be developed for social-media-based online news media outlets.



4.4. Section Four Recommendation

Daw Htaike Htaike Aung presented recommendations from Session Four:

Elections in the age of social media

1. The Union Election Commission needs to clarify how the existing laws, by-laws will affect Social media. For example, is the election campaign on social media before the official campaign period legal or not?
2. The Union Election Commission needs to have a good strategy on how to counter fake news during the election. The Union Election Commission needs to build up capacity. Township level commissions need the capacity to counter fake news. The Union Election Commission needs to explain how they will collaborate with fact-checkers in verifying facts related to electoral information.
3. Facebook needs to provide a Blue Mark to government offices, Political parties, and political candidates because misinformation and disinformation in Myanmar spread out through Facebook pages and Facebook Profiles. Thus, Facebook needs to verify the authentic page of government offices, political candidates so that the users can identify them accurately.
4. Facebook needs to facilitate political parties and candidates who plan to launch an online campaign to register

to the political and election ad systems before the election campaign period.

5. Facebook needs to share information with the media regarding their collaboration with the Union Election Commission, Political Parties, and other government officials.



4.5. Section Five Recommendation

Daw Nan Paw Gay presented the recommendations from Session Five:

Election reporting in ethnic states and regions – challenges and solutions

We have discussed a lot of things and to wrap it all up,

1. the first point is women journalists, to be gender balanced in this upcoming election, we have resources so we recommend to promote and enhance women journalists.
2. The next point is the Covid 19 pandemic will not be over after the election and the challenges will remain. We recommend that the Press Council, the government, or INGOs/NGOs support journalists.
3. The next point is the Internet cut in Rakhine State. We have discussed the challenges caused by the lack of Internet connection, to be able to report the 2020 election and to enhance the election to be free and fair the media has to make efforts. On the other hand, if the situation, without electricity and Internet the public will not be well-informed

and it will challenge the right to information, thus we recommend finding a solution.

4. The next point is safety for journalists. The journalists need to be well prepared before their deployment, and when they have to do issue-based reporting they need to be impartial. To be able to do their job professionally, capacity building through election reporting training is needed in States and Regions.
5. The next point is the representation of the Press Council. We have discussed to strengthen the Press Council and there should be representations from States and Region-based journalists in the Press Council.



