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ARTICLE 19

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STATEMENT

Nepal: Beyond Hooliganism Undermining of a Free Media

The escalating number of violent attacks on certain parts of the Nepali media can no longer be regarded as hooliganism – instead they point to an organised assault on freedom of expression in Nepal.

On the morning of 24 October, the CEO of leading media house *Himalmedia* was attacked on his way to work. Just a few weeks later, bundles of *Himalmedia*'s newly printed *Himal Khabar Patrika* (Himalaya news magazine) were doused in petrol and burned. On 16 November, twenty-five men circled the depot whilst eight ransacked the building, cutting off phone lines and stealing mobile phones before threatening to kill the distribution staff. The edition carried as lead story an exposé on the growing violence carried out by youth groups associated with political parties.

Himal Khabar Patrika's Editor Kanak Mani Dixit told ARTICLE 19: “*There is a planned effort underway to weaken the resolve of journalists amidst a growing political polarisation in Nepal today. Besides verbal intimidation, there have been physical attacks. Our own media house has been victim to planned attacks in the last couple of weeks; first an attack on the vehicle carrying our CEO, and lately an act of arson and the torching of our latest issue at our Kathmandu distribution centre.*”

A number of similarly unconcealed attacks on the media have continued to occur over the last few weeks and have been reported by ARTICLE 19 partners in Nepal.¹ Staff and buildings of the Regional Bureau office of Avenues Television were attacked on 18 November, while similar assaults took place against *Nuwakot Jagatan* on 17 November and the government-controlled *Rastriya Samachar Samiti* on 13 November.

In October there were also attacks on a *Gorkhapatra* correspondent on 28 October, *Basudha* Editor Rammani Upadhyay on 24 October, the offices of *Tarai Times* on 20 October and a *Himalayan Times* correspondent on 11 October. According to local staff, media personnel continue to be phoned and given death threats.

¹ ARTICLE 19 partners in Nepal are the Federation of Nepalese Journalists www.fnjnepal.org and Freedom Forum Nepal www.nepalpressfreedom.org/freedomforum.php

Escalating harassment against media staff in a coordinated manner by what appears to be organised groups demonstrates both an increase in impunity in Nepal and a decrease in political interest in protecting Nepal's vibrant media. It may also point to support for such attacks from higher up in the government.

As Kanak Mani Dixit continued: *“It is important that a culture of self-censorship does not develop to weaken the role of media in a developing democracy. We have fought hard for media freedom in Nepal over the years, and it would be a shame to let it come under a cloud at a time when [the] media should be a partner for critiquing those in power, bringing transparency in political relationships, and helping create a healthy environment for the drafting of a new constitution.”*

It is interesting to note that the timing of these attacks on the media coincide with government's systematic blocking of legal reforms, called for by local and international organisations, including ARTICLE 19. The government has consistently ignored orders given by the Supreme Court of Nepal to reform both the Printing and Publications Act and the Offences Against the State and Punishment Act, which were found to be in contravention of the Interim Constitution 2006.

ARTICLE 19 calls upon the Nepali government to implement the changes in legislation required by the very constitution that they drafted in 2006. ARTICLE 19 also calls on the government to create an environment whereby the media can carry out its work free from interference or violence.

It seems likely that these attacks are not simply random criminal acts but form part of a sustained and deliberate assault on freedom of expression. The impunity of those involved and the lack of any legislative changes ordered by the Supreme Court not only generate a “chilling effect” within the local media, but also amongst the NGO community and civil society itself.

ARTICLE 19 therefore also calls upon the international community to monitor and raise the profile of any such organised crimes against freedom of expression directly with the Nepali government, and to lobby for the implementation of laws to end impunity and guarantee media freedom and independence.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

- For more information: please contact Oliver Charles, oliver@article19.org, +44 20 7278 9292
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.