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இலங்கை பத்திரிகை முறைப்பாட்டு ஆணைக்குழு

Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka

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PRESS RELEASE

The Annual General Meeting of the Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka

July 30, 2009

The Annual General Meeting of the Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka (PCCSL) was held at the Sri Lanka Press Institute auditorium on Monday (July 27) at which the report by the Commission's Secretariat for the year 2008 was tabled and approved.

The PCCSL was established in October, 2003 following discussions between media organisations and political party leaders represented in Parliament to introduce an independent and autonomous self-regulatory body to hear public complaints against newspapers in keeping with modern trends in several advanced democracies around the world. Sri Lanka was the first country in South Asia to introduce the system.

The voluntary self-regulatory body attends to public complaints on a free, fast and fair basis. It functions under the provisions of the Arbitration Act No. 11 of 1996 and an autonomous Dispute Resolution Council sits when a matter cannot be resolved by way of conciliation and mediation between the complainant, the PCCSL Secretariat and the editor of a newspaper. Since its inception, over 700 complaints have been entertained by the PCCSL Secretariat.

The 2008 report was released to media institutions and the public on Wednesday.

According to the report, ninety three (93) complaints were received by the public against newspapers for the year 2008, 72 against Sinhala language newspapers, 3 against Tamil language newspapers and 18 against English language newspapers. One hundred and thirty one (131) complaints were resolved outside the PCCSL process by editors exercising the 'Right of Reply' provision directly to their readers.

The Council for the year under review comprised former Secretary General of Parliament, Mr. Sam Wijesinha (Chairman), and 5 other non-media representatives (former Government Agent, Mr. Devanesan Nessim, Attorney at Law, Ms. Sithie Thiruchelvam, former Principal Zahira College and one-time Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Mr. Javid Yusuf, Chartered Accountant, Mr. Lucille Wijewardene and management executive, Mr. Dion Schoorman) and 5 representatives of the media (Mr. Siri Ranasinghe, Mr. Jayathillake de Silva, Mr. Pramod de Silva, Ms. Vijitha Fernando who replaced the late Ms. Mallika Wanigasundera and Mr. Daya Lankapura who replaced Mr. G.S. Perera who resigned due to health reasons).

All Council members offer their time on a voluntary basis.

In his message to the 2008 report, Council Chairman Mr. Sam Wijesinha states that “the Press Complaints Commission as I have had occasion to remark has shown improvement both in its speed and efficiency in resolving complaints”.

The outgoing Chairman of the PCCSL, Mr. Ranjit Wijewardene in his message states, “.... Self-regulation is not necessarily a fool-proof system of policing the press, and ensuring its professional responsibilities towards the public-at-large. Admittedly, there are many weaknesses. While we have, over these years tried to rectify as many of these shortcomings, there is still more to be done. Even in advanced democracies where self-regulation of the press has long existed, the mechanism is constantly under review.

“The general consensus, however, is that self-regulation, with all its deficiencies is still better than a state-controlled statutory policing of the media with punitive powers that can be wielded against media practitioners and publishing houses”.

The Editors’ Guild Code of Professional Practice (Code of Ethics) which was reviewed in 2007 was printed and distributed by the PCCSL in 2008 to journalists and the public.

The report also details the various programmes undertaken by the PCCSL Secretariat to have training programmes for provincial journalists to inform them on the work of the Commission and the provisions of the Editors Code. An essay competition for school children in association with the Ministry of Education to introduce them to the concept of journalism and professional ethics is also undertaken by the PCCSL.

The audited accounts of the PCCSL were also released with the annual report. These audited accounts are published in newspapers since the inception of the Commission in 2003 and are open for public inspection.

The PCCSL is funded entirely by the newspaper industry’s contributions and funds from overseas donors. As a result the Sri Lankan tax-payer does not need to finance this self-regulatory system.

Messrs. Ernst & Young, Chartered Accountants were re-elected the Commission’s Auditor for another year.

The following were elected to the Board of Directors, Mr. Kumar Nadesan, Managing Director, Express Newspapers Ltd., (nominee of the SLPI), Mr. Nimal Welgama, Managing Director of Uplai Newspapers Ltd., (nominee of the Newspaper Society of Sri Lanka), Mr. Manik de Silva, Editor, Sunday Island and Mr. Waruna Karunatilake, Reuters (nominees of the SLPI), Mr. Sinha Ratnatunga, Editor, the Sunday Times (nominee of the Editors’ Guild of Sri Lanka), Mr. Uvindu Kurukulasuriya (nominee of the Free Media Movement), Mr. N. M. Ameen, Editor, Navamani, Mr. Sundara Nihathamani de Mel, Editor, Irida Lakbima and Mr. Nisthar Cassim, Editor, Bottom Line were elected by the House.

The Articles of Association were also amended to accommodate a representative from the Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association onto the Board of Directors following the Association becoming signatories to the Colombo Declaration on Media Freedom and Social Responsibility which was the basis for the establishment of the PCCSL in 2003.

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