

Press Release

The Human Rights Forum (HRF) calls upon the AP government to rescind GO 2430. The GO, issued on 30-10-2019 accords permission to government functionaries to file complaints and lodge appropriate cases through public prosecutor against defamatory news items in the print, electronic and social media.

HRF believes GO 2430 undermines the fundamental freedom of the Press and expression and is intended to harass and browbeat media that is not parroting the official narrative. This is completely unacceptable. A cornerstone of the media has been the many self-corrective mechanisms and the cardinal principle of self-regulation that have been in place since long. In fact, there are sufficient institutional remedies currently available that can address issues of concern that the GO purportedly tries to redress. The apprehension of journalists that this GO's intent is to choke criticism, and that it is tailor-made for misuse, is credible and well founded.

A vibrant and independent media that can keep people well informed and hold those in power to account is crucial for a strong and sustainable democracy. Without it, citizens cannot make informed decisions about how they are governed and abuse of power, which is all but inevitable in any society, will remain unexposed. Whether the Press in AP is up to this task is a matter of debate and there is much in the way the media has evolved in recent decades in the State that is plainly undesirable. However, it is improper on the part of the government to issue such orders since they can have a chilling and intimidating effect on journalists.

It would also do well to remember that this GO comes in the backdrop of an alarming rise in attacks on reporters in AP, mostly rural-based and of the vernacular media. These assaults took place essentially because of critical exposes of governmental malfunctioning. There are substantive allegations against ruling party functionaries of being complicit in these attacks.

We urge the AP government to revoke immediately this undemocratic GO.

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