

Title of session: Citizen Journalism

- 1. Date and time of session:** Wednesday, 27 February from 11:05 to 12:30
- 2. Number of participants:** 50
- 3. Number of remote participants:** 3
- 4. Session personnel (moderator, main speakers, discussants):**

Mr Stuart Allan, Professor of Journalism, The Media School, Bournemouth University, Civil Society, United Kingdom (Moderator)

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Speakers (10 minutes each)

Mr Maurice Ali, Founder and President, International Association of Independent Journalists (IAIJ), Civil Society, Canada

Ms Ellery Biddle, Editor, Global Voices Advocacy, Civil Society, United States

Ms Oiwan Lam, Regional Editor for Northeast Asia, Global Voices, Civil Society, China

Mr Julien Pain, Journalist and Director of "Les Observateurs", France 24, Private Sector, France

Ms Sana Saleem, Executive Director and Spokesperson, Bolo Bhi, Civil Society, Pakistan

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Ms Htaike Htaike Aung, Program Manager, Myanmar ICT for Development Organization (MIDO), Civil Society, Myanmar (Remote Moderator)

5. Summary of presentation and/or debate

Stuart Allan opened the session, noting that he hoped the discussion would as inclusive as possible and leave time for dialogue and debate.

Maurice Ali presented an IAIJ survey titled, "The Status of Citizen Journalists Around the World: 2012". Key findings included that the majority of citizen journalists were 18-30 years old, received no financial or logistical support from traditional news agencies, and disseminated their material through the Internet. He concluded with several recommendations for increased recognition, rights, access, protection, and collaboration with mainstream news organizations for citizen journalists.

Ellery Biddle spoke about Global Voices Online, an international network of bloggers, translators and citizen journalists. The goal of Global Voices, she said, is to amplify voices and perspectives that are not commonly heard. She noted concerns typically cited in regards to citizen journalism related to accuracy and ethics. Ms Biddle explained that Global Voices employs editors to verify content, and that community norms ensure that writers produce accurate material to preserve their own credibility.

Oiwan Lam said the major difference between citizen journalists and other Internet users is that citizen journalists use information to monitor the government and corporations, engage in public debate, set the social agenda and make change. In China, citizen journalists on social media platforms have become a major source of news. She noted government pressure on online media through censorship; monitoring of online activities; hiring online commentators to influence opinion; and harassing major opinion leaders and dissidents, as well as their family.

Julien Pain spoke about mainstream media's use of images submitted by "amateurs". These images are especially useful for events that happen suddenly (such as a tsunami) or that States do not want covered, but must be verified. Mr Pain said that amateur images could be verified by searching for previous occurrences online or by analysing the "meta data" to see where the photo was taken. He concluded that technical verification is not enough, and that traditional journalism is still necessary.

Sana Saleem refuted the idea that citizen journalism should influence mainstream journalism, outnumber it or compete with it. She said it should rather serve as an alternative media. In her own case, Ms Saleem started blogging in Pakistan to cover issues such as minority rights, women and children, since mainstream media mostly focuses on international affairs. She said the turning point for citizen journalism in Pakistan was in 2008, when there was a media blackout and citizen journalism was the only source of news.

General discussion:

Methods of verifying information: Some panellists said their organizations hired professional editors to check accuracy of content. One panellist said that citizen journalists in her city work together and rely on community support to verify information.

Media literacy and the need to educate people on becoming critical of information were highlighted as particularly important.

A question was raised about how citizen journalism impacts **licensing**. While panellists acknowledged the practical need for citizen journalism to carry press cards, one said that accreditation should not be required since there should not be limits on who can gather information.

It was acknowledged that the term "citizen journalist" is a **Western concept** that has different meanings in other cultures.

An audience member asked whether the panellists' organizations had **Codes of Conduct** for their members. While one panellist said his organization did have a Code of Conduct, others questioned the need for it. Since citizen journalists usually are not paid, their motivation comes from wanting to build readership or sometimes a career in journalism, thereby incentivizing accurate reporting.

6. Any agreed recommendations from the session.

- Citizen journalism is an emerging field that warrants further recognition, discussion and debate.
- Citizen journalists should be provided the same rights and protections as traditional journalists.
- Media and Information Literacy is needed for people to develop a critical attitude toward information.