

Research Paper

The Secretariat of Senate Spokesman

Strengthening the parliamentary representation function in Cambodia

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1. Introduction

The Senate undertakes three main roles representation, legislation and oversight. Throughout the implementation of its different functions the Senate's administration has to build appropriate information and communication channels with the media, the citizens and all other interested stakeholders to provide accurate information about the ongoing work of the Senate. Related to this, the **Senate Spokesperson Secretariat** has been established to improve transparency of the Senate legislative process through the delivery of regular updates to the media and the public in respect of the ongoing parliamentary activities of the Senate in a neutral and independent way. The Senate Spokesperson Secretariat also contributes to improving outreach to the public by publicizing and organizing visitors' services and arranging access for the public and the press to the Senate building and to special meetings/debates/hearings. In addition, it advises Senators from all parties on how to be more responsive to their constituents by providing relevant information via parliamentary communication resources (i.e., Senate Spokesperson Secretariat).¹ The establishment of this Unit underlines the acknowledgement by the Cambodian Senate that information about parliamentary work needs to be made more available to the media and, in turn, the citizens.

This research paper will serve as a supporting document for a forthcoming workshop which will be organized at the end of 2015. The purpose of the workshop is to inform the media about the new service and to improve the understanding of Senators and other participants about the importance of the media's oversight and information role through regular reports about parliamentary affairs.

This document will focus on the strengthening of Parliamentarians' representation role through the media. It will touch on the role of the media in a democratic society, parliamentary communication in Cambodia and other international practices, what makes a 'good' news story, mechanisms and approaches to news dissemination, and how parliamentarians can deal with media and journalists effectively.

1.1 Measures to help journalists

Article 41 of the Cambodian Constitution recognizes the important role the media play in the democratic process, namely in providing a platform in which citizens' views can be expressed and debated, legislative, parliamentary, and electoral information can be shared, and citizens and governments can be connected: media professionals, it suggests, should have the freedom to convey the relevant information². This is supported by the 1995 Press Law³. Nevertheless, the Cambodian media still face

¹ Senate Spokesman Secretariat, 2014, *Structure and Role of Senate Spokesman Secretariat*, p 1-5.

² Cambodian Center for Human Rights, *Repression of Expression: The state of free speech in Cambodia* (CCHR, September, 2013), pp13, http://www.cchrcambodia.org/admin/media/report/report/english/2013_09_19_CCHR_FoEx_Report_Repression_of_Expression_The_State_of_Free_Speech%20in_Cambodia_EN.pdf.

³ See for instance, *The World Law Guide: Legislation Cambodia*. Accessed 14 September 2015. www.lexadin.nl/wlg/legis/nofr/oeur/lxwecam.htm

challenges on this front⁴. As Jürgen Habermas⁵ and others have suggested, the media constitute a public sphere for political discourse, but in order for this function to be fully realized, those in power as well as the country's journalists need to recognize the importance of the media, and how they can be used in a fruitful and responsible manner. This requires a focus on two major elements that are currently not as strong in Cambodia as they might be.

The first is that the media need to be allowed sufficient freedom to act as reliable messengers that citizens can trust, and can thus be used to inform their voting behavior. This freedom must go hand in hand with the exercise of responsibility on behalf of journalists, and an understanding of, and adherence to professional ethics and a code of conduct in the way they perform their roles. This is further discussed in the next paragraph. But to look first at media freedom, according to the index produced annually by Reporters Without Borders, although the media in Cambodia are more “free” than most of their SE Asian counterparts (with the exception of Thailand), they are still well below average, with a ranking of 139 out of 178 countries.⁶ This index scores countries according to the pluralism of opinions represented in their media, media independence, journalists’ environment and self-censorship, the legislative framework, transparency, infrastructure supporting the production of news and information, and the abuses to which journalists are subjected. It might be beneficial, therefore, if those in power were fully aware of the potential of the media, the way the media work, and how they, as Senators, could interact with the media to enhance media freedom and improve Cambodia’s international ranking on that front.

The second, and to an extent interlinked, element is the need for journalists to be fully trained as professionals, able to understand the importance of their role and to fulfill it in an ethical manner. Here, Cambodia has made good progress. For instance, universities such as the Royal University of Phnom Penh – in its Department of Media and Communications – and Pannasastra University of Cambodia now offer in-depth professional training for journalists that includes ethical practice as a key course component. Furthermore, organizations such as the Cambodian Center for Independent Media and the Club of Cambodian Journalists have come into being both to support the independence of journalists, and to provide Codes of Ethics to instill integrity and professionalism into the way they conduct their professional activities⁷. But as these organizations acknowledge, there is still a need for more journalists to be given appropriate training and for them, too, to be aware of their role in linking parliamentarians with citizens and vice versa, along with the associated responsibilities. At the same time, reporters also need to be made more familiar with the way the Cambodian Parliament operates and of the parliamentary functions, so that there is mutual, productive understanding. Training here would also be beneficial.

In addition, practical mechanisms that provide reporters with access to parliamentarians and to news about government issues are equally important, and might be given greater consideration by the

⁴ Cambodian Center for Independent Media, *Challenges for Independent Media* (CCIM, 2014), p3, http://www.ccimcambodia.org/images/Challenges_for_Independent_Media_2014.pdf.

⁵ Jürgen Habermas in Denis McQuail. 2011. *McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory* (6th edition) pp180.

⁶ *Reporters Without Borders 2015 World Press Freedom Index*. Accessed 14 September 2015: <https://index.rsf.org>

⁷ See the Code of Ethics for Cambodian Journalists on the CCIM website: www.ccimcambodia.org/code-of-ethics

Cambodian Parliament⁸. Although in other SE Asian countries such access tends to be rigidly controlled, and the media are seen more as tools of the government than as independent purveyors of information⁹, some western systems have established mechanisms that are designed to facilitate the productive, and relatively unfettered, interaction between journalists and parliamentarians. For instance, US reporters who cover the White House need to gain accreditation from the Standing Committee of Correspondents, which is elected by reporters who are already accredited, and they need to work for a media outlet that is, among other criteria, appropriately independent. The White House also requires a Secret Service background check. Successfully accredited reporters are then entitled to attend the regular briefings, as well as given access to politicians¹⁰. As an example of another mechanism, access of British journalists to their MPs has developed over centuries: the number of reporters based in Parliament has gradually increased and, although often criticized for nurturing too close a relationship between journalists and MPs¹¹, the “lobby system” gives a selected group of reporters privileged access to certain parts of the UK Parliament where they can interview MPs directly¹². The name is derived from the fact that such journalists have access to enter the “Members’ Lobby” of the UK Houses of Parliament where MPs gather. Information gathered here cannot be attributed to a named source, but can be reported. Lobby journalists are also invited to the prime minister’s house – 10 Downing Street – for regular “off the record” briefings, which they may not report, but which constitute valuable background information about current political events. Although neither of these western mechanisms might be appropriate in Cambodia, a process that allows for a more systematic two-way flow of information – from parliamentarians to the media, and vice versa – could be considered.

⁸ For instance, in their publication *Challenges for Independent Media 2014*, the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (p9) cite the comments of reporters lamenting difficulties in access to information about government actions and policies, and a lack of “officials’ competencies” in responding to journalists’ requests for information. In their *Country Case Study: Cambodia: Support to media where media freedoms and rights are constrained* (p6), BBC Media Action in August 2012, makes similar points.

⁹ See, for instance, Zaharom Nain: Globalized theories and national controls: The state, the market, and the Malaysian media, in James Curran and Myung-Jin Park (eds.). 2000. *De-Westernizing Media Studies*. New York: Routledge, and the UNESCO-funded publication from Article 19 (the organization named after the relevant article in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), called *Freedom of Expression and the Media in Thailand*. 2005. Accessed 14 September 2015. <https://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/publications/thailand-baseline-study/pdf>

¹⁰ Joshua Keating. June 7 2010. *Can the White House Revoke a Reporter’s Credentials?* Foreign Policy. Accessed 14 September 2015. foreignpolicy.com/2010/06/07/can-the-white-house-revoke-a-reporters-credentials/

¹¹ David Aaronovitch. 7 May 2002. *The media column: The lobby system poisons political journalism*. Accessed 14 September 2015: www.independent.co.uk/news/media/the-media-column-the-lobby-system-poisons-political-journalism-650494.html

¹² For example, *Lobby Journalism*, on the UK Parliament website. Accessed 14 September 2015. <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/parliamentwork/communicating/overview/lobbyjournalism/>. And *Lobby Correspondents*. On the BBC website. Accessed 14 September 2015. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/h-l/82525.stm

2. An expressed need for capacity development

In furthering their representation function, Parliamentarians need to engage with the citizens in two-way communications: Parliamentarians need to tell citizens about new laws and legislative implementation policies, while also listening to their concerns and suggestions to inform future legislative processes. Indeed, the strategy documents produced by the General Secretariat of the Senate¹³ articulate this need in several instances. For example, the documents express a need:

- to develop Senators' capacity to conduct outreach activities, especially in disseminating up-to-date information to citizens so that they are aware of the roles, responsibilities and activities of the Senate;
- to develop public relation skills to improve public perception about the Senate and the way it works;
- to promote public knowledge about parliamentary processes and roles – achieved through appropriate public engagement; and
- to recognize that it is the Cambodian people themselves who are the ones who actually implement democracy at both national and subnational levels. The 'will' of the people – generated through appropriate public relations/communications– is what will ultimately enable the realization of Parliamentary missions.

These Senate strategy documents also agree with international experience¹⁴, which supports the view that, if people are to feel respect and trust for their Parliament, they need to know about its work and role, and need to be assured that it is truly interested in engaging and representing them.

3. Enhancing MPs' communications skills to support the representation function

3.1 A communications strategy and associated plan

Interacting with the people is, therefore, an essential element of Parliamentarians' representation function. Developing the associated skills and knowledge can support Parliamentarians to fulfill their role as the people's representatives, and, first and foremost, good practice guides suggest that the composition of a communications strategy and associated work plan can help to maximize the benefits¹⁵. For a start, a strategy can crystalize the aims of communications activity.¹⁶

¹³ General Secretariat of the Senate. 2014. *Study on the Strategic Framework and Activity Plan for 10 Years of Capacity Strengthening for the Cambodian Senate (2014-2024)* and General Secretariat of the Senate. 2014. *The Study on the Ten-Year Perspective of the General Secretariat of the Senate (2014-2024)*.

¹⁴ The Hansard Society. 2010. *Lessons from Abroad: How Parliaments around the World Engage with their Public*, a report from the Group on Information for the Public, UK Parliament.

¹⁵ The UK Government's *Government Communications Plan 2015/16* is an example of a plan that identifies aims and reviews past practice. It can be accessed at: <https://communication.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/government-comms-plan/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/GCS-Government-Communications-Plan-1516.pdf>

. These will mirror those aims that appear in the Senate strategy documents (discussed above), and are international in their application. But audiences will differ, as will the messages Parliamentarians wish to convey to them. For example, messages aimed at people living in remote rural areas will cover topics that differ from those aimed at, say, representatives from the business community, parliamentary colleagues or at a highly educated group of urban professionals. The language would also vary in order to match the needs of the different audiences. Guidance in identifying differences in audiences and consequently in the approaches to each are outlined in documents such as the ICLEI (International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives) *Resource Guide: Outreach and Communications*, which is aimed at local governments who need to engage community members in their activities related to climate change¹⁷.

Linked to the above, identifying the most appropriate modes of communication is also vital. In accessible areas, where it is relatively easy for people to congregate, outreach activity that enables Parliamentarians to meet with the people face-to-face is important. However, to engage with people living in remote rural areas Parliamentarians might have to rely on the radio. Television and newspapers are other ways to reach many people at the same time. The media will be discussed in the next section.

3.2 Social media

Throughout the world, but especially in poorer countries where the use of information technology might inevitably be more limited, the traditional media remain important. But to reach a younger audience these days, the use of social media, especially **Facebook** and **YouTube**, has become increasingly effective for Western MPs wishing to boost support among young voters, and is a growing trend in countries like Cambodia, too¹⁸. In one 2012 estimate, Facebook was said to have around 750 million users throughout the world, and that every minute, 60 hours of video were uploaded to YouTube¹⁹. It is reasonable to assume that those figures have continued to rise. In the 2008 US Presidential campaign, online videos of the election were viewed more than a billion times²⁰, and the UK Parliament has its own YouTube channel. Furthermore, a survey conducted by the Hansard Society in 2009 suggests that UK MPs were also increasingly making use of digital media to communicate with their constituents²¹.

In Cambodia, many leading government figures – including MPs and Ministers - now regularly post news and links on Facebook, and in July of 2015, the communications team from the Ministry for Women's

¹⁶ See, for instance, *Writing a Communication Strategy*, published by the UK Government Communication Service in 2014. Accessible at: <https://gcn.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Writing-a-communication-strategy-GCS-Guide.pdf>

¹⁷ ICLEI Resource Guide 2009. Outreach and Communications. Accessed at: [www.usclimatenetwork.org/resource-database/Outreach and Communications Guide.pdf](http://www.usclimatenetwork.org/resource-database/Outreach%20and%20Communications%20Guide.pdf)

¹⁸ Centre for European Studies (undated). *Social Media – the New Power of Political Influence*.

¹⁹ Katy Howell. 2012. An Introduction to Social Media. in *Share This: The Social Media Handbook for Professionals*. pp4.

²⁰ Nikki Schwab. 2008. In Obama-McCain Race, YouTube Became a Serious Battleground for Presidential Politics. <http://www.usnews.com/news/campaign-2008/articles/2008/11/07/in-obama-mccain-race-youtube-became-a-serious-battleground-for-presidential-politics>

²¹ Andy Williamson. 2009. *MPs Online: Connecting with Constituents*. Hansard Society

Affairs received training from Deutsche Welle Akademie in the use of Facebook to promote women's issues²². Facebook can, therefore, provide a means to convey important messages or to promote a public figure in a positive way.

That said, social media can present problems as well as benefits. As never before, a negative comment posted on Facebook about a person, a product, a company – or indeed a political party – can swiftly go 'viral' (in other words, spread to many people) to cause significant reputational or financial damage. A recent international example would be the fate of Walter Palmer, the US dentist who hunted and killed Cecil, a much loved lion who was a star attraction in one of Zimbabwe's national parks. The lion was electronically tagged and part of an Oxford University study, and his slow, painful (and apparently illegal), killing sparked international outrage and forced Palmer into hiding²³. The existence of social media means, therefore, that negative actions that might otherwise have taken place with few repercussions, might now be broadcast to millions of people across the world turning the perpetrators into "household" names. It is important, therefore, for all people in public life to be aware of the dangers, as well as the benefits, that these new means of communication offer. It is also important to underline the 'uncontrollable' nature of social media: when a story or video goes 'viral' there is little that can be done to stop its spread, and the international nature of the internet makes legal action difficult if not impossible.

Although **Twitter** is not yet widely used in Cambodia, the experience of other countries suggests that it might become more popular in the future²⁴. In 2013, the Inter-Parliamentary Union published *Social Media Guidelines for Parliaments* which gives a comprehensive overview of the ways in which social media can be used for parliamentary purposes, as well as compliance and legal issues, strategies and practical examples²⁵.

3. 3 Social marketing (public information) campaigns

Social marketing campaigns have an important role in enabling government bodies, politicians and others in senior positions to directly address issues of concern to people. These issues are not political or contentious in any way, but aim rather to provide information that will help citizens in their everyday lives. Detecting serious illnesses before they become fatal, improving diet and exercise, alerting people to the dangers of impure water and unsanitary methods of waste disposal, are among many possible

²² Jeanette Seiffert. 3 July 2015. *Cambodia: Using Facebook for women's rights*. Accessed at: www.dw.com/en/cambodia-using-facebook-for-womens-rights/a-18558528

²³ Among many newspapers around the world to give extensive coverage to Walter Palmer and the killing of Cecil the lion, *The Telegraph* (a leading UK newspaper) gave a detailed account on 26 August 2015, along with first images of the elusive dentist since he went into hiding. This can be accessed at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/11806856/walter-palmer-cecil-the-lion-killer-first-pictures.html>

²⁴ Alex Lacey. 2012. Twitter: The Unstoppable Rise of Microblogging. In: *Share This: The Social Media Handbook for Professionals*. P71

²⁵ Andy Williamson. 2013. *Social Media Guidelines for Parliaments*. Inter-Parliamentary Union. Accessible at: www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/SMG2013EN.pdf

topics about which governments and their representatives might wish to inform the public²⁶. Although arguably of less relevance to individual Parliamentarians than to parliamentary staff or the employees of government ministries, **social marketing campaigns** are nevertheless an important tool in linking parliamentarians with constituents in a way that underlines the concern of the former for the wellbeing of the latter. These campaigns apply marketing principles and practices to the spread of public information²⁷ and employ advertising methods to persuade people to change habits or behavior. The support of other organizations, especially health service providers or environmental agencies, is often enlisted to ensure the widest coverage for such campaigns in the places where people are most likely to take note²⁸.

3.4 Practical speaking skills

The effective actualization of communications strategies and efficiency in the different modes of communications benefit from the development of the related skills²⁹. For instance, the **preparation and delivery of speeches** can benefit from the identification of some basic principles³⁰. What is the main message of the speech? Who are the audience? How does the message relate to them? What techniques will enable the presenter to, first, capture their attention, and then hold it to the end of the speech?

Linguistic and other techniques can also be identified with reference to past masters. The 'I have a dream' speech of Dr. Martin Luther King, delivered in 1963, was key in creating the political momentum that resulted in the Civil Rights Act of 1964; Sir Winston Churchill's 'We shall fight on the beaches', delivered to the British Parliament in 1940, acted as a great inspiration to an embattled United Kingdom as it entered the darkest phase of the Second World War; while Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address lasted just two minutes when it was delivered in 1863, but is still quoted in support of the values of liberty and democracy today. All three speeches had a profound influence on the people who heard them and each includes techniques to engage their audiences that can be analyzed and applied in more general settings³¹.

²⁶ Gerard Hastings and Laura McDermott. 2006. Putting social marketing into practice. *BMJ* May 20; 332(7551): 1210-1212

²⁷ Adam Corner and Alex Randall. 2011. Selling climate change? The limitations of social marketing as a strategy for climate change public engagement. *Global Environment Change*. 21. 1005-1014. And Tony Proctor. 2007. *Public Sector Marketing*. London: Prentice Hall

²⁸ Many case studies can be found on the website of the UK-based National Social Marketing Centre: www.thensmc.com

²⁹ CIPR Skills Guide (undated). *Writing Great Speeches*. And Paul Richards 2004. *How to Win an Election*. pp97

³⁰ See, for instance, the EU-funded *Communications Handbook – Factsheet 12 Version 1: Presentations and Speeches*. April 2012. Produced by MED (Europe in the Mediterranean) Available at: http://www.programmemed.eu/fileadmin/PROG_MED/Communication_projets/Communication_GUIDANCE/Factsheet_12.pdf

³¹ Jeff Schmitt. 2013. 10 Keys to Writing a Speech. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffschmitt/2013/07/16/10-keys-to-writing-a-speech/>

PowerPoint can play an important role in supporting presentations, but, again, there are techniques that can be applied - and approaches that are best avoided - to make them more effective.

4. How MPs can use the media to strengthen their representation role

As discussed above, outreach activity is an important part of Parliamentarians' representation function. But, although vitally important, visits to conduct forums, public consultations, and so on, can bring Parliamentarians into contact with only a relatively small number of people: therefore, the opportunity for two-way communications with the electorate as a whole is limited.

However, the effective use of the media can facilitate a much broader two-way link. Through interaction with responsible, professionally qualified journalists, Parliamentarians can convey even the most complex legislation in simple terms, explaining who will be affected by it, and how. In return, the media provide citizens with a platform to air their views and pose questions. This platform is a means through which Parliamentarians can learn about the concerns of citizens, and these can be fed back into the parliamentary debating process and help to inform new legislation or amendments to existing laws³². The effective use of the media does, however, require Parliamentarians to form a good understanding of journalistic norms and practices and to form productive and mutually beneficial relationships with journalists³³.

4.1 Understanding what makes a 'good' news story

In their choice of news stories – and in the way these stories are handled – journalists employ a series of judgments. These relate fundamentally to the interests of their readers – what they want, or need to read. Understanding the criteria behind these judgments – in other words, what will make a 'good' story, journalistically – can help Parliamentarians to package information in a way that is likely to appeal to journalists³⁴. At the same time, journalists are often under pressure to find 'good' stories before deadlines, and generally welcome the receipt of information in a form that is easy for them to use. Given that a great deal of parliamentary information – particularly in respect of the drafting and reviewing of legislation – is highly relevant to journalists' audiences, it is beneficial to Parliamentarians, the media and the general public for it to be fully and accurately reported³⁵.

Similarly, understanding other journalistic norms can support the news dissemination process. For instance, the need for stories to be supported by quotes from the people involved, for complex issues to be presented in 'plain' language, and for all content to be filed before a deadline, is helpful³⁶.

³² Dr Jamie O.P. Shea. 1998. *The Role of the Media in a Democratic Society*. Delivered at the NATO Seminar, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Accessed at: www.nato.int/docu/speech/1998/s980707c.htm

³³ Mark Pearson and Roger Patching. 2008. Government and media relations: A 'spin' through the literature. *Humanities & Social Sciences papers*. Paper 228. http://epublications.bond.edu.au/hss_pubs/228

³⁴ Amada Barry. 2002. *PR Power: Inside Secrets from the World of Spin*

³⁵ National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. 2008. *Constituent Relations: A Guide to Best Practices*

³⁶ See, for instance, *The News Manual* website: www.thenewsmanual.net

4.2 Handling media interviews, answering 'difficult' questions and dealing with crises

In all types of interviews – live on radio or TV, or in preparation for a written story – it is the journalists' role to ask the questions they consider their audience would like to ask. In other words, they are representing the people by posing questions on their behalf. Sometimes the topics to be discussed will be agreed in advance between the journalist and the Parliamentarian. But even if this is not the case, an understanding of journalistic practices and norms, and specifically of the nature and audience of the news medium for which the journalist works, can help the Parliamentarian to identify in advance – and prepare for – the topic areas and questions that might be posed³⁷.

At the same time, especially in the case of TV interviews, an interviewee's mannerisms and behavior during the interview can affect the impression the audience will form. Being aware of these can help to promote an impression of authority and professionalism³⁸.

Similarly, effective ways to deal with difficult questions, especially in the wake of a 'crisis', can help to preserve a reputation for professionalism and maintain public confidence³⁹. Recent history provides many examples of products and people that have not just survived crises, but have even emerged in a stronger position because of the skillful – but honest – way in which they have used the media, often to allay public fears or to outline plans to improve the situation or to prevent it from happening again⁴⁰. But at the same time, the generation of public opinion by activists and lobbying groups needs to be understood⁴¹. Indeed, the advent of the Internet has also led to the formation of cyber communities who act together to put pressure to end what they perceive to be human rights abuses or other injustices or environmental threats. Examples include Avaaz that, with a reported 30 million members worldwide in 2013, wields considerable influence over public opinion⁴², as well as Amnesty International and the UK-focused 38 Degrees. The existence and power of such cyber communities reinforces a need for all Parliamentarians to ensure that the citizens of their country are properly informed and engaged in the democratic process and that they understand, and are thus able to support, parliamentary stances on various issues.

5. Conclusion

The Senate has taken a significant step towards improving the access the media have to information about parliamentary activity: the establishment of the Spokesperson and PR Offices of the Senate

³⁷ Chris Rose. 2005. *How to Win Campaigns: 100 steps to success*. Pp133

³⁸ Paul Richards. 2004. *How to Win an Election*. pp142

³⁹ CIPR Skills Guide (undated). *Crisis and Risk Management*.

⁴⁰ Jessica Hullinger (undated). *Inside a PR disaster*. www.fastcompany.com/304852/lessons-learned/inside-a-pr-disaster

⁴¹ For instance, Beth Corning (in *Accountancy*, March 1999 – *Great Reputations: A PR disaster could cost your corporation dearly*) and Robin Grove-White (in the *New Statesman*, 20 June 1997 – *Brent Spar rewrote the rules*) both outline the cost to a number of major companies that failed to handle a 'crisis' effectively

⁴² Carole Cadwalladr. 17 November 2013. *Inside Avaaz – can online activism really change the world?* <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/nov/17/avaaz-online-activism-can-it-change-the-world>

underlines an acknowledgement that the media are a vital means of channeling information to the Cambodian people about the important work conducted by the Senate.

With these offices in place, the need now is for the media to be more aware of the services they offer, and for MPs and journalists to find ways to interact so that, through the regular flow of information, parliamentarians can strengthen their representation role, engage citizens in a more vigorous two-way communication process, and thereby nurture Cambodia's democratic process.

The Cambodian Constitution and 1995 Press Law both acknowledge the importance of the media in linking government with the people. However, as the experience of many other countries has exemplified, ensuring that parliamentarians and journalists understand the roles and working practices of each other, comprehend the responsibilities that come with their roles as purveyors of critical information, and build positive relationships that are of mutual benefit, takes time and effort, as well as the development of the associated professional skills and approaches.

However, as this paper has shown, where there is the will – in the media and parliament – to develop the potential of the media to provide the people with an invaluable, two-way communications platform, there are ways in which this can be achieved. Deepening understanding, building practical skills and knowledge, and establishing practical mechanisms and processes, can go a long way towards the achievement of this ideal.

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