

## Naga Editors' statement on Assam Rifles's diktat



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On October 25 2015, Editors of five [Nagaland](#)-based media houses were issued a notification by a Colonel of the General Staff for [Assam Rifles](#). Given the gravity of the matters raised in the notification we, the Editors of various English and Indigenous language newspapers of [Nagaland](#) have taken the communication [as](#) an opportunity to reflect, consult and critically examine what our role is in these circumstances.

It is our understanding that the General Staff for [Assam Rifles](#) is concerned about three critical issues: (a) that through our reporting of press statements by [NSCN](#)-K, we have, in effect, intentionally or unintentionally supported unlawful association; (b) we have violated the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) [Act](#) of 1967; and (c) by publishing statements by banned organizations, we are, ipso facto, complicit in the organizations' illegal activities. These are serious charges indeed that merit a response from the [Nagaland](#)-based media and the wider media fraternity.

In the following paragraphs, we respectfully describe our role [as](#) media organizations functioning in an environment of conflict where the search for peace and justice is a critical component of our collective vision and mission in [Nagaland](#).

1. [As](#) Editors, our reporting has always been guided by a free, fair, forthright, sensitive and unbiased approach [as](#) we work both within the backdrop of Naga history and our current reality. Such an approach to journalism ensures that reporting is impartial and inclusive to the fullest extent, provides opportunities for constructive engagement and, where possible, promotes healthy debates and dialogues on the difficult issues and challenges that [Nagaland](#) faces. Pursuant to this mission, we, the Editors and Journalists, are always open to critical feedback that can help improve our media practice.
2. When we have reported news by, or from, banned organizations, we have done so in the spirit of transparency, inclusivity and

fairness so that the surfacing divergent opinions can promote dialogue and constructive engagement among diverse groups in [Nagaland](#). [History](#) shows that at no point has the spirit or letter of our publications intentionally sought to support a banned organization or to incite and promote violence, or was biased in nature.

3. It is within this context that the Editors are concerned by the suggestion that in our reporting we, in effect, support unlawful association and are complicit in illegal activities. Is this an attempt to censor, weaken and ultimately silence the role of the media in [Nagaland](#)? We believe that the [Assam Rifles](#) shares our vision that the citizens of [Nagaland](#) have the basic and inalienable right to be informed, to listen to all voices on matters that affect their daily lives, and to make informed decisions pursuant to the dream we all share of a [Nagaland](#) that is thriving, peaceful and democratic.
4. Further, by implying that the [Nagaland](#)-based media is supporting a particular banned organization, the [Assam Rifles](#) is, ipso facto, jeopardizing the personal safety and well being of the Editors and the media fraternity in [Nagaland](#). We want to believe that this is not the spirit or intent of the notification letter dated October 25, 2015.
5. We wish to reiterate that the notification needs to be viewed within the context of the long standing Indo-Naga issue, which historians and scholars have noted is one of the oldest political conflicts in the world. We fully appreciate the historical reality within which we live and work that has many forces [as](#) the pursuit of peace and justice has involved multiple actors and

stakeholders who have their share of competing interests and positions [as](#) well.

6. However, the media in [Nagaland](#) has remained non-partisan, impartial and independent by upholding [indigenous](#) and internationally accepted values of non-violence, democracy and peace. With the print media being the primary means of mass-communication in [Nagaland](#), we have carefully and diligently ensured that the editorial process – individually and collectively – acts responsibly, without prejudice, and is guided by universally recognized standards and ethical norms of journalism. We seek to make critical editorial decisions in ways that encourage healthy, peaceful and constructive engagement.

It is in this spirit that on this occasion of the [National](#) Press Day, which is commemorated on November 16 of every year, we, the Editors of various English and Indigenous language newspapers in [Nagaland](#), take this opportunity to reflect and assert our role [as](#) an independent and responsible free press, and to affirm our commitment [as](#) the fourth pillar of democracy. We remain open to critical feedback, and believe that the free flow of information and ideas is essential for contributing to mutual understanding and peace in [Nagaland](#).

Hence, [as](#) proponents of the free press supporting our commitment to the right to freedom of speech and expression, peace, democracy and economic empowerment, we shall:

- a. remain impartial and non-partisan while exercising our editorial independence that is free from all influences by State, Non-State and Corporate entities;
- b. continue to create and provide responsible and healthy spaces and opportunities that are open to diverse viewpoints in a sincere and sensitive manner without infringing on the news quality or the potential for constructive engagement;
- c. continue to uphold and safeguard values and practices of non-violence, democracy, liberty, inclusivity and peace;
- d. continue to practice universally acceptable standards and ethics of journalism, in particular peace journalism, while upholding the right to freedom of speech and expression;
- e. continue to exercise the right of free press – which also includes the right to freely gather and distribute news, information and ideas without restrictions; and
- f. continue reporting events ethically with transparency, accountability and objectivity by verifying and authenticating our sources of information while respecting the principle of confidentiality.

[As Nagaland](#)-based media houses, we hold ourselves responsible to the Press Council of [India](#). Furthermore, in order for the media in [Nagaland](#) to uphold democratic values, protect the right to a free press, and to creatively examine our role in the complex and challenging situation in [Nagaland](#), we are open to meeting and exploring with democratically elected members of the Government of [Nagaland](#) on issues that would enhance an environment where the media can function freely and where any issues that any party might object to – like the notification from [Assam Rifles](#) – can be addressed in a peaceful and constructive way.

Finally, by no means should this joint statement be misconstrued [as](#) a tacit support, or [against](#) any [group](#) in [Nagaland](#).

Monalisa Changkija, [Nagaland](#) Page

Geoffery Yaden, [Nagaland](#) Post

Witoubou Newmai, Eastern Mirror

K. Temjen Jamir, Tir Yimyim

M. Kire, Capi

Dr. Aküm Longchari, The Morung Express

Dated: November 15, 2015

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