



The Digital Rights Movement in Myanmar is Growing – And EngageMedia Gets to be a Part of It!

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What a difference a year makes!

Last year, EngageMedia collaborated with Phandeeyar and the Myanmar ICT Development Organisation (MIDO) to hold a one-day event in Yangon to discuss digital rights with human rights organisations and other allies. That event was attended by 18 participants and tackled the basics of relating digital rights to human rights with a focus on the Myanmar context.

Last week, for a day and a half, the Myanmar Digital Rights Forum (MDRF) was held – with over 90 participants, including 10 from outside of Myanmar. The MDRF was the product of the continued partnership among Phandeeyar, MIDO, the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB), and EngageMedia. But more than that, the MDRF was a milestone in the digital rights movement – a result of the years of policy advocacy and awareness-raising, capacity building, participation in regional and international events, and hard work by the local groups to bring to the foreground the issues of internet freedoms.



BUILDING A DIGITAL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

India

Sunil Abraham, The Centre for Internet and Society

Philippines

Nica Dumlao, Engage Media

Myanmar: Beginning Our Movement

Nay Phone Latt, Member of Parliament

Htaike Htaike Aung, MIDO

In the last year alone, the MDRF collaborators have been busy playing critical roles in events in Myanmar. Phandeeyar organised [a Tech Camp to Strengthen Transparency and Accountability in April](#), a [meet up on the Violence Against Women in the Digital World](#) in July, and a [Right to Information Law event](#) in November. Between travelling around Myanmar to raise awareness on responsible internet use and internet rights, running campaigns against hate speech, conducting research on internet usage in Myanmar, and implementing a telecentre initiative with Telenor, MIDO co-organised a camp on the Politics of Data with Tactical Technology Collective (TTC) in September. MCRB has continued to hold [consultation meetings with various stakeholders to discuss the implications of the different laws and bills on human rights in Myanmar](#) over the past year.

Unfortunately, all of these initiatives were triggered by troubling trends in Myanmar in relation to digital rights and internet freedoms. Journalists, bloggers, activists and ordinary internet users have continued to be arrested under Section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law — [as of the end of November 2016, 20 individuals have been arrested](#). Hate speech online has continued to be an issue in Myanmar, and the increasing instances of harassment of women and LGBT individuals have worsened. Beyond these on-going issues, another has emerged in the last month — the Privacy and Protection Law that the Parliament is rushing to pass. According to experts, how that particular law has defined “privacy” is problematic in its vagueness and its lack of comprehensiveness. More than that, there has been no public consultation on the law.

Needless to say, it’s been a busy year for digital rights in Myanmar.

And the MDRF came at exactly the right time. The MDRF allowed the long-time advocates for digital rights (both those working locally and internationally) the

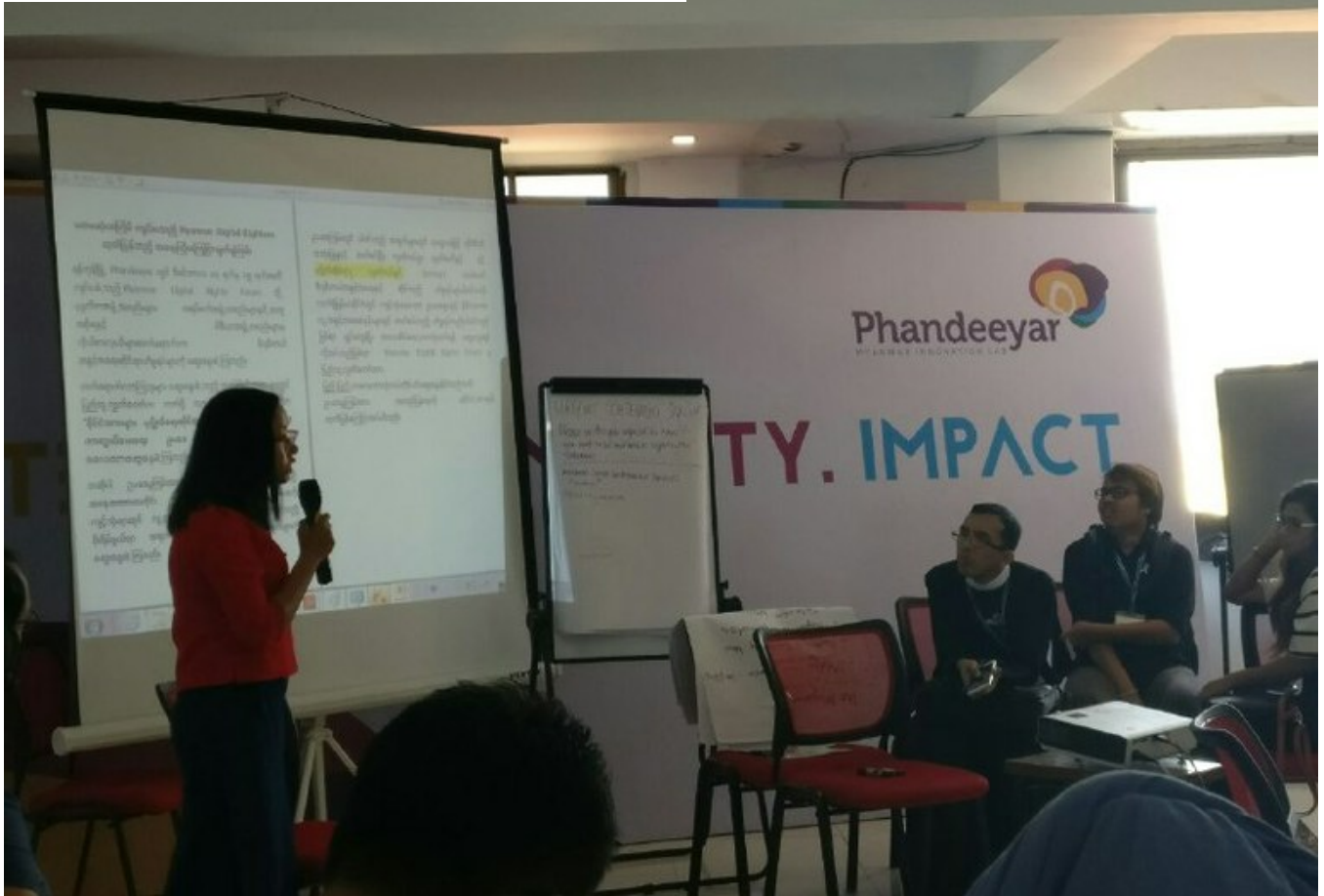


eholders. The topics tackled in the MDRF

reflect the current and emerging trends in and threats to digital rights in Myanmar: surveillance, content restrictions, and lawful interception standards; freedom of expression and hate speech; harassment of journalists; policy reform; right to information; national identification; and privacy issues in the current laws. The MDRF was also an opportunity for digital rights movements from across the region to learn from each other – and to encourage the growth of the Myanmar digital rights movement – with sessions that shared experiences around building social movements on policy reform, and looking back on the digital rights movements in India, the Philippines and Myanmar.

The MDRF also created a space where the participants could brainstorm what actions to take to address the daunting digital rights issues in Myanmar. On the second day, specifically, the participants formed themselves into groups to discuss specific action ideas and initiatives:

- Engaging Facebook on Hate Speech
- Anti- Hate Speech campaign
- Open data basics and awareness-raising
- Law review towards policy reform
- Campaign against the 66(d) arrests
- Addressing online harassment of women and LGBT
- Building the capacity of the youth on digital rights



At the end of the MDRF, a range of concrete actions and plans were made. Of these, a **statement against the Privacy and Protection Law** was signed by the participants of the forum, and sent to Parliament at the end of day two.

EngageMedia is fortunate and thankful to have been able to be part of this, and to witness the continued growth of the digital rights movement in Myanmar. And we will continue to support this growing movement.

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