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Media Watch Report

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Media Watch Report

The current issue of Media Watch newsletter covers the following topics:

- A journalist attacked in Kabul
- A journalist threatened by a member of Ghazni provincial council
- Ministry of Information and Culture unlawfully pressed Etelaat-e-Roz daily
- Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan called on the government of Afghanistan to open investigations to the legal files of slain journalists
- Media should not turn to loud speakers for terrorists





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Journalists have recently faced more incidents of violence than ever. For Afghanistan's media and journalists, November was an easy month to pass. Mr. Jawed Yosofi, a journalist for Arzo private TV canal, was on his way to home in an evening when unidentified armed men stopped and stabbed him in Kabul. He was critically injured. The men fled the scene. They have neither been identified nor captured yet. In central province of Ghazni, another journalist has been threatened to death for publishing the picture of a provincial council member. The journalists' community has expressed their grave concerns.

On the other hand, quite contrary to its expected constitutional role as supporter and protector of journalists' rights, the Ministry of Information and Culture has turned to a pressing force against journalists and media. Recently Etelaat-e-Roz daily published a critical article in the form of a satire. The Minister of Information and Culture registered a file against the daily and referred it to legal and judicial organs.

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan has registered over 500 cases of violence against journalists in the past 13 years. Forty-seven journalists lost their lives during this period. Their killers are free to move and the government has not ruled any of their cases. Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls on the national unity government to take seriously and rule judicially all of the cases of violence against journalists. It should arrest, try, and punish the perpetrators in accordance with the effective laws of Afghanistan. Meanwhile, terrorist attacks in major cities of Afghanistan reached a record high in November. Just in the second half of November, terrorists conducted over ten suicide attacks in Kabul and other cities across the country. They killed and injured scores of fellow citizens. It was in this context that Nai Supporting Open Media and Afghanistan's National Journalists' Union called on journalists and social media users to exercise caution in reporting such events so that they do not turn to loud speakers for terrorists.

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan expresses its strong concerns about the recent wave of violence against journalists. It calls again on the government of national unity to prevent such incidents from happening and do not taint its reputation by shortcomings and skipping of punishment of the perpetrators including terrorists.

The previous administration of Afghanistan's government was under criticism from media and the citizens to identify, arrest, try, and punish the perpetrators of violence against journalists. Yet the Karzai administration nominally tried selected cases of violence against journalists and technically set aside cases of violence committed against journalists.

Leaving the perpetrators of violence against journalists untried and unpunished will only contribute to an already increasing graph of violence.

Hopes rose with the formation of national unity government that the new administration will take cases of violence against journalists seriously and rule them judicially. Citizens have ever since expected that the new government will identify, try, and punish the perpetrators involved in cases of violence against journalists. So far it has come short in fulfilling this popular expectation. Perpetrators and enemies of freedom of speech continue to threaten, beat, and in some cases even kill journalists.

If the current trend in violence against journalists continue to climb and the government still remains unresponsive, it will not take so long for the new administration, like its predecessor, to deepen the gap between citizens and the government thus losing its legitimacy.





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Arzo TV journalist stabbed and injured in Kabul

Unidentified armed individuals stabbed Mr. Jawed Yosofi, a journalist for Arzo private TV canal, in the third district neighborhoods of Kabul city in the evening of November 4, 2014. They escaped from the scene immediately.

The armed motorcycle riders attacked Mr. Yosofi when he stepped out of a store in Pul-e-Surkh area of Kabul and started to walk to his home. According to Mr. Yosofi's family members, the attackers stabbed Mr. Yosofi twice and critically injured him. They immediately escaped from the scene.

Mr. Hussain Daad, a cousin of Mr. Yosofi, told Media Watch in an interview: "Five days are passed now and Mr. Yosofi's condition has not improved. They just transferred them from Ali Abad Hospital to another one in the city."

Mr. Hussain Daad added that his cousin, Mr. Yosofi, who works for Arzo private TV canal, has been severely beaten and tortured, and the signs of several stab-induced injuries are visible on his body.

According to Mr. Daad, the attackers have taken Mr. Yosofi's mobile phone along with documents and his other belongings.

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan was shocked by the news of the attack on the journalist and called on security authorities, particularly the police station in district three of Kabul city where the attack took place, to identify and arrest the attackers.

Kabul city's district three has recently turned into an insecure area for journalists. Earlier, a mullah from a nearby mosque, beat a journalist in district three neighborhood. Although policy has vowed to identify and arrest the attackers, they have not been successful after several days have passed.





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A journalist threatened by a member of Ghazni provincial council

Mr. Rahmatullah Alizada, a local journalist for Agence France-Presse, claimed that Mr. Amanullah Kamrani, a member of Ghazni provincial council, has threatened him to death.

Mr. Alizada told Media Watch in an interview that the reason behind the threat was the publishing of a picture from the inaugural ceremony of the provincial council in which all members, except Mr. Kamrani, were shown to put their hands on a copy of Quran.

Mr. Alizada continued: “It was the inaugural ceremony of Ghazni provincial council. While taking the oath, all members of the council put their hands on a copy of Quran except Mr. Alizada. I noticed it, took a picture of it and published it on social media.”

Mr. Alizada published the picture on Facebook and it drew a lot of comments from the network users. This has made anger Mr. Kamarani, a member of Ghazni provincial council, who has then threatened the journalist.

A day later when Mr. Alizada went to the provincial council’s office, one of Mr. Kamrani’s bodyguards threatened him and told him that he would not forgive him.

Mr. Alizada added: “When I went out of the provincial council’s office, one of his [Mr. Kamrani’s] guards spotted me and blocked my way. He told me that I must have been jailed. When he wanted to attack me, others intervened and did not let him to do so.”

But Mr. Kamrani, in an interview with Media Watch denied that he has threatened any journalists and added that with such allegations, the journalist wants to make up reasons for leaving the country. But Mr. Alizada, the local journalist for Agence France Presse in Ghazni province, called Mr. Kamrani’s comments as mere accusations and added that through such baseless accusations, the member of the provincial council tried to escape possible charges. He added that he did not need to escape from the country and wanted to stay and continue his sacred profession of journalism.

Media Watch considers all such threats as violations of the laws and therefore calls them as crime. No individual or group has the right to threaten journalists or disturb their professional works.

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media calls on the government of Afghanistan, particularly the security authorities of Ghazni province, to take the issue seriously and arrest and submit the perpetrator.

Whenever the government of Afghanistan falls short of preventing powerful individuals such as the member of Ghazni provincial council, then the figures of violent incidents against journalists will even go higher. This will pose serious harm to the journalism profession and reporting around the country.





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Ministry of Information and Culture unlawfully pressed Etelaat-e-Roz daily

The Ministry of Information and Culture summoned Mr. Zaki Daryayi, chief editor of Etelaat-e-Roz, to the unlawful Commission for Assessment of Complaints and Violations of Media, to explain publishing of his recent article.

Etelaat-e-Roz daily had criticized Mr. Makhdoom Raheen, Caretaker of the Ministry of Information and Culture, in a critical and satirical piece published in its Issue 706.

Then officials from the Ministry of Information and Culture summoned via telephone calls and an official letter, the chief editor of Etlaat-e-Roz to the unlawful Commission for Assessment of Complaints and Violations of Media.

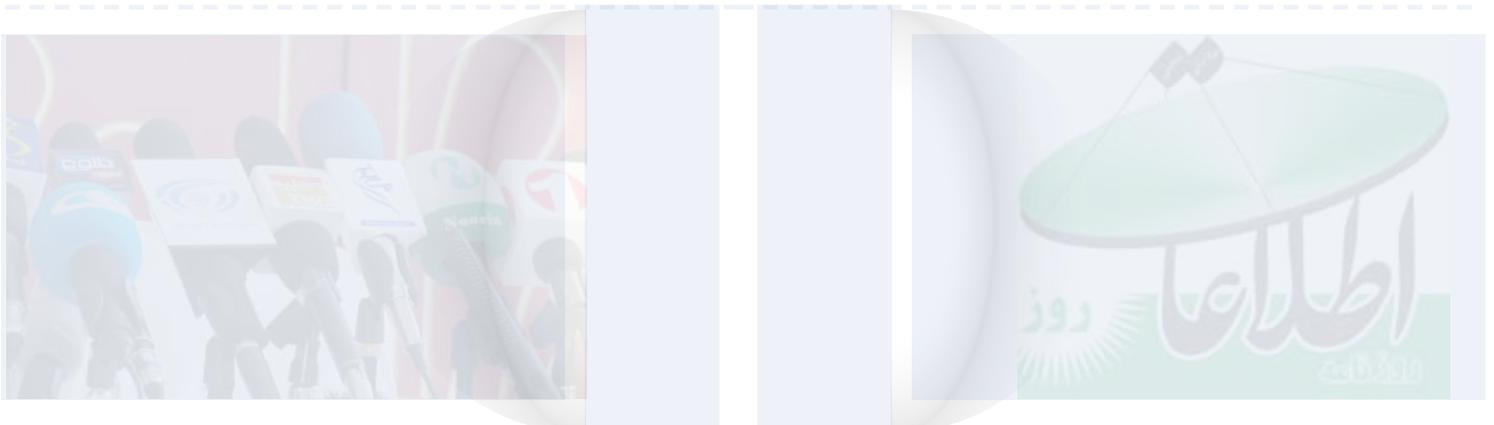
Responding to the letter of the Ministry of Information and Culture, Mr. Daryayi told Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan that he did not intend to attend a Commission whose very legitimacy was under question by law.

Mr. Daryayi believed that the action of the Ministry was unlawful and emphasized that the legal status of the above mentioned Commission is yet to be determined. However, he expressed his concerns and fears on a possible incorrect conclusion that the unlawful Commission may reach under the supervision of the Caretaker and refer his case to the Attorney General's Office.

Media supporting organizations and journalists' unions condemned the decision of the Ministry of Information and Culture to summon the chief editor of Etelaat-e-Roz daily and called it as an attempt by the Ministry to press media and limit their activities.

Mr. Sidiqullah Tawhidi, Director of Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, said: "An unlawful institution does not have the mandate to summon any person or entity. If the Ministry of Information and Culture was really interested in assessing media violations, it should have already established the Mass Media Commission in accordance with the Media Law."

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan condemns the decision of the Ministry of Information and Culture and calls it an attempt to abuse its authority to suppress journalists and media.





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Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan called on the government of Afghanistan to open investigations to the legal files of slain journalists

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan called on officials of the national unity government to open investigations into the pending legal files of slain journalists, arrest the perpetrator and bring them to justice.

In a press conference at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, Mr. Sidiqullah Tawhidi, Director of Media Watch, said: “In the past 13 years, over 500 cases of violence against journalists have been reported across the country. Forty-seven journalists lost their lives and the government has thoroughly investigated none of these files. The perpetrators, including those who involved in killing journalists, have ever been free to move.”

“The majority of the cases of slain journalists have been kept silent without any proper investigation. Since 2004, we have consistently tracked the incidents of violence against journalists and called on the previous government administrations to investigate the cases, convict perpetrators, and punish them. The government, however, did not listen to us. As a result the graph of violence against journalists continue to climb,” said Mr. Tawhidi. “

At the same press conference, Nai called on the Council of Ministers within the government of Afghanistan to approve the journalists’ employment regulation. A draft of the regulation is still lagged in the Ministry of Justice. If approved, it will allow journalists and media staff to enjoy their rights of retirement compensation, transportation fare, health insurance, and promotion.





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Media should not turn to loud speakers for terrorists

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan in joint press conference with Afghanistan's National Journalists' Union asked media and journalists to be careful not to serve as loud speakers for terrorists. Therefore, media were advised to pay more attention when they cover and broadcast/publish terrorist attacks.

Mr. Sidiqullah Tawhidi, Director of Media Watch at Nai, said: "We [journalists] are obliged to hold impartiality and report only credible and precise information. But this commitment to impartiality does not mean to compare an elected state on the same grounds with terrorism."

Mr. Tawhidi asked all media, including users of social media networks, to abstain from publishing any pictures of victims of terrorist attacks that may cause public anxiety.

Mr. Tawhidi also called on the government of Afghanistan to come up with a clear definition of terrorists who commit crimes against humanity across the country. He emphasized that the media should also follow the suit and distinguish between friends and enemies of Afghanistan."

Meanwhile, Mr. Fahim Dashti, Chief Executive of Afghanistan's National Journalists Union said: "Whenever media broadcast or publish activities of terrorist groups, we turn to the loud speakers for terrorist groups."

Mr. Dashti continued: "We request all media in the country to stop broad coverage of such [terrorist] attacks. In particular they should refrain from publishing/broadcasting pictures of war victims. We should not harm people through their access to information."

As the incidence of terrorist attacks have recently risen, coverage of these incidents has turned into the main news content in the media.

Access to information and news is a fundamental right of citizens of Afghanistan who should be informed about such incidents. However, magnification of the problem and a serious competition among media over the earliest coverage of such incidents will undoubtedly spark public anxiety.

In particular, publishing and sharing of news and pictures of such bloody events as terrorist attacks are unprecedentedly high among users of social media networks.

Publishing pictures of war victims in both traditional and social media is a clear violation of ethics of journalism as well as laws of the country.

Publishing and sharing such pictures harms the mental wellbeing of citizens. On the other hand, it will reflect a violent image of Afghanistan to the rest of the world. Finally, it strengthens the morale of terrorists and enemies of Afghanistan.





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Attention!

All journalists and media organizations are hereby notified that Mr. Mohammad Qasem Rahmani works with the Media Watch in the capacity of Media Lawyer. Those journalists and/or media outlets that face legal issues in connection with their media related and journalistic activities, or need consultation on performing such activities, may contact him by phone at 0799 830 905 or via email at: m.qasim@nai.org.af.

For more information on Media Watch project please contact our team at:

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To obtain a soft copy of the report, please visit the following link: <http://www.nai.org.af/Media-watch.htm>

Note:

1. To maintain confidentiality and to protect sources it was not possible for Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan to corroborate the incidents by carrying out additional investigations.

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