

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan



نای حمایت کننده رسانه های آزاد در افغانستان
Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan

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The upcoming Presidential Election runoff and media coverage of such a broad national event is of special importance to the people of Afghanistan. Therefore, media directors from all over Afghanistan took part in a national conference in Kabul to discuss the importance of media coverage of the upcoming Election. They agreed on several points which made up a resolution at the end of the conference.

Learning from the first round of the Election held on April 5, 2014, media directors decided not to broadcast or publish any news of terrorist activities that may affect mental security of citizens until the end of the Election runoff on June 14, 2014. They also emphasized on refraining in their publishing and broadcast programs from insulting either candidates as well as from stirring any ethnic, linguistic, religious, and regional tensions.

On another note, Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan celebrated the World Press Freedom Day on May 3, 2014 and presented Nai Awards to the country's selected top journalists. A group of professional juries from various media outlets of Afghanistan thoroughly evaluated work samples from over 100 nominees and presented the best ones with Nai Awards. World Press Freedom Day has been celebrated since the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001 in Afghanistan – every year getting more recognition.

However, journalists continued to face violence and misbehavior in Afghanistan in the past month. Assassination attempts on two journalists in Kabul and Helmand concerned journalists' supporting and media advocacy organizations. Luckily, both journalists escaped the attacks. On the other hand, investigative journalists have continued to face serious challenges in their work. They face violent treatments including insulting and threatening and challenges in accessing information. Once they finally prepare and publish or broadcast their investigative reports, yet another phase of violence and threats against the involved journalists and producers begin. Those individuals and authorities whose corruption and law-breaking records are revealed in investigative reports usually lose temper and resort to unlawful activities including threatening, beating, and if they can, even assassinating the involved journalists and producers.

The current issue of the Media Watch Newsletter contains the following titles:

- 1. Media directors agreed to ban broadcasting and publishing news on terrorist activities through Afghanistan media outlets**
- 2. Seven top journalists awarded Nai Awards**
- 3. Two journalists escaped assassination attempts in Kabul and Helmand Provinces**
- 4. A journalist intimated and threatened in Bamyan Province**
- 5. Nai celebrated World Press Freedom Day**
- 6. Journalists insulted in Badakhshan and Kadahar Provinces**
- 7. The draft Law of Access to Information referred to the Parliament**
- 8. International media should respect the interests of people of Afghanistan**
- 9. Nai called on the Parliament to pass the Law of Access to Information**

Media directors agreed to ban broadcasting and publishing news on terrorist activities through Afghanistan media outlets

The National Conference of Afghanistan Media Directors convened in Kabul on May 26, 2014. Over 110 media directors participated in the Conference to discuss ways and issues of covering the upcoming Presidential Election runoff in Afghanistan.

All participating media directors agreed to refrain from broadcasting or publishing any security-related incidents which may damage the Election process, reduce public participation in the process, and disturb public mental security.

Abdul Mujeeb Khalvatgar, Nai Executive Director addressed the audience: “The role of media in covering election-related news in the first round of the Election was productive. Therefore, they can actively play such a role again in the upcoming Presidential Election runoff.”

Mr. Khalvatgar added: “Media played a dominant role through raising public awareness, encouraging people to vote, and creating national sentiments across the nation of Afghanistan.

“We wanted to discuss the role of media in the upcoming Presidential Election runoff so that we can enhance media’s role in the process,” said Mr. Khalvatgar.

Nai Executive Director added: “A number of media requested to ban covering incidents related to Taliban terrorist group during the first round of the Presidential Election. Nai and Journalists’ Unions in Afghanistan supported their request.”

Nai Executive Director stated that the one of the goals of this National Conference is to consult and poll on whether to publish and broadcast news of incidents and events related to Taliban and other armed opponents to the state during campaigns for the Presidential Election runoff.

“We wanted to seek and learn the opinion of our peers on publishing and broadcasting news related to Taliban and other armed opponents to the State during the campaigns for the Presidential Election runoff,” said Mr. Khalvatgar.

Taliban had threatened to disrupt the first round of the Election but the Ministries of Interior and Defense had announced that they were ready to provide security for the voters.

The first round of the Election was held in a secure atmosphere where millions of Afghanistan citizens participated and cast their votes.

Reports indicate that the Taliban’s failure to disrupt security in the first round of the Election has created multiple divisions among the leadership ranks of this terrorist group.

According to Afghanistan’s National Directorate of Security, the Pakistani Inter-State-Intelligence (ISI) has ousted and imprisoned Mawlawi Abdul Qayoom Zaaker, the military leader of Quetta Shura after the latter failed to disrupt Afghanistan’s Election.

Meanwhile, Fahim Dashti, Executive Director of Afghanistan National Journalists Union, told journalists in the Conference that whenever media ban broadcasting or publishing terrorists-related news, they do not commit a mistake; instead they serve their people.

“This time, the situation is more delicate than the first round of the Election. It is predicted that armed opponents to the state will try to disrupt the runoff Election more than before; if we do not maintain our alertness, do not consider the interests of the people and the land, and instead damage the process with the illusion of



following principles then such damage will later come back to all of us,” added Mr. Dashti.

Afterwards, Afghanistan media directors divided into five working groups, discussed coverage of the runoff Election, and then prepared and signed a resolution of eleven articles. They all pronounced their commitment to seriously regard and implement each article of the resolution during the upcoming Election runoff. The resolution is as following:

Afghanistan's open media:

- 1. will regard impartiality, balance, precision, fairness, and other principles and ethics of journalism during the upcoming Presidential Election runoff.**
- 2. will refrain from stirring regional, ethnic, linguistic, and religious issues.**
- 3. Free media will refrain from publishing or broadcasting material that may defame or insult the candidates.**
- 4. will encourage people through multiple programs to actively participate in the Election.**
- 5. will raise awareness among citizens through broadcasting news, reports, round tables, interviews, documentaries and other programs.**
- 6. will reflect the realities, law-breaking activities including violations and fraud, and other Election-related challenges objectively, fairly, quickly, directly, and accurately.**
- 7. will publish and/or broadcast internal news related to the two front-runner candidates according to principles and ethics of journalism.**
- 8. will refrain from publishing or broadcasting security-related incidents that may damage the Election process, reduce people's participation and affect their mental security.**
- 9. will specially refrain from publishing or broadcasting on terrorist attacks until the end of the Election Day.**
- 10. directors call on security forces to cooperate with journalists in all areas.**
- 11. directors call on election commissions to cooperate with media and in particular in providing them with fast, credible, and accurate information.**

Refraining from broadcasting programs that stir ethnic, religious, and regional tensions; and banning on broadcasting and/or publishing about security-related incidents that may damage the Election process, reduce people's participation and disturb their mental security are highlights of this resolution.

This resolution also asks international media which cover news events in Afghanistan and have readership, viewership, and listenership in the country to regard the contents of the resolution.

Prior to this, in the aftermath of the killing of AFP's journalist Sardar Ahmad and three other members of his family, Afghanistan's journalists had banned publishing or broadcasting Taliban-related news for two weeks. This left tangible results during the first round of the Election.

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan supports this decision taken by Afghanistan media directors and considers it a step toward preserving the country's national interests.

Media Watch believes that the country's national interests are the most important to regard and successful holding of the upcoming Presidential Election runoff lies in line with them. Therefore, Afghanistan media which belong to the citizens of the country are obliged to regard the national interests of the country.

Seven top journalists awarded Nai Awards

Every year on the eve of observing the World Press Freedom Day on May 3, Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan appreciates journalists who have remarkably contributed to different working fields in media.

This year, too, Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan celebrated World Press Freedom Day and awarded Nai Awards to seven selected top journalists.

Sidiqullah Tawhidi, Media Watch Director at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, said: "Five veteran journalists who do not work at Nai composed the jury. They selected the winners from a pool of over 100 nominees who had submitted their work samples to the Nai office.

"Every year we present the

Nai Awards to seven top journalists on May 3," added Mr. Tawhidi.



This year's winners of Nai Awards are Mr. Ayub Arween from BBC-Persian, Mr. Vali Aryan from 1-TV, Ms. Tamanaa Jahesh from Khorshid TV, Mr. Ajmal Alamzai from Shamshad TV, Mr. Mir Ali Asghar Akbarzada from Maiwand TV, Ms. Farahnaaz Frotan from Ariana TV, and Mr. Baes Yosofi, photographer at Pazhwak News Agency.

On behalf of the participating journalists, Mr. Mir Ali Asghar Akbarzada, Editor-in-Chief at Maiwand TV and one of the NAI Awardees, thanked Nai office and the juries.

The winners told Nai's Media Watch that the Nai Awards do not only bring them a great pride but also a great responsibility that will make them work harder than ever in their fields.

A journalist escaped an assassination attempt in Helmand Province

Abdulaziz Safdari, a reporter for 1-TV in Helmand Province, claimed that on May 13, 2014, he was chased by a motor driver while he was making a report on the confiscated lands in Lashkargah City. According to Mr. Safdari, he ran away from the motor driver when the latter tried to assassinate him.

In an interview with Nai's Media Watch, Mr. Safdari described the incident as following: "I intended to make a report on confiscating lands and building trading markets in Lashkargah City. I took some films and then headed for home when I noticed that I was chased by a black car. It approached me and a man got off the car and approached me. While insulting and threatening me, he asked: 'Why did you film this area?' I had no other way but escaping from him. I went to police directly, asked for their help and provided them with my home address."

The 1-TV journalist added: "The man who has chased me had destroyed a cemetery and instead built a trading market in Lashkargah City. When he noticed that I was filming the area, he tried to intimidate me and take the films that I shot."

After Mr. Safdari ran away from the man who was chasing him, he called police for help. The police arrived in the area shortly and detained the man who allegedly wanted to assassinate the journalist. But authorities in Helmand Province did not take the incident seriously and called it a misunderstanding between the journalist and the alleged chaser.

Mohammad Omar Zwak, spokesperson for Helmand Governor's office, told Media Watch that both men were innocent. "The accused man who was detained by the police said that when he noticed the journalist filming the area approached him and asked what he was doing, but the journalist, without responding to the man, ran away," added Mr. Zwak.

The spokesperson for Helmand Governor's office said: "Both sides have told the police that they do not have any problems with each other."

But Mr. Safdari, 1-TV reporter, told Media Watch that he cannot follow up the case since the accused person has close ties with mafia and government authorities and enjoys a multitude of means.

The journalist said that Helmand Province Security Chief has advised him not to pursue the case against that man and instead settle it with him because, as he said, governmental offices require money in order to proceed.

According to Mr. Safdari, this is not the first one to settle with and will definitely not be the last one either. There are tens of such local powerful individuals that if a journalist set a deal with each one of them, then reporting and journalism profession will become impossible to pursue.

But the spokesperson for Helmand Governor told Media Watch that they have suggested to Mr. Safdari that if he wanted he could take the case through official legal channels, but the latter decided not to.

Mr. Zwak told Media Watch: "If the mentioned journalist still wants to take the case through official legal channels, the office of the Helmand Governor is fully ready to seriously follow up the case."

Media Watch at Nai office strongly condemns the attempt to assassinate the 1-TV journalist and calls it an explicit adversary against freedom of speech.

Corruption and land confiscation have stained the prestige of the State of Afghanistan among other nations in the world. If the government of Afghanistan truly intends to tackle these ominous problems then it is obliged to support media and journalists and investigate those individuals whose misconducts are revealed through investigative reports. And whenever journalists are threatened or attacked on, the government is obliged to protect them.

Media Watch, once again, asks the authorities in Helmand Province to support and protect the journalists in accordance with the Constitution, arrest the individual who attempted to harm the journalist and submit him to the legal and judicial authorities. Otherwise, people will conclude that land confiscators enjoy close ties with some state officials and through them continue to confiscate more state and non-state lands which will in turn further expand corruption in the country. This will create more distance between people and the state.

A journalist escaped an assassination attempt in Kabul Province

Mumtaz Bahir, formerly a journalist for Radio Salam Watandar and currently contributor to a sports news website, claimed that on May 9, 2014, he noticed that two motorbike riders were chasing him close to his home in Deh Sabz District of Kabul Province. When he entered his alley the motorbike riders opened fire at him. The bullets missed him while the attackers escaped.

Mr. Bahir told Media Watch that after the incident, he informed Deh Sabz district police about the incident via a letter.

The journalist says that there has been no enmity between him and anyone else so far. He considers the attack as related to his last year's journalistic works at Radio Salam Watandar in which he has prepared reports on confiscation of state lands and other social problems.

However, Nangialai Khan, Deh Sabz District Police Chief told Media Watch that he was completely unaware of such an incident. He added that by the order from the Minister of Interior there have been tough security measures in place in the area for the past week and that nobody has informed him about such an incident.

Months ago another journalist was shot in Kabul City and was seriously injured. He is still in bed at home.

Media Watch at Nai is concerned over an increasing trend of violence against journalists and asks the police to take practical measures to ensure journalists' security.

A journalist threatened by Bamyan University officials

Nasir Behzad, a reporter for Deutsche Welle Radio and a contributor to the 8 AM Daily, has repeatedly been threatened by Bamyan University officials after he has prepared and published an investigative report about corruption in the mentioned university. In one occasion, the Deputy Chancellor of the Bamyan University has even attempted to beat him.

Mr. Behzad told Media Watch about the report, increasing pressures, threats and insults: "I wrote and published in 8 AM Daily a report about corruption in Bamyan University. The report was based on credible evidence and indicated that large sums of money were wasted in the procurements for the University. A number of officials who were involved in this corruption were skipping interviews from the beginning. They also tried to prevent publishing of the report. The report was finally completed and published in 8 AM Daily on May 4, 2014. Direct and indirect

threats immediately began afterwards. Even a former Jihadi commander got involved. ‘We will eliminate you from Bamyan,’ he threatened me.”

Publishing of the mentioned investigative report has now created many security threats for this journalist. When provincial officials were welcoming the new Governor of Bamyan in the airport, and journalists were also present in the site, Deputy Chancellor of Bamyan University physically attacked the journalist and attempted to beat him before the Provincial Head of Information and Culture intervened and stopped him.

But Mr. Mohammad Amin Joya, Deputy Chancellor of Bamyan University rejected the claims of threatening or beating of the journalist. He stated that the published report in 8 AM Daily has distorted the quotes by some and has defamed an academic institution.

“This journalist has published distorted words in the newspaper and defamed an academic institution,” said Mr. Joya.

Mr. Joya also criticized the journalist’s professionalism as he claimed that the journalist first introduced himself as a report for Deutsche Welle and then published his article in 8 AM Daily.

Mr. Joya stated that there were personal motives involved in his physical encounter with the journalist as when he was a student at the university, he was repeatedly applying for membership of the council of university cadres and was being rejected.

But Mr. Behzad, a reporter for Deutsche Welle Radio, calling such claims as baseless, said that after the report was published and these officials’ corruption was revealed to the public, they have lost their credits among citizens and therefore attempted to retaliate.

Mr. Behzad said his report has regarded all journalism principles and effective laws in Afghanistan. He said he is ready to respond to any question at the Mass Media Commission of Afghanistan.

Media Watch at Nai strongly condemns intimidating, threatening, and beating of journalists regardless of their sources – individuals or institutions, and considers them in violation of the effective laws of the country.

If officials at Bamyan University think that the published report has distorted their words and violated principles of journalism, they can follow the mass media law and refer their complaints to the Mass Media Commission so that the latter evaluates possible violations in the report. They are not allowed to take action directly and threaten and insult the journalist in different ways.

Effective laws of Afghanistan consider intimidating, threatening, insulting and beating of journalists as crime and penalize the perpetrators. Media Watch calls on Bamyan provincial officials to seriously investigate the case and do not allow Bamyan to slip into the group of provinces with presence of enemies of freedom of speech in them.

Nai celebrated World Press Freedom Day

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan celebrates World Press Freedom Day in the country every year.

Mr. Mobarez Rashidi, Minister of Counter Narcotics, Ms. Simin Ghazal, Deputy Minister of Information and Culture for Publish Affairs, Ms. Hilai Ershad, member of House of Representatives, media directors, Chair of Afghanistan National Journalists Union, and many journalists attended this year's celebration at Nai office.



Sidiqullah Tawhidi, Director of Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan presented the incidence of violence committed against journalists from May 3, 2013 – May 3, 2014 which reached 78 cases and showed an increase this year.

Mr. Tawhidi further detailed the figure, which included six cases of murder, unprecedented in the past 13 years. Four journalists have been injured in this period. Thirty other incidents involved threatening, insulting, and beating of journalists while six cases of brief detention of journalists were registered.

Most of the detentions, according to Mr. Tawhidi, have been temporary with no definitive court order, yet many of them were performed by individuals, organizations and institutions that are legally not allowed to detain any citizen.

Mr. Mujeeb Khalvatgar, Executive Director of Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan read the message of UNESCO representative in Afghanistan on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day.

Part of the message read that with talent, sacrifice, and endeavor, Afghanistan's media and journalists risked their lives in covering the pre and post-Election periods including public activities of the Presidential Election candidates as well as raising public awareness in making their informed decisions. Citizens of Afghanistan have proved that media are not only critical in covering news but also in developing the country.

Ms. Simin Ghazal, Deputy Minister of Information and Culture for Publish Affairs, told the gathering: "Regardless of all shortcomings, threats and challenges on the way of the country's media, they have shined well in recent years, particularly at times of Election."

Ms. Hilai Ershad, Chair of Lower House's Commission on



Religious and Cultural Affairs, said that freedom of speech is one of the country's most important achievements. "The freedom of speech in Afghanistan is unprecedented in comparison with countries of the region," added Ms. Ershad.

This year's celebration of World Press Freedom Day was jointly held at Nai office in Kabul by journalists' unions, media supporting organizations, Afghanistan Journalists' Federation, UNESCO, Voice of Afghan Female Journalists and Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan. All speakers at this ceremony mentioned media and journalists' dedicated works in over a decade and called on the Government of Afghanistan to do its utmost to preserve the invaluable national value of freedom of speech.

Journalist insulted in Badakhshan

After a bodyguard of the Badakhshan Governor insulted Mr. Abdulbasir Haqjo, Head of local radio Amu and Chair of Badakhshan Council of Journalists, a number of journalists gathered and decided to ban reporting on progressive news from local Badakhshan administration until the Governor appears before media and explains the misbehavior of his bodyguard toward journalists.

Badakhsan Governor invited a number of journalists to discuss the social and security situation in the province on May 20, 2014. One of the Governor's bodyguards insulted Mr. Haqjo, Chair of Badakhsan Council of Journalists, as he entered the Governor's office along with other journalists. It is said that the bodyguard even attempted to shoot Mr. Haqjo.

Mr. Abdulbasir Haqjo told Media Watch: "A bodyguard of Badkhashan Governor attacked on me and even pointed his gun at me and threatened me."

Mr. Haqjo did not exactly know the motive behind the Governor's invitation without any specific reason and then the proceeding incident of insulting them by his bodyguard. But he thought that the Governor may have minded when, some time back, he and a BBC journalist corrected Mr. Governor's exaggerated figures of possible casualties from Argu landslide incident and he may have responded to that.

The Chair of Badakhsan Council of Journalists called the actions of the Governor's bodyguard as preplanned and rejects any allegation of misunderstanding between him and the bodyguard as he indicated that all officials at the Governor's office including his bodyguards know him as a journalist.

Following the misconduct of the Governor's bodyguard, a number of Badakhshan journalists gathered, condemned the incident and issued a resolution. Part of their resolution reads: "We ban covering activities of Badakhsan Governor until he seriously takes on this issue and rehabilitates Mr. Haqjo."

Nai's Media Watch reporter tried to reach the office of Badkhashan Governor to speak with officials about journalists' problems but they were not available to comment.

Obstacles in accessing information are another problem that Badakhsan journalists complain about.

According the Badakhshan journalists, officials in the provincial administration including the Governor himself underestimate Badakhshnan local media and sometimes they even do not interview with national media.

Samiullah Saihoon, a reporter for 8 AM Daily in Badakhshan told Media Watch: "One of the challenges for journalists in Badakhsan Province is obstacles in getting access to information. Local officials in Badakhshan do not easily accept to interview with journalists."

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan condemns the actions of Badakhshan Governor's bodyguard toward journalists and calls on the Governor to submit his bodyguard to the legal and judicial organs in accordance with law.

Nai also calls on Badakhshan Governor to explain his bodyguard's violent actions toward journalists.

Badakhshan Governor's silence will not help solve the problem; yet it will limit the opportunities for cooperation between journalists and state officials. The enemies of Afghanistan will exploit the gap.

Journalists insulted by police and officials of Mirwais Hospital in Kandahar Province

After officials at Mirwais Hospital and a number of policemen insulted journalists in Kandahar province, the latter decided to ban covering progressive news in the province until the former apologize to them.

On May 25, 2014, police refused to provide information, insulted journalists and prevented them from making reports about a terrorist attack which targeted Kandahar City's 8th District Police Chief.

It was initially claimed that the District Police Chief was killed in the attack. To examine the credibility of the information journalists called Mirwais Hospital for clarification and more credible information. The officials at Mirwais Hospital, instead, insulted journalists through responding with ugly words to their phone calls.

Ahmad Lodin, a journalist for Shamshad TV in Kandahar province, told Media Watch: "Soon after a suicide attack targeted the 8th District Police Chief, the rumors spread that he was killed in the attack. To examine the credibility of this rumor, journalists called Mirwais Hospital. I was one of them calling officials in the Hospital. The doctor in charge responded to my call and insulted me with ugly words. 'You journalists always annoy people,' he said."

According to Mr. Lodin, officials at Mirwais Hospital insulted at least five journalists in the incident. The other four included: Mr. Abdulmanan Arghand from Kabul News TV, Mr. Sediqullah Alizai from Pazhwak News Agency, Mr. Alauddin from Associated Press, and Mr. Jawed Tanwir from 1-TV.

After the incident, journalists in Kandahar Province gathered and jointly decided to ban covering any progressive news in Kandahar Province until the insulting officials at Mirwais Hospital are recognized and penalized or at least apologized to them.

Meanwhile, Mr. Dawa Khan Meenapaal, Head of Information and Culture in Kandahar Province and current Caretaker of the Governor's Spokesperson Office, told Media Watch that he unfortunately confirmed the incident. According to Mr. Meenapaal, while journalists make reports on security and terroristic incidents they usually encounter misbehavior by security forces and in spite of his efforts; he has not been able to overcome the problem yet.

However, on the provincial leadership level, Mr. Meenapaal reassured that all officials are committed to support freedom of speech and media as is indicated in the country's laws. Yet he added that there are still such individuals who have not well understood the concept of freedom of speech and sometimes conduct misbehaviors such as the one happened today.

The demands made by Kandahar journalists are not so heavy and overwhelming for the provincial officials. They have asked for identifying of the misbehaving officials and making them apologize to the journalists.

Mr. Meenapaal told Media Watch: "Apologizing after committing a mistake is a sign of a high culture that is unfortunately yet to be well institutionalized in our society. It is one of my hopes that once an official comes short of performing his/her duties, he/she should first consider resignation; if not then at least consider apologizing. Therefore, I will try to convince officials at Mirwais Hospital to apologize to the journalists, but they also make up reasons for proving their innocence."

Journalists in Kandahar Province have not been complaining about insecurity alone but also about restrictions in access to information for a long time.

According to journalists in Kandahar Province, provincial officials including civilian administration, district governors, and police chiefs have recently received a directive order to stop interviewing with journalists.

Media Watch at Nai strongly condemns violence against journalists and calls on Kandahar provincial officials to penalize the perpetrators in accordance with law.

Officials in Kandahar Province are expected to understand the sensitivity of the current situation as the country heads for a Presidential Election runoff. They are expected to provide convincing

and positive answers to the demands of the journalists. Otherwise, enemies of Afghanistan will exploit the opportunity which will not be in favor of Afghanistan's interests.

Media Watch also calls on the journalists in Kandahar Province to regard the current delicate situation of the country. In the middle of Presidential Election campaigns and on the eve of a Presidential Election runoff, people need to know about progress and achievement made by the State. Depriving citizens from information they need in this historical and sensitive moment will be harmful.

International media should respect the interests of people of Afghanistan

In the National Conference of Media Directors at the office of Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, they called on those international media which broadcast and publish in Afghanistan national languages to seriously regard Afghanistan people's public interests.

Mr. Sidiqullah Tawhidi, Director of Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan said that media directors' demand from the mentioned international media included the following: Whenever Afghanistan's media agree on banning coverage of terrorist incidents then international media should also seriously regard such a ban for the sake of preserving public interests of people of Afghanistan.

"Those media outlets which broadcast and publish in Afghanistan's national languages should do their part in encouraging people to vote," emphasized Mr. Tawhidi. "International media did not regard this point in the first round of Presidential Election."

Director of Media Watch at Nai added: "If the listenership, viewership, and readership of such international media are citizens of Afghanistan, then those media outlets should regard the demand from Afghanistan people's media. Otherwise a gap will grow between such media and its Afghan audience."

Mr. Tawidi added that Afghanistan media are in favor of open circulation of information but Afghanistan's public interests is above and higher than any other value.

Mr. Tawhidi also said that if international media regard their professional values in this context but forget the interests of a country with so many problems, it means that their priority is other than their Afghan audience and the people of Afghanistan.

Media Watch at Nai believes in open circulation of information. It does not support censorship. But the interests of giant masses of people need to be regarded. If news on terrorist attacks is

repeatedly broadcast, it may well affect the minds of the public in Afghanistan and may ultimately make them skip participating in the Election. And if the Election is not held then Afghanistan will face serious problems and challenges.

Nai demanded the Law of Access to Information to be passed

Mr. Sidiqullah Tawhidi, Media Watch Director at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, called on the Parliament to pass the Law of Access to Information as soon as possible.

In his speech in the celebration of World Press Freedom Day at Nai office on May 3, 2014 Mr. Tawhidi said that the draft law has reached the Lower House's Commission on Religious, Cultural and Higher Education Affairs for evaluation. Mr. Tawhidi called it a step forward and hoped that in the new administration media and journalists will not face any problems in accessing information.

Ms. Hilai Ershad, Chair of the Lower House's Commission on Religious, Cultural and Higher Education Affairs promised to make the draft law ready in coordination with other members of the Commission as soon as possible.

Ms. Ershad said: "We currently go through a delicate and historical period and are on the eve of the Presidential Election runoff. At this moment we need the Law of Access to Information to be effective so that we can publish news and evidence on state officials and powerbrokers that need to be revealed."

Mr. Abdulhamid Mubarez, Chair of Afghanistan National Journalists Union, said: "We have made many efforts to institutional freedom of speech so far and we will continue to do so."

At the same time, Mr. Zubair Shafiqi, Chief Editor of Weesa Daily, said: "Our commitment to preserve freedom of speech will remain firm under any condition."

With approval of Law of Access to Information, individuals and institutions will be obliged to provide journalists and citizens of Afghanistan with information in accordance with provisions of the law.

Whereas, in the absence of such a law, no individual or institution feels obliged to provide citizens with information and therefore deprive them from their right.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls on the Parliament one more time to pass the Law of Access to Information so that citizens reach their right and those who violate this fundamental right can be penalized according to the law.

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 .

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

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