

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan



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

MEDIA WATCH REPORT

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An increasing in the incidence of violence against journalists in Afghanistan in the past seven months has worried organizations which support journalists. The period illustrates the peak of violence against journalists including six cases of murder. General statistics support the claim that journalists have faced more violence and intimidation so far this year.

The 2014 Presidential Elections, lack of essential security measures by the state, and increase in terroristic attacks account as main factors for the increase of violence against journalists.

In spite of repeated requests by Nai, the government has fallen short of taking essential measures for the security of journalists. On the other hand, whenever a journalist is injured or killed on duty, no organization support the affected family – neither the employing agency nor the government oblige to support the injured journalists and the families of the fallen ones.

In some occasions, the employing media entity only obliges to compensate for the salary of the affected journalists but rejects to provide essential financial supports especially when they are injured or killed on duty.

The main reason for the status quo is absence of the Media Employment Law. Were such a law in effect, it would have obliged owners of media entities to provide financial assistance to the affected journalists or their families. It is hoped that the upcoming administration of the Government of Afghanistan will pay attention and guarantee the rights and privileges of journalists in legislative documents.

The current issue of Media Watch Newsletter includes the following topics:

- 1. A journalist mysteriously killed at his home in Balkh Province**
- 2. Unidentified armed men beat a Ghazni journalist**
- 3. A journalist attacked in Herat Province**
- 4. A Pakistani journalist sentenced to four years in prison in Afghanistan**
- 5. National Radio Television staff protested non-payment of their overtime**
- 6. Nai strongly opposed to the possibility of social media shut-down in Afghanistan**

A journalist mysteriously killed at his home in Balkh Province

Unidentified gunmen shot to death Mr. Khaled Agah Yaqoobi, a presenter of entertainment programs at local radio station Lahza, in Mazar-e-Sharif on July 12, 2014.

Director of Radio Lahza, Mr. Fahim Haqbin told Media Watch that moments after Mr. Yaqoobi returned home from the evening prayer, the door was knocked and once his children opened the door, armed men entered and shot Mr. Yaqoobi in head.

Murder of a journalist in broad daylight in Afghanistan's most secure city raises questions in public mind as well as among organizations that support journalists, about possible motives and behind-the-scene actors who might have been involved in the case including hidden and mysterious hands who follow certain political aims.

Family members and colleagues of Mr. Yaqoobi told Media Watch that he had no enmity or any other personal links or trades with any individual or group.

But officials in Balkh Province categorize the case as a criminal one and reject any links between the case and the slain journalist's professional works. In particular they strongly reject the possibility that there might have been political motivations behind the case.

Mr. Monir Farhad, Spokesperson for Balkh Governor Office, told Media Watch: "So far initial investigations which has also covered the slain journalist's work place indicate that he has not written or produced any political reports or articles and therefore we can say that the motivation behind the case has not been political but rather a criminal one."



The case has still remained opaque for the Balkh Provincial Police. According to Balkh Governor's Spokesperson, the slain journalist's brother has informed the respective police district about the incident and told them that his brother, Mr. Yaqoobi, was killed in their own house at 1:00 pm.

Mr. Farhad assured that the murderer will be identified and arrested within two more days. However, a month is passed now and the murderer in the case has yet to be identified and arrested.

A total of forty-three journalists have been killed in different ways in various parts of Afghanistan since the fall of Taliban regime in 2001; their cases have not been investigated yet.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan is thrilled by the murder of the mentioned slain journalist and asks the Government of Afghanistan to take every necessary measure to identify and arrest the murderer(s).

The mysterious murder case of the journalist in Mazar-e-Sharif has once again rung the danger bells for media professionals across the country.

Six journalists, including slain Mr. Khaled Yaqoobi, have been killed in Afghanistan since the beginning of 2014.

Unidentified armed men beat a Ghazni journalist

Unidentified armed men pursued Mr. Saifullah Maftoon, a Ghazni reporter for Pazhwak News Agency, on his way home in the evening of July 14, 2014. They ultimately stopped Mr. Maftoon in one of Ghazni City lanes, beat him and took his camera and laptop computer with them.

Mr. Maftoon told Media Watch via phone: "A Corolla-type car pursued me on my way home and once I approached home, a man with a pistol got off the car and beat me. Then two other individuals got off the car, took my laptop computer and my mobile phone, got back on the car and drove away."

Mr. Saifullah Maftoon said that he has not been threatened by any individual or group and has had no personal enmity with anyone in the past several years that he has worked as a journalist.

This journalist does not reject the possibility that the attack might have been conducted by armed thieves, but he also adds that there is a possibility that it was conducted to intimidate Ghazni journalists' community.

Officials in Ghazni Province reported that they have launched their investigations to identify and arrest the perpetrators.

Mr. Shafiq Nang Safi, Spokesperson for Ghazni Governor Office, told Media Watch that initial investigations at the scene of the incident and of the affected person indicated that the attackers have been armed thieves and had nothing to do with the affected journalist's profession.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan expresses its concerns over exacerbating insecurity for journalists and calls on the Government of Afghanistan to try its utmost to provide essential personal security as well as occupational safety for journalists.

Nai also calls on Ghazni Provincial Police to identify and arrest the perpetrators involved in this case as soon as possible which will help prevent occurring of similar cases in the future.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is responsible for providing personal security and occupational safety for journalists by effective laws of the country.

The current week has seen an increase in violence against journalists. Mysterious killing of a journalist at his home in Mazar-e-Sharif City has been the most thrilling case of violence in the recent days.

Nai calls on the Government of Afghanistan, yet another time, to curb individuals and groups that commit violence against journalists and do not let a handful of opportunist and law-breaking individuals to pose danger to the freedom of speech in the country.

Worth to mention is that journalists have repeatedly faced violence, even in its harshest forms, across the country while the State has not investigated a single file of their cases so far.

A journalist attacked in Herat Province

Mr. Idrees Amini, a journalist and presenter of Rawzana program at Saaqi TV in Herat Province, was attacked and injured by unidentified armed individuals.

Assailants stabbed Mr. Amini and seriously wounded him. Several days since the incident occurred, he has been improving now. However, Mr. Amini expressed his concerns to Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, over possible similar attacks in the future in which, he said, he may lose his life.

Mr. Amini said: "Unidentified armed motorcycle riders attacked me and stabbed me seven times. After treatment, I feel a little better now."

Mr. Amini also said that he has been running the Rawzana program with a focus on election issues. He thought that the motives behind the attack are related to his professional works and added that he has not had any personal or family enmity with anyone.

Mr. Amini added: "People thought that I was supporting a specific candidate."

The journalist also said that running the program made some people label him as a supporter of a specific candidate and so the supporters of another candidate tried to disrupt broadcasting of his program.

The Saaqi TV journalist described the attack incident as following: “I was sitting in my brother’s store that several individuals entered and without saying a word stabbed me with knives.”

Officials in Herat Province said that they had no information about the attack on the journalist. A provincial police official said that if the journalist officially registered a complaint and provided the police with more details about the case then he would have assisted them to arrest the assailants.

Meanwhile, Ms. Aatefa Ghafoori, News Director at Saaqi TV in Herat Province, told Media Watch that it was possible that some individuals or groups might have picked on some issues discussed in Mr. Amini’s broadcast programs.

But she added that the security organs have not released the results of their investigations yet to determine whether the attack on the journalist has had any links with his journalistic works or not.

She added: “There are sensitive young people in every province and it is possible that some might have picked on some issues discussed in the programs.”

Although Mr. Amini said that after he was fully recovered, he would have continued his work as a journalist, but Ms. Ghafoori told Media Watch that she did not think it might have been the case. “I think the employing media organization will be less interested in Mr. Amini’s return; because there is a fear that this problem may hurt the reputation of the entity.”

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan condemned in a press conference the attack on the journalist and called on security officials to arrest the perpetrators and submit them to the judicial organs.

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan has demanded that the perpetrators of violence against journalists should be tried in court, a demand that has been ignored by the State in the past 13 years.

A Pakistani journalist sentenced to four years in prison in Afghanistan

A primary court held in Nangarhar Province on July 7, 2014, accused a Pakistani journalist of membership in terrorist groups and sentenced him to four years in prison in Afghanistan.

The journalist has been identified as Mr. Faizullah Khan who has worked as a reporter for ARY TV network. Afghanistan National Security (intelligence) officers arrested Mr. Khan on May 6, 2014, when he entered the border district of Lalpoo in Nangarhar without holding any lawful documents.

The Pakistani journalist, along with two other Pakistani companions, entered Afghanistan without any passport.

Officials from Attorney Office for Combating Crimes against Internal and External Security arrested and litigated the mentioned Pakistani citizens on the charge of having connections with Taliban terrorist group in Afghanistan.

Judge Wasiullah, Chief of the Department of Combating Crimes against Internal and External Security at Nangarhar Primary Court told Media Watch: “If his crime was not proven and we had no essentially proving reasons, we would have not sentenced him to four years in prison.”

There were allegations that the arrested Pakistani journalist was tried at a secret court, which Judge Wasiullah rejected. “All accused Pakistani citizens were received a fair and open trial in accordance with Afghanistan laws and each was sentenced to four years in prison in the presence of their attorneys,” added Mr. Wasiullah.

According to the law, every accused person is entitled with certain rights including those of having an attorney, having a translator, keeping silent, no torture, to ask for and understand the reason for proposed charges, and other rights that guarantee the fairness of the trial process.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls on all foreign journalists to respect Afghanistan laws and enter the country formally and with proper documents. This will prevent possible subsequent problems and challenges.

National Radio Television staff protested non-payment of their overtime

National Radio Television journalists and staff protested non-payment of their overtime for the past five months and planned to stop all Radio Television broadcasting programs.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan wants all demands of the National Radio Television journalists and staff to be met.

Mr. Esmat Muslim, a National Radio Television journalist, told Media Watch that the reason behind their protest was the neglect by NRT officials to pay their overtime. “We are poor people and face many problems. The more we requested the NRT officials to pay our overtime, the less they paid attention about our rightful demand,” added Mr. Muslim.



After the protest, according to Mr. Muslim, the NRT officials promised to solve the problem. However, the protesters urged that if the officials do not act as they promised then they will protest for the second time.

Mr. Nabi Shadan, a NRT journalist who took part in the protest, told Media Watch: “A rise in the prices [in market] caused the NRT staff to carry out a civil protest and demand the payment of their overtime. The NRT officials vowed to solve the problem.”

Mr. Shadan also said that the NRT staff wanted to continue working with this organization unless the NRT kept refusing to pay their overtime and other privileges in which case the staff would have no other way but to seek for employment with other media organizations.

Meanwhile, Mr. Jalal Mahmoodi, Deputy Director of National Radio Television, called the demands of the protesting staff as legitimate, invited them to be patient as he vowed to pay their overtime in the coming days.

Mr. Mahmoodi blamed the Ministry of Finance for the problem as the latter had rejected to provide the payment.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan supports the demands of the protesting NRT staff and calls on the Ministry of Finance to take action and to ensure that the NRT staff's overtime and other privileges are paid.

Neglect in paying the NRT staff on time will cause more such gatherings, protests, and demonstrations which will ultimately paralyze the NRT.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan emphasizes on NRT administration's immediate action to meet the legitimate demands of its staff and prevent non-payment of their overtime in the future.

Nai strongly opposed to the possibility of social media shut-down in Afghanistan

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan was informed that the State of Afghanistan have intended to possibly shut down or impose limitations on social media networks, including Facebook and Twitter, in the country.

If such actions take effect then they will deprive people from one of their fundamental rights, the right to access information.

The acting Director of National Security Directorate suggested at a meeting of top security officials at the Lower House to shut down or to put limitations on social media networks.

According to the top security officials, social media have negatively impacted the mental security of citizens.

However, Mr. Sediqullah Tawhidi, Director of Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, stated in a press conference on July 6, 2014 that social media networks have played an effective role in circulating and exchanging information [among citizens] during the Presidential Runoff. Mr. Tawhidi added that using social media networks has turned as a part of people's life in today's world and shutting down or imposing limitations on such networks in Afghanistan would have been in direct violation of national and international laws. Mr. Tawhidi continued: "[citizen's use of] social media, including Facebook and Twitter, played an important and effective role in circulating and exchanging information on election-related events."

Mr. Tawhidi, Director of Media Watch, added that while some users of social media networks have misused such networks as Facebook and Twitter, in most of the cases these networks were used in effective ways.

Mr. Tawhidi added: "Of course some users misuse social media networks, but this never means that the entire networks like Facebook or Twitter are improper to use or should be limited."

“There are speculations that based on cases of misuse that occasionally happen in social media, the Government of Afghanistan may limit citizen’s access to social media networks or entirely shut down the networks in the country,” said Mr. Tawhidi.

Afghanistan citizens use social media networks in accordance with Article 50 of the Constitution, Article 19 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which is accepted by all members of the United Nations.

Media Watch Director added: “Today social media form a part of people’s daily life around the world. Shutting down of social media networks deprives people from their fundamental right of access to and exchange of information. Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls on the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to avoid shutting down or imposing limitations on social media networks particularly on Facebook and Twitter.”

Media Watch Director said that social media networks, on the other hand, have also provided an environment that could be used for stirring dividing issues and unethical and un-Islamic topics, which in no way should be used as excuses to shut down the entire networks. Mr. Tawhidi suggests that the Government of Afghanistan, instead, can use today’s advanced technologies to locate and track those users who use social media under fake identities and try to stir ethnic, regional, and religious divisions in the country.

Mr. Tawhidi also called on social media users across the country to “seriously pay attention to regard ethical principles in writing their views and sharing opinions, pictures and videos.”

Users of social media networks also reacted to the State’s possible shutdown of social media. Most of them said that shutting down of Facebook will not help the State to prevent possible chaos and disorder. Mr. Akhtar Mohammad, an Afghanistan Times journalist and a user of Facebook, told Media Watch that blocking access to social media networks denies citizens their fundamental right of access to information.

Other users stated that today social media have turned to fairly accessible connecting tools through which individuals can connect with their relatives and friends at no or very low cost.

Users in social media networks, including in Facebook, have vowed to oppose and protest against the State’s possible decision to shut down social media networks in the country.

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan believes that social media networks have provided an atmosphere for exchange of information and promotion of integration and tolerance among

people. ‘Unacceptable use and misuse’ by some users of social media networks, should not be used as an excuse to deprive the majority of users, who use such networks for exchanging information and promoting tolerance and integration, from their fundamental right of open access to information. Media Watch Director stated: “Social Media provide a virtual environment for individuals and groups from different walks of life to share and discuss their viewpoints and opinions and read, watch or listen to opposing opinions. If these outlets are closed then individuals and groups with different or even opposing ideas will face each other in real world and may even take position and clash. Social Media are the channels of understanding and dialogue. Users should patiently listen to and read opposing ideas or share their own opinions. This does not create any tension.”

Although there are no clear statistics available on the exact number of social media users in Afghanistan, the usage of such networks have been constantly increasing in the country in the recent years.

The National Security Council, in one of its meetings, called on users of Facebook across the country to positively use the social medium.

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>

Note:

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