

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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August was a difficult month filled with adventures for journalists in Afghanistan. Six journalists were beaten; cameramen and journalists of Raah-e-Farda and Khorshid TV stations were tortured and beaten twice at the Independent Election Commission (IEC) before they were beaten yet one more time by the observers of The Change and Continuity Election Camp. In another incident, a group of Raah-e-Farda-TV journalists were threatened by protesters near the Independent Election Commission and escaped the scene before the protesters could smash their cars' windows and break their equipment. They stated that the Independent Election Commission's staff and a specific election camp's observers asked them to delete their recorded film after they filmed the apparent fraudulent ballots. They refused and got beaten and forced to delete their recorded films.

The Nai's Media Watch also registered two incidents in which officials from local administrations as well as military officers threatened and beat journalists in the provinces. In one incident, Nangarhar Police Chief insulted and threatened a journalist, while in a separate incident; officials from Attorney General's Provincial Office in Kandahar pressed and threatened the chief editor of a local weekly.

State-imposed limitations on media in August have concerned journalists, media entities, and national and international organizations supporting freedom of speech. The most serious case is the expulsion of the New York Times' journalist from the country. The Office of the Attorney General has ruled out granting of any re-entry permission to the journalist.

Banning the country's TV stations from broadcasting advertisements prepared by the security institutions of the country (Ministries of Defense and Interior and National Security Directorate) is deliberately designed by the state of Afghanistan to financially press open media.

The Council of Ministers of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has recently taken the decision to ban the country's TV stations from broadcasting advertisements prepared by the security institutions. They argue that such advertisements can irritate public opinion and hurt national unity.

Meanwhile, some government agencies have opened unjust and unlawful files against media in August attempting to discourage them in their investigative and disclosing activities and to impose further limitations on them. In a specific case, the Kandahar Provincial Branch of the Office of the Attorney General has made threatening phone calls to the Chief Editor of Afsar Weekly and summoned him to provide explanations on publishing a critical article. This is a mere violation of laws and intends to limit media activities.

On the other hand, six journalists lost their lives in the first half of 2014 while Media Watch at Nai has registered over 60 cases of violence against journalists since the beginning of the year. This is alarming for freedom of speech in Afghanistan. Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan expresses its grave concerns.

On average, Afghanistan loses three journalists every year, but as predicted by Western media and analysts, this year has been far more challenging and violent for the people of the country and particularly for the journalists and media.

The two rounds of presidential election and the consequent contention it has created, the ongoing exit of international forces from Afghanistan, and an increasing deterioration of security situation across the country are among the main factors in increasing levels of violence against journalists.

This edition contains the following topics:

- 1. Journalists beaten at the Independent Election Commission (IEC)**
- 2. A journalist shot and wounded in Kabul**
- 3. Provincial Director of National Radio Television in Ghor Province survived an assassination attempt**
- 4. Security forces beat Noor-TV Journalists in Kabul City**
- 5. A National Army commander beat a journalist in Sar-e-Pul Province**
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- 7. Afghanistan media banned from broadcasting advertisements prepared by the security institutions**
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- 9. Case filed against Afsar Weekly in Kandahar Province**
- 10. Concerns expressed over increase in violence against journalists in Afghanistan**

Journalists beaten at the Independent Election Commission (IEC)

Journalists from Raah-e-Farda and Khorshid TV stations claim that the Independent Election Commission's staff and the Change and Continuity Election Camp's observers beat them and deleted the contents of their cameras while they were filming the ongoing observation and recount of ballots in one of the Commission's warehouses.

These journalists have been beaten twice on August 10, and August 25, 2014; both times their recorded films have been deleted.

Mr. Rahman Mirzad, cameraman at Raah-e-Farda TV, told Media Watch: "On August 10, 2014, when I was filming the process of observation of ballots on a ballot box with similarly marked ballots, observers from Change and Continuity Election Camp first accused me, next beat me and finally deleted all my recorded films."

Mr. Mirzad added that the mentioned observers seized his Press ID and beat him while he was trying to keep his equipment safe.

"To create obstacles to my work and delete my recorded films from my camera," continued Mr. Mirzad, "the observers leveled accusations against me."

The accusation, according to Mr. Rahmani, was that why Mr. Mirzad was contacting a female observer more than others.

Meanwhile, Mr. Zabihullah Doorandish, a journalist for Khorshid TV station, who was also beaten, told Media Watch: "After I heard their voices and saw that they were beating up my colleague, I intervened to help him, but they also beat me up."

According to Mr. Abdrreza Shahir, a journalist for Raah-e-Farda TV station and a colleague of Mr. Mirzad, this was the second time for them to be beaten up at the Independent Election Commission.

These journalists claim that when they wanted to film similarly marked ballots, empty ballot boxes, broken ballot boxes, marked-but-yet-undetached ballot books, and boxes that contained over 600 ballots all cast in favor of one specific candidate in one of the IEC's warehouses on August, 25, 2014, they faced sharp reactions by the IEC staff who did not allow them to film and prepare their report.

The Raah-e-Farda journalist told Media Watch: "We wanted to film and cover those cases where most of the ballots were called 'fraudulent' so that people learn about where fraud took place and who committed it, but the IEC staff beat us."

According to these journalists, the IEC staffs were looking for excuses to delete their recorded films.

“The IEC staff were looking for excuses to delete our recorded films. They first targeted our Press ID Cards, which were eventually issued by the IEC itself on daily basis, and commented that they were expired. They later leveled other accusations against us and attacked us,” added Mr. Shahir.

Mr. Shahir commented that the observers from Change and Continuity Election Camp acted in coordination with the IEC staffs to prevent uncovering of the committed fraud.

The Change and Continuity Election Camp has rejected such allegations.

Mr. Mirzad told Media Watch: “Although the Media Law has granted us the right to film and report on the process of observation and inspection of ballots, but the IEC staff and the Change and Continuity observers try to create obstacles on our way.”

Meanwhile in a press conference, Mr. Hashmatullha Radfar, Chair of the Media Commission of the Independent Election Commission discussed ways to prevent such incidents and asked both election camps to not introduce to the Commission persons who have a background of violent behavior toward media.

“Journalists face a politically motivated treatment at the Independent Election Commission. In some occasions, journalists are asked what media organization they worked with and whenever they mentioned a media entity affiliated with an opponent’s team, they were immediately treated with violence,” said Mr. Radfar.

The IEC staffs have beaten the journalists of this media outlet (Raah-e-Fardaa) twice before and have deleted their recorded films.

A while ago, after violence broke between the observers of Reforms and Integration Election Camp and the Change and Continuity Election Camp, supports of the Change and Continuity Camp blocked entrance of these journalists to the Independent Election Commission and seized their equipment including their mobile phones.

These journalists are now concerned that supporters of Change and Continuity Camp may stop them on the way to the Commission and create more problems for them.

In reaction to these incidents, Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan stated in a press conference that the presence of journalists at the Independent Election Commission for covering the observation of ballots, and not for any other reasons, requires cooperation from both Election camps, not their violent treatment.

Election is a national process. Those individuals and groups who sabotage this national process through fraud, violation of laws, and foul play, commit national treason. Journalists are to investigate about

massive fraud in the election, film and report on the observation of ballots and ultimately disclosing the identities of the fraudsters.

Individuals or groups who prevent journalists from filming or reporting on the process of ballots' observation are in fact associating with fraudsters and should be held accountable and punished by law.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls on the Independent Election Commission to identify and punish its staff who violently treat media and journalists and introduce them to law enforcement organs.

The IEC should strictly prevent reoccurrence of such incidents. The IEC should facilitate access of information for the journalists and remove any obstacles from their way.

The right to access information is a fundamental right of the citizens and the State of Afghanistan is obliged to help journalists to achieve their right.

A journalist shot and wounded in Kabul

Armed individuals shot and wounded Mr. Azizullah Hamdard, a journalist of the Pazhwak News Agency, near his home in Kabul City.

Shot in his left arm, Mr. Hamdard was then taken to a nearby hospital where his doctors have reported that his condition was improving.

In a phone interview from his bed at a hospital, Mr. Hamdard described the incident to the Media Watch as following: "It was around 9:00 pm and I was on my way to home when I noticed that a group of armed individuals were chasing me. They approached and beat me. One of them had a pistol in his hand and shot at me. When I fell down on the ground I shouted; they escaped."

Mr. Hamdard linked the armed attack on him to his media works. He says that he has prepared many reports on the election –both the first round and the runoff- and in some polling centers disclosed fraud and meddling of armed individuals with the polling process. He adds that he was then frequently threatened and expelled from polling centers by fraudsters and powerful individuals.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan condemns the armed attack on Mr. Hamdard and calls on detective organs especially Kabul Police to identify the attackers and introduce them to legal and judicial organs.

An increase in violence against journalists has concerned media and journalists' community. They have brought the issue to the attention of the State institutions while the latter has yet to taken any meaningful measure to curb and reverse the trend.

Nai once more calls on the Government of Afghanistan to seriously engage in and take necessary measures to providing security for journalists.

Provincial Director of National Radio Television in Ghor Province survived an assassination attempt

Mr. Alauddin Mohammadi, Ghor Provincial Director of National Radio Television, came under attack from armed motorcycle riders when he was on his way home on August, 16, 2014.

Mr. Mohammadi told Media Watch: “After ending my work day, I was in my car driving towards home, which is located 10 km outside the provincial capital Feroz-Koh. I suddenly came under attack from two motorcycle riders. Their bullets failed to hit me because of my car’s high speed.”

Mr. Mohammadi said that he then quickly pulled up his car and hid in a pit until a number of farmers from nearby came to help him and the armed attackers escaped.

Mr. Mohammadi said that he had no personal atrocity with anyone and had no idea who attacked him and why.

But, Ghor Provincial Police Chief, General Ahmad Fahim Qayem told Media Watch that the attack on Mr. Alauddin Mohammadi is a conspiracy orchestrated by himself.

General Qayem said: “In an effort to dismiss the allegations of corruption leveled against him, The Ghor Provincial Director of National Radio Television has orchestrated this fake attack by which he wants to file a case against his opponent’s side.”

The Ghor Provincial Police Chief said that after investigations, the case of the Provincial Director of National Radio Television is now referred to the Provincial Office of the Attorney General for further investigation.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls on Ghor Security Officials to thoroughly investigate the case.

Nai believes that if the investigations lack proper thoroughness and the accusation of a made-up attack scenario cannot be verified then this all will negatively affect the spirit of media and journalistic activities. In the absence of a thorough investigation, the journalist’s life may be in further danger in the future.

On the other hand, it is an obvious crime and would undermine the credits of media among people if a journalist under the disguise of his profession would want to file a case against others.

Security forces beat Noor TV Journalists in Kabul City

Mr. Haadi Sina, presenter and moderator of political programs at Noor TV station, claims that the National Security's Quick Reaction Force Checkpoint at Omid-e-Sabz neighborhood first stopped and then beat him while he was on his way to home.

Mr. Sina told Media Watch: "Although I introduced myself as a journalist, but the QRF officer told me that: 'I knew you; you are the spokesperson for Dr. Abdullah and I watch the hypocrisies that you play every night.'"

Mr. Sina said that the officer did not stop with boxing and slapping but also kicked me and hit me with his gun butt. "At this time, my wife was passing by with her car and noticed the scene. She wanted to help me but they took her away and started to beat me again," added Mr. Sina.

Mr. Sina said that in a contact he made with the spokesperson of the Directorate of National Security, he offered his apologies for the behavior of their officer and promised to treat Mr. Sina's injuries.

Nai's Media Watch repeatedly tried to contact the Directorate of National Security to discuss the case, but could not succeed.

Meanwhile Mr. Khairullah Azad, Director of News and Political Programs at Noor TV told Media Watch: "It is possible that the TV station has camped for a particular candidate or expressed its political viewpoints, but its individual staffs and journalists are professionally free and hold their own political perspectives which are not allowed to be expressed during TV programs. Therefore, labeling media staff [for TV station's political views] is not correct."

Mr. Sina told Media Watch that he was concerned for possible harm that they can do to members of his family as he and his family has to pass every day by the same street where the checkpoint is located.

Media Watch calls on National Security officials to seriously investigate this case. No individual is allowed to use military uniform and private labeling to accuse and beat up citizens. If such recklessness among security staffs is not prevented and continue to harass citizens, then they will lose their trust in security forces and withdraw their support for them.

A National Army commander beat a journalist in Sar-e-Pul Province

Mr. Atila Noori, a journalist for Aryana TV and Pazhwak News Agency in Sar-e-Pul Province claimed that a National Army commander, named Abdul Majid, beat him while he was driving with his family through Sar-e-Pul City on August 23, 2014.

Mr. Noori told Media Watch: “The road was under construction and my car was behind the Commander’s. When his car started to drive reversely, mine horned to stop a possible collision. He and his bodyguards walked out of his car and beat me in front of my family.”

Mr. Noori then filed a complaint with Sar-e-Pul Police. According to Mr. Noori, the police intended to solve the case properly, but the mentioned Army Commander attacked the journalist once more at the Police HQ and said: “Do whatever you can!”

But Mr. Abduljabaar Haqbin, Sar-e-Pul Governor, told Media Watch: “It was a verbal tension and a physical engagement between the journalist and the National Army commander. It was then ended up with the commander offering apologies to the journalist. But then the journalist has not accepted his apology.”

The Governor assured journalists that he will introduce to the judicial organs anyone who treats journalists violently but emphasized that in such cases a journalist should complain to the Provincial Governor’s Office.

Journalists face ever increasing levels of multiple problems across the country on a daily basis. These problems include, but are not limited to, insecurity, denied access to information, terrorists’ threats. They limit necessary conditions for sound journalistic works. Mr. Noori mentions of all these challenges in Sar-e-Pul Province and asks the government to tackle these challenges.

But Sar-e-Pul Governor, Mr. Haqbin, assures all journalists that he and all other provincial officials are always accessible to journalists and that they try to solve any problems that journalists may come across in the Province.

Media Watch strongly condemns violence against journalists from any address and calls on the government of Afghanistan to identify and punish the perpetrators.

Failing to pursue and punish perpetrators of violence against journalists in the past 13 years has heartened opponents of freedom of speech to increase the level of violence against journalists.

Security officials and Army commanders are supposed to provide security for citizens and when they themselves turn to violent actors, they will disappoint citizens and gradually lose their support. The enemies of people and of the State of Afghanistan will step in to fill and exploit the gap, instead.

A foreign journalist expelled from Afghanistan

New York Times' journalist, Mr. Matthew Rosenberg, was expelled from Afghanistan after publishing an article about the country's election in the paper. He cannot return to Afghanistan.

Mr. Rosenberg had traveled to Afghanistan to cover the election process and its aftermath. According to the officials in the government of Afghanistan, he was expelled because of his recent article, published in the paper's August 18 edition, in which he mentioned of the probability of establishing of an interim government in Afghanistan since the result of the country's election has remained unclear so far.

Mr. Rosenberg wrote in his article that some officials of the government of Afghanistan planned to establish an interim government if the result of the election remains unclear.

Authorities at the Office of the Attorney General have repeatedly called such articles, published in the Western media, in violation of Afghanistan laws. In this case, they first barred Mr. Rosenberg from exiting the country, but later on August 20, asked him in an official letter to leave the country within 24 hours. The letter also informed him that he will not have the right to reenter Afghanistan.

The Spokesperson for the Office of the Attorney General, Mr. Basir Azizi, told Media Watch: "The presence of this journalist was threatening national interests of Afghanistan. Therefore, the Office of the Attorney General after investigations decided to expel Mr. Rosenberg, the New York Times journalist, and to not let him reenter the country."

The Spokesperson for the Office of the Attorney General said that no media outlet in Afghanistan is allowed to publish or broadcast any news or information without evidence and sources.

The authorities at the Office of the Attorney General insisted that Mr. Rosenberg should have disclosed the source(s) of his information which he refused.

According to Afghanistan's Media Law, a journalist has the right to keep the source of his/her information unrevealed unless an authoritative court rules otherwise.

But the Spokesperson for the Office of the Attorney General refers to Afghanistan's Constitution, Article 134 as the basis of Attorney General's decision to expel the New York Times journalist.

Article 134 of Afghanistan's Constitution reads: "Discovery of crimes shall be the duty of police, and investigation and filing the case against the accused in the court shall be the responsibility of the Attorney's Office, in accordance with the provisions of the law." This article clearly frames the mandate

of the Attorney General Office in investigation of crimes and filing case against the accused in the court. It does not grant the Attorney General's Office the authority to arbitrary investigation. In this case, according to Article 134 of the Constitution, the Office of the Attorney General should have first filed a case in the court against the Journalist to disclose his source(s) of information.

Therefore, the reference by the Office of the Attorney General to the Article 134 of the Constitution is baseless thus its decision to expel the Journalist and bar him from reentry is completely unlawful.

After expulsion of the New York Times' journalist, reactions against the decision of government of Afghanistan mounted. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) expressed its concerns over expulsion of the Journalist. Mr. Ján Kubiš, the United Nations' Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA issued a statement in which he called the decision of Government of Afghanistan as "a disturbing disregard for freedom of expression."

The statement urged authorities of Afghanistan "to urgently review their actions in light of due process, domestic laws and the international obligations of Afghanistan to safeguard media freedoms in the country."

The United States' Ambassador to Kabul, Mr. James Cunningham, called the decision of the Government of Afghanistan "a regrettable step backward for the freedom of the press in this country."

Ambassador Cunningham said: "The decision by the Government of Afghanistan to expel the New York Times' Journalist has brought under question over-a-decade-long achievements in freedom of press."

However, the Spokesperson for President Karzai called the New York Times' report fanatic and claimed that it contains nothing but lies.

President Karzai's Spokesperson said that the report relied on an anonymous source for at least 17 times which creates serious questions about the credibility of the New York Times.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls on the Government of Afghanistan to clear the reentry bar on the journalist as well as to explain how the mentioned report violated Afghanistan laws and national interests.

Article 34 of Afghanistan's Constitution guarantees freedom of expression. Nai believes that the Government of Afghanistan's decision to expel the New York Times' journalist is in violation of the country's Constitution and other effective laws.

This case is unprecedented in the past 13 years and the Government of Afghanistan's decision has raised serious concerns among the country's citizens as well as the international community that the Government of Afghanistan may have taken steps toward despotism.

The decision has cast shadow over the country's considerable achievements in freedom of expression in the last 13 years. It can directly put pressure on both domestic and foreign journalists to pay less attention and report on 2014 election.

Afghanistan media banned from broadcasting advertising messages prepared by the security institutions

The Council of Ministers of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has recently decided to ban broadcast of advertisements promoting armed forces (the National Army, the National Police, and the National Security) by TV stations. The advertisements have been considered as threatening the national unity as well as hurting public opinion.

The Ministry of Information and Culture has communicated the decision to TV stations which created serious reactions by both the TV stations and media advocacy organizations in the country.

Mr. Ekhpolkwak Safi, Director of Shamshad TV, called the decision politically motivated without legal and lawful bases.

Mr. Safi said: “TV stations make a significant portion of their finances through broadcasting advertisements from Afghanistan security institutions. Banning their broadcasting will put Afghanistan media in a difficult financial situation.”

None of such advertisements has either threatened national unity or hurt public opinion, Mr. Ekhpolkwak believes.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls the contents of the letter as unlawful and a step to limit the country’s media.

Nai believes that such a ban for media is not applicable in the current and sensitive circumstances. Broadcasting these advertisements is a significant financial source for some TV stations. The Council of Ministers’ decision to ban broadcasting these advertisements can deeply impact the finances of these TV stations and subsequently affect their activities. On the other hand, it is not such advertisements but the government’s decision to ban broadcasting them that can hurt public opinion, social well-being, and public security of the society.

Afghanistan citizens will conclude from the government’s decision to ban broadcasting these advertisements that the government is complacent toward those who kill their fellow compatriots every day.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls on the government of Afghanistan to do its utmost to support freedom of speech and media rather than hindering it.

Only Afghanistan’s Constitution and Media Law rule on regulating media activities in the country. No other institution is allowed to interfere in media affairs and limit their scope.

Ningarhar Police Chief threatened and insulted an Aryana -TV journalist

Ningarhar Police Chief threatened and insulted Mr. Rahmatullah Ziarmal, Aryana-TV journalist in Ningarhar Province, when he was making a report on the security situation in the Province.

In order to complete his report, Mr. Ziarmal was interviewing Ningarhar Provincial Police Chief who was agitated and then threatened and insulted the journalist.

Upset about this government's official, Mr. Ziarmal told Media Watch in a phone call: "During the interview, after I received formal answers to my questions on the achievements of police, I asked the Police Chief about the increasing insecurity in Ningarhar, The Police Chief turned upset and started to insult me. He ordered his bodyguards to stop filming the interview and ultimately to delete the recorded film. They threatened me to never ask such questions again."

Journalists' associations in Ningarhar Province responded to the Provincial Police Chief's behavior toward their fellow journalist, Mr. Ziarmal. They decided to refrain from broadcasting or publishing any positive news about security forces until provincial officials in Ningarhar vow to support and protect freedom of speech and access to information according to the laws of the country.

Mr. Lalpacha Azmoon, Chair of Free Association of Journalists and Writers in eastern zone, condemned Ningarhar security officials' behavior, called it in violation of Afghanistan's laws, and asked the police to refrain from violent behavior towards media and journalists in the future.

According to Mr. Azmoon, later in a press conference, where the Deputy-governor of Ningarhar was also present, the Provincial Police Chief informed journalists that the misunderstanding between police and journalists was over and the ban on broadcasting and publishing positive security news was lifted.

Mr. Ahmad Zia Abdulzai, Ningarhar Governor's Spokesperson, in an interview with Media Watch, expressed his regrets about the verbal contention between Provincial Police Chief and Aryana-TV journalist. "We will pave the way for media to conduct their activities in this province," added Mr. Alizai. Mr. Alizai said that in a meeting in which the Police Chief, the Aryana-TV journalist, and members of a number of media and journalists' associations participated, both sides reconciled. The Police Chief assured the journalists that he believed in access to information as a principle and vowed to try to realize it.

However, Ningarhar journalists said that they had previously faced similar problems with government's officials, but provincial officials have not taken any honest actions so far.

Mr. Lalapacha Azmoon said he was waiting for the new government administration to tackle such problems. He commented that the current administration was marred in corruption and cannot solve journalists' problems.

Journalists in Ningarhar complain about the current status of affairs in the Province and call it concerning for the freedom of speech and reporting.

Mr. Rahmatullah Ziarmal, Aryana-TV journalist in Jalalabad, said that he was not as much upset about the Provincial Police Chief's insults and threats as he was about the future of freedom of speech in Ningarhar and across Afghanistan.

Lack of access to information is a major reason behind many incidents of violence against journalists in Afghanistan. In order to make their reports and news, the journalists need to get access to reliable sources for further information. However, government officials frequently refuse to provide journalists with their requested information and when the latter insist on getting access to the needed information, the former commit violence against them.

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan believes that the Law of Access to Information will solve a significant portion of the journalists' problems. Both houses of the Parliament have approved the Law and now it is time for the President to sign without any delay.

Media Watch calls on all state officials particularly on security officials to provide journalists with their requested information. Law defines access to information as a citizens' right. Refusing to share information with and hiding facts from journalists will create serious problems in society which the enemies of Afghanistan can easily exploit.

On the other hand, insulting or threatening a journalist is a crime and specially state and law enforcement officials should not turn into perpetrators and insult citizens.

Afsar Weekly in Kandahar Province come under pressure from state officials

Editors at Afsar Weekly in Kandahar Province claim that after they published a critical article, government organizations have put pressure on the Weekly editors and threatened them via phone calls in which to attend the Office of the Attorney General and explain about the publishing of the article in the Weekly.

Mr. Samay Ghairatmal, Chief of Afsar Weekly, told Media Watch via a phone call that a renowned Kandahari journalist and writer wrote an article about the condition of the hospitals and pharmacies across the Province. The writer then sent his article to Afsar Weekly where it got published. The report

pointed out unprofessionalism among doctors and the presence of fake medications in the pharmacies across the province.

Mr. Ghairatmal said that after the report was published, Kandahar Provincial Director of Public Health filed a case against Afsar Weekly and called its editors to show up at the Office of Attorney General to provide explanations.

According to Mr. Ghairatmal, putting pressure on media has now turned routine in Kandahar. Whenever a state official finds out that he is mentioned in a report or in connection with corruption, he directly takes action and puts pressure on the journalist or the media outlet.

Mr. Ghairatmal called the recent stance by Kandahar Department of Public Health as putting the Weekly under pressure: “This is absolutely to press the media. Such pressures and threats have recently increased. There are mafia circles in some state offices who do not want to be disclosed. Whenever a journalist or a media outlet wants to make a report on a topic and disclose information about it, some of these officials press the journalist or the media outlet and prevent them from making such reports.”

However, Mr. Ghairatmal said that committed journalists and media would never bow to such pressures and would continue their reporting.

On the other hand, Dr. Abdulqayoom Pakhla, Director of Kandahar Department of Public Health, claimed to Media Watch that an article published on Afsar Weekly has insulted himself and his administration. So Mr. Pakhla said that in order to rehabilitate, he complained against it to judicial organs as well as to the Department of Information and Culture.

Director of Kandahar Department of Public Health told Media Watch: “Afsar Weekly should provide evidence for the claims made in its published article; otherwise they should be investigated by law.”

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls pressing of media and journalists unlawful and believes that media publish critical articles and reports in order to help improve social conditions in the country. Therefore, it calls on state officials who are determined to curb corruption and other social inequalities to assist media and journalists.

Media Watch calls on Kandahar authorities to investigate the case, identify actors who have deliberately pressured journalists and media, try and punish them.

Concerns expressed over increase in violence against journalists in Afghanistan

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan and Afghanistan National Journalists' Union express their concerns over increasing violence against journalists in the country.

According to these organizations, there have been over 60 cases of violence against journalists recorded since the beginning of the year. Six journalists were killed; a 50% increase comparing to last year.

In a joint press conference with Afghanistan National Journalists' Union and Media Watch, Mr. Sediqullah Tawhidi, Director of Media Watch, said: "Six journalists, including two foreigners, have lost their lives in separate incidents in Afghanistan this year."

Mr. Tawhidi said that armed opponent forces to the State have been responsible for majority of the cases while a number of violent incidents against journalists have been committed by the state officials.

There have been over 60 cases of violence against journalists recorded in Afghanistan in the first half of 2014 including six cases in which journalists have been murdered.

Mr. Tawhidi accused the government of neglecting the rights of journalists and said: "Leaving perpetrators unpunished has further increased violence against journalists." Mr. Tawhidi added: "The Ministry of Information and Culture has so far only condemned violence against journalists. It has more to do to help curb violence against journalists. It should have directly contacted respective organs to solve journalists' problems. The Ministry is also responsible to take action rather than only sufficing by only commenting in the media."

These statements came at a time when a journalist has been attacked in Kabul City's district 15 and subsequently hospitalized.

Media advocacy organizations have called the freedom of speech in the country as one of its most significant achievements in the past 13 years and urged the State of Afghanistan to protect it.

Journalists and media advocacy organizations have previously predicted that violence against journalists would probably increase in 2014 – which is unfortunately realized today. They now express their concerns over a 50% increase in the cases of violence against journalists in the country in comparison the last year.

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:

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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