

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan



نای حمایت کننده رسانه های آزاد در افغانستان  
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# **MEDIA WATCH REPORT**

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**Preamble:**

Over the past ten years, media organizations and reporting associations have struggled to bring awareness to the problem of violence against journalists in Afghanistan because there has been no comprehensive study done on the problem.

During the last decade, a high number of Afghan reporters have lost their lives while working as professional journalists, but yet none of these cases has been pursued in an impartial manner through the judicial system. With no legal pursuit of these cases of murdered or harassed journalists, criminals and enemies of freedom of speech are more likely to continue their crimes against journalism and the media.

However a few years ago, six Afghan reporters received awards and appreciation letters for their courage to stand up for the country's freedom of speech. This is proof that despite many challenges facing the media and reporters in Afghanistan the media as a whole is defending their rights in a dangerous region.

The information awareness duties for the media in a community where the war and insecurity has affected the sanctity of life is crucial. Unfortunately, most of local rulers and government officials are unable to understand the value of media and the freedom of expression. Afghanistan is a country where injustice, corruption and a total lack of rule of law is considered normal life. Given these serious hazards, the work of reporters to criticize government officials and warlords can be very dangerous.

Despite all these challenges, the country's open media has the ability to win the confidence of the people and their audiences. Currently, the people in order to gain information first refer to the internal media and then to external media. This is what media achieved in ten years. Now none of the incidents can be hidden from the cameras of the media and Afghanistan is a country with several aspects and several sounds that no event can be concealed.

Ten years ago, when the Afghan people wanted to get information regarding the country's events and incidents, they turned to the international media because the domestic media was restricted by the government and was acting as the government's loudspeaker, but now no incidents could be hidden from media and Afghanistan is a country with several aspects and several sounds.

The opportunity is here for the Afghan people and government to safeguard this great blessing and do not allow the voices to get muted and the aspects to get darken. Access to information is the right of Afghan people and it should be protected and safeguarded.

**Based on the above, the below news topics will be covered:**

- Beating of a reporter in Kabul
- Two reporters were beaten by police in Ghazni province
- In 2012 69 cases of violence against reports were recorded
- The reporter arrested by American forces is asking restore of reputation
- The violation against reporters cases should get priority
- Refusal of the media violation investigation commission request by NAI
- Efforts to develop an ethical code of journalism in Afghanistan
- Request for naming a road as the name of freedom of speech in Kabul
- Conferment of International Prize for Freedom of Information to an Afghan newspaper
- A special sports TV commenced its broadcasts

## **Details of the reports**

### **Bakhtar news agency reporter was beaten In Kabul**

Zabihullah Alam, Bakhtar news agency reporter claims that on December 1- 2012 at 9 PM, while returning home from a press conference, he was seriously beaten by unknown armed men and some of his money and reporting tools were also stolen.

The assailants were allegedly armed with knives and a pistol when they stopped the reporter in the Qualacha area of the eighth police district of Kabul. The reporter said the men beat him and he had been injured.

The reporter, Zabihullah Alam, told Media Watch that he was returning home from a press conference at the Kabul Star hotel and tried to enter to our home street. He saw two or three masked men standing at the beginning of the street, who called to him to give them his money. The men searched him and found his reporter badge. The robbers told each other that the victim was a reporter and started beating him. He was hit on the forehead with the handle of carpel, which caused bleeding.

News of the incident raised a serious reaction within the media communities in Afghanistan. A joint press conference was held with representatives from Media Watch, the Free Association of Afghan Journalists, the National Union of Afghan Journalists, the Journalists Protection Committee, the Journalists Defense Committee and the South Asia Free Media Association. Each of the organizations condemned the beating of Haji Zabihullah, and demanded that the Afghan police capture the suspects.

The organizations and also distributed a joint press release, which was read by Zia Boomia, Head of South Asia Free Media Association in Kabul. In this press release the government is asked to pursue the incident of assault to Mr. Alam seriously.

Abdul Hamid Mobariz, who is head of the Afghan National Union of Journalists said that the Afghan government is responsible to protect its people including journalists and asked the government to identify and punish the perpetrators of violence against journalists.

Media Watch also condemned the attack against journalists by any person or groups and asked the responsible officials specially the intelligence entities of ministry of interior to identify the perpetrators of this incident and submit them to the law court.

Media Watch is concerned of daily violence against journalists and says that the government efforts in securing the lives and careers of journalists are insufficient.

### **Two journalists beaten by police in Ghazni**

Associated Press reporter Rahmatullah Nikzad and Reuter's reporter Mustafa Andaleeb reported being beaten by police in Ghazni while gathering information on an explosion that occurred within the city on December 6<sup>th</sup>.

During a phone conversation with Nai, the reporters said they were gathering news and photos from the explosion, but were stopped by the police. During the incident, the Ghazni police commander said not to allow the journalists to gather information, and the reporters were then beaten, according to their reports

Mustafa Andaleeb, the reporter for Reuters told Nai, "While I and Mr. Nikzad were getting closer to the explosion area, the police commander ordered his soldiers to not allow the journalists to get closer; police attacked us and beat us up."

Rahmatullah Nikzad, the reporter for AP also told Media Watch, "Right after the order of Ghazni police commander, we were insulted and beaten.

"Because the attack occurred in the vicinity of Ghazni police headquarter and police wanted to conceal their own weakness, tried to prevent from news coverage," Mustafa Andaleeb said.

Media Watch attempted to discuss this issue with Ghazni police officials, but no one wanted to say anything about it. Besmellah Sharifi, head of Ghazni Information and Culture department said, "Because I am newly assigned in this position, I do not have much information about it, but I am trying my best to reduce such kinds of challenges and problems of the journalists in Ghazni."

Besmellah Sharifi told Media Watch that in order to remove these kinds of problems, he has asked the journalists in Ghazni to establish a journalist's union association. He said that he is supporting the establishment a journalists association.

The Ghazni journalists say that the police behavior has disappointed them and expressed that after one decade of Taliban collapse, some government officials, especially police, still do not understand the value of freedom of speech and the role of journalists.

The reporters said if police and other government officials continue this behavior, they will boycott news coverage of their turnover.

Media watch condemns beating of journalists by police in Ghazni and defines it as in contradiction with applicable laws of Afghanistan.

Police do not have the right to interfere in journalists' affairs. The report clearly states that police tried to stop journalists from covering an explosion that took place in Ghazni. The action taken by police is contrary to the constitution of Afghanistan. It is the duty of police to provide security for the citizens of the country, Journalists also have a right to report accidents and incidents and deliver the news to the world.

### **Media Watch recorded 69 cases of violence against journalists in Afghanistan in 2012**

In the annual media watch report, 69 cases of violence against journalists were recorded in 2012.

The Media Watch annual report was presented by Seddiqullah Tawhidi on December 25. During the presentation, Mr. Tawhidi emphasized that the annual report contains only reported cases of violence against journalists, but there are more incidents that are not reported. One reason is that some of the journalists involved in these incidents do not want to disclose their identities for fear of further violence. In the Media Watch report, 2012 saw a 13.7 percent reduction of violence compared to 2011.



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Instances of journalists' murder, injuries, beaten, detain, insult and threat in 2012 in Afghanistan

Instances	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Total
Murdered		1					1						2
Injured	1	1			1		1			5			9
Detained	1			1							1		3
Beaten		4	3	1	2		1	1	2	2		3	19
Insult		1	7		1						2		11
Threat		2	1	3	3	3	4		3	4	1	1	25
<b>Total</b>													<b>69</b>
Violences done by the government													45
Violence cases by the Taliban to the journalists													4
Violence cases by the Nato forces to the journalists													1
Violence cases by the Unknown men													19

**Note**

Totally there are 69 instances of journalists' murder, injuries, beaten, threat and insult in the list above. There are 45 cases of violence by the government, 4 cases of violence by the government, 1 case by the Nato forces and 19 cases of violence by the Unknown men

All right

During 2012, two journalists were killed in Afghanistan, nine were wounded, three were temporarily detained, 19 were beaten, 11 were insulted and 25 journalists were intimidated.

Forty-five of the reported cases of violence against journalists were made by government personnel. Four were made by the Taliban, one was made by coalition forces and 19 cases were made by unknown individuals. The security challenges in 2012, financial problems, lack of access to information and internal problems, journalists, reporters and media staff have had to face serious challenges

In 2011, 80 cases of violence against journalists were recorded in the Media Watch report. The recorded statistics in 2012 compared to last year, shows a 14 percent decrease in reported cases. The reason for the reduction of violence against journalist's self-censorship. Unrecorded violent events are based on requests by journalists and reporters on behalf of administrative authorities who are not pursuing domestic violence cases.

As before, Media Watch has asked the Afghan government and International organizations defending the rights of journalists and media to make their best efforts in terms of providing security in order to continue information awareness in a secure environment and the journalists can continue to pursue their careers.

### **NAI asked the murdered Journalists cases to be pursued**

NAI Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan expressed its concern regarding the cases of murdered journalists that have not been pursued by the government's judicial system. Because of the lack of prosecution in the cases, incidents of violence against the media have increased.

“Violence and intimidation of journalist's increases day-by-day, but the government and judicial organizations have not presented any clear response regarding identification and punishment of the perpetrators,” said the Head of Media Watch, Sediqullah Tawhidi. Mr. Tawhidi also called for the support from freedom of speech and judicial organizations to

give the cases of the murdered journalists a priority and to punish the perpetrators as soon as possible.

In a press conference held at NAI on Dec 3, Tawhidisaid that right after the murder of journalists, numerous investigation commissions was assigned, but no results have been announced at the present time.

He emphasized that there salts of investigation of violence against journalists, especially the murderers of journalists, should be announced as soon as possible in order to provide the journalists' community a sense of security and safety.

Mr. Tawhidi said the families of victims are still waiting to see justice for these crimes, but the suspects have yet to be identified.

Mr. Tawhidi announced names of the journalists who were killed in order to substantiate the values of freedom of speech and to illustrate the reality journalists are facing in different provinces.

Abdul Samad Rohani, a reporter for BBC and Pazhwak news agency was abducted and killed in Helmand. Ahmad Omid Ekhpulwak, a reporter for Pajhwok was murdered by ISAF forces and Janullah Hashimzada another Pajhwok reporter, was murdered along the Peshawar-Torkham highway.

In addition, Shaima Rezaie, an employee of Tolo television, was killed mysteriously in Kabul, and Zakia Zaki the director of "Peace" Radio was killed in her home in the district of Jabalulseraj in Parwan province.

Also, Ajmal Naqashbandi, a freelance journalist, was beheaded by Taliban in Helmand.

Sadim Khan Bahadurzoy, Jawed Ahmad, Anwar Salih, Sultan Munadi, Rahman Qul, and Abdul Qudos Hand were other murdered journalists that Mr. Tawhidi mentioned during his presentation, but none of these cases have been pursued.

However, Sediq Seddiqi, the spokesperson for Ministry of Interior has emphasized the efforts of the police to protect the media and journalists and states that the police are protecting the rights of Afghan citizens and especially journalists.

“Detection and investigation of some crimes are time consuming and it is unfortunate that our journalists have been victims of conspiracies of the enemies of freedom of speech in Afghanistan,” Mr. Sediqi said.

### **Journalist detained by U.S. forces, demanding compensation and claim to restore dignity**

Habibulrahman Ibrahim, a journalist for Barkhlick newspaper and IWPR who was detained by US forces and was released after a week of detention says that during detention, he was beaten, tortured and abused by US forces.

Mr. Ibrahim, who spoke at a joint press conference held by several journalism institutions in support of him said, “The Americans came to our home took me out from my bedroom and transferred me to Bagram Air Base by aircraft and detained for a week. “However, after release I asked to them to restore my dignity and to be compensated, but no one responded to my demands,” Mr. Ibrahim added.

During the conference, the attending associations and freedom of speech institutions demanded that illegal detentions should be stopped in Afghanistan

After the conference, a joint press release was issued by Media Watch, the Free Association of Afghan Journalists, the Afghan National Union of Journalists, the Journalists’ Protection Committee, the Journalists Defendant Committee and the South Asia Free Media Association stating that the detention of Mr. Ibrahim known as an

illegal act and NATO officials were asked to prevent such kinds of detentions in the future.

Media Watch has also asked the Afghan government and member of the coalition forces to give clear details on the detention of Mr. Ibrahimi.

The lack of acknowledgement of the allegations against Mr. Ibrahimi has created a fear and concern among journalists and the media. The Afghan government is responsible for the protection of its people, and therefore, should ask for clarification from the American forces in this regard for the reason behind the detention of this journalist, so that the case to be cleared for other journalists and Afghanistan citizens.

**The illegal media violation investigation commission issues illegal notification.**

On Nov 27, the Commission of Media Offenses, which was appointed by the Ministry of Information and Culture, issued a notification stating that the media should stop broadcasting negative news and other programs that disseminates negative images and words for the civilian and military population after 2014.

The notification has threatened prosecution if the Afghan media continues to broadcast programs contrary their declaration.

Sediqullah Tawhidi, the Head of Media Watch at NAI Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, said that the notification is not only a warning to the media, but also insulting to military and civilian officials.

In the press conference, he strongly urged the Ministry of Information and Culture to establish the media commission, which is mentioned in the Afghanistan Media Law to investigate cases of violence against the media and other offenses. Mr. Tawhidi insisted that the Ministry of Information and Culture disband the Commission of Media Offenses which works under the name of media violation investigation but has no legal authority and establish the commission agreed upon in the current media law.

Media Watch insists that observing mass media law is one of the tasks and obeying ethical morals is an accepted professional duty of information awareness.

Any usage of religious components and or national values or other words that could be interpreted may lead to restrictions in the information awareness duties.

Mr. Tawhidi stated that it is the Ministry of Information and Culture should focus on the safety of reporters, especially during the up-coming presidential election and after the 2014 transition of security rather than issue warnings and alerts that lead to self-censorship in the free environment of information awareness in the country.

### **Group of media practitioners including NAI Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan seek to unify a national journalism ethics document.**

Over the past decade, the Afghan media has lacked any ethical media guidelines that sometimes create serious problems for the media and the people of Afghanistan.

The lack of ethical guidelines can create great difficulties for vulnerable individuals who are subject to broadcasting and publishing news about them.

Abdul Mujeeb Khalvatgar, the executive director of NAI said that the lacking of a codified document in this regard is counted as a gap in the media duties in Afghanistan.

In the countries where the freedom of speech is guaranteed, there is a national document called the media ethics document, he added.

“The Ministry of Culture and Information in cooperation with some media has created a commission with 33 people. This 33-member commission has created a sub commission with seven persons in order to collect media ethics that has been codified in some of the institutions and present it to the 33 persons commission,” said Mr. Khalvatgar

“NAI, Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan asks all Afghan reporters and media to assist the commission in codification of this national document,” he added.

He also raised his concerns regarding broadcasts of harrowing images and disclosure of the victims of violence and offense that has been recently increased in the digital and printed media, and asked the media officials to act based on the mass media law.

According to some media officials in the democratic countries, the media is counted as the fourth estate in order to have active participation in awareness of the people and to monitor the government functions.

They are saying as the three branches of the government have acting guidelines, the media is not an exception and needs to have acting guidelines as well.

According to these officials, the media are managed by two general variables: Mass media law and media ethics. However, in Afghanistan, there is one of the best mass media laws in the region, but a good law cannot change the media to the fourth power.

Media Watch and media institutions in the country have considered the consolidation of the media ethics as one of their work priorities and are trying to fill out lacking of such a document with cooperation of the Ministry of Information and Culture.

These institutions are asking the media to consider their audience and their responsibilities when broadcasting news stories and other programs to respect the sensibilities of their viewers and the values of their families.

**The road in front of Ministry of Information and Culture should be named by freedom of speech Road.**

NAI Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan celebrated 10 years of the freedom of speech and free media activities and for institutionalization of this freedom asked the

ministry of Information and Culture and Kabul Municipality to call the road in front of the Ministry of Information and Culture “freedom of speech” road.

In the press conference held at NAI Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, Seddiqullah Tawhidi, the head of Media Watch said the some of the roads in Kabul has been changed



to the names of individuals and events. However there is no road called “freedom of speech” in the city.

The road in front of the Ministry of Information and Culture is the best option to be named freedom of speech, Mr. Tawhidi added.

He emphasized that it has been ten years from the freedom of speech in the country and he believes dozens of reporters have lost their life defending the freedom of expression.

Mr. Tawhidi said that with the changes after 2014, the institutionalization of freedom of speech is one of the values of human rights and demands of the Afghan people. He added that during past 11 years, dozens of TVs, radios and printed presses began operations, but this progress has been associated with problems.

Because of this, Media Watch asks for the change of name for the road, so that the Afghan government can solidify their cooperation in the support of freedom of information.

### **Hashte Subh (Eight in the Morning) Newspaper has won the International Prize for Freedom of Information**

The international Prize for Freedom of Information is a famous prize in information awareness all over the world. Every year, it is presented to a medium by Reporters Without Borders, which is stationed in Paris, France.

For the first time in Afghanistan, Hashte Subh (Eight in the Morning) newspaper, has won the International Prize for Freedom of Information.

Since 1992, the award is given to the media, and a reporter in the most dangerous regions in the world where there are many problems in the field.

During a special ceremony this award was presented to Hashte Subh (Eight in the Morning) newspaper at the Le Monde headquarters in Paris on December 18.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan has welcomed the decision of Reporters Without Borders and during a press conference congratulated (Eight in the Morning) and all Afghan journalists.

During this press conference Mr. Tawhidi said that Afghan journalists are encountered with “serious” challenges and during past 11 years dozens of journalists were killed while performing journalism activities

Mr. Tawhidi added that when the international organizations pay attention to Afghan media, the government officials should pay attention as well.

Fahim Dashti, the executive director of the Afghan National Union of Journalists said the awarding of the International Prize for Freedom of Information, demonstrates what has been accomplished for the freedom of information in Afghanistan.

“The awarding of the International Prize for Freedom of Information to Hashte Subh (Eight in the Morning) does not belong to this newspaper, but it belongs to all reporters who are performing activities in journalism, and it belongs to all Afghans who are giving sacrifices for the freedom of information,” said Shah Hussain Murtazawi, the editor in chief of Hashte Subh (Eight in the Morning).

At the same time, the International Prize for the Best Reporter was presented to “Mazoon Darwish”, a Syrian reporter. This prize was presented to her because she provides reports from a very dangerous region in the world.

### **The 3 Sports TV commenced broadcasts**

On December 13, the Sports Special TV 3<sup>rd</sup> commenced broadcasting.

“We can feel broadcasting of sports programs in other media in the country, but the question that how effective in the quality and quantity improvement of sports they are is an issue to be paid attention, ”said Temorshah Adil, the editor in chief of the network during the opening ceremony.

“The start of this TV in Kabul is a dramatic progress in media family of the country,” he added. Mr. Adil also stated that it could be a very good gift for sports and athletes and is reflective of sports activities.

In addition, Mr. Adil stated that the role of media in the promotion of sports in the country, introduction and reflection of sports events could motivate the next generation of the country is crucial.

Doctor Abdullah Abdullah, Head of National Coalition who was speaking in this ceremony congratulated the opening of this TV and added that private networks have a very key role in encouragement and appreciation of athletes in the country.

Seddiqullah Tawhidi, the Head of Media Watch who was speaking in the ceremony said, there is a need for media specialization especially in the sports fields that with the arrival of sports 3<sup>rd</sup> TV, the need is filled. He hoped that in various aspects of society special media to be established.

Media Watch announced its support from specialization of TV channels in various fields and believes that media in Afghanistan is in a stage that would be better for every press to find its own audiences.

When the media broadcast in a special method, audience knows where and what TV channel to find a program.

## 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](mailto: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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