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# Media Watch Report

Owner Nai

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# Media Watch Report

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

- Taliban threatened Tolo and 1TV networks
- Attacking media constitutes a war crime
- Simultaneous attacks on the offices of two media outlets in Jalalabad, Nangarhar
- Explosion in the office of Saanga local radio station in Kandahar, Kandahar
- Taliban damaged Saaqi TV station after brief occupation of Ghorian, Herat
- Jahaan TV station stopped its broadcasts in Parwan
- Police beat up a journalist in Charikaar, Parwan
- Zabol Governor referred a freelance journalist to the legal and judicial organs
- Media directors from all over Afghanistan gathered in Kabul to discuss increasing security threats
- Third social media gathering held in Kabul





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Afghanistan's journalists and media passed through a difficult time last month. Terrorist Taliban's threatening of the country's two leading media outlets, Tolo News and 1 TV, and calling them 'military targets' have further increased journalists' concerns. In the aftermath of Taliban's occupation of Kunduz city last month, several journalists and media outlets reported and published news stories and reports on Taliban's crimes in the fallen city. Consequently, Taliban announced in one of their statements that they consider Tolo News and 1 TV as "military targets" and explicitly said that the offices, staffs, journalists, and news teams of these renowned media outlets will not be safe in the provinces anymore.

After Taliban's threatening of Tolo News and 1 TV, other journalists, media entities, journalists' unions and support organizations in Afghanistan gathered and condemned Taliban's warning. They stated that if Taliban act based on their warning, then their actions will be recorded in history as a war crime and they will face an absolute ban by all media entities in the country.

Explosions at the entrances of three media entities in Nangarhar and Kandahar provinces also made Afghanistan's media and journalists angry. Two mines exploded in less than five minutes time at the entrances of Radio Kilid and Radio Safa in Jalalabad city, Nangarhar province. Another one exploded at the entrance of Saanga Radio in Kandahar city, Kandahar province. Fortunately none of these three incidents caused any casualties. However, they did cause considerable damages to the targeted radio stations. DAESH (ISIS) claimed the responsibility for the two explosions in Jalalabad city, but the perpetrators behind the attack in Kandahar have not been determined yet.

The office of Saaqi local TV station in Ghorian district, Herat province, was partly damaged after Taliban took control of the district for one hour. They fired missiles at a security checkpoint close to the local TV station's office which broke its glasses, cut the power supply, and caused a break in the TV's broadcast for several hours.

Afghanistan's media and journalists do not only face terrorists, but also encounter violent behavior from state forces and some local powerbrokers. Sometimes they threat and even beat journalists. In a separate incident, police insulted and beat a journalist before the eyes of public in Charikar city, Parwan province.

In Zabul province, the governor has referred to the legal and judicial organs a journalist who attempted to publish a critical report in which people voiced their complaints about state's performance. The provincial government has attempted to prevent journalists from publishing critical reports.

Shortages in budget and economic problems also harm media owners and journalists. Lack of sufficient funds forced Jahaan local TV station in Parwan to suspend its broadcasts. Operating for several years in Parwan province, the TV station could not reach a self-sufficient status due to the government's incorrect policies and reduction in invest-

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ments in Afghanistan.

Given the security challenges and rising insecurity in some parts of the country, media directors from all over Afghanistan gathered in Kabul and shared their security concerns with each other. After fall of Kunduz and destruction of Kunduz media outlets in the hands of Taliban, media directors from other parts of the country feared that a similar situation may also threaten their media entities. Media in provinces have seen large investments and in order to protect such a value, media operators from all over Afghanistan participated in a meeting, organized by Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan. In the meeting, they prepared and submitted to the state their suggestions on protecting media achievements, journalists' lives, and media entities.

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## Taliban threatened Tolo and ITV networks

Taliban's Military Council threatened Tolo and 1 TV networks in a statement published in their Al-Emara website on Oct 12, 2015. The threat was issued in connection with both networks' coverage of Kunduz occupation by terrorist Taliban. The statement calls both media networks as enemy and emphasizes they will be considered as military targets with no protection to any employee of those entities.

Taliban announced Tolo and 1 TV networks as military targets and threatened to death their journalists and staffs because both media outlets published consecutive reports on the fall of Kunduz and Taliban's war crimes during their occupation of the city.

Terrorist Taliban's threatening of Afghanistan media caused national and international responses: The United Nations, Amnesty International, International Human Rights Committee, Reporters without Borders, Committee to Protect Journalists, and Afghanistan's National Federation of Journalists which includes nine media and journalists support organization including Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, condemned Taliban's threatening of Afghanistan media and called it a war crime.

Reporters without Borders, based in Paris, issued a statement in which it condemned Taliban's threats against media in Afghanistan. Part of the statement reads: "We again caution all parties to the conflict, both the Afghan state and non-state actors, and we remind them of their obligation to protect journalists. Attacks against civilian targets, including media outlets and journalists, constitute war crimes. From now on we will demand an explanation from the Taliban delegations abroad, including the Taliban office in Doha, for every Taliban attack on journalists and media outlets. The countries hosting or having relations with these delegations must firmly condemn this statement and use all possible means to prevent criminal acts by the Taliban against journalists and media outlets. Or else they will also be held responsible."

The State of Afghanistan also condemned Taliban's threats against media and journalists. Part of a statement issued by ARG, the presidential palace, reads: "The government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan reassures that in due consideration of the complete independence of the press, it will not hesitate to put every effort to ensure protection and safety of every journalist, as citizens of this country, and media organizations."

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The Parliament of Afghanistan also called Taliban's threats against media as threats against freedom of speech and strongly condemned it.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan strongly condemns Taliban's threats against Tolo and 1 TV networks. Nai statement calls Taliban's threats against media as a sign of their animosity against humanity and civilization. Part of Nai statement reads: "By threatening media entities, once again Taliban show their animosity against humanity and civilization. It shows that they do not believe in any human, Islamic, or global values and will use any opportunity to attack and harm media and supports of freedom of speech. Killing of a host of journalists including Ajmal Naqishbandi, Abdul Samad Rohani, Sardar Ahmad, and Zubair Hatami and so on, by the Taliban stand as firm prove to that statement. On the other hand, Taliban's ransacking and burning of media entities in Kunduz show that they have no respect for freedom of speech and are sworn enemies of media and freedom of speech."

Taliban's threats against Tolo and 1 TV networks are not limited only to these media entities as they will do to any media entity they gain access to the same as what they did to Kunduz media.

As its legal obligations clearly stated in the Constitution and in the Mass Media Law, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan should take special measures for protection of journalists' lives and media entities. It should provide special security measures to Tolo news and 1 TV networks after both entities were strongly threatened Taliban. Sidiqullah Tawhidi, Media Watch Director, says: "We have direct contacts with state officials and ask the government of Afghanistan to provide Tolo and 1 TV networks with specific security measures and address their concerns caused by Taliban's threats."

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan specifically calls on security organs to provide essential security measures for protection of media and journalists. They should not allow enemies of freedom of speech to silence the voice of Afghanistan's free media, which is one of the greatest achievements of the current system. On the other hand, Nai asks media and journalists to join their voices and hands in order to protect on another and stand firm against any threats and challenges. The power of media community relies on their unity and cooperation.

Meanwhile Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls on international community and international organizations of freedom of speech and human rights to understand the delicacy of the situation and do not allow the terrorist Taliban to cancel through threats and intimidations the biggest achievement of Afghanistan people.

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## **Attacking media constitutes a war crime**

After Taliban's threats against Tolo and 1 TV networks which declared both TV stations as military targets and vowed to attack their offices and kill their staffs, media, media activists, and support organizations for Afghanistan media and journalists considered the warning as a threat against the entire media community of Afghanistan and freedom of speech which is the biggest achievement of Afghanistan people in the past fifteen years.

All participating civil and media entities in a gathering said: "We believe that people of Afghanistan expect the country's media to stand firm against threats and violence and to fulfil their obligations in reporting and circulating of information with full commitment and based on the accepted standards.

Media do not belong to any warring sides and are civil institutions. If Taliban or any other group has any kind of objections, there are recognized ways to raise them. However, any kind of attack on media and journalists will constitute war crime.

Media and freedom of speech support organizations stated that if such threats and harms to media and journalists continue by Taliban or any other group, they will be left with no other option but first banning any news related to such groups and then, in next steps, to take other actions.

Afghanistan media community emphasizes on its commitment towards democratic values and professional standards and maintains its compliance with such standards as impartiality and balance in publishing information.

Media support and other civil society organizations called on the State of Afghanistan, national and international institutions to broadly support Afghanistan's media and media staffs and put their safety and security as their priority.

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## **Daesh (ISIS) simultaneous attacked offices of two media outlets in Jalalabad, Nangarhar**

Evergreen Jalalabad city is suffering from terrorist attacks as presence of terrorists continue to claim victims in this city.

Reports indicate a range of events from terrorist attacks to infiltration and recruitment by Daesh. Even some speak of their nests in the recent months.

In the most recent terrorist attack in this province, the offices of Kilid and local Safa radio stations were bombed and significantly damaged on Sep 9, 2015.

Yahya Yaqubi, chief editor of Radio Kilid in Jalalabad says that a mine placed at the entrance of radio station's building went off first and then, few minutes later, a second mine went off only five meters far from the entrance. "Two mines, placed near the entrance of the radio station exploded five meters away from each other. The first explosion was so strong that it destroyed the main entrance door and the guardroom. It shattered all glasses of the seven rooms in the building and those of the office car. Radio's technical equipment remained intact but the building is damaged."

The news of attack on Radio Kilid in Jalalabad city was still to spread among citizens when the third explosion targeted the office of Radio Safa half an hour later. These explosions did not cause any casualties but inflicted serious financial damages to the offices of the targeted radio stations. Ferdows Hazrati, chief editor of Radio Safa says that when they were preparing to broadcast the news about Radio Kilid explosion, another one just hit the entrance of their radio station and inflicted significant damages to the office. "When we heard the sound of the explosion, we wanted to prepare the news and broadcast it, when in 30 minutes another mine exploded at the entrance of our radio station and everywhere was filled with dust. We suspended our broadcast and security forces arrived to investigate the scene."

Three nearly simultaneous explosions targeting two media entities in Jalalabad city raise questions; who did the explosions? Chief Editor of Radio Kilid says that few minutes after the explosions a person called in his mobile phone, introduced himself as a member of Daesh group, and said that they conducted the attacks. "After the explosions, a number contacted us, the caller introduced himself as Daesh spokesperson, and claimed that they conducted the attacks."

Hazrat Hossain Mashriqiwal, spokesperson for the police chief of Nangarhar, told Media Watch: "Somebody placed a mine at the gate of the office of the radio station which later exploded and caused damages to the radio station's entrance gate

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but did not hurt anyone. Our investigation is going on and the police headquarter has ordered detective agencies to arrest the perpetrators and submit them to the hands of law."

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan believes that such attacks on two media outlets in the same city are preplanned terrorist attacks conducted by the enemies of people and freedom of speech. Nai calls on the government of Afghanistan in particular on Nangarhar police, to investigate the incidents, identify the perpetrators and punish them. Abdulmujeeb Khalwatgar, Nai executive officer, calls on the Ministry of Interior and other security entities to appoint patriot, prudent, and serving commanders to help provide security for all citizens. Freedom of speech in Afghanistan has become highly vulnerable. Last week Taliban occupied Kunduz, ransacked offices of all media entities and set in fire all other media equipment that was impossible to move out of the city.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls on the State of Afghanistan and the international community to stand beside people of Afghanistan to save values of human rights and freedom of speech.

## **Explosion in the office of Saanga local radio station in Kandahar, Kandahar**

A bomb attack hit office of Saanga local radio station in Kandahar in the evening of Oct 12, 2015. An explosion happened in the courtyard of Saanga local radio station which caused significant financial damages but fortunately did not hurt any radio staffs. The radio station's broadcasts were not interrupted. Agha Sher Monar, chief editor of Saanga Radio told Media Watch: "Until now, we cannot say what caused the explosion; all glasses and doors of the office are shattered and broken. The cars that were parked on the courtyard are destroyed. Police is investigating to find out the cause of the explosion."

Monar continues: "The target of the attacker has been our radio station. As the damages to the door and glasses of the building show, we have been the target but fortunately did not harm us."

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan believes that terrorist attacks on journalists and media constitute war crimes and asks international human rights' organizations and the United Nations to record crimes against Afghanistan media and media staffs as war crimes and join us in advocating for the rights of journalists and media.

Only three weeks before this attack, the offices of two private media entities, Radio Kilid and Radio Safa, in Jalalabad were hit by nearly simultaneous explosions which caused significant damages to both of them.

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Terrorists have recently stepped up their targeted attacks against Afghanistan's media and apparently the government has no specific program to defend against such attacks. Nai calls on the government to fulfil its constitutional obligation in protecting all citizens, particularly journalists, as well as media entities.

## **Taliban damaged Saaqi TV station after brief occupation of Ghorian, Herat**

Terrorist Taliban's one-hour occupation of Ghorian district in Herat province caused significant damages to the district's governmental and non-governmental buildings in the evening of Sep 19, 2015.

Damages also occurred to the district office of Saaqi TV station as all glasses of their office building shattered and the power supply was cut by rocket fires after Taliban attacked security checkpoints near the TV station's district office. Saaqi TV station had opened its district office in Ghorian to cover the district and its surrounding areas.

Taareq Nabi, chief editor of Saaqi TV told Media Watch about hours-long stoppage of the station's broadcasts in Ghorian district and its surrounding areas: "There is a security checkpoint located near the district office of Saaqi TV station. [Taliban] fired missiles at the checkpoint which sat it in fire and also shattered the glasses of all buildings in the area. But we continued our broadcasts to prevent any concerns among local that may have caused chaos among them. However, when the power supply was cut, our broadcasts were also cut and our staffs left the office building."

Mr. Nabi added that when Taliban sat the security checkpoint in fire, the TV station's staffs escaped from the office and went to their homes. But the equipment at the TV station is safe.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls targeting media, harming journalists, and stopping media broadcasts as a war crime and asks the government to give priority to protecting media and journalists. It should let the achievement of the government in the past 13 years slip away so easily.

Earlier, terrorist Taliban ransacked Kunduz media and destroyed the office of some of them after they occupied the city.

War and continuing insecurity have inflicted a great harm to the people of Afghanistan. Media employees and journalists bear the bulk of this harm. Once again Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls on security organs to come up with an appropriate strategy for protection of media entities and journalists.

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## **Jahaan TV station stopped its broadcasts in Parwan province**

Jahaan TV was a private station broadcasting various news and entertainment programs in Parwan province in the past three years. However, it recently stopped its broadcasts.

Haaji Massoud, director of Jahaan TV, explained the reason behind stoppage of his TV's broadcasts to Media Watch as following: "We had multiple security problems which we ignored in the past. Recently economic problems also added them and made us stop broadcasting of the TV programs. In the past three years, we paid all TV expenses out of our own pocket, no private or governmental entity helped us economically."

Budget shortages and lack of financing local media until they reach self-sufficiency is among the problems that some local media face.

Director of Jahaan TV says that in addition to economic problems, they also faced security problems and as a result of both the TV station stopped its broadcasting. He adds: "After we faced both economic and security problems, we could not continue broadcasting and so shut the door of the TV station."

Closure of local media due to shortages in budget and lack of funding has raised concerns among media support organizations. Over 70 media outlets have closed their offices in the last two years.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls on international media support organizations to support local media in Afghanistan and do not let the reach of information circulation get restricted.

When a media outlet stops its broadcasts, it means that a group of Afghanistan people lose their voice and access to information which is among their fundamental rights.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, once again, calls on the State of Afghanistan and international media support organizations to support and protect freedom of speech in Afghanistan and do not let Afghanistan media to go silent due to insecurity, financial, and economic reasons.

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## **Police beat up a journalist in Charikaar, Parwan**

Police at the Passport Department in Parwan province insulted and beat Shayeq Qasemi, a journalist for Kherad Weekly, on Sep 19, 2015.

Shayeq says that he previously made several reports on corruption in Parwan Passport Department and when he went there to get a passport, police in the Passport Department violently acted against him and beat him severely.

Shayeq told Media Watch: "I was visiting the Passport Department for six or seven days and every day they made pretexts and told me that my work cannot be processed. Ultimately I told the guard to let the office know that a journalist was there to pick up his documents. The guard went inside and then an officer came out and said: Is it you? I responded: Yes! He right away began to beat me."

Shayeq says that next he went to Parwan Police Chief. There, in order to clear himself of any possible charges at once, the police officer who had earlier beat Shayeq, accused him of initially attacking the officer.

Parwan Police Chief told Media Watch: "We spoke with both of them and they were convinced. But the journalist refiled his complaint today. I referred his application to the office of the attorney general to investigate both sides and punish the guilty one."

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan strongly condemns violence and misbehavior against journalists and considers such acts as violence against freedom of speech and media. Nai calls on Parwan security officials to address the case and submit to judicial organs the perpetrator of violence against the journalist.

In the past 14 years many journalists have been insulted and beaten and several others were killed. However, except in one or two cases, no other cases of violence have been properly addressed. This has contributed to a steady increase in violent incidents against journalists.

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## **Zabul Governor referred a freelance journalist to the legal and judicial organs**

Ahmad Wali Sarhadi, a freelance journalist in Zabul province, provides reports to several credible media. He claimed that the Governor of Zabul has referred him to the Office of the Attorney on Oct 14, 2015. He said that the Governor asked the Office of the Attorney in an official letter to summon him after he made a report on people's complaints about inefficiencies in the Governor's works.

Mr. Sarhadi continued: "I published in multiple media a report about the Governor in which people complained he was supporting corrupt officials. After the report was published, the Governor sent a letter to the Office of the Attorney in which he asked why such a report was published and that the journalist will disrupt public opinion. The Attorney called me and summoned me to his office."

The journalist says that after media support organizations, particularly Media Watch at Nai, were informed about the incident, the Governor took back his letter. "After the Governor came under pressure from media support organizations, he has denied issuing such a letter and has said that no one should learn about it."

However, chair of Zabul Provincial Council called the issue a misunderstanding. Akhtar Mohammad Haq-bayan, chair of Zabul Provincial Council says after he was informed about the issue, together with some members of Zabul Provincial Council, he went to the office of the Governor and convinced him to put an end to the issue.

Chair of Zabul Provincial Council said that now Governor of Zabul has taken back the letter that he had earlier sent to the Office of the Attorney. "We talked to the Governor about this; it was a misunderstanding and the problem is solved now," he added.

Mohammad Anwar Eshaaqzai, Governor of Zabul, told Media Watch that no journalist has been summoned to the Office of the Attorney. He said: "No one has been officially summoned to or interrogated by the Office of the Attorney. But, if anyone acts against the national interests, it is in my power to refer him or her to the Office of the Attorney for investigation."

Media Watch at Nai believes that it is unlawful to summon journalists to legal and judicial organs without Mass Media Commission's decision on whether they have committed any crimes. Media Watch asks local officials to refrain from any unlawful behavior towards journalists.

According to the Mass Media Law, whenever someone complains about journalists' reports, the can send their complaints

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to the Mass Media Commission. The Commission will investigate the case and if it finds any indications of crime in it, then it will refer the case to legal and judicial organs. Therefore, sending cases of journalists directly to legal and judicial organs is unlawful and is considered an act of restraining freedom of speech and pressuring journalists.

## **Media directors from all over Afghanistan gathered in Kabul to discuss increasing security threats**

Over 100 media directors from all over Afghanistan gathered at the Office of Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, shared their witness stories about insecurity and threats against journalists and media in their provinces, and discussed ways of addressing those challenges.

Abdulmujeeb Khalwatgar, executive director of Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan called the purpose of the gathering to learn lessons from Kunduz events and to prevent similar possible threats in the future. He added: "Given what happened in Kunduz, we wanted that our friends from Kunduz share their experiences with us and with our friends from private security organizations. They will then make suggestions to the government of Afghanistan on how to protect journalists' lives. Suggestions made by media directors will be officially submitted to Afghanistan security entities."

Siddiqullah Tawhidi, director of Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, pointed to Kunduz events in his address to the gathering of media directors: Our journalists and media scattered during Kunduz event. They had no coordination among themselves. Now our efforts are focused on how to help journalists in other provinces in the cases of such threats.

In order to prevent the Kunduz catastrophe from happening again, Mr. Tawhidi called on media directors to establish a contact group in which state officials should also participate. Such a group can meet whenever necessary, i.e. when threats are high, and discuss ways out of such situations.

Director of Media Watch asked Afghanistan media directors to take to high-ranking state officials their suggestions on preventing threats against journalists. Mr. Tawhidi added: "We face multiple problems, but security is the priority. I ask all of you to carefully make your suggestions. We will gather them and will share them with Joint Security Command and with the Joint Chiefs of Staff of Afghanistan Armed Forces. If there were serious problems, we will meet again with the National Security Council and will take the suggestions to the President, the Chief Executive Officer, and members of the National

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Security Council. I hope that no bad incident happen to any one of our colleagues anywhere anytime.”

Haroon Andar, Nai security affairs analyst, shared with media directors, media and journalists, important safety measures to prevent possible threats in a session of the gathering.

Zarghoona Hassan, director of Kaihan local radio station in Kunduz, shared with other media directors her witness experiences from fall of Kunduz in the hands of Taliban and media works in the days and nights when the city fell.

All participating media directors divided into six groups and discussed their experiences and came up with specific suggestions.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan submitted their suggestions to the Government of Afghanistan so that the National Unity Government uses them in taking serious measures to prevent and solve security challenges.

### **Third social media gathering held in Kabul**

The gathering was held by Ambition Afghanistan Office in Kabul on Oct, 18-20, 2015. The purpose of the three-day gathering was to discuss effective ways of using social media and evaluation of activities of social media users in Afghanistan. Nawidullah Pashtunyar, one of the organizers of the gathering said: “We try to crystallize culture of correct and effective usage of social media among the users. We show participants how to use social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The purpose of social media is not to only upload a picture and receive a number of ‘likes’ and ‘shares’. We want to show to the participants how to use social media for their own progress and that of their society.”

The three-day gathering was held in Baagh-e-Babur in Kabul. The open venue of the gathering provided friends in the virtual world to also learn about each other in the real world, share their views face-to-face, take selfies, post collective statuses, and simulate in the virtual world their surrounding social networks.

Noorullah Pashtunyar says that the number of social media users in Afghanistan increases every day and this shows that youth walk the way of progress. He adds: “As we evaluated, the number of participants in our social media gathering increases every year. We estimate that 700-750 participants from 34 provinces took part in our gathering this year.”

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Social media gathering has been held for three years in Afghanistan. Although social media do not have a long background in Afghanistan, they have attracted a large number of youth in a short period of time. Only Facebook has attracted 1.5 million users from Afghanistan in the recent years. Such statistics show that social media are rapidly opening their way in the country.

It is worth to mention that, observing the importance of social media, Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan celebrates the first week of Asad month as the Social Media Week in Afghanistan in the past four years. We have asked the United Nations to include in the UN calendar the mentioned week as the Social Media Week initiated by the people of Afghanistan.

Once again, Media Watch calls on the State of Afghanistan to nominate the first week of Asad month as Social Media Week and mark it on the country's calendar. We renew our request from UNESCO to accept our demand and recognize the privilege of the Social Media Week, first suggested by Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, in the name the people of Afghanistan.

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### **Attention!**

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

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

Note:

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

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