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# Media Watch Report

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# Media Watch Report

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

- A Noor-TV journalist was injured by shots fired by the guards of Presidential Palace
- Ariana News and 1 TV Network's live coverage of a large demonstration in Kabul was cut off
- Demonstrators in Kabul behaved fairly and cooperated with journalists
- Chief Editor of 8 AM Daily was summoned by the Office of the Attorney General
- A journalists' van came under attack in Zabul province
- Assassination attempt on the owner of Bokhdi News Agency failed
- A Radio-Salam-Watandar journalist was threatened in Helmand province
- State officials and Taliban threatened and insulted Helmand journalists
- Daikundi based media complained about lack of access to information
- International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists observed in Kabul
- A new publication joined the country's media family



صبح





The past month was yet another one full of challenges for Afghanistan's journalists and employees in the media sector. A journalist was shot and wounded by guards of the Presidential Palace (Arg); Office of the Attorney General illegally summoned chief editor of one of the country's highly circulated daily papers; a van carrying journalists who planned to make a report in Zabul province came under gunfire attack; owner of a news agency escaped an assassination attempt in Kabul; a Salam-Watandar journalist was threatened to death by Taliban in Helmand province; journalists in Helmand and Daikundi provinces complained about lack of access to information; chief editor of a private TV station was shot dead in Kabul; Ahmad Saidi, a political analyst highly critical of the State was shot and wounded in broad daylight in Kabul.

The Presidential Palace guards fired at protestors of November-11 demonstrations and injured one journalist and 10 protestors. Before covering the incident in which the journalist was injured, it is worth to discuss in brief about the demonstration in which tens of thousands of citizens took part.

The November-11 demonstrations in Kabul city which were held in protest to beading of seven passengers in Zabul province were significant for values of freedom of speech and for Afghanistan's journalists in two ways:

1. The street protest by Kabul citizens was called unprecedented in the contemporary history of Afghanistan. A large number of people participated in it and it was completely peaceful. The protestors' demands included justice, equality, trial of traitors, and president's accountability on state's negligence of freeing the abducted passengers in Zabul. Unlike in other protests in the past, protestors and demonstrators in this demonstration behaved respectfully and friendly towards journalists. They were cooperating with journalists, photographers, and media employees in order for their demonstration and demands to be covered fairly and to reach to officials.

Through their good behavior towards journalists and media, Kabul citizens demonstrated their understanding of the significance of freedom of speech and the responsibility of media and journalists' works. They showed that every citizen of Afghanistan is a protector of freedom of speech.

2. From another perspective, Afghanistan's statesmen and government showed through their behavior that they were not ready to fulfil their duties in protecting and respecting freedom of speech, media activities, and journalists as indicated in the Mass Media Law. They acted contrary to the Constitution, Mass Media Law and Access to Information Law.

Due to fires shot by the guards of the Presidential Palace, ten demonstrators and a journalist were injured. Reportedly, security forces were ordered by senior government officials, to cut Ariana News TV's live coverage of demonstrations. According to another report, security forces also prevented other TV channels including 1 TV Network from live coverage





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of the demonstrations.

In a separate illegal action by the government of Afghanistan, the Office of the Attorney General summoned chief editor of 8 AM Daily for publishing of critical material.

The 8 AM Daily has previously published critical articles and investigative reports to which some plaintiffs complained to the Office of the Attorney General. Since the case involved media, it was referred to the Commission for Assessment of Media Violations and Complaints, presided by the then Minister of Information and Culture, Sayed Makhdoom Raheen. The Commission, however, without informing 8 AM Daily, had referred the case through Ministry's Oversight Department back to the Office of the Attorney General.

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## **A Noor-TV journalist was injured by shots fired by the guards of Presidential Palace**

Kabul citizens participated in a broad demonstration on November 11, 2015 to demand justice and advocate for the rights of the seven beheaded passengers. They demonstrated people's power and left in worry those sitting in the Presidential Palace.

The protest was called as unprecedented in its scale and organization. Media and journalists, shoulder to shoulder with demonstrators, covered their move from the beginning till the end. In their moment-by-moment coverage of the demonstration, journalists faced no single incidence of improper behavior from the demonstrators.

The protestors controlled their frustration by setting a deadline for the president to come out and listen to their demands. The deadline, which was extended for several times, was finally expired, but the president did not respond to the demonstrators. This left the demonstrators in anger and despair, who then entered the Office of Administrative Affairs in an attempt to reach Arg, the Presidential Palace. The guards of Presidential Palace fired gunshots to disperse the protestors. As a result, ten demonstrators and a Noor-TV journalist, Wasiqullah Azimi, who was covering the demonstration, were injured.

Mr. Azimi told Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan: "When gunshots were fired, I tried to exit the risk area; I was running away when something hit my head and injured me."

Mr. Azimi, who is injured in the head, is worried about his wound and fears that it may cause him further problems in future.

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls any such attempts to harm journalists during a street protest as a crime and asks security forces to behave and cooperate with journalists in accordance with law.

Media Watch strongly demands that the Presidential Palace guards' commander should be held accountable for the gunshots which injured eleven citizens including a journalist on duty.

Media Watch also demands that the soldiers who fired gunshots at demonstrators should be identified and referred to legal and judicial organs. The reason behind the gunshots at demonstrating citizens should be clarified and if they were





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ordered by someone, then he should be punished.

The demonstration was unprecedented in its scale and in demonstrators' appropriate behavior towards journalists and media employees. But it is unacceptable that state forces shot and injured a journalist and several demonstrators during the protest. The state of Afghanistan should provide a clear answer.

## **Ariana News and I TV Network's live coverage of a large demonstration in Kabul was cut off**

Terrorists beheaded seven passengers that they had abducted in Zabul province on their way to Ghazni several months ago. Among those beheaded were four men and three women including two children. This act of brutality by terrorists made scores of citizens so angry that they carried the bodies of the beheaded passengers to Kabul. Here, a large wave of citizens including the relatives of the slain passengers took part in a demonstration to show their frustration with regards to state's negligence and shortcoming in freeing the abducted passengers. Carrying the beheaded bodies, they walked towards Arg, the Presidential Palace.

When protestors' frustration and anger intensified, they attempted to enter Arg, the Presidential Palace, to seek the president's answers to their demands, suddenly guards at the Presidential Palace opened fires in the air to disperse demonstrators and prevent them from entering Arg.

Understanding their responsibility, media and journalists broadly covered the protests. Among them, Ariana News TV channel began to cover the demonstration in its early moments and provided moment-by-moment coverage to its viewership. But when firing gunshots began, security forces prevented Ariana News TV from live coverage of the demonstration. In an interview with Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, Ariana News TV chief editor, Sharif Hassanyar, called cutting off of Ariana News' live coverage of the demonstration in violation of the country's laws and said that by cutting off their live coverage, the state of Afghanistan has caused them losses that it should compensate. He added: "Our live broadcast was ongoing until the security forces opened fire at protestors, then Kabul Police cut it off. Moments before the incident took place, Kabul Police chief told our reporter to cut off their live broadcast or otherwise the police would not be responsible for their security. Our reporter responded that we would take the responsibility ourselves. But after few minutes, Kabul Police cut off our live broadcasting





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and took our vehicle out of the area.”

Mr. Hassanyar also said: “After security forces damaged Ariana News TV’s live broadcaster, we sent another one to the area and resumed our live broadcasting.”

On the other hand, Sayed Zafar Hashemi, deputy speaker for the President, rejected cutting off the live broadcasts of Ariana News and said: The state does not attempt to cut off live broadcast of any media outlet. Mr. Hashemi insisted: “We ensure that we never want to cut off freedom of speech. We learned from our contact, that the live broadcasting of this TV [channel] was cut off due to a dense crowd and further problems.”

In addition to Ariana News, some other media outlets that wanted to provide live coverage of the protests and people’s advocacy faced violent behavior from security forces.

Mojahed Andarabi, a 1-TV official told Media Watch: “We faced an unprofessional conduct by security forces when we were taking our live relaying machine to the area. They prevented our live broadcast of the incident’s area. Police did not allow our journalists to enter the area. It was 9:30 PM when our journalists went to the area for live coverage. But in Zer-e-Zamini area, near Abdurrahman Mosque, police stopped them and prevented them from entering the area. In spite of our multiple attempts, we did not succeed to connect and talk with Kabul Police chief. Ultimately after waiting for several hours, we called back our journalists.”

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan considers it illegal to cut off Ariana News TV’s live broadcasting by the security forces and asks for legal pursuit of this action by relevant organs.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan also demands that those who opened fire during the demonstration, in which several protestors and a journalist were injured, should be identified, and referred to law enforcement organs.





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## **Demonstrators in Kabul behaved fairly and cooperated with journalists**

Journalists and media in Afghanistan have always tried to broadcast news of incidents in the fastest possible way to their viewers and listeners as well as to provide them with correct and accurate information. Many journalists walked shoulder-to-shoulder with protestors and reported on the large and unprecedented November-11 demonstrations in Kabul, in which people went out to the streets to protest and chant slogans against injustice and perpetrators who beheaded seven passengers in Zabul province.

Sharif Amiri, a Tolot-TV journalist, joined protestors in the initial moments of their protest. He recalls people's behavior and that of the security forces: "Civil movements and demonstrations are among people's rights. This time security forces behaved differently than any other time; understanding the significance of media, people did not create any obstacles on the way of media."

Journalists seemed contented with protestors' behavior towards them. Baa'es, a photojournalist for a news agency, who was photographing the protests, called behaviors of people and protestors towards journalists as friendly. He recalled his experience from the November-11 demonstrations: "Protestors' behavior towards journalists was much better than before. Even police's behavior towards us was unprecedented."

Arshiaa is another journalist who was reporting on the protests in the area. In an interview with Media Watch, he recalled his experience as following: "Behavior of security forces towards a high number of protestors was very good. They well managed to provide security."

In the past, due to several obstacles on their way, journalists were not feeling safe while covering protests and, as a result, were not able to provide accurate reporting. They were facing inappropriate behavior from demonstrators and even organizers of demonstrations. Sometimes protestors were beating and injuring journalists and breaking their equipment.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan asks security organs as well as citizens of the country to pay attention to the significance of media and journalists' works and cooperate with them during large public demonstrations. They should also help to protect the lives of journalists and their media equipment as they thrive for taking the voice of protestors to the officials - which is also a main objective of the protestors.





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## **Chief Editor of 8 AM Daily was summoned by the Office of the Attorney General**

The 8 AM Daily faces multiple challenges and obstacles after publishing investigative reports. It is one of the widely read and highly circulated newspapers in Afghanistan and is simultaneously printed in Kabul and other major cities across the country every day.

In the most recent incident, the Office of the Attorney General has summoned via an official letter the chief editor of 8 AM Daily.

In an interview with Media Watch, chief editor of 8 AM Daily, Parwez Kawa, elaborated about summoning letter from the Office of the Attorney General: "We published a story about problems in the Office of the Attorney General a year ago, in which we quoted a source who stated his eye-witnessed account of a meeting between some influential and elder figures with the president. The Office of the Attorney General did not like the story and summoned the chief editor of 8 AM Daily."

Mr. Kawa says that they face obstacles and challenges including direct and indirect threats every now and then after they publish an investigative report. He adds: "Most of obstacles we face with regards to our investigative reports lie in the making stage of the report; access to information and documents from state institutions is always a difficult task as they never are ready to cooperate and even try to hide documents and evidence. Next are serious threats that we face after we publish such reports. Individuals whom an investigative report has mentioned as corrupt or land usurpers or who have been accused of any relevant accusation have threatened us directly or indirectly. The office of the 8 AM Daily has often been forced to ask police organs for providing security to the office and staffs of 8 AM Daily. Finally, whenever the Office of the Attorney General decides to investigate a case, they try hard to gain possession of our documents while, based on the Mass Media Law and principles of journalism, we cannot disclose our sources."

Journalists and media support organizations responded to the summoning letter that the Office of the Attorney General sent to the 8 AM Daily. Afghanistan's National Journalists Federation which includes nine media support organizations and journalists unions held multiple meetings and sent a letter to the president and demanded that he should put an end to the arbitrary actions of the Office of the Attorney General and does not allow the latter to act illegally.

Abdulmujeeb Khalwatgar, executive officer of Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan and a member of Afghanistan's National Journalists Federation, told Media Watch about the letter that they sent to the president: "Media support organizations under the umbrella of Afghanistan's National Journalists Federation worked on a political and fundamental solution.





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This involves a program to be sent to the office of the president and demand him to officially ask legal and judicial institutions to stop pursuit of media in relation to their publishing of investigative reports. The president will emphasize that any media related violation should go through the Commission for Assessment of Media Complaints and Violations. The letter is supposed to be sent to the president today. Once he signs the letter, it will be sent as an official letter to legal and judicial institutions including the Ministry of Justice and Office of the Attorney General and may be published in multiple print media."

Based on Afghanistan's Mass Media Law, any media related violation goes through the Commission for Assessment of Media Complaints and Violations in the Ministry of Information and Culture and if a case is found to bear criminal charges, then it will be referred to the Office of the Attorney General. But currently the question is that why the Office of the Attorney General bypasses the mentioned Commission and directly summons journalists?

Abdulmujeeb Khalwatgar believes that the Office of the Attorney General cannot stand against powerful individuals and instead presses media. He adds: "When the Office of the Attorney General of Afghanistan receives complaints filed by powerful individuals such as ministers and other officials, it seems to lack the ability to act legally, and to ease off pressures, it presses media instead."

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan considers any arbitrary summoning and interrogating of journalists and media by the Office of the Attorney General as illegal and believes that such actions will restrict freedom of speech and media.

Media Watch demands from the president and the chief executive officer of the National Unity Government to put an end to such arbitrary acts by government's offices which will result in restriction of media and journalists' activities. Otherwise, continuation of such arbitrary and law-breaking actions will grant enemies of people and freedom of speech with opportunities to commit acts of violence against journalists.





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## **A journalists' van came under attack in Zabul province**

A van carrying five journalists escaped an attack in Zabul province on November 10, 2015. The journalists were heading for the provincial media center.

Nesaar Ahmad Sapaand, director of Shaikh Mati local radio station, told Media Watch that they were on their way to the provincial media center to conduct interviews and make reports when gunshots fired at their van. Fortunately no one was harmed.

Mr. Sapaand added: "We were on our way to the provincial media center to conduct interviews and make reports when our van came under attack and bullet hit at it."

Mr. Sapaand says that he is not sure whether the attackers knew that the van was carrying journalists.

However, security officials in Zabul province say that journalists have not been the target of the attack as armed groups commit such acts of terrorism every now and then.

Mirwais Noorzai, Zabul Police chief, told Media Watch: "The gunshots have been fired from several kilometers away and journalists have not been the target."

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan strongly condemns any assassination attempt and attack on journalists. Media Watch asks local officials in Zabul province to enlist security of journalists in insecure areas as their priority and cooperate with journalists in their efforts to make reports and channel information.

Local officials' neglect towards attacks on journalists and media employees can hurt the state's image and cause citizens, in particular journalists, to lose their trust on the state. This can lead to further distance between citizens and state which will cost both parties dearly.

## **Assassination attempt on the owner of Bokhdi News Agency failed**

Saalem Wahdat, owner of Bokhdi News Agency, claims that unidentified gunmen opened fire at him in the evening of November 17, 2015 when he was accompanying his guest out of his home. He was not harmed while his guest was injured due to the gunfire.





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In an interview with Media Watch at Nai, Mr. Wahdat elaborated on the assassination attempt: "It was 7:00 PM when I went out of my home with my home to accompany my guest to the main street. When I turned back, I heard gunfire and saw that my guest was injured as bullets hit in his body. The attackers have first seen that I got out of my home, but did not notice my return. They thought that I was still out there and so opened fire."

Mr. Wahdat added that he had no personal atrocity with anyone and had no idea who might have attempted on his life. However, he complained about the neglect of security officials at Police District 15, which he said were only 100 meters away from the attack scene. They only arrived in the scene after an hour past the attack incident.

Mr. Wahdat continued: "The incident took place only 100 meters away from the security check post. I called 119 and reported the attack only two minutes after it happened. But police officers arrived one hour after the incident took place. At the time I was already in the hospital when I received a call from the police. They asked me to come back to the area and point to them the exact location where the attack took place!"

On the other hand, Kabul Police says that their investigations on the attack have begun. Basir Mojahed, spokesperson for Kabul Police Headquarters, told Media Watch: "Police investigations have begun and the chief of Kabul police has instructed all security organs to begin pursuit of the case over night."

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan strongly condemns any assassination attempts and attacks on journalists and asks Kabul Police Headquarters and the Ministry of Interior to identify the perpetrators of the attack on the media activist and submit them to the legal and judicial organs.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls on the government of Afghanistan yet another time to enlist security of journalists and media as their priority and does not allow insecurity and threats to cause restrictions on journalists' works.

## **A Radio-Salam-Watandar journalist was threatened in Helmand province**

Sefatullah Zahedi, a Helmand-based local journalist for Radio Salam Watandar claims that unidentified individuals who introduce themselves as Taliban, have been threatening him in the past several days.





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In an interview with Media Watch on November 3, 2015, Mr. Zahedi claimed that after he reported on Taliban's suicide bomb attacks in Marja and other parts of Helmand province, unidentified numbers call his mobile phone and ask him to visit Taliban's commanders in the addresses that they give him.

Mr. Zahedi elaborated on the reasons behind the threats: "When I made a report on Taliban's approaching towards Marja and then published it, individuals under the address of Taliban called and asked me to go to them as their [shadow] governor wants to meet with me in person."

Mr. Zahedi adds that when he decided not to visit the place that Taliban asked him to go, they called him again and threatened him to death. "Several hours after I told them that my office does not give me permission to visit them, they called me back and warned to kill me," continued Mr. Zahedi.

On the other hand Omar Zwak, spokesperson for Helmand governor, told Media Watch: "If Mr. Zahedi has been threatened or received threatening phone calls, he should have first shared it with state officials in Helmand province so that we could have tackled such threats."

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan considers it a crime to threaten a journalist or restrict media activities and calls on local government officials in Helmand province to identify the perpetrators of these threats and submit them to legal and judicial organs.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls on the government of Afghanistan yet another time to enlist security of journalists and media as their priority and does not allow insecurity and threats to silence the voice of media.

## **Daikundi based media complain about lack of access to information**

In comparison to other provinces, Daikundi has fewer media outlets. Therefore, activities of state officials in the province are less reflected through media.

Daikundi has only three local media outlets; yet journalists of these media outlets cannot easily get access to information.

Reza Wahedi, chief editor of Radio Nasim in Daikundi province, in a phone conversation with Media Watch said: "State offices in Daikundi are not willing to share information with media and under various pretenses avoid interviews





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with media.”

Mr. Wahedi added: “We have faced this problem right from the first day of our activity and it has still remained unsolved unfortunately. State officials avoid sharing information with journalists. Time and again we tried to get information so that we can broadcast accurate information to our listeners. However, every time we go to government offices and ask for information, they show us a letter that apparently indicates that their central office in Kabul banned them from interviews with media.”

Mr. Wahedi, for instance, mentions the office of the provincial attorney, municipality, police headquarters, and office of Daikundi governor which do not share information or conduct interviews with media. He mentions a case that is currently under investigation in the office of the provincial attorney on which the latter shares no information with media: “A while ago, a huge amount of money was stolen from the office of urban development and four officials were arrested in connection with the case. After two days they were all set free. Whenever we go to the office of urban development they tell us that the case was sent to the office of the provincial attorney and has been under investigation. Then we go to the office of the provincial attorney to ask if the case has been sent to them; they do not even say a word to us on whether they have received the case.”

Mr. Wahedi adds that he never asks the office of the provincial attorney for secret information as he knows what kind of information is considered secret in the law.

After the mentioned journalist shared his complaints and concerns with Media Watch, the latter contacted state officials in Daikundi province including office of the provincial attorney. Ahmad Yaar, the provincial attorney, told Media Watch that for the first ever time a journalist has come to his office and asked for information in connection with a specific criminal case. He has responded that based on the Office of Attorney’s Act of Professional Practices, all cases are secret and they were not obliged to share information. But the provincial attorney also refused to interview with Media Watch and did not permit the latter to record his voice.

Then Media Watch decided to contact Daikundi governor but after repeated attempts was not able to get in direct contact with the governor. However, deputy governor, Mr. Mohammad Hassan Hassani said: The governor has always interviewed with media except on secret cases.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan believes that any restriction on sharing information with journalists and media is in clear violation of Law of Access to Information and the country’s constitution. It calls on local and central state officials





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to share information with journalists in accordance with provisions of the law.

The claim of some provincial officials about sharing information and interviewing with journalists except on secret cases is nothing more than a pretense under which they escape from their responsibility of sharing information with journalists. Journalists and media better know what constitutes secret and banned information in accordance with Law of Access to Information and do not attempt to get access to them.

## **Access to information is a challenging task for Helmand journalists**

Access to information has been a challenge for Afghanistan's journalists for a long time. Even after approval of the Law of Access to Information, the challenge persists in many parts of the country.

In most of the cases, when journalists contact state officials and ask for access to the information that they need, state officials not only refuse to share information with journalists, but even insult, threaten, and commit violence against journalists.

In the most recent case, Elyas Daayee, a Radio-Azadi journalist in Helmand province claimed on November 4, 2015, that after multiple attempts of contacts with state officials, he ultimately could not get access to the information that he needed. He said he was left with no other way but posting on his Facebook page a critical writing on the problem. In his critical piece, he mentioned that state officials in Helmand province including the spokesperson for the governor and the governor himself did not respond to journalists' phone calls and did not share information with them.

Mr. Daayee claimed that after posting his criticism on his Facebook page, authorities in Helmand province have insulted and threatened him.

Mr. Daayee told Media Watch: "I asked the spokesperson for Helmand governor to provide me with information; for two days neither he picked up my phone calls nor provided me with any information. Then I published a critical post on my Facebook page in which I criticized Helmand governmental officials. However, my post in Facebook was neither serious nor insulting to anyone. Then I received a phone call from Helmand deputy-governor in which he insulted me with curse words and summoned me to his office. I told him that I was not in office and God knows they would have either beat or imprison me had I gone to their office."





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Mr. Daayee also said that journalists faced the problem of lack of access to information in Helmand for a long time, but it has been intensified in the past three months as security problems have mounted. According to Mr. Daayee, the spokesperson for Helmand governor, the governor himself, and security officials all refuse to let journalists interview them. None of them respond to journalists' phone calls.

However, state officials in Helmand province reject Mr. Daayee's claims and say that they are accessible to journalists in any moment and share information with them.

Omar Zwak, spokesperson for Helmand governor, told Media Watch: "State officials had not insulted or threatened any journalist for their emphasis on access to information. As you may know, the journalist who complains is unprofessional. I do not talk about all journalists but only a number of them who are not professional and this sometimes puts them in trouble. I completely reject that journalists face problems in accessing information in state offices in Helmand. The governor himself has always had interviews with media."

Mr. Zwak says that it is not the state's policy to hide information from journalists or block their access to information. But in some cases a delay of 10 - 15 minutes may happen for the sake of getting accurate and credible information.

On the other hand, Mohammad Jan Rasoolyar, Helmand deputy-governor, completely rejected the allegation that he insulted or threatened any journalist and called them baseless. He said that what Mr. Daayee wrote on his Facebook page was contrary to reality and we tried to call him to the office and ask for clarification.

Media Watch believes that insult, misbehavior, and violence against journalists are illegal as well as refusing to share information with journalists is in violation to the country's effective laws.

Based on the Law of Access to Information, every citizen of Afghanistan has the right to get access to information. The Law respects this right and obliges state officials to share information with citizens. In democratic systems, citizens, not governments, are the real owner of information.

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls on state officials in Helmand province to share information with journalists as is indicated in the Law of Access to Information and to refrain from any misbehavior towards journalists and media. Refusing to share information with journalists will pave the way for propaganda and this will let enemies of Afghanistan's people to exploit the void.





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## **International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists observed in Kabul**

November 2 is officially recognized as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. This is an international day and enjoys a proper recognition in advanced countries. Although it is yet to gain the recognition it deserves in countries like Afghanistan, media and organizations supporting freedom of speech in the country try to remind the government of the significance of such a day.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, in coordination with Afghan Journalists Safety Committee held a meeting in observation of this day on November 2, 2015. Abdulmujeeb Khalwatgar, Nai executive officer, said that unfortunately impunity from punishment has turned to a culture in Afghanistan which hurts media. He added: "Cases of violence against journalists have not been pursued and this points to the bitter reality of how pervasive the culture of impunity is in Afghanistan."

Impunity from punishment is unfortunately a prevalent phenomenon in backward societies which largely hurts credibility of their governments because it is an obligation of the governments and rulers to address such cases and to bring about social justice in their societies. This will reduce the gap between the government and various classes in the society.

Mr. Khalwatgar also added: "It is for this purpose that Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan emphasizes on punishing perpetrators of violence against journalists so that in one hand the incidence of violence falls down and in the other hand, the culture of punishing perpetrators of violence get institutionalized. Unfortunately we have witnessed loss of nearly 50 journalists in different parts of the country in various incidents in the past 14 years and the government has only addressed two of their cases so far." Mr. Khalwatgar believes that the culture of impunity from punishment has heartened perpetrators of violence to even commit more crimes against journalists.

On the other hand, Sediq Sediqi, spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior, addressed the meeting's audience: "The government of Afghanistan has taken some measures in supporting media and journalists, but they are not enough; more work needs to get done to reduce the incidence of impunity from punishment for perpetrators of violence against journalists."

Mr. Sediqi added that there are still such state officials who do not understand the significance of journalists' works. Freedom of speech is the only achievement of the government and should be saved jointly through addressing challenges that journalists continue to face.





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The spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior mentioned, for instance, of punishing a police chief in one of Afghanistan's provinces after journalists and media support organizations complained about him. He had misbehaved and committed violence against journalists and, therefore, was fired from his position. But Mr. Sediqi insisted that it was not enough and without coordination with journalists, media, and media support organizations, such an objective would not be achievable.

Meanwhile, Gul Ahmad Madadzai, deputy chair of Afghanistan's Lawyers Association addressed the meeting on the negative consequences of a culture of impunity from punishment. He emphasized that breaking the laws will increase incidence of violence which will not end until rule of law is enforced.

Mr. Madadzai continued: "Violence can never be brought to an end in such a society where abidance by the rule of law is rare and the rulers do not value rule of law."

Given the rise in the incidence of violence against Afghanistan's journalists, Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls upon the government of Afghanistan to enforce rule of law and pay serious attention on eliminating the culture of impunity from punishment.

## **A new publication joined the country's media family**

Print media has been going through a difficult time recently as they struggle to provide sufficient financing and therefore cease to operate. However, Aayeena-e-Omid (the Mirror of Hope) has begun to publish with a new hope. This is a different publication, the void for which was always felt among print media.

Aayeena-e-Omid exclusively publishes for children and youth and tries to operate in the field of children's literature. Azmuddin, chief editor of this monthly says that he intends to fill the void of children's literature among Afghanistan's media.

The chief editor of Ayeena-e-Omid Monthly told Media Watch: "The motivation behind the launch of this publication was to disclose needs and aspirations of children and to draw attention of the state's leadership to plan for realization of youths' aspirations."

Mr. Azmuddin said: "When I realized that there is a void for children's literature in schools' curricula, I decided to create launch this publication."





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Aayeen-e-Omid is published in 40 pages - all in color. The coloring is inspired by the children's and youths' worlds. In spite of publishing four issues so far, the chief editor of the monthly seems less motivated for continuation of his publication. He says that no governmental or any other relevant organizations financially support his publication and unless he can compensate for its expenditures, he may stop publishing the monthly after few more issues.

Lack of sufficient budget is the main challenge before this publication.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan welcomes launch of this publication to the family of Afghanistan's media and asks cultural organizations as well as local businesspeople to financially support this publication so that open circulation of information continue to flourish.

صبح





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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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