Media Watch Report

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نی حمایت کنندۀ رسانه های آزاد افغانستان
Nai supporting open Media in Afghanistan

Media Watch Report

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

- Demonstrators in Kabul beat ten journalists
- Zabul Governor insulted a number of journalists
- Officials at Herat University banned four publications for using Persian/Dari words of "Danesh-gah" and "Daneshkada"
- A police officer insulted journalists in Ghazni province
- Kandahar Provincial Department of Information and Culture imposed restrictions on media in their province
- Journalists' Code of Ethics was approved in Kabul
- Nai Statue was presented to the selected seven best journalists
- World Press Freedom Day, May 3rd, was observed in Kabul
- President Ghani supports freedom of speech in Afghanistan

Afghanistan journalists continued to face challenges and violence in May 2016. Ten journalists and cameramen who were covering a demonstration in Kabul were insulted and beaten by the protesters. The demonstrators of the "Movement of Light" protested to reverse a government's decision which shifted the route of a power transmission line from Bamyan to Salang path.

Journalists in Zabul province claim that the governor has blocked their access to information. They further add that he even refuses to admit journalists to his office.

According to the Zabul-based journalists, the governor insults and occasionally threatens them.

In Ghazni province, a police officer has insulted a group of journalists and hit their cameras on the ground. The journalists say that the police officer insulted and threatened them when they wanted to film bodies of slain policemen who were killed by their fellow police officers.
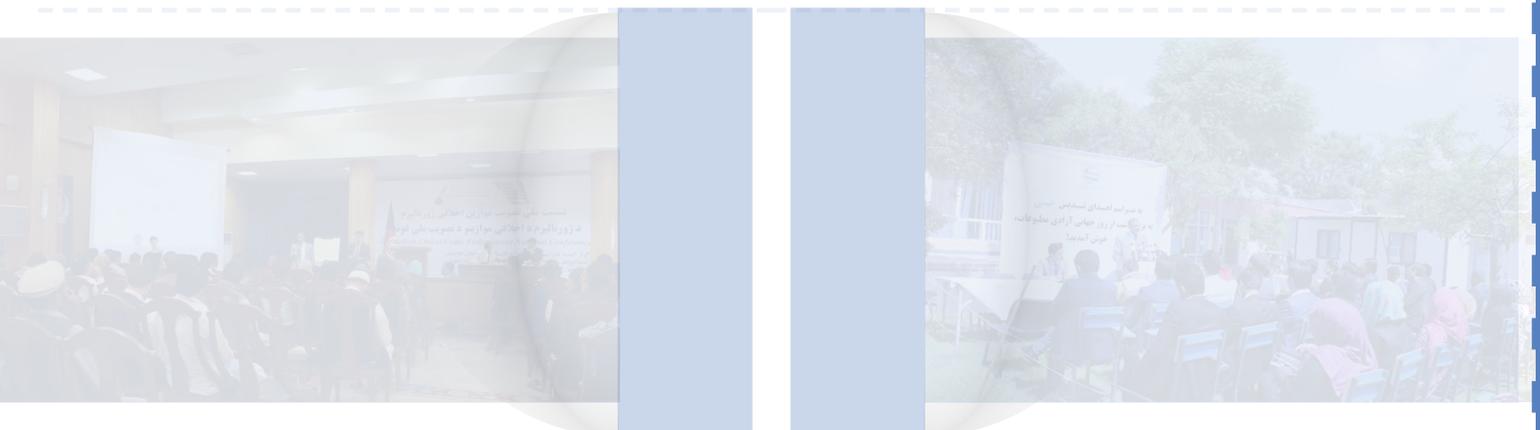
In Herat province, officials from Herat University banned four publications because they used the Persian/Dari words of "Daneshgah" and "Daneshkada" (They respectively mean 'university' and 'school'.) The fact that such an incident occurred in an academic institution, particularly in Herat University School of Journalism, alarmed students. This harms freedom of speech in the bud.

If this act committed by Herat University officials is not reversed and corrected, its negative repercussions will lead to self-censorship and systematic censorship among journalists. Such an academic institution is highly expected to nurture students with freedom and tolerance instead of taking their freedom and banning them from using words of their native language.

Despite all these challenges and problems, journalists also scored certain important achievements in May 2016. For the first ever time, they approved Journalists' Code of Ethics in a national gathering in Kabul.

Afghanistan journalists and media personnel lacked such a document in the past and, therefore, faced multiple problems.

Approval of Journalists' Code of Ethics by the journalists from all across the country is a significant step towards institutionalization of freedom of speech and circulation of information in Afghanistan.

Demonstrators in Kabul beat ten journalists

The Movement of Light held a large demonstration in Kabul on May 16, 2016. Demonstrators were chanting slogans and marching towards Arg, the Presidential Palace, and journalists were following the demonstration and providing media coverage of the event. A number of demonstrators, however, assaulted a group of journalists, insulted them and broke their equipment.
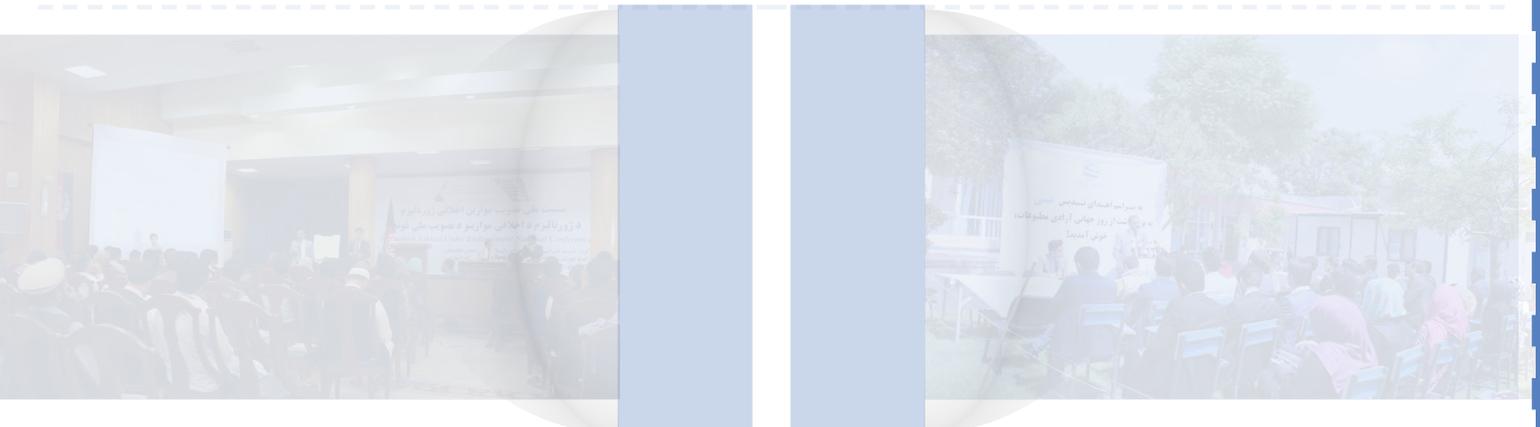
The following journalists were affected in this incident:

1. Nawid Bahar (journalist) and Samay Jahesh (cameraman) from Ariana News TV
2. Emad Rostayee (journalist) and Mokhtar Yaqubi (cameraman) from 1-TV
3. Farid Halimi (journalist) and Khatib Karimi (cameraman) from Noorin TV
4. Romal Khoram (journalist) and Farid Rostaqi (cameraman) from Jahan TV
5. Massoud Hossaini, photojournalist, and Jim, a Belgian journalist

Protestors treated these journalists violently while they were providing news coverage of the protests. Romal Khoram from Jahan TV told Media Watch that while they were making a news clip about the protestors, the latter began insulting them and calling them by abusive words. "When I wanted to make a clip about the protestors, a group of them who appeared to be organized, came to me and violently pushed me to the back of the car," says Mr. Khoram. "Then they insulted me and run towards my cameraman who was at the top of the car. They could not reach him. They really wanted to create a quarrel but we ignored them."

According to Mr. Khoram, at first, protestors behaved well towards the journalists. In about half an hour later, however, a new group of protestors arrived in the scene and insulted and beat journalists. "A group of girls came out of Kabul University and joined the protest right where we were standing and covering the event. One of them approached us and wanted to have an interview with us. At this time, a group of protestors violently entered the scene and wanted to beat us; others prevented them from doing so."

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan responded to the incident by holding a press conference a day after the demonstration and called upon its organizers to identify the perpetrators of violence against journalists and introduce them to the law enforcement authorities. Sidiqullah Tuwhidi, Media Watch director, said that civil protests in accordance with law is among the civil rights of each and every citizen; however, misbehaving towards journalists is unethical and a clear violation of the law. "Those protestors who beat journalists, in fact, blocked the voice of all protestors who gathered to raise their voice to reach out to authorities in Afghanistan and the rest of the people as well as to the international community. Demonstrations and protests are among the civil rights, but insulting, threatening, and pressuring others are clear violations of the law."

Mr. Tuwhidi added that "Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls upon the organizers of the demonstration to identify the perpetrators of violence against journalists and introduce them to the law enforcement authorities."

Mr. Tuwhidi also said that "Ten journalists are assaulted and beaten by demonstrators while police forces are also present in the scene. Police is obliged to ensure the security of demonstrators, journalists and other citizens. They have neglected their duties and Kabul Police should be held accountable."

While organizers of the demonstration at the Movement of Light said that there have been opportunists joining the demonstration to perpetrate violence and create riot, Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan strongly condemns beating of journalists during the demonstrations in Kabul.

Once again, Nai calls upon the organizers of the demonstration to identify the perpetrators of violence against journalists and introduce them to the law enforcement authorities.

Freed of speech is protected by law and those who assault on journalists and their equipment perpetrate acts of crime and should be pursued by law enforcement.

Zabul Governor insulted a number of journalists

A number of journalists based in Zabul province claim that the new Zabul Governor does not have a good relationship with journalists and constantly misbehave towards them. Lal Jan Afghan, a media correspondent from Zabul province, told Media Watch that the new governor has no commitment towards media and created a dictatorial system in the province. "Unfortunately ever since the new governor assumed his duty here, the door of the office of the governor has been closed to journalists and governor's body guards constantly threaten journalists. Only last week they insulted two journalists. The governor shows no commitment to media and has formed a dictatorial system here. Media activities are intangible and the governor wants to bring media under his control."
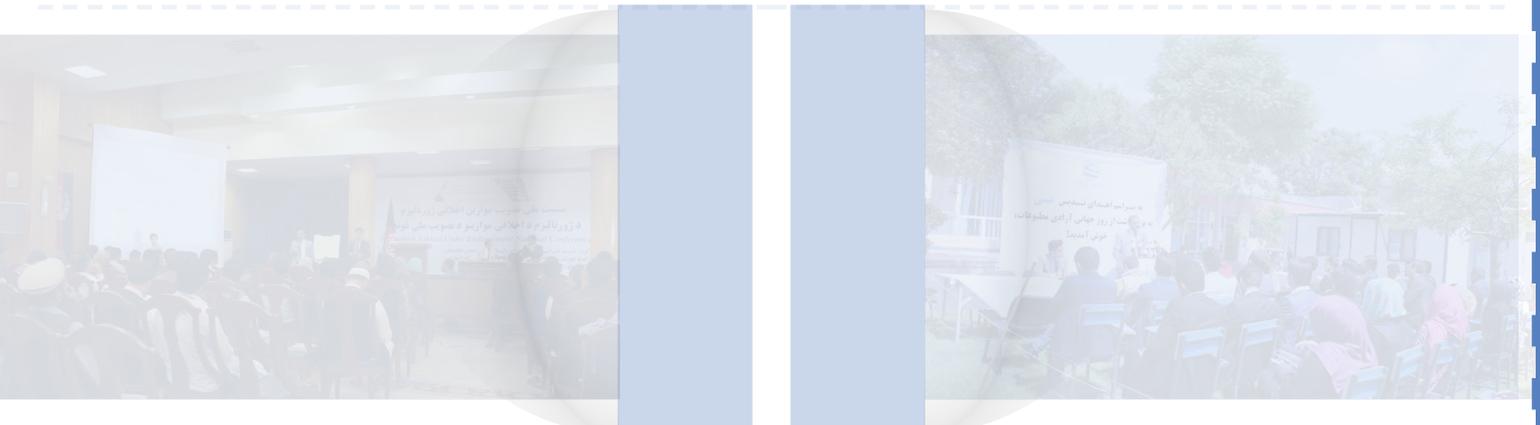
Lala Jan says: "One of Zabul journalists, Nesar Ahmad Sapaan wanted to interview the governor, but the governor refused to have an interview with him and instructed his guards to insult the journalist."

However, in an interview with Media Watch, Besmellah Afghanmal, the new governor of Zabul, rejected the claims of misbehavior towards journalists and censorship of media in his province and said that he had a good relationship with journalists.

Zabul Governor added: "Such a claim is definitely untrue. There have been one or two persons involved. I was in an important meeting and they might have been kept in waiting for a while. Other than that there is no problem at all. We do not have so many journalists here; therefore, they are very honorable to us. I am at their service 24 hours. Even if they have contacted me in the midnight, I have responded to their calls."

The governor also says that he welcomes journalists' works when they reveal the truths. He says that he never wants to censor them.

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls upon the state authorities in Zabul, par-

ticularly the governor of Zabul to treat journalists in accordance with law and cooperate with them as the Law of Access to Information defines it, when they ask for accessing information.

Officials at Herat University banned four publications for using Persian/Dari words of "Daneshgah" and "Daneshkada"

Officials at Herat University have recently pressured and banned four weekly publications on campus. Herat University students were publishing their works in Pagaah, Papyrus, Hudhud, and Roshangar weeklies.

According to the students running those publications, dean of School of Journalism at Herat University had warned them that if they ever attempt to use the Persian/Dari words of "Daneshgah" and "Daneshkada" in their publications, then he would not permit them to publish and distribute their publications among students.

According to the chief editors of these publications, Herat University officials have told them that after this they will review the material before they permit to publish them.
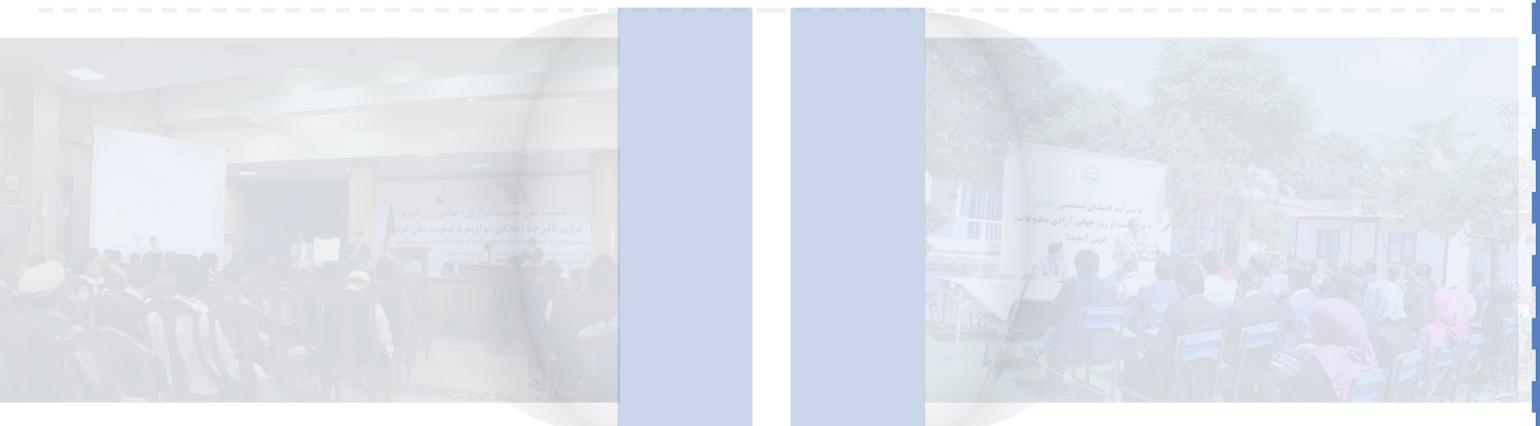
Abdul Samay Sharifi, chief editor of Pagaah Weekly in Herat and a student at Herat University's School of Journalism, told Media Watch that the University has recently imposed some restrictions which ban them from using the Persian/Dari words of "Daneshgah", and "Daneshjo" in their publications. "They have imposed some restrictions on us, as if we use the [Persian] word "Daneshgah", we should also use the [Pashto] word "Pohantoon" next to it."

"Today dean of School of Journalism summoned me to a meeting where there were also other authorities present and told me whatever they pleased," says Mr. Sharifi, "He asked me to only work under his supervision or else he would not allow me to work at all."

The chief editor of another publication, who asked to remain unnamed, told Media Watch that the officials at Herat University have time and again asked them not to use the Persian/Dari word "Daneshgah" in the material that we publish.

To shed further light on the issue, Media Watch contacted Abdullah Fayez, dean of Herat University and asked him about the incident. He completely rejected imposing of those restrictions and said "The leadership of the University has never discussed any restrictions or censorship."

Dean of Herat University said: "The leadership of Herat University only said that the publications should obey the laws and publish in accordance with the laws. Herat University has neither issued nor has seen such a letter. It has not taken such a decision and I do not know where such allegations come from. We have not taken any such decision. We have documented what we said. We only said that those publications

that are published on the University campus should do so in accordance with the law."

Dean of Herat University also said that if there is any such letter or evidence that proves banning of those publications, then he can be held accountable for it. "We will be accountable if there is any evidence pointing that I ordered banning those publications or anyone else in the leadership of the University issued any such letter."

Nematullah Sarwari, dean of School of Journalism at Herat University, told Media Watch that these four publications have neither official permits nor any budget. They have been only created to publish students' home works and therefore they are only published every now and then.

Dean of School of Journalism also said that these publications are in fact classroom projects and for this reason Herat University administration has recently sent a letter to the School to supervise their contents and prevent them from publishing subjects that cause differences and riots among people.

The decision taken by Herat University caused serious responses. Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan condemned Herat University's decision and called it a court-style decision.

Abdulmujeeb Khalvatgar, chief executive director of Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, said: "We call on the chief editors of these four publications to continue their work as they did in the past and if they face any troubles, then contact Nai Office."

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan condemned the decision taken by Herat University and asked University officials to treat media and journalists in accordance with law.

Based on the effective laws of Afghanistan, no real or legal person has the right to impose censorship or interfere into the publishing affairs of media or ban their publication unless an authorized court has ordered so.

Censoring and banning these four publications before they publish their material is in violation with Article 4 of Mass Media Law which prohibits both censorship before publishing of any material as well as interference by any real or legal personalities into the publishing affairs of mass media.
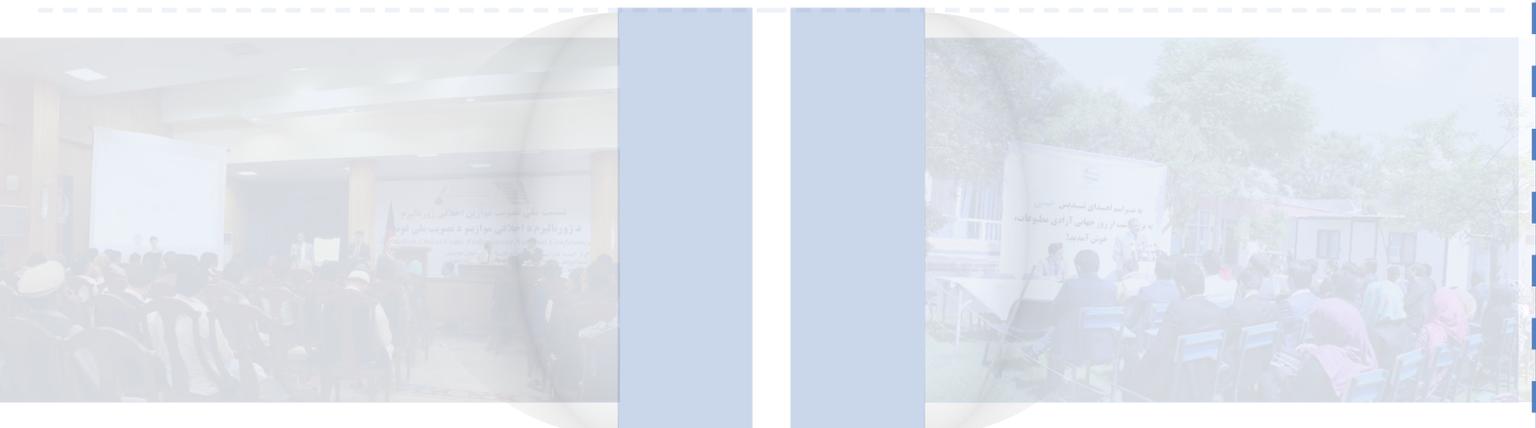
Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls upon the officials at Herat University to treat media and journalists only in accordance with the law.

A police officer insulted journalists in Ghazni province

A number of Ghazni-based journalists claimed in a phone contact with Media Watch that Ghazni Police has committed violence against them.

Mostafa Andalib, a local journalist for Aftab TV in Ghazni province, says that a policeman has fired shots and killed three of his colleagues at a security checkpoint and then escaped to the Taliban.

Mr. Andalib says that the next day when he and a group of other journalists went to Ghazni Police Headquarters and filmed the bodies of slain policemen, the financial officer of the Ghazni Police HQ, Colonel

Mohammad Ali has insulted them and treated them violently.

According to Mr. Andalib, while they were filming bodies of the martyred policemen, the financial manager of Ghazni Police HQ has prevented them from taking pictures and said that they needed permission to do so. "We came to make a report, but the financial manager of Ghazni Police HQ suddenly turned to us, grabbed our cameras, called us abusive words and traitors and said that we needed to have a permission letter either from the governor or police chief."

Rahmatullah Nekzad, another journalist who works for Aljazeera, says that the mentioned police officer has insulted him and called him a "traitor".

Mr. Nekzad adds: "This police officer has behaved violently towards journalists several times in the past. This is the fourth time that he insults us, beats our camera, and calls us 'traitors'. He has even called us spies before hundreds of people and has put our lives in danger."

Ghazni Police officials have rejected all these claims made by Ghazni-based journalists and called them baseless.

In an interview with Media Watch, Ghazni Police Chief, General Aminullah Amarkhel, rejected all these allegations and said that the mentioned officer has never treated journalists violently. He added: "What journalists have said is not true. Our financial manager is a harmless person. We were taking bodies of the martyred policemen to their homes via private cars yesterday and, due to a deteriorated security situation, the driver of the private corolla car said that if journalists would take his pictures and share it on Facebook, then his life will be at risk on the way and he would refuse to carry bodies of the martyred."
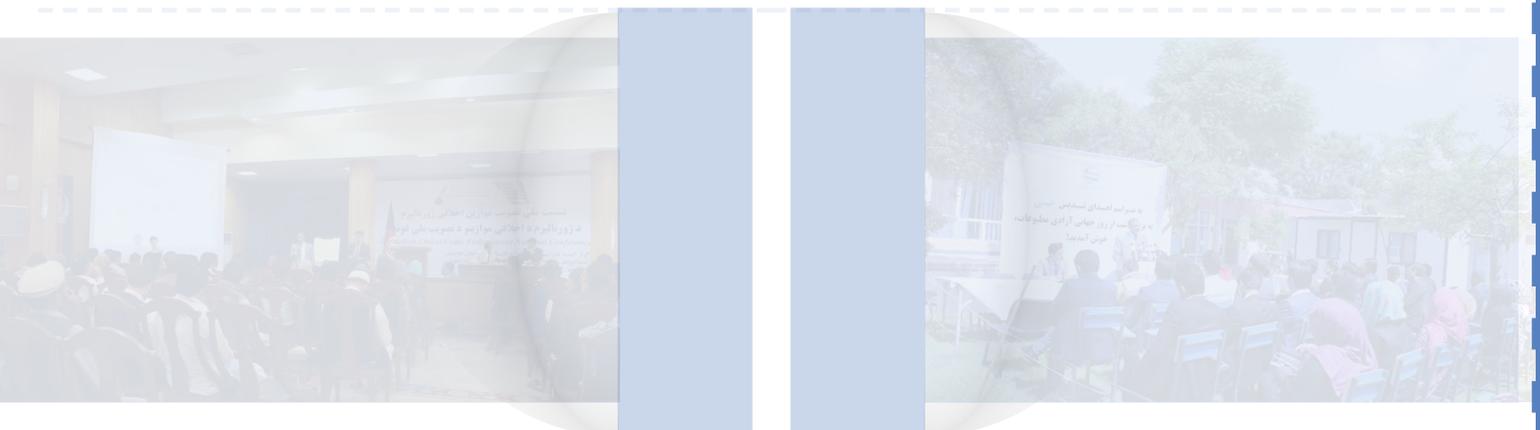
When Media Watch insisted that according to Ghazni journalists the mentioned officer has committed acts of violence toward journalists multiple times in the past, Ghazni Police Chief responded: "Our financial manager is a harmless person. He is neither in a working relationship with media nor is he a spokesperson that would suggest he might have had some troubles with journalists. A joint committee was established in the province yesterday to follow and solve such cases."

According to Ghazni Police Chief, taxi drivers who were supposed to carry bodies of the martyred policemen to their homes complained that journalists have taken their pictures and it would put their lives at risk.

However, Mr. Nekzad says that there were no taxi vehicles and all bodies were carried by the ambulances. He also emphasized that journalists are well familiar with sensitivities in their area and environment and based on standard professional works, they know what points can interrupt citizens' safety and security and would never violate them.

The journalists who faced violent reaction from police while they were taking pictures of the martyred policemen are concerned that their safety and prestige in the society have been put at risk.

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan believes that preventing journalists from do-

ing their professional work and making reports is in violation of the law and calls upon the local authorities in Ghazni province to prevent such incidents in the future.

Media Watch strongly condemns insulting and using abusive words against journalists and asks the Ghazni provincial administration to introduce the perpetrators of violence against journalists to the legal and judicial organs.

Kandahar Provincial Department of Information and Culture imposed restrictions on media in their province

Kandahar Department of Information and Culture asked media outlets in the province to refrain from broadcasting women's songs in their programs.

This decision taken by Kandahar authorities has caused different reactions in Kandahar media as well as among media support organizations. It is in violation of Article 34 of Afghanistan's Constitution as well as in violation of several articles in the Mass Media Law.

Article 34 of Afghanistan's Constitution reads: Freedom of expression shall be inviolable. Every Afghan shall have the right to express thoughts through speech, writing, illustrations as well as other means in accordance with provisions of this constitution. Every Afghan shall have the right, according to provisions of law, to print and publish on subjects without prior submission to state authorities. Directives related to the press, radio and television as well as publications and other mass media shall be regulated by law. Local traditions and customs as restrictions have no legal and lawful basis.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan emphatically demands from Office of Kandahar Governor to oppose imposing any restrictions on media's publishing affairs and does not allow the Kandahar Provincial Department of Information and Culture to unlawfully pressure open media in that province.
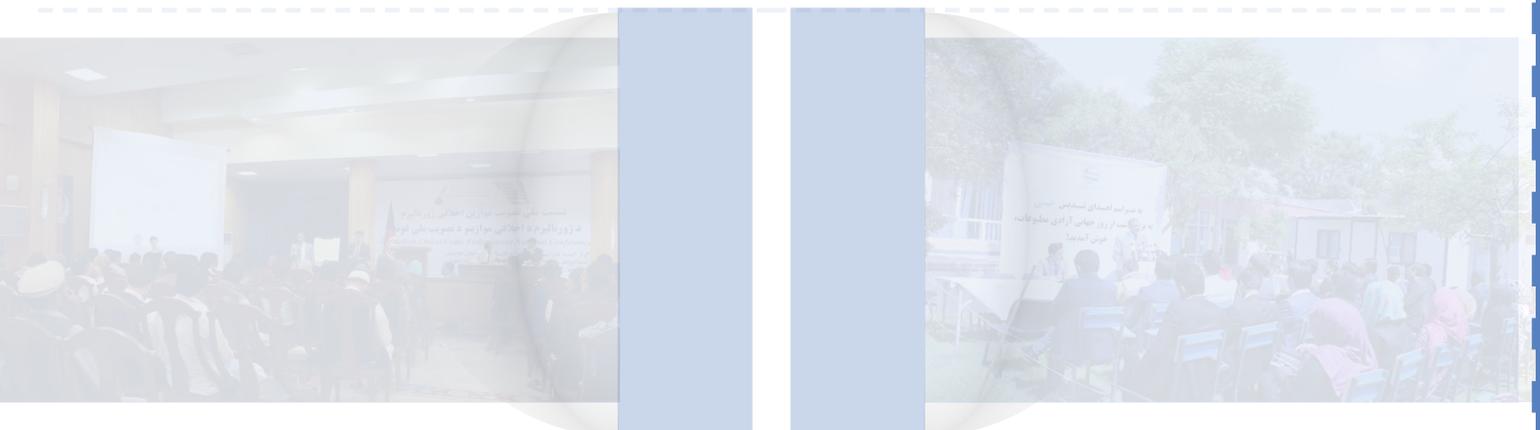
Nai believes that no state or non-state organ has the right to interfere into the media's publishing policy.

Journalists' Code of Ethics was approved in Kabul

Initiated by Afghanistan's Journalists' Federation and after several months of hard work, the Journalists' Code of Ethics was finally approved in a grand gathering of 400 journalists from all over the country in Kabul. Participants discussed the final draft text of the code of ethics in multiple working groups and shared their comments and suggestions with each other.

Sidiqullah Tuwhidi, director of Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, said: "Approval of this Code of Ethics brings ethical and professional standards to journalism in Afghanistan and takes accusations of lack of such standards away of the shoulders of journalists and media."

Mr. Tuwhidi added: "It was for this reason that we began to work on creating a general consensus in 2012 which ultimately led to preparing and approving of the current Code of Ethics by the majority of journal-

ists."

Mr. Tuwhidi also said that the mechanism for monitoring implementation of this Code of Ethics is prepared by the Afghanistan's Media and Journalists' Federation which is tasked to monitor the implementation process.

"If a colleague violates the Code of Ethics either intentionally or unintentionally, there are mechanisms to notify or condemn them," said Mr. Tuwhidi.

According to the director of Media Watch, media have the right to monitor implementation of the Code of Ethics while the government has no such right.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan has been working on drafting the Afghanistan Journalists'' Code of Ethics since 2007. In preparing the draft text of the document, Nai studied several journalists' code of ethics from the countries of the region and the world and taken into consideration the customs, traditions and values of Afghanistan's people it prepared the draft text. Then the text was shared in various separate meetings with journalists from all over Afghanistan and their inputs were used to further enrich the later versions of the draft.

The text was further debated upon and edited through seven zonal conferences in the centers of all zones of the country. Journalists from each zone gathered and discussed the draft text of the Journalists' Code of Ethics.

Journalists from the northern and northeastern zones gathered in Mazar-e-Sharif, from western zone in Herat city, from southwestern zone in Kandahar city, from southeastern zone in Khost city, from eastern zone in Jalalabad, from central zone in Bamyan city, and from Kabul city in the capital Kabul. They discussed the draft text and shared their views and suggestions with Nai Office.

A committee at Afghanistan's Journalists' Federation reviewed all of the presented suggestions and comments and incorporated them into the draft text of Journalists' Code of Ethics.

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan congratulates the country's journalists and media on approval of Journalists' Code of Ethics and hopes that this credible document can solve a big part of the problems and challenges that they face in the country.
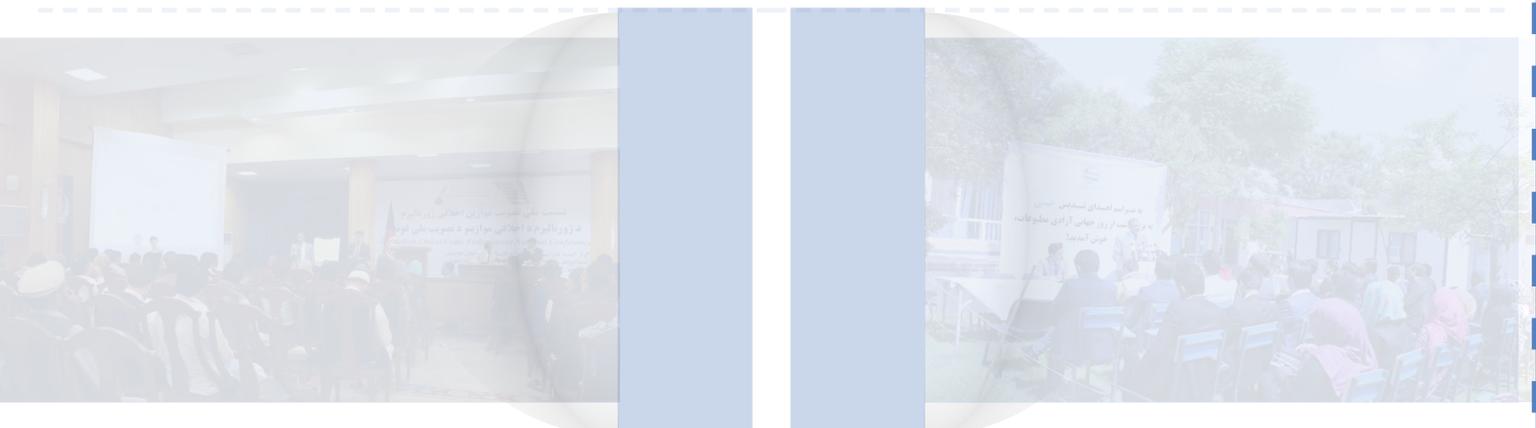
Nai Statue was presented to the selected seven best journalists

In observance of World Press Freedom Day on May 3rd, Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan holds an annual program which recognizes the best works of the country's journalists.

This year, the program chose through an open competition seven journalists as the winners of the Nai Statue for their best works.

The winners of Nai Statue for this year included:

1.   Farshad Saleh, from Aryana News TV, as the best reporter

2. Zainab Azizi, from Arzo TV, as the best moderator of political programs
3. Shafi Karimi, from Aryana News TV, as the best director of TV programs
4. Ahmad Fayaz Omari, from Pazhwak News Agency, as the best photo journalist
5. Wahidullah Kabiri, from Maiwand TV, as the best cameraman
6. Sohaila Erfani, from Meraj local radio station in Herat, as the best radio commentator
7. Wahida Faizi, as the best online reporter

Over 60 journalists and media activists took part in the competition. They submitted their work samples to Nai Office, out of which the jury chose seven best works.

The jury was composed of the following expert journalists: Abdulhai Roshan, Mahmoud Kochi, Abdulhai Muram, Makia Munir, and Ahmad Quraishi. They spent two full days in reviewing all submitted work samples and pick up the winners.

Nai observes World Press Freedom Day on May 3rd, every year and presents Nai Statue to the best journalists.

The process begins a month to the World Press Freedom Day (May 3rd), when Nai sends out an open call to all journalists through email and social media and invites them to register for the competition and submit their work samples to the Nai Office.
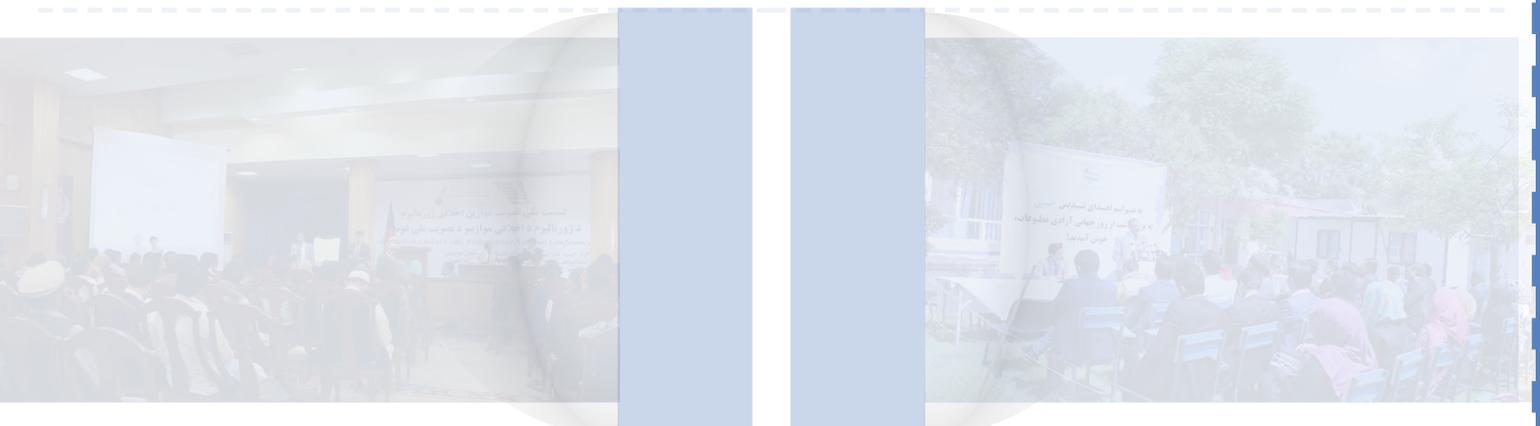
Then a week before the World Press Freedom Day celebration on May 3rd, the jury, which is composed of members outside the Nai Office, meets and thoroughly reviews each and every submitted work sample, comment and grade them. The works with the highest scores will be identified as the winners of Nai Statue.

The winners of Nai Statue thanked the Nai Office and emphasized on continuation of the process. They stated that they were encouraged and heartened as their works were appreciated. This will strengthen freedom of press in the country.

The winner of Nai Statue for the best reporter, Farshad Saleh from Aryana News TV said: "This program encourages journalists and promotes the spirit of competition among them. I hope that this transparent process continues, and expands even further."

Another winner of Nai Statue, Zainab Azizi, the best moderator of political programs, told Media Watch that this competition encourages journalist to work harder and fulfil their responsibilities. She added: "Such sound and standard competition organized by the Nai Office will help us improve our professional work. Being a female journalist and winning the Nai Statue can encourage other female journalists to step up their hard work in the political and news programs."

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan congratulates the winners of Nai Statue and hopes that they continue to achieve further success in their efforts for strengthening freedom of speech and civil society values.

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Media Watch also appreciates the works of those journalists and media personnel which were not selected as winners.

World Press Freedom Day, May 3rd, was observed in Kabul
Access to Information and Fundamental Freedoms,
This is Your Right!
This is the theme of the World Press Freedom Day in 2016. Afghanistan's Journalists' Federation and the Ministry of Information and Culture celebrated this day under the same theme in Kabul.
Chief Executive Officer of Afghanistan, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, addressed the audience and expressed his support for freedom of speech and journalists in Afghanistan: No state or non-state entity or any powerful personality has the right to directly contact journalists and criticize their working approach. If there is a complaint against a journalist, it should be processed through the lawful channels. CEO Abdullah said: "No state institution should directly contact a journalist and inquire about his/her works. Nobody in any positon has the right to do so. A complaint should be processed only through the Media Violations Review Committee."
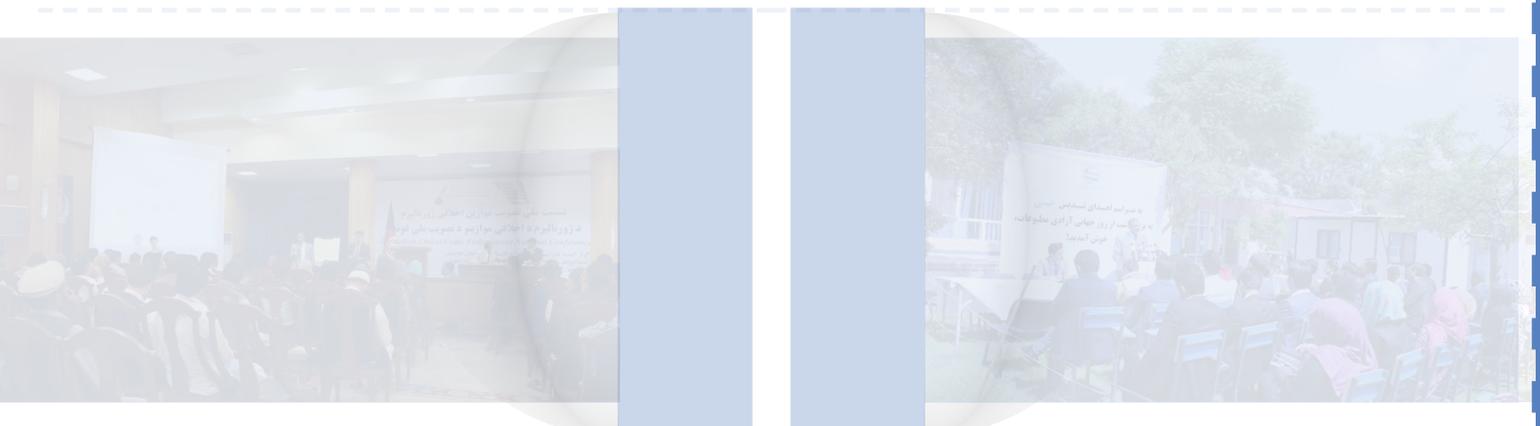CEO Abdullah also confessed that the government of Afghanistan has not been able to fulfil its promises to punish perpetrators of violence against journalists.
He added: In no ways we can claim that we fulfilled our promises – we have come short in fulfilling our promises to lower the incidence of violence against journalists; we have not done enough. However, we hold our promises and try to fulfil them.
The Minister of Information and Culture, Abdulbari Jahani mentioned the country's achievements in freedom of speech including approval of the Law of Access to Information, Regulation on the Establishment and Operation of Private and Mass Media and establishment of the Journalists' Safety Committee and called them as the system's biggest achievements.
Meanwhile the public relations advisor to UNESCO said that access to information requires strong determination and the State of Afghanistan has been successful in this area.
Although CEO Abdullah said that no state institution has the right to interfere into the journalists' works, the state imposed restrictions on media and the presence of some anti-freedom and anti-independence ideologies are among the serious challenges that freedom of speech face in Afghanistan. Some journalists complain about the challenges and difficulties they face in doing professional journalism in the country.

President Ghani supports freedom of speech in Afghanistan

President Ashraf Ghani issued a statement in celebration of World Press Freedom Day and stated that all governmental offices are obliged to cooperate with journalists while they are making news or investigative reports.

The statement also says that the government is committed to the freedom of speech and supports this value within the frame of law.
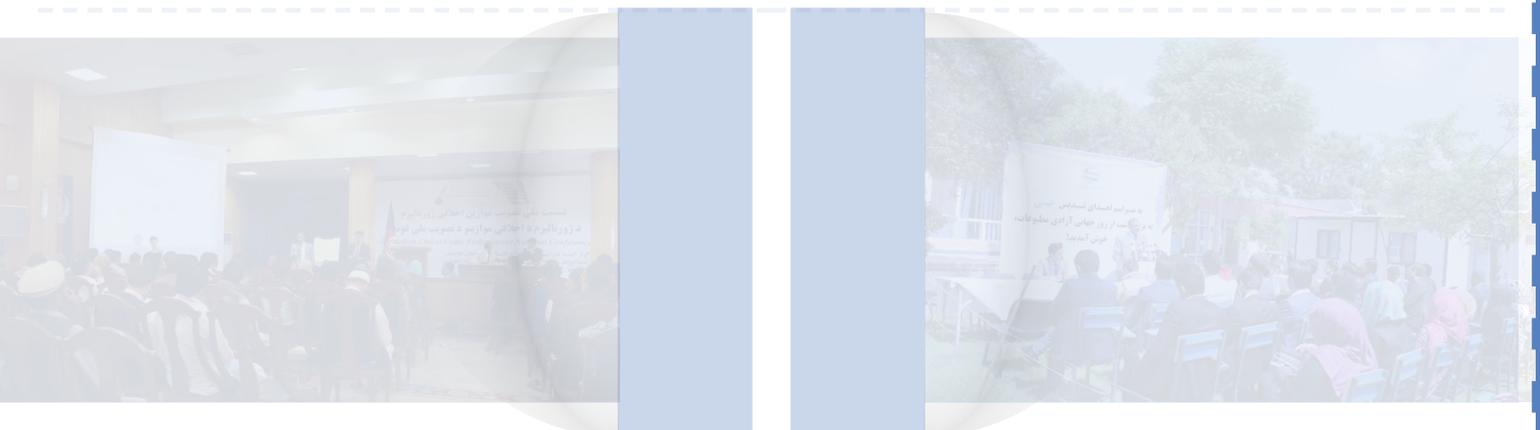
The statement issued by Arg – office of the president, reads: "We are proud that in spite of unfavorable security conditions, in the most recent ranking of freedom of speech, Afghanistan is ranked in a better position relative to other countries in the region. In a recent occasion, one of Afghanistan's media received world press freedom medal from Reporters Without Borders. Meanwhile this is not enough; Afghanistan media should try harder through conducting of standard and professional works to move Afghanistan's place to a higher position."

The statement also says that the State of Afghanistan has followed up the promises made to media and people during the election campaigns and has taken valuable steps towards supporting media and institutionalizing freedom of speech. Signing of the Law of Access to Information and review of criminal files which involved murder of journalists are among those steps.

In order to support freedom of media, the President and the First Lady introduce Mr. Nader Nadery as Ambassador for Protection of Freedom of Speech.

This comes in a time when over 60 journalists have lost their lives in Afghanistan in the past 15 years and hundreds of cases of violence against journalists have been recorded in Afghanistan. However, none of these cases have been legally processed by the country's legal and judicial institutions and subsequently no perpetrator has been punished.

Before the leaders of the National Unity Government assumed power, they pledged their commitment to support freedom of speech and review cases of violence against journalists in official letters issued to media support organizations. However, 18 months have passed and they are still to fulfil their pledge. Enemies of freedom of speech are still free.

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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/Mediaawatch.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.