



## **Media Watch Report Afghanistan Journalism Freedom Report # 21**

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Despite the existence of Media Law in Afghanistan, killing and torture of journalists is becoming a common thing.

In Report # 21 of Media watch, unfortunately, most of the topics are investigating the lack of government attention to such killings and incidents.

Murder of an innocent human being is considered a crime in the current law of the country, and the judiciary authorities are responsible to sue and punish the criminals.

Besides, torturing people, even by police, is strictly prohibited and is a crime according to the law even if the person is a suspect or criminal, no one has the right to torture anybody.

It's not worth ratifying a law if it's not enforced afterwards. An appropriate law needs to be enforced and to benefit the people of a country.

Afghan leaders are unaware that a law which is not enforced is not only harmful to the people, but also to them. And also it seriously harm the government..

This issue will investigate the following:

- Rahman Qul, a reporter, killed by unknown gunmen in Faryab province
- Ahmad Fawad Ahmadi, reporter, and Eshaq Quraishi, cameraman of Ariana Television and Atta Mohammad Sahel, Logar's Esteqlal Radio RJ were beaten in Herat province
- Resignation of Fahim Kohdamani, the spokesman for Kabul Police Department
- Reporters gunned in Laghman province
- Situation of free media in Takhar province
- Some media agencies were banned in Pakistan.
- Journalists protest the government officials' act on blocking their access to information
- Release of Ahmad Bukhari, Aljazeera reporter from Taliban captivity

### **Rahman Qul, a reporter, killed by unknown gunmen in Faryab province**

Mr. Rahman Qul was working for Andkhoy's governmental publication and also he was hired by a German NGO. On February 20, he was shot by two bikers in front of his house.

Regarding the murder of Rahman Qul, Mohammad Sadeq, the security chief of Faryab province, said: "In the past Mr. Rahman Qul was a school teacher. But after the fall of Doctor Najeeb's regime, he began to work with an Armani lady, a German citizen, who was helping schools at the

Farah province. In addition, recently he was working as a reporter for Andkhoy's governmental publication. No one has been arrested for his murder yet, but the police is trying to capture the murderers."

Andkhoy's district governor, Khairullah Anosh, speaking to Media Watch, said, "Lately Rahman Qul was one the key persons in the education and culture field in Andkhoy district and he did a lot of work for the education sector of Faryab province."

Mr. Anosh asserted that the reason behind his assassination is not clear and the police is yet to capture anyone in relation to the case.

"Murder of Rahman Qul was truly a big loss and we are sorry about this incident," said Abdul Latif Ibrahim, the governor of Faryab province. "As far as the motive behind the murder is concerned, you can point out to two things – first, it could have been Taliban and secondly he could have been a victim of local rivalries for his profession. We are waiting for the results of the investigations."

The head of Culture and Youth Department of Faryab province, Shah Reza Munshizada, also, stated that the motive behind the murder of Mr. Qul is not clear.

Media Watch expresses its concern over the incident and writes that if the attack is carried out by Taliban or local gunmen, it could have been an anticipated move. But it's the government obligation to identify and capture the criminals.

Assassination of Mr. Qul, once again, proves that the government is unable to ensure the safety of its citizens. The murderers remain unidentified and government officials are showing few efforts to resolve the case.

### **Ahmad Fawad Ahmadi, reporter, and Eshaq Quraishi, cameraman of Ariana Television and Atta Mohammad Sahel, Logar's Esteqlal Radio RJ were beaten in Herat province**

During the demonstrations by auto-rickshaw driver protesting against the imposed government law on auto-rickshaws in Herat province on February 22, 2006, Ahmad Fawad Ahmadi and Eshaq Quraishi, while covering the protest, were beaten up by police and their camera was confiscated by the security officials.

Speaking to Media watch, Mr. Ahmadi said, "Auto-rickshaw owners were demanding the government to retract the restrictions that have been imposed on their work. They had gathered in front of the Herat's governor office. Later the police started to drive them away from the area but the protesters begun to react against the police. The police started firing to disperse them and I wanted to shoot their firing. Then I saw that one of the protesters fell on the ground and started bleed. I went to film the wounded person but the police rushed at us and started beating us. They also grabbed the camera from Mr. Quraishi's hands, which was lost. I tried to explain that we are Ariana Television reporters but they didn't listen to us and they kept beating up Mr. Quraishi. His condition is serious now."

But Ahmad Shafiq Fazli, Herat's Security Chief, rejects the allegations by Mr. Ahmadi and says, "Mr. Ahmadi and Quraishi were not beaten up by the police and I, personally, respect the freedom of speech and journalists. The police only told them not to go among the protesters, which they didn't accept. And their camera was stolen by the protesters. I asked Mr. Ahmadi to identify the

policemen who beat them up or took away their camera, but he failed to do so. I again emphasize that they were not beaten up.

Media Watch tried to find out about the reaction of the Ariana TV officials about the issue, but Ehsanullah Aryanzai, the head of the channel, refused to talk.

It is worth-mentioning that prior to this incident, Mr. Fawad Ahmadi was also threatened by Herat's former mayor, Mohammad Rafiq Mujadadi, after reporting the embezzlement case of Mr. Mujaddadi.

According to another report, Atahullah Sahel, Esteqlal Radio's presenter, a Logar local radio station supported by Internews, was beaten up by security officials.

On February 16, 2007, Atahullah Sahel was beaten up inside the radio station by two security men of the area wearing civilian clothes.

Regarding the incident, Mr. Sahel recalled: "Two men from the National Security Department of Logar province entered our office. They beat me up and then took me to their office. Then they told me that people are complaining about the disturbance caused by Esteqlal Radio's frequency to the TV channels, which, I told them, was not my fault and was a technical problem. And then they released me."

But Abdul Karim Hashemi, Logar's governor, rejects the allegations by Mr. Sahel and says, "During the investigation I carried out on National Security Department of Logar officials, they told me that no physical attack happened to Mr. Sahel."

Some minutes after the conversation with the governor, Media Watch received a call from someone, who claimed to be the Head of the National Security Department of Logar Province, saying that they didn't physically assault Mr. Sahel but a group of 200 to 300 people filed complaints against the radio station. They were complaining that the station is causing disturbance to TV frequencies in the province, he added.

The Chief Editor of Esteqlal Radio, Lahl Mohammad Turabi, confirmed the physical assault on Mr. Sahel, but said that he wasn't present during the incident. But he added that they referred the issue to the National Security Department of the province.

Internews Afghanistan established the Radio Station in the Baraki Barak district of Logar province in 2004. The station was programming 10 hours daily. But after the station was sat fire on June last year, it was moved to Pul-e-Alam, center of Logar province.

In its reports, Media Watch has repeatedly urged the security officials and police to prevent any kind of physical assaults on people, as this is against the law, and required more effort to arrest criminals. But unfortunately none of these people have been arrested or brought to justice.

The Ministries of Culture and Youth, Interior Affairs, and Defense as well as the National Security Department should inform their own offices to take preventive measures against such incidents otherwise government will be proved weak when enforcing the law.

## **Fahim Kohdamani, the spokesman for Kabul's Security Department, resigned**

Fahim Kohdamani claimed that the reason behind his resignation is the censorship on news by the newly appointed chief of police.

“Mr. Esmatullah Dawlatzai, the new chief of police, did not approve my work. He was reading and editing the news himself. That’s why I quit,” Kohdamani told Media Watch.

But Esmatullah Dawlatzai claimed that Mr. Kohdamani was currently not an official employee of the Kabul Police Department and there was no specific requirement for his resignation.

Speaking to Media Watch, Kohdamani said, “I was appointed by the former police chief of Kabul, Mr. Amanullah Guzar, and by approval of the Interior Ministry. My documents currently exist in the Ministry.”

General Mohammad Usman, the head of recruitment department of the interior ministry, told Media Watch “as we considered the employment record of Fahim Kohdamani which is available in this department, he was working for a non military position in a government ministry.” He added: according the interior ministry institutional structure, the spokes person have to be a military official within the interior ministry, therefore Mr. Kohdamani was not spokesperson for Kabul Police Head Quarter, but he was appointed as a temporary employee for the Kabul Police Head Quarter..

Media Watch tried to talk to the Interior Ministry spokesman, Zemaray Bashiry but he neither answered our calls nor was found in his office.

Media Watch believes that censorship still exists in some of the governmental departments and that officials are trying to avoid spreading some news items, which is against the constitution and Media Law and also deprive the citizens from having access to information. Recently Tolo TV, for instance, was boycott by the Interior Ministry, but the boycott was taken back later.

Senior officials must know that by imposing censorship they can not prevent incidents and disasters. Therefore, people have the right to know what’s happening in their country.

They should prevent the occurrence of such incidents, rather than censor the news about the incidents. Besides, one can suppose that governmental authority have enough of their own tasks not to loose time on censorship.

## **Security officials opened fire on reporters of Ariana Television, Pajhwok News Agency and Associated Press in Laghman province**

On January 13, 2007, Reporters of Ariana TV, Pajhwok News Agency and Associated Press had gone to Alingar district of Laghman province to make reports. On their way back their car came under fire of National Security Department employees.

Mahid Hashemi, a Pajhwok’s news reporter, who was traveling with the two other journalists, said, “When our car was going down the hill, we were shot by the area’s security men. We stopped the car and asked them why they opened fired on us, they told us that they have mistaken our car with a smuggler’s car.”

Ariana TV reporter, Khan Wali Kamran, said, “It wasn’t a mistaken shoot out, because when we passed by, they didn’t stop us but they fired at the back of the car.”

Laghman governor, Gulab Mangal, in a phone conversation to Media Watch, said, “We have detained the people who fired at them. But we released them when the reporters suggested their release. The men claimed that they waived at the reporter’s car to tell them to stop, but they didn’t. That’s why they opened fire on them.”

Media Watch states that if the reporters refused to stop, when they were asked to, they were in an illegal position. But if the security men fired at the car without stopping them at the first place, it was a mistake that could cost lives of three reporters.

Journalists and security officials should be careful when doing their jobs to prevent such unpleasant incidents, because life is a worth God-given gift and we shouldn’t play with it.

### **Some of the Free Media Outlets are facing downturn in Takhar province**

Nearly 12 publications of Takhar province have failed to run due to financial problems.

Speaking to Media Watch, Abdul Matin Sarfraz, a Pajhwok reporter, said that the situation of media outlets is worrying in Takhar province: “I remember that Andisha and Agahi publications were closed down due to financial problems. I have figures showing that nearly 12 publications were closed due to financial problems.”

He claimed that, besides financial problems, the media community is facing threats from local government officials. “Once, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> issue of Sarw Monthly, an article about women was published. Part of this article said that woman is a blessed creature of God and paradise is under her feet. The article raised anger among some Mullahs, which resulted in protest against the publication. They were claiming that publishing such articles will create women-domination.”

Mawlawi Mustafa Kakar, a Supreme Court official, said, “Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) had twice emphasized in his last speech that women are God’s gifts and you should careful about them. In some parts of Islam the position of women has been emphasized because women are mothers and mothers have much higher place then men.”

Mr. Sarfraz criticized the imposed pressure on media in the province and said” “The local officials are not directly pressuring the media, but when news related with them are published, they stop cooperating with the media outlet.

“Currently, we can’t go to some remote district of Takhar province and the government officials are refusing to cooperate due their personal reasons.”

But the governor of Takhar, Khwaja Ghulam Ghaws Abobakr, rejected the allegations and said: “There are no imposed limits on media and journalists in Takhar. In fact, I personally have, many times, arranged car for the reporters and taken them to remote areas. No one has any problem with journalists; they can go anywhere they want. Also, no government official ever tried to publish personal related news in the media outlets’ programs.”

Closing down of print media outlets is not only widespread in Takhar, but in most of the provinces of the country – especially in Kabul. The new wave of media in the country have paved the ground for the media outlets to operate in a free environment, but lack of support from some international organizations, lack of newspaper-reading culture and poverty are the reasons that cause the close down of the papers one after another.

More than 300 publications were operating in Kabul, among which only few of them currently have managed to survive. Financial problems, lack of advertisements and government lack of attention are considered the main reasons behind the collapse of some good publications like Kabul Weekly, a very popular newspaper.

According to the media law, the Afghan government has to support free and open media outlets. This support could include financial aid as well. The government can cooperate with the publications in their printing issues, as it has a huge access to printing facilities.

### **Tolo and Lemar Televisions banned for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time by Pakistani government**

Afghan refugees in Islamabad and Pakistan complained that a ban was imposed for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time on Lemar and Tolo TVs.

“Anyone who watches Tolo or Lemar TV would be fined by the government,” Gul Ahmad, an Afghan refugee, told Media Watch.

Another refugee, Nadera Ahmadi, also said, “If someone watches Tolo TV by satellite, Pakistan government will fine them. The government claims that it spreads anti-Pakistan propaganda.”

The CEO of Tolo TV, Sediq Ahmadzada, also, acknowledged the ban and said, “After the visit of Mr. Shawkat Aziz, the Prime Minister and Ali Durani, the Culture Minister of Pakistan to Kabul the ban was removed on Lemar and Tolo TV channels, but recently it has been imposed once again. And cable networks are prohibited to air the channels. We have referred the issue to the President, and Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Culture and Youth to negotiate with the Pakistani government the lift of the ban.”

According to some recent reports, all Afghan TV channels, aired in Pakistan, are banned by Pakistani government; details will be given in report #22 of Media Watch.

Media Watch believes that there is law , approved by the Pakistani government, allowing to ban Afghan TV channels in its territory. On the other hand, nearly 2 million Afghan refugees live in Pakistan and they have the right to watch the TV channels of their own country.

The Afghan Foreign Ministry should seriously follow this issue and urge the Pakistani side to remove the ban. Otherwise, it will lead to a similar reaction to Pakistani media in Afghanistan

### **Journalists accuse the government officials of mistreatment and not providing them with the information they need**

In the Media Law it's clearly enshrined that access to information is the right of every Afghan citizen and government officials should provide people with the information people need, unless the information acquired reveals secrets which are against the national interests of the country.

Speaking to Media Watch, Farida Nekzad, the deputy chairman of Pajhwok News Agency, said, “Recently, the National Security Department gave a drafted code of conduct containing 24 articles for media, but asked them not to publish the bill, because it was imposing restrictions on media. But

the media outlets published and released the drafted code of conduct, which evoked National Security Department Officials' anger.”

Abdul Ghafor Popal, a Shamshad TV reporter in Kabul, claimed that National Security Department officials have changed their behavior after the capture of the Taliban spokesman, Doctor Anif. He said, “The reason behind this problem is the existence of non-professional people in some key positions. They don't understand the meaning of democracy. Of course, the President is an exceptional case”.

National Security Department officials have been mistreating the journalists since the capture of Doctor Anif. They want the media to become governmental recently, the Indian FM visited Kabul and, during the visit, the National Security officials misbehaved and humiliated the journalists. I reported the issue to UNAMA and some media outlets.”

Pajhwok News Agency reporter, Habibullah Ibrahimi, also, complains about the misbehavior of National Security Department and Supreme Court Officials: “I remember that four years back from now, I referred 11 times to the Interior Ministry but the officials whom I wanted to interview, refused to talk. And almost two months ago when I went to the National and International Criminal Court to investigate the capture of some suspects in relation to the suicide bombings, they told me that I should get the permission from the Supreme Court. Thus I referred to the Supreme Court to talk to the Head of the Press Department and I was asked by the security guards to show my ID badge, which I did. As my ID card was in English, one of them told me that I didn't ask for this “American-spy” ID card. Subsequently, they didn't allow me to meet him. When I phoned the Supreme Court's Press Department Chairman, he said that what his security guards told, me was true. As I was talking to him through the phone, one of the guards grabbed the phone out of my hand and asked him if he wants to see me, which the answer was ‘No’ from his side.”

But Abdul Wakil Omari, the Press head of Supreme Court, rejected Ibrahimi's allegations and said, “So far , we never refused to talk to a journalist. Only in case the reporter wants to talk to the Chairman of the Supreme Court, he would have to wait for one day.”

Mr. Ibrahimi has always been cooperated. But he did not treat well the officials and refused to show his ID card. When he contacted me I told him that he couldn't get the interview on that day.”

On the other hand, recently Salam Watandar National Program was boycotted by the Ministry of Women Affairs. According to Fahim Sediqi, a reporter for the radio station, the boycott took place after airing the interview of Mrs. Mazari Safa, the deputy minister of women affairs, regarding a letter which was sent to Taliban asking to reduce violation against women.”

After the interview was aired, the Ministry of Women Affairs denied giving any kind of information to Salam Watandar Radio.

Speaking to Media Watch, Mrs. Safa, rejected the addressed allegations by Salam Watandar, “One day Mr. Sediqi, a reporter for Salam Watandar National program, made an interview with me about the violation against women in the country. Aside from other factors, I pointed out that terrorists are also violators of women's right, and, through terror activities, they are killing mothers. The reporter asked me that what I had to say to the enemies of the country. I replied that my message, as a mother, is that they should stop violation against women. But the radio has only aired my message to Taliban out of the whole interview. That I was asked by the Women Affairs Minister as if I had sent any message to Taliban, which I responded, no. She told me about the interview with Salam

Watandar Radio. I urged Mr. Sediqi to go to the ministry and objected the false airing of my interview and told him that that I was not going to talk to the radio for a while, but you can talk to other officials within the ministry or air the news about the ministry. There hasn't been any boycott on them."

Concerning the issue, Sanjar Qyam, the chairman of Salam Watandar Radio, said, "Government officials behave arbitrary and selfishly with the journalists."

Meanwhile, Mubarez Rashidi, the Deputy Minister of Youth and Culture, in an exclusive interview with Media Watch, said, "All government departments are obliged to provide the journalists with the information they need It's only forbidden to tell secrets that would jeopardize the security of the country.

"It's enshrined in the constitution that journalists have the right to access information. But unfortunately some officials refuse to talk to media. I urge all the government officials to act constitutionally. If an official refuses to talk because he doesn't want an article to be published, it's against the law. But if there is a technical problem, then the interviewee should be excused. If a ministry requires an official letter from a reporter, it's only a waste of time for the reporter and nothing else.

Speaking in a press conference on February 20, Tom Koings, Special Representative of UN in Afghanistan, also expressed concerns over the imposed limits on media by the parliament.

But Mohammad Arif Noorzai, the first deputy of lower house, in a phone conversation with Media Watch, said: "No restriction has been imposed on media by the parliament."

Media Watch believes that imposing restrictions on media is against the law, but the journalists should also understand that editing the articles unprofessionally can harm the main message of the report, which is something against ethics of journalism and damages the honesty of the report. The chief editors should pay more attention while editing the articles and reports to prevent any kind of misrepresentation of the speaker.

But government officials should also understand that blocking journalists' access to information means violating people's right in accessing information because it's the media that spreads the information to people.

Making excuses to prevent talking to media is against the law and asking journalists for officials letters from their agencies is nothing but waste of time. It's because there is a limited time to publish and release news or articles, and if the required information is not accessible on time, the news or the article becomes outdated.

### **Ahmad Bukhari, Aljazeera TV reporter, released after two days captivity**

Ahmad Bukhari, who went to the volatile Helmand province with a group of national and foreign journalists, was captured by Taliban. After his release, Mr. Bukhari told the media that reporting from the south of the country is a dangerous job. Before entering the province, he talked to some Taliban leaders and got the permission to report, but later he was captured by another group of Taliban and was taken to a remote area, he explained.

He also added that even though he had the permission he was kept on detention for two days until his permission was confirmed by the Taliban spokesperson.



“During my two days in captivity, I was moved to many places but I was assured that I will be protected in case of attack by NATO forces. It seems that Taliban have many places to shelter in Helmand province, but the region is very dangerous to journalists.  
The full report on Ahmad Bukhari will be available in the Media Watch Report # 22.

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*Note: To maintain confidentiality and to protect sources it was not possible for Nai to corroborate the incidents by carrying out additional investigations.*

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