



Afghan Journalists Safety Committee

Six Months Report

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Preface

2013 is a critical year for the future of Afghanistan. It marks the completion of security transition from Nato to Afghan security forces. Moreover, preparations for political transition of 2014 and economic transition takes place this year. This will, by a large extent, determine how Afghanistan navigates its way through a host of heavy challenges into stability.

In the context of these major changes, media sector, among others, has sustained considerable difficulties. Some of them include increased violence against journalists, increased financial challenges of media organizations and growing restrictions with regards to access to information.

Violence against media workers, instigated by various parties, increased significantly this year in comparison to the past couples of years. Amid this, the violent behavior of government officials, which has been on the rise and tending to become more systematic, is of a great concern simply because in principle and according to laws government is responsible for ensuring safe working conditions for journalists. On the other hand, continued coverage of violence by journalists has resulted in many of them succumbing to psychological disorders and prompting some of them to quit their profession as journalists.

It is worth mentioning that, in the first six months of the year, some important steps have also been taken to safeguard freedom of expression and provide a better working environment for journalists. In this line, of note is the formation of Afghanistan Journalists' Federation, which can be considered a major achievement in the history of media in Afghanistan. The federation has created a new atmosphere and momentum to enhance integration of media support organizations and groups and create a bulwark against escalation of various types of pressure on media and journalists.

This report sheds light on journalists' safety in Afghanistan during the first six months of 2013 and presents statistics and brief description on cases of violence against media workers. Additionally, the report briefly features economic and security situation of each region in the backdrop of the practice of journalism. This is because there is direct relation between these two phenomena.

It is worth mentioning that cases of violence against media workers have been registered in line with the policy and procedures of the Safety Committee. This means the Committee has a specific definition for journalists and media workers; therefore, cases in which the legal status of the victims does not conform to the definition recognized by the committee, have not been recorded.

A Snapshot of the Security Situation in the Regions and its Impact on Journalists' Work

The experience of the last 10 years shows that insecurity poses great challenges to the work and safety of journalists. Over the last 12 years, 2003 through 2006 are known as golden years for Afghan media because the environment was more open and journalist friendly and the government extended considerable support to media activities.

The trajectory of violence against journalists went up in 2013 compared with the previous years. This comes at a time when the security situation in many parts of the country has improved in comparison to previous years. Over the first six months of 2013, majority of incidents have taken place during the second quarter because of the drop in terrorist activities during the winter. A considerable number of incidents of violence against journalists have been caused by government security forces in the aftermath of insurgent attacks as journalists rushed to the sites for press coverage of the event.

Primarily, media organizations and journalists that work in remote areas are more vulnerable to violence and intimidation because of increased level of insecurity in the remote areas and pronounced fear from insurgents, warlords, and organized criminals. On the other hand, journalists operating in remote areas enjoy the least level of cooperation of local government authorities with regards to obtaining access to information.

Based on the analysis of Afghanistan Journalists Safety Committee, violence against media workers will increase in the coming months until after the elections for the following reasons:

1. The Afghan government will exert more pressure on journalists and media outlets in the run up and during the election in order to control the information space.
2. Armed opposition groups will accelerate their destructive activities to disturb the election process and further their psychological war.
3. Individuals and parties that support certain candidates will put media and journalists under pressure during the campaign period for a variety of reasons particularly for not supporting their preferred candidate.
4. With the reduction of the presence of the international community and their weakened commitment toward safeguarding the values of freedom of expression, intimidators will find more space and courage to threaten media workers and pressure media outlets for the purpose of advancing their interests.

Security challenges of the regions in relation to the work of journalists have been described hereunder:

The central region of the country, which includes Ghazni, Daikundi, Bamyān, Wardak and Logar Provinces, has witnessed deterioration of security this year. This has created the opportunity for the insurgents to control the programming of the local media and punish media workers if their broadcast content is not favorable to insurgents. For example, in Ghazni Province, the Taliban have banned government advertisements especially the messages of the High Peace Council; thus, local media cannot air such messages.

In the Northeast region, which includes Kunduz, Takhar, Baghlan and Badakhshan Provinces, security has not deteriorated compared to past years. However, districts that are located along the Silk Route, which is meant to become a transit route between Afghanistan and China, have recently been experiencing a new wave of insecurity. An example is Wardooj district of Badakhshan province, which used to be one of the safest districts but has recently become volatile. Although these security challenges have not made journalistic work as much difficult in this region, still as a result, government officials tend to show less cooperation with journalists in terms of providing them with information and in some cases threaten them for their curiosity and persistence looking for information. Women's presence in media organizations of this region has become less dominant because of the atmosphere of terror created by the psychological war of the Taliban.

Unlike Northeast region, the provinces in the Northern region (including Samangan, Faryab, Sar-e-Pol, Jawzjan and Balkh) were relatively safe over the past six months; as a result journalists did not face serious challenges and were able to continue with their work regularly. However, more challenges in this region emanates from the lack of cooperation of the local government authorities with regards to providing information to media workers– a challenge that aggravates day by day. This problem is especially rampant in government institutions such as departments of public health, education and higher and semi higher education where journalists are not allowed to cover freely. In addition, enticing of journalists by government officials and political factions, which is a great cause of concern about the integrity and independence of media in that region, is very common in this region.

In Panjsher, Parwan and Kapisa, despite their proximity to the capital Kabul, media organizations have not had remarkable progress. In this region, local powerful individuals very often threaten journalists and this has created numerous obstacles in the work of media. The mysterious murder of two journalists in that region over the past few years has created tremendous panic among the rest of journalists and media workers and has resulted in more extensive censorship. On the other hand, the emerging extremist ideology in these provinces has further restricted the space for media organizations and journalists. The findings of the investigative report by the Safety Committee on the death of Radio Nejrab's journalist, Mohsen Hashimi, shows that he was murdered by his family because of his family's extremists tendencies.

The Southeastern provinces such as Khost, Paktia and Paktika are counted among the most vulnerable provinces in the country as they share border with Pakistan. However, the overall security situation of that region has been better than previous years. Yet, journalists in this region are unable to travel out of cities for stories because of the fear of insecurity. On the other hand, the excessive focus of government officials on the issue of security has resulted in a situation where government officials do not cooperate with journalists when journalists approach them for information.

Security challenges in the Eastern region have also caused journalists to restrict their work to cities and to reports with security theme only, and fail to cover other issues and also report from far-flung area. Of all provinces in this zone, Nooristan is experiencing the highest degree of problems due to its geographic location; thus undermining media activities in this province. In Nangarhar Province, journalists banned coverage of the governor's office news two times within six months due to insufficient cooperation of the governor's office with journalists.

Although worse compared to other provinces, the security situation in Kandahar, Zabul, Helmand and Urozgan Provinces of the Southwest region shows improvement. In this region too, journalists' scope of work because of the fear of violence remains restricted to security issues and they rarely get to report on other matters such as social issues. On the other hand there are few government officials who are willing to cooperate with journalists in the region and this has given rise to friction between journalists and government officials.

Security situation in the Western region (that includes Herat, Farah, Ghor, Badghis and Nimroz Provinces) has seen a shift over the last six months and continues to deteriorate every day. Poor access of journalists to rural areas is one of the implications of this unwelcoming shift. Even in the relatively secure provinces such as Herat, very few journalists have travelled by road over the last several years to neighboring districts or provinces to prepare reportage. Increase in the rate of life threats to journalists, intimidation of journalists by powerful individuals, enticing journalists and media organizations and self-censorship are among the issues that have emerged in the western provinces during the last six months of insecurity.

Economic changes and Media:

Afghanistan's economy has remained dependent upon international aid since 2001. International aid has been the driving factor behind the growth of media sector in the country and most outlets are still vitally dependent on international aid.

Because of massive and sometimes unrestrained international aid to the sector, media proprietors, rather than developing plans and programs for the long-term sustainability of their media organizations, solely relied on the donor aid over the past ten years. As a result, with the gradual decline in international aid to Afghanistan since 2011, media sector sustained the biggest harm and majority of the outlets faced financial challenges.

Some of them had to either stop operating or cut down significantly on their programming and downsize their staff. Their employers have not paid some of the media workers for months and some others have been notified that their respective media outlet would not afford to pay them due to bankruptcy.

As the number of independent media organizations reduces, the viewership space will be expanded for those media organizations that are not independent and follow specific agenda and interests. There are also fear that financial needs may put independent media organizations under the sway and influence of countries and groups, which follow certain objectives. This will be the most dangerous scenario for the future of media in Afghanistan as it will seriously damage the credibility and image of media and will discourage the public to rely on media as a credible source of information. This, in turn, will intensify the financial problems of media due to reduced viewership and the ensuing vicious cycle can lead to downturn of free media in Afghanistan.

Having considered the above, however, in some parts of the country, the number of media organizations continues to increase despite the economic recess. An example is the Northern region where the number of media organizations has increased as new outlets have started to work within the past six months. In the light of financial challenges media outlets are undergoing, the new outlets may have been established to serve certain interests and further the agenda of individuals, groups or countries. This is at a time that independent media in this region are suffering from financial problems.

By assessing various regions of the country, one can conclude that media organizations have taken stringent measures in order to prevent a total shut down; however, such economic austerity greatly harms journalists and other media workers as it usually takes the form of salary reductions or downsizing schemes.

Job Security for Journalists

Job security has been one of the major concerns of Afghan journalists over the past ten years. Even in their golden times Afghan media have taken minimal measures to make available to their staff the necessary means and benefits their staff members were entitled to. The contracts media owners sign with their staff is a good example as such employment conditions don't have precedence in any other country around the world. These contracts are totally unilateral and are crafted in a way that serve specifically the interests of media owners and commit no benefits for workers except for the monthly salary, which is usually lower than average salary range. There is no insurance for journalists who risk their lives working in highly insecure areas. These contracts contain a provision requiring the employee not to seek employment with other media organizations for a period of six months following resignation or they will be prosecuted. Multiple journalists have been fined unfairly by their employers by power of this provision. Lack of a standard employment procedure in media organizations continue to exist as a major problem affecting media workers as there are no laws that govern such employments and such law is not perceived to be passed in the near future.

In response to the declining international aid and in order to ensure viability, media organizations have applied salary reduction and staff reduction measures. As a result, many journalists have lost their jobs in different

provinces and those who remain have been assigned to cover multiple provinces within the region. For instance, Radio Killid, which is one of the big outlets has lost 22 of its employees due to financial crisis in the last two years. This has prompted some media workers to consider switching their profession as they are no longer ready to risk their lives for the very low salary they get paid.

Miscellaneous Points on Journalists' Job Security

1. Unprofessionalism

The booming quantitative growth of Afghan media over the last decade was not balanced by parallel qualitative growth due to shortage of trained and experience professionals, therefore, media outlets filled positions with amateur and inexperienced individuals and this created a huge professional vacuum. At the same time, media organizations put minimal efforts to build capacity of their personnel, thus, the professional vacuum is still visible by a large extent. Poor professional knowledge of journalists does not only inhibit the quality of reporting but also serves as a factor of violence against them. Statistics reveal that the reason behind a remarkable number of cases of violence against journalists has been lack of professional knowledge on the journalists' part. A considerable number of journalists have no clue of the standards and ethics of journalism and do not apply the minimal professional standards in their routine work.

2. Misuse of the Profession

Misuse of the profession is another major problem in the community of media workers. Some journalists abuse journalism profession for their personal purposes. They act as if they are above any laws and regulations when they have their journalist ID on. Such behavior has not only obscured the image of this profession but also in many cases has provoked verbal or physical violence against them.

3. Access To Information

Although Article 50 of the Afghan Constitution guarantees the right to access information as a fundamental right of Afghan citizens, government officials frequently violate this right and do not share information with journalists. Lack of cooperation of government officials with journalists has created a reactionary spirit among journalists and is indeed the starting point of a widening distance and animosity between journalists and government. A good example is the recent incident where a reporter of channel 1 TV station was threatened by the Head of Olympics Committee because of his insistence on obtaining information and the Olympic committee's refusal to cooperate.

The act of government officials denying journalists information creates problems not only for journalists but also for government institutions. Over the last six months, Nangarhar and Baghlan Provinces saw ban on news coverage of local government activities by media as a reaction to poor cooperation of the provincial governors' offices with journalists. The only side that benefits from this situation is the insurgents as the ban on news coverage of government entities further expands the space for their propaganda activities.

4. Enticement of the Journalists

One of very pitiable practices, which is unfortunately on the rise, is enticing of journalists by various groups including government officials and some journalists' submission to such unprofessional practice. This happens for the most part in provinces outside the capital and government officials are in the forefront of this endeavor.

By providing journalists with benefits, they prevent disclosure of negative points and weaknesses in their work environment. Afghan Journalists Safety Committee anticipates that this practice will intensify by use of force and money in the run up to the Presidential and Provincial Councils elections which will result in concealment of very important matters; thus, undermining the image and credibility of journalism.

5. Female Journalists

Female journalists are highly vulnerable and are facing a variety of problems from low professional knowledge and experience to sexual harassment in the workplace. Female journalists are the first group to diminish their presence in media sector especially in provinces as concerns over the future of the country continue to arise. Sexual harassment by the supervisors is a prominent challenge ahead of the continuation of the work of women in the media. In some cases, supervisors purposefully restrict the workspace on the targeted female employee to the extent that she gets compelled to submit to the illegitimate demands of her supervisor. In such circumstances, if the subject resists to give in, she will be fired from work. Moreover, female journalists are not as well educated and experienced as their male peers, which makes them more vulnerable to losing their job as a result of the increasing financial challenges of the media outlets. Cultural constraints is yet another obstacle adding to the array of problems and serving as the reason for violence against female journalists in many instances. Cultural constraint has also been responsible for female media workers to restrict their work inside the office and refrain from going out to the field for reporting.

Table of Violence Against Journalists

S/N	Journalist's Name	Employer/ Designation	Province	Case Type	Perpetrator of Violence	Date and Brief Description of the Case
1	12 members of production group	Tolo News	Farah	Armed attack by the Taliban	Armed Taliban	18/03/2013 The convoy of Tolo News staff was attacked by armed Taliban militia.
2	Ibrahim Mohammadi	Radio Faryad Correspondent	Farah	Threatened to death on phone by the Taliban	Armed Taliban	Ibrahim Mohammadi, correspondent of Radio Faryad and RTA was threatened to death on phone by the Taliban on 31/03/2013. He said the reason behind the threats were his work with media.

3	Nazir Reha	Chief Editor of Asia TV	Herat	Beating and attempt to kidnapping	Unidentified individuals	On 13/04/2013 Nazir Reha, Chief Editor of Asia TV, was beaten and injured on the road in Herat city. The reason for this attempt was his critical show on his TV station.
4	Ahmad Nadim Ghory	Chief Editor of Saam Publication	Ghor	Repeatedly threatened to death by armed Taliban and former commanders on phone and by letter	Armed unidentified individuals	Ahmad Nadim Ghory, Chief Editor of Saam Publication in Ghor, was threatened to death and leaving his job through phone call on 04/17/2013 and night letter by unidentified individuals
5	Aziz Ahmad Sadeqi and Sayed Sharif Aseel	Chief Editor and correspondent of Taban TV - Herat	Herat	Beat up by police officer	Police of Herat Police HQ	Aziz Ahmad Sadeqi and Sayed Sharif Aseel Chief Editor and correspondent of Taban TV – Herat were beaten by police in Herat on 04/18/2013. The reason behind the beat up was to silence the media.
6	Ali Asghar Yaqubi	Head of Communications and Media Unit of Herat information and culture directorate	Herat	Armed attack and injury by unidentified individuals in capital city of Herat	Armed Taliban	On 4/23/2013 Ali Asghar Yaqubi was shot wounded by unidentified individuals in Herat city.

7	Atefa Ghafoori	Correspondent of Channel 1 TV in Herat	Herat	Physical attack – verbal insult and breaking of video cassette	Freshta Beheshti, Head of Herat Juvenile Rehabilitation Center-Ministry of Justice	On 04/24/2013 Atefa Ghafoori was physically attacked and affronted by the Head of Herat Juvenile Rehabilitation Center. The reason behind this behavior was filming without permission, despite the reason she accepted to clear out her recordings.
8	Naqibullah Motunwal	Manager of Killid Radio	Khost	Indirect threat	Member of Parliament	On 08/06/2013 MP Kamal Naser Usooly sent an official letter to Radio Killid and Aryana TV asking for termination of Naqibullah Motunwal
9	Abdul Malik khorasani	Local Radio Kokcha	Badakhshan	Wounded by pistol shot	Security Forces Officer	On April 8 2013, he was wounded during an argument with a security officer. The case is under investigation
10	Naseer Ahmad Sadeq	Channel 1 TV Correspondent – Taloqan	Takhar	Beating up	Police	On April 25 2013, he was beaten and insulted by police while preparing a report.
11	Shahbaz Saberi	Khawar Local TV	Kunduz	Beating up	Police	On February 6 th 2013, he was beaten by police who also broke the glasses of his car.

12	Bashir Ahmad Ghezali	Correspondent of Radio Ashna – Pol e Khomri	Baghlan	Phone threat	Kidnappers	He has been receiving telephone threats since last year. According to him, the threat has increased since January 2013.
13	Sher Mohammad Jahish	Radi Ashna Reporter – Pol e Khomri	Baghlan	Phone threat	Report on land confiscation by unknown people	From June 4 2013 after airing a report on land grabbing receives serious telephone threats
14	Abdul Wadood Wahedi	Correspondent of Radio Azadi – Kunduz	Kunduz	Phone threat	Unknown people	He receives continuous threats ever since he was working with RTA as presenter, according to him. His threat however has become more serious since he started working with Radio Bayan Shamal.
15	Dayan Ahmadi	Radio Azadi Correspondent	Badakhshan	Phone threat	Unknown people	He is threatened by phone and is told that he spreads propaganda against Islam.
16	Hayatullah Hayat	RTA presenter	Kunduz	Phone threat	Unknown people & Taliban	He has been working with RTA in Kunduz for eight years. He is told that he spreads propaganda in favor of the government
17	Mozamil	Correspondent of Jalalabad based Radio Enhikas in Kunduz	Nangarhar	Killed in Kunduz	For unknown reason by unknown people	His dead body was found in river between Ali Abad and Kunduz districts on May 11, 2013. The cause of his death is still unknown

18	Najia Khodayar	Manager of Radio Zohra - Kunduz	Kunduz	Phone threat	Unknown people	She says she receives threats ever since she established Radio Zohra in 2004.
19	Rahmatullah Reha	Radio Azadi	Faryab	Threat	Taliban	Rahmatullah Reha claims to have been threatened by armed Taliban on January 20 th 2013. He has recorded the voice of those who threatened him. And claims they are Taliban against whom he made reports.
20	Haseebullah Hajati	Naw TV correspondent in Samangan	Balkh	Threat	Armed Commander	According to Hajati, he was threatened by an armed commander in Samangan Province on 16/2/2013 after he had aired a report on disagreements between the Head of Provincial Council and Governor of Samangan.
21	Abdurrazaq	Asia TV in Balkh	Balkh	Threat	By TV Authorities	On 18/2/2013 he was threatened when he asked the TV administration for his salary. The issue was resolved later on.
22	Khalil Rasool	Asia TV Technician	Balkh	Threat	By TV Authorities	On 18/2/2013, he was threatened when he asked the TV administration for his salary.

23	Saleh Mohammad Khaleeq	Head of Information and Culture	Balkh	Threat	By an MP representing this province	. He was threatened by MP Abbas Ibrahimzada on 1/4/2013 when he was distributing appreciation letters to media.
24	Mirwais Bezhan	Local TV Maiwand and VoA TV Correspondent	Balkh	Insult	By NDS Officers	On 30/4/2013 he was threatened by officers of National Directorate of Security while obtaining license for a magazine.
25	Hameedullah Ibrahimi	Reporter of Ho-wayda Website	Balkh	Threat	By Armed individuals	He claims that on 19/6/2013 he was threatened by unknown persons. The reason for the threats were his critiques to different groups.
26	Mohammad Jan Tamkin	Pajhwak News Agency	Jawzjan	Threat	Mr. Dostom's armed men	On 6/7/2013 he received life threats from Dostom's henchmen after publishing a report on disagreement between Dostom and Jawzjan Governor.
27	Babrak Amirzada	Pajhwak News Agency	Nangarhar	Beating up	NDS	On 24/2/2013 he was beaten by National Directorate of Security officers while reporting from the scene.

28	Ziyar Khan Yaad	Jhwandoon TV	Nangarhar	Beating up	NDS	On 24/2/2013 he was beaten by NDS officers while reporting from the scene.
29	Noorullah	France Press	Nangarhar	Beating up	NDS	On 24/2/2013 he was beaten by NDS officers while reporting from the scene.
30	Shafiqullah Khewawal	Jalalabad	Nangarhar	Kidnapping	Unidentified Individuals	Shafiqullah on 5/20/2013 was kidnapped by unknown people for unknown reasons.
31	Rahmatullah Nekzad	Al-Jazeera Arabic TV	Ghazni	Arrest and beating	Armed Taliban	On April 8 2013, Rahmatullah was reporting on scene of a roadside bomb explosion in Salar area part of Sayed Abad district of Wardak Province when he was arrested and beaten by the Taliban. He was let go after a few hours.
32	Abdullah Rahmani	Al-Jazeera English TV	Ghazni	Arrest and beating	Armed Taliban	On April 8 2013, Abdullah Rahmani was reporting, on scene, a roadside bomb explosion in Salar area part of Sayed Abad district of Wardak Province when he was arrested and beaten by the Taliban. He was let go after a few hours.

33	Zafar Bamyani	Voice of America	Bamyan	Phone threat	Former Jihadi Commander and Currently Afghan Local Police Commander	On 24/3/2013, Zafar Bamyani reporter of VoA in Bamyan received telephone threat after he had published a critical report about an ALP commander in VoA website. This report was edited by VoA editor in a way that had distorted its balance
34	Abdullah Danish	Radio Dunya Reporter	Parwan	Phone threat	Unidentified armed men	On 10/3/2013 Abdullah Danish received threats that he should stop his program in the radio or he will be killed. Consequently, the radio stopped airing the mentioned program because of the threats.
35	Farid Tanha	Reporter of Pajhwak in Parwan	Parwan	Phone threat	Irresponsible armed men	On 13/4/2013, he was threatened to death by irresponsible armed men who warned him not to pursue his job. He faced this threat because he had name those armed men in his report on an armed clash in Kabul

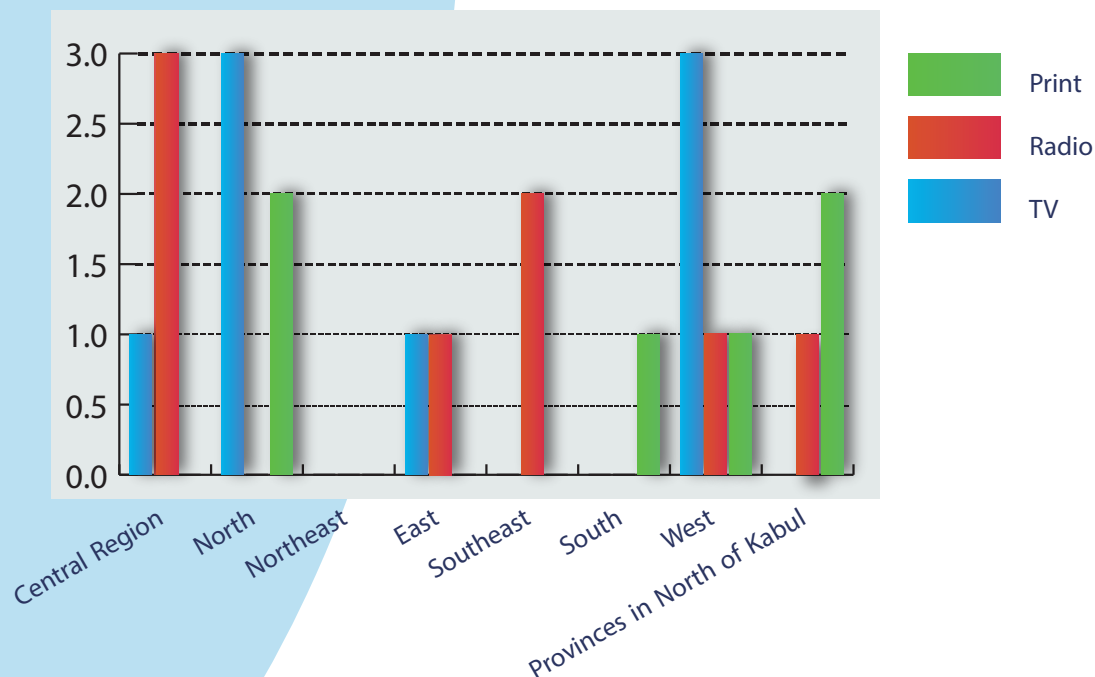
36	Mohammad Muhsin Hashemi	Raido the Voice of Nejrab Reporter	Kapisa	Killed	According to officials, he has been killed by his 3 brothers and father	On 2/5/2013, he was killed at home and security forces found his dead body from a well.
37	Kawoon Khamosh	1 TV Reporter	Kabul	Insult	NDS Soldier	Kawoon Khamosh was insulted by NDS soldier on 16/01/2013 during reporting from the site of an attack.
38	Sayed Sabawoon	Azadi Radio Reporter and Freelance Photographer	Kabul	Beating up	NDS Soldier	On 16/01/2013, he was beaten by officers of NDS while reporting the suicide attack on NDS office in Kabul.
39	Alizada	Negah TV Reporter	Kabul	Beating up	Head of National Hospital	On 17/03/2013 when Attorney General's officials went to close down the hospital. Journalists who went there for reporting were beaten by the hospital's owner and their camera was broken.
40	Naser	Channel 1 TV cameraman	Kabul	Beating	Head of National Hospital	On 17/03/2013 when Attorney General's officials went to close down the hospital. Journalists who went there for reporting were beaten by the hospital's owner and their camera was broken.

41	Wali Aryan	Tolo News Reporter	Kabul	Threat	Unidentified individuals	Wali Aryan received phone threats on 20/4/2013 after he produced a report about a commander in Parwan Province
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Developments in Media Sector

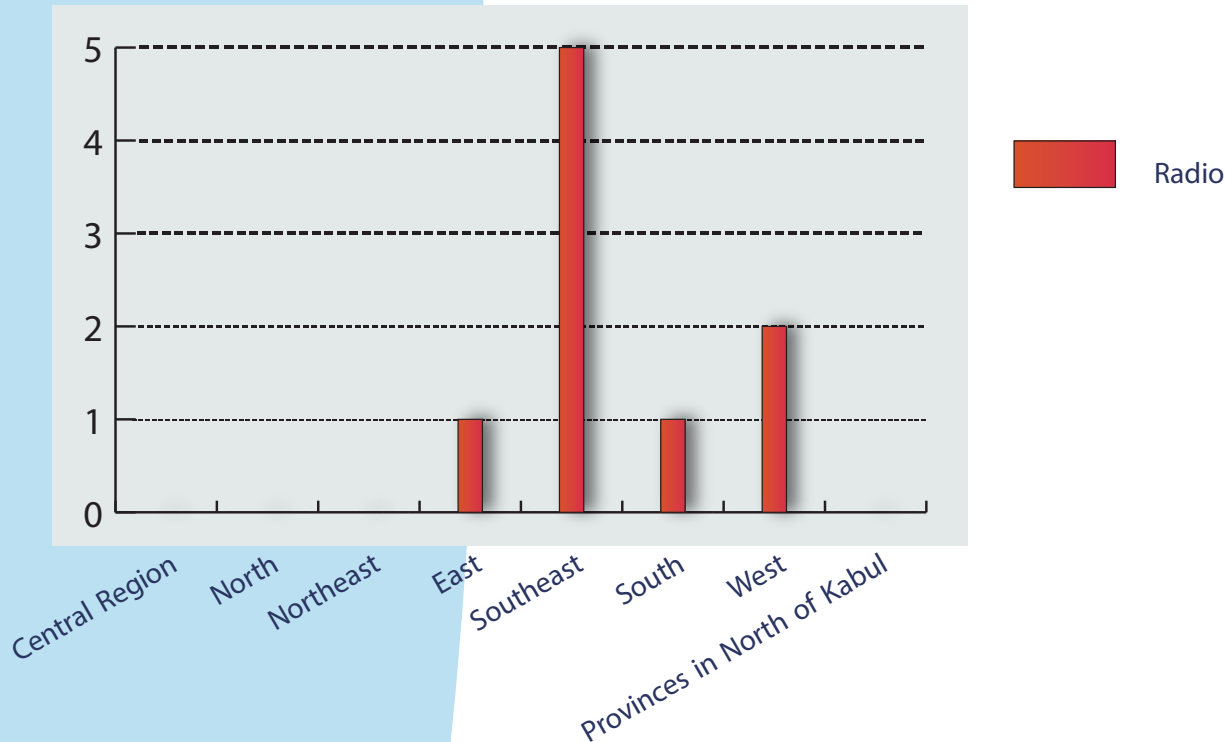
Although media outlets and journalists faced numerous challenges over the first six months of the current year, including security and economic challenges and self-censorship; however, these challenges could not stop the media sector from continuing to grow and expand. Some developments have been achieved during this reporting period. A total of five TV stations, eight radio stations and four print publications have come to existence during this reporting period.

The following chart illustrates developments in media sector during this reporting period:



A total of nine media organizations (all radios) have shut down during this reporting period.

The below chart illustrates the media organizations closed down during this reporting period:



Conclusion:

The increase in the level of threats and challenges against media workers is alarming for the future of journalism and media. The major reason for this concern includes not only unwillingness of the Afghan government to ensure safe working environment for journalists but also the active part government officials take in exercising violence against journalists. This has discouraged many prominent journalists to continue with journalism and some have set out to change their career. Their leaving journalistic work will further weaken the profession. Reluctance of government officials in regard to sharing information with journalists also remains a progressive challenge. With the Presidential and Provincial Councils elections around the corner, violence against journalists will intensify tremendously. Government officials account for XXX% of cases of violence against journalists. Consequently, journalists adopt a hostile approach against the government, and the government, in turn, exerts more pressure on journalists thus perpetuating a vicious cycle that harms both the government and journalists while creating more space for the propaganda machine of the insurgents. On the other hand, this ongoing friction has undermined the constructive role of journalism in the Afghan society.

Absence of adequate knowledge of standards and principles of journalism and lack of code of conduct in the media organizations and a national Code of Ethics will continue to remain an important facilitator of violence against journalists. As the international community's presence is set to diminish its presence, support to values such as freedom of expression will decline and this will embolden various parties to augment threats and violence against journalists. In general, the level of threat against journalists working in remote areas is much greater than those working in the capital and in big cities. Therefore, the level of censorship is much bigger among media operating in remote areas. On the other hand, enticement of reporters and some journalists' submission to such attempts has created a significant threat toward the future of the profession.

The government seems to have no interest in preserving freedom of expression as the biggest achievement in

the last decade. Undermining the role of media will weaken the process of institutionalization of democracy and will also mean losing an effective tool in combating some major issues such as corruption, bad governance and human rights violation, especially women's rights. Furthermore, the decline in international aid may pave the way for domination of dependent media organizations and for the independent media organizations to be influenced by different parties including the neighboring countries who use media as a propaganda tool. It should not be left unsaid that, despite all these challenges, the elite community of journalism recognize the importance and value of freedom of expression in eliminating the calamities and establishing peace, security and democracy in the country; hence, they are dedicated to spare no efforts to uphold this achievement. Their tireless efforts can serve as a beam of hope for safeguarding media and the values of freedom of expression.

Recommendations:

1. If the Afghan government is interested in safeguarding freedom of expression as its biggest achievement, it should put meaningful efforts into growth of media and freedom of expression and take measures to prevent from the downturn of the industry. The Media Law should be fully implemented by the government, especially Ministry of Information and Culture, and should avoid using the law as a tool for furthering illegitimate purposes. Putting pressure on journalists and media, which the government considers an effective means for an improved media sector, is not indeed a reasonable way to solve media related problems; hence, the government should instead take appropriate steps to build the capacity of journalists and the profession at large, bridge the existing gaps between the government and media and improve the conditions for access to information. Since continuation of hostility between journalists and the government can prove detrimental, the government as well as media support organizations and media managers should find appropriate solution for this dilemma and put it in action accordingly. The government should acknowledge that today's war is a war of propaganda for the most part; hence, losing the media as the pivot of this war will undermine the position of the government in fighting its dark enemy. Given that security forces account for a significant portion of the cases of violence against journalists, it is necessary that security bodies develop a guideline in terms of security personnel's behavior towards journalists and make the guideline part of their curriculum. Safety Committee has already developed core materials for such a guideline, which it will disseminate among relevant authorities soon. Meanwhile, the government should make every effort to pursue the approval of Access to Information Law, because enforcement of this law can alleviate much of the problem with regards to journalists' access to information. Moreover, Ministry of Information and Culture as a monitoring and controlling authority should take steps to amend the contracts media owners sign with their staff members.
2. Media organizations should take steps to enhance professionalism among their staff and also prepare code of conduct and editorial policy. Enhancing the capacity of media workers will not only improve the quality of the media outlet but will also cause a drop in the rate of violence against them. Professional independence, staff safety and improved employment contracts should be at the top of the priorities of media organizations. Furthermore, media organizations should have a long term vision and develop their financial plans accordingly given the steady reduction of international aid so they can rely more and more on advertisements as a source of income. Similarly, they should develop and enforce anti-sexual harassment policies and exercise affirmative action procedures to empower their female employees. As part of the affirmative action scheme, media workers should provide their female colleagues with managerial position as this can serve to alleviate the sexual harassment challenge.
3. Today more than any other time media advocacy organizations need to coordinate their activities and be

more consistent. With the establishment of Journalists' Federation, which is composed of nine media support organizations, this problem has been tackled to a great extent; however, much more is still to be achieved in this front. These organizations need to further focus on amending and enforcement of media related laws and policies and monitor the performance of the government.

4. The international community needs to adopt a clear stance in regard to supporting the values of freedom of expression and press freedom in Afghanistan. The unexpected silence of the international community gives courage to those who do not believe in freedom of expression and consider it a threat for their interests to exercise violence against journalists and suppress freedom of expression. The indifferent position of the international community towards this matter has undermined the will of the Afghan government to support freedom of expression and has given it adequate opportunity to suppress freedom of expression under the pretext of national interests. The international community should understand that their firm stance in defending freedom of expression will influence the Afghan government and even other groups involved in violence and can play a crucial role in preserving these values. The international community has heavily invested in Afghanistan in terms of media development and freedom of expression, so they should use their leverage in preserving this achievement.