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HUnited Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Committee

Topic 2:

Protecting Women Journalists' Access to Media and Professional Participation in Afghanistan

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Topic Overview

Women journalists in Afghanistan are facing constraints that, in their varying forms, have profound implications for employment, reporting, access to information, engagement with the public and safety. The issue applies to the rights of women in the media and public interest in diverse and independent reporting. Participants should consider documented restrictions that may be official regulations, local implementations and/or individual experiences.

Background Information

Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, Afghan media has come under increasing pressure. The United Nations and other organizations have recorded censorship, arrests, threats, harassment and heavy restrictions for women journalists and media workers. Many women have been dismissed from their jobs or restricted from appearing on air, attending press conferences and covering public affairs. Poverty, threats and collapsing educational and professional opportunities are also a challenge for the media. Independent media is essential for providing the public with information, monitoring accountability and documenting humanitarian needs.

International Frameworks and Past Actions

The Declaration of Human Rights enshrines the right to work and freedom of expression. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) creates treaty obligations for state parties so delegates should consider Afghanistan's treaty status with regard to the Convention and delineate between legally binding obligations and political statements. Reference to the latest reports of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) should be made for the facts relating to restrictions and proper citation of figures or examples should be given.

Key Challenges

Threats, censorship, restrictions on travel and employment, limitations on access to sources, and risks to family members may all be faced by women journalists. Actors outside of Afghanistan have little leverage to implement recommendations. Exile programs have the potential to protect some journalists, but can also cut them off from their communities and sources. Digital technology can enable remote work, but it can also enable hacking, monitoring, and harassment.

Possible Areas for Resolution

Safety and anti-retaliation: Consider options for confidential reporting and other communication channels, emergency response services, risk assessments and protection for journalists and their families.

The agenda should address how workers can access fellowships, remote working, training, computers and support the development of independent media outlets.

Access to information: Explore the possibility of having open press access regulations, equal access to briefings and protection for confidential sources.

It is essential to look at centralized reporting, support for independent monitoring, and international United Nations, media and other institutional cooperation.

The conversation should include how to communicate safely and protect your accounts, what anti-harassment measures and support are available and how to keep data safe.

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Guiding Questions

1. How can international organisations support women journalists without putting them at greater risk?
2. Which forms of emergency assistance and long-term professional support would be most useful?
3. How can journalists maintain secure contact with sources and audiences?
4. What roles should states, media organisations and technology platforms play in countering online harassment?
5. How can international monitoring remain credible when independent access is restricted?
6. How can programmes support journalists inside Afghanistan as well as those living in exile?

Resources

- **UNAMA / OHCHR: Media Freedom in Afghanistan**
  https://unama.unmissions.org/en/news/un-urges-afghanistans-de-facto-authorities-to-protect-media-freedom
- **UNESCO: Safety of Journalists**
  https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists
- **UN: Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists**
  https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/un-plan-action
- **UN Women: Afghanistan**
  https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/afghanistan