



# AFGHAN MEDIA UNDER THE TALIBAN

## RESTRICTIONS AND VIOLATIONS

---

September 2022

**Cover Image:** Taliban fighters walk toward journalists during a protest in Kabul on December 28, 2021.  
(Mohd Asfan/AFP via Getty Images)

AFGHANISTAN HUMAN RIGHTS  
AND DEMOCRACY ORGANIZATION

# AFGHAN MEDIA UNDER THE TALIBAN

RESTRICTIONS AND VIOLATIONS

---

RESEARCH REPORT

## About the Author

**Kobra Moradi** is a research officer at the Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organization (AHRDO). Kobra holds a master's degree in International Law and Diplomacy from the Australian National University. Her research focused on victim-centered transitional justice and Islamic law.

## Acknowledgments

AHRDO would like to thank the Afghan journalists for sharing their stories and insights with us. We are profoundly indebted to them and inspired by their commitment to an independent and free press in Afghanistan. Ghulam Sakhi and Professor Helen Hintjens reviewed and edited the report. AHRDO would also like to thank the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands for their generous technical and financial support, without which this report would not have been possible.

## About AHRDO

Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organization (AHRDO) was founded in 2009. The organization aims to improve the human rights situation for Afghan citizens, contribute to the country's democratic development, promote understanding of and compliance with international humanitarian law, design cultural and artistic initiatives to foster inter-ethnic and inter-community peace and communication, and develop public memory of millions of war victims as an antidote to the deep-seated culture of impunity and the profoundly ingrained ethos of war and violence in the country.



© 2022 Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organization. All rights reserved.

# CONTENTS

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Methodology</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>I. The Decline of the Afghan Media</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>II. Taliban Media Control Regime and Policies</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Taliban Control Ends Free and Independent Media</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Content Regulation</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Gender-Based Discrimination</b> .....	<b>19</b>
Mandatory Hijab.....	19
Concerns Raised .....	21
Other Gender-Based Restrictions.....	22
<b>III. Human Rights Violations Against Afghan Journalists and other Members of the Media</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>Surveillance: Raids, Random Checks, and Summons</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Intimidation: Warnings and Threats</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>Arbitrary Arrests and Detentions</b> .....	<b>29</b>
First Case against Journalists: Khaled Qaderi.....	32
<b>Physical Abuse</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>Enforced Disappearances</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>Killings</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>Lack of Investigations and Accountability</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>43</b>

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIJA	Afghanistan Independent Journalists Association
AJC	Afghanistan Journalists Center
AJSC	Afghanistan Journalists Safety Committee
ANJU	Afghanistan National Journalists' Union
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
DW	Deutsche Welle
GDI	General Directorate of Intelligence
GMIC	Government Media and Information Centre
HRW	Human Rights Watch
KDRR	Kabul Department of Refugee and Repatriation
MIC	Ministry of Information and Culture
NRF	National Resistance Front
RSF	Reporters Without Borders
RTA	Radio Television Afghanistan

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Afghan media landscape has shrunk dramatically under the new Taliban regime. Since August 2021, more than half of Afghan media outlets have closed down. Compounded by other difficulties, this has forced hundreds of Afghan journalists—women, in particular—out of their jobs. In many instances, they have been forced to leave the country. The few Afghans who remain working in media under the Taliban, operate under extremely difficult conditions. Every day they go to work, they put their lives at risk to provide news on Afghanistan.

The Taliban regime exercises power and governs with complete impunity. There are no national or international mechanisms to provide any checks and balances and to hold Taliban leaders and officials accountable. A free and open media has never been more vital than it is now, but it has also never been more difficult to achieve. Currently, the Afghan media is one of the few institutions that still provides some transparency and oversight over Taliban-imposed governance.

A free and independent Afghan media would serve as a government watchdog by monitoring and reporting on violations and abuses of power. Because of this role, Taliban censors the media and Taliban intelligence and security services see it as a threat. The Taliban de-facto government seeks to control the media completely in order to suppress dissent and maintain its totalitarian rule. When media freedoms, a basic pillar of any human rights system, are viewed by the government in power as a security threat, censorship and arbitrary punishment inevitably follows, which is currently what is happening in Afghanistan.

Since returning to power in August 2021, the Taliban has imposed a new media control regime, which has three key features: *restriction, gender-discrimination, and repression with impunity.*

First, the Taliban has passed several media policies, imposing extreme constraints on press freedom and media rights. Any sort of critical reporting on topics related to the government or the public is banned. The Taliban regulate the content of publications and broadcasts, imposing broad, vaguely worded prohibitions. For example, under the new regulations, media content that contradicts “Islamic values,” “Afghan values,” and “public interest” is prohibited. No operational definitions have been provided for these terms, nor an objective standard for assessing and determining breach. This has caused uncertainty and confusion about what the media can and cannot publish and broadcast, often resulting in precautionary media self-censorship. The new rules also give the Taliban sweeping powers to directly control the media and news output, barring broadcast and publication of matters and content that has not been officially sanctioned by Taliban official/s. These restrictions and interferences limit the right and ability of the Afghan media to seek, receive and impart information freely and independently.

Second, the Taliban has passed policies specifically targeting Afghan women in the media. These restrictions give the Taliban control over women’s attire and the nature and scope of their involvement in the media,

restraining their freedom of expression and movement, as well as their ability to perform their tasks effectively. The general travel restrictions on women and girls make it almost impossible for women to work, in particular, limiting the ability of female journalists from gathering information or contributing to field reporting. The Taliban's antiwomen media policies and practices are aimed towards excluding Afghan women from the media and public life.

Third, the Taliban treats the Afghan media and media-related affairs as a security threat. The Taliban security and intelligence agencies are increasingly involved in controlling media affairs. Taliban operatives use repressive measures against members of the Afghan media in claiming to enforce the new regulations. Afghan journalists and other members of the media have been subjected to heavy surveillance, intimidation, and arbitrary arrest and detention. Cases of beatings, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings have also taken place.

Despite several calls for accountability, Taliban leaders have failed to investigate and prosecute violations. Instead, they have adopted a strategy of denial, regularly dismissing complaints and evidence of abuse as false or fake news and baseless rumors. In some cases, Taliban officials have claimed that they are either investigating or will launch investigations. However, because no information is publicly available, it is not clear whether and when such investigations have commenced, and their outcomes remain unknown.

In short, Afghan journalists and members of the media work under perilous conditions. The Afghan media, especially the few remaining independent and critical journalists, are under widespread attacks. Their rights are violated with complete impunity. The dismal state of the Afghan media and the absence of any internal support mechanisms calls for urgent, coordinated, and sustained international efforts to protect press freedoms and media rights in Afghanistan.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Taliban Leadership

1. In collaboration with members of the Afghan media, review and update the new media rules and regulations. Provide greater clarity and certainty, codifying updated rules in one single document that also defines key terms.
  - 1.1. Ensure updated media policies and rules comply with international human rights principles on freedom of expression and a free and independent press.
  - 1.2. Clarify whether the 2015 Media Law is still operative. If so, then any newly agreed rules should be incorporated in the existing media law.
2. Treat Afghan press and media-related matters not as matters of national security but as part of civil society. Prohibit the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) and other security service agencies from intervening in media operations.
3. Establish a joint media commission, with a membership that includes representatives from the Afghan media and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), to provide safeguards and independent oversight. This joint commission should receive and assess complaints and resolve media-related problems as they arise. Other sections of the Taliban should not intervene in media affairs.
4. Prevent Taliban security forces from arbitrarily arresting and detaining journalists. Put an end to other violations against journalists and other members of the media and their families.
5. Investigate cases of violations against journalists and other members of the media and hold the perpetrators accountable.

## International Community

1. Strongly and consistently make it clear to the Taliban leadership that freedom of expression and an uncensored media in Afghanistan are vital and nonnegotiable concerns for the international community.
2. Strongly and consistently condemn Taliban's restrictive media policies and violations of journalists' rights and take targeted measures such as economic sanctions and prolonged travel bans against the Taliban leadership, in particular members leading institutions within the regime that are responsible

for the harsh media restrictions and ongoing violations. Directly communicate international concerns to the Taliban leadership during formal and informal meetings.

3. Provide renewed financial, logistical, and operational support for Afghan media advocacy organizations so they can assist and advocate for press freedoms and rights of journalists in Afghanistan. This will enhance capacity to monitor, investigate, and document existing and future violations of media freedoms by the regime.
4. Provide moral, political, and financial support for independent media outlets and for journalists who are still working in Afghanistan, against the odds.
5. International organizations and human rights groups, notably UNAMA, Human Rights Watch, and international media advocacy organizations, should step up. They should monitor, investigate, and document violations inside Afghanistan against journalists and other members of the media.

# INTRODUCTION

This report assesses the situation of the Afghan media under the Taliban regime from August 2021 to June 2022. More specifically, it focuses on the media policies and restrictions passed by the Taliban during this period, as well as violations against journalists. The report examines primary and secondary data, including 30 comprehensive interviews undertaken by AHRDO with Afghan journalists. It conducts a thematic review of the interviews and other available data, classifying the restrictions and violations under different categories, to consolidate knowledge and provide a detailed insight into the Taliban's media control regime.

The arrival of the Taliban in August 2021 radically changed the Afghan media landscape. Despite promising that media would be allowed to function,<sup>1</sup> the Taliban created conditions that make it impossible for the Afghan media to operate freely or independently. Journalists and news outlets are unable to seek, receive, and impart information without direct Taliban interference. As de facto authorities, the Taliban have passed several new sets of regulations to control every aspect of media operations. These new policies are accompanied by coercive enforcement measures, and widespread attacks have taken place against journalists and other media workers. Independent journalists are repeatedly intimidated and arbitrarily arrested and detained. They are also subjected to enforced disappearance, physical abuse, and other human rights violations. Since August, Taliban's security services have kept journalists under constant surveillance, routinely stopping and questioning them and often raiding their homes and offices, checking their phones profiles, destroying work equipment, and deleting data, images, and files. Such restrictions and violations have drastically limited freedom of expression for the press in Afghanistan, reversing any achievements of the past two decades. Deteriorating condition for Afghan media workers call for urgent, coordinated, and sustained international efforts to protect freedom of expression for the press in Afghanistan and to open spaces so media workers can continue their work of informing various audiences.

---

The arrival of the Taliban in August 2021 radically changed the Afghan media landscape. Despite promising that media would be allowed to function, the Taliban created conditions that make it impossible for the Afghan media to operate freely or independently.

---

---

<sup>1</sup> M. Shaheed, "Taliban Detain Human Rights Activists Planning Protest of Pakistan Official's Visit," VOA News, January 19, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-detain-human-rights-activists-planning-protest-of-pakistan-official-s-visit-/6402892.html> (accessed July 20, 2022); Rawa News, "The Kabul Times Reporter Was Beaten by the Taliban," December 11, 2021, <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2021/12/11/the-kabul-times-reporter-was-beaten-by-the-taliban.html#ixzz7MNDTPIBN> (accessed 20 July 2022); F. Daryush, "Afghan Female Reporters Fear Increased Restrictions," TOLONews, March 7, 2022, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/attack-mediajournalists-176237> (accessed July 20, 2022); Salam Watandar, "Mujahid Says Bo Issues with the Media Law," February 2, 2022, <https://swn.af/en/2022/02/02/8211/> (accessed July 20, 2022).

The report is organized into four parts. Part I provides a general overview of the decline of the Afghan media under the Taliban regime. Part II examines the Taliban's restrictive media policies under three broad categories: media control, content regulation, and gender-based discrimination. Part III assesses the Taliban's enforcement measures and violations of journalists' and other media workers' rights. Part IV summarizes the key findings of this report.

# METHODOLOGY

This report seeks to provide a detailed insight into the Taliban’s media-control regime. It examines primary and secondary sources to consolidate knowledge about the Taliban’s policies and practices and their impacts on media rights and press freedoms in Afghanistan since August 2021. The report relies on firsthand accounts from Afghan journalists. These were collected by a research assistant based in Afghanistan, and at great personal risk. In total, 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with Afghan journalists, in person and online, about their experiences under the new media regime and their encounters with Taliban agents. The primary data was supplemented by a desk-based review, monitoring attacks on Afghan media personnel and analysing developments affecting Afghan media freedoms generally. The report conducts a thematic review of the available information. It evaluates new media policies, practices, and punitive enforcement measures. The outcome is a comprehensive picture of the Taliban’s media control regime as can be gained at present.

---

The report relies on firsthand accounts from Afghan journalists. These were collected by a research assistant based in Afghanistan, and at great personal risk.

---



# I. THE DECLINE OF THE AFGHAN MEDIA

Under the Taliban, the Afghan media's fortunes and autonomy have dramatically declined. Around 43 percent of Afghan media outlets disappeared within just three months of the Taliban's return to power.<sup>2</sup> A survey by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the Afghanistan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA), published in December 2021 found that "a total of 231 outlets" had already closed down.<sup>3</sup> The latest annual press freedom report on Afghanistan from the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) also indicates that more than 300 media outlets shut down between August 2021 and April 2022.<sup>4</sup> Outside the capital, in seven Afghan provinces, at least 60 percent of the media stopped operating in the first four months of the Taliban takeover.<sup>5</sup> Before the Taliban took over, most provinces had at least 10 privately owned media outlets; now some have almost no local media,<sup>6</sup> demonstrating a drastic decline.

The decline continued into 2022. Analysis by the Afghanistan National Journalists' Union (ANJU) and the IFJ shows that before August 15, 2021, an estimated 623 media outlets operated in Afghanistan. By February 2, 2022, this number had dropped to 305.<sup>7</sup> Thus, during this short period, almost half of all Afghan media outlets had ceased operations. This finding was reaffirmed by another survey conducted by the Afghanistan Journalists Center (AJC) in early 2022.<sup>8</sup> (See Figure 1.)

Such mass closures of media outlets significantly reduced employment in the sector. According to the RSF and AIJA, by the end of 2021, more than 6,400 Afghan journalists had lost their jobs.<sup>9</sup> Of the 10,790 individuals working in media at the start of August 2021, only 4,360 remained in their posts in early December. The RSF emphasizes that female journalists were "hit the hardest," with four out of five out of work. Within the first few months of the Taliban's return, around 80 percent of Afghan women journalists lost their jobs. Another survey, conducted by the IFJ and ANJU, published on 2 February 2022, confirms that 28 percent of men, compared with 72 percent of women, lost jobs between August 15, 2021, and February 2, 2022.<sup>10</sup> (See Figure 2.)

---

The latest annual press freedom report on Afghanistan from the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) also indicates that more than 300 media outlets shut down between August 2021 and April 2022

---

2 Reporters Without Borders, "Since the Taliban Takeover, 40% of Afghan Media Have Closed, 80% of Women Journalists Have Lost Their Jobs," <https://rsf.org/en/taliban-takeover-40-afghan-media-have-closed-80-women-journalists-have-lost-their-jobs> (accessed July 20, 2022).

3 Ibid.

4 International Federation of Journalists, "Solidarity and Survival: The Story of South Asia Afghanistan Country Report," IFJ, May 3, 2022, <http://samsn.ifj.org/SAPFR21-22/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/IFJ-SAPFR21-2-SolidaritySurvival-Afghanistan.pdf>, 2.

5 Reporters Without Borders, "Taliban Takeover."

6 Ibid.

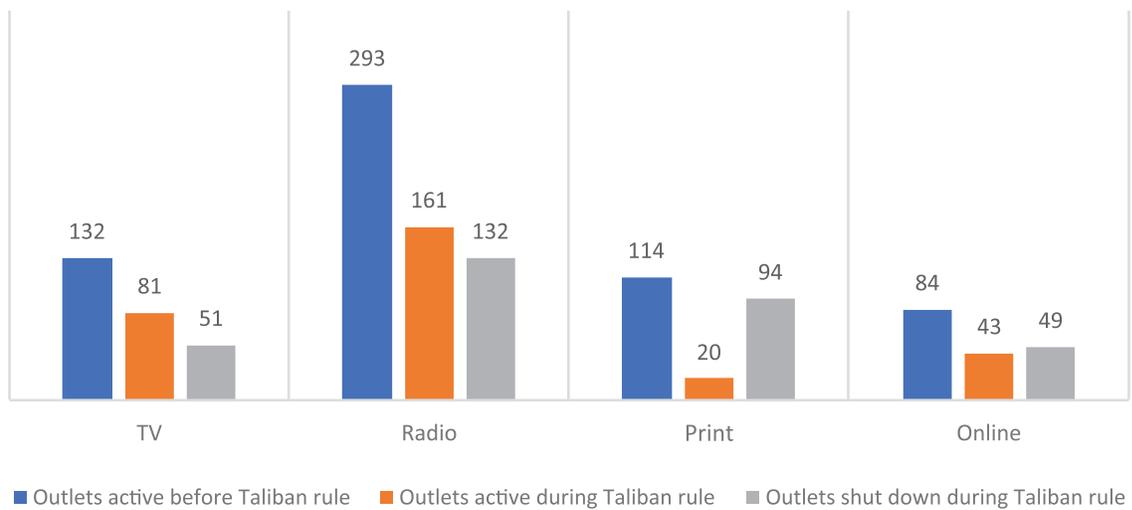
7 International Federation of Journalists, "Statistics Report: A Comprehensive Statistics on Active and Noe-Active media Outlets in Afghanistan after the Government Collapsed," IFJ, February 2, 2022, [https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/Statistics\\_Report\\_Newsletter\\_2\\_02Feb2022.pdf](https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/Statistics_Report_Newsletter_2_02Feb2022.pdf), 2-3.

8 Afghanistan Journalists Center, "Taliban's Takeover of Afghanistan," March 16, 2022, <https://ajc.media/english/> (accessed July 21, 2022).

9 Reporters Without Borders, "Taliban Takeover."

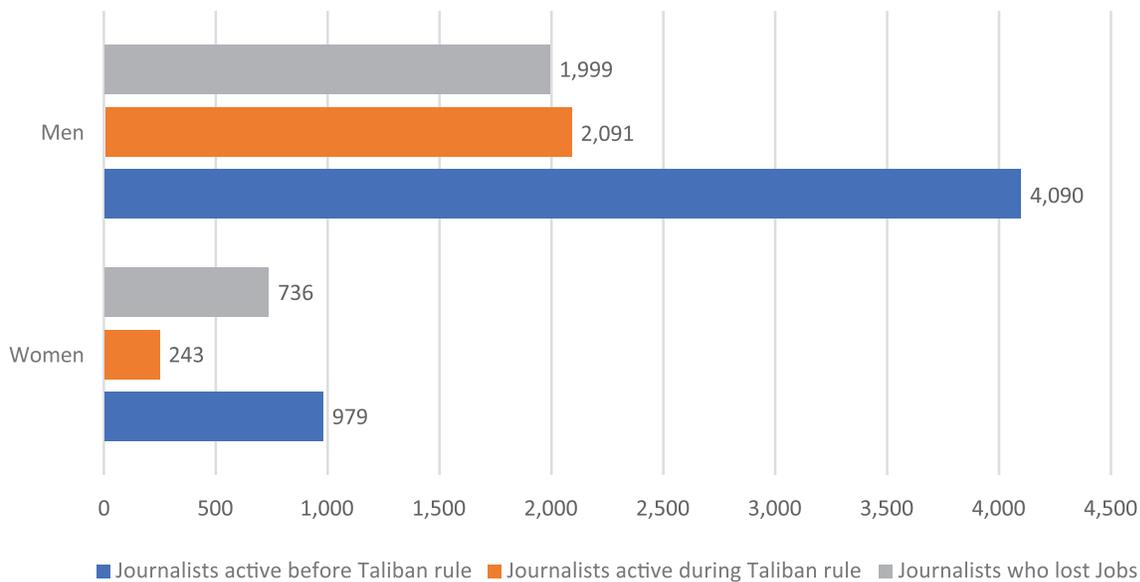
10 International Federation of Journalists, "Statistics Report," 5.

**Figure 1: Number of Media Outlets Active Before and After the Taliban Takeover**



Source: IFJ<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 2: Number of Journalists Active Before and After the Taliban Takeover**



Source: IFJ<sup>12</sup>

Various factors led to the decline, including lack of financial resources, lack of access to information, Taliban restrictions, insecurity, and threats.<sup>13</sup> The gains made in the last two decades in press freedom shrank rapidly within a few months of the Taliban takeover. In the years preceding the takeover, Afghanistan ranked relatively high in terms of access to information and freedom of expression.<sup>14</sup> In one year, the country’s position dropped

11 International Federation of Journalists, “Statistics Report,” 3.  
 12 Ibid, 4.  
 13 Ibid, 3.  
 14 International Federation of Journalists, “Solidarity and Survival,” 2.

by 34 positions, from 122 to 156 in the 2022 World Press Freedom Index.<sup>15</sup> However, even this ranking is over-optimistic considering the harsh realities faced by Afghan journalists on the ground. Nonetheless, the drop in ranking is indicative of the very difficult conditions that the Afghan media operate in.

Despite making preposterous promises, on many occasions, to allow the Afghan media to operate freely and independently, the Taliban has not done the least to allow media to work.<sup>16</sup> Instead, in practice the regime has demonstrated hostility to a free and independent press. As the next sections of this report will demonstrate, the regime has imposed all kinds of restrictions on media, which are often enforced through intimidation and violence. As has been shown (Figure 2), many journalists—especially women—and other members of the media have lost their jobs and been forced to quit the media sector.<sup>17</sup> More than 1,000 journalists have fled the country since August 2021.<sup>18</sup> Those who remain work under extremely difficult conditions, facing heavy censorship and a media landscape fraught with risks and threats of violence.

---

15 Ariana News, “Afghanistan Falls 34 Places in World Press Freedom Index,” <https://www.ariananews.af/afghanistan-falls-34-places-in-world-press-freedom-index/#:~:text=Afghanistan%20moved%2034%20places%20down,safety%20of%20journalists%2C%20especiallly%20women> (accessed July 22, 2022).

16 Daryush, “Female Reporters Fear”; DW, “UN Rights Chief Slams Taliban over Broken Promises,” September 13, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/un-rights-chief-slams-taliban-over-broken-promises/a-59166424> (accessed July 22, 2022).

17 International Federation of Journalists, “Afghanistan under the Taliban,” [http://samsn.ifj.org/SAPFR21-22/afghanistan\\_2021/](http://samsn.ifj.org/SAPFR21-22/afghanistan_2021/) (accessed July 22, 2022).

18 Ibid.



## II. TALIBAN MEDIA CONTROL REGIME AND POLICIES

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right protected under international human rights law (IHRL).<sup>19</sup> Journalism, and the work of the media in general, falls under the right to freedom of expression,<sup>20</sup> which everyone is entitled to under international law, including journalists and other media personnel.<sup>21</sup> The right to freedom of expression requires broader conditions to work for journalism and the media. It requires a free press and protections for journalists so the media can “seek, receive, and impart” information and ideas,<sup>22</sup> without restraints imposed by state authorities.<sup>23</sup> Freedom of expression protects “all kinds of ideas,”<sup>24</sup> “all forms of expression”—whether spoken or written<sup>25</sup>—and all “means of their dissemination,” including newspapers, TV, and film, as well as social media and digital news platforms.<sup>26</sup> Freedom of journalism and the press includes the right to operate without any restraint or interference from state authorities, including threats from security forces.<sup>27</sup> The public has a corresponding right to access such information from the media.<sup>28</sup> The purpose of this is to ensure that the media can function freely and independently, without fear, intrusion, or violence.

---

The right to freedom of expression requires broader conditions to work for journalism and the media.

---

Since coming into power, the Taliban have passed multiple policies that restrict the ability of journalists and media workers to operate freely and independently. The first set of restrictions came two days after the Taliban’s takeover of Kabul. On August 17, 2021, Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesman for the Taliban regime and Deputy Minister of information and culture, announced a “framework” that would govern media operation.<sup>29</sup> A month later, on September 19, 2021, the Government Media and Information Centre (GMIC) announced “11 Rules of Journalism,” thus imposing new media restrictions.<sup>30</sup>

---

19 See, e.g., International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Dec. 16, 1996, 999 U.N.T.S 171, art. 19.2 [hereinafter ICCPR].

20 UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 34 Article 19: Freedom of Opinion and Expression, 102nd sess, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/34 (Sep. 12, 2011), para. 11 [hereinafter General Comment No. 34].

21 ICCPR, arts. 19, 18, 17, 25, and 27.

22 General Comment No. 34, para. 11.

23 A. Wietzorrek, “Journalism Under Fire—A Global Surge in Unlawful Violations against Journalists,” The Organisation for World Peace, October 14, 2020, <https://theowp.org/reports/journalism-under-fire-a-global-surge-in-unlawful-violations-against-journalists/> (accessed July 22, 2022).

24 ICCPR, art. 19(2).

25 General Comment No. 34, para. 12; ICCPR art. 19(2).

26 Ibid.

27 Wietzorrek, “Journalism Under Fire”; General Comment No. 34, para. 13.

28 Ibid.

29 W. Rahmani and S. Butler, “Afghanistan’s Intelligence Agency Emerges as New Threat to Independent Media,” CPJ, March 2, 2022, <https://cpj.org/2022/03/afghanistans-intelligence-agency-emerges-as-new-threat-to-independent-media/> (accessed July 22, 2022).

30 Reporters Without Borders, “Afghanistan: ‘11 Journalism Rules’ Imposed by Taliban Open Way to Censorship and Arbitrary Decisions, RSF Warns,” <https://rsf.org/en/afghanistan-11-journalism-rules-imposed-taliban-open-way-censorship-and-arbitrary-decisions-rsf> (accessed July 22, 2022); International Federation of Journalists, “Afghanistan: Draconian Media Rules Set to Further Strangle Media,” September 28, 2021, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/afghanistan-draconian-media-rules-set-to-further-strangle-media.html> (accessed July 22, 2022).

Following this, on November 21, 2021, the Taliban issued eight “Religious Guidelines.”<sup>31</sup> Since then, the regime has repeatedly warned Afghan journalists and media workers not to publish or broadcast content that the Taliban perceive to be against “Islamic values” and “national interests.”<sup>32</sup> In addition, since March 28, 2022, privately owned TV channels have been banned from broadcasting any news programs from international broadcasters, including Voice of America and the BBC.<sup>33</sup>

This section assesses the Taliban’s media control regime and policies under three broad categories: Taliban control, content regulation, and gender-based discrimination.

## Taliban Control Ends Free and Independent Media

A free and independent media is central to human rights protection, because it fosters the transparency and state accountability required for realizing other fundamental human rights. According to the United Nations Human Rights Committee, “[a] free, uncensored and unhindered press or other media is essential in any society to ensure freedom of opinion and expression and the enjoyment of other rights.”<sup>34</sup> Free media is critical to ensuring people have access to information about decisions and events that affect their lives, including information on matters of public health and civil, political, and economic issues. A relatively free and independent media serves as a government watchdog, by monitoring and reporting on abuses by those in public office. This watchdog role is vital in the context of Afghanistan, where the Taliban is now exercising power with almost complete autonomy, with few if any checks or balances from state or private institutions. In the absence of any mechanism for securing accountability of Taliban leaders and officials, the desirability of an “uncensored and unhindered” media in the country has never been more evident, more critical, or less likely.

Despite the Taliban promising that media and journalists would be “free and independent,”<sup>35</sup> their new media policies give local officials sweeping powers to control media affairs. Rule 7 of the “11 Rules of Journalism,” mentioned earlier, gives the Taliban control over all news output, including the content of all publications. These rules also prohibit the media from publishing or broadcasting matters that have not been officially sanctioned by a Taliban official or officials.<sup>36</sup> This implies that Taliban representatives can refuse to allow the publication of content with which they disagree or that may be critical of their actions and policies. Media organizations are explicitly instructed to treat with caution any media content that has not been officially sanctioned and confirmed as suitable.<sup>37</sup>

---

31 Rahmani and Butler, “Afghanistan’s Intelligence Agency”; International Federation of Journalists, “Afghanistan: Taliban’s New Directives Will Further Muzzle Press Freedom,” November 30, 2021, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/afghanistan-talibans-new-directives-will-further-muzzle-press-freedom.html> (accessed July 22, 2022).

32 Rahmani and Butler, “Afghanistan’s Intelligence Agency”; Hasht e Subh, “Taliban Warns Media Not to Publish Rumors,” January 20, 2022, <https://8am.af/eng/taliban-warns-media-not-to-publish-false-news/> (accessed July 22, 2022); Salam Watandar, “Mujahid Says No Issues”; Aljazeera, “Taliban Release Three Afghan Journalists after Media Crackdown,” March 18 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/18/taliban-release-three-afghan-tv-staffers-detained-over-media-ban> (accessed July 22, 2022).

33 Reporters Without Borders, “Act Quickly to Protect Afghan Journalists, RSF Tells New UN Special Rapporteur,” April 11, 2022, <https://rsf.org/en/act-quickly-protect-afghan-journalists-rsf-tells-new-un-special-rapporteur> (accessed July 22, 2022); The Print, “UN Extends Support to Afghanistan’s Embattled Media,” April 7 2021, <https://theprint.in/world/un-extends-support-to-afghanistans-embattled-media/905981/> (accessed July 22, 2022).

34 General Comment No. 34, para. 13.

35 R. Noorzai, “What Taliban’s Publishing, Broadcasting Directives Mean for Afghan Media,” October 1, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/a/what-taliban-s-publishing-broadcasting-directives-mean-for-afghan-media-/6253972.html#:~:text=Under%20rules%201%2D3%2C%20media.national%20figures%2C%20or%20violating%20privacy> (accessed July 22, 2022).

36 International Federation of Journalists, “Draconian Media Rules”; Human Rights Watch, “Afghanistan: Taliban Severely Restrict Media,” October 1, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/01/afghanistan-taliban-severely-restrict-media> (accessed July 22, 2022).

37 Reporters Without Borders, “11 Journalism Rules.”

Rules 10 and 11 of the same “11 Rules of Journalism” specify that news production should be aligned with “Taliban ideology.”<sup>38</sup> These rules direct all journalists and others working in the media to coordinate with the GMIC when preparing content and reporting on events.<sup>39</sup> Media outlets are required to prepare detailed reports in coordination with the GMIC.<sup>40</sup> The GMIC has designed a form for this express purpose, which the Taliban suggests will “make it easier for media outlets and journalists to prepare their reports in accordance with the regulations.”<sup>41</sup> The exact nature of the “reports” referred to here is unclear<sup>42</sup> and will need further clarification by the Taliban, to avoid having journalists and other media personnel placing themselves in danger of reprisals, for having fallen foul of the rules.

The Taliban’s ability to control news output is detrimental to press freedom and timely publication of news in Afghanistan. It deprives journalists of their agency and independence and delays them in reporting the news, because they are obliged to share their information in advance and have it approved by Taliban officials. Permission to publish is required, prior to publication. A journalist from a prominent Afghan TV channel told AHRDO:

*The reports and news that are ready for broadcast and publication are first sent to the Taliban, who check them, and if they have no problem, the media then publish and broadcast them.*<sup>43</sup>

Another journalist also confirmed:

*There are a lot of restrictions. One of the most important ones is that the Taliban try to review the news and articles before they are broadcast and published. Although our media has so far resisted this demand from the Taliban, we have to self-censor extensively.*<sup>44</sup>

Taliban officials also put pressure on the media in the opposite sense, particularly in the provinces, where it has been reported that journalists and media outlets are told to publish reports favorable to the Taliban. Some Taliban leaders have ordered journalists to interview them.<sup>45</sup> For example, in Kandahar Province, journalists are claiming it has become “impossible” for them to do their work professionally under the new conditions.<sup>46</sup> A local journalist complained that the Taliban “want us to publish only what comes from them.”<sup>47</sup> He further added, “self-censorship is common” and “the subjects that we were covering in the past, we cannot even think of covering them now.”<sup>48</sup> Similarly, journalists from the northeastern province of Badakhshan have described the current media landscape as “dangerous,” explaining that if they report on issues the Taliban do not want known, they can get in trouble.<sup>49</sup> As a local journalist describes the situation currently, “[t]here is no free media left in Badakhshan.”<sup>50</sup>

---

38 International Federation of Journalists, “Draconian Media Rules”; Noorzai, “What Taliban’s Publishing”; Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Severely Restrict.”

39 Noorzai, “What Taliban’s Publishing”; Reporters Without Borders, “11 Journalism Rules.”

40 Reporters Without Borders, “11 Journalism Rules.”

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 AHRDO interview with Sajad (online), April 15, 2022. **Note:** The names of journalists interviewed by AHRDO are replaced with pseudonym to protect their identity and safety.

44 AHRDO interview with Abdul (online), March 14, 2022.

45 Human Rights Watch, “Afghanistan: Taliban Crackdown on Media Worsens,” November 22, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/22/afghanistan-taliban-crackdown-media-worsens-o> (accessed July 22, 2022).

46 West Observer, “Afghan Journalists in Kandahar Speaks Out about Taliban Repression,” May 4, 2022, <https://westobserver.com/news/united-states/afghan-journalists-in-kandahar-speak-out-about-taliban-repression/> (accessed July 22, 2022).

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 DW, “Afghanistan: Journalists Encounter Tough Times under Taliban Rule,” October 7, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/afghanistan-journalists-encounter-tough-times-under-taliban-rule/a-59439857> (accessed July 22, 2022).

50 Ibid.

From the start of 2022, Taliban security forces have become closely involved in controlling media affairs and media output. Initially it was mainly the civilian institutions within the regime—such as the Ministry of Information and Culture (MIC) and the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (hereinafter “Ministry of Virtue”)—that addressed media issues. However, more recently this role has been taken over to some extent by the state security services, which show signs of taking a more proactive role in monitoring civilian affairs, including media outlets. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the Taliban has “imposed an unwritten, unannounced security regime on journalists operating across Afghanistan.”<sup>51</sup> In January, the Taliban’s General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI), the new security, intelligence, and spy agency,<sup>52</sup> instructed the Afghan media to refrain from publishing and broadcasting what GDI termed as “false news and baseless rumors.”<sup>53</sup> This followed allegations that GDI agents were mistreating journalists by carrying out beatings, arbitrary detentions, and harsh interrogations.<sup>54</sup> Officials with the various security services—in particular, the intelligence services—can now ban publications and broadcasts arbitrarily and can arrest journalists and other media workers on the spot.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, all journalists are now required to acquire a permission or accreditation letter from the Taliban’s local spokesperson, who takes his orders directly from the GDI.<sup>56</sup> The letter is addressed to any “security official” of the Taliban, names the reporter and their employer, and states that they have permission to visit a particular area for reporting purposes.<sup>57</sup> The letter provides a Taliban phone number for additional confirmation of the journalist’s identity.<sup>58</sup>

Although this sounds protective, it is a worrying sign, because it indicates that the Taliban now treats those working in media as a potential security threat to its regime. GDI crackdowns on journalists and their media outlets are likely to intensify, and GDI officials have been reported to regularly stop journalists who lack the all-important permission letter from gathering information, speaking to people, or reporting the news.<sup>59</sup> Even media personnel with a duly signed letter have been intimidated, arrested, interrogated, and abused, raising the question of whether the letters are intended to protect or to more easily identify journalists and other media workers simply doing their job.<sup>60</sup> Taliban intelligence operatives have threatened to revoke the operating licenses of news agencies that report news they do not approve of and have arrested reporters simply for being critical of Taliban leaders.<sup>61</sup> GDI interference with the media, in particular, shows a worrying disregard for basic principle that the state should safeguard spaces for a free and independent media and press.

Freedom of expression and journalism rest on the right to “seek, receive, and impart” *all kinds of information and ideas*, not only that deemed acceptable by the authorities. More importantly, for greater transparency and accountability of government, the media needs to be able to report on the activities and performance of those in public office and on other issues of public importance, including state policies, without fear and without political interference.

---

51 Rahmani and Butler, “Afghanistan’s Intelligence Agency.”

52 SIGAR (@SIGARHQ), Twitter, June 22, 2022, 5:15 p.m., <https://twitter.com/SIGARHQ/status/1540594478267990018>.

53 Rahmani and Butler, “Afghanistan’s Intelligence Agency”; GDI, (@GDI1415), Twitter, 20 January 20, 2022, 5:03 p.m., <https://twitter.com/GDI1415/status/1484043786074345475>.

54 See this report, part III.

55 Reporters Without Borders, “Act Quickly.”

56 Rahmani and Butler, “Afghanistan’s Intelligence Agency.”

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Committee to Protect Journalists, “Taliban Forces Beat, Interrogate Journalist Zahid Samadzai in Kabul,” February 3, 2022, <https://cpj.org/2022/02/taliban-forces-beat-interrogate-journalist-zahid-samadzai-in-kabul/> (accessed July 23, 2022).

60 See this report, part III.

61 Rahmani and Butler, “Afghanistan’s Intelligence Agency.”

## Content Regulation

The new Taliban rules governing the media provide broad and vaguely worded provisions for what topics can and cannot be reported on. For example, they have put prohibitions in place that ban any broadcasting or publishing of content that may run counter to Islamic values and religious beliefs or the national interest, or that is deemed to influence the public attitude. Of other broad categories of news that the Taliban has proscribed, one journalist told AHRDO:

*The Taliban have forbidden us from covering the issues concerning discrimination against ethnic groups, women, languages, and particular regions. They do not tolerate any criticism and [just] cavil and nit-pick.*<sup>62</sup>

On August 17, 2021, while announcing the media operations framework, Mujahid pledged that the Taliban would allow all media to function freely and independently when they came to power.<sup>63</sup> This statement belied its intent from the very outset. The Taliban regime placed an immediate caveat on this freedom, requiring media to respect “Islamic values” in whatever they were reporting.<sup>64</sup> Mujahid emphasized that “no broadcast should contradict Islamic values.”<sup>65</sup> The “11 Rules of Journalism” support this and forbid printing or broadcasting anything that contains content “contrary to Islam.”<sup>66</sup> The “Religious Guidelines” of November 2021 also prohibit screening films or television programs that are “against Islamic or Afghan values.”<sup>67</sup> On February 2, 2022, in a meeting with the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC), Mujahid reiterated that journalists must follow Islamic values and principles in all their output.<sup>68</sup> Following the arrest of three journalists on March 17, 2022, the GDI complained that some of the journalists had published reports that offended the “religious sentiments of the community” and warned that no journalists would be allowed to violate “Islamic principles.”<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, the Taliban forbid publishing or broadcasting anything deemed to be against assumed national or public interest. On August 17 2021, Mujahid announced that no broadcast or publication should go against the “national interest.”<sup>70</sup> The “11 Rules of Journalism” also bans publications that “could have a negative impact on the public’s attitude,”<sup>71</sup> though what “negative impact” might mean is not specified. The rules prevent broadcasts and publications that ostensibly insult national and religious figures.<sup>72</sup> In February 2022, Mujahid proclaimed that journalists should consider the need to protect “national interest and national unity” before deciding what to publish.<sup>73</sup> In March 2022, the GDI warned the media that some of their outputs threatened “the mental and psychological security of the Afghan people,” as if the media (and not the Taliban) were trying to undermine morale.<sup>74</sup> The GDI cautioned that going forward, it would no longer allow the media—and journalists, in particular—to trample on the psychological security of Afghan people.<sup>75</sup>

---

62 AHRDO interview with Abdul (online), March 14, 2022.

63 Noorzai, “What Taliban’s Publishing”; VOA News, “Media Watchdogs, UN Call on Taliban to Stop Arbitrary Detention of Journalists in Afghanistan,” April 13, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/media-watchdogs-un-call-on-taliban-to-stop-arbitrary-detention-of-journalists-in-afghanistan-/6527948.html> (accessed July 23, 2022).

64 Rahmani and Butler, “Afghanistan’s Intelligence Agency.”

65 Ibid.

66 Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Severely Restrict.”

67 International Federation of Journalists, “Taliban’s New Directives.”

68 Salam Watandar, “Mujahid Says No Issues”; Human Rights Watch, “Afghanistan: Taliban Threatening Provincial Media,” March 7, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/07/afghanistan-taliban-threatening-provincial-media> (accessed July 23, 2022).

69 Ibid.

70 Rahmani and Butler, “Afghanistan’s Intelligence Agency.”

71 Reporters Without Borders, “11 Journalism Rules”; International Federation of Journalists, “Draconian Media Rules”; Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Severely Restrict.”

72 Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Severely Restrict.”

73 Salam Watandar, “Mujahid Says No Issues.”

74 Aljazeera, “After Media Crackdown.”

75 Ibid.

The “11 Rules of Journalism” further require journalists to conform to strict—but loosely defined—ethical principles. Rules 4 to 6 demand that journalists and media organizations “not distort news content,” that they “respect journalistic principles,” and that they “keep reporting balanced.”<sup>76</sup> In addition, the media must “adhere to the principle of neutrality” and “only publish the truth.”<sup>77</sup> The criteria for determining balanced reporting and the “truth” are still very unclear, because any “truth” does not include news about what the Taliban are doing wrong. The use here of obfuscating language that sounds like standard journalist ethics adds to the uncertainty that remains around what the media can and cannot report, and how it can report.

The prohibitions are ambiguous, especially terms like “Islamic values,” “religious sentiments,” “public attitudes,” and “psychological security,” which are all vague and open-ended issues, are subject to a potentially wide range of different interpretations. The Taliban has not provided operational definitions for any of these terms and, as demonstrated earlier, uses them in such a broad sense that their impact is largely arbitrary. What criteria establish whether reporting is balanced and truthful? This remains very uncertain, and this lack of certainty has reinforced self-censorship. Many surviving media outlets caution their staff to choose words with care, especially during live reporting, and to avoid using terms that might be seen as provocative.<sup>78</sup> Some reporters were directed by their bosses not to report even on credible allegations of crime, such as theft and robberies, when it involves Taliban personnel.<sup>79</sup>

It has been reported that conditions for journalists working at the district level are even harsher than in the capital and in other major cities.<sup>80</sup> This suggests media restrictions are not applied uniformly, yet everywhere issues even vaguely related to Islam are considered off-limits, including reporting on ethnic conflicts or gender-based issues, as well as human rights in general.<sup>81</sup> In Kabul, journalists have even been prevented from reporting on aid distribution,<sup>82</sup> and in the provinces, such as Kandahar and Zabul, Taliban officials have prohibited the media from reporting on the banning of girls from secondary schooling, for example.<sup>83</sup>

While failing to define and clarify their rules, the Taliban regularly accuse those in the media of “unbalanced” reporting. By repeatedly making such accusations, Taliban officials avoid specifying precisely how the media have failed to abide by new media policies and rules. For example, in January 2022, the Taliban intelligence agency complained the media had published accusations aimed at Taliban military forces and warned media outlets to adhere to the new rules and strictly refrain from spreading baseless rumors.<sup>84</sup> They issued this warning without providing any clarity about what it implied. One month later, Mujahid expressed the view that although the Taliban regime supports all sound forms of criticism from the media, the media must refrain from spreading fake news and rumors.<sup>85</sup> However, he failed to define or explain what exactly this meant. In addition, in March 2022, the GDI accused the media of producing propaganda that favored anti-Taliban groups, describing it as “evil and vicious elements,”<sup>86</sup> without clarifying the basis for this accusation. The prohibitions are so broad and vague, in effect, as to forbid any critical news reporting at all. There is a strong likelihood that the vagueness of the rules increases the risk that rules are misused by the authorities to censor

---

76 Reporters Without Borders, “11 Journalism Rules”; International Federation of Journalists, “Draconian Media Rules”; Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Severely Restrict”; Noorzai, “What Taliban’s Publishing.”

77 Reporters Without Borders, “11 Journalism Rules”; Noorzai, “What Taliban’s Publishing.”

78 Ehsan Qaane, “Regime Change, Economic Decline and No Legal Protection: What Has Happened to the Afghan Media?,” Afghanistan Analyst Network, March 7, 2022, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/rights-freedom/regime-change-economic-decline-and-no-legal-protection-what-has-happened-to-the-afghan-media/> (accessed July 23, 2022).

79 Ibid.

80 Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Threatening Provincial Media.”

81 Reporters Without Borders, “Afghanistan,” <https://rsf.org/en/country/afghanistan> (accessed July 23, 2022).

82 AHRDO interview with Ali (in person), March 15, 2022.

83 Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Threatening Provincial Media.”

84 Hasht e Subh, “Taliban Warns Media”; GDI, Twitter, January 20, 2022.

85 Salam Watandar, “Mujahid Says No Issues.”

86 Al Jazeera, “After Media Crackdown.”

and suppress media and journalists, exposing the latter to arbitrary reprisals and arrests. As stated by one Afghan journalist based in Kabul:

*Once the Taliban threatened to close our media and arrest our officials. The Taliban accused us of sowing discord, propagandising in favour of the Resistance Front, and disrespecting the government. We are strongly forbidden to use the word “Taliban”.*<sup>87</sup>

Such restrictions are not grounded in any new laws. The restrictions neither pursue a legitimate purpose, nor are they proportionate to the risks in the current situation in Afghanistan, meaning that the de facto government fails to satisfy the criteria for limiting press freedoms under international human rights law.<sup>88</sup> For example, the prohibition on “insulting national figures” cannot be considered a legitimate aim. This ban, in conjunction with the accusations and warnings directed toward media outlets merely for publishing criticisms of the Taliban regime, suggests that any reporting on corruption and other abuses is prohibited. Although IHRL recognizes that under certain conditions freedom of expression can be restrained, penalizing journalists simply for criticizing the ruling authorities “can never be considered to be a necessary restriction.”<sup>89</sup> Moreover, public order arguments and preserving religious values cannot be used “as a pretense to censor or punish journalistic scrutiny of public officials’ conduct.”<sup>90</sup>

## Gender-Based Discrimination

The Taliban regime has passed several gender-specific restrictions that exclusively target female journalists and women working in media. These policies dictate women’s clothing, restrain their freedom of expression and movement, and limit their ability to perform their tasks as reporters. Women have been barred from participating in press conferences, denied interviews by Taliban officials, prevented from working or even appearing on camera in some provinces, and many have been dismissed from public-sector jobs. The Taliban’s antiwomen policies and conduct are designed to erase women from the media and the public sphere, limiting women to domestic spaces. The previous Taliban regime (1996–2001)<sup>91</sup> also upheld this policy. These limitations on women’s movement and work breach several human rights under international law, including the right to freedom of opinion and expression,<sup>92</sup> the right to freedom of movement,<sup>93</sup> the right to work,<sup>94</sup> and prohibitions on gender-based discrimination.<sup>95</sup> This section discusses the Taliban’s gender-discriminatory conduct in relation to media, examining its impact and implications for Afghan women (and men) in the media.

## Mandatory Hijab

One of the first gender-specific restrictions imposed by the Taliban concerns female clothing. The Taliban’s obsession with controlling the attire and movement of women is remembered from their previous regime, when women were prevented from stepping outside their homes without a male guardian and were forced to wear a *chadari*, or burqa, covering them from head to foot, including the face.<sup>96</sup> A myth around Taliban

87 AHRDO interview with Abdul (online), March 14, 2022.

88 General Comment No. 34, para. 22–30.

89 Ibid, para. 42.

90 Ibid, para. 31.

91 UN Commission on the Status of Women, Situation of Women and Girls in Afghanistan, 44th Session, UN DOC E/CN.6/2000/L.4, (29 February 2000).

92 ICCPR, art. 19.

93 Ibid, art. 11(2); The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Dec. 18, 1979, U.N.T.S 1249, art. 15(4) (hereinafter CEDAW).

94 CEDAW, arts. 11(1)(a)–(c), 13.

95 Ibid, arts. 7, 13, 14; ICCPR, art. 26.

96 E. Popalzai and I. Nasser, “Taliban Decree Orders Women in Afghanistan to Cover their Faces,” CNN, May 7, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/05/07/asia/afghanistan-taliban-decree-women-intl/index.html> (accessed July 23, 2022).

2.0 led some observers to envisage a lighter touch this time around, but in reality, the Taliban remains deeply conservative and repressive of women and girls. Then, a very narrow interpretation of Islam was imposed, and the images of Afghan women in blue burqas, with titles such as “Behind the Veil,” regularly appeared in the international media.<sup>97</sup> After more than two decades, such images of Afghan women in blue burqas have reappeared.<sup>98</sup> In reality, there is hardly any difference between Taliban 1.0 and 2.0 in regard to the lack of rights for women and girls.

Three months after taking control of Kabul, on November 22, 2021, the Ministry of Virtue passed a directive requiring all female journalists and TV presenters to wear “Islamic hijab” on screen.<sup>99</sup> At the time, it was unclear what the Taliban meant by this requirement. Afghan women in the media were already wearing a headscarf, which is considered a form of hijab both in Afghanistan and across the Muslim world. The directive was to presage stricter regulations imposed on Afghan women in the media. The Ministry of Virtue stated that this directive amounted to “religious guidelines” rather than rules,<sup>100</sup> suggesting some degree of leniency. At that time, the new regime had been in place for three months and was still getting organized after the transition from the battlefield to being in control of the state. The main aim, early on, was international recognition, and the new leaders at first attempted to project a new image of its regime as open to women’s rights.<sup>101</sup> It did not take long for this mask to slip, as the regime settled into its positions of authority. The regime rapidly moved toward being more restrictive in passing and enforcing rules that limited women’s rights. This shift was demonstrated in its treatment of female journalists and media workers.

On May 21, 2022, the Ministry of Virtue passed a new order that required all female journalists and TV presenters to *cover their faces* while on air.<sup>102</sup> This time, the requirement was not described as a “guideline.” Rather, Taliban officials made it very clear that this is a “religious *order*,”<sup>103</sup> which all female journalists and TV presenters *had* to obey.<sup>104</sup> Members of the Afghan media and others called on the Taliban to reconsider this move.<sup>105</sup> One Afghan female journalist proposed to hold a dialogue with the Taliban on the nature of the hijab to be adopted by women in the media, as a means of reaching an outcome that would be acceptable to all sides.<sup>106</sup> However, the Taliban rigidly adhered to its position and insisted on enforcing this order. The Ministry of Virtue, which is charged with interpreting and enforcing the Taliban’s version of Sharia,<sup>107</sup> made it clear that its decision was final and that there was no room for discussions or negotiations.<sup>108</sup>

97 See, e.g., I. Hilton, “Behind the Veil,” *New York Times*, April 28, 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/04/28/books/behind-the-veil.html> (accessed July 23, 2002).

98 See, e.g., E. Graham-Harrison, “Taliban Order All Afghan Women to Cover Their Faces in Public,” *The Guardian*, May 8, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/07/taliban-order-all-afghan-women-to-wear-burqa> (accessed July 23, 2022).

99 Rahmani and Butler, “Afghanistan’s Intelligence Agency”; International Federation of Journalists, “Taliban’s New Directives”; RSF, “RSF Condemns the Taliban’s Attempt to Cover Afghan Women Journalists’ Faces,” <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-condemns-taliban%E2%80%99s-attempt-cover-afghan-women-journalists%E2%80%99-faces> (accessed July 23, 2022); *The Guardian*, “Afghan Journalists Decry Taliban Rules Restricting Role of Women on TV,” November 24, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/23/afghan-journalists-taliban-rules-restricting-role-women-on-tv> (accessed July 23, 2022); Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Crackdown on Media.”

100 *The Guardian*, “Afghan Journalists Decry Taliban.”

101 S. Saeed, “Taliban 2.0: Older, Media-Savvy and Still Duplicitous,” *Politico*, August 20, 2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/taliban-afghanistan-rebrand> (accessed July 23, 2022).

102 RSF, “Cover Afghan Women Journalists’ Faces”; R. Treisman, “Male Afghan TV Anchors Cover Faces in Solidarity with Women after a Taliban Order,” NPR, May 24, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/24/1100957881/free-her-face-afghan-tv-anchors-face-coverings-taliban> (accessed July 23, 2022); A. Gul, “Taliban Order Afghan Female TV Presenters to Cover Faces,” *VOA News*, May 19, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-order-afghan-female-tv-presenters-to-cover-faces-/6580605.html> (accessed July 23, 2022).

103 W. Faizi and F. Paimani, “Taliban Want to Erase Women from Media, Afghan Journalists Say,” *VOA News*, May 20, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-want-to-erase-women-from-media-afghan-journalists-say/6583256.html#:~:text=The%20Taliban%20takeover%20had%20an.their%20jobs%20since%20August%202021> (emphasis added) (accessed July 23, 2022)≥

104 *Ibid.*

105 *Ibid.*

106 *Ibid.*

107 *Ibid.*; Gul, “Presenters to Cover Faces.”

108 S. Fetrat and H. Barr, “Afghans Call to #FreeHerFace,” Human Rights Watch, May 23, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/23/afghans-call-freeherface> (accessed July 23, 2022); Gul, “Presenters to Cover Faces.”

The Taliban justified this new restriction by naming it a *religious* order. Mujahid explained that the requirement would help women in the media to preserve their “modesty and honor.”<sup>109</sup> However, “hijab” is a generic term subject to a wide range of interpretations, ranging from headscarves covering the neck and hair to full body covering. Before this new order, Afghan women wore headscarves, or *chadari*, some covering their faces, others not, depending on their varied understandings of the meaning of hijab. Women in the media, including those appearing on air, already wore a headscarf. By ordering mandatory face covering for all women in the media, the Taliban imposed its own very narrow interpretation of hijab, without consulting Afghan women or considering their views. This demonstrates how the group constrains women’s rights, misusing Islam for this purpose. Much like under Taliban 1.0, the “new” Taliban is fiercely patriarchal and does not accept any public role for Afghan women.

## Concerns Raised

Afghan women in the media have raised concerns about the face-covering order. While giving the order a religious-sounding justification, Mujahid stated that the order is “not something to call a threat.”<sup>110</sup> However female journalists questioned whether the mandatory face covering was a prelude to the imposition of even stricter measures targeting the few women remaining in media, prior to completely banning them from working in this sector. Somia Walizada, a board member of the Afghan Journalists Centre, describes the order as “a warning for female journalists.”<sup>111</sup> Likewise, the Taliban’s gender-specific controls on women display a distinct pattern—media restrictions that first recommend hijab but then enforce one particularly narrow interpretation of hijab, namely face covering. Lima Spesali, a reporter in Kabul, worries that the next move may “bar women from appearing in TV and order them to stay home.”<sup>112</sup> Female journalists see the order as a clear attempt to remove them from the media landscape and make them invisible in the society in general.

Furthermore, the order challenges the agency and professionalism of women in the media and exposes them to high risks of being unemployed. The Ministry of Virtue has vested TV channels with the responsibility to ensure that female program presenters cover their faces while on screen.<sup>113</sup> It has directed all media outlets to exclude female staff from broadcasting and dismiss them from their posts, should they fail to follow the new dress code.<sup>114</sup> While the order deprives women of identity and freedom of expression, it also empowers men in the media to intimidate women and to enforce face veiling on their female colleagues, pushing women, and only women, into a position where they will be fired if they fail to obey and cover their faces.

Mandatory veiling presents an additional challenge for women in the media. Female journalists consider the order a distinct step backward, because many women TV presenters believe they will not be able to perform their jobs adequately or professionally from behind a veil.<sup>115</sup> An anchor from TOLONews stated, “We were not ready mentally and morally that such things would be forced on us.”<sup>116</sup> Female TV anchors have raised concerns about how realistic it would be to announce the news, or lead hours of programming and communicating, with their faces fully covered.<sup>117</sup>

---

109 Faizi and Paimani, “Erase Women from Media.”

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid.

113 Treisman, “Male TV Anchors Cover Faces.”

114 Gul, “Presenters to Cover Faces.”

115 Treisman, “Male TV Anchors Cover Faces”; Faizi and Paimani, “Erase Women from Media.”

116 Treisman, “Male TV Anchors Cover Faces.”

117 Ibid.

## Other Gender-Based Restrictions

Since the return of the Taliban, the environment for women in the Afghan media has become extremely oppressive, and many women have been forced to leave. A very limited number of women remain, and those who do are working under severe restrictions. On August 15, Taliban officials barred two female journalists from doing their jobs at the state-owned Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA).<sup>118</sup> Khadija Amin, a well-known TV anchor, was replaced by a Taliban official.<sup>119</sup> The next day Amin returned to work and was sent away and told to “stay at home.” Her male colleagues were allowed to continue coming to work. Another female journalist reported that Taliban guards were stationed outside their media outlet and could prevent women from going outside to cover stories, restricting their mobility.<sup>120</sup> Also, in the first months of Taliban rule, many media outlets, anticipating reprisals and punishments, had already directed their female staff to “stay at home,” thus anticipating Taliban repression of female staff, but also facilitating it.<sup>121</sup> According to the Afghanistan Analyst Network, for the first few days after the fall of Kabul, the Afghan media landscape was suddenly emptied of women journalists, anchors, and media personalities.<sup>122</sup> On August 24, Mujahid announced that women journalists could “return to work in a few days,” citing concerns for their security.<sup>123</sup>

Toward the end of 2021, some of these women in media who had been told to “stay at home” did return to work. In early February 2022, in a meeting with the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC), Mujahid reiterated “women can work freely in the media by observing Islamic and national principles.”<sup>124</sup> When exactly women were permitted to return to their jobs in media is unclear, but according to some reports, from as early as mid-September, women journalists were increasingly appearing on TV, particularly at the major stations, such as TOLO and Ariana News.<sup>125</sup>

However, this return of women was very limited, with less than one in five taking up their post again. According to RSF, by December 8, 2021, only 410 out of 2,490 women journalists—just over 16 percent—had returned to their workplaces.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, for many, their return was “short-lived,”<sup>127</sup> and they either left their workplaces and remained at home or decided to flee the country. The very limited return of women to their media jobs can be attributed to various factors, including being targeted by the Taliban, gender-based discrimination, a lack of safety, and new security obstacles hindering them from properly doing their jobs. A woman journalist from Badakhshan stated she did not return to work, both because she felt unsafe returning and because she was not paid.<sup>128</sup> Some women journalists have allegedly been “blacklisted” by Taliban officials.<sup>129</sup> According to a survey by ANJU, released in March 2022, about 87 percent of women in the media faced gender-based discrimination,<sup>130</sup> something not unknown, of course, even before the Taliban returned to power.

118 International Federation of Journalists, “Afghanistan: 87% of Women Journalists Have Suffered Discrimination under Taliban Rule,” March 9, 2022, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/afghanistan-87-of-women-journalists-have-suffered-discrimination-under-taliban-rule.html#:~:text=79%25%20of%20women%20journalists%20said,officials%2C%20written%20and%20verbal%20threats.&text=Respondents%20also%20shared%20deep%20concerns.lack%20of%20a%20media%20law> (accessed July 23, 2022); Committee to Protect Journalists, “Taliban Take 2 Female State TV Anchors Off-Air in Afghanistan, Beat at Least 2 Journalists,” August 19, 2021, <https://cpj.org/2021/08/taliban-take-2-female-state-tv-anchors-off-air-in-afghanistan-beat-at-least-2-journalists/> (accessed July 23, 2022).

119 Committee to Protect Journalists, “Beat at Least 2 Journalists.”

120 Qaane, “Afghan Media.”

121 Ibid.

122 Ibid.

123 Reporters Without Borders, “Fewer Than 100 Kabul’s 700 Journalists Still Working,” August 31, 2021, <https://rsf.org/en/fewer-100-kabuls-700-women-journalists-still-working> (accessed July 23, 2022).

124 Salam Watandar, “Mujahid Says No Issues.”

125 Qaane, “Afghan Media.”

126 Reporters Without Borders, “Taliban Takeover.”

127 Qaane, “Afghan Media.”

128 Ibid.

129 Z. Ahad and R. Kumar, “Afghan Female Journalists Defiant as Taliban Restrictions Grow,” *Al Jazeera*, May 24, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/24/afghan-female-journalists-defiant-as-taliban-restrictions-grow> (accessed July 23, 2022).

130 International Federation of Journalists, “Discrimination under Taliban Rule.”

The current media environment is very unsafe for female journalists. For example, the International Federation of Journalists announced in March 2022 that 79 percent of female journalists have been insulted or threatened under Taliban rule. They had received physical threats and abuse from Taliban officials, both in writing and verbally.<sup>131</sup> The scope of the work they could do had become significantly more limited, and woman reporters now can make little to no contribution to field reporting.<sup>132</sup> Their situation is worsened by travel restrictions imposed by the Taliban specifically on women. Previously women journalists had some scope to travel to different parts of Afghanistan to cover the news.<sup>133</sup> The new Taliban rules require women to be accompanied by a *mabram* (a male guardian) at all times,<sup>134</sup> limiting their freedom of movement and making it impractical for a woman to work in the media, especially as a news journalist or reporter.

Afghan female journalists have reported being prohibited from attending press conferences held by Taliban officials.<sup>135</sup> On May 19, 2022, Marjan Wafa, a reporter from Herat Province, stated that the Taliban's provincial director of information and culture expelled her from his press conference without giving any reasons.<sup>136</sup> Wafa was complying with the Taliban's new dress code and had covered her face.<sup>137</sup> This situation indicates that she was excluded only because of her gender. Taliban officials regularly cancel interviews with media outlets when they learn that the interviewer is a woman.<sup>138</sup> Yet Taliban leaders have often granted interviews to *non-Afghan* women journalists,<sup>139</sup> demonstrating a double standard in their treatment of Afghan and non-Afghan women in the media.

The situation is even worse for female journalists working outside the capital city, in the more remote provinces and districts. In some provinces, the local Taliban authorities have already completely prohibited women from working in the media or tightly restrict what tasks they can work on. When the Taliban took over Faizabad, the provincial capital of Badakhshan Province, they announced that women journalists were not permitted to appear on camera.<sup>140</sup> Women would be permitted to work in radio stations only if *all* the staff were women,<sup>141</sup> something they knew would be impossible in practical terms, because there are few all-female radio stations in the world, let alone in the more remote provinces of Afghanistan. In Balkh, a woman journalist was beaten up by Taliban officials in September 2021, while she was covering a local women's protests.<sup>142</sup> Other women have reported that they have been prevented from attending public events, even those organized by journalists themselves.<sup>143</sup> In Helmand, Taliban officials allegedly instructed the media not to include any women as program hosts or guests.<sup>144</sup> Cultural programs involving only women have also been stopped.<sup>145</sup> In Herat, a woman's media program was terminated, and women were no longer allowed in newsrooms. Women could not broadcast their own voices or the voices of other women.<sup>146</sup> The Taliban policies are moving toward a complete ban on women being seen or heard in Afghan media.

---

131 Ibid.

132 Qaane, "Afghan Media."

133 Ahad and Kumar, "Afghan Female Journalists Defiant."

134 Ibid.

135 Ibid; Daryush, "Female Reporters Fear."

136 Committee to Protect Journalists, "Afghan Journalist Ali Akbar Khairkhah Disappears in Kabul, Taliban Cracks Down on Women Reporters," May 27, 2022, <https://cpj.org/2022/05/afghan-journalist-ali-akbar-khairkhah-disappears-in-kabul-taliban-cracks-down-on-women-reporters/> (accessed July 23, 2022).

137 Ahad and Kumar, "Afghan Female Journalists Defiant."

138 Ibid; Qaane, "Afghan Media."

139 See, e.g., CNN, "Exclusive: Amanpour Speaks with Taliban Deputy Leader," May 17, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ne8yjHbnOYA> (accessed July 23, 2022).

140 DW, "Tough Times under Taliban."

141 Ibid.

142 Human Rights Watch, "Taliban Threatening Provincial Media."

143 Ibid.

144 Ibid.

145 Ibid.

146 Reporters Without Border, "Fewer Than 100"; Human Rights Watch, "Taliban Threatening Provincial Media."



### III. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST AFGHAN JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA

Afghanistan was not safe for journalists even before the present regime took over the country. During the years prior to that takeover, many Afghan journalists had lost their lives in targeted killings and while reporting on the frontlines of war.<sup>147</sup> Before August 2021, journalists were subjected to abuse and arbitrary detention.<sup>148</sup> However, since the Taliban's return, this already challenging media landscape has become much more precarious. This section assesses human rights violations against Afghan journalists under the Taliban regime. It demonstrates that since August 2021, violations against journalists, both men and women, have amplified. Journalists are increasingly being subjected to extreme forms of surveillance, intimidation, arbitrary arrest and detention, physical abuse, enforced disappearance, and extrajudicial killing. In its recent report, which analyzes the overall human rights situation in Afghanistan from August 15, 2021, to June 15, 2022, the United Nations Assistance Mission (UNAMA) documented the following:

---

During the years prior to that takeover, many Afghan journalists had lost their lives in targeted killings and while reporting on the frontlines of war.

---

*Human rights violations affecting 173 journalists and media workers, 163 of which were attributed to the de facto authorities. Among these were 122 instances of arbitrary arrest and detention, 58 instances of ill-treatment, 33 instances of threats and intimidation and 12 instances of incommunicado detention. Six journalists were also killed during the period (five by self-identified Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant–Khorasan Province, one by unknown perpetrators).<sup>149</sup>*

Taliban agencies, including the Ministry of Virtue, MIC and the GDI, are implicated in these human rights violations against journalists and media workers.<sup>150</sup> Sajad, an Afghan journalist from a prominent local TV News channel told AHRDO that the “journalists [...] are detained, beaten, tortured, insulted and humiliated [...] by the Taliban’s intelligence and the intelligence gets information and orders from the [Ministry of] Information and Culture’s staff.”<sup>151</sup> Attacks on journalists are intentional and aim to silence critical voices in the media. As explained by another Afghan journalist interviewed by AHRDO:

*I think it [the behaviour of Taliban forces toward the media] is purposeful and at the behest of the Taliban’s leaders. If it were arbitrary, the scale of detaining and arresting the journalists would be less, but many journalists have been arrested, tortured, and beaten in the past eight months. The*

---

<sup>147</sup> International Federation of Journalists, “Afghanistan under the Taliban.”

<sup>148</sup> DW, “Tough Times under Taliban.”

<sup>149</sup> UNAMA, “UN Releases Report on Human Rights in Afghanistan,” July 20 2022, [https://unama.unmissions.org/un-releases-report-human-rights-afghanistan-taliban-takeover#\\_ftn1](https://unama.unmissions.org/un-releases-report-human-rights-afghanistan-taliban-takeover#_ftn1) (accessed July 23, 2022).

<sup>150</sup> VOA News, “UN Call on Taliban”; Committee to Protect Journalists, “Taliban Forces Beat Samadzai”; Committee to Protect Journalists, “Three Afghan Journalists Detained Following Coverage of Anti-Taliban Protests,” January 11, 2022, <https://cpj.org/2022/01/three-afghan-journalists-detained-following-coverage-of-anti-taliban-protests/> (accessed July 23, 2022).

<sup>151</sup> AHRDO interview with Sajad, an Afghan journalist (online), April 15, 2022.

*Taliban's treatment of journalists is purposeful and dictated by their leaders. The reason they treat the journalists this way is to prevent the coverage of their hideous acts and their violent and extremist treatment of the public, so the international community and people are not informed. They are afraid of the media because the media can publicise their crimes to the world.*<sup>152</sup>

The Taliban's various security services, especially the *Istikhbarat* (Directorate of Intelligence), are authorized to ban broadcasts and publications and arrest journalists and other employees of media outlets.<sup>153</sup> Turning a civilian matter—the press—into a security concern and providing Taliban security officials such broad powers, in particular in the absence of detailed media laws, has encouraged the abuse of power and exposed journalists to attacks. The Taliban leadership have not passed any media laws with clear provisions, precisely defining what constitutes an offence and specifying penalties for noncompliance. Instead, this section will show that punishments for noncompliance are carried out by Taliban officials arbitrarily and without any consideration of due process or procedural justice. Arbitrariness and impunity characterize the Taliban's overall handling of the media and media rules.

The Taliban's mistreatment of journalists most obviously violates the human rights of freedom of expression and the press, as well as other rights guaranteed under IHRL.<sup>154</sup> In particular, officials are violating journalists' right to be protected in their ability to gather and publicize information, even though these officers have a duty to protect that right.<sup>155</sup> The scope of press freedom can be subject to limitations, but government authorities can never justify attacking, torturing, or killing journalists, even those highly critical of the authorities.<sup>156</sup>

## **Surveillance: Raids, Random Checks, and Summons**

The Taliban keep the remaining independent journalists still working in Afghanistan today under close surveillance, strictly monitoring their work and movements. Since August 2021, Taliban personnel have randomly summoned, stopped, checked, and questioned journalists and raided and searched their houses and offices. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), within the first three months of the Taliban's return, several journalists were summoned by local intelligence officers after publishing reports about what was happening under Taliban rule.<sup>157</sup> Media outlets complained about having heavily armed Taliban intelligence agents posted outside their premises, or coming into their offices or homes, and warning them not to publish on certain issues considered taboo by the regime.<sup>158</sup>

AHRDO's interviews with Afghan journalists corroborate these claims and indicate that the Taliban security services have a list of independent and critical journalists whom they monitor closely, harass, and, in some cases, arrest and torture. As an example, Sajad stated:

*The Taliban intelligence asked the media [outlets] for the names and details of their staff and the media shared the list of their journalists and staff with the Taliban intelligence without informing their journalists and staff. This is how the Taliban follow and, sometimes, arrest journalists and media staff. Once, they came from the Taliban's intelligence directorate to Ariana's office. They clearly named some staff including myself [and threatened] that we were on their blacklist, and they would*

---

<sup>152</sup> AHRDO interview with Rahib (online), April 23, 2022.

<sup>153</sup> Reporters Without Borders, "Act Quickly."

<sup>154</sup> See, e.g., ICCPR, art. 7 (right not to be subjected to torture or cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment), art. 9 (right not to be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention), art. 17 (right to privacy).

<sup>155</sup> General Comment No. 34, para. 13.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Taliban Severely Restrict"; Human Rights Watch, "Taliban Crackdown on Media."

<sup>158</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Taliban Crackdown on Media."

*eliminate us. They said that until they were recognised, we would continue to work under their surveillance and when they were recognised, they would decide about us mean and vile people. They said that in front of all the TV station's staff.*<sup>159</sup>

The following are examples of Taliban surveillance, raids, and stop and search of journalists in the days and months following the takeover:

- On August 19, 2021, DW reported that the Taliban has raided the homes of at least three of its journalists.<sup>160</sup>
- In October 2021, a journalist from Kunar Province, accused of publishing “anti-jihad propaganda,” told DW news, “Armed men came to the house of my father, asking for me, saying that they have business with me, as I sometimes had worked with foreign journalists and as they accused me of having published antijihadi propaganda.”<sup>161</sup> The journalist has been hiding his location since then.
- An Afghan journalist, Shamim, told AHRDO that he was stopped by Taliban officials on December 12 or 13, 2021, at a checkpoint in Area 6 in Kabul.<sup>162</sup> They checked Shamim’s car and phone and accused him of spreading false news about the group in the past 20 years. After filming him, to probably maintain a record of his identity, the agents let him leave. Shamim stated that after the incident, Taliban agents came and searched his house twice—first, later on the day of the incident, and second, on March 5.
- In March 2022, HRW reported that two journalists from Kandahar remained under the Taliban’s surveillance after their release from custody.<sup>163</sup> In the same month, the Taliban also raided four radio stations in Kandahar and arrested some of their reporters and staff members.<sup>164</sup> In addition, on March 2, the CPJ reported that senior media executives have told the media advocacy organization that Jawad Sargar, the deputy director of the GDI’s directorate of media and publication, regularly contacts and visits their media offices to tell them what they should and should not be programming.<sup>165</sup> On March 17, the GDI raided TOLO News’s newsroom in Kabul and arrested three of its employees.<sup>166</sup>
- On May 24, 2022, Mirza Hassani, the former owner and editor of Radio Aftab, was stopped by Taliban agents at a checkpoint in District 12 of Herat city.<sup>167</sup> He was detained after the agents searched his phone and found news reports posted on his social media account.
- On May 29, 2022, Roman Karimi, a reporter from local news Salam Watandar, was stopped by Taliban officials while covering a women’s protest in Kabul.<sup>168</sup> The officials interrogated Karimi and reviewed the contents of his voice recorder, phone, and social media account. They slapped him after Karimi refused to open his phone on the grounds that it contained personal files.

---

159 AHRDO interview with Sajad (online), April 15, 2022.

160 DW, “Relative of DW Journalist Killed by the Taliban,” August 19, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/relative-of-dw-journalist-killed-by-the-taliban/a-58912975> (accessed July 23, 2022).

161 DW, “Tough Times under Taliban.”

162 AHRDO interview with Shamim (online), March 15, 2022.

163 Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Threatening Provincial Media.”

164 VOA News, “UN Call on Taliban.”

165 Rahmani and Butler, “Afghanistan’s Intelligence Agency.”

166 International Press Institute, “Afghanistan: Taliban Detain TOLO News Employees, One Journalist Still in Custody,” March 18, 2022, <https://ipi.media/afghanistan-taliban-detain-tolo-news-employees-one-journalist-still-in-custody/> (accessed July 23, 2022).

167 International Federation of Journalists, “Afghanistan: Taliban Detains Three Media Workers,” June 2, 2022, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/afghanistan-taliban-detains-three-media-workers.html> (accessed July 23, 2022).

168 Ibid.

- On June 3, 2022, Taliban forces stopped and searched Reza Shahir at District 18 in Kabul while he was on his way home.<sup>169</sup> They checked his mobile phone and beat him (again) after finding screenshots of media reports of Shahir’s previous detention and beating by the Taliban in April.

These cases portray the intimidating environment in which journalists in Afghanistan must operate, with each aspect of their work being closely scrutinized. The feeling of being watched and potentially facing reprisals from the Taliban through a “home visit” instills fear and is intended to produce self-censorship. As expressed by Patricia Gossman, the associate director of HRW’s Asia Division, “the reality of Afghanistan is that journalists live in fear of a knock on the door and a summons from the authorities.”<sup>170</sup>

## Intimidation: Warnings and Threats

The Taliban use intimidation tactics to censor independent reporting. After August 2021, officials of the regime regularly visited, called, and threatened independent news outlets. They warned editors, journalists, and broadcasters against publishing any content hostile to the regime.<sup>171</sup> Officials would issue physical warnings, by going to homes and offices of media staff, and digitally by sending text messages or phoning.<sup>172</sup> GDI agents threatened to revoke the operating licenses of media houses and threatened to arrest all their staff, if any content was produced criticizing the Taliban.<sup>173</sup> According to media reports, in the provinces of Kapisa, Parwan, and Panjshir, Taliban intelligence officers issued “harsh warnings” against media outlets and journalists critical of the Taliban regime.<sup>174</sup>

Female journalists face increasing threats. As stated previously, 79 percent of women journalists have reported that they have been insulted and threatened under the Taliban regime, including being subjected to physical threats and abuse by Taliban officials. The Taliban’s hostility toward women is nothing new. Prior to August 2021, Taliban forces regularly targeted and threatened Afghan women journalists.<sup>175</sup>

The case of Jibrán Lawrand, a presenter at Kabul News TV station, is an example of how intimidation tactics are used to silence dissenting voices. On April 25, 2022, Lawrand was summoned to the GDI, where he was detained, interrogated, and cursed at.<sup>176</sup> Most likely this was because he had disagreed with a Taliban supporter on a TV show he hosted the day before, on April 24.<sup>177</sup> GDI agents warned Lawrand that his shows should not criticize the Taliban or invite analysts critical of the regime.<sup>178</sup> They also warned him to not disclose the fact of his detention and questioning to the media, or he would face even graver consequences.<sup>179</sup> Lawrand continued to receive anonymous

169 Committee to Protect Journalists, “Taliban Forces Beat Journalist Reza Shahir, Charges 3 Others over Corruption Reporting,” June 9, 2022, <https://cpj.org/2022/06/taliban-forces-beat-journalist-reza-shahir-charge-3-others-over-corruption-reporting/> (accessed July 23, 2022); International Federation of Journalists, “Afghanistan: Journalists Beaten and Arrested by Taliban Militants,” June 10, 2022, <https://www.ifj.org/es/centro-de-medios/noticias/detalle/category/press-releases/article/afghanistan-journalist-beaten-and-arrested-by-taliban-militants.html> (accessed July 23, 2022).

170 Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Crackdown on Media.”

171 Rahmani and Butler, “Afghanistan’s Intelligence Agency”; Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Crackdown on Media”; DW, “Tough Times under Taliban”; International Federation of Journalists, “Afghanistan under the Taliban”; Committee to Protect Journalists, “Taliban Intelligence Agents Detain, Pressure Afghan Journalists Jebran Lawrand to Stop Critical Reporting,” May 23, 2022, <https://cpj.org/2022/05/taliban-intelligence-agents-detain-pressure-afghan-journalist-jebran-lawrand-to-stop-critical-reporting/> (accessed July 23, 2022).

172 Rahmani and Butler, “Afghanistan’s Intelligence Agency”; Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Crackdown on Media”; Committee to Protect Journalists, “Lawrand to Stop Critical Reporting.”

173 Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Crackdown on Media.”

174 Hasht e Subh, “AIJA: A Local Journalist Disappeared in Kapisa,” June 13, 2022, <https://8am.af/eng/aija-a-local-journalist-disappeared-in-kapisa/> (accessed July 23, 2022).

175 Human Rights Watch, “Afghanistan: Taliban Target Journalists, Women in Media,” April 1, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/01/afghanistan-taliban-target-journalists-women-media>.

176 Committee to Protect Journalists, “Lawrand to Stop Critical Reporting.”

177 Jebran Lawrand, Facebook, April 24, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/100001151883899/posts/5030894733625540/?d=n/>.

178 Committee to Protect Journalists, “Lawrand to Stop Critical Reporting.”

179 Ibid.

threats from unknown telephone numbers,<sup>180</sup> most likely from the Taliban, because despite GDI warnings not to do so, he has disclosed his detention experience.<sup>181</sup> The situation led to Lawrand leaving journalism altogether. In a Facebook post, he stated that he felt pressured into quitting his job after 16 years of reporting.<sup>182</sup>

Moreover, members of the Taliban have abused their authority to force news outlets to publish and broadcast programs that favor the Taliban regime. For example, some journalists have reportedly received warnings from GDI agents that they can continue working only if they agree to report on issues that portray the Taliban in a positive light.<sup>183</sup> Others have disclosed cases of heavily armed Taliban intelligence officials entering their offices and warning them that in all media publications and broadcasts, the term “Islamic Emirate” must replace “Taliban.”<sup>184</sup> In one province, the local Taliban allegedly ordered media organizations to replace the word “suicide bomber” with “martyr,” after one article stated that Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani had honored the families of “suicide bombers.”<sup>185</sup>

The ability of the media to operate, without threats and fear of reprisals, is fundamental to press freedom. In their engagement with the Taliban, the international community should strongly condemn the harassment and intimidation of journalists. If left unchecked, the Taliban is likely to continue and increase its attacks against the Afghan media and create a situation in which it becomes impossible to work as a journalist at all. After detaining and beating one journalist in Kabul, the Taliban warned, “once the world recognizes us, we know what we’ll do to you!”<sup>186</sup>

## Arbitrary Arrests and Detentions

In meetings with media support organizations, Mujahid has repeatedly claimed that the Taliban is “committed to freedom of expression” and does not arrest journalists.<sup>187</sup> However, in practice, Afghan journalists are routinely arrested and detained by Taliban officials. Although the exact number of cases is inconclusive due to lack of local monitoring, nonetheless, several reports and AHRDO’s own research show widespread and regular patterns of arbitrary arrest and detention of journalists and other members of the Afghan media. In October 2021, HRW reported that between August and October 2021, at least 32 journalists were held in Taliban custody.<sup>188</sup> Another report estimated that 57 media workers had been arrested by the Taliban by the end of April 2022.<sup>189</sup> According to the RSF, between August 15, 2021, and February 14, 2022, the Taliban’s intelligence services arrested at least 50 members of the Afghan media.<sup>190</sup> These estimates more or less tally. In March 2022, it was estimated that 21 journalists remained in Taliban custody,<sup>191</sup> with a further 12 being detailed in May.<sup>192</sup> Once again, as mentioned earlier, outside the capital, where little international oversight is possible, the situation is particularly serious. For example, in early 2022:

- In late March, Taliban intelligence agents raided four radio stations in Kandahar and arrested Mirwais Atal and six other local journalists without providing any reason.<sup>193</sup> Atal was released

---

180 Ibid.

181 Lawrand, Facebook.

182 Ibid.

183 Rahmani and Butler, “Afghanistan’s Intelligence Agency.”

184 Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Crackdown on Media.”

185 Ibid.

186 AHRDO interview with Sabir (online), April 16, 2022.

187 VOA News, “UN Call on Taliban.”

188 Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Severely Restrict.”

189 International Federation of Journalists, “Solidarity and Survival,” 2.

190 Reporters Without Borders, “Act Quickly.”

191 VOA News, “UN Call on Taliban.”

192 Reporters Without Borders, “Many Arbitrary Arrests of Journalists in Afghanistan,” June 10, 2022, <https://rsf.org/en/many-arbitrary-arrests-journalists-afghanistan> (accessed July 23, 2022).

193 VOA News, “UN Call on Taliban.”

with the other journalists after being detained for four days. Describing his detention as “psychological torture,” Atal believes he was detained because of his campaign to reopen the local girls’ schools.<sup>194</sup>

- On April 6, Taliban security forces arrested Ghulam Rabani Hadafmand, the provincial representative of AJSC in Ghor Province, and another journalist, Gul Ahmad Khosraw.<sup>195</sup>
- On May 10, Khan Mohammad Sial, a TV journalist from Paywaston, was arrested in Oruzgan Province in what was described as a “private case” with no further explanation.<sup>196</sup> He was detained at Uruzgan’s central prison.<sup>197</sup> Local Taliban officials beat Sial, telling him that he would be released only if he confessed that his outlet was funded by foreigners and was financially corrupt.<sup>198</sup>
- On May 27, Basira Mutasim, a female journalist, was detained in the northern Faryab Province and released on bail after being held in detention for several hours.<sup>199</sup>
- In late May, Mirza Hassani, the director and owner of Radio Aftab in Daikundi, was arrested and transferred for detention to the 12th Directorate of the Taliban’s GDI in Herat city.<sup>200</sup> Hassani was accused of working as a reporter for the National Resistance Front (NRF)—an anti-Taliban group. Taliban agents searched his phone and found news reports posted on his social media.<sup>201</sup> Hassani was not officially charged.<sup>202</sup> He claimed he was beaten and tortured in Taliban custody.<sup>203</sup>
- On May 28, three journalists, Basireh Mosamam, Ologh Big Ghafari, and Firouz Ghafari were arrested in Faryab Province by the Taliban prosecutor’s office. The arrest allegedly followed a complaint by the local director of the Ministry of Information and Culture.<sup>204</sup> The three were charged with criminal insult, for reporting on corruption allegations involving government officials including the director who complained about them.<sup>205</sup> According to media reports, after being held for seven hours, the three journalists were released on bail.<sup>206</sup>
- On June 14, Taliban agents detained Abdul Hannan Mohammadi, a reporter for the Pajhwok news agency in Kapisa Province, while he was on his way to an assignment.<sup>207</sup> The reason given for his detention remains unclear.<sup>208</sup>

---

194 International Press Institute, “Taliban Detain TOLO News Employees.”

195 Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (@ajsc-afg), Twitter, April 7, 2022, 6:35 p.m., [https://twitter.com/ajsc\\_afg/status/1511986709986168840](https://twitter.com/ajsc_afg/status/1511986709986168840).

196 Reporters Without Borders, “Many Arbitrary Arrests”; Committee to Protect Journalists, “Taliban Members Beat Journalist at Kabul Checkpoint, Detain 2 Others,” June 22, 2022, <https://cpj.org/2022/06/taliban-members-beat-journalist-at-kabul-checkpoint-detain-2-others/> (accessed July 23, 2022).

197 Committee to Protect Journalists, “Taliban Members Beat Journalists.”

198 Ibid.

199 CFWIJ, “Press Freedom Status for Women Journalists: May 2022,” May 2022, <https://www.womeninjournalism.org/reports-all/press-freedom-status-for-women-journalists-may-2022>.

200 Reporters Without Borders, “Many Arbitrary Arrests”; Salam Watandar, “Intimidation of Journalists Continue,” May 30, 2022, <https://swn.af/en/2022/05/30/intimidation-of-journalists-continue/> (accessed July 23, 2022); S. Cloteaux, “Afghanistan: Two Journalists Go Missing, Two Detained,” International Press Institute, June 3, 2022, <https://ipi.media/afghanistan-two-journalists-go-missing-two-detained/> (accessed July 23, 2022); International Federation of Journalists, “Taliban Detains Three Media Workers.”

201 International Federation of Journalists, “Taliban Detains Three Media Workers.”

202 Ibid.

203 Hasht e Subh, “Taliban Arrests the Owner of Aftab Radio Station,” March 29, 2022, <https://8am.af/eng/taliban-arrests-the-owner-of-aftab-radio-station-in-daikundi/> (accessed July 24, 2022).

204 Reporters Without Borders, “Many Arbitrary Arrests”; Committee to Protect Journalists, “Taliban Beat Reza Shahir.”

205 International Federation of Journalists, “Journalists Beaten and Arrested”; Reporters Without Borders,

206 Reporters Without Borders, “Many Arbitrary Arrests.”

207 Reporters Without Borders, “Taliban Members Beat Journalists.”

208 Ibid.

All these arrests and detentions are arbitrary and unlawful; in most cases, journalists and media staff are arrested and held in custody without any charges,<sup>209</sup> reasons, or explanations and without being allowed to access a lawyer or even their own families.<sup>210</sup> Of the 30 journalists interviewed by AHRDO, seven had been arrested and detained by the Taliban.<sup>211</sup> They were not charged or provided with any explanation for their arrest. All seven were arrested while covering news in the field, whether on protests, bomb attacks, or other local issues such as aid distribution and Afghani people fleeing the country. The journalists were detained for short periods—between two and eight hours. Four had had their hands and feet tied while in custody, and on release, some were warned not talk about their arrest and detention through the media.

Ali, a journalist from Kabul, told AHRDO he was arrested, beaten, and tortured by the Taliban's Kabul Department of Refugee and Repatriation (KDRR) on December 12, 2021.<sup>212</sup> Ali was preparing to cover the news at an aid distribution site in Kabul, when he was stopped by KDRR officials. Ali had taken videos and pictures of KDRR members mistreating the aid beneficiaries, women in particular. Ali was then detained for eight hours at the KDRR office. He was released with a warning to never appear at any events organized by them. His equipment, including a camera, recorder, and smartphone, were confiscated along with the footage and pictures of the event.

Even in cases where a reason is given for journalists and other media staff being arrested or detained, it is often based on vague and unsubstantiated allegations. For example, journalists have been arrested and detained for “propagandizing against Afghanistan’s national interest,” “ruining the Taliban’s reputation,” “collaborating with the resistance front,” “colluding with foreign governments,” “spreading anti-Taliban propaganda,” and “disrespecting Islam.”<sup>213</sup> These expressions are broad and vague, and none constitutes an offence *under the law*, because the Taliban has yet to legislate its own media policies and to define what actions are to be viewed as offences and what penalties are prescribed for noncompliance with the law.

Taliban officials can and do detain journalists for almost any reason and for unspecified periods of time. This is demonstrated in the irregularities between different cases of detention. For instance, some journalists have been held in Taliban custody for a few minutes, others a few hours, and some for weeks, or even months. Although some journalists reported being released after a few hours, often after interrogation, and often with a warning, others have faced beatings and other forms of physical abuse over much longer periods.

An important case is the trial of Khaled Qaderi, the first journalist to have been tried by the new Taliban regime. This trial indicated that even when the Taliban decides to deal with a journalist through “legal” avenues, there

---

209 International Federation of Journalists, “Taliban Detains Three Media Workers.”

210 Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Severely Restrict”; VOA News, “UN Call on Taliban”; Reporters Without Borders, “Many Arbitrary Arrests”; Reuters, “U.N. and U.S. Raise Concern over Reports of Afghan Journalists Arrests,” March 18, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/un-us-raise-concern-over-reports-afghan-journalist-arrests-2022-03-18/> (accessed July 24, 2022); International Federation of Journalists, “Afghanistan: Journalists Missing and Detained as Attacks to Media Continue,” June 16, 2022, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/afghanistan-journalists-missing-and-detained-as-attacks-to-media-continue.html#:~:text=Pajhwok%20Afghan%20News%20correspondent%20and,district%20of%20the%20Kapisa%20province> (accessed July 24, 2022); *The Print*, “Afghanistan: Taliban Arrests Journalists for Unclear Reasons,” March 6, 2022, <https://theprint.in/world/afghanistan-taliban-arrests-journalist-for-unclear-reasons-in-kabul/861462/>; Reuters, “U.N. and U.S. Raise Concern.”

211 AHRDO interview with Sajad (online), April 15 2022; AHRDO interview with Rahib (online), April 23, 2022; AHRDO interview with Shukran (online), April 14, 2022; AHRDO interview with Sabir (online), April 16, 2022; AHRDO interview with Ali (in person), March 15, 2022; AHRDO interview with Mansour (on person), March 9, 2022; AHRDO interview with Naqdi (online), April 2, 2022; AHRDO interview with Daryabi (online), March 31, 2022.

212 AHRDO interview with Ali (in person), March 15, 2022.

213 International Federation of Journalists, “Journalists Beaten and Arrested”; International Federation of Journalists, “Solidarity and Survival,” 2; Reporters Without Borders, “Many Arbitrary Arrests”; Gandhara, “Media Watchdog Demands Release of Afghan Journalist Held by Taliban,” May 7, 2022, <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/adghanistan-journalist-qaderi-taliban-cpj-release/31839020.html> (accessed July 24, 2022); Committee to Protect Journalists, “Taliban Beat Reza Shahir”; International Federation of Journalists, “Taliban Detains Three Media Workers”; F. Abbasi, “Afghanistan’s Taliban Crack Down on Vloggers,” Human Rights Watch, June 14, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/14/afghanistans-taliban-crack-down-vloggers> (accessed July 24, 2022).

is no guarantee of procedural or substantive justice. On the contrary, Qaderi's case signals a new development in the Taliban's overall approach to the media, suggesting that increasingly journalists may be suppressed under the guise of the rule of law.

## First Case Against Journalists: Khaled Qaderi

### Background

In mid-April, Qaderi was tried at a Taliban military court in Herat city.<sup>214</sup> This was the first example of a journalist being tried, convicted, and sentenced for what they had written, under the new Taliban regime. Qaderi was a former reporter for Radio Nawruz, an independent broadcaster in Herat.<sup>215</sup> He had been in Taliban custody since his arrest on March 17, 2022.<sup>216</sup> Ten days after the trial, he was notified of the court's verdict.<sup>217</sup> He was sentenced to one year in prison after a trial that can be described as unfair.<sup>218</sup>

### Unfair Trial

Several publicly available documents suggest Qaderi's trial was not properly conducted. First, the "nature and cause" of the accusations against Qaderi remain unclear.<sup>219</sup> Qaderi's conviction and sentence were based on vague charges including spreading anti-regime propaganda and committing espionage.<sup>220</sup> The reasoning of the military court is not publicly available, but according to media reports, the charges stem from Qaderi's criticism of the Taliban on social media, specifically on Facebook.<sup>221</sup> The military court cannot be considered "independent and impartial" and the court was not "established by law."<sup>222</sup> Also, Qaderi was denied the right to prepare his defense or access a lawyer.<sup>223</sup> Finally and most importantly, he was forced to sign a document agreeing not to appeal the verdict<sup>224</sup> and thus denying him in advance his right to challenge the court's verdict.<sup>225</sup>

International media advocacy organizations, such as IFJ, CPJ, and International Press Institute (IPI, a global network of journalists, editors, and publishers), condemned Qaderi's "arbitrary" sentencing.<sup>226</sup> The IPI called on the Taliban to immediately release Qaderi, to drop all charges against him, and to cease its campaign of harassment and intimidation against Afghan journalists.<sup>227</sup> Likewise, the IFJ urged the Taliban to cease its persecution of journalists for their independent reporting.<sup>228</sup> While calling on the Taliban to "immediately and unconditionally" release Qaderi, Steven Butler, the CPJ's Asia Coordinator, stated, "[t]rying and convicting a journalist on vague charges using shoddy legal proceedings marks an ominous new phase in the Taliban's crackdown on Afghanistan's once-thriving independent media."<sup>229</sup>

214 International Federation of Journalists, "Afghanistan: Journalist Sentenced to Prison for Criticism of Taliban Regime," May 12, 2022, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/afghanistan-journalist-sentenced-to-prison-for-criticism-of-taliban-regime.html> (accessed July 24, 2022).

215 Ibid, Reporters Without Borders, "Many Arbitrary Arrests"; Gandhara, "Afghan Journalist Held by Taliban."

216 U. Eyo, "Afghanistan: Journalist Khalid Qaderi Sentenced to Prison for Criticising Taliban," International Press Institute, May 10, 2022, <https://ipi.media/afghanistan-journalist-khalid-qaderi-sentenced-to-prison-for-criticizing-taliban/> (accessed July 24, 2022).

217 International Federation of Journalists, "Journalist Sentenced to Prison."

218 Ibid; Gandhara, "Afghan Journalist Held by Taliban."

219 ICCPR, art. 14(3).

220 Gandhara, "Afghan Journalist Held by Taliban."

221 Ibid; International Federation of Journalists, "Journalist Sentenced to Prison."

222 ICCPR, art. 14(1).

223 Gandhara, "Afghan Journalist Held by Taliban"; International Federation of Journalists, "Journalist Sentenced to Prison"; ICCPR, art. 14(3)(d).

224 Ibid.

225 ICCPR, art. 2(3).

226 International Federation of Journalists, "Journalist Sentenced to Prison"; Eyo, "Qaderi Sentenced to Prison"; Committee to Protect Journalists, "Afghan Journalist Khalid Qaderi Sentenced to 1 Year in Prison," May 6, 2022, <https://cpj.org/2022/05/afghan-journalist-khalid-qaderi-sentenced-to-1-year-in-prison/> (accessed July 24, 2022).

227 Eyo, "Qaderi Sentenced to Prison."

228 International Federation of Journalists, "Journalist Sentenced to Prison."

229 Committee to Protect Journalists, "Journalist Khalid Qaderi Sentenced."

## Physical Abuse

Since August 2021, journalists and other media workers have frequently been subjected to beatings and other forms of direct physical abuse. In the first two months after the Taliban's return, ANJU recorded 30 instances of physical violence and threats of physical violence against Afghan journalists. Nearly 90 percent of these attacks were from the Taliban.<sup>230</sup> Violence and threats of violence are used by Taliban officials to compel journalists to comply with restrictive media rules, and those most at risk of such abuse and threats are independent media, especially those that resist Taliban repression in the first place. Given the absence of clear and explicit media laws, almost any form of critical reporting can be viewed by Taliban agents as warranting retaliation. This unnerving situation is evidenced by the following cases, documented by AHRDO:

- On September 7, 2021, Shukran and 8 other journalists from various media outlets were arrested by the Taliban intelligence agents while covering a women's protest in Kabul.<sup>231</sup> Shukran and the other journalists were put in a car and taken to the Taliban intelligence department. They were detained and beaten. Shukran was held in custody for four to five hours. He told AHRDO that the Taliban agents hit him on the head with a gun and beat him on his waist and arms with rifle butts. He was kicked and punched. He had blood on his clothes and sustained an injury on his waist and back. Shukran was released with the intervention of the Afghanistan Journalist Federation (AJF).
- On September 7, another journalist, Sabir, was also detained by Taliban intelligence agents at the women's march.<sup>232</sup> The agents tied Sabir's hands and detained him. Sabir stated that the Taliban accused him of being from Panjshir. Like Shukran, Sabir was beaten on the head with a rifle butt. He was threatened that if he shared his experiences with the media or anyone else, he would face even worse punishment in future.
- On December 12, 2021, during his detention described earlier, Ali was beaten while in custody. He told AHRDO that he was treated "harshly." The head of the Directorate slapped Ali on the face and ordered his bodyguards to tie his hands and beat him some more. One bodyguard kicked Ali's shoulder and held him down as three others beat him with a large pipe and kicked him three or four times. The journalist sustained a back injury.<sup>233</sup>
- On December 12 or 13, Shamim was stopped at a checkpoint at Area 6 in Kabul. He was beaten by Taliban members from the Ministry of Interior.<sup>234</sup> After they searched his car and phone, they accused him of spreading fake news about the Taliban for the past 20 years. Shamim says he was hit with a belt and a gun and kicked in the head a few times, leaving his head swollen. Taliban members then filmed him and let him go. Shamim stated: *"What I was very concerned about after the incident was the stroke on my head. They had hit me on the head with kicks and gun stock. Parts of my head had been swollen and bruised. I was emotionally hurt [in shock] but was at the same time happy that I was alive because they had killed many [others]. They had killed many in Kabul and Mazar [-e Sharif] without any investigation."*
- Sajad was arrested and beaten three times by Taliban members.<sup>235</sup> He claims that before the fall of Kabul, the Taliban had a blacklist called "Caravan" and that his name was on that list, because he had been identified as a spy for the Kabul administration. First, Sajad and his cameraman

---

230 Al Jazeera, "Watchdog: 30 Recent Cases of Violence against Afghan Journalists," October 28, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/28/afghanistan-journalists-watchdog-violence-taliban-media> (accessed July 24, 2022).

231 AHRDO interview with Shukran (online), April 14, 2022.

232 AHRDO interview with Sabir (online), April 16, 2022.

233 AHRDO interview with Ali (in person), March 15, 2022.

234 AHRDO interview with Shamim (online), March 15, 2022.

235 AHRDO interview with Sajad (online), April 15, 2022.

were detained for six hours. They were beaten at the airport after he reported on people leaving Afghanistan immediately after the fall of Kabul. The second time, Sajad, his cameraman, and their driver were arrested by the provincial director of information and culture in Panjshir. They were put into the boot of a car and taken to Parwan. Local Taliban detained Sajad and then beat him in detention. He was released with a warning to never report about Panjshir or else they would kill him. During the third incident, Taliban agents attacked Sajad while he was reporting on a protest organized by civil society activists. He was taken to the National Security Department, where other journalists were also being held. He was interrogated and held in custody until late at night. During this time, he was beaten with a gun, punched, and kicked. “They beat me mercilessly,” Sajad recounted. He was released after ANJU and the Afghanistan Federation of Journalists intervened. The Taliban warned him not to report on what had happened to him and not to write “propaganda against the Taliban” or he would face harsh retaliation. His left ribs were broken, and he had to be hospitalized.

- On April 15, Rahib was arrested by Taliban officials while he was covering a suicide attack at a school in western Kabul. Taliban members inquired about who had given Rahib permission to be at the site of the incident and to issue news reports. Rahib showed his professional identity card, which the agents dismissed as invalid. They warned that he needed a permission letter from the Islamic Emirate or Najibullah Mujahid. They put a cloth over his head, tied his hand, and detained him. Rahib described that while he was in custody, he was hit with a gun, kicked, and slapped. He was released with a warning not to report any news that was damaging to “public values.”<sup>236</sup>

These cases show a few common patterns. First, all the journalists were beaten up merely for doing their jobs—gathering information and reporting on local issues, including public demonstrations and bomb attacks on civilian places. Second, they were specifically attacked because of their identity as journalists. Not one of them had committed any crime or posed any threat to the Taliban officials who arrested or attacked them. There was no cause for resorting to violence other than to intimidate the journalists. Third, in many of these cases, the Taliban resorted to extreme physical force, capable of causing permanent injury. Journalists were punched, kicked, hit in the head, beaten with belts and guns, and tied up during attacks. The level of violence resulted in wounds, bleeding, broken bones, head injuries, and, for some, lasting and chronic pain. Most journalists AHRDO spoke with had also been given warnings not to talk about their treatment through social media. They were warned to cease damaging the reputation of the Taliban with their critical reporting and, in some cases, warned that if they persisted, there would be worse consequences in the future.

Other reports show similar patterns, showing that members of the Taliban attacked journalists for reporting on women’s protests,<sup>237</sup> or on everyday issues of poverty and unemployment,<sup>238</sup> or difficulties of obtaining a passport,<sup>239</sup> or the urgent need to reopen public universities.<sup>240</sup> A report by HRW demonstrates that outside the capital, in the provinces, many journalists are harassed and beaten simply for reporting on anti-Taliban protests, on rising food prices, or other subjects that are seen as casting the Taliban in a negative light.<sup>241</sup> In November 2021, Mursal, a female journalist based in Takhar Province, was beaten with an iron rod by a Taliban member for allowing her wrist to show in public.<sup>242</sup>

---

236 AHRDO interview with Rahib (online), April 23, 2022.

237 See, e.g., Rahmani and Butler, “Afghanistan’s Intelligence Agency.”

238 Ziar Khan Yaad (@ziaryaad), Twitter, August 26, 2021, 3:52 p.m., [https://twitter.com/ziaryaad/status/1430769985702535170?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1430769985702535170%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5E%5E1\\_%ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.indiatoday.in%2Fworld%2Fstory%2Ftolo-news-journalist-thrashed-held-at-gunpoint-by-taliban-1845514-2021-08-26](https://twitter.com/ziaryaad/status/1430769985702535170?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1430769985702535170%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5E%5E1_%ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.indiatoday.in%2Fworld%2Fstory%2Ftolo-news-journalist-thrashed-held-at-gunpoint-by-taliban-1845514-2021-08-26) (accessed July 25, 2022).

239 Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Threatening Provincial Media.”

240 Committee to Protect Journalists, “Taliban Forces Beat Samadzai.”

241 Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Threatening Provincial Media.”

242 Amnesty International, “Death in Slow Motion: Women and Girls under the Taliban Rule,” 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/ASA1156852022ENGLISH.pdf>, 38.

Such attacks and abuse have detrimental effects for journalists, undermining freedom of the press in Afghanistan. Incidents of physical violence cause fear and panic, as well as self-censorship. Some journalists decided to flee the country; others quit journalism as a profession. These negative effects are demonstrated in the following examples documented by AHRDO:

- Morad was psychologically and physically affected after being shot at in December 2021. He no longer feels safe:

*Now, although I do not go out and [only] go to the hospital for treatment [or] physiotherapy occasionally, I am scared. I'm scared that the person who shot me will come to my home. This incident has affected me, and my family has also been deeply affected. . . . It has been seven months since I became bedridden, and I cannot move or work.<sup>243</sup>*

- Sabir was twice detained and beaten by the Taliban and also expressed fear and believes that if the current situation continues more journalists will leave their jobs:

*I cannot move freely after these two incidents. When I go out, I wear a hat and cover my head with a scarf. When I go to and come back from work, I am scared. If this situation continues, many journalists will leave their jobs and may seek daily-waged labour, becoming street peddlers or shopkeepers. When your life is at risk, it is better to leave your job and look for a different job. In order to make a living and feed our families, we will have to look for another [kind of] job.<sup>244</sup>*

- Nemat Naqdi is a journalist from Etilaat Roz. He was harshly beaten by the Taliban in November 2021 and decided to leave Afghanistan. He describes the current situation of Afghan journalists in the following terms:

*Journalists in Afghanistan have no freedom for discussion and no latitude. We have in fact fallen into a pit full of restrictions. My journalist friends in Afghanistan cannot go to work because they fear for their lives. Their minds are not at peace. The journalists who remain in Afghanistan are psychologically tortured. They are worried about their survival. The freedom of expression that we enjoyed in the past 20 years, we cannot find [even] 10 percent of it under the Taliban government. Currently, we have no such thing as freedom of expression. The media are under restrictions imposed by the Taliban. Our media had also been contacted and told to use the term Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan instead of the Taliban group [for this government].<sup>245</sup>*

- Taqi Daryab is another Etilaat Roz journalist. He was detained and beaten by the Taliban at the same time as Naqdi and describes how he lost hope about ever being able to work again as a journalist in Afghanistan under the Taliban. He felt forced to leave the country:

*Before this incident, I had some hope that the Taliban had changed and at least would not harm journalists and would let journalists do their work. We decided to stay and work in Afghanistan. In those early days, it was possible for journalists to get out of Afghanistan, as journalists were among the groups eligible to leave . . . but we wanted to stay and continue our work in Afghanistan. When this incident happened on September 8, 2021, I was completely disappointed. All of my colleagues lost hope and were disappointed too about the prospect of work, of keeping active, and our future. We have come to believe that the Taliban have not changed. They are the same Taliban*

---

243 AHRDO interview with Morad (online), April 15, 2022.

244 AHRDO interview with Sabir (online), April 16, 2022.

245 AHRDO interview with Naqdi (online), April 2, 2022.

*as two decades ago and still want to stop people working by beating, torturing, and killing them. They want to suppress all opposition. A group of us journalists continued our activities in the media and social media before being tortured. However, after the incident, we have seen a decrease in media engagement and we saw up close that journalists were scared. Many slowly distanced themselves from journalism. The same is the case with my own colleagues. They could not operate and work freely as in the past. The Taliban seek to prevent journalism and media activity by beating and torturing [us]. The Taliban have succeeded to some extent. A large number of media outlets have closed down. They have closed down their media due to fear of how the Taliban treat the media.*<sup>246</sup>

- Shukran, who was detained and beaten by the Taliban intelligence officials in Kabul, concludes that there are no free and independent media in Afghanistan and that everything is controlled by the Taliban:

*We have not had freedom of speech since the Taliban takeover. It directly impacted journalists' jobs. Journalists are not free anymore. Journalists cannot think freely, speak openly, and cannot produce and report on the news. Journalists now write and speak according to the orders they receive. Actually, their job is compulsory these days. Therefore, freedom of expression has been suffocated. The journalists who are currently in Afghanistan spend their days and nights worrying. They work without hope, and the only reason they still go to work is so as not to starve. The journalists' current goal is to save their families from poverty and hunger. They no longer can afford the ideals and high aspirations, of safeguarding freedom of speech and uncovering the truth. Since August 15, the media that has remained inside Afghanistan have not been able to work freely and independently. Rather they have had to adjust their modus operandi in line with the Taliban's orders.*<sup>247</sup>

Freedom of the press includes the right of journalists to be protected in their ability to perform their work. As noted previously, IHRL makes it clear that authorities never show a necessity to attack a journalist because of their journalistic work, even in if the journalist is highly critical of a regime and officials or leader, regardless of whether the criticisms are true or false.<sup>248</sup> Violence against journalists is in breach of freedom of expression and the press and may also violate other human rights protections.<sup>249</sup>

## Enforced Disappearances

Since August 2021, some cases of the forced disappearance of journalists and media workers have been reported, allegedly by the Taliban, although at times by “persons unknown.” Among the cases reported were the following:

- On December 26, 2021, dozens of armed men, identifying themselves as members of a militia affiliated with the Taliban-controlled Police District 4 in Kabul, stormed Aref Noori's house in Kart-e Parwan in Kabul and detained him.<sup>250</sup> On December 27, the CPJ reported that his location was unknown and called on the Taliban to immediately release Noori and stop intimidating the media.<sup>251</sup> Noori's son, Kashef Noori, told the CPJ that the family contacted

---

<sup>246</sup> AHRDO interview with Daryabi (online), March 31, 2022.

<sup>247</sup> AHRDO interview with Shukran (online), April 14, 2022.

<sup>248</sup> General Comment No. 34, para. 13.

<sup>249</sup> See, e.g., ICCPR, art. 7 (right not to be subjected to torture or cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment), art. 9 (right not to be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention).

<sup>250</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, “Afghan TV Station Owner Aref Noori Detained by Taliban-affiliated Militia,” December 27, 2021, <https://cpj.org/2021/12/afghan-tv-station-owner-aref-noori-detained-by-taliban-affiliated-militia/> (accessed July 25, 2022).

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

Police District 4, but the police denied any knowledge or involvement and referred the family to the GDI. The family contacted the GDI. They did not receive any response.

- On March 18, 2022, Reuters and other news outlets reported that several female journalists (and activists) have disappeared in recent months.<sup>252</sup> The Taliban have stated that they are investigating these disappearances.<sup>253</sup>
- On May 24, 2022, Ali Akbar Khairkhah, a photojournalist and reporter with a local newspaper, Subhe Kabul, disappeared in Kabul.<sup>254</sup> The morning of his disappearance, Khairkhah had told his family that he was going to the Kote Sangi area in District 5 to make a report.<sup>255</sup> His mother and brother told the local media they could not find any information about his whereabouts and contacted the Taliban authorities, suspecting their involvement in Khairkhah's abduction.<sup>256</sup> However, Taliban officials denied any involvement, claiming they were unaware of this disappearance.<sup>257</sup> On June 3, IPI stated that his family confirmed that Khairkhah was found after being missing for several days. They did not provide any details about what happened during his disappearance. However, on June 10, RSF reported that he "was arrested by a branch of the Istikhbarat five days before [being released] by 'unidentified men.'"<sup>258</sup>
- On May 24, Jamaluddin Deldar, the head of Gardiz Voice radio in Paktia Province, went missing in Kabul.<sup>259</sup> Deldar's family and colleagues suspected the Taliban of arresting Deldar but do not know why he was arrested.<sup>260</sup> A report by the RSF stated that Deldar "was arrested on 24 May, apparently in connection with his father's political views."<sup>261</sup> On June 3, the IPI confirmed that his whereabouts are still unknown.<sup>262</sup> The Taliban Ministry of Interior stated that it has launched investigations into Deldar's disappearance.<sup>263</sup>
- On June 12, Abdul Hanan Mohammadi, the provincial deputy of AIJA, was reported missing.<sup>264</sup> According to his family, Mohammadi had received threats from the Taliban.<sup>265</sup> Mohammadi's brother, Ishaq Mohammadi, stated that the journalist was detained by Taliban security forces.<sup>266</sup> The reasons for his disappearance are unknown.<sup>267</sup> AIJA demanded that the local Taliban authorities in Kapisa be held accountable and that Mohammadi's fate be clarified.<sup>268</sup> The president of AIJA, Hujatullah Mujadidi, and vice president, Farhad Behrooz, met with the deputy governor of Kapisa Province, Sheik, h Asadullah Sinan and the director of information and culture to advocate for Mohammadi's release.<sup>269</sup>

---

252 Reuters, "U.N. and U.S. Raise Concern."

253 Ibid.

254 A. Gul, "Global Monitors Decry Disappearance of 2 Journalists in Afghanistan," VOA News, May 31, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/global-monitors-decry-disappearance-of-2-journalists-in-afghanistan/6596682.html> (accessed July 25, 2022); F. Radfar, "Media Watchdogs Call for Answers on Missing Journalists, Writer," TOLONews, May 29, 2022, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-178234> (accessed July 25, 2022); Committee to Protect Journalists, "Ali Akbar Khairkhah Disappears."

255 Committee to Protect Journalists, "Ali Akbar Khairkhah Disappears"; Gul, "Global Monitors Decry Disappearance."

256 Committee to Protect Journalists, "Ali Akbar Khairkhah Disappears"; Gul, "Global Monitors Decry Disappearance."

257 Gul, "Global Monitors Decry Disappearance"; Cloteaux, "Two Journalists Go Missing"; Radfar, "Answers on Missing Journalists."

258 Reporters Without Borders, "Many Arbitrary Arrests."

259 Gul, "Global Monitors Decry Disappearance"; Radfar, "Answers on Missing Journalists."

260 Ibid.

261 Reporters Without Borders, "Many Arbitrary Arrests."

262 Cloteaux, "Two Journalists Go Missing."

263 Radfar, "Answers on Missing Journalists."

264 B. Binesh, "Journalist Mohammadi Missing Since Noon Sunday: Family," TOLONews, June 13, 2022, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/attack-mediajournalists-178460> (accessed July 25, 2022); S. Eqbal, "A Journalist in Kapisa Province Goes Missing; RSF Asks the Taliban to Provide 'Explanations,'" Khaama Press, June 13, 2022, <https://www.khaama.com/a-journalist-in-kapisa-province-goes-missing-reporters-without-borders-ask-the-taliban-to-provide-explanations-68759/> (accessed July 25, 2022); International Federation of Journalists, "Attacks to Media Continue."

265 International Federation of Journalists, "Attacks to Media Continue"; Eqbal, "Journalist in Kapisa Province."

266 International Federation of Journalists, "Attacks to Media Continue."

267 Ibid.

268 Eqbal, "Journalist in Kapisa Province."

269 International Federation of Journalists, "Attacks to Media Continue."

Enforced disappearance is prohibited under international human rights law and constitutes a crime against humanity. Moreover, international human right law obligates the authorities to investigate alleged forced disappearances and hold those responsible accountable.

## Killings

Some cases of killings of journalists and of their family members have also been reported. In its annual killed list for 2021, the IFJ identifies Afghanistan as the single most dangerous country in the world for journalists and other media workers.<sup>270</sup> According to the IFJ, nine Afghan journalists were killed in 2021.<sup>271</sup> In the first three months after the Taliban takeover, at least seven journalists were killed.<sup>272</sup> On August 19, Deutsche Welle (DW), a German media company, reported that while conducting a house-to-house search for an Afghan journalist employed by the company, Taliban agents shot dead one of the journalist's family members and seriously injured another.<sup>273</sup> On August 26, Ali Reza Ahmadi, a reporter from Raha News was killed in the Kabul airport suicide bombing.<sup>274</sup> On October 2, Sayed Maroof Sadat, a former government spokesperson and journalist, was shot dead in Jalalabad City in Nangarhar Province.<sup>275</sup> On November 13, Hamid Saighani, a journalist from Ariana TV, was killed in a bomb blast on a minibus in Kabul.<sup>276</sup> While ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack, unconfirmed sources told Khaama Press Agency that Saighani may not have died in the bus attack at all but may have been assassinated.<sup>277</sup> On May 25, 2022, Maryam Madadi, a female former radio journalist, was killed in a series of targeted bomb attacks in Mazar-e-Sharif.<sup>278</sup>

## Lack of Investigations and Accountability

Afghan journalists have frequently called on the Taliban de facto government to investigate cases of violence against journalists and bring those responsible to justice.<sup>279</sup> Instead of investigating and holding the perpetrators to account, the Taliban leadership has adopted a strategy of denial, regularly dismissing complaints and evidence of violations as “false news” or “baseless rumors.”<sup>280</sup> Also, they refuse to respond to inquiries about the detention and mistreatment of journalists by their own forces.<sup>281</sup> In some cases, Taliban officials have stated that they are either investigating or will launch investigations into specific incidents.<sup>282</sup> However, because there is no publicly available information about such investigations, it is not even clear if and when they have commenced, and their outcome remains unknown.

The Taliban leadership have made other promises they have not fulfilled. Mujahid has previously stated that the “Islamic Emirate” recognizes that the behavior of the Taliban security forces “has not always been correct

---

270 International Federation of Journalists, “2021 Killed List,” Belgium, 2022, [https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/IFJ\\_KILLED\\_LIST\\_2021\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/user_upload/IFJ_KILLED_LIST_2021_FINAL.pdf), 5.

271 Ibid.

272 VOA News, “UN Call on Taliban.”

273 DW, “Relative DW Journalist Killed.”

274 International Federation of Journalists, “2021 Killed List,” 4.

275 International Federation of Journalists, “Afghanistan: Journalist Sayed Sadat Gunned Down,” October 5, 2021, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/afghanistan-journalist-sayed-marooof-sadat-gunned-down.html> (accessed July 25, 2022).

276 International Federation of Journalists, “Afghanistan: Former Ariana Television Journalist Killed in Explosion,” November 16, 2021, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/afghanistan-former-ariana-television-journalist-killed-in-explosion.html> (accessed July 25, 2022).

277 N. Lalzoy, “ISIS-K Claims Responsibility for Kabul’s Explosion,” Khaama News, November 15, 2021, <https://www.khaama.com/isis-k-claims-responsibility-for-kabuls-explosion-564634/> (accessed July 25, 2022).

278 CFWIJ, “Women Journalists.”

279 G. Rahimi, “TV Anchor Beaten by Unknown Assaultants in Kabul,” TOLONews, November 21, 2021, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/attack-mediajournalists-175558> (accessed July 25, 2022); M. Morwat,

280 GDI, (@GDI1415), Twitter, January 20, 2022.

281 VOA News, “UN Call on Taliban”; Committee to Protect Journalists, “Lawrand to Stop Critical Reporting”; Committee to Protect Journalists, “Taliban Members Beat Journalists.”

282 Reuters, “U.N. and U.S. Raise Concern”; Radfar, “Answers on Missing Journalists.”

and professional” and that the authorities will make efforts to “try to train them and control such behaviour.”<sup>283</sup> However, as demonstrated in part III of this report, the Taliban forces continue to intimidate, arbitrarily arrest and detain, and mistreat journalists. All this is indicative of the regime’s failure to properly train and control their own personnel or impose any kind of discipline.

Mujahid also stated that Taliban officials would meet regularly with media representatives “in order to jointly find solutions” to any problems that arose.<sup>284</sup> This statement has not been reflected in daily practice, however, because the Taliban has unilaterally passed several sets of media restrictions, without any consultation with media representatives whatsoever. The Taliban have several times announced that they would establish a new media commission, to prevent “misunderstandings and address violations against members of the media.”<sup>285</sup> A similar commission that existed under the previous regime was disbanded.<sup>286</sup> In a meeting with the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee, Mujahid expressed the hope that once this commission was set up, no government institution in the “Islamic Emirate” would need to interfere in the work of the media.<sup>287</sup> Despite all these repeated commitments and promises, requests from journalists to create such a body to address ongoing problems<sup>288</sup> have not led to any further moves to create such a commission.<sup>289</sup>

According to Mujahid, the 2015 Media Law remains operative and will be kept in place under the new regime.<sup>290</sup> This law incorporates a requirement to comply with international law, including provisions on freedom of expression. Yet new rules do not mention IHRL and are inconsistent with international principles on media freedom. The Taliban’s conduct also violates the 2015 Media Law, which prevents the Istikhbarat from intervening in media and detaining journalists before a media commission has made an assessment.<sup>291</sup> As demonstrated in this report, the Taliban security forces routinely arrest and mistreat journalists, without any basis and/or assessments by any such commission.

It follows that the situation in Afghanistan is such that violations against journalists take place without any investigations and accountability—indeed with almost total impunity. As expressed by one Afghan reporter from Baghlan Province, “If something happens to a journalist, there is no institution or system to support them, or to seek justice.”<sup>292</sup> Similarly, Yasin complained about the absence of a system and structure for the protection of journalists, asking: “Who do we complain to? Who will hear our voices?”<sup>293</sup> According to Yasin, not the Taliban. “The Taliban do not see us as the media; they see us as an adversary and enemy,” he explained. Another journalist shares a similar view:

*The Taliban seek to eradicate all the media so the international community does not learn about whatever they do. The only group that acts against the Taliban is the journalists because this group monitors, reports, and publicizes the Taliban’s behaviour and performance. The Taliban also secretly threaten, torture, and, in some cases, eliminate the journalists but no one holds them accountable. Right now, tens of journalists are imprisoned in Kabul and [other] provinces but their families are not aware of their fates.*<sup>294</sup>

---

283 Reporters Without Borders, “Taliban Takeover.”

284 Ibid.

285 Reporters Without Borders, “Act Quickly”; Salam Watandar, “Mujahid Says No Issues.”

286 Reporters Without Borders, “Act Quickly.”

287 Salam Watandar, “Mujahid Says No Issues.”

288 Reporters Without Borders, “Act Quickly.”

289 While this report covers the period August 2021 to June 2022, media reports from August 2022 indicate that the Taliban has initiated a new media commission. However, whether this Commission is operative remains unknown and recent reports demonstrate continued Taliban interferences in media affairs. See: Etilaatroz, “Taliban: Ba khateri rasidagi ba mushkelat rasaanaha, dar Kabul yak kometa ejaad shuda ast”, [Taliban: A committee is established in Kabul to address media problems] 8 August 2022. ([etilaatroz.com](http://etilaatroz.com))

290 Reporters Without Borders, “Act Quickly”; Salam Watandar, “Mujahid Says No Issues.”

291 Reporters Without Borders, “Act Quickly.”

292 Human Rights Watch, “Taliban Threatening Provincial Media.”

293 AHRDO interview with Yasin (online), July 26, 2022.

294 AHRDO interview with Sajad (online), April 15, 2022.

One of the main and probably only means of raising awareness about the ongoing violations is the Afghan media itself. In particular, in the absence of any formal investigative body, the Afghan media advocacy organizations such as AIJA, ANJU, AJSC, and ASJ play a vital role in escalating complaints, advocating on behalf of journalists, and monitoring and reporting incidents of violence against the media. Indeed, some of these institutions have been critical in negotiating the release of journalists from Taliban custody, as has been shown in some of the examples discussed in this report.

# CONCLUSION

The return of the Taliban radically changed the media landscape in Afghanistan. Since August 2021, the Afghan media has gone into rapid decline. The new policies and practices severely constrain the ability of journalists and other members of the Afghan media to operate freely and independently. The Taliban now regulates and controls every aspect of their work. Coercive measures are used to enforce compliance with the media rules and expectations of loyalty. The rules give Taliban officials control over what can and cannot be published and broadcast, depriving news outlets, editors, and journalists of any agency and independence. The rules impose vague and open-ended prohibitions, virtually forbidding any news reporting or critical commentary that has not had prior approval. The failure to provide operational definitions for terms used in prohibitive provisions and specify penalties for noncompliance, leave wide discretion to Taliban officials to interpret and apply broad preventative and coercive powers, exposing journalists to arbitrary reprisals. Journalists, both men and women, are under widespread and systematic attacks and have been subjected to surveillance, intimidation, arbitrary arrests and detentions, physical abuse, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings.

Despite promising to leave the media to operate in peace, in practice, the Taliban has demonstrated little or no commitment to press freedoms. On the contrary, the findings of this report demonstrate the Taliban's intention to control and censor the media, which remains one of the only mechanisms for monitoring the Taliban's behavior and raising awareness about abuse of power. The current circumstances indicate that media conditions are likely to deteriorate under the Taliban regime unless, by miracle, the regime changes its approach. The likelihood of a change in the Taliban is implausible, highlighting the importance of sustained and coordinated international efforts to protect what has remained of the Afghan media.



# BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbasi, F. “Afghanistan’s Taliban Crack Down on Vloggers.” Human Rights Watch, June 14, 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/14/afghanistans-taliban-crack-down-vloggers>. (Accessed July 24, 2022.)
- Afghanistan Journalists Center. “Taliban’s Takeover of Afghanistan.” March 16, 2022. <https://ajfc.media/english/>. (Accessed July 21, 2022.)
- Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (@ajsc-afg). 2022. Twitter, April 7, 2022, 6:35 p.m. [https://twitter.com/ajsc\\_afg/status/1511986709986168840](https://twitter.com/ajsc_afg/status/1511986709986168840).
- Ahad, Z., and R. Kumar. “Afghan Female Journalists Defiant as Taliban Restrictions Grow.” *Al Jazeera*, May 24, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/24/afghan-female-journalists-defiant-as-taliban-restrictions-grow>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)
- Al Jazeera. “Taliban Release Three Afghan Journalists after Media Crackdown,” March 18, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/18/taliban-release-three-afghan-tv-staffers-detained-over-media-ban>. (Accessed July 22, 2022.)
- . “Watchdog: 30 Recent Cases of Violence against Afghan Journalists,” October 28, 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/28/afghanistan-journalists-watchdog-violence-taliban-media>. (Accessed July 24, 2022.)
- Amnesty International. “Death in Slow Motion: Women and Girls under the Taliban Rule.” 2022. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/ASA1156852022ENGLISH.pdf>.
- Ariana News. “Afghanistan Falls 34 Places in World Press Freedom Index.” <https://www.ariananews.af/afghanistan-falls-34-places-in-world-press-freedom-index/#:~:text=Afghanistan%20moved%2034%20places%20down,safety%20of%20journalists%2C%20especially%20women>. (Accessed July 22, 2022.)
- Binesh, B. “Journalist Mohammadi Missing Since Noon Sunday: Family.” *TOLONews*, June 13, 2022. <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/attack-mediajournalists-178460>. (Accessed July 25, 2022.)
- CFWIJ. “Press Freedom Status for Women Journalists: May 2022.” May 2022, <https://www.womeninjournalism.org/reports-all/press-freedom-status-for-women-journalists-may-2022>.
- Cloteaux, S. “Afghanistan: Two Journalists Go Missing, Two Detained.” International Press Institute, June 3, 2022. <https://ipi.media/afghanistan-two-journalists-go-missing-two-detained/>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

Committee to Protect Journalists. “Afghan Journalist Ali Akbar Khairkhah Disappears in Kabul, Taliban Cracks Down on Women Reporters,” May 27, 2022, <https://cpj.org/2022/05/afghan-journalist-ali-akbar-khairkhah-disappears-in-kabul-taliban-cracks-down-on-women-reporters/>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

———. “Afghan Journalist Khalid Qaderi Sentenced to 1 Year in Prison,” May 6, 2022. <https://cpj.org/2022/05/afghan-journalist-khalid-qaderi-sentenced-to-1-year-in-prison/>. (Accessed July 24, 2022.)

———. “Taliban Forces Beat, Interrogate Journalist Zahid Samadzai in Kabul,” February 3, 2022. <https://cpj.org/2022/02/taliban-forces-beat-interrogate-journalist-zahid-samadzai-in-kabul/>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

———. “Taliban Forces Beat Journalist Reza Shahir, Charges 3 Others over Corruption Reporting,” June 9, 2022. <https://cpj.org/2022/06/taliban-forces-beat-journalist-reza-shahir-charge-3-others-over-corruption-reporting/>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

———. “Taliban Intelligence Agents Detain, Pressure Afghan Journalists Jebran Lawrand to Stop Critical Reporting,” May 23, 2022. <https://cpj.org/2022/05/taliban-intelligence-agents-detain-pressure-afghan-journalist-jebran-lawrand-to-stop-critical-reporting/>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

———. “Taliban Members Beat Journalist at Kabul Checkpoint, Detain 2 Others,” June 22, 2022. <https://cpj.org/2022/06/taliban-members-beat-journalist-at-kabul-checkpoint-detain-2-others/>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Dec. 18, 1979, U.N.T.S 1249.

Daryush, F. “Afghan Female Reporters Fear Increased Restrictions.” TOLONews, March 7, 2022. <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/attack-mediajournalists-176237>. (Accessed July 20, 2022.)

DW. “Afghanistan: Journalists Encounter Tough Times under Taliban Rule,” October 7, 2021. <https://www.dw.com/en/afghanistan-journalists-encounter-tough-times-under-taliban-rule/a-59439857>. (Accessed July 22, 2022.)

———. “Relative of DW Journalist Killed by the Taliban,” August 19, 2021. <https://www.dw.com/en/relative-of-dw-journalist-killed-by-the-taliban/a-58912975>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

Eqbal, S. “A Journalist in Kapisa Province Goes Missing; RSF Asks the Taliban to Provide ‘Explanations.’” Khaama Press, June 13, 2022. <https://www.khaama.com/a-journalist-in-kapisa-province-goes-missing-reporters-without-borders-ask-the-taliban-to-provide-explanations-68759/>. (Accessed July 25, 2022.)

Eyo, U. “Afghanistan: Journalist Khalid Qaderi Sentenced to Prison for Criticising Taliban.” International Press Institute, May 10 2022. <https://ipi.media/afghanistan-journalist-khalid-qaderi-sentenced-to-prison-for-criticizing-taliban/>. (Accessed July 24, 2022.)

Faizi, W., and F. Paimani. “Taliban Want to Erase Women from Media, Afghan Journalists Say.” *VOA News*, May 20, 2022. <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-want-to-erase-women-from-media-afghan-journalists-say/6583256.html#:~:text=The%20Taliban%20takeover%20had%20an,their%20jobs%20since%20August%202021>, (emphasis added). (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

Fetrat, S., and H. Barr. “Afghans Call to #FreeHerFace.” *Human Rights Watch*, May 23, 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/23/afghans-call-freeherface>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

Gandhara. “Media Watchdog Demands Release of Afghan Journalist Held by Taliban,” May 7, 2022. <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/adghanistan-journalist-qaderi-taliban-cpj-release/31839020.html>. (Accessed July 24, 2022.)

GDI, (@GDI1415). Twitter, January 20, 2022, 5:03 p.m. <https://twitter.com/GDI1415/status/1484043786074345475>.

Graham-Harrison, E. “Taliban Order All Afghan Women to Cover Their Faces in Public.” *The Guardian*, May 8, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/07/taliban-order-all-afghan-women-to-wear-burqa>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

Gul, A. “Global Monitors Decry Disappearance of 2 Journalists in Afghanistan.” *VOA News*, May 31, 2022. <https://www.voanews.com/a/global-monitors-decry-disappearance-of-2-journalists-in-afghanistan/6596682.html>. (Accessed July 25, 2022.)

———. “Taliban Order Afghan Female TV Presenters to Cover Faces.” *VOA News*, May 19, 2022. <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-order-afghan-female-tv-presenters-to-cover-faces-/6580605.html>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

Hasht e Subh. “Taliban Arrests the Owner of Aftab Radio Station,” March 29, 2022. <https://8am.af/eng/taliban-arrests-the-owner-of-aftab-radio-station-in-daikundi/>. (Accessed July 24, 2022.)

———. “Taliban Warns Media Not to Publish Rumors,” January 20, 2022. <https://8am.af/eng/taliban-warns-media-not-to-publish-false-news/>. (Accessed July 22, 2022.)

Human Rights Watch. “Afghanistan: Taliban Crackdown on Media Worsens,” November 22, 2021. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/22/afghanistan-taliban-crackdown-media-worsens-o>. (Accessed July 22, 2022.)

———. “Afghanistan: Taliban Target Journalists, Women in Media,” April 1, 2021. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/01/afghanistan-taliban-target-journalists-women-media>.

———. “Afghanistan: Taliban Severely Restrict Media,” October 1, 2021. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/01/afghanistan-taliban-severely-restrict-media>. (Accessed July 22, 2022.)

———. “Afghanistan: Taliban Threatening Provincial Media,” March 7, 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/07/afghanistan-taliban-threatening-provincial-media>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Dec. 16, 1996, 999 U.N.T.S 171.

International Federation of Journalists. “Afghanistan: Draconian Media Rules Set to Further Strangle Media,” September 28, 2021. <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/afghanistan-draconian-media-rules-set-to-further-strangle-media.html>. (Accessed July 22, 2022.)

———. “Afghanistan: Former Ariana Television Journalist Killed in Explosion,” November 16, 2021. <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/afghanistan-former-ariana-television-journalist-killed-in-explosion.html>. (Accessed July 25, 2022.)

———. “Afghanistan: Journalists Beaten and Arrested by Taliban Militants,” June 10, 2022., <https://www.ifj.org/es/centro-de-medios/noticias/detalle/category/press-releases/article/afghanistan-journalist-beaten-and-arrested-by-taliban-militants.html>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

———. “Afghanistan: Journalist Sayed Sadat Gunned Down,” October 5, 2021. <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/afghanistan-journalist-sayed-marroof-sadat-gunned-down.html>. (Accessed July 25, 2022.)

———. “Afghanistan: Journalist Sentenced to Prison for Criticism of Taliban Regime,” May 12, 2022. <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/afghanistan-journalist-sentenced-to-prison-for-criticism-of-taliban-regime.html>. (Accessed July 24, 2022.)

———. “Afghanistan: Taliban Detains Three Media Workers,” June 2, 2022. <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/afghanistan-taliban-detains-three-media-workers.html>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

———. “Afghanistan: Taliban’s New Directives Will Further Muzzle Press Freedom,” November 30, 2021. <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/afghanistan-talibans-new-directives-will-further-muzzle-press-freedom.html>. (Accessed July 22, 2022.)

———. “Solidarity and Survival: The Story of South Asia Afghanistan Country Report” (IFJ, 20th Annual South Asia Press Freedom Report 2021–2022, CI-2022/RP/2, 2022). <http://samsn.ifj.org/SAPFR21-22/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/IFJ-SAPFR21-2-SolidaritySurvival-Afghanistan.pdf>.

———. “Afghanistan: 87% of Women Journalists Have Suffered Discrimination under Taliban Rule,” March 9, 2022. <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/afghanistan-87-of-women-journalists-have-suffered-discrimination-under-taliban-rule.html#:~:text=79%25%20of%20women%20journalists%20said,officials%2C%20written%20and%20verbal%20threats.&text=Respondents%20also%20shared%20deep%20concerns,lack%20of%20a%20media%20law>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

———. “2021 Killed List.” Belgium, 2022. [https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/IFJ\\_KILLED\\_LIST\\_2021\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/user_upload/IFJ_KILLED_LIST_2021_FINAL.pdf).

International Press Institute. “Afghanistan: Taliban Detain TOLO News Employees, One Journalist Still in Custody,” March 18, 2022. <https://ipi.media/afghanistan-taliban-detain-tolo-news-employees-one-journalist-still-in-custody/>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

Lalzoj, N. “ISIS-K Claims Responsibility for Kabul’s Explosion.” Khaama News, November 15, 2021. <https://www.khaama.com/isis-k-claims-responsibility-for-kabuls-explosion-564634/>. (Accessed July 25, 2022.)

Lawrand, Jebran. Facebook, April 24, 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/100001151883899/posts/5030894733625540/?d=n/>.

Morwat, M. “Journalist Stabbed in Kabul, Increased Attacks on Media Reported.” TOLONews, January 1, 2022. <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/attack-mediajournalists-175967>. (Accessed July 25, 2022.)

Noorzai, R. “What Taliban’s Publishing, Broadcasting Directives Mean for Afghan Media,” October 1, 2021. <https://www.voanews.com/a/what-taliban-s-publishing-broadcasting-directives-mean-for-afghan-media-/6253972.html#:~:text=Under%20rules%201%2D3%2C%20media,national%20figures%2C%20or%20violating%20privacy>. (Accessed July 22, 2022.)

O’Kane, C. “A Photojournalist Was Killed by Taliban Fighters, Reuters Says.” CBS News, August 24, 2021. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/danish-siddiqui-photojournalist-killed-taliban/>. (Accessed July 25, 2022.)

Qaane, E. “Regime Change, Economic Decline and No Legal Protection: What Has Happened to the Afghan Media?” Afghanistan Analyst Network, March 7, 2022. <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/rights-freedom/regime-change-economic-decline-and-no-legal-protection-what-has-happened-to-the-afghan-media/>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

Radfar, F. “Media Watchdogs Call for Answers on Missing Journalists, Writer.” TOLONews, May 29, 2022. <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-178234>. (Accessed July 25, 2022.)

Rahimi, G. “TV Anchor Beaten by Unknown Assailants in Kabul.” TOLONews, November 21, 2021. <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/attack-mediajournalists-175558>. (Accessed July 25, 2022.)

Rahmani, W., and S. Buttler. “Afghanistan’s Intelligence Agency Emerges as New Threat to Independent Media.” CPJ, March 2, 2022. <https://cpj.org/2022/03/afghanistans-intelligence-agency-emerges-as-new-threat-to-independent-media/>. (Accessed July 22, 2022.)

Rawa News. “The Kabul Times Reporter Was Beaten by the Taliban,” December 11, 2021. <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2021/12/11/the-kabul-times-reporter-was-beaten-by-the-taliban.html#ixzz7MNDTPIBN>. (Accessed July 20, 2022.)

Reporters Without Borders. “Afghanistan: ‘11 Journalism Rules’ Imposed by Taliban Open Way to Censorship and Arbitrary Decisions, RSF Warns.” <https://rsf.org/en/afghanistan-11-journalism-rules-imposed-taliban-open-way-censorship-and-arbitrary-decisions-rsf>. (Accessed July 22, 2022.)

———. “Fewer Than 100 Kabul’s 700 Journalists Still Working,” August 31, 2021. <https://rsf.org/en/fewer-100-kabuls-700-women-journalists-still-working>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

———. “Many Arbitrary Arrests of Journalists in Afghanistan,” June 10, 2022. <https://rsf.org/en/many-arbitrary-arrests-journalists-afghanistan>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

———. “RSF Condemns the Taliban’s Attempt to Cover Afghan Women Journalists’ Faces.” <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-condemns-taliban%E2%80%99s-attempt-cover-afghan-women-journalists%E2%80%99-faces>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

———. “Since the Taliban Takeover, 40% of Afghan Media Have Closed, 80% of Women Journalists Have Lost Their Jobs.” <https://rsf.org/en/taliban-takeover-40-afghan-media-have-closed-80-women-journalists-have-lost-their-jobs>. (accessed 20 July 2022).

Reuters. “U.N. and U.S. Raise Concern over Reports of Afghan Journalists Arrests,” March 18, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/un-us-raise-concern-over-reports-afghan-journalist-arrests-2022-03-18/>. (Accessed July 24, 2022.)

Saeed, S. “Taliban 2.0: Older, Media-Savvy and Still Duplicitous.” Politico, August 20, 2021. <https://www.politico.eu/article/taliban-afghanistan-rebrand>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

Salam Watandar. “Intimidation of Journalists Continue,” May 30, 2022. <https://swn.af/en/2022/05/30/intimidation-of-journalists-continue/>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

———. “Mujahid Says no Issues with the Media Law,” February 2, 2022. <https://swn.af/en/2022/02/02/8211/>. (accessed 20 July 2022).

Shaheed, M. “Taliban Detain Human Rights Activists Planning Protest of Pakistan Official's Visit.” *VOA News*, January 19, 2022. <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-detain-human-rights-activists-planning-protest-of-pakistan-official-s-visit-/6402892.html>. (Accessed July 20, 2022.)

SIGAR (@SIGARHQ). Twitter, June 22, 2022, 5:15 p.m. <https://twitter.com/SIGARHQ/status/1540594478267990018>.

*The Guardian*. “Afghan Journalists Decry Taliban Rules Restricting Role of Women on TV,” November 24, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/23/afghan-journalists-taliban-rules-restricting-role-women-on-tv>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

*The Print*. “UN Extends Support to Afghanistan’s Embattled Media,” April 7, 2021. <https://theprint.in/world/un-extends-support-to-afghanistans-embattled-media/905981/>. (Accessed July 22, 2022.)

Treisman, R. “Male Afghan TV Anchors Cover Faces in Solidarity with Woman after a Taliban Order.” NPR, May 24, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/24/1100957881/free-her-face-afghan-tv-anchors-face-coverings-taliban>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

UNAMA. “UN Releases Report on Human Rights in Afghanistan,” July 20, 2022. [https://unama.unmissions.org/un-releases-report-human-rights-afghanistan-taliban-takeover#\\_ftn1](https://unama.unmissions.org/un-releases-report-human-rights-afghanistan-taliban-takeover#_ftn1). (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

UN Commission on the Status of Women. Situation of Women and Girls in Afghanistan, 44th Session, UN DOC E/CN.6/2000/L.4. February 29, 2000.

UN Human Rights Committee. General Comment No. 34 Article 19: Freedom of Opinion and Expression, 102nd Session, UN Doc. CCPR/C/GC/34. September 12, 2011.

*VOA News*. “Media Watchdogs, UN Call on Taliban to Stop Arbitrary Detention of Journalists in Afghanistan,” April 13, 2022. <https://www.voanews.com/a/media-watchdogs-un-call-on-taliban-to-stop-arbitrary-detention-of-journalists-in-afghanistan-/6527948.html>. (Accessed July 23, 2022.)

*West Observer*. “Afghan Journalists in Kandahar Speaks Out about Taliban Repression,” May 4, 2022. <https://westobserver.com/news/united-states/afghan-journalists-in-kandahar-speak-out-about-taliban-repression/>. (Accessed July 22, 2022.)

Wietzorrek, A. “Journalism under Fire—a Global Surge in Unlawful Violations against Journalists.” The Organisation for World Peace, October 14, 2020. <https://theowp.org/reports/journalism-under-fire-a-global-surge-in-unlawful-violations-against-journalists/>. (Accessed July 22, 2022.)

Ziar Khan Yaad (@ziaryaad). Twitter, August 26, 2021, 3:52 p.m. [https://twitter.com/ziaryaad/status/1430769985702535170?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1430769985702535170%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5E%5E1&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.indiatoday.in%2Fworld%2Fstory%2Ftolo-news-journalist-thrashed-held-at-gunpoint-by-taliban-1845514-2021-08-26](https://twitter.com/ziaryaad/status/1430769985702535170?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1430769985702535170%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5E%5E1&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.indiatoday.in%2Fworld%2Fstory%2Ftolo-news-journalist-thrashed-held-at-gunpoint-by-taliban-1845514-2021-08-26). (Accessed July 25, 2022.)





Justice  
Truth  
Dignity



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the  
Netherlands