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Asia - Afghanistan

Growing violence

Ghani presidency's first 100 days: hopes persist despite more violence against journalists

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Reporters Without Borders welcomes the appointment of several human rights and freedom of information defenders in the new national unity government that was finally formed on 12 January. They include Najiba Ayubi, a journalist on the Reporters Without Borders list of "100 information heroes," and Ai Soltan Khirie, a renowned poet and journalist.

The first 100 days of the government led by President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah have seen significant advances for media freedom.

The two leaders made several [statements in support of freedom of information](#) in September. Key measures favouring freedom of information have also been taken. They include modifying the access to information law, eliminating the Media Offences Commission, and the planned creation of a media regulatory body under a new media law.

But this period has also seen the continuation of a wave of violence against journalists than was unleashed when election coverage began last October. The [Taliban stepped up attacks on the civilian population](#) more than a year ago, and their targets have included journalists and media.

Reporters Without Borders has also noted at least nine arrests of journalists and bloggers, 55 attacks or threats against information providers, five abductions and four fatal attacks, in which two of the victims were foreign reporters.

Despite this wave of violence, Afghan journalists have continued to [play an important and responsible role in providing coverage of the elections](#) and the post-election political crisis.

"The main reason for the continuing violence and resulting instability has been the war waged by the Taliban against the desire for peace and democracy that the Afghan people demonstrated in the presidential election," said Reza Moini, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Iran-Afghanistan desk.

"But news media and journalists are increasingly being threatened by local government officials and military personnel. All of these abuses must be stopped," Moini added.

Reporters Without Borders reiterates the importance of the need for the Afghan government to address the following essential points and to consider the recommendations that Reporters Without Borders made in its March 2014 report entitled "[Presidential election in Afghanistan: local media on the front line](#)":

- Abuses against journalists, which mostly take place outside the capital, continue to go unpunished. At least 32 journalists have been killed in connection with their work since 2002. Women journalists are often singled out for acts of violence and intimidation.
- The new interior and justice ministries must relaunch investigations into past murders and serious cases of violence against journalists. They must also ensure that the police investigate every new attack or threat against journalists and do what is necessary to punish those responsible and provide prosecutors and judges with complete case files.

- The information ministry must foster editorial independence in the state-owned news media.
- The government and religious authorities must defend the right of women to work as journalists, including TV journalists, in the same way that men do.

Afghanistan is ranked 128th out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

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