

Afghan Women Journalists Under the Taliban

Side event in the margins of the 68th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women

Moderated panel debate followed by Q&A session with audience

12 March 2024, 1.15-2.30 PM

Conference Room D, United Nations Headquarters, New York

The media plays a crucial role in challenging the gender norms and stereotypes that are root causes of gender inequality. By providing the public with women role models, women voices, and women perspectives, the media facilitates that women can become an active part of society. It also plays a key role in ensuring women's access to information, educating women about their rights to social protection, investigating violations of women's rights and holding decision makers accountable for providing social protection, public services, and infrastructure for gender equality. But in Taliban's Afghanistan, women's participation in the media - both as journalists and sources - have been put under heavy pressure. Women are no longer allowed to study journalism at university. Women journalists cannot attend press conferences, report from the scene of events or interview the Taliban. Women journalists that still work in the media are obliged to cover their faces.

In 2022, the Afghan National Journalists' Union (ANJU) conducted a survey on the situation of women journalists, and found that:

- 87% of women journalists have experienced gender discrimination during the Taliban regime.
- 60% of women journalists have lost their jobs and careers.
- 79% of women journalists said they have been insulted and threatened under the Taliban regime, including physical threats, abuse by Taliban officials, and written and verbal threats.
- 91% of working women journalists were the sole economic support of their families.
- 87% of women journalists are not motivated to work in the current situation due to fear.

Luckily, there are still women journalists resisting the oppression and courageously persisting in producing media content. These journalists take tremendous risks for their lives and need the support of the international community.

International Media Support (IMS) has been active in Afghanistan for more than 20 years, with a particular focus on promoting and enhancing the safety of media content producers and to ensure access to reliable information for the people in Afghanistan. The programmes are attentive towards gender balance and minorities, founded on the strong belief in the importance of enabling women and members of marginalized groups to participate equally and freely in the media as an integral part of democratic development. Similarly, UNESCO as the UN specialized agency to support freedom of expression and safety of journalists has been supporting the Afghan media sector for over 20 years. Through the EU-funded project "Support to Afghan Media Resilience to Foster Peace and Security" it places particular emphasis on ensuring women's voices can continue to be heard.

During this side event in the margins of CSW68, we will hear the testimonies of women journalists from Afghanistan, how they defy oppression, tirelessly continue their reporting on the violations and atrocities, while steadily standing up for their and other women's rights. Specific focus will be given on how the international community can support Afghan women journalists to continue their work for human rights.



The **format** for the event will be a moderated debate with women journalists in and from Afghanistan and representatives from international organizations. The panelists will describe the challenges they face, but also share their methods for resisting and surviving, and deliver their demands for support from the international community.

The **target group** of the planned panel debate is representatives of governments, international organizations and civil society.

The **specific objective** of the proposed event is to create awareness on the dire situation of women journalists under the Taliban rule in today's Afghanistan and to **explore ways of support from the international community**.

Agenda

1. *Opening remarks*

Marie Bjerre, Minister for Digital Government and Gender Equality, Denmark

2. *Panel 1 - Experience of Afghan women journalists*

Main Panelists:

1. Wahida Faizi, Afghan journalist and Gender Coordinator at International Media Support
2. Farahnaz Forotan, Afghan journalist and women's rights activist. Founder of the women led KAAJ media and former journalist of TOLO news
3. Lima Anwari, Women's Rights and Youth Advocate
4. Zaki Daryabi, Director Etilaatroz and KabulNow

Moderator: Malin Palm, International Media Support

3. *Panel 2 - What can the international community do*

Main Panelists:

1. Sofia Orrebrink, Lead Policy Specialist Gender Equality, Sida
2. Katarina Clifford, Counsellor and Head of Human Rights & Social Issues, Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations
3. Antonia Eser-Ruperti, Associate Programme Officer, UNESCO
4. UN Women - TBC

Moderator: Malin Palm, International Media Support

4. *Q & A with attendees*

5. *Closing remarks*