

## Declaration of Afghanistan's National Journalists Union

January 16, 2007

Freedom of speech in Afghanistan is facing new challenges and Afghan media are encountering more problems with every passing day. It is obvious from the events of past one year that the Afghan government has reduced its support to free flow of information in the society and has caused more restrictions on media work.

The Afghan Mass Media Law 2006 provides for transformation of state-run Radio Television of Afghanistan (RTA) into a public service broadcaster (PSB) and determines practical mechanisms in this regard. However, the Minister of Information and Culture has made it impossible for RTA to become a public broadcaster by not adhering to the law and moreover by embarking on new appointments in RTA contrary to the legal frameworks laid down in Mass Media Law for executing such high level changes. National media must belong to people and state of Afghanistan as a whole and changing them into a propaganda tool in the hands of the Executive Branch can be counted an attempt towards returning to authoritarian culture.

The Minister of Information and Culture while introducing one of his newly appointed officials in RTA used threatening and violent language against RTA employees who objected to the new appointment, and he forced them out of RTA premises. Mr. Karim Khurram also dismissed at once over 80 new and part-time staff members of RTA and took away their right of entering the RTA compound. This measure is against all codes of administration as well as job security of people in a society, and more importantly it strikes a severe blow on the creative talents and motivations of the dismissed young people and child presenters all of whom had an outstanding role in producing some of the new and most interesting TV programmes on RTA, and there is no doubt that they are responsible for future of RTA and of journalism of Afghanistan.

Breaking artistic pictures or removing such pieces from walls of the ministry is another measure by the Minister that journalists and cultural circles have been discussing in various gatherings and expressing their grave concerns about it. The issue has revived the impression of destruction of artistic pieces and precious cultural heritages by the Taliban group.

Also, the Minister of Information and Culture has suspended the Commission for Media Complaint and Violations since a while. The decision has turned into a major source of concern for all media since all journalists must now directly refer to the General Attorney. ANJU believes that suspending the Commission is an illegal act and shows disbelief of the government officials in values of freedom of press in the country.

ANJU also expresses its discontent at interferences of the government, especially the Ministry of Information and Culture, in the affairs of media and journalistic associations with the aim of destroying their power and reckons such measures against enforced laws in the country.

ANJU is deeply worried about such measures being contrary to freedom of speech and once again urges the Afghan government to fulfill its national and international commitments with regard to guaranteeing freedom of expression for Afghan citizens. ANJU calls on all active media and journalists being committed to the freedom of expression and press to join hands in defending their basic rights and freedom values against all existing threats and pressures. They must not allow globally supported achievements of people and state of Afghanistan in the past five years to fall victim to individual tastes and beliefs.

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