

Key recommended actions for the Media Freedom Coalition states from the MFC Consultative Network (MFC-CN) and broader group of CSOs

20 August 2021

Members of the Media Freedom Coalition Consultative Network (MFC-CN) and the broader group of CSOs working on media freedom are deeply concerned about the safety of journalists and media workers in Afghanistan.

We recommend a number of immediate actions that can be taken by the Media Freedom Coalition to support those at risk and urge a coordinated and rapid response.

Immediate priorities:

1. Help those journalists and media workers at risk who need to get out of the country with their families to do so, and pay particular attention to the situation of women

a) Visas

- Visa restrictions for all Afghan journalists and media workers seeking asylum must be eased.
 - Priority should be given to female journalists and media workers and those from ethnic and religious minorities who are at heightened risk
 - Governments should ensure their visa program and evacuation efforts include journalists, media workers and media advocates, including Afghan media freedom CSOs (specific contacts can be shared if needed)
 - Journalists and media workers should be granted asylum together with dependents and family members. Without permission to bring their families, many journalists and media workers are likely to opt to remain in Afghanistan, putting them and their families at risk of imminent harm
- MFC governments must simplify the process for visa application
 - Clear and secure methods for submitting names of those considered at risk should be immediately established
 - Governments should make clear who is eligible to apply for visas/ what documentation would be required to exit the country for processing in a third country and provide language support to help process and expedite applications. The documentation should include other options if a passport is not possible
 - Governments should ensure that the process for notification of visa approval is improved to ensure recipients are clearly notified when permission to travel has been granted
- Third country processing of visas
 - MFC countries should work with countries that have offered to host Afghan journalists and media workers, both publicly and diplomatically, to streamline the process of promptly issuing visas for journalists and media workers
 - MFC should work with these countries to develop a process of visa on arrival for media professionals

b) Safe passage

- Provide safe passage to and at the airport and other routes

- The route to the airport is currently extremely challenging and risky, particularly for women. Even those who have been granted exit and who have the correct paperwork report being turned away at checkpoints or unable to reach the airport gates. Countries should commit to providing or enlisting escorts for those being evacuated to the airport in Kabul or other routes out of the country (including land border crossings that are also quite risky). In the latest news, the Taliban have started to request a fee at the airport from the Afghans who have relocation papers in place

c) Keep forces in the airport

- US and other NATO countries must remain in Kabul in order to secure the airport and the possibility to evacuate beyond the August 31 deadline

2. Funding

It is extremely difficult to get funds into Afghanistan at the present time. This makes an already at-risk group even more vulnerable.

a) Provide pathways for cash to enter

- As long as banks remain closed, getting emergency funding to local organisations and individuals will be a priority. Governments should identify means for journalists and media workers to safely access funding, such as through the UN bank or other distribution mechanisms

b) Repurpose development budget lines

- MFC countries that currently fund media programming in Afghanistan should immediately loosen restrictions on all projects to budget lines to be repurposed to supporting journalists' and media workers' safety and potential relocation, including support for the establishment of exile media, digital security and related training, as well as to support media outlets operating within the country

c) Emergency fund for Afghan journalists and media workers

- MFC countries should establish an emergency fund for Afghan journalists and media workers to help meet the costs of immediate safety needs and medium-term relocation support, establishment of exile media, and in-country support for the continuation of independent media reporting where possible

d) Airline collaboration

- Work with the airlines to offer to refunds or pay for tickets for people on a cleared list, so that people at risk don't have to buy the tickets themselves. This also eases the need to get money into Afghanistan

3. Human Rights Council Special Session (24 August)

- Call on the governing authorities and armed forces to uphold international human rights obligations of Afghanistan and of all States and the UN agencies to ensure safe corridors to allow for the evacuation and relocation of all persons at risk, including journalists and media workers, also by broadening access to visas and asylum status
- Call for the establishment of an independent mechanism adequately staffed and resourced to conduct sustained monitoring and report on the situation of human rights;

and investigate serious violations of international human rights and IHL, including collecting evidence for prosecution.

Next priorities:

1. Coordinate efforts within the United Nations system

- In September, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) [mandate](#) is up for renewal and this as an opportunity for member states to call on UNAMA to ensure that journalists receive the necessary support.
- Call on the UN to provide support to journalists and media workers on a regular basis, and promote and defend media freedom

2. Engage in broader efforts to promote and defend media freedom

- We urge one or more member states of the MFC represented at the UN Security Council (such as the UK; the US; France or Estonia) to call for an Arria-formula meeting to specifically address the situation of journalists and media workers in Afghanistan. This meeting could lay the first stone of an "Emergency Plan for Afghan Journalism", which would include the above and these ongoing priorities
- Encourage the retention of the framework to support freedom of expression: This roadmap was developed in 2020 as a part of peace process negotiations: [A Roadmap to Protect Press Freedom during the Afghan Reconciliation Process | International Media Support](#)

3. Support the journalists and media workers inside who can keep working to do so as safely as possible

- Provide transport costs, safe housing, psycho-social care and health and other support costs for journalists and media workers at risk (and their immediate family) in Kabul and elsewhere for up to three months initially, potentially longer.
- Provide Afghan media organisations – including exile media – immediate and ongoing core support for their news gathering and operations. Grant funding for public interest content is critical – to ensure public interest content reaches people and that the most trusted media outlets have some income for content production. This is also an important strategy against misinformation.

4. Provide safety training for journalists and media workers

- Continued access to safety training, especially for women journalists and media workers, mainly in the areas of digital security and surveillance as well as physical security & risk assessment, in Pashto and Dari, including in the event of Internet shutdowns

5. Provide support for exile media

- Funding for housing/ safe houses and psycho-social care and health support
- Support setting up offshore media - everything from registration to bank accounts to reconstituting staff, rethinking their platform, switch to 100% digital, etc.
- Support for networking journalists and media workers in exile - they will land all over the world. They will need financial and emotional support. They will also want to work.

6. Increased support for/attention to monitoring of media content

- Civil society will need a few weeks to assess the impact of the Taliban takeover regarding changes in reporting and potential censorship, especially as risk of a civil war is looming. This must take place not only in Kabul, but in provinces outside the capital