

[AHRC Forwarded Statement] PAKISTAN: Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists terms 2007 as the bad year for journalists

Dear friends,

We wish to share with you the following two statements from the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ)

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A Statements from the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) forwarded by the Asian Human Rights Commission

PAKISTAN: Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists terms 2007 as the bad year for journalists

Six journalists were killed, three of them while performing their professional duties, 73 were injured, mostly by the police in the worst year for the journalists in a decade while media remained under government pressure through laws and threat, Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), said in a report release on Sunday.

Unprecedented incidents of violence and curbs on media remained the hallmark of 2007," PFUJ said in a report at the end of the year.

Beside killing of journalists media houses were attacked, raided by the police and security agencies and freedom of the Press came under attack as a result of two ordinance against media after the promulgation of emergency.

Those journalists killed include Zubair Ahmed Mujahid of daily Jang, who was killed in Mirpurkhas by unidentified men, Mehboob Khan, freelance journalist killed in Charsada, during the bomb blast on the rally of former Interior Minister Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao, Noor Ahmed Khan, killed in Bajour during a roadside blast, Javed Khan, photojournalist for daily Markaz was killed while covering Lal masjid battle in Islamabad, Mohammad Arif Khan, cameraman of ARYONE WORLD, killed during the bomb blast on Benazir Bhutto's procession on October 18, and Rab Nawaz Chandio, reporter for daily Halchal, killed by unknown person in Thatta.

PFUJ, the representative body of the journalists in Pakistan, said the year witnessed "growing menace of police brutality" against journalists as some 73 journalists including photo-journalists, cameramen were badly beaten, causing serious injuries to at least 30, who go head injuries. The latest was on December 17, when Aaj reporter Mohammad Usman was admitted to hospital after several head injuries.

Throughout the year the private news channels remained under pressure and as a result time and again GEO, ARY, Aaj, SINDH TV, KTN, Kyber were put off air, but on Nov 3rd, some 45 channels and two FM-radio were put off air through a verbal orders of the authorities for over three weeks.

PFUJ launched a protest movement against the curbs on the media, which has now been suspended after 55 days due to the tragic death of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto. The campaign was launched for the withdrawal of anti-Press laws, lifting of restrictions and ban on tv channels, held protest rallies, demonstration and set-up camps during which over 200 journalists were detained, several were beaten by police.

- Later, government allowed all channels and FM-99 and 103, after seeking "assurance," but the mainstream news channels GEO news and GEO Supper (Sports) remained off air.

Worst violent incident against journalists took place on September 29th, in Islamabad, when police attacked journalists

outside the Election Commission office. At least 43 were injured, many received head injuries while on the same day in Peshawar, police injured four journalists during a protest against Islamabad incident. The ex-CJP after a suo-moto action suspended senior police officials after looking into the evidence and video of police brutality. Earlier, in March, police used baton-charge against journalists covering the rally of former chief justice of Pakistan, Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry, in which 10 journalists were injured. Police were again found involved in beating journalists in Lahore and last month in Karachi, during which several journalists were injured.

PFUJ, is deeply concerned and shocked over treatment of journalists across the country on the hands of state machinery. The year has seen an unprecedented rise in violence against journalists with some areas. Reporting became most difficult in the militancy hit areas like Wana, Waziristan, Swat and the nearby areas. Journalists also faced difficulties in reporting in many parts of Baluchistan and interior of Sindh, particularly if they report on Baluchistan operation or on forced marriages, jirga in Sindh. Two reporters Latif Khosa and Riaz Mengal were kidnapped in Baluchistan while three reporters left their native towns in Sindh, after reporting on social issues. The media house which came under attack include Aaj office in Karachi, GEO in Islamabad, by the armed groups and police respectively. Professional hazards at the hands of law enforcement agencies become order of the day, and Union received complaints from different parts of the country, during which security officials either seized cameras or removed films.

PFUJ also blamed the pressure groups for threatening journalists in different parts of the country. While journalists working in the tribal areas in NWFP regularly complain about threats from militants, journalist Riaz Mengal was abducted on the orders of an influential Sardar. In Karachi, an ethnic group MRC, issued a "list of journalists," whom they considered chavans. Few days later, bullets in envelopes were found in cars of three journalists. "These threats made job most difficult for journalists with general elections round the corner," PFUJ observed.

ANTI-MEDIA LAWS AND CLOSURE OF CHANNELS :

Pakistan's mainstream private tv news channels remained under pressure throughout the year. Even before the closure of around 45 tv channels, mainly news channels on November 3, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), which supposed to regulate things in fact turned into a "police force." The three mainstream news channels GEO, ARY and Aaj, become the prime target but even regional news channels like KTN, SINDH TV, KHYBER were not spared.

Channels were forced not to telecast programmes on Baluchistan operation, kept news not favourable to government in low key. Several channels informed PFUJ that at least on 11 occasions their channels were put off air through cable operators.

After an illegal action on Nov 3, when all tv channels went off air government allowed all channels and two main FM radio, Power-99 and Mast-103, after most of them were compelled to sign an undertaking and the so called code of conduct, but even they are not free to report according to "editorial decisions." They can not take free decisions about their "talk shows."

GEO and all their other channels, Jang group become the worst target as they are reportedly been told to "sack," at least three anchors from GEO, and two reporters from The NEWS. "The struggle is on and will continue till the repeal of anti-media laws and for the cause of freedom of the Press in the country," PFUJ said.

Following are the details of the Journalist's killed :-

Mehboob Khan, freelance, April 28, 2007, Charsadda

Photographer Khan was killed in a suicide bomb attack aimed at Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao. The minister escaped with minor injuries, but 28 people died in the attack at a political rally in the small town of Charsadda in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province.

Three other journalists were injured: ATV cameraman Arif Yousafzai; Siddiquillah, a reporter for the Urdu-language paper Subah; and reporter Ayaz Muhammad of the Associated Press of Pakistan.

Khan, a 22-year-old who had recently begun his journalism career, had contributed photos to local and national publications. He was believed to be working at the time.

Follow-up reports said the bomber was believed to have been a teenage male, and that security at the event may have been lax. The federal and provincial governments were investigating the attack, the Daily Times Web site reported.

Noor Hakim Khan, Daily Pakistan , June 2, 2007 , Bajaur

Khan, a correspondent for the Daily Pakistan and a vice president of the Tribal Union of Journalists, was one of five people killed by a roadside bomb in the Bajaur region of the North-West Frontier Province , near Pakistan's border with Afghanistan.

New reports suggest that Hakim was returning from covering a jirga, a traditional court. He had been invited to witness the demolition of a house belonging to the perpetrator of a February car bombing that had killed a local physician. The demolition was part of the disposition of the court case. Khan was traveling with a local official and a tribal chief who had taken a role in the case, according to news reports. Their car was third in a convoy returning from the area, reports said, and it might have been specifically targeted.

Javed Khan, Markaz and DM Digital TV, July 3, 2007, Islamabad

Khan, a photographer for the Islamabad-based daily Markaz and a cameraman for U.K.-based DM Digital TV, was shot in the chest and neck while caught in crossfire between government forces and the students of Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) in Islamabad, according to media reports. Four other journalists were wounded in the clashes.

News reports said gunfire came from both sides in the standoff. The source of the fatal shots was not immediately clear. Pakistani security forces had surrounded the mosque in an effort to end a months-long standoff. The mosque, generally seen as pro-Taliban, had been the center of efforts to remove what leaders saw as undesirable activity such as massage parlors and music shops.

Muhammad Arif, ARY One World TV, October 19, 2007, Karachi

Arif was among more than 130 people killed in an October 19 bombing in Karachi , which took place during a political rally held to celebrate former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's homecoming. The cameraman, who was on assignment, was survived by his wife and six children.

Zubair Ahmed Mujahid, Jang, November 23, 2007, Mirpur Khas

Mujahid, correspondent for the national Urdu-language daily Jang, was shot dead while traveling on a motorcycle with another journalist in the city of Mirpur Khas in the southern province of Sindh, according to local news reports. He was targeted by unidentified gunmen, also traveling by motorcycle.

Local journalists believed their colleague was slain because of his investigative reporting, according to Owais Aslam Ali, secretary-general of the local media group Pakistan Press Foundation. Mujahid was known for his critical writing on a variety of issues—including alleged mistreatment of the poor by local landlords and police—in his Jang weekly column, "Crime and Punishment." His coverage of alleged police brutality had led to arrests and suspensions of police officers, Ali told CPJ.

Mujahid was survived by a wife and four sons. No arrests were immediately reported.

Rab Nawaz Chandio,

Report for Sindhi daily Halchal was killed in Khurshid Colony in Kotri, by unknown persons. However, till date his murder remained a mystery.

**Mazhar Abbas,
Secretary General, PFUJ**

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