



Six Months Report

January - June 2016

Exclusive - 15 years of reporting in Afghanistan

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Preface

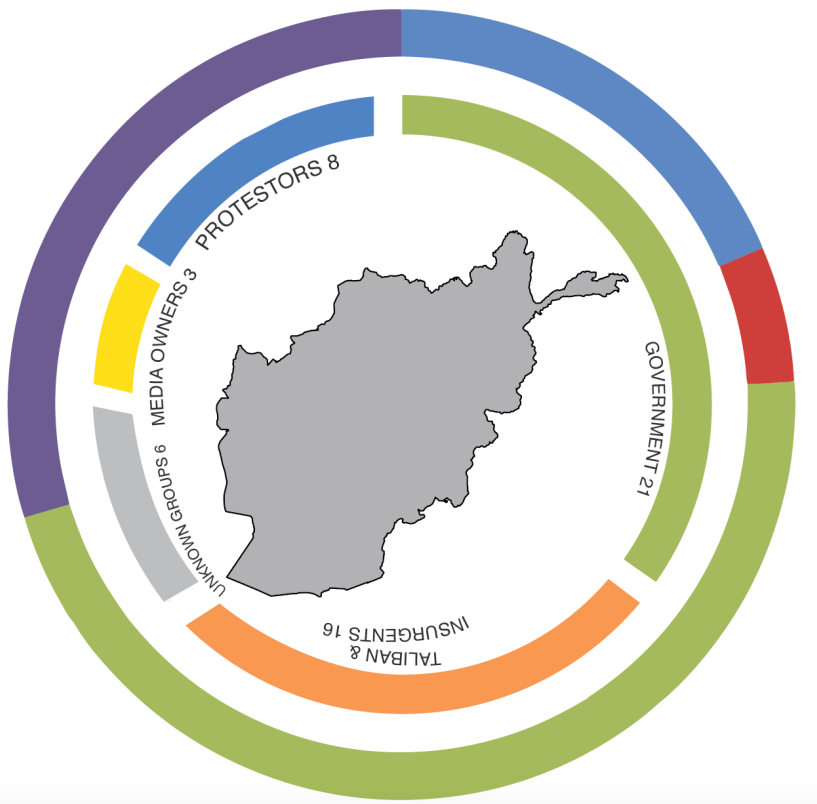
Fifteen years ago, Afghanistan turned a new page in its history, opening an era of opportunity for its citizens to exercise their political and civil freedoms. To this day, the country's achievements in freedom of expression and media growth are considered of the greatest and most successful aspects of development progress in the country. Afghanistan ranks at the top of all countries in the region in terms of freedom of the press and freedom of expression. However, the process of media growth over the past decade and half has been concomitant with the emergence of both opportunities and challenges. The increase in the quantity of media nationally is considerable, but media quality and obstacles to access to information are still among the challenges facing the media community in the country. Likewise, an array of threats against journalists by various parties, from violent extremist groups to government officials, has turned journalist safety into one of the main challenges.

This is the seventh semi-annual report produced by the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC) to assess the safety situation of journalists. As 2016 marks the 15th year of media development, this report also discusses the process of growth of media in Afghanistan over the past 15 years. It also examines the quality of media, gives an overview of media support organizations in the country and concludes with a set of recommendations for the Afghan government, international community, media outlets and other organizations.

It is worth mentioning that cases of violence against media workers have been registered in line with the policy and procedures of AJSC. AJSC has a specific definition for journalists and media workers; therefore, cases in which the legal status of the victims does not conform to the definition recognized by AJSC, have not been recorded. Also, as part of the policy, AJSC records only cases of threat and violence that are directly linked to the professional work of journalists.

54 Cases of Violence Against Journalists

REPORT



Death	10
Assault	16
Threat	25
Injured	3

Western Afghanistan: 4 Cases

South eastern Afghanistan: 5 Cases

Southern Afghanistan: 3 Cases

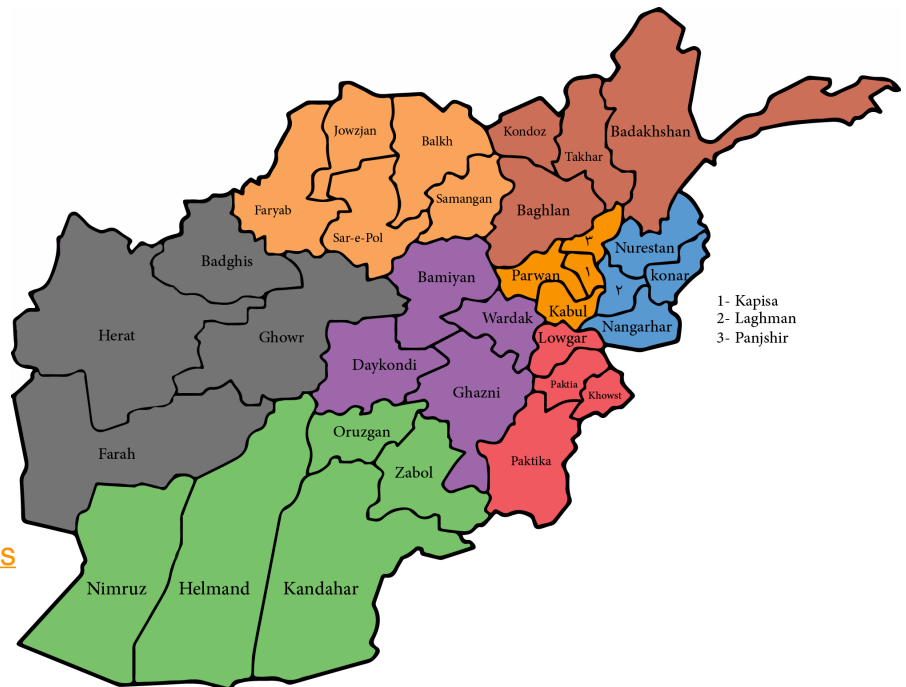
Eastern Afghanistan: 4 Cases

Central Afghanistan: 8 Cases

North eastern Afghanistan: 7 Cases

Kabul and Northern Provinces: 20 Cases

Northern Afghanistan: 3 Cases



38 Increase in Cases of Violence in 1st Six Months

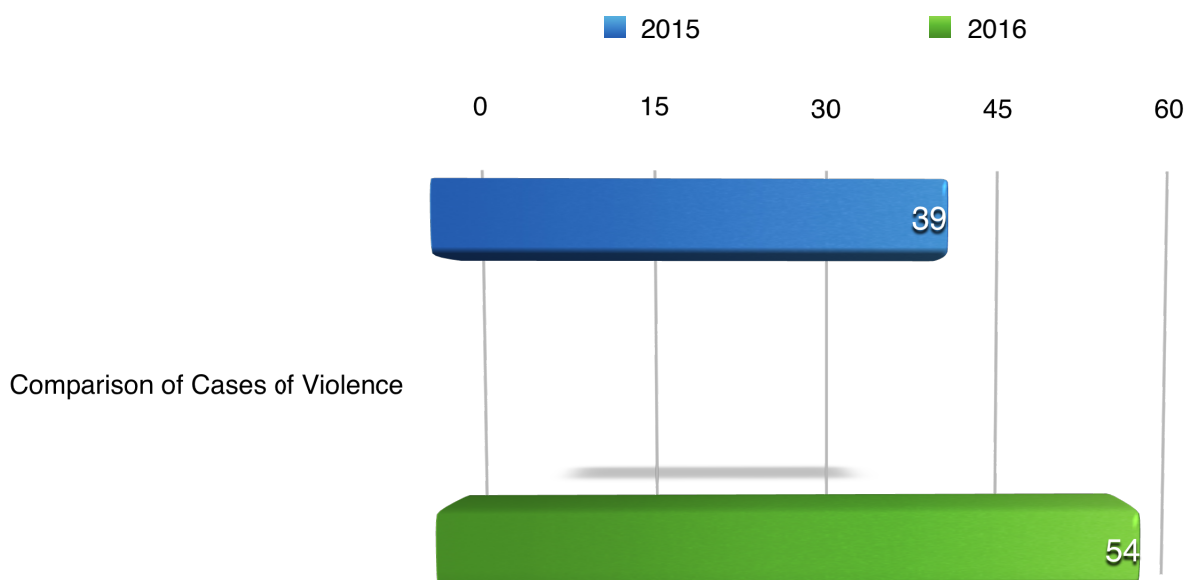
www.ajsc.org

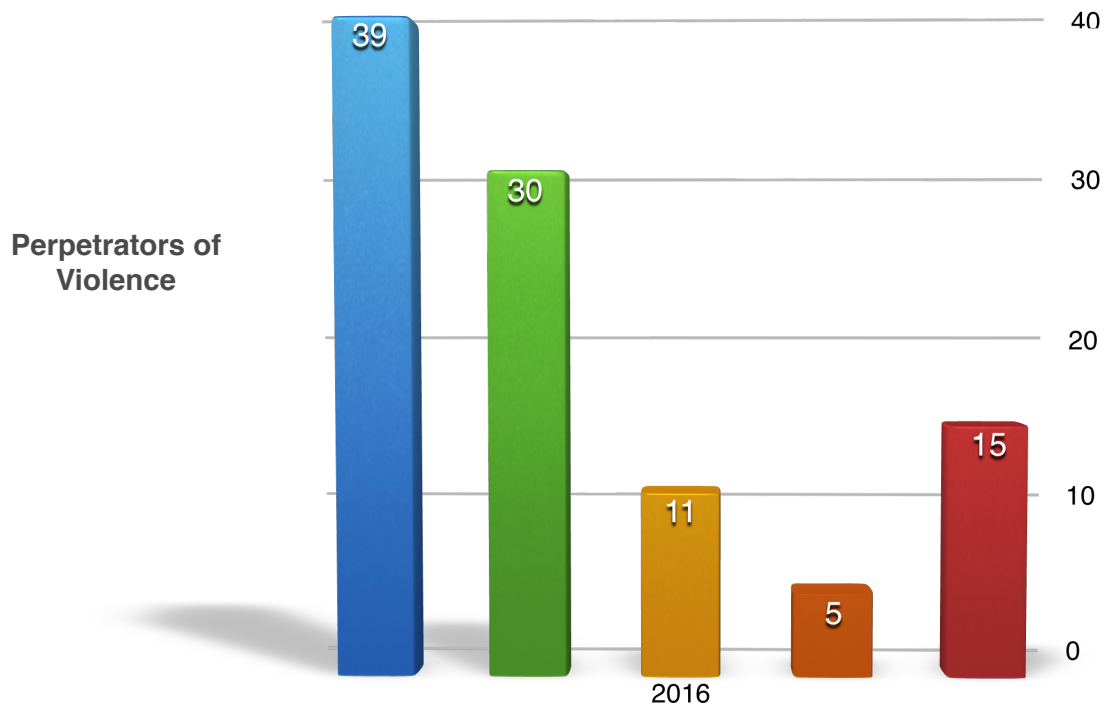
2016 was the bloodiest year for journalists in the history of Afghanistan. Only in the first six months, ten journalists were murdered, exacerbating fear and concern over safety of journalists. In this reporting period, AJSC recorded a total of 54 incidents, which include murder, physical assault, detention, and intimidation. This figure shows a 38 percent increase from the first six months of 2015, in which 39 cases were reported. Individuals linked to the government still account for the majority of cases of violence and intimidation. Based on the findings of this report, the number of cases where Taliban have been the perpetrators has dramatically increased compared to the previous years. In this reporting period, the government is responsible for 21 cases (39%) and Taliban 16 cases (30%).

The increase in threats against journalists by the Taliban and other violent extremist groups marks a significant shift in the nature of threats and risk against journalists, making the environment for journalists much more dangerous and lethal. The increasing hostile position of the Taliban towards media could be attributed to their policy shift towards media. Until late 2015, Taliban refrained from direct confrontation with the media. However, this policy changed after the fall of Kunduz to the Taliban in September 2015.

In February 2016, president Ghani issued a decree to promote better access to information and also safety of journalists. While this marked a significant step proving president's commitment to safeguarding freedom of media and safety of journalists, this decree has so far failed to result in considerable changes in the safety situation of journalists. Amid an increasingly grave backdrop for journalist safety, the government has failed to provide adequate protection to journalists.

Meanwhile, in the midst of growing concern over safety of journalists, the Kabul Police have called on all expatriates, including foreign journalists, to not travel outside their offices and houses without armed guards. The police claim this measure is meant to improve security and safety of foreign citizens, but the expense and inconvenience of traveling with armed guards jeopardizes the ability of expatriate journalists to carry out their professional work.





■ Government (21 cases)
 ■ Taliban & Insurgents (16 cases)
 ■ Unknown People (6 cases)

■ Media Owners (3 cases)
 ■ Protestors (8 cases)

Violence Against Journalists in 2016



On January 20, as a result of a suicide attack against the vehicle of Tolo Television staff, seven employees of Tolo TV lost their lives and more than 20 others were injured. This marked the deadliest attack against media workers in the history of Afghanistan.



Zabiullah Tamana and David Gilkey, working for National Public Radio (NPR), were killed on June 5 in Helmand Province when Taliban militants ambushed their vehicle as they traveled to Marja district of the province with an Afghan National Army convoy



Armed men injured Mohammad Ibraheem Hashemi, a journalist at Radio Adeeb, on February 4 in an attack as he was on his way home from the radio. AJSC contacted local security officials and immediately transferred him to Kabul for treatment. AJSC also provided cash assistance of \$500. After transferring him to Kabul, AJSC gave him necessary financial and health assistance, including covering hospital expenses. AJSC also introduced to him a defense attorney to address his legal claims.



Taliban kidnapped Hekmatullah, a Kabul News TV reporter in Logar Province, while he was on his way to spend his holidays in his hometown in Maidan-Wardak Province. After AJSC learned of the incident, talks were held with the Taliban, and AJSC, through mediation of the local elders, convinced the militants that Hekmatullah, a resident of Maidan-Wardak, is a journalist and not affiliated with any group. He was subsequently freed.



Mustafa Andaleeb, Rahmatullah Nekzad and Abdullah Rahmani, journalists from Reuters and Al-Jazeera's Arabic and English services, were filming the transportation of shrouded bodies of police soldiers martyred by the Taliban from a civilian hospital in Ghazni when they were insulted by the finance head of the Ghazni Police Department and prevented them from filming. When the journalists took their complaint to AJSC, the head of the Committee in the central zone held a meeting with the governor and police chief of Ghazni province and shared this matter, as well as other challenges that journalists face in the province. In this meeting, the offender extended an apology and it was promised that a commission would be formed to address the problems of journalists to prevent recurrence of such instances in the future.



On February 2, when Ibraheem Rahimi, VOA Reporter, wanted to pose a question to the counter-corruption manager of the Khost Police Department at a press conference in the presence of provincial authorities, he was insulted by the manager and prohibited from asking his question. AJSC raised this issue with the police department and other pertinent officials; they subsequently apologized to Mr. Rahimi and promised that in the future no journalist would be insulted while asking a question and the right to ask will not be taken from them.

Quality of Media in Post-2001 Afghanistan

The termination of Taliban's five-year reign in Afghanistan in 2001 marked the end of an era in which the country's citizens were deprived of all types of freedoms. The country entered a new age of democracy and opened new windows of hope to its citizens, who began exercising political and civil freedoms. Freedom of expression expanded at an unprecedented scale and media of various types saw a considerable increase in number. For the first time since the Decade of Democracy (1963-1973), private media freely operated in the country. Kabul Weekly, Arman-e-Mili Daily, Radio Arman, Ayena TV, Afghan TV and Eqtedar-e-Mili Daily were among the first media outlets to publish and broadcast after the fall of the Taliban regime. The new Constitution of Afghanistan, ratified in 2003, dedicated a special place for civil freedoms, particularly freedom of press and expression. Only few months after the formation of the interim administration, Afghanistan approved a new Media Law. This law serves as the legislative basis for the exercise of freedom of expression and operation and expansion of media in the country.

The international community emphasized the emergence of an open space in which media could perform a major role. They not only provided political and moral support for the growth of media, but also broadly pressed the then-administration to foster freedom of expression and free media operation.

The international community made significant financial investment to support and encourage the formation of free media in Afghanistan, which led to the emergence of hundreds of media outlets across the country.

Benefitting from the new atmosphere, a number of political figures also formed their political and party-affiliated media to publish and promote their political ideas and party agendas. Instances of media in this category include Ayena TV, Rah-e-Farda TV, Tamadon TV and many more.

The newly established media have fallen into the following categories:

1. Governmental media promoting the government's agenda and news
2. Independent media promoting news, political and entertainment programs
3. Political and party-affiliated media promoting agendas of certain political parties, movements and figures
4. Ethnic media promoting ethnic agendas and objectives

Although classifying media into these four categories has raised concern, the important point is that most of the media audience and readership are interested in independent media. The main reasons include impartiality of these media outlets in reporting and their capability to produce interesting entertainment programs. This has made independent media much more impactful than other types of media.

Initially it was expected that the quality of news reporting in media outlets would improve over time; however, as time passed, there was not considerable improvement in this area. Although some major media have improved their news reporting quality, most media outlets continue to follow classic patterns of reporting and their achievements in innovative news reporting have been minimal. Roundtable discussions have not seen any significant improvement in their quality either. A number of certain faces frequently and repeatedly appear on TV and radio roundtable programs. Repeating their cliché analyses, they do not contribute to the analytical depth of those programs.

Media, particularly television programs, which attract the majority of audiences compared to other media types, focus on entertainment programs. This has led to a remarkable increase in

the quantity and improvement in the quality of those programs. However, increase in the viewership of television channels due to their entertainment programs has caused these media outlets to pay less attention on other production venues, particularly their news sections.

There is a big void in producing and publishing investigative reports in Afghanistan's media. Given the high rate of corruption in the country, media should allocate part of their publishing material to investigative reports. However, this has not happened. Although producing investigative reports has been impeded by factors such as pressures from powerbrokers, journalists' lack of assurance on their safety and a limited access to information, the media's lack of sustained efforts to producing and publishing investigative reports is still subject to criticism.

Afghanistan's media has also not paid essential attention to the production of reality programs, particularly documentary films. Only a handful of media outlets have produced few documentary films in the past 15 years, which have fulfilled neither the expectations of the audience.

Likewise, the quality of the news reports has not improved in most media outlets. Rather, it has either remained on the same level most likely because of failure of media outlets to raise their reporting standards.

Despite these shortcomings, the media has played a significant role in supporting the democratic process in the country. It has particularly contributed to improving good governance, raising human rights issues especially women's rights, creating platforms for dialogue, and connecting Kabul to the provinces and remote areas of the country. The role of media in persuading people to participate in the country's elections, particularly the 2014 presidential election, was immense. Revealing cases of human rights abuse in the remotest parts of the country is another area where media has made the most impact.

While Afghanistan's media have a long way to go, one should not forget that the country's dead journalism was revived only 15 years ago.

Journalists and Media Support Institutions: Formation, Growth and Activities

Huge development and progress has brought great opportunity to Afghanistan's media and journalist community, but this opportunity has also come with obligations. In a country without any law for journalists and media or discussion of journalists' professional ethics until 15 years ago, improving the quality of journalism required a lot of serious work.

Given the circumstances, the country's Ministry of Information and Culture, as an organization responsible for supporting media and also encouraging formation of self-regulatory framework, should have informed journalists of their rights and responsibilities and advocated for the media community when it faced troubles. It should have followed up their legal cases and files, as well. However, this has not been the case.

The government's negligence towards promoting ethical standards and also facilitating establishment of self-regulatory platform, urged a stronger and more serious need for the emergence of journalists' rights and advocacy organizations, unions and professional institutions. The governmental structure of the National Journalists' Union was disintegrated and numerous other organizations emerged to defend journalists' rights. Operating in various fields, they have played important role in the protection of journalists' rights and promotion of impartial

reporting. In 2013, in a milestone move, 9 media support organizations and unions came together and formed Afghan Journalists Federation. This was a historic achievement as the formation of the federation improved coordination and cooperation of these organizations, resulting in greater outcome and impact.

The significant activities of these organizations have included the following:

- Addressing journalists' complaints and problems they face in their work environment
- Advocacy for journalists rights
- Legal support for journalists
- Health support for journalists
- Capacity building and training programs for journalists
- Technical support for media

As a result of continued push from AJSC and Afghan Journalists Federation, the government approved a bylaw, which creates legal basis for much of the challenges journalists are facing in the private media. These challenges ranged from unfair contracts to insurance, salaries, safety and other privileges media outlets are supposed to provide to their staff.

As a result of advocacy efforts of these organizations, a number of other important laws, regulations and documents were approved, including enactment of the Access to Information Bill, approval of Mass Media Law and drafting and approval of National Code of Ethics. The most important achievement of these organizations in the year 2016 was approving the National Code of Ethics in a gathering of more than 500 journalists from the 34 provinces of the country. This was the first event where hundreds of journalists came together from 34 provinces of the country.

Before the second round of the previous Presidential Election, AJSC initiated a 12-point Commitment Letter and sought the signatures of both presidential candidates. Other journalist rights and advocacy organizations supported the plan, and both candidates signed and committed to implement it. This set the basis for effective advocacy with the government after the National Unity Government was formed in 2014.

Breaking Taboos by Women in Afghanistan's Media

Young people with fresh views and new perspectives who returned to the country after 2001 quickly became bored with the monotonous broadcasting by the National Radio Television, the country's only media outlet, owned by the state. The outlet's broadcasting could not adapt to their tastes. There was a strong need to break old patterns and styles.

The first private radio station, Radio Arman, was founded in 2003. This station broadcasted music, which had been banned under the Taliban, and other entertainment programs. To a high degree, these programs were adapted to the taste of the new generation.

The production and broadcasting methods of this radio station were different than traditional broadcasts. The young staff members broke traditional patterns of posing and talking formally. Instead, they began to talk in colloquial and friendly language. Almost all presenters were young men and women.

Appearance of women in such a public realm as radio and television was a disruption to Afghanistan's heavily traditional and religious society. The young girls who were ready to work in

media accepted serious risks. The decisions and performances by some of these girls sparked debate—both positive and negative—in society. The breaking of this taboo led to the victimization of many women, the first case of which was the murder of Shaima Rezayee in 2005, whose death remains a mystery, but who many believe was murdered by her family for her work in media.

This risk did not prevent young women from working in media; instead, it pointed out to a higher need for their presence and leadership in media outlets.

As media outlets grew, the need for the presence of women in both media and society grew even stronger because stories related to women and families could be best done by female journalists. In fact, male journalists and cameramen were hardly granted any entry into female-dominated environments, including women's prisons, maternal hospitals or other women's organizations. The level of demand for female journalists led to many girls and women entering media and doing very well.

However, after 15 years of exercising freedom of expression and the press in the country, a large number of female journalists are discontent with the prevailing conditions inside media organizations. They claim that in addition to cultural and traditional challenges, women face personal biases and prejudices to reach key positions in almost all media entities, particularly in audio and visual media outlets.

Wida Saghar, a journalist at Ariana News says, "Men in media do not hire women in key positions no matter how qualified they may be. There are two reasons behind this: First, they would not be able to behave with prejudice toward a professional and capable journalist. Second, they do not want to fear losing their own positions. They only use women as an inexpensive workforce and instruments for attracting more audience and viewership. Women with higher levels of knowledge can hardly keep their positions in media."

A number of female journalists believe that their male colleagues in media have created intentional obstacles to hinder their progress. For instance, men make references to working hours and maternity leaves, among other reasons, to deny female journalists the opportunity to rise to key leadership positions in media.

The dominant patriarchal culture in the working environment of media entities is cited as one of the factors for women's disinterest in the media sector. Makia Munir, a female journalist with nearly a decade of experience in journalism says that men, due to their discriminatory views, never want to work as subordinates to a woman, no matter how capable and experienced the woman may be. Another female journalist says, "When I was introduced as a news manager in a radio station, all my male colleagues who in the past exercised a good mood of cooperation toward me, suddenly stood against me." She believes that women may not be able to reach leadership positions in any entity as long as such anti-women biases and discriminatory views persist.

Although there are many educated women working in media and media management around the country, the majority of these journalist cadres are recruited to run entertainment programs or commercial advertisements, and are recruited more on the basis of their physical appearance than media professional skills. For the most part, their employers pay them insufficient salaries.

To better understand the scale and depth of problems female journalists are facing in the media, AJSC conducted a survey in eight provinces and published a report on the [state of women in Afghan media](#), a study that sparked constructive dialogue of the role of women in media, and marked the most extensive study of its kind in Afghanistan.

The security condition around the country has steadily deteriorated in recent years, which has negatively affected all journalists, but particularly female journalists.

Mina Habib, a female journalist with over a decade of experience in media says that female journalists experienced relatively good condition from 2004 through 2009, when the security situation around the country was relatively good. Women enjoyed bigger presence in media and were able to travel to provinces to make reports. However, the situation has significantly changed since 2009 as the security conditions have deteriorated and female journalists are often afraid to undertake such trips now.

Currently, female journalists in the capital city of Kabul and in provinces alike face pressures from violent extremists, extremist individuals and groups and also extremist elements of their own families. Based on the findings of AJSC's survey, the work environment is not supportive either. All of these factors have led to reduction of the presence of women in the media outlets since 2014.

Conclusion

- The year 2016 has been the bloodiest year for journalists in Afghanistan's history. In the first half of 2016, 10 journalists were killed, an unprecedented figure. The 38 percent increase in the scale of violence and threats against journalists compared with the first six months of 2015 has generated serious concerns regarding the future of safety of journalists in the country.
- The growing violence and intimidation from the Taliban rise of the Taliban as the biggest factor in killing and commission of violence against journalists has changed the nature of threat against journalists and media in the country. These changes have significantly increased the risks associated with practicing journalism in Afghanistan.
- General instability and the likelihood of certain provinces falling to the Taliban have heightened concerns about the safety of journalists. The Taliban's systematic efforts to track down and target journalists following the fall of Kunduz City demonstrates the reality that journalists are seriously vulnerable in unstable and insecure provinces.
- Free media and freedom of expression are the greatest achievements of the past 15 years, but face serious challenges. Threats to the lives of journalists, financial challenges facing media outlets, the slow growth of media and the multiplicity of factional and partisan media outlets are the main challenges facing free media in the country. The lack of a spirit of cooperation on the part of the government of Afghanistan concerning sharing information with journalists is also among the main obstacles hampering journalism work in the country.
- Although women have taken on a remarkable presence in the media, they have been mainly featured as news presenters or in entertainment programs, rather than in serious reporting roles. The presence of women in the media has been largely limited to the urban areas, and has had very little presence in media outside of urban centers, especially in insecure provinces. Women have maintained weaker roles in the leadership and news sections highlighting a setback the presence and qualitative growth of women in the media.
- Media organizations have acted weakly and, on many occasions, unfairly in ensuring the legal rights of their staff and in creating an environment conducive for the growth of women as journalists.
- In consideration of the breadth of the problems of journalists with their related media, the media has, not implemented the Statute on the Establishment and Operation of Private Mass

Media that has provided the legal ground for resolution of most of these problems, so far. The Ministry of Information and Culture has not done any noteworthy work in enforcing this statute and monitoring its implementation.

Recommendation

- The government of Afghanistan, international community, and national and international media support organizations must take serious measures to ensure the safety of journalists in Afghanistan. The government of Afghanistan, especially the National Security Council, should finalize the procedure for safety of journalists and facilitate its full implementation.
- The central government should direct local governments in the provinces, especially in unstable and insecure provinces, to cooperate closely with journalists and the media in order to ensure journalist safety. In insecure provinces, provincial governments should develop an emergency evacuation plan for journalists in case of the fall of a province to the Taliban. This plan is much needed in the light of growing threat posed to journalists by the Taliban.
- National and international media support organizations must continue advocacy activities to secure meaningful measures from the government towards safety of journalists. They must also provide safety training for journalists in Kabul and provinces.
- International community needs to pressure Afghan government to provide journalists and media with the necessary safety support. International community should also work with the local media support organizations to expand safety measures for journalists, particularly those operating in remote areas.
- Taking necessary measures to improve staff safety is not only the moral obligation of media, but also their legal responsibility. Media should place the safety of their staff as their top priority. The newly approved Statute on Establishing and Operations of Mass Media, which stipulates the obligations of media in this area, makes this the legal obligation of media houses.
- The financial problems that Afghan media face pose an existential threat to their survival. The government of Afghanistan and international community must undertake a joint program in support of media in the country. This program can include components such as subsidies and the development of a procedure for balanced distribution of commercials. The international community should place media support and freedom of expression at the top of their strategic priorities. The remarkable growth of media in Afghanistan is attributable to the generous assistance of the international community over the past years. However, this achievement is unstable, and the international community should not allow Afghanistan's greatest achievement—which has come about as a result of costly investments—go to waste.
- The media should take necessary measures to increase the presence of women across all levels of media production, especially in management and decision-making roles. The media should also develop and implement a specific policy to prevent sexual harassment, which is a main problem for women in media, as found in AJSC's 2016 survey on the status of female journalists in the media. The government of Afghanistan should develop a statute to improve the condition of women in media and ensure its implementation. Media support organizations should also cooperate with and monitor media outlets to ensure implementation of the policies and procedures.
- The government must undertake serious measures to implement the Statute on the Establishment and Operations of Private Mass Media, which addresses most of the present and potential problems of journalists with their employers. Unless the statute is implemented, these problems will linger.