



PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN  
**AFGHANISTAN**  
LOCAL MEDIA ON THE FRONT LINE

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## AFGHANISTAN

**Capitale:** Kaboul

**Population:** 29,82 millions (2012)

**Curent President:** Hamid Karzai



## INTRODUCTION

Reporters Without Borders has evaluated the current state of freedom of information in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on the eve of its third presidential election, in which the media will have a key role to play in providing news coverage despite the uncertainty and danger to which they are exposed in the run-up to the withdrawal of foreign troops.

This report is the fruit of a fact-finding visit by Reporters Without Borders in September 2013 to Kabul and the northern provinces of Parwan, Kapisa and Panjshir to identify the main threats facing news media and journalists. The observations and conclusions about freedom of information in these provinces – the first to be liberated 12 years ago – are broadly applicable to the rest of the country. Reporters Without Borders also conducted an information campaign with the aim of preparing and protecting journalists during the elections.

Afghanistan is now one of the world's countries where the media and freedom of information are relatively protected by the constitution and legislation. However, although benefitting from these hard-won rights, the media have to cope with the chronic political instability and unrest that affects all of Afghan society, and journalists in particular.





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# 1 THE MEDIA'S KEY ROLE IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The presidential election on 5 April will be conducted under close national and international surveillance. It will choose a successor to Hamid Karzai, the president since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, who is forbidden by the constitution from running for a third term. After candidate registration closed on 6 October, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced the list of approved candidates on 20 November.

The leading candidates are Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzi, an economist and former UN official, Zalmay Rassoul, who recently stood down as foreign minister, Abdullah Abdullah, one of the leaders of the Panjshir Resistance Front and a former foreign minister, Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, a former Pashtun warlord, and Qutbuddin Helal, who was deputy prime minister in 1993 and again in 1996, and who is a member of the political bureau of Hezbi-Islami Afghanistan (HIA), the radical Islamist movement led by Gulbadin Hekmatyar.

The credibility of this election is crucial in the run-up to the departure of the foreign military presence led by the United States. In view of the possibilities of electoral fraud and corruption, the media will have a key role to play as a source of information for the population and as observers of a free and democratic election.



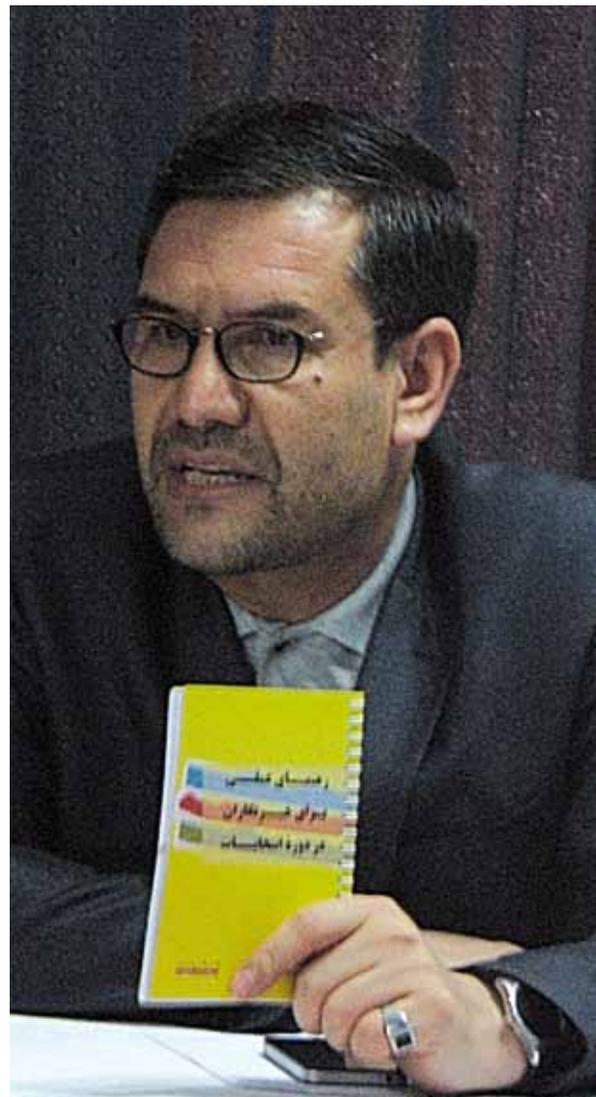
## ELECTION COVERAGE – “A CIVIC DUTY”

This is *Pajhwok Afghan News* editor **Danish Karokhel**'s take: “As well as a professional obligation, covering the election is civic duty for us. It is not just a question of presenting the candidates and their programmes. We also have to give the population a way to express their demands and we have to take account of their rights. We have a responsibility towards our fellow citizens during and after the elections. During the last election, Mr. Karzai published a programme containing 100 promises. We can now see that barely seven of them have been kept. Pajhwok has put an ethics charter on its site for those of its journalists who are covering the election, and special pages for each province. We think that despite the persistence of certain problems such as violence and threats against journalists, the election will be a success if we manage to cover it professionally.”



▲ Fahim Dashti, the head of the Afghan Journalists Federation (AJF)

Mobarez Rashedi, deputy information and culture minister



**Zia Bomia**, a journalist and representative of the South Asia Free Media Association, shares his view: "We journalists have a duty to urge the people to vote and to encourage them to participate in the construction of their future. And to help ensure that they don't yield to the threats of the Taliban and others who are taking advantage of the lack of a democratic alternative."

## THE DANGERS FOR MEDIA PERSONNEL

Zia Bomia said: "Ever since the country's liberation, the media have played a major role in the preparation and holding of elections, despite the big increase in violence and the decline in freedom of information from one election to another. I think that both before, during and after this election, journalists will face two main dangers: intimidation and corruption. The question is not 'should we resist?' but 'how can we resist in a country where some corrupt bureaucrats want more power in order to get richer, and warlords still have considerable power and influence?'"

**Fahim Dashti**, the head of the Afghan Journalists Federation (AJF), said: "The current violence and threats do not favour the holding of a free and democratic election. But we have decided to press ahead. The question is whether we have the resources to play our role as journalists. Personally I think we do. Compared with the last election, the media are more developed and we have more professional journalists. If they want to, they will be able to play their role as reporters and observers of an election that is decisive for the country's future. But it is also the government's responsibility." Zia Bomia added: "Does the government really want to defend journalists? I am not optimistic on this last point."

## GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY

Fahim Dashti said: "As far as journalists are concerned, there are several misunderstandings about the information and culture ministry's role, both as regards the law on access to information, which has yet to be changed despite the urgency posed by the election, and as regards the body that verifies media offences – the media commission – and the media law's provisions. But despite all these difficulties, I think we should not abandon the idea of doing our duty."

Responding for the government, deputy information and culture minister **Mobarez Rashedi** said: "The media have a say in this election. Nowadays, our media are more numerous, relatively mature and very active. There are of course difficulties such as violence, but this is a problem that does not just concern the election. I can assure journalists that they will have our support in accomplishing their professional duties. I would also like to mention the 'professionalism' they must display, because sometimes there are abuses by some journalists."

Rashedi continued: "It is true we have had a considerable delay in the adoption of the law on access to information. Firstly, it should not be forgotten that this is the first time in the country's history that something like this has been undertaken. Secondly, several bodies are involved in drafting the law and the coordination has been very difficult. Basically, it was the information and culture ministry and the anti-corruption department that finalised the draft. It was then submitted to the cabinet, which expressed some reservations, some of them probably legitimate. A commission was created to incorporate the cabinet's proposals and once all the changes had been made, the bill was finally sent to parliament.

"We are doing everything possible to have this law adopted before the election in April. This law facilitates things for journalists but, aside from the legal aspect (namely the obligation for political figures to answer citizens' questions under pain of being sanctioned), I don't think the absence of this law will be an obstacle for journalists during the next election. We have held more than five elections without this law and I think no candidate would be able to refuse to answer questions, regardless of the subject raised."

# 2

MEDIA AND

JOURNALISTS

EXPOSED

TO VIOLENCE

## NEWS PROVIDERS, VIOLENCE AND IMPUNITY

One of the main factors undermining the media is the lack of security. The south and east of the country, which are under de facto Taliban control, have become news “black holes.” Media activity there is much less than in the rest of the country. These “black holes” have been spreading to other parts of the country.

One of the causes of the hostile climate for the media is the impunity enjoyed by the instigators and perpetrators of murders and other acts of violence against journalists. The inability and, in most cases, the lack of will on the part of the police and judicial apparatus to arrest and convict those responsible for crimes of violence against journalists have cast doubt on the Afghan government’s commitment to guaranteeing the principles of the rule of law.

Afghan media personnel have paid a high price in the past 12 years. At least 19 journalists have been killed in connection with their work since 2002. Most of these murders have gone unpunished.

The perpetrators and instigators of the murders of **Zakia Zaki**, the manager of *Sada-e-Solh* (*Voice of Peace Radio*) in the province of Parwan, in June 2007, **Abdul Samad Rohani**, a reporter for the Afghan news agency *Pajhwok* and the *BBC*, in June 2008, **Janullah Hashimzada**, another *Pajhwok* journalist, in August 2009, and freelance journalist **Javed Ahmed** in March 2009 have never been publicly identified and punished.

**Mohammad Hassin Hashemi**, a 30-year-old employee of local radio *Nadjhrab* in the Kapisa Valley, was brutally murdered by fundamentalist members of his own family on 20 May 2013. Witnesses, colleagues and relatives said certain family members had repeatedly threatened him in a bid to get him to “end his journalistic activities and his work for the radio station.” In a closed-door session with no prosecutor present, a Kapisa appeal court acquitted two of the defendants, his father and one of his brothers, on 18 September. Two other brothers who had initially been sentenced to 16 years in prison were subsequently acquitted by a high court. Family members have accused local judges of taking bribes. Information and culture minister Makhdum Rahin told Reporters Without Borders that “the government will do everything possible to render justice.”

In a ruling on 8 January 2014, an Afghan high court ruled that the appeal court decision was illegal and sent the case back to Kapisa. Reporters Without Borders and other media freedom organizations welcomed the decision. But Seddiqullah Tauhidi of the Afghan media support NGO Nai told Reporters Without Borders: “There is a danger of the same process being repeated in Kapisa. The high court should have transferred the case to a Kabul court to prevent the killer’s family from interfering.”



Two Afghan journalists, **Sultan Mohammad Munadi** and **Ahmad Omid Khpalwak**, were killed as a result of negligence by foreign troops. In a September 2011 report, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) acknowledged its responsibility for Khpalwak's death but the British forces and the Afghan interior ministry have yet to release the findings of their investigation into Munadi's death during an assault by British special forces on 9 September 2009. His family continues to demand the truth about his death and to press for justice to be rendered.

An Afghan journalist who requested anonymity told Reporters Without Borders: "Fear is a constant companion in our work, especially when we reveal cases of corruption involving senior officials. The fear is such that it drives some journalists to leave their region. We are increasingly seeing a lack of professional journalists, especially those doing reporting and investigative journalism."

**Emadudin Rostaye**, a representative of the NGO International Media Support (IMS) in Parwan province, expressed concern about the threats to his NGO and the journalists its works with. "The violence and threats to journalists have increased of late. They take many forms and vary in intensity. They range from humiliation and psychological pressure to physical violence and even attacks on premises with explosives. Different people are responsible for these abuses, but mostly it is warlords or senior officials."

## WOMEN JOURNALISTS ON THE FRONT LINE

Dozens of women journalists have been attacked, threatened or silenced in the past six years. "There was a 68 per cent increase in violence against women journalists last year," **Najiba Ayubi**, the head of the *Killid* media group said at a conference organized by Reporters Without Borders in Kabul on 22 September 2013. She added :



“The presence of women in the media is a big advance, but they still face countless difficulties, especially those who are journalists. The pressure on women journalists has increased since 2007, especially in the provinces.”

In addition to the violence that affects all media personnel, women journalists are the victims of additional social obstacles, usually created by the family and those close to the women. “In some cases, it is the families that, out of fear of the threats or violence to which they could be subjected, become a source of pressure,” said **Farida Nekzad**, the head of the independent news agency *Wakht*.

Murders of journalists by family members are not always a private matter, especially if the victim is a woman. Several journalists, including women, have been killed by family members since 2002. They are the victims of fundamentalist propaganda against the idea of women working in a patriarchal society. They are also the victims of a lack of protection by the authorities, who are often criticized for doing little to improve the living conditions of women. According to UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon, more than 300 women and young girls were killed in Afghanistan in 2012 and 560 were injured. The violence increased significantly in 2013.

According to the research carried out by Reporters Without Borders in cooperation with other NGOs that protect journalists such as Nai and International Media Support, the murders of **Zakia Zaki**, the director of radio *Sada-e-Solh*, **Shima Rezai**, a *Tolo TV* presenter, and **Shakiba Sanga Amaj**, a young presenter on the Pashto-language *Shamshad TV*, were all linked to their activities as journalists. But the police and judicial investigators always treated these cases as “private matters” that were not linked to the victims’ work as journalists.

**Shima Rezai**, 24, was killed at her home “by unidentified men” on 18 April 2005. Police officer Zamri Amrie said: “She was killed at 10 a.m. but the family did not notify the police until 1 p.m., after cleaning the crime scene. The murder weapon has not been found. The family presented a gun but we rejected its authenticity as it had not been used for years.” At the time, the *Chicago Tribune* quoted her mother as saying her daughter took her own life and that the gun was found in her hand.

*Shamshad TV* presenter **Shakiba Sanga Amaj** was also murdered at her family home, in Kabul. A man shot her at close range at around 7 p.m. on 31 May 2007. Two days later, the police arrested Abdul Latif, a man from the central city of Ghazni, on suspicion of having been hired to kill her because she refused to marry. Her father, Mohammad Rabi Amaj, said Latif had been hired by members of the family.

Impunity feeds the cycle of violence and persuades some women to stop working as journalists. A woman who used to be the presenter of a privately-owned TV station in the north of the country told Reporters Without Borders on condition of anonymity: "For two years, I was often threatened by phone or by anonymous letters addressed to me and my family. The people writing the letters said that, if I did not abandon my work, I would be responsible for the death of members of my family. I was forced to resign and find an office job."

**Masomeh Hidary**, a journalist with *Radio Baran* in the city of Herat, said: "I studied at Herat's journalism faculty. We were 14 female students and I was the only journalist in my year. Of course, in the provinces people are more traditional. They regard women, and women journalists in particular, in a different way. The prejudices sometimes lead to physical attacks. Women are more easily accused of 'immorality' than men."

**Najiba Ayubi** of the *Killid* media group said: "The accusations of immorality or of behaviour 'contrary to society's values' are pretexts that are used to put pressure on women journalists and force them to return to their homes. Why do they never use this type of accusation against men?"

**Ahmad Henayesh**, the head of *Radio Dunya (Radio World)* in Parwan province, said: "The situation has changed radically since the start of 2013. Several women journalists have had to stop working. We now have only seven woman journalists and media workers while 23 women journalists were still working in 2012."

## ZAKIA'S MURDERERS HAVE BEEN KILLED!

Zakia Zaki, an emblematic Afghan journalist who ran *Sada-e-Solh (Voice of Peace Radio)* in Jabal Saraj, in the northern province of Parwan, was murdered by the two or three gunmen who entered her home in the early hours of 6 June 2007 and shot her seven times in front of her two-year-old son. She liked to say her radio station was "a home for the community's residents, the only place where they dare to speak freely." She and her staff had often been threatened by local warlords.

No proper investigation has ever been carried out by the authorities in the nearly seven years since her murder. A few suspects were arrested but they were released after being held for six months. Neither the instigators nor the perpetrators have been identified. Several journalists say the instigators managed to block the police investigation right from the outset.

The information and culture minister nonetheless told Reporters Without Borders on 29 September 2012: "The murderers have been punished. They were arrested in other cases. Two of them died and one of them is still in prison." He did not provide any additional information or explanation.

According to the information obtained by Reporters Without Borders, the murderers were followers of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the founder and leader of the Islamist group Hezb-e-Islami (HIA). Several sources said that, several months before Zaki's murder, Hekmatyar issued a fatwa against her, saying: "If you want to protect Islam, you must silence this woman's voice." A radical fundamentalist group, HIA is an ally of the Taliban in their fight against the Afghan government and the foreign military forces. At the same time, it has representatives within the government. From the outset, some of the Taliban, including some HIA leaders, remained in Kabul and officially "distanced themselves" from their brothers. In practice, they continue to conduct negotiations between

the government and Taliban. Although Hekmatyar is calling for a boycott of the elections, Qutbuddin Helal, who is still a member of HIA's political bureau, is a presidential candidate. And Mohammed Khan, another HIA member, is a vice-presidential candidate on Abdullah Abdullah's ticket.

A senior police official said: "The first suspect, the head of the commando implicated in the journalist's death, was killed by foreign forces a year after the murder. He was one of the assailants who attacked a military base in the region. The government knew full well that he was one of the local Hezb-e-Islami leaders but did not know

he was involved in Zakia Zaki's death. We determined that when we found his gun on him. It was the gun that was used to kill the journalist. As for the other two assailants, one is in prison for other crimes and the third is also apparently in prison."





# 3

## MEDIA

## DYNAMISM AND

## UNCERTAINTY

### **WHAT HAPPENED TO THE AFGHAN MEDIA SPRING?**

While the period of Taliban rule from 1996 to 2001 was the darkest hour for Afghan journalists, the period that followed was a golden era for the media. Mass media developed thanks to the efforts of Afghan journalists and international aid. Today, Afghanistan has 48 TV stations, 175 radio stations and 190 newspapers and magazines that include dailies, weeklies, monthlies and publications that appear at irregular intervals. There are also eight news agencies.

The women's press was born in 1920 and the first women journalists worked in radio in 1918. Women journalists were among the first victims of war, the 1992-1996 civil war and the reign of the Taliban from 1996 to 2001. But women journalists have been able to work with a degree of openness in the past 10 years.

Afghanistan currently has 30 women running news media, most of them privately-owned. Although the government is supposed to ensure that 30 per cent of civil servants are women, none of the 86 state-owned media is run by a woman. In some provinces such as Paktia, Panjshir and Faryab, there are no women journalists.

Northern Afghanistan has been a fertile ground for the development of free speech and media freedom in recent years. After Kabul, the northern provinces have the highest media density, with six TV stations, 10 radio stations and 18 publications, including weeklies and monthlies. But the decline in the security situation and the revival of armed opposition groups have made it hard for these media to operate. Six news outlets – a TV station and five newspapers – have suspended operations since the start of 2013.

“Threatened by all the warring parties,” said a Kapisa-based journalist when asked to describe the current situation of the media in the region. “For example, when we broadcast a report about a local official accused of corruption, we were threatened by both parties concerned, although we gave equal time to the different points of view in our report. And we are also threatened by the Taliban, who are always opposed to a woman being interviewed because, according to them, hearing a woman’s voice is forbidden by Islam.”

**Ahmad Henayesh** of Parwan-based *Radio Dunya* said: “The current problems of the media in the north, as in other parts of the country, are not limited to violence. It is compounded by the behaviour of certain government officials and local big shots towards journalists. They constantly obstruct news stories and reporting that would conflict with their personal interests or draw attention to their failures.”

## MORTGAGED FUTURE

The hopes of developing the media in the northern provinces, hopes that emerged in the decade after the fall of the Taliban, have been disappointed. The NGOs and journalists that took the plunge and launched media are now plagued by worries and uncertainty about their survival. Some journalists are nonetheless pressing on courageously and are encouraging the population to support freedom of information.

In the run-up to the April presidential election and the complete withdrawal of foreign military forces expected in 2014, Afghan and international civil society organizations have been voicing deep concern about the future of the Afghan media. The Taliban threat remains. At the same time, the media must cope with financial problems and the restrictions imposed by the government. The creation of armed bands linked to organized crime, especially in the provinces of Parwan and Kapisa, are compounding these threats.

These concerns, especially as regards the situation of journalists in the provinces of Parwan, Kapisa and Panjshir, are also compounded by a quantitative and qualitative stagnation in media activity although it is widely accepted that these media have a real growth potential. But there is no disputing the fact that there is not one daily newspaper in these three provinces. Publication of the Parwan province monthly *Parwan* was suspended in July 2013, following the suspension of four other monthlies – *Shora*, *Sedai Mardom*, *Enkeshafi* and *Payam Shahr* – in the same province.

### **Economic difficulties**

Despite the public's thirst for information, investment is lacking. Most of the newspapers available are published by the information and culture ministry's various departments or by other governmental bodies. There is just one radio station in Charikar, the capital of Parwan province, while several newspapers have had to close down in Panjshir in recent years.

"When *Radio Khorasan* began broadcasting, it was the first time that Panjshir's inhabitants had heard a radio station talking about them," the station's manager, Ruhollah Yousefi, said. "Despite all the financial problems it has had to face, the station continues to broadcast. The withdrawal of the American security forces has played a decisive role in the station's decline. The station cannot make enough money from advertising and is not supported by any foreign or Afghan NGOs or institutions."

Finding the money to be able to continue operating is a priority shared by *Radio Khorasan* and *Radio Dunya*. **Ahmad Henayesh**, the CEO of both stations, is nonetheless optimistic. "It's true we have had financial problems but this is election year. We have more listeners and therefore more advertising. At the same time, we have reduced the number of salaried staff. They have been replaced by a large number of freelancers who are journalism students or citizen-journalists. We have applied the same method that worked for *Radio Khorasan*."

Jabal Saraj-based radio *Sada-e-Solh*, the first station to broadcast in 2001, is trying to maintain the quality of its programmes. Despite financial problems and the problems its journalists encounter, it has managed to continue being a voice of hope for its listeners. "The station broadcasts nearly 10 hours a day, from 6 to 11 a.m. and from 4 to 9 p.m.," said Abdol Ghodos Esmati, one of its journalists. "We produce six programmes that have many listeners in the neighbouring provinces of Kapisa, Bagram Najrab and Panjshir."

Asked about the problems for news media and journalists in Kapisa province, **Abdul Matin Wafa**, the editor of the newspaper Kapisa, described the factors acting as a brake on any improvements.

"Kapisa is one of the country's central provinces, the smallest in area," he said. "Its developed agriculture and short distance from Kabul give its inhabitants a relatively good standard of living. All this should have favoured the media but it has not been enough. Media activity has been held back by the province's ethnic and cultural characteristics. Various ethnic groups, including Pashtuns, Tajiks, Pashai and Nurisani, live here. This disparity has resulted in resistance to the government's social, political and economic plans. Unfortunately, the media have not been sufficiently encouraged and developed."

Wafa added: "At the same time, security in the Kapisa region is the second biggest obstacle to freedom of information. Proximity to the enormous military base at Bagram gives the province a strategic value and has therefore turned it into an area of tension that is prey to armed conflicts. The influence of forces opposed to the government is palpable, and they have an interest in promoting violence in the region."

Most of the 40 journalists who attended a meeting organized by Reporters Without Borders in Sayad, in Kapisa province, on 28 September 2013 thought that, for the most part, the media in these northern provinces had a positive impact on the regions they cover, despite the lack of resources available to them. These same journalists also thought that the quality of these media was insufficient and that this was mainly due to the lack of training for their journalists.

### **The international military presence's impact on the media**

The international military presence in the northern provinces has had a positive impact on the safety of journalists. By clearly displaying their support for the media, the international troops have effectively limited the ability of the different pressure groups (including Taliban, warlords, armed groups and local officials) to cause them harm.

This support has helped to reinforce and develop media capacity. Several Kabul-based NGOs have also been an important source of support for some of these media, providing them with monthly funding in exchange for their help in publicizing the NGOs' local projects.

By informing the public about NGO projects with a direct impact on their daily lives and the region's social problems, radio stations such as *Radio Khorasan* (Panjshir), *Radio Najrab* (Kapisa) and *Radio Dunya* and *Elham* (Parwan) improved their reputation among their listeners. *Radio Sada-e-Solh* presenter Farshid Ajidi said: "As soon as you allow listeners to talk on the air, lots of them phone in, both for entertainment programmes and more serious ones, in order to talk at length and to express their views on the subject." The finances of these radio stations have been jeopardized by the termination of some of the funding by Kabul-based donors.

Even if the international presence has had a beneficial impact on the daily lives of some of these media and some journalists regret the withdrawal of funding, these journalists also spoke to us about the negative consequences of this support. The relations between provincial media and international forces have been exploited by government opponents as grounds for arguing that these media should not be trusted.

The propaganda put out by the enemies of freedom of information has spread the idea that most of the provincial media are foreign creations that are mainly controlled by the Americans. This negative publicity has undermined the credibility of these media and endangered their staff.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The interior ministry and justice ministry must revive the investigations into past murders of journalists and serious attacks on journalists. They must also ensure that the police carry out proper investigations into every threat or attack against a journalist, identifying those responsible and providing prosecutors and judges with all the necessary evidence.
- The justice ministry and parliament must immediately begin the required legislative process so that the law on access to information can be adopted before the election.
- The information ministry must allow state media to have editorial independence.
- The government and the religious authorities must defend the right of women to work as journalists, just as men do, including on television.
- Those who represent the media and journalists in representative bodies must be chosen by unions. Any intervention by the authorities in this choice is unworthy of a democracy. All the “legal” and “administrative” obstacles to the media commission's creation must be removed. As a media regulatory body, this commission could play an important role in the holding of a democratic election.
- The Afghan media must reinforce provisions for the protection of journalists, especially in the provinces.

## RWB'S VISIT TO AFGHANISTAN

September 2013

In September 2013, Reporters Without Borders conducted a fact-finding visit to Afghanistan – to Kabul and the northern provinces of Parwan, Kapisa and Panjshir – to identify the main threats and difficulties that news media and journalists face with regard to the presidential election and the withdrawal of foreign troops.

RWB met the culture and information minister, the governors of Kabul and Parwan, a member of the Council of Ulemas, representatives of civil society, human rights groups and media freedom organizations, the families and lawyers of victims, and many journalists and journalists' associations.

During this visit, Reporters Without Borders also conducted an **information campaign aimed at improving the preparation and protection of journalists while covering the election.**

Journalists from more than a dozen independent national and local media attended a seminar that RWB organized in Kabul from 21 to 23 September 2013 for media personnel who will be covering the presidential election on 5 April 2014.



The participating media included *Tolo TV*, *Shamshad TV*, the *Pajwak* news agency, the *Vakhat* news agency, *Saba TV*, the *Killid* media group, the *8 Sobh* newspaper (Kabul), *Radio Najrab* (Kapisa), *Radio Sedai Solh* (Parwan), *Hevat TV* (Kandahar), *Radio Bamian* (Bamian), *Radio Chenar* (Khost), *Radio Baran* (Herat), *Radio Rabeh Balkhi* (Mazar Sharif) and *Radio Enekash* (Nangarhar).

The seminar covered the following subjects:

- Elections in accordance with international standards and Afghan law
- The rights and duties of journalists during elections
- Woman journalists and election coverage
- Covering elections in war zones and other dangerous areas

Several **round tables and workshops** were organized with well-known Afghan journalists and specialists, including :

- Najiba Ayubi, head of the *Killid* media group
- Farideh Nikzad of the Afghan Independent Journalists Association
- Masomeh Heidary, editor of the *Wakht* News agency and a journalist with Herat-based radio *Baran*
- Mobarez Rashedi, deputy information and culture minister
- Fahim Dashti, general secretary of the Afghan Journalists Federation
- Zia Bomia, a journalist and representative of the South Asian Free Media Association
- Danish Karokhel, head of *Pajhwok Afghan News*
- Sediqolah Tohidi, head of the media freedom NGO Nai and former head of the media commission of the 2009 presidential election's independent commission.

Persian and Pashto translations of RWB's **Handbook for Journalists during Elections** were prepared ahead of this visit to help Afghan journalists covering this election, one that is particularly sensitive and important for the country's democracy. Copies were distributed to the journalists attending the Kabul seminar and to the 40 northern journalists who attended the 28 September meeting in Sayay, in Kapisa province. The handbook was produced in partnership with the International Organization of the Francophonie.

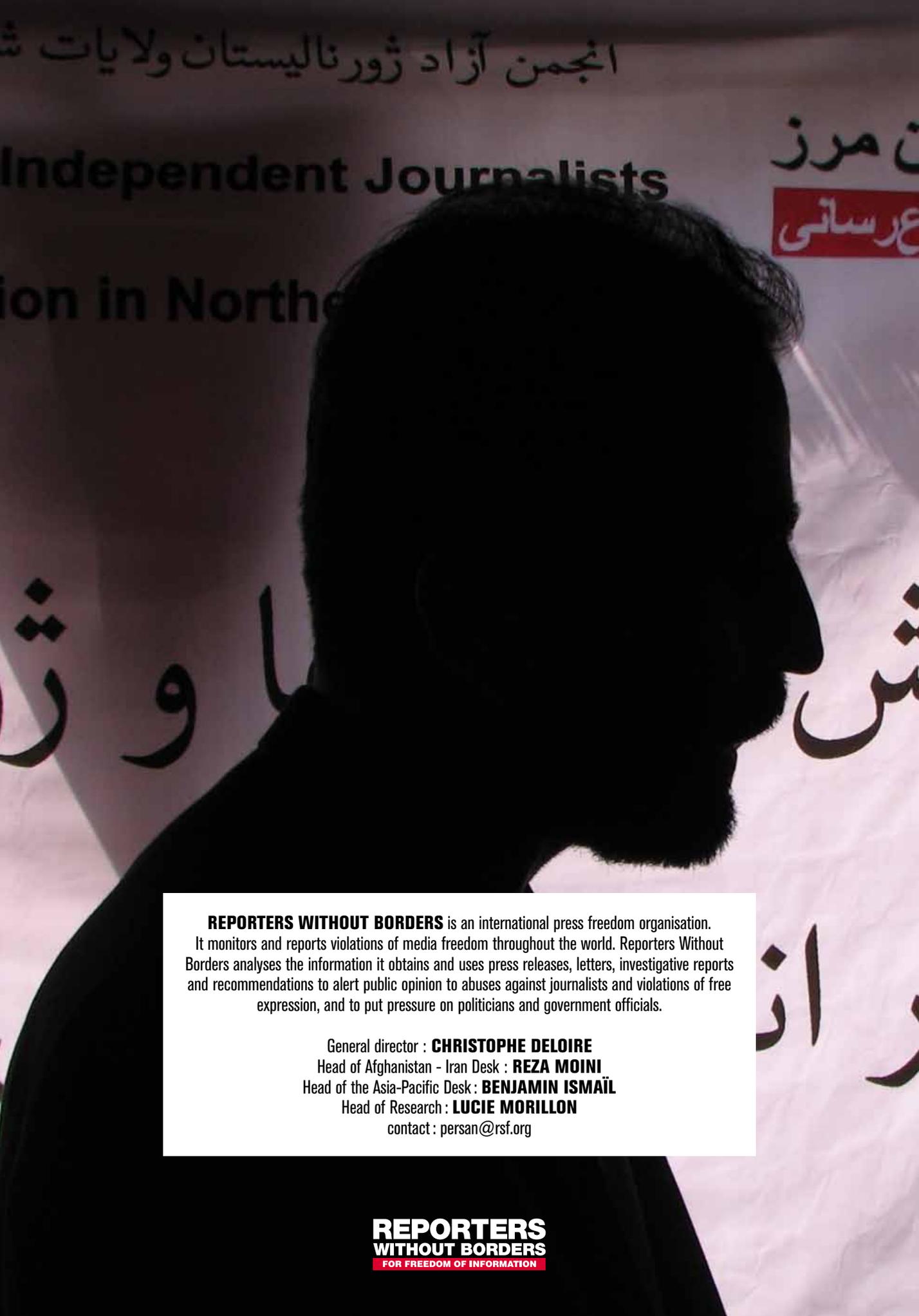
*The Handbook for Journalists during Elections*

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