



PAKISTAN: 6-POINT AGENDA ON MEDIA FREEDOM AND JOURNALIST SAFETY FOR POLITICAL PARTIES' ELECTORAL MANIFESTOS

As Pakistan navigates its path towards democratic progression, it's imperative for political parties to embed a comprehensive digital rights agenda for journalists and media personnel in their electoral manifestos. Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) urges political parties to ensure their digital rights agenda aligns with both national laws and international commitments to human rights, ensuring a free, safe, and inclusive environment for media freedom in Pakistan.

This agenda considers the following key aspects:

1. Amend and Ensure Effective Implementation of the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act, 2021

- a. Amend section 6 of the Act to alleviate the threat to journalistic freedom by addressing concerns over vague and subjective requirements within the Act, such as by creating clearer parameters of terms such as "Good faith" obligations of journalists and others.
- b. Eliminate measures outlined in section 6(3) that risk prosecution of journalists and ensure transparency by specifying definitions within the law, preventing arbitrary interpretation, and upholding the principles of media freedom.
- c. Eliminate the 14-day time limitation for filing a complaint of harassment and abusive, violent, and intolerant behavior before the Commission. The amended timeframe for filing the complaint should be a minimum of 30 days.
- d. Reduce the 14-day period to a more reasonable timeframe to expedite the investigative and legal processes against the complaints of harassment and abusive, violent, and intolerant behavior. Additionally, the specific actions that fall under the term "all necessary actions" (as outlined under sections 7(3) and 8(3) of the Act) that will be taken after the filing of a complaint needs to be listed clearly, including a detailed list of investigative steps, and prosecutorial measures.
- e. The Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals (CPJMI), as mandated in section 12(1) of the Act, has not been established for the past two years. To ensure the implementation of the Act, it is strongly recommended that the CPJMI be established immediately.

2. Ensure Freedom of Expression and Media Access

- a. Ensure that no journalist is barred from accessing information, even under the right to information (RTI) law.
 - i. Prohibit any form of censorship or content blocking that violates *Section 37 of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016*.
 - ii. Ensure that no journalist is barred from accessing information, consistent with RTI laws and *Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)* which Pakistan has ratified.

- b. Ensure that no journalist is threatened, intimidated, or mistreated for doing their job of making information more accessible to the masses.
- c. Provide protection to bloggers and influencers and ensure their right to freedom of expression as per law.

3. Ensure Safety and Protection

- a. Prevent the misuse of laws against journalists sharing their work or expressing their views on social media. Ensure that legal provisions are clear, and charges are not fabricated to stifle freedom of expression.
- b. Ensure the safety of journalists, particularly female journalists as per Pakistan's laws.
- c. Ensure any action taken against journalists, including arrests and detention, is strictly based on human rights principles of necessity, proportionality, and legality. Ensure that due process is followed, and actions are not disproportionate to the alleged offense.
- d. Guarantee that harassment in online spaces against female journalists is taken up by the authorities immediately:
 - i. Establish a specialized cell within the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) for immediate response to complaints from journalists.
 - ii. Ensure mandatory gender-sensitive training programs for the personnel at FIA to enhance understanding and responsiveness to gender-based violence against journalists.
- e. Provide protection and compensation to the journalist's family, including camerapersons, apart from the Press Club administration, if injured or killed during duty.
- f. Ensure journalists' right to online and offline freedom of assembly and association and commit to end the misuse of instruments such as the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance 1960 or the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997 to curb their right to peaceful assembly.

4. Implement Media Industry Reforms

- a. Ensure safety of Media persons working in/with media houses in both Online and Offline spaces:
 - i. Ensure safety of female journalists under the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010, allowing healthy and safe working environments where Sheharyar Rizwan
 - ii. Senior sub-editor, Samaa Digitaljournalists can flourish.
 - iii. Ensure protection to journalists, especially those belonging to or covering stories related to at-risk and marginalized communities.
 - iv. Ensure mandatory gender sensitization training for personnels at media houses to enhance understanding of, and prevent gender-based violence against journalists.
- b. Ensure that the media houses end salary delays, increase workforce to avoid overburdening existing staff and give yearly increments.
- c. Commit to end the influence and monopoly of media houses and political parties to make media reporting unbiased.
- d. Take actions to register everyone working in the media, even on web desks, in press clubs.

- i. Mandate registration of all media personnel in press clubs and the Ministry of Information for access and protection.

5. Ensure Digital Accessibility and Inclusion

- a. Remove obstacles that restrict journalists from covering news on certain issues across Pakistan.
- b. Recognize and address the detrimental impact of internet shutdowns and social media blackouts on journalism.
- c. Invest in infrastructure that promotes the publication of diverse content from various regional and linguistic backgrounds within Pakistan.
- d. Establish measures to deal with harassment and discrimination in journalist spaces, to ensure equal opportunities for women, gender minorities, and other underrepresented groups.

6. Uphold Data and Protection:

- a. Advocate for the passage and implementation of the *Personal Data Protection Bill 2023*, ensuring it aligns with international standards for data protection and addresses existing loopholes.
- b. Establish the *National Commission for Personal Data Protection* to safeguard individuals’
- c. data rights, with clear and stringent penalties for data breaches
- d. Address the broad and vague definitions within *Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act 2016* that have been used to stifle freedom of expression and dissent, and which put journalists at risk of prosecution for legitimate expression.

Signatures of Journalists:

1. Asma Shirazi, Senior Journalist
2. Mahwish Fakhar - Producer Coordination Dawn TV
3. Lubna Jerar Naqvi - Journalist; PFUJ; IFJ
4. Laiba Zainab - Senior Editor Political Desk The Current
5. Aneela Mehmood - Credible News Pakistan (CNP)
6. Fauzia Kalsoom Rana - Founder and Convenor Women Journalists Association of Pakistan WJAP, Broadcast Journalist
7. Anmol Irfan - Freelance journalist
8. Jamaima Afridi - Freelance Journalist /Documentary Filmmaker
9. Zeest Naaz - Assignment Editor, South Today Live, PNN News Network
10. Syed Sibte Hassan Rizvi - Senior Reporter Hum News TV.
11. Sabahat Khan - Freelance content and feature writer
12. Amer Malik Journalist / Correspondent - The News International, Pakistan
13. Majid Siddique Nizami - Senior Producer Geo News
14. Wasif Shakil - Senior News Editor (Digital) Geo News
15. Umaima Ahmed - Freelance journalist
16. Moazzam S. Bhatti journalist
17. Islam Gul Afridi, Correspondent, Special Broadcasting Services (SBS Radio)
18. Muhammad Ammad (Copywriter) AbbTakk News
19. Zeenat Shehzadi: Freelance Investigative Reporter (Voicepk.net).
20. Sheema Siddiqui - Investigative journalist, Geo News Karachi.Sindh-coordinator WMF-Pakistan-IFJ

21. Fauzia Yazdani, journalist.
22. Rani Wahidi: Correspondence DW Urdu Deutsche Welle/Documentary maker / editor monthly WomenShade
23. Farhan Ali, Defense and Diplomatic correspondent, Public News Islamabad
24. Sameer Ajmal, Reporter, Daily Jang
25. Sajjad Azhar Independent Urdu
26. Kashif Nawab, the White post.
27. Nabila Feroz, freelance journalist
28. Sarah B. Haider, freelance journalist
29. Wajiha Aslam, special projects manager, Samaa TV.
30. Afshan Masab, C.E.O NativeMedia / Multimedia Journalist
31. Dr. Tehreem Azeem, Freelance Journalist, Visiting Faculty University of the Punjab
32. Ahsan Raza, subeditor, Dawn newspaper
33. Adila Batool, freelance journalist
34. Sumeira Ashraf, Head of assignment and planning at 24 news HD Islamabad bureau
35. Ajmal Jami, Anchor/Reporter at Aik News
36. Riffat Anjum, Freelance journalist, broadcaster
37. Maleeha Mengal, freelance journalist
38. Anas Mallick, Pakistan Bureau Chief at WIONews
39. Sehyr Mirza, Independent Journalist and Author
40. Nida Mujahid Hussain, Multimedia Producer, Independent Urdu.
41. Asma Bashir Kundi, Multimedia journalist, wenews.pk
42. Zunaira Rafi, Wenews.pk, Reporter
43. Fozia Azam, Freelance Journalist
44. Shaiq Hussain, 92 newspaper Chief Reporter
45. Maryam Zia, Anchorperson PTV World
46. Iqra Batool, Sub Editor wenews.pk
47. Faiz Paracha, Journalist Pro Pakistani & News Diplomacy
48. Yassar Talib, Columnist, Humsb
49. Annie Zaman, Global Voices, Deutsche Welle TV
50. Zeenat Bibi, Freelance Journalist and Filmmaker
51. Sheharyar Rizwan, Senior sub-editor, Samaa Digital
52. Imtiaz Hussain Reporter The News at Sukkur Region.
53. Fatima Razzaq - CEO, Lok Sujag
54. Haider Kaleem - Journalist and Researcher (Lok Sujag, South Asia Partnership - Pakistan)
55. Maryam Tanveer (Freelancer from Quetta) currently associate with Women Media Center as their correspondent Quetta
56. Nasreen Jabeen, Reporter, Daily Jang (Peshawar)
57. Sana Jamil, Digital Editor English News at IMM (Geo)
58. Murtaza Ali Shah Geo News Correspondent (London)
59. Malik Waqar Ahmed, VOA
60. Kamal Siddiqi director news Aaj tv
61. Sidra Ayan (Mardan) TNN,Indy
62. Waleed Tariq - Editor at Anadolu Agency
63. Rabia Mushtaq - Geo.tv
64. Aneela Ashraf, Free Lance Journalist & Founder Journalists Save Movementa
65. Safina Javed, Peace and development organizations.
66. Saddia Mazhar. investigative journalist

67. Annam Lodhi, Freelance Journalist
68. Sahar Saeed 92 News
69. Kainat Malik Chief Editor Jamal e jahan Rajanpur
70. Raza Rumi, editor The Friday Times/ NayaDaur Media
71. Najia Ashar, President, GNMI
72. Miranda Husain, journalist and editor
73. Fozia Azam- Independent News Pakistan
74. Shiba Gill, Anchor person LCCI Executive member CJAP
75. Ismat Jabeen Freelance Correspondent Deutsche Welle
76. Mehr F Husain, editor The Friday Times/ publisher, Zuka Books
77. Rai Waleed bhatti , Staff Reporter daily Ummat Rawalpindi / Islamabad
78. Alveena Sajid, Assistant Manager Production & Coordination, Express News
79. Sana Rauf BBC Vlogger, Freelance Reporter
80. Saeed Sarbazi President Karachi Press Club
81. Lala Hassan, Media Lawyer & HRD
82. Khawaja Burhan Uddin Deputy News Editor Geo Digital - English
83. Madiha Batool News Editor Jang Web
84. Yousuf Abid, Resident Editor, E-Media Group Multan
85. Anwar Iqbal, Dawn
86. Zoya Anwer, Freelance Multimedia Journalist
87. Sana Eqbal - Web Editor The Nation Newspaper.

Civil Society:

1. Nighat Dad, Executive Director - Digital Rights Foundation
2. Maryam Saeed, Research Lead - Digital Rights Foundation
3. Seerat Khan - Programs Lead, Digital Rights Foundation
4. Zainab Durani, Senior Project Manager - Digital Rights Foundation
5. Irum Shujah (Advocate High Court) - Senior Legal Associate - Digital Rights Foundation
6. Sadia Khalid Founder Be Torch Bearer
7. Bushra Iqbal Hussain, CEO of Mahfoozbachpan a campaign for child protection
8. Dr Hassan Shehzad Department of Media, International Islamic university
9. Ayesha Khalid, project manager MMfD
10. Jalila Haider, Balochistan Bar council
11. Haider Ali Butt - CEO, Policy and Advocacy Solutions and Founder, Progressive Democratic Lawyers Forum
12. Farooq Tariq - Secretary General, Pakistan Kissan Rabta Committee
13. Khalid Mahmood - Executive Director, Labour Education Foundation
14. Dr. Ammar Ali Jan - Secretary General, Haqooq e Khalq Party
15. Sabahat Rizvi - Secretary - Lahore High Court Bar Association
16. Dr. Riaz Shaikh, Szabist University, Karachi
17. Pushpa kumari HRCF Council Member
18. Nida Tanweer- HRCF
19. Kashif Aslam -CICF