

**2021  
REPORT**

The  
Coalition  
For  
Women In  
Journalism



**HUNDREDS OF AFGHAN  
WOMEN JOURNALISTS  
PLEAD FOR HELP AS  
THEY FACE TALIBAN  
RETRIBUTION**

Photo Credit: Wakil Kohsar/Agence France-Presse

# ABOUT US

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The Coalition For Women In Journalism (CFWIJ) is a global organization of support for women journalists. The CFWIJ pioneered mentorship for mid-career women journalists across several countries around the world and is the first organization to focus on the status of free press for women journalists. Our network of individuals and organizations brings together the experience and mentorship necessary to help female career journalists navigate the industry. Our goal is to help develop a strong mechanism where women journalists can work safely and thrive.

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The threatened yet resilient Afghan women journalists shared stories of despair, fear, and silence as The Coalition For Women In Journalism was flooded by applications for assistance. With a tireless team effort and sincere commitment to our women journalists on the ground, we have managed to relocate more than 30 at-risk individuals so far. The bustling Afghan media that once thrived even amidst the worst of threats is now finding it hard to survive under Taliban rule.

Women journalists destroyed the traces of their identities and work documentation as they wrote their applications to CFWIJ for safe relocation. Every story is similar in terms of the fear, pain, and struggle to survive. We continue to report and assist the women journalists, activists, and social workers stuck in this crisis, fearing for their lives and families. The CFWIJ is in the process of vetting over 2500 applications, prioritizing and processing the cases with the most urgent needs. As the CFWIJ is engaged with several countries, including the U.S., Canada, and Pakistan, and assisting work with international organizations in evacuation efforts, we are helping to facilitate safe passage for the most vulnerable journalists, activists, and human rights defenders.

Among the hundreds of applications to CFWIJ, there was an email from SH, a local female journalist who had worked with an international news network. She described her situation, "I have worked as a local reporter with \*\*\*\* and as an employee for the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan since 2017. Given the current situation, I have to leave the country as soon as possible. I see my life at high risk as a female who worked as a reporter. Looking forward to your help and support."



AZ, another female journalist, wrote her story and described the terror she is witnessing, "Before the Taliban entered Herat, I had been threatened several times by telephone and chased several times by unknown and suspicious individuals; I do not have the opportunity to work now, both because of my gender and because I belong to the Hazara people and the Shiite religion. I am being persecuted by the Taliban because of my media and civic activities in the past, and most likely the death penalty is on the way for me and my family."

A war-ridden country that built up extensive media in the past two decades is now losing most of its women journalists. The women journalists who courageously took a bold and sensitive role by continuing to report from conflict zones are now in immediate danger. Taliban leadership has let some media houses continue their coverage, but there is no telling how long this will last. The CFWIJ believes after the recent crisis, world leaders must remain engaged with the Taliban to ensure the safety of innocent citizens, women rights activists, and journalists. Otherwise, the progress and development made in Afghanistan over the past two decades could soon be lost.



The CFWIJ also received a plea for help from ZF. She is another brave woman journalist who has worked with international news agencies and human rights organizations, following the stories of women in shelter homes. She finds herself at great risk under the Taliban's regime as women's shelters have been targets for extremists in the past. Another woman journalist, BS, told us her own horror story, "I am writing this email with tears in my eyes while the Taliban are patrolling in front of my apartment building. I have spent most of my time studying, taking training, and working as a woman journalist in Afghanistan in the past ten years. However, I feel in imminent danger under the seizure of the Taliban working as a journalist and no longer can continue my activities. I am requesting your organization to consider me and my family's resettlement out of Afghanistan for the safety of me and my family."

There is an unsettling uncertainty around the future of these women journalists, activists, and writers. So far, the Taliban has managed to present a softer image than the brutal past they established over twenty years ago. They portray a moderate picture— no more than a facade— as their actions speak otherwise.



On August 20, CFWIJ reported the cases of Shabnam Dawran and Khadija Amin. Both women journalists were barred from entering their office after the Taliban took control. Shabnam recounted in her video statement that she presented her work ID but was asked to go home as the regime had changed. Further, she revealed the male colleagues were allowed to enter the office. "Those who are listening to me, if the world hears me, then please help us as our lives are under threat," Shabnam concluded her message.

Anisa Shaheed, a TOLO News journalist, shared on Twitter that, "This is the fourth day that I have no motivation to work. In my years of journalism, I have never felt so frustrated and useless. Every day, I receive calls from many people who have been attacked, beaten, kicked out of their houses. What should I do? Where should we take action? My hands are tied."

Nasrin Nawa, a former BBC journalist, shared a picture depicting a bruised arm. She wrote, "Taliban beat @callmeraha13 for her visible hand tattoo, and she says: they are not changed, but they are smarter now because they monitor people around to not make video."



Threats mentioned in the above tweets are similar to the claims the CFWIJ has received from over 2500 applicants. KF, a full-time journalist associated with a TV channel, received death threats several times while working with USAID projects. She states in her email, "I worry about my family's safety and well-being. We are now anxious and wonder how we could survive the threats from the Taliban. I can't work. I can't serve my family & cannot live as an ordinary member of Afghan society. I'm worried what would happen to my husband if the insurgents kill me." KF also narrated how her father was stopped by some people and questioned about her. He told them that KF is out of Helmand and studying in Kabul. Now, she is looking for a safe relocation.

The CFWIJ has made significant efforts to provide help to as many urgent cases as possible. We also call on the United Nations Security Council to play its decisive role in ensuring the safety of women journalists, activists, and human rights defenders who are stuck in Afghanistan. The media present in Afghanistan must be able to report safely and freely.

Women journalists have seen and suffered horrible incidents over the past years. From car bombings to suicide attacks, they have faced terrible challenges from the conflict zones. Now, as the repressive group takes power over the country, it is an inescapable crisis for the hardworking and progressive people who have committed themselves to serving humanity.



MM has worked in an Afghan radio station since 2003. She writes in her email, "My life and my family's life is under threat. As the world is aware that Afghanistan and its people are in a precarious situation, and the Taliban has occupied Kabul. They are the biggest enemy of women, especially those who have worked in the media and have shown their faces on TV. Despite my degrees, I will not be able to work anymore. I'm in real danger and threat."

Another name on our urgent cases list mentions FMH, who has served with the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. Presently, she is serving under a ministry that offers help to women. FMH stated in her application that she recently received a call from insurgents who inquired about her workplace. BH, a research analyst based in Kabul, revealed the Taliban threatened her in March to quit her job or be beheaded.

The Coalition For Women In Journalism is monitoring the situation on the ground and actively helping women journalists and activists. Every application we have received deserves equal attention. We have categorized the applications and utilized all of our resources to provide as much assistance as we can. Journalists who truly and urgently need to relocate should be able to get a safe passage. We also support those who decided to stay and continue to report. We commend their courage and commitment to covering developments as they unfold. We also want these women journalists to remain safe and secure without feeling harassed or threatened by Taliban insurgents.





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