



Committee to Protect Journalists



HRW.org



Internews



PCOMS  
PAKISTAN COALITION ON MEDIA SAFETY



---

## OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER NAWAZ SHARIF

### Joint statement of shared concerns about attacks on journalists in Pakistan

29 May 2014

Dear Prime Minister

Three years ago today, journalist Saleem Shahzad was abducted a short distance away from his Islamabad home and later found dead, his body bearing marks consistent with torture. We, the representatives of the undersigned group of civil society organisations working in human rights and media, call on you to fulfil your promise to end the impunity enjoyed by individuals and groups who threaten, attack, abduct, torture and kill journalists in Pakistan. In order to address these attacks on journalists, we urge you to follow through on [the commitments](#) you made in March, and as a first phase country for the UN Action Plan on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, and to take further concrete steps along the lines set out below.

Based on our collective experiences monitoring human rights globally, Pakistan is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists, judging by the severity and extent of threats and attacks on media professionals due to their reporting. Dozens of journalists have

been killed in Pakistan in direct response to their work over the last decade. At least eight journalists have been killed since your government came to power in June 2013.

Journalists and other media workers from across Pakistan face harassment, abduction, torture and attempts on their lives by state intelligence officers, members of political parties and armed groups like the Taliban. Journalists reporting on national security and human rights, and those reporting from the conflict-affected northwest, violence-ravaged Balochistan and the city of Karachi are most at risk as they rarely enjoy protection from the state or support from their employers.

We are deeply concerned at the failure of successive Pakistan governments to carry out prompt, impartial, independent and thorough investigations into abuses against journalists, or to bring those responsible to justice. Attempts on the lives of Hamid Mir and Raza Rumi and the abduction and killing of Saleem Shahzad exemplify the enduring challenge to justice when journalists come under attack: as far as our organisations are aware, no one has been brought to justice for any of these attacks. Only in two cases of journalist killings have the perpetrators ever been convicted in Pakistan.

The failure to bring those responsible for attacks on journalists to justice sends a signal that the media can be silenced through violence and that the perpetrators can literally get away with murder and other abuses. It also has a chilling effect on freedom of expression in Pakistan, with journalists increasingly resorting to self-censorship to avoid the risk of harm.

It is the Pakistan government's duty under international law to protect the rights to life, liberty and freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of all individuals within its territory and under its jurisdiction, including journalists. As a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Pakistan must also ensure the media is free to carry out its critical function of facilitating and promoting freedom of expression, as guaranteed by Article 19 of the ICCPR. Journalists play a vital role in exposing human rights abuse. Ensuring that journalists are able to undertake their work free from harassment and abuse is therefore an essential cornerstone in the protection and promotion of human rights in Pakistan.

We call on your Government to urgently take the following steps, in line with Pakistan's international legal obligations, so that journalists may carry out their work free from harassment and abuse:

- Re-start the criminal investigations into the abduction and killing of Saleem Shahzad, as promised by the current Pakistan government, and ensure that all potential suspects, including members of any military and intelligence authorities, are subjected to a full, independent and impartial investigation.
- Ensure prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations into human rights abuses against journalists, including abductions, enforced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment, extrajudicial executions and other unlawful killings.
- Ensure that all persons suspected of crimes involving human rights abuses against journalists, regardless of their status, rank or affiliation with state or non-state groups, are brought to justice in fair trials without recourse to the death penalty.

- Implement the Prime Minister’s announced plan to establish a public prosecutor at the federal and provincial levels tasked with investigating attacks against journalists, and ensure that it is independent, adequately staffed and resourced, and has authority to investigate the military and intelligence services in addition to civilians. Also implement the Prime Minister’s commitment to expedite the prosecution of the killers of journalists by changing trial venues and expanding witness protection programs.
- Ensure, in line with the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, that media companies adhere to requirements on due diligence, health and safety, among other standards in national law and policy; and introduce systemic legal and policy reforms where such requirements either do not exist in national law or are inadequate.

We welcome your concern about the situation for journalists in Pakistan and look forward to the Pakistan government taking real steps to improve the working environment for journalists in Pakistan.

Yours faithfully

1. **Amnesty International** – Salil Shetty, Secretary General
2. **Article 19 (UK)** – Thomas Hughes, Executive Director
3. **Committee to Protect Journalists** – Joel Simon, Executive Director
4. **Freedom House** - Karin Karlekar, Project Director, Freedom of the Press
5. **Human Rights Watch** – Brad Adams, Executive Director, Asia Division
6. **International News Safety Institute** – Hannah Storm, Executive Director
7. **Internews** – Jeanne Bourgault, President
8. **Pakistan Coalition on Media Safety** – Owais Aslam Ali, Head of Secretariat
9. **Pen International** – Ann Harrison, Programme Director
10. **Reporters Without Borders** - Christopher Deloire, Secretary-General