



WORKING PAPER

# Freedom of Expression and Media Pluralism in the Age of Democratization

Based on Round-Table Meeting Recommendations  
September 05, 2019

# Freedom of Expression and Media Pluralism in the Age of Democratization

This paper presents suggestions on how freedom of expression and a free press can help prevent violent conflict and make its contribution to building peace and harmony in society. It aims to help the civil society, media, government and researchers in the field of conflict and communication. This working paper for the GNMI research desk was produced on the basis of a round-table meeting held by Media Baithak on September 05<sup>th</sup>, 2019 in Karachi, Pakistan. (The list of panelists is attached herewith)

## **INTRODUCTION:**

For a community to instill tolerance into its members it is important that all its representatives are allowed to practice the inalienable human right of freedom of expression. “Freedom of expression is a precious instrument,” OSCE media freedom representative Dunja Mijatović said. “It facilitates the dissemination and discussion of all kinds of beliefs, thoughts, and creeds. Free speech and free media are therefore vital for the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination.” Therefore the concepts are imperative to countering violent extremism (CVE) to promote these freedoms instead of restricting them.

Globally there is no governance that permits absolute freedom of speech or expression; this is in order to protect the rights of others from racist, sexist or otherwise hateful language. Though freedom of expression is limited for these reasons, the limits are not distinctive and often favor the already privileged. This vagueness undermines freedom of speech and press as well as the well-meaning intents that curb it. A school of thought by the name of ‘Tolerance Theory’ suggests that all speech, including hate speech, should be permitted. It argues that hate speech stems from a lack of understanding and an exchange of dialogue, hence should it be legalized. It will enable the increase the probability of engaging in meaningful conversation between polarizing groups as well as the tolerance to withstand and counter it with ideas instead of radical action.

However, as a counter to this debate, Karl Popper discussed the paradox of tolerance that can be summed up thusly; ‘Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we

extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them.’

Freedom of expression and freedom of press are entangled in these two polarizing theories that prevent any concrete definitions regarding what freedoms this human right allows.

The recommendations presented in this document address: (1) general practices regarding the freedom of expression and press in the context of CVE; and (2) advancing free media’s role in CVE. This list of recommendations is not intended to be exhaustive.

### **KEYWORDS:**

Freedom of speech, counter extremism, freedom of press, security, journalism, CVE, Freedom of expression

### **KEY CONCEPT:**

Freedom of expression and media both play effective roles in CVE, even though the current local and global trends illuminate that it is these freedoms in particular that are being curtailed, in the hopes that that will counter radical and extremist worldviews. As a result the world is becoming an increasingly hostile place for journalists. Reporters without Borders called 2018 the deadliest year on record for journalists. UNESCO confirms that at least 99 journalists were killed, a further 348 imprisoned and 60 held hostage. Freedom of expression is being stifled and barriers are preventing the functioning of an independent media. We must address this and the dangers it presents. A decline of freedom of the press is usually a warning sign that restrictions on other freedoms may soon follow.

Freedom of expression and freedom of press are two rights that safeguard a citizen’s claim to information and accountability from their state. If these are restricted it can alienate the citizen from their government and environment and it leaves too much margin for conspiracy theories and drastic points of views; all of which fuels VE in a society.

As censorship increases in society so does intolerance, as it enables only selected narratives to be broadcasted or printed, which shapes society in ways that make binary opinions rampant. In comparison, when there is little to no censorship in a community there is an increase of view points and opinions. The space for varying perspectives to flourish ensures representation for differing demographics, where a large part of the population feels acknowledged.

The participants of the round-table were of the consensus that globally these freedoms are shrinking and due to the blurred parameters around this subject it is much more difficult to know when one is crossing that line. The consequences for stepping over the line are varied and often irrevocable, such as the permanent suspension of social media accounts, termination from a post

in the press, to some of the more extreme costs such as abductions and casualties. Some participants saw social media as the silver lining and defense against this growing limitation on press freedom as well as freedom of expression.

One of the more disheartening results of this global clampdown on the freedoms of expression and press is the self-censorship, meaning that oftentimes members of the media or even civic individuals restrain themselves before the authorities have a chance to or because they know that their work will either not be published or it will endanger them. The role that freedom of speech plays in CVE is undeniable as currently only one narrative is protected and perpetuated whereas ideally the representatives of every community and demographic must be given their due share to reflect on the political and social climate that they are experiencing. Limiting these freedoms for the sake of other freedoms is like putting a band aid on a tumor; completely ineffectual.

The space for the press to hold government authorities and the elite to account has been diminished. According to the Council of Europe Platform: ‘ten new alerts on problematic legislative or administrative measures ... include the closure or banning of media outlets by decree; new legislation allowing the blocking of Internet sites on national security grounds without independent oversight; rules requiring foreign-funded media outlets to register as “foreign agents”; a bill that would criminalize the viewing of certain online content and publishing certain pictures or video clips; and measures that potentially criminalize the legitimate work of journalists reporting on terrorism issues.’

## **DISCUSSION REFERENCE**

It is relatively tricky to measure freedom of press and expression in Pakistan as oddly the consensus amongst Media Baithak panelists was that press freedom was at its highest during a dictatorship. Reporters without Borders however have ranked the country 142 out of 180 for freedom of press, 180 being the absolute worst. Since 2002, the numbers of television channels have risen from just three state-run channels in 2000 to 90, including private television channels, in 2019, according to the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority. Most of the private media in Pakistan flourished under the General (retd) Pervaiz Musharraf’s military regime. There are about 90 satellite TV channels, 22 TV channels with landing rights and 227 radio stations in Pakistan.

## **STRESS DISCUSSION**

This topic is not only of concern to journalists and the media industry but to the country and world at large. What is the course of action when simply asking questions brands one as anti-state / traitor / foreign agent / foreign funded? By pushing singular or selected narratives are we enabling home-grown extremists? Are we as a society losing tolerance for constructive criticism? What is the long-term cost of censorship and are we ready to pay it? What role can a free press play in CVE?

# RECOMMENDATIONS

*The panelists of the roundtable meeting proposed a number of recommendations on maintaining and protecting freedom of expression in the country. The following list summarizes key recommendations from a number of wide-ranging discussion points, case studies and international documents including resolution 59 of the UN General Assembly adopted in 1946, as well as by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which states that the fundamental right of freedom of expression encompasses the freedom to “to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”*

1. Promote and safeguard freedom of expression in the country through strong federal and provincial laws by taking onboard all journalistic organizations, members of civil society organizations, lawyers and other relevant stakeholders. A strong legal framework will give the much-needed constitutional cover to the vulnerable section of society.
2. Increase recruitment and training of journalists in the media industry, including print, electronic and digital, and remove obstacles to their retention and career advancement. The journalists should not be dictated to by media organizations regarding where and where not to participate, as a panelist or speaker after working hours.
3. Media owners should not be taking editorial directions of their respective news media organizations. Senior veteran journalists assigned for the task must be given the authority to take these decisions.
4. Support quality, context-specific research on freedom of expression in the country, including dialogue between relevant national and international stakeholders and institutions to counter marginalization in the society. Such a research document would also serve as national database for journalists and members of the development sector.
5. Promote partnerships between local media organizations and civil society institutions – this is the key to effective CVE program implementation. Support community outreach programs that raise awareness and inform journalists on identifying and responding to the key issues present in the community.
6. All ordinances and laws being used to restrict freedom of expression in digital spaces must be condemned across the board. A thorough and detailed review of cybersecurity laws must be taken by senior journalists and social activists.
7. A detailed review must be taken by a parliamentary committee to oversee the ambiguities present in the Constitution of Pakistan in respect to freedom of expression. The right to express

oneself until and unless it hurts ‘glory of Islam’ and ‘national interest’ is vague and subjective and prone to be misused by the official authorities.

8. Censorship in all its forms should never be allowed to be mainstreamed. The journalists, civil society organizations and media owners must sign a ‘Charter of Journalism’ to protect their civil liberties as enshrined in the Constitution of Pakistan.

9. All restrictions placed in the academic spaces must be lifted by their respective university administrations. The academia and students should be independent in conducting research on any subject without fear. The university administrations should ensure an open and free environment is given to the students for their academic research.

10. A brief PEMRA guideline should be made in consultation with the state authorities, journalists and artists to determine the ‘red lines’. The broader consultations between all the sections of the society to set ‘the rules of the game’ will ensure massive transparency in respect to freedom of expression in the country.

11. As Central Board of Film Censors (CBFC) include members of security forces along with civil servants, it’s imperative that the board must also include journalists and members of civil society to ensure that the cinema’s freedom of expression is not curtailed for the interests of few.

12. A broad coalition of journalists from regional and national mainstream papers along with members of civil society should have a joint platform in every metropolis city of the country; where issues pertaining to media freedom can be discussed and strategies are devised to address it.

**List of Panelists**

<b>SN</b>	<b>Guest Name</b>	<b>Designation / Organization</b>
<b>01</b>	Mr. Kamal Siddiqui	Director CEJ-IBA
<b>02</b>	Ms. Nazish Brohi	Columnist
<b>03</b>	Mr. G.M Jamali	General Secretary - PFUJ
<b>04</b>	Ms. Naghma Iqtidar Shiekh	Social Activist
<b>05</b>	Ms. Farieha Aziz	Founder, Bolo Bhi
<b>06</b>	Ms. Sidra Dar	Journalist - VOA
<b>07</b>	Ms. Nusrat Haris	TV host – PTV
<b>08</b>	Ms. Angeline Malik	Actor – Director – Social Activist
<b>09</b>	Mr. Nasir Baig Chughtai	Senior Journalist
<b>10</b>	Ms. Yasmeen Farooqui	Educationist
<b>11</b>	Ms. Jia Ali	Actor
<b>12</b>	Ms. Kaif Ghaznavi	Head of Media Studies – Iqra University
<b>13</b>	Mr. Ahmed Mushtaq	Vlogger
<b>14</b>	Mr. Ahmed Zakriya	Media Manager– TVOne
<b>15</b>	Mr. Samar Abbas	NCHR
<b>16</b>	Ms. Mehar Khursheed	Journalist
<b>17</b>	Mr. Sajjad Suhaj	Sindhi Media

**About the Working Paper:**

This working paper is based on 10 days of desk-based research and policy recommendation proposed in aforementioned round-table. It was prepared for the GNMI ©. The views and recommendations expressed in this working paper are those of the speakers and experts of the round-table, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of GNMI, its partner agencies or the federal or provincial governments of Pakistan. The GNMI Research desk provides rapid syntheses of key discussion and of expert recommendations in response to specific topic of discussion on governance, social development, humanitarian and conflict issues. Its concise working papers draw on a selection of the best recent literature available and on input from national experts. Each GNMI Research desk working paper is peer-reviewed by a member of the GNMI team.

**About the Global Neighborhood for Media Innovation:**

GNMI- Global Neighborhood for Media Innovation, a non-profit organization, registered under society act of 1860, bridges the gap between media and society. It promotes the nationwide access to media advocacy, learning and literacy in the spectrum of news, entertainment and infotainment, through intellectual and cultural engagement. It is committed to becoming the centre of developing media and civil society. GNMI works under the areas of media awareness, cultural development, providing learning resources, advocacy and social justice.