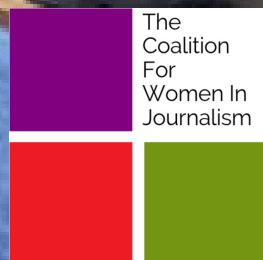


AGAINST THE ODDS: WOMEN JOURNALISTS IN IRAN CONTINUE TO SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER DESPITE HARROWING CHALLENGES



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REPORT**

Photo Credit: Fatemeh Bahrami/Anadolu Agency

ABOUT US

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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Trauma is not equal. Political upheaval, like every social development, always presents greater risks to communities already more vulnerable in society. And more often than not, women find themselves at the receiving end of multifaceted oppression, as several power relations interact to create an exceedingly unequal social order. In Iran, years of war, political revolutions, international intervention, and the rise of religious right-wing has given way to a political landscape where women, especially women journalists, find themselves increasingly vulnerable at the hands of racism, international Islamophobia, patriarchy and theocratic elements within its governance system. In fact, research has indicated that Iran, with 11 women journalists in captivity, is the world's biggest jailer of women journalists.

Ever since the beginning of 2021, the Coalition For Women In Journalism has recorded six cases of extreme violations in the country. The report acknowledges that repression of press by the Iranian authorities, restricted interaction with the larger global community and orientalist and Islamophobic narratives about the country, makes it extremely difficult for organizations to gauge the exact number of violations that are taking place against women journalists in the country. It is possible, and probable, that the number is much higher. However, the six cases that CFWIJ managed to cover, present not a quantitative but a qualitative insight into the authoritarian and misogynistic approach of the Iranian state towards their journalist community.



Of the six cases registered, four concern state captivity and torture, whereas others include instances of physical assault and attempts of state abduction on foreign land. The nature of these events is extremely concerning and sheds light upon the dangers that women journalists are currently confronting in the country with very little international support.

In February of this year, news about Zeynab Jalalian's torture while in custody came to light. Zeynab was arrested in 2008 and sentenced to death under the charge of Moharebeh, meaning enmity against God. She was arrested for her alleged membership to the Party for Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK), an armed Kurdish opposition group. In December 2011, her sentence was reduced to life imprisonment. Zeynab denies the allegations against her, despite enduring years of torture in prison. Zeynab has had a turbulent medical history during her time in confinement. She has suffered from internal bleeding, intestinal infections, and a case of chronic conjunctivitis, to which the prison authorities refused to provide adequate medical attention. The Iranian state has deliberately denied her medical aid during this time, purposely putting her life at risk.



In the same month, Journalist Nooshin Jafari was arrested without any prior notice. She was transferred to Tehran's Qarchak Prison to serve her four-year prison sentence. According to Amir Raisian, the journalist's lawyer, she was arrested in violation of legal ethics and without any official notice because of the "fear of escaping." This is not Nooshin's first time in prison. The journalist was first arrested in August 2019 for criticizing the Iran regime through a Twitter account Yar Dabestani.

In February as well, investigative journalist Saba Azarpeik was reportedly arrested by The Iranian Cyber Police (FATA) for undisclosed reasons. Saba's husband Ataullah Hafezi took Twitter to announce the journalist's arrest in violation of her legal rights. Although she was released on bail a day later, neither the allegations against her were made public nor was there any acknowledgement of the extrajudicial nature of the arrest.

Then in April, the Iranian authorities extended the custody period of journalist and philanthropist Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe. Nazanin was arrested in 2016 by Iranian authorities on charges of propaganda against the regime. In the latest hearing held in March, the court extended her imprisonment by another year, bringing the total of her years spent in captivity to six. Nazanin's crime was protesting against the state and speaking to reputed, international news media outlets about it.



In May, Faeze Momeni, a correspondent for Event 24 News, was covering pandemic management and the vaccination process at the Shahid Beheshti University when she was attacked. The journalist was leaving the premises when she was confronted by armed guards who demanded she delete the data she had recorded on her phone. When Faeze refused to comply, they physically assaulted her. The journalist was hospitalized as a result and suffered from a broken limb.

In the latest incident of this harrowing trend, the Iranian authorities violated international protocol in their attempt to silence voices of dissent. The FBI recently foiled an attempt by Iranian forces to abduct prominent Iranian human rights activist and journalist Masih Alinejad from American soil. Four Iranian intelligence officials have been convicted by the Federal court in Manhattan for orchestrating the plot. CFWIJ learnt from its sources on the ground that the FBI had been following the suspects for a while before the agency informed Alinejad that her life was in danger several months ago. This has been the latest in a long history of Iranian state's attempt to intimidate and silence Masih.



The Coalition For Women In Journalism is committed to its advocacy for a better world for women journalists around the world. It is disappointing and reprehensible how low the safety of women journalists rank on the list of concerns of the international community despite their plight being regularly used to strengthen liberal narratives against authoritarian regimes like Iran. The actions of the Iranian state against its own journalists is deplorable in the strongest possible terms. Countries do not progress without a thriving, inclusive civil society. We are aware that the challenges Iranian women journalists face are immense and occur at the intersection of several powerful groups interacting and clashing with one another. However, we are also aware of the brave work women journalists continue to do despite being vulnerable to these attacks and having very little local and international support. CFWIJ stands in solidarity with Iranian women journalists.



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