

Prime Minister Pledges Justice, Security For Journalists In Pakistan

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By Ahmed Rashid.

Prime minister pledges justice, security for journalists in Pakistan

Islamabad, March 19, 2014 -- In a wide-ranging meeting today with a delegation from the Committee to Protect Journalists, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif pledged to continue to expand Pakistan's media freedoms and address the insecurity plaguing the country's journalists. He also promised to ease visa and travel restrictions on foreign journalists working in the country.

"The important commitments made by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to address many of the problems facing journalists and their need for security and other issues indicate that he and his government recognize the importance of a free media in Pakistan," said CPJ board member Kati Marton. "His commitment is encouraging and unprecedented in Pakistan's history."

Sharif's pledge to streamline the investigation and prosecution of attacks on journalists is significant because the record of unsolved crimes has made Pakistan one of the world's most deadly countries for the media. The CPJ delegation presented the prime minister with case histories of 25 journalists killed in the last decade, all but one unprosecuted. In early March, six people were convicted in the 2011 murder of journalist [Wali Khan Babar](#). In a 45-minute meeting with CPJ, also attended by Information Minister Pervaiz Rasheed and Tariq Fatemi, special assistant to the prime minister on foreign affairs, Sharif made a series of commitments:

- Establish a joint government-journalist commission to address continued attacks on journalists and the impunity with which they occur.
- Expedite the prosecution of the killers of journalists by changing trial venues and expanding witness protection programs.
- Include the protection of journalists as a negotiating point in upcoming peace talks with the Taliban.
- Speak out in support of media freedom and in support of journalists under attack, particularly in high-conflict areas like Baluchistan and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.
- Expedite visas for foreign journalists working in the country.
- Review immediately the case of *New York Times* Bureau Chief Declan Walsh, who was expelled from Pakistan in May 2013.
- Following the meeting with CPJ, the government also announced the creation of special prosecutors in all four provinces and federally to oversee cases involving crimes against journalists.

In addition to Marton, the CPJ delegation included board member Ahmed Rashid, CPJ Executive Director Joel Simon, and CPJ Asia Program Coordinator Robert Dietz.

In 2013, CPJ released a [special report](#) examining the targeted killings of [Babar](#) in Karachi, tribal area journalist [Mukarram Khan Aatif](#), and defense and political reporter [Saleem Shahzad](#), along with the underlying culture that has led to so many other killings. In meeting with the CPJ delegation, Prime Minister Sharif pledged to reinvigorate the stalled investigation in the Shahzad killing.

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CPJ is an independent, nonprofit organization that works to safeguard press freedom worldwide.

Pakistan Vows to Improve Journalists' Freedom and Safety

New York Times By DOUGLAS SCHORZMAN MARCH 19, 2014

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan promised on Wednesday to improve journalists' safety and freedom to work, saying his government would investigate targeted violence, ease visa and travel restrictions, and immediately review the blacklisting of The New York Times's Pakistan bureau chief, according to the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) advocacy group.

The Times reporter, Declan Walsh, was abruptly [expelled from Pakistan](#) during national elections last May after the Interior Ministry canceled his visa with no explanation.

Since then, officials have denied or ignored The Times's repeated requests to reinstate Mr. Walsh's visa, despite a promise by Mr. Sharif during a meeting in September with Times journalists in New York to review the case. Mr. Walsh, who lived and worked in Pakistan for nine years before his expulsion, continues to cover the country from London.

"I'm encouraged that Prime Minister Sharif has promised, again, to take action on Declan's case, and that he has reaffirmed how important it is for Pakistan to do a better job in protecting journalists' safety and access," said Jill Abramson, the executive editor of The Times. "Too many journalists there have been illegitimately frozen out as we've been. And worse, for years, many have been intimidated or killed in the course of their work."

Representatives from the New York-based advocacy group met in Islamabad, the Pakistani capital, on Wednesday with Mr. Sharif, Information Minister Pervaiz Rashid and other officials to address the risks to members of the news media in Pakistan.

The nation is among the deadliest for journalists, with at least 46 killed over the past decade, according to the advocacy group. Reporters are [often beaten or intimidated](#), and in the vast majority of cases, their attackers are [not prosecuted](#). In some cases, news organizations believe that members of the Pakistani security or intelligence forces have been involved in the abuses.

“This is a long-term problem in Pakistan for journalists who are investigating organized crime, the Taliban, Baluchistan – nearly any national security story,” said Joel Simon, the executive director of the committee and a member of the delegation to Islamabad. “It is an incredibly risky place for reporting.”

At the meeting on Wednesday, Mr. Sharif promised to devote more resources to prosecuting such cases and to look into why the people who attack journalists have faced essentially no repercussions. Of the 25 killings of journalists listed in a case file that the advocacy group presented to Mr. Sharif, only one – the killing of Wali Khan Babar in 2011, in which [six people were convicted](#) in March – has led to prosecution.

Mr. Sharif also told the Interior Ministry to begin expediting visas for foreign journalists, and promised to ensure journalists were allowed more freedom of movement within the country. News organizations say the Pakistani government and military have used paperwork delays and tight limits on travel to punish or head off journalists working on stories unfavorable to them.

“The problem of long visa delays and travel restrictions has been a universal one for foreign journalists in Pakistan for years now,” Mr. Simon said. “What we got today was a very public commitment by Mr. Sharif to do something about it.”

More specifically, Mr. Sharif promised the review of Mr. Walsh’s case for The Times.

“Mr. Sharif seemed honestly open to engaging these issues. Now we wait and see what happens,” Mr. Simon said. “Everyone will be watching.”

Group highlights dangers for Pakistan journalists

By Associated Press, Updated: Wednesday, March 19, 8:00 PM

ISLAMABAD – Representatives of the Committee to Protect Journalists called the conviction of six defendants accused of killing a Pakistani journalist a significant step toward ensuring reporters’ safety, but said Wednesday that more needed to be done in one of the world’s most dangerous countries for the press.

A delegation from the New York-based organization traveled to Pakistan to draw attention to the dangers journalists in the country face and met with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to discuss ways the government could work to protect the media.

On March 3, a court convicted six men of killing a television reporter, a rare case of someone being held accountable for a journalist’s slaying. Last year, Pakistan ranked eighth on the organization’s “impunity index,” which ranks countries according to incidents where journalists are killed and their attackers are not prosecuted. Joel Simon, the committee’s executive director, said the last conviction for a journalist killing in Pakistan was in connection with the 2002 kidnapping and slaying of Wall Street Journal correspondent Daniel Pearl. He called the March conviction in the death of Wali Babar Khan, who was working for Geo TV in Karachi, very significant. “We want to see more convictions. We have very concrete suggestions on how those could be achieved,” he said. Simon said Sharif said he would take specific steps to bolster prosecutions such as protecting witnesses or changing trial venues.

Kati Marton, a member of the watchdog’s board, said the meeting with Sharif was “very productive” and that he seemed committed to improving the climate for journalists.

The prime minister said in a statement that he is creating a commission of government officials, media leaders and public figures to propose ways to protect journalists in the field and to monitor the prosecution of crimes against journalists.

The group also discussed with the prime minister the expulsion last year of New York Times journalist Declan Walsh and the slow process journalists face to get visas to come to Pakistan, Marton said.