

## **Bill on Journalist Welfare and Safety**

Recommendations submitted to:  
Senate Standing Committee on Information, Broadcasting, and National Heritage

In reference to the Bill on journalist welfare and safety currently under consideration by the Senate Standing Committee on Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage, Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) puts forward the following recommendations.

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1. **Digital safety as protection:** Digital safety and security should be included under the definition of “protection” in the Bill. In the digital age, the internet is a commonly used medium of news reporting and consumption--all major news outlets have a digital component as well. Most journalists use the internet in some form or another: to communicate via email and messaging apps, cultivate sources, disseminate information through social media or publish online. Under this digitized landscape Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) feels that it would be remiss to exclude digital security from the realm of protections guaranteed under the proposed Bill. Digital security intersects with physical security in complex ways, thus it is an aspect that can no longer be ignored. These observations are in line with international best practice and juridical opinion.<sup>1</sup>
2. **Institutionalisation of digital safety of journalists:** As a policy matter, News organisations should put protections in place in terms of digital security and protection in online spaces and to provide a safe environment for their reports, editors and writers. There need to be clearly defined policies and protocols for digital safety and protection, accompanied by regular trainings to ensure that all employees have a necessary skill-set to ensure person and organisational digital security.
3. **Lift obstacles on use of encryption:** While policy and regulation are quite murky, the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) requires prior approval for the use of VPNs and encryption. This impacts the work that journalists can do.<sup>2</sup> The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression has concluded that encryption and anonymity deserve strong protection and recommended that legislation and regulations protecting journalists also enable access and provide support to technologies to secure and protect their communications.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UN General Assembly, “The safety of journalists and the issue of impunity”: report of the Secretary-General”, 6 August 2015, A/70/290, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/55f2cd454.html>.

<sup>2</sup> PTA VPN Policy: [http://www.ispak.pk/Downloads/PTA\\_VPN\\_Policy.pdf](http://www.ispak.pk/Downloads/PTA_VPN_Policy.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye”, 22 May 2015, A/HRC/29/32, <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/29/32>, pg. 4.

4. **Provisions for Women Journalists:** In a report by Report of the Secretary-General published in 2017,<sup>4</sup> noted that women journalists face additional threats to security in the gendered threats, harassment, gender-based violence and discrimination at the workplace. Women are less likely “less likely to have the same contractual protection; in addition, there are fewer women working in senior and management position [...] They are also less likely to be asked to work on high-profile issues.”<sup>5</sup> These same concerns were raised through DRF’s own research.<sup>6</sup> The onus must be placed on media organisations to address these gendered issues, and have functioning mechanisms in place when female journalists experience these issues. Existing laws on workplace harassment, online harassment and gender discrimination need to be implemented specifically keeping in mind the needs of female journalists.
  
5. **State Responsibility with regards to Digital threats:** State should facilitate and create a conducive environment for the adoption of effective digital rights policies within media houses.

**Endorsed by:**

Digital Rights Foundation  
Network of Women Journalists united for Digital Rights  
Media Matters for Democracy  
Bolo Bhi

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<sup>4</sup> “The safety of journalists and the issue of impunity Report of the Secretary-General”, 4 August 2017, A/72/290, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1304392/files/A\\_72\\_290-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1304392/files/A_72_290-EN.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pg. 3.

<sup>6</sup> “Surveillance of Female Journalist of Pakistan”, Digital Rights Foundation, December 2016, <http://digitalrightsfoundation.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Surveillance-of-Female-Journalists-in-Pakistan-1.pdf>.