

## **86 Tech Organisations, Citizen Society and Academics Demand Reversal of Ban on Wikipedia in Pakistan**

February 6, 2023

72 organisations from civil society and the business community, 15 representatives from universities and 24 citizen stakeholders from across Pakistan condemn the blocking of Wikipedia by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) on February 3, 2023 after “degrading” access to the platform for 48 hours on February 1, 2023.

Blocking an educational platform like Wikipedia, which is accessed [55 million times](#) per month in Pakistan, violates citizens' right to access information guaranteed by Article 19-A of the Constitution of Pakistan.

At a time when the country is going through an unprecedented economic downturn, we are concerned about the large economic cost of a blanket ban on Wikipedia for students and information workers.

The actions of the PTA, invoking the *Removal and Blocking of Unlawful Online Content (Procedure, Oversight and Safeguards) Rules, 2021* (Rules 5(7)(2)(ii)(a) and Rule 5(7)(2)(ii)(b)), are also contrary to the order of the honourable Islamabad High Court issued in May 2021, which directed Parliament to review the Rules. This commitment was reiterated recently by the Secretary of the Ministry of Human Rights during Pakistan Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on January 30, 2023, stating:

*“In light of the feedback from the local and international human rights constituencies we are revisiting the online social media rules and aligning these rules with principles of international law and good practices. With this overarching approach, we take good note of the suggestions made in this important thematic area and will thoroughly reflect on them”.*

The PTA's use of these Rules, while under review, should be dealt with by the courts as per law. Furthermore, as per international human rights law, any curtailment of speech and information needs to be proportionate in nature, necessary to the specific harm being caused and established by law. This blanket ban does not meet any of these requirements.

Wikipedia is a community-driven, free-to-access repository of knowledge from across the world and it has revolutionized the way we access information. The platform stands for a democratized approach to knowledge creation, where anyone with access to an Internet connection can edit articles, subject to referencing requirements. This feature makes it difficult for the platform to intervene to remove content, however, it does allow anyone who wants to contest an article or information on the platform to edit it accordingly.

It is expected that the ban on Wikipedia will severely impact the ability of Pakistani freelancers and businesses to provide globally competitive services and earn precious foreign exchange for the country. According to the [ILO](#), Pakistan provides the third largest number of online labour in the world, and as per the Ministry of IT and Telecommunication ([MoITT](#)), freelancers generated US\$397 million in remittances for the country during the fiscal year 2021-22. The exports of telecommunication, computer and information services stands at \$2.6 billion in FY22. Add to this the nearly \$400M in remittances generated by freelancers and over \$350M raised by Pakistani startups. Collectively, the size of the IT and communications industry is approaching \$3.5B (Source: [SBP](#)). When news about the banning of the top information website reaches global investors and companies, it is expected to generate a negative sentiment among them.

Students and professionals from across the country can attest to the positive role the platform has had on their work, facilitating education and knowledge-sharing, particularly for people who do not have alternative enabling resources to purchase books and access websites behind paywalls. This ban will disproportionately impact the most marginalized among us, creating a monopoly of knowledge for the elite and cause an unjust exclusion from co-creation of information and knowledge in various fields of human endeavours in thought, invention and discovery.

Civil society, the business community and citizen stakeholders stand against this arbitrary and damaging ban on Wikipedia, and the larger misuse of broad laws such as Section 37 of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), which must be repealed in the long run if the country wishes to uphold its own constitutional values, which guarantee the right to information and freedom of expression to its citizens.

#SaveWikipedia

## **Signatory Organisations:**

1. 22 Ventures
2. Addo AI
3. Adlytic AI
4. aikRozan.com
5. AirNex
6. Amazon Web Services
7. Balochistan24
8. Bolo Bhi
9. Bytes for All
10. Carbon Law
11. Comsats Isb
12. Conatural Beauty Pvt Ltd
13. Courting The Law
14. Cruise Saudi
15. Damaan TV
16. Digital Media Alliance of Pakistan
17. Digital Rights Foundation
18. EasyFresh Tech
19. efani Secure mobile
20. Electric Eenerge
21. Frontier
22. Hazara Express News
23. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
24. Indus Valley Capital
25. Infoarc LLC
26. Inseyab Consulting
27. InstaTute App
28. Institute for Research, Advocacy and Development (IRADA)
29. Integrity Inc
30. International Media Support
31. IoBM, SSKIC
32. Jetzy
33. Joblogic
34. Karandaaz Pakistan
35. Khaleej Digital FZCO
36. Markaz Technologies
37. Mazars
38. Media Matters for Democracy (MMfD)

39. Muawin - B2B Retailer Financing Startup
40. One8nine Media
41. PakLaunch
42. P@SHA
43. Rakurai.io
44. reformcouncil.org
45. Rent It
46. Renzym
47. SadaPay
48. Samsung Electronics America Inc
49. SehatKahani
50. Shujra, Farooq & Hashmi
51. Smartlane
52. SmartSindh, STV, AspirePK
53. SnappRetail
54. Soan Valley Tech
55. Spekit
56. StartupLawncnch
57. STC
58. Stealth Startup
59. Stipple Tech
60. Taarah Ventures
61. Taraki Technologies
62. Tech Comradery
63. Techshaw
64. Techwards
65. The Catalyst
66. Trade Foresight
67. Trellis
68. Urban Brands
69. USAID Investment Promotion Activity-IPA
70. Utopia Deals
71. VaporVM
72. VoicePK
73. Wukla and Paksign

**Signatories from Educational Institutions:**

1. Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan
2. Bahria University

3. Comsats University, Islamabad
4. Government College University (GCU)
5. HSM, University of Management & Technology (UMT)
6. Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi
7. Institute of Chartered Accountants of Pakistan
8. Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS)
9. National University of Sciences & Technology (NUST)
10. NFC Institute of Engineering and Technology, University of Multan
11. Quaid e Azam University, Islamabad
12. University of Engineering and Technology (UET), Lahore
13. University of Karachi
14. University of Lahore (UCL)