



February 25, 2026

Sent via email

H.E. Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif
Prime Minister, Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Prime Minister's Office,
Constitution Avenue, Red Zone,
Islamabad, Pakistan

Dear Prime Minister Sharif,

We, the undersigned press freedom and human rights groups, write to express our deep concern regarding the sustained deterioration of media freedom in Pakistan. Recent legal and institutional developments, alongside persistent failures to ensure accountability for attacks on journalists, have contributed to a worsening environment for members of the media in Pakistan. We urge your government to take immediate action to uphold Pakistan's obligations under the Constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which guarantee freedom of expression and the press, and require the State to protect journalists from violence, intimidation, and unlawful interference.

Pakistan's press freedom situation, which was already challenging, has deteriorated further since the adoption of the 27th constitutional amendment in November 2025. The amendment led to the establishment of the Federal Constitutional Court (FCC), a development that has coincided with a weakening of judicial oversight and accountability in cases involving attacks on the media. Rather than strengthening protections for journalists, these changes have contributed to a [more restrictive](#) and [uncertain environment](#) for independent journalism. Judicial inaction in high-profile [murder cases](#) has reinforced a pattern of impunity that continues to endanger the press.

In the period following the amendment, journalists across Pakistan have faced increased [legal harassment](#), [intimidation](#), [surveillance](#), [regulatory scrutiny](#), and [threats](#) — all of which have had a chilling effect on press freedom. At the same time, the persistent failure of authorities to ensure accountability for crimes against journalists has reinforced a pattern of impunity that continues to place media workers at serious risk.

In light of these concerns, we urge your government to take the following action:

- **Immediately and unconditionally release journalist [Sohrab Barkat](#)**, who has been detained for more than 90 days under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 in connection to his reporting. Despite being [granted](#) bail by the Supreme Court on December 18th, he has not been released. His prolonged detention raises serious concerns about due process and has contributed to the closure of his employer's Islamabad office. We

urge the government to ensure that laws are not used to criminalize journalism, and to guarantee that media organizations can operate without intimidation or administrative pressure.

- **Ensure justice for Arshad Sharif.** We are seriously concerned by the lack of accountability for the killing of journalist [Arshad Sharif](#), who was shot dead by police in Kenya in October 2022 after leaving Pakistan due to threats linked to his reporting. Despite the seriousness of the case and its global significance for journalist safety, justice remains incomplete. Unfortunately, in February 2026, the FCC formally [disposed](#) of the suo motu proceedings in his case. We urge the government via an independent judicial commission to reopen a transparent investigation into his death.
- **End impunity for murders of journalists, including by ensuring justice for the murder of [Shan Dahar](#).** We are appalled by the pervasive impunity in the case of Dahar, who was shot and killed in Badah in January 2014. No serious attempt has been made to investigate his murder, and two key suspects have not been held for interrogation. Dahar's case is emblematic of impunity in Pakistan: investigations are often lengthy, opaque, and lacking in objectivity, and rarely lead to justice. We urge the government to reopen the currently dormant investigation into Dahar's death, including by detaining and interrogating any suspects in the case, and publicly recommit to ending impunity for crimes against journalists.
- **Ensure accountability for the murder of journalist [Imtiaz Mir](#) in Karachi,** whose alleged killing in September last year by a militant group highlights the persistent dangers facing journalists in Pakistan. We call on authorities to swiftly, thoroughly, and transparently investigate the suspected perpetrators and masterminds behind the attack.
- **Investigate threats and halt intimidation against journalist [Nadir Abbas Baloch](#).** Baloch, one of the few Shia and Baloch minority journalists in Pakistan, has faced harassment and police summons he believes are connected to his reporting on human rights and misuse of the [blasphemy law](#). We ask authorities to conduct a prompt, independent, and transparent investigation into the threats. Ensuring accountability in cases of intimidation is essential to prevent an escalation in harmful behavior towards journalists nationwide.
- **Stop the [prosecution and conviction](#) of Pakistani journalists living overseas.** Targeting journalists abroad represents an alarming expansion of restrictions on press freedom beyond national borders and amounts to transnational repression. We urge your government to halt judicial action against foreign-based journalists for their reporting or commentary, review relevant laws to ensure alignment with international standards on freedom of expression, and reaffirm that journalism and criticism of public institutions are protected.
- **Protect Afghan journalists in exile from deportation.** It is concerning to see a [recent surge](#) in [detentions and deportations](#) of Afghan journalists living in Pakistan. Many of these journalists fled threats, violence, persecution, and repression under the Taliban because of their professional work. Deportation could expose them to serious retaliation, arbitrary detention, violence, or death. We urge the government to immediately halt deportations of journalists and media workers at risk and uphold the principle of non-refoulement for individuals facing credible threats due to their journalistic work.
- **Urgently repeal or substantially amend the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 (PECA),** including the 2025 amendments, to protect press freedom and end its [misuse](#) against journalists. PECA's [vague provisions](#) enable [arbitrary FIRs](#), [arrests](#), and prosecutions of [journalists](#), [independent media](#), and [digital platforms](#) for legitimate reporting on state institutions, creating a chilling effect on free expression. These abuses violate international freedom of expression standards and must be reformed to safeguard journalists' constitutional rights and the public's right to information.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to your reply and welcome any dialogue with the relevant offices of your government.

Sincerely,

Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)

AwazCDS, Pakistan

Bolo Bhi, Pakistan

Bytes for All, Pakistan

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Committee To Protect Journalists (CPJ)

Defence of Human Rights, Pakistan

Free Press Unlimited (FPU)

Freedom Network Pakistan

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

International Press Institute (IPI)

National Commission for Justice and Peace, Pakistan

PEN America

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

Robert & Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center

Safe Journalism

The Awakening, Pakistan

CC:

H.E Attaullah Tarar

Federal Minister of Information & Broadcasting

H.E Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar

Federal Minister for Law and Justice

Ms. Rabiya Javeri Agha

Chairperson

National Commission for Human Rights Pakistan