AMSO
Afghanistan Media Support Organisation

Symposium

Freedom of Speech for Afghanistan

November 21, 2025

SUMMIT REPORT: “ The 3rd Annual Global Summit on Afghanistan’s Press Freedom”

On 21 November, the Afghanistan Media Support Organization (AMSO) hosted a great gathering in Berlin titled Global Summit on Afghanistan Press Freedom. The event brought together Afghan journalists worldwide, media leaders, international partners, and human rights advocates to discuss the state of press freedom and the future of Afghan media in exile.



The third global symposium of AMSO was held in berlin.

From first-hand testimonies of violence and censorship to discussions on digital safety, mental health, and ethical journalism, the summit highlighted both the severity of the crisis and the extraordinary determination of Afghan journalists to continue their work.
The event opened with remarks from Hamid Obaidi, Founder and executive director of AMSO, who outlined the realities facing Afghan journalism today: a) the shrinking space for media inside Afghanistan, b) the difficult circumstances of exiled journalists, c) the fragile condition of independent Afghan media, and d) hardship faced by Afghan journalists in neighboring countries, i.e., Pakistan and Iran.

He stressed that despite restrictions, Afghan journalists continue to produce content, document human rights abuses, and provide credible information to audiences inside and outside the country. Obaidi emphasized the need for continued political and financial support, especially for women journalists who face the most severe hardships, as well as journalists stranded in Pakistan and Iran. He urged international organizations and the relevant governments to accelerate visas for Afghan journalists and pressure the governments of Pakistan and Iran not to deport them. Mr. Obaidi also thanked the event sponsors, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) and Leipzig University, for their support.



Hamid Obaidi, Founder and executive director of AMSO:
"Afghan journalists have paid a high cost for the truth. They have survived violence, censorship, and exile — yet they have never compromised their values."

Among the early speakers was Richard Bennett, UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Afghanistan, who delivered a strong message of solidarity. He noted that freedom of expression in Afghanistan has been "systematically restricted," with censorship increasing and journalists facing intimidation and violence. He praised AMSO for organizing the symposium, calling it an essential step in supporting media freedom. He highlighted that Afghan journalists abroad continue to document and broadcast issues from Afghanistan, ensuring the international community remains informed. Mr. Bennett stressed that women journalists in particular need urgent support: "Women in Afghanistan experience the harshest restrictions, and they must be supported both inside the country and in exile."



Richard Bennett: "Afghan journalists, especially women journalists, need urgent support."

The symposium also gave a platform for Afghan female journalists currently in Afghanistan. A 12-minute video message from a female reporter, recorded and shared from Afghanistan, was played, attracting significant attention from participants, including international partners. As a keynote speaker, Nasir Ahmad Andisha, Afghanistan's Ambassador and Permanent Representative in Geneva, emphasized the importance of collective action to defend freedom of expression. "We are gathered here to defend press freedom, and we will not allow the voice of Afghan media to be silenced." He described the Taliban as "masters of fake news and propaganda," using censorship to control the narrative and restrict access to accurate information.



Nasir Ahmad Andisha: "We will not allow the voice of freedom of expression to be silenced."

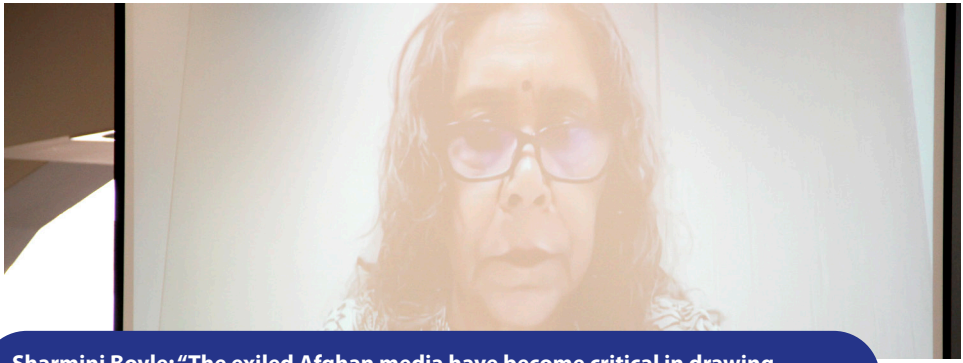
Andisha stressed that exiled media now play a crucial role as alternative sources of reporting: “Exiled outlets have become a key address for covering issues inside Afghanistan and challenging Taliban policies.” He urged the international community not to allow Afghanistan to fall into complete information darkness.
After the speeches, the first panel titled “Gender, Crisis, and the Media: Afghan Women Journalists on the Frontlines” started. Moderated by Mr. Mortaza Behboudi, panelist Ms. Sharmini Boyle (Afghanistan Program Lead at Internews), Ms. Wahida Faizi (Gender Coordinator for IMS), and Ms. Shogofa Danish (CEO for Advocacy Committee for Women Journalists of AMSO) focused on the experiences of women journalists during and after the Taliban takeover.



Morteza Behbudi: “We call on the international community not to allow Afghanistan to fall into complete darkness.”

Wahida Faizi shared stories from Helmand, where women journalists are banned from working: “They cannot appear on air. Even their voices are not allowed to be broadcast.” Despite this, she emphasized that many continue to work in secret, driven by a commitment to the profession and their communities.

Sharmini Boyle noted that exiled Afghan media have become critical in drawing international attention to Afghanistan: “Exiled media have done essential work and continue to do so. They carry a heavy responsibility.” She explained that many young women journalists need trainings in several areas and support to continue working professionally. Ms. Shogofa Danish added that the AMSO strives to enhance capacity, provide a platform, and amplify the voices of female journalists inside and outside Afghanistan.



Sharmini Boyle: “The exiled Afghan media have become critical in drawing international attention to Afghanistan”



It was during the question-and-answer part of the panel that one of the most emotional moments came when journalist Fakhriya Radfar shared her experience: "One week after the fall, Taliban slapped me in the street. I still feel the pain." She was reporting on a women's protest when Taliban fighters stopped her, threatened her, and prevented her from documenting the event. She described the ongoing intimidation faced by journalists attempting to report on human rights violations.

Fakhriya Radfar: Narrative of Taliban violence against female journalists

The afternoon panel explored funding cuts, digital shifts, and survival: rethinking sustainability for Afghan journalism. Moderated by Dr. Hazrat Bahar, Head of International Affairs and board member of AMSO, the panelists included Sami Mahdi, Editor-in-Chief of Amu TV; Klaas Glenewinkel, Co-founder of MiCT; and Said Sulaiman Ashna, an Afghan award-winning journalist. They discussed the challenges Afghan outlets face, particularly those that operated for less than two decades before the Taliban takeover, as they rebuild their structures in exile.

Mr. Ashna said: "After 2021, the U.S. shifted its priorities from supporting Afghan media to focusing on immigration and domestic needs. This sudden change caused massive staff reductions and left media outlets fighting for survival. With donors stepping back, private sector engagement and creative digital initiatives have become essential for sustainability." Similarly, Mr. Klaas added that when USAID abruptly cut funding, the global media development sector entered a crisis. Europe, especially Germany, could not fill the gap due to political and economic uncertainty. The old era of donor-funded media development is over—we must build new, independent business models rooted in community and alternative funding sources. Mr. Mahdi shed light on the current situation of media in Afghanistan and added, "We now live in a time when there are no heroes of free expression. Over the past four years, the Taliban have turned Afghanistan's media into loudspeakers for their propaganda. No one can question their policies anymore—not even ask where Mullah Hibatullah is." He further added that despite the funding cut, Amu was able to survive by diversifying its funding sources.



Sami Mahdi: "The Taliban have turned the media into their propaganda tool. No one dares to ask questions!"

One of the most substantial sessions was the Code of Conduct presentation by Basir Ahmad Daneshyar, deputy director for AMSO, Mr. Sanjar Sohail, founder and publisher of 8am media. During this session, Mr. Daneshyar presented the work, code of conduct for Afghan exile media. After the presentation, a deliberation followed, during which participants praised the work, raised questions, and shared feedback. Mr. Sanjar Sohail reflected on the questions and added that professional journalism and its principles shall be adhered to regardless of borders and frontiers.



Sanjar Sohail: "Professional journalism and its principles must be observed regardless of borders and limitations."

The summit concluded with the screening of a documentary film titled "Afghanistan's Media over Two Decades," produced and presented by Dr. Kefajat Hamidi, head of the research center Development Communication for Social Change (EC4SC) at the University of Leipzig.
This was followed by dinner and Afghan music. The cultural program reinforced a sense of solidarity and identity among Afghan journalists living far from home.



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The Berlin summit showcased the resilience of Afghan journalists who continue their work despite censorship, intimidation, and exile. AMSO's leadership in organizing the event provided an essential platform for connection, learning, and collective strength. The message throughout the day was clear: a) Afghan journalism remains alive, b) Afghan journalists will continue to speak, and c) their voices will not be silenced.



The event was moderated by Freshta Hemmati, CEO of AMSO, and Head of the Advocacy Committee for Women journalists of AMSO, and the photos were captured through the lens of Ahmad Shah Azimi, AMSO board member whose work provided a vivid depiction of the summit's energy and engagement.

Special appreciation to our sponsors and partners

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