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MEDIA RELEASE

Free Media Movement demands immediate cessation of state's media freedom violation in Pakistan. Free Media Movement urges immediate halt on the suppression of media freedom in Pakistan.

The Free Media Movement (FMM) is deeply concerned with the new restrictive laws and administrative restrictions imposed on international media organisations and journalists working with them by the Government of the Pakistani State.

New restrictions have been enforced that have forced the international media to obtain prior government permission to report from outside the cities of Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore, which has prevented coverage of important events affecting the people of Pakistan. These curbs are said to be also being imposed on Pakistani journalists and other local staff members of foreign media organisations.

These measures can not be considered administrative restrictions on the media only. The impunity of the media to collect and report on a country's political, social and human rights situation is directly impacted.

There are serious concerns about these restrictions, especially in the light of the ongoing furor over international media reporting on events in the Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. There have been reports of use of force by security forces in the region and Amnesty International has also emphasised the need to respect freedom of information and freedom of communication in connection with the situation.

Creating an environment in which information that may be critical of any government is discouraged or prevented from being reported is not media freedom. Such measures also put a significant constraint on the public right to know.

Restrictions on the freedom of international journalists to travel to specific regions in the country, the need for local journalists employed by media organisations to register, and the imposition of

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compulsory authorisation on local journalists are severely threatening to the independence of journalists. This kind of atmosphere can also enable the development of self-censorship.

As a member organisation of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the global freedom of expression network IFEX, the Free Media Movement calls on the Government of Pakistan to immediately:

1. Lift new restrictions that hinder free reporting of international and domestic journalists;
2. Ensure journalists' access to and reporting from anywhere in the country on public interest issues;
3. Lift unnecessary and unjustified restrictions on several permissions and registration for Pakistani journalists, reporters and other media support personnel working with foreign media organisations;
4. Avoid practices that put government permission or influence over the output of the media organisations;
5. Make sure that journalists have a safe and independent environment to perform their professional tasks, free from fear or excessive state interference; and
6. Safeguard freedom of expression, media freedom and the public's right to information, in accordance with international human rights' standards.

The free media is not a media which only delivers information good for the government. A free and independent media environment is crucial for a democratic society, allowing journalists to investigate and report on issues that may be difficult or uncomfortable for those in power, or of public importance.

Free Media Movement thus strongly condemns the steps taken by the Pakistani Government which are curtailing the freedom of media and urges the government to immediately lift these restrictions and restate the professional freedom of journalists and the right of public to know.



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