

Challenges for Media in Exile and Their Struggle for Truth in Taliban-Controlled Afghanistan



Photo: AFP

By Lutf Ali Sultani

On November 28, the Afghanistan Policy Lab hosted a virtual panel discussion titled **‘Afghan Exiled Media and the Struggle for Truth Amidst Taliban Oppression.’** The event was moderated by Ambassador Adela Raz, the director of APL. Leaders and journalists from Afghanistan's exiled media shed light on the severe impact of the Taliban's restrictions on freedom of speech and independent journalism, emphasizing the continuous struggle against these limitations.

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Afghan republic, the constitutional support existing for Afghan media has been eliminated by the Taliban. Their work and coverage are limited and the lives of many Afghan journalists have been in danger. Despite these challenges, the free and independent media, a significant accomplishment of the past two decades, continued to operate in exile and some with struggle and censorship in the country. Faced with the loss of legal, constitutional, and international support post-2021, Afghan media encountered the dilemma of

either limiting their work under the Taliban regime or shutting down their operation and relocating their newsrooms abroad.

Some who have stayed inside the country had to comply with the new rules imposed by the Taliban. Under these regulations, they are now required to refer to the Taliban as the "**Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan**" and adhere to all issued directives. These media entities, despite their ongoing struggles, found themselves compelled to try to cover some of the important social issues in society. The threat of violence, with many reporters, presenters, and editors being detained and tortured, left them with little choice. Samiullah Mahdi, Editor-in-Chief of the newly established [Amu TV](#) in Virginia, United States expressed understanding, stating, "**I respect the work that they are doing, especially when it comes to covering social issues.**"



Samiullah Mahdi, Editor-in-Chief of the newly established Amu TV

Fortunate journalists managed to leave the country, re-establishing their newsrooms in Europe and the United States, with reporters on the ground in Afghanistan working under constant threat or anonymously to cover the news on the ground. Zaki Daryabi, the Publisher of [Etilaatroz \(Daily Information\)](#) and [Kabul Now](#), now operating from Silver Spring, Maryland, expressed concerns

about the safety of colleagues in Afghanistan, stating, **"Every day we wake up with the fear of our colleagues being detained or tortured by the Taliban. It is a constant concern, especially for media leaders in exile."**

In addition to the efforts of unknown journalists associated with exiled media, Afghan citizens contribute by sharing information through various platforms, such as WhatsApp and Telegram.



Zaki Daryabi, the Publisher of Etilaatroz (Daily Information)

[Amnesty International reported](#) that in 2022 alone, over 80 journalists had been arrested and tortured by the Taliban. In 2023, Mr. Mahdi, the editor-in-chief of Amu TV, noted that 14 people affiliated with Amu TV had been detained and tortured for over six months by the Taliban, underscoring the criminalization of journalism by the group.

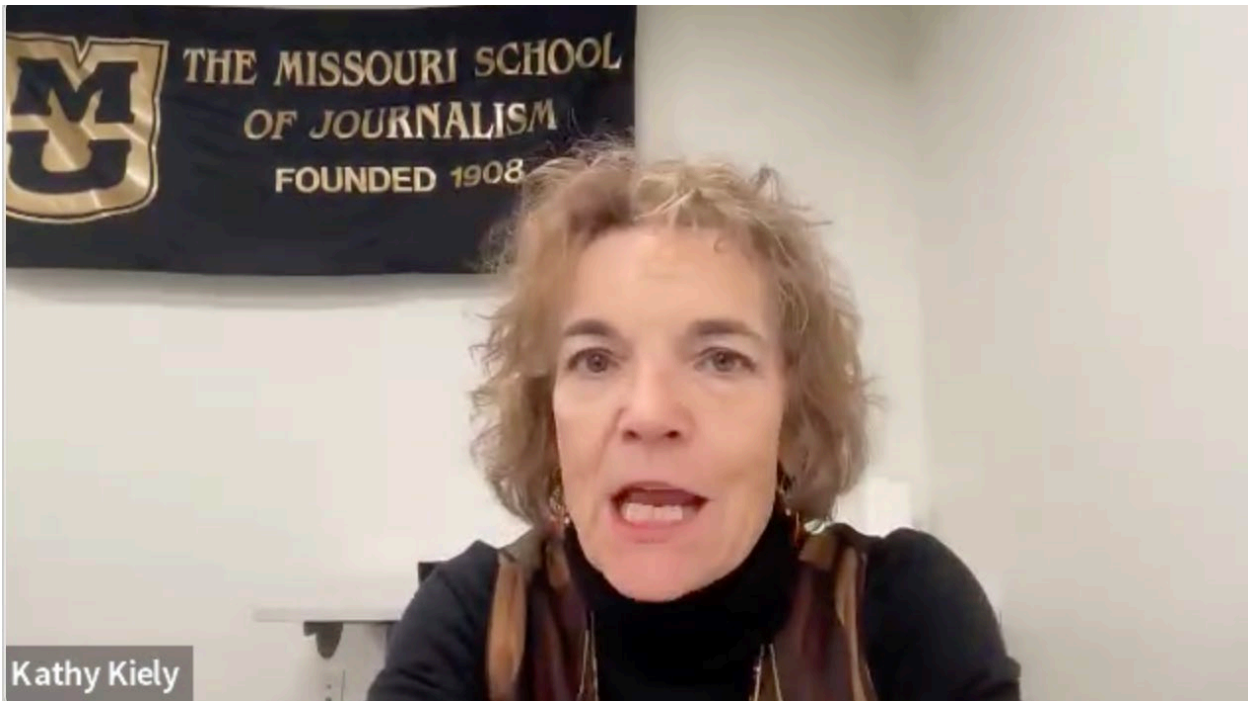
For women journalists, the situation is particularly dire. Zahra Joya, the founder, and editor-in-chief of [Rukhshana Media](#) operating from the UK, highlighted the challenges of being both a journalist and a woman in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, where both are “deemed serious crimes”. The number of female journalists has dwindled since the Taliban seized power, resulting in the loss of crucial potential.



Zahra Joya, the founder, and editor-in-chief of Rukhshana Media

Many talented Afghan journalists who fled the country face challenges, including language barriers and insufficient support, often ending up in manual labor positions.

Kathy Kiely, a professor at the Missouri School of Journalism and a member of the Overseas Press Club, stressed the need for policymakers to provide support for displaced journalists, including visas and legal assistance. She also emphasized the importance of psychological support for journalists grappling with significant life changes.



Kathy Kiely, professor at the Missouri School of Journalism

In summary, Afghan exiled journalists are grappling with numerous challenges, including financial sustainability, as they endeavor to preserve and promote democratic values, particularly the hard-fought freedom of speech. The international community must prioritize the issue of freedom of speech in discussions about Afghanistan's future with the Taliban to ensure a better future for the country.

To watch the full event, click on the link below: