

## STATEMENT - THE OBSERVATORY

---

### AFGHANISTAN: Attacks on civil society and human rights defenders intensify

***Paris-Geneva, March 4, 2021 – Over the past five months, the situation of human rights defenders and journalists has deteriorated significantly in Afghanistan, with at least fourteen targeted killings and constant harassment reported. The Observatory (FIDH-OMCT) expresses its utmost concern over this worrying trend and calls on the Afghan authorities to ensure that an end be put to the killings, attacks, and acts of harassment against civil society in the country.***

While negotiations have been taking place between the Afghan government and the Taliban since September 12, 2020 in Doha (Qatar) to try to reach a peace agreement, the situation for civil society in the country has been rapidly deteriorating. In a [report](#) by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) published on February 15, 2021, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Ms. Deborah Lyons, deplored : *"The voices of human rights defenders and the media are critical for any open and decent society. At a time when dialogue and an end to the conflict through talks and political settlement should be the focus, the voices from human rights and the media need to be heard more than ever before, instead they are being silenced."*

Since the beginning of the peace talks, at least 14 journalists and human rights defenders have been killed by unidentified armed individuals or by explosive devices:

- **Syed Haider Hashimi**, a human rights defender and engineer, was shot dead by unknown gunmen on October 2, 2020 in Pul-i-Alam, the capital city of Logar Province.

- **Yama Siawash**, a former prominent television presenter on Tolo TV was killed by the detonation of an explosive device attached to his car on November 7, 2020, in Kabul. Two other persons, Ahmadullah Anas, deputy CEO of Afghanistan National Bank and Aminullah Rezayi, their driver, were also killed in the explosion.

- **Elias Dayi**, a correspondent for *Radio Liberty* who covered conflict in Helmand Province, was killed in an explosion in the southern Helmand Province on November 12, 2020. According to the Afghan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA), he was killed when an explosive device attached to his car exploded.

- **Malalai Maiwand**, a journalist and women and children's rights activist working for Eneka Radio and TV, was fatally shot while on her way to work in Jalalabad, in Nangarhar, on December 10, 2020, after assailants opened fire on her vehicle. Her driver, **Mohammad Tahir**, was also killed during the attack. The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack. Her mother, a women's education activist, had been killed by unknown gunmen several years ago.

- **Rahmatullah Nikzad**, a freelance photo-journalist, a contributor to Al Jazeera and the Associated Press (AP) of long standing and the head of the Ghazni Journalists' Union, was fatally shot by unknown assailants on December 21, 2020 in Gazni on his way to a local mosque.

- **Yousuf Rasheed**, Executive Director of the Free and Fair Elections Forum of Afghanistan Organization (FEFA), was fatally shot in the Tenikut area of Kabul on December 23, 2020. His driver was wounded in the shooting.

- **Freshta Kohistani**, an advocate for women's rights and ex-provincial advisor, was fatally shot by unknown individuals on motorbikes in Kapisa Province on December 24, 2020. Her brother Shahram Kohistani was also killed in the attack.

- **Abed Jahed**, a civil rights activist from Baghlan and member of leadership of the Sunni Hazara Council of Afghanistan, was found dead with gunshot wounds on December 31, 2020 in Bostan Kabul area in Kabul, where he had recently relocated.

- **Bismillah Adel Aimaq**, journalist and Editor-in-Chief of *Sada-e Ghor Radio* and a human rights activist, was fatally shot on the evening of January 1, 2021, by unknown individuals near the city of Firuzkuh, the capital of Ghor Province. On the night of January 26, 2021, his father, sister and nephew were killed in their home by unidentified armed individuals who abducted two other members of his family.

- **Adel Nang**, a civil society activist from Paktia province, was fatally shot by unidentified gunmen in Gardez on January 21, 2021.

- **Mursal Wahidi, Sadia Sadat and Shahnaz Roafi**, three employees of Enekass Radio and TV, were fatally shot by unidentified gunmen on their way home in Jalalabad, Nangarhar Province, on March 2, 2021. The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack.

- In addition, two female Supreme Court judges were fatally shot when their car was ambushed on their way to work in Kabul on January 17, 2021.<sup>1</sup>

To date, except for the murders of Malalai Maiwand, Mursal Wahidi, Sadia Sadat and Shahnaz Roafi, no one has claimed responsibility for these targeted killings. Those responsible for these acts remain unknown, although security officials reported having arrested suspects involved in some of the attacks.

In addition to these targeted killings, Afghan civil society remains at high risk of attacks, harassment and threats. Several lists containing the names of civil society activists targeted for assassination, including details about their positions and places of work, are said to be circulating in the country. Although the origin of these lists is unknown, it contains the names of a wide variety of civil society personalities, including human rights defenders.

The above-referenced targeted attacks and the alleged “kill lists” have a chilling effect on civil society and provide further evidence of the serious insecurity prevailing among the entire population in the country.

The Observatory expresses its utmost concern and strongly condemns the recent targeted killings and the ongoing harassment of civil society actors and human rights defenders in Afghanistan.

The Observatory recalls that it is the Afghan government’s primary responsibility to protect its civilian population. In this regard, the Observatory reiterates its calls on the Afghan authorities to fully investigate each case and stop the cycle of impunity. It urges the authorities to bring an end to the repeated and targeted attacks and acts of harassment against human rights defenders, journalists and civil society members in the country.

The Observatory calls on Afghanistan’s international partners to urge the government, in bilateral and multilateral fora, to take all the necessary measures to prevent further attacks against civil society members and to achieve peace in the country.

---

<sup>1</sup> Earlier in 2020, the Observatory documented several other cases of targeted killings of human rights defenders, including [Ibrahim Ebrat](#), [Fatima Khalil](#), [Jawid Folad](#), [Asmatullah Salaam](#) and [Naqibullah Khaksar](#).



The Observatory  
for the Protection  
of Human Rights Defenders

*The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (the Observatory) was created in 1997 by FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). The objective of this programme is to prevent or remedy situations of repression against human rights defenders. FIDH and OMCT are both members of [ProtectDefenders.eu](https://www.protectdefenders.eu), the European Union Human Rights Defenders Mechanism implemented by international civil society.*

fidh

**OMCT**  
SOS-Torture Network