

Forum : Forum citoyen sur la liberté d'expression

Theme: How can we guarantee Generation Z access to reliable information while protecting it from the dangers of the media ?

Name of Citizen: Carlotta Pereira

Family situation ☐ Married/ In a relationship ☒ Single ☐ With children, if yes, how many	EducationSecondary Level ☐ Primary ☒ Secondary ☐ University/ Higher education
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1. How am I concerned by this issue ?

My name is Carlotta Pereira, I am a 57 year old Afghan woman and for most of my life I have been a doyra player. The doyra is a traditional frame drum. It may look like just a simple instrument: but it carries the traditions of generations, the pain of loss, the joy of celebration, the voices that struggle to be heard and most importantly the hope that survives even when words are taken away. For me, playing music was never just about making sound, it was about finding a way to have a voice when so many were and still are being silenced.

I was 27 when the Taliban first came to power in Afghanistan in 1996. At that time, I was already playing the doyra at weddings and family celebrations. Music, which had once brought neighbours together, became an instrument of fear. For women, the situation was even harsher. A woman's voice in public was treated as something improper. I put my doyra away and stopped playing in public.

After 2001, I slowly began to play again, I started to believe that music could be part of an ordinary Afghan woman's life. However, when the Taliban returned to power in 2021 the fear returned immediately.

Today, I cannot take my instrument to a public celebration, teach music freely or even show my face and my performances openly. If you ask me, I have not stopped loving music even just a tiny bit less, yet I have been pushed into silence. I am not alone in this situation, behind me are thousands of other women, musicians, journalists, teachers and artists who have disappeared from public life. Afghanistan's media has not disappeared overnight, but it has been progressively silenced. Radio stations, television channels, independent newspapers and online media have been forced to work under censorship and pressure and strict guidance from authorities on what can and cannot be published. Journalists can no longer freely report on subjects that are considered to be sensitive and many have been threatened, detained, attacked or even killed. Many have been forced to leave the country. Women journalists have been affected even more severely: more than 80% of women media workers lost their jobs after August 2021.

When experienced journalists cannot report freely and when women are pushed out of newsrooms, people lose access to professional and verified information. The Taliban do not even need to close every newspaper or arrest every journalist to control the narrative. Fear is enough. A journalist who is afraid will avoid certain words. A radio station that is afraid will stop inviting women to speak. A family that is afraid will stop discussing what it has seen. Little by little, silence becomes the new normal. With traditional media weakened, many Afghan civilians, especially young people, increasingly depend on social media and short videos for news. These platforms can be useful in many ways. They allow information, images and testimonies to circulate when official media remains silent. However, they can also be full of rumors, propaganda, manipulated images and false promises.

Young people are not only expected to distinguish between truth and lie, they must do so when reliable sources may be blocked and women's voices may be absent from the information they receive.

My niece is 16 years old. At her age, she should be worrying about her studies, choosing what music to listen to, laughing with her friends and thinking about the person she wants to become. Instead, she has to grow up in a country where even simple information can become uncertain. When reliable voices disappear rumours take over. My niece is then left to build her own understanding of the world built on fear, half-truths and uncertainty.

For a girl whose education has already been taken away, this is another loss. UNESCO estimated that 2.2 million Afghan girls had been excluded from education beyond primary school by 2025. She should not have to learn what is true by guessing what other people are too afraid to say. I want her to inherit more than my fear, I want her to inherit the freedom to ask questions and the freedom to receive honest answers to those questions.

2. What do I propose at my own level?

Personally, I do not believe that creating another newspaper or television channel would be enough. If the government can silence one journalist, it can silence a radio station. Giving people information is useless if the people controlling the country can decide which information they are allowed to receive. We have also seen what happens when foreign powers try to control Afghanistan through force. However, I also do not believe that the international community should simply accept the Taliban's rule and wait for the situation to improve by itself. I therefore believe that the United Nations should adopt a three part strategy: pressure, protection and preparation.

First, I would support stronger targeted sanctions against the Taliban leadership. The United Nations already has some sanctions adopted that include freezing assets and travel bans, however, sanctions should be directed at those responsible for repression rather than at the Afghan population as a whole. Freezing the assets of Taliban officials, restricting their international travel and limiting access to international financial systems which could therefore increase the cost of maintaining policies that violate fundamental human rights. With that, I'd also propose stronger international monitoring of sanctions: sanctions become meaningless if the person can simply avoid them by going through another country or organisation. Therefore it should work with member states to identify attempts to evade sanctions and regularly report it to the Security Council.

My second proposal would be to strengthen the UN presence inside Afghanistan. Using supported forces to monitor human rights, support humanitarian access and maintain dialogue with Afghan communities. Helping NGOs in the media sector and helping journalists to create free press. I do not want another foreign army trying to rebuild Afghanistan from the outside. I want international forces, if they are necessary, to create enough security for Afghans themselves to rebuild their communities.

The third part, and the most important proposal in my opinion, would be to prepare the Afghan for a future in which the Taliban no longer have absolute control over society.

This means investing in education, specially for girls, and creating secure ways for Afghan women and young people to participate in public life.

If the Taliban take measurable steps towards allowing girls to receive an education or maybe even allowing them to work while also allowing humanitarian organisations to operate freely, certain diplomatic and economic restrictions may be gradually eased. If they, on the other hand, move the opposite direction, targeted sanctions should be strenghted.

For my fourth and last proposal, moving beyond Afghanistan, the UN should create a global system to help young people and journalists in any country ruled by an authoritarian government. From Myanmar to Belarus, Iran and Russia use identical tactics to silence news, block certain platforms and restrict youth access to verified information. Under this global initiative, the UN would provide secure app/software and emergency satellite internet infrastructure so they can access real news even if their government shuts down the internet or block sites. It should also set up UN sanctions (like trade or financial penalties) against any government that arrests journalists or blocks digital

news without valid motive. It guarantees that our solutions protect press freedom universally, regardless of which regime holds power.

I am fully aware that this strategy would not produce immediate results. Sanctions will not suddenly change Afghanistan and peacekeeping armies will not rebuild an entire country. But putting pressure on those responsible and giving Afghans the tools to eventually determine their own future are important steps towards the protection of its own people. And reliable information and truth in news and reporting are key elements in building this broader strategy.