

# The Dhaka Declaration

## For Enabling Environment to Practice Independent Journalism

July 2022

This declaration was drafted by journalists, journalists' leaders, academics, and media activists who attended a camp on July 29-31, 2022. *SoMaSHTe – Society for Media and Suitable Human-communication Techniques* organized this camp under its Press Freedom project.

### **Demands to Lawmakers:**

Media registration process:

- Implement a systematic and transparent registration process for newspapers, TV, radio, and online media.
- Require proper verification before approving the registration.
- Condition registration upon depositing security money for at least two years, ensuring financial security for employees if owners cannot pay salaries and allowances.

Ensuring professionalism and press freedom:

- Create an enabling environment and maintain professionalism in journalism.
- Establish standard policies and legal protection for journalists' physical, social, and financial security.

Wage board compliance:

- Ensure that each media organization adheres to the remuneration package set by the wage board.
- Media failing to comply should not receive state-provided privileges such as public sector advertisements.

Amendment of Digital Security Act:

- Amend or repeal the Digital Security Act 2018 to prevent its excessive abuse against journalists and online communicators.
- Preserve sections related to core cybercrime while eliminating elements that restrict independent journalism and freedom of expression.

Qualifications and professional editors:

- Set minimum educational qualifications for working as a journalist in consultation with relevant stakeholders.
- Ensure the appointment of professional editors based on legally defined qualifications.

Nationwide database of professional journalists:

- Initiate and maintain a regularly updated database of professional journalists.

Appellate authority for the Right to Information Act:

- Establish an appellate authority in each district to handle cases where entities deny information requested under the Right to Information Act, 2009.

- Avoid harassment and complications for applicants outside Dhaka.

Set a special tribunal for offences against journalists:

- Establish a special tribunal to handle cases of harassment, torture, murder, and other offenses against journalists.

Timely access to information:

- Ensure journalists have timely access to information, especially information held in public offices.

Ensure a gender-sensitive environment in the media:

- Eliminate discrimination in recruitment, promotion, and evaluation of women workers in the media.
- Include various benefits, such as paid maternity leave, as rights of women journalists.
- Provide special benefits for single-mother journalists.

State benefits for all journalists:

- Ensure state benefits, including the Journalist Welfare Trust, for all journalists regardless of political or ideological affiliation.

Addressing bureaucracy complexities:

- Introduce necessary legal measures to eliminate complexities and situations where bureaucrats undermine public representatives, including journalists.

Complaints to the Press Council:

- Establish provisions for aggrieved parties to complain to the Press Council instead of filing direct lawsuits regarding published or broadcasted news.
- Exempt reporters from being defendants in lawsuits, as they are not the decision-makers in publishing or broadcasting news.

Pension and insurance for journalists:

- Introduce legal provisions to ensure pension and insurance benefits for journalists.

**Demands to Media/Owners:**

Recruitment and job security:

- Implement a progressive and fair recruitment policy, ensuring the appointment of qualified individuals as journalists or news-related staff.
- Guarantee job security for journalists and prohibit unjustified terminations.

Professional editors:

- Appoint only professional journalists as editors in media houses.

Compliance with legal frameworks:

- Ensure compliance with media-related legal frameworks, including implementation of the Wage Board, regardless of the location of operation.

#### Logistic support and risk allowance:

- Provide required logistic support in news gathering, processing, and dissemination.
- Offer risk allowance to journalists and uphold professionalism.

#### Policies and codes of conduct:

- Establish standard policies and codes of conduct for media organizations.
- Include clear gender-sensitive elements and ensure equal rights and dignity for journalists and news workers.

#### Performance evaluation and non-discrimination:

- Implement a standard performance evaluation process.
- Prohibit discrimination based on religion, caste, and gender in recruitment, promotion, and operational procedures.
- Ensure no harassment and discrimination against women journalists.

#### Journalists' security and contingency fund:

- Ensure the physical, social, and financial security of journalists.
- Create a contingency fund to address any emergencies.

#### Training and technological advancement:

- Arrange local and foreign training programs for journalists to keep them updated on current and evolving journalism practices, especially due to technological advancements.

#### Preservation of public interest reports:

- Media houses should not suppress or stop the publication and dissemination of reports that serve the public interest.

#### District-based engagement and fair compensation:

- Stop engaging district-based reporters and correspondents in increasing subscriptions or collecting advertisements.
- Align salaries, allowances, and other benefits of local representatives with market value or the Wage Board.

#### Elimination of ID-card-only journalism:

- Prohibit the practice of providing identity cards without stable salaries.
- Actively work to eliminate all forms of malpractice in journalism.

#### Ethical standards and objectivity:

- Ensure ethical standards in all stages of journalism.
- Uphold objectivity in news gathering, processing, and presentation.
- Media houses should not reflect any political ideology or have affiliations that impact their overall operation.

Proper sourcing and credit:

- Discourage the copying of news from other media.
- When necessary to source news from other media, prepare their version of the news and provide proper credit to the source.

Elimination of corporate influence:

- Work to stop the influence of corporations in journalism practices.
- Media should not be used as a tool to protect other businesses of the owners.

Representation and digital facilities:

- Ensure representation of local journalists under the leadership of the central newsroom using digital facilities.

**Demands to Journalists' Associations:**

- Ensure journalists' rights, dignity, safety, and professionalism:
- Work towards building greater unity among journalists by eliminating political divisions, differences, and factions.

Advocacy for Wage Board implementation:

- Continue all-out advocacy efforts to ensure the implementation of the Wage Board by all media outlets.

Maintain communication with journalists nationwide:

- Keep in touch with journalists across the country to stay informed about their concerns and challenges.

Address embarrassing practices in the media:

- Take action to prevent practices in the media that are embarrassing for journalists, such as sudden shutdowns.

Support systems and grants:

- Ensure support systems for journalists in need, including grants from the Journalist Welfare Trust, are open to all journalists, regardless of their political affiliations.

Collaboration with media houses for staff capacity development:

- Collaborate with media houses to implement staff capacity development strategies.

Promote honesty and professionalism in journalism:

- Encourage news managers, journalists' leaders, and journalists to take various initiatives, such as discussions and training arrangements, to promote honesty and professionalism in journalism.

Link journalists in districts and Upazilas with associations:

- Establish links between journalists and news workers in 64 districts and 503 Upazilas with capital-based associations.

Impartiality in journalists' livelihood movements:

- Ensure that associations do not take the side of media owners, the government, or any political party in movements related to journalists' livelihood.

Unified protests against incidents targeting journalists:

- Encourage journalists or their organizations across the country to organize similar protest programs in response to incidents such as murders or torture of journalists.

Active role of National Press Club:

- Recognize the vital role of the National Press Club in socio-cultural and political movements.
- Ensure that the National Press Club actively protects the rights and dignity of journalists, in addition to its recreational activities.

**Other Demands:**

- Collective efforts to create an enabling environment for journalism:
- All journalists, institutions, and related actors should work together to create an environment that encourages honest, courageous, constructive, and independent journalism.

Responsibility and commitment to the profession:

- All journalists should be committed to their profession and carry out their work with greater responsibility.
- No journalist should engage in behaviors that may damage the image of the profession, their media outlet, or other journalists.

Objective journalism free from personal political ideology:

- Personal political ideology should not influence objective journalism in any way.
- Journalists must adhere to ethical standards even in hostile environments.

Database for monitoring harassment of journalists:

- Consider creating a database to monitor instances of torture or other forms of harassment against journalists.
- Regular updates and periodic analysis can provide valuable insights for addressing these issues effectively.

Balanced distribution of public and private sector advertisements:

- Stakeholders should work towards ensuring a balanced distribution of public and private sector advertisements among media outlets.

Formation of a parliamentary caucus on press freedom:

- Explore the possibility of forming a parliamentary caucus dedicated to press freedom.
- Such a caucus can provide significant support and advocacy for journalism within the legislative framework.