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Kunduz: The presence of women in local media organisations of northern Kunduz province has declined by 60 percent in the past two years, a local news agency reports.

Currently, only 32 women are working for nine radio stations and three local television channels in Kunduz province. Women's representation has apparently fallen due to escalating violence.

Before the fall of Kunduz two years ago, 81 women worked for different local media outlets. But they fled the province due to security concerns, bringing their number down to only 32.

**Two years ago**

According to Pajhwok investigations, two years back, four women worked for Kunduz Radio, 13 for Zahra Radio, over 15 for Kehan Radio, six for Sabnam Radio, one for National Kunduz Radio.

As many as 11 women were associated with Cheragh Radio, two with Badloon Radio and 25 with Roshani Radio while the Eslah Radio had no female employee two years ago.

### **Current representation**

The presence of women declined by 60 percent compared to two years back. At the moment, there is no woman employee in Radio Eslah, while four females work for Zahra Radio, five for Radio Kehan, three for Shabnam Radio, seven for Radio Cheragh, six for Radio Roshni, two for Radio Badlon and one for Kunduz National Radio.

Three local television channels are also on the air in Kunduz. The National Television has no woman employee, with Khawar and Roshni having two women workers each.

Not a single woman in Kunduz works as a reporter. Mostly of females work either as newscasters or host social women-related programmes.

### **Worries of owners**

Owners of local media outlets confirmed women had lost interest in working in the sector after the fall of Kunduz City and growing insecurity. They say women were no longer enthusiastic about working as news-people.

Obaidullah Qazizada, head of the Roshni Radio Television, said most women had left their jobs in the media after the fall of Kunduz and had migrated to other provinces or foreign countries.

Financial issues being faced by media and security threats have been the main reason for media outlets' failure to compete. He accused the government of being unable to maintain security.

"In the past two years, many female workers had left their jobs and the main reason was insecurity. We had over 25 female workers but currently only eight women work with us," he explained.

Malalai Yusufi, head of the Charagh radio, said the security situation had been terrible in Kunduz and no females dared work in the media sector.

She added some families had heard about security threats over the telephone and therefore did not allow their daughters to work in media organisations.

She asked the government to pay enough attention to the rehabilitation of the media sector and ensure journalists' security.

Zarghona Hassan, editor in chief of Kahan Radio Station in Kunduz City, said the radio was run by 15 females before the province was overrun by Taliban. But now only five female workers are there.

She expressed concern over the deteriorating media situation and warned the progress made towards media freedom over the past 14 years would be reversed if the government did not pay serious attention.

### **Journalists' apprehensions**

Shekiba Hashimi, working for a local media outlet, said: "We worried about the security situation. Officials have repeatedly promised improving the situation but have failed to take any practical step yet."

Sana Mohammadi, a former employee of Cheragh radio station, said: "I had a lot of interest in working for media, but the bad security situation in the province forced me to leave my job. I presented a programme regarding women's problems on a local radio but now my family doesn't allow me to work."

She added her family had been warned by unidentified gunmen against letting women work for radio or television channels. However, Mohammadi said she was still interested in working if the security situation improved.

### **Concern at shrinking representation**

A number of Kunduz residents, while expressing concern over the shrinking presence of women in media outlets, asked the government to improve the security environment and protect female workers.

Bashir Khan, a resident of Kunduz City, told Pajhwok radio and television programs done by women had decreased after the fall of the provincial capital to the Taliban.

"It is obvious women's participation in local media has declined by around 90 percent in this area after the recent violence in Kunduz," he said, adding there was no security for girls, who felt unsafe working for media organisations.

Nisar Jalali, a journalist, also expressed concern at women's situation and their presence in radio stations, television channels and printing media outlets in the province.

"The absence of girls from media has left a negative impact on women's situation in Kunduz. This situation needs serious attention from the government. The lives of women and journalists have to be protected," he stressed.

However, the provincial police chief, Brig. Gen. Abdul Hamid Hamidi, said security forces were always ready for protecting journalists, particularly female media workers.

He confirmed the problems regarding media workers' security, he assured no one would be allowed to create hurdles for them or disrupt the programmes they present.

Impressive improvement in the media sector in Afghanistan has been one of the major achievements of the government and people. But insecurity and economic problems have seriously damaged the media and its workers.