

# Women in media and digital journalists in the crosshairs of threat actors in Pakistan



**Freedom Network Pakistan Press Freedom Report – 2021-22**  
World Press Freedom Day 2022

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# 1. Executive Summary

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At least 86 cases of attacks and violations against media and its practitioners, including journalists, took place in Pakistan over the course of one year – between May 2021 and April 2022. While the overall numbers of documented violations in the preceding year have gone down several notches, there is a continuing trend of targeting journalists working for digital media, according to this research and analysis report by Freedom Network, an award-winning Pakistan-based media rights watchdog that tracks violations against journalists and attacks on freedom of expression on an ongoing basis.

The report, released in Pakistan in 2022 to mark the World Press Freedom Day marked globally on May 3 every year, reveals that the state actors continue to be the largest threat source for journalists in Pakistan in a period marked by a dramatic escalation of coercion by the erstwhile Imran Khan government resulting in murders, legal cases, assaults, abductions, detentions and threats.

The data shows that no place in the four Pakistani provinces, federal capital Islamabad or even Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir is safe – attacks against journalists are taking place everywhere.

According to the key findings of the **Freedom Network Pakistan Press Freedom Report 2022**, monitored for the period May 2021 to April 2022:

**Scale of violations against media in Pakistan and their frequency:** At least 86 cases of attacks and violations against journalists and media practitioners were documented in Pakistan in the one year between May 3, 2021 and April 10, 2021 across all territories of Pakistan, including the four provinces, Islamabad, Gilgit Baltistan and Azad Kashmir. This is an average of over seven cases of violations a month – one every fifth day.

**The top three categories of violations** against the journalists in Pakistan in the period under review included (a) 13 **legal cases** filed against them (15%) and 13 cases of **offline harassment** (15%), (b) 11 instances of **illegal detention** by the authorities (13%), and (c) nine cases of **attempt to murder** (11%) and nine cases of **verbal threats** (11%). These six categories of violations – legal cases, offline harassment, illegal detention, attempt to murder and verbal threats – constituted 65% of the 83 categories of violations against media in Pakistan in the period.

**The most dangerous regions in Pakistan for journalists:** Overall, Islamabad emerged as the riskiest and most dangerous place to practice journalism in Pakistan with 37% of the violations (32 out of total 86 cases) recorded in the federal capital. Sindh was the second worst with 27% of the violations (23 cases) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) the third most dangerous with 19% (16 cases). These were followed by Punjab with 13% (11 cases), Balochistan with about 2% (two cases) and one case each from Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB).



**The most targeted journalism mediums in Pakistan:** TV and print media in crosshairs: Of the total 86 attacks and violations against journalists recorded in Pakistan in the period under review, TV medium emerged as the single largest victim of type of media with at least 39 cases (45%) of the cases against its practitioners compared to print, radio and internet. Print media was the second most targeted medium with 35 journalists working for it targeted (41%) while 12 cases (14%) were recorded of online journalists targeted. No targeting of a radio journalist was documented.

**The biggest threat actors targeting media in Pakistan:** In a whopping 41% of the 86 documented cases (at least 35 cases) of violations against media practitioners in Pakistan – thus the biggest threat actor – in the period under review, the victims or their families suspect the involvement of the **State** and its authorities and functionaries in the attacks on them compared to other influential threat actors. A group of miscellaneous ‘**others**’ with 24% (at least 21 cases) emerged as the second largest threat actor in the period under review. ‘**Unknown**’: The victims and their family, as well as the authorities and their employers, have been unable to identify perpetrators of violations against 22 journalists (25% cases). Surprisingly another category of threat actor identified by the victims, or their families, were **political parties** – constituting 4% (3 cases).

**Targeting women media practitioners:** In at least 3 of the total 86 violations against media practitioners in the period under review the targets were women journalists receiving threats of dire consequences or harassment.

**Digital media journalists in the crosshairs:** In at least 12 of the total 86 violations (or 14%) against media practitioners in the period under review the targets were journalists working with digital media. These included 2 of the 4 journalists killed.

## 2. Scale of violations against journalists in Pakistan and their frequency

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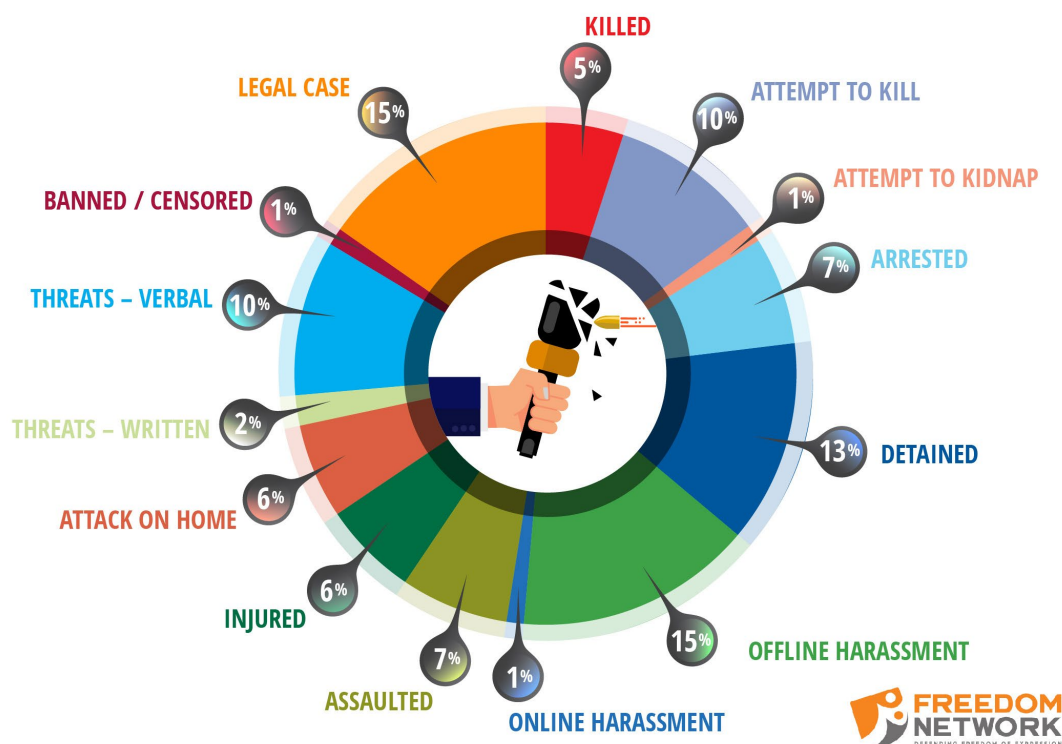
At least 86 cases of attacks and violations against journalists and media practitioners were documented in Pakistan in the one year between May 3, 2021 and April 10, 2021 across all territories of Pakistan, including the four provinces, Islamabad, Gilgit Baltistan and Azad Kashmir. This is an average of over seven cases of violations a month – one every fifth day.

The documented violations included:

- 04 cases of **murders** of journalists, plus 09 other unsuccessful assassination attempts.
- 13 instances of **legal cases** registered against journalists.
- 17 cases of arrests, **detentions or illegal confinements** of journalists by the State.
- 06 cases of **physical assault**, 05 of which caused bodily injuries.
- 05 cases of **attacks on the homes** of journalists.
- 11 cases of specific **threats** of murder or other dire consequences issued to journalists.
- 14 cases of **harassment** of journalists.

### 3. Categories of violations against journalists in Pakistan

#### CATEGORIES OF VIOLATIONS AGAINST JOURNALISTS IN PAKISTAN



**The top three categories of violations** against the journalists in Pakistan in the period under review included (a) 13 **legal cases** filed against them (15%) and 13 cases of **offline harassment** (15%), (b) 11 instances of **illegal detention** by the authorities (13%), and (c) nine cases of **attempt to murder** (11%) and nine cases of **verbal threats** (11%). These six categories of violations – legal cases, offline harassment, illegal detention, attempt to murder and verbal threats – constituted 65% of the 83 categories of violations against media in Pakistan in the period.

**Killings and attempted murder:** At least four working journalists were killed for their journalism work in the period under review. The murders constituted 6% of the total 86 cases of violations against journalism practitioners. At least another 9 journalists – around 10% of the total violations – survived assassination attempts. The total cases of murders and attempted murders totaled 14, or 16% of the total 86 violations.

**Legal cases:** At least 13 cases were documented in which journalists were served with legal notices for various alleged infractions, or 15% of the 86 total cases of violations.

**Threats:** Specific verbal threats of murder or other dire consequences constituted another frequent category of violations against journalists in the period under review with 11 cases documented, or 13% of the total 86 violations.

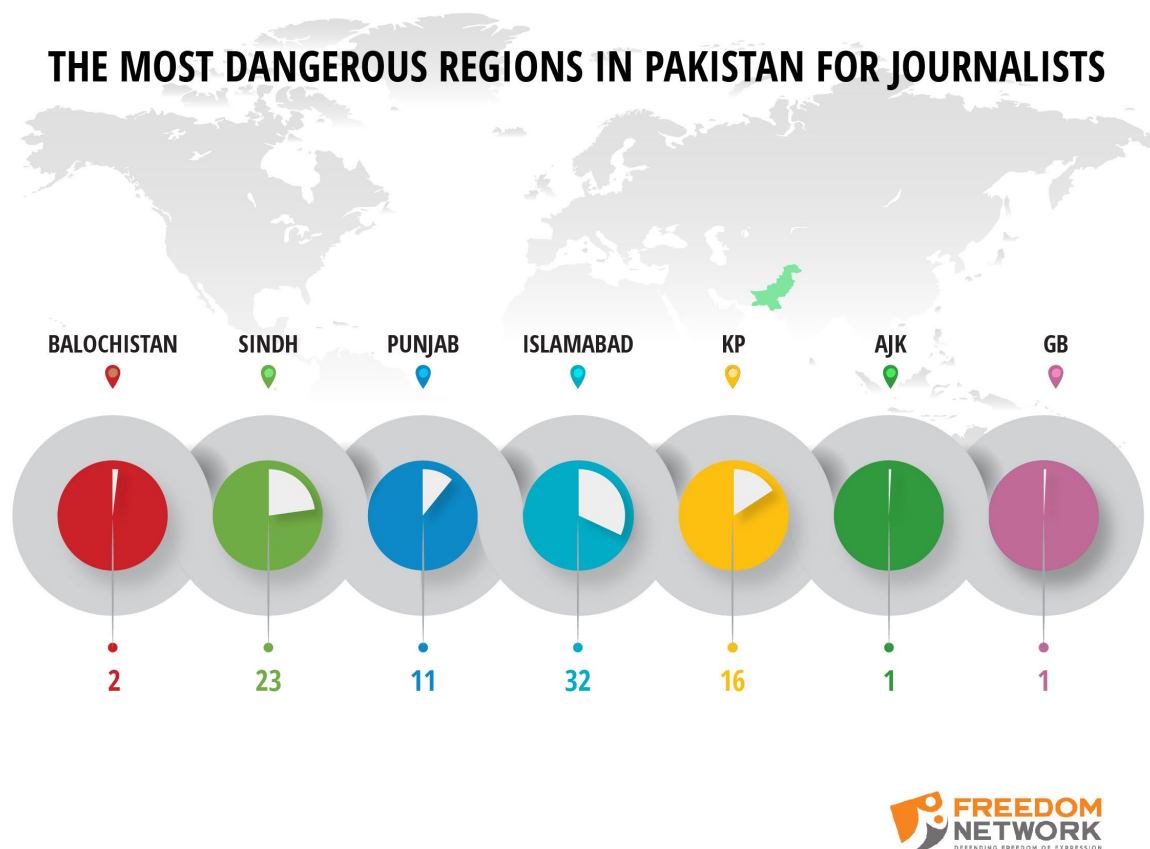
**Arrests or detention:** At least 6 cases of arrests (under specific charges) and 11 cases of illegal detention by authorities without serving cause were documented in the period under review – a total of 17, or 20% of the total 86 violations recorded.

**Assault:** At least 6 journalists were physically assaulted in the period under review, of which 5 sustained serious injuries. These categories of violation constituted 13% of the total 86 violations against the journalists.

**Harassment:** At least 14 cases of harassment (offline and online) and intimidation of journalists were documented in the period under review, constituting over 16% of the total 86 violations recorded.



## 4. The most dangerous regions in Pakistan for journalists



**Overall hostility:** Overall, Islamabad emerged as the riskiest and most dangerous place to practice journalism in Pakistan with 37% of the violations (32 out of total 86 cases) recorded in the federal capital. Sindh was the second worst with 27% of the violations (23 cases) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) the third most dangerous with 19% (16 cases). These were followed by Punjab with 13% (11 cases), Balochistan with about 2% (two cases) and one case each from Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB).

**Risk to life:** In terms of threat to the lives of journalists, all four provinces recorded equal risk for lives with one journalist killed in each of the four provinces – Balochistan, KP, Punjab and Punjab. No murders were reported from AJK, GB or Islamabad.

**Bodily harm:** In terms of physical assaults and bodily harm, Sindh emerged as the most violent region in the country for journalists documenting 6 of the total 11 cases – 55% – of assaults and injuries of journalists during the period under review. The second worst was Punjab with 2 cases (18%) and AJK, Islamabad and KP the third worst with one case (9%) each. Balochistan and GB recorded no case of assault.

**Arrests:** In terms of arrests, detentions and illegal confinements, of the total 17 cases documented, six (35%) were documented from KP, 5 (or 30%) from Sindh, 4 (or 24%) from Islamabad and one (9%) from GB. No case was reported from AJK, Balochistan or Punjab.

**Threats:** In terms of specific verbal threats that journalists received, of the total 10 cases, 8 (or 80%) were documented in Islamabad while one (10%) was recorded each in KP and Sindh. No verbal or written threat to any journalist was documented in AJK, Balochistan, GB or Punjab.

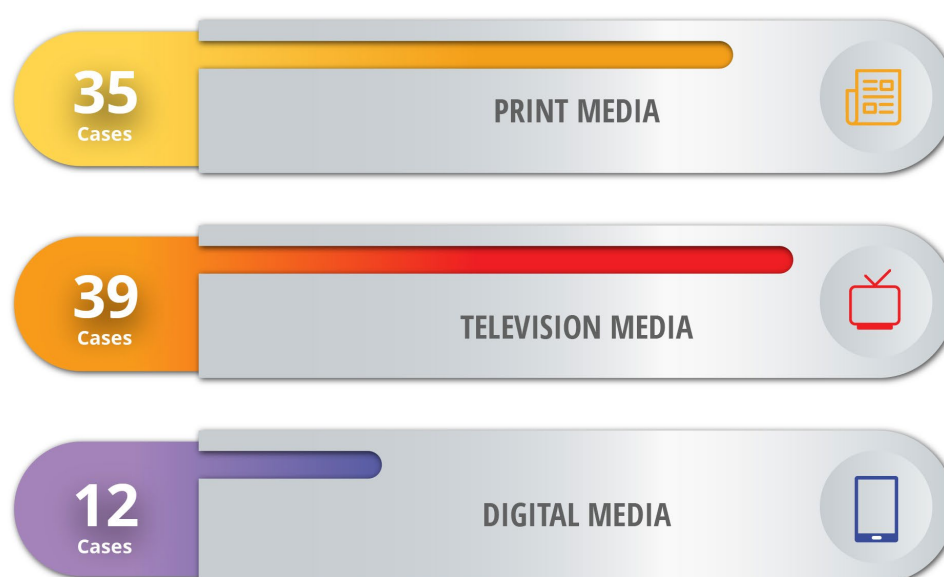
**Legal:** In terms of legal cases registered against journalists, of the total 13 cases documented, Islamabad emerged as the most hostile for journalists with 8 cases (62%) while Sindh was second with 3 cases (23%) and KP and Punjab third with one case (8%) each. No legal cases were documented from AJK, Balochistan or GB.

**Harassment:** Of the total 14 cases of harassment and intimidation documented in the period under review, at least 5 cases (33%) each were from Islamabad and Sindh while 3 were from Punjab (20%) and KP one case (7%). No harassment cases were documented from AJK, Balochistan or GB.

## 5. The most targeted mediums in Pakistan for their journalism

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### THE MOST TARGETED MEDIUMS IN PAKISTAN



**TV and print media in crosshairs:** Of the total 86 attacks and violations against journalists recorded in Pakistan in the period under review, TV medium emerged as the single largest victim of type of media with at least 39 cases (45%) of the cases against its practitioners compared to print, radio and internet.

Print media was the second most targeted medium with 35 journalists working for it targeted (41%) while 12 cases (14%) were recorded of online journalists targeted. No targeting of a radio journalist was documented.

In the period under review:

- Of the 4 journalists **killed**, 2 each worked for TV media and digital media.
- Of the 9 journalists who **survived assassination attempts**, 4 each worked for print and one for digital media.

- Of the 13 journalists against whom **legal cases** were registered, 9 were from print media, 3 from TV media and one from digital media.
- Of the 6 journalists **assaulted**, all worked for TV media.
- Of the 5 journalists **injured**, 3 worked for TV media and one each for print media and digital media.
- Of the 6 journalists **arrested**, 2 each worked for TV media, print media and digital media.
- Of the 11 journalists **detained** illegally, 7 worked for TV media, 3 for print media and 1 for digital media.
- Of the 14 journalists who faced offline and online **harassment**, 7 worked for print media, 5 for TV media and 2 for digital media.



## 6. The most vicious threat actors targeting journalists in Pakistan

### THE MOST VICIOUS THREAT ACTORS TARGETING JOURNALISTS IN PAKISTAN



**DISCLAIMER:** *The information here is based on reporting by victims or their families and does not necessarily imply it is verified, unless specified. The information filed here is aimed at analyzing trends for the sole purpose of informing strategies to reduce threats against media and its practitioners.*

**State authorities:** In a whopping 41% of the 86 documented cases (at least 35 cases) of violations against media practitioners in Pakistan – thus the biggest threat actor – in the period under review, the victims or their families suspect the involvement of the State and its authorities and functionaries in the attacks on them compared to other influential threat actors such as political parties, religious groups or criminal gangs and influential individuals, or unidentified threat sources. Among specific threat actors, the State authorities were not suspected of involvement in any of the 4 journalists killed but were involved in arrests and detentions of 16 journalists, registering legal cases against 7 journalists, threatening (verbal and written) 3 journalists and harassing 7 journalists. Thus, the state authorities demonstrated an arsenal of various ways in which to harass and harm journalists in Pakistan.

**“Others”:** A group of miscellaneous ‘others’ (including feudal lords, land mafia, traders, individual clerics, lawyers, etc.) with 24% (at least 21 cases) – as a distinct overall category of actors targeting journalists in Pakistan for their journalism work – emerged as the second largest threat actor in the period under review. These ‘other’ categories of threat actors attempted to kill 2 journalists, assaulted and injured five journalists, filed legal cases against 5 journalists and attacked the home of one journalist.

**“Unknown”:** The victims and their family, as well as the authorities and their employers, have been unable to identify perpetrators of violations against 22 journalists (25% cases). ‘Unknown’ threat actors were involved in killing 2 of the 4 journalists murdered, making unsuccessful attempts to murder another 7 journalists, attacking the homes of 4 journalists, and injuring 3 journalists, among other violations.

**Political parties:** Surprisingly another category of threat actor identified by the victims, or their families, were political parties – constituting 4% (3 cases). Political parties were allegedly involved in killing one journalist, registering a legal case against one journalist and harassing another.

## 7. Violations against women journalists in Pakistan

### VIOLATIONS AGAINST WOMEN JOURNALISTS IN PAKISTAN



In at least 3 of the total 86 violations against media practitioners in the period under review the targets were women journalists. These included at least two documented cases of offline harassment of women journalists out of 14 such cases (or 14%). Another included a woman journalist threatened with dire consequences for her journalism work out of 11 similar cases (or 9%).

## 8. Violations against digital media journalists in Pakistan

### VIOLATIONS AGAINST DIGITAL MEDIA JOURNALISTS IN PAKISTAN



In at least 12 of the total 86 violations (or 14%) against media practitioners in the period under review the targets were journalists working with digital media. These included 2 of the 4 journalists killed (or 50%), 3 cases of digital journalists out of the 17 journalists arrested or detained (or 12%), 2 cases of digital journalists out of the 14 journalists harassed (or 14%) and attempted murder of a digital journalist out of assassination attempts against 9 journalists (11%), the sole documented attempted kidnapping of a journalist, one digital journalist injured out of injuries sustained by 5 journalists (20%) and legal case registered against a digital journalist out of legal cases registered against 13 journalists (8%).



## 9. List of journalists killed in Pakistan for their journalism work during May 2021 to April 2022

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The following is a list of the four journalists killed in the period under review for their journalism work:

**Hasnain Shah**, reporter associated with Capital TV, was shot dead on January 24, 2022, by two motorcyclists outside the premises of the Lahore Press Club in Punjab province. The suspects were later apprehended, and a case investigation opened.

**Muhammad Zada Agra**, a citizen journalist, was gunned down in Malakand in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on November 8, 2021, by unidentified men days after he spoke about alleged corruption and the drugs business in front of senior government officials.

**Nazim Jokhio**, a citizen journalist, was tortured to death on November 2, 2021, in Malir area of Karachi in Sindh province and four days later his body found at the residence of a ruling party provincial legislator lawmaker Jam Awais who later fled to Dubai. A murder case was registered against him. Jokhio had earlier filmed and published a video of illegal hunting in his village by Awais and his foreign guests.

**Shahid Zehri**, a reporter for Metro 1 News TV was killed on October 10, 2021, in coastal Hub city in Balochistan province, in a targeted bomb blast later claimed by regional armed group Baloch Liberation Army. He had twice before escaped assassination attempts.

## DISCLAIMERS

- **DATA:** The data used and analyzed in this report was generated by the **Safety Hubs Network**, which **Freedom Network** helped establish and manages in partnership with National Press Club in Islamabad, Karachi Press Club, Lahore Press Club, Quetta Press Club and Peshawar Press Club. The hubs monitor and document threats and attacks against journalists using pre-developed templates with cases cross-verified by press clubs, journalists' unions, media houses and journalists and/or their families. The hubs also provide intermediation assistance for victims. In serious cases, the victims are assisted through the **Pakistan Journalists Safety Fund (PJSF)**, also managed by Freedom Network.
- **LIABILITY:** The list of threat actors is based on information provided by victims, or their families, and alleged involvement of suspected threat actors cannot be independently verified either by the Safety Hubs Network or Freedom Network.
- **CASES:** The list of cases included and considered for analysis in this report is based on cases documented by the Safety Hubs Network that have been brought to their notice. This is not necessarily an exhaustive list. The actual number of violations against journalists in Pakistan may be higher than the cases documented here.



# ABOUT FREEDOM NETWORK ([www.fnpk.org](http://www.fnpk.org))

Freedom Network is a Pakistan-based independent media and development sector research, advocacy and training organization registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP). It was established in 2013.

In 2017, Freedom Network was awarded the prestigious global **French Human Rights Prize 2017** by the Government of France for “its efforts for safety and protection of journalists and promotion of freedom of expression.”

**OUR MISSION:** To protect civil liberties, including freedom of expression and access to information, and promote an informed society that sees media as a key partner in a democratic and pluralist Pakistan.

## OUR OBJECTIVES AND EXPERTISE:

- 1. To serve as a watchdog on the right to freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and Internet and of civil society**
  - a. Through 24/7 monitoring of the rights to freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and online
  - b. Through monitoring and documenting violations of freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and Internet
  - c. Through researching the causes, symptoms and case studies of the violations of freedom of expression in all forms of media
  - d. Through monitoring violation of the right to expression of non-media sections of society such as human rights groups, development practitioners, and the performing arts industry.
- 2. To promote an ethical and professional media**
  - a. By promoting, supporting and conducting advocacy, research, analysis and training initiatives for media
  - b. By promoting, supporting and conducting initiatives to help civil society strengthen its stakeholding in a pluralistic, independent, open and professional media with emphasis on professional ethics and journalism best practices
  - c. By strengthening the interface between media and civil society by improving professional development communications within and for development sector organizations as well as for their supporters and donors.
  - d. By promoting a culture of safety and security for journalists and media houses through advocacy, research and training on issues of safety and impunity against journalists.
- 3. To serve as an advocate for freedom of expression and access to information as fundamental rights**
  - a. Through a broad range of advocacy, research and analysis initiatives
  - b. By promoting and building synergies between and among media and civil society stakeholders
  - c. By promoting citizens’ participation on issues relating to freedom of expression and access to information
  - d. By conducting assessment missions, studies, research, translations of resources in multiple languages on its own and for other organizations for wider national and international audiences.