

Citizen Media: A Call for Transformation of Pakistan State Broadcasting Media

Declaration of the public consultation held in Serena Hotel, Islamabad, September 20th 2012:

We the stakeholders of Pakistan's pluralistic community, comprising citizens, civil society, political parties and media, including newspapers, TV channels and radio stations, from both the private and public sectors, affirm that

- a) freedom of expression and right to information are fundamental rights as guaranteed by the Constitution of Pakistan which must be respected by way of transparent commitment and practice,
- b) Pakistan media, as critical sources of reliable information for a large majority of the citizens, must be free, fair and dedicated to serving and safeguarding public interests by being editorially independent and at all times respectful of public trust,
- c) without commitment to public service values in media – to ethics and professionalism – there will be biased and incomplete coverage of news, current affairs and other information-based programming, and that
- d) all media in Pakistan, whether in the public or private sectors, should strive to be unbiased, ethical and professional.

We recognise that in an open, diverse and digital media landscape the notion of government-run state broadcasting is not a viable or credible system that can command the attention and trust of the public.

We believe that there should be full transparency in state relations with the media as a vital part of creating public trust.

The media itself has a responsibility to show leadership in setting standards for internal transparency and accountability.

Accordingly, we demand that all forms of secret funding of media and journalism, both from national and international agencies, should cease.

We call for the allocation of state advertising to be made more transparent, for it to be taken out of government control and for this work to be carried out by an independent body of reputed professionals.

We believe that state media institutions, including Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation, Pakistan Television, APP and Shalimar Recording and Broadcasting Company, should become free from undue political influence at all levels and that editorial independence should be guaranteed.

In a democratic and transparent society government must not be afraid of journalism and public scrutiny of its actions.

As a first step we therefore declare that PBC, PTV, APP and SRBC, which are major shareholders of the Pakistan media space serving the whole population, should be freed from direct and exclusive control of the government.

It should become public service media, charged with safeguarding constitutional guarantees on freedom of expression and the right of all citizens to information and administered with public funds according to an explicit public mandate.

As representatives of direct stakeholders in this public-funded enterprise, and in conclusion of a focused national consultation, we demand urgent reforms that will allow the PBC, PTV APP and SRBC to be transformed from government service operations to genuinely public service systems.

We call for management of these media to be handed over to independent boards comprising eminent citizens reflecting Pakistan's diverse socio-political, ethnic and cultural communities and opinions.

These independent boards should prepare a public service agenda for its transformation to enable PBC, PTV, APP and SRBC to function in a transparent and accountable manner as non-partisan, ethical and professional media organisations committed to the promotion of a public interest information environment in the country.

Finally, we call for legal reforms that will underpin the principles of media independence set out here in particular the transformation of PEMRA and the creation of a single authority for regulation of broadcasting across all platforms, both public and private.

We believe a further consultation on the future of media regulation including the creation of a single media council based on principles of self-regulation and covering all media platforms is urgently needed and we commit ourselves to following this process.
