



PRESS RELEASE

Statement by CHRI on criminal cases against media

February 2, New Delhi, India – Over the past months, and especially in recent days, across the length and breadth of India, for different reasons and in different jurisdictions, criminal cases have proliferated against media professionals.

Senior and younger journalists, photographers, news anchors and editors have been physically and legally attacked as well as abused on social media for their work. This casts a long shadow over the state of freedom of expression in the country, which has for decades been a thriving bastion of journalism.

Police in different cities and states have used colonial laws like sedition, criminal defamation as well as economic offences to silence media figures, including prominent ones who draw both extensive support and dislike for their views. It is worth remembering that Mahatma Gandhi, also a journalist and editor and whose assassination was commemorated by national leaders on Jan 30, was tried for sedition by a British judge.

Laws such as sedition and criminal defamation have no place in a nation committed to democratic practices. The sedition cases against the journalists should be withdrawn. India should commit to revisiting, reviewing and repealing these archaic laws, rooted in a colonial past. The government must ensure protection under law for journalists who face harassment and threats.

India is a leading member of the 54-nation Commonwealth whose summit is scheduled to take place in June this year. It is a signatory of the Commonwealth Charter to uphold freedom of expression and the role of the media in democratic governance. It has just assumed non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council. In addition, it is also a member of the UN Human Rights Council where it has pledged to uphold freedom of expression and of the media.

To be a journalist is not a crime. To assault, abuse, attack and intimidate those who practice journalism is -- just as it is for those media leaders who use their powers and on and offline spaces to peddle fake news, misinformation and disinformation.

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