

WAF WC Minutes – 2nd June 2021

Participants

1. Ayra
2. Bunny
3. Mehreen
4. Nida
5. Nighat Dad (ND)
6. Nyla Naz
7. Rani
8. Ruby
9. Sahar Bandial
10. Tauseef

Agenda Item # 1 Review WAF's Advocacy Strategies

Rani said that WAF takes up various issues, makes our positions and then moves on but we need to follow up on the issues we take up. Some we do but others we don't. We need updates on issues taken up. Need to review our advocacy issues. Rape, Blasphemy, RUDA, RTI etc.etc.

What kind of strategy do we want to continue with. We take up women issues, but also others like SNC, Media, etc.

This will be discussed at the next WAF Meeting.

Agenda Item # 2 Discussion on Media Ordinance –Nighat Dad & Sahar Bandial

Protection of Journalists.

Pakistan Media Development Authority Ordinance

Sahar gave a briefing on the Protection of Journalists Bill. Government has approved Bill on Protection of Journalists. The Bill is very broad, with various sections. Governments responsibility to protect journalists against abuse of various kinds. Bill has lofty principles. Commission will be established but we don't know how much power the commission has and how exactly it will work. No detail has been provided. We don't know if it has suo moto powers. A journalist has been defined as someone attached to newspapers but doesn't cover bloggers or free lance journalists. Who will decide if journalist is impartial. All very, very vague. Commission has members from the Human Rights Commission and Ministry of information, so that means they will be biased in favour of the Govt.

Rani: High on principle and low on substance. These Commissions always have members from the Govt. Commission needs to make its own rules and that can often become problematic.

Bunny asked if the Government saw this Commission as Autonomous, with Members from the public.

Sahar said, yes, Chairperson to be independent, and Commission envisaged as autonomous.

Need to think about this in conjunction with other laws being brought in to suppress Media.

Nighat Dad said we must see this as a whole, part of a larger trend. Seems like a Creeping takeover.

Rani: Look at this from all perspectives.

Nighat Dad gave a briefing on the **Pakistan Media Development Authority Ordinance 2021.**

(PMDA)

Very draconian laws. Repeal of current laws including PEMRA, and resolve all issues via this Authority. This Bill talks about digital media and journalists. PMDA has an Advisory Committee/ Complaint body and a Tribunal.

Appeals can only be taken to the Supreme Court not the High Court.

Bill applies to all those who go on line. Print, Digital, Electronic.

Sec. 29: Need permission from authority to show foreign programs like BBC Urdu etc.

The newly formed Digital Media Group (DMG) completely rejects this Bill.

WAF can have a meeting with DMG to discuss the BILL.

Nighat Dad said that it seems that the Government wants to centralize all media including digital media, so it all comes under one umbrella.

Bunny: Reminds me of Ayub Khan's 1963 Press and Publications Ordinance. Agree we should meet with DMG. Could Nighat and Sahar make these into bullet points to share with WAF National.

ND: We will write up a document on our position.

Sahar: Analysis of interaction of laws.

Rani: Contradiction between laws

Ruby: Appeal only to Supreme Committee? Isn't that unconstitutional??

N.D: The whole Ordinance is unconstitutional.

Bunny: Talks about section 19 on Freedom of Speech.

Sahar explains how law is interpreted.

Rani: we can rely on courts.

Decided to take it to WAF National. And liaise with other groups.

Nida: This issue could morph into a civil rights movement.

Agenda Item # 3 Discussion on SNC

Nida: 6-8 approved. Grade 5 Social Studies leaves out PML-N Period.

Write up on Women's contribution very limited.

Issue of religion out of subjects other than Islamiyat. Legal challenges. Narrative against private schools - we need to improve our advocacy to counter Government propaganda.

Language creating issues. NOC process for books very slow.

Ruby: erased period of history. If we go by Government whim, you can't teach history properly.

Nida will talk to other groups and then come up with a strategy. Possibility of a bigger coalition.

Rani Update on HEC: 2 petitions one in Sindh HC, Judgement reserved. Another petition in Isl High Court filed today.

Ruby: There is fear that HEC will not support public sector universities.

Rani: on the one hand we don't have funds, yet we are opening new public sector universities.

Nida: we need to look at this holistically to identify general trend on educational control.

Bunny: Agree with Nida. Need a larger document of 2 or 3 pages on education.

Rani: We need update on RUDA. And also pull together all the various issues.