

## **IWPR Press Centre for Isolated Afghan Province**

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Media resource centre will connect Uruzgan to the outside world.

An IWPR press centre complete with computers and internet access has been hailed as a timely response to the needs of journalists in Afghanistan's central Uruzgan province, where equipment shortages previously made timely reporting all but impossible.

Uruzgan is one of Afghanistan's least developed provinces, and few reporters have access to computers and the internet. Until now, journalists had to beg permission to use the IT facilities at a handful of connected offices in the provincial capital Tarin Kowt in order to file their stories. Local journalist Ahmad Shah Jawad reported on this for IWPR in February: **Lack of Internet Cuts Off Afghan Province**.

As a result, IWPR Afghanistan Country Director Noorrahman Rahmani said, "Afghans in other parts of the country and the international community know very little about what is happening in this province."

To address this problem, IWPR's Afghanistan team opened a provincial office in Tarin Kowt where reporters file stories for IWPR and other news agencies.

Local reporters say they are relieved to finally have proper access to the internet.

"Before this, we had to spend days and nights going from one NGO to the next, asking them to let us use their internet just to send a single report," a freelance reporter Hekmatullah Aftab said. "That has now been resolved."

Journalists joined NGO representatives and local government officials for the April 30 inauguration ceremony, where Maulawi Hamdullah, head of the provincial department for the Hajj and religious affairs, recited verses from the Koran and prayed that the office would transmit voices from Uruzgan out to the wider world.

Alhaj Abdul Rahman Khan, representing the provincial governor's office, described the media as the "breath and soul" of society, and said journalists in Uruzgan played an important role by holding up a mirror to the problems and successes of their communities.

IWPR has been extending its work to areas outside Afghanistan's major cities, and Uruzgan has presented a particular challenge. A training workshop for local journalists was delayed for weeks because the Taliban presence made travelling by road extremely dangerous.

Uruzgan, bordering on the volatile southern regions of Helmand and Kandahar, has a strong insurgent presence.

"The number one challenge we face in the province is security. The government and the foreign forces in the province have very little control outside Tarin Kowt," Rahmani said. "We've heard that people in some districts... regard those who live or work in government-controlled areas as non-Muslim infidels."

"In addition to the insurgent threat, there are a great many other problems like rampant corruption, lack of transparency in government offices, and dozens more. These and other problems have remained unreported so far."

Local government officials responded positively to IWPR's new presence. Alhaj Ghulam Nabi Ulfat, who heads the information and culture department in Uruzgan, said the media centre was a "great achievement" that would strengthen journalism in the province, and provide better coordination for it.

Aimal Haand, director of the Red Crescent for Uruzgan, said the province needed robust reporters - and it also needed them to be free from obstructions created by local powerbrokers.

"The media are very important in any society," he said. "If a kingdom collapses, it is brought about by the media, and if ordinary people come to power, that too is achieved through the media."

The media centre was established as part of an IWPR project promoting investigative journalism in Uruzgan and Nangarhar, using practical training workshops followed by mentoring reporters as they work on print and radio stories.

**Topic:** [Refugees](#)

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