

Report of Multi-stakeholder Dialogue IMF-Islamabad

A multi-stakeholder dialogue among members of Inclusive Media Forum (IMF) Islamabad was organized by JDHR in collaboration with Alert on 21st of July 2017 at Islamabad Hotel (Holiday Inn). The members discussed in detail on the topic of 'Responsible, objective and inclusive Media Practices and various ways to increase media space for marginalized segment of the society'.



The session began with a brief introduction of JDHR and the Inclusive Media Forum by JDHR Chief Executive Mr Khalid Jamil. This was followed by an introduction session of the IMF members where the members were asked to introduce themselves as well as their role in IMF as the forum is a mix of Media professionals, Civil society workers, Minority Rights Defenders, Marginalized Community representatives, and more.



After the introduction session, Mr Jamil highlighted the major problems prevalent in media reporting today which he believes are a highly politicized media that has high influence over the content served to the public, biased media reporting which leaves major gaps in public knowledge, and the use of intolerant and inflammatory words and statements in reporting to generate buzz and get higher ratings. He further commented that while reporting often times non-provocative word choice alone is effective in creating harmony between groups.

Mr Jamil also outlined the expected goals of the forum for the members and assured JDHR's full support in teaching the members how to portray all communities in the media in correct perspective. He shared the success story of KPK IMF's 'ShamshanGhat Issue' where the IMF members had moved the issue of there not being a place for their Sikh brethren in Peshawar to perform their traditional funeral rites and secured not only land but funding for the project in the provincial budget. This inspired the forum members and motivated them to raise similar issues and have action taken upon them.

Mr Jamil further opined that reporting should be unbiased regardless of religious beliefs or alignments and that twists should not be added to make stories more 'buzzworthy'. He further cautioned that intolerant and inflammatory terms and statements should not be employed to boost rating or to create hype. Following this primer, Mr Jamil opened the floor for a discussion between the members.

Ahmed Mukhtar, Bureau Chief of AbbTak, appreciated the forum calling it an extraordinary initiative especially for an open yet insular community like Islamabad where neighbours of many years don't even know each other. Mr Mukhtar stated that the media needs to raise a voice for the needy and the marginalised in order to help them. He also commented that we need to be especially careful and sensitive when sharing jokes, funny stories, and memes so as to not hurt the sentiments of those around us.

An IMF member from the Hindu Community commented that care needs to be taken not to humiliate or hurt the sentiments of minorities or marginalised communities through any form of the media. People need to be made aware that other religions, beliefs, and sects need to be respected as much as their own if there is to be peace, harmony, and tolerance in the society and the media has a vital role to play in this regard.

A Sindhi Origin Journalist IMF member Sahib Oad stated that, in the past, Journalists were quite unaware of the issues of minorities as well as the impacts of their writings on individuals and communities. Generally, journalists approach issues with a biased mindset and quickly become defensive over perceived threats to their religious beliefs of mind-set. There is a need to teach media professionals to approach issues from a neutral perspective rather than a pre-conceived notion of how things are or should be. They need to accept that denying the existence of social issues will not in fact make those issues stop existing.



A Bahai community IMF member question whether or not there is a minimum qualification requirement for being a journalist as she opined that this could be a cause of a problem with media reporting in Pakistan as in her opinion. A good education and moral base will lend itself to ethical and more professional journalism.

A senior journalist IMF member, Myra cautioned that we should take care not to create boundaries between communities by overly focusing on one aspect of their identity; instead of just focusing on awareness, we need to provide structures, which support and enhance that awareness. Media houses need to be brought into line when it comes to paying their employees on time and appropriately so that they are not forced to resort to “other” means to earn extra money on the side.

A civil Society member, Aftab Alam was of the opinion that perhaps there is a need for positive marginalisation of minorities as they have been suppressed for so long that without going the extra mile and giving them extra considerations, they may never reach equality in society. He went on to stay that we need to promote Jinnah’s 14 points and article 25 related to equal rights as much as possible to encourage and strengthen the rights of minorities.



Another civil society IMF member, Shakeel Ramay stated that we need to take ownership of our own issues and stop expecting international help every time there is a crisis or natural disaster and then turn around and make up excuses and conspiracy theories for our own weaknesses. We should look towards and idolise local heroes and supports their efforts at peace building, social cohesion, and self-help initiatives. We need to force our corporations and Government to provide funds for minority development projects and initiatives like a lot of our youth seem to be doing these days.

Towards the closing of the forum meeting the discussion turned towards the topic of religion and how the media needs to realize that all the religion promotes peace and interfaith harmony. The members agreed that there should be a focus on promoting this fact in the mainstream media. There was also a consensus that a forum like this is to be appreciated as it provides a formal space for a much needed discussion that usually only occurs informally with little to no follow up action as a result.



The meeting ended on a positive note with members agreeing to stay in touch and keep updated via whatsapp group and share relevant materials. Mr Khalid Jamil closed the forum with a small end thanking the members for their valuable time and sharing a few noteworthy instructions regarding the whatsapp group and its rules and regulations.