

## **WAN-IFRA Board Press Freedom Resolution – Pakistan**

The Board of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), meeting in Estoril, Cascais, Portugal on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2017, on the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> World News Media Congress, calls on the Pakistan authorities to lift restrictions on the distribution of Dawn newspaper and condemns recent actions as a deliberate attempt to stifle press freedom in the country.

The Board acknowledges reports of disruptions in many parts of Sindh, Balochistan and Punjab provinces, where salesmen have been told to cease distributing the newspaper as a direct result of its publication of a controversial interview with former Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif. Military personnel went so far as to search newspaper sellers to prevent copies of the paper from reaching military cantonment areas.

Furthermore, the Board notes that since October 2016, there have been reports of disruptions in the distribution of the newspaper in a number of cantonments and other military controlled residential districts as a result of Dawn's coverage of civilian and military relations.

The Board is disturbed to learn about accusations of interference made against the Press Council of Pakistan for its handling of the Dawn case. The Board reminds Press Council members of their duty to regulate with neither partiality nor favour, and to avoid undermining the right of the media to report the news.

The Board of WAN-IFRA stands firmly behind Dawn and calls on the government of Pakistan and military authorities to desist in attempts to control access to information by ensuring that the newspaper reaches citizens unimpeded. The Board is particularly concerned that this latest move against Dawn, coming on the back of other recent cases of censorship and suspension of mainstream news organisations, comes just months ahead of general elections - a period during which the need for the press to operate freely and without restriction or interference will be urgently required.

The Board of WAN-IFRA therefore urges the Pakistani authorities to provide firm guarantees regarding the safety and security of journalists in the lead up to, and during, the forthcoming election period, and to ensure access to information is assured in order for the media to play its crucial watchdog role over the country's democracy.