



Mahrugh Jabeen on being a **female journalist** in Pakistan

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The Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) runs along the Afghan border in Northern Pakistan, a region plagued by the presence of extremist groups. These tribal areas are highly conservative, patriarchal, and a difficult place for balanced media. To be a journalist in FATA is dangerous, especially for women such as Mahrukh Jabeen - the only female journalist in FATA.

By Amy Vis

Mahrukh is a journalist working for the Tribal News Network (TNN), a news organisation supported by Free Press Unlimited since its inception in 2013. She perseveres against the values of her family and society, on top of facing the same dangers all journalists in the tribal areas face.

We asked Mahrukh how it is to be the first female journalist. This is what she said: "I didn't know when I began working with media that I would be the first woman journalist. I thought there would be many like me, but when I realised I am the only woman journalist I felt proud but at the same time disappointed that there is no representation of women in journalism in Pakistan's tribal areas."

Mahrukh continues: "Maybe the reason for not joining journalism is that there are many challenges ahead for woman reporters, because I can't go out freely and can't report from the scene because of security, as well as traditions/customs that women have to be in the home and not in public. I was encouraged by TNN to start reporting and for that reason I was trained by them.

I enjoy journalism and am appreciated by women in my community by becoming a voice for them. I love to report from the scene but I can't. I am optimistic that one day I will be able to move freely without fear and report on every issue not just women issues."

The Tribal News Network seeks to provide local news for the tribal areas of Northern Pakistan, by broadcasting bulletins via the radio and their website. TNN is a news agency that has lead the way in supporting female journalists to raise their voice in Pakistani tribal media. Their founders believe that the solutions to problems in tribal areas of Pakistan can only be solved by hearing the voices of all parts of society, including women.

Towards this goal TNN has trained young women from Peshawar University as reporters and editors, though many return home after the training and do not pursue a career in journalism due to the societal barriers that continue to prevent them.

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Free Press Unlimited is committed to promoting gender issues and providing a voice for women in challenging environments such as Pakistan. To this end, FPU has provided support and training for TNN's journalists. This came together with the commitments of the founders of TNN to create a supportive environment for a female journalist such as Mahrukh to work.

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