

# OpenVoiceNews Pakistan

Transparent. Unbiased. Yours.

## Free Speech Under Siege: Calls Grow for Repeal of PECA in Pakistan's Digital Crackdown

July 19, 2025

– Categories: Human Rights



A recent national roundtable in Islamabad has reignited concerns over the shrinking space for free expression in Pakistan, particularly in the digital realm. Organised by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) in partnership with the European Union, the event brought together journalists, civil society members, and legal experts to discuss the far-reaching impact of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016 especially in light

of controversial amendments passed earlier in 2025. Participants warned that the law is being misused to suppress dissent, silence critics, and erode democratic norms.

Prominent journalists at the forum, including Asad Toor and Matiullah Jan, gave first-hand accounts of how media practitioners are being silenced without legal process. “If you don’t align with the state’s narrative online, your platform is shut down, often without warning or legal recourse,” Toor said. Matiullah Jan highlighted the alarming rate at which YouTube channels and online accounts are being blocked. “This is not just censorship, it’s the stripping away of our basic constitutional rights,” he added. The panel pointed out that PECA has become a blunt instrument used to muzzle not only journalists, but also ordinary citizens engaging in legitimate discourse.

What emerged from the discussion was a clear pattern of economic and legal pressure used to stifle free media. Journalist and TV anchor Absa Komal explained that targeting advertising revenue has become a new tactic to weaken independent media. “It’s not just about arresting reporters anymore. There’s a quiet, strategic form of economic strangulation happening,” she said. HRCP Co-Chairperson Munizae Jahangir echoed these concerns, stressing the urgent need for media, legal professionals, and civil society to unite in defending democratic freedoms. Veteran journalist Nasir Zaidi added that this isn’t just a threat to journalism, it’s a broader assault on public discourse.



Political leader and human rights advocate Farhatullah Babar took it further, urging the Senate Information Committee to obtain and release details of all cases filed under PECA by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). He also proposed establishing an independent commission to review both PECA and Pakistan’s blasphemy laws. The roundtable concluded with a unanimous call for PECA’s repeal or, at the very least, meaningful reform. As Pakistan navigates a precarious digital landscape, the demand is loud and clear: suppressing voices may control the narrative temporarily, but it ultimately undermines the nation’s democratic fabric