

Radio Meraj

Radio Meraj has been in operation since May 2015. Meraj means "reaching for the highest good." The station is enjoying great success both in listener numbers and listener engagement but also in recognition received from professional organizations. Meraj is many years ahead of its strategic plan. The station broadcasts 18 hours a day to 8 out of 15 districts of Herat Province reaching 65% of the land area of Herat, which is home to nearly 2 million people.

Many people who live in remote locations and have no opportunity to get to a workshop or seminar on important issues of health, education, citizenship and human rights now can hear this information on the radio.

"Education is the first step for development and media is the best tool for carrying out education goals," said a senior advisor to AIL.

The station is one of the two top stations in Herat winning a nation media award in 2016 and other awards in 2017, 2018 and 2019. The station has programming of benefit to the community including, health, education, human rights and social values together with music and news.

Professional Recognition

In 2016, Radio Meraj won the national award from NAI-Support Open Media in Afghanistan. Being the top media outlet, Radio Meraj won best guest speaker category for the whole country. Radio Meraj is one of the best news channels in Afghanistan and one of the top three in Herat. In May 2017, The Afghanistan Institute for Research and Studies held a contest for 161 media outlets. Meraj was permitted to enter 3 categories and won all 3! Meraj won best news package, best analysis and speakers, and best innovative programming. In addition, a photographer working with AIL won the best photography prize for one of his AIL photographs. The competition attracted media outlets from all over the western zone including the well-known stations that have been operating for decades. Meraj's success is remarkable in that it has been in operation for only two years yet won awards usually associated with stations of 5 plus years of experience. It won the most awards among all the existing media.

Radio Meraj was awarded 3 prizes at the Herat Media Awards Festival 2018. The event was open to all vocal, pictorial and print media. Meraj received the prizes for: **Best News Announcer:** Meraj has professional on-air staff who are both genial and serious in their presentation, which adds to the trust level and engagement that audiences have with the station. **Best News Service:** this was from a pool of 21 active radio stations and was for accurate reporting, developing news and best style of news broadcast. **Best Report:** this was won by one of Meraj's female reporters. She was encouraged by management to develop her journalist skills and presentation.

All the staff are proud that Meraj is one of the top stations both in Herat and regionally after only 3 years of operation. It is now one of the top two stations in Herat. A staff person said, *"A major goal of our programs is to enlighten minds and opinions of Meraj Radio*

listeners. We work to help women to take a more active role in society and also to look after their families better through planning and management. For youth and children we have programs that aim to discourage negative behaviors, to make youths interested in studying and taking an active role in the country's development."

Radio Meraj reporter, Quadratullah Hamidi received the award for Photojournalist 2018 from Free Media Support Institute of Afghanistan (NAI)!

In 2019, the station was again honored with awards for its excellence in broadcasting.

Radio Meraj staff received awards for best news package, best news announcer, top photographer at the Selahuddin Saljoqi Media Awards 2019 Herat.

Mission

A major purpose of the programs on Radio Meraj are to enlighten minds and public opinions of listeners. Programs are specifically designed to help women take an active role in society and to educate them in how to look after their families. Women are given the knowledge to plan and manage and develop self-expression in society.

There are also programs directed toward the development of youth working to ensure they are on the path to a successful future. Radio Meraj had a special program in relation to International Day against Drugs to motivate youth not to use drugs and not to destroy their future through substance abuse. In addition, the station regularly has graduate students from Dr. Yacoobi's Leadership Class as guests. Two graduate students gave an interview about the leadership class activities and its effects on their personal and educational life. The live program allowed many young girls and boys to call in and share their thoughts and seek advice. The programming aims to expand the knowledge and create interest and awareness in learning among young people so they become active in the progress of the country.

Programs

Radio Meraj has 13 live programs and 17 archived, with at least 10 programs running daily. The following is a list of some of the programs currently on air:

Morning Messenger: Guests and experts talk on different social and educational issues relevant in society.

Brief News of morning: Broadcasting news from all around the world, particularly new happenings in Afghanistan. Residents in the area share informative local happenings that allow reporters to go about searching and providing feedback.

At Home: Social programs that focus on either social or family issues which allow listeners to call in and ask different questions.

The Daily News: programs shares daily breaking news.

The Voice of Meraj: This program is the voice of the people to the government and officials. Listeners are given the opportunity to call in and share their concerns and problems that relate to injustice in the government.

Poetry Program: Cultural and educational programs that discuss the lives of different poets

and invite poets of the city to share their poetry on air.

Respect to be respected: This program conveys the message how to be a significant member of society. What is the path one should take in life to be successful. Guests speak of keys to success and the circumstances that led them down their path in life. Listeners have the opportunity to call in and ask questions.

An adolescent listener named Morsal from Shakiban Village of Zendejan District said,

“I have three younger siblings in my family. They lacked interest in school and as a result received low grades. My older brother and I tried to help them but the end result was fruitless. I began to have them listen to Radio Meraj. While listening to the teenagers’ program they became interested in studying and academics. Now they spend two or more hours in doing their homework and even reading in their spare time. I owe this to Meraj and only wish future success for the station.”

The popularity of Radio Meraj has expanded to the government level. The station has a well-established ongoing rapport with government offices that keep the radio station informed of important news and reports. While spreading the influence and effectiveness of programs takes time, the effects of the programs will become more and more obvious over the coming years. Consistently changing and adapting the programs to the requests and suggestions of the listeners is important and ensures the continuous success, popularity and effectiveness of Radio Meraj.

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