

Produced In Ghana

By

**The Private Newspaper Publishers  
Association of Ghana (PRINPAG)**

P. O. Box Gp22282

Accra - Ghana

Tel: +233 - 302-229576

+233 - 302-220666

Email: [prinpagghana@yahoo.com](mailto:prinpagghana@yahoo.com)

With Funding Support From:

**ECOBANK (GH) Ltd**

And

**United Nations Development Programme**

## **TABLE OF CONTENT**

Introduction	2
Ghana's 4th Republican constitution	2
African Charter on Human and Peoples Right	3
UNESCO	4
Right to Information Bill	5
Chapter One: Fundamental Print Media	
Guiding Principles	8
Chapter Two: Responsibilities and Obligations	11
Chapter Three: Owners/Share Holders & Directors	13
Chapter Four: Advertisers/Business and Political Allies of Owners	14
Chapter Five: Politicians/State Functionaries	15
Chapter Six: Donors & Diplomatic Community	16
Chapter Seven: Partisan & Parochial Interests	17
Chapter Eight: The Public	
Chapter Nine: Protection of Practitioners by Media Owners	19
Chapter Ten: Internal Complain Settlement	21
Chapter Eleven: Social Responsibilities	22
Chapter Twelve: Corruption, Cheque Book, Journalism & Inducements	23
Chapter Thirteen: Violence, Hate & Bigotry	24
Chapter Fourteen: Responsibilities of other Critical Players	25
Chapter Fifteen: Endorsement and Undertaking	26
Appendix: National Media Commission Print Media Standards	

# **PRINT MEDIA GUIDELINES & CODE OF ETHICS FOR THE PRIVATE NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION OF GHANA (PRINPAG)**

## **PREAMBLE**

### **Introduction**

Over the last two decades and half the media scene in Ghana, as elsewhere in Africa, has undergone significant changes. Although there has been rapid privatization of the media, thus opening new possibilities for citizens access to diverse sources of information, the state continues to compliment editorial independence and freedom in various direct and indirect ways, thus making Ghana the freest media regime in Africa with fundamental rights and freedoms.

### **GHANA'S 4TH REPUBLICAN CONSTITUTION**

Chapter 12 of the 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution clearly spells out the FREEDOM and INDEPENDENCE OF THE MEDIA.

Article 162 states:

- (i) Freedom and independence of the Media are hereby guaranteed.
- (ii) Subject to this constitution and any other law not consistent with this constitution there shall be no censorship in Ghana
- (iii) There shall be no impediments to the establishment of private press or print media; and in particular, there shall be no law requiring any person to obtain a license as a prerequisite to the establishment or operation of a newspaper, journal or other media for mass communication or information.
- (iv) Editors and Publishers of newspapers and other institutions of mass media shall not be subject to control or interference by government, nor shall they be penalized or harassed for their editorial opinions and views, or the contents of their publications.

The above provisions, notwithstanding the emerging print media scene also poses, a new set of threats to the exercise of fundamental human rights, including the right to information and freedom of expression. The private media is increasingly concentrated in a few media houses and conglomerates and controlled by a few individuals and political parties. In addition to the State and private owners, non-state actors whose pressure, influence, power and interference impact on editorial independence and freedom, pose threats to the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms of the public.

### **AFRICAN CHARTER**

The right to information and freedom of expression are both part of collective and individual rights and freedoms. These rights and freedoms are enunciated and protected by African state constitutions and several international and regional instruments, including the Declaration of

Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa adopted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in 2002.

The right and freedom to receive, process and disseminate information, including the right and freedom to express opinion, constitute the cornerstones of democratic political and economic governance. The meaningful exercise of these rights and freedoms enables citizens to participate in their own governance, thus giving substantive content to the right of peoples to self-determination, which is recognized and fervently guarded by all international and regional human rights conventions, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1982 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. For Africa today, the right of people to political and economic self-determination is crucial for the exercise of their right to development and the assertion of their permanent sovereignty over natural resources.

### **UNESCO**

At the 36th session of the UN General Conference (November 2011), Member States mandated UNESCO to explore the impact of change on press freedom and the safety of journalists. For this purpose, the Report has adopted four angles of analyses, drawing on the 1991 Windhoek Declaration, to review emerging trends through the conditions of media freedom, pluralism and independence, as well as the safety of journalists. At each level, the Report has also examined trends through the lens of gender equality.

These developments raise issues that go to the heart of UNESCO's mandate "to promote the flow of ideas by word and image" between all peoples, across the world. For UNESCO, freedom of expression is a fundamental human right that underpins all other civil liberties, that is vital for the rule of law and good governance, and that is a foundation for inclusive and open knowledge societies. Freedom of expression stands at the heart of media freedom and practice of journalism, as a form of expression aspiring to be in the public interest.

To these ends, UNESCO is working across board, across the world. This starts with global awareness raising and advocacy, including through World Press Freedom Day. In Ghana, Media Associations spearheaded by the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) and PRINPAG have been active organizers and participants of this May 3 celebration of Media Freedoms. It entails supporting countries in strengthening their legal and regulatory frameworks and to eliminate impunity. This is the importance of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, spearheaded by UNESCO and endorsed by the UN Executive Board in April 2012.

### **RIGHT TO INFORMATION BILL**

Private media owners in Ghana must recognize that their ownership is neither absolute nor exclusive. The media industry is pre-eminently in the public domain, providing a public good. Therefore, the driving force of private ownership — profit— needs to be subordinated to legitimate public interest, which is to ensure and enable the meaningful exercise of the

fundamental rights and freedoms referred to above. Public interest and social responsibility thus override ownership rights and interests; by virtue of being actors in the public domain providing a public service, owners and media practitioners are primarily accountable to the public.

Mindful of these considerations in 1998, the Media Associations in Ghana and civil society organizations formed a Rights to Information Coalition and initiated a process of developing an important piece of legislation on The Right to Information Bill. After country-wide consultation over a period of nearly twenty years, the two proposals drafted by non-state actors, media practitioners, owners, and other civil society actors, was submitted to the Parliament of Ghana.

## **Resolution**

-Cognisant of the importance of editorial freedom, independence, and social responsibility in developing a free and robust media;

-Aware of the central social and political role of a free media in the exercise of the collective right of the people to political and economic self-determination and individual fundamental rights recognised by various international and regional instruments, including state constitutions;

-Recognising the importance of the right of the African peoples to assert their permanent sovereignty over natural resources in the interest of the sustainable development of their countries; and

-Aware of the role which media can play in combating stereotyped images of women and men and the sexist attitudes in our society;

-Convinced that the free flow of information, discourse and expression of opinion play a catalytic role in raising social awareness and consciousness for people to exercise their rights and freedoms meaningfully and to assert their political and economic sovereignty;

Now, therefore, the signatories to this Declaration do hereby resolve:

1. To endeavour to adhere to the principles of the Declaration and create formal and semi-formal mechanisms to facilitate their observance and enforcement;

2. To impress upon academic, research and professional organisations and institutions the importance of integrating the Declaration and its underlying principles in their teaching, training and research programmes;

3. To demand that some of the appropriate obligations which require formal adoption be enshrined in contracts and charters of agreement between public and private media owners on the one hand and practitioners on the other;

4. To demand that significant non-state actors, other than owners, recognise and publicly endorse this Declaration and its underlying principles and observe the same in their dealings with the media; and

5. To demand that all actors in positions of influence desist from interfering with editorial freedom and independence.

Furthermore, the signatories to the Declaration call upon all print media owners and practitioners generally and editors particularly:

6. To resist influences, pressures and incentives from outside factors which could undermine editorial freedom and independence and tamper with the exercise of their discretion in accordance with professional standards and the underlying principles of this.

### **Declaration;**

7. To perform their duties and discharge their social responsibility with the utmost personal integrity, objectivity and competence consonant with professional standards and ethics; and

8. To be aware and conscious at all times that their duty and accountability are to the people and that they are actors in the public domain involved in delivering a crucial public service for the fostering of a democratic Society free from oppression; from prejudices based on race, ethnicity, gender, and disability; and from inhuman practices.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Fundamental Guiding Principles**

The fundamental guiding principles below are an integral part of this Declaration. They shall guide its interpretation and application, and shall be taken into account when entering into charters of agreement between owners and practitioners and setting editorial policies and such other policy documents.

1. Freedom of expression, which includes the fundamental right to receive, process and disseminate information, belongs to the public collectively and individually.

2. The primary obligation of media owners and practitioners is to facilitate the exercise and enjoyment of these rights and freedoms by the public, collectively and individually.

3. Print Media owners and practitioners are accountable and responsible to the public.

4. All media practitioners should exercise their functions truthfully, ethically, competently and professionally and with the utmost social responsibility and integrity such that they earn trust and credibility in the eyes of the public.

5. Media practitioners should foster social, political, economic, and cultural unity in diversity by promoting tolerance of different views and beliefs.
6. Media owners and journalists should take measures to protect child rights and children's dignity by raising public awareness on issues such as internet violence, child trafficking and sexual slavery.
7. Media owners and practitioners should endeavour to foster, promote and facilitate public dialogue and discourse and the dissemination of ideas and information. In this regard, they should provide space in their respective media for such dialogue and discourse.
8. Media practitioners have the responsibility to promote human dignity, fight all forms of discrimination and promote equality between women and men in the society while combating stereotypes of all kinds.
9. Media practitioners have an obligation to refrain from inciting, or facilitating the incitement of, violence, hate, and xenophobia while always adhering to the highest standards of truth. It is the duty of editors, particularly, to exercise judicious discretion in the reporting of news and opinions which are likely to incite violence, hate and xenophobia.
10. All actors mentioned in this Declaration have an obligation to refrain from interfering with editors and media practitioners in a manner that could undermine editorial independence and freedom.
11. It is the basic right of members of the public to access media without let or hindrance. The State and media owners and practitioners should facilitate and enable such access, always mindful of the fact that media space and the right to acquire information are public goods.
12. Media owners and practitioners should devise mechanisms such as media watchdog committees composed of independent civil society members of high integrity to facilitate the participation of the public in the oversight of the media to ensure that it plays its requisite role in the public interest.
13. To ensure diversity and the free flow of objective and truthful information, all media actors and related groups must endeavour to prevent the monopolisation of media and concentration of media outlets in a few hands, and should consistently oppose mergers and take-overs which could lead to such monopolisation and concentration.
14. Media stakeholders should encourage cooperative forms of ownership and management by media operators and practitioners themselves.
15. All concerned players must work towards converting state-owned media to public media responsible and accountable to the public through representative organs such as the legislature.
16. Media practitioners in decision-making organs must strike a judicious balance between paid advertisements and news coverage.

17. Salary structures should be streamlined by all media owners for editors and practitioners to motivate them to carry out their editorial duties with integrity.
18. Print Media Owners need to engage services of legal consultants to scrutinize contents periodically.
19. Occasionally organize training courses for both editorial and auxiliary staff.
20. Media owners must seek for sponsorship support for editors and practitioners to attend international conferences organized by the parent body —the World Association of Newspaper and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) etc for exposure and: necessary experience to boost self-confidence of their editorial staff.
21. Print Media Owners as much as possible should respond to initiations by the National Media Commission —the regulators and constitutional authority to avoid infractions against media houses.
22. Must differentiate between newspapers which are mouthpiece of political parties and independent commercial newspapers.
23. Print Media Owners must endeavour to draw up Business Plan prior to the setting up of any newspaper to enable them acquire the necessary funding support from the banks or international donor agencies.
24. All media Houses must display Copies of GJA Code of Ethics in their newsroom to guide their employees and editorial staff in their day-to-day activities.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Responsibilities and Obligations**

25. All the major actors in the media must bear the responsibilities and obligations in fostering and protecting editorial independence in order to ensure that editors and other practitioners have the freedom to make decisions based on professional requirements and ethical imperatives.

#### **The State**

Notwithstanding the rapid privatisation of the media, the State still plays important legislative and administrative roles which sometimes impinge on freedom of expression and editorial independence. Therefore, it has certain obligations and responsibilities in ensuring a healthy media environment.

26. Action should be taken to transform State run media into public media outlets, established by an Act of Parliament and funded through parliamentary procurement. The appointment of editors and other practitioners to run these outlets as well as the policy direction should be placed



in the hands of non-partisan agencies representing the will of the wider public and with a mandate to serve all citizens without let or hindrance.

27. The State should not use legislation to curb or limit editorial freedom through draconian laws, such as Criminal Libel. Laws pertaining to the protection of reputations ought to be in the realm of civil law.

28. Registration and licensing requirements should not impinge on editorial freedom. There should be no laws giving a Minister or any Government official unfettered discretion to ban, disallow, suspend or restrict media because such powers are invariably used to interfere with and threaten editorial freedom.

29. Any limitations on freedom of expression on grounds of state security must be necessary in a democratic society and serve a legitimate purpose. Such limitations must be reasonable, narrowly and clearly defined.

30. In defamation, libel and other related litigation, the judiciary must take cognisance of the need to promote editorial independence and freedom so as to expand the ambit of the fundamental rights of the public. Courts should refrain from awarding astronomical damages in defamation and like cases whose effect is to bankrupt media houses and thus encourage self-censorship and discourage investigative journalism.

31. Courts ought to make a distinction between defamation cases involving public figures and private persons. By taking positions in the public domain, individuals implicitly accept greater criticism and scrutiny by the public, and courts ought to enable this important intervention by narrowing the meaning of defamation in such cases.

32. The State should desist from using strong-arm tactics, which curb editorial freedom and independence, such as police intimidation, incarceration of journalists or confiscation and destruction of media equipment. Where its agents are found to have acted brutally against media practitioners, thorough investigations must be carried out and the culprits dealt with in a firm and transparent manner.

33. Government should not use its power of being the major source of news and advertising revenue to deny information or advertising to media that it considers unfriendly. Advertisements should be placed based on objective criteria such as the reach and impact of each outlet.

34. Government should take measures to restrict the publication of advertisements which perpetuate stereotyped images of women and men in the society.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Owners/shareholders/directors**

The ownership structures of many media houses contain layers of people who, using the influence afforded them by ownership, shareholding or directorship; can be a source of serious interference in, and erosion of, editorial independence. It is necessary for these individuals and the interests they represent to desist from using their influence in a manner that is inimical to editorial independence.

35. Print Media owners should not use their decision-making powers which affect the careers of editors and other journalists, including recruitment, training, career advancement and tenure, to grant favours or as an incentive to curb the independence and freedom of practitioners. The selection of editors and journalists and their training, promotion and remuneration should be done solely on the basis of merit and without the interference of extraneous considerations, such as family ties.

36. Editors must enjoy contractual security of tenure and they may be dismissed only for specified infractions such as misconduct or incompetence after due enquiry.

37. The context of high unemployment ought not to be used to exert unethical pressures on editors and journalists and/or make unreasonable demands on them or induce practices contrary to the tenets of professionalism.

38. Diversified ownership of media and other forms of ownership and management such as co-operatives of media practitioners ought to be encouraged by all stakeholders to enable the public to get varied sources of news, information and opinion.

39. Media owners should put in place sexual harassment policies that protect women and men from gender-based violence (GBV).

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Advertisers, Business and Political Allies of Owners**

There exists a nexus between business people, political friends of media owners and media practitioners competing for advertisements, which are the mainstay of media revenues. Depending on the conditions in the media industry, this can adversely affect editorial independence.

40. Corporate organisations, which are the second biggest source of advertising revenue after the government, should not use this power to punish or pressurise the media which carry or are perceived to carry unfavourable stories or stories inimical to their interests. Media owners should not succumb to the pressures and demands of unscrupulous business people for fear of losing

advertising revenue. Under no circumstances should they lean on their editors and other operators to kill public interest stories for fear of losing advertising revenue.

41. Media practitioners should endeavour to protect women's dignity by refusing to carry sexist advertisements.

42. Media owners should not use their connections with politicians or big business to tamper with stories and commentaries on their political and business friends. Editors should not allow political and business connections of their owners to influence their stories or in any way interfere with their editorial discretion.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Politicians/State Functionaries**

Politicians and State functionaries maintain a keen interest in what the media is doing and will seek to influence media content to serve their particular interests. Editors must guard against such influences to avoid fostering ties that can undermine their effectiveness.

43. While contacts with politicians and political organisations are important, editors and other practitioners must guard against entertaining too close a relationship with politicians or embedding themselves in political systems which could make their work harder and balanced journalism elusive. Any relationship or affiliation that could be perceived as a conflict of interest should be disclosed to the reader or viewer to ensure transparency.

44. Politicians, including those who are media owners, must refrain from using the media and media personnel for the advancement of their own narrow political interests, against the obligations of the media to represent the general public interest.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Donors/Diplomatic Community**

Sections within the donor and diplomatic communities have shown interest in promoting greater press freedom, including editorial independence.

45. Donors and members of the diplomatic community must not usurp the right of nationals to make their own decisions with regard to issues of Press freedom. They should refrain from using their financial clout to substitute their own agenda for national agenda.

46. Donor support and funding should be based on a principle of initial support designed to enable the efforts by nationals to get strong enough to stand on their own.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **Partisan/Parochial Interests**

47. Editors must always resist pressures from partisan and parochial interests and avoid giving them undue prominence or championing a particularistic cause.

48. Editors and journalists must always reject unreasonable and unethical demands from their own social groups if these could lead them to have a bigoted outlook or render them prone to groupthink and self-censorship.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **The Public**

Given that the role of the media is to serve the public by providing space for exchange of information and views, members of the public in turn have an obligation to play an increasingly active role by demanding the highest standards of media professionalism and by taking part in the generation of media products.

49. The public should promote and defend press freedom as an integral part of the broader issues of democratic governance and development.

50. The public should hold the media accountable through writing letters to the editors and other forms of feedback to correct distortions and engage journalists on their coverage of various issues.

51. Members of the public have both the right and the duty •to become more active participants in the production of information, news and views and to take advantage of the increasingly advancing new media in the promotion of responsible citizen journalism.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **Protection of Practitioners by Media Owners**

A free and independent media presumes a body of professionals who can undertake their work without undue interference, pressure or intimidation from power-wielding sources. These include the State, media owners and political and commercial lobbies in society. The current competitive context, both within and outside the media, has exposed media practitioners to new threats and hazards. It is therefore imperative that measures be instituted to protect practitioners in the conduct of their duties. Freedom from such threats will enhance editorial independence and foster a media that is committed to high professional and ethical standards.

52. All media practitioners have the right to fulfil their functions of investigating, photographing, filming, writing and reporting information and providing services without fear of interference, harassment, intimidation, restriction or repression from the State or any other public authority.

53. All media practitioners need to make use of their confidential sources of information without fear of being forced to disclose them, except where a due court order has been issued to that effect, or where the public interest outweighs the need for confidentiality. Chief Editors will obtain the source from journalists and protect it.

54. Where a party demands disclosure of source in litigation, the onus of showing the necessity for doing so must rest on the party demanding it.

55. Judicial authorities should give narrow interpretation to the laws governing the publication of information relating to state security and official secrets provided the laws are reasonable, necessary and justifiable in a democratic society, so that the public is not deprived of important information unnecessarily.

56. State organs with support from Media Owners have an obligation to provide protection to media practitioners who may be under threat of attack to their person, their office or their working tools until such threat has passed.

57. Media Owners have an obligation to protect and shield journalists from interference, harassment, intimidation, or repression they face or may face from State Organs, political organisations, commercial groups, etc.

58. Media Owners should ensure that journalists are protected from undue external influence and inducements from other sources by offering them just and fair remuneration and conducive working environments.

59. Media Owners are under an obligation to maintain a high level of professionalism and ethical behaviour among their staff through merit-based recruitment procedures, provision of training opportunities, regular post-mortem reviews and exposure to wide experience.

## **CHAPTER TEN**

### **Internal Complaint Settlement**

60. Media owners and media houses should be encouraged to institute, in consultation with the chief editors, independent internal committees to receive complaints from their staff. Media professionals should feel free from undue interference in the conduct of their duties by negotiating agreements with their media owners which would guarantee editorial independence and reduce the influence of political and commercial interests.

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

### **Social Responsibility**

61. Editors, by the very nature of their work, shoulder great responsibility as they are the final arbiters of what gets published and are thus required to be steadfast, upright and just.

62. Editorial freedom and independence must mean the freedom of the public to access information which has been processed and disseminated by editors and other journalists.

63. Editors should take great care to distinguish editorial copy from advertisements and paid for press releases so as not to deceive or confuse the public as to the source and nature of the content.

64. Editors should exercise due caution when using as sources press releases and other official communiques emanating from government departments, corporate organisations, diplomatic missions and other official and semi-official organisations by treating them critically and investigating their veracity.

## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

### **Corruption, Chequebook Journalism and Inducements**

65. Media Owners and Editors must strive to inculcate in their journalists the ethos of honesty, integrity and commitment to service; journalists should not demand or accept any form of improper incentive.

66. Chequebook journalism must be discouraged and journalists need to be nurtured in an environment that stigmatises corruption as a foremost evil to be fought by all.

67. Media Owners and Editors have a duty to train their journalists to recognise the various forms of inducement that may compromise them and their work, including financial and other gifts, such as meals and drinks as well as free rides while on duty.

68. Media Owners and Editors are called upon to investigate all allegations of, and any actions suggesting corruption, and take stern action against all proven cases in order to eradicate corruption from their newsrooms. Under no circumstances should a journalist tainted with corruption be allowed to continue working in the newsroom.

## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

### **Violence, Hate and Bigotry**

69. Editors must refrain from giving undue prominence to reports and commentaries promoting violence, hate and religious, racial and ethnic bigotry, likely to cause or exacerbate social tensions and conflict, or those that promote gender discrimination and other forms of social exclusion.

70. The protection of vulnerable groups, such as minors, the disabled and victims of abuse is of paramount importance. In particular, evidence-based information on GBV should be used to advocate for zero tolerance policies on GBV. Thus, editors have the duty to guide their journalists regarding the appropriate way of covering stories about these groups and issues.

71. In any public debate and discourse, editors have to give all sides of the argument equal space and consideration, making sure every significant strand of public opinion is heard and that all major positions in the exchange are reported in a fair and balanced manner.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

### **Responsibilities of Other Critical Players**

The safeguarding of editorial independence is a continuous struggle that requires the support of stakeholders external to the media institutions in order to advance. The capacity for training, research, advocacy and awareness-raising within the media institutions themselves is either limited or non-existent, and in this regard, they have to be assisted by other organisations where that capacity is concentrated.

72. Academic institutions, research organisations and professional bodies which provide training in journalism have a responsibility to integrate issues relating to editorial freedom and independence in their training programmes.

73. Civil Society Organisations and other advocacy groups have a responsibility to propagate and 'defend' editorial freedom, independence and responsibility in the interest of constructing a democratic society.

74. Strong professional associations must help strengthen professionalism in the media through continuing education programmes as well as regular public dialogues on issues of freedom of expression, editorial freedom and other contemporary issues in mass communication.

75. Media organisations should institute peer review mechanisms on a systematic basis, to do regular audits in areas of editorial freedom, professional conduct and ethical journalism, which would then be made public.

## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

### **Endorsement and Undertaking**

76. Stakeholders may accede to this Declaration by signing a copy on behalf of their organisation or on their own behalf as citizens, and depositing the same with the National Media Commission of Ghana.

77. By signing this Declaration, the signatories undertake: to abide by its underlying principles; to publicise, propagate and campaign for it in the form and manner considered appropriate and suitable to their particular conditions and circumstances.

#### Authenticity and Interpretation

This Declaration shall be considered authentic and its interpretation and application shall be guided by the Preamble and the Fundamental Guiding Principles and Code of Ethics which are integral parts of the Declaration.

Adopted by the Private Newspaper Publishers Association of Ghana herein referred to as PRINPAG and opened for endorsement

**in Accra this . . . . . day of.. . . . . 2017.**

**Gina Blay      Kenteman Nii Laryea Sowah**  
**(President)    Executive Secretary**

**This PRINPAG CODE OF ETHICS is proudly sponsored by ECOBANK GHANA LIMITED and UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP)**

## **APPENDIX**

### **NATIONAL MEDIA COMMISSION PRINT MEDIA STANDARDS**

**PREFACE:** The National Media Commission, in the exercise of its constitutional mandate to promote and facilitate press freedom and freedom of expression, especially in the wake of the proliferation in the print media, has come out with this Print Media Standards to enable the operatives in the industry to manage information that is put in the public domain in such a way as will be beneficial to the reading public and Ghana.

Before the 1992 Constitution, the print media was regulated by a licensing regime that tended to strangulate the industry. Quite apart from this factor, Newspaper and Publishers editors and journalists were always on their guard lest they had their licence withdrawn or were even arrested, detained or prosecuted.



With the repeal of the criminal libel and sedition laws by Parliament in 2001, and the apparent boost that the repeal brought to the practice of journalism, there arose the need for basic standards to ensure that journalism practice impacted qualitatively on the reading public.

It is against this background that the National Media Commission commissioned a group of seasoned journalists to develop the Print Media Standards. It is the hope of the Commission, that both the Private Newspapers Publishers' Association (PRINPAG) and the Ghana Journalists' Association (GJA) will find the Print Media Standards useful.

The Commission wishes to express its gratitude to Messrs. G.B.K Owusu, who chaired the committee, Berifi Appenteng, Kwaku Baako Jnr, Peter Zwennes, Newton Amedofu, Drs. Yao Graham,

Anthony Bonnah Koomson and Audrey Gadzekpo, Mrs. Diana Heyman-Adu, Mrs. Margaret Ivy Amoakohene, Mrs. Elizabeth Nunoo and Mr. Yaw Boadu-Ayebofoh who served as secretary to the committee.

The Commission is grateful to Ms. Joyce Offei for typing the manuscript and also, to the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung for financing the publication.

The National Media Commission takes responsibility for any lapses in the Print Media Standards.

Nutifafa Kuenyehia  
Chairman

## **PREAMBLE**

The print media in Ghana have a long, albeit checkered history and tradition of press freedoms and responsibilities dating back to 1822. Until recently, they largely operated without written codes or guidelines. Whereas the 1992 Constitution guarantees the freedom and independence of the media, and forbids censorship in Ghana, it also enjoins the National Media Commission "to take all appropriate measures to ensure the highest journalistic standards". The Print Media Guidelines have, therefore, been prepared by the Commission to help the press balance freedom of expression and the public right to know with individual rights and matters of national or public interest.

All persons working in the press are urged to respect and honour both the letter and spirit of these guidelines.

### **1. ACCURACY AND FAIRNESS**

- a. The Press has a fundamental duty to seek and publish the truth. Journalists should be honest, fair and factual in gathering, reporting, interpreting and publishing information.
- b. The Press should take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted material, including pictures, data and graphics.

- c. Whenever it is recognized that an inaccurate, misleading statement or distorted report has been published, it should be corrected promptly and with due prominence. An apology must be published whenever appropriate.
- d. Accuracy and fairness can best be achieved by avoiding deliberate distortion, by attempting to get information from diverse sources and by diligently seeking out subjects of news stories to give them an opportunity to respond to allegations and misrepresentations.
- e. The Press is free to be partisan. However, facts must be distinguished from comments and conjecture.
- f. Analysis and commentary should be distinguished from straight news reports and not represented as fact.
- g. The Press must avoid misleading headlines, news teasers, promotional materials and quotations.
- h. Direct quotes, delineated by quote marks, must be distinguished from paraphrased speech. The Press must ensure that when quoting people directly their exact words are reproduced in the original language.

## **2. SOURCES**

- a. It is important to identify sources as often as is feasible; the public is entitled to as much information as possible on a source's reliability.
- b. Whenever confidentiality is required and negotiated journalists must respect the terms.
- c. Journalists must always question sources' motives before promising anonymity. Journalists must be wary of sources offering information for favours or money.
- d. The Press must recognize a special obligation that in nurturing Ghana's democracy public business must be conducted in the open and journalists must insist that government records are open to inspection.

## **3. RIGHT OF REPLY**

The Constitution guarantees a right to rejoinder. In discharging this responsibility journalists must ensure that replies are responsive and in proportion to the prominence given the original article as specified by the NMC Guidelines on Publication of Rejoinder.

## **4. NEWS GATHERING**

- a. As a general rule, journalists must not use, or publish materials obtained by subterfuge; using clandestine devices such as hidden cameras and hidden tape-recorders. Such activity may, however, be justifiable in special circumstances such as detecting and inspecting crime sites or protecting public health and safety.
- b. Payments must not be made to criminals for their stories or other criminal activities.
- c. It is unacceptable to ask for payment for covering and writing news story.
- d. Journalists must distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.

## **5. HARASSMENT**

Journalists and photographers must neither obtain nor seek to obtain information or pictures through intimidation, harassment or blackmail. This includes persistent telephoning, pursuing, following or photographing individuals after having been asked to desist, or remaining on their property after having been asked to leave.

## **6. PRIVACY**

a. There must be respect for private life. A person is entitled to privacy in their home, and in matters such as health and correspondence. It is unacceptable to use long -lens camera and recording devices without the consent of news subjects and to intrude in places where there should be reasonable expectation of privacy.

b. The Press must recognize that private individuals have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power or command influence or attention.

## **7. PROTECTION OF THE VULNERABLE**

### **7.1 Children:**

a. It is unacceptable to interview or photograph a child on subjects involving the welfare of the child or any other child in the absence of, or without the consent of, a parent or other adult who is responsible for the child.

b. A child must be protected from unnecessary intrusion, and must not be approached or photographed at school without the permission of school authorities.

c. Children deserve privacy irrespective of the status of their parents. Where material about the private life of a child is published, there must be justification for publication other than the fame, notoriety or position of his or her parents or guardian.

d. A child must not be enticed with money or any other inducement for information that will compromise their welfare.

e. The press must not identify children who are involved in cases concerning sexual offences, whether as victims, suspects or as witnesses.

f. The word "incest" must not be used where a child victim might be identified. Care must be taken such that nothing in the report identifies the relationship between the accused and the child.

g. Adult victims of sexual abuse, or crime, either male or female, should not be named without their consent.

### **7.2 Grief**

a. In cases involving bereavement, personal grief or shock, the Press must show compassion. Publication must be handled sensitively at such times.

b. Special sensitivity should be shown when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects affected by tragedy.

### **7.3 Patients**

- a. Journalists or photographers making enquires at hospitals or similar institutions should identify themselves to responsible officials and obtain permission before entering designated nonpublic areas.
- b. The Press must remember that restrictions on intrusion are particularly relevant to enquiries about individuals in hospitals or similar institutions.

### **8. REPORTING CRIME**

- a. A balance must be struck between a suspect's right to a fair trial and the public's right to be informed, bearing in mind that suspects are innocent until proven guilty.
- b. The Press must be judicious in naming criminal suspects and photographing them before the formal filing of charges.
- c. Journalists must be careful about interviewing suspects and accused persons since some of them may incriminate themselves.
- d. Suspects and accused persons should be identified as such until they have been convicted of the crime.
- e. The Press must avoid identifying relatives or friends of persons suspected, accused and convicted of crime without their consent.
- f. Particular regard should be paid to the potentially vulnerable position of children who are witnesses to, or victims of crime.

### **9. VIOLENCE**

- a. Violence must not be exploited in press publications. As much as possible coverage and reportage of violence should be warranted and should not be undertaken for shock effect or for trivial reasons.
- b. In cases where there is civil disorder or civil violence, every precaution must be taken to ensure that the presence of journalists on the scene of the event and publications on the event[s] do not provoke or inflame the situation.
- c. To this end, journalists are advised to:
  - i. Assume low profile if their presence is evidently inspiring a potentially dangerous situation;
  - ii. Be wary of persons and groups who are clearly performing for the press;
  - iii. Avoid making suggestions or requests to participants, which would lead to any form of staging.

### **10. DISASTERS**

News, views or comments relating to communal or religious disputes/clashes should be published after proper verification of facts, and should be presented with due caution and restraint in a manner which is conducive to the creation of an atmosphere congenial to communal harmony, amity and peace.

## **11. DISCRIMINATION**

- a. The Press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to a person's race, ethnicity, colour, religion, gender or to any physical or mental illness or disability.
- b. The Press must not originate material, which encourages discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity, colour, religion, gender, physical illness or disability.

## **12. PHOTOGRAPHS**

- a. Photographs must be used tastefully so as not to offend public sensibilities. The Press must be circumspect in using graphic pictures of tragedies so as not to contribute to the pain of victims and the bereaved.
- b. The Press must not distort the content of news photographs. Image enhancement for technical clarity is permissible but not manipulations that mislead readers.

## **13. LANGUAGE**

Journalists must avoid using obscene, hateful and vulgar language. Journalists must avoid expletives and swear words.

## **14. FINANCIAL JOURNALISM**

- a. Even where the law does not prohibit it, journalists must not use for their own profit financial information they receive in advance of its general publication, nor should they pass such information on to others.
- b. Journalists must not write about the performance of securities in which they and/or their close family members have an interest.

## **15. COPYRIGHT/PLAGIARISM**

- a. Journalists must not appropriate the work of others as their own.
- b. Where the work of others is used, it must be identified as such and appropriately credited or bylined.

## **16. CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

- a. Journalists must avoid conflict of interest, real or perceived, especially in financial issues.
- b. Journalists must disclose all instances of conflict of interest.

## **17. MISCELLANEOUS**

- a. Journalists must support the open exchange of views, even if they disagree with them.
- b. Journalists must avoid suppression of information unless it borders on national security or it is in the public interest.
- c. Public interest is difficult to define but it is generally taken to include any matter of social and legitimate public concern, i.e.
  - i. Detecting or exposing crime or a serious misdemeanor
  - ii. Protecting public health and safety

- iii. Preventing the public from being misled by some statement or action of an individual or organisation.
- d. Journalists must abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.
- e. Journalists must give voice to the voiceless, noting that official and unofficial sources of information can be equally essential for the promotion of good democratic governance.

**Newspaper Publishing is more than an industry.  
It's an effort to discover and report the truth, even in places where doing so is punishable by  
a jail term or even torture and death.**

**Freedom of Opinion, Freedom of Expression, Freedom of the Press.  
These are the three Pillars of any democratic Conception of the State.**

**World Association of Newspapers (WAN)**

Printed by KEY PUBLICATIONS LTD. P. O. Box 14169, Accra. Tel.: 0302-220666