

Media Council Inc. of Tonga

General Code of Ethics for the News Media.

In order to maintain public trust, freedom of speech and the credibility of the news media, journalists are urged to remain within the following guidelines derived from international standards and with valuable input from a broad cross section of the media in Tonga. The word "publish" is used here to mean released to the public by any news media.

1. Accuracy and Balance

- a) Report and interpret news stories honestly, striving for accuracy, fairness and disclosure of all essential facts. Do not suppress significant available facts or give distorting emphasis.
- b) Do your utmost to provide balanced coverage by providing a fair opportunity for any individual or organizations mentioned in a news story to respond to allegations or criticism before publication. Failing that, you should provide a reasonable opportunity for response after the news item has been published.
- c) Do not allow personal interest, belief, commitment or perceived benefit to sway your accuracy, fairness or journalistic independence. Strive for objectivity.
- d) Distinguish clearly between fair comment, conjecture and fact.

2. Conflict of Interest

- a) Disclose any conflicts of interest that affect or could be perceived to affect the accuracy, fairness or independence of your report. This includes business reporting where the reporter may have shares or an interest in the welfare of a company or investment mentioned. Never use your journalistic position for personal gain.

- b) Do not accept any benefit or gratuity that might be seen as personal gain in conflict with fair and unbiased news coverage at the time or in the future. When assistance is given in covering a news event, such as free accommodation or transportation, it should be revealed in the story content.
- c) Cash allowances must never be directly accepted in any circumstances. It is common during political campaigns for politicians to offer cash allowances to reporters. If they or others seeking coverage wish to provide such assistance to the news media, it must be done openly through the parent media body and should be revealed in the news items produced.
- d) Do not allow the purchase or potential purchase of advertising or other commercial considerations to undermine or influence your news selection, accuracy, fairness or independence.
- e) Advertising or advertiser sponsored material with news value should be clearly distinguishable from editorial material and, where necessary, labelled accordingly.

3. Privacy

- a) Publication of information about the private lives or concerns of individuals without their consent is acceptable only if the intrusion relates to legitimate public interest outweighing the normal right to privacy.
- b) Prominence in public life does not disqualify individuals from the right to privacy about their personal affairs unless these matters affect their performance or fitness for the public role or office they seek or hold.
- c) Avoid identifying innocent relations of persons convicted or accused of crime unless the connection is relevant to the story reported.

4. Children and Juveniles

- a) The names of persons under the age of 18 who are charged with crimes or involved in other offenses are not to be released. Care must be taken not to release details which might lead to the identification of persons under the age of 18.
- b) Discretion should be exercised when interviewing children under the age of 18 about subjects which might have legal or moral consequences, or where such interviews could place them in a detrimental position threatening their safety or well being.
- c) Generally, children should not be approached or photographed at school without the consent of school authorities.

5. Discrimination

- a) Care must be taken to avoid releasing material, statements or references which could adversely affect vulnerable groups, or which could promote or encourage hatred, prejudice, discrimination or violence.
- b) Do not place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationships, religious beliefs, physical or intellectual disability. However, where it is relevant to explaining the story or of compelling public interest, you may report information in these areas.

6. Taste and Decency

- a) Care should be taken in presentation of content that might distress or offend a significant proportion of the public.
- b) Approach cases involving personal grief, shock or tragedy with care and discretion. Suicides should be respected as a private and personal tragedy and not reported unless they involve prominent figures or generated newsworthy consequences.
- c) Crimes should not be reported in such a way as might encourage or incite imitation by others.

- d) No one should be subjected to undue intimidation or harassment in the pursuit of information.

7. Victims of Sexual Offenses

- a) Information that either identifies or could reasonably lead to the identification of victims of sexual offenses should not be published without their informed consent.

8. Purchase of Information

- a) Payments or other benefits should not be provided to anyone allegedly involved in/or convicted of a crime. Payment should not be made to their relatives, friends, neighbours or associates for information about the crime. Rewards for information may be justified in the rare exception where the information is of compelling public interest and can be obtained in no other way.
- b) Do your utmost to disclose any direct or indirect payment or benefit supplies for purchase or information, interviews, pictures or stories.

9. Subterfuge

- a) Try to always use fair, responsible and honest means in obtaining material. Identify yourself and your employer before obtaining any interview for publication or broadcast. Use of subterfuge (e.g. false identity or covert recordings) should be avoided. It can be justified only in rare circumstances when the material sought should be published because of compelling public interest and cannot be obtained in any other way.
- b) The invasion of privacy by use of long lens photography can only be justified when the photograph provides information of compelling public interest.
- c) Never exploit a person's vulnerability or ignorance of media practice

10. Misinformation

- a) Anonymous bomb threats and other serious threats must be reported immediately to the police. Do not publish or broadcast any such threats unless requested to do so by the police or a civilian authority for reasons of public safety. If such a threat causes widespread inconvenience or other consequences affecting the public (with the exception of airline delays), it may be reported.
- b) Aim to always attribute information to its source and make sure that source has the authority to speak for the organization or individual they claim to represent. Check press releases from unfamiliar sources, individuals or groups to ensure they truly represent a statement from that individual, group or organisation. This can be crucial in times of elections or national crisis when the generation of misinformation may be a tool used by elements trying to generate propaganda, disruption or instability. When press releases are unsigned, check to ensure they are authentic and endorsed by the issuing body.
- c) Material obtained from a single confidential source must be provable or verified by at least one other source to avoid manipulation of the news or public opinion. Consider the possible motives of the initial source and find an alternative attributable source. This includes instances where the confidential source is someone in authority or well known but who wishes their name withheld.
- d) Double-check reports of "probable or impending disruptions" to ensure something is happening. In times of political disruption or insurrection, even reports from authoritative and official bodies, such as the police and military, should be carefully checked.

11. Hijacking and other forms of Kidnapping

- a) No information should be published which is likely to endanger the lives of hostages or which might prejudice attempts by law enforcement authorities to deal with a hijacking or kidnapping.
- b) Journalists should not become involved in ongoing kidnappings or hijackings in such a

way as to become a publicity or safety factor in the incident.

- c) Journalists should not continue direct contact with hijackers, kidnappers, or others involved in any ongoing criminal action where lives are in immediate peril without permission from law enforcement authorities.

12. Public and Personal Standards.

- a) Do not plagiarize.
- b) Do your utmost to provide swift and fair correction of errors. Small errors may be corrected with a story designated as a correction, however in cases of serious mis-reporting or false information, full retraction must firmly identify and retract the false statements of the previous, incorrect report.
- c) Journalists are morally obligated to protect their confidential sources and any confidences or agreements they willingly accepted.

Tonga Media Council

Broadcasting Code of Practice

1. Taste and Decency

- a) Recognise currently accepted general standards of decency in language with consideration of the context in which the language and behaviour occur (including humour, satire and drama), and the timing of transmission and likely audience of the program.

2. Impartiality and Balance

- a) Show fairness, impartiality and balance in any programme, series of programmes, or in broadly released programmes when dealing with political matters, current affairs and public controversy

3. Deceptive Practices.

- a) Abstain for using any deceptive programme, practice or technique (including transmission of "reconstruction" or library film or recordings) which are not clearly identified as such.

4. Interviews

- a) Interviews for radio and television must be arranged, conducted and edited fairly and honestly. Potential participants are entitled to know in advance the format, subject and purpose of their interview and whether it will be live or recorded.
- b) The presentation and editing of an interview must not distort or misrepresent the views of the person interviewed or give a false impression of dialogue.
- c) Pre-recorded interviews must not be presented as live interviews.

5. Violent or Distressing Content

- a) Violence shown graphically or realistically indicated by sound must be justifiable in its context and intensity as being necessary to the programme.
- b) Violence combined with sexuality should not be transmitted in a manner designed to titillate its audience. Explicit detail and prolonged focus on sexuality violent contact must be avoided.
- c) Editors, producers and broadcasters of news, current affairs and documentaries should take care in deciding whether the inclusion of graphic detail and intense violent or distressing material is warranted by its relevance and aid to public understanding of the subject.
- d) Special consideration must be given to possible transmission of particularly disturbing images including:
 - i. Torture or ill-treatment of people or animals.
 - ii. Close ups of dead or mutilated bodies.
 - iii. Images of people in extreme pain or on the point of death.
 - iv. Violent or ill treatment of children.

6. Warning of Disturbing or Offensive Content

Warnings should be broadcast before or at the beginning of any programme containing language or pictures which are likely to be disturbing or offensive to normal viewers or listeners considering the time of transmission and the likely audience.

7. Dangerous or Anti-Social Detail and Hypnotism

- a) Detailed pictures or information about methods of suicide and hanging, the making of explosive or incendiary devices, or illicit use of drugs or solvents should not be transmitted in a way that might instruct or encourage such action.
- b) Refrain from broadcasting any program that simulates news or events in sound or pictures in such a way as to mislead or alarm its audience.
- c) Do not depict the actual process of putting a subject into a hypnotic state or any process designed to induce a hypnotic state in its audience.

8. Crime and Disorder

- a) Programmes likely to promote civil; insurrection or encourage crime or public disorder, must not be broadcast.

9. Cartoons

- a) Cartoons depicting human characters should not include excessive violence or scenes of gore or torture.
- b) Fantasy cartoons featuring fantasy characters or comic story lines should not depict torture or excessive suffering.

10. Supplied Material

When a strong editorial reason warrants the inclusion in any programme of recorded or prepared material supplied by, on behalf of, official bodies, companies or campaigning organizations, its source should be revealed.

11. Product Reference and Placement

Undue prominence should not be given in news, factual or entertainment programs, to commercial products or services. Their appearance or reference to them should

be given no more prominence than editorial consideration warrants.

12. Competition Fair Dealing

Ensure that in programmes and promotions providing prizes or rewards there is no collusion between broadcasters and contestants which result in unfair advantage for one contestant over another.

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Tonga Media Council, Code of Ethics, published 2007.