



CODE OF ETHICS FOR JOURNALISTS

(Issued under Section 26 (d) of Chapter Three of the
Bhutan Information, Communications and Media Act
2006)

Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority
Royal Government of Bhutan
Thimphu

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CODE OF ETHICS FOR JOURNALISTS

1. Legal Basis

Upholding the Universal rights of citizens to information, freedom of speech and expression and independence of the media, and wishing to foster the highest professional standards of journalism, promote public understanding of and confidence in the Bhutanese media, and the responsibilities of the media and the journalists, the Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority (“the Authority”) establishes this Code of Ethics for Journalists (“the Code”) in accordance with Section 26 (d), Chapter 3 of the Bhutan Information, Communications and Media Act 2006 (“the Act”).

2. Citation and Commencement

This Code of Ethics shall be cited as the Code of Ethics for Journalists and it shall come into force from the 18th Day of the first month of the Female Fire Pig Year, of the Bhutanese calendar, corresponding to the 7th Day of the month of March, 2007.

3. Scope of Application

This Code shall apply to all journalists, whether writing for print media, broadcast media or the online media, operating within or for Bhutan.

4. Amendments

This Code may be amended by the Authority as and when required.

5. Definition

Unless the context otherwise requires, the words and terms used in this Code shall have the same meaning as assigned in the Act.

6. Ethics of Journalists

Journalists in Bhutan, as elsewhere, have a duty to maintain the highest professional and ethical standards. They shall provide independent and accurate news and information with integrity, remaining accountable for their actions, neutral in their position and keeping the national interest foremost in their minds at all times. They shall, accordingly, conduct themselves in consonance with the following principles and observe these principles both in letter and in spirit:

6.1 Professional Integrity

A Journalist shall:

- a. present the news with integrity and decency, avoiding real or perceived conflicts of interest, and respect the dignity and intelligence of the audience as well as the subjects of news;
- b. not use any information or materials, obtained for public information, for personal use and interest;
- c. not function or operate while under the influence of alcohol, drugs or other intoxicants that might undermine the objectivity of the news and information;
- d. clearly label opinion and commentary;
- e. guard against extended coverage of events or individuals that fail to significantly advance a story, place the event in context, or add to the public knowledge;
- f. refrain from contacting participants in violent situations while the situation is in progress;
- g. refrain from using surreptitious newsgathering techniques, unless there is an overriding public interest;
- h. refrain from paying news sources that have vested interest in a story;
- i. refrain from accepting gifts, favours, compensation or any other form of entertainment from those who might seek to influence coverage;
- j. not engage in activities that may compromise his integrity or independence;
- k. always disclose any personal pecuniary or other interest that he may have in any matter which is the subject of any report or story written by him. Where a journalist comes across any information, for example concerning a commercial enterprise, in advance of it being put in the public domain, he shall refrain from using such information for his own private profit;
- l. recognize that he is accountable for his actions to the public and to the profession;
- m. respond to public concerns and sensitivity. Investigate complaints and correct errors promptly and with as much prominence as the original report;
- n. explain journalistic processes to the public, especially when practices spark questions or controversy;
- o. recognize that professional journalists are duty-bound to conduct themselves ethically;
- p. encourage employees to raise professional objections and create conducive environments in which such objections and discussions are encouraged;

- q. seek support for and provide opportunities to train employees in professional decision-making;
- r. refrain from ordering or encouraging courses of action that would force employees to commit an unethical act;
- s. not use identification, special licenses or any other press privileges except in the conduct of his profession;
- t. protect the identity of children in case their parents or family members are involved in crimes; and
- u. not report judicial proceedings that might affect or alter the trial unfairly.
- v. not offer or make payments to any person who has been accused or convicted of a crime or any person who is, or is likely to become, a witness in a criminal trial, unless it can clearly and objectively be demonstrated that there is an overriding public interest in doing so. The onus of demonstrating the overriding public interest shall be on the journalist.

6.2 Social Responsibility

A Journalist shall:

- a. recognize their obligation to the public and to the country;
- b. believe in the freedom of media as an overriding right to honour the public's right to know and thus shall pledge themselves to promote, guard and defend this freedom both from internal or external influences and interferences;
- c. understand that any commitment other than service to the public and the country undermines trust and credibility;
- d. provide a full range of information to enable the public to make enlightened decisions;
- e. apply for accreditation while also encouraging other professionals to be accredited; and
- f. not publish any matter which offends against good taste and decency. In particular, he shall avoid publishing matter which is:
 - (a) obscene, vulgar or sexually explicit; or
 - (b) culturally insensitive, having no regard to the norms of Bhutanese society and its values; or which has the effect of glamourising or glorifying:
 - (i) gratuitous violence;
 - (ii) gambling; or

(iii) the consumption of alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs.

6.3 The Right to Truth

A Journalist shall:

- a. pursue the truth at all times and not publish false, inaccurate, misleading or distorted material. He shall ensure that, as far as possible, every story he writes is thoroughly researched. In particular, he shall clearly distinguish between fact, comment and conjecture. Where, despite due diligence in researching a story, he publishes an inaccurate fact, he shall ensure that a correction, and a suitable apology, is published as soon as possible after the inaccuracy has been brought to his attention;
- b. avoid or resist distortions that obscure the importance of events;
- c. disclose the origin of information unless the source demands otherwise;
- d. not report anything known to be false or re-enacted;
- e. not manipulate images or sounds in any way that can mislead the public; and
- f. not engage in plagiarism of other people's work, and he shall ensure that, where he quotes from other published or non-published sources, such sources are clearly and fully identified.

6.4 Non - Discrimination

6.4.1 A Journalist shall:

- a. defend the independence of all journalists from those seeking influence or control over news content and gather and report news without fear or favor, and vigorously resist undue influence from any outside forces, including advertisers, sources, story subjects, powerful individuals, and special interest groups;
- b. stand by the principle that all persons are equal before law and hence shall not be swayed by any political, economic, business or other social prejudice;
- c. resist those who would seek to buy or politically influence news contents or who seek to intimidate those who gather and disseminate news;
- d. determine news contents solely through editorial judgment and not as a result of outside influence;
- e. resist any self-interest or peer pressure that might erode journalistic duty and service to the public and to the country;
- f. recognize that sponsorship of the news will not be used in any way to determine, restrict, or manipulate contents;

- g. refuse to allow the interests of ownership or management to influence news judgment and contents inappropriately;
- h. defend the rights of the free press for all journalists, recognizing that any professional or government licensing of journalists is a violation of that freedom;
- i. present the news fairly and impartially, placing primary value on significance and relevance;
- j. not guise his participation in prohibited activity by using a proxy. This, however, does not prohibit his relatives from taking part in any political, financial, commercial, religious or civic activity allowed under any laws of Bhutan;
- k. treat all subjects of news coverage with respect and dignity, showing particular compassion to victims of crime or tragedy;
- l. present analytical reporting based on professional perspective, not personal bias; and
- m. avoid taking sides in political debates.

6.4.2 The coverage of any Journalists shall not in any case glamorize or discriminate against any political parties, organizations, individuals or the government, except as provided by any laws of Bhutan.

6.4.3 A Journalist shall not publish any prejudicial references to a person's sex, race, colour, national or ethnic origin, linguistic background, religion, or any physical or mental illness or disability unless there are compelling reasons, such as relevance to the story being published, for doing so.

6.4.4 Where any person or organisation has been inaccurately portrayed or quoted in any news report or story, or where the news report or story presents an unfairly slanted account, the Journalist responsible shall provide such person or organisation a reasonable opportunity to reply or to have their version of events conveyed to the audience to whom the original report or story was published.

6.5 Sensationalism

6.5.1 A Journalist shall avoid sensationalism in the reporting of events and take all possible precautions to ensure that anything published by him does not have the effect of inciting people into violence or other illegal acts.

6.5.2 A Journalist shall show utmost sensitivity in reporting matters relating to children or other young persons. In particular, they shall not interview a child or other young persons under the age of sixteen in the absence of, or without the consent of, his parent(s), or publish any story about such child or young person solely for reasons of the fame, notoriety or position of his parent(s). Where a child or young person is involved in court proceedings, a journalist shall not ordinarily publish any matter

which would have the effect of identifying the child to the reader. In cases involving sexual offences against a child or young person, a journalist shall ensure that the identity of the child or young person is not revealed, although he may reveal the identity(ies) of any adult(s) who may be involved in such cases, if allowed by the law.

6.6 Protection of Sources

A journalist shall ordinarily protect the confidentiality of his sources. He may, however, reveal the identity of a source where he has obtained the consent of the source or where the law requires him to do so.

6.7 Respect for Privacy and Human Dignity

A journalist shall:

- a. not publish anything that is defamatory of any person or organization;
- b. not invade the privacy of any person without his consent and shall respect his private and family life, home, health and correspondence, except in circumstances where it can clearly and objectively be demonstrated that there was an overriding public interest in the invasion of his privacy. The onus of demonstrating the overriding public interest shall be on the journalist;
- c. not publish any matter which would have the effect of identifying any person who is the complainant in a case involving sexual offences, except with the written consent of such person, or under an order or direction from a court of competent jurisdiction;
- d. respect the sentiments and the privacy of persons who may have suffered grief or shock. Where a journalist needs to carry out enquiries in such circumstances, he shall do so with utmost sensitivity; and
- e. not identify relatives or friends of any person accused or convicted of crime, or imply guilt by association in relation to such relatives or friends, unless there are compelling reasons, such as relevance to the story being published, or evidence that might reasonably point to such guilt.

6.8 Recordings of Conversations

A journalist shall not harass, intimidate or trick any person to obtain, or attempt to obtain, information or pictures. In particular, he shall not install listening devices on anyone's property or tape-record conversations with anyone without their consent, or enter anyone's property surreptitiously or using a subterfuge, except in circumstances where it can clearly and objectively be demonstrated that there is an overriding public interest in doing so. The onus of demonstrating the overriding public interest shall be on the journalist.

6.9 Competition and Fairness

A Journalist shall:

- a. adhere to the spirit of free competition in the Bhutanese media and shall not, at any time, monopolize or attempt to monopolize the market by using power, influence, authority, money or by any others means; and
- b. maintain a healthy, professional, courteous, and harmonious relationships among fellow journalists and media persons.

6.10 National Interest

6.10.1 A Journalist shall place the national interest and security above everything.

6.10.2 A Journalist shall refrain from reporting on anything that might:

- a. incite religious, ethnic, regional or communal conflicts;
- b. undermine the sovereignty and integrity of the Kingdom; or
- c. breach or compromise the security of the country.

7. Failure to Comply with the Code

Any Journalist who contravenes or fails to comply with the provisions of this Code of Ethics shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable for any actions prescribed under the Act or the Bhutan Penal Code.
