Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

Screening and Exhibition of Films in Cinemas of Bhutan

1. Purpose

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) establishes a uniform, binding framework for the public exhibition of films across all licensed cinema facilities in the Kingdom of Bhutan. It aims to:

- Promote, preserve, and protect Bhutanese cinema as a vital pillar of national cultural identity and Gross National Happiness (GNH).
- Ensure equitable screen allocation and access for domestic film productions.
- Regulate the importation, classification, and public exhibition of foreign films.
- Safeguard intellectual property rights and combat media piracy.
- Maintain transparency, administrative fairness, and legal accountability in cinema operations.
- Enforce compliance with the Information, Communications and Media Act of Bhutan 2018 and relevant BICMA regulations.

2. Scope

This SOP applies strictly to:

- All licensed commercial cinema halls, multiplexes, open-air venues, and digital theaters operating within the Kingdom of Bhutan.
- Private cinema operators and commercial event organizers conducting public screenings of cinemas.
- Domestic film producers, local distributors, foreign film sales agents, and exhibition rights holders.

3. Guiding Principles

- Cultural Primacy: Film is a strategic cultural product that reflects national values, language, and heritage. Domestic productions shall receive regulatory priority.
- Balanced Access: Regulation shall encourage fair commercial opportunities for domestic films without completely depriving the public of access to international cinema.
- Administrative Fairness: All regulatory decisions, disputes, and content classifications shall adhere to the principles of natural justice, transparency, and timely redress.
- Legal Integrity: Absolute adherence to copyright laws, content standards, and public safety mandates is mandatory.

4. Definitions

- BICMA: Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority.
- Bhutanese Film: Any feature film, documentary, animation, or short film produced predominantly in Bhutan or by Bhutanese nationals, certified as such by BICMA.
- Foreign Film: Any motion picture produced outside the Kingdom of Bhutan.
- Prime Time: The core daily viewing period defined strictly as 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM.
- Exhibitor: Any licensed individual or corporate entity operating a public cinema screen.
- Grievance: Any formal complaint, dispute, or appeal arising from screen allocations, licensing decisions, content classification, or procedural violations under this SOP.

5. Priority Screening Policy

5.1 Prime Time Reservation

- Mandatory Slot: Every licensed cinema shall reserve the daily Prime Time slot (6:00 PM – 9:00 PM) exclusively for Bhutanese films whenever a certified domestic film is available for release.
- Exceptions for Foreign Films: A foreign film may only be scheduled during Prime Time if:
    1. No Bhutanese film is actively available or requested for theatrical exhibition;
    2. BICMA issues a prior written waiver based on a formal application; or
    3. National cultural events or public holidays warrant special regulatory dispensation.

5.2 Screen Allocation and Equity

- Where multiple Bhutanese films compete for screen time, exhibitors shall allocate schedules transparently in consultation with distributors to ensure equitable market access.
- No exhibitor shall deny or curtail reasonable screening opportunities for a domestic film to accommodate a foreign blockbuster.

5.3 Annual Screen Quota

- Every licensed cinema shall allocate not less than sixty percent (60%) of its total scheduled public screening slots during each calendar year to Bhutanese films.
- The remaining 40% may be allocated to foreign films, educational documentaries, or special international showcases.

 # From a total of 1095 screenings per year, considering 3 shows a day, 60% (657 shows) to be dedicated to local films and 40% (438 shows) to be allocated for foreign films.

6. Foreign Film Exhibition

Foreign films shall only be approved for public screening if the exhibitor satisfies all of the following requirements:

1. Proof of Legal Acquisition: Submission of verifiable licensing agreements, chain-of-title documentation, or distribution certificates from recognized international sales agents or copyright owners. Pirated or unauthorized media is strictly prohibited.
2. Mandatory Documentation Submission: Prior to exhibition, the exhibitor/distributor must submit the following to BICMA:
    - Legally executed distribution contract/license agreement.
    - Full film synopsis, technical specs, runtime, and original language details.
    - A copy of film classification certificate from the country of origin
    - Certified Dzongkha or English subtitles (if spoken in another foreign language).
3. Mandatory Pre-Screening & Classification: No foreign film shall be exhibited to the public without a valid BICMA Classification Certificate.

7. Film Classification Standards

All films (domestic and foreign) must be reviewed by BICMA and assigned an official content rating before public release. Rating labels must be prominently displayed at box offices, digital displays, and on all promotional literature:

Rating Label	Target Audience / Terms
U (Universal)	Suitable for general public viewing.
PG (Parental Guidance)	General viewing; parental guidance suggested for young children.
13+	Suitable for viewers aged 13 and older.
18+	Strictly restricted to persons aged 18 and older.
Restricted/Prohibited	Subject to special conditions or private exhibition criteria.

8. Promotional Parity and Advertising

- Exhibitors shall provide domestic films with equal visibility in lobby displays, digital trailers, print posters, official websites, and ticketing apps.
- Exhibitors shall not charge discriminatory promotional fees to Bhutanese film producers compared to foreign distributors.

9. Compliance, Monitoring, and Audits

BICMA officials reserves the right to conduct:

- Scheduled and unannounced surprise inspections during operating hours.
- Box-office ticket audits, programming schedule reviews, and digital server log checks.
- Copyright authenticity verifications.

Exhibitors must grant BICMA inspectors immediate access to electronic point-of-sale (POS) systems, screening logs, and distribution agreements upon request.

10. Grievance Redressal & Dispute Resolution Framework

To ensure procedural fairness, transparency, and timely conflict resolution between filmmakers, distributors, cinema operators, and the regulatory body, the following mechanisms are established:

10.1 Scope of Grievances

Any stakeholder (producer, distributor, cinema operator, or member of the public) may lodge a formal grievance regarding:

- Denial or unfair allocation of screen time / Prime Time slots.
- Content classification disputes (e.g., appealing an "A" rating or requested edits).
- Unfair trade practices or breach of screen quota requirements.
- Allegations of copyright infringement or unauthorized exhibition.

10.2 Procedure & Escalation Ladder

a) Level 1: Nodal Officer (Informal Resolution)
   - Complaints must be lodged in writing to the designated BICMA Film Officer.
   - The Officer shall review the matter, consult the involved parties, and issue an informal administrative resolution within three (3) working days.

b) Level 2: Film Grievance & Advisory Committee (Formal Review)
   - If the party is dissatisfied with the Level 1 decision, an appeal may be filed within five (5) working days to the Film Grievance & Advisory Committee (composed of a BICMA representative, an independent film industry representative, and a legal representative).
   - The Committee shall hold a hearing and issue a written Reasoned Order within seven (7) working days.

c) Level 3: Appellate Authority (Head of Authority)
   - A final administrative appeal against a Level 2 ruling may be submitted to the Head of BICMA within seven (7) working days of the decision.

- The Head of Authority shall review the administrative record and issue a final order within fourteen (14) working days. This ruling exhausts administrative remedies under this SOP.

10.3 Dispute Register

BICMA shall maintain a central, transparent digital Grievance Register logging all filed complaints, investigation notes, and final disposition orders.

11. Non-Compliance and Penalties

Failure to adhere to any provision of this SOP shall trigger graduated administrative actions:

Violation Stage	Administrative Action / Penalty
First Offense	Formal written warning and compulsory schedule adjustment within 48 hours.
Second Offense	Administrative fine imposed in accordance with BICMA fee schedules; temporary suspension of foreign film screening privileges.
Third Offense	Temporary suspension of Cinema Operating License (1 to 3 months).
Repeated / Flagrant Offenses	Permanent cancellation of Cinema Operating License.

Note: Screening pirated, stolen, or uncertified media shall result in immediate police referral and legal prosecution under the Copyright Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

12. Stakeholder Responsibilities

a. BICMA:
   - Classify content impartially.
   - Enforce compliance.
   - Maintain national exhibition stats.
   - Process waivers, and adjudicate grievances within established timelines.

b. Cinema Operators:
   - Comply with the 60% quota and Prime Time mandates.
   - Maintain transparent logbooks.
   - Display age classifications clearly, and honor licensing contracts.

c. Distributors & Producers:
   - Deliver certified digital cinema packages (DCPs) on time.

- Provide accurate chain-of-title documentation.
- Utilize formal grievance channels for disputes.

13. Review and Amendments

This SOP shall undergo formal review every three (3) years or earlier if required by technological shifts (e.g., new digital distribution models), amendments to the *Information, Communications and Media Act*, or major changes in industry structure.

ANNEXURE A: GRIEVANCE APPLICATION FORM

This form must be completed and submitted to the designated BICMA Film Nodal Officer to initiate a formal grievance under Section 10 of the *Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Screening and Exhibition of Films in Cinemas of Bhutan*.

SECTION 1: APPLICANT DETAILS

- Full Name: _____
- Organization / Entity Name: _____
- Role / Capacity: [ ] Bhutanese Film Producer / Director [ ] Film Distributor / Sales Agent [ ] Cinema Operator / Exhibitor [ ] Member of the General Public / Other: _____
- Contact Number: _____ Email Address: _____
- Mailing / Business Address:_____

SECTION 2: NATURE OF GRIEVANCE

- Select Primary Category: [ ] Violation of Prime Time Reservation (6:00 PM – 9:00 PM) [ ] Denial or Unfair Allocation of Screen Time / Screen Quota Violation [ ] Appeal Against Content Classification / Rating Decision [ ] Unfair Promotional / Advertising Practices [ ] Allegation of Unlicensed / Pirated Foreign Film Exhibition [ ] Other Regulatory Non-Compliance:

- Details of Film Concerned (if applicable):
  - Title of Film: _____
  - Country of Origin: _____
  - BICMA Certificate No. (if issued): _____
- Respondent Entity (Party against whom the grievance is filed):
  - Name of Cinema / Organization: _____
  - Location / Screen No.: _____

SECTION 3: STATEMENT OF FACTS AND GROUNDS

Please provide a clear, chronological statement of the facts, including dates, times, and specific clauses of the SOP alleged to have been violated. Attach additional sheets if necessary.

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SECTION 4: REMEDY OR RELIEF SOUGHT

Specify the exact action or outcome requested from BICMA (e.g., re-allocation of Prime Time slots, review of age classification rating, enforcement audit, etc.):

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SECTION 5: SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS ATTACHED

Check all applicable documents included with this application: [ ] Copy of Distribution / Licensing Agreement [ ] Screen Booking Requests & Written Correspondence with Exhibitor [ ] Evidence of Non-Compliance (e.g., ticket stubs, schedules, advertisements, photos) [ ] Copy of BICMA Classification Certificate / Submission Receipt [ ] Proof of Payment for Dispute Resolution Processing Fee (if applicable)

SECTION 6: DECLARATION AND UNDERTAKING

I, _____, hereby declare that the information provided in this application and the attached supporting documents is true, correct, and complete to the best of my knowledge and belief. I understand that submitting false or misleading information may result in the dismissal of this grievance and appropriate administrative or legal action under the *Information, Communications and Media Act of Bhutan*.

Signature of Applicant: _____

Date (DD/MM/YYYY): _____ / _____ / 20___

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OFFICIAL USE ONLY (BICMA NODAL DESK)

- Date Received: _____ / _____ / 20___
- Grievance Reference Number: GRN-20___-_____
- Assigned Level 1 Officer: _____
- Target Resolution Date (3 Working Days): _____ / _____ / 20___
- Initial Status: [ ] Accepted for Review [ ] Rejected (Incomplete / Ineligible)

ANNEXURE B: INTERNAL GRIEVANCE PROCESSING CHECKLIST & TRACKING LOG

(For BICMA Official Use Only)

This internal document outlines the operational protocol and verification workflow for BICMA Film Nodal Officers handling grievances under Section 10 of the *Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Screening and Exhibition of Films in Cinemas of Bhutan*.

PART 1: LEVEL 1 INTAKE & PRELIMINARY SCREENING CHECKLIST

(Target Timeline: Complete within 24 Hours of Receipt)

1. Case File Setup

- [ ] Grievance Reference Number assigned (Format: GRN-YYYY-XXXX)
- [ ] Application logged into the digital Master Grievance Register
- [ ] Written acknowledgment issued to the Applicant with the Reference Number

2. Admissibility & Completeness Check

- [ ] Identity & Standing: Is the applicant an authorized entity (Producer, Distributor, Exhibitor, Public)?
- [ ] Jurisdiction: Does the complaint fall under BICMA's regulatory scope (Section 10.1)?
- [ ] Section 1 Compliance: Are all mandatory fields in Section 1–4 of Annexure A fully completed?
- [ ] Supporting Evidence: Are core supporting documents attached (contracts, tickets, schedules, photos)?
- [ ] Prima Facie Merit: Is the grievance actionable, or is it frivolous/vague?

3. Initial Determination

- [ ] ACCEPTED: Proceed to Level 1 Investigation.
- [ ] REJECTED / RETURNED: Issue Formal Rejection Notice to Applicant with reasons noted (e.g., lack of evidence, outside scope).

PART 2: LEVEL 1 INVESTIGATION & ACTION PLAN

(Target Timeline: Day 1 to Day 3)

1. Respondent Notification

- [ ] Formal Notice of Grievance served to Respondent Entity within 24 hours of intake.
- [ ] Written response and supporting evidence requested from Respondent within 48 hours.

2. Fact-Verification Workflow

- [ ] Quota & Schedule Audit: Verify POS box-office logs and server schedules against Prime Time (6:00 PM – 9:00 PM) rules.
- [ ] Contractual Inspection: Review distributor-exhibitor agreements and chain-of-title documents.
- [ ] Site Inspection (if required): Conduct an unannounced or scheduled cinema inspection to verify screen allocation or promotional material placement.

3. Informal Resolution / Nodal Ruling

- [ ] Level 1 Mediation meeting convened between Applicant and Respondent (optional/if agreed).
- [ ] Level 1 Administrative Order issued within 3 working days.
- [ ] Copies served to both parties.

Outcome:

- [ ] RESOLVED: Both parties accept Level 1 Ruling in writing. Case Closed.
- [ ] ESCALATED TO LEVEL 2: Applicant/Respondent files written Appeal within 5 working days.

PART 3: LEVEL 2 ARBITRATION PANEL CHECKLIST

(Target Timeline: Complete within 7 Working Days of Appeal)

1. Panel Convening

- [ ] Convene the Film Grievance & Advisory Committee (BICMA Representative, Independent Industry Expert, Legal Officer).
- [ ] Compile the complete Level 1 Case Record and distribution dossier for Panel members.

2. Formal Hearing & Evaluation

- [ ] Issue Notice of Hearing to both parties giving at least 48 hours' notice.
- [ ] Conduct formal hearing; record minutes and party statements.
- [ ] Deliberate on compliance with the *Information, Communications and Media Act 2018* and the SOP.

3. Disposition

- [ ] Draft and issue a written Reasoned Order signed by all Committee members within 7 working days.
- [ ] Update Master Grievance Register and inform the Head of Authority.

ANNEXURE C: NOTICE OF FORMAL HEARING (LEVEL 2 PROCEEDINGS)

BHUTAN INFOCOMM AND MEDIA AUTHORITY (BICMA)

ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF BHUTAN

Document Ref No: BICMA/FILM/GRN--/NOTICE/01

Date: ____ / ____ / 20___

NOTICE OF HEARING

(Issued under Section 10.2 of the Standard Operating Procedure for Screening and Exhibition of Films in Cinemas of Bhutan)

TO:

1. Complainant/Appellant: _____
   *Address/Contact:*_____
2. Respondent Entity: _____
   Address/Contact: _____

RE: FORMAL HEARING FOR GRIEVANCE REF NO: GRN-20___-_____

WHEREAS, a formal appeal/grievance was lodged regarding:

[ ] Denial or Unfair Allocation of Screen Time / Prime Time Slot

[ ] Appeal Against Content Classification / Age Rating Decision

[ ] Breach of Annual Screen Quota Requirements

[ ] Allegation of Unlicensed / Unauthorized Foreign Film Exhibition

[ ] Other Regulatory Dispute: _____

TAKE NOTICE that the Film Grievance & Advisory Committee has scheduled a formal hearing to review and adjudicate this matter. You are hereby directed to appear before the Committee at the time and venue specified below:

- Date of Hearing: ____ / ____ / 20___ *(Day: _____)*
- Time: ____ : ____ AM / PM

- Venue: Conference Hall, Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority (BICMA) Headquarters, Thimphu / [ ] Virtual Hearing Link: _____

INSTRUCTIONS TO PARTIES

1. Appearance: Both parties (or their designated legal/authorized representatives) must attend the hearing. Authorized representatives must present a signed letter of authorization prior to proceedings.
2. Submission of Written Submissions & Evidence: Any additional written arguments, witness lists, or documentary evidence must be submitted to the BICMA Nodal Desk at least twenty-four (24) hours prior to the hearing.
3. Failure to Attend: If the Complainant fails to appear without prior written notification and valid cause, the grievance may be dismissed for non-prosecution. If the Respondent fails to appear, the Committee may proceed to hear the matter *ex-parte* and issue a binding ruling based on the available record.

ISSUED BY THE ORDER OF THE COMMITTEE:

Member Secretary / Film Nodal Officer

Bhutan InfoComm and Media Authority (BICMA)

Official Seal

ANNEXURE D: FORMAL LEVEL 2 GRIEVANCE ORDER & DISPOSITION TEMPLATE

BHUTAN INFOCOMM AND MEDIA AUTHORITY (BICMA)14

ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF BHUTAN

Document Ref No: BICMA/FILM/GRN--/ORDER/01

Date of Order: ____ / ____ / 20___

BEFORE THE FILM GRIEVANCE & ADVISORY COMMITTEE

In the Matter of Grievance Ref No: GRN-20___-_____

BETWEEN:

_____ *(Complainant / Appellant)*

AND:

_____ *(Respondent / Contested Entity)*

1. SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

1. A formal appeal/grievance was filed by the Complainant on ____ / ____ / 20___ alleging non-compliance with Section(s) _____ of the *Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Screening and Exhibition of Films in Cinemas of Bhutan*.
2. Level 1 administrative resolution was attempted on ____ / ____ / 20___. The decision was appealed on ____ / ____ / 20___, escalating the matter to Level 2 proceedings.
3. A formal hearing was conducted on ____ / ____ / 20___ pursuant to Notice Ref No _____. Both parties were present and given full opportunity to present written and oral arguments.

2. ISSUES FOR DETERMINATION

- Issue 1: Whether the Respondent violated Section _____ regarding [Screening Quota / Prime Time Reservation / Content Classification / Unauthorized Exhibition].
- Issue 2: Whether the relief or compensation sought by the Complainant is justified under the *Information, Communications and Media Act 2018* and the SOP.

3. FINDINGS AND REASONED ANALYSIS

(Detail the factual findings, evidence reviewed, POS logs inspected, contract provisions evaluated, and regulatory justifications behind the decision.)

4. DISPOSITION AND FINAL ORDER

Having evaluated the submissions and evidence on record, the Film Grievance & Advisory Committee hereby rules as follows:

1. RULING: [ ] Grievance UPHELD in Full [ ] Grievance UPHELD in Part [ ] Grievance DISMISSED
2. DIRECTIVES & REMEDIAL ACTIONS:
    - Directives to Respondent: *(e.g., Immediate allocation of Prime Time slots to the Complainant's film within 48 hours; adjustment of cinema schedules; re-display of promotional posters).*
    - Administrative Penalties (if applicable): *(e.g., Written Warning; Administrative Fine of Nu. _____ under Section 11).*
3. TIMELINE FOR COMPLIANCE: The directives outlined above must be fully implemented no later than ____ / ____ / 20___. Failure to comply shall trigger automatic escalation to Level 3 enforcement and potential license suspension.

5. NOTICE OF RIGHT TO APPEAL (LEVEL 3)

Any party aggrieved by this Level 2 Order may submit a final administrative appeal to the Head of Authority (BICMA)within seven (7) working days from the receipt of this Order, in accordance with Section 10.2 of the SOP. If no appeal is lodged within the stipulated timeframe, this Order shall become final, binding, and unappealable.

BY ORDER OF THE COMMITTEE:

1. _____ *(BICMA Representative)* — Signature: _____
2. _____ *(Industry Expert)* — Signature: _____
3. _____ *(Legal Officer)* — Signature: _____

Official Seal of the Authority