

Domestic Initiatives

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MEDIA CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ELECTION REPORTING 2000

PREAMBLE

We, practitioners and other stakeholders in the media industry,

Recognising the significance of the forthcoming national multi-party elections;

Guided by the desire to ensure the success of this democratic process, and

Determined to ensure that the voters make an informed choice, hereby agree on and adopt a Code of Conduct for covering the elections as follows:

1. Objectivity

Journalists should provide fair, balanced and impartial reporting by giving space and time to all sides of an issue and to give any aggrieved party the right to reply.

2. Truth

Journalists reporting on elections must seek the truth.

3. Respond to the Needs of Voters

Journalists must provide voter information and education in a form easily understood at all levels.

4. Providing Relevant Information

Journalists must provide voters with information that would help them make their choices.

5. Encourage Free Speech

The media should encourage and provide access to the voters to express their opinions and views.

6. Hate Speech and Incitement

The media should report hate speeches that are likely to incite or provoke a breach of peace but should at the same time expose and take a stand against hate speech in their editorials and/or analytical articles.

7. Promote Democratic Values

The media should promote democratic values such as the rule of good law, accountability and good

governance.

8. Commitment by Media Owners

Media owners should commit themselves to contribute towards the achievement of free and fair elections by developing the media capacity in election coverage and to giving higher priority to election matters.

9. State Media Obligation

The state media have a greater and more formal obligation to provide factual election information to the public as they are supported by taxpayers and therefore should provide equal space and time to all political parties, candidates and platforms.

10. Private Media Obligation

The private media have an obligation to avoid being swayed or influenced by either the owners, government, advertisers, patrons or any other organisation through direct or indirect pressure.

11. Investigate Issues

The media have a responsibility to investigate and expose issues pertaining to elections in order to facilitate fair play and to level the socio-political playing ground.

12. Media Obligation to Political Parties

- i. The media should provide equitable and regular coverage to all political parties, their candidates and platforms;
- ii. The media should encourage and promote the candidature of women and other disadvantaged groups irrespective of parties

13. Advertorials

Media should identify advertorials and charge equal rates for political parties.

14. Refraining from Publishing

If the contents of a party's advertorials violate the Constitution or the Electoral Code of Conduct or the law, the media should refrain from publishing it.

15. Media and the Election Act

The media, like all other stakeholders in the election process, must adhere to the Election Act.

16. Media Obligation to Electoral Authorities

The media should publish election information that is complete and accurate and cover the election process in an objective and fair manner.

17. Alternative Views

Journalists should seek and publish alternative views from all stakeholders in the election process.

18. Media and Civil Society

The media should work in partnership with civil society in providing civic and voter education, training and monitoring.

19. Gifts

Journalists reporting the elections should not be compromised by gifts, favours or special treatment.

20. Incumbency

Media should not favour incumbent candidates.

21. Opinion Polls

Media that publish opinion polls on the election projections should provide all available information that will help them to interpret the trends and to make informed decision.

22. Gender

- i. Journalists should refrain from coverage that is biased and which reinforces the existing prejudices against women;
- ii. Journalists should encourage women contestants by raising public awareness of the importance of women's participation in public life and by rebuking all moves aimed at suppressing them.

Adopted on July 5, 2000.