

Code of Professional Practice (Code of Ethics) of The Editors Guild of Sri Lanka adopted by the Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka

01. PREAMBLE

This code of practice which is binding on all Press institutions and journalists, aims to ensure that the print medium in Sri Lanka is free and responsible and sensitive to the needs and expectations of its readers, while maintaining the highest standards of journalism.

Those standards require newspapers to strive for accuracy and professional integrity, and to uphold the best traditions of investigative journalism in the public interest, unfettered by distorting commercialism or by improper pressure or by narrow self-interest which conspires against press freedom. Newspapers and journalists, while free to hold and express their own strong opinions, should give due consideration to the views of others and endeavour to reflect social responsibility.

This code both protects the rights of the individual and upholds the public's right to know. It should be honoured not only to the letter but in the spirit – neither interpreted so narrowly as to compromise its commitment to respect the rights of the individual nor so broadly as to prevent publication in the public interest.

Editors should co-operate swiftly with the Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka (PCCSL) in the resolution of complaints. Any publication judged to have breached the Code must print the adjudication in full and with due prominence, including a headline reference to the PCCSL.

02. ACCURATE REPORTING

2.1: The media must take all reasonable care to report news and pictures accurately and without distortion.

2.2: Every reasonable attempt should be made by editors and individual journalists to verify the accuracy of reports prior to publication. Where such verification is not practicable, that fact shall be stated in the report.

2.3: Editors and their staff, including external contributors, shall not publish material in such a way as to endorse any matter which they know or have reason to believe to be false or inaccurate.

2.4: Publications are encouraged to engage in investigative journalism in the public interest.

03. CORRECTIONS and APOLOGIES

3.1: Where it is recognized by the editor that a report was incorrect in a material respect, it should be corrected promptly and with due prominence and with an apology where appropriate, except where the correction or apology is against the wishes of the aggrieved party.

04. OPPORTUNITY TO REPLY

4.1: A fair and reasonable opportunity to reply should be given to individuals or organizations in respect of factually incorrect statements endangering their reputation, dignity, honour, feelings, privacy and office. The reply should be confined to the complainant's version of the facts and no longer than necessary to correct the alleged inaccuracy.

4.2: Newspapers or journalists who respond to a complainant's reply other than to apologize or regret the error, must then be prepared to offer the aggrieved party a fresh opportunity to reply.

05. CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES

5.1: Every journalist has a moral obligation to protect confidential sources of information, until that source authorizes otherwise.

06. GENERAL REPORTING and WRITING

6.1: In dealing with social issues of a particularly shocking or emotionally painful nature – such as atrocity, violence, drug abuse, brutality, sadism, sexual salacity and obscenity – the press should take special care to present facts, opinions, photographs and graphics with due sensitivity and discretion, subject to its duty to publish in the public interest.

6.2: In reporting accounts of crime or criminal case, publications shall not, unless it is both legally permitted and in the public interest –

i. Name victims of sex crimes

ii. Knowingly name any young person accused of a criminal offence who is below the age of 16 and who has no previous convictions

iii. Identify without consent relatives of a person accused or convicted of a crime

6.3: A journalist shall not knowingly or willfully promote communal or religious discord or violence.

6.4: i. The press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to a person's race, colour, religion, sex or to any physical or mental illness or disability.

ii. It must avoid publishing details of a person's race, caste, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability unless these are directly relevant to the story

6.5: i. 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 for the profit of others.

ii. They must not write about shares or securities in whose performance they know that they or their close families have a significant financial interest, without disclosing the interest to the publisher, editor or financial editor.

6.6: When reporting suicide, care should be taken not to give excessive detail of the method used.

07. PRIVACY

7.1: The press shall exercise particular care to respect the private and family lives of individuals, their home, health and correspondence. Intrusions on this right to privacy without consent could be justified only by some over-riding public interest.

7.2: The use of long-lens or other cameras to photograph people without consent on private or public property where there is a reasonable expectation or privacy is unacceptable, unless in the public interest.

7.3: Particular care should be taken to ensure that in cases involving grief or shock, inquiries and approaches are handled with sensitivity and discretion.

7.4: Young people should be free to complete their school years without unnecessary intrusion. Publication of material concerning a child's private life would be acceptable only if there was some exceptional public interest other than the fame, notoriety or position of his or her family or guardian.

7.5: The restrictions on intruding into privacy are particularly relevant to inquiries about individuals in hospitals or similar institutions, unless it serves the public interest.

08. HARASSMENT and SUBTERFUGE

8.1: Journalists, including photo-journalists, must not seek to obtain information or pictures through intimidation or harassment or by misrepresentation or subterfuge. The use of long-lens cameras or listening devices must also not be used unless this can be justified in the public interest and the material could not have been obtained by other means.

09. DIGNITY

9.1: Every journalist shall maintain the dignity of his or her profession.

INTERPRETATION

'Public Interest' means;

1: i. Protecting democracy, good governance, freedom of expression and the fundamental rights of the people and of keeping them informed about events that would have a direct or indirect bearing on them, and that of their elected government, and detecting or exposing crime, corruption, maladministration or a serious misdemeanor;

ii. Protecting public health and security and social, cultural and educational standards;

iii. Protecting the public from being misled by some statement or action of an individual or organisation.

2: In any case where the public interest is involved, the Press Complaints Commission will be entitled to require a full explanation by the Editor and/or journalist demonstrating how the public interest was served.

ONLINE PUBLICATIONS

The provisions of this Code will also apply to the Online publications of the print media.

REVIEW

The Editor's Guild of Sri Lanka shall review the provisions of this Code from time to time, in consultation with a Code Committee comprising of members, and non-members appointed by The Guild.

The Code is supported by the following organizations:

- ***The Newspaper Society of Sri Lanka***
- ***Free Media Movement***
- ***Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association***
- ***Sri Lanka Press Institute***
- ***Sri Lanka College of Journalism***
- ***Sri Lanka Tamil Media Alliance***
- ***Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum***
- ***Federation of Media Employees Trade Union***
- ***South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA) – Sri Lanka Chapter***

END/PCCSL