Cherno Jallow
Charter of Ethics for Journalists

Revised version
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Introduction

Press freedom is enshrined in the country’s constitution. The supreme law of the land grants the press a privileged status and arrogates to it a duty to inform, and to hold the government accountable to the governed. The journalists understand that, in doing so, we have a responsibility to the public.

This Code of Conduct for Media Practitioners first came into effect in 2016. It is being named after a veteran journalist who has earned the nickname Ethics for his insistence on ethical journalism. The Code should henceforth be called Cherno Jallow Charter of Ethics for Journalists. It is based on global standards of journalism, taking into account local context with regards to legal, economic, political, technological and socio-cultural realities.

Journalism is facing new ethical issues. Journalistic practice is changing in a manner that challenges the foundations of media
Charter of Ethics for Journalists

ethics. Technology has blurred the lines. The worlds of TV, print, radio and internet are overlapping. Journalists are no longer a clearly defined group. Citizens are engaged in journalism. With more enlightenment, socio-cultural and political narratives have changed.

The Code is updated to address new reality in journalism while strengthening good, old beliefs. The revision process was led by Code of Conduct Committee, a media stakeholder group comprising publishers, regulators, editors, academics and civil society.

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This updated version contains specific rules on reporting migration, elections, and crime and courts. Online journalism and broadcast journalism are distinctly catered for. The previous version contains only three sections: General Principles, Children’s Reporting Guidelines and Gender-based
Reporting Guidelines.

In essence, the Code provides guidelines for the conduct of journalists, from information gathering to dissemination or transmission, in all types of news and information media – print, radio, TV and online.

The GPU accepts that may not cover every area of need or satisfactorily articulate issues. For us, the Code is the last word on matters to which it refers.

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Part 1
General Principles (GP):

We the journalists in The Gambia hereby commit to:

1. Public Interest and Social Responsibility
   a. promote and protect public health and safety
   b. respect the law
   c. shall uphold the public’s right to fair, accurate, balanced information of issues and events of public interest
   d. shall not use his or her professional status for selfish motives
   e. will uphold the constitutional mandate of holding the government accountable to the governed
   f. be sensitive to the national mood and feeling in times of grief

2. Media Freedom and Independence
   a. Show solidarity with colleagues
b. protect and promote the principles of media freedom, independence and freedom of expression

c. defend press freedom and contribute to the development of journalism

d. not suppress news, except in the interest of the public

e. uphold the principles of editorial independence

f. not act as auxiliary for police or security

g. always act in public interest

h. resist threats from and oppose corporate, political attempts to influence our work

i. not accept payments, gifts, favours, fares in exchange for news coverage

j. not pay subjects or sources that have vested interest in the story

k. apply the same standards of fairness and balance when reporting news about our owners

l. govern ourselves on and off the job in a manner to avoid conflict damage to reputation

m. Never promise editorial favours in exchange for advertisement
3. **Truth and Accuracy**
   
a. be truthful and accurate the gathering and dissemination of news
b. not suppress, falsify or distort information
c. verify facts
d. place accuracy above immediacy
e. not misrepresent ourselves or deceive people we cover, except in overriding public interest

4. **Rejoinders**
   
a. correct errors with due prominence
b. publish an apology promptly and with due prominence
c. grant a right of reply upon request

5. **Facts and opinions**
   
a. Uphold our entitlement to comment upon or criticise issues of public interest
b. ensure that comments are fairly and honestly made
c. ensure facts and opinions are clearly distinguishable
d. avoid mixing journalism, advertisement, public relations and propaganda
e. recognise that expressing opinion publicly and on social media can erode public trust in us as fair and balance

6. **Fairness and Honesty**

a. Treat everyone with decency and courtesy
b. Use fair methods in obtaining information
c. Present facts in facts in an impartial, factual and non-partisan manner
d. Give particular consideration in dealing with inexperienced interviewees
e. Avoid subjecting subjects to any pressure or blackmail

7. **Copyright and Plagiarism**

a. give credit where appropriate to information sourced from other platforms
b. uphold the intellectual property rights of others

8. **Privacy**

a. respect an individual’s right to privacy and
dignity
b. recognise that the public has a right to have facts that bear upon the ability or suitability of public figures to perform their duties
c. show tact and compassion in seeking information in situations of personal grief or shock
d. Avoid use of hidden recording of audio, photo or other materials
e. Seek permission before recording telephone conversation
f. Openly make recording in public places
g. consider publication of relevant details of a person’s private life and circumstances only where a person:
   1) holds public office
   2) deals with public affairs
   3) follows a public career
   4) has sought or obtained publicity for his or her activities

9. Protection of Sources

a. Withhold the identity of confidential sources of information
b. interrogate the motive of confidential
sources

c. ensure that confidentiality is agreed upon prior to revealing the information
d. exercise discretion where confidentiality request is made after the information is given

10. Embargo

a. respect embargoes

11. Inducement

a. reject bribery in all forms
b. reject all forms of inducements that influence or are likely to influence the performance of his/her professional duties.
c. not receive transport refund for news coverage

12. Advertorial and Payment for Article

a. acknowledge any news or information that is paid for
b. ensure that paid-for news and information does not cause harm to any individual or business interest.
13. Minimise harm

a. Avoid publication of material intended or is likely to harm or stir up hatred against individuals or groups
b. show compassion for those who may be negatively affected by news coverage.
c. use heightened sensitivity when dealing with sources or subjects who are inexperienced or unable to give consent
d. recognise that legal access to information differs from an ethical justification to publish or broadcast.

14. Sensationalism

a. ensure that news headlines are fully warranted by the contents of the articles they accompany
b. ensure that photographs and multimedia contents adequately reflect an event and not highlight an incident out of context
c. avoid the use of indecent language and images.
Part 2
Gender and sex

15 Recognise and respect the equality of both sexes
16 Respect and uphold every survivor’s right to privacy
17 Avoid use of terms that refer to only one gender
18 Use gender-sensitive language
19 Avoid negative and inequitable portrayal of sex-roles in news and in commercials
20 Not publish any material that promotes violence against any sex
21 In news and current affairs, women and men should appear equitably
22 Protect and promote the best interest of the survivor
23 Expose all forms of gender-based violence
24 Ensure standards in terms of accuracy, sensitivity, responsibility and fairness
25 Correct inaccuracies, taking into account plight of survivors
26 withhold the identity, distort the voice and obscure the visual identity of a survivor of gender-based violence, except where the
survivor wants to be identified

27 avoid publication of any information that could put survivors, their family members, or providers of assistance at further risk, even when identities are changed or obscured

28 Not stigmatise or discriminate survivors when reporting on gender-based violence issues

29 Avoid publication of material that promotes, sanctions or glamorises harmful traditional beliefs and practices

30 Provide a secure and appropriate setting when conducting an interview with a survivors

31 Avoid questions, attitudes, gestures or comments that are insensitive to survivors and their cultural values

32 Not coerce, bribe, manipulate or threaten survivors into telling their stories

33 Secure a consent form for gender-based violence survivors for all interviews

34 under no circumstance ridicule survivor of gender-based violence
Part 3
Children

35 protect and promote the Best Interest of the Child
36 place the Best Interest of the Child above any other consideration
37 Give children an opportunity to express their views
38 Ensure standard of excellence in terms of accuracy, sensitivity, responsibility, balance and objectivity when reporting on issues relating to or involving children;
39 Expose violations of the rights and welfare of children
40 withhold the identity or obscure the visual identity or distort the voice of any child who is a survivor, perpetrator, or witness in any situation
41 avoid publication of any information or an image which might put a child, his/her siblings or peers at risk even when identities are changed or obscured
42 avoid publication of the identity of the perpetrator if that could lead to the identification of the survivor
43 avoid the publication of sensational or
stereotypical information relating to children

44 Ensure that the information provided by a child is verified and special care taken to ensure that any such verification does not put the child at risk.

45 Avoid the use of degrading and sexualised messages and images of children.

46 Obtain informed consent of a parent or a legal guardian before taking and or using any information of the child. Where appropriate and necessary, such consent should be in writing and signed by the parent or the legal guardian.

47 Verify the credentials of any organisation or person purporting to speak for or to represent the interest of a child.

48 Not pay or coerce a child or a parent, or a legal guardian for providing information or material that involves a child.

49 Always make it clear if material is being published or broadcast as a result of sponsorship.

50 Not ask a child to fabricate information.
Part 4
Court and Crimes

51 Recognise that police appeals for information is published free of charge
52 Uphold the ideals of fair hearing
54 Where legal jargons must be used, simplify them for your readers/audience
55 Have fair knowledge of and abide by the rules of court
56 Seek permission from the court before any recording of audio, photo or video of any proceedings
57 Reject gifts or bribe or inducement or personal favours from anyone associated with a case
58 Present facts of any court proceeding with fairness and accuracy
59 avoid interviews about the substance of a case before a Court of law
60 avoid discussing the substance of a case in the media while the matter is still going on
61 avoid publication of any material that a Court has placed an embargo
62 recuse oneself where one is conflicted
63 avoid publication of any material that promotes, sanctions or glamorises crimes
64 respect and uphold presumption of innocence of accused and suspects

65 avoid guilt by association by ensuring that families and colleagues are not implicated in wrongdoing

66 avoid publication of any material that depicts explicit sexual conduct between adults and children

67 in reporting suicides, avoid publication of any material with graphic depiction of methods used in suicides
Part 5
Election

68  give voices to the public about matters relevant to election
69  Investigate and expose electoral malpractices
70  in times of referendum, give equal time and space to both sides
71  grant parties or candidates direct access programmes on a fair and non-discriminatory basis
72  provide comprehensive and impartial coverage of elections; and in local languages
73  Where fees are applied, charge uniformly for all political parties and candidates
74  Remain independent of the politicians and parties we cover
75  Provide policy in undertaking election coverage
76  Not take inducement, gifts and bribery from politicians
77  Not fan election violence or encourage hate speech and incitement
78  Resist threats and not censor election programmes in any way unless they are certain that this is necessary to prevent harm, such as an act of violence or tribal tension
79 Where there is conflict of interest, whether by ownership or party affiliation, it should be known
80 acknowledge any financial support for coverage of electoral process
81 be transparent and fair in political advertisements
Part 6
Migration

82 recognise and promote right to migration
83 give voice to migrants, in their diversity, to tell their stories
84 raise awareness on the root causes of migration
85 place duty for the quality of labour of conditions or local services away from migrants towards those with the power to change it
86 avoid publication of materials that put blame on migrants for socio-economic challenges of host communities
87 withhold the migration status of a person, unless consent is granted for disclosure
88 obtain the informed consent of migrant before any photo, audio or video recording
89 use irregular, instead of ‘illegal’ to refer to undocumented migrants
90 avoid labelling of migrants as deserving or undeserving
91 stay with the story
92 frame headlines in a responsible manner
93 consider giving equal prominence positive
stories of migration

94 consider the human cost of political-decision making
95 keep audiences and migrants informed of new research, legislative changes, policy shifts and their implications on migrants
96 ensure that migrant interviewees are of full scope of story being written about them
97 outline with sensitivity the full context of reasons for migrations
98 make appropriate use of definitions and terminologies on migration
99 articulate to audience the rights migrants are under international, regional and national laws
100 Avoid spreading inaccurate, distorted information as regards asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and migrants
101 Take due care in publishing identifiable information about asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and migrants
Part 7
Online Journalism

102 Adhere to the General Principles and other guidelines in this code
103 Avoid using our platforms or any other online platform to publish or broadcast, share or promote hate speech, incitement and or defamation.
104 link publication or broadcast to the social media public profile of the subject of our publication
105 Use public domain images/videos, paying close attention to attribution requirements.
106 Seek permission before using content found online
107 Check photo-sharing sites that offer Creative Commons search and appropriate attribution.
108 Credit borrowed video, audio, photo contents.
109 Ensure that if we make a correction to an article that is already published, note the correction on the updated version.
110 Maintain open communication with our audience and encourage divergent views.
111 Fact-check your information and use documentation to support them.

112 Do not produce from online sources that do not cite the author’s name.
113 Always check the author’s credentials.
114 When information is linked to an organisation, verify that the organization is reliable and credible.
115 Check for statistics and data to back up and refute source’s claims.
116 Using hyperlinks can be additional sourcing for your write-up.
117 Using multimedia reporting for an online story is encouraged when possible.
118 Seek parent’s or legal guardian’s consent to use pictures of minors online.
119 Do not reference the names of rape victims or minors in a story – or provide any indication that can help identify the said survivor or minor.
120 Moderate user-generated content.
121 In doing so, avoid undue censorship or feeding trolls by replying in professional manner to ensure adult-in-the-room effect.
Part 8
Broadcast Journalism

122 Adhere to the General Principles and other guidelines in this code
123 Recognise and strive to satisfy the varied tastes of the public in programming
124 Ensure that programming portrays the wide and diverse spectrum of Gambian life
125 Ensure that programming caters to the needs of differently abled persons particularly in news and public interest programming
126 Disclose the name of producer in every programming
127 Make clear to the audience the name and nature of every programme
128 Avoid needless use of archival material
129 Always double-check recorded programme to ensure that the information is up-to-date
130 Inform viewers and audiences in advance about content of programming that contains violence or sexualised scenes
131 Depict violence or indecency in a manner that is relevant to story being told
132 Evaluate depiction of violence or sexualised scenes in relation to the individual program,
its intended audience and time of broadcast

133 Avoid airing any programme that promotes, sanctions or glamorises violence
134 Ensure that programme that contains violence, intended for adults, are not aired before 9pm and after 6am.
135 Endure good editorial judgement during live coverage so that coverage does not became a factor for additional violence
136 Avoid intrusive audio recording or camera shots of grieving families
137 Provide viewer advisory
138 Be balanced in the use of men and women in voice-overs and in expert roles,
139 Avoid negative and inequitable portrayal of sex roles in programming and advertisement
140 Avoid airing of smoking and alcohol drinking scenes, particularly in children’s programming
Part 9
Implementation

I. It is the responsibility of every person engaged in journalism to read, comprehend and comply with the principles enshrined in this Code. Such persons, when in doubt, should be ready and willing to seek second opinion especially from more experienced or knowledgeable practitioners.

II. The provisions of the Code are not to be read in isolation of each other.

III. Every journalist should stand by high journalism standards; support colleagues who are willing to take a stand for ethical journalism; and censure or exorcise those that are not willing to abide by our abiding principles.

IV. Every news and information media house has a responsibility to provide procedures for knowledge of and compliance with this Code at all levels, including independent content providers to whom media houses commission work from.
V. As journalists, we accept that the Code will guide the Media Council of The Gambia in monitoring our compliance and reaching decisions on complaint from the public. We commit to adhere to the decisions of the Council.

VI. The GPU hereby undertakes to print and distribute copies of the Code. Every journalist will be entitled to a copy. Media training institutions will each get a pack.

VII. The GPU recognises that the Code and its implementation is not the exclusive province of those who call themselves journalists. The public will have free access to the digital version of the Code. Relevant government bodies and civil society will each get a pack.

VIII. The GPU and the MCG, individually and jointly, undertake to raise public awareness and improve the skills of journalists on ethics.

IX. The GPU, jointly with NEPAG, BAG and MCG, and through an industry and public consultation process, will
undertake review of the code every five years.