



CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ZIMBABWEAN **MEDIA** PRACTITIONERS

VMCZ

VOLUNTARY MEDIA COUNCIL OF ZIMBABWE

THE MEDIA COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE



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FOR ZIMBABWEAN
MEDIA
PRACTITIONERS

**CONTACT THE MEDIA COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE OF THE
VOLUNTARY MEDIA COUNCIL OF ZIMBABWE (VMCZ)**

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COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE:

Is available on www.vmcz.co.zw together with the Media Code of Conduct

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VOLUNTARY MEDIA COUNCIL OF ZIMBABWE

EXCERPT FROM THE PREAMBLE OF THE MCZ CONSTITUTION

“....Mindful of the need to create a widely accessible public complaints system for print and broadcasting media in Zimbabwe to ensure accountability and maintain professionalism:

We, the members of the media profession in Zimbabwe, including but not limited to members of the Zimbabwe Union of journalists (ZUJ), Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA-Zimbabwe), Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (MMPZ), Zimbabwe National Editors’ Forum (ZINEF), Zimbabwe Association of Editors (ZAE), Federation of African Media Women (FAMWZ) publishers and media houses in Zimbabwe hereby declare as follows:...”

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ZIMBABWEAN MEDIA PRACTITIONERS

(hereinafter referred to as “this code”)

This Code serves to provide a set of common reporting standards for media practitioners and media institutions in the print, broadcast, television and new media sector in Zimbabwe to ensure professional and gender sensitive coverage of news and information.

Media practitioners and media institutions should abide by these standards and the public is entitled to expect that they will do so. There should be a remedy for those men and women harmed by media conduct that violates these standards.

This Code will be applied and enforced by the Media Complaints Committee.

1. INTERPRETATION

In this Code:

“media institution” means any institution in Zimbabwe, whether in the public or private sector, that disseminates news to the public through the medium of a newspaper and/or other written or electronic broadcasting.

“media practitioner” means a reporter, editor, radio and television programme producer and presenter, employed by a media institution or a freelance reporter or columnist who is a stringer or writes columns for a media institution.

In this Code gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the different implications for women and men in the coverage of news, analysis, commentary, opinion and information. While sex identifies the biological difference between men and women, gender identifies the social relation between men and women. It concerns human relations and is thus socially constructed. Rooted in gender are issues of dominance, power and rule. Gender is the culturally specific set of characteristics that identifies the social behaviour of women and men and the relationship between them. Gender, therefore, refers not simply to women or men, but to the relationship between them, and the way it is socially constructed. Since it is a relational term, gender must include women and men. Just like the concepts of class, race and ethnicity, gender is an analytical tool for understanding social processes.

2. APPLICATION

This Code will govern the conduct of media practitioners and media institutions that have agreed to be bound by this Code and to submit to the disciplinary jurisdiction of the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe.

3. GENERAL STANDARDS

- a) Media practitioners and media institutions must carry out their function of informing, educating and entertaining the public by maintaining the highest

professional and ethical standards and ensuring gender balanced and sensitive content that treats men and women equally as news sources and subjects.

- b) Media practitioners must defend the principle of the freedom of the media to freely access, collect and disseminate information and to publish comments and criticisms. They must oppose censorship, suppression of news and the dissemination of propaganda.

4. ACCURACY AND FAIRNESS

- a) Media practitioners and media institutions must report and interpret the news with scrupulous honesty and must take all reasonable steps to ensure that they disseminate accurate information and that they depict events fairly, without distortions and without discrimination in the portrayal of women and men.
- b) Media practitioners and media institutions must never publish information that they know to be false, gender insensitive or maliciously make unfounded allegations about others that are intended to harm their reputations.
- c) When compiling reports media practitioners must check their facts and the editors and publishers of newspapers and other media must take proper care not to publish inaccurate. Before a media institution publishes a report, the reporter and the editor must

ensure that all the steps that a reasonable competent and objective practitioner would take to check its accuracy have in fact been taken.

- d) Special care must be taken to check the accuracy of stories that may cause harm to individuals or organisations or to the public interest. Public interest should be assessed in terms of its impact on men and women. Before publishing a story of alleged wrongdoing by any person, all reasonable steps must be taken to ascertain the response of the alleged wrongdoer to the allegations. Any response from that person must be published together with the report setting out the allegations where possible. Treatment of all such cases should be objective irrespective of gender, race, class, culture and ethnicity.
- e) Media institutions must endeavour to provide full, fair and balanced reports of events and not suppress or exaggerate essential information pertaining to those events, whether subjects are male or female. They must not distort information by exaggerating, by giving only one side of a story, by placing improper emphasis on one aspect of a story, by reporting the facts out of context in which they occurred or by suppressing relevant available facts on the basis of the gender of those being covered. They must avoid misleading headlines, billboard postings and perpetuation of stereotypes.

5. CORRECTION OF INACCURACY OR DISTORTION

- a) If a media institution discovers that it has published a report containing a significant inaccuracy, distortion or insensitivity of the facts, it must publish a correction at the earliest possible opportunity and with comparable prominence. This should apply regardless of whether the offended party is male or female.
- b) If a media institution discovers that it has published an erroneous report that has caused harm to the reputation of a person or an institution's reputation, it must publish an apology promptly with due prominence.
- c) A media institution must report fairly, sensitively and accurately the outcome of an action for defamation against it.

6. RIGHT OF REPLY

Where a person or organisation believes that a media report contains inaccurate information or unfairly criticises the person or institution, the media institution concerned must give the person or organisation a fair opportunity to reply so as to enable that person or organisation to correct any inaccuracies and to respond to the criticism.

7. COMMENT

- a) A clear separation should be made between comment and opinion.
- b) A comment or expression of opinion must be a genuine and honest comment or expression of opinion relating to established fact rather than sexist myths, stereotypes or conjecture.
- c) Comment or conjecture must not be presented in such a way as to create an impression that it is established fact.

8. BRIBES AND INDUCEMENTS

Media practitioners and media institutions must not publish or suppress a report or omit or alter vital facts in reportage in return for payment of money, sexual favours or any other gift or reward.

9. PRESSURE OR INFLUENCE

- a) Media practitioners and media institutions must not suppress or distort information which the public has a right to know because of pressure or influence from their advertisers or others who have a corporate, political, or advocacy interest in the media institution concerned.

- b) Media institutions must avoid contributing to the portrayal of women and girls in advertising which is demeaning.

10. HATRED OR VIOLENCE

- a) Media practitioners and media institutions must not publish material that is intended or is likely to engender hostility or hatred towards persons on the grounds of their race, ethnic origin, nationality, gender, sexual orientations, physical or other disability, religion or political affiliation.
- b) Media institutions must take utmost care to avoid contributing to the spread of ethnic and sexist hatred or political violence.
- c) Media institutions must take utmost care to avoid justifying or trivialising any cases of gender-based violence.

11. REPORTING ON ELECTIONS

- a) Media practitioners and media institutions must ensure that media coverage of elections is comprehensive, fair and balanced and make certain that all candidates, parties and election issues are given equitable and gender sensitive coverage.

- b) Before reporting a damaging allegation made against a candidate or a political party, a media practitioner should obtain, wherever possible, a comment from the candidate or party against whom the allegation has been made especially where the allegation has been made by an opposing candidate or an opposing political party.
- c) A media practitioner or media institution must not accept any gift, reward or inducement from a politician or candidate.
- d) As far as possible, a media practitioner or media institution should report the views of candidates and political parties directly and in their own words, rather than as they are described by others.
- e) A journalist must take care in reporting the findings of opinion polls. Any report should wherever possible include details about the methodology used in conducting the survey and by whom it was conducted.

12. REPORTING OF POLICE INVESTIGATIONS AND CRIMINAL COURT CASES

- a) In our law a person, male or female, is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. The media must therefore refrain from publishing articles prejudging the outcome in criminal cases or seeking to influence the outcome of the case.

- b) Media institutions are entitled to inform the public about the arrest of suspects by the police and the trial of persons accused of crimes. They should not, however, publish the names of suspects until the police have filed formal charges against them, unless it is in the public interest to do so before formal criminal charges are laid.
- c) Where a media institution has begun to report a criminal case, it must follow up and report subsequent developments in the case. For example, it is grossly unfair to report that a person has been charged with murder or rape and then fail to report that the person was acquitted. The report of the subsequent development must be given due prominence.
- d) Media practitioners must endeavour to provide a context to cases of gender-based violence beyond the issues reported in court.

13. PRIVACY

- a) It is normally wrong for a media practitioner to intrude into and to report upon a person's private life without his or her consent
- b) Reporting on a person's private life can only be justified when it is in the public interest to do so. This would include:

- i) detecting or exposing criminal conduct;
 - ii) detecting or exposing seriously anti-social conduct
 - iii) protecting public health and safety
 - iv) preventing the public from being misled by some statement or action of that individual, such as where a person is doing something in private which he or she is publicly condemning.
- c) Media practitioners may probe and publish details about the private moral behaviour of a public official where such conduct has a bearing upon his or her suitability as a public official.

14. INTRUSIONS INTO GRIEF OR SHOCK

- a) In cases involving personal grief or shock, enquiries should be carried out and approaches made with sympathy, sensitivity and tact. It is insensitive to ask a bereaved person how he or she is feeling, neither does it add to the substance of a report.
- b) Media practitioners or photographers making enquiries at a hospital or similar institution should normally identify themselves to a responsible official and obtain permission before entering non-public areas.

15. INTERVIEWING OR PHOTOGRAPHING CHILDREN

- a) Media practitioners should not interview or photograph a child under the age of 18 years in the absence of, or without the consent of a parent or an adult who is responsible for the child. Media practitioners should be careful when identifying parents, other siblings and family members of an abused child as the association may make it easy to identify the child. Media practitioners should:
 - b) avoid categorisations or descriptions that expose a child to negative reprisals - such as additional physical or psychological harm, or to lifelong abuse, discrimination or rejection.
 - c) Media practitioners and media houses should change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child who is identified as:
 - i) a victim of sexual abuse or exploitation; or
 - ii) a perpetrator of physical or sexual abuse; or
 - iii) HIV positive, or living with AIDS, unless the child and the parent or a guardian gives fully informed consent; or
 - iv) Being charged or convicted of a crime.
 - v) Children should not be approached or photographed while at a school, crèche or similar institution without the permission of the appropriate authorities.

vi) Child abuse should be reported as it is. For example, rather than media practitioners using demeaning labels such as child prostitutes, children should be regarded as victims because by law they are incapable of giving consent to sexual liaisons.

16. CHILDREN IN CRIMINAL CASES

Media institutions must not publish the names of a person under the age of 18 years who has been arrested by the police or is being or has been tried in a criminal court.

17. VICTIMS OF CRIME

Media institutions must not identify victims of sexual assaults or publish material likely to contribute to such identification unless the victim has consented to such publication or the law authorises them to do so.

18. INNOCENT RELATIVES AND FRIENDS

Media institutions should avoid identifying relatives and friends of a person convicted or accused of a crime unless the reference to them is necessary for the full, fair and accurate reporting of the crime or the legal proceedings.

19. SURREPTITIOUS GATHERING OF INFORMATION

- a) Media practitioners should use open methods of gathering information in which they clearly identify themselves as media practitioners. Generally they should not obtain or seek to obtain information or pictures through surreptitious methods such as misrepresentation, deception, subterfuge or undercover techniques.
- b) Surreptitious methods of information gathering may only be used where open methods have failed to yield information in what is public interest. These methods may thus be employed where, for example, they will help to detect or expose criminal activity or will bring to light information that will protect the public against serious threats to public health or safety.

21. NATIONAL SECURITY

- a) Media institutions must not prejudice the legitimate national security interests of Zimbabwe and place at risk members of the Defence Forces who are on active military duty.
- b) This provision does not prevent the media from exposing corruption in security or defence agencies or from commenting upon levels of expenditure on defence.

22. PLAGIARISM

A media practitioner must not engage in plagiarism. Plagiarism consists of making use of another person's words or ideas without permission and without proper acknowledgement and attribution of the source of those words or ideas.

23. PROTECTION OF SOURCES

- a) Where a person has agreed to supply information only on condition that his or her identity remains confidential and the media practitioner agrees to this condition, the media practitioner must respect this undertaking and refuse to reveal the identity of the source.
- b) However, the media practitioner may tell the source that his or her identity might have to be revealed if it becomes clear in court that this information is needed to prevent or expose serious criminal conduct.



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