

Independent Media Council of Uganda

The Independent Media Council of Uganda (IMCU) was formed in February 2006 by 42 media houses and association during a two-day meeting held at Entebbe Botanical Beach Hotel. This was a result of a long campaign and consultative process to introduce in Uganda a self regulatory mechanism for the media.

The objectives of the IMCU among others are to promote the growth of a responsible, free media that adheres to the highest standards of journalism and to consider complaints and deal with complaints about the conduct of the Media.

A Governing Board consisting of 13 people from different disciplines was put in place headed by a former Prime Minister who is a veteran journalist and former media proprietor. It was instituted to ensure that the objectives of the council are met.

However it was realised that these critical objectives could not be met without a professional code of conduct for the media industry. The Governing Board drafted a code focusing on the following areas:

Professional Integrity, Accuracy and Fairness, Social responsibility, Respect for privacy and human dignity, Right to reply and correction, Facts and opinions, Letters to the Editor, Plagiarism, Non-disclosure of sources, Intrusion into grief, Innocent relatives and friends, Victims of sex crimes, Protection of children, Children in criminal cases, Publication of pornographic material, Gathering information, Use of pictures, Hatred and disadvantaged groups, Obscenity, taste and tone in reporting, Covering conflicts, Undue pressure or influence, Payment for Information, Recording interviews and telephone conversations and Advertisements.

The is the Role IMCU?

The primary role of the IMCU is to: consider and deal with ethical complaints against the media and promote the growth of a responsible and independent media in Uganda that conforms to the highest standards of journalism.

Legal status of IMCU

IMCU was registered as a non government organization in July 2006 and as a body corporate in January 2007. It is also a member of the World Association of Press Councils (WAPC).

What is self-regulation?

It is a system not controlled by state or statute, independently funded, and delivering a voluntary but universal commitment of the industry. It operates on a professional code whose values reflect those of its national culture.

It upholds freedom of expression and the public's right to know by providing a quick, easy and effective way of resolving complaints that is affordable and not over-legalistic. It is accessible by everyone, it operates at no cost to either complainants or the taxpayer, resolves complaints amicably not punitively.

self-regulation rules are effective and carry greater authority than externally imposed legal rules.

It is a major defence of democratic freedoms because it enables the media to effectively play their role as public watchdogs, scrutinize those exercising power in every walk of life, empower voters to make informed choices and provide a platform for effective participation of citizens in governance affairs.

For the press it promotes higher standards, professional maturity and responsibility, and helps to head off political interference and legal constraints.

Self-regulation protects the reader while leaving editors and publishers in charge of their own destinies, while for the state it is a powerful attraction for governments wishing genuinely to show they have all the credentials of modern democratic nationhood and that their commitment to press freedom is not merely ritualistic rhetoric.

Does the media need it?

Eastern Africa Media Institute-Uganda carried out a media freedom survey published on 3rd May 2005.

One of the survey indicators was whether the media was practising high levels of professional standards which are enforced by self-regulatory bodies. 53.3% of the respondents said journalists minimally meet the indicator, 33.3% were of the view that they have started to meet it while 9% believed that journalists do not at all meet the indicator.

These results indicate the need to have a self-regulatory body to improve the standard of the profession in the country.

Why the public should support self-regulation

- A state-regulated press is not a free press – it looks bad and criminal laws create martyrs. Who wants editors going to jail defying the courts against the over-mighty State?

- Civil laws work only for the rich, the powerful or the criminal and corrupt not the ordinary citizen who cannot afford to pay and does not want to be dragged through the courts.
- An informal system is free and easy, quick and effective it takes weeks, not months or years, and involves no red tape.
- Self-regulation can also cover areas that no State system could really tackle like harassment, subterfuge, telephoto lenses, victims of sexual or racial discrimination.
- It saves years of legislative time – and can be adapted in days, it allows editors the right to be wrong – no prior restraint.
- Shaming papers means they can be castigated by their rivals as a marketing tool, whereas fines and compensation could be budgeted for by wealthy newspapers.