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PREFACE
*Guidelines for Political Journalism* was developed in response to demands from media practitioners and other stakeholders to replace the Commission’s *Guidelines for Political Reporting* with principles that encompass the broader spectrum of journalistic enterprise beyond reporting. Some emerging concerns including media coverage of opinion polls and dealing with conflict of interest are also addressed.

For a nation involved in the dual transition of good political and economic governance, questions about allocation and management of national resources, feelings of marginalisation and the contest for state power and control over the means of producing public goods, generate tension and conflict which must engage the media. *Guidelines for Political Journalism* therefore advocates the adoption of “peace-angle journalism” in political communication to promote mature discussion of the triggers to conflict with emphasis on opportunities for peace building.

The Commission is grateful to the UNDP for supporting this publication. My predecessor, Mr. Tim Acquah Hayford and his colleagues deserve special acknowledgement for their initial work which provided the impetus for our current effort. Mr. George Sarpong, Executive Secretary conceptualised and led the implementation of this project. The Commission is greatly indebted to all those who contributed to the development of the Guidelines especially Dr. Doris Dartey and her team of experts.

Paul Adu-Gyamfi
Chairman
October, 2008

ACKNOWLEDGMENT
The National Media Commission is grateful to the team of experts who worked tirelessly to produce these Guidelines, especially the following:
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We are also grateful to the leadership of all political parties in Ghana for their support.
1 POLITICAL JOURNALISM

Political journalism is about how the media cover politics. Politics is about the activities of political parties, politicians, electoral candidates and political institutions. But politicians and political institutions exist to serve the people. Political journalism is therefore as much about politicians as it is about the people – ordinary persons – whose interest both politics and journalism must serve.

1.1 Political journalism should aim at engendering public debate. This may best be done by collecting and disseminating truthful, unbiased information on the activities of political parties and candidates to the public and in turn, offering opportunity for the public to express their views on the candidates and their programmes. Qualitative political journalism is obtained when the media ensure the interaction of views and ideas between politicians and the public.

1.2 This means that media practitioners must seek to provide the public with information that would enable the electorate to make intelligent choices during elections.

1.3 It calls for practitioners to ensure that coverage is comprehensive and fair to all and that the information gathered is presented as objectively and impartially as possible.

2 ACCESS TO INFORMATION

2.1 The public's right to information is a fundamental democratic right. It is therefore non-negotiable and cannot be circumvented. Article 21(1) provides that:

All persons shall have the right to information subject to such qualifications and laws as is necessary in a democratic society.
This provision places dual responsibility on the media. First, to honour the public's right to information to enable them participate actively in the governance of the nation. Second, and deriving from the first responsibility, it places an injunction on the media not to conceal information from the public.

3 ORIENTATION OF POLITICAL JOURNALISM

Political journalism must balance coverage of political personalities and events with analysis of issues in the overall context of good governance. The electorate must be given every opportunity to discuss and understand the issues. Thus, apart from providing information about the candidates, media practitioners should balance discussions of personalities with analysis of the issues and must offer a forum for the public to participate in public discussions.
4 PROMOTING PEACE

Peace is the bedrock of progress and development. Political journalism must therefore aim at promoting peace. This demands active and purposive search for ideas that promote peace and national cohesion.

4.1 In covering politics, the media must endeavour to identify the critical issues that can trigger conflict and encourage dispassionate discussion. Such issues may include questions of marginalisation, identity politics based on religion, ethnicity, etc.

4.2 Views that have the potential to promote violent conflict, especially political, social, cultural, racial, ethnic and religious, should be handled with great sensitivity.

4.3 In covering political conflicts, analysis of the causes and issues involved in the conflict must be balanced with efforts towards promoting peace. Institutions and individuals involved in efforts at resolving the conflict must be given opportunities to highlight efforts at peace building.

5 PROVIDING CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

5.1 Both during election campaigns and in the day-to-day coverage of political activities, media practitioners must arm themselves with a good grounding in the history of this country. This knowledge will enable them to understand the alignments (actual or perceived) that inform political activities in Ghana and help them to identify and properly analyze issues at both national and local levels.
6 COVERING POLITICAL PROGRAMMES/MANIFESTOES AND CANDIDATES

6.1 The media must do their utmost to make the programmes and manifestoes of political parties and candidates intelligible to the electorate by subjecting them to objective analysis.

6.2 It is the duty of the media to help the electorate assess the candidates to make elections meaningful. This duty requires them to provide accurate information about the candidates and also reflect the views of the public to candidates.

7 CAMPAIGN BROADCASTS

7.1 Apart from the normal coverage of political activities, including campaigns, there should be at least one political broadcast for each registered party.

7.2 Terms and conditions of the broadcasts shall be the same for all parties.

7.3 The division and allocation of time within the allotted slot will be by the parties themselves in consultation with the media houses under the auspices of the National Media Commission.

8 POLITICAL ADVERTISING

8.1 Media houses may adopt the rules on political advertising contained in the state-media guidelines or develop their own transparent rules on political advertising in consultation with the political parties under the auspices of the National Media Commission.

8.2 Content of political advertising should not be offensive.

8.3 Advertising rates should be the same for all.
8.4 Each media institution should constitute an in-house committee to meet periodically to vet all advertisements emanating from political parties, presidential candidates and other stakeholders.

9 COVERING OPINION POLLS

To avoid wilful bias or unwitting manipulation, the media shall cover opinion polls only when they include the following:

9.1 The name of the person or organisation which conducted the poll.

9.2 The name of the person or organisation which commissioned or sponsored the poll.

9.3 The exact questions which were put to respondents and any explanation or information given to respondents which could affect their understanding of the questions.

9.4 A description of the population under study, and a description of the sampling procedures and sample size.

9.5 The period or time covered by the poll.

9.6 Place or location where the poll was conducted.

10 POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT OF MEDIA PERSONNEL

10.1 Media practitioners must avoid activities that may compromise their integrity as journalists or damage their credibility in order to be effective in the discharge of their duties.
10.2 Media practitioners, irrespective of political party affiliations and beliefs, shall remain impartial in their dealings with political parties and in particular, shall be guided by the Code of Ethics of the Ghana Journalists Association.

11 ENDORSEMENT OF CANDIDATES

11.1 The state-owned media should under no circumstances, endorse candidates for political office. Personal preferences by individuals in the state-owned media of candidates, positions, etc. must also not be permitted to spill over into news reports and other programmes.

12 FULL COVERAGE OF ELECTION PROCESS

12.1 Media houses must not limit their political coverage to just campaigns. Coverage should be extended to encompass all phases up to and including the declaration of the results.

12.2 As far as possible, the media shall endeavour to provide coverage at all levels of political campaigning from the constituency to the national level.

12.3 The Guidelines of the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), the Private Newspaper Publishers Association of Ghana (PRINPAG) and the Electoral Commission (EC) will be adopted in the coverage of Election Day activities.

13 MEDIA COVERAGE OF INCUMBENT

13.1 In their reportage, media practitioners must distinguish between the government and the activities of its political party.
13.2 Presentation of government activities during elections should be weighed carefully to ensure that the incumbent government does not gain unfair access to the media. Bona fide news should be covered without giving the impression of bias.

14 BRIBES AND OTHER INDUCEMENTS

14.1 Media practitioners must avoid all actions that could compromise their own integrity, judgement or the reputation of their organisations by, for example, refusing to accept bribes or other inducements.

15 RESPECTING THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS

15.1 Media practitioners must, as far as possible, avoid infringing on others’ rights by, for instance, checking their facts correctly, and eschewing gratuitously malicious, scandalous or defamatory publications.

16 USING PARTY RELEASES

16.1 Journalists should not solely depend on handouts in view of the possibility of promoting “conduct journalism”, which is clearly not satisfactory. “Conduct Journalism” is the passing through of news without filtration, refinement or editing of any kind.

17 RESPONSIBILITIES OF POLITICAL PARTIES

17.1 All statements, press releases and other forms of information for publication in the media must be signed by a representation duly identified to the media beforehand.
17.2 Political parties must give all media houses adequate notice, at least 48 hours, of impending political party activities to allow for proper and adequate logistics arrangements.

17.3 Political parties should clean their statements and releases of insulting language that could lead to public unrest or breach of peace. This, hopefully, will ensure that media practitioners are not compelled by professional imperatives to edit out undignified or intemperate language – which they have the right to do – and thereby, offend political parties.

17.4 Political parties should have a clearly defined public relations or media/press relations departments from where the media can obtain necessary information without difficulty.

17.5 Political parties are reminded that press conferences are not political rallies and are therefore restricted to the press only.

17.6 It is the responsibility of political parties to assure the safety of media practitioners covering their assignments from their own supporters and, as far as possible, from other would-be molesters.

17.7 Political parties must refrain from attempting to influence media practitioners through the offer of money and other such considerations.

18 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

18.1 Media practitioners should not engage in any activity that may appear to be or has the potential to give preferential treatment to any political party or candidate.

18.2 Media institutions should endeavour to make adequate arrangements to facilitate the work of journalists.

18.3 Political parties and presidential candidates should not induce journalists and officials of media houses with favours.
18.4 Journalists and other officials of media houses should not:

i. Accept gifts and favours from political parties and presidential candidates.

ii. Solicit gifts, tangible or intangible, directly or indirectly, from political parties or presidential candidates.

18.5 All issues relating to conflict of interest shall be resolved in accordance with the Guidelines on Conflict of Interest of the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) with the necessary modifications as the situation may warrant.

19 GENERAL PROVISIONS

19.1 The media are enjoined to beware of exploitation and avoid unwitting promotion for self-seekers.

19.2 All quotations, especially when they are politically controversial or are defamatory in language and terms, for example, jargons, technical abbreviations and political euphemisms not clearly or easily understandable, should be verified and fully explained.

19.3 Controversial or offensive references to opponents must be avoided, if at all possible, unless there is a clear justification and also are defensible in a court of law.

19.4 The deliberate presentation of scenes, episodes and facts that are meant to excite passion, hatred, contempt and prejudice must not be entertained.

19.5 The media must, as far as possible, respect legitimate police order to clear away from a particular scene. (Police and other accredited security agents have security duties to perform, for instance, of protecting certain categories of officials and public property that might be endangered by refusal to obey such orders). The Police should also, as far as possible, respect the constitutional responsibility of media practitioners to the general
public at all times. There should be mutual understanding to avoid conflict in the interest of the public.

**20 OBSERVANCE**

20.1 Media houses should undertake to observe these Guidelines. The National Media Commission (NMC) shall monitor and encourage observance.

**21 PROCEDURES FOR COMPLAINTS AND SETTLEMENT**

21.1 Complaints alleging that any provision of these Guidelines has been breached shall first be directed to the entity against whom the complaint is made. A copy of the complaint shall be submitted to the National Media Commission.

21.2 The complainant shall provide the following information:

i. Where applicable, the date and time of the breach; and

ii. The remedial action proposed.

21.3 The entity against whom the complaint is made shall endeavour to address the grievance within ten (10) days upon receipt of the complaint and inform the complainant in writing of the action taken. A copy shall be submitted to the National Media Commission.

21.4 If upon receipt of the response, the complainant is satisfied of the remedial action taken, he/she shall communicate that in writing to the entity complained against and a copy shall be submitted to the National Media Commission.

21.5 Where a complainant is not satisfied with the response, he/she shall complain to the National Media Commission for redress. The National Media Commission shall resolve a complaint referred to it within ten (10) days.
SUMMARY OF GUIDING NOTES FROM RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION WITH EXPERTS¹:

Research into media theory reveals that the existing material positioned communication as a linear process. Emphasis was placed on what the media should tell readers/audiences. Communication is an interactive process. Review must therefore recognise the central role of the public as active participants in the political communication process. Good political communication should not only be about journalists “speaking well to the public”; it should also be about the people being “in conversation” with the political class with the media as the vehicle for the interaction. – Gilbert

Reporting is only an aspect of journalism. Editors and Senior Journalists should therefore consider ‘Guidelines on Political Reporting’ as something basic for the young reporter. The concerns about the media and political processes must include everybody in the journalism chain. Guidelines must therefore focus on “Political Journalism” to make it relevant. Guidelines must also address additional issues including conflict of interest and coverage of opinion polls. The dynamics of local language broadcasting deserve special treatment. Guidelines for local language broadcasting must therefore be developed. – Doris.

It is good to avoid conflict. But peace is not achieved by the avoidance of “views that promote violent conflict.” Peace-angle journalism requires mature discussion of the triggers to conflict with emphasis on opportunities for peace building. It demands that the voices of peace makers be highlighted as the disagreeing parties are offered a platform to articulate their needs and concerns for solutions to be sought. Guidelines must adopt peace-angle journalism approach. - Jones

¹ The Consultants were charged to research into the issues and also hold consultation with other experts. The notes guided conceptual discussion at the stakeholders’ workshop.
Review of Supreme Court decisions in Ghana and views from other jurisdictions, suggest that the constitutional provisions cited in the existing material are of doubtful relevance and application. Access to information is different from the doctrine of fair and equitable coverage. Article 21 may be more relevant than Articles 55 and 163. For, Articles 55 and 163 are not provisions of general application to the entire media. – Ishaq