

# CODE OF ETHICS

For

Nigerian Journalists

*Approved By*

Nigerian Press Organization

Code of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists  
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## FOREWORD

AN Ethical code is without doubt a sine qua non in any profession. Journalism today faces an increasing need for critical reporting, accuracy fairness and objectivity. The Code of Ethics is therefore, the companion of the practicing journalist as well as the informed public in providing ethical guidelines by which practitioners can judge and be judged.

This Code is new and comes after a painstaking and collective effort of Nigerian Journalists represented by the Nigerian Press Organization (NPO) and the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) whose adjudications are predicted entirely on the interpretations and provisions of the Code. The old Code of Ethics put together and adopted by the NPO since 1979 was clearly deficient in many vital areas. It lacked boldness, forthrightness and clarity and looked more of a gratuitous contrivance which could compound and obfuscate judgement of any perceived wrong doing in journalism practice.

The new Code is a consensus document. It is bold, detailed and evinces clarity for practitioners and the public alike. It is a credit to Nigerian Journalists that they could set so clear and unambiguous yardstick for their own practice and judgement. This review process began in March 1996, when the Press Council held a National workshop in Ota, Ogun State in collaboration with the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) which successfully reviewed the old Code of Conduct to make it more responsive to violations in Journalism practice. The amended Code was adopted by the central working committee of the NUJ in an in-house conference held in Abuja, shortly after the Ota Workshop. To give it yet the widest possible acceptance, the NPC finally organized the Ilorin Forum, from March 18-20, 1998 where the NPO made up of NUJ, NGE and Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria formally ratified and gave impetus for the implementation of the new Code.

This publication also contains the Ilorin Declaration and illustration of relevant sections of the enabling law of the Nigerian Press Council on qualification for registration of the Nigerian Journalists. We believe the New Code should be the practitioners' companion and delight.

HADJ ALADE ADUNEWU,  
CHAIRMAN.

## **THE ILORIN DECLARATION**

**HAVING** reviewed the Code of Ethics drafted at Ota, Ogun State in March 1996, delegates at the Forum for the Implementation of the Code of Ethics, held at Ilorin, Kwara State, affirm and declare as follows:

**That we:**

**ACCEPT** the imperative of a Code of Ethics as a vital pillar of Journalism and the necessity for the application of ethics tie ace standards;

**AFFIRM** that self-regulation through a Code of Ethics and other structures drawn up by professionals would best serve the interest of both the profession ad the public;

**ENJOIN** the Nigerian Union of Journalists, the Nigerian Guild of Editors and the Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria to ensure the implementation of the eligibility criteria for entry into and practice of journalism in Nigeria, as contained in the Nigeria Press Council Decree No 85 of 1992;

**PLEDGE** to abide by the Code of Ethics and to promote the observance of its provisions by all journalists; and

**URGE** the Nigerian Press Council to collaborate with the Nigerian Press Organization to publicize the Code of Ethics for the benefit of the press and the public, and ensure compliance with its provisions hereafter.

**SIGNED THIS DAY, MARCH 20, 1998**

**BY:**

**Mr Lanre Ogundipe**  
National President  
Nigerian Union of Journalists

**Mr Ray Ekpu**  
General Secretary  
Newspapers Proprietors  
Association of Nigeria

**Mallam Garba Shehu**  
President  
Nigerian Guild of Editors

**Hadj Alade Odunewu**  
Chairman  
Nigerian Press Council

# **CODE OF ETHICS FOR NIGERIAN JOURNALISTS**

## **PREAMBLE**

Journalism entails a high degree of public trust. To earn and maintain this trust, it is morally imperative for every journalist and every news medium to observe the highest professional and ethical standards. In the exercise of these duties, a journalist should always have a healthy regard for the public interest.

Truth is the cornerstone of journalism and every journalist should strive diligently to ascertain the truth of every event.

Conscious of the responsibilities and duties of journalists as purveyors of information, we, Nigerian journalists, give to ourselves this Code of Ethics. It is the duty of every journalist to observe its provisions.

### **1. EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE**

Decisions concerning the content of news should be the responsibility of a professional journalist.

### **2. ACCURACY AND FAIRNESS**

- i. The Public has a right to know. Factual accurate, balanced and fair reporting is the ultimate objective of good journalism and the basis of earning public trust and confidence.
- ii. A journalist should refrain from publishing inaccurate and misleading information. Where such information has been inadvertently published, prompt correction should be made. A journalist must hold the right of reply as a cardinal rule of practice.
- iii. In the course of his duties, a journalist should strive to separate facts from conjecture and comment.

### **3. PRIVACY**

As a general rule, a journalist should respect the privacy of individuals and their families unless it affects public interest.

- A. Information on the private life of an individual or his family should only be published if it impinges on public interest.
- B. Publishing of such information about an individual as mentioned above should be deemed justifiable only if it is directly at:
  - i. Exposing crime or serious misdemeanour;
  - ii. Exposing anti-social conduct;
  - iii. Protecting public health, morality and safety;
  - iv. Preventing the public from being misled by some statement or action of the individual concerned.

#### **4. PRIVILEGE/NON DISCLOSURE**

- i. A journalist should observe the universally accepted principle of confidentiality and should not disclose the source of information obtained in confidence.
- ii. A journalist should not breach an agreement with a source of information obtained as “off the record” or as “back ground information”

#### **5. DECENCY**

- i. A journalist should dress and comport himself in a manner that conforms with public taste.
- ii. A journalist should refrain from using offensive, abusive, or vulgar language.
- iii. A journalist should not present lurid details, either in words or picture, of violence, sexual acts, abhorrent or horrid scenes.
- iv. In cases involved in personal grief or shock, enquiries should be carried out and approaches made with sympathy and discretion.
- v. Unless it is in the furtherance of the public’s right to know, a journalist should generally avoid identifying relatives or friends of persons convicted or accused of crime.

#### **6. DISCRIMINATION**

A journalist should refrain from making pejorative reference to a person’s ethnic group, religion, sex, or to any physical or mental illness or handicap.

#### **7. REWARD AND GRATIFICATION**

- i. A journalist should neither solicit nor accept bribe, gratification or patronage to suppress or publish information.
- ii. To determine payment for publication of news is inimical to the notion of news as fair, accurate, unbiased and factual report of an event.

#### **8. VIOLENCE**

A journalist should not present or report acts of violence, armed robberies, terrorist activities or vulgar display of wealth in a manner that glorifies such act in the eyes of the public.

#### **9. CHILDREN AND MINORS**

A journalist should not identify, either by name or picture, or interview children under the age of 16 who are involved in cases concerning sexual offences, crimes and rituals or witchcraft either as victims, witnesses or defendants.

#### **10. ACCES TO INFORMATION**

A journalist should strive to employ open and honest means in the gathering of information.

Exceptional methods may be employed only when the public interest is at stake.

#### **11. PUBLIC INTEREST**

A journalist should strive to enhance national unity and public good.

#### **12. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

A journalist should promote universal principles of human rights, democracy, justice, equity, peace and international understanding.

#### **13. PLAGIARISM**

A journalist should not copy, wholesale, or in part, other people's work without attribution and/or consent.

#### **14. COPYRIGHT**

- i. Where a journalist reproduces a work, be it in print, broadcast, art work or design, proper acknowledgement should be accorded to the author.
- ii. A journalist should abide by all rules of copyright, established by national and international laws and conventions.

#### **15. PRESS FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY**

A journalist should strive at all times to enhance press freedom and responsibility.

### **WHAT THE NIGERIAN PRESS COUNCIL LWA SAYS ABOUT REGISTRATION OF JOURNALISTS**

#### **Section 17:**

(1) Subject rules made under this decree, a person is entitled to be fully registered under this Decree if:

- (a) He had attended a course of training recognized by the Nigerian Union of Journalists so acquired with the cognate experience recognized by the Nigerian Union of Journalists; or
- (b) The course was conducted at an institution so approved, or partly at one such institution and partly at another or others; or
- (c) He holds a qualification as approved; or
- (d) He holds a certificate of experience issued in pursuance of section 22 of this Decree.

(2) Subject as aforesaid, a person shall be entitled to be registered as a journalist if he satisfies the Council that immediately before the commencement of this Decree he has not less than five years experience as a journalist.

(3) An applicant for registration shall, in addition to evidence of qualifications, satisfy the council that:

- (a) He is of good character;
- (b) He has attained the age of 18 years.
- (c) He has not been convicted in Nigeria or elsewhere of an offence involving fraud or dishonesty;

- (d) He has been trained at an approved mass media institution.
- (e) He has a general professional orientation which covers the basic requirements of information art leading to a qualification not less than a diploma; and
- (f) Has good knowledge of politics and socio economic affairs of his society acquired from an approved institution.

**Section 22:**

**CERTIFICATE OF EXPERIENCE**

- (1) A person who after obtaining an approved qualification, satisfies the conditions specified in subsection (2) of this section shall be entitled to receive free of charge a certificate of experience in the prescribed form from the person in charge of the institution.
- (2) The conditions referred to in subsection (1) of this section are that
  - (a) he shall have served his time for employment. The prescribed period in Nigeria with a view to obtaining a certificate of experience; or
  - (b) he shall have acquired, during his employment practical experience under the personal supervision and guidance of one or more registered journalists for such periods as may be prescribed;
  - (c) the manner in which he carried out the duties of his employment and his conduct during the period of his employment shall have been satisfactory.
- (3) It shall be the duty of the employer, being a registered journalist supervising the training of the person employed with a view to obtaining a certificate of experience, to ensure that the person is afforded proper opportunities of acquiring the practical experience required for the purpose of paragraph (b) of the subsection (2) of this section.
- (4) Where after having served his time as referred to in paragraph (a) of subsection (2) of this section, a person is refused a certificate of experience, he shall be entitled-
  - (a) to receive from his employer the particulars in writing of the grounds of the refusal; and
  - (b) to appeal from the refusal to a committee of the Council in accordance with rules made by the Council in that behalf (including rules as to the time within which appeals are to be brought) and on any such appeal the committee of the Council shall have power to either dismiss the appeal or itself issue the certificate of experience in question or give such other direction on the matter as it considers just.



(5) The Minister may make for the issuance of certificate of experience in respect of employment and institutions outside Nigeria.

### **INTERPRETATION**

As contained in the Nigerian Press Council Law.

***Journalist***- means any person (not being less than 18 years of age) engaged in the collection, processing and dissemination of information for use in the Press and who has been accredited by the Nigerian Union of Journalists;

***Newspaper***- means any paper containing public news, intelligence or occurrence in any remarks, observations or comments printed therein for sale and published periodically, or in parts, or numbers.

***News Agencies***- means any agency engaged in the collection and dissemination of news, pictures and features;

***Press***- includes radio, television, wire services, newspapers, magazines and such other channels of communication involved in the collection and dissemination of information.

***Radio and Television***- includes electronic means of mass communication which share in the formation of public opinion.