

# CODE OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS FOR JOURNALISTS OF AZERBAIJAN<sup>1</sup>

## **PRINCIPLE 1: To serve the truth, accuracy and objectiveness**

1.1 The primary goal of journalism is dissemination of truth; and objectiveness is a main professional criteria.

1.2 Journalists shall study and convey the viewpoint held by the target of criticism in their articles. If this is not possible and if the target of criticism requires so, the journalist shall create due conditions for such persons to communicate their views. The principle of pluralism shall be upheld.

1.3 Opinions in articles shall be expressed in a way that readers could differentiate them from news and facts; and attribute such opinions to the journalist.

## **PRINCIPLE 2: Respectful approach towards sources of information**

2.1 The source must always be indicated while disseminating official information from organizations, parties, societies, unions and other interest groups. However, if the person who provides the information prefers to remain anonymous, journalists or media entities must adhere to his/her privacy conditions. The confidentiality of the source of information shall be protected.

2.2 The information provided by unofficial sources shall be checked for its authenticity and informative value before being disseminated. The content of the information shall not be distorted while being prepared for print. When quoting from another article or speech, journalists should note precise starting and ending points of the quotation. When printing photo-symbols (illustration, photo-editing) together with texts, it should be noted that such images do not have documentary importance. Titles of articles should correspond to their content.

2.3 Journalist should try to have his/her interview signed by interviewees or their authorized agents. If this is not possible, interviewees should be notified of the way in which the interview will be published and whether the questions asked by the journalist will be modified.

2.4. If there are no other methods available, journalists may use special equipment (hidden cameras, hidden microphones or other hidden tools) or methods (“fake” IDs and etc) as an exception for obtaining information that has public importance.

2.5. Journalists shall not resort to intimidation, application of force or threats in order to obtain information or images.

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<sup>1</sup> *The revised version of the Code of Professional Ethics from a gender equality perspective introducing the Principle 4 was developed within the Council of Europe Project “Gender equality and media freedom in Azerbaijan” and approved by the Azerbaijan Press Council on 1 November 2018*

### **PRINCIPLE 3: Protection of honour and dignity, inviolability of personal life**

3.1 Journalists shall not condemn people for their nationality, race, sex, language, profession, religion, and place of birth or residence and shall not highlight such data.

3.2 Journalists shall respect the honour, dignity, and inviolability of personal life of the person he/she meets with and writes about.

3.3 Journalists may not disseminate facts about citizens' personal lives without their consent, unless dissemination of such information does not violate the rights of the society, is lawful, does not contradict social interest and is of public unimportance.

3.4 Journalists and mass media entities must correct their errors wholly and as soon as possible, regardless of the person who identified the error. The correction should indicate whether the related article was erroneous in whole or in part.

3.5 When publishing personal letters, the author, the person to whom the letter is addressed to, or their heirs, should be asked for permission.

3.6 Names or images of victims who suffered from accidents or crime must not be disclosed without their consent. This is possible under special conditions and if the victim is a public figure. If the crime was committed by teenagers or children (persons below 18 years of age), journalists should refrain from disseminating the names or pictures of the criminals.

3.7. Journalists should respect the right to presumption of innocence of persons who are suspected of committing crimes and should introduce such persons not as criminals, but as persons who have been detained for being suspected of committing crimes.

3.8. If a mass media entity disseminated information on detention or indictment of a citizen as a suspect and if his/her innocence was later proven, the media entity must inform the public in this regard.

3.9. Journalists shall not take advantage of children's innocence and trust; shall respect their rights and demonstrate a special responsibility in communicating their views; and shall seek to avoid interviewing children without the consent of their parents or lawful guardians. Journalist shall not publish information or photographs about private life of a child unless there is an over-riding public interest. Journalist shall protect the identity of children involved in or affected by tragedy or criminal activity.

3.10. If a person is charged with committing of a crime, journalists shall not prepare reports which could undermine the objectiveness of the court in this issue and opinions from all involved parties should be reflected in such reports. If victims of a crime have not given their consent to be identified, journalists shall treat the identities of such individuals with sensitivity. This rule is especially important in cases

involving sexual assault. If witnesses have not consented to being identified and if their identification does not have any public importance, journalists shall treat their identity with sensitivity.

3.11 Journalists shall refrain from glorifying or unnecessarily sensational reporting about crime, violence, brutality and suicide. Journalists shall be careful not to be used as a means by those who promote, incite or use violence; instead, journalists shall report on their activities with due constraint and only if there is a clear public interest.

3.12. Journalists or editorials should not prepare reports that exaggerate terror acts; reports that serve the interests of terrorists; reports that create fear or those which promote or justify terror acts.

***PRINCIPLE 4: Protection of the principle of gender equality and non-discrimination***

*4.1. Journalists shall respect the principle of gender equality and non-discrimination, avoid language creating sexual discrimination or inciting sexist hatred, should not use sexist phrases; they should not emphasize sexual belonging of a person, if the content of news does not directly require it.*

*4.2. Journalists should not propagate gender stereotyping, they shall described free of gender stereotypes image of men and women in the media.*

*4.3. Journalists shall be sensitive to media coverage of gender-based violence cases; they should not promote gender-based violence and shall raise awareness on its negative effects in society.*

*4.4. Journalist should not be discriminated based on his/her sex in the media outlet, where he/she works or cooperates; equal rights and opportunities shall be provided for male and female journalists.*

***PRINCIPLE 5: Protection of journalists' own reputation and of the organization he/she works for***

5.1. Journalists shall not accept any personal, political or financial inducements that may impact their ability to provide the public with accurate information; shall not receive expensive gifts; and shall not induce others to serve them for free. Journalists shall not use his/her access to editorial documents and information as a means of obtaining personal gain, especially in respect to information about business performance and financial markets. Journalist shall avoid covering stories where he/she has a direct personal interest, or should at least declare such personal interests where it is relevant.

5.2. Journalists shall maintain a clear distinction between editorial decision-making and commercial policy of the media entity. Journalists shall refrain from engaging in activities that can undermine his own reputation or that of the media entity that he/she works for or acts that could weaken the confidence in its objectiveness, from membership to political organizations; and shall not be subject to political or commercial pressures and be independent.

5.3. Journalists shall maintain a clear distinction between editorial content and marketing, advertisements or sponsored materials. Journalists shall have the right to refuse assignments, if such assignments are against the laws and rules of professional conduct. If a journalist's opinions have been distorted during

the editorial process, the journalist has the right to decline from having the article published under his/her signature.

5.4. If an editorial secret is not related with violation of the legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan and this Code, journalists are obliged to protect such secrets.

5.5. Journalists may not offer the material that he/she has prepared to other parties without prior consent from the management of the media entity that he/she works for.

5.6. Plagiarism is an intolerable act. Any form of plagiarism under all circumstances is unacceptable. Journalists shall respect copyright and the terms of copyright agreements. Journalists shall always acknowledge the source of complete materials or short extracts from other media which may be used without express permission. Journalist shall only reproduce longer extracts or complete materials from other media with prior permission and with acknowledgement of the author and media.

5.7. Journalists must avoid the use of vulgar expressions, jargons and should try to contribute to enrich and protect the purity of the Azerbaijani language.

5.8. Journalists shall not pay sources for information, but where payment is considered necessary in order to obtain information that the public has a right to know, it shall be made clear in the relevant report that payments have been made.

5.9. Relationships between different media outlets and between media professionals should be characterised by mutual respect and fair competition in order to preserve the integrity of the media.

5.10. The public has the right to be informed about who owns and controls media outlets.

5.11. Journalists shall support media colleagues when they are unfairly attacked or criticised; however, professional solidarity should not be an excuse for suppressing or distorting information.

Infringement of the terms of this Code may only be justified where it can be demonstrated that the relevant publication serves the best interests of the public.

For the purposes of this Code, information ‘of public interest’ should not be confused with information which is ‘interesting to the public’.

**A** publication is in the public interest only if:

- It protects health, safety and security;
- It helps the prevention and disclosure of serious crimes and abuse of power;
- It prevents the public from the danger of being seriously misled.

*This document was adopted in the First Congress of Azerbaijani journalists on 15 March 2003*