



## EDITORIAL GUIDELINES

Fourth Edition

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## **PREFACE**

This is the Fourth Edition of the CBA's Editorial Guidelines – making it far and away the CBA's most sought after publication. It has been translated into a number of languages, to help countries outside the Commonwealth. And it has been used by many of our organisations as the basis or foundation of their own Guidelines.

This new edition has been updated with new material on Social Media and Citizen Journalism, and in particular, how such incoming material can best be handled by responsible broadcasters. This means allocating resources to checking and verification, but the effort is worth it in terms of accuracy and objectivity. With proper procedures, using material from e-mails, phone calls, texts, pictures and footage from mobile phones, blogs, Facebook and Twitter can greatly increase the impact of programming, and sometimes provide information or footage where there are no other sources.

Mary Raine is a highly experienced broadcasting journalist with an amazing knowledge of editorial issues and I commend these Guidelines to you.

**Elizabeth Smith**

Secretary-General, Commonwealth Broadcasting Association

## **FOREWORD**

UNESCO is pleased to again support the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association's initiative to publish an updated version of the Editorial Guidelines, which are designed to help broadcasters identify and adopt good practices that ensure sound coverage by the media which operate freely and fairly.

Since its first edition in 2004 the publication has contributed to improving the professional skills and practices of a large number of broadcasters.

For the majority of the world's population, particularly those belonging to disadvantaged groups, broadcasting remains the most widely accessible communication medium. It is therefore very important to set up and share internationally recognized professional standards thus fostering freedom of expression, "free flow of ideas by word and image", independent and pluralistic media and universal access to information and knowledge.

Most of the chapters of the previous editions are still relevant and have been maintained in this new updated edition as they relate to everlasting issues such as basic editorial principles, accuracy, impartiality, election coverage, gender and stereotyping, disaster coverage, war reporting etc. Furthermore, new sections covering citizen journalism and social networking sites as new tools to enhance journalism have been added.

I strongly encourage electronic media organisations and professionals to put these guidelines into practice.

**Abdul Waheed Khan**

UNESCO's Assistant Director General for Communication and Information

# 1. BASIC EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

Report and present news and current affairs honestly by disclosing all the essential facts.

Respect the right of listeners to hear a variety of views. Do not suppress relevant, available facts or distort by wrong or improper emphasis.

Try to present all sides of a question. Try to achieve balance. This may not always be achieved in a single programme or news bulletin but should be done within a reasonable time.

Reach editorial decisions on news merit. Fairness does not mean being unquestioning, or that every side of an issue should receive the same amount of time.

It is vital to uphold the principle of journalistic freedom. Protection of a journalists' source is an important part of this principle.

Take great care in the presentation of brutality, violence, atrocities and personal grief.

Respect a person's legitimate right to privacy and do not do intrude into private grief and distress, unless it is justified by overriding considerations of public interest.

Do not allow advertising, commercial, political or personal considerations to influence editorial decisions.

Do not take any editorial position in reporting and programming.

## 2. CREDIBILITY, BALANCE AND IMPARTIALITY

*Impartiality must be the core value for any public service broadcaster. It is the key to a broadcaster's credibility. Audiences must be able to trust what they hear on radio and see on television. Credibility depends not simply on accuracy and truthfulness in reporting but on journalists doing anything which could give rise to doubts about their impartiality. (Southern Africa Broadcasting Association Guidelines 2006)*

In an open society credibility is an essential attribute of a journalistic organisation. The credibility of the organisation and that of its journalists are inter-linked. Credibility is dependent not only on factors such as accuracy and truthfulness in reporting and presentation but upon avoidance by the journalists of associations or contacts which could reasonably give rise to perceptions of partiality. In taking on staff in its news and current affairs programming, the station must be aware of their published views, their personal involvement and their associations and backgrounds in order to avoid any perception of bias or susceptibility to undue influence in the execution of their professional responsibilities. In order to maintain their credibility and the credibility of the [broadcaster] on air personnel as well as those who edit produce or manage programmes must avoid publicly identifying themselves in any way with partisan statements or actions on controversial matters.

News programmes should offer viewers and listeners an intelligent and informed account of issues that enables them to form their own views. A reporter or specialist correspondent may express a professional journalistic judgement but not a personal opinion. That judgement must be recognized as perceptive and fair. Audiences should not be able to tell from a program a presenters' or correspondent's personal views on any controversial issue.

Journalists, like anyone else, will have opinions of their own. But they must not yield to bias or prejudice. For a journalist to be professional is not to be without opinions, but to be aware of those opinions and make allowances for them so that their reporting is and appears to be, judicious and fair. (CBC)

Information programmes must reflect established journalistic principles:

- Accuracy: the information is correct and is not in any way misleading or false. This demands careful and thorough research and disciplined use of language and production technique
- Integrity: the information is truthful, not distorted to justify a conclusion. Broadcasters must not show personal bias.
- Fairness: the information reports equitably all relevant facts and significant points of view. It deals fairly and ethically with persons, institutions, issues and events.



### 3. ACHIEVING IMPARTIALITY IN NEWS

To achieve balance and fairness the widest possible range of views must be expressed – programming cannot be limited to what the largest audience wants to know. It must include what the public is entitled to know and needs to know. The challenging of accepted orthodoxies should be reported – but the established views must also be clearly put.

Programmes must have breadth and depth. Reporting must not be too simplistic so that the listeners are able to have an adequate understanding of issues.

A broadcaster should reflect society around it. Balance must be maintained between the national, regional and local needs. Undue weight should not be given to points of view of one region of the country.

Programmes dealing with matters of public interest on which differing views are held must ensure they cover all sides of the argument. In reporting matters of political or industrial controversy, the main differing views should be given. If a variety of viewpoints cannot be projected in the same bulletin or programme, the balance should be achieved within a reasonable period of time.

When an appropriate representative of one side of the story cannot be reached, the journalist or producer should make every effort to find someone who can represent that point of view. And if unable to do so, they should say so. To take one example, even though Zimbabwe ministers refused to give interviews to journalists not working for the state-run media, journalists were still able to present the government's view by using anonymous officials or quoting from the state-run newspaper which acts as its mouthpiece. More recently in June 2009, the Iranian authorities imposed a major clampdown after violent protests over the disputed elections. Foreign news media were banned from the country and officials were forbidden to talk to them. Nevertheless the BBC broadcasts to Iran took great care to report all sides. "The authorities might not talk to us, but that does not mean we should not reflect their opinions. They speak to Iranian TV and radio and Iranian news agencies, so we monitor those carefully and pick up statements and interviews from there"

In aiming to record all points of view, programmes will sometimes need to report on or interview people whose views may well cause offence to many listeners or viewers. Editors must be convinced that there is a material public interest which outweighs the offence which will be caused.

Broadcasters should:

- Give all sides to a question. Ensure all viewpoints are presented.
- Make sure opposing views are not misrepresented.
- Programmes may achieve impartiality over a series or over a number of programmes within a series making this clear to audiences.
- Consider making follow up discussions or other programme formats such as phone-ins as alternative methods of achieving impartiality.

## 4. ACCURACY

*“Accuracy is not a virtue. It is a necessity.”*

Accuracy can be difficult to achieve. It is important to distinguish between first hand and second hand sources. Wherever possible we should gather information first hand by being there ourselves, or where that is not possible by talking to those who were.

Research for all programmes must be thorough. Simple matters like dates and titles may well need to be checked and re-checked.

Look for confirmation from more than one source. Look for a report on more than one news agency. Agencies vary in reliability. Be aware that one local correspondent can be stringer for all the main news agencies. On a general rule of thumb: The French news agency Agence France Presse is strong in Francophone countries which were once French colonies. Likewise the Spanish news Agency EFE is strong in the Spanish-speaking countries of Central and South America and Spain and Portugal.

Be careful in the use of newspaper cuttings. They can rapidly get out of date – or simply contain information which is wrong. An error can easily be repeated.

A reporter should try to make contemporaneous notes of an event, he/she is covering.

Do not exaggerate. Avoid value judgements.

If there is a gap between recording a programme and putting it on air, check to make sure it has not got out of date or been overtaken by events – such as the death of a contributor, the charging of an offender. Likewise if a programme is being repeated it may need to be amended.

### 4.1 Personal View Programmes

Some broadcasters, such as Britain’s BBC, have a long tradition of open access to the airwaves for a wide range of individuals to offer a personal view or advance a contentious argument.

- If it is a personal view-type programme, this should be signalled clearly in advance.
- The editor must make sure any such programme does not seriously misrepresent opposing viewpoints.

Regular presenters or reporters normally associated with news or public policy related programmes should not present personal view programmes on controversial matters.

## 5. INTERVIEWS

Interviews are a vital tool of journalism and programme making.

- An interview should have a clear purpose. Do not invite people to appear simply because they are major players in a news story unless you have a clear idea of what you want to find out from them.
- Interviews should be well – informed and well prepared.
- Interviews may be searching, sharp, sceptical – but not partial, discourteous or showing an attachment to one side of an argument. Interviewees should be given a fair chance to set out their full response to a question.
- If an interviewee refuses to give an interview unless questions are rigidly agreed in advance, or unless certain subjects are avoided, it may be worth not proceeding with the interview.
- Some interviews are not meant to be challenging, but to inform, explain or entertain. People interviewed as eye witnesses or as experts may need to be encouraged, rather than challenged.

### 5.1 Even-Handedness in Interviews

Anyone expressing contentious views should be rigorously challenged. If the interview becomes charged, the emotion should come from the person interviewed, not the interviewer. Politicians have a known standpoint, but it should not be assumed that academics and journalists from other organisations are impartial. It should be made clear to the audience if they are associated with a particular standpoint.

### 5.2 Fair Dealing with Interviewees

It is important interviewees know *why* they are being invited for interview, what subjects they are going to be asked about, the context of the programme and the sort of part they will play in it. Some interviewees ask in advance what the particular line of questioning may be. This request is not unreasonable, but it should be pointed out that only a broad outline can be given because the interview itself will depend on what the interviewee says. It is not usually right to submit details of actual questions in advance – nor to give any undertaking about the precise form of questions.

Interviewees will sometimes try to change the terms on which an interview was suggested – perhaps to exclude a particular line of questioning. They may try to filibuster or use the interview as a platform for their views and evade answering the question. Do not interrupt too much but evasions should be exposed coolly and politely if necessary by repeating the questions and explaining to the interviewee and the audience why the previous answer has not dealt with the question.

Occasionally, a person who has been interviewed seeks to withdraw permission for the interview to be broadcast. If the producer nonetheless believes that the interview should be presented in the public interest – a decision a producer is entitled to take – the matter should be referred upward to senior management. While there may be occasional exceptions in special circumstances, only those with editorial responsibility should view or hear the programme before broadcast. While

there must be impartiality and fairness in presentation, there must not be external interference in the preparation of programmes. Interviewees cannot be allowed to give directions on how an interview should be edited or broadcast.

### **5.3 Political Interviews**

When a politician is asked, but refuses or is unable to appear this should not normally act as a veto on the appearance of other politicians or other outside speakers holding different views. But there may be occasions when the refusal of a particular key player to take part invalidates the idea behind the programme proposal.

Anyone has a right to refuse to appear in a programme. It is not always necessary to mention a refusal on air. However, where the audience might reasonably expect to hear counter-arguments or where an individual, viewpoint or party is not represented, it may be appropriate to explain that the person concerned “was invited to appear on the programme but declined”.

Politicians and other contributors sometimes try to place conditions on programs before agreeing to take part. Any arrangement reached must not prevent the program asking questions that audiences would reasonably expect to hear asked.

Politicians may have an expertise outside the political field. Care must be taken to ensure that frequent use of a particular person in public life – made on valid editorial grounds – do not give any politicians undue advantage over their opponents.

### **5.4 Doorstepping**

Journalists regularly catch people in the news as they enter and leave buildings and put questions to them even though there has been no prior arrangement for an interview. This is a legitimate part of news gathering known as door-stepping. People in the news must expect to be questioned and recorded by journalists – even if the questions are sometimes unwelcome.

### **5.5 Media Scrums**

When a person suddenly features large in the news, media organisations will send reporters to that person’s private home to try to secure pictures or interviews. The result is frequently a large number of journalists gathered in the streets outside. It is essential that it does not become intimidating or intrusive. People must not be harassed unfairly with repeated phone calls, knocks on the door, or by obstructing them as they come and go. Ask yourself:

- Is the subject of the story and private citizen or public figure?
- Is he/she a villain, victim or interested party?
- Has that person expressed a wish not to give interviews and to be left in peace?

## **5.6 Payments to MPs**

These are not normally made. Their appearances on radio and TV to express political views are part of political life and payment is not appropriate. This applies when they answer questions on matters like public policy, international affairs, party politics or constituency issues.

If their contribution is outside the normal course of their duties, politicians may be paid a fee. If they are called in very late or early in the day, or at weekends, they would be paid a disturbance fee.

Politicians who hold government office or executive office in any elected assembly or have party front bench responsibilities do not qualify for a fee.

## **5.7 Protection of Sources**

Protecting sources is a key principle of journalism – for which some journalists have even gone to jail. Information which the public should know is sometimes only available through a confidential source. Off-the-record conversations take place frequently between journalists and public figures. If the confidentiality of sources is not respected as a matter of principle, this would inhibit the free flow of information, which is essential to the vitality of a democratic society.

Information from someone who wishes to remain anonymous (or be on a non-attributable basis) may be used if the source is known to the journalist and has a record of reliability. However to avoid the possibility of being manipulated to broadcast inaccurate or biased information, the journalist must seek corroboration from other sources.

Promises of confidentiality given to a source or contributor must be honoured. Otherwise the broadcasters' journalism will suffer if people who have provided information on condition they remain anonymous are subsequently identified.

Anyone who comes across information which could prevent a terrorist act or lead to the arrest of a terrorist wanted for violence is obliged to inform the authorities.

## **5.8 Anonymity**

Accuracy and integrity in journalism require that the identity and credentials of an interviewee be evident to the audience. If an interviewee or participant in a programme is concealed or has their voice distorted, this is tantamount to depriving the audience of pertinent information enabling the viewer or listener to make a judgment on such comments. The authority of the programme can be undermined by the use of anonymous contributors whose status the audience cannot judge. But there are times when anonymity is appropriate:

- For reasons of safety. Someone – e.g. in a totalitarian state – whose personal safety may be jeopardised by identification.
- If the subject is a delicate one e.g. health.

- . For legal reasons.

Where anonymity is necessary, producers must make sure it is effective. Both picture and voice may need to be disguised.

## **6. OTHER REPORTING ISSUES**

*“reports are coming in...”*

Rolling news channels (i.e. 24 Hour News networks) in particular thrive on breaking news. They will interrupt their schedules to say “we are getting reports of...”

Frequently a broadcaster would be advised to wait till the situation is clearer and more facts emerge and they have been able to make some checks of their own. Accuracy is better than speed. Above all care must be taken not to cause unnecessary distress or alarm.

With television, thought should be given to establishing some delay mechanism when broadcasting live coverage of sensitive events, where there could be a large number of casualties (for example, a terrorist siege of a school as happened in Russia in September 2004 when more than 330 people, including many children, died). This would prevent the relaying of distressing images best omitted.

### **6.1 Disappearing Stories**

Occasionally an event gets reported and then it simply disappears from the news. For example a crash was reported at Nairobi airport in 2005. After the initial report, nothing more was said. In fact, there had not been a crash, but a rescue exercise staged by the Kenyan authorities. It was so realistic that the local media reported that a crash had taken place. If a station reports something which turns out not to have occurred, or was an incorrect report, it should say so at once and put out a correction.

### **6.2 Using Archive Material**

Library or archive material used to illustrate something in the news must be clearly labelled. Otherwise the audience could be misled.

## 7. ELECTION COVERAGE

*“We believe in the liberty of the individual under the law, in equal rights for all citizens regardless of gender, race, colour, creed or political belief and in the individual’s inalienable right to participate by means of free and democratic processes in framing the society in which he or she lives”.* (One of the Commonwealth principles agreed in 1971 and re-affirmed in the Harare Declaration twenty years later)

All broadcast outlets, large or small, rich or poor, have a public service duty to contribute to free and fair elections in any way they can. Radio and TV create and foster the democratic environment by telling the truth, by investigating the hidden, by explaining the background, by presenting the facts so that a well informed electorate can make reasoned choices. (Commonwealth Election Broadcasting Guidelines)

The media has a very important role in a democracy. It is up to journalists, as well as voters, to find out what different parties stand for and to inform citizens about their policies and all the big issues. (Elections New Zealand, 2008)

The real test of a broadcaster’s commitment to impartiality is in the way it reports elections and election campaigns. It is during elections in particular that a station’s commitment to objectivity, accuracy, fairness, impartiality and balance is scrutinised closely and evaluated assiduously.

The aim of any election coverage is to ensure that the electorate is empowered to make an informed choice. Voters are entitled to accurate, fair, impartial and balanced information about the election procedures and the positions of political parties/independents and/or candidates on issues. (Southern African Broadcasting Association Editorial Guidelines 2006, Article 1)

A public service broadcaster will, during an election campaign, make periods of programme time available to the officially recognised political parties so that they can explain their policies directly to the electorate whose support they are seeking.

All parties will seek to influence editorial decisions at election time. Programme makers must not let themselves be intimidated by the politicians. Complaints will be made throughout. Politicians that any complaints they make will be dealt with at a higher level.

Election broadcasts are subject to the same broadcasting and journalistic rules as other programmes. That is to say they must reflect established journalistic principles of accuracy, integrity and objectivity. Programmes should offer viewers and listeners an intelligent and informed account of issues so that they can form their own views.

Audiences must be able to trust what they hear on radio and see on television. Journalists must avoid doing or saying anything which could reasonably make viewers and listeners doubt their impartiality.

They must avoid publicly identifying themselves in any way with partisan statements or actions on controversial matters.

They must not broadcast views which could incite violence or hatred based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion or political conviction.



A reporter or specialist correspondent may express a professional journalistic judgement but not a personal opinion. Audiences should not be able to tell from a programme a presenter's or correspondent's personal views on any controversial issue.

During an election campaign, the broadcasters have an overriding duty to the electorate to cover the issues and arguments fairly. Editors must ensure that the main viewpoints and arguments are heard during the course of the campaign and that every part of the news and topical programming plays its part in helping audiences understand the issues. And in their reporting, journalists must talk to a broad range of voters. They must not ignore women or minority groups.

The parties contesting an election will be given programme time so that they can explain their policies directly to the electorate whose support they are seeking. All parties will seek to influence editorial decisions at election time. Programme makers must not let themselves be intimidated by the politicians. Complaints will be made throughout the campaign. Politicians complaining to reporters or producers should be told that any complaints they make will be dealt with at a higher level.

Several important principles apply at election time:

- The public is entitled to hear the principal points of view of the various parties on all questions of importance.
- Broadcasters should provide credible, balanced and impartial accounts of issues so voters can make up their minds.
- Broadcasting must not fall under the control of individuals or organised pressure groups who are influential either because of their wealth, family connexions or their special position.
- A news item should be chosen for its importance – not because some outside source has ordered it to be included. News decisions have to be driven by the news judgement of the broadcasting journalists who must ensure that they provide a thorough examination of the views, policies and campaigns of all the main political parties.
- Voters must be given opportunities to express their opinions and views freely.
- In order that they can do so, broadcasters must provide opportunities for the public to take part in political debates on election issues. Those taking part in such broadcasts must be as representative as possible of different views and sectors of society.

## 7.1 Preparing for an Election

Elections do not usually come out of the blue. In many countries Parliaments have fixed terms so the broadcasters know when an election is due. But even if, because of important unexpected political developments, an election is called suddenly, the broadcaster must not be caught unawares. They must ensure proper planning and budgeting for all election coverage.

There are a number of essential steps which a broadcaster should take in preparing for an election:

- Well before an election is due, before an election is due, set up a special elections unit, staffed by the station's most talented journalists, to draw up plans for the campaign. It should meet regularly, weekly to begin with, but more frequently as the campaign period approaches. It may be a one-person unit on a very small station, but whatever the size, it will

ensure that appropriate planning takes place.

- Train this election team during this pre-election period. Ensure that an experienced senior journalist leads the team. As the elections approach, the team will inevitably expand.
- Draw up guidelines for coverage which include achieving balance, monitoring that balance, resisting pressure to act undemocratically, and responding to complaints from the parties which will inevitably arrive.
- Secure acceptance for these guidelines by all concerned as the agreed basis for election broadcasting. This includes the Ministry of Information, the major political parties and the official body responsible for running the election. If there are disagreements, it is better to sort these out beforehand when things are quiet rather than in the heat of an election.
- Publish these guidelines. This can be as a pamphlet, in newspapers or magazines, on a website on the Internet and of course on air. The wider the publicity given, the easier it will be to convince the nation of the honourable role you are playing in the democratic process.
- Establish an overall election programme plan which covers what programmes will be produced; their format, how the issues will be explained, what rules will apply to programmes where rival candidates are taking part. Communicate this plan to the electoral body, to the politicians and to the audience. Wherever possible get a consensus.
- Introduce a comprehensive system for monitoring the election output. Be able to judge at every point in the campaign the balance of the programmes up to that point and relate that balance to the output which will follow. It will often be necessary to adjust the output to maintain fairness. Editors need to assess each bulletin and where normal journalistic judgement creates an unavoidable temporary imbalance; they must rectify it as soon as possible over succeeding output.
- Some system must be set up to log coverage given to each party. A large wall-chart with basic details of every election story broadcast entered after each bulletin/news program is one effective way of doing this.
- Educate the audience. Responsibility for voter education rests largely with the broadcasters. The media must get across to the public an understanding that their votes matter, politics matters, politics are about their lives, their health, their education, their culture, their security, their future. Creating a democratic environment is not necessarily a heavy intellectual exercise.
- Have a register of good speakers. Some politicians are boring and poor communicators. In every country many of the leading politicians of all parties are poor broadcasters. But in many countries politicians are groomed for TV and radio. Where possible, the politicians who are the best communicators should be invited to take part in programs.

## 7.2 Reporting a Campaign

*Voters need information on the options in order to decide how to vote, including what existing MPs have done and each party's stance on a range of issues. Alongside campaigning by parties and candidates, the news media plays a vital role by providing much of the information that voters use when deciding how to vote. (Elections New Zealand 2008)*

The same journalistic standards apply as much to election programmes as elsewhere.

### **7.3 How to Achieve Balance**

To help ensure that news programmes achieve an appropriate balance in their coverage, note carefully who is used and how much time they or that party has had on air. Senior broadcasting staff must be able to demonstrate that the main parties or candidates contesting the election were given approximate equivalent opportunities to take part in programmes (i.e. to be heard and questioned) and that minor parties or candidates have not been treated unreasonably or unfairly in the allocation of airtime, given their size or the support they command.

Here is the advice several leading broadcasters have given their journalists on steps that can be taken to ensure fair election coverage:

- Equitable treatment is unlikely to be achieved in a single programme but can be achieved in a series of programmes. Audiences should be told the opposing viewpoint(s) will be aired in the next programme in the series and they should be told when it will be broadcast.
- Single programmes should avoid individual editions getting badly out of balance. There may be days when inevitably one party dominates the news agenda (e.g. when it launches its manifesto) but in that case care must be taken to ensure that coverage of similar prominence is given to the other manifesto launches on the relevant days.
- Daily news magazine programmes must maintain fair balance over the course of each week of the campaign. Each programme should be careful to ensure it does not get out of balance.
- Each strand (e.g. a late afternoon show on radio as people are going home after work) is responsible for reaching its own targets within the week and cannot rely on any other outlets at different times of day (e.g. a breakfast show) to do so for it.
- Every edition of the multi-item programmes which cover the campaign should refer in at least one item to each of the main parties.
- Weekly programmes, or running series within daily sequence programmes, which focus on one party or another should tail both forwards and backwards so that it clear to the audience that balance is built in over time.

### **7.4 Fair Coverage**

Broadcasters should ensure they avoid giving the impression of one sidedness or favouring one particular party. They must act and be seen to act in a fair and independent manner. Any journalists who are active in political campaigning or standing for Parliament should be banned from broadcasting or taking part in editorial decision-making during the election period. A station should have a rule that its journalists – newsroom bulletin writers and reporters, especially those who appear on television – are forbidden to express their own political views. While on duty they must not wear or exhibit symbols or colours associated with any political party or contestants during the election period. Otherwise this destroys their credibility and that of their station. They should exercise great caution before accepting lifts to rallies or other such assistance from any party. Gifts should not be accepted.

News and comment must be kept separate. In some countries journalists are identified with one or other political party. This completely destroys their credibility and that of their station.

Does *fair* mean *equal*? Here is how South Africa's SABC answers this dilemma:

- The SABC will treat all parties and all viewpoints equitably. But this does not mean we will distort our news values and processes by giving the same weight to small one-person parties as we do to serious contenders for a place in national or provincial government. The electorate is entitled to more comprehensive coverage of serious contenders for a place in government.
- Equitable treatment is achieved over time. It is unlikely to be achieved in a single programme. This also means that not all parties have the right to appear on every programme.
- We will be consistent in our treatment of contesting parties and conflicting views.
- We will not only rely on parties to bring information to us, but will actively seek out information. Failure to do so would skew our coverage in favour of those parties with more resources.

In a general election campaign there is a risk of top politicians, such as the President or Prime Minister trying to manipulate events for political advantage. They try to turn routine ministerial engagements into extra electioneering broadcast opportunities. Journalists should be very sceptical, asking themselves whether the particular appearance of a minister is strictly on government business or part of their election campaign.

This is a major problem in many countries which grossly distorts the balance of election coverage on both radio and television. All candidates, up to the highest level, must be told well before the election that the media will not aid the making of political capital out of day-to-day official events. Politicians who try to exploit their official engagements will find the event reported but not any blatant electioneering statements.

In Australia, for example, if the Prime Minister requests time to address the nation on a matter of national interest – he has to submit a request to the national broadcaster, ABC. If the ABC grants the request, it will reserve the right to offer the leader of the Opposition the right of reply if the broadcaster considered the Prime Minister's request is of a party political nature.

In many countries it is the Ministry of Information's news agency which gathers news from around the country and feeds it, often highly selectively, to the radio and television newsrooms. Stations are pressured into putting out this material unedited, unchecked and unchallenged. Just because a story arrives via a government news agency does not mean it does not need checking. If a station's journalists know from other reliable sources that a report put out by the Ministry of Information is untrue, it should inform its viewers and listeners and put out a correct report, using a formula such as "X denies a claim by the Ministry of Information that... X says..."

Likewise "news" coming from a presidential press office should be treated in similar fashion and not be broadcast prominently in a bulletin, with not a word altered or dropped. It is for the news editor to judge an item's news value and accuracy.

Political parties often try to demand that a particular journalist covers (or should be barred from covering) their campaign meetings or rallies. They must be told that this is not allowed. The editor must be free to decide which reporter to assign to a particular story.

## 7.5 Party Election Broadcasts

The parties are normally given time slots (free in some countries) where they can put out programmes setting out their policies. The content of these party election broadcasts is primarily a matter for the party making the broadcast and is therefore not required – or expected – to be impartial. The broadcaster remains responsible for the broadcast as publisher and requires the parties to observe proper standards of legality, taste and accuracy. It must show impartiality in the allocation of such broadcasts.

How much airtime a party can have, and how long each broadcast, is likely to be laid down by an independent regulatory body. At every election, the parties fighting the campaign should be issued with a detailed guide which outlines the allocation of free time on radio and television, the conditions for broadcasting, the technical standards to be observed.

- As a general guide the government and opposition parties are allocated equal time on air for their broadcasts. If parties are in coalition, either as government or as the official opposition, they will be given an equal allocation of time. It will be up to the parties which are in coalition to divide the time between them as they see fit.
- In New Zealand factors taken into consideration by the country's Election Commission in deciding how much time to allocate for party election broadcasts are the number of people who voted for that party at the previous election; the number of Members of Parliament a party had in the last Parliament, any relationships that exist between that party and any other and any other indications of public support such as the party membership total.
- Significant minor or regional parties must also receive coverage during the campaign. The amount of time they will be allocated for election broadcasts will be less than the main government and opposition parties but will be proportionate. In some countries, e.g. Canada and India, it will be based on their representation in the outgoing parliament and poll performance in the last general and state assembly elections.
- The broadcaster will maintain the same ratio for the allocation of broadcasts among the parties in each of the country's official languages where appropriate.

Each party election broadcast must be clearly identified as such before it begins (e.g. “now follows a broadcast by the ... party”) and after it has ended (“That was a broadcast by the ... party”). Audiences must be in no doubt what they are watching or hearing.

News staff must familiarize themselves fully with the law on election broadcasting – regulating matters like party election broadcasts, time to be made available to the various political parties, the duration and scheduling of party election broadcasts and political advertising during election periods.

The question of editorial control over the party election broadcasts must be spelled out clearly. In countries such as Australia, Britain, Canada, and New Zealand, the parties make their election broadcasts themselves at their own expense and are responsible for their content. But they have to abide by ground rules laid down, such as observing the law – for example on libel and incitement to racial hatred and violence – and observe the broadcasters' own guidelines on taste and decency.

They must ensure that their party broadcasts are not used as a vehicle for personal attack as distinguished from criticism of a party and its policies. The broadcaster should have the right to take out any material submitted for broadcast if, in the opinion of the broadcaster, it is of a defamatory nature, containing unacceptable abuse of political opponents.

It may be necessary for the broadcaster to offer production facilities, otherwise the technical quality of the broadcasts may be well below standard.

## **7.6 The Right to Reply**

A broadcaster will usually afford political parties and candidates the right of reply where a report aired on that station contains inaccurate information, or unfair criticism based on a distortion of facts. A station will usually have rules on this – say, giving the opportunity to reply within 24 hours in a programme of similar weight and audience.

Mistakes on the part of the broadcaster must be corrected as soon as possible – within the same time slot if possible.

There should be a distinction between demands for the right to reply to mild or rhetorical criticism which is a proper part of the cut and thrust of lively political exchange and allegations of seriously inaccurate information which could affect the way people vote.

## **7.7 Complaints Procedures**

During election periods the need for quick resolution of complaints is very important. In New Zealand, for example, new procedures were drawn up by the Broadcasting Standards Authority for handling any complaints lodged against the media during the 2008 campaign. Complaints came to the Authority, not to the broadcasters. A fast track system was established to determine any “urgent complaint” within three days of receiving it. Elections can also be a time of high tension – and violence. Inaccuracies or inflammatory reporting may create extra tensions between different political forces or between communities.

## **7.8 Opinion Polls**

Public opinion polls where members of the public are asked how they intend to vote should not be ignored during an election campaign, but they must be treated with great care. A party may try to swing undecided voters by publishing so-called opinion polls that appear to put it in a strong position thus creating a bandwagon effect.

In reporting the findings of voter intention polls, say who carried out the poll, who commissioned it, how it was conducted (e.g. face-to-face interview, by telephone or via the Internet) when was it carried out, over how many days? What is the margin or error? Had anything happened which might have a significant effect on public opinion since the poll was conducted?

Poll results should not be the lead item in a news bulletin or programme. They are often interesting because they show a trend in voter intention. Polls which defy the general trend without convincing explanation should be treated with scepticism and caution.

## 7.9 Polling Day

Strict rules usually apply on polling day. Campaigning stops (often at midnight the day before). The broadcasters must ensure that they do not put out anything which could be seen as influencing the poll. Obviously there needs to be some reporting but it has to be purely factual – for example, the size of the turnout (“voters turned out in large numbers as soon as the polls opened... long queues formed out the polling stations... turnout was low in some areas as voters heeded an appeal by opposition parties to boycott the poll”). The weather (raining or not). Appearances by leading politicians at the polls, e.g. the Prime Minister voted in his home town/own constituency. How long until the polls close etc. When will the counting of votes begin? How long this is expected to last. When it comes to television, the cameras can film at a polling station (provided election official permit it) but no footage or photographs can be taken of voters filling out their ballot papers, showing how a person voted.

## 7.10 Exit Polls

These are polls carried out on voting day when people are asked how they voted as they are leaving the polling station. They may predict the result accurately – but beware they can sometimes be wrong! Careful language must be used in reporting poll predictions. “It looks as if X or Y will be the biggest party with between A or B number of seats”.

## 7.11 Reporting Referenda

The circumstances under which referenda are held vary considerably, but broadcasters must ensure during the campaign that their coverage is:

- Comprehensive. Give audiences as much information as possible, providing them with the full range of significant views.
- Authoritative. The question being put to the voters is fully explained and the arguments for and against are fully tested. The audience should receive a clear picture of the weight of opinion on either side of the arguments.
- Impartial. Journalists covering the campaign must not express a view for or against the issue being put before the public. Likewise, the tone of the reporting must never give the impression then broadcaster is taking sides.
- Fairness. In most referenda, journalists must be aware that it is the government which frames the questions and campaigns for a “Yes” vote. News coverage should reflect that. The views of all political parties (and dissenting groups within them) must be accurately reflected.

Reporting the debate is crucial – but not the only way to achieve fairness. Analysis of the practical consequences of a “Yes” or a “No” vote may be a more effective way of informing the audience about the choice before them.

In the formal debate programmes, the broadcaster should ensure that not only are the speakers on the panel a good balance of opposing views, but that the audience represent a fair cross-section of views as well.

The aim of any election coverage is to ensure that the electorate is able to make an informed choice. Voters are entitled to accurate, fair, impartial and balanced information about the election procedures and the positions of political parties/independents and/or candidates on issues.

The “Don’t Knows” and those still making up their minds how to vote should also be reflected in any coverage. The broadcaster should seek out ways of giving a voice to alternative views not expressed by those campaigning for either “Yes” or “No”.



## 8. BUSINESS PROGRAMMES

Financial and business news are increasingly receiving greater coverage in news programmes. Currency movements, company deals, takeovers, collapses and corporate scandals are now reported in great detail.

Economics and financial correspondents find themselves bombarded with figures and statistics every day ranging from production figures in one particular industry, international reserve holdings, and changes in government accounting procedures. Apart from obvious news, such as details of the budget and taxation changes, a financial correspondent will use his/her judgement which statistics are worth reporting and how to interpret data. It is all very well to report that a company has achieved record profits (or incurred massive losses), that a country's imports are up (or down). The viewer will want to know why and what is the significance and the likely repercussions.

It is essential that those specialising in financial news are seen to be impartial. Here is the advice of the BBC Economics Correspondent, on the approach to business reporting:

- They should not be partisan on an issue that divides the public (it is one thing to criticise the national football team, another to criticise economics policy).
- In their analysis they should give due weight to the body of expert opinion on the subject, remembering that in selecting an outside expert to comment, that expert is seen as impartial.
- It should be clear in any report that a correspondent is giving a fact, an impression, an obvious interpretation or a personal hypothesis. Viewers and listeners should not draw conclusions from a correspondent's report – that, for example, it is a good idea to buy/sell a particular share.

### 8.1 Products and Services in Programmes put out by a Public Broadcaster

References within programmes to particular commercial products or services should be included only where they can be justified editorially. No undue prominence should be given to any branded product or service. There must be no element of "plugging" The broadcaster must not give the impression that it is promoting or endorsing products, organisations or services. It should never include a service in sound or vision in return for cash.

It is perfectly proper to mention a brand name if a particular product is the reason for a company's success (or failure). It would help the audience understand better.

In factual programming the usual justification for mention of a brand or product is where a story of general interest or importance to audiences would be meaningless or significantly less informative without reference to it. In non-factual programmes such as drama or light entertainment, references (including visual references) to specific products or commercial organisations will usually be appropriate only to add authenticity. In comedy, such references may be appropriate, but programme makers should be aware of the dangers of being thought to plug a particular product, as well as the risk of inadvertent defamation.

A public service broadcaster should:

- . Avoid giving undue prominence to particular products or services.
- . Tell firms they cannot refer to the station's use of a product in any advertising or promotions.
- . Ensure references to trade names, brand names and slogans are editorially justified.
- . Do not linger on brand names or company logos in filmed reports unless there are strong journalistic reasons for doing so.
- . Do not accept free or reduced cost products in return for mention on air.
- . Be on guard against attempts by commercial companies to try to place stories in a station's output or secure a favourable mention for themselves.
- . Pay for your own travel, and accommodation and most other facilities unless there is no other way of covering a story – e.g. a major event such as an inaugural flight of a new aircraft, voyage or military operation.

## **9. CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

A broadcaster's reputation for impartiality and objectivity is crucial. The public must be able to trust the integrity of programmes and services. The integrity of any organisation ultimately is shaped by the individual integrity of each of its employees in their work and outside. Audiences need to be confident that the broadcaster's impartiality is not undermined by the outside activities of programme makers or presenter. The broadcaster must be satisfied that everyone involved in editorial decisions and programme making is free from inappropriate outside commitments. They must also consider whether the position of families and close personal contacts presents a likely conflict of interest.

### **9.1 Presenters and Reporters**

Those known to the public primarily as presenters and correspondents must be seen to be impartial. They should have no outside interests or commitments which could damage the broadcaster's reputation for fairness impartiality and integrity. Nothing they do, such as writing, speech making, giving interviews should lead to any doubt about their objectivity on air. If presenters and correspondents express personal views off-air on controversial issues, then their on-air role may be seriously compromised. It is important that in outside activities such as writing, speaking giving interviews they do not:

- State how they vote or express support for any political party.
- Express views for or against any policy which is a matter of current political debate.
- Advocate any particular position on a matter of current controversy.
- Call for change in public policy.

### **9.2 Commercial, Business and Financial Interests**

It is essential that a station's integrity is not undermined by the commercial, business or financial interests of any programme makers, journalists or presenters. There must never be any suggestion that commercial or financial interests have influenced coverage of the subject matter of programmes or the choice of items.

Programme producers, journalists and presenters must declare if they have interests which could be perceived as a conflict of interest.

- Any directorships or consultancy work for outside organisations, especially media ones.
- Any significant shareholdings, loans (except mortgages) or financial interest which could constitute a conflict of interest.
- Any shareholdings, securities in media-related companies. Very senior officials might be requested to sever any financial interest in other broadcasting or related organisations.

### **9.3 Personal Benefits, Gifts**

Anyone working on a financial story must on no account use information they have come across in the course of covering a financial or business story to trade ahead of the markets. This is not only unethical.

Individuals must not accept personal gifts or benefits for themselves or members of their family from organisations or people with whom they might have dealings in their journalistic work. These include: gifts, goods, discounts, services, cash, loans gratuities or entertainment outside the normal scope of business hospitality. Receiving such benefits could lead to a conflict of interest.

### **9.4 On-Air Talent and Commercial Advertising**

Increasingly advertisers and companies want to employ presenters to endorse their products. Presenters should observe certain generally-agreed principles.

- No advertising campaign in which they appear should give the public reason to doubt their station's objectivity.
- The product must not be shown featured, reviewed or discussed in the programmes they present.
- No presenter shall replicate his/her on air role to endorse a product or service in advertising or Internet advertising.
- Stricter rules are likely to apply to long-established presenters than someone doing a few programmes or a one-off series.
- Disc jockeys should not use their appearances on radio or television to promote their concerts or themselves as musicians.

### **9.5 News and Current Affairs Presenters, Consumer Programme Presenters**

News presenters and correspondents should not take part in any promotions, endorsements or advertisements for outside companies. The same applies to presenters of consumer programmes because there is no product or service they can be certain they will not find one day arising in a news context. It is the duty of presenters and correspondents, producers and freelance staff to declare any personal interest which may affect their work.

### **9.6 Political Activities**

Some broadcasting staff may wish to become involved in political activities. In certain circumstances there can be no objections. The main considerations are:

- The level of political involvement involved (if publicly identified as a candidate or prospective candidate, holding office in a political party, speaking in public for that party on matters of political controversy, or writing about it in books, articles, letters to the press; promoting a partisan view on an issue). This may be inconsistent with their work for a public service

broadcaster.

- The nature and level of the individual's job in the broadcasting organisation.
- The extent of involvement in editorial decision making. stricter rules apply to news and current affairs staff than to others.

## **9.7 Standing in a General Election**

If a member of staff has been selected to stand for election the rule in the BBC, for example, is that that person may not work in any programme area which could be linked to political issues. Once an election is called, the member of staff is granted 6 weeks unpaid leave. This is to avoid any suggestion that the BBC is subsidising the individual's election campaign.

## 10. PHONE INS

Using the telephone can enhance programmes by allowing the public to give their own point of view or to interact directly with programmes. Phone-in programmes are an accepted and important means of broadcasting individual points of view and of allowing the listeners and viewers to question politicians and other public figures. Both factual and entertainment programmes use phone in programmes to provide individual contributions or to get an immediate response from members of the public.

- Phone in programmes are generally live. The aim is genuine spontaneity.
- The producer must be constantly on the alert to the possibility of callers breaking the law by making outspoken remarks, wild unsubstantiated allegations or causing widespread offence in matters of taste or decency.
- To minimise the risks, a station needs to have some system whereby staff screen potential callers before allowing them to be put through to the programme. Callers should not normally be put straight on air.
- Staff should also ensure that the phone in does not become a focus or platform for organized pressure groups or wild irresponsible individuals.

The presenter/moderator should take special care to maintain fairness, impartiality and balance and to ensure that a wide range of views is broadcast. They must be able to extricate the programme where difficult situations arise, cutting short a caller politely and firmly.

Some broadcasters offer back up information for the audience to phone in programmes and use telephone help lines to follow up and provide extra advice and support for problems covered in the phone in or other programmes. There is a range of services such as fact sheets, booklets, telephone help lines.

These “helplines”, where possible, should be free. If a charge is made, this should be purely to recover costs, not make a profit. If viewers or listeners are being invited to ring a station, they must be told the cost of such calls.

The broadcaster must take care not to promote any one particular organisation, charity or agency, manufacturer or supplier. Where possible, give details of a range of organisations which are in position to offer help or advice.

### 10.1 Vox Pops (clips of the views of members of the public)

These are not an indication of wider public opinion but their value is that they allow different sides of an issue in question to be expressed through the voices of the man and woman in the street. But it should be made clear that they are an expression of a point of view, not an indication of the weight of opinion on either side. Great care is needed with political questions and the various voice

clips should be assembled in such a way as to ensure both sides of an issue are covered.

Statements gathered from people chosen at random should be presented solely to illustrate the range and texture of popular opinion on a topical issue. There should not be any suggestion – explicit or implicit – that the views broadcast in such a survey reflect wider public opinion.

## 11. CITIZEN JOURNALISM – TACKLING STORIES IN NEW WAYS

*“You see it. You report it. Be a citizen journalist.”* (Large billboard with the lens of a camera instead of an eye advertising the international news network CNN-IBN channel in Mumbai, India early 2006)

*“It has completely transformed our journalism. It means we can get access to people who have seen and witnessed all kind of incredible events around the world almost instantaneously. Within half an hour, an hour of a major even happening, someone has e-mailed us, texted us, left a message on Twitter. We have got video and film of that event, which five years ago, we would never have had.”* (Matthew Eltringham, Editor, BBC TV News User Generated Content, November 2009)

We are now in an era of instantaneous news and fast developing technology – especially with mobile (cell) phones which are also cameras. The result has been the rapid growth of what has come to be known as “Citizen Journalism” – people who happen to be on the scene of a big news story, taking pictures on their mobile phones, and sending them to the broadcasters for use in their news bulletins. No sooner had momentous events such as the Asian tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, the Pakistan earthquake happened, along with the bombs on the London transport network, than the broadcasters began showing dramatic eye-witness film sent in by members of the public. CNN, for example had graphic film of a block of flats collapsing in Pakistan. British television showed mobile phone footage taken by people trapped underground inside their bombed out carriages minutes after an explosion aboard the train in which they were travelling.

Over a short period of time pictures by eye-witnesses have become a major feature in the coverage of top news events, regularly leading television and radio news bulletins. They are a powerful new way of reporting – telling the story more graphically than any reporter arriving on the scene some time later and quite unlike anything a conventional camera crew could have taken. Ordinary people are now playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting and spreading breaking news and information.

The major news networks now find themselves deluged by material from members of the public when a big event happens. Valuable though this material is, it is not a cheap alternative to traditional journalism. Editorial standards apply as much to this kind of source material (now referred to as “User Generated Content”) as to that gathered by a broadcasters’ own staff. The issue for the broadcasters is how to cope with the volume of material they are being sent and integrate it with conventional news coverage.

The BBC, for example, received a record 6,500 images in the hours immediately after a massive fire at an oil depot not far from London towards the end of 2005. It had received a large number after the bombs on the London transport system a few months earlier. At the height of the trouble in Iran following the disputed Presidential election in June 2009 its Farsi-language programmes were deluged by material from Iran, including 6 or 7 video clips per second. To cope with this, the BBC has set up a unit to process the material sent in by the public. In an average week, the team processes over 10,000 e-mail comments and photos and up to 100 video clips – considerably more if there is a big domestic story, such as the unusually heavy snow falls in Britain in early 2009 and again in January 2010. The team sifts through the e-mails and pictures and films to establish their authenticity and scrutinizes images to make sure they have not been tampered with. They cross

check, ring up contributors. As the BBC editor in charge of this UGC put it: *“We look at the stuff*



*coming in. We make sure it is what it says it is. We authenticate it; we check it out. Once we are happy it is legitimate, we pass it on to a whole range of outlets... You cannot just publish that stuff."*

Besides the need for some kind of mechanism to handle this UGC, other issues arise.

- . As a starting point apply the same approach to material sent in by the public as to any other material you handle as journalists.
- . Do not automatically assume that the material submitted is accurate. The quality of the material sent in is very uneven. Those who send in the material so enthusiastically are not trained writers or fact checkers.
- . Whenever material sent in by the public is used, there must be someone to vet it and take editorial responsibility.
  - Interest groups may seek to send in material related to a particular cause they are involved with. Broadcasters should be on the lookout for this and also for possible photo manipulation and hoaxing.
  - There is a need for particular care in handling pictures of incidents such as air crashes or earthquakes where many people could have died. For example, roadside security cameras captured a plane bursting into flames at Toronto Airport in 2005. All 300 people on board escaped but did the networks know that when they showed live pictures?
- . The broadcaster needs to bear in mind that people who witness horrific events are often very confused and frightened. They think they saw something, but often it turns out they got it wrong.
- . Provide clear instructions on how members of the public can submit material – the e-mail address, text messaging number, and address for sending picture messages from mobile (cell) phones.
  - Ensure that material from the public is clearly labelled so that audiences know it has not come from the broadcaster or another news organisation. Likewise material from other organisations such as lobby groups must be labelled so that listeners or viewers know the source.
- . Care must be taken when encouraging the public to send in images so that people do not take unnecessary risks trying to take photographs, e.g. people filming a big fire could be potentially risking their lives getting too close to a blaze, collapsed building etc. And they should not breach police or emergency services lines, or trespass on private property. If it is suspected they have done so, they should be told their material will not be used.
- . Many of the images sent in will not come with any form of consent, particularly if taken as dramatic events unfold. Editors will use their own judgement to decide whether further consents may be needed in order to publish this material. They may wish to ask themselves questions like: does the material submitted show a person in great distress, does it show a clearly-identifiable person receiving medical treatment, does it feature activity which appears to be criminal or seriously anti-social. Where has the material been taken – in a public place such as a shopping centre, or in a doorway? Does it show clearly identifiable children?
- . Is there a copyright problem with pictures received? Was anyone's privacy infringed when the pictures were taken? The right to privacy, particularly where children or vulnerable adults are involved, must be respected.

Despite the dramatic growth of this new-style journalism, it does not mean the end of the traditional media. It simply provides an extra layer of source material. There will always be a role for the traditional reporter in sifting through everything and trying to present as clear and authoritative picture as possible; testing the rumours and the reports; setting an event in context and providing analysis. This new kind of eye-witness testimony does not replace the need for authoritative reporting. It is just that the technology makes it more instant.

## 12. SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES – NEW JOURNALISTIC TOOLS

### 12.1 Twitter – The Fastest Growing Social Networking Site

Within a period of about eighteen months (from mid 2007 to 2009) there has been a huge increase in participatory journalism involving members of the public. Now when there is a breaking news story, journalists with access to the Internet are likely to turn to the micro-messaging site Twitter for first reports from eye-witnesses and possible contacts. It was Twitter which really brought news of the Haiti earthquake to the outside world in January 2010. For more than 24 hours after the quake, all the vivid reports and images dominating the airwaves and newspapers came from ordinary people via Twitter or the video-sharing site YouTube. Within minutes of the news of the earthquake given by the US Geological Survey, eye witness accounts were being posted. “Earthquake 7 Richter scale. Just happening.” An American living in Haiti reported “Just experienced a major earthquake here in Port au Prince. Walls were falling down – we are all fine. Pray for those in the slums.” Then, 7 hours later. “Covered in dust and debris... we saw a few bodies that had been pulled out of the rubble lying dead in the sidewalk... many others injured.” In the hours after the even more powerful earthquake in Chile a few weeks later, Twitter posts provided a mass of information – the latest casualty figures, phone numbers of the emergency services, the Chilean Red Cross, seismology experts. There were also vivid pictures of the damage – for instance, a large building being sliced in two – with links to other information about the quake damage and relief operations.

When Britain experienced exceptionally heavy snow falls early in 2010, it was possible from the Twitter messages sent by people saying how deep the snow was in their area to create a “snow map” of the country. It provided important information about the effects of the snow on transport, school closures and the state of roads.

Another major crisis where Twitter proved invaluable as a news source was the unrest in Iran following the disputed election of June 2009. Tight restrictions were imposed on the media. Reporters were not allowed to cover unauthorised gatherings or move around freely. Iranians turned to Twitter in large numbers to post reports and updates on what was happening. Mobile phones and digital cameras took pictures of the street clashes and their dramatic footage was uploaded to video-sharing social media sites such as YouTube and Facebook. For many Iranians the most reliable guide to events was the BBC Persian TV broadcasting in Farsi. At the height of the trouble it was receiving hundreds of e-mails, calls and text messages and 6 or 7 video clips every second. “Hundreds if not thousands of people were working for us informally and unpaid throughout the country.” Although this material was invaluable it all had to be checked. Some of it was pure disinformation – intended to mislead and cause confusion. Nothing went out on air unchecked. This created an enormous logistical problem. Nowadays, however, there is the technology which can establish the precise geo- location of the person sending in material; the time it is submitted and that the material (taken by a digital camera for example) has not been tampered with.

Another new development is for journalists to post very short messages from big conferences giving brief points from the main speakers with references to a longer report on the Internet.

Politicians have realised the value of these social networking sites and are increasingly using them to put across their messages. They like the way they can speak direct to their public without being

edited by a journalist. Among those who use Twitter regularly is the Malaysian Prime Minister. He

posts messages several times a day and actively solicits opinions from the Malaysian public. Several of his ministers have started using Facebook and Twitter to seek out public opinion.

Twitter has also had its scoops. For example when ice was discovered on the planet, Mars, news first came from Twitter. “We have ICE!!!. Yes, ICE Water ice on Mars.” It was posted at 7.14pm on June 19th 2008 by the US team behind the Mars Phoenix Lander project. And when the then opposition leader in Zimbabwe was arrested that same month, a local human rights organisation posted a message on Twitter saying where they believed Mr Tsvangirai was being held. In January 2009

Twitter was first with a graphic picture of an aircraft which had come down in the Hudson River. “I just watched a plane crash in the Hudson” posted an eye-witness four minutes after it came down, while a man who sent in the picture reported “There’s a plane in the Hudson. I am on the ferry going to pick up the people” (who could be seen in his photograph standing on the wings or on the escape chutes.)

From earthquakes in China and more recently Chile and Haiti to the Mumbai terror attacks and street protests in Iran, the social media, especially Twitter, were at the forefront of breaking and disseminating news, providing a running commentary on events as they happened.

There is so much material being posted every minute that newsrooms need, where possible, to draw up a guide to Twitter for their journalists. “Twitter Search” (<http://search.twitter.com>) is a good starting-point: Posts are often tagged by users according to subject using the hash symbol (#). For example: #chilequake, #chileredcross, #chiletsunami, #chiledamage, #uksnow, #iranelections, #ahmedinejad, #moussavi. Searching for these tags brings up relevant posts.

Another useful category is [twitter.com/breakingnews](http://twitter.com/breakingnews). WeFollow.com (click on “news”, and the outlet you want, then on “follow this user”) is a good guide to news developments. Twitterfall is another useful site. (Click on the item in “Trends” and you will get the Twitter posts on that subject), [Twitter@Reuters](http://Twitter@Reuters), [Twitter@africanewsfeed](http://Twitter@africanewsfeed), [Twitter@APNews](http://Twitter@APNews) are also excellent for finding latest headlines with links to stories mentioned.

Twitter now has fast-growing rivals in Asia – Mig33 and the Japanese Ameba Now website.

## **12.2 Journalistic Uses of Twitter**

Journalists now use Twitter to micro-blog as part of their professional duties. They use it to share articles and draw attention to material they think of interest. They also use Twitter to build up a following and to distribute news and get comments from their readers and audience.

Twitter has become an invaluable tool for monitoring breaking news.

- When some natural disaster happens such as the earthquakes in Chile and Haiti early in 2010, Twitter is a valuable source of eye-witness reports and pictures and of useful phone numbers and contacts for reporting on the relief operations.
- In countries like Iran where there are restrictions on reporting and where many use social networking sites, Twitter is one of the best ways to follow what is happening on a day by day basis. In the unrest following the Presidential elections of June 2009, demonstrators gave details of planned protests, tactics and slogans via Twitter, text messages and Facebook.

- . Editors need to be aware of the need for balance. For example using the Twitter messages from Iran alone would produce very one-sided reporting of the situation there. Those sending in material from Iran are mostly pro Opposition.
- . Journalists for example have begun tweeting from big conferences such as the one in Davos in 2009.
- . Celebrities and sports personalities often announce important developments in their personal lives or careers on Twitter – new albums, starring roles, impending moves (for footballers) and such like.
- . Twitter is a good way of seeking out expertise. It can be an excellent source of ideas, providing leads for stories. Journalists use it as a research tool, acting on the principle “there is always someone who knows better than you”. For example, a BBC technology correspondent with a large following on Twitter successfully sought advice on how to cover a new invention and found a top expert to interview.
- . Journalists regard Twitter as a good way of building up a relationship with their audience. It can provide instant feedback, often used in programmes. But care is necessary in using instant reaction. For example Nigerians sent in reaction to the news that their seriously ill president had returned home after receiving treatment abroad. (February 2010). The BBC programme presenter started reading out some comments then stopped. “Oh, now he is speculating on what has happened so we will not go down that route.”
- . Politicians are increasingly using Twitter as a way of announcing their movements, meetings and views on a particular subject. Malaysia's Prime minister is a great fan and updates his entries regularly. The Australian Parliament's House of Representatives permits sending Twitter messages from mobile (cell) phones or laptops from the floor of the House during Question Time.
- . Increasingly newspapers and broadcasters have their own Twitter pages. Networks announce forthcoming programmes and highlights. The wife of the British Prime Minister has a page on Twitter. She has over one million followers.

As the use of Twitter is becoming an established part of journalism in the developed world, media organisations are now issuing guidelines for their journalists on the use of Twitter. The agreed basic rules are:

- . Check everything carefully. Do not put information you have just found on Twitter on air without checking it properly. Treat it as a tip-off. Check it as you would any other journalistic story. Mistakes can be made if there is not proper checking. For example earthquake damage shown as happening in Haiti in 2010 was in fact from a Japanese earthquake in 2004.
- . If you are not prepared to say something on air, do not put it on Twitter. Twitter is a public place. Once something has been published, it cannot be deleted. Nor can you control what use is made of it.
- . Remember that nothing on a social networking site is really private. A lady complained on Twitter about the state of a property she had rented. She found herself facing action for alleged defamation by the estate agent.
- . Do not reveal confidential information on Twitter. Do not discuss internal policies of your organisation without permission. Do not mention comings and goings among fellow staff.
- . Do not disparage colleagues. Issues such as libel, slander and contempt of court apply as

much on Twitter as elsewhere.

- Do not post anything inflammatory. Do not get into an argument. Do not post in anger.
- It is easy to lie on the Internet. How do you know if the person on the Internet is really the person he/she says they are? Seek corroboration. Interview the source yourself.

### **12.3 Facebook**

The other fast developing social networking site, particularly popular with people under the age of 40, is Facebook with nearly 500 million users worldwide. In many cases it is just a way for people to keep in touch with each other and exchange news and photographs. Increasingly, though, young people prefer it as a source of news and information rather than listening to radio or watching television. (Twitter, some journalists feel, is more useful than Facebook because users use it less for social news than for seeking out information).

Like Twitter, Facebook is valuable in situations where it is hard to report from and in emergencies. The two sites acted like running diaries on the Iranian unrest and forums for coordinating protest activities following the disputed Presidential election of June 2009. Opposition leader, Mir Hussein Mousavi, complained that he was being denied access to the public so posted political messages and news of rallies to supporters via his Facebook site. Facebook was one of the first sites people turned to for news following the big earthquakes in Chile and Haiti in early 2010. Its value was recognised by relief organisations such as the American Red Cross, Global Relief and Oxfam who opened special pages immediately after the quakes happened. They played an important part in spreading news of the devastation, helping trace people, and in mobilising the relief effort and raising funds.

Facebook has now become an important journalistic source and tool for reporters. It is seen as very useful for finding sources, making contacts and tapping expertise. It is a barometer of trends. It is also invaluable in getting audiences to interact with the news. During the US Presidential Election campaign of 2008, Facebook was widely used by the American networks to gauge public opinion throughout the campaign. Viewers and listeners were invited to post their views on candidates and issues on special Facebook pages. This provided useful source material for items about the state of public opinion.

Politicians – and governments – are also increasingly using Facebook to connect with their supporters and the public. This way they can side-step the traditional media and put over their message directly without being edited by journalists. Most have open Facebook sites so anyone can read entries and leave comments.

Facebook is used regularly by campaigning groups to organise and spread news of activities. For example in April 2009 when world leaders came to London for the G20 economic summit, protest groups used Facebook to mobilise their supporters and organise street protests.

Celebrities, too, use Facebook and have huge followings.

News organisations have issued guidelines for their journalists regarding the use of Facebook. Their main message is to be very careful what you reveal on Facebook. “We all leave an online footprint whenever we use the web”.

- Editorial staff in politically sensitive areas should never admit a political allegiance either through profile information or through joining political groups. Be very careful what information you use in your profile.
- It may be appropriate to join Facebook groups related to political causes for research and information-gathering purposes where approved. If a political correspondent were to join a Facebook group linked to a right-of-centre party he/she might find it appropriate to join the equivalent group for the left and centre parties. Maybe safest of all not to join a group.
- Editorial staff should be careful about joining campaigning groups or sites with a special agenda (e.g. in medical or science sites).
- Be careful what professional information you give out on Facebook. Do not discuss articles which have not been published, meetings you have attended or plan to attend with sources or interviews you have conducted. Think carefully before expressing opinions about subjects in the news. It could open your organisation to criticisms and allegations of bias and make a reporter ineligible to cover topics in future.
- Great care should be exercised over who or what organisation a journalist “friends”. Someone may draw the wrong conclusion from your choice of “friends”. Avoid “friending” controversial individuals.
- Be upfront in your dealings with people you contact via Facebook. Be open about who you are and whom you represent. If relevant, make it clear that you are seeking information which may be used in a broadcast.
- Social networking sites allow photos, videos and comments to be shared with thousands of other users. It may not be appropriate to share work-related information in this way.

Social networking sites are often well ahead of traditional news organisations with breaking stories. Many turn out to be correct – but equally many are not, showing the need for careful checking. Better be correct than first! The evidence is that the great majority of audiences still look to the traditional news organisations for their news. The traditional media is not dead. The social media complements it.

#### **12.4 Blogs – Another Growing Form Of Participatory Journalism**

After the attacks on the World Trade centre in New York in September 2001, many internet sites were overwhelmed by immense demand and people turned to e-mail and web-logs (or blogs) for information and comment. It led to a proliferation of do-it-yourself journalism: eye-witness accounts, photo galleries and personal story telling. Some of the most valuable blogs for a journalist have been those from places in conflict zones describing what is going on, how people feel and are coping in their everyday lives. The blog has become a valuable source of information for example from the Caucasus area of Southern Russia where human stories go unreported. Global Voices Online highlights many of the world’s bloggers and aims to provide what it calls “a shining light” on places and people not reported in other media. [Twitter.com/BBC\\_Blogworld](https://twitter.com/BBC_Blogworld) lists the best blogs in a variety of languages on the special BBC World Service blog site. Many blogs, however, are of no editorial value. They do not deal with politics.

The mainstream media have rushed to tap into this new phenomenon by setting up their own blogs written by their own journalists (and editors, explaining editorial decisions.) These may be short entries, more details about a story being covered or the fuller version of an interview carried on radio or television and merit attention even if only as useful background information. For BBC journalists, who are required to show impartiality, the attraction of blogging is that it enables them to say at greater length what they were not able to include in a one to two minute radio or television report. The knowledge they have acquired is not wasted. It also enables them to establish their professional credentials.

Blogs can be very influential and reputable bloggers are now being invited to big international gatherings alongside the mainstream media. American Blogs for example exposed shortcomings in the Hurricane Katrina relief efforts in New Orleans. Others have brought down prominent American politicians and media figures. In Britain a blog led to the resignation of an aide to the Prime Minister in April 2009 when it was shown that he was responsible for smearing political opponents. However the blogger passed on his scoop to a leading newspaper as he considered this was the best way to achieve maximum publicity.

Occasionally a story may be broken in a blog as, for example, when the BBC Business Correspondent revealed in September 2007 that a British Bank was seeking an emergency loan from the Bank of England to avert collapse. His blog has since become one of the most read blogs in Britain – required reading during the world economic crisis of 2007-2010.

Many blogs are a form of political campaigning and are increasingly being taken seriously by the politicians. They do not pretend to be impartial. One leading British blogger explains: “we blog because we want to give our political opinions and we hope to influence the general political agenda.” The most read blog in Europe, for example, is by a British Conservative who makes no secret of his political outlook. Equally there are many blogs representing the left and centre.

In scientific and technical journalism, for example, blogs can be very useful. A station can ask its viewers and listeners for their help and knowledge. For example after one of the major American space shuttle disasters, the space authorities in the USA appealed to the public to send in eye-witness accounts and photographs which might help in establishing the cause of the craft breaking up. Blogs can provide a way of getting information from experts, especially on technical and scientific questions. People are usually only too happy to share their expertise – to the benefit of all.

As with the social networking sites, news organisations have drawn up guidelines for journalist who blog. Again the concern is that bloggers, in dealing with controversial issues, should not write anything which would cast doubt on the impartiality of their station. Here is how Britain's BBC spells it out:

- Those involved in editorial areas must take care to ensure that they do not undermine the integrity and impartiality of the BBC or its output in their blogs.
- Those working in news and current affairs should not advocate a particular position on high-profile controversial subjects relevant to their areas. They should not advocate support for a particular party.
  - Personal blogs or websites should not be used to attack or abuse colleagues. Or to reveal confidential information about the BBC.
- Bloggers should take care to separate their professional writing from their personal ones.



There is general agreement that some system for moderating responses is necessary so that illegal, offensive or inappropriate and unsuitable content can be removed. Some moderators may decide not to publish comments until they have seen them first. Others may decide a particular comment which has appeared is not suitable to remain.

## **12.5 Internet**

Be careful with material found on the Internet. No one edits it. It is full of excellent material – but also of highly biased material, polemics and blatant advertising of products, masquerading as “reporting”. Accounts on the internet are no more reliable than any other similar source elsewhere. They still need checking.

Journalists should be rigorous about the origins of material derived from the internet. They need to scrutinize and if necessary corroborate eye-witness accounts submitted by e-mail, before using them, by talking to others.

Be aware that some sites might be hoax sites.

Any contributor found via internet should be checked and double checked. Talk to them before putting them on air to make sure they are who they say they are.

### 13. RELIGION IN PROGRAMMES

The majority of citizens of whatever country acknowledge belief in a Supreme Being, which is expressed through a variety of religious beliefs, practices, and forms of worship. A public broadcaster is likely to feel under an obligation to provide religious programmes, and to broadcast religious material in a manner which is unbiased and representative of faiths in society.

In multi cultural societies, religious programming should reflect a mix of faiths in a particular country. But the broadcaster should not support any one religion over another nor provide a medium for one religion to denigrate another.

- References to religion should be presented accurately and in a dignified manner.
- Programmes that denigrate or satirize any racial or religious group should not be broadcast.
- Programmes that feature the views or beliefs of any race or religion must be acceptable to the target audience and should not be proselytising in nature.

Programmes covering religion are most effective if they follow a variety of formats. Religious services (where appropriate); religious news programmes giving, say, news developments of the past week, month or quarter; magazine-type programmes combining music, hymns, interviews, coverage of general issues from a religious standpoint. At major religious festivals there could be devotional talks, including prayers.

Programme makers dealing with religious themes should be aware of what may cause offence. What may be unexceptional to some may provoke strong feelings elsewhere. Deep offence will be caused by:

- Profane references or disrespect, whether verbal or visual, directed at deities, scriptures, holy days and rituals which are at the heart of various religions e.g. the Crucifixion, Gospels, the Koran, the Hajj (annual pilgrimage to Mecca) the Holy season of Ramadan and the Jewish Sabbath and dietary laws.
- Casual use of names considered holy by believers in expletives. e.g. the use of "Jesus" "Christ" or "God" or of names held holy by other faiths. The use of such expletives in drama or light entertainment causes distress far beyond their dramatic or humorous value.

Programmes which contain profane expressions or other references to religion which could cause deep offence should not be broadcast before the watershed and broadcasters should give warnings of material which could cause offence to an audience.

People and countries should not be defined by their religions unless it is strictly relevant. Particular religious groups or factions should not be portrayed as speaking for their faith as a whole. For example footage of chanting crowds of Islamic activists should not be used to illustrate the whole Muslim world.

## 14. TASTE AND DECENCY

*“Programmes should be in good taste, that is to say, they should respect and reflect the generally accepted values in society regarding such matters as vulgarity, profanity or sexual behaviour. The audience for broadcast information is composed of differing groups and notions of good taste vary substantially among them. Where matters of taste are concerned, therefore, care must be taken not to cause gratuitous offence to the audience.”* (CBC Journalistic Standards and Practices, p103)

*“Broadcasters should be mindful of public morals and social values of local viewers. For instance, themes on sex and promiscuity should be treated with caution. Explicit sexual sequences are not allowed. Information, themes or sub-plots on alternative lifestyles (e.g. homosexuality, bi-sexuality, incest) should be treated with caution. Their portrayals should clearly not promote, justify or glamorise such lifestyles. Explicit sequences on alternative sexual behaviour should not be broadcast. In general nudity is not allowed except in exceptional circumstances.”* (Singapore Guidelines no 5)

These two extracts from two leading broadcasters, one North American, the other Asian illustrate the problem. Notions of what is in good taste and what is considered decent are often simply matters of judgment. South Africa’s SABC goes one step further: *“freedom of expression [is] held to protect even unpopular and offensive speech. It is believed that any attempt to curb speech carries the potential to stifle artistic creativity which is seen as fundamental to broadcasting.”* (SABC Guidelines, p10)

So instead of banning completely anything which might give offence, broadcasters need to:

- Give the audience clear and adequate warning beforehand when they believe material may upset viewers/listeners.
- Be very careful in their scheduling of such material. Do not let material that viewers and listeners might find threatening or shocking intrude unexpectedly.
- Make sure material that is unsuitable for children is not broadcast at a time when they are likely to be watching.

While a station will do everything possible to minimize what audiences might find distasteful or tasteless, a public broadcaster nevertheless does have a duty to deal frankly with controversial topics, HIV/AIDS for example, and cannot avoid tackling issues because of the risk of offending certain people. The key is careful scheduling (“a good rule of thumb is to avoid taking the audience by surprise.”). Advance warning means viewers can make their own choices about what they want to see and hear and any offence caused can be kept to a minimum. People are likely to respond less negatively to violent and distressing scenes if they have been alerted in advance.

## 15. HEALTH PROGRAMMES

*“I switched on the radio... heard your programme about testicular cancer... found a lump. I can say I probably wouldn't be alive if it weren't for the programme”* (a listener to a BBC World Service “Health Matters” programme)

Health programmes are not current affairs programmes. Nor are they “blue skies” accounts of the latest medical research at the frontier of knowledge. They can be programmes aimed at doctors keeping them abreast of latest developments in medical thinking as gleaned from the leading medical journals in the West and interviews with specialists and researchers. But their most important purpose is to be a source of authoritative and reliable advice for doctors and health workers.

Mostly however, health programmes will be aimed at the ordinary person. Health coverage should be undertaken with advice from the relevant medical authorities. The perspective will be that of the patient. In many parts of the world it is radio and television which are the most important sources of information. Radio in particular is often the only way of reaching the vast majority of people living in rural areas where literacy levels are low. Put simply, it is the best way of reaching people and getting across important information on basic matters such as the need for hygiene, washing hands regularly, ensuring latrines are not placed next to wells, urging the importance of anti-mosquito nets to prevent malaria and such like. These audiences can be reached via programmes using a variety of formats: reports, packages, discussions, interviews and on-the-spot reports from hospitals, surgeries and clinics.

Campaigns should be run in cooperation with appropriate bodies such as the Ministry of Health, specialist medical organisations, e.g. HIV/AIDS organisations, the global funds to fight tuberculosis and malaria and NGOs working in the health field.

- . Producers should check all medical facts with doctors and authoritative medical journals specialising in the particular field.
- . They must make special efforts to ensure the accuracy of their information.
- . They must make sure their programmes are not used as vehicles for disinformation.
- . Producers should consider running campaigns across all types of programming, for maximum effect, rather than just specialist information slots.
- . Health broadcasters should work in partnership with reputable organisations for community back-up.
- . It is important that producers know who their audience is and are clear what they want to achieve.
- . Each country will have its own approach and priorities.

## 16. HIV/AIDS

*“Stop playing deaf and blind. It’s a killer”* (Person with AIDS calling on governments and political leaders – heard on BBC World Service on World Aids Day, December 1st 2003)

Broadcasting about HIV/AIDS presents special challenges because of the extent of the epidemic, the means of its transmission, and the social ostracism of those who have the illness.

HIV/AIDS is the one area where broadcasters may find themselves in conflict with accepted ideas of taste and decency. For example, a public service broadcaster may hesitate to talk about condoms. Yet, all experts agree that the use of condoms is the most effective way of preventing the spread of the disease.

Certain basic principles need to be observed in broadcasting about HIV/AIDS. Programmes and campaigns should:

- Dispel ignorance – provide the facts. What it is; how people get it; what are the symptoms. Many people who are at risk may not know what HIV/AIDS is or how it is spread. There is a need for programmes to set out the facts. Broadcasters have a responsibility to tell the truth.
- Separate the truth from myths, disinformation and lies. For example, there is no justification for claims that condoms are unsafe or full of holes. But it is true that you can safely have a meal with someone who has HIV/AIDS.
- Be clear – In order to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS people’s behaviour may well have to change. Broadcasters need to tell audiences quite frankly in what way they need to do so (for example, men need to wear condoms for their own protection and the protection of women: razor blades and needles need to be sterilized, or – even better – used only once during medical treatment: health care workers need to take precautions against accidental infection).
- Avoid stereo-typing on TV where the face of the pandemic is often a women.
- Use doctors and experts as advisers regularly.
- Advise audiences to be aware of bogus cures.
- Be factually accurate. Audiences need to know about available drugs, ways of caring for people with HIV/AIDS, ways of living with people with HIV/AIDS.
- Research the latest developments thoroughly – new medical findings will continue to emerge and need to be communicated to people reliably. Broadcasters should be sceptical of announcements of AIDS cures.
- Make programmes about how people with HIV/AIDS are coping, allowing them to tell their story and how they are being helped.
- Maintain a sense of proportion. It is important to tell the facts without exaggeration and to avoid value judgements. Be careful in the language used. Avoid using phrases like “the dreaded disease”, “scourge” or “plague” which create a climate of fear and perpetuates stigma. Stigma and fear of discrimination are preventing people from coming forward and getting tested and this is contributing to the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- Aim to reach the target audience. Health campaigns are often effective if they target different sections of the population at different times in different ways. For example a programme for married women about HIV/AIDS is likely to be very different in style and

content from a programme for teenage boys. It may also reach more of its target audience if it is scheduled at a particular time of day when women listen.

- . Take a range of approaches and draw on other countries' experiences.
- . Broadcasters will have to think about how they put across this message with taste and discretion. They may need to use cautious language, but the message cannot be dodged. "Silence is death" said the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, "there is no embarrassment in saving lives".

### **16.1 Soaps as Health Messages**

One of the most effective ways of getting information to people living in remote areas is via "soaps" serials or short dramas which put across vital information about matters of public interest. The BBC has had a long running serial which was originally aimed at farmers and containing advice on growing food crops. Another example is a soap opera broadcast to Afghan audiences which included basic health advice on birth spacing, and simple treatment of child diarrhoea. It also had a sub plot about a returning refugee family. The villagers in the series discussed how to help them re-settle, how they could spot landmines, and which areas to avoid – reinforcing a message in an entertaining way. Botswana has put out a series giving the various messages about HIV/AIDS over one hundred episodes.

## 17. GENDER ISSUES AND STEREOTYPING

Despite women becoming heads of State, Prime Ministers and government ministers and holding other important positions they are still liable to face forms of discrimination. It is not uncommon in society for people to deride, belittle, and make fun of others on the grounds of their gender, colour, ethnicity, age, sexuality or physical or mental ability. At its worst, prejudice results in hatred and violence between groups.

This means:

- . Public broadcasters have a duty to their audience to be truthful in their depiction of people as individuals, not to use stereotypes.
- . They should not broadcast programmes which promote stereotyping on grounds of race, national or ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, age or disability.
- . Great care is needed over the use of language, avoiding images and language which reinforce stereotypes or give offence to communities or individuals – the disabled, women, and the gay community.
- . Avoiding sexist language. Neutral phrases, e.g. “chair” or “chairperson” is better than “chairman”; “work hours” is better than “man hours”; “spokesperson” or “representative of” preferable to “spokesman”; “flight (or cabin) attendant” rather than “stewardess”. Otherwise it can create the impression that certain activities are the preserve of one sex. That only men can chair meetings, women be air hostesses on a plane, and such like. For many words, dating from the days when women did not do many types of jobs (e.g. “policemen”, “taxmen”, “newsmen”, “manning”) there are alternatives reflecting the change in society. (e.g. “police officers”, “tax inspectors”, “journalists”, “staffing”).
- . Portray women (as well as men) as persons who have professions, skills, expertise, and authority over a wide range of activities.
- . Avoid unnecessary reference to disability. Often these are seen as slighting, insulting and implying deficiency and give great offence. Some people who use wheelchairs often dislike the term “confined to a wheelchair” or “wheelchair bound”. A person “who uses a wheelchair” or “is in a wheelchair” is preferable.

The broadcasters cannot ignore the existence of these problems and from time to time may well want to report on them and what is being done to deal with them. In doing so they must take care

not to resort themselves to stereotyping.

## 18. CHILDREN

Children can be involved in programmes in a number of ways – as actors, interviewees, participants in or subjects of programmes. The use of children in programmes requires handling with great care. In many countries there are laws to protect children. Special care should be taken to ensure that programmes children are likely to watch unsupervised would not cause alarm or distress, or incite aggressive behaviour.

Offering children enjoyable and enriching programmes should not be confused with concealing the real world from them. Adults sometimes seek to exclude [things].. to protect children. For some children, though, the world is already violent and dangerous and it is important for the media, especially television, to help them understand and deal with their own lives. (SABC Guidelines, p16)

There is general agreement among the major broadcasters about children and the media:

- Material that is unsuitable for children should not be broadcast at times when large numbers of them may be expected to be part of the audience.
- Broadcasters should exercise particular care in depicting violence in children’s programmes.
- Animated programming for children shall not have violence as a central theme and shall not invite dangerous imitation.
- Programming for children should be very careful in dealing with themes that threaten a child’s sense of security – themes like domestic conflict, death, crime or the use of drugs.
- Programmes for children should not contain realistic scenes of violence which create the impression that violence is the best way to resolve conflict.
- Programmes for children shall not contain realistic scenes of violence that minimize or gloss over the effect of violent acts. Any realistic depiction of violence shall also portray the consequences for both victims and perpetrators of that violence.
- Programmes for children shall not contain frightening or otherwise excessive special effects not required by the story line.
- Any adult-only type programme should not be shown immediately after the watershed. Children often stay up later during school holidays.
- Children’s cartoons should avoid gratuitous violence.
- In news breaks screened during programmes directed at children, broadcasters should not normally use images or descriptions likely to alarm or disturb children except in cases of public interest.
- Broadcasters should recognise the rights of children and young people not to be exploited, humiliated or unnecessarily identified. (UN Convention of the Rights of the Child)

### 18.1 Children and Violence

There is some evidence that violence in circumstances resembling real life is more upsetting for children than violence in a fantasy setting. Children may feel particularly distressed when violence occurs in a familiar setting or between familiar figures. For instance, violence in the home between characters resembling their parents, or towards characters or pets with which the child can sympathise, should be avoided. Children can be particularly upset/distressed by violence involving animals. (BBC Guidelines, pp27-45)



The dangers of imitation are very real among children. Extra care should be taken for example over karate chops, or the use of weapons that are easily accessible such as ropes, knives or bottles, hammers. Producers should also remember the danger of suffocation from plastic bags and children playing with matches. Criminal acts, if shown, should not be lessons in “how to do it”. Children’s play is often influenced by what they see on TV. In making programmes for children, or likely to be popular with them, we need to avoid showing actions or techniques which could lead to dangerous imitation. The BBC guidelines on children’s programmes states:

- Smoking and drinking should generally be avoided in children’s programmes. Likewise pop stars, sportsmen, popular entertainers and others likely to be admired by children should not smoke and drink when being interviewed in children’s programmes.
- Inventive and unusual methods of inflicting pain and injury should not appear in children’s programmes – particularly when capable of easy imitation with objects readily available in the home such as knives or hammers.
- Where hazardous activities such as climbing or motorcycling are portrayed in programmes aimed at children, warnings should be given of the dangers of trying to imitate without expert supervision.

## 19. THE WATERSHED

Many broadcasters have a policy of not showing material which would be unsuitable for children. This is usually set at 2030 or 2100 (2200 in Singapore) and is known in countries where English is widely used as “the watershed”. The basic principle of the watershed is that material which is unsuitable for children cannot be broadcast before this time as large numbers of children are likely to be viewing. These are programmes which are intended for adult audiences, which deal with controversial themes, or contain scenes of violence, sexually explicit conduct, nudity, swearing, with bad or profane language. They should not be broadcast until well after the watershed.

Particular care should be taken in the period immediately after the watershed. The transition to more adult programming after the watershed time should be very gradual as children often watch beyond this time – particularly during the school holidays. Adult material should never be positioned close to the watershed.

The broadcaster has a responsibility to ensure that audiences have enough information upon which to judge if a programme is likely to be one they want to watch or listen to or if it is suitable for their children to see or hear.

Basically it is up to parents to decide whether or not individual programmes should be seen by their children. The broadcaster has a responsibility to ensure that audiences have enough information on which to judge if a programme is likely to be one they want to watch or listen to, or if it is suitable for children to see or hear. Whenever there is a programme containing material that might be offensive to significant numbers of viewers or listeners, the broadcaster should consider how best to prepare audiences. In some cases, it may simply require a warning. e.g. “this report contains scenes which may upset some viewers”. To help them in this some broadcasters have devised a system of programme classification. (Australia and New Zealand, for example) In these countries, broadcasters are responsible for ensuring that programmes are correctly classified and display the right symbols. New Zealand Guidelines spell it out in the following way:

- Definition: a child means any boy or girl under the age of 14 years (NZ), 15 in Australia.
- G – General: programmes which exclude material likely to be unsuitable for children. programmes may not necessarily be designed for child viewers but must not contain material likely to alarm or distress them.
- PGR – Parental Guidance Recommended: programmes containing material more suited for mature audiences but not necessarily unsuitable for child viewers when subject to the guidance of a parent or an adult. (In NZ PGR programmes may be screened between 9am and 4pm and after 7pm until 6am.
- AO – Adult Only: programmes containing adult themes and directed primarily at mature audiences. (These may be shown between set hours – when children are not likely to be watching).

Current Affairs programmes which may be scheduled at any time are not because of their nature subject to the classification system. However producers need to remember that young people may be among viewers of news and current affairs programmes during morning, day time and early evening hours and should give consideration to including warnings where appropriate.

In addition, the country's broadcasters are reminded:

- . Broadcasters should ensure that appropriate classification codes are established and observed. Classification symbols should be displayed at the beginning of each programme and after each advertising break.
- . Broadcasters should ensure that all promotional material, programme trails comply in content with the classification band in which they are shown. For example, trails for Adult Only programmes shown outside Adult Only time must conform in content with the classification of the time band in which they are broadcast.
- . Broadcasters should consider the use of warnings where content is likely to offend or disturb a significant proportion of the audience.
- . News flashes prepared for screening outside regular news bulletins, particularly during children's viewing hours, should avoid unnecessary distress or alarm. If news flashes contain distressing footage, prior warning should be given.

## 20. CRIME AND ANTI-SOCIAL ACTIVITY

Programmes on crime must not glamorize crime or criminals or act as incitement to violence and other anti-social behaviour. Scenes of violence or suffering such as close ups of persons being brutally killed and tortured and visual descriptions of rape scenes should normally be avoided. Gratuitous and graphic portrayals of violence should not be shown.

Violent crime is usually a tiny proportion of total crime but it takes up a greater proportion of crime coverage. In handling crime stories, broadcasters need to be alert to the possible cumulative effect of crime coverage. Television and radio may add to peoples' fears of becoming victims of crime even when this is unlikely to happen.

Care should be given before identifying the victim of a crime. Broadcasting the victim's identity often only adds to the person's grief, anguish and trauma especially in the case of sexual assault. Do not broadcast the name of someone who has been the victim of a sexual assault unless the victim gives consent, or volunteers his/her own story for broadcast. Only rarely will it be in the public interest.

News programmes must not stage their own reconstructions of crimes in their reporting. They may feature coverage of police reconstructions for the purpose of gathering evidence.

Interviews with serious criminals who are active or being sought by the police are rarely justified. The broadcaster must be sensitive to the impact such interviews would have on an audience. Usually it is necessary for approval to be given by someone at a senior level before such an interview can take place.

When interviewing witnesses to a particular crime, there must be particular care that the interview will in no way interfere with the course of justice. No such interview should take place once legal action has begun and a trial is under way.

### 20.1 Surreptitious Recording

Journalists should operate within a framework which respects people's right to privacy, treats them fairly, and yet permits investigation and to establish matters which it is in the public interest to know about. The BBC, for example, permits surreptitious recordings only in certain circumstances:

- As an investigative tool to explore matters which raise issues of serious anti-social or criminal behaviour where there is reasonable prior evidence of such behaviour. The programme maker has to show that an open approach would be unlikely to succeed and that there is a public interest in showing such material.
- To gather material in countries where the local law is hostile to fundamental freedoms and where reporters and correspondents are not able to work openly.

New Zealand guidelines, which encapsulate the principles which many broadcasters follow, say that in the preparation and presentation of programmes, broadcasters are responsible for maintaining standards which are consistent with the maintenance of law and order.

- . Broadcasters must respect the principles of law which sustain society.
- . Factual programmes should not glamorize criminal activity or condone the actions of criminals.
- . Programmes should not depict or describe techniques of crime in a manner which invites imitation.
- . Ingenious devices and unfamiliar methods of inflicting pain, injury or death, particularly if capable of easy imitation, should not be shown except in exceptional circumstances which are in the public interest.
- . The realistic portrayal of anti social behaviour, including violent and serious crime and the abuse of alcohol and drugs, should not be shown in a way that glamorizes these activities.
- . Programmes should not glamorize suicide and should not show or explain in detail how suicides are carried out.
- . Broadcasters should ensure that the incidental promotion of liquor is kept to the minimum.

## 21. DISASTER COVERAGE

The aftermath of a tragic event calls for considerable sensitivity. Every effort must be made to ensure that nothing is broadcast on radio or television or posted on-line which might cause widespread offence.

In covering accidents, disaster and disturbances, journalists need to balance accurate reporting against the obligation to avoid causing unnecessary distress or anxiety. The emphasis must be on providing swiftly and accurately basic factual information such as times, locations, place of departure, destination, route, flight number (in the case of an airliner crash, for example). By doing so, you can avoid needless suffering.

Where forewarning can prevent widespread damage and reduce human misery and avert loss of life, break into a programme and give a warning of some impending natural disaster. All programmes beamed towards the region likely to be affected must carry and give prominent position to warnings, announcements regarding relief measures and such statement of leaders as would build up morale of the people affected. In serious situations, transmissions should be kept open all day long and not restricted merely to their regular transmission hours. Weather forecasts should be taken only from the official meteorological service.

In the early stages of a disaster, it is especially important to give the source of information. If different sources give different casualty estimates, either report the range or quote the source which carries the greatest authority.

News and factual programmes should follow some basic well established principles:

- . The dead should be treated with respect and not shown unless there are compelling reasons for doing so.
- . Close ups of faces and serious injuries should be used very sparingly.
- . A person should not learn from a radio or television report that a relative has been killed. Concern for next-of-kin calls for special care in naming people who have died or are missing. Leave out names until you are sure next of kin have been informed.
- . Avoid using violent material simply because it is available.
- . In virtually no circumstances is it justified to show executions or other scenes in which people are being killed.
- . Still photographs can sometimes convey the horrific reality without shocking to the same degree as moving pictures.
- . Do not put pressure on grieving relatives for interviews.
- . In cases of drought or cyclone, avoid putting crop losses in monetary terms until a figure is available from a reliable official source.

## 22. VIOLENCE

We live in a violent world. Violence is part of everyday life but particular care must be taken in portraying it. Violence on screen does upset many people – particularly children whom it has a unique potential to distress and disturb – and audiences remain concerned about its showing on screen. Decisions about whether and how to portray violence should not be taken lightly. Producers should also bear in mind its possible effects, including whether it may stimulate aggressive or violent behaviour or induce indifference or insensitivity. Violence should not be presented in such a manner as to glamorize it or make it attractive. It is important that when violence is portrayed that, as a rule, its serious consequences are not glossed over. An excess of violence can de-sensitize viewers.

In the preparation and presentation of programmes, broadcasters are required to exercise care and discretion when dealing with the issue of violence. NZBC advises:

- Broadcasters should ensure that any violence shown is not gratuitous and is justified by the context.
- Broadcasters should be aware of the cumulative effect of violent incidents and themes.
- Scenes of rape or sexual violence should be treated with the utmost care. Explicit details and prolonged focus on sexually violent contact should be avoided.
- The combination of violence and sexuality in a way designed to titillate should not be shown.
- When real or fictitious killings, including assassinations are shown, the coverage should not be explicit or prolonged or repeated gratuitously.

### 22.1 Violence in News Programmes

News, current affairs and factual programmes will by their nature often contain violent, disturbing or alarming material. A broadcaster's duty to inform includes communicating and analyzing the facts about violent events. Broadcasters should not try to sanitize by omission a world in which much violence and brutality occurs. When such scenes are included to serve the public interest, the fact that violence has painful and bloody consequences should be made clear.

The decision whether to broadcast certain pictures or sounds which portray violence must be based on their newsworthiness and reporting value, together with a proper regard for the susceptibilities of audiences to the detail of what is broadcast. Many news events are violent and involve injury and death but reports should never linger on corpses or the sufferings of the wounded. Wide-shots of the dead may be necessary to make a point but unnecessary close-ups should be avoided. Editors must use judgment and discretion in deciding the amount of graphic detail to be shown.

Scenes of suffering should be used only when necessary to an understanding of information important to the public. Discretion is necessary in showing harrowing sights and if used, they should not be prolonged unnecessarily. Private grief may sometimes have a legitimate programme purpose but must not be exploited for sensational effect and personal privacy must be respected.

With some news stories, a sense of shock is part of a full understanding of what has happened. There may be occasions when it is judged necessary to use material that will shock, but this should be done only after very careful consideration. Where a particular sequence is likely to disturb,

distress or offend some of the audience, the broadcaster has a responsibility to provide a prior warning.

The more often viewers are shocked, the more it will take to shock them. Some of the material will involve images of the aftermath of violent acts, rather than the act itself.

Consideration needs to be given to the time of day when any violent sequences are shown. Particular care needs to be exercised in the editing of pictures for bulletins likely to be seen by vulnerable groups such as children.

Where appropriate, news segments should be preceded with a warning that the material may be distressing to some viewers or listeners



## 23. WAR REPORTING

*“The function of a journalist is to give viewers and listeners plain, unvarnished facts as fully, calmly and honestly as possible. We must not tell them what to think. Leave that to the newspapers.”* (Veteran BBC journalist, John Simpson)

A broadcaster has a special responsibility to its audience when reporting conflict. It must ensure they are confident they are being told the truth as far as is possible. Audiences need to be provided with context and impartial analysis if they are to be able to make sense of what is happening.

In times of emergency, some countries will impose temporary restrictions on a broadcaster’s editorial independence for reasons of national security. If such action is ever necessary, the broadcasters will inform audiences of the precise nature of the restrictions they are forced to operate under so that audiences are aware that they are no longer receiving a normal and full service of news and information.

The various parties to a conflict will organise news conferences, issue official statements, offer photo-opportunities and guided tour facilities to put over their side of the story, but news reporters will also face obstacles such as “prohibited areas”, road blocks, the need for special permits and “escorts” all aimed at discouraging them from reaching areas where the authorities wish to stop them going.

Wherever possible, it is better to gather information first hand. If this is not possible, a station should talk to eye-witnesses or those with direct knowledge of issues or events. The value of first hand reporting has to be balanced against the risk to life and limb.

Some places are too dangerous so journalists may have to resort to other ways of finding what is going on. They can, for example, speak to aid or relief officials who may have reached a particular hotspot: they can try to talk by phone to ordinary residents; interview people who have spoken by phone to people in the affected area; interview a local journalist reporting from there or interview a journalist who has just left the place.

- A reporter should make it clear where his/her information has come from particularly in the face of conflicting claims.
- The reporter should explain the rules under which he or she is operating; are they “embedded” with one of the opposing sides’ army: if his/her reports are being censored or being monitored while they being filed or if information is being withheld.
- The tone of any reporting can be as important as the reliability of any reports. Avoid loaded words like “evil”. A broadcaster has a duty to be balanced and calm in the way it reports.
- Report on the widest possible range of opinion about what is going on.
- Respect human dignity without sanitising the realities. There must be editorial justification for the use of very graphic pictures of war or atrocities. Where a particular sequence is likely to cause distress to viewers, the broadcaster has a responsibility to provide advance warning.

## 24. DISORDER, KIDNAPPING AND HOSTAGES

Each broadcasting organisation will have its own rules for covering demonstrations and protests. In some cases of rioting and civil disorder, it is clear the presence of cameras and microphones can provoke further violence. On the other hand there is evidence in other situations to show that the presence of the media has had a moderating effect on violent incidents.

When plans are being made to cover events where civil violence might be expected, every precaution should be taken to ensure that the presence of journalists, cameras and microphones are not a provocation. If journalists are by their presence seeming to aggravate a potentially dangerous situation they should cease using recording equipment and in some cases even conceal it. In some situations journalists may be targeted.

Reporting on hostage-taking acts, terrorism, riots and civil disorder puts a heavy responsibility on the broadcaster. Journalists must ensure they do not further endanger the lives of the hostages or interfere with the efforts of the authorities to secure their release. They must guard against being used or manipulated by terrorists/hostage takers.

No live or recorded broadcast of a statement by or an interview with a terrorist/hostage taker or hostage should take place without authorization at a very senior level. It is likely that authorization would be granted only in exceptional circumstances.

In protracted incidents and where hostages are involved, broadcasters must be aware of the danger that anything they say on air may be overheard by the kidnappers/hostage takers. Reporting must be strictly factual. Do not speculate about what has happened or what may happen. Journalists, camera crew must follow advice of the police about what they can report so as not to exacerbate the situation.

Occasionally the police may ask broadcasting organisations and the media to withhold or even include some piece of information. In complying be sure you never knowingly broadcast something you know to be untrue.

Great care is needed over language used in terrorist incidents. Terrorist groups often use military and judicial terms to give themselves status.

## **25. BOMB WARNINGS**

News organisations sometimes receive telephone warnings from people claiming to have planted bombs. Pass on such warnings immediately to the police and emergency services. The warnings may well be preceded by a special code so the broadcaster knows they are genuine and not hoaxes. In reporting bomb warnings, the broadcaster must never reveal the code words used by callers. If a broadcaster becomes aware of bomb alerts at specific locations it may

be appropriate for programmes to report them even before it is known for certain whether they are genuine or merely hoaxes. Editors have to balance the need to inform and warn the public against the importance of not giving publicity to hoaxers.

Do not normally report terrorist threats against particular individuals unless the threats have produced a serious and evident effect, e.g. the cancellation of a public appearance.

Care should be taken filming the homes of people whose position clearly puts them at risk (politicians, senior military, members of the security services, judges). Avoid giving any detail which might aid a terrorist attack. This includes exact locations, detailed plans of buildings, aerial pictures, readable shots of vehicle number plates etc. Likewise details of anti-terrorist devices should not be revealed.

Care must also be taken not to identify as possible targets for a terrorist attack people who would otherwise not be in danger, e.g. avoid naming companies working for military establishments or animal laboratories (if revealing the latter could put them at increased risk from animal rights campaigners).

### **25.1 Interviews with Terrorists and Guerrilla Leaders**

This is permissible only on occasions where the public interest in doing so outweighs the outrage and offence such interviews are likely to arouse in viewers/listeners. Permission would have to be granted at the highest levels.

### **25.2 Suicide**

Suicide is a legitimate subject for news reporting. Any portrayal of suicide requires a high degree of sensitivity and reports should avoid glamorizing the story. They should also avoid graphic or technical details of a suicide method. Broadcasters should not put out material which is likely to incite or encourage self harm or suicidal behaviour.

## 26. DEMONSTRATIONS

Protests and demonstrations and the right to conduct them are part of the democratic process. They take many forms, including marches, the occupation of buildings or other places, picket-lines, sit-ins, hunger-strikes and similar initiatives by individuals or groups.

Many public events are planned and conducted largely with media coverage in mind particularly protests and demonstrations. Demonstrators have increasingly sought media coverage by positioning themselves prominently at large or important public events or by trying to disrupting these events. The potential for manipulation of coverage is often great. Canada's CBC requires its journalists to observe the following guidelines:

- The decision to cover a demonstration should not be communicated to anyone outside the broadcasting organisation.
- Journalists must maintain their distance from organizers and demonstrators.
- Reporting teams should be wary of persons or groups who are clearly putting on a performance for the cameras or microphones.
- Reporting teams must not make any suggestions or requests to demonstrators which could lead to staging of events.
- Journalists should inquire into and report on the identity of the organizers, the aim of the demonstration and the number of those taking part.
- When a planned public event is disturbed by a demonstration, the event itself should still receive the coverage it merits.
- The decision to broadcast a report must be based on the importance of the event, protest or demonstration – rather than on the sounds and images it provides.

All India Radio adds further advice, based on its experience of covering communal unrest:

- When riots and communal clashes occur in any part of the country, AIR broadcasts should help to defuse the situation and restore amity, order and confidence.
- While facts should not be distorted or suppressed, they should be presented in a manner which should serve the national interest. As a rule treat all such news in a low key
- If riots are of a communal nature, do not identify the communities concerned.
- Even if delayed, information about clashes, such as casualties, should be given after proper verification. They should be attributed to a dependable source. Only such views as would defuse the situation should be highlighted.
- Never offend any particular community or religion.
- While reporting disturbed situations, avoid references which may create panic among people and induce violent or emotional reaction among communities or sections of people.
- Unconfirmed reports and hearsay in disturbed situations are best ignored.

## 27. FAIRNESS AND STRAIGHT DEALING

Programmes should be based on fairness, openness, and straight dealing. Contributors should be treated honestly and with respect. From the start, programme makers should be as clear as they can about the nature of the programme and its purpose. They should be open about their plans and honest with everyone taking part in a programme.

Whether they are public figures or ordinary citizens, contributors ought to be able to assume they will be dealt with in a fair way. They should not feel misled, deceived or misrepresented before, during or after the programme. Contributors have a right to know:

- What a programme is about.
- What kind of contribution they are expected to make: (interview, take part in a discussion), who the other participants are, whether it will be live or recorded and whether it will be edited. They should not be given a guarantee that their contribution will be broadcast. But programme makers should not record a substantial contribution unless they expect to use it.
- The need for fairness applies equally to people asked for help and advice in the preparation of programmes. They should be told why they are being contacted and what the programme is about.

The only occasion when programme makers are not frank with contributors is where there is a clear interest when dealing with serious illegal or anti-social behaviour. Deception should be the minimum necessary and only after approval has been granted by a senior broadcasting official.

Some contributors may ask to see/hear a copy of the programme before it is broadcast. It is generally unwise to agree to this – for legal reasons and to maintain editorial independence. There may be special circumstances when a preview is allowed without surrendering editorial control.

### 27.1 Embargoes

When programmes accept material under embargo, the policy must be to observe it. Sometimes it may be possible to persuade the organisation that has imposed the embargo to lift it – sometimes other media break it. In this case, it may be justified to do likewise. The more widespread the disregarding of an embargo, the more justifiable it is to follow suit.

### 27.2 Anonymity

There is no absolute obligation to name all programme contributors, though in most cases, both contributors and audiences would expect speakers to be identified, especially if the contribution is significant. Sometimes, a decision is taken not to name a person in order to protect that person.

## 28. PRIVACY

Privacy in the broadest sense means being left alone. It means protecting an individual's personal and private life, as opposed to his/her public life, from intrusion or exposure to public view. Intrusion is justified only when the individual's private life impinges on or becomes part of his/her public life; is relevant to discussion of a public issue or becomes a matter of legitimate public concern.

Any intrusions have to be justified by serving a greater good. Private behaviour, correspondence and conversation should not be brought into the public domain unless there is a wider public issue.

### 28.1 Private Lives and Public Issues

Public figures are in a special position, but they still have rights to a private life. The public should be given facts that bear upon an individual's ability to perform their duties or his/her suitability for office. The public does not have the right to know about a public figure's private behaviour provided it is legal and does not raise important wider issues (even if the newspapers are full of it).

An individual's legitimate right to privacy must be respected. Broadcasters should not do anything that entails intrusion into private grief and distress unless it is justified by overriding considerations of public interest." But in certain circumstances, the public's right to information may take precedence over privacy.

- The public has a right to receive information about public figures and public institutions if the information is in the public interest
- Invasion of privacy may be justified in order to give information that has a bearing on someone's performance of public duties and on any matter of public interest
- It is important to distinguish between those aspects of the private lives of public figures that are pertinent to their public duties, and those which are not
- Where it does not affect public interest, public figures should have the same right to privacy as others.

The right to privacy is qualified by:

- Public interest: people are less entitled to privacy when protection of privacy means concealing matters which are against the public interest.
- Behaviour: people are less entitled to privacy where their behaviour is criminal or seriously anti-social.
- Location: the right to privacy is clearly much greater in a place such as a private home than it is in a public place.

## 29. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES

A broadcaster is responsible for the quality and standards of all programmes on its services. This includes programmes produced by its own staff as well as co-productions or bought in material. It is important that the public have opportunities to express their opinions on programmes and to make complaints if they wish. A public service broadcaster must be accountable to its viewers and listeners. It has to monitor and respond to public concerns whether they are expressed in the form of letters, phone calls or e-mails or are raised by newspapers or other media, or through formal means.

With so many programme services being provided each day errors may occur from time to time. Each station will have its own rules and formulas for dealing with any complaints it receives from the public. Usually it will have a special department to deal with such matters. There are several generally accepted ways of dealing with complaints.

### 29.1 Correcting Mistakes

When a serious factual error does occur it is important to admit it clearly and frankly. Saying what was wrong, and offering an apology, if appropriate, can be an important factor in making an effective correction.

Inaccuracy can lead to complaints of unfairness. Where an error is acknowledged, a timely correction may have the effect of persuading the person who made the complaint from taking the matter further.

### 29.2 Complaints

It is important that complaints receive a prompt reply – even if initially it is simply an acknowledgment while the complaint is investigated. More serious complaints are likely to be:

- . A claim of unjust or unfair treatment in a programme.
- . Unwarranted infringement of privacy over the way material in a programme was obtained.
- . The portrayal of violence or sexual behaviour or use of foul language in a programme.
- . Other matters of taste and decency.

Some broadcasters, such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation lay down a time scale for the handling of complaints. There must be a reply within four weeks of receipt of a complaint. In Britain, anyone can complain to the Broadcasting Standards Commission about matters of taste and decency within three weeks of the transmission of a radio programme; and within two months of the last showing of a television programme.

In the first instance, the broadcaster should consider whether the complaint is reasonable. If so, something should be done about it. If not, the broadcaster should reject the complaint –  
courteously.

If a complaint is received while a programme is still live on air, a correction may be made during or immediately after the programme. This is a decision which will be up to the most senior editorial person present.

Many people prefer the immediacy and informality of making a complaint by telephone. If the person simply wants his/her complaint noted, audience contact staff will register their comments. If the caller is not satisfied, usually he/she should be asked to put the complaint in writing. This is the most appropriate action where the matter is more serious and complex, or where a caller becomes abusive.

If the caller has problems in writing (language, literacy or disability) alternative arrangements will need to be made to obtain a written record of the complaint.

Once a complaint has been lodged, the department which deals with the public will refer the matter to the department which produced the programme and ask for a detailed response.

When there is a threat that legal action may be taken, the broadcasters' legal department should be informed and its advice sought.

### **29.3 Pursuing Complaints**

If a person who has made a complaint is not satisfied with the station's response, it may be appropriate to refer the matter for further investigation. Stations have different ways of dealing with these matters. In Britain, for example, the BBC Governors consider appeals from viewers and listeners dissatisfied with the Corporation's response. Every quarter, they publish a bulletin outlining complaints that have been upheld and saying what action has been taken as a result. This is a public document available on the BBC's public web-site.

If a complaint is upheld the broadcaster will be expected to publish a summary of the complaint and the findings. It may be required to broadcast these findings on screen or on air as well as to publish the verdict in the newspapers.