



## *INSTITUTE ON RELIGION AND PUBLIC POLICY*

### **CHARTER ON**

### **FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND JOURNALISTIC ETHICS**

### **IN RELATION TO**

### **RESPECT FOR RELIGION OR BELIEF**

#### **1. INTEGRITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY:**

Journalists are accountable for the social and political consequences of their actions and have a duty to maintain the highest ethical and professional standards.

Journalists shall scrupulously endeavor to report the truth; respect the right of the public to know the truth; ensure that any information they disseminate is fair and objective; promptly and prominently correct any material inaccuracies; and afford the right of reply in appropriate instances.

The media<sup>1</sup> is responsible for any material released through it.

#### **2. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ETHICAL ACCOUNTABILITY:**

The public's right to information is a fundamental right and cornerstone of a free and democratic society. Thus, the media exercises an essential role in the society that requires a great sense of responsibility to the public. Freedom of speech, freedom of information, and freedom of the press represent the heart of democracy. A free, independent media is critical to ensure transparency and an open and robust democratic society; it is instrumental to the development and strengthening of effective democratic systems.

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<sup>1</sup> **“Media” refers to all forms of the press, through print, audio-visual or electronic media, or any other means and all journalists who impart information through the press.**

A responsible media recognizes the vital necessity of the free flow of information and the impact it has on shaping public perception. It is mindful of its ethical responsibility to the public and its need to respect and defend human rights.

A responsible media has the right and the duty to report and to comment on all matters of public interest with respect to the rights and freedoms of individuals and institutions. It advances understanding and participation in the democratic process for all.

A responsible media freely expresses personal or group opinions within the limits of the pluralistic contest of ideas. It accepts that freedom of expression may be subject to restrictions and limitations when other fundamental rights are endangered. It takes special care to not violate other fundamental human rights and takes individuals' rights to privacy, honor and dignity into account while fostering the free flow of information.

A responsible media respects prevailing ethical and moral standards and avoids pandering to the lurid or profane.

A responsible media fosters the public's right to know and right to freedom of expression. It aims at promoting the free flow of information and transparency, and adheres to the principles promoting and upholding respect for human dignity and religious beliefs as reflected in the United Nations Resolution Combating Defamation of Religions. <sup>2</sup>

A responsible media strives for peace, democracy, social progress, and respect for human rights. It recognizes, respects and defends diversity of opinion. It opposes discrimination based on any grounds.

A responsible media makes earnest efforts to reduce ignorance, promote greater understanding, alleviate cultural and religious insensitivity among peoples and facilitate dialogue among nations

A responsible media ensures that the display and dissemination of images complies with the same requirements and the highest ethical standards as for written or oral presentations.

### **3. RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION AND ETHICAL ACCOUNTABILITY:**

A responsible media serves as a watchdog to safeguard fundamental rights. It does not, therefore, fuel or engender discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, cultural traditions or similar grounds. It recognizes and respects diversity and minority rights.

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<sup>2</sup> **Human Rights Resolution 2005/3, "Combating Defamation of Religions" (Human Rights Commission UN Doc. No. E/CN. 4/RES/2005/3 April 2005)**

A responsible media avoids discriminatory or denigrating references to religious beliefs and spiritual values.

A responsible media does not refer to religions or religious institutions in a prejudicial, biased or pejorative context; when religious references are essential to the reported matter or facilitate understanding, they are made accurately, fairly, impartially and respectfully.

A responsible media does not intrude on sacred matters relating to creed, religious rites and religious institutions. It refrains from encouraging or instigating discrimination, contempt, bias, ridicule or hatred based on religion or belief.

A responsible media balances fundamental human rights, including the right to be free from discrimination based on religion or belief, with the right to freedom of expression and the public's right to know. It shows special sensitivity when dealing with religious issues to avoid any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on religion or belief and having as its purpose the nullification or impairment of human rights.

A responsible media avoids religious stereotyping and does not associate any religion or belief with human rights violations or terrorism.

A responsible media provides a fair and prompt opportunity for reply to inaccuracies and stereotypes regarding religious organizations or affected members when reasonably called for.

#### **4. INCITEMENT AND ETHICAL ACCOUNTABILITY:**

A responsible media never promotes religious hatred. It scrupulously avoids engendering hostility towards religions and their members likely to lead to imminent violence or systematic deprivation of human rights.

A responsible media refrains from provoking aggression, hatred, discrimination and any form of violence directed at individuals and organizations because of their religious beliefs and association. It remains alert to the grave danger associated with condoning or encouraging violence, discrimination, hatred and intolerance on religious grounds.

A responsible media eschews inciting foreseeable violence, inflaming hatred, stigmatizing religions and their followers, and engendering inequality on grounds of religion or belief. It is sensitive to avoid affronting religious beliefs and contributing to conflicts between religions and their members due to religious differences.