

# Reporting for All:

Developing a public service journalism culture in Sri Lanka



A HANDBOOK FOR JOURNALISTS

**CPA – Centre for Policy Alternatives**

24/2 28th Lane, Flower Road,  
Colombo 07  
Sri Lanka  
Phone: +94 11 2301634  
Fax: +94 11 4714460  
E-mail: cpa\_sara@sri.lanka.net, sara@cpalanka.org

**IFJ Headquarters**

International Federation of Journalists  
Residence Palace, Block C  
155 Rue de la Loi  
B-1040 Brussels, Belgium  
Telephone: +32 2 235 22 00  
Telefax: +32 2 235 22 19  
Email: ifj@ifj.org  
Website: www.ifj.org

**IFJ Asia-Pacific**

245 Chalmers Street  
Redfern NSW 2016 Australia  
Telephone: +61 2 9333 0999  
Fax: +61 2 9333 0933  
Email: ifj@ifj-asia.org  
Website: www.ifj-asia.org

**IFJ South Asia Office**

New Delhi  
Mobile: +91 9818 383 669  
Email: ifjsouthasia@hotmail.com  
Website: www.ifj-asia.org

**IMPACS - Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society**

207 West Hastings Street, Suite 910  
Vancouver, BC, CANADA V6B 1H7  
Phone: 604 682 1953  
Toll-free: 1 877 232 0122  
Fax: 604 682 4353  
Email: media@impacs.org

**SRI LANKAN ORGANISATIONS****Federation of Media Employees' Trade Unions (FMETU)**

Lake House, Colombo 10  
Phone: +94 1472407  
Fax: +94 1472704  
Email: fmetu@sltnet.lk

**Free Media Movement (FMM)**

237/22, Wijaya Kumaratunga Mawatha,  
Colombo 05, Sri Lanka  
Phone: +94 777 312457 or +94 777 394959  
Fax: +94 114714460  
Email: fmm@diamond.lankanet

**Sri Lanka Working Journalists' Association (SLWJA)**

276/3 Pradeepa Mawathe, Maligawatte  
Colombo 10  
Phone: +94 1 429248  
Fax: +94 1 429240

**Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum (SLMMF)**

A3, 1/1, Manning town,  
Colombo 08, Sri Lanka  
Phone: +94 0112688293  
Fax: +94 0114204765

**Sri Lanka Tamil Media Alliance (SLTMA)**

113/6, Eli House Road,  
Colombo 15, Sri Lanka  
Email: tamilmedia@hotmail.com  
Website: www.sltma.com

## Reporting for all: Developing a public service journalism culture in Sri Lanka – A handbook for journalists

**Editor:** Jacqueline Park, International Federation of Journalists  
**Authors:** Mike Dobbie, Sunanda Deshapriya and Jacqueline Park  
**Thanks to:** Pi James, Sylvia Garcia  
**Design by:** Louise Summerton, Gadfly Media  
**Photographs by:** Buddika Weerasingha  
**Cartoon by:** Cathy Wilcox

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Journalists are the ears and eyes of our communities, they are reporting and analysing events and issues from the front line and it is through them that much of our world is interpreted.

The quality of the information available through the media comes from the professionalism, ethics and courage of the journalists in the field and the media culture that supports them.

The strengthening of a viable independent media in Sri Lanka is a critical step in the ongoing process of building democratic institutions, eliminating ethnic conflict and encouraging public participation.

The long years of war, with the country split along ethnic, cultural, language and religious divides, has seen many elements of Sri Lanka's media present stories that are biased in favour of one side or another.

A 2005 survey showed that 87 per cent of Sri Lankan journalists believe the media fails to provide accurate, balanced and fair information. Four out of five journalists believe the media is biased to one ethnic group or another (Park & Deshapriya 2005).

What these alarming statistics show is that, as journalists, we lack confidence in our work. And if we aren't confident in what we do, how can we expect our communities to have confidence in us?

***Our challenge is to reclaim the media for the values of journalism and to create a media space that we can work in, a culture that encourages the practice of independent ethical journalism***

Sri Lankan journalists work in a society that is politicised, both between and within ethnic and religious groups. As journalists, we are pressed to take sides, to align ourselves with this group or that.

But there are strong roots for collective action among journalists. The survival of the Sri Lankan Working Journalists' Association as the largest organisation of journalists. The collective trade union action of the Federation of Media Employees' Trade Unions in defending the rights of all media workers. The campaigning of the Free Media Movement to defend and extend press freedom. The work of the Tamil and Muslim organisations in advancing rights of journalists from minority communities.

The coming together of these organisations under the reformist Media Charter in 2005 was a truly historic moment in Sri Lankan journalism.

Journalists, working together in professional solidarity, building a culture of independent journalism, have a leading role in the campaign for media reform.

Our challenge is to reclaim the media for the values of journalism and to create a media space that we can work in, a culture that encourages the practice of independent ethical journalism, that is a journalism deeply embedded in true public service values.

The privileges and benefits we demand as journalists are only worth holding if we deliver in turn to empower our communities by informing, educating and enabling them to participate in public life.

Embracing the principles of public service journalism means we must place the principles of journalism above politics. Those principles can be summed up in one word: respect. Respect for truth. Respect for the public's right to know. Respect for the

views of others.

As journalists, each of us must accept we have an individual professional responsibility to:

- ◆ Commit to democracy, pluralism and tolerance.
- ◆ Strive for quality – to do the very best we can.
- ◆ Be accurate, fair and honest – all the time.

We must acknowledge the need to set and maintain a high journalistic standard, behave in an ethical manner always, strive to produce quality journalism and be accountable for the work we do and the journalism we produce.

In Sri Lanka, reclaiming the practice of independent ethical journalism comes at a time when the country is at a crossroads. After more than two decades of civil war and the devastation of the December 26, 2004 tsunami, the role of the media in Sri Lankan society is under intense scrutiny. Journalists must accept their special responsibility to inform, educate and assist citizens to achieve a peaceful solution to the conflict and to go on to rebuild their lives.

In a society divided by political forces and wracked by ethnic violence and terrorism, it would be easy for us to despair, particularly when journalists and other media workers are too often the targets for abuse, assault and murder.

As journalists we know that it is precisely these sorts of challenges that make a free, vibrant and independent media so important. Right now, Sri Lanka needs more independent courageous and campaigning journalism.

Change begins with us.

Jacqueline Park  
IFJ Asia-Pacific Director  
Media consultant, CPA-IMPACS Voices of Reconciliation Project

### How to use this handbook:

The purpose of this handbook is to examine how journalists can fulfil their duties within a framework of producing high quality, ethical journalism that is responsive to the needs of the community. The handbook aims to give Sri Lankan journalists an appreciation of their role in society with particular emphasis on journalism driven by public service values.

This report looks at ways individual journalists can play their part in overcoming these problems as part of the peace-building process and the advancement of Sri Lankan society. More importantly, it would allow the media to fulfil its role as the watchdog of an informed democratic society. It proposes, as a solution, that journalists strive for increased professionalism using the public service journalism model as the basis for change.

The book explains the role of the journalist with particular regard to producing high quality ethical journalism that informs and engages the public – a vital element in the creation of a vibrant democracy.

Checklists are useful in changing behaviour by implementing a new practical way of doing work. The checklists that appear throughout the handbook offer ways to ensure high quality ethical journalism that meets the values of public service journalism.

The handbook is part of a strategy to encourage the support of journalists, editors and media owners to transform Sri Lanka's media with the broad support of the community.

## 2. GOOD JOURNALISM WITH COMMUNITY VALUES



### The role of the journalist

Our role as journalists is to inform society. Carrying out that duty is not easy but most of us believe that there are core professional values that we must practice if we are to produce good work.

These values include: getting the story first, getting the facts right (accuracy), being honest and telling the truth, remaining neutral and independent, getting all sides of the story (balance and fairness), using fair means to gather material for our stories, correcting mistakes, not publishing rumours, attributing sources, checking information with at least two sources, and respecting information given in confidence.

Other values important for good journalism include declaring conflicts of interest, avoiding inflicting unnecessary harm, respecting privacy and grief, not allowing business interests to influence reporting and not accepting bribes or gifts.

But what do these core values really mean for us as we go about our work? Here are two statements about journalism:

- ◆ Journalists should report problems; not try to solve them. There are other people who have that job.
- ◆ Journalists have a responsibility to go beyond exposing problems and look for solutions.  
(adapted from Nelson, 2000).

Those two statements contradict each other but which one is true? Is it possible that, in some circumstances, they are both right? And what do people expect from the media? If the media not only reports on society's problems but also goes a step further by seeking solutions, wouldn't the public appreciate the role of the media more?

**Forgotten survivors:** Public service journalism promotes issues that are important to citizens and is responsive to citizens' needs. Issues such as education, health, community services, and instances of grassroots community activism are all important stories for a journalist with a public service focus.

### Communities want information so they can make sensible decisions.

Because the media plays a vital role in society, particularly as a pillar of democracy, journalists have a role to play in educating and informing our communities. That includes not just reporting on the problems of our communities, but trying to do something about them.

### What do our communities want from their media?

In times of conflict or disaster, what do our communities want from their media? What do they want from their media in times of grief or during election campaigns?

Communities want information so they can make sensible decisions. They want issues they are concerned about to be given media exposure, and they want to hear their own voices in their media. Our communities want respect, tolerance and understanding. And they want solutions to their problems.

For example, after the tsunami, what do we think our communities wanted from the media? They wanted to know what happened: "the problem". But they also wanted to know what could be done about it: "the solution".

The Readership Institute (2004) at Northwestern University found that newspaper readers sought the following from their media:

- ◆ News that looks out for my civic personal interests, that makes me feel like I'm a civic player.
- ◆ News that makes me feel like I'm smarter.
- ◆ News that gives me something to talk about, that makes me feel that I'm at the hub of my social network.

### Public service journalism

Our stories also have enormous impact on our audiences. We wield tremendous power. We decide what to report and what not to report, which sources to interview, where to place a story, the images to go with the story, and the headline. We apply a filter on the news while trying to be objective and neutral.

As we wield this power, we have to be conscious that the core values of journalism are being observed.

One framework to achieve this was developed initially in the United States in the 1920s, and has been evolving rapidly since the 1980s, is called "Public Service Journalism". It is also called "Civic Journalism" or "Community Journalism". The values underpinning that framework are referred to as "Public Service Values in Media".

This framework of "public service journalism" has several definitions:

*"Journalism that helps to overcome people's sense of powerlessness and alienation"* (Schaffer, 2001)

*"Journalism that reflects the richness of society, serves the whole community independent of commercial, partisan or government interests and provides a plurality of voices from across the spectrum of society"* (Media Charter, 2005, see Appendix II)

*"Journalism that gives citizens access to a fair, balanced and independent media that respect the principles of pluralism, diversity and universal respect for human rights"* (Public Service Values Leaflet, CPA)

In other words, public service journalism acknowledges that the creation of a tolerant, peaceful and just society depends upon the freedom of citizens to have access to a fair, balanced and independent media that respect the principles of pluralism, diversity and universal respect for human rights.

The ultimate goal of public service journalism is to provide a comprehensive, varied and balanced media, which is of a high quality, for the entire public. In countries like Sri Lanka, this community conscious journalism has a key mission:

- ◆ To promote access to education and culture
- ◆ To develop knowledge and promote a national culture and identity
- ◆ To foster interaction and understanding among citizens.

This means the media has to develop a relationship of trust and respect with the community so that it can fulfil its obligations. The media has to demonstrate that it is professional, ethical, skilled, committed and independent in order to gain the trust of our communities and fulfil our responsibilities to them. Without the public's trust, the media cannot perform its role in democracy.

### Core values

Public Service Journalism therefore aims to achieve many things and operates with these core values in mind:

- ◆ Promote democracy, pluralism and tolerance
- ◆ Strive for quality
- ◆ Accuracy, balance, honesty

### Journalists solving problems

"Public journalism defies easy description. Its major proponents... describe it in part as an ongoing experiment that attempts to turn people into caring citizens determined to become more active in finding solutions to some of the problems they face, and determined to make institutions that govern their lives and their communities work.

To accomplish this goal, public journalists are encouraged to take a more activist stance as facilitators of social change.

Such activities go beyond the more traditional definition of journalism which regards the reporter as an objective chronicler of public events and who leaves it up to citizens to decide what they'll do with the information they have been given.

(Supporters of public service journalism) say public journalists must consider themselves activists, not an advocate of a certain opinion or point of view, but as proponents of effective deliberation to empower people to solve problems they share in common and that need urgent attention." (McKie, 2000)

- ◆ Look for solutions to problems
- ◆ Recognise many voices
- ◆ Help society understand itself
- ◆ Investigate issues of public interest
- ◆ Promote issues important to citizens
- ◆ Be responsive to citizens' needs
- ◆ Build trust with readers/viewers/listeners

Public service journalism recognises its place in a community, fostering democracy, acknowledging pluralism and encouraging tolerance and understanding. This is needed in Sri Lanka now more than ever as after years of civil war peace negotiations were suspended and the country has plunged again into conflict.

It must consistently strive to produce high standard journalism that is accurate, balanced and honest. This requires both journalists and the media they work for to make greater efforts to ensure the quality of the journalism they produce is as high as possible. For journalists this means maintaining an ethical approach to news gathering and reporting at all times (see Chapter 6 – Ethics diversity and community conscious journalism). For media outlets this may mean a review of how it goes about collecting, processing and managing news stories. (See the example of the independent newspaper *Ravaya* in Appendix I for the newspaper's approach to changing the daily practice of journalism at the paper to boost quality and *Ravaya's* commitment to monitoring and correcting errors.) It may also mean that staff, including editors, may require training to assist them in raising journalism standards.

### Journalism with many voices

In recognising pluralism, public service journalism seeks to include the many voices in society. Media monitoring surveys in Sri Lanka (see Chapter 4 – How does Sri Lanka's media perform?) demonstrate the poor use of sources in most news stories, where in an alarmingly high number of stories only a single source is quoted. Not only can this imply that the information from the single source is wrong (either by accident or perhaps deliberately), it also suggests the journalist has probably not checked the validity of the information before publication. As a general guide, at least two sources should be

**Society is made up of many voices with many perspectives and opinions. Good journalism should try to reflect the entire story, not just a one viewpoint.**

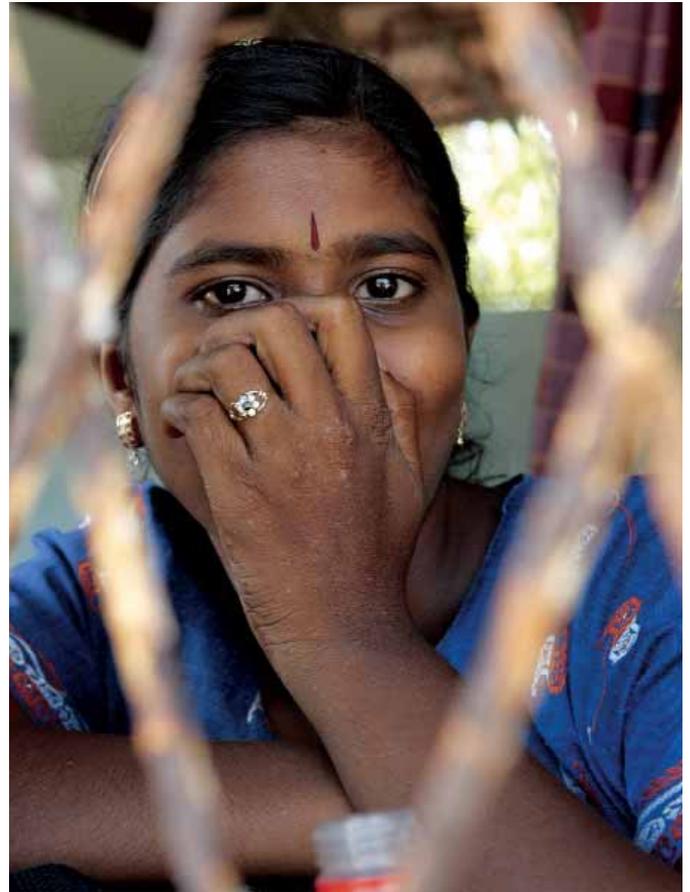
quoted for every story – not least to ensure accuracy and balance.

Using many sources in a story is also good public service journalism. Society is made up of many voices with many perspectives and opinions. Good journalism should try to reflect the entire story, not just a one viewpoint. Journalists can write better stories, and develop higher quality journalism, by seeking out more voices in a story, getting a range of viewpoints and opinions, and actively working to involve the public in the story (see Chapter 8 – Engaging the public and Chapter 9 – Exercises).

There are added benefits from embracing the use of many voices in a story. Aside from encouraging pluralism in reporting, and making an attempt to reflect the diversity in the community, using many voices is also likely to help promote public service journalism that is responsive to the needs of citizens, build trust among the audience, and discover, investigate and promote issues that are important in the community.

Public service journalism aims to help society understand itself. It listens to the community and responds to what they want reported, and it also actively involves them in the journalism process. And finally, by involving the community, if journalists maintain high standards of ethical behaviour, it can help build trust and understanding.

For instance, in the case of reporting on the tsunami in Sri Lanka, a reporter practising public service journalism would seek the views of not just politicians, but also would allow the voices of the people affected by the waves to be heard, as well as local community groups, aid workers and emergency personnel and so on. Those reporters would look at the issues that were important to the citizens whose lives had been changed by the tsunami and would try to find solutions to



**Hear my voice:** It is important that the voices of all are heard and represented in our media, including the stories and voices of women, children, the elderly and the disadvantaged. Journalists need to strive for a variety of sources and if all the sources are men, seek out women's opinions.

### Characteristics of public service or civic journalism

We've already seen that public service journalism is sometimes called civic journalism. Jan Schaffer, executive director of The Pew Center for Civic Journalism, lists the characteristics of civic journalism as:

- ◆ Seeking to expand the definition of “news” to cover consensus as well as conflict, to report about success stories as well as failures.
- ◆ Seeking to frame stories in ways that are more relevant to people.
- ◆ Seeking to treat ordinary people as players in a self-governing society, rather than as passive spectators of some civic freak show.
- ◆ Trying to provide entry points for people to recognise and act on their community issues.

(Nelson, 2000)

those problems.

### Journalists' checklist – complete this for every story you write

As you write your story, answer these questions to ensure it has balance, accuracy, honesty, fairness, independence and respect.

1. Have you reported how the issue has affected different ethnic groups?
2. Have you used a wide range of sources to tell all sides of the story?
3. Have you named at least two sources?
4. Have you tried to find new voices rather than over-used familiar sources?
5. Have you avoided applying stereotypes or “labels”?
6. Is there a balance between men and women?
7. Have you looked for a solution to the problem?
8. Have you provided details of where readers can get more information?
9. Have you explained the background and context of the issue?
10. Have you included the human voice: ordinary people?
11. Have you avoided writing your own opinions and views?
12. In your work, have you adhered to the Code of Ethics? (IFJ, 2005)

### 3. PUBLIC SERVICE JOURNALISM IN SRI LANKA – AN ESSENTIAL COMMUNITY SERVICE

Most Sri Lankan journalists agree there needs to be change in the media in the country. In a multi-ethnic society such as Sri Lanka, journalists must understand how their reporting, even of everyday issues, can either inflame or ease tensions. Violent conflict and political upheaval raise tempers and prevent mutual understanding.

In times of conflict, disaster and for the election of our leaders, our communities need accurate, truthful, honest, independent and unbiased information. However, in Sri Lanka it is clear the media is divided along ethnic lines.

This means most of our media only speak to a section of the population and that the information provided is lacking many of the elements of public service journalism. At times when information is needed most, bias creeps in.

The role of the journalist is to report on issues, reveal the truth and to help people understand each other's differences — cultural, religious, ethnic and otherwise. Journalists should not conceal or ignore these issues but they should understand the complexities. They must go beyond the surface of a story, and dig deeper. This means they also have to actively hunt out new sources, search for new ideas and present new opportunities to their audience. Not only does such action make for a better, and more balanced report, but it is also better quality journalism too.

As the IFJ wrote in its earlier report, *On the Road to Peace – Reporting Conflict and Ethnic Diversity: A research report on good journalism practice in Sri Lanka*, the role of Sri Lanka's media requires individual journalists to participate in change.

“The most important thing is to do our job: professionally, accurately and ethically. We have to get the basics right. The second task is to exercise our rights and our responsibilities. It is critical to maintain a free society in a time of conflict. We exercise these rights on behalf of the communities we serve, and

we have an overriding responsibility to report fairly, accurately and honestly. The third task is to build solidarity and support among journalists. Solidarity does not mean that all of us must agree politically, or that journalists in different countries, or from different groups, on different newspapers or rival channels, cannot be in competition. Solidarity is based on a shared understanding of the importance of our craft, a commitment to good will and a recognition that we can disagree on issues – freedom of speech means the right to disagree.

“On the most basic level, journalists need to support each other to do their job in safety and to agree, entrench and uphold an ethical code of conduct. Professional journalists, operating to a code of conduct, should be ‘non-combatants’, even in a factional struggle” (Park & Deshapriya 2005).

#### Ethnicity checklist

- ◆ Avoid reference to a person's ethnicity, race or religion
- ◆ If it is necessary to refer to a person's ethnicity, race or religion, confirm these details with the person to ensure accuracy
- ◆ Where other news sources unnecessarily treat ethnicity as a cause, educate readers on the real causes and point out that ethnicity was not a factor
- ◆ Understanding your own biases is vital and should be kept in mind when preparing or selecting news reports
- ◆ Using images is a useful way of avoiding descriptions that might cause offence
- ◆ Ask sources how they would like you to describe them – in terms of their race, religion and ethnicity for example



**Street talk:** As a general rule, journalists should avoid reference to a person's ethnicity, race or religion. If it is important to the story, ask the person how they would like to be described and confirm these details with them.

## 4. HOW DOES SRI LANKA'S MEDIA PERFORM?

Does Sri Lanka's media apply public service values journalism? How well does it report the many sides of a story, using a variety of sources, and correct errors? A media monitoring survey reveals some of the answers.

A survey study of 11 national daily newspapers over eight days in mid-2005 showed Sri Lankan newspapers suffer from an over-reliance on single source news stories. Indeed, almost a third of all stories do not identify any source for their information. The country's newspapers only infrequently offer corrections.

Almost half of all stories in Sinhala and Tamil newspapers that were monitored featured only a single source, while English language newspapers fared slightly better with 30 per cent of their articles featuring only a single source.

The survey found that a right of reply was published only three times in the English-language newspapers (and all of them were in one newspaper). Sinhala press published rights of reply 15 times while Tamil media carried only six.

During the monitoring period, the English language newspapers carried two corrections; Sinhala press ran 13 corrections and the Tamil press carried just one correction.

**Most editors wanted their staff to write on society's common problems: transport, health, education and the environment.**

### Views from the top

A face-to-face survey of chief editors in Sri Lanka conducted in April and May 2006 indicated that most believed that their editorial staff had an above average knowledge of ethics. This contrasts with a 2004 IFJ study which found only half of all journalists were aware of a professional code of ethics and less than 10 per cent of those had a copy or had received training in the code.

The 2006 survey found that 12 out of the 14 chief editors surveyed believed media organisations needed editorial charters that would guarantee independence from political and commercial pressures of their owners.

The number one reason given for diminishing public service values in Sri Lankan media was political imperatives, followed by ownership and then commercialisation. Chief editors saw public training, a change in editorial policies, and instigating wider public debate, as the three best ways to make public service journalism values a priority in the media.

Thirteen of the 14 chief editors surveyed said they would like their journalists to be trained in public service journalism values. And they said there was a need to enhance professionalism through training, professional guidelines and codes of ethics.

### What news editors think

Similarly, a survey of news editors of Sri Lankan media was conducted, in October and November 2005, using one-on-one



**The richness of society:** In September 2005, journalists from across the island met in Tholangamuwa and agreed on an historic charter outlining a strategy and timeline for implementing a democratic and pluralist media culture in Sri Lanka. The charter recognised that "there needs to develop a strong and democratic media culture within the news media so that it reflects the richness of society..."

discussions with 28 news editors: 10 from state-controlled media and 18 from other media. Eighteen of them were from Sinhala language media, 10 from English and four from Tamil language media.

The editors said that the sources for most of their news stories were instruments of the government: the security forces, state agencies, and the police, although the general public rated highly, as did other journalists.

In terms of writing stories, most editors wanted their staff to write on society's common problems: transport, health, education and the environment. Other popular story topics were politics, the peace process, accidents, crime, and corruption. Editors said they chose to run with a particular story if it used established sources, was about an issue relevant to the audience and if it contained all sides of the story. The biggest limitations to press freedom, they said, were institutional policies, lack of resources, and pressure from business and political groups.

When asked about promoting public service journalism, editors recognised that high-quality journalism is vital and said they strive to produce journalism that is without political, commercial and party bias, and that demonstrates impartiality and works for social justice. Asked why they thought public service values were diminishing in Sri Lanka's media they blamed political imperatives, commercialisation, and the state and private ownership of the media.

More than half the news editors think that there is not enough effort given to promoting public service values in media and they said they would support a program to improve/introduce public service values journalism into their organisation.

## Provincial journalists' problems

Central to the reform of the Sri Lankan media is the recognition of the roles and responsibility of provincial journalists – too often neglected, underpaid and under-supported.

About half of Sri Lanka's estimated 4000 journalists work on a freelance basis in the provinces. These provincial journalists are confronted with a variety of problems that stem from their isolation, their employment status as freelancers, and the news values of the media outlets they work for. Another factor is that most of Sri Lanka's media is based in Colombo leaving provincial journalists isolated from mainstream media outlets and often without the trust and working relationship with their peers and editors in Colombo that is necessary for good journalism.

And yet, so much of the critical challenges for Sri Lanka are happening around the country, outside the capital where the media is based. To find out about them, Sri Lanka relies on the dedication and commitment of the country's provincial journalists.

A survey of 205 provincial journalists was conducted in September 2005. The survey asked provincial journalists about their sources of information and again, the instruments of government (police, state agencies and politicians) were the major source for news stories for 53 per cent of the survey's

respondents. The general public is used only 16 per cent of the time.

The survey also looked at public service values in media. Specifically, the survey asked why these values are being neglected in Sri Lanka's media and the respondents were asked to rank reasons they thought this was so. The number one reason cited by 36 per cent of respondents was "political reasons", followed closely by "commercial interests". These two responses appeared strongly in the top three rankings followed by "private and state ownership" and "editorial policies".

When asked how these values could be instilled in Sri Lankan media, 52 per cent of respondents said there needed to be a "broad public debate". The survey asked if the provincial journalists would like to participate in a campaign to make public service values a priority in the media. An overwhelming 91 per cent of provincial journalists would participate in a campaign to make public service journalism a priority in the media.

Integrating the provincial journalists into the broader journalism community is a key priority and challenge now.

## The Sydney Morning Herald accuracy checklist - 10 rules for getting it right:

- 1. Names and titles.** We check whether we've got the right person. We check spellings of all names and repeat them in parentheses. We check the person's job title and/or relationship (e.g. son, niece, etc, if relevant). If we're stating someone's CV we seek first-hand confirmation. We ensure the reporter's name is spelt correctly.
- 2. Times, dates, place.** We check and verify all times and dates. We also independently check that we've got the right place, the right street, and that we've described them precisely and spelt them correctly. We then tick them. Geographic generalisations are to be avoided.
- 3. Calculations and numbers.** We must check all calculations and statistical assumptions twice rather than taking another person's word for the arithmetic. Where possible we explain the basics of the calculations in the text. We tick the result in the copy and we display in note form (Control F9) in the text how it was derived. In the note we must include all numbers used in calculating percentages and percentage changes. All numbers must be double-checked and ticked.
- 4. Substantiation.** We substantiate or source all facts. When there is not enough space on minor claims we include the basis of our assertion in notes. Description of sources must be specific enough to allow the reader to determine the source's perspective. Anonymous quotes may be used only when approved by the editor.
- 5. Verification.** We verify material where possible and we independently check material from other media before we repeat it. We do not use the internet or Fairfax archives as a primary source for checking. It causes us to repeat errors.
- 6. Quotes.** We guarantee that words in direct quotes in the *Herald* are the exact words used and in the right context. If we are in doubt about exact wording we paraphrase, strictly adhering to the original meaning. Ellipses are a legitimate tool but use them rarely and only when the intent could not be misconstrued.
- 7. Photos.** Court reporters must identify the photo of an accused or witness before publication. Photos of victims must be independently verified before publication. Captions must be double-checked and sourced to a photographer. Photos of people with common names, or where we have multiple photos of people with the same name, must be double-checked with the reporter. Photographers should repeat checked names. Do not use if in any doubt.
- 8. Editing.** Reporters must read their copy through and do a spell-check before filing. Reporters should not overwrite as cutting can introduce errors. Edits will be checked with reporters. Reporters must be accessible to subeditors so changes can be checked.
- 9. More calls.** We speak to more sources to increase our chance of uncovering errors of fact, emphasis or interpretation. A basic news announcement requires a minimum of four calls: to the person making the statement, to a person or body affected, to a likely detractor and to an expert. Stories of speculative nature always require two sources.
- 10. Corrections.** The *Herald* is committed to presenting information fairly and accurately and correcting it if we get it wrong.

## 5. THE MEDIA CHARTER 2005

In September 2005, Sri Lankan journalists took a great leap forward towards changing the media culture to promote public service journalism in the country. The five representative journalist associations, the Federation of Media Employees' Trade Unions, the Sri Lanka Working Journalists' Association, the Sri Lanka Tamil Media Alliance, the Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum and the Free Media Movement, with the support of the IFJ, came together to draft a Media Charter.

The charter outlines a strategy and timeline to implement a democratic and pluralist media culture as well as social and professional rights for media and journalism in Sri Lanka. The charter is a broad agreement among journalists that media



**The charter outlines a strategy and timeline to implement a democratic and pluralist media culture as well as social and professional rights for media and journalism in Sri Lanka.**

should be free from political and commercial pressure and should operate according to minimum standards. There is solidarity among journalists on how to tackle the problems.

The introduction of the charter states:

*Fair, balanced and independent media is essential to good governance, effective public administration and the capacity of Sri Lankans to achieve a negotiated peace settlement and undertake a successful post-tsunami reconstruction program. A professional media with a responsibility to the public interest, independent of government or partisan influence and interference, is a vital part of the series of checks and balances central to democracy.*

*The practice of journalism in Sri Lanka faces many challenges. These challenges are of concern to Sri Lankan citizens but journalists, working together in professional solidarity, by building a culture of independent journalism, have a pivotal role to lead the campaign for media reform.*

*There needs to develop a strong and democratic public service culture within the news media so that it reflects the richness of society, serves the whole community independent of commercial, partisan or government interests, and provides a plurality of voices from across the spectrum of society in Sri Lanka.*

*This charter sets out the minimum standards and principles that underpin the public's right to know and a free media in a democratic society and outlines a practical program of action to support media reform. (For the full charter see Appendix II).*

The charter is a starting point for change in Sri Lankan media. Its aim is to not only galvanise journalists in to action through the work of their associations, but also sets out an agenda for debate on how this can be done.

The charter defines a set of fundamental principles, including respect for the truth and the public's right to know, as being the primary obligations of journalists. It also acknowledges that the creation of a tolerant, peaceful and just society "depends upon

**Not dropping the ball:** In times of disaster, it is more important than ever that journalists practice public service journalism, by providing accurate, honest, ethical, unbiased, and up to date information. Journalists and editors also need to look after the reporter's wellbeing.

the freedom of citizens to have access to quality media that respect the principles of pluralism, diversity and universal respect for human rights".

The charter stresses the working rights of journalists, including working in safety and security, freedom of association and collective bargaining for wages and conditions.

It also sets down a set of minimum standards including ethical conduct by all media, whether public or private. "Media must never be used as instruments of propaganda to support violence and extremism," it says. "Responsibility for ethical conduct in journalism rests with media professionals who should be responsible for drawing up codes of ethical conduct and who should establish credible and accountable systems of self-regulation."

Journalists should not be impeded from carrying out their responsibilities and media policy should encourage the adoption of internal editorial statutes and other provisions to safeguard the independence of journalists in all Sri Lankan media.

The journalist organisations call on the government through the charter to "promote transparency, open government and freedom of information and ensure the participation of all citizens in developing a democratic culture to strengthen the cohesion of all communities".

Importantly, the charter is an acknowledgement that while change must take place with the full cooperation of the community and with the government; the change has already begun with journalists taking action.

This is the starting point to raise awareness about the issues confronting the media in Sri Lanka and to promote the idea of reform.

## 6. ETHICS, DIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY CONSCIOUS JOURNALISM



### Ethical standards

Jack Nelson, a journalist with *The Los Angeles Times* says one approach for adopting public service journalism is for reporters to observe a strict adherence to journalism ethics. “Standards in deciding what is fit or fair to publish or broadcast have been lowered,” Nelson says (Nelson, 2000).

Despite this, he believes good journalism, especially public service journalism, is flourishing and that media outlets are investing heavily in ways to encourage ethical journalism and to produce journalism that engages “citizens in seeking solutions to the problems”.

Nelson’s involvement in public service journalism began when he was investigating malpractice at a mental health institution in a particular US state. After reporting on the issues, his editor then assigned him to report how another US state had reformed its mental health institutions. “I was not too happy about the assignment. As an investigative reporter I saw my job as uncovering problems, not as seeking solutions to them. But my editor was right and the ... trip taught me an important lesson about seeking solutions.”

Another key issue in public service journalism is ensuring diversity – not only in the newsroom but also among the voices that are used in news stories. For journalism to be truly effective, it must be inclusive of everyone in the community, it must be accountable to the community and it must reflect the whole community. So it is vital that a newsroom should include all types of Sri Lankans to ensure a diverse mix of gender, ethnicity, religion, language and background.

Diversity in the newsroom means more than just ensuring a balance of gender, ethnicity and religion – it should be seen as a way of creating a “more accurate newsroom”, according to

Diversity – both in what we read and hear on the news, as well as within our own newsrooms – is an important part of public service journalism in Sri Lanka.

### Ethnic diversity in Sri Lankan newsrooms

A survey among chief editors in Sri Lanka found that five out of 10 Sinhala newspapers did not have any journalist from another ethnic group, and the other five only had one Tamil journalist in each. Furthermore, both Tamil newspapers surveyed did not have any Sinhala journalists but had one and four Muslim journalists respectively. The most diverse newsrooms were English language newspapers, who although they were predominantly employed Sinhala journalists, also had a mix of Tamil, Muslim and Burger. While many editors recognise the value of having journalists from ethnic groups outside the newspaper’s language, not least to overcome language barriers and allow access to information from all communities, there are structural imperatives which the media need to work to overcome. One of the problems is, despite Sri Lanka’s trilingualism, there is little culture that supports the learning all three languages.

– Survey April-May 2006 for VOR project

the Project for Excellence in Journalism (Journalism.org, 2006). This means that rather than just reflecting Sri Lankan society, a truly diverse newsroom should be able to produce better journalism that seeks out stories in the community.

“The goal of diversity should be not only to assemble a newsroom that might resemble the community, but one that is also open and honest so that this diversity can function. This is not racial or gender diversity. It is not ideological diversity. It is not numerical diversity. It is what we call intellectual diversity, and it encompasses and gives meaning to all other kinds” (Journalism.org, 2006).

Ensuring that stories quote a diverse range of people also helps to create better journalism that properly reflects Sri Lankan society. Stories should quote people of different gender, ethnicity, language, geographic location, age, religion and so on – whenever possible.

### Ethics and quality

“Ethics entails making tough decisions – not the obvious choices between right and wrong, but the tough choices between not-quite-completely-rights, or even choosing between the lesser of two wrongs.” - Professor Jay Black, co-author of the Society of Professional American Journalists’ Ethics Handbook (MEAA, 1997).

Sri Lankan journalists need to use ethical standards as a way to promote high quality journalism. At present, journalists are not sufficiently aware of the ethics of their profession. The following statistics are taken from *On the Road to Peace: Reporting Conflict and Ethnic Diversity: A research report on good journalism practice in Sri Lanka* (Park & Deshapriya, 2004). The IFJ and the Centre for Policy Alternatives produced the report in 2005. It involved surveying 100 Sri Lankan journalists as well as conducting a media monitoring exercise over two weeks in June 2004.

### Ethics

- ◆ Only half Sri Lanka’s journalists are aware of the Code of Ethics.
- ◆ Only 11 per cent of journalists have a copy of the code.
- ◆ Less than 5 per cent have received training in ethics.

### Balance and bias

- ◆ 87 per cent of Sri Lankan journalists believe Sri Lanka’s media is failing to provide accurate, balanced and fair information
- ◆ 80 per cent of Sri Lankan journalists believe their media is biased toward one ethnic group or another.

### Sources

- ◆ More than 50 per cent of stories in Sri Lanka only use one source.
- ◆ Sinhala and Tamil press are selective in sources used.
- ◆ 80 per cent of journalists think their sources not accurate or reliable (*So why do we use them?*).

### Balance checklist

- ◆ Avoid becoming a cheerleader for one side
- ◆ Establish the different viewpoints and ensure they are presented respectfully and accurately
- ◆ Bear in mind the context in which these views exist. ◆ Does an extreme majority hold some views?
- ◆ Rather than paraphrase other people’s points of view, where possible quote them directly
- ◆ Ask yourself whether the story, as it is written, would harm or aggravate religious, racial or ethnic sensitivities
- ◆ Be careful not to create a false balance – balance does not mean equal merit on all sides

Remember you are reporting for the whole community, not just your ethnic group

### Codes of ethics

A code of ethics has several purposes. It is an aspirational statement that says how we should try to behave in our work as professional people (just as doctors and lawyers have codes of ethics). It also aims to build trust between ourselves and our audience and ourselves and the authority figures who seek to regulate us – we aim to regulate ourselves through a code of ethics rather than have rules imposed on us. And a code of ethics aims to improve the quality of our journalism by ensuring we do our utmost to demonstrate the best values of journalism.

Sri Lankan journalists should be aware of the current Sri Lanka editors’ code and the IFJ code, to which journalists subscribe. The codes aim to both protect the right of the individual to privacy, and uphold the public’s right to know. They require corrections to be made and offers a right of reply.

The IFJ’s code of professional conduct for journalism is a broad summary of principles relating to the way journalists should carry out their role and responsibilities (see [www.ifj.org](http://www.ifj.org) for the full code).

In Sri Lanka, the independent newspaper *Ravaya* has adopted a Declaration of Editorial Practice, which operates as an internal code of ethics, outlining the rules journalists must follow. The *Ravaya* document (see Appendix I) is a house standard, that declares for both reporters and readers alike, the newspaper’s commitment to ethical behaviour.

### Credibility and anonymous sources – weighing up the risks with the rewards

The use of anonymous sources can seriously damage a news organisation’s or journalist’s credibility. According to Ryan Pitts with the Poynter Institute, while most readers and journalists agree that rewards can outweigh the risk of reporting based on anonymous sources, a significant number of readers say the media would be better off not using them. (Pitts, 2005)

A recent Associated Press and Associated Press Managing Editors (APME) survey of 419 media outlets found that most allow reporters to protect a source’s identity in at least some cases (Crary, 2005), but nearly one-quarter of editors said they’ve banned the practice entirely.

“The use of unnamed sources is limited to the most compelling cases where an important story can be told no other way,” (David Boardman, managing editor of *The Seattle Times* in Crary, 2005).

Editors said they allowed anonymity in special cases when they understood the motivation for anonymity. For instance, if someone could lose his or her job out of retribution, or to protect the identity of a rape victim, illegal immigrant or someone who suffered from addiction.

The survey found that many papers require information from one anonymous source to be corroborated by an additional source, or for at least one senior editor be told the source’s name and, in some cases, require an editor to speak with the source.

Tonnya Kennedy, managing editor of *The State* in Columbia, S.C said: “We try to print enough information about the sources that signals to the reader, ‘This person is real,’ without giving away their identity” (Crary, 2005).

## The Sydney Morning Herald sources checklist

### General rules on Sources

1. We want two (or more) sources for each major claim in a story. One source may be acceptable if it is a first-hand account. We prefer to sight primary documents and authenticate them.
2. Our priority is to get a source on the record, wherever possible. We can do this by:
3. Asking if they'll go public if we get official confirmation of an incident;
4. Asking if they'll go public if we get it confirmed by another party/document;
5. Asking if they'll go public if someone else does too;
6. Using their information to get others familiar with the issue to go on the record.
7. We can agree to check quotes and their context with a source. We do not read out or give them the story.
8. Reporters need to question themselves about the quality and motive of every source as they gather a story.
9. We seek to disprove what sources are saying as we gather information.
10. We prefer to name a spokesman or spokeswoman to improve accountability.
11. We tell people where comments were made, i.e. "issued a statement", "told a meeting", "told the *Herald*".
12. We attempt to seek comment from people rather than use words attributed to them in other media. If the person is not available a transcript, tape or other corroborating source should be used to verify the reported comments and their context.
13. In cases where a comment cannot be independently verified, reporters should seek guidance from their editor. Comments quoted in other print media should be treated with great caution. If we believe the information is credible, we may decide to use it. This material should always be directly attributed to the media outlet which reported it, i.e. "AAP reported that..."
14. We don't accept conditions placed on any of our stories by sources seeking to improve their run in the paper.
15. Every claim or allegation needs to be specifically sourced. We do not accept "critics say", "experts say" or "analysts say".

### Rules on Anonymous sources

1. We limit the use of anonymous sources in stories to cases where the use is essential to substantiate a major claim.
2. We refer to the editor or a senior editor any important story where we cannot get someone on the record. The editor will determine if the story will be published.
3. We do not use direct quotes in stories from anonymous sources to substantiate news stories.
4. In cases where it is agreed we will use an anonymous source, the description of the source must be as specific as is safe to do so:
  - ◆ We can't simply say "a source" or a "government source".
  - ◆ We don't lie about a source in copy.
  - ◆ We don't fudge on how many sources. We're precise.
  - ◆ We don't make them sound more important or reliable than they are.
  - ◆ We locate the source as close as possible to the action, i.e., someone who has seen the document, someone who was at the negotiations, someone familiar with the deal.
  - ◆ Wherever possible, we identify in the story where the interests of the source lie - for example, someone who stands to benefit, an impartial observer, someone from a rival camp.
  - ◆ Where possible we explain why they will not go on the record.
5. An anonymous source is to be told that confidentiality of sources is our basic tenet and that the editor will be told the identity as a requirement for approving such a story for publication.
6. An anonymous source is to be told we uphold the confidentiality agreement if the source has provided us the information honestly and in good faith.
7. We can use an anonymous quote in columns, colour, features and gossip items only if it adds description, humour or an observation, but not in relation to news elements of such pieces. The description of the source must be specific. We do not use direct quotes from anonymous sources in any circumstances if they contain personal attacks, allegations or malicious claims.

## Questions to ask before going 'off the record'

By Kelly McBride

1. Is the story crucial to the public? Does it further equip readers and viewers to make responsible decisions in this democracy? Or is it simply a scoop?
2. Is the information of this source crucial to the story?
3. Does this source have firsthand knowledge of what he or she is describing? Can you report the nature of that knowledge to help the public judge the source's reliability? Is there someone else who could provide the same information on the record?
4. Is the source targeting an individual or group of individuals, and if so, does the source benefit? How? Who else benefits? How?
5. How would the source be harmed by publication of his or her name? Can you make that clear to the audience? Who else might be harmed?

If, after asking and answering these questions, it is worth continuing the conversation with the source, here are some strategies to consider:

- ◆ Ask the source why he or she wants to go off the record.
- ◆ Warn the source that if the information is published, his name will be revealed to at least one editor back in the newsroom. Ask him if he'll come forward if you are subpoenaed.
- ◆ Ask the source to suggest others who can at least confirm the information he provided and possibly go on the record.
- ◆ End every conversation on the record. Go over each piece of information. Can this be on the record? What about this?
- ◆ All this will chip away at the source's resistance to being quoted.

(McBride, 2004)

### Readers question credibility

In the Associated Press and Associated Press Managing Editors survey on readers' attitudes toward anonymity in news stories, 44 per cent said anonymity makes them less likely to believe what they read.

The APME reviewed comments from 1,611 readers in 42 states of America, who were asked to describe how anonymous sources affect their trust in the news. The findings indicated that seeking verification is the most important thing a reporter can do, and that the public is willing to wait for a more trustworthy news report.

One reader said: "If the information provided cannot be independently verified, it cannot and should not be used. The standard of verification must be set much higher for anonymous sources than that used for open sources, as the risks associated with error are so much higher" (Pitts, 2005).

Readers cautioned that the only credibility at stake is the media's: The more believable a newspaper has been in the past, the more likely readers are to accept its judgment on anonymity. But trust the wrong source, and the public will stop trusting you (Pitts, 2005).

For more guidance see the *Sydney Morning Herald* rules on use of sources on page 14.

**Every anonymous source weakens journalism's credibility. In the end, ask yourself whether the loss of public trust is worth the public gain**

### Conflict and trauma reporting

Good journalism on a disaster such as the tsunami is more than just getting a good reporter or photographer to the scene. Journalists and newsrooms need to be prepared to deal with covering tragedy and suffering.

The Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma provides tips for covering traumatic events in your community:

"Understand that your coverage of a traumatic event, and the tone you use, will have an impact on your readership, viewers, or listeners.

Write stories about the victims' lives and their effect on your community

Provide forums on what people are thinking, especially words of encouragement. Offer lists for ways people can help and how they have helped.

Find ways people are helping including acts of kindness and report on them throughout the recovery process. This may provide hope for the community.

Constantly ask these questions: What does the public need to know and how much coverage is too much? When does a medium become infatuated with a story when the public is not? A community is much more than a mass killing or disaster. The coverage must reflect that (Hight & Smyth, 2004)"



### Context checklist for conflict

- ◆ Research the history of the conflict
- ◆ Avoid focussing on individual acts of violence and try to paint the broader picture
- ◆ Examine what each party has to lose or gain
- ◆ Provide the perspective of the common people who are affected

## 7. EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE



Many Sri Lankan journalists can cite instances where their work has been interfered with. Either a story has not run, or it has been changed, or the journalists have been threatened if they run a story. Often, this interference happens because outsiders (such as politicians, interest groups) approach the journalist or editor, or because the owner/publisher interferes with the editorial.

A charter of editorial independence is one solution to this problem. But for any challenge to editorial independence, journalists need to work together in solidarity to fight instances of interference in their work. Only if journalists work together can any stand against interference be taken.

A charter of editorial independence is a written agreement between the editorial staff of a media outlet and its owner. They jointly define their relationship so the proprietor is separated from power over the day-to-day preparation and presentation of news and opinion. The staff's independence of the owner is supposed to free them to aim for high standards of journalism. Charters are intended to avoid the appearance or the reality of journalism being slanted to suit the owner's views or interests.

### What charters do

Charters usually contain an ethical statement explaining why there is the charter in the first place. For example: "The proprietor declares publicly a commitment to the fundamental and longstanding principle of editorial independence... The proprietor acknowledges that journalists, artists and photographers must record the affairs of the city, state, nation

**Netting the catch:** Charters of editorial independence give the readers and viewers some trust in the news they hear and see. News media has a moral obligation to its audience to not filter the news through a proprietor's lens.

### Why Have Charters

We have charters of editorial independence because media assets are uniquely more than a mere business. Due to the media's vital role in a functioning democracy, it must be separated from the influence of profit motivations. Charters also make commercial sense, as real and apparent independence is crucial to the commercial health of a media asset. Finally, we need editorial independence charters because trust is not enough. Despite media owners acknowledging the power they hold, they cannot always be trusted not to abuse this power. Thus, a published declaration of intent safeguards against the misuse of proprietary control.

(Chadwick, 1991)

and world fairly, fully and regardless of any commercial, political or personal interests, including those of any proprietors, shareholders or board members."

A charter should aim to provide protection for editors who may be pressured by the owners or other interests. Sometimes creating a board of trustees – to provide a buffer between the editor and the owners – does this. The charter also aims to

ensure the editor does not become a puppet of the owner – staff and readers need protection from these types of editors. This is achieved by giving staff a say in who is appointed as editor, having the trustees consult with staff, creating a dispute resolution procedure and having a process for dismissal of the editor.

Because media businesses are also required to run to budgets, a charter needs to clearly recognise that owners set the budgets and must bear the financial risk. But once the budget is set, how it is spent is up to the editor.

There must be a mechanism for resolving disputes, which may include reference to the company's articles of association; contract law; industrial law or a purpose-built dispute resolution system.

### What charters don't do

Charters of editorial independence are not perfect. The owner may sign the charter, but this doesn't necessarily mean they really agree to its terms. However, a charter is a mechanism that can support independent media, and they do provide a framework to promote accurate, balanced, fair and honest reporting.

## Australian Journalists' Association Model Charter

### *Preamble*

The proprietor and the editorial staff, represented by the Australian Journalists Association, agree that the media is a unique business that imposes on them responsibilities to the community.

The chief responsibility is to provide news that is as accurate, fair and complete as possible and comment that reflects the diversity of opinion within the community. The owner and staff properly claim the prestige and influence a paper may command only if they fulfil the responsibilities it entails. Commercial success depends on a reputation for meeting the responsibilities and being seen to meet them.

Accordingly, the proprietor and editorial staff undertake to abide by this charter, which is intended to preserve the reality and appearance of editorial independence. The proprietor agrees to incorporate this charter into the company's articles of association.

### *Editorial trustees*

The proprietor will establish a board of five editorial trustees separate from the company's board of directors.

The trustees will be agreed by negotiation and acceptable to both the proprietor and editorial staff. Selection will be based on ability; experience and independence, to try to ensure the trustees' decisions command the confidence of the proprietor, editorial staff and the community.

Appointments will be for three years. The vote of each trustee will have equal weight and decisions will require at least three votes in favour.

The main function of the board of editorial trustees will be to settle disputes between the proprietor and an editor, either of whom may approach the trustees to mediate in a dispute that the two have been unable to settle by negotiation.

The proprietor and editors agree that the trustees' decision will be final and that the decision and reasons will be published in full in the relevant paper.

### *Editors*

Appointment or dismissal of editors will require the approval of the trustees.

The editor will be fully consulted during the fixing of any budget for editorial expenditure and editorial and advertising space. Subject only to such budgets; the editor will have sole control of content.

No editor will be restrained or directed in reporting news or opinion that might directly or indirectly conflict with the opinions or interests of the proprietor, whether political, financial or otherwise.

Only the editor or his or her delegates may appoint, instruct, direct or dismiss journalists, artists and photographers.

### *Ethics*

The proprietor subscribes to the AJA code of ethics. No employer shall require a member to work other than in accordance with the following code of ethics (AJA code).

(Sourced from Chadwick, 1991)

## 8. ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

**Democracy begins with citizens. Indeed, there can be no real democracy without citizens who are reasonably well-informed. Information and communication are, therefore, integral to democracy. By the same token, the democratisation of communication is a prerequisite of democracy. - (Joseph, 2005).**

Jan Schaffer, executive director with the Pew Centre for Civic Journalism, monitors innovations that are being developed to involve the public in media. Some ideas are simple: games on media web sites that offer interactive news, and news exercises that engage the public in a non-narrative way. Other ideas follow the example of South Korean media site OhMyNews and encourage citizen participation journalism.

In a speech to the World Media Association in May 2005, Schaffer said that traditional journalistic conventions don't work well for some people. "In our efforts to become so balanced, we end up reporting the most extreme viewpoints on a story, and the great grey middle often doesn't have a voice." Part of the problem is that readers are confused about journalism. The public believes that the distinction between reporting and commentary is blurred, and the distinction between entertainment and news is blurred. Journalists are out of touch with the public, they get things wrong and media outlets are concerned with the commercial success of their business, which can drive sensationalism in the media.

Schaffer suggests that "media participation" is a framework journalists should adopt for the future. She defines media participation as several layers of involvement. "It's not just story telling, it's story making as well, allowing other people to make stories. It's not only constructing stories, it's de-constructing them into the component parts that people will use to make their own journalism. It's news exercises and experiences, not just stories. And I think it's civic participation".

One example Schaffer gives of getting the public's involvement in the media online involves a TV station in Cincinnati, in the US. The station asked the local community to suggest ways a local eyesore by a river could be fixed using the station's web site. "You could click on buttons and say you wanted to contribute to a new flower planter—here's \$400. You want a park bench, so here's \$750. If you want to help paint the bridge purple, invest here. An enormous number of citizens responded; this empowered them to help with the solution".

*The New York Times* has also embarked on a series of changes to improve the quality of its journalism. It is limiting the use of anonymous sources, making efforts to reduce and track factual errors and making a clearer distinction between news and opinion. The newspaper is also making its operations and decisions more transparent to readers and is making transcripts of interviews available on its website. The newspaper is also making it easier for readers to send emails to reporters and editors. Similarly, *The Washington Post* encourages its readers to contact reporters and Britain's *Times* newspaper allows readers to contact section editors to ask them how they prepare their material for the paper.

### Getting involved

Schaffer says that such tools can also help educate readers. One radio station in San Francisco demonstrated this. "The station took [big] issues — such as should the United States have a public health service? You answered yes or no to a question of

whether you would agree. If you answered yes, it said, 'Are you sure?' And it would offer a counter argument. If you continued to answer yes, it said, 'What if you knew this?' If you clicked no, it presented opposing viewpoints on the issue... The exercise offered a new paradigm for reporting: instead of telling you one side, then the other of a story, it really told you about eight or nine sides of the story and it more fully fleshed out the information. All of these are participatory news experiences, not necessarily narrative stories (Schaffer, 2005).

### Eyewitness news

A new way of getting people involved is the explosion of weblogs (blogs) on media web sites, particularly newspapers. Newspapers now offer up to a dozen or more blogs covering different stories and issues, and inviting readers to express their views. And reporters can interact with readers to answer particular questions or to add background information.

As seen with the tsunami and other major news events, media organisations are now inviting readers to send in their photos, eyewitness accounts and even video footage shot on mobile phones, for use in news stories. Likewise, the devastation from Hurricane Katrina in the US, and the London terror bombings, were triggers for many people to blog news reports and photos based on their own accounts of what was happening in their communities.

**"Writing articles to change the world, not to earn money" – OhMyNews Founder Oh Yeon Ho, 2004**

David Higgins, writing in *The Walkley Magazine – Inside the Australian Media* wrote: "Bloggers ... specialise in topics that don't fit into the broad church of the mass media. They tend to write passionately; while journalists are taught to be detached, and that passion increases trust... They are self-correcting – bloggers and their readers compete to quickly correct each other's mistakes. They're not restricted by censorship or proprietors' views. And they offer pluralism on a scale that single media outlets can't match" (Higgins, 2005).

This form of citizen journalism (also known as citJ) does have concerns. Higgins says: "So what is the impact of citJ on journalism as a craft? And as a profession? The first question seems open and shut. Citizen journalists have no code of ethics, no training, no accountability, no budget, no subediting standards, no industry monitoring and no separation between advertising and editorial... In short, if blogging grows at the expense of professional journalism, the craft – and society – will be worse off. The first draft of history will be riddled with errors, subjectivity, poor spelling and cash-for-comment. Logically, the second question should also be open and shut: the more bad citJ on the internet, the greater the need for 'proJ' [professional journalism]" (Higgins, 2005). However, Higgins notes that professional journalism – that is journalism in mainstream media – continues to suffer a decline in terms of numbers of readers who are deserting traditional media outlets in favour of blogs and other new media, or are not seeking media outlets at all, preferring entertainment over information.

Citizen journalism, from bloggers who post their own news and opinion through to large-scale networks such as OhMyNews.com, are also crucial examples of how readers and members of the public are involving themselves in the media. OhmyNews is a South Korean online journal that allows thousands of citizens to become reporters. Its founder, Oh Yeon Ho, says the Korean press provided its audience with only the



information they needed to know, and that OhMyNews reporters are “writing articles to change the world, not to earn money” (Oh Yeon Ho, 2004).

### Citizen journalism

In the US in the early 1990s, newspaper groups were conducting surveys and interviews with citizens to discover the issues that concerned them – and this has led to the spread of ‘civic journalism’ initiatives. But the OhMyNews example, on the other hand, goes a step further – rather than just allowing citizens to become more involved with the media, OhMyNews actually allows them to become the reporter. Anyone can report a story once OhMyNews has checked the individual’s personal details and they have agreed to a code of ethics.

The online journal has more than 36,000 citizen reporters writing first-hand personal stories, movie criticism, book reviews, and so on. They file about 150 and 200 stories a day or about 70 per cent of the journal’s contents. Professional journalists write the more complex articles, usually on political or international stories. The citizen journalists are paid a small amount, between 3 and 20 dollars, for their stories. Citizens are also encouraged to comment on all OhMyNews content.

Staff editors review, edit and fact-check the information provided by the citizen reporters. Occasionally, things go wrong and inaccuracies creep in. Even so, the citizen reporters get a great say in how the business is run, with a board of citizen reporters meeting once a month to analyse the work of their professional journalist counterparts. OhmyNews also trains citizen reporters for free.

### Community-made news

Other ideas involve creating bulletin boards of community news that is too local to run in mainstream media. A

**Riding on:** Involving and engaging readers and listeners makes media more accessible and is an essential part of public service journalism. This can be done through reader surveys, introducing a community notice board or promoting ‘citizen journalism’ (or ‘citj’). Even just providing information about the easiest way to contact the editor can help to make media more engaged with the audience.

community bulletin board can be online or a local village noticeboard supported by a media outlet, with contributions from members of the community who write the copy which is edited by the outlet.

Community radio stations are a great example of building a sense of media involvement. Sri Lanka has two UNESCO-sponsored stations operating at present. Both have a strong sense of ethical responsibility, triggered in part by the interaction between the stations and the local community.

Broadcasters can also help encourage community involvement through listener and viewer clubs (such as those that are run by the BBC’s audience as well as broadcasters throughout Europe, or other similar organisations such as ‘friends’ of the organisations (such as the Friends of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Friends of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation). These groups not only involve themselves in programming but also help lobby the state on behalf of the community.

Another development in public service journalism is simple fact-checking. The US presidential election in 2004 saw the development of a web site that scrutinised the promises of the candidates, another site examined the campaign contributions paid to the candidates.

Schaffer says, “The journalism that will be successful will deliver a lot less noise and a lot more meaningful interaction, and to do that they have to use new media tools” (Shaffer, 2005).

**“The journalism that will be successful will deliver a lot less noise and a lot more meaningful interaction, and to do that they have to use new media tools”**

While we can do more, in our behaviour and in our reporting, to bring public service values to our journalism, to fully serve the public, we must engage the public in our media, and gain the trust of the public and authorities. Some of the values of journalism that serves the public were to be found in media that:

- ◆ Promotes issues important to citizens
- ◆ Responsive to citizens’ needs
- ◆ Builds trust with readers/viewers

### Role of the public editor

Media organisations get in touch with their audience in many ways and ask them to participate in the newspaper/radio or TV station.

Two leading newspapers, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* have a journalist whose sole responsibility is to arbitrate issues on the readers’ behalf. At the *Post* this is the role of the Ombudsman, at the *Times* it is the Public Editor. This position on the paper aims to handle readers’ queries and complaints and to explain how the paper functions as well as being a watchdog for when the newspaper or its staff misbehave ethically, ensuring that all of the newspapers activities are open and transparent.

In Australia, *The Sydney Morning Herald* established a reader services department called ReaderLink. ReaderLink answers inquiries, investigates possible inaccuracies and acts on complaints relating to the editorial content of the paper, and assists communication between the *Herald’s* readers and journalists.

### Your audience is your friend

Involving your audience in your media isn’t just an aspect of public service journalism. It also makes good sense from a commercial basis. Public service journalism is about building a relationship based on mutual trust and respect with your audience. That’s why ethical behaviour and journalism of the highest quality are important.

But there’s also a commercial benefit from involving your audience – it gives you an edge on your competitors and it allows your audience to gain a sense of ‘ownership’ over media they see as theirs.

### Engaging the public

There are simple ways to engage the public in the media:

- ◆ Provide easy ways to contact journalists/editor (list e-mail addresses, give phone numbers)
  - ◆ Implement a policy to respond promptly to complaints
  - ◆ Take complaints seriously and act on them
  - ◆ Introduce/enlarge letters page or phone-ins and talk back
  - ◆ Create polls on web sites around topical issues
  - ◆ Create weblogs (blogs)
  - ◆ Introduce a ‘community notice board’
  - ◆ Conduct surveys, polls etc to find out what the public wants, what interests them
  - ◆ Introduce a position dedicated to representing the reader/viewer like an Ombudsman or Public Editor
  - ◆ Get your staff out to see the public in their own environment, by visiting educational, civic, religious, arts and government leaders at work.
  - ◆ Offer your editors and reporters to speak at local groups. Post the list online and let the organisations pick their own speakers.
  - ◆ Encourage the public to visit the newsroom.
  - ◆ Let people attend news meetings to see the decision making process.
  - ◆ Hold journalism workshops for high school and middle school journalism students and their teachers to demystify the journalism process.
  - ◆ Encourage the community to report their news.
- (adapted from Clark, 2000)

### Improving accessibility

In early 2006, *The Washington Post* newspaper revitalised its web site to allow readers using its web site to send e-mails direct to the journalists. A week later the *New York Times* began offering the same feature that is designed to provide readers with greater access to reporters and columnists.

**“Dialogue between writers, editors, and readers is mutually beneficial. Not just for conversation, but for perspective, source material and story ideas as well.”**

Jim Brady, executive editor of washingtonpost.com, explained the new feature: “The many interactive features on washingtonpost.com have shown that the dialogue between writers, editors, and readers is mutually beneficial. Not just for conversation, but for perspective, source material and story ideas as well. These new links to e-mail offer an additional opportunity to build a better relationship between writers and the audiences they serve.”

## 9. EXERCISES

Here are some exercises you can do to help you practice and improve your journalism.

### Case study I – Many voices

When the Tsunami struck, there was confusion and enormous dislocation caused by such a massive disaster. Who would you interview if you were on the scene?

- ◆ Eyewitnesses to the waves?
- ◆ Survivors?
- ◆ Disaster relief organisations?
- ◆ Politicians about the government's response?

- ◆ Community leaders?
- ◆ Civil society organisations?
- ◆ Police and other emergency services?
- ◆ Medical personnel?
- ◆ Women and children?
- ◆ Organisations in charge of infrastructure?
- ◆ Aid workers?
- ◆ Search and rescue?

Who else should you interview? What other voices should be heard? What other views, opinions and experiences could you add to your story?

### 5 steps to covering a disaster

By Joe Hight, managing editor, *The Oklahoman*

#### Your Plan

Take a few minutes during the first day's coverage to plan for the days to follow — beyond the first day. Follow-up coverage is vital. Think about coverage before disaster occurs. Does your newsroom have sufficient resources to cover a disaster? Do you need an overall plan?

#### Your Focus

Have certain people/teams responsible for different areas. Here is a breakdown of *The Oklahoman's* teams during the bombing in 1995 and the tornado outbreak in May 1999:

**Bombing** — law enforcement (the scene, investigative, tracing how donations are spent, etc.); victims (dead and injured. This includes a person responsible for accuracy of numbers and spelling of names); help and recovery (how the community can help and how the victims can get help); and business (effect on insurance, etc.).

**Tornado** — Areas hit by tornadoes (three teams that concentrated on Midwest City, Del City and Bridge Creek, Moore and other state areas); "Profiles of Life" (stories about the victims' lives, person responsible for accuracy of numbers and spelling of names, etc.); business, and help and recovery. In initial days of coverage, meet with representatives of teams, copy editing desk(s), photography and graphics or arts departments at least twice a day to discuss scope of coverage.

#### Your Story Affects People

Teach your reporters and editors about how to approach and interview victims. Remind them during the coverage.

- ◆ Emphasise that victims must be treated with dignity and respect.
- ◆ Victims should be approached but allowed to say no. If the answer is no, the reporter should leave a card or number so victims can call back later. Often, the best stories come this way.
- ◆ Each victim is an individual and must be treated that way, not just as part of an overall number.
- ◆ Little things count. Call victims back to verify facts and quotes. Return photos (if possible, hire runners to get and return photos). Emphasise writing 'Profiles of Life' about the victims, instead of the usual stories about how they died.
- ◆ Try calling funeral homes or representatives first to

connect with a family member. In most cases, victims' relatives wanted to talk when they realised that the reporter was writing a "Profile of Life." Some of these led to bigger stories, too. Establish policies that affect your coverage.

- ◆ *The Oklahoman* reporters covered public memorial services for the victims of the bombing and tornado, but not private funerals.
- ◆ Don't re-run the bloody images on anniversaries and key dates. However, consider showing comparison pictures of destruction with current ones on the recovery's success.

#### 4. Your Community is Important

Readers and viewers need outlets to provide help. They need forums to vent their feelings.

Use the newspaper (or station) and web site to provide forums on what people are thinking, words of encouragement, and offer lists for ways people can help and how they have helped (acts of kindness).

Find ways people are helping and report on them throughout the recovery process. (This provides hope for the community). That coverage must begin to focus on other parts of the community at some point. How much coverage is too much? When does the journalist become infatuated with a story when the public is not? A community is much more than a mass killing or disaster. Your newspaper or medium must reflect that.

#### 5. Your Newsroom's 'Wall Effect'

Like a tennis ball that's hit against a wall and bounces back to the person, the emotional trauma suffered by the victims could bounce back and affect the reporters who are interviewing the victims.

Offer individual counseling and even group debriefing. (Professions such as police and fire now require debriefings. *The Oklahoman* required debriefings of reporters who covered victims of the 1999 tornadoes.)

Offer meals to reporters and editors during first days or weeks of coverage. Then gradually end these so they will be encouraged to go elsewhere — a return to their own normalcy.

Send e-mails or memos that offer encouragement, reminders of what day and date it is, tips to alleviate stress, and letters and notes from readers.

(Hight & Smyth, 2004)

## Case study 2 – Ensuring balance

Read this story and think about how you would report this event using the values of journalism that serves the public.

### The camp massacre

By Tilak Jayarathna

“The Bindunuwewa massacre at a camp set up to rehabilitate suspected terrorists took place on October 25, 2000. Twenty-four inmates were killed.

A routine meeting had been held on the evening of October 24. Some of the detainees were angered by the delay of their release and became violent during the meeting. Later in the evening, they forcibly entered a storeroom and then the police checkpoint, damaging the building with iron bars and other weapons.

The following morning, 700 villagers gathered outside the camp, armed with rods, swords and axes. The crowd ignored pleas by the police, entered the camp and killed 24 inmates, throwing their bodies into the dormitories and setting them alight.” (from Park & Deshapriya, 2005)

When reporting this story, journalists who use the values of journalism that serves the public, should interview numerous sources to ensure balance, many voices and ethnic diversity:

eyewitnesses, the police, the camp commander, leaders of the initial disturbance by the inmates, the leaders of the village, medical personnel, regional and provincial politicians and members of opposition parties, legal representatives, the military, the terrorist organisation, the wounded, the families of the inmates.

Questions to ask include:

- ◆ Why were the detainees being held for so long, what was the delay?
- ◆ Why did the camp authorities not control them better and were the detainees receiving correct information?
- ◆ Who informed the villagers and incited them to attack the camp?
- ◆ Why did the police, who were armed, not control the situation better and arrest the leaders of the attack?
- ◆ How did the villagers gain entry to the camp?
- ◆ How many people were injured and how were they treated?
- ◆ What legal redress will those who suffered have now?
- ◆ Why were authorities slow to respond after the initial violence on the first evening?
- ◆ What will the government do to prevent a repeat of this event occurring?
- ◆ What other solutions are there?

## Case study 3 – After the deadly attack...

By Sunanda Deshapriya  
June 18, 2006\*

The road leading to Kebitigollewa is normally quite deserted with only a few people travelling on bikes. But three days ago, on June 15, 2006, a claymore mine exploded destroying a bus carrying civilians from various villages around Kebitigollewa to Vavuniya. Some 64 people were killed including 15 children. Among the dead were two pregnant mothers

The Government accused the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for the attack and although the LTTE denies responsibility it is the primary suspect, according defence journalist Namal Perera.

The bus was heavily overcrowded. “We need more buses. Public transport here is provided if it can be a money-making business, it is not a public service,” said local teacher Sunil Bandara.

The Kebitigollewa Madya Maha Vidyalaya, a camp that provides shelter for most of the displaced community, occupies the grounds of a school and a large police presence is located at the entrance.

On June 17, the day after the mass funeral for the bomb victims, the camp contained 1013 displaced people, including 297 families. The school buildings which normally cater for 1800 students is hardly able to house more than 1000 adults.

There are only five usable toilets and on June 17 the pits had overflowed and there was a cleaning operation underway. A key water source in the areas has been contaminated, according to the deputy chairperson of the Pradesheeya Saba (local government body). Twenty temporary toilets had been set up by the to cope with the crisis but this was still inadequate, say many refugees. Arrangements had been made to chlorinate the water tanks.

The public health inspector said overcrowding and poor sanitation had the potential to lead to outbreaks of infectious disease. He added that most of the people involved either directly or indirectly in the loss of life from the bombing, were bound to suffer from psychosocial problems.

There was consensus that the school was not a suitable location for displaced people and the camp should be relocated without delay.

It was announced that all schools in the country would reopen on the June 19 but Kebitigollewa’s schools would remain closed until further notice.

The bus had been full of mothers with infants and pregnant women travelling to the clinic in Vavuniya for their regular

inoculations and vaccines because Kebitigollewa’s Medical Health Office does not possess a vehicle.

If a vehicle had been available the vaccines, some of which are expensive and perishable, would have been transported from Vavuniya and women and children could the vaccinations could have been carried out in Kebitigollewa. “Where are the basic health rights?” said Kalyanee, a social activist in the village.

Most people are sceptical that interest in Kebitigollewa’s plight will last as a long-term issue. This in itself raises issues about the long-term sustainability of assistance to people in the area.

Kebitigollewa is very disadvantaged area and its civilian population could be subjected to a direct attack at any moment, says Sunila Abesekara, the director of INFORM, a human rights documentation centre. People in the area are treated as if they are nothing more than human shields in the conflict. But the tragedy of the bus bombing does provide an opportunity for this perception to be turned around, he said .

*\*This case study is based on fact-finding report of INFOM on Kebitigollewa situation written on June 18, 2006*

Possible sources and questions to be consider in covering Kebitigollewa situation after the attack:

- ◆ Police and other law enforcement agencies – on the security situation.
- ◆ Villages, injured, and social workers – on transport facilities - why so many were on the bus; the lack of vehicles for health clinics; the villagers’ requests for security; their livelihood, and so on.
- ◆ Health authorities – on health clinics, why were the mothers and children were going to another town to get vaccinations, confirm the number and identity of dead and injured, the sanitation situation of refugees.
- ◆ Transport authorities – on the availability of extra busses, are there especial arrangements on clinic days.
- ◆ Social services authorities – on the facilities provided to refugees, the plans to move them to better places, funeral arrangements.
- ◆ Education authorities – on how to continue the education of children of the area, and so on.
- ◆ Monitoring mission – on their role in such incidents, and which side is to be blamed.
- ◆ Human Rights Commission – on violations of basic rights of villagers: transport, education, health, right to life.
- ◆ LTTE – what do they have to say?

# APPENDIX I

## Ravaya's Declaration of Editorial Practice

A code of ethics can also be applied in the workplace – it doesn't have to be a code that's applied across the profession of journalists.

For example, in Sri Lanka, the weekly newspaper *Ravaya* has adopted a declaration of its editorial practice, which is available for public scrutiny, the way the newspaper's journalists will operate as well as a statement of the newspaper's particular vision and values. The declaration works as an internal code of ethics as well as a checklist for each and every story, and also acknowledges how the newspaper intends to practice journalism that serves the public.

In other countries, many media organisations adopt a "Code of conduct" or "handbook or ethical principles" or "guidelines for journalists" (links to these can be found in the [More Information](#) section) that apply an internal or house code of ethics for the journalists employed by that organisation.

## Declaration of Ravaya's Vision, Values and Mission Statement

### The Vision

For almost 20 years, the *Ravaya* newspaper has strived for social justice, liberty of the people, and for the rights of ethnic, religious and caste groups. *Ravaya* has often gone beyond reporting by fighting in Sri Lankan courts for the human rights of the people.

With these principles as a guide, *Ravaya* reaffirms its commitment to:

- ◆ Effecting a healthy change in Sri Lanka's media,
- ◆ Helping strengthen the people and institutions who work for social justice, and
- ◆ Building a democratic society of citizens, conscious of their rights and duties.

### The Values

We, the journalists of *Ravaya*, are obliged to work honestly for that purpose, to function impartially for justice, to be free of corruption and prejudice in our actions, and to always increase and nourish our knowledge.

### The Ethics

To that end, the journalists of *Ravaya*, commit themselves to adhering to the fundamental ethics of our profession:

1. **Truthfulness** - We promise to report truth.
2. **Honesty** - We shall obtain information honestly.
3. **Impartiality** - We shall report the views of all, without prejudice.
4. **The right to reply** - We pay the highest regard to the right to reply.
5. **Sources of information** - The confidentiality of our sources of information will be protected, and we will confirm the validity of the information before publication.
6. **Privacy** - We respect privacy. We recognise that private individuals have greater privacy than public people who seek or hold power, influence or attention.
7. **Diversity** - We respect human diversity as a fundamental principle.
8. **Sensitivity to conflicts** - We acknowledge the need to be sensitive when reporting conflict.
9. **Bribery and corruption** - We shall be free of bribery and corruption, and demand others be likewise.
10. **Intellectual property** - We respect intellectual property rights.

## Daily Practice

Each journalist will adhere to the follow practices in their work:

1. All news, features and other writings published must accord with the accepted ethics of *Ravaya*.
2. Publication of any reports or articles that directly or indirectly benefit the journalist or people connected with the journalist must be avoided.
3. Journalists will disclose any conflicts of interest they may have when writing about another person, a group of persons or an institution.
4. If errors occur, corrections and explanations will be published in the newspaper as soon as practicable.
5. If complaints are received, early action will be taken where applicable.
6. If an individual seeks to provide information anonymously, that information will only be published if at least two other sources confirm it.
7. Every endeavour must be made to ensure published information is true.
8. All *Ravaya* journalists must declare their assets and liabilities to the editor.
9. Anything that could be construed as gift or benefit received as part of the newsgathering process will be disclosed.
10. When information received is accurate, reporting it must not be avoided only if there is good reason to do so.
11. Journalists will refrain from receiving hospitality from sources.
12. If a member of *Ravaya's* editorial board performs a function for which he or she receives payment, the head of the institution must be informed about it, and permission must be obtained.
13. The members of the editorial board must not do anything to bring discredit to other board members, nor to *Ravaya* and its journalists.
14. In reporting and writing, journalists will follow *Ravaya's* editorial checklist.
15. Every story, in the final analysis, must be of general interest to the public rather than personal interest of any journalist.

## Improving Quality

There are other ways to improve the quality of our journalism.

We can implement systems to:

- ◆ track errors,
- ◆ check facts,
- ◆ increase ethics training,
- ◆ publish or broadcast information only when it has been verified by two or more sources,
- ◆ resist using anonymous sources,
- ◆ make a clear distinction between news and opinion,
- ◆ clearly label material that is advertising or advertorial.

We can also ensure that editors:

- ◆ spend more time guiding journalists,
- ◆ implement a policy of making apologies or corrections quickly,
- ◆ create a quality review committee to ensure that our journalism is of the highest standard.

Ensure that you have diversity in the newsroom to ensure that the journalists reflect the broader community.

Take steps to avoid sensational and inflammatory reporting.

In order to track errors (including the ability to monitor how they occur) and correct mistakes, the *Ravaya* newspaper has adopted the corrections form below to both tally the number of errors that appear in the paper (by monitoring how errors

occur, *Ravaya* can determine if procedural changes are needed or extra training is required to prevent them recurrence) as well as to ensure that corrections are always posted in the newspaper in a prominent location to ensure that *Ravaya* maintains a commitment to always publish the truth.

**Corrections Form - Ravaya**

Article 4 of *Ravaya's* CHARTER OF EDITORIAL PRACTICE says: **If errors occur, corrections and explanations will be published in the newspaper as soon as practicable.** This form is to implement this policy, and it is to be used to:

- ◆ track every error that appears in *Ravaya*,
- ◆ monitor how these errors occur,

- ◆ correct the information for our readers, and
- ◆ explain to readers how the error occurred.

Corrections **must** be made to fulfil *Ravaya's* commitment to reporting the truth, and to adhere to its ethical standards of accuracy and honesty.

Corrections will appear in a dedicated space on page 19 of *Ravaya* whenever a correction has to be made. Corrections will appear in the next issue of *Ravaya* immediately after the error has been identified. This form must be signed and the correction approved by the editor or section editor. This form is to be kept so that errors can be tracked, in case additional training or assistance is required, and to determine of these frequent errors should be fully explained in a *Style Guide* for *Ravaya's* editorial staff.

**The Error**

The Error appeared in the issue dated . . . . . , and appeared on page. . . . . in the story headlined . . . . .

The Error is contained in the sentence . . . . .  
 . . . . .

**The True Information**

The actual information is: . . . . .  
 . . . . .

**How did the error occur? (please tick)**

**Internally:**  Reporting ?       Proof-reading ?       Production ?

or

**Externally:**  Inaccurate source ?       At Printing ?

**The Correction to be Published on Page 19 will read:**

The correction to appear in the next issue dated . . . . . will read: "On page . . . . . of the . . . . . issue of *Ravaya*, an error appeared. The story incorrectly said . . . . .  
 . . . . .

The story should have said . . . . .  
*Ravaya* regrets the error."

**Approval**

Signed . . . . . Dated . . . . .

## APPENDIX II

### Charter for a Democratic and Pluralist Media Culture and Social and Professional Rights for Media and Journalism in Sri Lanka

As declared unanimously at the all-island conference of Sri Lankan journalists at Tholangamuwa, September 9-11, 2005

This meeting of representatives of Sri Lankan journalists' associations including the:

Federation of Media employees' Trade Unions (FMETU),  
Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association (SLWJA),  
Sri Lanka Tamil Media Alliance (SLTMA), and  
Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum (SLMMF);

Which was organised by Sri Lanka's Centre for Policy Alternatives in conjunction with the Free Media Movement (FMM) with the assistance of Canada's Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society (IMPACS) through funding from CIDA and AusAID, and with the support of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ);

Declares its endorsement of this charter for a democratic and pluralist media culture and social and professional right for media and journalism in Sri Lanka, and commits its associations and members to the practical program of follow-up action outlined below.

Fair, balanced and independent media is essential to good governance, effective public administration and the capacity of Sri Lankans to achieve a negotiated peace settlement and undertake a successful post-tsunami reconstruction program.

A professional media with a responsibility to the public interest, independent of government or partisan influence and interference, is a vital part of the series of checks and balances central to democracy.

The practice of journalism in Sri Lanka faces many challenges.

These challenges are of concern to Sri Lankan citizens but journalists, working together in professional solidarity, by building a culture of independent journalism, have a pivotal role to lead the campaign for media reform.

There needs to develop a strong and democratic public service culture within the news media so that it reflects the richness of society, serves the whole community independent of commercial, partisan or government interests and provides a plurality of voices from across the spectrum of society in Sri Lanka.

This charter sets out the minimum standards and principles that underpin the public's right to know and a free media in a democratic society and outlines a practical program of action to support media reform.

#### I. Fundamental Principles

- 1.1 Respect for truth and the public's right to know are the primary obligations of journalists.
- 1.2 That the creation of tolerant, peaceful and just society depends upon the freedom of citizens to have access to quality media that respect the principles of pluralism, diversity and universal respect for human rights.
- 1.3 All journalists and media staff have the right to work in conditions of safety and security. They have the right to freedom of association and to collectively bargain for wages and conditions.
- 1.4 It is recognised by all the journalists organisations that the creation of a single national voice for journalists is central to advancing the social and professional rights of journalists in Sri Lanka.
- 1.5 Journalism and media policy in Sri Lanka must be guided

by the following principles:

- ◆ That media, whatever the mode of dissemination, are independent, tolerant and reflect diversity of opinion enabling full democratic exchange within and among all communities, whether based on geography, ethnic origins, religious belief or language;
- ◆ That laws defend and protect the citizens' rights to freedom of information and the right to know;
- ◆ That there is respect for decent working and professional conditions, through legally enforceable employment rights and appropriate regulations that guarantee editorial independence and recognition of the profession of journalism.

#### 2. Editorial Independence

- 2.1 All media, whether public or private, must uphold ethical conduct in journalism, support professional independence, exercise tolerance, and respect the democratic rights of all citizens.
- 2.2 The treatment of news and information as a commodity or for political ends or in support of cultural or religious objectives must not override or interfere with the duty of journalists and media to inform the public.
- 2.3 Media must never be used as instruments of propaganda to support violence and extremism.
- 2.4 Responsibility for ethical conduct in journalism rests with media professionals who should be responsible for drawing up codes of ethical conduct and who should establish credible and accountable systems of self-regulation.
- 2.5 There should be no legislation beyond the general law that interferes in matters that are the responsibility of working journalists: namely, the gathering, preparation, selection and transmission of information. Freedom of expression, press freedom and freedom of association should be guaranteed in law in accordance with international standards.
- 2.6 In addition, media policy should encourage the adoption of internal editorial statutes and other provisions safeguarding the independence of journalists in all Sri Lankan media.
- 2.7 The IFJ Code of Principles for the Conduct of Journalism and the Sri Lankan Professional Code of Conduct provide ethical codes supported by all national representative journalists' organizations and the basis for a common Sri Lankan understanding on ethical issues through voluntary adoption of journalists and publishers.

#### 3. Media Pluralism, Public Service and Open Government:

- 3.1 Sri Lanka must promote transparency, open government and freedom of information and ensure the participation of all citizens in developing a democratic culture to strengthen the cohesion of all communities.
- 3.2 Political parties and authorities should respect the role of media to report, in an independent and critical manner, on all aspects of government at all levels.
- 3.3 There should be no legal, regulatory or policy developments in media without full consultation with Sri Lankan media and journalists and their representative organizations.
- 3.4 The law must guarantee citizen's access to information and freedom of information at all levels of government.
- 3.5 There must be no undue pressure on media, exercised directly or indirectly, or interference in the work of journalists. Where such pressure is identified it should be

- properly investigated and appropriate remedies taken.
- 3.6 Public service values in media should be respected in all state-owned media. Urgent reform of the state media sector is needed with the following objectives:
- ◆ To remove all forms of direct political control over the public service media
  - ◆ To create a framework for the administration of public service media, in line with international standards, through ethical, accountable and financially transparent structures
  - ◆ To support editorial self-regulation by journalists and media professionals that will promote editorial independence and high standards of accuracy, reliability and quality in information services.

#### **4. Social Dialogue, Rights of Journalists and Media:**

- 4.1 Structures for dialogue should be set up bringing together representatives of media managements and the workforce through their representative media associations and trade unions to establish a basis for professional dialogue and industrial relations within Sri Lankan media.
- 4.2 There should be openness and transparency in the business and social affairs of all media enterprises including full public disclosure of political affiliations and ownership information.
- 4.3 Representatives of media and the workforce should agree an action plan to promote the economic and social development of Sri Lankan media, including provincial media, and improvements in working conditions through collective agreements according to the following priorities:
- ◆ To ensure that all employees have an employment contract setting out their wages and conditions and labour rights;
  - ◆ To improve the safety and security of journalists and media staff;
  - ◆ To limit the use of freelance and casual labour, and where they are used, to ensure proper remuneration;
  - ◆ To guarantee non-discrimination and gender equality at all levels in media;
  - ◆ To recognize the rights of trades unions to organize in media and to represent media workers including journalists;
  - ◆ To ensure diversity in access to journalism and to provide access to proper professional training.

## RESOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Resources

Australian Broadcasting Corporation Code of Practice <http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/codeprac04.htm>

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Journalistic Standards and Practices <http://www.cbc.radio-canada.ca/accountability/journalistic/index.shtml>

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Ombudsman <http://www.cbc.radio-canada.ca/accountability/ombudsman.shtml>

Centre for Policy Alternatives <http://www.cpalanka.org/>

Columbia Journalism Review <http://www.cjr.org/>

Editor & Publisher <http://www.editorandpublisher.com/eandp/index.jsp>

Free Media Movement Sri Lanka <http://www.freemediasrilanka.org/>

International Federation of Journalists <http://www.ifj.org/>

International Federation of Journalists IFJ Asia-Pacific <http://www.ifj-asia.org/>

New Assignment.Net <http://newassignment.wordpress.com/2006/08/19/welcome-to-newassignmentnet/>

Poynter Institute <http://www.poynter.org/>

Reporting the World [http://www.reportingtheworld.org.uk/index\\_1.html](http://www.reportingtheworld.org.uk/index_1.html)

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The Colombo-based Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) is an independent, non-partisan organisation which receives funds from international and bilateral funding agencies and foundations. CPA cites its key objective as disseminating and advocating policy alternatives for non-violent conflict resolution and democratic governance. The organisation, whose work incorporates a major research component, promotes accurate reliable and unbiased reporting. [www.cpalanka.org](http://www.cpalanka.org).

Based in Canada, the Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society (IMPACS) is a nonprofit organisation that supports responsible and accessible media and government policies that foster democratic development. IMPACS provides training and strategic communications services to non-profit organisations in Canada and internationally to strengthen the voice and profile of civil society. [www.impacs.org](http://www.impacs.org)

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