

International Federation of Journalists

Status of Journalists and Journalism Ethics: IFJ principles

05/05/2003

1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1.1 The International Federation of Journalists representing more than 450,000 journalists in over 100 countries, believes that professional journalists, organised in free and independent trade unions, play a key role in the creation and maintenance of a democratic media culture.

1.2 The IFJ believes that democracy depends upon the extension of freedom of expression and social justice worldwide. The IFJ insists that democracy depends upon an understanding of the special and particular role of the media in democratic society.

1.3 The IFJ believes that media must respect the professional and ethical principles of press freedom upon which the freedom of expression and opinion relies.

The IFJ defines press freedom as:

"that freedom from restraint which is essential to enable journalists, editors, publishers and broadcasters to advance the public interest by publishing, broadcasting or circulating facts and opinions without which a democratic electorate cannot make responsible judgments."

The IFJ believes this freedom can only be expressed when there exists:

- a) A free, independent and media reflecting diversity of opinion;
- b) A free flow of information enabling full democratic exchange in all communities, whether they be based on geography, ethnic origins, shared values or common language;
- c) Statutory defence and protection of citizens' rights to freedom of information and the right to know;
- d) Respect for the professional status and independent role of journalists.

1.4 The IFJ considers that the treatment of news and information as a commodity must not override or interfere with the duty of journalists to inform their audience and that media must be administered according to the highest standards of transparency and openness.

1.5 The IFJ believes in the coexistence of public service and private broadcasting in order to protect independence, pluralism and variety in programming to the enrichment of all sections of society.

1.6 The IFJ affirms that responsibility for ethical conduct and maintenance of the highest standards in journalism rests with media professionals.

1.7 The IFJ strongly believes that the law should not interfere in matters which are the proper responsibility of working journalists: namely, the preparation, selection and transmission of information.

2. ACCESS TO THE PROFESSION

2.1 Access to the profession should be free. The professional level of future journalists should be as high as possible.

2.2 Trainee journalists must undergo proper training under conditions agreed by publishers and journalists' unions.

2.3 Appointments are restricted to qualified journalists, that is, persons who have minimum professional qualifications agreed by journalists' unions and media organisations. Such qualified journalists should be recognised as such in collective agreements. Employers accept that is the duty of the media in general and the employer in particular to reflect the society it serves.

3. CLAUSE OF CONSCIENCE

3.1 Journalists must have the right to act according to their conscience in the exercise of journalism. In case of fundamental change in the political, philosophical or religious line of the employer, a journalist may put an end to his or her contract, without notice, and be paid compensation equivalent to what he or she would have received in case of termination of his or her contract by the employer.

3.2 No journalist should be directed by an employer or any person acting on behalf of the employer to commit any act or thing that the journalist believes would breach his or her professional ethics, whether defined by a code of ethics adopted by journalists collected at national level or that would infringe the international Code of Principles for the Conduct of Journalism as adopted by the IFJ. No journalist can be disciplined in any way for asserting his or her rights to act according to their conscience.

4. EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE

4. 1 Common minimum standards of editorial independence should apply in all media.

4.2 These minimum standards must include:

- the Editorial staff represents the moral and intellectual capital of publishing houses and broadcasting station;
- the right of the editorial council to be consulted on decisions which affect:
- appointment and dismissal of the editor-in-chief;
- definition of editorial policy and content of the paper/broadcasting station;
- personnel policies;
- transfer/change of tasks of the journalists in the editorial department;
- the right of the editorial council to be heard on matters of grievances concerning editorial policy;
- the right of the journalist to refuse an assignment if the assignment proves to breach journalists professional ethics as laid down in the union's code of conduct;
- the right of the editorial staff to prevent interference of management of third parties on the editorial content;
- the right of journalists in Europe to equal pay and equality in career development.
- In case of grievances the editorial council, the editor in-chief and management hold bona fide negotiations. Representatives of the journalists associations and unions can be involved in the negotiations in line with existing labour/press legislation.

5. SELF-REGULATION AND ETHICS OF JOURNALISM

5.1 The IFJ believes that codes of ethics or codes of conduct must be drawn up by the professionals themselves.

5.2 The IFJ Code of Conduct, first adopted in 1954, provides a code of ethics adopted by all national representative journalists organisations in Europe. Therefore, the IFJ Code of Conduct provides the basis for a common understanding on ethical issues through voluntary adoption of journalists and publishers. In this area IFJ sees no active role for national governments.

IFJ DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES ON THE CONDUCT OF JOURNALISTS

“This international Declaration is proclaimed as a standard of professional conduct for journalists engaged in gathering, transmitting, disseminating and commenting on news and information in describing events.

1. Respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist.
2. In pursuance of this duty, the journalist shall at all times defend the principles of freedom in the honest collection and publication of news, and of the right of fair comment and criticism.
3. The journalist shall report only in accordance with facts of which he/she knows the origin. The journalist shall not suppress essential information or falsify documents.
4. The journalist shall use only fair methods to obtain news, photographs and documents.
5. The journalist shall do the utmost to rectify any published information which is found to be harmfully inaccurate.
6. The journalist shall observe professional secrecy regarding the source of information obtained in confidence.
7. The journalist shall be aware of the danger of discrimination being furthered by the media, and shall do the utmost to avoid facilitating such discrimination based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national or social origins.
8. The journalist shall regard as grave professional offences the following:
 - * plagiarism;
 - * malicious misrepresentation;
 - * calumny, slander, libel, unfounded accusations;
 - * acceptance of a bribe in any form in consideration of either publication or suppression.
9. Journalists worthy of the name shall deem it their duty to observe faithfully the principles stated above. Within the general law of each country the journalist shall recognise in professional matters the jurisdiction of colleagues only, to the exclusion of every kind of interference by governments or others.”

(Adopted by 1954 World Congress of the IFJ. Amended by the 1986 World Congress.)