

Guide to Self Regulation for Egyptian Media

Introduction

These are exciting times for journalists in Egypt. Independent journalism and media-savvy citizens armed with the latest digital tools can play a key role in driving forward the popular movement for political and democratic reform.

But this will not happen automatically.

Media will only contribute to the transformation of Egypt if they deliver journalism that is fact-based, free of political bias and gives voice to all groups in society.

This short guidebook aims to help people in Egyptian media to strengthen quality through ethical journalism, good governance and self-regulation.

It starts from the belief that media and journalists, including citizen media, need to be professional in their work and loyal to the people they serve.

To achieve high standards editors and media owners must shake off decades of political influence and break free from institutional and legal controls which have often stifled pluralist and independent journalism in Egypt.

There is cause for optimism. The media boom after the revolution pointed towards an era of liberal press and more objective editorial content. It has been suggested that today there are about 50 television channels, of which around 20 are new, and about 40 newspapers, with a handful launching since the revolution.

But partisan and government-owned media still dominate. Many newspapers, television and radio channels remain either government-owned or they represent an opposition political party.

The Egyptian constitution, which is currently under review, guarantees free expression, but the law allows government and censorship underpins the power of state-run media.

The penal code, in particular, contains many criminal restrictions on media content and there are specific laws covering the Syndicate of Journalists, the Egyptian Radio and Television Union and the Supreme Press Council all of which currently reinforce governmental influence and encourage self-censorship by journalists and editors.

At the same time, there is no independent regulatory body to monitor, regulate and question any medium, with the government as the ultimate authority. Not surprisingly, there are strong calls for better press regulation and more media transparency, including over ownership.

In that process it will be vital to create an enabling environment for media freedom and a legal framework to encourage journalists and media to set up forms of self-regulation.

This guidebook is an introduction to some of the principles and ideas behind self-regulation. It arises from a discussion in Cairo in April 2011 when media leaders and journalists, meeting under the auspices of UNESCO and the Syndicate of Journalists, launched a debate on building a new framework for ethical journalism in media.

The guide is in three parts. It begins with a broad outline and practical explanation of the principles of ethical journalism and self-regulation. In the second part it draws upon experience in other countries to outline the options for setting up an independent authority for media self-regulation based upon partnership between journalism, the media and the public. Finally, it sets out a checklist for practical actions to support self-regulation and a summary of recommendations for initial work.

The starting point is the belief that a culture of self-regulation will create a confident community of ethical journalists, improve levels of transparency and accountability, and build public trust in media.

This debate is up and running. A growing movement of Egyptian journalists and media professionals is already discussing how to steer media towards a renaissance of values and standards that will build public confidence.

But this will not be easy. People know that journalism has a history in the shadows of politics and forms of state control. They want media they can trust and not journalism that is an instrument controlled by invisible hands, whether from the world of politics, public relations or business.

When journalism acts unethically media can cause of confusion, ignorance, uncertainty and fear. Even worse, journalism can become a weapon for division and hatred in the community, particularly when it is manipulated by unscrupulous politicians who encourage sectarianism, sensationalism and propaganda.

Egyptian journalists need to tell their stories with integrity and style; communicating essential facts and always balancing the need for humanity but to do that there must be an end to media serving narrow political interests.

At the same time people everywhere are concerned by the growth of a culture of live and breaking news and the expansion of more yellow, tabloid or junk journalism.

Information travels at breakneck speed. In an instant reputations can be destroyed, falsehoods spread and privacy invaded. Often journalism seems to be driven by sensationalism, violence and conflict while less dramatic, but important stories about politics, health, education and community slip down the news agenda.

In this context the need for ethical journalism, good governance and media self-regulation poses an enormous and urgent challenge for journalists, editors and owners.

This guidebook is a response to that need.

Part One: Basics of Ethics and Self-Regulation

1. Why Ethics Matter

Ethics are important in all aspects of public life but they are particularly important in journalism.

Human beings are essentially ethical animals who make moral choices. They understand what is good and what is bad, what is shameful and what is worthy of praise. They think freely and they have the right to express their opinion, thanks to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states:

But in order to frame opinions and to make judgments of value people need to be properly informed. They need access to timely, reliable and truthful information about events, whether in their own neighbourhood, across the nation or in the wider world.

They rely upon journalists and media to provide them with information and news that is useful and that they can trust.

Ethical journalism is based upon professional values and encourages relevance, context, facts and analysis which helps people focus on what is important. It also builds credibility for media within society.

Just as governments have set benchmarks for moral and ethical behavior through international agreements, standards and conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, journalism, too, has its recognised conventions and standards.

In journalism the benchmarks are set out in professional codes of ethics. In order to ensure respect for the code and the values of journalism media establish systems of self-regulation.

2. **How Self Regulation Works**

Ethical journalism and the self regulation that goes with it are part of the solemn promise made by media and journalists to behave responsibly.

A system of self regulation corrects media errors and deals with concerns and complaints from the public, particularly when media and journalists cause offence or violate their own ethical rules. It also ensures that media engage in dialogue with the audience.

Self-regulation can be achieved without setting up formal and rigid structures. It is only necessary for media to commit themselves to be transparent and accountable and to respond promptly to public complaints and concerns.

Self regulation is both **internal** and **external**. Inside media it is carried out by individual companies who define their own standards and systems for monitoring the work of journalists.

Internal self-regulation involves dealing with complaints as well as efforts to promote good governance and transparency at all levels of the company's operations.

Some companies appoint a readers' editor or ombudsman to work independently in the editorial department dealing with complaints and concerns from the public. Normally this position is independent of direct control by the editor.

An accessible system for prompt correction of errors and efficient and amicable resolution of complaints not only builds trust with the public it can help companies avoid costly legal disputes.

External self-regulation involves the creation of a national authority, such as a press council, media commission or national ombudsman. (See Part Two).

Although in many democratic countries media codes of ethics are supported by systems of internal and external self-regulation, in most countries of the world there are no formal systems of self-regulation of media.

In this context the promotion of a culture of media self-regulation in Egypt based upon ethical principles is an important step in establishing an open and pluralist system of government and an important sign of democratic development.

3. The Code of Ethics

Codes of ethics guide journalists in the moral choices they make in their daily work. They are a statement of professional aspirations by journalists.

One widely recognised example is the International Federation of Journalists' *Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists* (See Appendix One).

There are many codes of ethics for journalists – more than 400 different codes exist around the world – which reflect different cultural and historical traditions.¹ Many are designed for particular acts of journalism – for instance codes covering how to report on the rights of children, or at election time, or in specific areas of journalism such as crime, business and politics.

Almost all codes are based upon the following core principles:

- a. **Truth-telling:** Journalism has an obligation to tell the truth. Truthfulness creates a sense of security. Journalists should always strive for accuracy. Reporting must be balanced and fair; it is the essence of news. Media must verify the facts they publish. They must avoid deceptive handling of the truth.
- b. **Independence and impartiality:** Journalists must be loyal to citizens. Media should be independent and journalists must not serve vested interests. In particular, journalism and media must be free of political manipulation and undue influence by commercial or other interests.
- c. **Minimise Harm:** Journalists should never shy away from reporting reality, however painful, but they must minimise harm to the public. People who make the news are vulnerable to the impact of stories about them -- their lives or reputations may be at risk. Journalists must avoid causing unnecessary pain or suffering. They must not incite hatred and discrimination and they should avoid stereotypes.
- d. **Accountability:** Journalists and media must correct their errors promptly. They must also permit legitimate criticism of their work. Media must respect the right of the audience to have their say by subjecting themselves to public scrutiny.

Although most journalists cannot recite exactly the words of their code, they are all aware of these core principles. The difficulty is in putting these values into practice.

4. Setting Guidelines for Ethical Journalism

Codes of ethics resonate with a high moral tone but they are only effective when they are translated into a working document that helps journalists in their daily work.

Most media that respect and adopt codes have developed guidelines to help journalists and editors to understand what good practice is and how they should behave.

¹ A full list of codes from around the world can be found at <http://www.rjionline.org/MAS-Codes-of-Ethics>

Many media organisations – such as the *BBC*, *Aljazeera*, *Associated Press*, *Reuters*, and major newspapers such as *The Guardian*, or *Le Monde* and the *New York Times* for example – have developed their own internal rules and producer guidelines.

Sometimes these are very extensive – often running to hundreds of pages. They help journalists to balance rights and responsibilities and to avoid bias, intemperate language, plagiarism, financial conflicts of interest, unbalanced reporting, obscenity, sensationalism and other pitfalls in the hot-house of the modern newsroom.

These guidelines also represent the values of the company and provide the moral compass for the whole workforce and management. A typical set of internal guidelines on content of journalism might cover the following:

Verify facts and Attribute Sources

Be honest about what is said and who said it and avoid anonymous quotes.

Plagiarism

Do not copy, lift or steal other people's work.

Bias

Bias in reporting and use of media stereotypes are the enemies of truth and understanding

Quoted Speech

Avoid altering quotes when it changes their meaning.

Fairness and balance

Journalists are obliged to allow people who suffer criticism the right to respond.

Reporting Conflict

Journalists need to be sensitive in reporting from scenes of conflict. They need to understand the origins of conflict and respect the victims of violence.

Reporting Children

Take care when dealing with children. They have rights too.²

Digital alteration of Images

It is easy to distort and alter digital photos and film. Avoid this, but if it is necessary, label images accordingly.

Use of language

Avoid using words that are hateful or likely to offend people.

Race and Ethnicity

Ethnicity is only important when it is relevant to a report. Avoid incitement to racial hatred.

Religion and Sectarianism

Respect all of the audience and avoid contributing to sectarian divisions.

Respect minorities

² See The guidelines of UNICEF http://www.unicef.org/media/media_tools.html

Sensitive reporting is required when reporting the most vulnerable groups in who are often in minority communities.

Subterfuge

Avoid using deception, except where there is a clear and defensible public interest involved.

Suicide, Grief

In times of trauma and tragedy avoid intruding into private grief. Take

Particular care with incidents of suicide so as not to encourage other similar acts.

Know the law

Journalists should be informed of their legal rights under national and international law and be aware of dangers they face including laws of defamation and privacy.

Safety

Safety of journalists is an ethical issue. Journalists should be aware of the risks they face and the need to protect themselves and colleagues under fire.

Protect Sources

People promised confidentiality for good reasons must be protected.

Right of reply

Journalists have a duty to correct mistakes promptly. Where appropriate people or groups who are victims of unethical conduct should be given the right to reply.

Privacy

People have the right to a private life so do not invade their privacy unless the public interest demands it.

In addition, editorial guidelines should give advice on **conflicts of interest**, both financial and political, as well as personal behaviour.

There should also be **staff training** in the basic concepts of ethical journalism to ensure that ethical weaknesses are corrected.

In the end it is the experience and wisdom of colleagues that provides journalists with their best guide to good behaviour. That is why media should regularly monitor and review the performance of editorial staff and the operation of the guidelines.

5. The Role of Law

The rule of law is important to protect pluralism and prohibit censorship. It can be used to protect journalists' sources and can promote the cause of open government through freedom of information rules.

In addition, in many countries the power of media monopolies is legitimately regulated by law to protect pluralism. There are also useful rules of transparency regarding ownership of media.

These legal constraints prevent media being used by powerful individuals and industrial interests to exercise undue political influence on the state and society.

However, the law has no place in the regulation of the work of journalists or of media content. Responsibility for matters of journalism and media content rests with media professionals themselves.

Egypt like many countries making the transition to democracy has over the years developed a web of intricate legal controls over journalism. These should be systematically identified and repealed.

Although the law should never be used to control journalism, it may strengthen some aspects of self-regulation by giving a self-regulation authority some narrowly-defined powers, such as the right to carry out investigations, to define suitable penalties and to enforce adjudications.

1. Good Governance: The Role of Media Owners and Editors

It is not only journalists who must show moral courage in media. Media owners and executives must also demonstrate deep commitment to the core values of journalism.

Moral behavior in the boardroom ultimately decides the quality of journalism. It is as important for building public trust as the performance of journalists in the newsroom.

Unless media are led by people of principle there is little chance that journalism will deliver the quality of information that communities need and democracy requires.

Unethical and partisan behavior by media owners – such as that exposed by recent events at Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation in the UK – leads inevitably to corrupt or biased journalism. This undermines public confidence and leads, as one renowned philosopher has said, to “the poisoning of public discourse and public life.”³

When this happens as recently in Britain, for example, lawmakers begin to consider using the law to discipline media and regulate journalism.

This can be dangerous for democracy. Media can avoid the threat of arbitrary and dangerous legal regulation by adopting internal standards of transparency to ensure proper disclosure of their political, financial and editorial activities.

Public disclosure, not secrecy is the key to honesty in public life and journalism is no exception.

In this regard the launch of an extensive set of guidelines to help media report on their activities by the Amsterdam-based Global Reporting Initiative at the 2012 UNESCO celebrations for World Press Freedom Day in Tunisia is a timely and useful contribution to the debate about corporate social responsibility in media.⁴

Genuine commitment from owners of media to make their business activities more accountable will greatly strengthen the cause of media self-regulation and ethical journalism.

³ See the comments of philosopher Onora O’Neill in her Reith Lectures at the BBC in 2002.

⁴ See the Global Reporting Initiative,
[Http://www.globalreporting.org/reporting/sector-guidance/media/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.globalreporting.org/reporting/sector-guidance/media/Pages/default.aspx).

Additionally, it should be noted that without good governance journalism can become a victim of self-censorship. Journalists often bend to pressure from advertisers and commercial sponsors. News which might hurt the financial interests of a news organisation goes unreported by journalists within that organisation.

This threat is even greater when political tensions run high and when competition in media is intense. In summary, the key elements of a strategy for good governance are:

Transparency: Ownership of media including the major sources of media funding should be subject to public scrutiny. There should be information available on those who own media including information about their financial and political interests. This should be regularly updated.

Commitment: media can demonstrate their loyalty to citizens and to rights and values of society by engaging with the audience and regularly reporting on how they promote ethics in journalism and management including respect for human rights and core labour standards;

Accountability: media should join with others in the industry to establish credible and effective structures for dealing with complaints and concerns.

Part Two: A Credible Authority for Self-Regulation

A national system for voluntary self-regulation is normally achieved through the creation of a special authority – a press council or a media council.

The aim of such an authority is to build public trust in media, to improve standards of ethical journalism, to stop all forms of state and government interference in media and to deal with complaints and concerns from the public.

This authority can be established as a voluntary exercise through co-operation among media owners, journalists and professional bodies and will normally involve representatives of civil society.

In some countries the authority is established by law, but its work and operations are organised according to the voluntary principles of self-regulation as in Denmark and Indonesia, for example. This is called co-regulation.

Whether it is established through co-regulation or voluntarily a media authority must be independent of the state and government and must not be subject to undue political or commercial influence.

Role and Responsibility

The media authority is not just a punishment body. In a democracy, a media self-regulator plays a key role in defending media freedom and promoting responsible use of information both within journalism and wider society.

This is particularly important in countries like Egypt which is in transition to democracy and where there is no established tradition of effective self-regulation.

The activities of a self-regulating authority in Egypt should be:

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- **Advocacy for Media Freedom and Free Expression**
- **Promotion of an industry code of ethics within journalism**
- **Campaigning for the responsible use of information in society**
- **Adjudication and mediation of complaints**
- **Monitoring and reporting on media trends**

The self-regulating authority should operate on a national basis.

It should deal with journalism content across all media platforms – print, broadcast and online – and will usually promote respect for a unified code of ethics covering all sectors of media.

Sometimes there will be separate systems of technical regulation of print and broadcast and online media (because of different rules of registration or allocation of frequencies or telecommunications rules). Even so agreement should be reached on the need for a single, unified system for regulating the content of journalism based upon the principle of self-regulation.

Besides dealing with complaints and monitoring the state of media, a self-regulating authority should also have the right to initiate its own investigations and to carry out such work that is needed to respond to legitimate concerns about the work of media and the behaviour of journalists.

Informing the Public

All citizens should be aware that they have the right to raise concerns and to complain about what they see, hear or read in the media.

The role and the aims and objectives of the self-regulation authority must be made widely known to everyone in all corners of society. Media covered by the self-regulation authority should publicise details of the authority and its work.

Membership

It is critical that members of a self-regulation authority are respected representatives of all the major groups concerned: media owners, editors, journalists and members of the public.

Membership of an authority for media self-regulation should not include representatives of government, parliament or political bodies in its operational activities. This will intimidate journalism and compromise the ability of media to promote debate and to carry information critical of government.

The number of members may vary from country to country although in almost all cases the majority of members come from the media community. In Indonesia, for example there are nine members -- three media owners, three journalists and three representatives of the public.

They should all be people who are dedicated to the defence of the wider public interest in free expression and who understand the role of pluralist and ethical media as a bulwark of democracy.

Public representation should be achieved by seeking nomination of individuals from all sections of society (unions, professional bodies, religious society, civil society bodies and individuals).

The selection of public representatives should be independently organised and not be the responsibility of government or parliament. One model used in Sweden is to ask the country's Bar Association to select the public representatives to serve on the press council. Similar independent selection bodies exist in other countries.

Governance and Funding

The self-regulation authority should establish its own internal working rules of governance.

It should ensure there are no conflicts of interest. For instance, when dealing with complaints, no owner or journalist directly associated with the media concerned should play a role in hearing the complaint or in adjudicating on the outcome of an investigation.

The work of a self-regulating authority should be supported by an independent secretariat which handles complaints and organises support activities to promote the authority and to carry out its advocacy and educational work.

The responsibility of the secretariat and the different roles played by employees should be clearly defined.

Funding of the authority must itself be transparent and enshrined in a mechanism that respects the ethical values which the authority upholds.

The funding of the authority and the secretariat can come from a number of different sources:

- a. Media and media support organisations
- b. Public donations and external donor support
- c. Defined areas of public funding.

Most self-regulating authorities have a mix of funding.

In Indonesia, for example, the press council receives state funding for its educational and advocacy activities. However, it seeks industry support to maintain its core costs covering meetings of the Council itself and handling complaints.

In Germany, the unions of journalists and media owners pay for the work of the Press Council, but the council also accepts government money to pay for the cost of dealing with complaints.

In many countries, Egypt included, the public interest activities of a self-regulation authority should be supported by public funding.

However, this should be strictly controlled. There should be transparent and accountable systems for monitoring how public money is used in order to avoid state interference in the authority's work.

At the same time, the rules of the authority must ensure that there are no conditions attached to the provision of funding by media organisations.

In all cases the rules and operations of the authority must ensure full transparency on the origins of all money received with full accounting for how it is spent.

Enforcement of Decisions

The essential credibility of the authority lies not only with transparency in how it is funded, but also in public confidence that its decisions are respected by the industry.

It is essential, then, that all media support the authority and accept its right to investigate complaints independently and are ready to go along with its adjudications and decisions.

When a media authority has the full support of all media houses the voluntary process of self-regulation can work effectively. In Sweden, for instance, all newspapers are part of the press council process. All media accept the decisions of the council. When media are criticised they have to pay a “fee” of 40.000 Euro. This money is paid directly to a fund to support the press council and its work.

However, this level of industry consensus is rarely achieved. Sometimes there are disputes over funding arrangements or some media refuse to join the process.

When the authority is created through co-regulation and has legal authority (Denmark and Indonesia, for example) it can go to court to enforce its judgments or to ensure that it can carry out its work according to its mandate.

Normally, a self-regulating authority will not seek to fine media or journalists or to suspend a publication. It will resist the temptation to replace the courts in upholding law.

Even when it has legal authority, a self-regulator can change a culture of confrontation to one of consensus by using its powers wisely.

In Indonesia, for example, more than 95 per cent of all complaints received against media are resolved through successful mediation between the two sides.

By seeking amicable resolution of disputes a self-regulating authority can provide a cheaper, shorter and more efficient way of dealing with complaints than the courts.

But for that to happen media organisations must be ready to take responsibility for their actions and agree to go along with the authority and its work.

Part Three: A Checklist for Self-Regulation

The following checklist covers the elements of and actions needed to create the conditions for both internal and external forms of self-regulation.

Mission statement:

Media should publish a declaration of company objectives and values including commitments to ethical journalism, transparency and accountability and loyalty to citizens.

Code of Conduct:

Media should support a code of principles in line with international standards of media freedom that demonstrate commitment to ethical journalism and good governance.

Editorial Guidelines:

Media should compile handbooks or manuals for reporters and editors' providing detailed advice on how to apply ethics in their daily work.

Training:

It is not enough that codes of conduct and ethical principles exist as the theory of journalism. Working journalists need to be constantly reminded of their rights and responsibilities in their everyday activities.

Codes and guidelines should be distributed to all journalists and editorial staff and all staff should receive training on ethical principles

Media should ensure regular review and monitoring of the effectiveness of codes and guidelines through internal debate

Editorial policy related to ethical use of information should feature in published material, including online services.

Contracts:

Journalists and media staff need to work in a safe and secure environment which encourages them to behave ethically. Precarious working conditions can damage morale and confidence in the newsroom.

All editorial staff including journalists working as freelance contributors should have contracts which clearly outline their rights and ethical responsibilities as well as their employment rights.

Journalists should have the right to act according to conscience. This can be formally achieved by agreeing to a "conscience clause" in contracts which allows journalists to resist unreasonable pressure on them to violate their ethical principles.

Job descriptions of editorial staff should highlight the importance of ethical conduct in the exercise of specific tasks, for instance covering political and business journalism.

Editorial Contact Point: An Ombudsman or Readers' editor:

Internal systems for monitoring standards and responding to concerns and complaints from readers and viewers can encourage self-criticism and build credibility.

Media should appoint a senior journalist to act as a public contact point – a readers' editor or ombudsman, for instance – who will receive and respond to public complaints.

In smaller media houses the company can designate a specific member of the senior editorial staff to undertake these duties.

The ombudsman or readers' editor should liaise between the staff of the media outlet and its readers, viewers or listeners and try to resolve amicably disagreements between the two sides.

This position should be independent of the Editor in Chief and may be appointed, for instance, by the board of directors and owners of the media.

Some examples of this practice are found in The Guardian (UK), in Le Monde (France) and also in some broadcast media.⁵

Dialogue with the Audience:

Media should encourage debate and dialogue with reader, listeners and viewers. This will build public trust and inspire confidence in journalism.

Media should

- a. **Prominently display information on how to comment, express concerns and make complaints regarding journalistic work.**
- b. **Provide opportunities for readers and viewers to express contrary opinions and express the right of reply where it is appropriate.**
- c. **Publish an annual report of editorial activities reflecting on successes and challenges of journalism and giving the audience information on how they can express their opinion.**

Ethical Management:

Ethical conduct in media management is an essential prerequisite for ethical journalism.

At all levels media should apply internal rules that ensure good governance, transparency and accountability. Such rules should define

- **The independence of the Editor in all matters related to journalism, editorial operations and content**
- **Procedures for transparency in the appointment of editors**
- **Systems to maintain the independence of journalism from undue influence by commercial, marketing and advertising departments;**
- **Systems that avoid conflicts of interest at the level of the boardroom and administration of media,**

⁵ There is a special international association for ombudsmen, the Organisation of News Ombudsmen, www.newsombudsmen.org

- **Respect for media's role to protect the public interest including, where appropriate, the appointment of independent directors to the board of management.**

Transparency, accountability and reporting:

Because media exercise a particularly powerful influence on political and commercial affairs they must be open and accountable, even more so than other sections of the national economy

Media companies should be transparent and report regularly on the standards they apply in the administration and conduct of their business and their journalism.

Such reporting should cover all aspects of their affairs and indicate a commitment to implement the highest standards of good management practice covering, for instance,

Transparency in ownership as well as disclosure of political affiliations and financial interests including contacts with government

Commitment to good industrial relations and employment practice including social dialogue, workforce diversity and application of core labour standards as well as a culture of security so that journalists and all media personnel can practice their profession safely.

Commitment to international human rights standards.

Useful links

[Alliance of Independent Press Councils in Europe](#)

[BBC Standards of Ethical Journalism](#)

[CBC Ombudsman](#)

[Institute of Communications Ethics](#)

<http://www.ethicaljournalisminitiative.org>

[Journalism ethics for the global citizen](#)

<http://www.journalismethics.net>

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/freedom-of-expression/professional-journalistic-standards-and-code-of-ethics/>

[Media Ethics and Media Accountability Systems](#)

[Media Helping Media](#)

<http://www.mediahelpingmedia.org/>

[Media Monitoring South Africa](#)

[New York Times-Handbook on Ethical Journalism](#)

[PoynterOnline](#)

[Regret the Error: How to Avoid Online Hoax](#)

<http://www.regrettheerror.com/>

[Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press](#)

<http://www.rcfp.org/index.php>

[Society of Professional Journalists](#)

Taking Action: the First Steps

The ideas set out here will remain mere aspirations unless practical steps are taken by media and journalists leaders in Egypt to put them into effect.

Not least important is the need for **professional solidarity** among media professionals and a commitment to work together in favour of the following concrete actions:

- **Internal self-regulation:** Media houses in Egypt should hold internal meetings at the highest level to assess what needs to be done to establish effective internal forms of self-regulation including
 - drawing up mission statements
 - adopting a code of conduct
 - ethical guidelines for journalists
 - rules of good governance including avoiding all conflicts of interest
 - establishing a system for dealing with public complaints and concerns
 - ethical obligations in contracts of employment
 - social dialogue to agree minimum standards of social and professional rights and safety and protection of media staff.

- **External self-regulation:** Egyptian media and journalists groups, in co-operation with relevant civil society groups, should establish a process for creating an industry-wide body for self-regulation of media and journalism.
This process should involve investigation of the most appropriate structure for such an authority covering:
 - Legal status and mandate
 - Membership: including representation of the public

- Governance
 - Aims and objectives
 - Funding
 - Annual Reporting of its activities
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- **Dialogue with Government:** Media and journalists' groups should establish a structure for dialogue with state agencies and representatives of government to convince them of the benefits of media regulating themselves. Particular attention must be paid to media under government supervision or dependent on state funding as well as the need for new legal rules to strengthen media freedom and independent journalism including
 - Access to information laws
 - Reform of state-run media and creation of genuine public service media
 - Review and repeal of all laws that endanger or compromise free journalism

Appendix One

International Code of Principles for the Conduct of Journalism (International Federation of Journalists, 1954)

This 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, and unfounded accusations;*
 - Acceptance of a bribe in any form in consideration of 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.*