

Reporting Hate Speech, Terrorism & Violence

Guidelines for journalists and media
workers in South East Asia

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Foreword

We live in an uncertain world. None of us can be entirely sure how we would respond when called to report on a terror attack or incident. On such occasions, journalists are expected to act calmly and professionally, putting their own fear and emotions to one side. They must report with regard to their own safety and the safety of others, while covering such incidents with accuracy, impartiality and clarity.

The ways in which journalists report on such incidents and how they respond to violence and hate speech in the media, is especially critical at a time when public trust in the media is at an unprecedented low. Good journalism is at the core of rebuilding public trust in the media. How journalists react and work when confronted with acts of terrorism, hate speech and violence is fundamental to maintaining peaceful and stable societies.

PMA believes that adequate and relevant training provides journalists and media practitioners with a supportive framework, enabling them to deal with major events in a professional, rather than sensationalist, manner. Alongside training and preparedness, clear and established guidelines, developed collaboratively, are also an essential tool. Such guidelines support the media in their aim to be productive and neutral in their coverage of acts of terror and hate speech in the region. Working collaboratively also helps to build and strengthen strong, cross border, professional networks.

In March 2019, the PMA, with the support of UNESCO International Programme for the Development of Communication and the Ethical Journalism Network (EJN), ran a 3-day workshop in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The event provided an opportunity for journalists and media professionals from across the region to work together to develop guidelines that set out policies and best practices for the coverage of terrorism, hate speech and violence.

Sally-Ann Wilson, CEO. Public Media Alliance

Overview

In March 2019, a group of journalists, media managers and press regulators from five countries in the Asia-Pacific region [Indonesia, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Philippines and Malaysia] met in Kuala Lumpur.

They came together to collaboratively develop a set of guidelines to assist journalists covering hate speech, acts of violence and terrorism across the region.

Each set of guidelines begins by defining ‘hate speech’, ‘acts of violence’ and ‘terrorism’ respectively. It is important to establish such definitions before developing guidelines on how journalists and media professionals should respond to such situations.

These guidelines are divided into three sections, as there are specific considerations for each scenario, although some of the key principles are applicable in all three situations.

In interpreting these guidelines, consideration must be given to context, editorial justification, freedom of expression, public interest and the capacity of media.

Hate Speech

Journalists play a critical role in building and contributing to peace and harmony within society.

High quality, independent journalism is a pillar of democracy and it is important that journalists and media professionals understand and act in a way that protects that journalistic reputation.

These guidelines aim to provide support and guidance for journalists based on integrity, independence, fairness and accuracy. In the era of information technology, hate speech can rapidly spread and cause great harm, but journalists can play an important role in countering its spread. It was with this realisation that journalists in the ASEAN region worked together to formulate these guidelines.

Definition

Journalists in the ASEAN region understand that hate speech refers to content that targets and causes harm to identifiable groups and individuals, with or without malicious intent.

Hate speech tends to be related, but not limited to, individuals or groups who can be categorised by race, religion, sexuality, country of origin, gender, political affiliation, residential location, cultural identity, disability and age.

There is a difference between 'hate speech' and 'hurtful speech'. The first can, and often does, cause harm and incite violence. The second, despite being hurtful, does not necessarily incite direct harm or violence.

Guidelines

Journalists are encouraged to:

1. Maintain good journalistic values; accuracy, accountability, and building trust, are three important factors in maintaining good journalism.
2. Understand what constitutes hate speech content and how best to identify it through the use of tools such as the Ethical Journalist Network's Five Point Test for Hate Speech [see back page].
3. Differentiate between facts, fiction, and opinion. Ensure to cross check statements made by experts and analysts. These may be presented as 'facts' that might mislead the public and generate hate speech.
4. Be mindful of the language you use when reporting. Provide context; be aware of semantics, phrasing, and avoid stereotypical references.
5. Be aware of hate speech embedded within linguistic codes across different cultures.
6. Ensure the contextual relevance of the story when identifying an individual as a member of a particular group of society.
7. Avoid stereotyping, generalisation, judgment or labelling, based on race, sexual orientation, religion, gender, and political affiliation.

8. Avoid partisan views, especially when covering election campaigns
9. Be aware of political agendas that use hate speech for political gains.
10. Consider your own physical and psychological safety when reporting on terrorism.
11. Avoid publishing graphic or visual content depicting hate.
12. Establish moderation processes to monitor feedback and comments across all media platforms, including those that are 'live'.
13. Refrain from reproducing hate speech across multiple platforms.
14. Critically assess the content of social media posts before rushing to report on or share them.
15. Moderate comments on social media in the aftermath of the terrorist attack, to avoid inciting further acts of terror.

Terrorism

The priority of journalists when developing guidelines is to understand what terrorism is and to maintain journalists' impartiality.

The safety of journalists is essential. Adequate training and necessary caution should be the central consideration for any journalists reporting on terrorism. When reporting terrorism, journalists must protect victims and vulnerable persons by ensuring that reporting does not worsen the situation.

Journalists are encouraged to continue reporting in the aftermath of a terror incident. In addition, they should monitor any comment and feedback on social media as part of a strategy to prevent re-igniting acts of terrorism driven by political and ideological causes.

Definition

We understand terrorism as any action or strategic intention to cause death, serious bodily harm and widespread fear to civilians for ideological and political reasons.

Guidelines

Journalists are encouraged to:

1. Differentiate between terrorism and a criminal act of violence.
2. Maintain journalistic values of impartiality, fairness, and accuracy when reporting on acts of terror.
3. Seek appropriate training prior to engaging with covering acts of terror.
4. Avoid publishing photographs or broadcast images of acts of terror that have the potential to cause public panic and revive traumatic experiences.
5. Avoid providing a platform to those propagating and glorifying violence based on political ideologies.
6. Give justice to victims of terror acts and allow time to report on their legitimate grievances.
7. Try to avoid irrelevant religious and political attribution including the use of images of religious symbols when identifying perpetrators of terrorist attacks.
8. Distinguish between 'alleged' or 'suspected' perpetrators of terrorist attacks when reporting upon their arrest.

9. Seek multiple opinions to avoid contributing to a polarisation of existing political conflict.
10. Consider your own physical and psychological safety when reporting on terrorism.
11. Protect the identity of children and family members of the perpetrators of terror.
12. Follow-up on the aftermath of terrorist attacks and try to tackle the complexity of the situation.
13. Objectively consider the credibility of sources before presenting them as 'experts'.
14. Critically assess the content of social media posts before rushing to report on or share them.
15. Moderate comments on social media in the aftermath of the terrorist attack, to avoid inciting further acts of terror.

Violence

Amidst a growing international interest in the portrayal of violence and its impact on the understanding, behaviours and attitudes of communities, much attention has been centred on how stories of violence are framed in news print, broadcast and social media.

Violence is often perpetrated against the most vulnerable groups in society. Reporting and covering acts of violence needs specific and discerning preparation, good knowledge and sensitivity.

Aside from considering the impact of reporting acts of violence on those people involved, journalists need to be mindful of their own security and safety and unite with fellow journalists who may also be subjected to violence as a result of their journalism.

Hence, these guidelines have been developed by the group of ASEAN journalists to encourage accurate, responsible and sensitive coverage of different forms of societal violence.

Definition

We understand 'violence' as behaviour involving psychological and physical harm inflicted on individuals, or groups, on the basis of their political affiliation, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, social class, financial status, and state of origin.

These guidelines cover the reporting of violence in relation, but not limited to, the following areas: political violence; violence committed by state agencies, including the police and the military; violence against journalists; violence committed against environmental activists; racial or ethnic violence; gender-based violence; domestic violence; violence against children and or elderly persons; violence against people with disability; and violence-based on sexual orientation.

Guidelines

Journalists are encouraged to:

1. Consider expressing solidarity with fellow journalists who are subject to violence as a consequence of their journalism.
2. Acknowledge the impact of live coverage of acts of violence, as this may trigger further acts of violence.
3. Abstain from reporting personal opinion, unverified information and claims, when reporting violence.
4. Be careful and accurate when using terminologies and graphic images related to violence.
5. Secure your own safety; no story is worth your life.
6. Exercise impartial reporting by not providing, either witting or unwitting, support for those perpetrating violence.
7. Veer away from focusing on the specific tragic aspects of an incident.
8. Understand that violence and abuse might be part of a long-standing social problem, that might cause further trauma.

9. Be impartial and try to get all sides of the story when reporting on political violence.
10. Respect the privacy of victims by asking consent to interview and provide detailed information on the topics that will be covered in any interviews with them.
11. Understand and respect the complexity of issues related to race, ethnicity, religion, and culture, as well as state of origin.
12. Be mindful and show empathy when interviewing vulnerable people including women, children, and people with disability that have been subjected to violence.
13. Consider protecting the identity and other personal information of victims and immediate family members when reporting violence against children and vulnerable people.
14. Be mindful of protecting the identity and other information that might lead to the suspects, and their immediate family members, when reporting incidents of children who are in conflict with the law.
15. Acknowledge the rights of people with different sexual orientation to privacy and dignity.
16. Adhere to impartial and accurate reporting when covering violence committed by government agencies, including police and the military.

Guidelines

17. Aim to consult all stakeholders, including people that are affected, when reporting environmental issues.
18. Protect the privacy and identity of the victims when reporting violence triggered by illegal money lending.

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HATE SPEECH

TURNING THE PAGE OF HATE:
A MEDIA CAMPAIGN FOR
TOLERANCE IN JOURNALISM

When it comes to hate speech, journalists and editors must pause and take the time to judge the **potential impact** of offensive, inflammatory content.

The following test, developed by the EJN and based on international standards, highlights questions in the **gathering, preparation and dissemination** of news and helps place what is said and who is saying it in an **ethical context**.

2 REACH OF THE SPEECH

How far is the speech traveling?
Is there a **pattern** of behaviour?

3 GOALS OF THE SPEECH

How does it benefit the **speaker** and their **interests**?
Is it **deliberately intended** to **cause harm** to others?

A 5 POINT TEST FOR JOURNALISTS

4 THE CONTENT

Is the speech **dangerous**? **ITSELF**
Could it incite **violence** towards others?

5

SURROUNDING CLIMATE SOCIAL / ECONOMIC / POLITICAL

Who might be **negatively affected**?

Is there a history of **conflict** or **discrimination**?

1

STATUS OF THE SPEAKER

How might their **position** influence their **motives**?

Should they even be **listened to** or just **ignored**?

DON'T **SENSATIONALISE!**

AVOID THE **RUSH** TO PUBLISH

TAKE A **MOMENT OF REFLECTION**

EthicalJournalismNetwork.org

