

# **CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEDIA PERSONNEL AND MEDIA HOUSES DURING ELECTIONS**

## **PREAMBLE**

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) is an exclusive authority empowered to direct, supervise and control, in a fair and impartial manner, the National Assembly and Local Government election as well as the referenda as stipulated by the Constitution of the Kingdom of Lesotho and Electoral Act, 2011. Both Constitution and Electoral Act does not have specific sections that direct the behaviour of the media during elections. However the Commission has the power to develop Electoral Code of Conduct that provides the dos and don'ts to the stakeholders including the media, with regard to their conduct during election.

The purpose of this code of conduct is, therefore, to remind the media of the duty to provide the public with truthful, impartial and necessary information when reporting on issues concerning every relevant aspect of the electoral process including information on citizens' electoral rights.

## **APPLICATION**

This Code of Conduct shall apply to every journalist, whether from the private or public media and all stakeholders including the Commission.

## **THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA**

The role of the media in electoral process is to bring out content of all campaign activities in its reportage or simply to make sure that messages by parties and candidates are adequately and professionally covered. In carrying out its mandate media has to take into consideration the two aspects stated here below:

- **Duty of Balance and Impartiality**

Public and private owned media shall ensure that they are balanced and impartial in their election reporting and that no political party or candidate shall be discriminated against in editorial coverage or granting of access to media coverage.

Although private media cannot be compelled to cover political parties' activities, whenever they do, they should report and cover candidates in an unbiased and fair manner.

- **Advertisements**

When publishing or carrying out electoral advertisements, media, whether private or public, has to clearly indicate that the matter is an advertisement by placing the word "Advertisement" as a headline.

## **THE ELECTORAL CODE OF CONDUCT**

Electoral Code of Conduct provides for both public and private media to practice fairness in the coverage of candidates and political parties in the spirit envisaged by the Electoral Act.

### **1. Media Coverage**

1.1 All print and electronic media shall provide fair and balanced reporting of the campaigns, policies, meetings, rallies and press conferences of all registered political parties and candidates during the period of campaigning;

1.2 Media has the right to provide news of the electoral process up to the declaration of the results.

1.3 All print and electronic media shall abide by regional codes of conduct in the coverage of elections such as 'the SADC guidelines and principles for broadcast and coverage of elections' provided the guidelines are not in conflict with the code.

2. All print and electronic media shall in liaison with the Electoral Commission recognise a representative media body to receive complaints and provide advice regarding fair coverage of elections.

### **3. Accuracy in reporting**

2.1 All media shall report news on elections in an accurate manner and shall not:

- a) make any abusive editorial comment;
- b) incite violence; or
- c) advocate hatred based on race, ethnicity, tribe, gender, political or religious conviction.

2.2 Further, all media shall identify any editorial comment they wish to make and separate it from the news.

### **3 Protection of journalists**

3.2 The Commission and stakeholders shall ensure protection of journalists while carrying out their duties during elections.

3.3 To this end, heads of public and private media are urged not to intimidate media practitioners and shall allow them to exercise professional judgment without undue influence.

3.4 If a media practitioner is victimised in the course of his/her duties, he/she will be entitled to report to the Conflict Management Committees established by the Commission which shall take necessary action against the perpetrator.

3.5 Political parties and candidates are also entitled to complain against journalists to the Conflict Management Committees and the Commission.

3.6 Any candidate or party that wishes to make a complaint of unfair treatment or coverage in the course of the election campaign shall send it in writing to the Commission.

4 Where a right of reply, a retraction or the correction of a matter of significance is necessary, such a response must be placed or scheduled in a position of equal prominence.

## **5 Interviews/Opinions**

5.2 All public and private media personnel shall conduct interviews with candidates with fairness both in the style of the interview and in the amount of the time given.

5.3 The media shall not broadcast their own political opinion, commentary or assessment.

5.4 Where they wish to do so, they shall clearly identify the opinion, commentary or assessment as their own and shall carefully balance it in order to avoid bias.

## **6 Airtime**

6.2 Public television and radio broadcasters shall allocate public air-time to parties for their political broadcasts.

6.3 Such air-time shall not exceed the agreed maximum duration.

6.4 Media shall ensure the political parties' programmes are free from incitement to public disorder, violence or war and must also comply with the code of conduct for broadcasting services.

6.5 Political parties shall not broadcast in the 48-hour period between the end of the official campaign and the close of the poll.

6.6 The Commission shall come up with a time table that will be agreed by all.

## **7 Opinion Polls**

The television and radio broadcasters shall not schedule any party's political broadcast or other political discussion or interview, opinion poll-results or broadcast prediction of the result on polling day until the polls have closed.

## **8 Publication of results**

The media shall broadcast only confirmed election results as they are announced and published by presiding officers, returning officers and Commission.

## **9 Record keeping**

9.2 Public media, namely, radio and television shall maintain full records of all radio and television news bulletins and recordings of all programmes related to the election, including party political broadcasts.

9.3 Television and radio stations shall provide the Electoral Commission with all such records, information and recordings as the Commission may require to fulfil its monitoring role.

9.4 The Commission may also require other media houses to provide back-up copies in the event of a complaint.