

september 2005

# media charter

for a democratic and pluralist  
media culture  
and  
social and professional rights  
for  
media and journalism  
in Sri Lanka



# main signatories to charter

Federation of Media Employees Trade Unions

Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association

Sri Lanka Tamil Media Alliance

Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum

Free Media Movement



# | introduction

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.

# fundamental principles |

## 1.1

Respect for truth and the public's right to know are 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.

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*respect the principles of pluralism, diversity and universal respect for human rights*

# |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 (attached) 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.

# 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.

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*guarantee  
citizen's  
access to  
information  
and freedom  
of  
information*

# 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.

# Background

*Promoting journalism as a public service  
Media Freedom and Social Responsibility  
Professional Solidarity and Rights of Journalists*

A Conference of National Journalists in support of a democratic and pluralist media culture and social and professional rights for media and journalism in Sri Lanka, held from 9 – 11 September 2005, at Human Development Centre, Tholangamuwa, unanimously agreed to strengthen these values as enshrined in the following charter.

This charter was drawn up by the Federation of Media Employees Trade Unions, Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association, Sri Lanka Tamil Media Alliance, Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum and the Free Media Movement.

In addition, the provincial journalists organizations listed below also contributed to the creation of this charter.

The conference facilitated by the Media Unit of the Centre for Policy Alternatives and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

- Rajarata Independent Mass Media Forum, Anuradhapura.
- Sathkorale Media Organization, Kurunegala.
- Media Forum, Colombo.
- District Independent Media Organization, Gampaha.
- United Provincial Journalists National Foundation, Kandy.
- Kelanivalley Journalists Organization, Colombo.
- Uva Tamil Media Forum, Badulla.
- Sabaragamuwa Media Forum, Rathnapura
- Sri Lanka Journalists Association, Mathale.
- Media Forum, Polonnaruwa.
- District Journalists Forum, Mathara.
- District Journalists Welfare Society, Mathale
- Ruwanpura Media Forum, Ratnapura.
- Batticaloa Media Forum, Batticaloa.
- Pramuka Media Forum, Mathara.
- Upper Uva Media Forum, Badulla.
- District Journalists Association, Hambanthota
- Provincial Journalists Society, Kurunegala.
- Free Media Foundation, Kaluthara.
- District Media Forum, Mathara.
- Environmental Journalists Forum, Puttalam.
- Mithra Media Foundation, Ampara.
- Journalists Society, Kandy
- Lower Uva Journalists Organization, Monaragala.
- Nuwarakalaviya Media Forum, Anuradhapura.
- Pramuka Media Forum, Galle.
- Kaththankudi Journalists Organization, Batticaloa
- District Journalists Organization, Kegalle.
- Northlanka Journalists Organization, Jaffna



## Voices of Reconciliation

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The Voices of Reconciliation project aims to increase the capacity of civil society organisations to effectively engage in the peace process and strengthen professional media that supports Sri Lanka's transition to democracy and reconciliation.

The project supports civil society organisations working for peace, human rights and conflict resolution in Sri Lanka. The VoR project also works towards developing durable inter-connections between national and provincial media and their CSO counterparts.

This project is made possible by the generous funding from the Canadian International Developmental Agency (CIDA) and Australian Aid (AusAID). The Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society (IMPACS) is our primary partner for the VoR project. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) provided expert input into this Media Charter.

For more details on the project, our partners and our vision:

[www.voicesofpeace.lk](http://www.voicesofpeace.lk)

centre for policy alternatives  
colombo, sri lanka  
[www.cpalanka.org](http://www.cpalanka.org)