

Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon

First: Preamble

Reaffirming the fact that the Lebanese media's leading and responsible role in rejecting discrimination and promoting civil peace is fulfilled when the truth is told with utmost credibility and accuracy that allow professionalism in a working environment built on independence, freedom, and social responsibility,

Believing in the vital contribution of the honest word and the objective opinion in developing the society and consolidating national unity and coexistence in a spirit of respect to the right of being different and having a different opinion, as inspired by the responsibility of the media established on the professional principles, values, ethics, and conduct of persons working in both audiovisual media and press, including the electronic media,

Recognizing that, in view of the political, economic, and social changes witnessed on the local, Arab, and international scene, and the fast multimedia advances in the fields of journalism and communication, it has become incumbent upon the Lebanese media to establish a Journalists' Pact in order to promote the media contribution for strengthening civil peace in Lebanon by building the bridge of credibility and trustworthiness between the Lebanese media and the public and reflecting the reality with national and social responsibility;

Equally, given the ever-expanding role of social media in broadcasting news and the rising phenomenon of "citizen journalism", it has become necessary to draft the guiding principles for the social media in order to strengthen civil peace in Lebanon,

Seeking to implement the provisions of the Lebanese Constitution preamble and Article 13 regarding the respect of public freedoms, with a particular focus on the freedom of opinion and belief as per the applicable laws, and to meet the commitments made under UN instruments, essentially the UN Declaration of Human Rights, and in keeping with all the aforementioned,

This Journalists' Pact was drafted to reflect, in its articles and implementation, the spirit of the present preamble and binding reasons.

Second: Guiding Principles

The present Pact follows the media and press principles and ethics established by regional and international media institutions and consulted in the references of this Pact.

The aforesaid principles include:

A. Media Ethics:

1. The freedom of expression and communication
2. The right of public access to information
3. The right of the journalists to obey their human and professional conscience

B. Duties of the journalist and media institutions:

1. Ensure accuracy, respond and readjust
2. Discern facts, comments, and opinions
3. Respect personal privacy
4. Protect information sources
5. Avoid bias and discrimination
6. Cultivate objectivity and fairness
7. Avoid bribery and conflicts of interest

C. Media professionalism and ethics require the following:

1. Compliance with the basic principles of media: a. Accuracy over speed; b. Fairness over provocation; c. Telling the public the truth is the actual goal.
2. Fairness: The coverage of an event shall not result in any psychological, ethical, or physical harm.
3. Neutrality¹: Maintain equal footing with all parties.
4. Accuracy: Avoid all types of mistakes.
5. Balance: Provide equal opportunities to all parties involved in the covered event.
6. Equal opportunities: Select the parties' best arguments.
7. Impartiality: Separate facts from opinions.
8. Context-awareness: Link the part to the whole and the private to the public.

Third: Articles of the Pact

Article 1: Journalists shall respect the rule of law and handle issues related to the security and stability of the country or constitutional constants with personal, corporate, and national responsibility. They shall reject the supremacy of personal interests over public interest, or the inappropriate use of any media institution, when handling security or judicial issues, if likely to jeopardize the security or breach the national unity.

Article 2: Journalists shall commit to strengthen national unity and coexistence, respect religions, refrain from instigating sectarian or confessional strife, and reject violent disobedience movements, crime and abasement.

Article 3: The Lebanese media shall reject racial discrimination and refrain from directly or indirectly offending the dignity of people, and from interfering in their personal or private matters or marring them.

¹ Excluding matters related to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Lebanon-Israel hostility.

Article 4: The Lebanese media shall act with professionalism and social responsibility when broadcasting a live coverage of events, violent scenes, or the immediate reaction and behavior of journalists that may influence the public opinion.

Article 5: Journalists shall ensure that the families of the victims and the injured- prior to announcing their names- have already been informed of the event. They shall use multiple reliable sources to confirm the identities of the victims together with the relevant authorities, and handle the information related to the victims with accuracy, clarity and appropriateness. Journalists shall take into account the feelings of the victims' families and those of the citizens in general when transmitting any footage or voice recordings of the victims. These images or voice recordings shall not be used to serve any purposes other than the truth.

Article 6: Journalists shall safeguard their right to obtain -from various sources-, analyze, publish, and comment on information, news and statistics that are of prime importance to the citizens. They shall also safeguard their right not to disclose the source of confidential news as such disclosure would expose the source to danger, or silence it gradually or completely, thus lead to a weaker flow of information in the future.

Article 7: Journalists shall refrain from resorting to illegal means in order to obtain news, pictures, documents or other pieces of information. They shall preserve the confidentiality of the sources, unless otherwise required in cases that threaten national security. Unsupported slander or accusation is considered a blatant breach of the profession ethics; consequently, any information proved wrong shall always be corrected.

Article 8: Journalists shall refrain from publishing off-the-record information while keeping the use of this information informally is possible upon verification of its accuracy and reliability or publication without indicating the source.

Article 9: Journalists shall apply the highest levels of objectivity when "associating" published materials to their sources and mentioning the source of every piece of information. "Associating" information to unidentified sources shall not be allowed unless in cases where access to information is otherwise impossible.

Article 10: Journalists shall commit to applying accuracy and objectivity in the drafting, editing, directing, and diffusion of information, documents, images, and scenes on all subjects related to the press and to the audiovisual and electronic media, without distorting the facts.

Article 11: Journalists shall regulate the tone used in newspapers editorials, TV and radio breaking news, in addition to talk shows of the audiovisual media, in compliance with the principles and basics of journalism. Journalists shall also refrain from spreading a spirit of violence and strife.

Article 12: Media institutions shall commit to presenting news and programs related to parliamentary, municipal, union, or student elections with fairness, equality, and impartiality, and with the highest level of justice in order to give equal opportunities to all candidates. They shall also commit to educating citizens on democracy and elections through the dissemination of

information on elections and their importance in democratic systems, the principles and standards of holding elections, as well as the role, rights, and duties of the voter.

Article 13: Media institutions shall avoid making mistakes or using expressions of libel, slander, defamation, discrimination, or bias (except from matters related to the Arab-Israeli conflict). They shall ensure the delivery of the information to the public in an objective, reliable and clear way that safeguards the authenticity, accuracy, and credibility of the information as well as the transparency of its sources following the provisions of the Constitution, the law and the intellectual property rights that reflect the civilized aspect of Lebanon.

Article 14: In the context of strengthening civil peace in Lebanon, Lebanese media institutions and their staff shall emphasize, promote, and encourage the initiatives, projects, and activities started by individuals or organizations to reject violence and discrimination and strengthen civil peace in Lebanon. This can be achieved by allocating ample time and space to shed light on issues that bring the Lebanese citizens together, and focus on values and morals that all religious communities agree upon, such as respect for the homeland. Media institutions shall carefully select the guests that they host and the writers that they recruit, as these shall enjoy a decent level of thinking and a high spirit of citizenship.

Article 15: Journalists who supervise the content of news bulletins and political programs in the audiovisual media, the press, and the electronic media shall commit to applying personal and corporate responsibility and complying with professional principles and values, as well as relevant codes of conduct and management policies.

Article 16: News anchors and presenters of political programs shall enjoy a high level of neutrality and professionalism and shall refrain from blatantly and provocatively showing their personal political position by practicing self-censorship in their work.

Article 17: A journalist shall not use his/her position to promote or support any idea that directly or indirectly serves any political side. A journalist shall always be aware that his/her personal opinions that he/she posts on social media websites do not reflect the opinion of the media institution to which he/she belongs.

Article 18: A journalist shall be fully aware of his/her responsibility for professional mistakes that result in material or moral damage to third parties. Therefore, practicing journalism in a way that contradicts the applicable laws and regulations is considered a violation of the professional duties and a breach of its ethics and rules, hence the subjection of violators to legal accountability.

Fourth: Implementation

The implementation of the present Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon calls for:

1. The commitment of media institutions that contributed to the drafting of the pact by submitting written comments and participating in discussion sessions.

2. The commitment of media institutions to the Audiovisual Media Law, the Press Law, and other applicable laws.
3. The support of the Ministry of Information, the National Council for Audiovisual Media, the Press Syndicate, and Editors' Syndicate to the implementation efforts.

Fifth: References

1. Codes of Conduct, Mike Jempson, Manager of the Press Wise Trust
2. The Arab Media Code of Ethics, issued by virtue of a decision of the Council of Arab Ministers of Information dated 20/6/2007
3. The Audiovisual Media Code of Ethics, Media Affairs Committee, Bahrain, 2012
4. The Journalists' Code of Ethics- Jordan
5. Code of Conduct for the Audiovisual Media Staff in Jordan
6. Code of Ethics for Journalists Working in the Field of Child Protection against Violence
7. "Project for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon", special publication issued by the UNDP Project for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon in partnership with the European Union, and distributed along with "Annahar" and "Al Safir" newspapers in December 2012
8. The Guide to Protecting the Young Public Opinion in Audiovisual Media, Morocco, 2001
9. EU Code of Ethics for Journalists
10. BBC Consolidated Editorial Principles and Guidelines.