

# Ethics Code for Journalists in Turkey



THE MEDIA ASSOCIATION





# Ethics Code for Journalists in Turkey

*This code of ethics was written during a three-day “Media Ethics Workshop” organized by the Media Association and ICFJ on January 2011. The instructors of the workshop were Alper Gör-müş, journalist, Sherry Ricchiardi, Ph.D., Indiana University Journalism professor, and Frank Folwell, former deputy managing editor of USA TODAY. The workshop was attended by journalists from various media companies and cities of Turkey representing a wide political spectrum.*

*The Media Association believes that fully implementing these principles will be an important step towards raising the standards of Turkish journalism.*



THE MEDIA ASSOCIATION

We, the journalists in Turkey,  
pledge commitment to the following  
ethics code and to the guiding  
principles of our profession:

Seek truth and report it.  
Minimize harm  
Act independently  
Be accountable

# Introduction

As journalists in Turkey, we believe that honesty, fairness, and courage are vital in collecting, reporting, and interpreting information. We are committed to act independently and to serve no interest other than the public's right to information. It is our fundamental principle to be responsible and accountable to our sources, individuals we report about, and to our colleagues.

We sincerely pledge that our work as journalists will be free of discrimination and enmity and will not give way to unfairness, manipulation, stereotypes or hate speech. We will pay close attention to distinguishing news from commentary in the media.

Only by adhering to these basic journalistic principles can we preserve and advance the prestige and quality of journalism in our country. Our main motivation is to minimize mistakes in our reporting and to provide a fair, balanced and accurate account of day's news to the Turkish public.

Moreover, we maintain that practices conflicting with the ethics of journalism should be met with punitive sanctions within our newsrooms so that media professionals will be held accountable for their actions.



## Truthfulness and Accuracy

Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information. Serving the public should be their first and foremost concern.

---

4

It is the journalist's essential task to reflect reality in a complete and concise manner. We must present information clearly and avoid vagueness that might give rise to questions, confusion and manipulation.

In order to accomplish this, journalists should:

- Test the accuracy of information from all sources. Confirm the authenticity of written, digital, and audio-visual documents they have obtained for use in their reports.
- Inspect the information, documents, and allegations with a keen eye, as though they have encountered the subject of the report for the first time.
- Consult with their supervising editor if information cannot be completely verified.





Among questions to be considered:

- a) How important is the information for the public to know?
- b) What are possible consequences for individuals mentioned in the report?
- c) How can the harm be minimized?
- d) What alternatives do we have?

The subjects of the news story must be sought out to give them an opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing. We must be careful to cite correctly and in detail the information we can verify about the individuals, institutions, and places mentioned in the report.

In fulfilling these requirements, the journalist should:

- Use all available means to learn the truth and consider the alternatives
- Consider using a tape recorder for interviews to guard against potential lawsuits or denials that could undermine the credibility of the report, particularly when dealing with sensitive issues. In this case, journalists would need to tell the sources that they are being recorded. Hidden tape recorders should not routinely be used without permission of those being interviewed. Television cameras also might be used to build credibility of the report.
- Approach information with suspicion that comes from institutions or individuals who might have a vested interest in directing the focus of the story. Always question the motives of sources that provide information that could slant the story in their favor or put their opponents in a bad light.



## Impartiality and Fairness

Media professionals in Turkey should not take on the role of spokesperson or show public support for any political party or special interest. This includes giving speeches in the party's behalf or leading political movements.

---

8 They should remain neutral and fair in their reporting and should not become part of any clash of political, social or economic ideologies that have existed in the past, present or potentially in the future.

A journalist must remain impartial and suspend all personal opinions, ideologies, and interpretations while collecting documents, interviewing and writing news reports.

In order to accomplish this, journalists should:

- Respect the right to expression of all parties involved in the report and in the interest of fairness and balance, include their views in the story.
- Not turn individuals or groups into targets.
- Consider all possible alternatives that would ensure the impartiality of the news even in cases of economic dependence, such as advertising revenue, from the individuals or institutions mentioned in the report.



**POLIS**



## Act Independently

Journalists should be free of obligation to any special interest other than the public's right to know. They should avoid conflicts of interest that are real or perceived and remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage their credibility.

---

10

Media institutions must be independent from the state, from special interests, and from political parties. The public should feel secure that neither commercial nor personal interests influence the policy of the news organization.

Although journalists, like others in society, may hold strong personal political and ideological views, these should not enter into the process of their reporting. Personal opinions or political biases have no place in news stories. Opinion or commentary must be clearly labeled so that it is not mistaken for fact-based news.

Advertisers should not be given favorable treatment and they should not be allowed to influence news coverage.

Journalists should avoid sources that offer information for favors, gifts or money.





## Use of Sources

When it comes to sources, journalists should:

Make sure that there are no conflicts of interest in the relationship with the source that might weaken the credibility of the reporter or the reporter's news organization.

- Be careful that they have no material ties with the source they could not account for.
- Be certain of the truthfulness of the allegations made by the source. The journalist must ask for documents supporting these allegations regardless of whether or not the source has a reliable image in the eye of public opinion.





# Use of Anonymous Sources

Journalists should always question sources' motives before promising anonymity. Be sure to clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information. Once a promise of confidentiality is made, it must be kept.

In Turkey, it has been customary to publish stories based on anonymous sources, which often leads to manipulation of information and unproven allegations or rumors. Under the ethics code all sources should be named unless there are special circumstances.

14

In that case, the situation should be discussed with newsroom managers and information about why the source has been granted anonymity should be shared with the public.

Journalists should consider the following matters with their editor or anyone else they are accountable to:

- a) Will the information the source provides place them or their significant others in danger or cause social complications for them?
- b) To what extent does the information concern the public? Is it important and have significant impact?
- c) Does the source have documents to substantiate the allegations?
- d) What motivation does the source have for providing this information?
- e) Would the credibility of the report be subverted if the source were to be kept anonymous?





If the decision is made to grant anonymity, reporters should reveal the identity of the source to their editor if the editor requests it. The editor, as well as the reporter, must honor the commitment to confidentiality.

Information and documents of unknown origin must be approached with suspicion and their authenticity thoroughly investigated.

Beating the competition should not be a deciding factor in running a story that editors know might not be true, even though it is being leaked to other news media. Accuracy and truth should be the deciding factors even in today's competitive media market.

One tactic might be to run the information along with a segment in the report that questions the authenticity and provides perspective on the data questioning where the information came from and why it was being released.



## Theft of News/Plagiarism

The rule regarding plagiarism is simple: Don't do it.

18

Original expressions, styles, and ideas in our reports quoted from any other medium (the web, newspapers, TV, radio, books or journals) must be cited appropriately by indicating their source. This principle of attribution also applies to information taken from the news agency pools. Plagiarism has become widespread due to the Internet. It is more important than ever that we understand and define what it is.

Theft of information: Using the information another correspondent has obtained without citing them or their report as the source.

Theft of style: If a correspondent writes a news report in a creative and distinct style and another correspondent transfers passages from that report into theirs, they have committed theft of style.

Theft of ideas: If a journalist, often a columnist or a news analyst, puts forth a new idea or theory in their article, and if another journalist copies it without referencing the source, they have committed theft of ideas.





## Visual Communication

20

Photojournalists and those who manage visual news productions are accountable for upholding high ethical standards in their work. They must be accurate and comprehensive in the representation of subjects and resist all temptation to manipulate images with new digital technology.

The key question to be asked: Does this image accurately represent the scene or event we are photographing?

Video and still photographers must be respectful of personal privacy and pay utmost attention to being fair while choosing the photographs and visuals they use in their reports.

Ideally, photojournalists should:

- Take photographs from an ample distance that would not disturb or worsen the suffering of the victims or survivors of violence. We must be sensitive to special moments of mourning and agony of those affected by tragedy.





- Provide images that reflect reality. The public must not be manipulated by images that have been digitally altered, especially where something has been added or taken out of the photo or video. Technical corrections made in order to improve the image quality are an exception to this rule.
- Show greater sensitivity in taking and using photographs or video of children, victims of sexual abuse, victims of crimes, and victims and survivors of traumatic events.
- Treat all subjects with respect and dignity. Photojournalists should take special care when they are dealing with vulnerable subjects and be compassionate to victims of crime or tragedy. They should question whether it is absolutely necessary to use a photo or video that might cause pain to the people involved, as well as their own motivation. They should consider consequences of using photographs and visual materials
- Produce visual images that support news reports, and the captions must express the reality depicted in the photograph.

Be careful and sensitive in using archival images, bearing in mind that reviving memories of tragedy or trauma can cause the survivors and the public in general emotional pain. If there is a good journalistic reason to use the photo, such as the anniversary of a tragic event, date it and make cutlines clear.





## Privacy

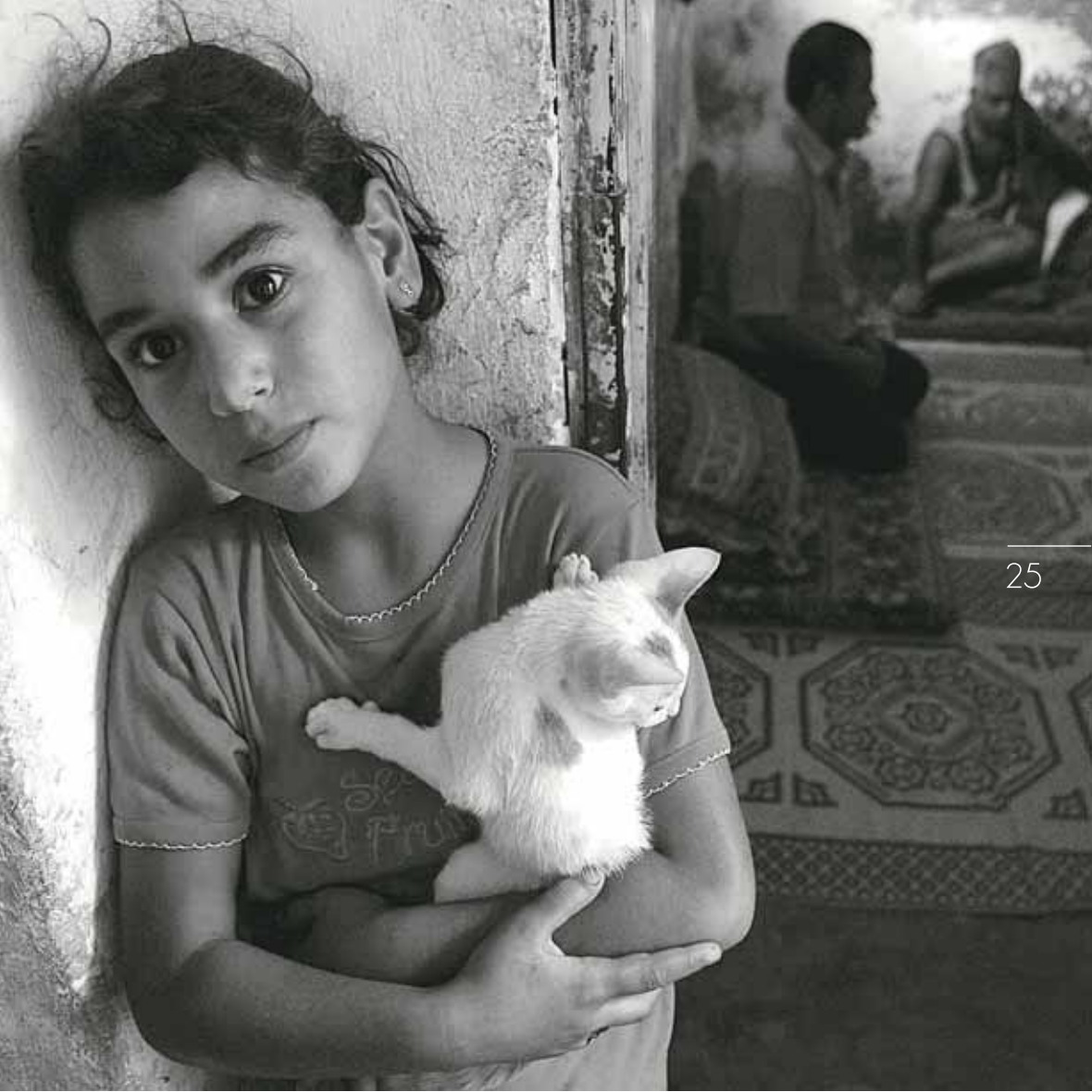
---

24

Professional principles must be upheld throughout the processes of collecting information and writing the news report, and it must be kept in mind at all times that our position as journalists does not give us the right to violate an individual's privacy.

Accordingly, when we face the risk of violating one's privacy in our pursuit of reporting news, we must ask ourselves, "What is our objective in doing this report? How would I feel if this was happening to me? Does this news item serve the greater public good?"

Great caution must be exercised in the disclosure of the identities of sex crime victims and children accused of crimes.





## Discrimination and Hate Speech

News reports should not use inflammatory or discriminatory language of any kind. Unless it is directly related to the news, journalists should not define a person or a group by their language, faith, race, gender, sexual identity, or social class.

---

26

The media must be extremely cautious when publishing any form of hate speech or images that are discriminatory. This is a very delicate issue: On the other hand, it is the duty of journalists to document events. So when we ignore acts of hate, no one has the opportunity to react, to condemn them, or to proclaim a different point of view. On the other hand, journalists should explore choices that could minimize harm while still upholding their duty to document offensive points of view. They must provide their audience with the information it needs to understand the larger picture. It is important for the media to help the public understand why this is hate speech and why it is being used in a story or a video clip. In other words, it is our responsibility to give it context.

Therefore, publishing quotes or other material that contains hate speech would only be allowable if it has been judged to be newsworthy, sheds light on an issue or event, and is for the greater public good.



## Deception

Avoid using undercover methods, such as a hidden recording device or hidden camera, except when all traditional methods of reporting have been exhausted and have failed to produce information that is vital to the public.

---

28

The information sought must be of profound importance in order to justify the use of deception, such as a reporter going undercover using an assumed identity.

If deception is used to gain important information, the news organization should openly disclose the nature of the deception and the reason for it to all stakeholders, including the public.

There is one important rule: The harm prevented by the information that was revealed through the deception must outweigh any harm caused by the act of deception itself.

Journalists should weigh the consequences – short-term and long-term – of the deception on those being deceived, the impact on journalistic credibility and the journalistic mission or reason for the use of deception.





## Conflict of Interests

A journalist should not practice another profession that intersects or clashes with journalism. They should not take part-time jobs or volunteer for institutions such as state offices or political parties, especially if they are assigned to cover them.

Because of the great responsibility journalists have to society, they must be especially careful of any situations that create real or perceived conflict of interest. Journalists must consider their obligations against the impact of:

30

Involvement in certain activities, such as speaking at a political rally.

Affiliations with causes or organizations.

Acceptance of favors or special treatment from sources, advertisers or other parties.

Outside employment that would place journalistic credibility at risk.

Friendships, particularly with sources or others they cover as part of their beats.

Journalists must exercise caution in relationships with sources.

Accepting gifts, special favors or money is unacceptable.

Journalists should ask themselves:

Am I being independent?

Could my action harm my credibility or the credibility of my news organization?

Is the mere appearance of a conflict enough to diminish my integrity in the eyes of the public?





## Ethics of Blogging: The new frontier

---

32

When it comes to ethical standards, there is general agreement that the traditional values and principles of journalism should remain unchanged for bloggers and other forms of social media. This is new territory for many journalists and their news organizations, but the basics remain essentially the same:

Bloggers should be honest and fair. They should tell the truth.  
They should not plagiarize or steal style or ideas.  
They should identify and link to sources whenever possible.  
They should be careful about invading the privacy of those they write about.

It is important to make certain that Weblog entries, quotations, headlines, photos and other content do not misrepresent.

Bloggers should disclose conflicts of interests, affiliations, activities and personal agendas.





There are other important aspects to blogging. Among them:

- Act in accordance with the principles of your institution and refrain from issuing personal opinions that would not be acceptable in the newspaper or on television and radio.
- Blogs should not use hate language or stereotypes of any kind in the content.
- Journalists should cite sources of materials, voice recordings, photographs, footages, and other visual materials used in reports. Theft of news must be avoided at all times.
- In special cases it is acceptable for bloggers to conceal their identity and use a nickname.
- Reality and context must be preserved without diversion.
- A blogger must be accountable for what they have written. They must acknowledge mistakes if they make them and correct them immediately.







THE MEDIA ASSOCIATION



THE MEDIA ASSOCIATION

İstiklal Caddesi No: 86/6  
Beyoğlu-İstanbul- TURKEY

Tel: +(90) 212 243 70 02  
Fax: +(90) 212 243 70 03

[info@medyadernegi.org](mailto:info@medyadernegi.org)  
[www.medyadernegi.org](http://www.medyadernegi.org)  
[twitter.com/medyadernegi](https://twitter.com/medyadernegi)  
[facebook.com/medyadernegi](https://facebook.com/medyadernegi)