

## **Media Code of Conduct for the 2005 Somaliland Elections**

The media plays an important role in monitoring the electoral process. By covering the election events and the political campaign, the media insures that the public is aware of what is happening.

Good media coverage of the electoral process can increase public knowledge and information on the elections, the candidates and the issues. The coverage of elections in the media, and its analysis of candidate platforms and election issues, provides voters with the information they need to make an informed choice on voting day. It can also provide factual information needed by voters to participate, such as the day, hours and locations of polling stations.

In order to fulfil this role several conditions must be met:

- All media must have access to the electoral process and its participants.
- Reporters must have access to electoral managers, electoral sites, candidates and voters.
- It is essential that the media have access to public information.
- The media must be able to investigate and report in a safe environment, without fear of intimidation or retribution.
- The media should be free to cover and report on election events without restrictions or censorship.
- The media needs to be able to circulate freely throughout the country so that it can follow national campaigns or candidates and see how the election administration is working in outlying areas.
- All media should be treated equally, whether it is the government media or private. This applies to access to political parties, candidates, the electorate, electoral sites and information.
- Public authorities and other concerned parties should refrain from interfering with the activities of journalists and other media personnel with a view to influencing the elections.
- In order to combat the Danger of speculation the election results must be released in a timely manner

The foreign broadcast media, particularly the BBC Somali Service, have significant geographic coverage, listenership and potential influence on voters. For this reason, these services should be encouraged to report on the Somaliland election campaign in a considered and in depth manner giving due regard to their own codes for election coverage and the code adopted by the Somaliland media below.

The NEC is encouraged to monitor the election coverage of foreign broadcast media and establish a liaison mechanism for dealing with complaints.

In return and with due respect for editorial freedom, the Somaliland media has adopted the following code of conduct for the election period.

- To cover the electoral campaign in a fair, balanced and impartial manner.
- To ensure accurate, balanced and impartial coverage of the news and current affairs and in the content of interviews and debates that may have an influence on the attitude of voters.
- To avoid excessive and privileged coverage of an incumbent politicians from the both the ruling and opposition parties..
- Not to disseminate any partisan electoral messages on the day preceding voting, to allow voters to take a decision without pressures.
- As far as possible, to report the views of candidates and political parties directly and in their own words, rather than as others describe them.
- To guarantee a rapid right of reply to a candidate or political party, if so required, in order that this right can be exercised during the campaign period.
- To ensure that news content is factually accurate, complete, relevant and in context.
- To use neutral words for impartial, dispassionate election reporting and take care with technical terms and statistics and ensure headlines reflect the facts of the story.
- To avoid inflaming emotions over controversial issues through impassioned handling of these issues.
- To label opinions and personal interpretations as such, and limit opinions and editorials to the editorial and opinion pages/programmes.
- To label advertising clearly so it is not confused with the news and to ensure that advertising coverage complies with the code of conduct for political parties adopted between by the NEC.
- Journalists are obliged to introduce themselves as such and to be honest and fair in the way news is gathered, reported and presented.
- To honour pledges of confidentiality to a news source, otherwise identify sources of information.
- Not to plagiarise and to give due credit to secondary sources of information.
- Not to alter photographs or graphics to mislead the public.
- Not to accept any inducement from a politician or candidate
- Not to give favourable advertising rates to one political party and not to another.
- Not to give money for sources of stories

The National Elections Commission should consult with the media select two representatives from the media to serve on the Election Board of Monitors. In return the media will respect the Board's right to monitor and adjudicate on the media's compliance with this code of conduct.

Adopted by members of the Somaliland media –Hargeisa, 6 July 2005