

# Gulf News Ethics Policy

The following document details a set of guidelines undertaken by Al Nisr Publishing LLC and Al Nisr Media FZ LLC is to produce media of the highest quality to the highest ethical standards.



The goal of Al Nisr Publishing LLC and Al Nisr Media FZ LLC is to produce media of the highest quality to the highest ethical standards. To assist in attaining these requirements this document has been prepared to provide a set of guidelines.

For the purposes of this document, the term "*Gulf News*" will be used as shorthand to include but not limited to all print media presently published by Al Nisr Publishing LLC and Al Nisr Media FZ LLC and any subsequent publications, including its websites and any other form of electronic or broadcast medium.

The standards outlined here apply to all editorial employees and to all work they produce for *Gulf News* whether it appears in print, on the radio or television, or on the internet, or any other medium. The privacy of individuals shall be fully respected, except in instances of demonstrable public interest. Photographs shall not be electronically or manually altered, except in a photomontage or similar graphic illustration. If a photograph is so altered this shall be made clear to readers. Fact and opinion shall be separated and clearly identified.

*Gulf News* is committed to helping develop an industry-based self-regulatory organisation in the UAE based on international best practice. *Gulf News* is committed to the higher interests of the UAE, including its development, progress, safety and security. It is otherwise independent of any political,

commercial or sectional obligations or commitments, and will not represent the interests of any one section of the population at the expense of another. In its reporting, *Gulf News* will strive to ensure there is no discrimination on the basis of race, sex, religion, ethnic group or any physical attribute. Reports of a sensitive nature in regard to any of the above issues will be handled with great care to ensure the rights of freedom of expression and a free press do not diminish any other basic human rights, nor incite feelings of contempt, hatred or aggression in one section of the population against another. Great care will be taken to ensure that reports on events that might be deemed by a reasonable person to be of a lewd or salacious nature are sensitively handled and only used if they can be shown to be in the public interest. The same applies to reports that might be deemed to encourage or incite crime or violence. Full cognizance will be taken of the fact that *Gulf News* is read by people of all ages, including children.

Fairness and accuracy are among our core values to achieve quality journalism.

However, perhaps nothing stands above the need for *Gulf News* to maintain and preserve its integrity. We cannot hold the people we cover to standards we do not meet ourselves. The public's trust in our work - our most important asset - depends on our meeting these high standards.

In deed and in appearance, journalists at *Gulf News* must keep themselves - and *Gulf News* - above reproach. The ways a publisher can discredit itself are beyond calculation; these guidelines do not purport to cover them all. It is up to staff members to master the general principles and, beyond that, to listen carefully to their individual sense of right and wrong. Credibility, a publisher's most precious asset, is arduously acquired and easily squandered. It can be maintained only if each of us accepts responsibility for it.

When uncertainty arises about the application of these guidelines, the primary goal should always be to protect *Gulf News*' integrity. When in doubt, do not be shy about asking questions. A robust, ongoing discussion of ethics at all levels of the newsroom is essential to producing first-rate publications.

## **GUIDELINES**

### **Fairness**

A fair-minded reader of *Gulf News* coverage of news events should not be able to discern the private opinions of those who contributed to that coverage, or to infer that *Gulf News* is promoting any agenda.

A crucial goal of our news and feature reporting - apart from editorials, columns, criticism and other content that is expressly opinionated - is to be non-ideological. This is a tall order. It requires us to recognise our own biases and stand apart from them.

It also requires us to examine the ideological environment in which we work, for the biases of our sources, our colleagues and our communities can distort our sense of objectivity.

In covering controversial issues - government policies, labour disputes, emiratisation and the like - we seek out intelligent, articulate views from all perspectives. Reporters should try genuinely to understand all points of view, rather than simply grab quick quotations to create a semblance of balance.

People who will be shown in an adverse light in an article must be given a meaningful opportunity to defend themselves. This means making a good-faith effort to give the subject of allegations or criticism sufficient time and information to respond substantively.

Whenever possible, the reporter should meet face to face with the subject in a sincere effort to understand his or her best arguments. Investigative reporting requires special diligence with respect to fairness. Those involved in such stories should bear in mind that they are more credible when they provide a rich, nuanced account of the topic. Our coverage should avoid simplistic portrayals.

### **Sources**

We report in environments - Arab Gulf countries - where anonymity is routinely sought and casually granted. We stand against that practice and seek to minimise it. We are committed to informing our public as completely as possible; the use of anonymous sources compromises this important value.

These standards are not intended to discourage reporters from cultivating sources who are wary of publicity. Such informants can be invaluable. However, the information they provide can often be verified with sources willing to be named, from documents, or both.

We should make every effort to obtain such verification. We will not allow the use of unnamed sources in the case of personal attacks and we will avoid letting them be the sole basis for any story. Relying on unnamed sources should be a last resort, however, when a story arises where the reporter and editor together believe the use of an unnamed source may be necessary the following guidelines apply:

The editor and reporter need to ask each other: why does this person need to remain unnamed? There must be a thorough discussion between the reporter and the assigning editor on whether there is any other way to get the story and the ramifications of using the unnamed source, considering the option of not running the story at all if the source cannot be identified. We recognise that some people may be risking their livelihood by speaking out for a story

and the need to be protected.

If both the reporter and editor agree that the use of an unnamed source is necessary, the source must be described in as much detail as possible to indicate the source's credibility. Simply attributing a comment to "a source" is inadequate.

We should try to be as specific as possible. We should use the source's job title or general job description or say how they know the information if possible. We should use the word "person" or an equivalent rather than the word "source" in most cases; the word "source" is journalistic jargon and is vague. And we should be precise about the number of sources we have for any piece of information; saying "sources close to the investigation" when there is only one is not acceptable.

Some examples of phrasing that works in describing an unnamed source: "a city employee" or "a person present at the meeting" or "a university administrator" or "someone who has seen the affidavit". While it is important to protect the identity of our unnamed sources, we should not mislead our readers in order to provide this protection. So we should not say a key source "could not be reached for comment" if we reached them and had a not-for-attribution interview.

Likewise, if an unnamed source in a story is quoted on the record elsewhere in the same story, we should not allow the on-the-record quote to make contradictory assertions or distort the facts.

The reporter must identify the source to his or her editor and the editor must ask for the identity of any unnamed source used in the story. Editors who learn the identity of the source will be bound by the same confidentiality agreement reached by the reporter and the source, and the source's identity will not be made known to anyone outside *Gulf News*.

In cases where the assigning editor judges the story to be of great importance, of a highly sensitive nature or has any questions about using the unnamed source, that editor needs to bring the story to the Managing Editor or the Editor-in-Chief for discussion and approval. In all cases where a story is based largely on unnamed sources, the matter should be discussed with the Managing Editor or the Editor-in-Chief.

Every story that includes an unnamed source must include a notation on the check-in form indicating that the use of the source has been discussed with the assigning editor or section head. Staff members should be extremely circumspect about how and where they store information that might identify an unnamed source. Many electronic records, including e-mail, can be subpoenaed, or retrieved by non-newsroom employees.

Promises to a source must be kept except under the most extraordinary circumstances. If a source, acting in bad faith, were to succeed in using *Gulf News* to spread misinformation, we would consider our promise of anonymity no longer binding. That said, we do not "burn" sources.

### **Wire stories**

Carefully consider whether to allow the use of unnamed sources produced by other media or wire services. Since we cannot check the credibility of unnamed wire stories the way we can with staff-produced stories, the following guidelines should apply:

a) Wire stories should be held up to as many of the standards required of staff-produced stories as possible. These should include not allowing the use of unnamed stories in the case of personal attacks and using unnamed sources only when news warrants it and cannot be obtained in any other way.

b) Whenever possible, consult any in-house experts who may be knowledgeable on the topic discussed by an unnamed source. Picture: does it ring true? Are any red flags raised?

c) Consider the source: is the news organisation offering the story credible? In general *Gulf News* only uses credible wire services, but at the same time, a story is only as good as the reporter filing it. Is the story on a topic which the news organisation would have expertise? (You wouldn't expect E! to run a story on the stock market, for example.)

d) Carefully examine how the story is written and any circumstantial evidence that would point to the story being true or not: Does it all add up?

e) Spell out clearly in the wire story that the unnamed source is "an unnamed source in the *New York Times*" (for example) so readers are clear it is not a source of a reporter at *Gulf News*.

f) In cases where there are significant conflicts of interest between attribution of information in the wire story and *Gulf News* policy on unattributed sources, an effort should be made to contact the originating news agency for more information. This should be done especially when information comes from one of the *Gulf News* mediums.

g) Any doubts about the story, about questionable sourcing or insufficient attribution should be brought to the attention of a senior editor.

### **Precision and truthfulness**

We live and work in a media environment suffused with hyperbole. It is *Gulf News*' intention to stand distinctly apart from that world and speak straightforwardly to readers. It is obvious that we should not knowingly publish

falsehoods. Fabrication of any type is unacceptable. We do not create composite characters. We do not use pseudonyms. We do not manufacture, embroider or distort quotes.

Quotations should always be the exact words that someone spoke, with the exception of corrections in errors, as of grammar and syntax that often occur unnoticed when someone is speaking but are embarrassing in print. In most cases, the grammar of people for whom English is a second language should be corrected as well. Spoken hesitations such as "um" and "ah" should usually be omitted.

Parentheses within quotations are almost never appropriate and can almost always be avoided. Quotations are used to enliven and emphasise elements of a story, and internal explanations will often bog them down. If many parenthetical explanations are needed, the quote probably wasn't set up properly or wasn't a good quote to start with.

Avoid ellipses within quotations. While reporters often use ellipses in an attempt to remove extraneous elements, to readers they simply signal that we have altered the quotation and raise concerns that we may have changed its meaning in the process. Simply put, ellipses raise issues of credibility. We will, however, use ellipses to remove profanity from quotations.

How do we identify the manner in which quotes are received? Quotes obtained in a face to face conversation or over a telephone need no special explanation. However, we generally should explain when a quote was received in some other way: via e-mail, in a prepared statement, in a press conference on television or radio.

In cases where we conduct an interview through a translator, we should identify quotes received in that manner ("said through a translator") as a signal to the reader that there are limits on our ability to attest to the accuracy of the information. In cases where the reporter does the translation, no special designation is necessary, unless the fact that the interviewee spoke in a foreign language is material to the story.

Superlatives such as "biggest," "worst" and "most" should be employed only when the writer has proof. It is the responsibility of assigning editors and copy editors to challenge all questionable claims. The burden of proof rests with the writer; it is not the desk's responsibility to prove the writer wrong.

It is unacceptable to hedge an unverified or unverifiable assertion with words such as "arguably" or "perhaps". Our job is to tell readers what is true, not what might be. By-lines, datelines and credit lines should accurately convey to the readers the source of our reporting.

By-lines tell readers who is responsible for an article's content while giving credit where credit is due. When multiple by-lines are proposed for an article, the editor should consider, did all the reporters contribute significantly and

more or less equally? If not, a credit line is more appropriate for lesser contributors.

In multiple by-lines, the first name generally should be that of the reporter who wrote the article, or if different, of the largest contributor. This most directly tells readers who is responsible for the content. Datelines are statements of fact and are intended to show where a story was principally reported. Visiting an area fleetingly solely to justify a dateline is not acceptable.

### **Criminal suspects and convicts**

In general, the identity of criminal suspects or convicts is not disclosed unless given by the appropriate authority, such as the Police or the Courts. Names of convicts in the UAE, anyway, are rarely released to *Gulf News* until all avenues of appeal have been pursued.

On this aspect, and all others related to reporting and publishing, *Gulf News* abides by the UAE Publishing Laws. Any dispute of legal nature in regard to an article we have published must be brought to the immediate attention of the Managing Editor or the Editor-in-Chief.

### **Photographs and graphics**

Photographs and graphics must inform, not mislead. Any attempt to confuse readers or misrepresent visual information is prohibited. In photographing news we do not stage or re-enact events. Photographers may direct subjects of portraits, fashion shoots or studio work. In presenting such images, we must avoid the impression that they were captured spontaneously.

We do not add colour, remove objects or flip images. We do not digitally alter images beyond making minor adjustments for colour correction, exposure correction and removal of dust spots or scratches required to ensure faithful reproduction of the original image.

Exaggerated use of burning, dodging or colour saturation is not permitted. If we need to create photomontages then it will be clearly indicated as such. On occasion we publish artistic or graphic renderings that include altered photographs. Such renderings should be clearly labelled "photo illustration". Before creating a photo illustration, photographers, photo editors and designers must obtain approval from a senior editor for photography.

### **Staff conduct**

*Gulf News* expects its editorial staff to behave with dignity and professionalism. We do nothing while gathering the news that we would be ashamed to see in print or on television. We do not let the behaviour of the pack set standards for us.

As well as the guidelines outlined here, staff are also required to familiarise themselves with the staff manual, with particular reference to Chapter 19. In general, we identify ourselves as staff members when covering news events.

There are some instances when offering such identification is impossible, impractical or counterproductive, but in no case should a staff member lie about his or her affiliation with *Gulf News*.

We should deal honourably with people and institutions we cover, just as we expect them to deal honourably with us. Staff members may not use their affiliation with *Gulf News* to resolve personal disputes or seek special treatment or personal benefits.

### **Freelancing**

Generally, staff members are not permitted to freelance for any other media, anywhere. That said, there maybe occasion when a reporter is sought for his or her specialist knowledge.If such occurs, then the Managing Editor or Editor-in-Chief must give approval, in writing, before any work is done on the story. Any staff contravening this will be subject to disciplinary measures.

### **Freelancers**

The work of freelance journalists appears in *Gulf News* alongside staff-produced photographs, articles and graphics. Freelancers must therefore approach their work without conflicts and must adhere to the same standards of professionalism that *Gulf News* requires of its own staff.It is the responsibility of assigning editors to inquire about a freelancer's potential conflicts of interest before making an assignment.

Conflict-of-interest provisions may apply differently to contributors to the Op-Ed pages. They are expected to bring institutional and personal perspectives to their work. They are not expected to bring conflicts, but they are expected to disclose them.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

Guidelines cannot cover every conceivable conflict of interest. If doubt exists, staff members should consult with either the Managing Editor or the Editor-in-Chief. Nevertheless, some principles are clear. Financial Holdings: Staff members may not enter into business or financial relationships with their sources. Similarly, staff members may not cover individuals or institutions with which they have a financial relationship.

In no circumstance will staff members allow personal investments to influence their news decisions. They may not work on stories that could, in any way, shape events for their own financial gain. Likewise, they may not use non-public information obtained by *Gulf News* to make personal investment decisions.

In the case of, say, a personal finance columnist who owns securities in a company or shares in a fund, the columnist must disclose this financial interest to readers whenever writing about the company or fund. Outside affiliations and community work: Staff members may not use their positions

at the paper to promote personal agendas or causes. Nor should they allow their outside activities to undermine the impartiality of *Gulf News* coverage, in fact or appearance.

Staff members may not engage in political advocacy – as members of a campaign or an organisation specifically concerned with political change. Nor may they contribute money to a partisan campaign or candidate. Staff members should avoid public expressions or demonstrations of their political views - bumper stickers and the like.

While *Gulf News* does not seek to restrict staff members' participation in civic life or journalistic organisations, they should be aware that outside affiliations and memberships might create real or apparent ethical conflicts.

When those affiliations have even the slightest potential to damage *Gulf News*' credibility, staff members should proceed with caution and take care to advise either the Managing Editor or the Editor-in-Chief.

Some types of civic participation may be deemed inappropriate. A reporter on environmental issues, for instance, would be prohibited from affiliating with environmental organisations, a health writer from joining medical groups, a business editor from membership in certain trade or financial associations.

More broadly, staff members should be aware of the goals and funding sources of organisations with which they affiliate, and should avoid those whose purpose or backing could cause the paper or staff member embarrassment. *Gulf News* staff members occasionally are invited to speak to organisations or to appear on discussion panels. Before accepting, they should consider the purpose of the event and how it might be perceived. Staff members should avoid situations in which their participation could be construed as endorsement of the sponsoring organisation's interests. In general, staff members should refuse honorariums for appearances, though exceptions may be made, at the discretion of the Managing Editor or Editor-in-Chief, when the sponsors are educational institutions or journalistic organisations. Staff members should be careful during such appearances not to make comments that stray beyond what they would contribute to *Gulf News*.

### **Radio and television**

Shows that are related to a staff member's area of expertise - in other words, shows where the appearance is generated by work that has been published in *Gulf News* - require the approval of their immediate supervisor. The guest must be clearly identified as a staff member of *Gulf News*. (Example: Joe Jones writes a column on children and health issues that appears on Tuesdays in *Gulf News*.)

Staff members who appear as private citizens to discuss subjects not related

to their work in *Gulf News* do not need the permission the Managing Editor or the Editor-in-Chief. (Example: An assistant features editor does not need permission to go on the air to discuss his opinions US/China relations). If the guest is to be identified as a Gulf News member of staff, it must be clear that he or she is appearing as an individual and is not representing Gulf News.

Staff members shall demonstrate the same commitment to fairness and high standards of impartiality of which they are expected in *Gulf News*. Personal Relationships: Activities of family members may create conflicts of interest.

*Gulf News* recognises that it has no authority to restrict the activities of spouses, companions or close relatives of staff members who do not themselves work for the newspaper. However, *Gulf News* may restrict a staff member's assignment based on the activities of a family member or significant other. Staff members are responsible for informing the Managing Editor or the Editor-in-Chief whenever a companion's or close relative's activities, investments or affiliations could create a conflict.

Staff members shall not write, photograph, illustrate or make news judgments about anyone related to them by blood or marriage, or with whom they have a close personal relationship. This does not apply to first-person stories or stories in which the relationships are clearly spelled out. Nor shall personal relationships within the newsroom affect news judgment.

### **Perquisites**

**Meals:** As a principle, we pay our own way. However, newsgathering often occurs in settings where payment is awkward or impossible. When that happens, staff members should make every effort to reciprocate as soon as possible. Let common sense and good manners be the guide.

**Travel:** *Gulf News* also pays for travel by staff members on assignment. They may not accept free or discounted transportation or accommodation unless the same discount is available to the public, or the Managing Editor or the Editor-in-Chief has approved it in advance in writing. Staff are also expected to be familiar with the procedures outlined in Chapter 23 of the staff manual.

Exceptions may arise when access to a news event or source can be gained no other way. A journalist covering a military or scientific expedition, for instance, may have no reasonable method to pay for travel. Those arrangements should, however, be the exception.

**Review items:** *Gulf News* receives countless unsolicited items, such as books, CDs, DVDs, and food, to review or cover. They are tantamount to press releases.

Accordingly, staff members may keep such items for reference, share them

with other staff members, donate them to charity or throw them away. No staff member may sell or otherwise profit by review material. Items of significant value - electronic equipment, rare books and the like - must be returned.

**Gifts:** Staff members are prohibited from accepting gifts from or giving gifts to news sources, potential news sources or those who seek to influence coverage.

Exceptions can be made when reporting in countries and cultures where refusing to accept or provide a modest gift would give offense. When in doubt about the appropriateness of a gift, ask the Managing Editor or the Editor-in-Chief.

**Honorariums:** When invited, *Gulf News* staff members should be permitted to speak before trade groups, community organisations, etc. However, staff members should not accept honorariums from groups they regularly cover or are related to their work.

In the event the invitation to speak requires travel or special accommodation, *Gulf News* should normally cover all reasonable costs for legitimate engagements.

Instances where a staff member will be permitted to accept expenses as part of a speaking engagement will be decided on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the Managing Editor or the Editor-in-Chief, using ethics - not economics - as the overriding factor. If a staff member does accept expenses, he or she will not cover the event as a story.

There is one exception: In the event the presentation is a professional seminar before a group of peers, staff members are permitted to accept expenses for travel, tickets and admission: *Gulf News* staff members should make every effort to pay for admission to cultural events that they intend to cover. Critics may accept free admission to events they attend in order to write reviews. Arts organisations commonly provide critics' press passes in pairs.

Because viewing and discussing it with someone else enriches a critic's appreciation of a performance or work of art, a critic may accept the additional pass for a colleague, spouse, companion or friend with an assigning editor's approval. Staff members attending cultural and sporting events purely for private enjoyment may not use their affiliation with *Gulf News* to gain access or to avoid paying.

**Misrepresentation:** In ordinary circumstances, reporters or photographers ought to identify themselves to news sources. There might be times, however, when circumstances will dictate not identifying ourselves. Only the

Managing Editor or the Editor-in-Chief may approve such exceptions.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism exists in many forms, from the wholesale lifting of someone else's writing to the publication of a press release as news without attribution. Staff writers' work should be an original work. Do not borrow someone else's words without attribution.

**Paying for news:** Any attempt to pay for news or for access to news raises serious questions about the validity of the news and the motives of seller and buyer. Except in extraordinary circumstances - approved in advance, in writing, by the Managing Editor or Editor-in-Chief - we do not pay for news.

**Employee responsibility:** Any employee who is aware that another staff member has caused or intends to cause publication of a falsehood has a responsibility to alert a supervisor. Any employee who suspects a fellow staff member of committing ethical violations is encouraged to report the matter.

**Corrections:** *Gulf News* strives to guard against inaccuracies, carelessness, bias or distortion through either emphasis or omission. Errors, whether made by the reporter, editor or source, shall be acknowledged.

This includes all matters of fact, including the misspelling of proper names. When an error has been made, it shall be acknowledged in a straightforward correction, not disguised or glossed over in a follow-up story. Corrections and clarifications shall appear as soon as possible after confirming the correction or clarification is necessary.

**Contests:** Photographs, stories, headlines or artwork shall not be submitted to, nor awards accepted from, contests sponsored by organisations or special-interest groups that we may normally cover. Participating in such contests may create the appearance of conflict of interest or raise doubt about our ability to report fairly on that group or organisation.

By the same token, material shall not be submitted to, nor awards accepted from, contests where the entry will be used for the sole purpose of advertising or promotion. However, contests that are judged by professional journalists or non-partisan experts are acceptable, even if sponsored by a commercial institution.

*Portions of this document have been adopted from policy guidelines laid down by the Knight Rider Group, The Tribune Group and the New York Times for which we gratefully acknowledge.*