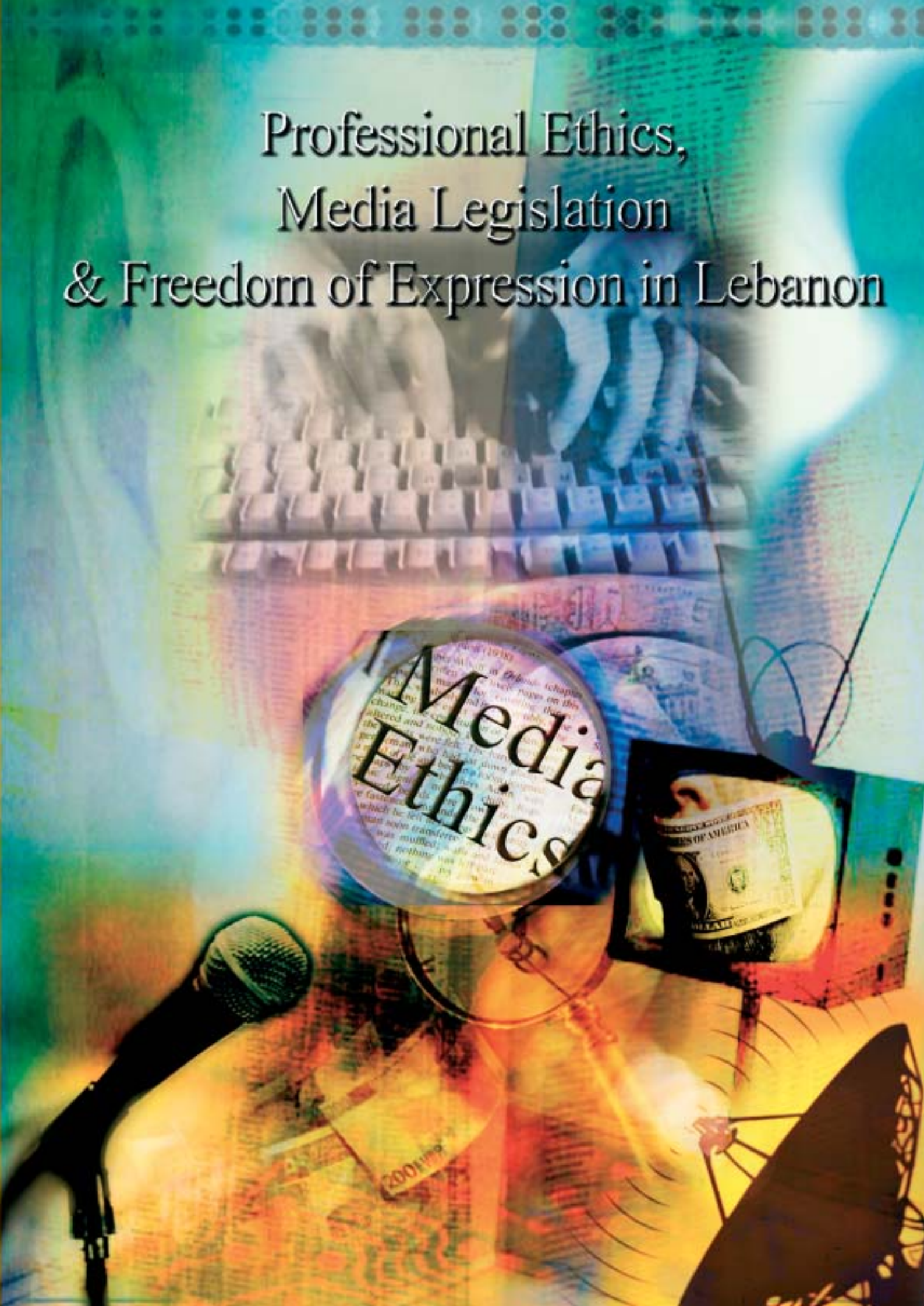


Professional Ethics, Media Legislation & Freedom of Expression in Lebanon





SOURCES

Gifts, Junkets
Benefits

Lebanese American University



Institute for Professional Journalists



Lebanese American University



UNESCO



International Press Institute

**Professional Ethics,
Media Legislation
& Freedom of Expression in Lebanon**

**March 1 - 2, 2002
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Editor's Foreword

The very mention of a code of ethics can rankle journalists unaccustomed to working within parameters meant to protect them and the public at large. The case is as true in Lebanon as in other countries still struggling to come up with a frame of reference for the media.

But I was heartened to know that reporters, editors, broadcast executives, educators and members of NGOs supported the efforts of our Institute for Professional Journalists in introducing guidelines for good journalistic practice.

Our first attempt to introduce the guidelines in May 2001 at an IPJ event culminated in a code, based on other such documents from countless sources worldwide, which participants suggested we rename guidelines, to avoid confusion with laws or anything being construed as carved in stone, which this project is not.

Rather, it is a dynamic document that we hope will continue to evolve, to reflect ongoing changes in a fast-paced field.

The May 2001 seminar led to a roundtable in March 2002 during which participants further clarified their vision of how journalism can, and ought to, be practiced in Lebanon, given existing local constraints and other regional considerations.

But participants did agree that given Lebanon's unique position as a leader in Arab press freedom, it could easily lead the way by establishing professional conduct practices to be emulated by other Arab countries.

With that in mind, the IPJ continues to dedicate its efforts to improving the status of professional journalists, thanks to generous support from sponsors and partners like the United Nations Educational Scientific & Cultural Organization in Paris and the Vienna-based International Press Institute.

Magda Abu-Fadil

Director
Institute for Professional Journalists
Lebanese American University
Beirut

May 2002

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Ms. Magda Abu-Fadil
Lebanese American
University

Opening Remarks by Ms. Magda Abu-Fadil, director of the Institute for Professional Journalists, Lebanese American University, Lebanon

Ladies and gentlemen, honored colleagues in the profession of hardships,

Welcome to the Lebanese American University's roundtable on "Professional Ethics, Media Legislation & Freedom of Expression in Lebanon," which is a follow-up to the seminar we organized in May 2001 on "Freedom of Expression & the Media in Lebanon," that culminated in the proposal of guidelines for good journalistic practice.

Just like any journalist, I love to ask, and ask and ask.

Do we need a code of journalistic ethics in Lebanon? Is it necessary in the Arab countries? Why do we need such guidelines and how can they help us in our work in the print, broadcast and online media? Do we have enough time to think about the matter or do breaking news, abundant crises and a pile of administrative duties prevent us from focusing on what we may dismiss as secondary?

And then, who's to decide what's ethical or unethical in the media? A university professor, a teacher of journalism who's never practiced it or no longer practices it? A publisher or newspaper editor, a TV presenter, a magazine owner lacking any journalistic background who acquires the medium for prestige purposes? A reporter in the field or a cabinet minister representing a government wanting to stifle negative news or terrorize and jail journalists while glorifying itself and rewarding those who praise it?

Above all, journalism has a mission to convey information in the best and most accurate way so that readers, listeners, viewers and browsers can determine how credible it is.

We face a major challenge, which is to assume responsibility for our actions. We have to keep ourselves in check before writing news from questionable or unreliable sources. We should avoid vagueness and think seriously about our credibility when we accept a gift or financial assistance from someone whose news we cover. That gold watch or computer or envelope containing hundreds or thousands of dollars from a politician or businessman will undoubtedly muddy our handling of the news and belittle the value of the media organization we represent.

Don't think me idealistic or unrealistic. I've worked for various local media and international news agencies and fully realize that financial priorities often determine the course of events.

But there's a dire need for placing our financial and professional journalistic priorities in the balance to analyze them, even if it's just once a year, to know how to solve problems resulting from conflicts of interest and to upgrade ourselves morally to be in tune with the 21st century.

I'd like to invite our speakers to present their views on these issues and to talk about the guidelines for good journalistic practice and development of a mechanism to implement them.

And now permit me to introduce the president of the Lebanese American University, Dr. Riyad Nassar.



Dr. Riyad F. Nassar
Lebanese American
University

Welcome by President Riyad F. Nassar Lebanese American University, Lebanon

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to LAU again for this journalists roundtable organized by the Institute for Professional Journalists. Last year, we had an international media seminar about freedom of expression and the media in Lebanon. This year's roundtable is a follow-up on what was done last year with the hope that guidelines can be established for what is considered good journalistic practice.

One can add very little to the excellent proposed guidelines which are to be discussed today, and I hope whatever final version you will come up with will become the normal practice in journalism in Lebanon.

I realize, though, that this is a very difficult task, but we should start somewhere. It is not going to be easy to discipline people in a country where accountability is not highly practiced; where the law does not easily punish people who default; and where compensation is not high enough to deter people from accepting bribes – but if we hope to develop this country and others in the region into internationally reputable and respected societies, we should start working seriously on improving professional ethics in all fields.

The media these days is becoming a very powerful agent of change in any community.

We at the university always do our best to educate people for high ethical practice. But we depend on the media to convince the public of the value of such behavior by being the good example of how one can be highly responsible and ethical in performing his professional duties.

People watch, read and listen to what you produce with close scrutiny. If they are convinced that you are fair and honest in what you report they will respect you and fear you.

They will then be more careful in performing their duties in life ethically, if not out of conviction, at least out of fear of exposure that will eventually become a habit.

Let us work together in the university and the media to achieve this goal. Our joint efforts will undoubtedly improve the performance of the community and bring about more professionalism in all fields and at all levels.

I wish you the best of luck in this roundtable, and I hope your recommendations will induce good positive changes in the near future.



Ms. Barbara Trionfi
International Press
Institute

“Rationale for Media Seminar Follow-up”

Ms. Barbara Trionfi, Press Freedom Adviser, International Press Institute (IPI), substituting for IPI director Mr. Johann Fritz, Austria

First, I'd like to bring apologies of IPI's director, Mr. Fritz, who with great regret had to change his plan at the last moment and asked me to represent IPI at this meeting.

It is a pleasure for me to be here today and it is a privilege for IPI to be part of this roundtable where such important issues are going to be discussed and the seeds of professional and ethical journalism in Lebanon will be planted.

And I'm glad that thanks to the efforts of Ms. Abu-Fadil and all those who worked for the organization of this meeting, the process that we started one year ago to improve the standard and practices of journalism in Lebanon has successfully continued.

At the last seminar that IPI had the pleasure to co-organize with IPJ and UNESCO last May in Beirut, participants analyzed the situation of the media in Lebanon and tried to identify the kind of interferences and pressures journalists are confronted with, while looking into possible ways to improve their working conditions and professional standards.

Despite some events of concern that IPI recorded over the past year with regard to the press freedom climate in Lebanon, most probably as a consequence of the escalation of violence in the region, Lebanon is still widely seen as the freest Arab country with regard to both media regulation and to the attitude of the authorities towards the media.

This was acknowledged by the participants of the last seminar, who, however, also agreed that editors and journalists in Lebanon are often confronted with pressures, both overt and covert, to conform to a certain viewpoint, and this clearly affects their ability to work.

Dr. Nassar, speaking at the last seminar, identified two major challenges that the Lebanese media had to face: to remain free of political tampering and to advocate justice. Both these two goals can be achieved by the media only if it can enjoy complete independence from any political or economic force.

Another speaker, the correspondent for the Arab region of the Swiss newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* mentioned the fact that despite the existence of the well established and pluralistic media in Lebanon, journalists are often forced to work under the umbrella of powerful political parties or individuals, which makes them their tools, with the consequent loss in the accuracy and independence of the media reports.

As the discussion went on, it became more and more evident that although the Lebanese media are free to express the most diverse opinions, there is a big lack of credible and accurate reports and both the journalists and readers are suffering from this.

In a very self-critical statement, Mr. (Bob) Haiman, senior editor and chairman of a US-based media training institute, noted that we tend to give the fault of the lack of accuracy and credibility of the media to the government or the laws, the media ownership or business or commercial pressures.

However, while all these reasons might be true, in most cases editors and journalists also bear some responsibility for the lack of accuracy in the media.

These and many other statements at last year's seminar proved the need for a system of self-regulation for the Lebanese media. The need for a code of good journalistic practice that would ensure at the same time the freedom and the independence of the media as well as the accuracy and the fairness of the information distributed by the media.

Self-regulation is a delicate issue that risks to be confused with self-censorship while it is precisely its opposite.

IPI promotes self-regulation as the most powerful argument against state regulation of the media content. However, for a self-regulatory system for a code of journalistic practice to work, it needs the approval of three categories of people:

It has to be approved by the journalists and the editors. If journalists and editors don't agree with the principles stated by the code, it is likely they will not implement it.

It needs to be approved by the public. If the journalism promoted by the code does not fulfill the expectations of the readers, they will protest and might even ask for a state regulation of the media content.

Finally, it has to be approved by the authorities. If the code is in disagreement with the principles and the purposes of the state, it is likely that the authorities will find other ways to regulate the media content.

I'm glad that these three groups are represented here today and that we will have the possibility to discuss the meanings and principles of journalistic ethics and look into ways to achieve it.



Mr. Marcello Scarone
UNESCO

“The Meaning of Journalistic Ethics”

Mr. Marcello Scarone

**Programme Specialist, Division for Freedom of Expression, Democracy and Peace,
UNESCO, France**

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be able to address you today on the important subject of freedom of expression and its relation to media legislation and the ethics of journalism. Allow me to make some comments concerning the importance of this freedom as a fundamental human right and the different issues related to its promotion and restriction.

Information is the oxygen of democracy. If people do not know what is happening in their society, if the actions of those who rule them are hidden, then they cannot take a meaningful part in the affairs of that society. Information is not just a necessity for people – it is an essential part of good government.

And governments can always find reasons for maintaining secrecy – the interests of national security, public order and the wider public interest are a few examples. Too often governments treat official information as their property, rather than something that they hold and maintain on behalf of the people.

Several press freedom organizations have produced principles that set a standard against which anyone can measure whether domestic laws genuinely permit access to information and the full enjoyment of freedom of expression. They set out clearly and precisely the ways in which governments can achieve maximum openness, in line with the best international standards and practice.

Legal principles are important as standards but on their own they are not enough. They need to be used by journalists, campaigners, by lawyers, by elected representatives and by public officials. They need applying in the particular circumstances that face each society, by people who understand their importance and are committed to transparency.

It may seem a bit odd for a human rights activist, especially after what I have just said, to mention restrictions on rights. I take it as a given that this audience needs no reminding of the importance of freedom of expression, both in its own right and as an essential underpinning of democracy. The constant reiteration of this by courts, international bodies and distinguished individuals has become almost a mantra.

Perhaps the safest way to ensure that these restrictions on freedom of the press do not harm the basic right to freedom of expression is to guarantee that as little ammunition as possible be given to regulatory authorities to intervene and attempt to curtail these freedoms.

This can best be achieved by the media professionals and organizations conducting themselves in a most professional and serious manner. This is why the existence and full respect of journalistic codes of ethics, or codes of professional conduct, as we prefer to call them at UNESCO, is of utmost importance.

Protecting freedom of expression from abridgment by any law guarantees to the people through their press a constitutional right, and thereby places on media people a particular responsibility.

Thus journalism demands of its practitioners not only industry and knowledge but also the pursuit of a standard of integrity proportionate to the journalist’s singular obligation.

The primary purpose of gathering and distributing news and opinion is to serve the general welfare by informing the people and enabling them to make judgments on the issues of the time. Media men and women who abuse the power of their professional role for selfish motives or unworthy purposes are faithless to that public trust.

The media was made free not just to inform or just to serve as a forum for debate but also to bring independent scrutiny to bear on the forces of power in society, including the conduct of official power at all levels of government.

Freedom of the press belongs to the people. It must be defended against encroachment or assault from any quarter, public or private.

Journalists must be constantly alert to see that the public's business is conducted in public. They must be vigilant against all who would exploit the press for selfish purposes.

As a social institution, the press looks after important tasks in that it carries information, debates and critical comments on society. The press therefore is particularly responsible for allowing different views to be expressed.

The press shall protect the freedom of speech, the freedom of the press and the principle of access to official documents. It cannot yield to any pressure from anybody who might want to prevent the free flow of information, free access to sources and open debate on any matter of importance to society as a whole.

It is the right of the press to carry information on what goes on in society and to uncover and disclose matters that ought to be subjected to criticism.

It is the task of the press to protect individuals and groups against injustices or neglect, committed by public authorities and institutions, private concerns, or others.

The importance of freedom of expression as a fundamental human right is now beyond question and the key role it plays in a democracy has been recognized by courts, international bodies and human rights activists around the world. Judicial and quasi-judicial bodies, both national and international, have dealt with most of the challenges facing the national and international media today and have provided us with solutions to many of them that respect international human rights norms.

Nevertheless, full enjoyment of freedom of expression is also the responsibility of the media itself. If media professionals do not respect their own profession, by not following professional practices, they will be handing the regulatory authorities a golden opportunity for them to intervene and attempt to curtail these freedoms.

Finally, I would like to stress UNESCO's long held principle, shared by all professional media organizations, that the creation, management and eventual enforcing of journalistic codes of professional conduct are, and should always be, the prerogative and responsibility of the journalists and media professionals themselves, never imposed by national or international authorities of any kind.

I trust this conference will be helpful in furthering the issue of professional media conduct and freedom of expression in Lebanon and wish you all a successful event.

I thank you very much for your attention.



H.E. Ghazi Aridi
Lebanese Information
Minister

“The Official View” H.E. Ghazi Aridi, Lebanese Information Minister

I’d like to thank the Lebanese American University in Beirut for organizing these periodic meetings and to discuss an important issue that concerns not only Lebanon. It’s true that the topic is Lebanese, meaning that it deals with freedom of expression and the media in Lebanon, but the matter truly transcends Lebanon.

First, I don’t represent a government, and am not an official spokesman for a government that wishes to terrorize journalists, or suppress them. And I’m not sure if it will praise those who glorify it.

Last year we discussed freedom of expression in Lebanon, which is a subject raised daily in Lebanon. There are a number of problems regarding this matter. Today we’re tackling an excellent journalistic code of ethics but in reality it makes us feel that we’re in another world, unrelated to what’s currently happening in the international arena.

It may reflect needed ambitions, dreams and hopes. It may bear many challenges we must face. It may carry hardships of a major experience in Lebanon and outside Lebanon. But if we read this code – and I’ve scrutinized every word in it and admit I’ve read it more than once – we find a comprehensive handling of media issues and how we can at least be objective as communicators.

Therefore, the distance between freedom and objectivity must be narrow. We often see it wide and permissive, in some cases, for some channels or organizations using expressions different from freedom of expression. It’s imperative that we protect it and benefit from it.

Before delving into the matter of freedom in Lebanon, we must zero in on the issue of freedom and democracy in the world today and the setbacks they’ve suffered.

We used to hear many terms, and still do, and many requests, and still do. And some of these requests often carried conditions.

We must realize that after September 11, 2002, we face a new world. Unfortunately, those who always spoke about freedom of the media and of democracy and human rights have now passed legislation that isn’t remotely related to these topics.

Second, they applied much pressure, and still do, and a kind of terror on the media in their countries to prevent the dissemination of certain truths or information. Hence, in that modern, civilized world – considered a free world, as they say – we’ve come to witness such practices, under the guise of protecting national interests or facing threats. That, in fact, contradicts the titles we’re discussing.

We also noticed that there are restrictions on some print and broadcast media people. That also contradicts the stated directives. We can’t expect others to go along with such a policy before Sep. 11, and after the events of Sep. 11 practice the complete opposite and continue to pressure others into writing along certain lines or following certain policies.

My colleagues, there’s widespread discussion today in the United States over the Pentagon’s to set up a network, a large media cell, with its own capabilities, with its own networks, with the aim of spreading disinformation.

We’re talking about a code of ethics and about transparency in the administration, in politics, in the media, in the economy and in all walks of life to safeguard the state’s and citizens’ interests, and set up cells charged with misinformation. How can we reconcile disinformation and transparency? This is a very dangerous matter. So imagine if such disinformation targets entire peoples and countries and even continents.



Let all the facts be presented before everyone interested in public discourse and let there be wide discussions and forums such as this and even more comprehensive ones in different frameworks to reach common ground because when we speak from a humanitarian point of view we'll find the same problems in different parts of the world and will seek to cooperate to solve them.

Lebanon has certain distinctive characteristics. This country is noted for its freedom and democracy, despite all challenges, problems and inclinations. We insist – in cooperation with one and all – on maintaining the country as a haven for liberty and democracy and diversity so that we may all say what he/she wishes since it's the cornerstone of the country's survival.

We should also be wary. We can't mix freedom of expression with sectarian antagonism. I'm pro-differences and media discussions but against capitalizing on sectarian strife for political gain. That is far removed from a journalistic code of ethics and from the media profession.

I always ask: Where is it all headed? What does one accomplish with such policies? All these distractions divert us from the goal of promoting a code of ethics.

A key element in a code of ethics is that of money. In Lebanon, there's a real problem. Political funding has a historical role. It's nothing new. Ever since we became aware of political life in Lebanon we've been hearing about the issue. It may have been exacerbated during the (civil) war and the following years.

We now face an offshoot of the money element. We often find political differences serving as a front for financial interests. We find media differences covering up financial interests. Where does that leave Lebanese citizens? Where are the Lebanese citizens' interests?

When we look at the power hierarchy, following the divvying up of the media pie, when the audio-visual media law was passed in 1994, and how the stations and channels were distributed and how the licenses were handed out to the 1st and 2nd category stations, we find almost all of them owned by politicians. They don't represent charities. They sought ownership to achieve two goals: to own something of the power base to reinforce their interests, and, they turned into commercial ventures, which means there are financial interests at stake.

When we discuss a journalistic code of ethics, emanating from the profession itself, the biggest danger we face is when we see some owners saying, with great conviction, that their media institutions are commercial ventures. Even the non-licensed stations providing entertainment fare cannot be considered strictly commercial enterprises. They must have direction, vision, responsibility towards the public.

What happens when we realize the danger of an institution broadcasting terrestrially and via satellite and say it's only a commercial venture? Who holds it accountable and on what basis? Does it have any political inclinations? If it does, we don't see it clearly. And if it's strictly a commercial venture, why is sectarianism raised in its programming?

I hope, if there's ratification of this code (and I'm one of its proponents), we'll be able to adhere to the lowest common denominator so as not to raise our hopes too high, since we're all too well aware of the realities of the situation in the country, notably with regard to money and influence peddling, etc.

If we adhere to some of the topics mentioned in this code, we'll be on the right track. With such gatherings and spirit, to which we've become accustomed thanks to the Lebanese American University, we'll be able to reinforce the code.

SOURCES



Ms. Octavia Nasr
CNN

“Sources”

Ms. Octavia Nasr, Senior International Editor, CNN, USA

First let me thank the Lebanese American University for inviting me to be part of this great roundtable. I take personal interest in this subject of ethics because I did work in Lebanon under very tough circumstances – war, division, hatred, and media being used as a weapon to incite, to excite – and in many cases I saw friends and colleagues die just trying to report a story.

I was one of the fortunate people to move to the United States and work for a good company called CNN. I’ve been there 12 years. I say fortunate because it gave me the chance to enjoy my job in a different way. I enjoyed my job a lot when I was in Lebanon. I was a war correspondent working for a local station and I always said “it’s easier for all these Western journalists to parachute into a country and tell their story from their perspective.”

I was fortunate enough to see things from a different perspective. And this is the reason why I’m here today. I’m not here to tell you that CNN is a great company or CNN’s code of ethics is the best in the world. It is not.

I’m here to tell you how we do things at CNN and to bring in both experiences – my experience as a local reporter and my experience as a global reporter and to try to compare notes and try to see if we can find common ground, and to try to tell you that a code of ethics is a must.

I cannot even imagine anyone working in journalism without a code of ethics anymore. I did. I worked without a code of ethics. I did not know what was right and what was wrong. There was no one for me to turn to, to ask what is right and what is wrong, so I did what I thought was best.

But then when you move to a country like the United States and you work for a company like CNN, you end up with a huge book on your lap called “Standards & Practices.” It’s very much like a book of laws about everything, from how you gather the news to how you talk to your sources, to how you conduct an interview, to how you shoot a reverse shot in an interview, how you shouldn’t smile, nod or look like you’re agreeing with the interviewee, to shooting riots, to shooting protests, to shooting wars, and death and reporting about the private lives of people.

Our code of ethics is huge. It takes a lot longer than 12 years to understand and grasp. I read it quite often and I share it with my colleagues, my new hires, my interns and I find myself looking at it every now and then to make sure what we’re doing is right.

That’s how hard it is to have a code of ethics. It’s not something you create overnight.

So, if in the 60s Lebanon came up with the first code of ethics, I really hope that in 2002 we can get Mr. Aridi to do something about it and maybe pass it into law. Then what happens is that every company, every media outlet is going to have to come up with its own code of ethics based on its own needs and limitations.

To go back to our subject today, sources. I think people have written books about sources.

Sources are probably the hardest part of our job because it all starts with a source.

Who decides what’s ethical at CNN is a large group of people. We have three important departments within CNN that have final say about what is a source and what news goes on the air. One of them is our senior management. These are the presidents of the networks, usually. Then we have a group called Standards and Practices. We don’t call them Ethics Committee anymore. And then we have our legal department.

So first senior management will have to make a call on something. And if they cannot, they will turn it to

Standards and Practices, and if they cannot reach a consensus, they will turn it to our legal department, because at the end of the day we want to make sure we're not sued for what we say or what we show or what we do.

So our anchors, like myself, our reporters and even our assignment editors, they don't have a final say. Sometimes situations are easy to decide if you go with the source or not. But in many cases, it's very hard and we even get our legal department involved like the private lives of politicians, or people in the news, or a lot of our investigative reporting. Very recently we dealt with a crisis after Sep. 11, which made us review every single decision we were about to make.

It all starts with the assignment desk, of course. These are the people who are gathering the news. Our standard is that we need two independent sources to take a story to air, meaning the two sources didn't communicate, didn't give the news to each other.

In many cases people will call and say there was an explosion, in say, downtown Beirut. You have a person saying "I'm seeing the flames and the smoke and people are running, a lot of screaming and shouting, hearing the ambulance sirens." That might be a good source, if you trust the person. We could use that person as a witness/reporter.

Otherwise, if something crosses the wires saying "seven people killed in Sri Lanka," we need to confirm with two sources. This is where the big question is: Who are the sources? Do you call friends and family? Do you call the police? Do you call the authorities? If it's after midnight who are you going to call? This is where it gets tricky and really hard and this is where a lot of people make mistakes.

We made a mistake when I first started at CNN, when Headline News carried a story live. They even had a reporter telling the story of President Bush, Sr., being killed on a trip to Japan. A story like this, of this magnitude, is obviously a scoop. Do you want the scoop or do you want to be accurate?

In our case, we learned over the years, the most important thing is to be accurate, is to be fair, and is to get the story right. And the other thing we learned over the years is that we don't create the story, we just report it.

Sometimes, in some stories, I go for four sources, not two. No one can say it's black and white. It's not. It's a lot of gray.

Sep. 11 changed all of us in a very weird way. One good thing will come out of this as far as the media is concerned. There's a big lesson to be learned for all journalists around the world: When the story is too close to home, we really cannot be objective. If we all agree on this, it's a major step forward.



Ms. Mona Ziade
The Daily Star

"Sources"

Ms. Mona Ziade, National News Editor, The Daily Star, Lebanon

I started in Beirut as a war correspondent for international news agencies, first UPI and then The Associated Press, where there was a code of ethics. It was very rigid. I progressed to leave the country and then work under even more rigid ethics abroad.

Returning to the country to work for a local medium, The Daily Star, as the national news editor, in 1996 was quite an experience. I had been taught over the years that sources, especially anonymous sources, were quite an evil, that we tried to shut out, when we were at The Associated Press. A source could be someone who gives you a tip to chase or a source that needs to be balanced by somebody else, giving a fact, or reporting on something that happened, but not having an opinion.

Much to my chagrin, I discovered very quickly that without the anonymous sources there was no way of filling the pages. You have the National News Agency, you have your cub reporters out on the streets. They're bring-

ing in stories. Most of them fall through because they are subjective and not objective or they are one-sided. You eliminate those stories that you feel have not been balanced and you're left with a few stories that are based on sources.

It became very difficult and slowly we developed some skills to handle the stories. During this evolution of The Daily Star, there were some extremely illuminating experiences, roughly starting three and a half years ago, and I hope nobody is going to take this as a political comment. These anonymous sources have turned into real plants across the board. One source says something and it's typically to float a trial balloon or to plant disinformation in the mind of the journalist that eventually influences public opinion.

It's very easy to influence public opinion, especially when you're talking about the local Arabic-language press, because it's read. It's more difficult when you're talking about newspapers and broadcasts in a foreign language because it's a completely different social class that reads you. It's normally the more critical thinking class.

However, it's very disturbing to see that this pattern that started three and a half years ago with sources has recently appeared before our eyes in the media war that we experienced over the past week between two local television stations which brought back real ugly memories of the tools of the civil war – the movers and shakers of the civil war.

I'm referring specifically, bluntly, to NBN and LBCI. It's been extremely pathetic.

The one thing that I find extremely outrageous and difficult to understand is that there's something called a newscast – prime time television everywhere in the world – which both these TV stations seem to be using for a completely different purpose. As a receiver, I would like to hear the news, events, success stories, tragedies, bombs, the economy, whatever. But I find it extremely difficult to understand why a newscast should start, not even with an editorial but more of a commentary that is basically extremely slanderous. I find it an insult to the audience.

In addition to what we have here as a code of ethics that's proposed, we need some guidelines to indicate what is a news story, what is an editorial, what is a commentary and what is an analysis. This jungle, mélange, of all these four different items of journalism that are appearing in our media, are confusing public opinion and, more often than not, planting new sensitivities, which we can do without.



Mr. Mohammad Baalbaki
Lebanese Press Order

“Sources”

Mr. Mohammad Baalbaki, President, Lebanese Press Order, Lebanon

Ladies and gentlemen, at the outset, we should say that what applies to the press applies to all other media, since journalism began as a print medium and remains the granddaddy of them all, notably since the broadcast media in most countries remain government monopolies, subjected to government pre-censorship – which is not the case in the free world.

As we know, the press observes, but is not observed. This is what uncensored free expression is all about, which is why it's come to be known as the “fourth estate,” or “her majesty.” But in reality, it's become one of the four estates and has substituted for the other three in times of strife, as occurred here in Lebanon during the war.

Journalists are close to being trustees of our national life and have drawn their power from this noble mission. But since they're subjected to government pre-censorship, they've had to turn to self-censorship, which borders on legislation.

One of the first realities is that journalists' practice of their freedom is akin to social responsibility, in its widest scope. In that respect, they should not be content with legal restrictions.

I'd like to refer to a famous saying by the American president Thomas Jefferson, who said he preferred to live in a country that had a press and no government, rather than in a country with a government and no press.

Likewise, as president Theodore Roosevelt once said, freedom without order is like order with no freedom – both are deadly.

This responsible freedom is the first of three pillars representing journalistic ethics, which are intertwined. If one is hit, they all collapse.

The second pillar is national loyalty. The relationship between freedom and nationhood is inextricable. Can a journalist practice the profession of journalism with dignity, if not in a free nation that guarantees human rights?

That's why it is imperative to stress the need for press freedom, and journalists' freedom, which is also intertwined with national loyalty.

The third pillar is national ethics.

Hence, journalists should be imbued with high ideals and ethics related to responsible freedom, national loyalty and national ethics. One can also say that progress in countries often depends on the image of the press in them.

Various countries have come up with codes of ethics and guidelines of good journalistic practice over the years. Among them are a code by the National Press Federation in Egypt in 1960, a code from the Lebanese Press Order in 1962 and the ratification of a code proposed by the Lebanese delegation at the Arab Journalists' Conference in Cairo in 1968.

All these codes focus on journalists' national and humanitarian duties as well as journalistic ethics. Their basic tenets are as follows:

1. Journalists' responsibilities are not limited to abiding by the law, but include taking national and professional considerations into account.
2. National conscience requirements are such that –
 - a. Journalists have a duty to mobilize public opinion in defense of their country, its freedom and independence, and to resist aggression.
 - b. Journalists must mobilize public opinion against all attempts to divide their people and should avoid reporting on matters promoting fanaticism and attempts to split national unity.
 - c. Journalists should defend public liberties, since their freedom is part of those liberties, while keeping self-censorship in mind.
 - d. Journalists must be mobilized to serve truth and justice in society.
 - e. Journalists must promote national dialogue since the press is the main forum for dialogue.
 - f. Journalists must accept that the public good supersedes journalistic scoops.
3. Professional conscience requirements are such that –
 - a. Truth, and only the truth, is a journalist's primary aim. A journalist should not fabricate news, twist it or publish unverified information.
 - b. Journalists must secure professional discretion, within limits that don't harm the public good and avoid resorting to illegal methods to obtain information or secrets.
 - c. Journalists must respect the right of every citizen to respond and to correct whenever inaccurate news is published.
 - d. Journalists must respect the reputations of individuals and preserve their dignity and not violate their right to privacy by blackmailing them, as we've come to know "yellow journalism."
 - e. Journalists should avoid insults, libel and unfounded accusations.
 - f. Journalists should avoid publishing materials that promote x-rated behavior and crime.

“Sources”

Q&A

Q: I'd like to ask about the law not allowing criticism of the president and issues of religion. Don't you think that this is a very serious limitation on the press, especially since we have a president that is not just a figurehead, but is actually involved in governing? On the issue of religion, we all know that Lebanon is a country suffocated by religion – not sectarianism, but the high decibels of church bells, to muezzins, to religious mores, morality that is suffocating, that dictates how the books operate in high schools, texts in schools and whether they can discuss evolutionary theory, or not. Isn't this a tremendous limitation on the press to speak about these issues?

Baalbaki: Thanks for the question. There's nothing in the law that prevents you from criticizing the president. Any mass medium can dispute whatever the president says. But the law says you cannot insult the president. When we began reviewing the law, we, at the Press Order, insisted on keeping this clause regarding insulting the president, not criticizing him.

When President Lahoud came to power, he said he wouldn't go after any journalist for expressing his/her views. That's clear. As for fomenting sectarian strife, Lebanon respects all religions and diversity of faiths, which is stipulated in the constitution. But the law bars us from demeaning religions and fomenting sectarian strife, which may harm society's interests.

Q: The press observes everyone but nobody observes it. Is there self-censorship?

Baalbaki: Yes, there's self-censorship. Every journalist and paper exercises that. The Press Order also plays a role in this respect. There's also a disciplinary council within the Order. But you can't have a paper exercising censorship on another paper, or disciplining it.

Q: Why not?

Q: Mr. Baalbaki, you know that membership in the Order and all press syndicates is strictly limited and admission almost impossible by newcomers. The Journalists Union is a monopoly of those who vote for the same president. There's a group of journalists here. I've been applying since 1986. I didn't want to speak but since you're here, you should be transparent and tackle the issue. We'd hoped to hear the truth from you.

Baalbaki: The truth is as follows. Membership is not closed. In the last session we accepted 225 applications. I do admit that the process is slow, but this isn't the place to discuss it. But to say that membership is closed is not true. Whoever wishes may send me an application and in the first upcoming membership committee meeting we'll discuss it and if he/she has the right, he/she will get in, very simply.



Q: Octavia, you say it's difficult to be objective when it's home. I thought home was the U.S. for you. Then you said you feel at home here. My question is, was CNN objective in reporting about events in Iraq and in Palestine and how do you feel about that? The other comment is that CNN and other tools of journalism are very careful not to report about individuals, they are really at ease to report about whole countries. They don't slander individuals but they're prepared to slander a whole country because a whole country cannot sue them.

To Mona, on the issue of sources, I've been reading prominent journalists who've been talking about reliable sources for the last 30 years. Journalism here means we sit with a politician and report what he told us. Don't you think the NBN, LBCI war of words is really a reflection of the law that was passed by parliament and is only a translation of this confessional and political pie sharing that this law allowed?

Nasr: Actually, both are home. I'm one of those people that can see it from both sides. That's what makes me different, I think, from a lot of other people. To ask if CNN was objective, I think objectivity is a very subjective term. What might look objective to you might look totally subjective to me and vice versa.

I lived the experience (9/11) through every moment, I worked seven days, 14-15-hour days, I traveled, I worked on the story extensively, so I'm one of the few people who can talk about it from experience. I think we did our best to tell the story as it happened. What I would say to people who were not there is that this story is so massive, the impact is so huge that no one can try to imagine what happened Sep. 11.



That morning I was watching the news – that's what I do before going to work every day, to make sure I see what other people are reporting and what's the big story of the day – and I cannot forget that moment. It's going to continue impacting me. So whether you call this subjective or objective, it's up to you. When the story hit so close to home, you really can't see it objectively anymore. This is not something that people choose.

The other thing, you're asking about profit and whether CNN or other networks focus on individuals or countries, it's really hard to focus on individuals. You can scrutinize a story when it's an individual, because it's focused on one person.

Q: When Christiane Amanpour was covering news in Baghdad, she reported about the night sky being lit with tracer bullets or bombs but when she covered Yugoslavia, we were seeing the slaughter that was taking place. We did not see the slaughter in Baghdad. We didn't see CNN reporting equal reporting in Iraq as it was reporting in Serbia and the same applies in Palestine.

Nasr: I have to totally disagree with you because maybe you're watching one portion of CNN and judging it and when you criticize it's always good to give a firm example, a date a time, and say that you've watched it over a duration of a week, every single day and compare it. I think we've done a lot to show the suffering in Iraq. I think we've done a lot to show the suffering in Palestine. We hear it from both sides all the time. No one is satisfied with our reporting. Although I don't want anyone to criticize CNN, I feel better when both sides criticize CNN and both sides say we're not doing enough to show their side of the story.

Ziade: You must have misunderstood what I said about reliable sources. I'm saying the sources should be restricted to using them for information that deals with events and facts and not with opinion. What I said about the newscasts, they were not there for editorializing. If they want to editorialize, they should not do it at the beginning of the newscasts, because this is slanderous and this is confusing news, commentaries, editorials and opinion. There should be a clear division between these four categories of journalism and writing.

Q: I'm bothered by a statement Mohammad Baalbaki made earlier, that the press watches everybody but nobody watches the press. Why should the press be exempt from being watched? Isn't there a way to watch the press at least from the professional performance point of view to keep the standards up? Another thing he mentioned is that the press is the fourth estate, just as equal as the legislative, executive and judiciary authorities. But these are authorities that we elected as citizens. Who elected the press to watch over everybody and be exempt from accountability?

Nasr: I hope to God no one elects the press and I hope to God that no one controls the press or watches over the press. I will never call for anybody to run the press.

To go back to the comment that my colleague made earlier about the code of ethics, that we should come up with something for everybody to follow. While I'm calling for that, too, I think it's very important to understand that will never happen. You'll always have liars, you'll always have people making up stories.

Scarone: In an ideal situation, that's the public. If the press does not do its job, if it's not professional, if it's not good, who will control it? The public, very simply, by the law of the market. They will not buy their newspaper, they will not watch their TV, they will not listen to that radio. Of course, sometimes the press will be very bad and they will still sell a lot of things, like the tabloids. This is the choice of the people. The only one who really can control these things is the audience.

Q: Undoubtedly, the most important thing we've heard today is the sentence: The press watches everybody

but nobody watches the press. The importance of our meeting today is this very concept. The media are not the fourth estate, but much more important than the fourth estate. So who is watching this press? Therefore, there must be someone to watch the press.

Q: There was one source you left off your list, and that is documents. We've learned in the U.S. that documents are the most reliable sources. We get them through the Freedom of Information Act. Mr. Baalbaki spoke about the passage of a Freedom of Information Act law. In the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act, there has sometimes been the use of the courts, and the declassification of documents. The judiciary is often the watchdog on the press.

Ziade: I have to start with the second, rather than the first question. It's quite unfair to try and draw parallels between us and the United States, especially when reporting court cases. More often than not, suspects are being arrested and they're being judged basically by the press and by the press releases we get from the courts before they've even gone to trial. The words "alleged" and "accused" do not even appear. So it's very hard to deal with the courts here. It's a totally antiquated system. It needs total revamping. If they're starting with any administrative reform, I hope to God it's going to get to the legal system.

As for documents, yes, documents and research and all the information that's now available to reporters has to be included in any article. I was more concerned with the anonymous sources and restricting it to Lebanon, where these anonymous sources are trying basically to influence public opinion through the media. I'm getting very upset seeing the media turning into a political tool or ammunition for wars and barricades that still exist in Lebanon, post the civil war.

Q: Octavia, did I understand right that eventually and finally if Lebanon is going to get a code of ethics, you wished it was passed into law? And if this is the case, don't you think that passing a code of ethics to law gives the government or the political authority a tool for censorship and very tough monitoring?

Nasr: Let me explain. It's really a fine line between controlling the media as in the way we're living right now where everything is censored. Just by watching television or reading the newspapers, you see that there are things that need to be there. If you cover X, you have to cover Y and you have to cover Z in equal parts. This is the kind of control I'm against. I am for a code of ethics. There are certain things we should abide by, that we should all agree on, like lying, like making up a story. Not accepting bribes for a story. I am for controlling this, but not in the sense where you have a government watching you.

I can share with you some of the code of ethics we go by. If you're doing an interview with somebody, if it's an important person, where controversy might arise, use two cameras, so that you get the reaction of the reporter right away. If not, you do a reverse shot and make sure that your interviewee knows that you're going to be repeating the same questions, in the same way, in the same tone of voice. If you're taking a reverse shot, make sure you don't nod in approval.

This is where the Order of Journalists can come in. Then if someone makes up a story, they can be judged, they can go to court for this. This is where you need a code of ethics. But then again, your own company can come up with a code of ethics. You have to take it and adapt it to your own circumstances. And, yes, I'd like to see it in the whole Middle East. I think it's about time.

Scarone: I think we have a slight difference of opinion in the use of the word code of ethics. You're calling for a code of ethics to be passed into law and, in a certain way, control abuses of the press, is what we generally call a press or a media law, which has to be fully respectful of freedom of expression, and if it punishes anything, it will punish abuses of a civil nature, and will be dealt with by the courts. As far as the codes of ethics are concerned, these, at least from UNESCO's point of view, should never, ever be dealt by the government, by the authorities or by any regulatory body. They should be strictly voluntary, and secondly, purely internal to the media company or the Journalists Association. And, if some action is to be taken, because somebody has overstepped their limits, this action will be taken strictly by that journalists association or the media company itself.

Never by the governmental authorities. So we should make the distinction between the media law itself and

the code of ethics.

Q: I'd like to comment on objectivity and subjectivity. We sometimes consider that a journalist is a machine that we can program. Which is wrong. Every journalist has a heart and a mind. Even Time magazine has faced the same problem with pictures of violence in the world. It organized a special seminar for senior editors and presented several pictures on violence, asking them what they should do. In the name of objectivity, did they have to publish all the pictures or choose some soft and some representative pictures of what was happening?

The rule was adopted by Time, saying that journalists should have a heart and a mind and should make a judgement at every moment. So, let's talk about the code as guidelines, not a Bible. There's a theory today asking, "What's news?" Today, news is what reporters are writing, researching then presenting to the public. Journalists will be responsible to that public.



We should have a certain kind of accountability, otherwise, it's prostitution of the freedom, not a service to the public.

Q: I have a question about the format of newscasts on TV. Since the end of the civil war in Lebanon, all the newscasts start, after the commentary that Mona was speaking about, with the president receiving so-and-so, and then the prime minister receiving so-and-so and the head of parliament receiving so-and-so. Then, depending on the affiliation of the station, the fourth person would be either religious or political, or a shareholder in the station. Doesn't this restrict press freedom? Restrict information?

And to Mr. Scarone, I totally disagree with the fact that the public can restrict, or regulate or control the press. It doesn't work like that in countries like Lebanon or the Middle East. Because buying a newspaper is not a good guideline to how the newspaper is performing professionally. Some newspapers in some Arab countries have fewer than 1,000 people buying them. It doesn't reflect anything. They're government newspapers or government TV stations. Or they could be selling 2,000 copies a day and still be good.

Ziade: Regarding the television stations and the pecking order, I can assure you that this is not imposed on them. When you're talking about the three leaders (president, parliamentary speaker, prime minister), you just have to follow protocol. I can assure you there are no restrictions on the television stations and the biggest proof, if you remember, about a year ago, three or four months into the intifada, all of them began to report about the intifada first with very good coverage. But then they switched and slipped back. I don't think it's imposed on them. It's because of lack of professionalism and lack of news sense.

Nasr: I just have to say something about my colleague here saying there are no restrictions. I'm an outsider now. I don't work in this medium, I watch it via satellite back in the States. It feels very much like I'm here. But I have to tell you, either I'm losing it, or things changed since the end of the war. What I'm seeing now is something scripted. It looks the same from one station to the other.

Scarone: When you said the public can regulate and control the press, definitely not in terms of legal control. Obviously not. I meant civil control by buying or not buying their product. This does not solve the issue of what you mentioned. There are very bad media which are still selling and having a great audience, and vice versa.

But the alternative would be to have what some of you are proposing. And I must say very honestly, I do not agree at all with some kind of regulatory authority to control the contents, the editorials, the professionalism, and so on. This can very quickly degenerate and become an element for control by people who do not like what's being written. So, the only possible solution is precisely what we're discussing here, ethics and professional conduct. But this should be done by the press itself. If some media organization is not behaving professionally, the answer is to have the organization itself or an association – a federation of journalists or of editors – controlling the professionalism of the media.



Gifts, Junkets
Benefits



Mr. Faysal Salman
As-Safir

“Gifts, Junkets, Benefits”

Mr. Faysal Salman, Managing Editor, As-Safir, Lebanon

Chair: The second session is devoted to gifts, junkets and benefits – something that is very important in our media that operate in the third world where they suffer from a number of problems, among them low pay for journalists and the fact that journalism doesn’t normally recruit people with high financial ambition or high financial potential. Therefore the issue of gifts and benefits to journalists is a very tempting matter.

It’s less of an issue in societies where people receive a decent salary for their work. I think this is increasingly so in Beirut, certainly increasingly so in the television world. But it remains a very serious problem with newspapers and across the Arab world where journalists are underpaid.

Salman: First, I’d like to apologize for what may seem excessive boldness or harsh frankness, in what I’ll say in my presentation.

I’ve read the proposed code of ethics offered to Lebanese journalists, and by extension to the Arab world, and which we’re here to discuss and endorse.

I’ve read it more than five times. And every time I felt my anger increasing a bit and decided to let you in on what occurred to me.

I became convinced – and I may be wrong – that what we’ve listed in the code’s clauses has made us prophets or missionaries and we’ve written commandments, which we’re prepared to preach.

I ask you, and ask myself to be more modest, and urge you to be objective and rational and to simplify matters and understand the reality we live in Lebanon and every Arab country.

I urge you to review the speeches each of us presented during the past session and that clearly noted the pressures media people are under from authorities, employers, advertisers and political and economic mafias.

Then let’s discuss the pay scales for journalists and their purchasing power, and inflation and the needs of journalists who have to depend on their work. Let’s discuss what’s expected of systems and governments, and I stress here the need to discuss what’s expected of syndicates. Let’s first discuss all these issues, after which we may be allowed to present a code that defines ethics and freedom of expression.

I don’t want any of you to think I support deviant journalists or the collusion of journalists and politicians, or with the powers that be or people with money. I only want to say, why not present a code of ethics that we can all aspire to attain or achieve, that would include what media organizations want from governments and cabinets, and of syndicates?

Governments don’t offer anything and unions don’t offer anything.

Did you know that journalists reaching retirement age go home with no pension or medical insurance? Did you know that journalists don’t have any privileges, aren’t even exempt from telephone taxes, or municipal taxes, or even 50% of them? Did you know that journalists face government, political, economic, social, medical and union pressures?

Then we meet and say: “Here are the commandments, don’t you dare violate them.”

It also seems that in this code, we’re treating journalists as if they’re guilty until proven innocent. We may suspect the powers that be, the financiers, even some publishers, but why do we cast aspersions before dealing with our demands and obtaining our rights as journalists?

I know this isn't the focus of this roundtable, so before I thank you for listening to me, I suggest deleting the second clause in the proposed guidelines under the topic of "gifts" and substituting it with "temptations" and limit it under that title to one sentence that says: "Journalism is a mission and a journalist is the sword of truth who rises above temptations and does not weaken before them."

As for the other clauses, they're open for discussion and most of them are good.



Mr. Jawad Adra
Information International

"Gifts, Junkets, Benefits"

Mr. Jawad Adra, Managing Partner, Information International, Lebanon

We spend the first half of our lives saying we're waiting for the opportunity to prove who we are. The moment comes and goes, and we reveal ourselves, and then we spend the second half of our lives telling ourselves that that wasn't the opportunity, and it wasn't ourselves.

Setting a code of ethics sets bases and restraints on journalism and is the beginning, the foundation to the development and reinforcement of the journalistic mission, whereby it truly becomes the fourth estate that watches over all other authorities in the government and society.

So it's inconceivable that journalism function without a code that determines how a journalist should work and by which he/she should abide. According to Imam Ali, "He who sets himself up as a preacher/leader, let him start by teaching himself before teaching others."

No journalist can write about integrity and fighting corruption and bribes in a given state or society while he is fully engaged in corruption or if he accepts bribes. There are ample examples of such people.

Imagine a broadcast journalist who accepts financial "gifts" from politicians and members of parliament just to cover their news and activities, or a reporter who writes a feature that harms a local product to allow for importation of the same product from another country, and is rewarded with a "gift" from an importer.

The Lebanese know which newspapers are beholden to whom, and how. And knowing their prices has become tragi-comic. The sources of temptation to journalists are politicians, or advertisers who proffer money the reporters don't deserve and positions unrelated to their jobs.

So how do we fortify journalists against such temptation?

First, we have to admit that it's a difficult undertaking, since some of our media have emerged and developed thanks to political or commercial funding. Wasn't the media law a "gift" from the political establishment to itself? Don't newspapers receive "gifts" from known politicians and known countries? Since the 50's, no Arabic-language newspaper has been founded in Lebanon without outside funding. So how can we ask a journalist, an employee, to abide by a code of ethics?

When a journalist accepts money or a "gift" or free trips, etc., he/she knows deep inside that he/she is doing something journalistically unethical. But he/she justifies it by saying that "the country is like that, the politician is like that, so why should I be the odd one out?"

The matter is further complicated when one sees the inextricable link between the "gift" and social traditions and mores. So when can such a gift be accepted and be devoid of hidden interests? When is it genuine or for a specific interest? The giver and receiver know the answer, and one should not resort to traditions to justify it.

Journalism is a profession and a mission aimed at providing correct information to citizens about the performance of politicians and administration and events in society. That helps in making the right decisions that serve

the people's interests. Not realizing the ramifications and depth of this mission, in addition to the low wages for most journalists (particularly reporters and freelancers), are the main motive that turns them into tools in the hands of politicians and special interests to promote the latter's ideas and projects.

Media owners are aware of this relationship but turn a blind eye because they know that the fees for services rendered don't cover the cost of disseminating that bit of news – picture, transmission, recording.

That's why we need effective journalistic unions and the formulation of a collective contract tying journalists to their employers, whereby a pay scale is initiated, along with unified social benefits, to avoid having matters dependent on the mood of every organization in determining salaries under the pretext of "unavailability of resources." Additionally, each organization must closely monitor its employees' incomes to ascertain their adherence to the code of ethics regarding gifts and money.

Lebanon is probably the only Arab country that doesn't own a print medium and the state's ownership is limited to what's left of Tele Liban and Radio Liban. This enables the private sector to compete commercially. But the question remains, is there sustainability without political and commercial funding?

Media can make it, if they are media for readers and listeners and viewers, not dedicated to financiers or politicians. Citizens should become the primary financiers, which will require a restructuring of these media to present news that objectively interest and benefit citizens. This may improve if our governments in the Arab world become democratic.

Finally, it's often said that there's no law in Lebanon. That's not true. We have important laws that are not enforced. For example, the "illegally acquired wealth" law that preoccupied political and popular circles since it was passed in 1953, and another law in 1954, and another law in 1999, remain unenforced.

According to a Civil Service Council report in 2000, only 5,974 employees divulged their sources of income during a legal deadline set for such an exercise, and the remaining almost 10,000 did not; did not resign and were not fired, so imagine what it would be like in the profession of journalism?

When we saw a politician lecture here at LAU, we didn't hear a single question from a journalist about the politician's role in assaulting public beachfront properties and other violations he's committed, and to which he'd admitted. So what's prevented the journalists from doing their jobs? What makes us all listen to untruths? Are they our traditions or our eagerness to make money?

Our media should not be part of the life and society we've all grown accustomed to but should elevate them and seek to develop them. I'd like to express my great appreciation for the clauses of this proposed code of ethics, that may be the first of its kind in the Arab world, and the exceptional effort exerted by the Institute for Professional Journalists, particularly to Mrs. Magda Abu-Fadil, for her follow-up and persistence, and I see a need for the following:

1. Rewriting the paragraph on gifts in light of the "illegally acquired wealth" law, to determine what gifts and benefits received by journalists are.
2. Creation of an effective union that seeks a collective contract for journalists and sets pay scales.
3. Provision of a mechanism to monitor journalists' sources of income within each news organization.
4. Creation of a watchdog body within the Press Order to oversee its members' incomes.

"Where did you get this?" is a slogan familiar to the Lebanese but they ask it of government employees, which is half the battle. The question includes all those working in the private sector, notably intellectuals and journalists, because they are society's beacon, or so they must be.

What's life's value if we don't try to build a dream that may not come true? What's important is to fight the dragon, even if we don't slay it.



Mr. Melhem Karam
Lebanese Journalists
Association



Mr. Kamal Fadlallah
Lebanese Journalists
Association

“Gifts, Junkets, Benefits”

Mr. Melhem Karam, President,

Mr. Kamal Fadlallah, Adviser, Lebanese Journalists Association, Lebanon

Karam: The speech I was asked to deliver, which I was pleased to do, I’ve asked my colleague in the association’s council, Kamal Fadlallah, to present.

Fadlallah: I’d like to thank the organizers of this roundtable and Mrs. Magda Abu-Fadil, director of the Institute for Professional Journalists, for allowing me to shed more light on a key mission that knows no boundaries, save in upholding responsibilities, awareness and knowledge, and realization of the impact of words and opinions in an objective framework far from pressured reality.

I must first admit, there is no job without guidelines, otherwise it would become chaotic. Nobody turns his back to just laws and professional ethics, notably if an issue deals with the majority.

That requires the highest degree of responsibility and knowledge of what’s happening, and what must be, so that needed reform is achieved and so that the written word has an impact and positive outcome, leading to adoption and implementation of the rules.

The media profession imposes these ethical, national and social bases. So there must be no harm done or instigation to destroy the civil peace or security in its various forms, or the fomenting of sectarian strife. They should abide by rules of a profession that aspires to sainthood and a mission, while upholding freedom in seeking news and printing it and in expressing views, with no bias except towards the truth which is the property of all. We’re responsible for presenting it to all to make them all aware of what’s going on around them to help them avoid mistakes.

Since Lebanon’s essence is freedom and democracy, a media law was adopted as a framework, despite biases and psychological factors due to local and narrow affiliations. It was firmly rejected, leading to the rejection of Law 104, which was passed following the tragic destructive events in Lebanon. This law stipulated provisional detention, the banning of a paper, pre-censorship or post-censorship.

Union President Melhem Karam has stood firmly and bravely, to the point of battle, to straighten up matters and to prevent any journalist from being sought by the law, except when national interests have been harmed.

This has made Lebanon a leading example of free democracy.

It’s easy to draft an ideal journalistic code of ethics, but can it be implemented in the Arab world and beyond? If so, media laws would be the same in all countries. That’s why we should seek a reality that allows us to practice the profession freely, with national, social responsibility and awareness, and alertness to achieve what’s best.

Suffice it to say that we, the Arabs, are subjected to the harshest, most misleading and unfair media campaign with no comprehensive decision to face and abort it. Nobody should be accused just for defending his land, dignity and independence against terrorism, while those who practice this terrorism in its ugliest form and commit massacres are described as defending themselves when they violate human rights and consider United Nations resolutions mere ink on paper.

There's another issue, another kind of war launched against us, to quote President Emile Lahoud, which is an avalanche of antagonism in print and broadcast media. We should join forces to stop it, which requires a unified stand, joint vision and effective strategy, so that words and deeds don't differ.

Individual freedom stops at the gates of majority freedom. We shouldn't subject people to vagueness of meanings. Just as we journalists have our freedom, so, too, do the masses have their freedom, and we should only provide them with the truth, even at our own expense.

But there are disparities, or imbalances in standards, because we're living through a technological revolution that has turned the world into a global village. So developing countries receive a lot more than they offer to the point where some media are practicing a form of dictatorship on many countries, leading them to globalization, by influencing their cultures, traditions, heritage and private lives.

Naturally, we don't have the capabilities that offer parity in the media battle, since we have to import and imitate, not to innovate and compete and challenge the pressures.

In summary, I call for the use of all available capabilities to produce effective media work in this environment and beyond, based on certain givens that we have the right to receive news and information and opinions.

We have the right of freedom to access information and the right to publish and disseminate news, information and views along with freedom of movement and secrecy of the profession.

On behalf of the Journalists Union president Melhem Karam, I thank the committee undertaking a great mission to improve the conditions we live in and wish it success in this noble cause.

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Karam: What my colleague, Mr. Faysal Salman, said was frank. He said what every journalist must say. But he said some things that were untrue. He said the press doesn't have any privileges. The press enjoys 50% reduction on all travel tickets. It also enjoys complete exemption from municipal taxes. Mr. Salman had a problem and extrapolated his case, but it doesn't apply to everyone.

Municipal employees are jealous because they have to pay municipal taxes but journalists don't, so they cause us problems. But the minister (of interior) can say he has the right to insist and sign regulations that exempt us, and that's been the case for 47 years.

As for retirement benefits, we're in the process of advancing legislation. But I'll be taken to task for something I haven't said before: Nobody who's needed medical treatment has been turned down by the Journalists Syndicate, which has provided 100% first-class funding. Let's put things in context.

When the budget was approved, there was a flare-up. The last article of the budget law called for rescinding exemptions for everyone. The law was endorsed but we're lobbying hard to reinstate it and expect a resolution within the next two weeks.

Let's not turn fears to realities. We must struggle. We're in the vanguard.

“Gifts, Junkets, Benefits”

Q&A

Salman: I'd like to say, once again, let's remember that I urged us all to be objective and modest. I can now say that I fully support this code. And I can add 500 commandments to it, bearing in mind that God gave us only 10.

We're not here to one-up each other. We're responsible men and women. Therefore, let's be up to the challenge, and not go too far in dreaming up what's unattainable. We all know each other. Why do you want me to fight the dragon? I won't be able to defeat it. I first want to provide a plan to face the dragon, so where is the plan?

I urge you, once again, to review these clauses that I find insulting to journalists. I beg you to understand this matter. Not everyone working in the media is guilty. We're talking about all journalists here. We should address these recommendations publicly. It's as if we're telling each other that half of us are guilty. And instead of offering solutions, we forge ahead with one-upmanship.



Mr. Ramez Maluf

Mr. Adra mentioned the salaries of journalists and the benefits reaped by media owners. Where's the logic of having a journalist's pay set at \$200 and you ask him to be an angel from heaven? This isn't in defense of deviation, but a call for rationality, of objectivity.

I'd like to add that, if the president of the association excuses me, Mr. Karam has exerted efforts to fight for rights for journalists. I assert that what we've received is totally insufficient to even discuss. He also said I'd raised the issue of municipal taxes, as a personal matter. This didn't happen just to me, but to others as well, and I have the proof. I also have all the receipts of the municipal taxes I've paid, despite what Mr. Karam has said.

There are those who don't get medicines after retirement. Mr. Karam may have offered some help to some retired colleagues, upon their request. But there are colleagues who don't ask. Therefore, after a journalist retires, he/she is dumped at home like a corpse.

Mr. Karam said he's working on draft legislation for retired journalists. I say that's wonderful. But did you know that newspaper owners have set up a retirement fund while reporters don't have any retirement insurance? That's unfair.

We're not putting each other on trial. We need to come up with recommendations. I stress my reservations in what I see as an insult to media people if we insist on talking about matters having to do with gifts and bribes. We're talking about an elite in society. I insist on erasing all this and doing away with it and replacing it with a sentence I suggested or one suggested by others. Thank you.

Karam: I must answer what Mr. Salman said. We're here to talk to each other, not to give ourselves authority over all unions. All that we'll have here is a recommendation that will be presented to the two syndicates.

What you said about bribes, etc., that's something you shouldn't say about journalists in Lebanon. I'm not saying we're priests, or saintly, but the issue isn't as serious as you make it out to be.

This suggested code is being presented to those concerned, which means the two syndicates. The Lebanese press is honorable. Journalists have morals. You read us every day. You can easily burn our newspapers, but you read them. You (Salman) said things that can be presented as recommendations.

As for a code of ethics, there is one in the Press Syndicate (Order). Faysal (Salman) read the proposed code, but I didn't. I'll take my time to read the code proposed here, see what good ideas we can come up with.

Everybody has an opinion. We respect their views. Even a bad opinion can result in something positive. I'm sure great effort was put into this work, and that there are no personal motives at all behind this code.

Once again, I'd like to thank the framework in which this was presented, this university, and this noble lady, who we see seasonally, with her various projects.

I salute the effort exerted to bring us this code.

Q: As a social researcher, I think this is one of the most important sessions I've attended and hope it's been recorded as it would offer rich material for my students to hear. Mr. Karam said that only those in the profession are entitled to speak about journalism. But those concerned are also citizens. Why do journalists get privileges? Because they serve the citizens. So the citizens and the audience here today, in particular, which includes academicians who teach the subject, are equally involved and have a right to discuss these issues. Where's democracy?

I agree with everything Mr. Salman said but if a physician's income in Lebanon is \$200 per month, does it give him the right to prescribe bad medication? What's wrong with pointing out values in journalism? That doesn't mean that every journalist takes bribes, at all. In the U.S., in all countries of the world, when you create a code of ethics, it doesn't mean you're accusing. A code tells you what's right. If there are violations, we should point out the mistakes and correct them.

Are we only entitled to discuss poor people's problems in Lebanon? We're barred from discussing the government. We're barred from discussing the profession of journalism.

Q: I'm Amal Shmouny from Al Anwar. I'd just like to ask for something minor. Why isn't entering the syndicate a simpler matter? We as journalists graduated from university and have been working for some time. We were told we hadn't applied for membership, or that we were late in applying when the council was to discuss new admissions. Why is there something fuzzy about membership in the Journalists' Union? Why do colleagues have to get their information from second-hand, unconfirmed sources? Why is it unclear?

Karam: Did you apply?

A: No.

Karam: If you haven't applied, why are you addressing us? Apply and then come back to us. If you want to win the lottery you have to buy a ticket.

Q: I'd like to restate what I said this morning, which is that the media watch but aren't watched. I'm a human rights activist. I'm not here to defend or accuse anyone. It's illogical for the press to remain unwatched. We're discussing ethics. Can we say that the international declaration of human rights should not have been created? We find that the document has offered a lot to people of the world, such as women's rights, children's rights, etc. All professions should have ethics committees.

We need to have a code. Who implements it and who doesn't is another matter. But we need the document.

Another matter, who decides what get published? In some cases, stories get coverage because of a source's friendship with the editor, or because of other personal considerations. There should, therefore, be an oversight committee in every newspaper.

Karam: Oversight comes naturally from a journalist's conscience. If you send us a news item, we have a right to decide whether it gets published. If we're busting our backs to work at our paper, should someone else become the editor? Every day we receive hundreds of news items or tips that we discard. It's our right and our duty. If you send a release that may be harsh, and I remove part of it, you call me to express your dismay. It's my right to delete it, or not. Don't hand our heads to people already wanting them. You're suggesting there be controls on the press.

Salman: As a citizen, I must say that many releases or statements issued by human rights organizations are subjective. I've never accused you of that as a representative of a human rights organization. I can help make your job more effective.

Q: I'd like to mention something basic. We speak about oversight as if it were something shameful. Oversight is good. I ask my students to watch me, to give me feedback. The mistake would be to have government oversight. If the government does it, it's wrong. In all democratic countries, there are press councils that are civil



groups that watch over the profession of journalism. A journalist would sometimes like to be alerted to matters that he/she may not realize are wrong. What I see in our society is something very dangerous: we don't accept criticism. Criticism is good. We live in backward societies. We need people to criticize us and help us. We can't advance in our society if we don't criticize ourselves, but in an objective and constructive way.

Salman: The whole issue started because of a suggestion that maybe we should summarize these clauses that seem to slander journalists. Why this tempest in a teacup? I've checked out some American media codes of ethics online

and didn't see so many commandments and accusations set against journalists. Why are we being put in a cage and accused so harshly? If you want to discuss these clauses, we can. We can summarize some of them but can address journalists respectfully.

Maluf: I can't understand why you view them as accusations? I know if I were to distribute this code to my students, there's much they can learn from it.

Q: I have the same question. I'm trying to understand the debate. Please give me an example, like "this sentence" is disturbing or slanders journalists. I think there's some misunderstanding regarding what you consider slander and what's disrespect to journalists.

Salman: You want me to point out such a sentence to you or to the audience?

Q: To all of us. I think you have an important point to make, but I think it got lost in the discussion.

Salman: All I'm saying is that all the clauses mentioned here -- that I basically agree with the way they're presented -- are unacceptable. They seem to be accusations that can be reformulated in a more acceptable style. The way they're currently stated they're very disturbing.

Q: What's mentioned in the law is addressed to those who are not professional journalists. Let's be logical. Let's find a middle ground. If I want to set rules to raise the standards of my profession, I have to be very strict.

Karam: If there's insistence on indicting journalists in this code, tell us. We give this meeting its legitimacy by our presence. If Mohammad Baalbaki, and I and Faysal (Salman) and others didn't show up, this meeting would be worthless. We said we accept being criticized, but we don't want to be put in the docket with handcuffs. Our strength is that we've made the law respect us. So we want the spirit, not literal wording, of this code of ethics to be adopted.

Q: Let this session come up with results, in the right spirit. All professions have codes of ethics, which is the outcome of people's conscience.

Q: Frankly, just as there's a Hippocratic oath, this is the same for journalists. All countries where journalism is taught, teach the profession's ethics. As a journalist, I don't feel at all disturbed by this code. On the contrary, in the six years I've been in the profession, not once was the issue of a code of ethics raised.

Q: I hope Mr. Karam and Mr. Salman take this with a big heart. We're here to discuss. The aim isn't to accuse each other. When the Good Lord gave us the Ten Commandments and told us not to kill and not to commit adultery, was that accusing human beings? Maybe this code needs some linguistic fine-tuning, but there are key issues being raised. When we say don't steal, it doesn't mean everyone is a thief. If we reject this code, does it mean we only accept directives from God?

Q: My name is Yasser Akkaoui and I'm editor of Executive magazine. It's clear that from the sources listed at the end of the code that most of them come from media that apply such codes on themselves. Each medium decides for itself what guidelines to follow and what's best for its purposes. The media organization assumes responsibility for its employees' actions. So I think the miscommunication hasn't been about the code of ethics, but about the idea that someone is going to implement it, or the existence of a third party that may oversee its application. There shouldn't be a third party because it will open up a whole range of interpretations, depending on who is presenting them.

Q: I'm Usama Salman, a lawyer. I'm glad someone mentioned the references at the end of the code. Because I'm interested in the subject, I reviewed the codes of the Washington Post, New York Times, Los Angeles Times, The Associated Press and the American Society of Newspaper Editors. With reference to gifts and integrity, in all the codes I listed, there was reference to two concepts – integrity of journalists and conflict of interest. None of them were accusatory like this code before us. They said that any monetary or non-monetary temptations should not be accepted by journalists. There was no specific reference to not accepting gifts. Even in the Washington Post's code, there was frank reference to the fact that some gifts do not harm integrity or represent a conflict of interest, like free meals, etc. They even defined what types of meals.

Q: I'm just surprised how you, Mr. Karam, were surprised by what Mr. Adra said about bribes. I don't know why you considered it an insult to the press. In Lebanon, newspapers and journalists are bought. There are bribes, there is bribery, in plain Arabic. Let's face the problem. When he spoke about conflict of interest, there's conflict of interest at the level of the government. When the prime minister owns newspapers, TV and radio stations, when the parliamentary speaker has a radio and a TV station, and when the entire ruling class has divided all the main media amongst it, they've effectively bribed themselves, because they have the means, they seized the media. There are journalists who accept bribes, and not just of the \$200 variety that Mr. Salman mentioned. There's a prevalent rule in the country that bribery is widespread because of the warped political picture in Lebanon. The press has become an investment just like politics has become an investment. Admission to politics requires funding, so that's the problem. Bribery of journalists is a small issue then, but it's a reality. It's not an insult. It's an issue that must be discussed and resolved.

Karam: I'd like to answer. We're accusing. Do we have proof of anyone on the take? Have we seen any journalist accept bribes? Have we seen checks deposited in journalists' names? Do I just throw out accusations that so-and-so is a thief? You're making a holy assertion. This is not worthy of discussion.



ACCURACY
HARMLESS



Mr. Ghayath Yazbeck
MTV

“Accuracy, Fairness” Mr. Ghayath Yazbeck, Editor in Chief, MTV, Lebanon

Dear Colleagues,

I’m honored to chair this session, which is affording me the opportunity to mingle and exchange knowledge with persons noted for their long struggle in defense of free expression in Lebanon and the world, as well as advanced research and studies in this field, most especially efforts to present a code of ethics which we’re discussing here today.

The effort put into this code is the result of hours of hard work and its promoters have drawn from numerous international codes before adding to it from our Lebanese and Arab realities to facilitate its acceptance in our countries, minds, mentalities and traditions, and to ensure that its implementation is accepted.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The long years I’ve spent in TV journalism, which began when I was a university student, followed by stints as a reporter and editor, made me formulate an idea, or realization, not theorization, about accuracy and fairness in journalism in Lebanon. And I hasten to say that neither is in good shape.

This is due to the fact that in the East, with Lebanon at its heart, there is no consideration for accuracy in the Western sense, not out of hate for it, but because of ignorance. Our language mirrors our psyches and our minds overflow with exaggeration so that a child grows up to hear such things as: “His father’s car goes at speeds of a million kilometers an hour and overtook a bus carrying 1,000 passengers.”

Or a child may hear its mother tell the father: “Your appointment is at 9:00. What’s the rush? You can arrive at 10:00. Teach them to wait.”

In this unhealthy environment, our children are being raised with no respect for precision, which leads to exaggeration, which is capable of disrupting a person’s biological and mental clock, which is born accurate or trained to be accurate.

So, unfairness and inaccuracy are not only diseases afflicting journalists but are deep-rooted social diseases, and journalists are only the offspring of their environments.

As for journalism, its body is afflicted with these two diseases, which are in their advanced stages. Here are some examples:

First, the lack of accuracy and fairness is due to a preponderance of non-journalists in the field, which has been overrun by lawyers, literary figures, politicians, economists and academicians dating back to the days when journalism was not a discipline taught in universities.

Journalism has become a profession and can no longer stand lack of professionalism. Which doesn’t mean that all those with journalism degrees are capable of handling such prerequisites as accuracy and fairness, both of which require a high degree of education and knowledge.

That’s where there’s an urgent need for a code of ethics that would set basic minimum standards of admission to this profession, which is full of temptations that face practitioners in Lebanon, the Arab world and the West, but in varying degrees.

Second, the non-existence of a code has left the door wide open to individual whims to determine journalistic practice, which has created great disparity between ethical and non-ethical practitioners, which then leads to the chasm between journalists who pursue accuracy and fairness in gathering their news, and those who don’t.

Third, accuracy and fairness cannot be practiced as long as we, journalists, continue to sink in our factionalism and tribalism and are beholden to certain financiers.

If we claim we're a fourth estate, it behooves us to be immune to temptations, to utter accurate words and fairly preserve the rights of individuals and institutions in their absence, not just in their presence. Is that what's happening now? A question we must ask in our deliberations.



Dr. Nabil Dajani
American University of
Beirut

“Accuracy, Fairness”

Dr. Nabil H. Dajani, American University of Beirut, Lebanon

Accuracy in reporting, I was taught in an introductory journalism course, a little over 40 years ago, was the central journalistic canon. The importance of accuracy was reiterated in every subsequent journalism course I took. To arrive at the truth, I was told; journalists need to be accurate in observing the five Ws and H of an event. (Who did What, When, Where, How and Why). I was instructed that to accomplish this, one needed to develop “a big nose.” With experience and maturity, it became apparent to me that being nosy is only the beginning of the road to accuracy and fairness in journalism. I realize today that journalistic training, here and especially in the West, is deficient and not practical.

Our journalism students are trained to go after news like a dog is trained to go after his dig. What they lack is the training to be critical of what they observe, to subject their observation to the scrutiny of the socio-political as well as cultural contexts of the news event. Because people are subjective, an event involving human actors is most often not what a reporter may assume it to be at the first observation. The five Ws that one supposes to have “actually” observed may not be the “real” ones of the news event a journalist is covering. The journalist needs to be trained to fit her/his observations within the socio-cultural context of the news event. Only then will the journalist assist her/his readers in their search for the “truth.”

This prerequisite is the beginning of a difficult undertaking to being “accurate” in reporting and “fair” to one’s audience. And being critical is not meant to be a cynic. It means the logical and continuous scrutiny of one’s skills of observation and ability to fit observations within the proper socio-cultural context.

Examining news coverage in the Western and Arab media today, one is conscious of how lacking these media are in undertaking their role as accurate and fair communicators. One can easily observe that the Western and Third World media systems present the same news events in different, sometimes contradictory, “factual contexts.”

This problem is being proliferated by fanaticism not only of the media systems of the deprived and the underprivileged but also, and mainly, by those of the affluent and the powerful, particularly after Sep. 11, when U.S. press critics began to criticize objectivity and balance in the coverage of what they termed “the war on terror.” Suddenly journalists were accused of upholding the very lack of bias that they usually are accused of betraying. Patriotism now was acceptable by U.S. media critics as a reason for bias in coverage. Of course, the rationale here was that opinion about “facts” needs to be developed in a news story. As a footnote, this makes me wonder how different this position is from the Soviet Theory of Press as described by Schramm, Petersen and others in their classic text “Four Theories of the Press.”

Sep. 11 exposed the domination of the powerful in dictating a new code for media operation that is far from accuracy and fairness. According to the Washington Post, CNN chairman Walter Isaacson told his staff to balance images of civilian casualties in Afghanistan with reminders of Americans killed in the U.S. terrorist attacks, saying it seems “perverse to focus too much on the casualties and hardship in Afghanistan.” And how would one explain why U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell asked the Emir of Qatar, in October 2001, to exert influence on Al-Jazeera news channel to pull back its so-called anti-American elements? According to Eric Deggans of the St. Petersburg Times of Florida, this is “an ironic move, coming from an official of a country with a free press of its own.”

The phenomenal leap into the development and adoption of communication technology that took place during the past half a century produced numerous structural changes in world information systems. Given that structural changes are easier to carry out than moral changes, especially for the powerful and affluent, this change often took place at the expense of morality. Consequently, the materialistic values of the rich and powerful today dominate the media practitioners. Little attention is being paid to the social and moral responsibility of the media.

The social and moral responsibility of the media in their societies and regions need to be taken into account in order to provide factual and fair coverage of events. We cannot assume a universal model of media operation. Rather, we need to recognize that the structure, content, and, therefore, operation of the mass media are unique to the society within which they operate.

The disease in the present world communication order was moral before it became structural. No matter how good the structure is, it is doomed if the morals are bad. In the final analysis, the driver is more important than the car and the one who uses the technology determines its output.

Structural changes that are required in the present world order are not to be determined by the dominant world powers. Rather the necessary changes are those that will allow the moral thrust for which the world order is in bad need. Thus, in a world dominated by materialistic forces and convenience the moral thrust into the new world information order should come, if at all it is to come, from countries that uphold their spiritualism and stand firm to their moral values.

Without a global moral order we will continue to have national and regional outlooks and interpretations of world developments and news, there will be no possibility for a global logic. There will be no accuracy or fairness in world media.

National and regional outlooks are usually ethnocentric and are often charged with hatred and negative stereotypes of nations and regions having different cultural backgrounds. The world will never become a "global village." Each country will continue to have its own national model of dealing with events.

National and regional models determine the prominence that their respective media give to the different regions of the world and the topics on which these media focus. Research on the news flow suggests that news events are shaped by the physical and cultural space of the region concerned. Thus, we see in media coverage of recent world events lack of balance in reporting the plight of innocent people in different world regions. Lives in the Third World don't seem to be valued at the same level of American or Israeli lives.

We also see that "democracy," "freedom," and "human dignity" seem today to be rights that may be put on hold whenever this is suitable for the powerful. The recent attack on Al-Jazeera television, by the Western media and officials for its coverage of the war in Afghanistan is an illustration of this point. "Free debate and, by implication, democracy in Third World countries are criticized if threatening to the powerful states." We are indeed living in an age in which media gatekeepers believe that "people are equal, but some are more equal than others," to paraphrase George Orwell.

Even with the phenomenal development of communication technology, it is impossible for the "big" news agencies, or any other corporate and regional player in international news provision, to set the agenda of foreign news in the media of any country. They can set the agenda only of foreign news outside the physical and cultural space of any national system. The major effect these powerful media players can produce is to provide their own ideological interpretation of foreign events outside the "space" of the national media concerned.

While the big news agencies continue to dominate the field of distribution of news and provide their own conscious or "unconscious" ideological interpretation of these news events, it is highly unlikely that they will ever be able to unify the view of their audiences across the globe to these foreign events. The national media systems will continue to select the news they receive and edit them to agree with their own ideological "consciousness." Thus a 'terrorist' in a wire service may become a "member of the resistance" or a "freedom fighter" in the national media, or vice versa.

Media institutions are manned by gatekeepers who are to a great extent influenced in their national and regional news selection and coverage by the socio-cultural contexts of their regions. In as much as these gatekeepers are human beings, and thus, by definition, subjective, it is impossible for media institutions to be completely accurate and fair in their reporting. However, by applying a professional code within a universal moral order, a journalist may be able to approximate accuracy and fairness in reporting by applying critical scrutiny to her/his socio-cultural biases and by observing news events within a proper moral context.

What is needed is a new world moral information order that, among other things, will uphold the professional journalists' need for a strong background in liberal education, ethics and cultural studies.



“Accuracy, Fairness”

Mrs. Stefania Delfino Bork, Projects Officer, International Federation of Journalists, Belgium

Good afternoon. My name is Stefania Bork and I represent the International Federation of Journalists where I work as the projects officer for the Arab World.

We are pleased to be able to join this roundtable and have the opportunity to discuss activities and projects in support of independent journalism, raising professional standards and improving the working conditions of journalists in North Africa and the Middle East.

Ms. Stefania Delfino Bork
International Federation
of Journalists

The IFJ is a federation of trade unions and associations of journalists, representing over 140 member organizations in 100 countries. We represent approximately half a million journalists. Our role is to lobby for the improvement of the professional and working conditions of all media staff, for the rights of journalists and for the promotion of a framework for free and independent media.

The IFJ runs international campaigns on issues such as authors' rights, independent public service broadcasting, editorial independence, the promotion of ethical codes of conduct and self-regulation of journalism, to name a few.

One major concern is to defend the human rights of journalists attacked, imprisoned or threatened for their work. Every year the IFJ publishes a list of journalists killed. Last year we recorded more than 100 dead – some caught in crossfire whilst covering conflicts, some from accidents at work, but the majority assassinated for their journalism.

To help journalists most at risk, we recently completed a week of safety training seminars in the West Bank and Gaza Strip attended by more than 100 Palestinian journalists. We have also organized risk-training programs for journalists in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

In short, the most important objective of the IFJ is the safety and welfare of journalists, and to encourage professional solidarity and cooperation among journalists and between journalists' organizations. Our motto is well known: “We believe that there can be no press freedom while journalists work in conditions of poverty, fear and corruption.”

The IFJ works to establish editorial independence in the newsroom. We promote the creation of strong independent unions that can represent their members, defend social and professional conditions and bargain for improvements in working conditions.

In the specific framework of promoting professional journalism and strengthening the journalists' unions, the IFJ will launch next week its Mediterranean program, sponsored among others by the European Commission. By working with our member unions in Palestine, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, the project will carry through a whole series of activities ranging from an equal opportunity campaign for women journalists, to trade union

development, to training of editors, to professional solidarity and safety training seminars.

I, therefore, would like to thank the organizers of this event for giving us the opportunity to talk about such a vital topic as professional ethics and the role of media legislation.

There are a few general points that I would like to make here today and which reflect the International Federation of Journalists' position on a few fundamental issues.

1. First, before journalists can be expected to act responsibly and to develop systems of self-regulation, they must be able to work in conditions of professional freedom. The fundamental principles of press freedom are an essential prerequisite for the promotion of ethical standards. It is pointless to discuss self-regulation if press freedom is not recognized and guaranteed by law, or if press freedom is restricted by legislation and practice.

In many countries editorial conditions are poor: limited access to information, defamation of the penal code, or journalists facing jail because of their commitment to the truth. In many Arab countries, for instance, "fair and accurate" criticism of the ruling party or of the head of state may be considered by the authorities as "bad" journalism, translating into extremely serious consequences – too often punishable by the criminal law – for reporters and editors.

2. Second, there must be an understanding among those in power that the media do not exist in order to promote their policies or aims. As long as self-regulation is seen as a soft policy approach to making sure the media do not get out of line, it will not be respected, it will not work and its failure to produce the desired results will be used to introduce laws limiting freedom of the press.

Good journalistic practice guidelines should not, therefore, be dictated and imposed. They must represent the outcome of a deep and complex process of consultation, which involves all media professionals, who commit to discuss them, who would approve them and adopt them. Journalists' professional ethics should not be transformed or embodied into national media legislation. If this happens, it can become a tool through which political authorities can exercise censorship. Instead, ethics must be promoted by the journalists and regulated by the journalists.

3. Third, the first IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists was adopted by the Federation's World Congress in 1954 and was later amended by the IFJ World Congress of 1986. This code represents the minimum ethical standards expected of all journalists and journalist organizations affiliated with the IFJ. It is deliberately short and to the point.



In many countries, media professionals have created and run Press Councils. Press councils are national bodies, independent – or they should be – from the government or the political power, in charge of surveying the quality of media according to pre-established journalistic good practice principles.

An example in the Arab World of a recently established council for ethics is Algeria, where the National Syndicate of Journalists (SNJ) established in May 2000 the "Conseil National de l'Ethique et de la Déontologie."

Other methods of self-regulation include editorial ombudsman, as in Sweden, or a "reader's editor," developed in the United Kingdom. These are people appointed inside media, to resolve conflicts or disputes with the public. They can help mediate when readers or viewers have complaints before an issue is taken to the press council, but should not interfere with anyone's right to complain to a council.

4. Fourth, a word of caution regarding the issuing of detailed guidelines to journalists. Journalists often get nervous about guidelines because these sometimes look more like instructions rather than helpful tips to people working in the field. The more detail that is put into good practice guidelines, the greater danger of ambiguity and confusion about what the text means.

We must remember that journalists come from different cultures and traditions. That often means they do things in different ways. However, it does not mean we should ever compromise with corruption or distortion of the journalistic mission. But is it really the case, for example, that anyone involved in journalism teaching should not work as a journalist to avoid partisanship, as we note in one of the detailed points being considered at this meeting?



We should remember that balance in journalism often is achieved over time and that although it is desirable, it is not always possible to ensure it in every instance of reporting, whatever the mode of dissemination.

All this being said, if we now want to tackle the specific issue of journalistic accuracy and fairness, I think that a couple of case studies may clarify to what extent ethical decision-making is not a clear-cut process, but reveals how journalists are often called to weigh competing values.

One example comes from Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, who was the editor of the Statesman in Calcutta and Delhi and who included it in an article in the British Journalism Review of 1994.

Datta-Ray recounts that he once accepted a tip-off from the police commissioner in Calcutta and published an apology for a story that the city's Muslims were likely to exploit. The commissioner phoned him late at night to say that, according to police intelligence, the Muslim community's newspaper was planning to carry an angry leading article.

That would have been the signal for a (spontaneous) protest, which was bound to provoke a Hindu backlash. The policeman did not coerce him (he did not have the authority to do so) and Datta-Ray knew, on the other hand, how easily such affairs could get out of hand. Both men had a common stake in community harmony.

So the police intelligence saw to it that the Muslim paper got to know in advance that a front-page apology would appear in The Statesman the next morning. Its own editorial was watered down in consequence and the march did not materialize. In a world of tension and religious conflicts, such examples are very useful to us.

Another example, from a completely different location and culture, is the one of an American newspaper publisher who resolved a similar dilemma in a similar way.

Following a stabbing murder in the city, the police found the murder weapon hidden in a drain. They asked the publisher to print a front-page article quoting the police as saying that they were still looking for the murder weapon and would conduct a thorough search of the area at first light.

The police told the publisher they wanted to use the false report to lure the murderer back to the scene overnight in order to retrieve the weapon from the drain. The murderer returned to the scene that night and was arrested by police.

This is a case where journalists deliberately failed the fundamental duty of journalism – to tell the truth. But they argued it was right and ethical to do so. That may be correct, but it can only be justified by full disclosure to readers after the event. We may sometimes have to bend the rules, but we should never do it in secret.

In both cases, decisions illustrate a model for ethical decision-making in which two competing values are weighed and a choice made in particular circumstances.

In the first case-study, if we assume that the original article was right in the journalistic sense – fair and accurate – and that in normal circumstances it warranted no apology, was the editor ethical in apologizing? And the

American publisher, was he right in knowingly publishing a lie in order to assist the police?

In both cases, “community safety” was given priority and the outcome for the whole society was possibly more beneficial than the strict respect for the duty of accuracy and fairness would have produced.

We believe that the promotion of ethics and self-regulation is an extremely important exercise and a key element to raising professional standards among journalists.

Most of the text and guidelines before you, we have no disagreement with – indeed we are pleased to be among your sources – but it might be advisable to have a more extensive trawl of opinion within journalism about the fine details here. If this is worth doing – and we believe it is – it is worth doing exhaustively.

For example, some years ago the IFJ prepared some draft guidelines on how journalists should report the rights of children. We launched an international debate. Had regional meetings. Obtained useful feedback and we were then able to adopt the final texts with some confidence that they were well enough understood by our own community.

For this process to be successful, however, the Lebanese journalists’ community itself must be fully engaged in the development of a national code of ethics.

We recommend that this code, if adopted, be promoted through the journalists’ organizations. Guidelines should be developed that explain in practice how to interpret the code with relevant examples from local media.

The code should be fully explained and debated to and by the media professionals. They should also be able to amend and adapt the code if and where necessary and create a self-regulatory body to oversee its promotion and its implementation.

To be successful the code must belong to the journalists, earn the respect of the journalists and be regulated by the journalists. Under no circumstances should the code be incorporated into law.

Finally, the most important result is not to be found in the fine detail of the adopted code, but in the discussion of the code and raising awareness of the importance and relevance of ethics to the journalists’ profession. We believe that when these principles are formally embedded in the mindset of Lebanese journalists, then the exercise will be judged to have succeeded. We will endeavor to give you full support. Good luck.

“Accuracy, Fairness”

Q&A

Q: I'd like to address the chairman. You say accuracy and fairness are in poor health. If that's the case, what's left of journalism? What's more dangerous? We have to examine the relationship between journalists and media institutions. Does the lack of accuracy and fairness reflect certain political directions by media institutions? If a journalist is inaccurate and unfair, will the media organization accept him/her? You suggest that in the Arab world we're a bit sentimental and emotional and tend to accept unverified news. It's a problem not limited to Lebanon and the Middle East.

Yazbeck: I just said that there was a big difference between us and the West.

Q: If these elements (accuracy and fairness) aren't available in our journalism, we'd have to redefine journalism. The other matter mentioned by Dr. Dajani is the need for education and general knowledge. One of the first things we ask our students is to become knowledgeable. I don't want to say that our journalists in Lebanon are ignorant, but we accept low standards. Lately, we've seen a number of schools of communication emerge, but we haven't really defined the curricula or defined the profession after providing the courses that would create a good journalistic framework through which we can come up with a code of ethics that would bring us closer to democratic societies elsewhere in the world.

Yazbeck: If we go back to the beginning, we have to ask, why is the profession like that in Lebanon? You'd have to trace it back to our education system in Lebanon. When I spoke about exaggeration, I said I found it to be the antithesis of journalism. We learn to exaggerate at home. We don't have punishment for it. We don't have standards.

Boys, in particular, if you'll excuse the expression, are taught to cuss and swear from an early age. It's seen as a sign of manhood. A few years later, those boys may get beaten because the swearing hasn't stopped and it becomes a social aberration.

When kids go to school, in the French system (and I'm a Francophone), they're taught to parrot. It doesn't allow for research. They just receive, fill their bags with assignments and go home. As for our university system, I'm a graduate of the School of Communication at the Lebanese University. With all due respect to all its programs, and I don't know if it's changed, I was ill prepared for the profession. All these factors undermine accurate and fair journalism. If we were in good shape, we wouldn't be discussing a code of ethics in Lebanon today.

Q: I have a couple of comments, leading to questions. It's the accepted perception among a lot of us who teach journalism, or simply are citizens and readers, that the marketplace will take care of the journalist's ethics. There's a sense that the credibility of our newspaper or our newscast will be tested in the marketplace. If the journalist lies, time will tell. If the broadcast is not objective, time will tell. That there's a severe and unrelenting judge, and that that is the public sphere. Therefore, this negates the need for anything serious about a code of ethics. What I'm hearing from the speakers is that that's not necessarily the case.

Prof. Dajani, I'd like to ask about the issue of each country, or each communications system or sphere, or geographical space creating its own sense of what's news. One of the problems I have with that is what we notice after Sep. 11. On the one hand we had Arab media – Al Jazeera was the best example of that – very anxious about what was happening, a lot of heated debates. The gist of them all was that Bin Laden might have done something bad, but Americans kind of deserved it, if only they'd pay attention to the rest of the world. It was a very forceful anti-American position.

On the other hand, we saw CNN, or even worse, Fox Television, taking all kinds of liberties with objectivity and good journalism practices, all in the fervor of patriotism. Two systems not talking to each other at all, talking to their own audiences, creating two worlds, a real lack of dialogue. Is that a danger?

Dajani: What I was talking about is based on actual research. It's based on two international research projects

I personally participated in. Twenty years ago I was a member of a team UNESCO sponsored to carry out a study of the content of the media in some 36 countries. Two years ago, we duplicated the study, done by the Association of Mass Communication Research. This is published. The study shows that in as much as we get the same news in every society, what's published is determined by two factors: The first is the proximity to the news. If I get a story about something that's happening in Zimbabwe, I may give it small coverage, if I use it at all. But if it's something about the Arab world, I give it more coverage.

And, culture. Lebanese newspapers will have more news about the Arab world. But among European countries, you'd be surprised to find that France has more news than America, because of the cultural ties. My conclusion in my study is that the world will never become a global village, because although we have the five dominant news agencies that will feed all the information to us, you get CNN, you get Al Jazeera, whatever. But you select their selectivity, which is influenced by proximity and by culture. So, no matter how technology will develop, we will never get to Marshall McLuhan's global village. Yes, we become closer, possibly.

The other point about letting the audience determine what's news, I don't think we can afford to let time determine the accuracy of news. In Third World countries, we can't afford the time to tell whether the newspaper or the media institution is accurate or not accurate. It's something very expensive. The media, especially with new technologies, are becoming so powerful, they can brainwash people and eventually they can carry you to accept that what Hezbollah is doing is terrorist. They can tell you that smoking is good for your health.



Q: If your theory is right, where's the bridging going to take place? Or shouldn't this be our concern?

Dajani: The answer is in a moral order. With the present immoral world order, there's no chance for us to communicate with the West or the West to communicate with us. Because this present immoral order means that the powerful and the flow of news is from north to south, from rich to poor, and so on. We have no chance. To get a newscast in English, who's going to listen to it? It's going to be so expensive.

Unless you have a world moral order, the chance of getting fair and accurate coverage of news is impossible. There's no accuracy and fairness as long as we have an immoral order. The only way to get accuracy and fairness in the news is to have a moral order, is to apply the same standards on you as on the others. You don't apply standards on me, and not on you. If we continue to accept what the boss tells us, then there's no chance for communication.

Bork: Going back to lies, I'm not suggesting that lies should be taken as an exercise. But because we're discussing ethics, we're clear about the point that there's no clear-cut issue. It's clear-cut on issues like corruption, for example, on bribes. In these two specific cases, the journalist is a responsible, or supposed to be, responsible professional. So he might be called to make decisions that are sometimes controversial.

In both cases, neither the editor nor the publisher reported the truth. But the scope was higher. In the first case, there would have been social turmoil and the editor decided that maybe an apology would have sufficed. Major social unrest was prevented. In the second case, the murderer was arrested and the paper then wrote that they had reported a lie.

I'm not saying that lying is something we should resort to. But ethics is complex and I think it's the whole point of today. To say that if we believe that journalists are responsible professionals, they might be called to make choices now and then that are not easy. But this should, in no way, excuse crimes like bribery, like corruption, like very major infractions. And as I said, the truth should always be revealed afterwards.

Scarone: I have a comment and a question for Dr. Dajani. I think I understand what you're trying to say, but I'm quite scared by it. I'm not a working journalist, even though I work at UNESCO's division of freedom of

expression in the field of journalism. If I were a working journalist, I'd be quite scared about what you just said, and especially, even just as a citizen of the world, about having something resembling a world moral order. For the simple reason that while we would all like to have this accuracy, this fairness, this balance, how would we go about doing that? Who will tell me what's moral and what's not moral? What's moral to you might not be moral to me.

In the field of media communication, you mentioned working for UNESCO and conducting studies, and as you know, in the late 1970s-early 1980s, UNESCO established in the field of communication something called a new world information and communication order, which nobody would argue with the necessity or rationale for, but a lot of people did argue with methods for it. The methods were bordering on the placing of obstacles on freedom of expression and freedom of the press.



Dajani: I'm also scared. You mentioned the UNESCO debate. I was on the UNESCO panel of consultants to the general secretary that did the groundwork for this world information order. That groundwork and the resolution adopted by UNESCO, and later by the United Nations, could be the beginning. Unfortunately, the United States destroyed the UNESCO program of the 70s. They pulled out. Now what you have is a completely different communications sector in UNESCO. The problem is because of a lack of a moral order.

You tell me you can never achieve a moral order, I disagree with you completely. What about the human rights declaration? Human beings are equal. Say that. Say that the Israeli is equal to the Lebanese. Apply that. Say that you apply U.N. resolutions on Iraq and apply them on Israel. You disagree about political issues, but when it comes to issues of morality, that's something no two can disagree about. There are basic moral values that no two people can disagree about. All human beings are created equal. This is the beginning. I'll accept to start with this.

I'm scared because of the hegemony of one country. My only hope is that the European Community will develop and balance the unethical and immoral control of America of the world.

Scarone: Related to the subject, and the media and journalism, to actually force some kind of global order onto the media, to try to address these imbalances, which have existed forever, by forcing some kind of media order at the world level, under some morality, which not everybody will share, that's what I think is very scary.

Q: When I talked about corruption in the media, Faysal Salman and Melhem Karam were upset.

There are honest people who are journalists. What is the dilemma? What are they facing? How can you contribute to promoting an honest image of Lebanese media?

The second question, going back to what Octavia Nasr said today, which was extremely dangerous, that after 11th of September you cannot be objective. She somehow justified any kind of propaganda that could be disseminated anywhere in the world. The loss of Palestine is even bigger than 11th of September, so can we justify Arab propaganda?

Yazbeck: Each of us can contribute by working on himself/herself. Unfortunately, there's no collective work in Lebanon. These efforts (the code) are great. We're meeting and talking about our problems. We're seeking solutions. But we can't limit them to individual efforts. We can't have someone ethical, for example, running MTV, and as soon as he leaves, accuracy and fairness disappear.

What we suffer from in Lebanon, is that efforts are on an individual level, and accuracy is a personal effort. So how can I steel myself and elevate standards so that whoever enters my institution resembles me? There's a lot of subjectivity involved, but you have to start somewhere.

A candidate working for you must be well educated to be in the profession and you have to use a fine filter to

select potential journalists. Journalism is a profession that doesn't have fixed hours. It's not just a job.

Unfortunately, journalism in Lebanon was founded on the hanging out at the doors of well-placed sources, so if you know a lot of members of parliament, you have a lot of news. You undermine journalism when you become a mouthpiece for political sources. We have ample examples of organizations that have become mouthpieces for the political establishment. If the political power changes, they make a 180-degree turn and follow the new master, with absolutely no shame. The Lebanese press is sick. If we don't admit it, we won't be able to take the first step on the 1,000-mile journey to remedy it.

There are examples of journalists who lived in very modest quarters – and poverty isn't something to be ashamed of – but who after five years have chauffeurs and villas and houses and no shame about flaunting it all.

We should filter who enters journalism programs at the university level to begin with and that's where the social contribution begins. The university should determine whether aspirants have it in them to become journalists. I address myself to this university and every university in Lebanon graduating journalists. Are we graduating journalists in tune with our society's absorptive capacity, or in tune with the profession's absorptive capacity? Does everyone with a journalism degree have the right to practice the profession?

My experience with interns is that they may know a smattering of languages but are incapable of functioning in any of them. I lay in wait for journalists. I hunt them. Every couple of years a good prospect comes through but I can't always bet on him/her.

I can't be a courtesan to the prime minister, or parliamentary speaker, or anyone. There are journalists who approach me saying, "I'm working with this member of parliament, and we have a news release to give you." They shouldn't call themselves journalists.

Q: I agree, but you're putting more on the shoulders of journalists than they can carry. The problem is higher up. It's not the reporter you need to filter. The problem is with the entire political setup. Corruption is at the level of the political establishment.

The code of ethics means nothing if we can't have a country where there's a law separating what's public and what's private. A prime minister has no right owning a TV station and a newspaper. A parliamentary speaker has no right owning a TV station. If they own them, they should divest themselves before entering the government.

Not only is there no distinction between the private and public sectors, there's also a media monopoly. Five or six people in the country own the major media. It's not my fault as a journalist if I accept bribes. The political establishment is to blame for making corruption so widespread and turning it into the rule, rather than the exception.

Q: I think you're overstating your case. A country like Lebanon, that is considering a code of ethics, this is a sign of maturity of the press. This code of ethics would be a joke in most Arab countries because they don't have a press in the terms that we understand. This is a very high level of professionalism and quite commendable and great that it's being considered.

We also shouldn't pay a lot of attention to Mr. Karam. Mr. Melhem Karam has no credible publication, we all know this. Maybe he has a lot of money, it's not a secret that he has publications that no one takes seriously. He's a wonderful person, and he's done a lot of work for the journalists, but he's not a good journalist at all.

I disagree with him and the idea that "this whole thing cannot be discussed unless we let you discuss it." As an educator, when I saw this (code), I thought it would be wonderful to give to my students. I know from my experience – and I worked as a journalist for 25 years – that a lot of journalists in Lebanon and other places don't know some of these things.

Yazbeck: We're living in the field and meeting some of these people. We're not exaggerating. At Christmas, I was contacted by a very important person whose secretary called to tell me that there was an envelope waiting for me at his office, if I'd like to pick it up. I told her I was insulted by the suggestion and prodded to ask if the envelope contained a greeting card. She replied that it had "some things" for me. I then asked her to connect me to the person sending me the envelope. You have no idea what language I used in talking to him.

These are things to which we're exposed in our profession. You say I'm hard on journalists. Yes, I am, because they should know where they're heading. Why is it acceptable for a journalist to have other sources of income but unacceptable for a cashier at a bank to slip a few banknotes into his pocket to supplement his income?

Q: To respond to an earlier comment, this is a problem journalists face in Italy. Hariri-Berlusconi are two sides of the same coin. Berlusconi had three private TV stations, but when he became prime minister, three public channels became his, under his direction, which created a problem in Italy. Now Italy's parliament is considering legislation to rectify the situation.

As for the Lebanese media, newspapers, etc., are they still providing me with a service? I don't think I can find real news or political analysis in Lebanese papers anymore.

On the academic level, we don't have specialists. We have people with degrees, but no specialists. On the issues of Afghanistan or Iran, nobody credible with good information was able to discuss them on TV. Experts were brought in from abroad to discuss these subjects in the Lebanese media.

Our university degrees don't produce good media people. The latest thing they came up with at the Lebanese University was a suggestion that all subjects be taught in Arabic. You can't deny that we have English-language and French-language media. If we're to discuss a code of ethics, we have to reform the entire academic system.

Magda went straight for the super-structure before laying the basis of an infrastructure. We don't have an infrastructure for this code. It's non-existent. It won't work in Lebanon. It has no value.

Bork: I'd just like to reply to you that I agree that a code of ethics represents a problem, and let's work on it. This morning the code of ethics was compared by somebody to the ten commandments. Somebody asked, who sent them? God. Who's supposed to be God in creating a code of ethics?



My point is that it's not because we have the ten commandments that we don't go around killing and stealing. There is a self-sense of what is correct and what is not correct. If a code of ethics is established, and it has to be done by the journalists, a consensus, I think the colleagues who do not stick to the code of ethics will know that there is a general consensus from the media community, that there is a set of rules to which they should stick.

To reply to the lady, the problems you were describing are so common in the Arab world, but not only in the Arab world. If there are structural problems, like salaries that are too low, or bad working conditions, the only thing is for journalists to get together and fight for these rights.

Dajani: The remark that there's no need for the media in Lebanon, I agree 100%. A very good example is that newspaper readership has gone down to unbelievable low circulation, because the media are no longer meeting the needs of the people. The people no longer find in the newspaper the information that is basic for their lives, so they don't buy it. Television is a different story. Television is not a source of news for them, it's a source for entertainment, and I have research findings I can show you, done over ten years.

I hope that the code of ethics we submit will include a preamble to stress the need for a moral order, at least on the national level. Without a moral order, we have no chance of having anybody respect this code of ethics.



FREEDOM



Edmond Saab
An-Nahar

“Freedom”

Mr. Edmond Saab, Executive Editor, An-Nahar, Lebanon

I’ve been in the profession for 35 years. I started as a proofreader. My first job was as a librarian at USIS in Beirut. Then I worked as a reporter, then a sub-editor, then assistant managing editor, then managing editor for a weekly, then editor-in-chief of a monthly (Readers’ Digest, Arabic edition), and now I’m executive editor of An-Nahar.

I work on all strategic plans for the future of the newspaper. I’m lucky that my editor-in-chief, Ambassador Ghassan Tuani, picked me from the first day and invested a lot in me. I’m happy to try to convey the message of our experience at An-Nahar – which was founded in 1933 – and how we managed to have our own code of ethics from the beginning. We tried to provide the proof every day that we still follow the covenant of the promise we made. We’re an independent, free newspaper and a forum for all kinds of ideas.

How can one be free in journalism? If you travel to Lebanon, you are free to enter the country, you’re able to exchange your foreign currency at the airport, you’re free to have a room at the hotel and ask for a driver to take you around the city or beyond.

In the evening you switch on the TV and watch the news and see that among five or six stations, the news is the same. Sometimes they begin with the same item. So then you wait for the morning and get the newspapers and notice that what they say is different from what you saw at night on TV. But as you know, what appears in the papers is often proof of what you saw at night.

Sometimes we can say there’s freedom in the country or the press by the kind of truth you find in the newspaper or the media in general.

When you listen to what Mr. Aridi was saying, there’s a certain kind of official truth. Sometimes it’s more diplomatic, it’s as close as possible to democracy. And sometimes it’s one truth – you don’t have any choice – while in another situation we have the freedom to believe, to criticize, to compare, to choose.

So we begin with that commitment. Maybe the newspaperman is the only one who has his own commitment based on a certain kind of ethics, not coded, from the family, from his surroundings, from the profession itself. Nobody can work without a reference, without guidelines, without certain rules of conduct.

Ethics are important because they deal with somebody who’s doing a job different from all other kinds of jobs. In all other professional jobs you have official rules, you have the laws, you have inside rules. But you never see someone with his own rules, his own commitment. He (journalist) is there to serve the public.

Yesterday we talked about radio and TV being commercial enterprises. A commercial enterprise has nothing to do with the public. It doesn’t owe anything to the public. But when a person decides to be a newspaperman, a server of society, it means that he is trying to use all the rights of that society for the benefit of that society, and not for himself.

Yesterday, some journalists asked the Press Syndicate’s president why they were excluded from membership and why barriers existed. There are unseen barriers – political – because we’re in a country where everything is divided into two and three and four segments, or factions. When five Christians are admitted to the syndicate, they have to be balanced with five Muslims.

So, on that level, you can’t talk about freedom of the press.

Some people refer to the First Amendment of the American Constitution. But that’s a false reference. The First Amendment refers to freedom of information and it would appear that a journalist has the privilege to obtain

information and then maybe hide it, as Bob Woodward did with “The Veil,” in his interviews with (the late CIA director) William Casey. He published the book after Casey’s death and was questioned why he had done that. Flora Lewis at the time wrote in the Herald Tribune from Paris that it was “the law” of freedom of information, which doesn’t allow any journalist to get the information and hide it in a drawer. It’s information for the public. It’s not your own, or individual information.

Not every journalist should have that privilege, to use information and serve the public the way he likes.

A journalist should be honest, which means he/she should deliver the whole truth, have the courage to stand up to political or financial pressures when jobs may be threatened, and have courage against cynicism within the media themselves. If we’re not balanced, we’re not professional. Balance means giving the whole picture and doing so with judicious restraint. Then there’s humility.

Media must be on guard against arrogance and the complications cause by fragile egos. They need to be willing to admit mistakes, print corrections and listen to the feedback of listeners and readers.

Every journalist who’d like to join the syndicate should have these qualities.

I wish Mr. Mishlawi were here to discuss accountability. Mr. Baalbaki said the newspaper is a censor but isn’t censored.

The newspaper is not a censor. The newspaper profession isn’t the fourth estate. A newspaper becomes a censor when it succeeds in empowering public opinion to become a power. So public opinion is the power, is the authority, is the reference, not the journalist. And not any journalist can do that job.

Journalists also have to forget about subjectivity and objectivity, because inside objectivity there’s a lot of subjectivity, and vice versa. The main point is not to be neutral, because a journalist has to be objective, but he/she has to examine all sides of the story in a very professional way to be balanced and to give the story that power that will, in turn, fuel the power of public opinion.

Here we have to avoid mistakes that need correction through accountability, by which I mean quality control. Serving the public needs severe quality control. We need something like ISO.

So, what are the obstacles to accountability?

First, love of power. Owners of newspapers don’t like to share it. Second, arrogance. They refuse to admit their mistakes. They’re demigods, fragile egos, who spend much of their time criticizing political and business leaders and find it painful to criticize themselves.

The price: Sometimes the price is very expensive. So they pass all the material to a lawyer for scrutiny, etc.

Some Japanese newspapers have their own in-house critics who scrutinize their papers for ethical violations. That’s why we need ethics. Many papers today have an ombudsman to deal with complaints from customers. Press councils operate on local, regional and international levels. And then you have letters to the editors, and columns that allow readers to have their way.

We have a duty to serve the public in a way that serves its own interests, not ours. That makes us leaders in our society and leading is a big responsibility, to improve society, for the welfare of the whole community. It’s a whole package.



Dr. Stephen Quinn
Zayed University

“Freedom”

Dr. Stephen Quinn, Director, Center for Media Training and Research, Zayed University, United Arab Emirates

I teach at a university in the United Arab Emirates in Dubai. It’s an all-girl university and we’re encouraged to teach using these machines here (computers). So most teaching is done with things like PowerPoint, which is the software package I’m using.

Thank you to the IPJ for the invitation and thank you Edmond Saab for an excellent presentation. It really beautifully leads into what I’m going to be talking about.

If I could talk about myself just for a little, I spent most of my working life as a journalist. I worked in four different countries, as a correspondent, as an editor, as a reporter and then I took up part-time teaching and part-time journalism and then I became a full-time academic in 1996. But I’ve always been a practitioner. So I’m speaking as a practitioner, as much as an academic.

The cartoon here is meant to indicate I like toys, technology, tools. But the point I make about these is that they’re only tools. I’ll be talking today about technology and the connection with journalism and freedom of expression. But technology is only a tool to do better journalism.

I’ll be discussing two main themes. One is GIGO, which is a computer acronym, meaning garbage in will give you garbage out. I’ll relate that to journalism. It’s a fundamental principle of journalism. If you have bad source material, it produces bad journalism. If you interview the same people all the time, you get the same boring reportage.

In my second theme, I’ll argue that research produces better journalism, which leads to better democracy and gives journalists the chance to better serve their public.

Technology is merely a tool in doing better research. It is also changing journalism very rapidly.

Technology gives journalists the ability to gather huge amounts of data. The world is full of information. We have too much. Technology is making that pool of information bigger and deeper and wider. Used well, this pool will help produce better journalism, which should help journalists perform their traditional watchdog role more effectively.

But it’s a double-edged sword: With privilege comes responsibility, with every curse comes a blessing. In a technology-driven world, it’s really important to establish clear ethical guidelines because technology tends to speed things up, and, as you know, speed kills. As a photojournalist friend once said: “It’s impossible to do ethics in 1/250 of a second.”

It’s impossible to do good ethics on the job. You have to do it beforehand. You have to have guidelines before you begin the process of any form of newsgathering. Journalism tends to be moving so quickly that we need to have the guidelines and the thinking process before we do the job.

This is especially important in an environment of rapid change. Training then becomes even more important with issues of technology and issues of ethics, and also to develop human potential and human capital because when you think about it, one of the biggest costs for a newspaper or a television program is the cost of staff.

Even if you’re only speaking in entirely economic terms, you should be developing the people who are producing the product because they are your intellectual capital.

Let me go back in history a little. The four ages we worked through as human beings are, the Agrarian age (10,000 years to the late 18th Century, as hunters and gatherers). Then from the 1760s we have the Industrial Age, the Information Age, people suggest, started around the 1950s, and people are suggesting we’ll be moving into the Knowledge Age.

Each age brings with it its own dangers, problems and consequences. The Agrarian Age was about survival. One of the problems that arose with the Industrial Age that we're dealing with now is pollution. One of the big problems of the Information Age is the issue of privacy. And I suggest that in the Knowledge Age ethics is probably the key issue that we have to grapple with, primarily because of these forces that are driving our world: rapid technology change and concentration of ownership of businesses.

So, in an age of uncertainty, ethics become even more important than ever. I'd like to use the words "moral compass."

I'd like to talk about technology and journalism. There are at least four varieties of news: regular events, like a council meeting; managed events, like a news conference; unplanned events, like an accident; and, planned events like a series of investigations.

Technology helps in all of these areas. The term being adopted around the world is computer-assisted reporting or computer-assisted research (CAR). One of the books I wrote, which I'll leave here, is "Newsgathering on the Net," which talks about how increasingly journalists use the Internet as one of their main tools for doing better research. It can be used for a whole range of tasks like backgrounding information for regular events, checking facts, but more interestingly, for generating news that's off the news agenda.



With technology you can also provide more context for your reportage and give yourself more credibility.

The Internet is changing journalism rapidly. The World Bank reports that in Lebanon, between 1995-2000, the number of users per thousand increased immensely, from 3/1,000 people to 300/1,000.

The Internet gives journalists, potentially, the opportunity to find lots of data and information using things called search tools and directories. The Internet also gives journalists ideas like listservs, e-zines and newsgroups.

The last time I checked, there were 100,000 listservs or email magazines on literally all subjects I could find. For journalists, these give reporters wonderful access to information because most listservs are run and edited, by people who have expertise in that particular topic.

For example, I subscribe to a listserv called CAR, or Computer-Assisted Reporting. It has about 2,000 members based in 67 countries, and it generates about 20 or 30 emails each day. So you have to spend a fair amount of time monitoring it because if I go away for a week I'll come to quite a bit of email to process.

One of the down sides of the Information Revolution is huge amount of data that we have to deal with. But the great thing about this listserv, for example, is that if I want information about something I don't know about, I simply send an email to this group, so this email is going to 2,000 people who are experts in this particular area, and if they can help, they tend to email me back.

It's an example of the generosity of the Internet. The Internet was set up as a military and academic communication device and it carries this notion of sharing and the willingness of people to offer their advice on topics if they have information about it.

The reason I like listservs as journalistic tools is that the people who run them tend to be experts in that particular area. If your beat is business, or finance or the environment, I guarantee you you'll find lots of listservs on your topic.

Here are some examples: Liszt (aka Topica) www.liszt.com, Tilenet www.tile.net, DejaNews www.dejanews.com/usenet, Dogpile www.dogpile.com

E-zines is a fancy term for electronic magazines. These are magazines that are available on the web, only in electronic form and they vary in standards from serious excellent journals to material put together by university or high school students. So the range varies considerably. So you need to monitor them and get a sense of what's good and what's not so good.

In that sense, you, the journalist, will always be needed because there will always be the need for the journalistic mind as the filter. I love that term you used Edmond about intellectual ISO.

The third group is a thing called newsgroups. These are more like the bulletin board in your newsroom where people pin notices. You could argue that a lot of it is fairly minor, but it's a very useful way to find out what people are thinking about in terms of topics that are in the news. So if you want to get a sense of what the public is thinking, newsgroups are very useful ways.

Another use of the internet is to find people to interview. One of the great criticisms of journalism which I've read about in many countries is that journalists tend to go to the same old sources, the same rent-a-person who will always be willing to talk. That's fine, but if you want diversity of opinion, then the Internet provides ways to find people who are available for interviews.

Has anybody here used Profnet (profnet@profnet.com) Expertnet (expert@cvcp.ac.uk) in the UK?

These are email-based services for journalists and only journalists. So if you're assigned a story on something and you need an expert to interview, someone who's willing to talk to you, you send an email to this address, identify yourself and say what you're working on and Profnet sends out your email to about 6,000 universities and think tanks and NGOs all around the world, particularly North America, and somebody in each of these institutions is assigned to answer the journalists' requests. Usually within 24 hours an email will come back to you with the name of a professor and email address, fax number, telephone number and physical address.

The same applies to Expertnet. Expertnet was put together by the vice chancellors' committee in the UK, so it links all of the UK to 70 some universities in the United Kingdom.

If you're interested, Profnet is doing a big campaign at the moment to set up partner organizations all around the world. So they're looking for countries where they can do a similar scheme for that particular country. Profnet works because in the US academics can get pay raises based on their media appearances. So it's one of these win-win situations.

On the wonderful World Wide Web, or the journalists' library, I use Google (www.google.com) all the time. It's a phenomenal tool for journalists. It has a wonderful advanced search facility. It allows you to search for specific key words or topics. Ask Jeeves (www.askjeeves.com) is one of my favorites. It uses what is called natural language, so when you ask it a question, you type your question the way you would ask your question of another human being.

I won't go through all the others. These are all multi search engines – they combine the services of six, eight or 10 other search tools into one like Vivisimo (www.vivisimo.com), Profusion (www.profusion.com), Mamma (www.mamma.com), Metor (www.metor.com), and Around the world (www.searchenginecolossus.com).

The Internet is an elephant, except it's an expanding elephant. Nobody knows how big it is, that's part of the problem. It's getting bigger every day. There's also the invisible web, which is part of the Internet that people aren't even sure how big it is. So the way to deal with it is to learn to take small bites.

The Internet is also very good for generating ideas. The Greenpeace motto: Think globally but act locally. So you can cherrypick ideas from online news organizations like the BBC (<http://news.bbc.co.uk>) and Reuters (www.reuters.com), The Paperboy (www.thepaperboy.com), Totalnews (www.totalnews.com) and Newspapers of the world (www.actualidad.com).

You can use these translation tools: Ajeeb.com and AltaVista babelfish. They're not very good, but at least if you get a newspaper in a language you don't understand, it gives you enough of the story to see that there is a story there.

There are lots of sites that journalists put on the web for other journalists, such as: Commonwealth Journalists Association (www.ozemail.com.au/~pwessels), Aussie computer-assisted reporting (<http://computer-assisted-reporting.com>), OzGuide (www.sjc.uq.edu.au/ozguide), Megasources (www.ryerson.ca/journal/megasources.html), JournalismNet (www.journalismnet.com), Bill Dedman PowerReporting (<http://powerreporting.com>).



There are also lots of reference sites for raw data, like United Nations (www.un.org), world experts (www.nyu.edu/globalbeat/experts.html), UNESCO statistics (www.uis.unesco.org), World Bank statistics (www.worldbank.org/data), planning news (www.newsahead.com), unusual events (www.dailyglobe.com), Financial Times archives (globalarchive.ft.com), and the CIA World Factbook (www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook).

The Internet can be used in other useful ways, like personalized news sites (worldnews.com) or (moreover.com). You can find experts to interview on (gurunet.com) or (atomica.com) or (profnet.com).

Even if governments ban journalists' reports, they can still appear on the Internet. For example, Arab Media Internet Network (www.amin.org) pools international coverage of Middle Eastern dailies.

The potential for the Internet to circumvent censorship or government bans is amazing. Digital technology is changing journalism rapidly, and forever. Ethics is more vital than ever. So is training and education. The key issues that come with technology and speed are: information quality, information accuracy and other technical stuff like domain name recognition and reading URLs.

So the question then is how do you set up useful websites for journalists in this part of the world?

“Freedom”

Q&A

Q: Seeing all those machines around journalists in their offices, I think they have to struggle every day to refuse programming themselves. If you deal with machines all day long you should at least be programmed yourself to deal with these machines. So what remains of your individualism? With time you'll become part of those machines.



Ms. Sarah Sullivan

Sullivan: I think it's very true that when you have so much information coming at you, and when you have so much to filter out, it's incredibly time consuming. It also requires very specific and very special training, which, again, is very time consuming. It can be very useful and it can also cause a lot of problems. It is very easy to get sucked into the technology of it and not really think of the technology as being a tool. But how do you balance between these things?

Quinn: I think the last word you used, balance, is the most important thing. When I'm not behind a computer I'm planting trees and growing vegetables and doing things in the garden because it's really important to have a balance in life. That becomes a matter of individual responsibility. I can't tell people how to live their lives.

I also agree that the issue of training becomes extremely important. It is time consuming but it's worthwhile and let me give you an example. You've all heard of the Pulitzer prizes for journalism. Every year since 1989, the Pulitzer prize for investigative journalism and/or social affairs journalism has gone to, usually, a team using much of the material I've been talking about and other related things. So the rewards are there. You just need the effort.

Q: What strikes me is that you're using your tools and then you're gardening but then you're not talking to any people, it seems, in your balance.

Quinn: I talk to trees. So that's something I should have also added. One of the dangers of technology is it's easy for the reporter to stay behind his or her computer terminal and not talk to people out in the street. You could argue the same thing about the telephone: that when the telephone arrived, the fear was that reporters would spend their time talking on the phone and not go out. So I suppose it's up to the newsroom managers to say to their staffs, "get away from your computer terminal, go and plant some trees and also talk to people to do some interviewing."

The best recommendation I make for technology is that it gives you better questions to ask the person when you go to meet them. It gives you the chance to do the background research more quickly, so when you go to talk to them, to interview them, you have better questions to ask, based on better research.

Q: I have a couple of questions. One is for Sarah. Why don't we see the Transnational Broadcasting Studies Journal more frequently on the Net? And, Stephen, what are your views on media convergence? I find it absolutely fascinating. I've visited some newsrooms, especially in Florida, where they've experimented with having reporters work for the site of a newspaper, for the newspapers itself, for the radio station and/or the TV station owned by the same company. So you'd find the same reporter doing a standup, writing the story for the web and doing a feed for the paper or a radio feed, which I've found fascinating but a bit dangerous because the news cycle is such, at 24 hours a day, that you wonder, when do they stop to think? Do they have time to analyze the flow of information?

Sullivan: That's a very good question. When we started TBS, it was about four years ago, and we're published at the American University in Cairo, so we started the journal on an academic model, whereas most academic journals will come out either twice or four times a year. Given that we were starting with a miniscule staff (the senior editor, me, and my two assistants) with a university budget, working within an academic setting, we started coming out just twice a year.

Our aim is, and we hope to do this very soon, to move to four times a year, and eventually we'd like to move to six times a year, because we're covering satellite television, and there are lots of developments constantly. What we're trying to do now is build more of a base of contributors, people from around the world, not just here in the Middle East, but in other parts of the world, who know their subject area very well and we can turn to as experts and will write pieces for us. That's what we really need.

We need to develop more content in order to be able to get it out there more often. What we've ended up doing, sometimes more recently, is something will happen, and then we'd have to publish a special report, not a complete issue. But we're finding that we do have to publish special reports, just for the timeliness aspect of it.

Quinn: The issue of convergence is very much on my mind now. I've just published a book that came out last month. It is the future of journalism, I think. It's the opinion of many people who think about the future of journalism.

During my talk, I mentioned many things that are forcing change. Technology is one of those drivers. The technology for convergence is already available. The gear is in place, it's relatively cheap.

When I worked as a television journalist we would pay about \$100,000 for a camera. Now you can get the same quality pictures with a machine you pay \$2,000-\$3,000 for. I have friends who work for CNN in Hong Kong. They go out on jobs with two cameras, one as a backup. If one fails, they just throw it away. It's just the way it is nowadays – disposable, broadcast quality cameras.

The technology is available. The desire is there, particularly at a management level. The two big companies that look at these things are Ifra.com and the World Association of Newspapers. Both have commissioned extensive reports around the world. The last time I checked, 1,500 companies around the world were in the process of making their media converged. Emirates Media in Dubai has just bought some land in Dubai Media City and they will converge their radio broadcasting and print in one site by April next year.

It's happening more around the world. The state of Florida in the U.S. was the leader. The Gannett chain just set up a site in Arizona where they now combine the Arizona Republic daily newspaper with a local radio and TV station and a website and the journalists are operating out of one site. So there are economic drivers there because the perception is that it'll save money – take one block of data and turn it into four types of stories.

The implications for journalism are profound, worrying, exciting, all sorts of words we could use. It will produce new forms of journalism. It will necessitate new forms of journalism education.

Q: To what extent are ethics in control, through media, through globalization, and freedom to portray the most proper images about certain societies like what's happening in the Middle East now?

Saab: Even in the United States they're aware of that problem. There's a very important report issued by the Aspen Institute that concluded that every citizen or reader or listener should have a proper education in how to deal with media. They set up a program called media literacy.

Media literacy teaches you how to protect yourself against anything you don't want, to analyze it and try to decipher it and then prepare your own response, then protect yourself. We need a certain program of media literacy in the Arab world to protect ourselves from what is unwanted, not become a garbage can of information, and then to rebuild from what is important, what's relevant, what we need, and then produce the messages we want to convey from schools, NGOs, etc.

We have to think it over. We can't blame everything on globalization.

Q: I agree and respect the examples you gave but when there's something I'm concerned about, I see media under the roof of ethics contributing freedom to some but when it's not under the roof of ethics, I see it making other people or societies its own hostages. It's both freedom and imprisonment. Is this what you mean by ethics for media?

Sullivan: Maybe I can say something in relation to the medium I work with, which is the Internet. There's a tremendous potential for the Internet to spread information. There's also a tremendous potential for it to spread disinformation. I agree with what you said about the need for media literacy. It's very democratic, publishing on the Internet in some ways. If you have a computer and some knowledge of HTML, you can put up a website and put anything you want out there and get it onto the search engines.



As somebody who's started up a web journal, establishing your credibility, if you're really trying to do something serious, and trying to work within very ethical standards of journalism, that's vital. It has to be from the beginning because of what's out there on the internet. You can use it for disinformation, you can use it with ill intent, you can use it with ill will, you can spread lies.

I work at a university. It's of concern to us to teach our students, if we're talking about computer-assisted reporting, to give them practice, to give them experience, to give them ways of really analyzing and being critical of the sources they're using, which I think is essential for journalists. On the Internet you have to be more careful.

Saab: I think we have to work a lot on spreading the habit of more thinking than feeling. We have to know what to choose, what's needed in our societies, our universities, etc. That'll be the difference. What's happening now is that every medium is trying to make a difference. So let us do our jobs and make a difference, and making a difference by having a contribution in all that's happening in the world. We have money and are buying arms. Let's use part of that to join people who are trying to build a new world, a better world, a safer world, a peaceful world.

Q: Sometimes the Internet can help you get a better perspective, better balanced report, because you're getting more than one source and getting them easily and getting them on time before you have to write your story, which is an hour or two before broadcasting it. That's the best way of getting something more balanced. We shouldn't always look at the Net as something negative. On the contrary, this is where your training would help in choosing, or get the most information out of most sites, to use later on and do a balanced story.

Quinn: Education doesn't finish when you leave university. Lifelong learning is the way it is and will be from now on because of change.

Saab: In my experience, I've learned two lessons: one is how to read – I attended a seminar on how to read – and then know how to cut and choose. We used to have books of 450 pages for homework. That's the most important and difficult exercise. The second lesson is how to check and how to research. Some big organizations in the United States have succeeded in setting up a system of researching and checking. You'd be surprised if you saw their bibles. Every story, every word, every comma, every date, every name is checked. And sometimes when you do the checking you kill the story. Checking, researching is quality control. That's the best way to have a good product and to educate a good journalist.

“Conclusion: Who Will Implement? When? How?”

Ms. Magda Abu-Fadil, Director, Institute for Professional Journalists, Lebanese American University, Lebanon
Mr. Marcello Scarone, Programme Specialist, Division for Freedom of Expression, Democracy & Peace, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, France

Abu-Fadil: This is the final session, during which we'll discuss the code and who will implement, when and how?

I was hoping some of the speakers would not take this code – we renamed it guidelines for good journalistic practice in May – as a personal insult. That was not the purpose of that exercise. If they got that defensive, then maybe they have something to hide.

What I was hoping we'd do during the different sessions was to take each segment, as per the titles, and really go through some of the items. If people had comments, suggestions, recommendations, they would provide them. But that didn't quite happen because what we ended up with was a lot of people hurling insults at each other and getting angry.

In a way it's good to have a healthy debate. And this is what this whole exercise is about. I don't see why we shouldn't discuss things in a rational fashion, take things you don't like, say why you don't like them, then propose something positive. If you don't like it, give me an alternative. What would you suggest?

Some people commented about the style of writing in the Arabic version. It was translated from the English and that was after having gone through countless codes of ethics from around the world. It took an inordinate amount of time.

Because I'm a product of many news organizations, I always had to work with some sort of guidelines, codes, whatever you want to call them. That was normal. I didn't take offense. I didn't think I was personally insulted when someone said: “You are not to take money from someone you cover.”

How can you maintain your impartiality, your objectivity, your sense of balance, if you are taking money with one hand and writing with the other about the same person? It's a conflict of interest.

But that's not the whole thrust of this document. Some people thought we're focusing just on the bribes or the money aspect. Not at all. There are segments on sources, accuracy and other things. We combined them from the first draft. We tightened it up.

No document is perfect. There's always room for improvement. This is a living document. It's dynamic. We can always add to it. We can always modify certain things. That's why I'd like us to have a vigorous, rational discussion about what you propose can be changed, improved upon and then move on from there and try to suggest a mechanism to implement it.

I'm delighted we have someone with the experience, prestige and caliber of Mr. Edmond Saab with us today because he can tell us how something like that can be put into practice in a newsroom in Lebanon.

The other point I'd like to make is that this has to come from within organizations. This cannot be imposed by any government. It cannot be imposed by outsiders. It has to be a consensus among journalists, editors, publishers, or people in the broadcast field, or online, that this is out of conviction, this is for our own benefit, because it reflects on our own credibility.

When we are credible, people take us seriously. If we are not credible, we have no right to say that we are journalists.

I'll tell you why I came up with these items. Because a lot of my colleagues did not follow ethical practices in Washington. They'd sit at home, watch newscasts, get the New York Times, Washington Post, Washington

Times, the transcription services and put a story together. They'd never interview anyone and get a feel for what was happening. That's not being a reporter.

Saab: I'd like to talk about credibility. You cannot get any appointment in the U.S. unless they know who you are, what's your background, what's your history. I was there once with an Arab radio correspondent. He didn't have anything to report that day, so he took the New York Times and he started broadcasting a story on the air for 15 minutes by reading the paper.

I asked him why he did that. He said: "Nobody cares." He lost his job and now he's doing agricultural work in Lebanon.

Abu-Fadil: There's a lot of legwork that's involved in journalism, there's a lot of research, as was mentioned earlier. It's a lot of hard work, it's thankless, and quite often the rewards are few and you don't get paid enough, you get kicked around: sometimes by the editors, sometimes by the publishers, sometimes by the advertisers, and sometimes by lawsuits.

That notwithstanding, you have to stand your ground, you have to have high ethical standards because in the final analysis, it's your reputation that's at stake.

Moving along, I would like to ask you what you think might be offensive. Granted the Arabic was not perfect, and we can still work on it. Let's put in what needs to be added, and modify what needs to be changed.

Let's create some sort of consultative committee to propose this in a modified form to editors, publishers, heads of stations. My hope is that we'll come up with a document that will hang in newsrooms, or that people will have on their desks, that people will refer to on a regular basis.

Scarone: I agree with everything you just said. I think there are two things to be kept in mind. First, this is not our code of journalistic practice. It's not the university's. It's not UNESCO's, it's not the IFJ's or the IPI's, or anybody else's. It will be something that we, as a group, will be urging journalists – through their organizations or their own companies – to adopt internally on a purely voluntary basis, if they wish to do so and in the way they wish to do so.

Our job here is to present them with the best possible background so that they can take it to their assemblies and then it can be accepted or rejected by them. We cannot force it upon them and we definitely would not wish to. Whatever format we got, it's just purely a suggestion we'll make to journalist associations or journalistic companies.

That said, I listened to a very interesting discussion yesterday and especially when the two fellows, rightfully so, felt that there was some insulting language that they did not fully appreciate in the way these things were written. Perhaps they were referring to the Arabic version, not necessarily to the English version.

However, honestly speaking, I cannot see any insulting language in the English version of it. There are harsh items, yes. But these are items that are included in all these codes of ethics, which are mentioned in the sources. I can tell you that in many other languages, which I'm fortunate to speak, the ethics codes are exactly the same. They have harsh language but it's put in a very clear direct way.

What I do find is that perhaps, for the time being, this might be a bit too detailed and too extensive. This is great once each of the companies adopts it for its own internal purposes. But as far as producing general guidelines on ethics, we might be able to condense these into more general principles. It might not be necessary right now to talk about using a private jet, or not.

Q: I agree with him that it's too detailed. There are versions that are more general. We should start with that.

On the other hand, I noticed that it's in the second person language. This is more confrontational. In a sense we could try to be more lenient in the way we form the sentences.

Abu-Fadil: Having written this, and coming from a news agency background, I tend to use active verbs. I like to cut down on wordiness. I get straight to the point. I know, in Arabic it's not quite the same. In Arabic you tend to use more flowery language. I was just trying to make a point, as directly and as succinctly as possible. We can definitely work on the Arabic to make it more palatable.

Maybe in order for us to evolve in this part of the world, we need to start looking ahead, and I think it's long overdue, we need to shed some of that emotional baggage and just move ahead – maybe not at the speed of light, but a little faster than now.

Some of the codes I got the information from were just a page long. The main principles are still the same. But what they took offense to yesterday was a common thread in just about all of them, especially the item of money.

Saab: I think the base of all ethics in journalism is the declaration of the American Association of Newspaper, dated 1923, which is very concise.

The second thing is that there should be no legal requirements for membership. I think this should be written.



There should be qualification, just to give people the right to be in the association. They should be qualified. The Lebanese journalists' syndicate requires at least a BA, two years training or an MA without training. And give priority to a BA in Mass Communication.

I think there's an internal law in the syndicate that all graduates of communication colleges are automatically members of that body. We have to realize that the daily problems we face are there in those syndicates. Last year Hezbollah proposed 40 reporters from their Al Manar TV and their radio for membership and the syndicate has to pick 40 from the other side (Christians) to create a balance. So they're all waiting. Some people have been waiting for more than 10 years.

Abu-Fadil: I'd like to ask, because you're really involved in this, do you think it's fair that someone who applied 10, 20 years ago, still hasn't been given an answer whether or not they can join the syndicate? And what is the logic of having two syndicates? Don't they serve the same purpose in journalism? Isn't the monopoly stifling when you have young reporters who would like to get in but are told categorically they cannot? Shouldn't we do away with this archaic system and freely have people join on merit, rather than some of these pre-qualifications placed on them?

Saab: To be realistic, I've been doing the job of talent scouting for more than 30 years. Among the people I've picked up have been George Simaan, who is the editor-in-chief of Al Hayat, Ghassan Charbel is now deputy editor, Rafik Chelala (presidential spokesman and former head of the National News Agency), May Kahale (former presidential spokeswoman and long-time journalist), and others. It's a matter of talent and qualifications. Every year we receive more than 40 people (at An-Nahar) graduating from these different faculties. They don't know what's Arabic writing, they have no talent, nothing, just a diploma.

Maybe we have to think about something that gives a chance to those people to pass some preparation. We tried to do it. We established a training center and asked a professor from one of the faculties to run that center. At the end of that training period, we picked three of 150 trainees. One of them knows English or French, and is not bilingual.

There are many barriers. Students don't work on them. They would just like to have diplomas. I once suggested to Mr. Baalbaki to create a center for training and trying to help people, especially those who are really talented, and then help them get into the syndicate.

There should be a union for journalists to protect their rights and a union for the owners. But the problem is that the journalists' union has its own problems and the owners' union also has problems, because we have as

many as 81 political licenses. It's blocking all development of the Lebanese press.

If your father or grandfather had a political license, you have a fortune. You can sell it for \$300,000.

Abu-Fadil: The point I'm trying to make is: should this be allowed to go on? Isn't there something wrong with the law that stipulates that you can have this kind of monopoly and just choke the market and prevent people from coming in to the union?

Scarone: What does the national law say exactly about who can be a journalist here in Lebanon?

Q: Same question. What is the legal status of journalists outside the union? We probably have a different definition of union because all around the world journalist syndicates and unions are struggling to have members in to have a bigger bargaining power towards the government.

Saab: The problem is with the owners of newspapers because they accept anyone who can write. Then he/she becomes a journalist and takes a card and they put his/her picture on it and he/she does the job with the same person who graduated with an MA. It's a big concern. Maybe it'll help in reorganizing that field. The number of graduates is growing enormously and why should all graduates go to newspapers, not to public relations or press offices?

Scarone: Many people, including myself, would answer, "what's wrong with that?" If the owner can hire whoever he wants to be a journalist, even if he cannot write a word in Arabic, French or English, that's the owner's problem. The question is to know the legal question. In other words, there's a media law in Lebanon. Does this law say that only the members of the press order or the journalists' association can work legally in Lebanon as journalists, or does it not say anything?

Saab: That's the law.

Scarone: So if you're not a member of the press order, officially you're not a journalist in Lebanon.

Saab: You are chosen by the syndicate.

Scarone: That's why we put number 2 in there because around the world most of our organizations think that is wrong. We understand your motives but the problem is when this is used as a good motive, where this is used to raise the professional standards, it can be good to have a requirement that journalists have a certain level of education.

Saab: Even in France. I'm a member of the Syndicate of Professional Newspapermen, there are many conditions to be accepted or to have your card.

Scarone: But in France, where I live, if you're not a member of the "Syndicat", you can still work as a journalist legally. We're talking about the national legislation, not about the internal law of each syndicate. Where we have a problem is with the national law that says that only people who are in the syndicate are journalists.

Q: I'd like to clarify some matters that were discussed over the past two days. Our colleague Edmond Saab said there has to be (confessional) balance for admission into the syndicate, just like all the government administrations in the country. I agree with him that there are mistakes, but we should correct them.

When we discuss the matter of the syndicates, he knows what happened when Melhem Karam applied for admission to the Owners' or Press Order. As for balance, there is none. The last list of applicants included 250 new journalists on January 1, 2001. There was no balance among them.

The other matter is that Hezbollah proposed 40 journalists for membership from its newspaper and magazine. Only four were admitted to the last two membership lists.

Today people also play around with the law. Yes, there are 81 political licenses but there are also 1,680 non-political licenses, 90 percent of whose owners are publishing political news. So we have to put our hand on the whole wound, not just part of it.

Abu-Fadil: We need to clarify to our foreign guests that you need a license to publish political news, as is the case with TV stations, to come out with political news on the air, which in many countries of the world would be considered ludicrous. But here it's the norm. That's one of the basic problems we have, this licensing, and the fact that the law stipulates, or tries to dictate, who is a journalist and who has a right to enter the union. Maybe the law ought to be changed. It can be a dynamic process.



Q: In all countries of the world, ethics committees have been created in the professions. This is something we launched 10 years ago. In 1994, we organized the first conference and each year we organize a conference on ethics. We've concluded that some professions have accepted these ethics committees. The reaction was also sometimes negative, as we heard yesterday, but not as sharply. They'd say: "Are you here to teach us ethics?"

We said that not only in each profession, but each company should have an ethics committee. Today people are convinced of the matter's validity and we're organizing an international conference in Lebanon in a few months, and hopefully, we'll organize it at LAU, on international ethics. It will be in Lebanon, in cooperation with the European Council and the United Nations, with several universities, to declare an international charter of ethics.

In 2000 there was a meeting in Sarajevo after which the Sarajevo Charter was launched. I hope you have a chance to examine it.

Another point is that there was a reference to the Taif Agreement that ended the war in Lebanon, saying that it stipulated there be the apportionment of jobs according to religious affiliations. It doesn't stipulate that as far as syndicates are concerned. It is unacceptable that we discuss confessionalism in the third millennium.

On the third issue, I agree that journalists who are not university graduates need some training. We see that some journalists don't have command of any language, be it English, Arabic or French. It's a sensitive issue. That's why we agreed with a French institute to organize training sessions in Lebanon for all broadcast media, in agreement with Lebanese universities.

Finally, I suggest this code be summarized to one page and group various topics and take into consideration the codes that were adopted in Sarajevo, Paris or New York. Anyone who has a suggestion should send it to the proposed draft committee. We shouldn't be in a rush to issue this code, let's take our time in order for this document to be accepted and adopted by the Press Syndicate and Journalists Union and the journalists themselves.

Q: I'd like to comment on what Mr. Saab said. I consider myself an example of what you gentlemen have been saying. I graduated a year ago with a BA in journalism. My English was OK. I had no French language at all and I've been going to French courses and my Arabic...I considered myself the person who spoke the best Arabic in class but when I went to the newspaper, it was below average. So when I joined An-Nahar, I had a real problem with Arabic but I did not lack any of the ingredients to be a journalist or the longing to pursue this profession and my interest and enthusiasm to be a journalist.

Although LAU is a Lebanese American university, I think Arabic is very important. We're an Arab country and if we really consider how many (English-language) newspapers and magazines there are in the country, they're at a minimum and they can't really absorb the number of graduates they're receiving each year.

Maybe if there's an institution where you are taught some of the language skills, special journalistic language, it would be very good. You should take into consideration that a minimum of two languages should be required, and Arabic is the basis, before English.

Scarone: I think there are two very important points, the first one being that even though she felt there were certain things she needed to improve, this is how it should be. The employers should be free to determine who they're going to hire, or not. There should be no law saying you cannot hire that person because she cannot speak Arabic or her English is not so good, or the French is not good.

What the syndicate decides, as to who they'll admit, is purely the syndicate's business. There's no way we or the government can say anything about it. I personally think it's a shame it takes so long for people to get admitted.

What's important here is that you got that job and you started working there even though you weren't in the syndicate. The employer decided that you were good enough to hire. We all would like the journalists to have higher levels in linguistic abilities, professional abilities. The journalist needs to be trained. Then it's up to the employer to decide whether that person is qualified enough or not.

But what we really would not like to see here, or anywhere else in the world, is any kind of legal restriction on who can be a journalist. There should be the freedom to hire journalists and the effort to raise their standards.

Q: I got the chance quickly. Many people like me who spend years trying to enter the syndicate still find a job. But what I'm saying is that we lack institutions that prepare journalists. My experience in journalism is still humble. But there are a lot of experts who write on specific topics and they don't have a BA in journalism.

But if there were any institutions to provide journalistic skills in Arabic, it would be much better than what exists now.

Q: Some of our leading journalists over the past century didn't specialize in journalism. It's a talent, like poetry. We can't legislate that a journalist has to be a degree holder. In the syndicates we're tackling this problem separately from other related problems. Today we have a disease in the country called unions, ministries, institutions. Political leaders also try to impose their followers on the unions from the lowest street cleaners to the highest positions. We don't seek qualified people.

There are warped institutions in the country, particularly universities, with all due respect to them. I'm in Lebanon and speak English, French and Arabic. There must be some balance in the teaching of languages because the journalist I'm trying to mold should be able to hit the ground running in any language.

Saab: We are a leading newspaper with a long history in the field. We are not a charity organization. We deal with talents. We deal with professionalism. All we offer new graduates is the chance to prove that they are qualified. We generally receive them for three months during the summer. It's a test. You have to find someone on the desk to take care of them, to read the copy, to comment, to rewrite it. It doesn't exist in Lebanon. That's why I suggested the syndicate have some kind of training program.

We never ask if someone has a diploma, but if he/she is not well prepared through the university he/she can't do the job.

Every year we take two, three or four out of 40 trainees. But we would like to ask the faculties to review their programs and create a link between the newspaper and the faculties. In the past year I received high school students, but no requests from universities to send people to see how the newspaper or the printing process work.

Abu-Fadil: I'd like to add a technical/professional question. As you well know, editors, middle managers, reporters, all the way up to publishers go through training sessions periodically to improve their skills, to expand their knowledge. But they have to take time out and time is such a valuable element. You may be so busy putting out the paper, meeting that deadline, doing the story, when do you find the time to do that? And do you not feel that there is a need for workshops, training on a regular basis?

Saab: Nobody can imagine how happy an editor is when he finds very good copy. Even if it's full of mistakes. We're looking for talented people. Give me talented people and I'll give you a newspaper.

PROPOSED GUIDELINES FOR GOOD JOURNALISTIC PRACTICE

Preamble:

These guidelines for a code of good journalistic practice are dedicated to journalists in Lebanon (and by extension the Arab World). They aim at ensuring that all those practicing journalism adhere to the highest ethical standards, professional competence and exemplary conduct in carrying out their duties.

A journalist should strive to maintain the highest professional standards by observing the following guidelines regarding sources, gifts/junkets/benefits, accuracy/fairness and freedom/privacy/relevance:

A. Sources:

- Not plagiarize. Information obtained from other media organizations or other sources must be clearly identified as such.
- Clearly identify pictures, videos and reports from other sources by providing references to the sources in print, on the air and on screen.
- Identify handout video, video news releases, standard press kits, etc., which should only be used when other video or other still pictures are unavailable.
- Protect confidential sources of information, unless deceived by those sources.
- Make adequate inquiries and cross-check his/her facts. Substantiate news from private or public sources before publishing or broadcasting it.
- Question sources' motives before promising anonymity.
- Corroborate information from unnamed sources through one or more sources and/or by documentary data.
- Not allow unnamed sources to attack others or take cheap shots in stories.

B. Gifts/Junkets/Benefits:

- Not accept money, paid trips, gifts or bribes from sources he/she covers. Accepting gifts compromises journalistic impartiality, or the appearance thereof. Avoid any appearance of conflict of interest that may occur through contracts, favors or public commitments. Not work for an institution he/she covers.
- Pay his/her own way or acknowledge the fact that he/she was offered special accommodations as part of his/her work – such as riding on an interviewee's jet or staying at a private estate to interview the person.
- Disclose any direct or indirect payment made for interviews. Not pay people who act as information sources.
- Not use journalistic position for personal gain. Not take private advantage of information gained in the course of his/her duties before it is made public.
- Not endorse by advertisement any commercial product or service except to promote his/her own work or the medium by which he/she is employed. Not promise a story in exchange of advertising.
- Not be influenced by vested interests, whether they are commercial, political, governmental or non-governmental.
- Not work in public relations, publicity or teaching of courses on how to deal with the media, or in staged news conferences to prepare public officials in such dealings, to avoid partisanship.
- Not threaten to publish/broadcast or not publish/broadcast a story for the purpose of unlawful benefit.

C. Accuracy/Fairness:

- Be honest, fair, impartial, independent, respect the rights of others, respect human rights, constantly pursue accuracy, be tolerant, put a high value on individuals' honor, maintain decency, have strong values, and, exercise moderation and common sense.
- Admit errors, correct them and apologize when necessary. Rectify any information found or likely to be harmfully inaccurate.
- Identify still pictures correctly and not manipulate them. Not manipulate audio, video or interactive information for illegal or unethical purposes. Clearly identify a symbolic photograph, noting in the caption that it is not a documentary picture.
- Not allow personal beliefs or commitments to undermine accuracy, fairness and independence.
- Work towards eliminating distortion, news suppression and censorship.
- Avoid the expression of comment and conjecture as established fact and falsification by distortion, selection or misrepresentation.

- Not originate material that encourages discrimination on the grounds of race, color, creed, gender, language, political affiliations, social origins, physical or mental condition, or sexual orientation.
- Not libel, slander, or engage in malicious misinterpretation.
- Proceed with great caution in publishing names of, or information about, members of police or security forces, which may endanger their lives or those of their families. Collaborate with police only if the lives and health of victims or other persons involved in incidents of threats or violence can be protected or saved by a journalist's actions.
- Respect standards of taste and decency and not offend the public unless the public interest is furthered by confrontation with seemingly offensive truths.
- Separate comments from facts. Put facts and opinions in their proper context so they are understandable, without exaggerating or diminishing their scope.
- Respect embargoes on stories.
- Write headlines that match the contents of the articles they accompany.
- Not publish rumors unless they come from credible sources and contribute to the understanding of events. They must always be identified as rumors.
- Not distort the meaning of people's words by distorting quotations or their sequence.
- Not, as a rule, obtain information through undercover means such as false identity, hidden microphones and cameras, spying, infiltrating, or misleading reasons about the news coverage. In exceptional cases journalists may do so if it is of definite public interest, where reprehensible actions must be exposed, or the information cannot be obtained through other means.
- Not use hidden cameras, recorders or microphones where a promise was made not to use them at all.
- Always identify re-enactments and dramatizations. Not present staged or rehearsed material as spontaneous. Not manipulate reality by inciting demonstrators to use violence or agitation to violence in front of the cameras.
- Respect the presumed innocence of suspects and the accused and not present them as criminals, by using the conditional.
- Not become a platform for propaganda in hostage, terrorism, riot or barricade situations since the presence of the media can excite a crowd.
- Respect pluralism.
- Be responsible for his/her statements and work.
- Inform the public how the selection of products was made and how they were tested in the case of consumer-oriented journalistic material.
- Indicate the number of people interviewed, the date a poll was conducted and identify of a poll's sponsor, when publishing findings by opinion polling organizations, particularly during elections.
- Exercise restraint when reporting on cases of suicide.
- Reject sensationalism or misleading emphasis.
- Seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing.
- Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting.
- Be accountable, clarify news coverage and invite public dialogue over journalistic conduct.
- Encourage the public to voice grievances against news media.
- Expose unethical practices of journalists and news media.

D. Freedom/Privacy/Relevance:

- Not use relatives or friends in print or on the air unless they are prominent in their own right or part of a story.
- Not violate people's right to privacy or endanger their lives. Not intrude into private grief and distress, unless justified by public interest considerations.
- Exercise particular care for the welfare of children and consider the impact of TV, radio and other media on children. Not interview minors except in the presence of, or with the consent of, a parent or guardian, unless an interview is intended to protect a child's interests or if the child is already under close public attention.
- Not identify victims and juvenile offenders.
- Try to ensure that life threatening, anti-social or criminal behavior does not encourage copycat actions.
- Defend the principles of freedom of the press and promote freedom of expression.
- Cultivate and defend the public right to receive information about issues of public interest. Be responsible and constantly mindful not to impair public interests.

- Recognize conflicting loyalties, search for alternatives and consider consequences.
- Inform, educate, entertain and enrich the lives of readers, listeners, viewers or browsers.

Recommendations:

1. There should be no restrictions on who may practice journalism.
2. There should be no legal requirement for membership in any journalists' association or federation.
3. Journalists should be tried under civil, not criminal, law.
4. Lebanon should strive to pass into law a Freedom of Information Act.

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