



## EDITORIAL GUIDELINES

The Seychelles News Agency editors, correspondents and photographers should maintain high professional and ethical standards and abide by the Editorial Guidelines<sup>1</sup> with the purpose of producing high quality journalism, while establishing trust with the readership as well as protecting the integrity and credibility of the SNA.

**The Seychelles News Agency is committed to these guiding principles:**

1. Obligation to tell the truth : Always hold accuracy sacrosanct.
2. Never fabricate or plagiarise information or alter a still or moving image beyond the requirements of normal image enhancement.
3. Safeguard the rights of the public to accurate and truthful information: be accountable to the public.
4. Practice a discipline of fact verification and persistence: Accuracy, as well as balance, always takes precedence over speed.
5. Always guard against putting own opinion in a news story.
6. Always correct an error openly.
7. Maintain independence from those that are covered: Always strive for balance and freedom from bias.
8. Protect freedom of expression: give a voice to the voiceless.
9. Minimize harm- sources, subjects and colleagues are human beings deserving respect.
10. Be an independent monitor of powerful groups.
11. Enable a forum for public criticism and compromise.
12. Strive to make the significant relevant and interesting: readers should not fall asleep.
13. Keep the news comprehensive and proportional: avoid sensationalism.
14. Exercise personal conscience.
15. Engage in ethical behaviour: Always reveal a conflict of interest to an editor, never pay for a story and never accept a bribe. Inform readers if free travel or accommodation was offered while reporting a story.
16. Ensure respect for human dignity, suffering, privacy and freedom from discrimination
17. Always respect privileged information and protect sources.
18. Maintain high standards of integrity and good taste.

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<sup>1</sup> Substantial proportions of the code and guidelines have been adapted from the Seychelles Media Commission Code of Conduct, the [BBC Editorial Guidelines](#), [the National Public Radio \(US\) Ethics guide](#), and [The Guardian's Editorial Code](#). For election coverage, the Principles for Broadcast Coverage of Elections in the SADC Region were used.

# Professional Practice

## 1 Accurate, fair, impartial journalism

### 1.1 Accuracy

- 1.1.1 The accuracy of a report must be vital and appropriate to the output, taking account of the subject and nature of the content, the international audience expectation and any circumstances, previous reports or news standards that may influence that expectation.
- 1.1.2 SNA should spend time and effort to verify information in order to give timely and accurate reports. In news and current affairs content, achieving due accuracy is more important than speed.
- 1.1.3 If a new story has been updated online, the new time and date of additional information must be included at the end of the story.
- 1.1.4 Digital recorders should be used for interviews and recordings kept in archives on hard drives. In circumstances where recording might inhibit the source, full notes should be made, preferably at the time or, if not, as soon as possible afterwards.
- 1.1.5 SNA should not publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information, including pictures.
- 1.1.6 A significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion once recognized must be corrected promptly and - where appropriate - an apology published at the end of the online article.
- 1.1.7 SNA shall clearly distinguish between news, opinion and advertisements.
- 1.1.8 The SNA news reports should not take a partisan stance, articles which are have much one-sided opinion should be labelled under the Editorial section so it is distinguished clearly as opinion, comment, and conjecture and not as news or fact.
- 1.1.9 SNA must report fairly and accurately the outcome of an action for defamation to which it has been a party, unless an agreed settlement states otherwise, or an agreed statement is published.
- 1.1.10 SNA aims to report the facts, not rumours. Readers rely on SNA to differentiate between fact and rumour and SNA's reputation rests partly on that. SNA should cite multiple reliable on-the-record sources whenever

possible.

- 1.1.11 Accuracy is not simply a matter of getting facts right. If an issue is controversial, relevant opinions as well as facts may need to be considered. When necessary, all the relevant facts and information should also be weighed to get at the truth.
- 1.1.12 Where appropriate to the output, SNA should: gather material using first hand sources wherever possible, check and cross check facts, validate the authenticity of documentary evidence and digital material, corroborate claims and allegations made by contributors wherever possible.

## **1.2 News and information sources**

- 1.2.1 Save for confidential sources, SNA must acknowledge sources wherever and whenever possible and refrain from plagiarism.
- 1.2.2 SNA editors and journalists have a moral obligation to protect confidential sources of information.
- 1.2.3 Material from anonymous sources may be used only if: (1) The material is information and not critical opinion or speculation, and is vital to the news report; (2) the information is not available except under the conditions of anonymity imposed by the source. (3)The source is reliable, and in a position to have accurate information.
- 1.2.4 Even if sources wish to remain anonymous, their comments should be recorded on a digital recorder or via email, or if they refuse, then full timely notes of interviews, conversations and information that they provide the basis for the story must be kept in case of need to present evidence to an editor, or in the cases of defense of SNA in a court of law.
- 1.2.5 A source who willingly contributed to a report may suddenly decide, before it is published, to withdraw their comments or contribution. Generally no one has a right to prevent their contribution being used, but SNA should carefully listen to any reasonable objections, and remove their comments if justifiable on minimising harm to the source.
- 1.2.6 SNA editors and journalists should identify themselves when gathering news and opinions as a matter of courtesy unless doing so will place them in danger or it is impractical.
- 1.2.7 Clandestine devices and subterfuge should not be used. SNA should not seek to obtain or publish material acquired by using hidden cameras or clandestine listening devices; or by intercepting private or mobile telephone calls, messages or e-mails; or by the unauthorized or illegal removal of documents or photographs.

- 1.2.8 SNA should try to witness events and gather information first hand. Where this is not possible, SNA should talk to first hand sources and, where necessary, corroborate their evidence. SNA should be reluctant to rely on a single source. If SNA does rely on a single source, a named on-the-record source is always preferable.
- 1.2.9 Particular care is required when researching on the internet or using material from websites. Even normally reliable sources of information on the web may not always be accurate. We should also be alert to the possibility of hoax websites; the most convincing material on the web may not be what it seems. It may be necessary to check who is running the website or confirm with an individual or organisation that the material is genuine.
- 1.2.10 SNA does not pay for information from sources or newsmakers.
- 1.2.11 SNA does not allow sources to dictate how a topic will be covered, or which other voices or ideas will be included in the stories it does.

### **1.3 Fairness and Impartiality**

- 1.3.1 To tell the truest story possible, it is essential that SNA treats those it interviews and reports on with scrupulous fairness, guided by a spirit of professionalism.
- 1.3.2 SNA will be open, honest and straightforward in its dealings with sources and audiences, unless there is a clear public interest in doing otherwise, or SNA needs to consider important legal issues or issues of confidentiality.
- 1.3.3 SNA should make every effort to gather responses from those who are the subjects of criticism, unfavourable allegations or other negative assertions in SNA stories.
- 1.3.4 When a person or company has been charged with wrongdoing by official sources, SNA must carefully avoid presenting facts in a manner that presumes guilt.
- 1.3.5 Whenever SNA quotes, edits or otherwise interprets what people say, SNA aims to be faithful to their meaning, so that SNA stories ring true to those it interviews. If SNA has any doubt about what a person interviewed meant, the journalist or editor should speak with them before publication of the story to prevent any misunderstandings.
- 1.3.6 SNA places a high value on earning the respect and trust of all sides when reporting on complex or controversial subjects, by sticking to facts and to language that is clear, compelling and neutral, so that all sides have been considered and represented fairly.
- 1.3.7 SNA may have difficulty getting responses from sources on the same day or

next day for a news item. Unless the matter is urgent, SNA should give reasonable amounts time for sources to respond, and try several routes of communication to reach them, and cultivate good relationships in this way. What SNA considers “a reasonable amount of time” will vary depending on the situation, determined after a thorough discussion involving the journalist and appropriate editors, in high-profile or sensitive matters.

- 1.3.8 When quoting from other media organisations’ work, SNA strives properly credit it to it and provides a hyperlink. SNA does not quote or paraphrase another organization’s material so much that it effectively make reading, watching to their reports unnecessary. Excessive quotation is effectively plagiarism, which SNA takes no part in.

## **1.4 Independence**

- 1.4.1 SNA is aware of other media and uses multiple media sources, but it exercises its own news judgment. SNA editors or journalists do not put their heads in the sand when good stories appear elsewhere in the media but by the same token, SNA should not adopting other news organizations’ assumptions about what’s important in framing headlines, shaping assignments or bringing in commentaries.
- 1.4.2 For social media and online photography, when posting or gathering material online, SNA considers the terms of service and always hyperlinks the original source.
- 1.4.3 SNA notes, audio and working materials from our journalistic work belong to SNA. SNA does not turn them over to any parties involved in or considering litigation, nor will SNA provide information it has observed in the course of conducting journalism. If such materials or information are requested pursuant to governmental, administrative or other legal process, immediately consult an editor.
- 1.4.4 SNA should use press releases and other handout materials carefully. We must take into account that press releases and other handout materials (such as images) from organizations we cover are usually delivered with the intent of portraying the subject in the best possible light. Therefore SNA should conduct its own research on the context and background in order to give a perspective that is beyond the press release scope.
- 1.4.5 SNA does not publish staged photos unless there’s a compelling news reason for doing so. If there is, we disclose this fact to the audience.
- 1.4.6 For purposes of accuracy and fairness, there are times when SNA may want to review portions of a story with a source or email/read back a quotation to ensure SNA captured it correctly. SNA may also play audio or read transcripts of an interview to a third party if the purpose is to get that party’s reaction to what another person has said. Otherwise, however, the public is the first

audience for SNA work — SNA does not preview stories in advance of their posting with sources, subjects of coverage or other parties outside SNA.

- 1.4.7 SNA greatly appreciates the financial support it receives from advertising revenue from organisations for the Journalism Promotion Fund. At the same time, SNA makes its own decisions about what stories to cover and how to report them. See *Personal Behaviour and Conflicts of Interest*.

## **1.5 Politics and Elections Reporting**

- 1.5.1 SNA shall abide by the provisions laid down by the Electoral Commission in its pursuit of free and fair elections and a responsible media landscape.
- 1.5.2 Editors and journalists working fulltime for party political newspapers cannot work as freelancers for the news agency. Exceptions may be made in circumstances where the reporting is for sports or entertainment features.
- 1.5.3 Journalists freelancing for political party newspapers may work as only freelancers for the news agency, and are not expected to report on political affairs.
- 1.5.4 Editors and journalists of the news agency must not take part in political party events or wear party garments, insignia or memorabilia outside of election campaign time or during election campaign time.
- 1.5.5 When attending political party events on behalf of the news agency, editors and journalists of the news agency need to wear their Press ID badge.
- 1.5.6 Editors and journalists with close family members who are high ranking political party officials must disclose this information to the Co-Editors, and avoid covering events of that party.
- 1.5.7 If editors or journalists are intimidated or subject to violence from electoral stakeholders, a report must be made on the same day of incident to the Seychelles Police, the Electoral Commission and to the Seychelles Media Commission.
- 1.5.8 On polling days, SNA coverage will be restricted to uncontroversial factual accounts, such as the appearance of politicians at polling stations or the weather. Subjects which have been at issue or part of the campaign, or other controversial matters relating to the election, must not receive coverage on polling day, to ensure that nothing in the Seychelles News Agency's output can be construed as influencing the ballot while the polls are open.

## **News Values**

1.5.9 Political statements and opinions must be weighed against standard news values, therefore the agency we must ensure that:

- 1.5.9.1 news judgements continue to drive editorial decision making in news articles
- 1.5.9.2 news judgements at election time are made within a framework of democratic debate which ensures that due weight is given to hearing the views and examining and challenging the policies of all parties.
- 1.5.9.3 Significant smaller parties should also receive some news coverage during the campaign
- 1.5.9.4 Focus should be on issues of relevance and interest to citizens and not purely to cover events of political parties/contestants
- 1.5.9.5 Political party newspapers may be used as news sources, as well as direct communications with officials.

## **Democratic values, balance and impartiality**

1.5.10 The aim of election coverage is to provide accurate, fair, impartial and balanced information about election procedures, positions of political parties/independents and/or candidates on issues, therefore;

- 1.5.10.1 The news agency's features should provide comparative analysis of the party manifestos, candidates, campaigns, rallies, with diverse views from the electorate.
- 1.5.10.2 Editors and journalists must take responsibility for achieving due impartiality in their own output and redress any imbalance in them when necessary them. For instance, it is not usually required for an comment by a politician, or other contributor with partial views, to be balanced on each occasion by those taking a contrary view, although it may sometimes be necessary to offer a right of reply.
- 1.5.10.3 When politicians or party spokespersons refuse to comment, this needs to be clearly stated in a report, so that the right to reply or comment has been established.

- 1.5.10.4 The news agency will not publish views that could incite violence or advocate hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion or political conviction and that constitute incitement to cause harm.

### **Equitable treatment of political parties**

- 1.5.11 Editors should treat all political parties/contestants equitably to ensure fair play during election time.
  - 1.5.11.1 Equitable treatment does not mean equal treatment nor does it mean editors will abandon their news values.
  - 1.5.11.2 Equitable treatment means fair treatment which may be achieved in a single article, where possible, or over time in several articles.
  - 1.5.11.3 Party leaders may each be provided with 1 opportunity for a Q& A extended interviews during a National Assembly election campaign, and the same applies for Presidential election candidates.
  - 1.5.11.4 Editors will afford political parties and or candidates the right of reply where a report was published which contains inaccurate information or distortion of facts on the same day of posting online, or if facts need verification, then 24 hours, with a clear indication that a correction has been made, and the date and time of correction.
  - 1.5.11.5 In instances of conflict about the right of reply, the news agency will ensure timely independent arbitration via the Seychelles Media Commission.



## **2 Minimising Harm**

### **2.1 Minimise negative impact to the public**

- 2.1.1 A reputation for accurate, balanced reporting is one of SNA's biggest assets. SNA must not shy away from painful reality, but it should also seek to minimise any harm to the public through its actions.
- 2.1.2 The people who make the news are vulnerable to the impact of SNA stories. In extreme cases, their lives or their reputations could depend on SNA reporting.
- 2.1.3 When covering people in the news, SNA journalists should avoid needless pain and offence and treat victims with sensitivity.
- 2.1.4 SNA avoids gossip about the private lives of public figures, and avoids sensationalism and hype.
- 2.1.5 SNA is committed to integrity, impartiality, persistence, accountability and humility when covering people.
- 2.1.6 SNA shall not encourage, glamorise or condone the use of illegal drugs, the abuse of drugs, smoking, solvent abuse and the misuse of alcohol.
- 2.1.7 SNA should not publish material that may encourage or glorify violence, terrorist activities, ethnic, racial or religious hostilities and xenophobia.

### **2.2 Human Dignity and Respect**

- 2.2.1 SNA should avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability unless genuinely relevant to the story.
- 2.2.2 SNA should avoid use of offensive language, violence, sex, humiliation and expressions that violate human dignity.
- 2.2.3 SNA should not engage in bullying, intimidation, harassment or persistent pursuit of private individuals in their daily life.
- 2.2.4 SNA should not persist in questioning, telephoning, pursuing or photographing private individuals once asked to desist; nor remain on their property when asked to leave and must not follow them. Editors should ensure these principles are observed by those working for them and take care not to use material from other sources that practice this kind of information gathering..
- 2.2.5 In cases involving personal grief or shock, enquiries and approaches must be made with sympathy and discretion and publication handled sensitively. This should not restrict the right to report legal proceedings.
- 2.2.6 Photographs and video from conflicts, accidents and crime or disaster scenes

shall be used with sensitivity and not to add further to the sufferings of victims and relatives and with due regard to the public interest and good taste.

- 2.2.7 SNA shall not engage in character assassination or defamation, such as making a statement which tends to lower a person in the estimation of right-thinking members of society generally or which tends to make them shun or avoid that person, or a statement that exposes a person to hatred, ridicule, contempt or disparages him in his office, profession or trade, which could result in court action for slander or libel.

## **2.3 Privacy**

- 2.3.1 Everyone is entitled to respect for his or her private and family life, home, health and correspondence, including digital communications. The restrictions on intruding into privacy are particularly relevant to enquiries about individuals in hospitals or similar institutions.
- 2.3.2 It is unacceptable to photograph individuals without their consent in private places; which can be public or private property where there is a reasonable expectation of privacy.
- 2.3.3 SNA journalists must identify themselves and obtain permission from an official of the Ministry of Health before entering non-public areas of hospitals or similar institutions to pursue enquiries.
- 2.3.4 SNA does not try to take photographs of foreign celebrities on the beach or other places in Seychelles, even if they are considered public places, if the celebrities are in Seychelles for a private holiday. If they are on an official visit, or have posted images or text to social media, or international news sources have reported their presence, then the principle does not apply.

## **2.4 Children**

- 2.4.1 Young people should be free to complete their time at school without unnecessary intrusion. Pupils must not be approached or photographed at school without the permission of the school authorities.
- 2.4.2 A child under 18 must not be interviewed or photographed on issues involving their own or another child's welfare unless a custodial parent or similarly responsible adult consents or is present.
- 2.4.3 Minors must not be paid for material involving children's welfare, nor parents or guardians for material about their children or wards, unless it is clearly established that this would not harm the child's interest.
- 2.4.4 Editors must not use the fame, notoriety or position of a parent or guardian as sole justification for publishing details of a child's private life.

## 2.5 Reporting of Crime, Violence, Judicial Proceedings

- 2.5.1 As a news agency that has a primary international audience, SNA does not report on common incidents of crime or accidents, natural deaths in public areas, fights, rape or other forms of violence between individuals in Seychelles.
- 2.5.2 Exceptions to 2.5.1 include, (a) deaths of high profile Seychellois public figures (b) accidents of high profile Seychellois public figures (c) Seychellois nationals arrested for serious crimes or tried in courts abroad (d) deaths of foreign nationals, (e) drownings of Seychellois nationals (f) serious road or sea accidents involving large numbers of fatalities and injured persons (g) arrests, criminal or civil cases involving high profile public figures which may affect their professional integrity (h) murders and the outcomes of murder trials (i) Seychellois or foreign nationals missing at sea and (j) large illegal drugs busts and significant drug trafficking trials.
- 2.5.3 Relatives or friends of persons convicted or accused of crime should not generally be identified unless they are genuinely relevant to the story.
- 2.5.4 Particular regard should be paid to the potentially vulnerable position of children who witness, or are victims of, crime. This should not restrict the right to report legal proceedings.
- 2.5.5 In reporting on proceedings of *sub-judice* cases, in the interest of justice, the SNA shall refrain from publishing detailed accounts of evidence in ongoing court cases, especially in criminal cases, so that upcoming witness evidence is not influenced.
- 2.5.6 The SNA shall not publish interviews with lawyers in a *sub-judice* case; the SNA can report what is being said in open Court to the Judge, and reserve direct interviews with lawyers until after the verdict has been delivered.

## 2.6 Religion

- 2.6.1 SNA should take care that comments from sources concerning religious news or features should not be allowed to undermine or denigrate the religious beliefs of others. Religion and religious views may be criticised but SNA should ensure there is appropriate context and critical views are open to challenge.
- 2.6.2 Any content dealing with matters of religion and likely to cause offence to those with religious views and beliefs must be editorially justified as judged against generally accepted standards and must be referred to a senior editorial figure.

## 3 Personal behaviour and conflicts of interest

### 3.1 Relationships

- 3.1.1 All SNA editors and journalists must tell their supervisors in advance about potential conflicts of interest in any business, commercial, financial or personal interests where such interests might reasonably be construed as being in actual, apparent or potential conflict with their duties. This includes situations in which a spouse, family member or companion is an active participant in a subject area that you cover.
- 3.1.2 A romantic or family attachment with a news source or with a person or persons who might be the subject of a staff member's coverage should be disclosed to their supervisor. Journalists may also not report on or quote family members in order to avoid a perception of favouritism or bias.
- 3.1.3 When a spouse, family member or companion is involved in political activity, be sensitive to the fact that this could create real or apparent conflicts of interest. In such instances, advise your supervisor so that it can be determined whether you should recuse yourself from a certain story or certain coverage. During the course of reporting, SNA editors and journalists may end up in poor relationship, an argument or other kind of conflict with a source or organisation. Although care should be taken to avoid such situations, when this happens, they should report it to an editor. The editor may choose to reassign the story, or to add another journalist to gather information, or may try to resolve the conflict directly with the source. The output of the final report should not in any way reflect the conflict, other than to say the person or organisation 'did not respond/ comment.'
- 3.1.4 SNA editors and journalists may report on religious events of the religious groups they belong to, however they should avoid reporting on matters of controversy which may become a conflict of interest to them, and should report any discomfort in their reporting to their supervisor. Equally supervisors are justified in reallocating reporting assignments if they are not satisfied that a religious matter will be treated with objectivity.

## **3.2 Public commentary**

- 3.2.1 SNA editors should avoid appearing on television or radio discussion shows, to take part in highly political debates.
- 3.2.2 SNA editors may appear in other media reports to talk about journalism, SNA or the news of the day, but not to offer opinions. If asked to offer opinions when on the air, SNA should base answers on their reporting and offer context, rather than personal opinions.
- 3.2.3 SNA editors and journalist should let their reporting, not personal opinions, guide their actions and comments in all types of public settings, from live appearances on TV to postings on social media sites.

## **3.3 Revenue and Outside Work**

- 3.3.1 SNA do not write stories, take photographs or film events to help clinch an advertising contract or alter its coverage of a company, government or institution to suit SNA advertising revenue interests.
- 3.3.2 SNA journalists must not use for their own profit financial information they receive in advance of its general publication, nor should they pass such information to others for their profit.
- 3.3.3 In general, SNA editors may not do work for government or agencies principally funded by a government, or for private organizations that are regularly covered by SNA. This includes work that would be done on leaves of absence. SNA may permit exceptions for activities that don't seem to pose a risk of undermining its credibility where the editor or reporter agrees to recuse himself or herself from reporting on that organization. Approval is needed from the Project Administrator.
- 3.3.4 SNA editors and journalists may belong to non-governmental organisations of their choice. SNA's interest is in avoiding even the perception of bias, therefore they should avoid reporting on their work of the NGO's they belong to. If this cannot be avoided due to lack of staff available, then they may report on the NGO but must have the editorial input and approval of a Co-editor, and also this relationship should be stated either in the correspondent's profile on the website in the Our Team section, or at the end of the story in question. i.e. *Giovanna Freminot is an SNA correspondent, who is also an active member of the Seychelles Red Cross Society.*

### **3.4 Free travel, accommodation, gifts**

- 3.4.1 SNA may accept cost free offers of air and boat tickets to cover assignments. This should be clearly stated at the end of a report i.e. *Robert Hoareau flew in the economy class to Paris as a guest of Air Seychelles.*
- 3.4.2 SNA reporters covering tourism or restaurant establishments may accept lunch, dinner, night's stay, if it is relevant to the story, and this must be approved by the supervisor, and must be stated at the end of the report...ie. *Jane Dubignon had a complimentary lunch at the Savoy Resort during the course of her reporting.*
- 3.4.3 The people and organizations SNA includes in its coverage are often appreciative of its work but SNA does not accept compensation, including property or benefits of any kind, from people or institutions SNA covers, except gifts of token value (hats, mugs, t-shirts, etc.).
- 3.4.4 If SNA editors or journalists receive unsolicited gifts of significant value (more than 1000 Seychelles Rupees), they should thank the sender, explain our policy and return the item (or, if it's perishable, direct it to a worthy cause unaffiliated with SNA). Free lunch or accommodation offers that are not related to reporting work, should be politely declined.

## 4 Complaints

The SNA reputation for 'getting it right' and 'reporting it fairly' is something it is proud of. It is a key part of attracting and keeping readers returning to the site. Sometimes SNA may get the wrong information, and it is important for its reputation to fix it when this happens.

Responding promptly and properly to complaints that SNA receives about lack of accuracy, balance or ethical considerations, can avoid what could become costly legal problems, or widespread bad publicity.

Complaints from any quarter - a source, a member of the public, or a colleague in SNA - must be investigated promptly so that immediate corrective action can be taken if it proves to be well founded. Complaints that cannot be immediately investigated must be reported to the Project Administrator at once and followed up quickly.

Complaints should be emailed to [editor@seychellesnewsagency.com](mailto:editor@seychellesnewsagency.com) .