

The Code of Conduct for the Mass  
Media and Journalists on the Manner  
of Reporting  
About Elections Regulation  
Number 6/2010

Whereas the need to ensure the upcoming elections is credible, transparent, free, fair, peaceful and democratic a code of conduct that guides the mass media and journalists is necessary

Understanding that mass media is indispensable to transmit to the public all election-related information that election administration bodies disclose

Convinced of the need to adopt a code of conduct that binds all mass media, political parties, candidates, and election administration bodies in such a way that no party encroach on the rights and freedoms of another,

Recognizing the crucial role that the mass media plays in a democratic election by providing information that enhances public knowledge about the electoral process so that voters may made informed choices.

Cognizant of the need to empower the media to function in a neutral fashion free from the influences of government, political parties or any candidate ,and recognizing the desirability of a conducive environment that encourages citizens to actively participate in the election by providing voters with comprehensive information.

Convinced of the need to introduce a system that enables the mass media and journalists to carry out their election coverage that reflects high professional and ethical standards over which consensus has been reached among stakeholders through open consultative sessions.

Now, therefore, pursuant to article 50 (4) 91(4) and 110 of revised election proclamation number 532/1999, it is hereby proclaimed as follows

**Article 1. Short Title**

This Regulation maybe cited as “Code of Conduct for the Reporting of Elections Regulation Number 6/2010”

## Article 2. Definitions

Unless the context requires otherwise:

1. “Mass Media” shall mean an activity that includes periodicals and broadcasts (electronics media).
2. “Electoral Law” shall mean the Electoral Law Amendment Proclamation No. 532/2007.
3. “Board” shall mean the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia which has established pursuant the Electoral Law.
4. “Election-Related Message” shall mean a campaign message aimed at convincing voters, presented by a party competing in an election, and it includes any analysis or opinion forwarded by candidates.
5. “Political Advertisement” shall mean a radio, television or newspaper message conveyed by a political party registered for an election, by paying or promising to pay for the announcement.
6. “Political Party” or “Political Organization” shall mean a legally registered social entity formed by a group of persons with the purpose of seizing political power through democratic elections by participating at the national or regional political activities, and by developing a program that reflects its own political beliefs and objectives.
7. “Election period” shall mean the period starting from the time the Board issues the electoral timetable until the final result of the election is officially announced by the Board.
8. “Election news or current affairs report” shall mean news or report having national or international content, and connected to political, social or economic matters which focuses on election related matters. It shall also include analysis and opinions given on these matters.
9. “Person” shall mean a natural or juridical person.

### **Article 3. The objective**

The objective of this code is to enable the media houses and journalists contribute their part to the electoral process by communicating political messages from parties and candidates; relaying important voter information from election administrators; and subjecting the whole election process to independent scrutiny and comment.

### **Article 4. Scope of application**

This code of conduct shall be applicable to any journalist or media house that is engaged in the production, transmission or dissemination of news, reportage, or information concerning election.

### **Article 5. Respect for the law**

Every journalist and media entities shall comply with the constitution and other laws and regulations including regulations issued by national electoral board of Ethiopia.

### **Article 6. The responsibility of journalists**

Every journalist shall:

1. report accurately and without bias.
2. report only fact-based information that the journalist knows the origin. A journalist shall not suppress essential information.
3. observe professional secrecy regarding the source of information obtained in confidence.
4. report in a balanced manner. If a candidate makes an allegation against another candidate, the journalist should wherever possible seek comment from both sides
5. do the utmost to correct any published information that is found to be harmfully inaccurate.
6. as far as possible, report the views of candidates and political parties directly and in their own words, rather than as they are interpreted by others.

7. avoid using language or expressing sentiments that may further discrimination or violence on any grounds, including race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national or social origins.
8. when reporting the opinions of those who do advocate discrimination or violence, do the utmost to put such views in a clear context and to report the opinions of those against whom such sentiments are directed.
9. not accept any inducement from a political party , candidate or from any other source.
10. not make any promise to a political party , candidate or about the content of a news report.
11. take care in reporting the findings of opinion polls. Any report should wherever possible include the following information:
  - a) who commissioned and carried out the poll and when
  - b) how many people were interviewed, where and how

- were they interviewed and what is the margin of error
  - c) what was the exact wording of the questions.

12. regard the following as grave professional offences:
  - a) plagiarism
  - b) malicious misrepresentation
  - c) calumny, slander, libel or unfounded accusations
  - d) acceptance of a bribe in any form in consideration of either
  - e) publication or suppression.

#### **Article 7. The responsibility of the media**

1. Every media shall make a clear separation between fact and comment. News reporting should reflect the facts as honestly perceived by journalists. Comment may reflect the editorial line of the publication.
2. Every publicly owned media shall not express an editorial opinion in favour of or against any party or candidate.

3. Every publicly owned media have a duty to be balanced and impartial in their election reporting and not to discriminate against any party in granting access to air time.
4. If media houses accept paid political advertising, they shall do so on a non-discriminatory basis and at equal rates for all parties.
5. Every media shall cover news, interviews, information or current affairs programmes or articles. The public media shall not be biased in favour of or against any party or candidate.
6. Every media shall provide equitable and regular coverage to all political parties, their candidates and platforms.
7. Every media shall encourage and provide access to the voters to express their opinion and views.
8. Every media shall promote democratic values such as the rule of good law, accountability and good governance.
9. Every media shall cover any candidate or party that makes a reasonable claim of having been defamed or otherwise injured by a broadcast or publication shall either be granted the opportunity to reply or be entitled to a correction or retraction by the broadcaster or publisher or by the person who made the allegedly defamatory statement. The reply or correction shall be broadcast or published as soon as possible.
10. Every media shall provide news coverage of press conferences and public statements concerning matters of political controversy (as opposed to functions of state) called or made by the head of government, government ministers, or members of parliament shall be subject to a right of reply or equal time rules. This obligation acquires even greater force when the person making the statement is also standing for office.

11. Every publicly owned media shall publish or broadcast voter education material.
12. Every media shall give voter education that is accurate and impartial and must effectively inform voters about the voting process, including how, when and where to vote, to register to vote and to verify proper registration; the secrecy of the ballot (and thus safety from retaliation); the importance of voting; the functions of the offices that are under contention; and similar matters.
13. Every media shall give voter education that includes programmes in minority languages and programmes targeted for groups that traditionally may have been excluded from the political process, such as women and people with disabilities.
14. Every media shall monitor their own output to make sure that it conforms to the standards set out in this code of conduct.

## **Article 8 The responsibility of political parties**

1. Every political party and candidates shall respect the freedom of the media.
2. Every political party and candidates shall not harass or obstruct journalists who are engaged in their professional activities.
3. Incumbent political party and candidates shall not abuse their office to gain unfair advantage in access to the media. This provision applies to all media, but is of particular relevance when publicly funded media are under direct control by the government of the day.
4. Every political party and candidates shall not offer bribes or inducements to journalists or media houses to encourage them to attend campaign events or to report favourably on the party or unfavourably on other parties or candidates.

5. Every political party and candidates should not misrepresent the stated positions or any other factual information about other parties and candidates.
6. Every political party and candidates should avoid using language that is inflammatory or defamatory, or that threatens or incites violence against any other person or group.
7. Party leaderships shall ensure that the standards of tolerance and free debate contained in this code of conduct are communicated and fully explained to campaign workers. Parties should take full responsibility for the words and actions of those campaigning on their behalf.

**Article 7. The responsibility of electoral management bodies**

Every electoral body shall:

1. respect the freedom of the media including their editorial independence

and right to express political preferences.

2. respect the right to freedom of expression of parties and candidates.
3. conduct the election in an open and transparent manner.
4. endeavor to make sure that their activities are open to scrutiny by the media to the fullest extent possible.
5. not favor any media outlet in the distribution of either paid advertising or free information material.
6. should use the mass media, among other means, to convey timely and accurate information to enable the electorate to exercise their right to vote in an informed manner.
7. only impose such restrictions on reporting – for example, at the polling station and the count – as are strictly necessary to ensure the integrity of the electoral process.

**Article 8. Inapplicable regulations and directives**

Any regulation, directive or practice, shall not apply to matters covered under this code

**Article 9. Effective Date**

This Regulation shall come into force on April 15, 2010, the day of its approval by the Board.

Merga Bekana (Professor)  
Chairman  
National Electoral Board of Ethiopia