

**WORKSHOP FOR SENIOR MEDIA PERSONNEL AND POLITICAL
PARTY LEADERS IN GHANA UNDER THE THEME:
“DEMOCRACY AND THE MEDIA: MEDIA POLITICAL PARTIES
RELATIONSHIP IN AN ELECTION YEAR FROM FRIDAY 28th –
SUNDAY 30th MARCH 2008 at AKOSOMBO CONTINENTAL
HOTEL
JOINT COMMUNIQUE**

Preamble

As part of its commitment to ensuring the conduct of free and fair, peaceful and transparent elections, The IEA-facilitated Ghana Political Parties’ Programme (GPPP) organized a workshop for Senior Media Personnel and Political Party Leaders to discuss the critical role of the two important stakeholders in Ghana’s democracy in ensuring peaceful elections, as well as issues of common interest.

The workshop was opened by Mrs. Oboshie Sai-Cofie, Minister of Information and National Orientation who delivered the keynote address on the theme “Democracy and the Media: Media-Political Parties’ Relations in an Elections”.

Papers were presented on the following five sub-themes:

- Providing a Media Code of Ethics with Teeth: The Role of the National Media Commission and the Ghana Journalist Association
- Addressing the Issue of Polarization, Lack of Objectivity and Biased Coverage in Reporting Events
- The Media as Watch Dog of Ghana’s Growing Democracy: Making the Media Accountable
- Interviewing Politicians: Getting the Issues to make the news
- Media- Political Parties’ Relationship in an Election Year.

The workshop frankly and exhaustively discussed the issues contained in the sub-themes and agreed as follows:

A Media Code of Ethics with Teeth

1. The media as the Fourth Estate of the Realm does not enjoy the kind of immunities available to the first three Estates. To impose external discipline on the media is therefore to further strangulate them. What is required is a kind of regulation in which media practitioners themselves would play a leading role to enable them ensure that professional and ethical principles are maintained.
2. Ethical re-writing of stories to maintain professional standards and to ensure conformity with the editorial policy of media houses is allowed in media practice, but any re-writing that results in factual inaccuracies is unacceptable.
3. Freedom of the media is an aspect of the fundamental right to free speech. Haste should therefore be made slowly with any regulation of media practice that will interfere with that right. In any case, any attempt at regulation of media content will be incompatible with the constitutional prohibition on interference with free speech.
4. The proliferation of FM radio stations occurred in the absence of a framework for the liberalized airwaves and private broadcasting and that accounts for some of

the excesses on some of the FM stations today. There is the need now for a Broadcasting Act to provide the requisite framework for public, private, community and educational broadcasting.

5. Employers of media personnel may consider incorporating the GJA Code of Ethics into their employment contracts with their journalism staff so that they could be enforced at the organizational level.

B. Polarization, Lack of Objectivity and Biased Coverage of Events

1. With the continued maturation of Ghana's democracy, one of the roles of the media is to continue to work to lessen political polarization and tension in the society, more so in an election year when there is the temptation on the part of the political class to resort to rumour mongering, exaggerated claims, provocative utterances and character assassination.
2. Given that the media is not a uniform institution, it is inevitable that they will reflect a variety of political, economic and social interests. Politicians and media practitioners must understand and appreciate this reality and work to ensure that it does not form a basis for disharmony and dysfunctionality in the run up to the December 2008 elections.
3. Fairness, accuracy and balance must be the minimum political demands to be made of journalists in an election year, whilst at the same time ensuring that basic professional standards are respected
4. Practical and sustained efforts must be made by the media to get all sides of a story before publishing it to ensure truth and objectivity in reportage
5. The principles of fair access, equal access, fair coverage and unbiased reportage must apply in a non-discriminatory manner to all political parties, whether big or small. This is an obligation imposed particularly on state-owned media by the Supreme Court in its interpretation of Article 55 (11) which states that "the State shall provide fair opportunity to all political parties to present their programmes to the public by ensuring equal access to the State-owned media. In this connection, attention is drawn to Article 55 (11) of the Constitution which states that " all presidential candidates shall be given the same amount of time and space on the State-owned media to present their programmes to the people".

C. Making The Media Accountable

1. The constitutional provision on the NMC as well as the NMC Act must be reviewed in the light of its lived experience and modifications made to the Commission's procedures, composition, functions, mode of functioning and powers of enforcement to enable it to better play its role in promoting the freedom and independence of the media as defined under Article 162 of the constitution. In particular, the NMC must be moved away from group and lobby-based interest representation to one of principled representation and the possibility of judicial enforcement of the Commission's recommendations, especially in relation to retraction and apology must be seriously considered
2. Media houses must develop in-house accountability mechanisms including the establishment of an in-house Ombudsman system to which the public can complain when they feel aggrieved.

3. The media must be accountable, but who they must be accountable to, how they must be accountable and for what they must be accountable must be the subject of public debate to feed into any future reforms which must also consider the issue of prominence and time limits for the constitutional prescription of compulsory rejoinders as well as the consequences of failure or refusal to publish such rejoinders.
4. Any framework for media accountability must take into account the phenomenon of the internet bloggers who are largely anonymous, faceless and unidentifiable but who nevertheless play the same journalistic role of informing, educating and entertaining the public

D. Interviewing Politicians

1. Media personnel who interview politicians in this election year must be competent, capable and confident. They must research into the subject matter of their interviews and must not seek to draw only of the politicians what they can do, but how they will do it
2. Politicians must avoid mudslinging of their opponents. Every political party that has been in government in the past and other previous governments have all contributed their bit to the wheel of progress. In political interviews this election year, therefore, emphasis should be on what political parties can do better, not that political parties that formed governments in the past or that previous governments did not do anything at all.
3. Given that the 2008 elections will break the election deadlock between the two main political parties that have formed the Governments of the Fourth Republic and the possibility of a different political party forming the Government, media reportage of political events, and the political and electoral processes are going to be of crucial importance. The GJA is therefore urged to examine the possibility of coming out with a “Code of Ethical Reportage in an Election Year” to guide all journalists

E. Media-Political Party Relationship in an Election Year

1. Media personnel must avoid the perception of conflict of interest or actual conflict of interest in their dealings with political parties in this election year. In particular, the media in this election year must perform as guardians of the public interest and not allow political parties with their partisan stakes in the election to perform that role.
2. Whiles it is acceptable for journalists to belong to political parties or be identified with the ideological stance of political parties, it is not so acceptable for them to be political activists or to be symbolically identified with political parties in terms of wearing political party paraphernalia especially in the course of performing their duties as journalists

3. A critical role for the media in this election year is to report political events and the political and electoral processes fairly and accurately. They must also avoid inflammatory reportage that are likely to provoke retaliation. This would help create a secure and peaceful environment for the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections.
4. Whiles political parties and their representatives should be more open to and accommodating of the media in this election year, it is also important for the media to seek information and clarification of issues from appropriate and authorized sources within the political parties
5. The media and political parties should build and maintain mutual trust and confidence in each other and develop a relationship based on their common desire to ensure good governance and accountability. The expectation of the media and the political parties should be that the December 2008 General Elections would be free, fair, peaceful and credible and the results acceptable to all and accepted by all.

We hereunder signed

1. Dr. Kwabena Adjei, National Chairman, NDC

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2. Mr. Ladi Nylander, National Chairman, CPP

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3. Mr. Kobina Arthur Kennedy, NPP

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4. Mr. Haruna Sumani, Policy Analyst, PNC

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5. Mr. Roland A. Monney, Vice President, GJA

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6. Nii Laryea Sowah, Executive Secretary, PRINPAG

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7. Mr. Yaw Boadu-Ayebofo, Daily Graphic

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8. Ms. Ajoa Yeboah Afari, Ghanaian Times

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9. Mr. Christian Agubretu, GNA

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10. Mrs Jean Mensa, Administrator, IEA

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