

Code of Conduct and Grievance Mechanism

Preamble

With reference to the Malaysian Media Council Act 2025, the Council shall have, amongst others, the following functions as set out in Section 5(1);

- (a) to set standards and establish a code of conduct for media practitioner and independent media practitioner in accordance with the standards of ethical and responsible journalism;
- (b) to promote the highest standards of ethical and responsible journalism, media independence and the rights of media practitioner;
- (c) to regulate the ethics and professional code of conduct of the media practitioner and independent media practitioner.

And in accordance with Section 15 (1) the Council may establish a mechanism to regulate procedures relating to complaints of grievance that should function for the following purposes:

- (a) as an intermediary between the Council, members of the Council and the public;
- (b) to determine process and procedure for a complaint system;
- (c) to establish an efficient and swift dispute resolution system to ensure public confidence in the members of the Council and the media industry; and
- (d) to promote understanding and compliance of ethical and responsible journalism.

And in accordance with Section 22 the Council may, via general meeting, establish a code of conduct.

The following Code of Conduct and Grievance Mechanism is established, taking into account the clauses above, Article 10 of the Malaysian constitution that guarantees the right to freedom of speech and expression for all citizens, within the laws of Malaysia and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Code of Conduct

The fundamental objective of journalism is to provide the public news, views, information and ideas so that they can make informed decisions about their lives, their communities, their societies, and their governments.

The media has the responsibility to further these ends, and is expected to conduct itself by abiding to professional norms and standards, while protecting the rights of individuals and organisations from unwarranted publicity and violation of privacy. The Code of Conduct sets out the benchmark for these standards.

This Code of Conduct will come into operation from 1 Jan 2026

1. Rules of Reporting

- 1.1 The media must respect the public's right to fair, accurate, truthful and timely information, distinguishing clearly between fact, comment and conjecture.
- 1.2 The media must take care not to publish/broadcast inaccurate, misleading or distorted information and should be critical of news/information sources by way of checking facts and other pieces of information in ensuring accuracy. Quotations or facts have to be attributed to a credible source
- 1.3 Visuals and sound shall be true and accurate. Making a montage, editing a photograph or video, or formulating a picture caption shall not be performed in such a way to mislead or deceive the reader.
- 1.4 AI-generated content and images should be disclosed, as such. AI-generated text, images and video require a human review to ensure accuracy.
- 1.5 All reporting shall be strictly distinguished from comment. Analysis, commentary and other opinion pieces shall be appropriately labelled and not misrepresent fact or context. As a norm, bylines are required for personal opinion pieces. The reader should be able to distinguish between statement of fact and statement of comment.
- 1.6 Unconfirmed information may be reported if deemed to be in the public benefit (per section 9 below) but only if attempts to verify such information have been made and put on record, with a disclaimer that the information is unverified. There should be no exaggeration or further speculation.
- 1.7 False, inaccurate, and misleading reportage deemed as factual errors are to be promptly corrected and — where appropriate — an apology or clarification published.
- 1.8 Anyone wishing to rebut a statement shall be given fair opportunity to do so. Corrections and rebuttals shall be published/broadcast promptly in appropriate form, in such a way that they will come to the attention of those who received the original information.
- 1.9 During any election period, media organisations should give reasonable and proportionate media space to all political parties and independents contesting, in such a manner that promotes informed decision making among voters.

- 1.10 The publication/broadcast of any material that involves fair comment, satire, parody, comedy, artistic work, or entertainment for the purpose of entertainment is allowed unless it infringes on any of the sections in the Code or is otherwise prohibited by law.

2. Editorial Comment

- 2.1 An editorial comment shall be a clear expression of the media organisation's own stand on particular matters and must be distinguished as such. In so doing the media organisation shall take cognisance of the fact that the media plays a crucial role in informing public opinion.
- 2.2 However, this section does not limit the freedom of expression of media practitioners who write or broadcast, under their name and in clearly defined items, such as criticism and editorials.

3. Advertising

- 3.1 All advertisements, advertorials and other forms of content, paid for by an external party, must be clearly identified and distinguished from news and editorial comment.
- 3.2 Media organisations must also ensure that advertisements and advertorials they carry must not violate the ethical and professional standards in this Code.

4. Privacy and sensitivity

- 4.1 The media shall not intrude, or report, or comment upon an individual's privacy, except when there is a clearly defined public benefit (as per section 9). In considering an individual's reasonable expectation of privacy, account will be taken of the complainant's own public disclosures of information and the extent to which the material and information is already in the public domain or will become so. However, once it becomes a matter of public benefit (as per section 9), the media shall balance the public's need for information against potential harm to the individual. This section is also subject to all applicable laws relating to privacy.
- 4.2 The media shall exercise great caution in reporting criminal cases with the assumption that an accused is innocent until convicted by a court of law. The same should also apply to persons under remand.
- 4.3 The names of juvenile (under 18) suspects or persons of interest, as well as their photographs and identifiable locations, shall not be published or broadcast.
- 4.4 When reporting on suicide and attempted suicide, as well as crime involving rape, abduction or sexual assault involving victims (of any gender) and children (under 18), or outraging the modesty, personal character and privacy of victims and survivors (of any gender) and children (under 18), the names, photographs of such victims or survivors, or other particulars leading to their identity being exposed or conjectured, shall not be published or broadcasted.
- 4.5 The media should avoid describing cases of rape, sexual violence, or violation of modesty where the victim is under the age of 16, and the suspect is an adult, as "incest" or "sexual intercourse" or any equivalent that denotes the presence of legal consent.
- 4.6 It is unacceptable to photograph individuals without their consent in private places, where

there is a reasonable expectation of privacy.

- 4.7 The media may publish or broadcast visuals of individuals in public places without obtaining prior consent if there is no malicious intent.
- 4.8 The media shall show compassion by not using interviews or photographs of those adversely affected by personal grief or tragedy, unless given permission by the affected parties to do so. Enquiries and approaches must be made with sympathy and discretion and publication/broadcast handled sensitively. These provisions should not restrict the right to report legal proceedings.
- 4.9 The media shall not publish or broadcast visuals that are excessively gory, violent or have adult-content, unless in the public benefit (as per section 9). Audiences should be alerted of such content, before they are exposed to it.
- 4.10 The media practitioner and media organisation shall be particularly sensitive when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects and apply gender-sensitive measures with regard to survivors of sexual harassment or assault.
- 4.11 When reporting suicide, the media practitioner and media organisation should avoid excessive detail of the method used and usage of language that glamourises, sensationalises or endorses the actions to prevent simulative acts, while taking into account the media's right to report legal proceedings.
- 4.12 When reporting on domestic violence, rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment use appropriate language, sensitivity and good judgement and do not compromise on the survivor's safety.
- 4.13 The media 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.
- 4.14 Relatives or friends of persons convicted or accused of crime should not generally be identified without their consent, unless they are genuinely relevant to the story.
- 4.15 The media must exercise great caution in the publication or broadcast of news and views impinging on communal rights and culture, that promote extremism, and are contrary to the norms of a pluralistic and a multiracial society.
- 4.16 News, views and comments relating to communal or religious conflicts, disputes or clashes shall be published or broadcast only after proper and rigorous verification of facts. They must be presented with due caution and restraint in a manner which is conducive to the creation of an atmosphere congenial to communal and religious harmony, amity and peace.
- 4.17 In all cases, sensational, provocative and alarming headlines should be avoided. Headings containing allegations made in statements shall either identify the source making it or at least carry quotation marks.
- 4.18 The media shall not emphasise race, gender, nationality, occupation, disability, mental state, political affiliation, sexual orientation or religious persuasion in the case of the persons concerned if such particulars are not important in the context or are disparaging.

- 4.19 The media must strive to avoid stereotyping by race, religion, ethnicity, gender, age, geography, sexual orientation, disability, mental status, physical appearance, social status or type of employment.

5. Methods of gathering information

(This section was taken out through a vote during the First General Meeting. It will be further fine-tuned and re-tabled at the next general meeting.)

6. Harassment

- 6.1 Media practitioners and organisations must not engage in intimidation, threats or harassment.
- 6.2 They must not persist in questioning, telephoning, pursuing or photographing individuals once asked to desist; nor remain on property when asked to leave. If requested, they must identify themselves and whom they represent.
- 6.3 The media shall respect and honour individuals and public figures just as it would other fundamental personal and human rights.

7. Sources and confidentiality

- 7.1 The media practitioner must identify attributable sources whenever feasible.
- 7.2 It is the duty of the journalists to protect confidential sources of information.

8. Plagiarism & Fair Use

- 8.1 In publishing and broadcasting, the media shall always attribute fairly to their source or sources.
- 8.2 Republishing or aggregating content from various news sources, without original reporting, is a form of plagiarism and a violation of copyright and is not regarded as Fair Use.
- 8.3 No content should be taken for training of AI without explicit licensing of such content by their rightful copyright owners.

9. Public benefit

- 9.1 The public benefit includes, but is not confined to:
- a. Detecting or exposing crime, or the threat of crime, or serious impropriety.
 - b. Protecting public health or safety.
 - c. Protecting the public from being misled by an action or statement of an individual or organisation.
 - d. Disclosing a person or organisation's failure or likely failure to comply with any obligation to which they are subject.
 - e. Disclosing a miscarriage of justice.

- f. Raising or contributing to a matter of public debate, including serious cases of impropriety, unethical conduct or incompetence concerning the public.
- g. Disclosing concealment, or likely concealment, of any of the above.

- 9.2 Media invoking the public benefit will need to explain and demonstrate that they reasonably believed the publication would serve the public benefit.
- 9.3 An exceptional public benefit would need to be demonstrated to override the normally paramount interests of children under 18.

10. Professionalism and Conflicts of interest

- 10.1 The journalist shall not demand or accept inducements in cash or kind.
- 10.2 The journalist and the media shall not accept an assignment or an invitation, a free trip or any other benefit that could bring into question the credibility and integrity of the profession, as this may be seen to undermine accuracy, fairness and independence.
- 10.3 If the media organisation publishes or broadcasts a report paid for in cash or kind by a third party, this has to be clearly indicated and acknowledged. No attempt must be made to conceal this information by adding bylines to the report.
- 10.4 The media shall explain the ethical process of reporting news and views and invite dialogue with the public over its professional conduct. The media shall perceive complaints and grievances against itself as a way to improve and maintain high standards of the profession.
- 10.5 Exposure of the unethical practices of media organisations and media practitioners must be acknowledged and followed by prompt correction.
- 10.6 The media organisation has the duty to protect the profession and the media practitioners from being influenced in the course of conducting their duties.
- 10.7 The media organisation and all other parties shall not prevent the media practitioner from adhering to any parts of this Code. If an attempt is made or the media practitioner is coerced to do so, the media practitioner has the right to seek redress within the organisation. If the media practitioner feels that is not feasible, he has the right to bring the matter to the Council.
- 10.8 The media company shall not be responsible for a journalist under their employment who writes or posts material in his personal capacity that has not been endorsed by the organisation.

****END OF CODE OF CONDUCT****

Grievance Mechanism

Pursuant to Part IV of the Malaysian Media Council Act (2025), a mechanism related to regulate procedures related to complaints of grievances is established and this avenue is accessible to any person aggrieved by actions of a member of the Council. The existing procedure is set out hereinbelow.

1. Complaints Submission

1.1 Complaints submitted must consider the following:

- a. That a complaint has been made by writing to the media (Respondent) through an accessible complaints portal on the respective websites or other appropriate means, and given two weeks to respond.
- b. That the Complainant is personally affected by the article or content.
- c. That the article or content was published within the last 3 months and contains evidence of a possible breach of the Code of Conduct
- d. That the Complainant has a copy of the article or content and a copy of the exchange of correspondence with the Respondent.
- e. That the subject matter of the complaint is not the subject matter of ongoing court proceedings.
- f. Urgent escalation to the Media Council may be made on the following grounds:
 - The complainant's safety is at risk, or
 - The complainant has attempted to and has been prevented from submitting a complaint to the Respondent.

1.2 No anonymous complaints shall be accepted. However, confidentiality of the identity of the Complainant may be maintained in the event there are specific threats or possibilities of repercussions.

1.3 Complaints shall be submitted to the Secretariat using the Media Council complaints submission form, available online.

2. Processing of Complaints

2.1 Upon receipt of the Complaint the Secretariat shall then make an initial assessment whether the allegations of fact made by the Complainant, if proven to be true, will constitute a breach of one or more of the provisions of the Code of Conduct and any related guidelines.

2.2 An initial assessment by the Secretariat is not to be regarded as a determination or verification of the Complaint itself.

2.3 The Secretariat shall in the following circumstances reject the submission of the complaint and notify the Complainant immediately:

- a. If the allegations of facts stated in the complaint, even if proven, would not constitute a breach of the provisions of the Code of Conduct
- b. If the Complainant fails to respond to the Secretariat's request for additional information or clarification;
- c. If the Complaint does not meet the above admissibility criteria;
- d. If the Complaint is vexatious or frivolous in nature.

3. Conciliation

- 3.1 Once it has been determined that a submission fulfils the criteria, the Secretariat shall proceed to formally accept the complaint and notify the parties accordingly.
- 3.2 The Secretariat may advise the Parties that the Complaint may be resolved and or brought to a conclusion at any time through bilateral conciliation between the Parties.
- 3.3 The Council may appoint a mediator to attempt to facilitate a settlement of the dispute between the parties. The mediation process shall be voluntary and does not involve any lawyers.
- 3.4 If any of the affected parties to Complaint refuses to proceed with the conciliation or mediation processes, then the matter is referred to a Complaints Panel to proceed with the inquiry.
- 3.5 Notwithstanding, any complaint not resolved via bilateral conciliation or mediation within 21 days from the initiation of the procedure, may at the discretion of the Secretariat be escalated to a Complaints Panel for an inquiry and further deliberation.

4. Complaints Panel

- 4.1 Where a bilateral conciliation or mediation fails to reach a resolution, and at the discretion of the Secretariat, the Complaint may be escalated to a Complaints Panel.
- 4.2 The Secretariat may, at its discretion, condition the escalation to a Complaints Panel on the parties agreeing and undertaking that the decision of the Complaints Panel and any subsequent appeal shall be final and binding, and not to be used in any legal proceeding.
- 4.3 Members of the Complaints Panel shall be constituted from among the Council members and from a list of potential external experts maintained by the Council.
- 4.4 Powers of the Complaints Panel include:
 - a. To manage the conduct of the inquiry and determine the most suitable way to hear arguments from the Parties to the Complaint, including but not limited to oral hearings, private meetings, conference calls, or requests for written statements and in this regard issue such procedural directives as are necessary to bring about a fair and expeditious conclusion of the Complaint;
 - b. The Complaints Panel will hold an inquiry in such a manner as may be provided by regulations, and the member concerned will be given an opportunity to be heard.

- c. Summarily dismiss the Complaint if the Complainant fails to comply with its directions;
- 4.5 Nothing within the inquiry powers of the Complaints Panel shall be deemed to compel any newspaper, news agency, editor or journalist to disclose the source of any news or information published by that newspaper or received or reported by that news agency, editor or journalist.
- 4.6 The Complaints Panel shall strive to reach a unanimous decision by consensus among panel members failing which the majority decision shall prevail. In cases of a decision by majority, the decision of members of the Complaints Panel comprising the minority shall be recorded.

5. Remedies

5.1 The Complaints Panel shall have the mandate to issue the following:

a. Interim measures

Subject to an evaluation made by the Complaints Panel on the basis of allegations made by the Complainant and the submission by the Respondent, that Complaints Panel may direct urgent action or interim measures in the following circumstances:

- Cases where there is evidence of violence or threats of violence or human rights abuses; and
- Where delayed action would likely result in any damage or further damage to persons or affected communities.

An interim measure is a temporary directive to be implemented while the complaint is being dealt with according to the procedures set out and remains valid until the Panel rescinds those measures.

b. A full decision by the Complaints Panel may include:

i. Corrective measures:

- Amend articles, or issue corrections or clarifications
- Make a private or public apology
- Remove articles or pictures from website (if online media)
- Delete internally held material or tagging from internal records and archives
- Publish the Complaints Panel's decision in full on the website of the Respondent.

ii. Administrative sanctions such as temporary withdrawal from the Board, committees or working groups of the Council

iii. Suspension or termination of Council membership

5.2 The decisions of the Complaints Panel shall be updated on the website of the Council and, if determined so, on the website of the Respondent, both of which shall be published within 21 days of the decision being issued.

- 5.3 Failure of the member to comply with the decision of the Complaints Panel shall automatically invoke an inquiry by the Complaints Panel and may lead to adoption of punitive measures such as an issuance of warning, suspension or termination of membership.

6. Appeals

- 6.1 Parties to a Complaint may submit an appeal over a decision by the Complaints Panel. The permissible ground for seeking a review:
- a. A serious error of fact or procedure occurred, or significant new evidence has become available which it was not reasonably possible to provide earlier; and
 - b. Correction of the error, or consideration of the new evidence, is reasonably likely to justify a change of decision to uphold or dismiss.
- 6.2 The appeal shall be reviewed by the Board or a panel of the Board (to be known as Appeals Panel) and shall have the power to:
- a. allow or dismiss an appeal;
 - b. adjourn its deliberation on such terms and conditions as it deems fit;
 - c. make any ruling or substitute any finding or decision of the Complaints Panel as it deems fit including enhancing or reducing the sanctions imposed by the Complaints Panel;
 - d. remit the matter back to the Complaints Panel for further inquiry and for review of its decision and to direct where it deems appropriate that the complaint be re-investigated de novo by a Complaints Panel composed of different members;
 - e. consider further evidence or receive additional documents on such terms and conditions as it deems appropriate;
 - f. manage the conduct of the appeal and determine the most suitable way to hear arguments from the Parties to the Appeal, including but not limited to oral hearings, private meetings, conference calls, or requests for written statements and in this regard issue such procedural directives as are necessary to bring about a fair and expeditious conclusion of the Appeal;
 - g. dismiss the appeal in the event that the Appellant fails to comply with its directions or the directions of the Secretariat issued in consultation with or at the behest of the Appeals Panel.
- 6.3 The Appeals Panel shall strive to reach a unanimous decision through consensus failing which the majority decision shall prevail and shall deliver its decision within 30 days of its formation. In cases of a decision by majority, the decision of members of the Appeals Panel comprising the minority shall be recorded.
- 6.4 The decision of the Appeals Panel shall contain its reasons for arriving at its decision including any dissenting decision and shall be final.

7. Other matters

- 7.1 The Complainant may exercise the right to withdraw the Complaint and notify the Secretariat of the Complainant's intention to withdraw their complaint at any time.
- 7.2 The Complaints Panel and the Appeals Panel may proceed with its inquiry and deliver its decision, notwithstanding the resignation of the Respondent as a member of the Media Council and where appropriate recommend that the Board issue a public censure.
- 7.3 The Complaints Panel, the Board, the Council and all officials and authorized personnel shall in no way be held liable to any person for any loss or damage arising, whether directly or indirectly, from any act or lawful exercise of their powers or duties under the grievance mechanism including all things done in the bona fide belief of the existence of such powers or duties.
- 7.4 Public authorities shall rely on the grievance procedures when considering action against members of the Council for breaches covered under the Code of Conduct.
- 7.5 Parties to the complaint shall not commence any legal proceedings against the other party until the complaints procedures have been complied with. Any exception to this clause shall be determined on a case-by-case basis by the Board
- 7.6 Any information provided to the Complaints Panel and Appeals Panel shall not be used as evidence in legal proceedings.
- 7.7 In the absence of a formal complaint, the Council, may on its own motion, initiate a complaint and inquire into an allegation of an infringement by a member, related to a matter of public benefit.
- 7.8 The Council may initiate complaints against a non-member for serious breach of ethical and responsible reporting, and relatedly issue a note of censure.

MALAYSIAN MEDIA COUNCIL

CODE OF CONDUCT AND GRIEVANCE MECHANISM

List of Amendments

Date	Passed by	Nature of Amendments
07.11.2025	First General Meeting of the Council	N/A
31.03.2026	Board of the Council	Rectification of Numbering Errors, Modification of Selected Terms, and Insertion of an Additional Sentence