

Newly revamped SA Press Code goes 'on honeymoon'



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The South African [Press Council](#), including press ombudsman [Joe Thlooe](#) and his deputy [Johan Retief](#), hit the road this week armed with the newly revamped [press code](#) to celebrate and present it to industry in an effort to create awareness and get journalists to abide by it.

Visiting as many media houses as possible



"Joe and I are visiting as many media houses as possible to familiarise the industry with the new code," Retief told Bizcommunity.com yesterday, Thursday, 20 January 2011.

Retief flew to Cape Town on Wednesday, where he was due to hold talks with Media24 and Independent Newspapers Group-owned publications.

"Next week I'll be in Port-Elizabeth to do the same. Joe is doing that today in Durban and Mpumalanga. One of us will speak to the Association of Independent Newspapers next month. We are also sending posters containing the new code to media houses, to be put up in their newsrooms," he said.

Launched last week

The new code, whose sections have increased from eight to 13, was launched last week, 14 months after the Press Council made a decision to review its system, including the code, with the sole objective in mind: raise the ethical standards of print journalism.

The [newly baptised code](#) is made up of the following new features:

- Two sections are entirely new: independence/conflict of interest, and dignity/reputation
- Three articles became sections: newsgathering, privacy and children
- Some articles have been expanded

In terms of newsgathering, the new code requests that news must be obtained legally, honestly and fairly, by someone identified as a journalist.

Regarding privacy - an issue that has often been at the centre of conflict with high-profile people such as politicians and celebrities - 'rape victims' (including children) and 'HIV/AIDS status protected' have been added in the section that initially included exceptional care, consideration in matters involving the private lives and concerns of individuals

Other additions and alterations include:

- State when comment could not be obtained
- Plagiarism
- Discrimination ('or other status')
- No checkbook journalism

"The press shall avoid checkbook journalism, where informants are paid, particularly when criminals are involved, except where the material concerned ought to be published in the public interest and the payment is necessary for this to be done," the newly revamped press code explains.

Phenomenal public input

According to Retief, the public's input has been phenomenal, with requests emanating from ordinary citizens to reinforce clauses such as dignity, HIV/AIDS, prohibition of advertising of adult content, discrimination, hate speech, confidential sources and children.

The new code is also the fruit of studying more than 100 international codes, including 25 from Africa, 22 from Europe and 18 from Asia.

While the Press Council reiterates that the old code was good and the new one is excellent, it does, however, insist that nothing is perfect.

Last week, Retief wrote in the *Cape Times* newspaper: "This is not to say that the new code is perfect and that it will never be amended or changed. Unlike the Bible or the Koran, it is a living document in the sense that it can (and probably will) change at some later stage."

For more:

- Press Council: www.presscouncil.org.za
- Updated press code: www.presscouncil.org.za/pages/press-code.php
- Complaints procedure: www.presscouncil.org.za/pages/press-code/complaints-procedures.php
- Complaints form: www.presscouncil.org.za/pages/press-code/complaints-form.php
- Press Freedom Commission: www.pressfreedomcomm.org

See also:

- Journalism.co.za: [Council adopts new code for new times](#)
- Mail & Guardian Online: [Zapiro slams new press code](#)

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Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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- Managing promotional resources: are TV broadcasters getting it right? - 1 Nov 2011
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