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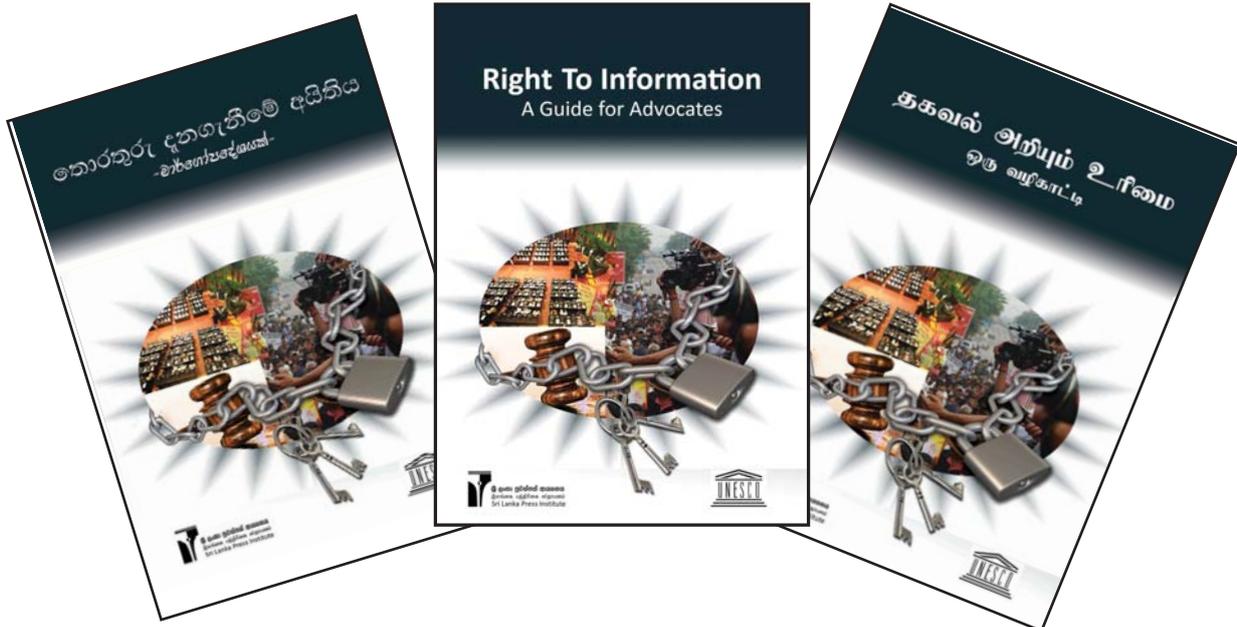
SLPI Proposes RTI Law to be incorporated in Constitutional Amendment

The Sri Lanka Press Institute (SLPI) calls for the proposed Right to Information (RTI) Law to be incorporated into the 19th Amendment to the Constitution currently being drafted by the new Administration.

SLPI, which represents the country's newspaper publishers, editors, working journalists, media workers trade unions and media freedom activists has already urged senior government leaders that the Right to Information Commission that will be established under the proposed

Despite repeated requests to enact such a law in the public interest, the earlier Administration refrained from doing so. It is now reaping the whirlwind of allegations made against its key personnel.

SLPI requests this Government to provide the proposed Right to Information Commission constitutional guarantees to ensure its viability in providing the country with good governance measures.



law be given constitutional status similar to the independent Police Commission, Public Service Commission, Elections Commission and the Bribery and Corruption Commission once they get re-activated under the 19th Amendment.

The country is witnessing the exposure of colossal amounts of wastage, mismanagement and corruption alleged to have taken place during the previous Administration. Much of this could have been averted earlier had a Right to Information Law existed.

Moreover, free communication of government information and opinion about public and political issues is essential and implies a free press. The SLPI calls on the government and all constituent parties, including those in the opposition to give due consideration to this key proposal, in its application of good governance and democracy.

Reader's Comments

Are you receiving the PCCSL's monthly newsletter? Do you find it useful and informative? If yes or no just drop us an email with your comments/suggestions. Email: srockwood@pccsl.lk

Sensitivity in times of high tension

By A. S. Panneerselvan, Reader's Editor *The Hindu*

One of the responses to my last column, "Living values" (January 26, 2015), questioned the decision of this newspaper not to reproduce the images carried by the French satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*. The argument: the newspaper took a strong editorial stand against the killers, and if the aim of the killers is to prevent the world from seeing those images, then republishing them would be the fitting answer to the intolerant criminals. Further, the reproduction would be an act of solidarity with the publication that lost 10 of its staff, including four of its top cartoonists, to cold-blooded murderers. This argument constructs the world in a neat bipolar manner.



The role of a responsible media organisation is to go beyond the reductionist narrative of 'you are either with us or against us.' It tries to retain the space for grey in an information ecology that is fast turning black and white.

The choices of news organisations to publish or reject images are not based on solidarity. They are determined by their own code of ethics and governed by three broad principles of journalism: truth, independence and the need to minimise harm. In the case of *Charlie Hebdo*, most of the major publications of the world took a principled stand against the ruthless hounds. But many of them felt that republishing the cartoons may not be the best response to the intolerant sect.

The Hindu was not the only publication that decided not to reproduce those images. *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and the news agency, The Associated Press, were among many that refrained from publishing those images. The editorial judgment of *The Hindu* and the internal debates in news organisations and professional networks like the Ethical Journalism Network (EJN) are important pointers for readers to understand how crucial editorial judgments are made on matters that are emotionally explosive.

Ethical path, not self-censorship

"All these choices, each with an ethical base, show that this is not a simple matter of black and white choice in the newsroom. It's a deeply troubling and grey area of editorial decision-making. These choices show that journalism that aspires to be in the public interest and driven by values of mission needs to lean on its ethical codes and traditions of editorial independence if it aims to provide sensitive and careful reporting in times of high tension," says Stefanie Chernow of EJN. She makes a fine distinction be-

tween self-censorship and an ethical path of not using acts of intolerance to promote tolerance.

Tom Kent, my colleague in the board of the Organization of News Ombudsmen and Standards Editor of the AP, explained why the news agency decided not to carry those images. He wrote: "AP tries hard not to be a conveyor belt for images and actions aimed at mocking or provoking people on the basis of religion, race or sexual orientation. We did not run the "Danish cartoons" mocking Muhammad in 2005, or the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons of the same type. While we run many photos that are politically or socially provocative, there are areas verging on hate speech and actions where we feel it is right to be cautious ... We learned long ago that some of our news decisions will be controversial. While there's certainly a slippery slope that leads to avoiding any image that could cause offense, there's an equally slippery one that leads to suspending our editorial judgment and allowing our news service to be hijacked by whatever offensive image is circulating on a given day."

The Guardian's editorial, "*The Guardian* view on *Charlie Hebdo*: show solidarity, but in your own voice," is an important read for all those who are committed to free speech and responsible journalism. It read: "The real clash is between free speech and a tiny number of jihadist murderers. We do not have to alter our editorial values to be on the right side of that divide." The editorial made it clear that the chief goal of terrorists is to make us change our behaviour and that it's best to deny them that victory.

Margaret Sullivan, Public Editor of *The New York Times*, wrote about how the decision not to republish the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons was made. Dean Baquet, the paper's executive editor, started out the day convinced that he should publish the images, both because of their newsworthiness and out of a sense of solidarity with the slain journalists and the right of free expression, but changed his mind twice. He felt that there was a line between gratuitous insult and satire, and most of the cartoons were gratuitous insult. He told the Public Editor that it would be deemed unacceptable if he were to show the most incendiary images from the newspaper.

If we recognise that a newspaper is an interlocking public, as espoused by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, then we can understand the crucial reasons behind not reproducing provocative images. Let's remember Scot Fitzgerald's dictum: "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function."

(Courtesy: *The Hindu* Feb.02, 2015)

SLPI partners with Global Media Ethics Project on 'Media Ethics in the Age of Globalization'

The Sri Lanka Press Institute (SLPI) in partnership with the Global Media Ethics Project organized the 5th Global Media Ethic Forum titled: Media Ethics in the Age of Globalization on January 27 and 28, 2015 at Kings bury Hotel, Colombo.

The Global Media Ethics forum is a series of roundtable meetings with journalists and scholars in various locations around the world. The Forum is formulating media ethics in the wake of rapid technological change and globalization. This has plagued journalists and academics around the world. The Forum last met in China in 2014 and in India in 2011.



Prof. Shakuntala Rao, Chair of the Department of Communications, State University of New York, USA, presents a paper on 'Global Media Ethics and Ethics Within Local and Regional Contexts,'



Mr. Clifford G. Christians, Research Professor of Communications, Professor of Media Studies and Professor Emeritus of Journalism, Institute of Communications Research, University of Illinois, USA spoke on 'Global Media Ethics and Ethics Within Local and Regional Contexts.'



Mr. Ahmad Javid Yusuf, Attorney-at-Law and member of the Dispute Resolution Council (DRC) highlighted the importance of 'The Role of the Media in Conflict Resolution.'



Mr. Vipul Mudgal, former Senior Editor of Hindustan Times spoke on 'Citizens Journalism and Ethics of Social Media,'



Mr. Kamal Siddiqi, is the Editor of The Express Tribune, a Pakistani English daily affiliated with the International New York Times, spoke on 'The Ethics of Contentious Cartoons and Freedom of Expression,'



Mr. Nihal Seneviratne, former Secretary General of Parliament and presently Chairman of the Dispute Resolution Council (DRC) of the Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka (PCCSL) spoke on 'Covering Elections Ethically.'

The press must take extra care not to refer to a person's religion in a derogatory manner

The attack on 'Charlie Hebdo' (French satirical magazine) journalists on January 08, 2015 has unleashed a debate on two important issues - 'Freedom of Expression' and in the 'Public Interest.'

The Editors' Code of Professional Practice in its Preamble states:

'This code of practice, which is binding on newspaper publishing companies, Editors and their journalists and contributors both in print format and online, aims to ensure that the Sri Lankan press is free and responsible and sensitive to the needs and expectations of its readers, while maintaining the highest standards of journalism.

'Those standards require newspapers to strive for accuracy and professional integrity, and to uphold the best traditions of investigative journalism in the public interest, unfettered by distorting commercialism or by improper pressure or by narrow self-interest, which conspires against press freedom. Newspapers and journalists, while free to hold and express their own strong opinions, should give due consideration to the views of others and endeavour to

reflect social responsibility.

'This code both protects the rights of the individual and upholds the public's right to know. It should be honoured not only to the letter but in the spirit – neither interpreted so narrowly as to compromise its commitment to respect the rights of the individual nor so broadly as to prevent publication in the public interest.'

Furthermore Article 06: General Reporting and Writing, sub clause 6.3: A journalist shall not knowingly or willfully promote communal or religious discord or violence and again in sub clause 6.4: i. The press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to a person's race, colour, religion, sex or to any physical or mental illness or disability.

Therefore, while condoning the attack on the 'Charlie Hebdo' journalists; the media must take extra care not to arouse religious sentiments. To this end the PCCSL received 140 complaints against a derogatory cartoon depicting a Muslim man. The complaint was upheld and the two newspapers had to carry an apology.

IPSO appoints Appointments Panel

The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) has announced the names of those that have been appointed to its Appointments Panel. This independent panel is responsible for appointing the Chairman and Board members of IPSO and the three lay positions on the Editors' Code of Practice Committee.

The IPSO Appointments Panel has three members who are not from a newspaper or magazine publishing background, one member must be a serving editor and one other will come from a publishing background. The Chairman of IPSO, Sir Alan Moses, sits on the panel ex-officio, except when the Chairman is being appointed.

The Appointments Panel is:

- Sir Hayden Phillips (Chairman)
- Sir Alan Moses, Chairman of IPSO
- Lloyd Embley, Group Editor-in-Chief at Trinity Mirror
- Keith Perch, a former regional newspaper editor
- Wendy Harris, a former civil servant with considerable executive and non-executive experience of regulation
- Mehmda Mian, a solicitor with considerable non-executive experience, including as a BBC trustee.

IPSO is the independent press regulation organisation set up in September 2014. It regulates most UK national, regional and local newspapers. (Courtesy IPSO Feb.03, 2015).

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