
Sudan Media Forum:

Journalistic Principles and Rules for Media Coverage During Armed Conflict

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The April 15, 2023, conflict between Sudan's Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces severely impacted the country's press and media landscape. Many institutions were forced to shut down entirely or operate at a reduced capacity, losing vital infrastructure. While some relocated operations outside Sudan, their ability to conduct essential fieldwork, especially in conflict zones, was hampered.

This media vacuum gave rise to a plethora of new press and media entities, mainly online websites, and social media accounts. Exploiting the situation, both warring parties and external actors infiltrated the journalistic sphere with numerous online platforms. Their aim: to dominate media coverage, control information flow, and spread misinformation, hate speech, and racism. This decline in professional journalism and media presence exacerbated the conflict with biased narratives favouring one side.

Many journalists, both men and women, lost their jobs due to media closures. While a small number became pawns in partisan campaigns, the majority distanced themselves from such manipulation. Facing threats, many journalists were forced to flee their homes, seeking refuge within Sudan or neighbouring countries.

These extraordinary circumstances necessitate stricter guidelines for press and media institutions, journalists, and media professionals during wartime. These guidelines must uphold their core mission:

To gather news and information, verify its accuracy, and present it to the public in a fair, accurate, and independent manner.

These principles compel press and media institutions to prioritise staff safety. Journalists must not enter conflict zones without proper safety measures in place.

We believe journalists covering the Sudanese conflict have the potential to influence public discourse, contributing to conflict resolution, mitigating its impact, and mobilising assistance and solidarity for the victims.

Journalists in war zones must uphold these professional principles:

- **Centring Humanity:** News coverage, reports, and analyses should prioritise the human cost of conflict. Citizens and their well-being should be at the heart of journalistic efforts.
- **Truthful Neutrality:** Avoid false neutrality. Strive for “positive neutrality” that champions truth, independence, and non-partisanship. Reports should not take sides or showcase personal opinions on the war.
- **Accuracy and Transparency:** Do not conceal information or distort facts for any party’s benefit. Exceptions may exist when disclosing information puts others at risk.
- **Protecting the Vulnerable:** Exercise extreme caution when reporting on vulnerable groups (refugees, displaced persons, soldiers/families, minorities) to avoid further suffering.
- **Respecting Victims:** Show sensitivity when covering victims. Avoid publishing details that could expose them to retaliation or harm.
- **Professional Detachment:** Uphold professional standards and avoid promoting ideological, tribal, or ethnic agendas.
- **Contextualisation:** Present news, analyses, and information within their context, helping the audience understand the evolving situation.
- **Multiple Perspectives:** Provide diverse viewpoints, covering events from various angles, introducing contrasting opinions, and giving voice to different individuals and groups.
- **Balanced Language:** Use balanced language free from bias. Avoid accusatory words or demonising adjectives targeting specific parties.
- **Transparency and Source Attribution:** Enable audiences to distinguish between facts, coverage, opinions, and analyses. Avoid emotionally charged vocabulary.
- **Combating Hate Speech:** Oppose hate speech, racism, and its transmission. Refrain from inciting racial, tribal, religious, or sectarian tensions, and avoid using racial or cultural stereotypes.
- **Verifying Information:** Combat fake news. Verify information before publication to avoid contributing to conflict escalation. Refrain from publishing unverified information. Attribute all quotes to their sources.
- **Truth-Seeking:** Actively seek, respect, and reveal the truth. Journalists have a duty to inform the public accurately and ethically.
- **Integrity and Accuracy:** Be committed to integrity and accuracy. Avoid intentional falsification of facts.
- **Promoting Peace:** Disseminate news of civilian and peace efforts within and outside Sudan. Highlight the work of volunteers in conflict zones.
- **Humanitarian Focus:** Showcase the resilience of displaced people: men, women, and children in camps and shelters. Share their stories of hope and perseverance.
- **Defending Human Rights:** Uphold freedom, peace, justice, and democracy. Defend good governance, equality, and non-discrimination according to human rights standards.
- **Documenting Abuses:** Comprehensively document war crimes and human rights violations. Advocate for justice and combat impunity.

- **Legal Knowledge:** Become familiar with international humanitarian law (laws protecting civilians in wartime) and relevant regional conventions and treaties. Additionally, understand domestic laws related to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

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By adhering to these principles, we strive to deliver responsible and ethical journalism throughout this devastating conflict in Sudan.

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