

THE PEOPLE'S COMMUNICATION CHARTER

An International Covenant of Standards

The originators of this Charter are the Centre for Communication and Human Rights (The Netherlands), the Third World Network (Malaysia), the AMARC-World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (Peru/Canada), and the Cultural Environment Movement (USA).

The Founding Convention of the Cultural Environment Movement, meeting in St. Louis on March 17, 1996, ratified the Charter and referred it to a committee for refinement. The present draft reflects the comments, interests and concerns of CEM and the other Signatories. It has also been informed by the international agreements listed below and the statements and publication noted in the Bibliography,

We, the Signatories of this Charter, recognize that:

- Communication is basic to the life of all individuals and their communities.
- All people are entitled to participate in communication, and in making decisions about communication within and between societies.
- The majority of the world's peoples lack minimal technological resources for survival and communication. Over half of them have not yet made a single telephone call.
- Commercialization of media and concentration of media ownership erode the public sphere and fail to provide for cultural and information needs, including the plurality of opinions and the diversity of cultural expressions and languages necessary for democracy.
- Massive and pervasive media violence polarizes societies, exacerbates conflict, and cultivates fear and mistrust, making people vulnerable and dependent.
- Stereotypical portrayals misrepresent all of us and stigmatize those who are the most vulnerable.

Therefore, we ratify this Charter defining communication rights and responsibilities to be observed in democratic countries and in international law.

Article 1. Respect

All people are entitled to be treated with respect, according to the basic human rights and standards of dignity, integrity, identity, and non-discrimination.

Article 2. Freedom

All people have the right of access to communication channels independent of governmental or commercial control.

Article 3. Access

In order to exercise their rights, people should have fair and equitable access to local and global resources and facilities for conventional and advanced channels of communication; to receive opinions, information and ideas in a language they normally use and understand; to receive a range of cultural products designed for a wide variety of tastes and interests; and to have easy access to facts about ownership of media and sources of information. Restrictions on access to information should be permissible only for good and compelling reason, as when prescribed by international human rights standards or necessary for the protection of a democratic society or the basic rights of others.

Article 4. Independence

The realization of people's right to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from the development of self-reliant communication structures requires national and international assistance. This includes support of development communication and of independent media; training programs for professional media workers; the establishment of independent, representative media associations, syndicates or trade unions; and the international adoption of standards.

Article 5. Literacy

All people have the right to acquire information and skills necessary to participate fully in public deliberation and communication. This requires facility in reading, writing, and story-telling; critical media awareness; computer literacy; and education about the role of communication in society.

Article 6. Protection of journalists

Journalists must be accorded full protection of the law, including international humanitarian law, especially in areas of conflict. They must have safe, unrestricted access to sources of information, and must be able to seek remedy, when required, through an international body.

Article 7. Right of reply and redress

All people have the right of reply and to demand penalties for damage from media misinformation. Individuals concerned should have an opportunity to correct, without undue delay, statements relating to them which they deem to be false and which they have a justified interest in having corrected. Such corrections should be given the same prominence as the original expression. States should impose penalties for proven damage, or require corrections, where a court of law has determined that an information provider has willfully disseminated inaccurate or misleading and damaging information, or has facilitated the dissemination of such information.

Article 8. Cultural identity

All people have the right to protect their cultural identity. This includes respect for people's pursuit of cultural development and the right to free expression in languages they understand. People's right to the protection of their cultural space and heritage should not violate other human rights or provisions of this Charter.

Article 10. Participation in policymaking

All people have the right to participate in public decision-making about the provision of information; the development and utilization of knowledge; the preservation, protection and development of culture; the choice and application of communication technologies; and the structure and policies of media industries.

Article 11. Children's rights

Children have the right to mass media products that are designed to meet their needs and interests and foster their healthy physical, mental and emotional development. They should be protected from harmful media products and from commercial and other exploitation at home, in school, and at places of play, work, or business. Nations should take steps to produce and distribute widely high quality cultural and entertainment materials created for children in their own languages.

Article 12. Cyberspace

All people have a right to universal access to and equitable use of cyberspace. Their rights to free and open communities in cyberspace, their freedom of electronic expression, and their freedom from electronic surveillance and intrusion, should be protected.

Article 13. Privacy

All people have the right to be protected from the publication of allegations irrelevant to the public interest, or of private photographs or other private communication without authorization, or of personal information given or received in confidence. Databases derived from personal or workplace communications and transactions should not be used for unauthorized commercial or general surveillance purposes. However, nations should take care that the protection of privacy does not unduly interfere with the freedom of expression or the administration of justice.

Article 14. Harm

People have the right to demand that media actively counter incitement to hate, prejudice, violence, and war. Violence should not be presented normal, "manly," or entertaining, and true consequences of and alternatives to violence should be shown. Other violations of human dignity and integrity to be avoided include stereotypic images that distort the realities and complexities of people's lives. Media should not ridicule, stigmatize, or demonize people on the basis of gender, race, class, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, and physical or mental condition.

Article 15. Justice

People have the right to demand that media respect standards of due process in the coverage of trials. This implies that media should not presume guilt before a verdict of guilt, invade the privacy of defendants or others, and should not televise criminal trials in real time while the trial is in progress.

Article 16. Consumption

People have the right to useful and factual consumer information, and to be protected from misleading and distorted advertising. Media should avoid and, if necessary, expose, promotion disguised as news and entertainment (infomercials, product placement, children's programs that use franchised characters and toys, etc.), and the creation of wasteful, unnecessary, harmful or ecologically damaging

needs, wants, products, and activities. Advertising directed at children should receive special scrutiny.

Article 17. Accountability

People have the right to hold media accountable to the general public for their adherence to the standards established in this Charter. For that purpose, media should establish mechanisms, including self-regulatory bodies, that monitor and account for measures taken to achieve compliance.

Article 18. Implementation

In consultation with Signatories, national and international mechanisms will be organized to publicize this Charter; implement it in as many countries as possible and in international law; monitor and assess the performance of countries and media in light of these Standards; receive complaints about violations; advise on adequate remedial measures; and to establish procedures for the periodic review, development and modification of this Charter.

INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS AND OTHER WORKS INFORMING THIS CHARTER

With regard to freedom of information: Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; UNESCO Resolutions 3.2. of 1983 and 4.1 of 1991 on the Right to Communicate; the provisions on information of the 1975 Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe; the 1991 UNESCO Declaration of Windhoek; and Article 13 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

With regard to the social responsibility of mass media: The 1978 UNESCO Declaration on Fundamental Principles Concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racism, Apartheid and Incitement to War; Article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; Article 5 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by the Beijing Platform of Action of the 1995 UN World Conference on Women; and Article 17 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

With regard to the development of communication: The UN Declaration on the Right to Development of 1986; and the UNESCO Resolution 4.1 of 1991 statement on Communication for Development.

With regard to the protection of cultural and linguistic rights: Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the 1966 UNESCO Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Co-operation.

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