

DECLARATION ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO JOURNALISM IN THE PACIFIC

The first **Regional Human Rights and Media Forum** hosted by the Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) of the Pacific Community (SPC), held from 13 to 15 April 2016, in Nadi Fiji, with its partners, the Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS), the Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) and the University of the South Pacific (USP) Journalism School, and supported by the Australian Government and the European Union, brought together editors and senior journalists from Pacific media outlets, and senior government communication personnel from Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The three-day Forum focused on the theme *Enhancing a Human Rights-Based Approach to News Reporting*.

At the Forum, participants acknowledged the vital roles the media play in being a mirror to society. They affirmed that the media hold the power to determine what is news, and to construct stories and select words in ways that affect people and their human rights. Participants recognised the importance of human rights as underpinning the concept of dignity and humanity, and affirmed that news coverage must ensure that it protects the rights of the vulnerable, and respects the principle of ‘do no harm’. Participants acknowledged that human rights treaties and laws provide a framework that should guide the content of reporting.

Participants from the Forum acknowledged that journalists have an important, shared responsibility with other sectors in society to actively promote human rights for all. Delegates affirmed that, in following the principles of a **Human Rights-Based Approach** to journalism, which emphasises the obligations of states and other duty bearers to **respect, protect and fulfil rights**, journalists will be empowered to fulfil their human rights responsibilities. A human rights-based approach engages, empowers and promotes the rights of all in society. Duty bearers include not only governments and other responsible parties, but also journalists themselves. Participants also recognised the importance of building a strong relationship between government communication personnel and journalists, in sharing information and appreciating the role that both play in disseminating it. Delegates reaffirmed the need to support and establish media bodies in all Pacific countries that will advance the rights and protections of journalists and media workers.

Participants agreed to the following five key principles of a **Human Rights-Based Approach** to strengthen their reporting responsibilities:

Participation ensures the importance of a broad and inclusive involvement of all parties in society in media reporting. This principle emphasises the inclusion of the voices of persons with disability and other marginalised communities. Participation must be objective and fair, presenting as many sides of a story as possible. It is important to ask: *Whose rights are being affected and what specific rights are being affected? Who is affecting their rights, and who is responsible for securing those rights?* To ensure gender equality, media stories should capture a balanced view and should not reinforce gender stereotyping.

Accountability identifies the rights holders as well as ‘duty bearers’ (those responsible for protecting, respecting and fulfilling rights). In reporting, this principle highlights the party that is responsible for ensuring rights holders rights are realised. It is important to ask: *In what ways are the rights being affected? What actions or strategies by different parties may address this? What information is needed to hold authorities accountable through our reporting?* The accountability principle focuses on increasing the capacity of duty bearers to meet their obligations. For example, ethical reporting would mean that in interviewing and reporting on children and young people, the dignity and rights of those children and young people should be respected and protected from harm. Delegates recognised that governments should strengthen laws, including passing freedom of information legislation, and create an enabling environment, to protect media freedoms and the rights of journalists to report on stories.

Non-discrimination reaffirms that stories should not infringe on the rights of others, or discriminate against people on the basis of race, religion, age, sex, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, and any other characteristic. Accuracy and truth should underpin stories, and stories should not contribute to stereotypes or generalisations attributed to groups. Journalists must safe guard the rights of marginalised groups and guard against power imbalances. When reporting about gender-based violence, journalists must be sensitive to dealing with issues concerning the victims and survivors, and maintain the dignity and rights of women and children. For example, decisions around *who is interviewed, where they are interviewed, how they are interviewed, and what information is reported on* should all prevent any harm.

Empowerment affirms that reporting on human rights issues should empower readers by providing information that encourages critical thinking, and contributes to enhancing the ability of rights holders to claim and exercise their rights. Rights holders must be placed at the centre of reporting.

Linkages to human rights standards reminds journalists that, in their reporting, they should link stories to associated human rights conventions that define relevant rights, and indicate whether a country is meeting these rights. All stories relating to human rights should refer to the progress the country has made in implementing relevant key human rights conventions.

