

29 May 2006

2006 CHARTER OF GENDER EQUALITY FOR MEDIA AND JOURNALISM IN SRI LANKA

This meeting of Representatives of Sri Lankan Journalists' Associations including the:

FEDERATION OF MEDIA EMPLOYEES TRADE UNIONS (FMETU),
SRI LANKA WORKING JOURNALISTS' ASSOCIATION (SLWJA),
FREE MEDIA MOVEMENT
SRI LANKA TAMIL MEDIA ALLIANCE (SLTMA), AND
SRI LANKA MUSLIM MEDIA FORUM (SLMMF);

This charter sets out the minimum standards, principles and actions needed to underpin gender equity in media in Sri Lanka and outlines a practical program of action to support the achievement of equality in media workplaces, journalists organizations and the media itself

The five organisations declare its endorsement of this charter for gender equity and urge all journalists, media institutes, organisations and media unions to adopt and support the following actions.

1. Fundamental Principles

To create equality throughout society it is essential that the media promote and protect gender equality, both within the working environment and in their representation of women. It is the responsibility of media to open debate and discussion of these issues, to better inform society and to break down the limitations of gender stereotypes.

Gender equity in the media workplace is central to any discussion about gender equality in media.

All journalists and media staff, regardless of gender, have the right to expect equal access and no discrimination in:

- appointment and recruitment of people to journalism:
- payment of salaries; or
- opportunities for promotion and advancement in journalism.

Media can either perpetuate the subordination of women or play a central role in promoting women's rights. It is vital that journalists recognize their responsibility to represent men and women in an equitable way so

that media images do not reflect or reinforce stereotypes about men and women and the relations between them that replicate inequalities traditionally unfavourable to women.

2. Equality of opportunity

All media, whether public or private, must uphold the principles of gender equity in the media workplace by committing to:

- The use of transparent selection and promotion procedures based on merit i.e. qualifications and experience, not gender or favouritism;
- The removal of job segregations, allowing equal access to all assignments and resisting traditional gender allocations;
- Equal pay for work of equal value;
- The introduction of policies and clear guidelines to rid the workplace of all forms of sexual harassment and outlining disciplinary procedures for inappropriate behaviour and provision of adequate safety for women journalists.
- Provide safe working environment and adequate transport facilities for women journalists at night.
- The introduction and promotion of clear anti-discrimination policies that encourage selection of women for important roles.
- Special policies to limit the use of insecure employment practices including freelance, casual, relief, piece rate and contract work

3. Equal Rights for journalists as parents

Journalists who are also parents have special needs and responsibilities. Since the bulk of the childcare often falls to the woman, creating pressure and conflicting demands with work, special provisions need to be made to both parents to allow their full participation at work.

All media houses and journalists organisations must address the under-representation of women both in journalism generally and in senior decision-making roles within media institutes and organisations particularly by promoting:

- Flexible working hours that accommodate family commitments;
- Fair payment of maternity and paternity leave;
- The availability of child-care services to employees;

4. Portrayal of women

Everybody involved in the media has a responsibility to strive for fair and inclusive representation of men and women. Journalism must give voice to everyone and should avoid reinforcing traditionally unfavourable images of women, but rather promote a balanced portrayal of women and girls and their multiple roles.

Journalists and media should make special effort to ensure a diverse range of female perspectives are included in all stories, including politics, economics and war;

Responsibility for ethical conduct in journalism rests with media professionals, including the drafting of guidelines to promote gender sensitive reporting and credible and accountable systems of self-regulation.

5. Gender equity and participation in unions and associations.

Journalists' organisations recognise they have a responsibility themselves to adopt a policy of gender equality and to take up the concerns of women and principles of gender equity and incorporate them into their policy and action frameworks, including through:

- Demanding equal opportunity in appointment, recruitment, promotion and advancement in journalism and in payment of salaries; or
- Best-practice surveys that encourage workplace policies that promote gender equality; and work practices that ease the burden on working parents and promote more compatible work and family responsibilities;
- Increasing representation of women in journalist's organisations, and in their decision-making structures will contribute to a mainstreaming of gender equity issues. Journalists organisations see this as a goal and commit themselves to working with women journalists on practical programs to encourage better representation of women.
- To hold union meetings at a time and place convenient to women members.
- Journalists organisations encourage and support the development of a national women's network for female journalists to share their experiences and support one another while also advocating for gender equity in media.
- Explore the possibility of hosting awards to create incentives for men and women to report on issues that are important to women as well as recognising special contribution of women in media.

- To open discussions with media houses to develop policies and proposals to ensure that internal regulations to promote gender equality are put in place in all media throughout the country.
- The journalists organisations understand the importance of adopting internal policies that reflect gender equality by adopting the following actions:
 - The development of a gender committee that specifically focuses upon producing campaigns related to gender issues;
 - The introduction of a minimum quota of female representatives, particularly on the executive board;
 - The encouragement of family-friendly meetings.