



GEOASOOL
VISION
FOR A BETTER
MEDIA
FOR A BETTER
PAKISTAN
<http://www.geo.tv/asool>

GEO ASOOL

A. GEO Manifesto (Our values, goals, and declared biases)

**WORKING DRAFT
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DISCLAIMER

This Code of Conduct mainly represents the aspirations and high standards that Geo management and Geo team wish to uphold professionally. Being an internal standard yardstick, this Code or any part of it, may never be used as a basis to pursue a claim against any company of Geo Group, any member of Geo management or any journalist working in Geo Group, if such claim is otherwise not maintainable under general provisions of law. Adoption of this Code of Conduct will neither increase nor decrease the legal obligations of Geo Group companies and members of Geo team under the laws of Pakistan.

PREAMBLE

The media in Pakistan, after years of struggle, has emerged as a vibrant and powerful catalyst of change in society. The freedom which the media enjoys, however, is not unfettered and there are forces that contrive to erect hurdles in its path. The people of the country have reposed an enormous trust in the media and consider it to be a positive check on authoritarian tendencies in the government and other actors of the state. The media's role in informing, educating and entertaining brings with it a huge responsibility. The social contract between the media and its consumers is sacrosanct and any breach in this contract will have serious repercussions.

Over the years there have been many occasions for soul searching amongst media practitioners. As we stumbled in a field that was never leveled we searched for guiding principles that would ensure that our credibility was not damaged. An unwritten code of conduct always helps us navigate uncharted waters. Much of what we have achieved was due to our intuitive grasp of best practices and our commitment, often at great financial loss, to uphold the truth and side with forces that represent a brighter, prosperous and peaceful Pakistan. We felt a need to codify these principles and set standards that we could be judged against. In doing so we recognize that freedom is not license. We brought together some of the best minds in the profession and openly debated, argued and deliberated on the principles that would bind us and keep us on the straight path. Over three dozen reporters, senior editors, hosts and members of our group's editorial management team vetted seven different code of conduct from across the world. They also studied in depth these regulatory frameworks created from various documents, borrowed from them and adapted sections in keeping with our ground realities.

The outcome of these discussions is Geo Asool – a draft, open to feedback, suggestions and amendments from you – the most important stakeholders of Geo. Geo Asool is a work in progress. Once we have fine-tuned it - based on your feedback - as a consensus document we intent to make this The Code which will guide all our actions. This code in its final shape will be formally adopted by the network on 14th of August, 2012 which also marks the 10th Anniversary of Geo. Geo Asool will be a living working document. Even after the 14th of August, 2012 the process of change will continue. Most documents, that are designed to capture an operational procedure or even a value or mission tend to stay static which, in fact, often is a sign that it is not being used by the people it has been designed for. In a modular and fast changing world, new interpretations and experiences help increase learning and adaptations and thus we believe that if we are truly successful changes and updates will be a continuous process in GEO Asool.

Your role will be critical and crucial. We look to you to constantly monitor our performance and evaluate our adherence to these guiding principles. Help us make Geo Asool the basis of our existence.

Geo Asool Key Saath!
Jaan Kar Geo!

A) Policy Vision: GEO Manifesto – Our values, goals, likes and dislikes¹

Core Value

Our greatest strength is the reputation of the brand GEO. We must do everything to enhance it and nothing to undermine or dilute that reputation. We believe our reputation is built upon the following goals:

Goals:

- a) To encourage tolerance in society
- b) To create an enabling environment for thought and change
- c) To promote “Public Interest” as ultimately the viewer is our employer
- d) Geo Pakistan. To make our slogan Geo Pakistan meaningful.
- e) To speak the truth with accuracy
- f) To be impartial through diversity of opinion
- g) To bring the world to Pakistan and Pakistan to the world
- h) To value feedback and accountability
- i) To encourage positive activism

a) To encourage tolerance in the society

For we believe, tolerance for each others ideas and feedback will make us overcome our differences and will make us grow instead of being divided and retarded by them; and will help us move our country and our people towards a progressive and peaceful society; a society that we all deserve.

b) To create an enabling environment for thought and change

Creating and enabling environment for discourse and debate will allow the entrepreneurship of ideas. An enabling environment for ideas will provide flexibility that is needed for our changing needs and environment. Such a foundation will not only provide a springboard for further progress but will also help absorb and cushion the varied and potential tensions that exist in a plural society.

c) To promote “Public Interest” as ultimately the viewer is our employer

Public Interest is the guiding light of our actions. Anyone who deals with the viewer is expected to honour that principle, knowing that ultimately the viewers are our employers. We seek to report and present stories of significance that add value and enrich people’s lives. Empowering

¹ GEO Asool-Vision document is our constitution- Our Values, Goals & Declared Biases. Derived from GEO Asool Vision Document, we have revised and circulated GEO Asool Best Practices/Code of Conduct draft amongst our TeamGEO members. We request all our stakeholders across the world including media, academia, government & NGO officials and regulators, and above all our viewers, to send us their feedback at: www.geo.tv/asool

our viewers with knowledge and insight so that they are able to form opinions and take informed decisions that affect their future, is the best way we can serve the public interest.

d) Geo Pakistan. To make our slogan Geo Pakistan meaningful.

We are patriots. Discussing issues and presenting criticism with the intention to improve the overall conditions is part of patriotism. We will be patriots at the expense of potential criticism. However, we will have a clear boundary when that criticism creates despondency or bias against the very sovereignty of the country for we believe true national interest overrides business and personal interests.²

e) To speak the truth with accuracy

We strive to be accurate and establish the truth. Accuracy is more important than speed. We will be honest and open about what we do not know and avoid wild speculation. We aim to never mislead our viewers and always protect their right to know, and form their own opinion.

We favor fact over opinion. Nevertheless we understand opinions are important as well not only because they enrich the value of information but also in a data starved society where facts are difficult to ascertain and access, opinions assume further importance. However, we will ensure that the expression of opinion is not confused with the assertion of fact. Moreover, we will be open about any conflict of interests, editorial discretion and biases which we may be using.

We will be extra sensitive to these aspects and protect our viewer's rights through verbal and visual disclaimers.

f) To be impartial through diversity of opinion

We aim to be fair and open-minded and it is our goal to reflect all significant strands of opinion by exploring the range and conflict of views. We will be objective and even handed and will always strive for balance and present diverse point of view even when the majority may be averse to the minority point of view.

We assure our audiences that our decisions are neither influenced by political or commercial pressures nor by any personal interests (except for the declared biases that have been listed in the "i) To encourage positive activism", section, see below)

² The definition of National Interest may be different for different stakeholders of the State including Government, Bureaucracy, Security Forces, Establishment, Judiciary and others. A conflict of interest will be present when institutional balance doesn't exist making the comparative definitions of National Interest controversial. Geo will strive to build an understanding with all stakeholders of the State, to build an understanding of National Interest and have regular dialogue to demonstrate that understanding.

g) To bring the world to Pakistan and Pakistan to the world

We will try our best to showcase the best practices of the world to our audiences. We will present them as options and compare them to our history and circumstances to expand the horizons of our minds and the potential for progress through debate. We will do this even at the expense of criticism. GEO will also try its best to represent Pakistan internationally through the distribution of our content worldwide.

h) To value feedback and accountability

We are accountable to our viewers. Their continuing trust in GEO is the most essential part of our social contract with them. We will thus be open in admitting our mistakes and encourage a culture of willingness to learn from them. We pledge to our viewers and our detractors never to take criticism personally and even when viciously attacked we will react with balance.

GEO will always encourage robust internal and external feedback and promote mechanisms to facilitate that.

i) To encourage positive activism

To protect our reputation and credibility we will try our level best not to be biased on most issues, nevertheless there are some areas where that very reputation & credibility will be at stake if we are not biased. The following are some areas which are important to us and where activism may take place.

Likes and Dislikes

1. Biases: There will be **no bias** in the following areas

- a. Between government and opposition
- b. Between political parties
- c. Between conservatives and liberals
- d. Between the urban vs. rural populations
- e. Between provinces
- f. Between castes and ethnicities and minorities
- g. Between gender groups
- h. Between age groups
- i. Against any religion/sects

2. Biases: There will **be biased** in the following areas:

- a) **People vs. the Government:** We will favor public interest over any other consideration. We represent the people of the country and not the government of the day. Ultimately our viewers are our employers.

- b) **State vs. the Government:** Many don't know the difference; the government of the day is not Pakistan. Government is just one element of the state along with territory, population and sovereignty. They are merely public servants elected by the citizens. Many a times the interests of a government may not be the interest of the state. Confronted to choose we will always be biased in favour of the state and not the government of the day.
- c) **Justice vs. the Judiciary:** We have a bias for justice. We firmly believe that justice is the cornerstone of a progressive and tolerant society. However, we understand there is a fine line between justice and the judiciary. The latter is primarily appointed to safeguard the principles of justice as laid down by the constitution.
- d) **Urdu vs. English:** There is a natural bias in our society for English as opposed to Urdu. Our culture promotes English communication in marketing, finance, law, medicine, business profession to name a few areas. We understand also that colonial and western pop culture also influences this thinking. In order to provide a counter balance to this as well as to protect the language that binds our nation together, we will favor Urdu over English when presenting and communicating with our TV audiences. We will do this without undermining the use of English as our window on the world.
- e) **Facts vs. the Opinions:** We will favor fact over opinions, although opinions should be celebrated for they enrich the value of information. But we will ensure that facts are never confused with opinions.
- f) **Democracy vs. the Dictatorship:** We will always favor democracy over dictatorships no matter how bad a political government might appear to be and how good an individual dictator might promise to be. Our bias in favour of democracy is fixed. However, we do believe that a real democracy includes an independent judiciary, a free media, the ability to have an independent foreign policy, easy access to information, accountability of elected officials with regular, free and fair elections within and amongst political parties.
- g) **Accountability vs. Vindictiveness:** We stand for accountability both internally and externally. But we will always be vigilant to the threat of vindictiveness disguised as accountability.
- h) **Fundamentals vs. Fundamentalism:** Fundamentals of faith and fundamentalism are worlds apart. We believe, Islam is a religion of peace and progress that introduced humanity to powerful concepts of universal rights which the modern world celebrates. We will be against any propaganda, foreign or local, against this image and will do whatever is possible to distinguish between the fundamentals of our faith and the extremism inherent in fundamentalism.
- i) **Institution vs. Individual:** Our forefathers and founders of this nation were great individuals but they also made it clear that building, protecting and developing institutions is more important than following any individual. Institutions are the pillars of a modern state and provide a foundation for stability and balance in society.
- j) **Best Practices vs. All Else:** We are for best practices, regardless of their origin. If we think a local way of doing something is better than an international best practice, we will not let the 'foreign value effect' dictate to us. Similarly, if we know of a practice,

value or technology that is better no matter what its origin, we will promote that practice even at the expense of what some may call tradition.

- k) **Ideal vs. Practical:** Idealism inspires hope for the future. At times the right thing to do may not seem practical at the time. But we must support the right thing to do even at the expense of practicality and regardless of the opposition we might face from forces of the status quo. That opposition, at times, might be disguised as orthodoxy and patriotism.
- l) **Choice (active/khudi) vs. Fatalism (reactive, passive):** There is a tendency in our society and culture to leave things to chance, to fate or mystical intervention. We believe we need to encourage practice to determine our fate.
- m) **Merit vs. Nepotism:** We will promote and celebrate decisions on merit and will shun decisions based on politics, nepotism and individual gain. We will oppose whimsical and arbitrary discussions taken to entrench positions of power.
- n) **News vs. Commercials:** If and when we are forced to choose, we will choose news over business. If any one doubts our ethical position then they may appreciate our enlightened sense of long-term gain instead over short-term greed. For we understand that in the long run our balanced coverage leads to better commercial performance for us and our stakeholders.
- o) **Question/Argument vs. Answers:** We believe that the media's predominant role is not to find answers but to raise questions. Professors, teachers, scientists, experts and politicians may take the lead in answering but we must ask our questions as this is the best way to serve the public interest. Questions are the right weapons we have to enforce accountability and we will defend this right to 'ask' at all times.

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