



**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  
Version: 2.0**

**Dated: 14 August, 2012**

## **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 intend 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 dislikes<sup>1</sup>**

### **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

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<sup>1</sup> 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](http://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.<sup>2</sup>

**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)

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

## Acknowledgments/References

The following people and organizations have at some point or the other helped create the ideas or the drafts that are included in GEO Asool. Many papers, drafts, discussions, debates, ideas and complaints from them have enabled GEO Asool to formulate. We are grateful to their time and concern. The credit behind GEO Asool if any is due to them and the complaints and errors are our responsibility alone.

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60. Imran Syed
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63. Irfan Siddiqui
64. Ismail Jilani
65. Jawad Naeem Rana
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67. Jugnu Mohsin
68. Kamran Khan
69. Ken Tiven
70. Khawar Naeem Hashmi
71. Maj. Gen. Ather Abbas
72. Maleeha Lodhi
73. Mariam Chughtai
74. Masoom Usmani
75. Mehdi Hasan
76. Mehmood Shaam
77. Mir Ibrahim Rahman
78. Mir Khalil ur Rahman
79. Mir Shakil ur Rahman
80. Moeed Pirzada

81. Mohammad Ali Mazhar
82. Mohammad Malick
83. Muaaz Ahsan
84. Mufti Muneeb
85. Mufti Rafi Usmani
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98. Owais Toheed
99. **Pakistan Broadcasters' Association Members**
100. Pervez Rashid
101. Pervez Shaukat
102. Professor Asim Khwaja
103. Professor Bharat Anand
104. Professor Das
105. Professor Jim Hoopes
106. Professor Marshall Ganz
107. Professor Ronald Heiftz
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115. Shadab Tayyab
116. Shafqat Mahmood
117. Shahrukh Hassan
118. Shahzad Nawaz
119. Shoaib Mansoor
120. Sohail Ansar
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122. Sunil Lulla
123. Syed Babar Ali
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- 125. Uday Shankar
- 126. Yousaf Baig Mirza
- 127. Zafrullah Khan
- 128. Zaigham Khan

# **GEO ASOOL**

## **B) Best Practices** **(Guidelines on how GEO Manifesto translates** **day-to-day)**

**WORKING DRAFT**  
**Version: 2.0**

**Dated: 14 August, 2012**

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## **B) Internal Code of Conduct: Guidelines and Best Practices**

### **1. Accuracy**

- a) We will not broadcast anything which is known to be false, or baseless and is malafide or for which there exists sufficient reasons to believe that the same may be false, baseless or malafide.
- b) We will strive to be accurate and establish the truth. Accuracy is more important than speed and it is often more than a question of getting the facts right. Accuracy should not be sacrificed for the sake of competition and the race to scoop one another. We will weigh all relevant facts and information to get at the truth. Our reportage will be well sourced, based on sound evidence. We will be honest and open about what we do not know and avoid wild speculation.
- c) First estimates of casualty figures often turn out to be inaccurate. If different sources give different estimates we should either report the range or go for the source which carries the greatest authority and attribute the estimate accordingly, openly acknowledging the source of such information.

### **2. Disclaimers/Disclosure**

- a) We aim to never mislead our viewers and always protect their right to know, to form their own opinion and safely consume our content and understand our philosophy. We will be extra sensitive to protect this right of our viewers and guard it through verbal and visual disclaimers and reminders especially in the following cases.
  - i. Conflict of interests
    - 1. Internal Conflicts: It could be a personal bias e.g. A crime reporter on screen says that "I may say something objectionable about police as I and my family have just been affected by them".
  - ii. Fact and opinion (Refer to section 23 for Opinion)
  - iii. PG<sup>1</sup>/Violence
  - iv. We should disclose if our reports are censored or monitored or if we withhold information, and explain, wherever possible, the rules under which we are operating. We will be forthright with viewers, listeners or readers about why certain information is being withheld if security/existential threats are involved.
  - v. Examples:
    - 1. If a reporter is embedded with the military covering an operation it will be difficult to provide objective coverage.

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<sup>1</sup> PG: Parental Guidance warnings and disclaimers.



2. If a reporter is reporting from an area under militants/terrorists control he will not be able to tell the entire truth with the barrel of the gun a foot away.
3. A channel might not be able to broadcast certain content due to pressure and forced channel closure from cable operators/PEMRA/Political Parties/Pressure Groups.

#### PEMRA Codes

4. When we have to comply with laws or regulation that we do not necessarily agree with editorially, which might be against our constitutional rights, we will inform our viewers of the circumstances reasons for our forced adherence.

### 3. Privacy

- a) High officials and public figures do not have the same right to privacy as ordinary citizens
- b) GEO will respect the privacy of all, unless significant “**public interest**” exists.
- c) There is no single definition of public interest, it includes but is not confined to:
  - i. Exposing or detecting crime.
  - ii. Exposing significantly anti-social behaviour.
  - iii. Exposing corruption or injustice.
  - iv. Disclosing significant incompetence or negligence.
  - v. Protecting people’s well-being and safety
  - vi. Preventing people from being misled by some statement or action of an individual or organization.
  - vii. Disclosing information that allows people to make a significantly more informed decision about matters of public importance.
  - viii. There is also an element of public interest in freedom of expression itself.
  - ix. When considering what is in the public interest we also need to take account of information already in the public domain or about to become available to the public.
- d) In the cases of sexual offences, heinous crime against children, juveniles and women, names and identifying photographs shall not be published with or without consent.
- e) Senior editorial control must be exercised in selecting material on issues relating to privacy

### 4. Neutrality/Fairness/Impartiality

Geo will maintain neutrality, fairness and impartiality by adhering to the following principles and guidelines:

- a) We will aim for impartial coverage of news and current affairs to promote fair and informed debate

- b) We will seek to provide a properly balanced service consisting of a wide range of subject matter and views broadcast over an appropriate time scale.
- c) We will strive to reflect a wide range of opinion and exploring conflicting views so that no significant strand of thought is knowingly masked or under represented.
- d) We will maintain neutrality and fairness in the choice of participants as well as the questions given to them and the time given to them to respond.
- e) We will avoid unjust or unfair treatment of individuals or organizations in our programmes.
- f) We will give fair representation to all the contributions when a programme is edited.
- g) We will give participants of a programme appropriate and timely opportunity to respond whenever an alleged wrongdoing or incompetence is presented. We will be careful neither to snub any participant nor go on break to interrupt a statement.
- h) We will make it clear to the public, whenever it happens, that a person or an interested party to an argument was invited to contribute to a programme and had refused to attend it or chose not to make any comments.
- i) We will not broadcast any material amounting to blackmail as defined in Pakistan penal code or incrimination of any person.
- j) We will take extra caution to ensure that the government's point of view is present especially when opposition is anticipated in a program, news report etc. We will note on a log-sheet a list of the government representatives that were asked to participate but refused to do so or were not available. This list will be available and will be circulated to the Ministry of Information, if required, on a regular basis.
- k) We will make all efforts through our producers and hosts to correct errors of fact at the earliest opportunity and ensure that corrections are broadcast in the next programme.
- l) We will practice and preach professionalism, balance and tolerance. One of the reasons why we have historically refused to bow down under pressure was that we were in practical terms being asked to become personal and supportive and side with the establishment against the opposition. However, we aim to be careful not to violate those very principles of neutrality in favour of any party.
- m) We will not be a party to anyone. That has been our stance from day one. We will focus on facts. If there will be any bias then it will be a bias towards justice, not the judiciary; democracy not the politicians; State not the government and accountability not vindictiveness. If there will be any bias then it will be bias for the truth and for a progressive and tolerant Pakistan.
- n) We will practice and emphasize tolerance for each other's ideas. We will ensure that we in GEO will not take things personally, and even when we are unfairly attacked we will react with balance and give the point of view of the accuser as well.

- o) Our hosts will refrain from displaying too much emotion during the show especially expressions of disbelief, shaking of heads, smirks that can be construed as mocking the guest, extensive sarcasm and abrupt interruptions bordering on rudeness
- p) Our tone and voice will be as neutral as possible and each guest must be treated with the same civility as the other guests. Derisory comments and taunting laughter by the host must be avoided.
- q) Our hosts will not make the kind of one sided interventions which reflect bias. Any such mistakes, if made will be edited out.

Unacceptable Examples<sup>2</sup>:

- i. *Bilkul galat, Aisa nahi hai, Aisa nahi hai...* (Contradiction)
- ii. *Aap bilkul theek keh rahe hain, bilkul theek keh rahe hain* (Agreement)
- iii. Drowning out a guest by shouting or raising voice.

## 5. Accusation/Allegation

- a) Geo will not normally use live unscripted two-ways (like beepers) to report serious allegations.
- b) We cannot allow any guest to make an accusation or allegation unless that person or his or her representative is there to defend him or herself in reasonable time.
  - i. Reasonable time:
    - 1. Beeper: Immediately or right after the allegation
    - 2. In the same programme, through physical presence or through audio. Ideally it should be physical if the accuser is physically present. If for some reason the defendant cannot be there, it should be made clear that he is innocent and that he/she will be given a chance to defend himself/herself in the immediately following program.
- c) The allegation must be in the public interest.
- d) The allegation must come from a source of proven credibility and reliability that is in a position to have sufficient knowledge of the events featured so that there is a strong reason for believing that the allegation might be credible.
- e) In areas, where past admission of guilt has not taken place or legal judgment hasn't been passed, our hosts/ anchors are advised to frame the allegations in a suggestive manner as opposed to direct accusation.
  - i. Unacceptable Example:
    - 1. *aap nai mulk tora*
  - ii. Acceptable Example:
    - 1. *xyz report/person/judgment kay muttabiq, aap nai mulk tora (better example)*

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<sup>2</sup> Examples given in this document are illustrative for better understanding. Any similarity with actual events is purely coincidental.

## 2. *kaha jata hey, aap nai mulk tora*

### 6. **Nuclear/Strategic Assets**

- a) We may not have any broadcasts that contain unrestrained/unchallenged opinions that are likely to hurt the security of the county's nuclear/strategic defence assets and capabilities.
- b) Every attempt will be made to take the point of view of the Defence Ministry and to incorporate their version while broadcasting such content. If the Defence Ministry is unavailable for comment, we will attempt to take the point of view of the military authorities.
- c) Unacceptable Example:
  - i. *Pakistan ko apne johari hathiyaroun ko tabah ker daina chahiye*
  - ii. *Pakistani johari tanseebat ko America kay hawalay ker daina chahiye*
  - iii. *Pakistani johari hathiyar jahadion kay haath lagney ka khatra hai.*
- d) Acceptable Example:
  - i. *Difa kay hawalay se qoum kay khadshaat ko duur kiya jaye.*
  - ii. We should not have a first strike policy  
Nuclear waste dump is causing harm to environment, we should try to alleviate this issue

### 7. **Militants and Terrorism**

Our broadcasts:

- a) Must not promote, aid, abet, glorify or depict a heroic/sympathetic picture of terrorism or terrorist activities or any other criminal activities or offence defined in Pakistan Penal Code or any other law in force.
- b) Must not incite violence or any action prejudicial to the maintenance of law and order in the country.
- c) Must report acts of terror quickly, accurately, fully and responsibly. Our credibility is undermined by careless use of words which carry emotional or value judgments.
- d) Must differentiate clearly-while reporting- between the concepts of: "negativity of terrorism" and "promoting terrorism".
- e) May cover the family members of victims of suicide bombers.
- f) Must not cover video footage of suicide bombers, terrorists, militants and extremists making statements and pronouncements which may promote aid or abet terrorist activities or terrorism.
- g) Must ensure that we differentiate between terrorism, secession and struggle for fundamental rights and greater autonomy. It is very difficult internationally to define terrorists or militants. In Pakistan this situations is further exacerbated as neither federal nor provincial governments have clearly laid down the government stand or policy on this issue. The government terms Baloch separatists traitors but the Interior Minister offers to receive them at the airport and withdraw all cases against them should they ever be willing to come to Pakistan. Under such circumstances, we will exercise our editorial judgment to

try and differentiate between terrorism, secession and struggle for fundamental rights and greater autonomy.

- h) Will be critical of the government if it moves to ban organizations in haste and especially for political gains. Where such an incident is observed, we will exercise our editorial judgment to expose the same.
  - i. We must take further precaution when airing such content to make it clear through debate and discussion that terrorism cannot be condoned in any condition and is an “unquestionably negative” act. A disclaimer as well as some expert opinion should be made during this broadcast.
  - ii. For the militants, jihadis, suicide bombers, our anchors, hosts or the newscasters will not use the word of “Shaheed”. We will also avoid this word in general since it involves a difficult value judgment and might be blasphemous as well, as only God knows who is really Shaheed in His cause and who is not.
- i) Unacceptable Examples:
  - i. Visit to the grave of the suicide bombers/terrorists and projecting them as national/religious heroes by stating that they are “Shaheeds” and a fragrance exists around the graveyard.
  - ii. *Laal masjid waloun ki madad kay liye farishtey aaye they.*
  - iii. *Gen Musharraf ko qatal karna wajibul islam hey- Osama Bin Laden*
- j) Acceptable Example:
  - i. *Militants nay kuch naye ilaqoun pe qabza ker liya* (provided a version of ISPR is given, immediately after the news).
  - ii. *Pakistani fouj ko Swat se bahar nikal dain gey – Molana Siraj*
  - iii. We should always try to negotiate and discuss ways to resolve all issues, and use violence as the last resort

## 8. Crime, Re-enactment and Violence

### We will NOT:

- a) Encourage, induce, incite, justify, reinforce or glorify violence or terror or its perpetrators or contain anything against the maintenance of law and order
- b) Present violence or criminality as glamorous or an acceptable solution to conflicts.
- c) Incite violence against specific groups identified by race, national or ethnic origin, colour, class, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age or mental or physical disabilities.
- d) Show footage or reenactments of executions/murders in which graphic details are shown.

- e) Show footage or reenactment in which sex crime or rape is depicted with salacious details of the crime and or the incident. Where sensitive crime scenes including reenactments are aired they must not be aired at family viewing time. Moreover, a clear disclaimer should be given for such upcoming content and PG sign should be aired throughout the program.
- f) Provide opportunities to any viewers to copy the modus operandi of criminals and thereby encourage commission of any offences or crimes. Divulge identity of any victim of rape or sexual abuse or kidnapped or deceased or victims of terrorist attacks or such victim's family without prior written permission of the victim or victim's guardian.
- g) However, in case the victim of rape or sexual abuse is a minor, we will not divulge identity of the victim.
- h) Glamorise persons, groups or organizations that use or advocate the use of violence or engage in any criminal activity within Pakistan including relaying of head money or bounties other than the competent courts or the government.

## **9. Human Suffering and Distress**

- a) Human suffering and distress are the kind of news which can help prevent such further suffering. We will identify the people responsible as well as create awareness and public support against the perpetrators of such crimes. However, merely sensationalizing the effects of human suffering and focusing on the distressing factors alone should be avoided.
- b) Sharply focused and highlighted gory images of bloodshed, corpses and human organs and of severely injured persons will be avoided-whether the footage is live or recorded. [This includes the images from both the natural disasters and acts of terrorism.]
- c) Geo will give instructions and reminders during such live coverage of events where blasts have just taken place that cameraman will not zoom in on any body parts. Online producers will be given instructions and reminders to edit out any such clips or blur them.
- d) PG disclaimers in Urdu and English will remain on the screen throughout such transmissions and verbal warnings will also be provided by our anchors.
- e) When we know that a certain potentially disturbing footage is about to be shown, the warning as well as the visual disclaimer will go on air at least 30 seconds before the actual showing.

## **10. Demonstrations, Disturbances And Riots**

- a) Comprehensive coverage of demonstrations, disturbances and riots is an important part of our news reporting and can help identify and lead to the arrest of the perpetrators.
- b) It is however important that we assess the risk or the likelihood of further disturbances by previewing the material before broadcast.
- c) We must withdraw our coverage/footage immediately if we have a fair degree of suspicion that we are inflaming the situation.

- d) When it is difficult for reporters located on one side of a confrontation to form a clear overall view, their material should be put into a wider context for broadcast.
- e) When describing the size of a protest rally or procession extra precautions will be taken not to exaggerate the head counts and editorial help will be sought to arrive at the closest estimates.

## **11. LIVE Broadcasting**

- a) When reporting live, we must preferably install a delay mechanism. However, if the level of violence or disorder becomes too graphic or is expected to become so then we may cut away from the live and record the material for use in an edited report.

## **12. Respect**

- a) Potentially offensive jokes, words, songs, dialogues and subtitles shouldn't be broadcast in news programmes and serious talk shows.
- b) Geo shall ensure that serious talk shows and news programmes will not have content that contains abusive or unduly discriminatory material or comment which is based on matters of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status or physical or mental disability.
- c) Recognizing that stereotype images can and do have a negative effect, it shall be our responsibility to exhibit, to the best of our ability: a conscious sensitivity to the problems related to sex-role stereotyping, by refraining from exploitation; and by the reflection of the intellectual and emotional equality of both sexes in our programming.
- d) Our hosts, anchors, newscasters and reporters should address each other as well as our guests with respect and humility.
  - i. We should try to address each other with formal words like "AAP" instead of "TU"
  - ii. When an expert or a guest is avoiding a question or is being aggressive, our representative should always give the benefit of the doubt to the expert and not lose their sense of decorum at any cost. At no point should we raise our voice and our tone should be polite, patient but firm to put our point across and to exercise control over the situation.

## **13. Political Satire vs. Ridicule**

We believe in tolerance for each other's ideas and feedback will make us overcome differences instead of being divided by them. This will take our country and our people towards a more progressive and peaceful society that we all deserve. As part of this philosophy it is important to laugh at oneself as well as our leaders and it is important for our public figures to have tolerance for comments made in a lighter vein. However we will be careful of the following while doing so:

1. We will give a disclaimer related to the above in order to communicate the philosophy of tolerance as well as commend the tolerance of those who are being depicted in the programme.
  - a) The ability to laugh at ourselves is the best example of tolerance. Tolerance will enable us to overcome our differences and learn from them instead. We are thankful for the tolerance shown by the public servants and personalities in such programmes. *Apnay aap par has kay geo.*
2. We will create the distinction between political satire and ridicule. Ridicule is described as something that is below the belt and you would not be comfortable watching it with your family. We shall avoid material that is private and personal in nature or which has to do with intimate details of family life.
3. We will not ridicule fun of the army, the judiciary and anyone's faith as that is prohibited by our Constitution
4. These guidelines regarding ridicule and political satire are regulated by the law of context as well. Therefore the tolerance of humour at someone's expense will be more in a social satire programme than in a talk show. We should avoid laughing at someone's expense in a serious talk show.
5. Personal, family life that is not in public domain already and sexual references will be avoided even in a comedy show.

#### **14. Defamation**

- a) We will not broadcast anything defamatory as defined in the defamation law. The definition of defamation includes malicious intent.

#### **15. Religion**

- a. Geo will avoid any derogatory remarks/ material about any religion or sect or community or use of visual images or words contemptuous of religious sects and ethnic groups or which promote communal and sectarian biases, hatred or disharmony, or violence.
- b. We will ensure that the beliefs and practices of the world faiths are described accurately when discussed and interfaith harmony is promoted at all cost.
- c. We will ensure the religious views and beliefs of an individual, a religion or religious denomination are not misrepresented, abused or discriminated against, as judged against generally accepted standards.
- d. We will respect the religious sensitivity surrounding the observance of holy days and the principal festivals of the various faiths and sects and during those days will be more conscious with greater sensitivity so that unnecessary and



avoidable offence is avoided by material that might be more acceptable at other times.

- e. In output, dealing with the religious views and/or beliefs of a religion or religious denomination as the central subject, we should make clear both the identity of the faith and the purpose of the output.
- f. Religion should not be used to recruit using public pressure, or ridicule or prove a personal political point giving quotes of the Quran/Hadees/interpretations in a live program or in a program where there aren't at least two known and relevant Aalim-e-Deen present to refute or correct such statements and references. Even in a non-live programme such things should be avoided without the presence of at least two well-known Aalim-e-Deen.
- g. Religious programmes must not seek to promote religious views or beliefs by stealth.
- h. Violence in any form will be discouraged, or condemned and where not possible to do both we should rather be silent about propagating violence.
- i. Wherever violence is associated with religion and can't be avoided during a discussion we or an expert should explain that one should not take law into one's own hands and that the state sanctioned institutions can only sanction violence where applicable after due process.
- j. Sometimes questions can be hurtful to one's belief. We will be conscious of sensitivities but will also value the right to raise questions. The distinction and tradeoff will require discussion and debate internally before such things are allowed or encouraged to go on air, especially live. For example questions that are intended to bridge gaps, which are asked to understand are different from aggressive questions that are designed to increase differences and animosity and cause deliberate offense. Much of the fine line exists in this distinction within the context and the framing of the questions as well as the intention itself and thus all such sensitive tradeoffs will require a proactive discussion with Editorial Committee and head of the department beforehand. When in doubt, discuss and debate to raise consciousness.

## 16. President

- a) Casting aspersions against the President is not allowed by the Constitution of Pakistan and the prevailing law<sup>3</sup>.
- b) The President is the symbol of the Federation and the constitution in spirit deems him/her to be neutral. If however, the President holds a political office his role can and will be criticized and debated.
- c) We don't have to necessarily agree with the President's policies and can criticize them but we need to differentiate between "respect for the office" and "disagreement with the policies". If, however, the President violates his oath or Article 41 of the Constitution of Pakistan then the media has the right to discuss

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to Article 63-1(g) of the constitution of Pakistan and Page 9 clause (g) of PEMRA Rules 2009 which state: "No programme shall be aired which contains aspersions against the Judiciary and integrity of the Armed Forces of Pakistan"

and debate the pros and cons of it with equal balance as a political and business entity.

## 17. Armed Forces

- a) We cannot broadcast any material that will contain aspersions against the armed forces of Pakistan as dictated by the Constitution of Pakistan and the prevailing law.
- b) We will support the armed forces and celebrate their achievements, as we recognize them as an integral part of the State as well as a guarantor of its sovereignty.
- c) However, if the military intervenes in politics and industry and contravenes the Constitution of Pakistan then the media has the right to discuss and debate the pros and cons of it with equal balance as a political and business entity.
- d) Professional competence and performance of Armed Forces will be open to discussion.
- e) Unacceptable Example:
  - i. *Sara fasaad fouj ka phailaya hua hai*
  - ii. *Be-ghairat fouj*
  - iii. *America ki pittho fouj*
  - iv. *Poori fouj corrupt hai*
- f) Acceptable Example:
  - i. *Gen. Yahya Khan agar waqt per faisla ker laitey tau mulk nahi tout'ta.*
  - ii. *Fouj ko siyasat main mudakhlat nahi kerni chahiye*
  - iii. *Difai budget mein kami ki gunjaish hai*
  - iv. *Difai budget ko parliament zeir-e-behes la sakti hai*
  - v. *Fouj mein bhi corruption hai*

## 18. Judiciary

- a) We cannot broadcast any material that will contain aspersions against the Judiciary of Pakistan as dictated by the Constitution of Pakistan and the prevailing law<sup>4</sup>.
- b) We will not broadcast any programme or discussion that will amount to contempt of the court and on sub-judice matters.
- c) We will support Judiciary as much as we can and celebrate its achievements and its role in advancing justice, as we recognize it as an integral part of the State.
- d) However, opinions and fair criticism can be made on the applicability of the principles of law once the case has been decided.
- e) Constructive criticism of the performance of judiciary will be encouraged for the betterment of the institution.
- f) Unacceptable Example:
  - i. *Adalat ne chamak main aa kay faisla diya.*

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<sup>4</sup> Refer to Article 63-1(g) of the constitution of Pakistan and Page 9 clause (g) of PEMRA Rules 2009 which state: "No programme shall be aired which contains aspersions against the Judiciary and integrity of the Armed Forces of Pakistan"

- ii. *Hum in adalatoun ko nahi mantey*
  - iii. *Saf nazar aa raha hay kay Adalat kaya faisla karnay wali hai*
  - iv. *Fouj aur adlia ki raaton raat meeting hotee hai aur phir faislay hotay hain*
- g) Acceptable Example:
- i. *Adalatee nizaam main islaah honee chahiye*
  - ii. *Matehat adaliya main corruption ka khatma hona chahiye*
  - iii. *Adalaton ko awam ke muqadmaat par tawajju deinee chahiye*
  - iv. *Matehat adalatoun main sainkrroun afraad nasal dar nasal ghomtey rehte hain lekin un ko insaaf nahi milta.*

## 19. Parliament

As per the Constitution of Pakistan only Allah is sovereign and this sovereignty is vested in people of Pakistan who in turn elect their representatives through one man one vote system. Parliament is the author of the constitution.

We will:

- a) Respect our elected parliament and parliamentarians and encourage them to establish good governance.
- b) Celebrate good work done by the Parliament and its committees especially the Public Accounts Committee.
- c) Guide the parliament through news and views to do better law making.
- d) Not ridicule parliament as an institution. Parliament as an institution should not be held accountable for the errors/corruption/crime of individual members.
- e) Criticize the role of parliament if it is seen to be deviating from the constitution.

## 20. South Asia

- a) We will always promote sovereignty of Pakistan.
- b) We will support the discourse of peace, trade and culture and tourism especially with our neighbours.
- c) We will show best practices of South Asia, derive historical learnings and current comparative progress to encourage a healthy competitive spirit.

## 21. Friendly Countries

- a) We will respect Pakistan's relations with all countries. However, we may criticize their policies on merit. We should also be careful in not revealing sensitive information which can be harmful to the national security and affect foreign relations.
- b) Unacceptable Example:
  - i. *Saudi Arab main shahzadoun ki bagahwat aur shahzadion ki taraf se huqooq-i-niswan ki tahreek kay matalliq baat na ki jaye*
  - ii. *Saudi Arab nai Pakistan mein Shia Sunni fasad ko hawa dee...*

iii. *Misir nay hameshah Pakistan dushmani kee hai ...*

c) Acceptable Example:

- i. *Munshiyaat faroosh kerne kay jurm main 2 afraad kay sar qalam kar diye gaye.*
- ii. *Misir aur Pakistan kay taaloogat mushkal rahen hai magar abb behtari hoi hay...*

## 22. Sovereignty

Geo will ensure that:

- a) No moderator, anchor person or host propagates any opinion or acts in any manner prejudicial to the *state of Pakistan*, its sovereignty, integrity and Pakistan.
- b) Debate and discussion to highlight the risks to the sovereignty of Pakistan with the intention to decrease those risks will be encouraged and considered a national service.
- c) Material and footage received from foreign countries and news agencies will be carefully monitored so that it is not used against our national interest. However, the material can be used for debate and discussions with a view to mitigate any serious threat.

## 23. Opinion

Empowering our viewers with information and knowledge enriches their lives. Information helps them to make their own opinions. Though as a news network we favour facts over opinion; however opinions are important as well because they not only enrich the value of the information but in a society where facts are difficult to ascertain, opinions spark debate and help bring the facts out. Given this complex relationship between “fact & opinion” the following guidelines have to be followed while dealing with opinions in our programmes:

- a) We must ensure that the matter commented upon is fair; both sides or main viewpoints are expressed and a variety of opinion is presented and undue prominence of one thought is not prevalent.
- b) The matter on which opinion is being given is in the public interest.
- c) We must ensure that the expression of opinion is not allowed to be understood as an assertion of fact. Opinion should clearly be distinguished from facts at all cost. We must protect our viewers from innocently consuming opinions as facts through disclaimers and reminders.
- d) No such opinion should be given which is not countered, confronted or challenged by equally weighted guests. Therefore we cannot have likeminded guests on shows. This is to ensure that we balance the points of view, and maintain our impartial editorial policy.

Our presenters, reporters and correspondents are the public faces and voices of Geo; they can have a significant impact on perceptions of our impartiality and following guidelines need to be observed:

- e) When we specifically invite someone from our own group as a guest in a programme or on beeper, we should ask them to give disclaimer or we should give a disclaimer on their behalf which clarifies that their opinion is independent and is not that of the institution itself.
- f) We must ensure that our journalists and presenters including those in the news and current affairs, during routine broadcasts, may not provide personal opinions (based on personal bias and views) that can undermine public's trust in Geo's impartiality- which is a promise to our viewers we cannot break at any cost.
- g) We must ensure that "Direct Value Judgments" should be avoided by our newscasters. Adverbs and adjectives lead to value judgments, and they may not match the perception of the viewer. Unless it is an identifiable political discussion programme we are not in the business of hawking opinions or forecasting; we give news as it happens. We should avoid making sweeping generalizations.
- h) We must ensure that commentary and analysis shall be clearly distinguished in the news and actual news should precede the commentary and analysis.
- i) Even in our political discussions, whenever an opinion is being given by our host, not only should they indicate the difference between fact and opinion, but also make sure that they try to give both opinions themselves. Example: ...*mera yeh khayla hay...meri opinion hay*

Promos of our opinionated programmes should also carry the disclaimer, clearly identifying them as political programmes with opinions.

- j) Disclaimer will be given at the beginning of the promo, during the promo, and as a scroll at the end. Plus it will be verbally pointed out during the beginning and the end
  - i. Disclaimer before the program: Empowering our viewers with information and knowledge enriches their lives. That information is used to make their opinions. We favor fact over opinion. However opinions are important as well not only because they enrich the value of the information but also because in a society where facts are difficult to ascertain and access, opinions cannot be ignored. Please do not take the following opinions as facts.

Bloomberg to be used when negatives points are being given to much. This will contain positive statistics: The intention of criticism is not to create despondency but to be used as a value to improve lives and resolve issues. We will try our best to present positive as well as negatives sides of the picture. However, ignorance cannot solve the problems that come with knowledge. ***Jaan kar Geo.***

**GEO ASOOL**

**C) TeamGeo Ethical Journalism  
Handbook**

**WORKING DRAFT  
Version: 2.0**

**Dated: 14 August, 2012**

## **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.

## **D) Employee Handbook<sup>i</sup>**

### **Disclaimer**

These guidelines generally apply to all members of the news and editorial departments; whose work directly affects the content of the channel and even includes those on leaves of absence. Examples given in this document are illustrative for better understanding. Any similarity with actual events is purely coincidental.

## **1. ETHICAL JOURNALISM**

### **Introduction, Scope & Purpose**

- i. The scope of these guidelines includes: anchors, newscasters, hosts, reporters, editors, editorial writers, photographers, picture editors, art directors, artists, designers, graphics editors and researchers. This group of professional journalists is what this text means by “TeamGEO members” or “staff members.”
- ii. GEO believes beyond question that its staff shares the values these guidelines are intended to protect. In the past GEO has resolved differences of view over applying these values amiably through discussion, almost without exception. GEO has every reason to believe that pattern will continue. Nevertheless, the organization views any deliberate violation of these guidelines as a serious offense that may lead to disciplinary action; potentially including dismissal, subject to the terms of any applicable collective bargaining agreement.
- iii. Our fundamental purpose is to protect the impartiality and neutrality of GEO and the integrity of its content and brand. In many instances, merely applying that purpose with common sense will point to the ethical course. Sometimes the answer is self-evident: simply asking oneself whether a course of action might damage the GEO’s reputation is often enough to gauge whether the action is appropriate.
- iv. Every staff member is expected to read this document carefully and to think about how it might apply to his or her duties. A lack of familiarity with its provisions cannot excuse a violation; to the contrary, it makes the violation worse. The provisions presented here can offer only broad principles and some examples. Our world changes constantly, sometimes dramatically. No written document could anticipate every possibility. Thus we expect staff members to consult their supervisors and Director News and or Executive Director News if they have any doubts about any particular situation or opportunity covered by this document. In most cases an exchange of e-mails should suffice.



- v. Thus this handbook is not an exhaustive compilation of all situations that may give rise to an actual or perceived conflict of interest as well as standards that define our editorial policy.
- vi. GEO reserves the right to modify and expand the guidelines from time to time, as appropriate.

The authority to interpret and apply these guidelines is vested in department heads and ranking editors, most notably in Director News and or Executive Director News.

They may delegate that duty to their ranking assistants, but they remain responsible for decisions made under their official authority.

#### **a) Third Party/Part time Engagements**

GEO freely acknowledges that outside appearances can enhance the reputation of its stories and programs and serve GEO's brand and organizational interests. Nevertheless, no TeamGEO member may appear before an outside group if the appearance could reasonably create an actual or apparent conflict of interest or undermine public trust in GEO's impartiality. This will be a serious violation as GEO's credibility will be adversely affected.

No TeamGEO member who takes part in a broadcast, Webcast, public forum or panel discussion may write or edit news stories about that event.

Speeches and other outside endeavors by TeamGEO members, paid or unpaid, should not imply that they carry the endorsement of GEO (unless they do). To the contrary, the TeamGEO member should gracefully remind the audience that the views expressed are his or her own. Outside commitments should not interfere with the speaker's responsibilities inside GEO.

Speeches, tours, seminars, writing assignments and beepers- contributions of any kind are discouraged due to potential conflict of interest as well as time management constraints.

Thus no TeamGEO member should agree to a third party part time assignment schedule without approval from a Director News and CEO/MD. Direct supervisor/Director News must agree first based on past performance as well as conflict of interest as well as future workload and time management capacity and then make formal recommendation to CEO/MD.

#### **b) Collaboration and Testimonials**

TeamGEO members may not collaborate in ventures involving individuals or organizations that figure or are likely to figure in coverage they provide, edit, and package or supervise. Among other things, this prohibition applies to collaborating in writing books, pamphlets, reports, scripts, scores or any other material and in making photographs or creating artwork of any sort.

Except in reviews or columns aired in GEO/Jang Group or on its Web site or appropriately voiced in authorized public appearances, TeamGEO members may not offer endorsements, testimonials or promotional blurbs for books, films, television programs or any other programs, products or ventures.

### **c) Voting, Campaigns and Public Issues**

No newsroom or editorial employee may do anything that damages GEO's reputation for strict neutrality in reporting on politics and government. In particular, no one may wear campaign buttons or display any other sign of political partisanship while on the job.

Media persons have no place on the playing fields of politics. Staff members are entitled to vote, but they must do nothing that might raise questions about their professional neutrality or that of GEO. In particular, they may not campaign for, demonstrate for, or endorse candidates, ballot causes or efforts to enact legislation. They may not wear campaign buttons or themselves display any other insignia of partisan politics.

No TeamGEO member may seek public office anywhere. Seeking or serving in public office plainly violates the professional detachment expected of a journalist. It poses a risk of having the TeamGEO member's political views imputed to GEO, and it can sow a suspicion of favoritism in GEO's political coverage when one of its staff is an active participant.

TeamGEO members may not march or rally in support of public causes or movements, sign ads taking a position on public issues, or lend their name to campaigns, benefit dinners or similar events if doing so might reasonably raise doubts about their ability or GEO's ability to function as neutral observers in covering the news. TeamGEO members must keep in mind that neighbors and other observers commonly see them as representatives of GEO.

### **d) Representing GEO**

TeamGEO members may appear from time to time on radio and television programs or write newspaper articles devoted to public affairs, but they should avoid expressing views that go beyond what they would be allowed to say in GEO. Opinion writers and commentators enjoy more leeway than others in speaking publicly because their business is expressing opinions. GEO nevertheless expects them to consider carefully the forums in which they appear and to protect the standards and impartiality of the GEO as a whole. As a general rule immediate supervisor must have prior knowledge and give consent to this activity.

Depending on circumstances, the TeamGEO member may have to excuse himself or herself from certain coverage or even move to a job unrelated to the activities in question.

GEO's good name does not belong to any of us. No one has a right to expropriate it for private purposes. TeamGEO members may not use GEO identification cards for purposes not

connected with GEO employment. Cards may not be used to obtain special treatment or advantage from governmental, commercial or other organizations (except when the card is required for a benefit available to all GEO Company employees by virtue of its foundation's charitable relationships, such as free admission to the Museums).

TeamGEO members may not use company stationery, business cards, forms or other materials for any purpose except the business of the GEO.

TeamGEO members must not disclose confidential information about the operations, policies or plans of GEO or its corporate affiliates. Department heads may authorize other TeamGEO members to comment publicly on policies or plans within the TeamGEO members' areas of responsibility and expertise. If staff members are approached by other media or other outsiders to discuss GEO content or policy, they should refer the questioners to the President of the Network, anyone delegated by him or the CEO, or the corporate communications department—who are the only authorities to represent GEO formally on its policy.

TeamGEO members are free to discuss their own activities in public, provided their comments do not create an impression that they lack journalistic impartiality or speak for GEO. None of these restrictions should be interpreted as barring a TeamGEO member from responding openly and honestly to any reasonable inquiry from a viewer about that TeamGEO member's work.

If a viewer asks for a correction, that request should be passed promptly to a supervisor/feedback@geo.tv. If the request threatens legal action or appears to be from a lawyer representing a client, the complaint should be promptly referred to the legal department through a department head.

#### **e) Disclosure of Possible Conflicts**

Any TeamGEO member who sees a potential for conflict or a threat to the network's reputation in the activities of spouse, friends or relatives must discuss the situation with his or her supervising editor. In some cases, disclosure is enough. But if GEO considers the problem serious, the TeamGEO member may have to withdraw from certain coverage. Sometimes an assignment may have to be modified or a beat changed. In a few instances, a staff member may have to move to a different department — from business and financial news, say, to the culture desk — to avoid the appearance of conflict.

Although this policy necessarily imposes restraints, GEO has no wish to intrude upon the private lives of its staff members and their families. Nothing in this document seeks to prohibit a companion, spouse or other relative of a TeamGEO member from taking part in any political, financial, commercial, religious or civic activity. GEO understands that friends and relatives of its staff have every right to pursue full and active lives, personally and professionally. If restrictions are necessary, they fall on GEO employee. But any attempt to

disguise a TeamGEO member's participation in prohibited activity by using a relative's name or any other alias constitutes a violation.

#### **f) Personal Benefit Ahead of Readers and Viewers**

Though TeamGEO members must necessarily accept certain limits on their freedom to invest, this policy leaves a broad range of investments open to them. Any TeamGEO member, regardless of assignment, is free to own diversified mutual funds, money market funds and other diversified investments that the reporter or editor cannot control. No TeamGEO member may own stock or have any other financial interest in a company, enterprise or industry that figures or is likely to figure in coverage that he or she provides, edits, packages or supervises regularly. TeamGEO members may not buy or sell securities or make other investments in anticipation of forthcoming stories that originate with GEO. In general, TeamGEO members must refrain from acting on such information before public disclosure.

#### **g) Personal Relations with Sources**

Relationships with sources require the utmost in sound judgment and self discipline to prevent the fact or appearance of partiality. Cultivating sources is an essential skill, often practiced most effectively in informal settings outside of normal business hours. Yet staff members, especially those assigned to beats, must be sensitive that personal relationships with news sources can erode into favoritism, in fact or appearance. And conversely staff members must be aware that sources are eager to win our good will for reasons of their own.

#### **h) Accepting Hospitality/Gifts from Sources**

GEO pays the expenses when its representatives entertain news sources (including government officials) or travel to cover them. In some business situations, it may be unavoidable to accept a meal paid by a news source. Whenever practical, however, the reporter should suggest dining where GEO can pay. Staff members may not accept free or discounted transportation and lodging except where special circumstances give us little or no choice. This however should be cleared with supervisor before hand.

If any TeamGeo member accepts a gift or travel offer from a source the TeamGeo member will declare this to his/her departmental head and HR and seek advice on appropriate action. Geo reserves the right to ask TeamGeo member not to accept the gift/travel request and to return it politely with a policy letter (see below for templates).

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### Sample letter declining a gift

Dear XXXXXXXXX,

Your recent gift came as a pleasant surprise. I appreciate your thinking of me.

But the gift puts me in an awkward position. The GEO Network bars its reporters and editors from accepting anything of value from the people or groups they cover. GEO does not want to risk the perception that it will cover a subject more thoroughly or skew its coverage of controversial subjects because interested parties have expressed appreciation for its efforts.

So I must return your gift with thanks. I hope you understand our position, and I thank you for your thoughtfulness.

Sincerely,

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### Sample letter declining an unsolicited award

Dear XXXXXXXXX,

Your recent letter informing me that I'd been selected to receive an award from XXXXXXXXX came as a pleasant surprise. I appreciate the sentiment behind the award.

But your decision puts me in an awkward position. GEO Network bars its reporters and editors from accepting awards conferred by groups that have an interest in the subjects covered by the award recipients. GEO does not want to risk the perception that it will cover a subject more thoroughly or skew its coverage of controversial subjects because interested parties have applauded its efforts.

So I must decline your award with thanks. I hope you and your colleagues understand our position.

Thank you again for your kind words.

Sincerely,

## 2. TeamGEO Social Media Guide

Every day, people discuss, debate and embrace Geo News and our brands in hundreds of online conversations on Social Media. These are conversations supported by online tools.

Social Media unlike the broadcast medium's target audience is not just a demographic of people, anymore. The people who use social media are real people who use it and their social interactions. To connect with them you need to understand them.

**Remember:** *Relationships are more powerful than marketing.*

**Aim for a target:** *Are you going mostly for awareness? Influence? Buzz?*

We must recognize the vital importance of participating in these online conversations and are committed to ensuring that we participate in online social media the right way.

**These Online Social Media Principles have been developed to help empower our concerned departments and our colleagues, to participate in this new frontier of marketing and communications, represent our Company, and share the optimistic and positive spirits of our company and brands.**

To achieve sustainable growth online, our shared goals and values individually and collectively must guide us:

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

These **Online Social Media Principles** are intended to outline how these values should be demonstrated in the online social media space and to guide your participation in this area, both when you are participating personally, as well as when you are acting on behalf of the Company.

The same rules that apply to our messaging and communications in traditional media still apply in the online social media space; simply because the development and implementation of an online social media program can be fast, easy, and inexpensive doesn't mean that different rules apply.

By leveraging our collective genius and the courage to shape a better future, combined with our passion, diversity, quality and accountable integrity, it is critical that **we always remember who we are (a news power house) and what our role is in the social community is.**

The best advice is to approach online worlds in the same way we do the physical one – by using **sound judgment** and **common sense**, by adhering to the Company's **values**, and by following the **Code of Business Conduct** and all other applicable policies.

### **Our Company in the Online Social Media Community**

Note that there's a big difference in speaking "on behalf of the Company" and speaking "about" the Company.

- **Adhere to the Code of Business Conduct and other applicable policies.** All Company associates, from the Chairman to every intern, are subject to the Company's Code of Business Conduct in every public setting.
- **You are responsible for your actions.** Anything you post that can potentially tarnish the Company's image will ultimately be your responsibility. We do encourage you to participate in the online social media space, but urge you to do so properly, exercising sound judgment and common sense.
- **Be a "pathfinder" for compliments and criticism.** Even if you are not an official online spokesperson for the Company, you are one of our most vital assets for monitoring the social media landscape. If you come across positive or negative remarks about the Company or its brands online that you believe are important, consider sharing them by forwarding them to [feedback@geo.tv](mailto:feedback@geo.tv).
- **Let the subject matter experts respond to negative posts.** You may come across negative or disparaging posts about the Company or its brands, or see third parties trying to spark negative conversations. Unless you are a certified online spokesperson, avoid the temptation to react yourself. Pass the post(s) along to our official in-market spokespersons who are trained to address such comments, at [feedback@geo.tv](mailto:feedback@geo.tv).
- **Be conscious when mixing your business and personal lives.** Online, your personal and business personas are likely to intersect. The Company respects the free speech rights of all of its associates, but you must remember that customers, colleagues and supervisors often have access to the online content you post. Keep this in mind when publishing information online that can be seen by more than friends and family, and know that information originally intended just for friends and family can be forwarded on.

Remember NEVER to disclose non-public information of the Company (including confidential information), and be aware that taking public positions online that are counter to the Company's interests might cause conflict.

- **Protection** of our consumers' privacy. This means that we should be conscientious regarding any Personally Identifiable Information (PII) that we collect, including how we collect, store, use, or share that PII, all of which should be done pursuant to applicable Privacy Policies, laws and IT policies.
- **Respect** of copyrights, trademarks, rights of publicity, and other third-party rights in the online social media space, including with regard to user-generated content (UGC).
- **Responsibility** in our use of technology. We will not use or align the Company with any organizations or Web sites that deploy the use of excessive tracking software, adware, malware or spyware.
- **Utilization** of best practices, listening to the online community, and compliance with applicable regulations to ensure that these Online Social Media Principles remain current and reflect the most up-to-date and appropriate standards of behavior.

### **Our Expectations for Online Interactivity**

Just as with traditional media, we have an opportunity – and a responsibility – to effectively manage the Company's reputation online and to selectively engage and participate in the thousands of online conversations that mention us every day.

**Be Certified in the Social Media Certification Program.** All associates who wish to officially represent the Company online must complete the Social Media Certification Program prior to beginning or continuing these activities.

**Follow our Code of Business Conduct and all other Company policies.** Our Code of Business Conduct provides the foundation for these Online Social Media Principles.

**Be mindful that you are representing the Company.** As a Company representative, it is important that your posts convey the same positive, optimistic spirit that the Company instills in all of its communications. Be respectful of all individuals, races, religions and cultures; how you conduct yourself in the online social media space not only reflects on you – it is a direct reflection on the Company.

**Fully disclose your affiliation with the Company.** The Company requires all associates who are communicating on behalf of the Company to always disclose their name and their affiliation. It is never acceptable to use aliases or otherwise deceive people.



**Keep records.** Because online conversations are often fleeting and immediate, it is important for you to keep track of them when you're officially representing the Company.

**When in doubt, do not post.** Associates are personally responsible for their words and actions, wherever they are. As online spokespeople or behalf of, you must ensure that your posts are completely accurate and not misleading, and that they do not reveal non-public information of the Company. Exercise sound judgment and common sense, and if there is any doubt, DO NOT POST IT.

**Give credit where credit is due and don't violate others' rights.** DO NOT claim authorship of something that is not yours. If you are using another party's content, make certain that they are credited for it in your post and that they approve of you utilizing their content. Do not use the copyrights, trademarks, publicity rights, or other rights of others without the necessary permissions of the rightsholder(s).

**Be responsible to your work.** The Company understands that associates engage in online social media activities at work for legitimate purposes and that these activities may be helpful for Company affairs. However, the Company encourages all associates to exercise sound judgment and common sense to prevent online social media sites from becoming a distraction at work.

**Remember that your local posts can have global significance.** The way that you answer an online question might be accurate in some parts of the world, but inaccurate (or even illegal) in others. Keep that "world view" in mind when you are participating in online conversations.

**Know that the Internet is permanent.** Once information is published online, it is essentially part of a permanent record, even if you "remove/delete" it later or attempt to make it anonymous. If your complete thought, along with its context, cannot be squeezed into a character-restricted space (such as Twitter), provide a link to an online space where the message can be expressed completely and accurately.

### **Quick Recap:**

There should be a clear division between "Geo News staff" pages and "personal" pages.

On Social Networking sites, you should be mindful that the information you disclose does not bring the "Geo News staff" into disrepute.

For example, editorial staff should not indicate their political allegiance. Non-editorial staff should make their role clear if they wish to engage in political activity.

It may not be appropriate to share Geo News-related photographs, comments and videos. Offensive comment about Geo News staff colleagues may be deemed a disciplinary offence.

Geo News staff are free to edit online encyclopedias (such as *Wikipedia*) but should be transparent about doing so.

If you are using Geo News in your usernames or twitter handles, your account will be considered as an official account.

All official accounts need to be approved by your supervisor and PD/New Media desk.  
All output on these accounts needs to be consistent with Geo News policy.

Posting content which is not from Geo News requires approval (this includes articles and videos from other websites).

### 3. TeamGeo Safety Guide

#### **Points to ensure Personal Safety while working in high risk environment**

1. The fundamental principle that governs news coverage in a conflict zone is: '**NO STORY IS WORTH YOUR LIFE**'. So, pull out before it's too late.
2. Staying in touch means staying alive. So your Executive producer/Bureau Chief/shift in charge should always be aware of your movements in a conflict zone.
3. The Executive Producer/Bureau chief /Shift Incharge are also expected to carry out the risk assessment before deploying the crew in a hostile zone.
4. In case of trouble Executive Producer/Bureau Chief/shift in charge is expected to coordinate with the emergency services/hospitals.
5. Make sure the team of reporters/photographers/cameraman being deployed has the basic knowhow/ training in reporting from a conflict zone.
6. The vehicle/DSNG they are traveling in should have the necessary safety gear (bullet-proof jackets etc) and a proper first aid/trauma kit.
7. At least one member of the crew should have the basic knowledge of life saving techniques.
8. The colour of the bullet-proof jacket/helmet should be different from that of the security forces operating in the area.
9. During civil disturbance/riots the journalists should be dressed up in a manner that they are not confused for members of one of the conflicting parties.
10. Geo News will not take beepers of Reporters or Photo/Video Journalist from the conflict areas unless they are wearing proper kit (Bulletproof Jacket).
11. As tempers often run high during civil disturbance, the reporter/photographer should never hesitate to identify themselves by shouting '**PRESS**' or '**JOURNALIST**' but try and avoid arguing with either of the parties (rioters/police).
12. The field reporters, tv crew's vehicle/DSNG should have a directory of all nearby hospitals/police stations.
13. At least one member of the team should be trained and senior enough to **DECIDE** on the spot the **RIGHT TIME TO ABANDON THE COVERAGE** and move to a safer place.

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<sup>i</sup> Much of this document, including whole paragraphs, have been derived from The New York Times and BBC Journalism Handbooks.

# **GEO ASOOL**

## **D) Monitoring & Implementation Procedure**

**WORKING DRAFT**  
**Version: 2.0**

**Dated: 14 August, 2012**

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## **C) Internal SOP: How will we monitor and implement the guidelines?**

This document indicates how the macro/strategic policy vision as well as the tactical guidelines and best practices, outlined above, will be executed. The process flow and standard operating procedure is laid out through which different stages and steps will be taken to ensure monitoring and compliance to the editorial policy of our network.

### **Pre-Production**

- 1) Editorial Committee Proactive Feedback Process
- 2) Discussion Program Content Committee
- 3) Control Room Experts Availability
- 4) Program Preview Committee Feedback and Edit Process

### **Post- Production**

- 5) Post Guest Analysis
  - 6) Post Topic Analysis
  - 7) Survey Perception Tracking of Program/Channels
  - 8) Post PD Feedback Reports/Sessions
  - 9) Live
    - a. Live Editorial Foresight
    - b. Live Censor w Delay – Audio and Video in MCR
- 

## **PRE- Broadcast**

### **1) Editorial Committee Proactive Feedback Process**

- a. All hosts and producers will be required to submit a draft rundown paper 36 hours prior to the show for a weekly recorded show and 3 hours prior to the show for 3 day a week live show, which will contain guests list and potential issues and questions being asked
- b. Feedback will be sent back 24 hours before program for weekly recorded programs and 2 hours before the programme for 3 day a week live programmes,
- c. When not possible and in exceptional circumstance related to time, the discussion however still needs to take place with EC verbally instead of email beforehand and that discussion can be documented at later stage when pressed for time.
- d. See attached template A

### **2) Pre Discussion Programme Content Committee**

- a. Before the programme is recorded a discussion must take place between the producer, host and internal experts assigned to the programme. At least two editorial experts will be assigned which will be helpful in bouncing back ideas, research as well as help with names of the guests and be available to draft balanced questions.
- b. These experts are only available for input and consultations and their suggestions do not have to be incorporated by the producer. However their suggestions will be recorded by them and sent to the editorial committee as well.
- c. This discussion ideally should take place before the draft run down paper is sent to the editorial committee.

**3) Control Room Editorial Experts Availability**

- a. The editorial experts will be available to the producer of the programme in the control room and try to be helpful in follow up questions as well as input and background data and input through the producer to the host, via IFB regarding key elements of GEO Asool where applicable and not just value additions.
- b. The producer will also be able to guide and give input to the host through the IFB, to keep a balanced perspective. The notes on Code of Conduct/Best Practices section on Fairness, Balance and Accuracy will be paid particular attention.

**4) Programme Preview Committee Feedback and Edit Process**

- a. The show before going on air, if recorded, will be seen by a EC in HQ in Karachi.
- b. The edit remarks will be sent to the producer to edit the program. Due to time sensitivity at time, in case there is only audio edits needed, timeline will be sent to MCR to edit the sound during transmission of the program. One representative from Censor dept will also be present while previewing.

**POST – Broadcast**

**5) After the show has gone on air, EC will send to the producer and anchor a report that will highlight the shows key plus and minus points including the key GEO Asool violations or supporting elements. This report will also include the material deviation if any of the rundown that was sent during the pre-production process to EC.**

**6) A summary report of the above will be sent on monthly basis and annual basis as well, which will be used by PD and MD to use in feedback process.**

**7) Post Guest Analysis**

- a. Post Guest Analysis tracking process will take place by editorial committee and monitoring dept where profiling of guests will be tracked to ensure variety of ideas and thoughts as well as balance of perspective.
- b. Formal Report will be done every month; summary will be compiled every wk.

**8) Post Topic Analysis**

- a. Topic Analysis is a tracking process where topics will be monitored on weekly basis to ensure that we have a variety of topics and are not unconsciously participating in what could seem like a campaign.
- b. Formal Report will be done every month; summary will be compiled every wk.

**9) Survey Perception Tracking of Program/Channels**

- a. Tracking surveys will be done on a monthly basis to assess the perception of the channel as well as the individual programs to ensure that we are balanced and editorial guidelines are being implemented as far as the perception of our viewers is concerned.

**10) Political Party Market share**

- a. EC will also be sent by monitoring a report that will give data on what coverage is given to which political party as a % in the main bulletins as well as in main

programs. This report with analysis will be given to MD and CEO with feedback related to GEO Asool.

## **11) Live**

### **a. Live Editorial Foresight**

- i. All live programs will require prior discussion with either Director News, MD, CEO or EC Chairman. Editorial oversight is crucial and discussion particularly with those area that have been deemed sensitive especially require a group discussion beforehand. From time to time, EC may issue reminder on avoiding particular subjects from being done live in the larger public interest. Editorial oversight is only possible when the people responsible for the oversight are not operationally involved themselves and are mostly using their time to monitor and for providing feedback and positive interventions.

### **b. Live Censor w Delay – Audio and Video in MCR**

- i. We will have a 10 second delay system installed which will be manned 24 hours with properly trained and responsible persons who would have read and signed on the best practices document and will ensure compliance. There will be two live censor templates, one with a visual screen and one with audio only effect.

## **12) State of Geo Asool**

- a. Every year a report on the implementation of Geo Asool will be released. This report will showcase the progress on Geo Asool, the violations, a listing of frequent complaints and the steps taken by Geo to resolve them. Moreover, it will also contain a performance scorecard and Social Ratings (Geo's Corporate Social Responsibility Index) from the viewers.

## **13) External Complaints**

- a. Any violations of Geo Asool or complaints can be sent to [feedback@geo.tv](mailto:feedback@geo.tv). Each complaint will be reviewed by the Editorial Committee, and where required, necessary action will be taken. Most pertinent questions and the actions taken to address them will be published on the FAQs section of the Geo Asool website.

## **COMPLIANCE**

The Editorial Committee Chairman, will function like an internal Ombudsman. Editorial Committee (EC) at Geo comprises of senior seasoned Journalists from print and electronic media. EC has been a core part of Geo TV Network for the last 4 years. EC reviews all live and recorded content that is aired on Geo News and ensure that the content being produced is of high journalistic quality and in line with Geo's values and voluntary internal code of conduct – Geo Asool. EC also provides qualitative feedback for both recorded and live programs which encompasses content, guests, questions, etc. while keeping in view the competition and issues of the day. EC is also available to production teams of all programs for consultation and brainstorming for their programs.

An Editorial Board will oversee the process of compliance. The board will include Editorial Committee Head, Director News, Managing Director, CEO, President and the Chairman or his representative. The Editorial Committee Head will recommend the following punitive measures when GEO Asool is violated. The alleged violator will be given a fair chance for explanation and can



bring up to two additional people to give a particular point of view. Video Conference or audio conference will be used where needed for these EC sessions which will routinely be done once a week and or anytime for an emergency.

- 1) Call for explanation/inquiry (this can be done solely on the authority of Chairman EC, or at the request of two of the board members)
- 2) Issuing Apology (this can be done by recommendation of Chairman and 1 member of the board)
- 3) Issuing Fine (this can be done by recommendation of Chairman and 2 members of the committee)
- 4) Suspension of person Involved (this can be done by recommendation of Chairman and majority vote of the committee)
- 5) Firing (this can be done at consensus of the members of the committee)

Level 5 penalty will apply to extreme violations or repeat of severe violations or repeat of level 3-4 violations.

Level 5 include but is not limited to violations of GEO Asool that incite violence, promote dictatorship as an agenda, involve accepting of money or favors to propagate a particular point of view or person, blackmailing and extortion.

# Annexure 1 - Progressive Content Details

(To be submitted to Editorial Committee before the programme)

Program Name:		
Episode #:		
Anchor/Presenter/Host:		
Program Topic/ Background:		
Guests:	Guest Name	Details (Background/Profile/Affiliations)
Proposed Questions:		

## Annexure 2 – Post Feedback Template

(To be submitted by Editorial Committee after the programme)

<b>Program Name:</b>		
<b>Episode #:</b>		
<b>Duration:</b>		
<b>Anchor/Presenter/Host:</b>		
<b>Program Summary:</b>		
<b>Guests:</b>	<b>Guest Name</b>	<b>Details (Background/Profile/Affiliations)</b>
<b>Positive Points:</b>		
<b>Negative Points:</b>		
<b>Asool Violations/Deletions:</b>		

# **GEO ASOOL**

## **E) Recommendations for Industry Body**

**Version: 2.0**

**Dated: 14 August, 2012**

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## **E. Recommendations for Industry Body**

### **A. Self-Regulation**

There are three types of regulations. One is the obvious government sponsored regulation. This form will always throw the baby with the bath water. Government regulation has a huge conflict of interest since it will always protect itself and its rule. The Government has too much incentive to influence the media and reduce criticism and embargo the truth. The other form of regulations are independent and self-regulation. Self-regulation is a good start since it allows you to lay down your own rules that are declared and that society can judge you against and also hold you responsible for through pressure groups and feedback. An independent ombudsman on top of the self-declared codes can help even further. The ideal solution however is a truly independent authority that conducts regulation. In order for such a thing to exist the media has to give up its own authority and hand it over to this committee and more importantly the authority has to deserve that power and truly be close to other outside influence and also be practical in its approach. Such an experiment exists in many countries, and one good example to follow is that of India where 4 experts from civil society are chosen along with 4 rotating serving editors, all headed by a retired Supreme Court Chief Justice. This committee is armed by an agreed code by the industry and has authority in fact to fine and also recommend suspension and closure to the government. In order for this to happen in Pakistan three things need to happen. One, all the channels will need to agree on a code. Two, the channels will need to agree on the committee and structure of the independent authority as well as the names who will be its executive body. Three they will need to give that authority the capacity to take punitive measures. Three the government will have to back off from its demand of government regulation and will need to give space for independent regulation to work.

Recently GEO has addressed the first two requirements. One, through Geo Asool it has given a potential blue print for the industry to use as a basic draft code. Two, recently GEO has sent to PBA a recommendation structure for the independent regulation modeled on the successful Indian model (see <http://www.nbanewdelhi.com>). However lack of unity due to government interference and support has not allowed the association to move forward as fast as it can. It is predicted that GEO and like-minded organization will allow for progress to take place now.

### **B. Disclosure Policy on Revenue Dependency**

The viewer as our most important stakeholder has the right to know of any major conflict of interest between us and our GEO Asool. Satellite TV channels throughout the world are run on a subscription and advertising revenue generating model, division being 50-50 on average if not 60-40 towards advertising. In Pakistan however the

dependency is 100% on advertising due to the regulator and its conflict of interests because of which it is not able to regulate the industry for the right causes and as per its mandate. Therefore there can be a situation where a large advertiser is able to influence the editorial policy or the independence of the organization. In order to minimize the chances of this happening or at least increase the probability of pressure for this to be disclosed ideally the material dependency of all channels should be disclosed which may have an impact on policy. The largest advertiser in Pakistan who can influence and leverage their position is the Government. We propose that all channels disclose (on quarterly basis) government advertising reliance as percent of their total revenue and any advertiser that is more than 5% of its revenue. Since 3rd party data exists regarding the volume and minutes of all advertisers the % revenue data will indirectly reveal the rate card information as well. Therefore if any one channel were to do this alone then it will be disclosing its rate card and discounts structure which can put its competitive position at risk. Therefore we recommend to PBA (Pakistan Broadcaster's Association) that this be made mandatory for all its members and GEO will be the first one to implement this policy.

Related to this is another matter. Many organizations that have launched TV channels also have other interests and businesses. It is not unusual for business houses and conglomerates to come into Media as a PR marketing exercise, or even at times as part of their insurance or 'ego' budget. In this regard and to maintain the spirit of disclosure of dependency, PBA should make it mandatory to have channels and their organizations disclose their other business interests and their shareholder's business interests and any reliance on government and political party's regarding those businesses. All conflict of interest situations need to be disclosed including legal cases.

### **C. Threats to Independent Media**

Media is the fourth and critical estate in any democracy. In Pakistan, Parliament has been crippled by the establishment and lack of cycles afforded to it. The judiciary and the media are the only pillars that are helping make the other pillars stronger in the long run. However there is always a status quo power stakeholders who will be afraid of change and do not want their ways and their past to be exposed. Some of them may even be in the opposition, establishment and judiciary and not just the government. Granted that media and judiciary need to improve and have an element of watchdogs and regulation and pressures to self-cleanse but the bigger risks comes from those status quo agents who want to prevent exposure and change and information to be available to the public. In this scenario protecting media's independence, even from its hosts, owners, and especially from government, becomes critical.

When we discuss media we at times forget to talk about the most important areas that are affecting freedom of speech in Pakistan:

## **1) Government Advertisement**

Government is the largest single advertiser of Pakistan. However there is no real audit done on how government is spending its advertising and on what merit. Independent analysts estimate that more than 50% of the government advertisement budget is used to buy influence of media and keep it under severe pressure or goes to corruption. Geo in fact gets 35-40% of every advertising rupee share that is spent from all commercial clients. However the Government gives less than 1% of its advertising budget. These anomaly exists to a great extent. For example there is some data that shows that small city channel which gets less than 0.5% of advertising of the commercial market but gets 5% Government advertising. There is one channel that gets 4 crore a month from Government advertising, which makes up almost 50% of its overall advertising- this is an amazing % and nowhere in the world does Government make up such a big figure. How can that channel ask the Government right questions on behalf of public when 50% of its revenue comes the Government?

The alarming thing is that not only government advertisement is not audited properly nor is there an independent committee that oversees it, but there are no rules in existence for TV advertising. Existing Government Advertisement needs to be audited and we need to expose who is getting extra share and why? A new and improved Government advertising law needs to be created and implemented that includes an independent commission that oversees it to ensure that freedom of speech is not being influenced.

## **2) PEMRA**

PEMRA, so called media regulator, is also used as a tool by Government against freedom of speech. Cable Operators are kept under pressure by PEMRA and their equipment is confiscated and or license nor renewed or they are threatened to be turned off. PEMRA also encourages cable operators to air illegal channels and lets them air illegal advertising on them and then uses that as leverage against the cable operators. This forces cable operators to follow all verbal directions of PEMRA to stop or shuffle channels at the back of the spectrum so no one can see the channel or program that is exposing the Government. PEMRA needs to be headed by an independent person, that is not part of the Government. It should be like the NAB and or Election Commission as right to be informed is a basic right and it is too risky to let the Government interfere in that right and no government will be able to resist the temptation not to do so for its own interests and prolonging its rule. PEMRA should also be forced to have quarterly audit by an independent commission made of professionals from civil society that are free from government selection and that can verify that PEMRA rules are not selectively being implemented to help the government influence and muzzle the press.



### **3) Freedom of Information Act**

Though investigation journalism has increased in Pakistan in the past 10 years since private electronic media, still too much of what is known as investigative journalism is actually a collection of leaks to the media by different institutions. Before it was usually just the establishment who was leaking but now there almost all institutions and the private sector is leaking information to the media. However most leaks have an agenda and in order to do increase independent investigative journalism freedom of information act will have to be implemented. This act will allow journalism's contribution to exponentially improve. Cost of investigative journalism will also decrease and competition will increase and at the same time the threat of being exposed will increase for everyone. This is imperative for our society. Pakistan does have a Freedom of Information Act but its ranked as one of the poorest and India's is ranked one of the highest (better than USA). And also the infrastructure required to process the act (manpower and independent audit board that oversees and monitors it is also missing, in India for example each ministry has a Freedom of Information Act Desk).

### **4) Secret Funds**

All secret funds to do with media need to be abolished even if they are part of establishment or government- especially the information ministry.