

Sikh Press Association IPSO Editor's Code of Practice Submission

The Sikh Press Association have found barriers in IPSO's Editor's Code facing the Sikh community when it comes to:

Clause 1 – Accuracy, which states:

- i) The Press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information or images, including headlines not supported by the text.
- ii) A significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion must be corrected, promptly and with due prominence, and — where appropriate — an apology published. In cases involving IPSO, due prominence should be as required by the regulator.
- iii) A fair opportunity to reply to significant inaccuracies should be given, when reasonably called for.
- iv) The Press, while free to editorialise and campaign, must distinguish clearly between comment, conjecture and fact.
- v) A publication must report fairly and accurately the outcome of an action for defamation to which it has been a party, unless an agreed settlement states otherwise, or an agreed statement is published.

Clause 12 - Discrimination, which states:

- i) The press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's, race, colour, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability.
- ii) Details of an individual's race, colour, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story.

The Public Interest, which states:

The public interest includes, but is not confined to:

Detecting or exposing crime, or the threat of crime, or serious impropriety.

Protecting public health or safety.

Protecting the public from being misled by an action or statement of an individual or organisation.

Disclosing a person or organisation's failure or likely failure to comply with any obligation to which they are subject.

Disclosing a miscarriage of justice.

Raising or contributing to a matter of public debate, including serious cases of impropriety, unethical conduct or incompetence concerning the public.

Disclosing concealment, or likely concealment, of any of the above.

2. There is a public interest in freedom of expression itself.

3. The regulator will consider the extent to which material is already in the public domain or will become so.

4. Editors invoking the public interest will need to demonstrate that they reasonably believed publication - or journalistic activity taken with a view to publication – would both serve, and be proportionate to, the public interest and explain how they reached that decision at the time.

5. An exceptional public interest would need to be demonstrated to over-ride the normally paramount interests of children under 16.

And a nondescript issue.

On Clause 1:

The Sikh Press Association has on at least three occasions (references 02672-15, #02585-16#, #03484-18#) complained to IPSO based on accuracy. During these experiences we feel accuracy has come second to commonality, specifically on case 03484-18#.

In this example, our complaint against The Times was rejected even though they had inaccurately called Sikh festival Vaisakhi the Sikh New Year (it is a celebration of the creation of the Khalsa).

The fact that Vaisakhi is NOT the Sikh New Year (which is in March and called Chet) was dismissed due to the fact that it has long been mistaken for the Sikh New Year, including by Sikhs. Despite there now being a plethora of avenues a journalist can go through for Sikh education, a google search standard level of research is being advocated by IPSO by allowing the mistake to not be addressed by The Times.

In this instance, **our suggestion is a review of what constitutes “a significant inaccuracy”.**

The current team sitting for reviews may not recognise a broad understanding of what constitutes a “significant inaccuracy”. From a Sikh perspective, we would encourage you to connect with the Sikh Press Association to help understand what is and what is not inaccurate in regards to the Sikh faith, which we base of teachings from Sikh educators. If one can prove that something is inaccurate academically, that should be the final say on the matter and result in a complaint being acted on.

On Clause 12:

The Sikh Press Association has on at least three occasions (references 17648-17#, 02578-18# and War on Error Sun article with no reference given) complained to IPSO about discrimination.

Our issues relate to inconsistent use and exploitation of these clauses, particularly clause ii. For a recent example we decided to NOT complain about due to our understanding of the flaws of the IPSO code, the Mail Online referred to a crime story (Seven Kings murders, January 2020) involving “Sikh gangs”. This stems from Met Police stating they believed those involved were from the “Sikh community”, which was mentioned so that the right witnesses may come forward. Nowhere did they mention “Sikh gangs”.

However, the press used that information in a way that was pejorative to the entire community by describing "Sikh gangs". Nobody - neither press nor police - explicitly called for witnesses from the Sikh community to come forward, and neither did they explain why the Sikh faith was mentioned in their statement/coverage.

Furthermore, in the case of the Mail Online, the day after reporting the Seven Kings incident, they carried a video article about a practicing Sikh woman who defended herself against armed robbers in a shop, and spoke about how her Sikh martial art training helped her, when speaking to the Mail's reporter. Yet the Mail Online did not deem her religion to be "genuinely relevant to the story" enough to mention her faith, in this case.

In this instance, **we ask you to create a separate branch of an approved committee that can decide when race/religion is appropriate to use.** Sikh PA offer our services to help create such a group/branch.

This is just one example of how this issue impacts Sikhs.

Comparatively, there has historically been an issue of describing sexual abusive grooming gangs as "Asian" gangs, which avoids mentioning religion but still implicates the Sikh community. gangs.

IPSO also need to recognise that grassroots impact such negative press can have on the average Sikh that may standout more than other Asians (or any persons) due to the purposely standout appearance of a Sikh with a turban and keeping kes (unshorn hair). There is potential for such stories to result in hate-crimes against Sikhs.

On Public Interest:

There needs to be more recognition that the public includes minorities. As such, should media run a story implicating a BAME community, there should be a process open for community groups to enforce a fair inclusion of facts that would be of public interest.

For example, in the last few years UK media have been following stories of Sikh activists that were raided in the UK related to “terror activities” in India. This is within the context of Sikhs campaigning against the Indian government due to their recognized involvement in the 1984 Sikh genocide. There also needs to be recognition for a history of documented stifling of minority community activism in India.

To the Sikh community, this would be considered something worthy of “Public interest”. **The Editor’s Code Committee should have a mechanism to review such cases should minority groups find a barrier in the way of fair and objective journalism.**

Nondescript issue – repetition of propaganda:

Something IPSO do NOT currently take complaints on is the reckless repetition of propaganda/manipulative language.

For an example which impacts Sikhs, references to the 1984 Sikh Genocide often depict the issue as a one-sided “government vs Sikh militants” issue. Those being called Sikh militants are revered by a large section of Sikhs, including through the form of having those individuals’ pictures up in Gurdwaras in a sign of respect for their role in fighting back against an oppressive state which was known for brutally treating minorities.

Such behavior is lazy journalism and enforces stereotypes and imbalanced views of issues. Media needs to be accountable for saying whose views they are (e.g. who says they were Sikh militants?) repeating in such instances, as well as being open to presenting a balanced view.

Sikh PA propose we write a specific Sikh Genocide and Activism related guideline for IPSO about this, something we hope the Editor’s Code Committee would approve.