

Helpful Guidelines For Journalists Covering The Election Prepared By The SA National Editors' Forum

SERVING THE VOTERS BY KNOWING YOUR RIGHTS: Safety at Election Time

This is the time when citizens cast their votes. Citizens must be able to exercise their choice without any irregularity in the voting process, which is why it is critical to ensure a canvassing and voting space free of intimidation. Parties must be able to campaign freely in any area that suits them and the media must be equally free to cover any meeting or rally.

Elections turn the heat on journalists and the media. The free-flow of information is critical to democracy if an election is to be declared free and fair. This may pose a challenge, so SANEF recommends the following guidelines (adapted from the International Federation of Journalists' (IFJ) Safety Manual -- Danger! Journalists at Work -- and journalists input after a series of IAJ election reporting courses). No journalist should be in danger of risk, injury, imprisonment or death.

The IEC Code.

The IEC code, enshrined in our constitution, is legally binding on all parties and stipulates that the rights of working journalists must be respected at all times. The reporter must be able to operate without harassment, fear, or intimidation. It is undemocratic, unconstitutional and a criminal act to harass or intimidate a reporter in any way.

Safety at Election Time

Newsrooms must respect and promote the physical safety of journalists, including photo-journalists. Journalists should be aware of the level of "volatility" of an area, including any possibility of racial, religious or political confrontations. If there are problems, media organizations need to be made aware of them and take them up with politicians or independent bodies, like the IEC. Discuss possible scenarios with your editors and newsrooms and map a course of preventative measures/guidelines relevant to your position.

Prepare and circulate a list of numbers - local and international – to use if in difficulty. IEC, SAPS and SANEF contact details can be found at the end of this document.

Safety plans. In the event of personal danger, turn down the assignment, or discuss various safety scenarios with your editor. You are entitled to full insurance (life, health, riot, property).

Report. If you are attacked or threatened with attack, report the incident to your employer, your union and the IEC. The IEC will monitor, track and pattern "incidents" involving the media and citizens.

Get it taken up. Should a political organization be responsible for the above, get your editor and the IEC to take it up with the leadership of that party.

Publish. Harassment of journalists and other individuals compromises the election process, and should be publicised.

Knowledge of what is allowed on Election Day is essential as it enables you to challenge any member of the security forces who refuses to allow photographs or orders you to leave an area.

In hostile, volatile areas: Never travel alone. Tell your editor, colleagues and family where you are going and what time you expect to be back. Make sure someone at home knows what to do and who to contact if you don't arrive. Identify a "safe" spot (home or contact) in the area.

In the field: Listen to the locals. Pay attention to advice from people living in a region or an area. Watch out for big crowds. They signal what is happening. Don't stop your vehicle in front of a crowd, or try to drive through it. Few or no people on the streets might indicate danger.

Know your destination. If you are covering a major protest march or political rally, survey the route/venue beforehand. Look for telephones that can be used (don't rely only on your cellphone) and vantage points from which you can survey the event without being too close. Be familiar with the roads and where they lead to in case you have to leave suddenly. Learn and observe local community protocol.

Make contacts. Get to know the media officers of all the major organisations in the area. Look out for press marshals at rallies and marches.

Dress appropriately. Wear comfortable clothing. Avoid expensive items. Avoid wearing the colours of the political movements and parties active in your region. While some journalists think wearing a t-shirt which announces "press" or "media" is a ticket to safety; it must be pointed out that journalists are sometimes targeted precisely because they are from the media. Use your judgment.

Consider protective clothing such as gloves, bullet proof vests and other appropriate clothing depending on the danger. You may request these from your media house.

Keep your current accredited press card where it's easily accessible, but not in your wallet, for obvious reasons. If you use your cell phone, carry an extra sim-card and carry coins and a phone card in the event that you have to use a landline.

Carry a bottle of water.

EXTRACTS FROM THE SOUTH AFRICAN ELECTORAL CODE

Taken from the Handbook on Legislation and Regulations for South Africa's Local Government Elections. Published by the EISA and IEC in 2000. Copies can be obtained from the two organizations.

Electoral Code of conduct

Purpose of the code : The purpose of this Code is to promote the conditions that are conducive to free and fair elections, including –

- a. Tolerance of democratic, political activity; and
- b. Free political campaigning and open public debate.

Promotion of the Code

Every registered party and every candidate bound by this Code must -

- a. Promote the purpose of the Code when conducting an election;
- b. Publicise the Code widely in any election campaigns; and
- c. Promote and support the efforts in terms of this Act to educate voters.

Aspects of Importance to the Media:

Role of women

Every registered party and every candidate must –

- a) Respect the right of women to communicate freely with parties and candidates;
- b) Facilitate the full and equal participation of women in all political activities;
- c) Ensure the free access of women to all public political meetings, marches, demonstrations, rallies and other political events;
- d) Take all reasonable steps to ensure women are free to engage in any political activities.

Role of media

Every registered party and every candidate –

- a) Must respect the role of the media before, during and after an election conducted in terms of this Act;
- b) May not prevent access by members of the media to public political meetings, marches, demonstrations and rallies; and
- c) must take all reasonable steps to ensure that journalists are not subjected to harassment, intimidation, hazard, threat or physical assault by any of their representatives or supporters.

Actions of infringement:

Those who violate the Electoral Code could face various criminal charges. Depending on the severity of the crime, various punitive measures can be enforced. The law calls for the nullification of votes in the voting district where the incidents occur. Political parties guilty of breaking the law can be fined up to R200 000 (two-hundred-thousand-rand). Results at affected voting stations can be nullified and the

party responsible may be disqualified from a voting station. There is also the possibility of a prison sentence for certain infringements.

CRIME SCENE MANAGEMENT

In the interest of justice, the general public and the media need not interfere with the crime scene. If police cannot produce the evidence, criminals will walk and justice would not be served.

Members of the media who may at time be the first at the crime scene should be sufficiently knowledgeable about the necessary steps to preserve evidence until the police arrive.

- * Consider your own safety. Park a safe distance away from the scene.
- * Consider all safety issues: there may still be armed suspects in the vicinity. There may be discarded evidence such as unexploded material or burning material that may be dangerous to an individual.
- * Identify yourself.
- * Police often wear colour-coded jackets, be sure you understand these.
- * Allow the police to take control of and secure the scene.
- * Identify the media liaison officer for a briefing or situation report.
- * If the crime scene is already cordoned, stay outside the cordoned zone.
- * Remember that taking care of the injured takes precedence, with due consideration of the integrity of physical evidence.
- * Approach the scenes with extreme caution and do not handle the evidence otherwise the integrity of it would be compromised due to damage or contamination.
- * Note that a deceased person is also considered evidence.
- * Regard everything within the crime scene as important until proven otherwise by experts.
- * Note that no item at the crime scene is trivial and therefore do not remove or shift anything from the original position.
- * Everything at the crime scene is crucial for the police to piece together what happened. They may be able to identify more physical evidence in order to improve or enhance the quality of the evidence found at the scene for a successful prosecution.
- * Do not step on liquid such as blood or physical evidence such as cartridges and glasses, and do not touch or wipe doors lest you mistakenly erase fingerprints.

For further information see the Handbook on Legislation and Regulations, published by the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa and the Independent Electoral Commission. URL:<http://www.eisa.org.za>; URL:<http://www.elections.org.za>.

Should you have any enquiries with these Guidelines please contact SANEF's Executive Director Femida Mehtar at the above SANEF contact details.

Some useful contact details:

SAPS: Director Phuti Setati has agreed with SANEF that reporters are welcome to call him directly at 082 778 4312 if there are problems between press and the police. Khathu Mamaila, SANEF Media Freedom Chair can also be contacted on 083 274 3941.

MEDIA CONTACT NUMBERS FOR THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

The Chairperson, Commissioner Brigalia Bam, and the Chief Electoral Officer, Adv Pansy Tlakula, are the national spokespersons for the Electoral Commission (IEC). They are assisted by the provincial electoral officers who act as spokespersons in the provinces.

The official spokesperson for the IEC is the Chief Communication Officer:

Kate Bapela

Tel: (012) 428 5579

Fax: (012) 428 5429

Cell: 082 600 6386

e-mail: spokesperson@elections.org.za

Communication Department at National Office

PLEASE NOTE that Lydia Young is NOT a spokesperson for the IEC, she only acts as a facilitator for the media.

Lydia Young

Tel: (012) 428 5425

Fax: (012) 428 5429

Cell: 082 650 8652

e-mail: spokesperson@elections.org.za

CONTACT NUMBERS IN THE PROVINCES

The Provincial Electoral Officers act as the media spokespersons for the IEC in their province. Their communication officers act as facilitators for the media.

Eastern Cape Province

Tel: (043) 709 4200/01/02

Fax: (043) 742 0948

Provincial Electoral Officer: Rev Bongani Finca

Cell: 082 650 5449

e-mail: fincab@elections.org.za

Communication Officer: Ms Pearl Ngoza

Cell: 083 950 9455

e-mail: ngozap@elections.org.za

Free State

Tel: (051) 401 5000

Fax: (051) 430 4845

Provincial Electoral Officer: Mr Jabulani Mepha

Cell: 082 802 3153

e-mail: mephaj@elections.org.za

Communication Officer: Mathabo Mfete

Cell: 083 507 9895

e-mail: mfetem@elections.org.za

Gauteng

Tel: (011) 644 7400

Fax: (011) 644 7447

Provincial Electoral Officer: Mr Simon Mamabolo

Cell: 082 328 3768

e-mail: mamabolos@elections.org.za

Communication Officer: Solly Kganyago

Cell: 082 568 6122

e-mail: kganyagos@elections.org.za

KwaZulu-Natal

Tel: (031) 279 2200

Fax: (086) 674 8829

Provincial Electoral Officer: Mr Mawethu Mosery

Cell: 082 821 9722

e-mail: moserym@elections.org.za

Communication Officer: Nonhlanhla Hlongwane

Cell: 083 273 9452

e-mail: hlongwanen@elections.org.za

Limpopo

Tel: (015) 291 0600

Fax: (086) 674 8802

Provincial Electoral Officer: Ms Nkaro Mateta

Cell: 082 800 2261

e-mail: matetan@elections.org.za

Communication Officer: Motsiri Ramafalo

Cell: 072 548 2134

e-mail: ramafalom@elections.org.za

Mpumalanga

Tel: (013) 754 0200

Fax: (013) 753 2564

Provincial Electoral Officer: Mr Steve Ngwenya

Cell: 082 331 3163

e-mail: ngwenyas@elections.org.za

Communication Officer: Khampani Victor Kekana

Cell: 082 360 2644

e-mail: kekanak@elections.org.za

North West Province

Tel: (018) 387 6500

Fax: (018) 387 6523

Provincial Electoral Officer: Dr Tumelontle Thiba

e-mail: thibat@elections.org.za

Communication Officer: Moss Makodi

Cell: 083 625 9636

e-mail: makodim@elections.org.za

Northern Cape Province

Tel: (053) 838 5000

Fax: (053) 831 8285

Provincial Electoral Officer: Mr Justice Bekebeke

Cell: 082 650 8640

E-mail: bekebekej@elections.org.za

Communication Officer: Godfrey Mjezu

Cell: 073 646 7045

e-mail: mjezug@elections.org.za

Western Cape

Tel: (021) 944-5300

Fax: (086) 674 8816

Provincial Electoral Officer: Rev Courtney Sampson

Cell: 083 285 6924

e-mail: sampsonc@elections.org.za

Communication Officer: Chris Balie

Cell: 083 708 3245

e-mail: baliec@elections.org.za