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**EXPERT OPINION OF  
MEDIA ETHICS OBSERVATORY  
REGARDING THE PIECES ON  
PRISONERS OF WAR/CAPTURED CIVILIANS AND  
THE PROTECTION OF PERSONAL DATA**

**In Addition to the Opinion of the Information Disputes Council  
on the Same Issue**

**MEO Composition:**

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**A. FACTS**

1. On January 11, 2021, the Information Disputes Council applied to Media Ethics Observatory to study the latter's [January 11, 2021 opinion](#) adopted on the pieces on prisoners of war/captured civilians and the protection of personal data. The IDC suggested to discuss it and present an expert opinion from the point of view of journalistic ethics.
2. The IDC opinion is particularly related to numerous information pieces on the captured, missing and killed persons during the 44-day war unleashed by Azerbaijan and Turkey against Armenia and Artsakh. These pieces published on various platforms, including the Internet, regularly present the personal data of the victims, captives and missing persons, including photos and videos.
4. The IDC concluded that in recent months there have been numerous such pieces in the Armenian media, which are often spread by ignoring the personal data and the right to respect for personal life of the prisoners of war and victims, violating the respect for the dignity of the person, his/her and his/her relatives' mental integrity, etc.

**B. ETHICAL NORMS**

**I. Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists**

1. Accuracy and Impartiality

**This principle entails the following obligations for editors and journalists:**

1.1. Prior to publishing, to check the accuracy of information from any source, not to conceal or distort facts, and not to publish obviously false information;

1.5. To ensure that the reports, photo, video and audio materials correspond to the reality, the headlines derive from the content of the material, citations are not used outside of context, and correspondence of the personal data of ordinary citizens with public figures is not abused.

## 2. Integrity in Relations with Sources of Information

**This principle entails the following obligations for editors and journalists:**

2.5. Not to abuse the credulity of persons who do not have experience of interaction with media and journalists.

## 4. Respect for Privacy and Other Human Rights

**This principle entails the following obligations for editors and journalists:**

4.1. To respect and protect the human right to private life, including respect to personal and family life, residence, property, health condition, correspondence;

4.2. In case of a conflict between the freedom of expression and other fundamental human rights, the media independently decides what to give preference to, and bears responsibility for its decision;

4.6. To be tactful when collecting information, broadcasting video or audio materials, publishing interviews or photos of people with severe health issues, persons who committed/attempted suicide or suffered tragedy and sorrow.

## II. MEO Guidelines on Conduct of Journalists and Media during Wars, Armed Confrontations and Internal Conflicts

### B. DILEMMAS

4. To publish or not photos or videos of the bodies of the victims? This is the most difficult dilemma. The publication will demonstrate the horrors of a war and an armed conflict, but it can also cause mental suffering to people. In any case, when publishing, the faces should be hidden so that the person cannot be identified: after all, the goal is to show the horrors, and not the death of a specific person or the tortured state.

### C. EXPERT OPINION

Media Ethics Observatory,

#### **Fully accepting**

the opinion of the Information Disputes Council on the pieces on prisoners of war/captured civilians and the protection of personal data, however,

#### **Adds:**

1. The dissemination of personal data, including photos, may be permitted if in

case of impossibility to receive the person's consent, there is a consent of his/her family members. In similar cases, it is necessary to limit oneself to disseminating data, which are at the direct disposal of the family or relatives or have been obtained from official non-confidential sources and not from other sources. It is also necessary to rule out the controversial position of family members on the dissemination. It should also be made sure before the dissemination that family members, relatives realize the risks associated with the disclosure of personal data - blackmail, fraud or other abuse.

**2.** It is recommended not to use any photos, videos, text or references spread by the side that took captive even if a former prisoner of war or a prisoner of war still in captivity or his/her relatives formally agree to the publication of that content. Victims sometimes do not realize their long-term interests clearly enough and give their consent without consulting with specialists. In other words, in this case, the consent of the victim may not be decisive either from the point of view of ethics.

**3.** Although the non-dissemination of the data (including photos) of prisoners of war or captives runs contrary to the ethical principles of non-concealment and integrity of information, in this case, however, the public interest in the protection of personal data and the safety of POWs comes first, especially considering that the adversary may use it for political and other manipulations.

**4.** It is necessary to enhance the level of professional-ethical responsibility of journalists in this issue, as well as the media literacy of the society.

MEO calls on journalists and media in every single case to explain to the relatives of the captives the importance of personal data and their confidentiality, as well as all the possible consequences of their publication.

***Adopted on January 29, 2021  
by the following MEO composition:***

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*[Media Ethics Observatory](#) was established by the media, joining the self-regulation initiative, which make 61 as of today. In its judgments MEO is guided by Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists, adopted at the self-regulation body's meeting on March 10, 2007, and revised on May 16, 2015*