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ԴԻՏՈՐԴ ՄԱՐՄԻՆ

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JUDGMENT OF MEDIA ETHICS OBSERVATORY

Regarding the complaint by human rights activist Zaruhi Hovhannisyan against the reportage titled “Prime Minister’s Spouse Anna Hakobyan Surprises Gyumri “Children’s Home” Orphanage Kids”, aired in the news program of the First Channel of the Public Television Company

A. FACTS

- On June 4, 2024, human rights activist Zaruhi Hovhannisyan submitted a complaint with Media Ethics Observatory, claiming that the May 2 [reportage](#) broadcast during “Lurer” news program on the First Channel of the Public Television Company, and posted on YouTube as “*Prime Minister’s Spouse Anna Hakobyan Surprises Gyumri “Children’s Home” Orphanage Kids*” lacked sensitivity towards children’s rights and was not in the children’s best interests. The reportage covered the excursion of the children under special care from Gyumri “Children’s Home” orphanage to the Yerevan Zoo, an event initiated by Prime Minister’s spouse Anna Hakobyan. According to the complaint, “the piece is aimed at glorifying the Prime Minister’s wife by showing children from a vulnerable group.” “The vulnerability of children is displayed openly, with their faces shown in close-up. Such videos make children who are already facing challenges doubly vulnerable: why target children in orphanages, further complicating their socialization process, as well as expose children’s health issues by showing their faces? In general, nowadays even internationally renowned documentarians blur children’s faces, even when filming abroad, while our Public Television shows these children’s faces as part of coverage of the activities of a politician’s wife,” Zaruhi Hovhannisyan’s complaint read.
- Upon reviewing the complaint, MEO reached out to the Public Television Company, notifying them about the complaint and seeking their position thereon. Hovhannes Movsisyan, Public TV Executive Director, replied that in compliance with legislative requirements, the organizers of the event had obtained the consent of the children’s legal representatives and the head of the orphanage to film the piece in question.

B. LEGISLATIVE AND ETHICAL NORMS

I. RA Constitution

Article 37. Rights of the child

2. In matters concerning the child, primary attention must be given to the interests of the child.

4. Children left without parental care shall be under the care and protection of the State.

II. RA Law “On Children’s Rights”

Article 25, Paragraph 4

The head of the orphanage shall serve as the guardian for children residing in the orphanage or those placed in the institution without parental care and requiring a guardian, as well as ensure the protection of their rights and legal interests.

III. RA Law “On Protection of Personal Data”

Article 9, Paragraph 9

In case the data subject is incapacitated or has limited capacity, or is a minor under the age of 16, the consent for processing their personal data shall be provided by a legal representative of the data subject.

IV [Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists](#)

... editors and journalists are obligated:

4.3. to be especially tactful when the sources of information or the heroes of publications are children or minors [...];

4.4. when preparing materials concerning/involving children follow the Principles and Guidelines for Ethical Reporting on Children, developed by UNICEF media group;

4.5. to obtain permission from the child and his/her guardian for all interviews, videotaping and for documentary photographs. When possible and appropriate, this permission should be in writing. Permission must be obtained in circumstances that ensure that the child and guardian are not coerced in any way and that they understand that they are part of a story that might be disseminated locally and globally.

V. UNICEF Ethical Guidelines for Reporting on Children

Guidelines for reporting on children

In certain cases, using a child's identity (their name and/or recognizable image) is in the child's best interests ...when a child is part of a sustained program of activism or social mobilization and wants to be identified as such.

VI. [Handbook](#) for Reporting on Issues Related to Children by the RA Human Rights Defender’s Office

... Drawing attention to a social issue should not be done through putting

children with disabilities at an unfair disadvantage, and invoking pity for these children with emotive language.

C. MEO JUDGMENT

After reviewing Zaruhi Hovhannisyan's complaint, analyzing the video in question and receiving clarifications from the Public TV Company, Media Ethics Observatory states:

- Prior to preparing the reportage, the journalist/media obtained the consent of the children's guardian, who in this case is the head of the institution.
- The video clearly showcases the health condition and unique characteristics of the children. This could have been done in line with the principle of inclusiveness and the objective of integrating children into society. However, despite the piece portraying the children's positive emotions, fulfilled wishes, with the journalist's speech devoid of discriminatory or offensive formulations, the reportage, nevertheless, contains scenes showing the children's helplessness and vulnerability (inability to eat and move independently). This portrayal does not align with the principle of protection of the best interests of a child and contradicts the obligation set out in point 4.3 of the Code.
- As for the issue of the excessive presence of the Prime Minister's spouse Anna Hakobyan in the reportage, MEO urges the media, in particular the Public TV Company, to cover charitable or social campaigns and events involving public figures in such a manner that does not highlight the presence of the public figure excessively, and the social significance of the action itself is not overshadowed. Otherwise, it could be reasonably interpreted that the focus of the journalistic piece is on glorifying the activities of a public figure (in this case, the Prime Minister's wife), rather than on children who require special care.
- MEO urges the Public TV Company and all other media to consult whenever possible with the Human Rights Defender's Office and organizations focused on children's rights protection, and adhere to the relevant guidelines when preparing content about children in vulnerable situations.

MEO reminds that the media that have signed the Code acknowledge the authority of MEO to review the compliance of their actions and publications with the provisions of that Code. They express their readiness to publish the specific parts extracted from the Media Ethics Observatory judgments that relate to violations of the Code, without adding any editorial remarks. They also commit to notifying MEO by providing a link to the particular publication.

***Adopted on July 16, 2024
by the following MEO composition:***

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[Media Ethics Observatory](#) was established by the media, joining the self-regulation initiative, which make 82 as of today. In its judgments MEO is guided by the Code of Ethics of Armenian Media and Journalists, adopted on March 10, 2007 and revised at the May 18, 2024 general meeting of the media that joined the self-regulation initiative.