

## **FREE-TO-AIR RADIO PROGRAMME CODE**

### **PREAMBLE**

1. Radio exerts a strong influence on the community. In Singapore, as a medium for entertainment, information and education, radio reaches almost all homes and is easily accessible to all people, including the young. Because of its impact, the programmes (including songs) over free-to-air radio must at all times maintain a standard that is acceptable to the community.
2. The Media Development Authority of Singapore (“MDA”) is empowered to issue, and from time to time, review codes of practice relating to the standards of broadcast programmes. This Free-To-Air Radio Programme Code (the “Code”) seeks to ensure that nothing is included in the programmes of any free-to-air radio service which is against public interest or order, national harmony, or which offends good taste or decency.
3. It is the responsibility of broadcasters to ensure that their radio services (whether analogue or digital) comply fully with the Code. The provisions set out in this Code have to be applied in spirit and should be read in conjunction with applicable legislation and licence conditions. Under the Broadcasting Act (Cap 28), MDA has the power to impose sanctions, including fines, on broadcasters who contravene the Code.

### **GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

- 1 Programmes should not undermine public security interest or public confidence in the law and its enforcement in Singapore.
2. Matters pertaining to race and religion should be handled sensitively. Programmes should not be of a proselytic nature.
- 3 As popular songs are played repeatedly on-air, they can impact and influence young listeners. Broadcasters must ensure that songs broadcast do not contain lyrics which are vulgar or may in any way promote wrong moral values and lifestyles.
- 4 Broadcasters should be careful about the likely effects of undesirable programme content on children. Broadcasters must exercise care and judgement when handling content which may not be suitable for children.
- 5 Broadcasters should provide advisory notices for programme content which may be potentially disturbing or upsetting so as to enable listeners to make an informed choice.

- 6 Programmes on crime and violence should not be treated in a cynical, frivolous or callous manner. Such programmes should not incite, glamorise or in any way promote violence or other types of anti-social behaviour.
- 7 Contents pertaining to sex and nudity (including programmes on AIDS, sex education, childbirth, etc) should be treated with discretion and consideration so as not to offend against good taste and decency.
- 8 Factual programmes such as news, current affairs or documentary programmes should present information in an objective, accurate and balanced manner.

## **PART 1: NATIONAL INTERESTS**

- 1.1 Radio programmes should not:
  - (a) promote values and attitudes which are contrary to national interest;
  - (b) present information or events in such a manner likely to mislead or cause alarm to the public;
  - (c) contain propagandist and ideological messages on behalf of any foreign country, group or organisation;
  - (d) contain extremist or anarchic messages, including the incitement of violence for political ends or other purposes; or
  - (e) sensationalise the treatment of any issue whether local, nationalistic or foreign in nature.
- 1.2 Broadcasters must ensure that due impartiality is observed in programmes dealing with matters of public policy or controversial issues of public importance in Singapore. Due impartiality requires programme producers to deal even-handedly when opposing points of view are presented in a programme. On matters of public importance, balance should be sought through the presentation, as far as possible, of principal viewpoints. Programmes should not be slanted by the exclusion of facts or by misleading emphasis. Every reasonable effort must be made to ensure that the factual content of programmes is accurate.

## **PART 2: RACIAL & RELIGIOUS HARMONY**

- 2.1 Matters pertaining to race and religion are sensitive and capable of evoking strong passion and emotions. Broadcasters should exercise due caution when featuring the views, beliefs, practices, or activities of racial and religious groups.
- 2.2 For the purpose of this part, race includes dialect groups and ethnic groups.

### **Race and Religion**

- 2.3 Radio as a mass medium should be kept secular. Programmes of a proselytic nature should not be broadcast.
- 2.4 Programmes which denigrate or are likely to offend the sensitivities of any racial or religious group should not be broadcast.

- 2.5 Programmes which incite or are likely to incite racial and/or religious intolerance, or misunderstanding, should not be broadcast.
- 2.6 References to race and religion should be presented accurately and in a dignified and sensitive manner.
- 2.7 Broadcasters must bear in mind the main religious faiths practised in Singapore whenever they carry programmes which make reference to or touch upon religious views or beliefs. In featuring any religious view or belief, broadcasters should ensure such views do not in any way disparage or cast other faiths in poor light.
- 2.8 Racial and religious stereotyping must be avoided.

### **PART 3: PUBLIC MORALS AND SOCIAL VALUES**

- 3.1 Broadcasters should bear in mind the importance of the family as the basic unit of society in Singapore. The sanctity of marriage should be respected, and divorce should not be treated casually or in a frivolous manner. Adultery, cohabitation and promiscuity should not be endorsed, glamorised or encouraged.
- 3.2 Information, themes or subplots on lifestyles such as homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexualism, transsexualism, transvestism, paedophilia and incest should be treated with utmost caution. Their treatment should not in any way promote, justify or glamorise such lifestyles. Explicit dialogue or information concerning the above topics should not be broadcast.
- 3.3 Programmes should not make careless references to any class or group of persons as being inherently inferior. Programmes should not encourage or in any way discriminate against any section of the community on account of gender, age, disability or occupational status.
- 3.4 Obscene or offensive jokes, words, songs, dialogue should not be broadcast.
- 3.5 Behaviour such as smoking and alcoholism should not be presented as glamorous or desirable, especially in local programmes.
- 3.6 Broadcasters must exercise sensitivity and avoid humour which offends against good taste and decency. Examples include jokes based on race, gender, disability, as such humour (even without malicious intent) can easily cause hurt or humiliation.

#### **Sexual Matters**

- 3.7 The inclusion of sexual matters in programmes must be defensible in context and presented with tact and discretion. Sexually suggestive or lewd dialogue and innuendoes should not be broadcast. Sexual stereotyping which can be hurtful and / or demeaning must be avoided.
- 3.8 The broadcast of topics related to sex should be targeted at appropriate audiences and scheduled accordingly to reach its intended listeners.
- 3.9 Programmes on sex education should be mindful of the target audience. They should not be presented in a sensational or exploitative manner, nor should they encourage or promote sexual permissiveness, promiscuity or unnatural sex acts.

#### **PART 4: VIOLENCE AND CRIME**

- 4.1 Suggestions that justice can be achieved by violence, vigilante action or other means of taking law enforcement into one's own hands should be avoided. Any exceptions must take into account the context and redeeming values.
- 4.2 Violence must not be described solely for its own sake, or for the gratuitous exploitation of sadistic or other perverted practices. In particular, descriptions of sexual violence should be treated with extreme care.
- 4.3 Programmes should not glamorise or in any way promote persons (e.g. gangsters, vandals, delinquents etc) groups or organisations who use or advocate the use of violence or engage in any criminal activity within Singapore or elsewhere.
- 4.4 Descriptions of law-breaking or countering law enforcement or other security measures should be treated with care to avoid giving ideas to those who may be criminally inclined.
- 4.5 Broadcasters should not broadcast any information from any source which could endanger lives or prejudice the success of attempts to deal with any crime such as hijacking or kidnapping.

#### **PART 5: GAMBLING AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

- 5.1 No programme should encourage, promote or in any way offer instruction on gambling even with regard to legitimate forms of gambling.
- 5.2 The broadcast of all forms of gambling tips is strictly prohibited.
- 5.3 References to mental or physical afflictions should be handled with caution to avoid offence or anxiety to sufferers.

#### **PART 6: NEWS AND OTHER FACTUAL PROGRAMMES**

- 6.1 Due impartiality requires broadcasters to deal even-handedly when diverse viewpoints are presented in a programme such as in a forum format. Balance should be maintained through the presentation of all-major viewpoints expressed. Programmes should not be slanted by the exclusion of facts or by misleading emphasis. Every reasonable effort must be made to ensure that the factual contents of programmes are accurate.
- 6.2 A right of reply or an opportunity to respond should be considered on the merits of each case. If so required by MDA, the broadcaster shall give an aggrieved party the opportunity to respond over an appropriate medium.
- 6.3 Significant errors in factual programmes such as news, current affairs and documentary programmes should be corrected and broadcast at the earliest opportunity.
- 6.4 In addition, presentation of news must observe the following guidelines:
  - (a) News reports / bulletins should always be presented with due impartiality and without the interjection of personal views by presenters.

- (b) News reports / bulletins should clearly be distinguished from commentary and analysis.
- (c) Morbid, sensational, or alarming details not essential to factual reporting should be avoided.
- (d) News reports must be sensitive to the use of materials or information relating to a person's personal or private affairs. The broadcast of such materials or information is acceptable only if there is an identifiable public interest for doing so.
- (e) Particular care must be exercised when reporting on sexual crimes. Reports must not carry information which could lead to the identification of such victims.
- (f) Sexual or other sensational material should not be exploited as news items without justification.

6.5 Any simulation of a radio news bulletin or news flash should be clearly distinguishable from an actual news bulletin.

#### **Personal View Programmes**

6.6 Opinion should be clearly distinguished from fact in all factual programmes. 'Personal view' programmes in which an individual is given the opportunity to put forward his or her own views, without necessarily referring to opposing views, are subject to the following guidelines:

- (a) The programme must be clearly identified as one which contains personal opinions/views both in advance announcements and at the start of the programme.
- (b) Undisputed / acknowledged facts must be respected, and broadcasters have an obligation to do what they can to ensure that the opinions expressed, however partial, do not rest upon false or inaccurate facts.
- (c) A suitable opportunity for response to the programme should be provided to correct mistakes, factual errors or other biased analyses.

#### **Accuracy and Fairness in Dramatised 'Reconstructions'**

6.7 Radio docu-dramas which seek to reconstruct actual events as a means of obtaining greater authenticity should not distort key reality issues and be identified as such so that the fictional elements are not misleadingly presented as fact.

6.8 The evidence on which a dramatic reconstruction is based should be tested with the same rigour required of a factual programme. Sequences that are based on extracts of court proceedings or other matters of public record must be fair and accurate. Where the creative realisation of some elements (such as characterisation, dialogue or atmosphere) may introduce a fictional dimension, this should not be used to distort the facts.

### **PART 7: MUSIC / PLAYING OF SONGS**

- 7.1 Songs disallowed or otherwise prohibited under the applicable laws and regulations in Singapore must not be aired.
- 7.2 Due care must be exercised in vetting the lyrics of songs as radio is a mass medium. The following themes, values and references should not be featured nor encouraged in songs:
- (a) those which contain sexually suggestive sounds and obscene/vulgar words or connotations;
  - (b) those which promote promiscuity and sexual perversions;
  - (c) those which glorify crime or violence or encourage anti-social behaviour such as drug taking, hatred, intolerance etc.;
  - (d) those which denigrate the sensitivities of any racial and religious groups (e.g. using the names of deities in a frivolous way);
  - (e) those which reinforce or promote superstitions or beliefs in witchcraft, the supernatural, occult or satanic worship; or
  - (f) those which are against existing public policies or objectives.

#### **PART 8: HORROR, SUPERNATURAL, FORTUNE TELLING AND OTHER BELIEFS**

- 8.1 Programmes exploring the occult, supernatural and psychic practices, particularly those involving spirits or the dead, should be treated with caution. Such programmes with frightening treatment should be broadcast in timeslots which are less accessible to young listeners.
- 8.2 Programmes based on or dealing with fortune telling, feng-shui, palm-reading, numerology, mind-reading, tarot reading, astrology, new age healing and the like should not give the impression that these practices are exact sciences.
- 8.3 Belief in superstition should not be promoted.

#### **PART 9: CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMES**

- 9.1 For the purpose of this section, "children" refer to persons aged 14 years and below.
- 9.2 Programmes targeted at children should generally reflect a respect for law and order, good morals and encourage family values. They should impart appreciation of sound moral and social concepts, and contribute to the healthy development of personality, character and intelligence.
- 9.3 Programmes should not be presented in a manner which may be disturbing or distressing to children or which may in any way adversely affect their general well being.

#### **PART 10: LANGUAGE**

- 10.1 Programmes should maintain high standards of language and speech in the four official languages of Singapore.
- 10.2 Standard English, which is grammatically correct, should be used for programmes such as news, current affairs and info-educational programmes. Local English, which is also grammatically correct but pronounced with a Singaporean accent and which may include local terms and expressions, could be used for programmes like music programmes, talk shows, dramas and comedies.
- 10.3 Singlish, which is ungrammatical local English, and includes dialect terms and sentence structures based on dialect, should not be encouraged and can only be permitted in interviews, where the interviewee speaks only Singlish. The interviewer himself, however, should not use Singlish.
- 10.4 All Chinese programmes, except operas or other programmes specifically approved by the Authority, must be in Mandarin. Exceptions are given to:
  - (a) News, current affairs, and info-educational programmes where dialect interviews are given by older people who are unable to speak Mandarin. Voice-overs should be provided for these interviews.
  - (b) Some dialect terms such as those used for food (e.g. *bak kut teh*, *char kway teow* and *ang gu kuey*) may also be used in local programmes.
  - (c) Dialogues and songs in dialects in a programme may be allowed provided the context justifies usage and is used sparingly.
- 10.5 Sub-standard Mandarin (characterised by poor syntax or use of vocabulary, poorly pronounced Mandarin or mixed with many dialect terms) should be avoided in all Chinese programmes.
- 10.6 Dialects in dialogues and songs in English programmes may be allowed provided the context justifies usage and is sparingly used. (Exceptions as in Clause 10.4 (a) and (b) apply.)
- 10.7 All Malay programmes, particularly news, current affairs and information programmes should be in Bahasa Malaysia Baku (standard pronunciation of Malay). However, broadcasters may exercise a suitable level of Malay language flexibility for music programmes, dramas and comedies.

## **PART 11: PRESENTATION AND SCHEDULING OF PROGRAMMES**

- 11.1 Broadcasters must exercise particular care when putting 'live' calls on air especially where topics involved are sensitive ones, and comments made may be derogatory or offensive.
- 11.2 Any presentation format which uses fictional personas to voice distasteful and offensive viewpoints is not acceptable. Broadcasters who adopt such formats will be responsible for all comments made by the fictional personas.
- 11.3 Broadcasters should exercise due caution when accepting on-air calls seeking advice. This is especially so when callers seek advice on emotional problems and matters requiring professional assistance since providing the wrong advice may have serious consequences. Broadcasters should refer such callers to the

appropriate persons or bodies such as professional counsellors, lawyers and consumers' association advisors.

- 11.4 Broadcasters must exercise care and sensitivity when scheduling programmes containing adult content. Such programmes should be placed in timeslots where younger listeners are less likely to be listening.

#### **EFFECTIVE DATE OF THE CODE**

This Code shall come into effect on 23 February 2004, and replaces the Code that took effect from 21 Sep 1998. MDA may from time to time revise or update the Code to maintain currency. The Code should also be read in conjunction with the Radio Advertising Code.