Appendix 9
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Fair and Equal Treatment of Candidates by the Print Media

1. The Electoral Affairs Commission ("EAC") will examine whether candidates are treated fairly and equally in light of the environmental circumstances of each case. Circumstances under consideration by the EAC include but not limited to practical problems that may be experienced by publishers, such as limitations of column space and staff resources; situations in which some candidates have extensive opinions on issues of public relevance while other candidates have none; some candidates have published newsworthy statements or speeches while other candidates have not said anything; the difference in status and standing of some candidates as public figures, etc.

2. No person is allowed to generally use these practical problems as an excuse, without specific explanations, for not giving fair and equal treatment and reporting to all candidates of the same Rural Area. Merely saying that practical problems gave rise to the selective reporting will be viewed as a lame excuse. However, if the print media concerned had approached other candidates but they refused to accept any interview, and this fact is made known by the relevant media in the same article, it will not be regarded as breaching the "Guidelines on Election-related Activities in respect of the Rural Representative Elections".

3. Equal treatment and reporting do not necessarily mean using the same length and word count when reporting each candidate of the same Rural Area, and must be considered on a case-by-case basis. For example, where a candidate speaks more than another candidate on a topic, and the newspaper reports it truthfully and faithfully, the media should not be criticised for not providing fair reporting. In other words, the key to fairness and equality is in the sense of **equal opportunity** being given to each candidate of the same Rural Area, so as to help electors make informed choices.

4. If the media has given fair and equal treatment to all candidates of the same Rural Area, its editorial and commentator can freely express opinions on each of the candidates, insofar as their comments are fair and based on facts. Any newspaper is at full liberty to express its support for or disagreement with a candidate. The "Guidelines on Election-related Activities in respect of the Rural Representative Elections" is not aimed at imposing any restrictions on the expression of such ideas.