

Guidelines for Ethical Photography

Ethical Photography:

- DOES NOT exploit or misrepresent people, places, or cultures
- DOES NOT violate privacy or human rights of subjects
- DOES NOT degrade, dishonor, or rob people of their dignity
- DOES exhibit respect and sensitivity for people and “otherness”
- DOES obtain the consent and input from those being photographed
- DOES seek to tell the true stories of real people, places, and culture

Ethical Photography Protocol

In order to pursue ethical photography, visual storytellers should heed the following protocols:

Before taking photos:

- Always get the subject’s consent first.
- Examine your motives for shooting a particular frame. What are you trying to convey? It is not acceptable to use photography simply to harness pity.
- You should not encourage subjects to feign despair, anger, or other emotions or seek to influence the “slant” of your photos in any way.
- Think about what you want to portray in your photo. While it is fine to portray the fears and struggles of your subjects in some photos, others should convey the community’s strengths and expectations. Never portray your subjects as useless or inadequate.

While taking photos:

- It may be appropriate in some instances to photograph subjects from behind so that only their activities, not their faces, can be seen. For example, you may show the face of a doctor performing an exam, but not the patient’s face, both preventing the patient from distraction and protecting their privacy.
- Be humble, considerate, and respectful. Try to take photos without being intrusive.
- Do not be aloof; build a relationship of mutual understanding with your subjects.

After taking photos:

- Do not stereotype or make false generalizations. A single photograph of a hungry child is not representative of an entire community. Use captions to give context.
- Photos should be used to raise public awareness, not to exploit public sympathy.
- Photos must be carefully and faithfully edited to avoid misrepresentation. Photos should not be overly manipulated or embellished digitally.
- Ensure your photos document what you believe is the real situation of your subjects.
- Photographers should use their skills to influence public perception responsibly, and it is crucial for organizations to use images that connect people from all walks of life through the language of photography.