

## DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE

### POLICY FOR THE USE OF INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA

#### **1. Introduction**

The Internet and social media are hugely powerful communications tools that have a significant impact on the way in which organisations operate. The Democratic Alliance welcomes and embraces these technologies and will continuously strive to use them to facilitate a closer and more immediate link between public representatives and the voters we serve. Such technologies assist the Party and its public representatives overcome the communication gap that exists, or is perceived to exist, between the voting public and their representatives.

However, because these electronic media have the potential to blur the lines between personal and institutional voices of its members, the Democratic Alliance (herein also referred to as “the Party” or “the DA”) has drafted the following policy to help clarify how best to enhance and protect personal and professional reputations of DA public representatives, as well as that of the Party, when using the internet and participating in social media.

For the purposes of this policy, “social media” is defined as communication or media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible publishing techniques. Examples include but are not limited to LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, and Mobilite.

DA public representatives may use, and indeed are strongly encouraged to use, social media as public representative of the Party. They may also use these media in their private capacities as citizens. They need simultaneously to remember that **the electronic communication is not anonymous, and information or views stored on the internet or disseminated via social media do not disappear**. Everything written or posted virally can be traced back to its author in one way or another, and very easily. Information is backed up often and repeatedly, and posts in one forum are usually replicated in others through trackbacks and reposts or references. For this reason, public representatives need always to be cautious, honest and respectful in their electronic communications, as they are expected to be in any other communication.

The Party promotes the free exchange of views, and creates a variety of different forums and decision-making structures in which such views can be freely expressed and respectfully debated. Public representatives are, by nature of their positions, ambassadors of the Party and promoters of its policies. Public representatives are therefore constrained in their use of the internet and social media to express views that are contrary to the official positions of the Party, adopted at such decision-making structures or forums. Expressed differently, that means that a public representative cannot contradict DA policy in communications on social media.

### **1.1 As a Public Representative**

The protocols that apply to a public representative when he or she is using the internet or social media are the same as when he or she is representing the Party in a legislature or council, talking to the media, or speaking at a conference. Public representatives must always disclose their position and that they are representing the Party. They should only disclose information, make commitments or engage in activities when they are authorised to do so. In respect of the internet and social media, public representatives should additionally remember that their comments will permanently be available and can be reproduced in other media.

### **1.2 In a private capacity**

DA public representatives have the same rights of free speech as all other South African citizens, but with additional obligations. Regardless of the media being used, public representatives must not do anything which could harm the reputation of the Party nor may they must disclose any Party material or official Party policy positions that they are not specifically authorised to disclose.

In the event that there may be uncertainty about in which capacity a public representative is acting, he or she should make it clear to others that his or her contribution on the internet or social media is as a private individual and not as a representative of the Party. Such a public representative should ensure that any comment he or she makes on matters of public policy is appropriate to the position they hold, and consistent with the Party's policies and principles.

## **2. Acceptable policy for the use of social network sites and the internet**

*If public representatives are uncertain of appropriate behaviour, they should consult the Code of Best Practice in Addendum A below.*

Use of the internet and social network sites by public representatives of the Party is encouraged where such use supports the goals and objectives of the Party.

However, the Party's policy for the use of social network sites and the internet is that public representatives must ensure that they:

- Comply with the law
- Use social network sites and the internet in an acceptable and responsible way
- Do not create unnecessary risk or embarrassment to the Party by their misuse of social network sites or the internet
- Adhere expressly to the Code for Public Representatives and the Behaviour and Attitude Statement

## **2.1 Unacceptable behaviour**

In particular the following is deemed unacceptable use or behaviour by public representatives:

- Visiting internet sites that contain illegal material;
- Using the computer to perpetrate any form of fraud, or software, film or music piracy;
- Using social network sites or the internet to send offensive or harassing material to other users;
- Downloading commercial software or any copyrighted materials belonging to third parties, unless this download is covered or permitted under a commercial agreement or other such licence;
- Hacking into unauthorised areas;
- Publishing or posting, directly or through surrogates, defamatory and/or knowingly false material about the Party, fellow public representatives, the professional staff or voters;
- Publishing any material that could reasonably be construed as discriminatory on the grounds of race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth;
- Revealing confidential information about the Party including financial information and information relating to fellow public representatives, the professional staff, voters, business plans, policies, polling techniques and/or internal discussions
- Introducing any form of malicious software into the Party's computer network.

## **2.2 Party-owned information held on third-party websites**

If public representatives produce, collect and/or process Party-related information in the course of their work, the information remains the property of the Party. This includes such information stored on third-party websites such as webmail service providers and other networking sites.

## **2.3 Monitoring**

The Party retains the right, on receipt of a complaint, to monitor the volume of internet and network traffic, together with the internet sites visited, by a public representative. The specific content of any transactions will be monitored legally, and will not be monitored unless there is a reasonable suspicion of improper use.

## **2.4 Sanctions**

If a public representative fails to comply with this policy, he or she may be charged with misconduct.

## **Addendum A: Code of Good Practice**

### **1. *Think twice before posting***

Privacy does not exist in the world of social media. Consider what could happen if a post becomes widely known and how that may reflect both on the person posting and the Party. Search engines can turn up posts years after they are created, and comments can be forwarded or copied. If you wouldn't say it at a conference or to a member of the media, consider whether you should post it online. If you are unsure about posting something or responding to a comment, ask your whip for input or contact the Communications Department.

### **2. *Strive for accuracy***

Get the facts straight before posting them on social media. Review content for grammatical and spelling errors. This is especially important if posting on behalf of the Party in any official capacity.

### **3. *Be respectful***

Understand that content contributed to a social media site could encourage comments or discussion of opposing ideas. Responses should be considered carefully in light of how they would reflect on the person posting and/or the Party, and the effect that might have on the image of the Party in the eyes of the voters.

### **4. *Remember your audience***

Be aware that a presence in the social media world is or easily can be made available to the public. This includes prospective supporters, current supporters, Party management (Political and Operational) colleagues, and peers. Consider this before publishing to ensure the post will not alienate, harm, or provoke any of these groups.

### **5. *On personal sites, identify your views as your own***

If you identify yourself as a Democratic Alliance public representative, it should be clear that the views expressed are not necessarily those of the Party.

### **6. *Photography***

Photographs posted on social media sites can easily be appropriated by visitors. Do not post images of yourself or your colleagues which may compromise these persons' positions.

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