



"Upholding Unchanging Principles in Changing Times"

"E Sui Faiga ae Tumau Fa'avae"



An Open Letter to the Honourable Editors of the Samoa Observer

16 September 2026

Respecting the rights of Samoa's Children

Dear Editors,

The Office of the Ombudsman in pursuance of its mandate as the National Human Rights Institution of Samoa writes to express deep concern regarding publication in today's Observer of the names and details of two children suspected to have died in tragic circumstances ("Parents mourns children after Nofoali'i deaths"). While the issue may be viewed by some as a matter of public interest, the disclosure of the names, ages, and personal circumstances of these children, including interviews with their immediate relatives, in our respectful view constitutes a grave violation of their rights to privacy and dignity.

Moreover, when read in conjunction with an earlier article ("Police investigate after young brother and sister die in Nofoali'i"), there can arise genuine doubt as to the cause of death of these children. This breaches international World Health Organisation (WHO) reporting guidelines, which state that media should never implicitly or explicitly tie a specific ongoing investigation to a cause of death without official confirmation, as it fuels community speculation and amplifies social media rumours.

The Office wishes to remind all media personnel of Samoa's binding obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), specifically Article 16, which guarantees every child the right to protection against arbitrary "interference with his or her privacy, family, home" or to attacks "on his or her honor and reputation". Publishing sensitive and extremely personal information and details of their lives breaches these obligations and only serves to compound the trauma of grieving families. It may also have other harmful repercussions which we do not propose to delve into.

Undoubtedly the media holds a powerful role in shaping public understanding and constructive debate. Responsible reporting can raise awareness of problem areas involving children and young persons and foster and encourage a culture of early intervention. Sensational or pervasive coverage of child deaths however, especially when all the relevant circumstances have not been fully investigated or determined, risks undermining these goals and can erode public trust in journalism as the fourth estate and a guardian of the common good.



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The Ombudsman's Office therefore calls upon the Samoa Observer and all media practitioners to:

- Immediately review and amend editorial policies on reporting the deaths of children and young persons.
- Adopt international best practice guidelines, such as those issued by the WHO and UNICEF, which emphasize non-identification, sensitivity, and referral to support services.¹
- Commit to training journalists on ethical reporting standards that uphold human rights and protect vulnerable groups.

The Office of the Ombudsman stands ready to support dialogue and capacity-building in this regard with media and all other stakeholders. Together, we can ensure that coverage of such tragedies rises above the sometimes spurious and insensitive comments that inhabit social media, respects the privacy and dignity of children and young people, supports grieving families, and contributes to a safer, more compassionate Samoa.

Sincerely,

Vui Clarence Nelson

OMBUDSMAN

¹ <https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/mental-health/suicide/responsible-reporting-on-suicide.pdf?utm_source=copilot.com>; <[unicef.org/media/reporting-guidelines](https://www.unicef.org/media/reporting-guidelines)>.