

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL UK SECTION

ACTIVIST CODE OF CONDUCT

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



1. INTRODUCTION

‘Those who today still feel a sense of impotence can do something: they can support Amnesty International. They can help it to stand up for freedom and justice.’

Peter Benenson, Founder Amnesty International 1961

‘We’re creating a new kind of force for human rights. It combines the worldwide strength and reputation of Amnesty, with the voices of grassroots activists everywhere.’

Atila Roque, Director, Amnesty International Brazil 2014

Amnesty International was conceived in 1961 as a one-year campaign. ‘Women and men of good will’ around the world demanded that the human rights of six individual prisoners of conscience be upheld and that they be released. It worked. What would become the world’s largest human rights movement was born.

Our central principle is that **people** are the instruments of change. The more people actively engage in our movement, the more we can promote and protect human rights. We encourage as many people as possible to participate in and feel part of this vibrant, effective movement.

We want to maintain an environment for activists that is open, accessible and welcoming. Amnesty supporters have great energy, skills and useful knowledge. Everyone has a role to play.

This Code of Conduct provides guidance on the values and behaviours we need to uphold. It also details the procedure to follow on the rare occasions when complaints or other issues arise.

All activists need to

- **Make** people feel welcome and able to contribute in ways that draw on their individual skills.
- **Value** and respect different opinions and approaches to achieving our aims. We are all working for a common cause.
- **Be open** to new ideas and different ways of working.
- **Work** together as part of a global movement to create a world in which human rights are known, claimed and enjoyed by all.

‘The success of the Amnesty Campaign depends on how sharply and powerfully it is possible to rally public opinion. It depends, too, upon the campaign being all-embracing in its composition, international in character and politically impartial in direction... How much can be achieved when men and women of good will unite.’

Peter Benenson

2. PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

The Code outlines reasonable guidelines for behaviour. Such guidelines are neither a binding commitment nor legal obligation. AIUK reserves the right to vary its processes if exceptional need arises.

Should any situation arise where an allegation may warrant a police investigation or arouse child protection concerns, AIUK will seek advice from the police or the designated Child Protection Officer on how to proceed.

3. DEFINITIONS

An **activist** is anyone who carries out unpaid activity on behalf of Amnesty International UK, including fundraising, campaigning, training or providing support to other activists. There are many ways to contribute and everyone’s contribution is valued.

The Code of Conduct does not cover AIUK’s board. Board members have a separate code that relates to their governance responsibilities.

Volunteers who work in AIUK’s offices and shops have their own charter, while staff are governed by a separate code of conduct and employment procedures.

An **‘activist role-holder’** has a regular, specific role, for example regional representative, country coordinator, officer of local or student group, school speaker and so on.

We hope this document assists our activists. AIUK has tens of thousands of supporters who annually organise hundreds of events, raise hundreds of thousands of pounds and contribute to our campaigns and wider work in many different ways. Problems are rare. Whenever possible we try to resolve difficulties informally.

4. VALUES

The values that inform our work as activists are drawn from a number of sources including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Amnesty International Statute. The Nolan Principles for Public Life have also informed the development of this Code of Conduct.

a) Dignity, respect and equal opportunities

Everyone is entitled to dignity and should have an equal opportunity to contribute to our work. We will treat everyone with respect, including those who disagree with us. AIUK's equal opportunities policy is available on our website: www.amnesty.org.uk/equality-and-diversity-policy. It is intrinsic to the values expressed in this document.

b) Honesty and integrity

Activists undertake their work in the interests of Amnesty International UK and the wider international movement. They do not seek financial or other material benefit for themselves, family or friends, nor do they place themselves or AIUK under financial or other obligation to outside individuals and organisations that might influence us in our work, or create a perception that such influence exists.

When activists carry out activities for Amnesty or make decisions on its behalf, they will make choices based on merit, including with respect to making appointments, awarding contracts, recommending people for rewards or obtaining goods and services on behalf of Amnesty.

Activist role-holders will declare any personal interests that may be perceived to impact on their choices or actions when contributing to AIUK's work. See 'Conflict of Interest', below, for more information.

c) Impartiality

AIUK will praise conduct that advances human rights and criticise conduct that infringes them. Such praise and criticism should be objective and based on Amnesty's own research and statements. We are not party political; we do not advocate any particular form of government or religion; we are impartial in our approach to political and social disputes not connected to fundamental human rights.

d) Accountability

Activists are accountable for their actions and willing to submit themselves to the scrutiny that is appropriate to their particular roles.

e) Openness

Activists should be as open as possible about their decisions and actions. They should give reasons for their decisions and be willing to provide information except where it is not in the public interest, in AIUK's interest or in the interests of those we work with.

f) Independence

AIUK activists are encouraged to work with other activists and organisations from time to time in a way that maintains (and is seen to maintain) AIUK's independence.

g) Democracy

We are a democratic organisation. Activists should promote participation in the democratic processes of AIUK and the wider international movement. They should maintain the integrity of those processes and respect their decisions.

h) International solidarity

AIUK is part of a global movement. We respect our partners in the international movement and the wider body of human rights defenders. We show solidarity when appropriate.

5. ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES

This section provides guidelines to inform the conduct of activists in specific situations. They aren't exhaustive but are provided to help negotiate dilemmas that can arise.

a) Public actions and statements

All public actions and statements related to Amnesty's work should be in accordance with Amnesty's policies and positions.

Activists should observe the law and ensure that necessary consents are obtained and notices given for actions and events.

b) Acceptance of awards

Activists sometimes may be nominated for an award (with or without monetary value) as a consequence of their work for Amnesty. This is usually to be welcomed and celebrated. Nevertheless advice from Amnesty staff should be sought before accepting any award of regional or national significance, or that may receive media attention beyond the local press.

c) Reasonable expenses

AIUK reimburses expenses for some activities. If you are not sure whether yours qualify for reimbursement, ask a relevant staff member. Where expenses are paid, activists should ensure that they are reasonable and should follow AIUK procedures when making a claim.

d) Confidentiality

Much of our information is for public consumption. However, some is marked 'internal' or 'for AI members only' and may contain sensitive information. It may not always be apparent why the information is sensitive. Such information and documentation should not be shared beyond Amnesty International members. Documents marked 'draft', 'for consultation', or similar, should be regarded as internal.

e) Copyright

Material produced by any part of Amnesty is the property of Amnesty International. Consent for its use by recognised activists can be assumed but it can be withdrawn at any time, including for inappropriate use. This also applies to logos and names.

Activists should also ensure that they do not violate copyright laws when using material not produced by Amnesty International. Attribution and acknowledgement of authorship should be made where appropriate.

f) Acceptance of gifts, hospitality or donations

Activists should not accept gifts, hospitality or donations offered as an inducement for preferential treatment, or which could be seen as exerting influence over decisions. Small gifts are permissible, as is the acceptance of a facility or service for free (a form of donation known as a gift-in-kind). It is permissible to receive donations, but activists are advised to seek advice before receiving donations of significant value. Permission must always be sought for a donation or gift in kind from a private company that exceeds £5,000. Activists should check with staff before accepting money from a governmental body (except for grants made by an educational establishment to its own student body).

Donations collected in the name of Amnesty International must be used to support the organisation's aims and activities, which usually includes the legitimate activities of our groups.

g) Conflict of interest

Very occasionally a conflict of interest may arise (or be seen to arise) between an activist's work for Amnesty and their other activities. Damage to AIUK's reputation might arise in certain unusual circumstances. Examples might include where a prominent activist role-holder becomes a legislative candidate or where an activist buys a service from their own company, or from a relation. We are not generally interested in knowing about membership of other organisations (including political parties) unless the other body is clearly seen as having values at odds with our own.

For group members any conflict of interest should be declared to other members of the group. Members of networks, committees or similar bodies should make a declaration to their chairs. For other activists the declaration should be made to the Chair of the Activism Sub-Committee, via the Head of the Community Organising, Human Rights Education and Events (CORE) team.

h) Drugs and alcohol misuse

Activists should not be under the influence of alcohol or drugs to the extent that their performance or behaviour is impaired during the performance of their duties for AIUK. No activist should consume or be in possession of illegal substances during the performance of their duties for Amnesty International or at any AIUK event.

i) Health and safety

Activists are expected to take responsibility for their own and others' health and safety when undertaking work or organising events on behalf of AIUK. Staff can advise on health and safety, including risk assessments.

j) Child protection guidelines

For AIUK's child protection guidelines see www.amnesty.org.uk/child-protection-policy

k) Harassment or bullying

Activists should treat others with respect and refrain from behaviour that may be construed as bullying or harassment, including malicious gossip. AIUK uses definitions provided by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) – see below.

Harassment, in general terms, is 'unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of men and women...It may be related to age, sex, race, disability, religion, nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident. The key is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient.'

Bullying may be characterised as 'offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipients'.

Bullying and harassment may be by an individual against an individual, or involve groups of people. It may be obvious or it may be insidious. Whatever form it takes, it is unwarranted and unwelcome.

If someone raises a concern about bullying and harassment with an activist, it is important that they try to be open-minded and see things from the other person's perspective. This can be difficult but can help to resolve problems informally.

l) Privacy and data protection

For AIUK's data protection policy see www.amnesty.org.uk/data-protection-policy

m) Working in partnership with staff

Staff and activists should work together in partnership to promote the best interests of AIUK. It is important that staff, activists and volunteers work within a culture of mutual respect and an understanding of respective roles at all levels. All communications should be conducted in a positive and constructive manner.

Differences of opinion and disputes may arise and activists may wish to complain about a member of staff. If they wish to do so, they can approach the relevant manager; they can request a network chair to raise the matter; or they can make a complaint in accordance with AIUK's feedback mechanism.

If a staff member wishes to complain about an activist, they will alert their line manager who will instigate the process for responding to complaints about activist outlined in the annex below.

6. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THINGS GO WRONG?

It is preferable that problems are addressed informally. However, this is not always possible. Our formal and informal processes for dealing with issues and complaints about activists can be seen online at www.amnesty.org.uk/coc

7. REVIEW AND COMMENTS

Comments are welcome on this Code of Conduct. It will next be reviewed in November 2017.

We appreciate that policies and procedures can be improved and welcome suggestions. These should be sent to chair of the Activism Sub-Committee, via the head of the CORE team at AIUK.

Further information and advice

AIUK's Supporter Care Team provides information and advice to our supporters and will be able to respond to queries arising from this Code, or will know where to obtain answers. The team can be contacted by phone on 020 7033 1777) and by email on activism@amnesty.org.uk

Additionally, the CORE team can provide information. Experienced activists can also be a good source of advice.