

International Civil Society Organisations (ICSOs): “We must and will do better”

As organisations whose core aim is to help the most vulnerable people in the world, to secure human rights and protect the environment we must always confront and eradicate abusive behaviour and the misuse of power. When it comes from individuals within our own staff, it is a double betrayal, not just of the people we exist to serve, but of the people (staff, volunteers, supporters, donors) who work with extraordinary engagement to achieve our mission.

There can be no tolerance for the abuse of power, privilege or trust by individuals within our organisations or in our work. Our utmost priority is to those victims and survivors of abuse – to atone for damage that has been done and to stand in solidarity with those women who have faced such injustice. We have an absolute duty to our staff, our supporters and, above all, the people we seek to help to ensure we do everything in our power to prevent, detect and eradicate unethical behaviour.

We take every necessary step to prevent any wrongs occurring and to respond quickly and decisively if they do – and we will deepen these efforts further. We also have a clear responsibility to ensure that the people we seek to serve are not the ones punished for our mistakes. The widespread public outcry at this behaviour demonstrates that people feel profound compassion for those who need civil society organisations’ help. We must honour that drive, and the rights and needs of the communities with which we work, by continuing to provide vital support but also by constantly seeking to improve.

We are fully committed to being transparent and accountable towards the people we serve, our partners, supporters and the public at large. That is why we are collectively announcing the following series of urgent and immediate measures:

- We commit ourselves to adhering to existing ethical standard frameworks and to intensify our work with the independent organisations that ensure our compliance. We have mandated a review under the lead of Accountable Now of the ethical standards employed across the sector
- We will increase the resources we devote to preventing and safeguarding against abuse and misconduct – meeting our responsibility to protect the people we serve, our staff, and our partners
- We will collectively review our current human resources referencing systems so that people found to have abused their power or behaved inappropriately are not re-employed in the sector – including in ICSOs, government agencies, the UN and other associated multilateral, bilateral and domestic agencies
- We will work with these authorities and regulatory bodies to ensure any individual caught abusing their power are sanctioned and cannot do so again.

In taking these steps, we are also asking people to come forward to report unacceptable behaviour. We hope these measures send a clear message to those who experience or witness any form of abuse or have done so in the past - it is essential that they know we take their reports seriously and that we will take action.

These actions are only the first step as, collectively and individually, we do everything possible to ensure that our organisations, our staff and our work meet the most fundamental principle for all civil society organisations - to do no harm. We are truly sorry that there have been occasions when this has not been the case. We must and will do better.