



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Policy to prevent and address harassment, including sexual harassment, at IPU Assemblies and other IPU events

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This policy may be revised periodically in the light of experience gained and technical developments. Any modification will be notified to the users in due course through policy amendment.

Purpose

The core values (equality, inclusiveness, respect, integrity and solidarity) of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), as well as its Statutes and Rules, lay the foundations for professional, respectful and harassment-free environments for all participants during its meetings and events.

The IPU is committed to enabling Assemblies and events in which everyone can participate in an inclusive, respectful and safe environment, free from any harassment, including sexual harassment. Participants are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that is professional, respectful and responsible.

IPU Assemblies and events are guided by the highest ethical and professional standards. All participants are expected to behave with integrity, and with due respect for human dignity, towards all other participants attending or involved in any IPU event.

The purpose of this Policy is to prevent any harassment, including sexual harassment, from occurring at IPU Assemblies and events, to support those persons who report incidents of harassment, and to take effective and prompt measures to investigate alleged incidents of harassment, and when proven, establish accountability.

The IPU Secretariat, through a designated anti-harassment core group, will offer support to those persons who are subjected to any such conduct, on the basis of respect, non-discrimination, safety and informed consent. This Policy has been drafted on the basis of the *UN Code of Conduct to prevent harassment, including sexual harassment, at UN system events*.

Scope

This Policy applies to all participants in IPU Assemblies and other IPU events, including parliamentarians and staff of IPU Member Parliaments, Associate Members and observers, IPU Secretariat personnel (including staff, external collaborators or interns), members of diplomatic missions, experts, advisers, consultants, invitees, employees of the Host Parliament and of outside companies servicing the events, and all persons attending or involved in any capacity at such events.

This Policy applies to any incidents that occur during and in the context of IPU Assemblies or events, including in-person, virtual or hybrid Assemblies, meetings, conferences and symposiums, receptions, scientific and technical events, expert meetings, seminars, workshops, exhibits, side events, training sessions and field visits, as well as to any other forum organized, hosted or sponsored in whole or part by the IPU, wherever it takes place.

This Policy supplements, and does not affect, the application of other relevant policies, regulations, rules and laws, including the *Statutes and Rules of the IPU*, the *IPU personal data protection policy and procedures* and the *Code of Conduct for IPU Personnel*, as well as laws regulating the premises in which IPU events take place and any applicable host country agreements.

Prohibited conduct

For the purpose of this Policy, the definition of “harassment” is that given in the *UN Code of Conduct to prevent harassment, including sexual harassment, at UN system events*, as follows:

“Harassment is any improper or unwelcome conduct that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another person. Harassment in any form because of gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, physical ability, physical appearance, ethnicity, race, national origin, political affiliation, age, religion or any other reason is prohibited”.

“Sexual harassment is a specific type of prohibited conduct. Sexual harassment is any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation. Sexual harassment may involve any conduct of a verbal, non-verbal or physical nature, including written and electronic communications, and may occur between persons of the same or different genders.”

Examples of harassment include, but are not limited to:

- “intentional abuse of power relations, offensive behaviour to humiliate or undermine an individual or groups;
- aggressive language, profanity, shouting and threats;
- excluding or isolating a person from professional activities without reason or legitimate authority;
- persistent negative comments to a person or group, including rumour, gossip and ridicule, quid pro quo.”¹

Examples of sexual harassment include, but are not limited to:

- Making derogatory or demeaning comments about someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity
- Name-calling or using slurs with a gender/sexual connotation
- Making sexual comments about appearance, clothing or body parts
- Rating a person’s sexuality
- Repeatedly asking a person for dates or asking for sex
- Staring in a sexually suggestive manner
- Unwelcome touching, including pinching, patting, rubbing or purposefully brushing up against a person
- Making inappropriate sexual gestures, such as pelvic thrusts
- Sharing sexual or lewd anecdotes or jokes
- Sending sexually suggestive communications in any format
- Sharing or displaying sexually inappropriate images or videos in any format
- Attempted or actual sexual assault, including rape”²

As illustrated by the above-mentioned list, the gravity of the incident can vary.

Prevention of harassment, including sexual harassment

Preventing harassment, including sexual harassment, requires a common understanding of what is valued and what is expected by everyone, so that all participants at IPU Assemblies and events are conscious of their positions, behaviours and interactions.

To this end, the IPU commits to taking proactive steps to promote a zero-tolerance environment for harassment, including sexual harassment, at IPU Assemblies and events. The IPU Secretariat will also raise awareness and provide training on preventing harassment, including sexual harassment, on a regular basis. In line with the Policy, a separate plan of practical measures will be prepared to implement action required and monitor progress and implementation.

Complaint process

A participant who feels that they have been subjected to harassment, including sexual harassment, by another participant at an IPU Assembly or other event can report the matter. A participant who witnesses such harassment can also make such a report.

1. Definitions for the purposes of this Policy:

- (a) the term “victim/survivor(s)” means the person, or persons, towards whom conduct constituting possible harassment, including sexual harassment, is directed;
- (b) the term “alleged perpetrator(s)” means the person, or persons, whose conduct constitutes possible harassment, including sexual harassment, if established under applicable policies.

¹ Examples are quoted from the *Code of conduct for prevention of all forms of violence and harassment at ILO events*.

² Examples are quoted from *UN Code of Conduct to prevent harassment, including sexual harassment, at UN system events*.

2. Disclosing harassment, including sexual harassment

During IPU Assemblies and events, the IPU Secretariat will identify one or more focal point(s) for matters related to harassment, including sexual harassment. Participants who believe they may have been a victim/survivor of, or have witnessed, harassment, including sexual harassment, at an IPU Assembly or event, can immediately seek advice and support from, and report the matter to, the designated focal point(s) and/or to speakout@ipu.org, which will be forwarded to the IPU Secretariat anti-harassment core group.

The focal point(s) and the members of the IPU anti-harassment core group will generally be members of the IPU Secretariat who will have received training to deal with such situations.

Depending on the persons involved in the case, the complaint will proceed as follows:

- If the alleged perpetrator is a member of IPU personnel (staff, external collaborator or intern), the complaint will proceed in accordance with the IPU Staff Rules and Regulations and the *Code of Conduct for IPU Personnel*.
- If the alleged perpetrator is a parliamentarian – including if this parliamentarian holds an official governance position within the IPU – or a staff member of an IPU Member Parliament, Associate Member or observer, the procedure described below will be followed and if required the investigation report will be transmitted to the Oversight and Ethics Committee.
- If the alleged perpetrator does not fall under either of the above categories, the procedure described below will be followed and, if required, the Secretary General will take action as he/she deems necessary based on the investigation report and in accordance with the consequences described in this Policy.

3. Procedure

The designated anti-harassment core group will take appropriate action in accordance with applicable IPU policies, regulations and rules, including the following:

With regard to assistance to the victim/survivor(s):

- Listen to the testimony of the victim/survivor(s).
- Provide practical information about support/assistance available.
- Provide guidance on informal and formal procedures, and what these options entail.
- Explain the policy of confidentiality throughout the processes.
- Explain the zero-tolerance approach against retaliation and possible interim protective measures.
- Consider the complaint as well as the victim/survivor's needs and safety, assess whether protective measures are appropriate, available and in accordance with the victim's wishes.

Where a complaint is submitted by a person other than the victim/survivor, the anti-harassment core group will seek the consent of the victim/survivor before deciding whether to proceed further.

Informal procedure

Should the victim/survivor choose to engage first in an informal procedure based on an open, non-threatening and non-contentious approach, the anti-harassment core group may offer the following options:

- Approach and attempt to resolve the matter with the alleged perpetrator.
- Involve a third party to facilitate a discussion with the alleged perpetrator.

An unsuccessful attempt to resolve the matter informally does not preclude the lodging of a formal complaint.

Formal procedure

In a formal procedure, the designated anti-harassment core group will:

- Receive the formal complaint and order an investigation to be carried out.
- Hire external, independent investigators (agency or consultant) with relevant experience and expertise to investigate the case and produce a report, unless the core group and the victim/survivor agree that this is not necessary.
- Inform the victim/survivor of the progress of the investigation and its outcome, including whether or not the formal complaint resulted in a sanction being imposed.
- Notify the alleged perpetrator of the investigation and keep him/her informed of the progress of the procedure.
- Transmit the investigation report to the IPU Secretary General.

A formal procedure must only be launched with the informed consent of the victim/survivor. If a complaint is submitted by a person other than the victim/survivor, the anti-harassment core group should obtain the consent of the victim/survivor before deciding on whether to proceed with an investigation.

If the investigation report concludes that no incident of harassment, including sexual harassment, has occurred, the Secretary General will notify the complainant and the respondent that the matter will not be pursued further.

4. Protective measures

When necessary, the Secretary General, on advice of the anti-harassment core group and in consultation with the victim/survivor, may decide that interim protective measures be taken. Such measures aim to protect the victim/survivor(s) and prevent them from suffering further harm, whether as a result of further harassment, the stress involved in having to interact with their alleged perpetrator or the risk of retaliation for having made a complaint. Protective measures can include, for example, measures to physically separate the alleged perpetrator and the victim/survivor on a temporary basis.

Basic principles

Confidentiality

This Policy and its reporting mechanism are designed to ensure respect for all. Parties to a complaint must not divulge any information relating to the procedure to any person who is not involved. All parties are under an obligation to protect the identities of the victim/survivor(s), the alleged perpetrator(s), any witness(es) and anyone who gives evidence during the investigation. These identities will only be shared, when necessary, with those directly involved in the investigation. They will not be made public during the investigation, or upon publication of the report. Failure to comply with this obligation may constitute a breach of this Policy.

Zero tolerance of retaliation

The IPU will not tolerate any retaliation, by any person, against someone who, in good faith, conveys or transmits a concern, allegation or information under this Policy. The victim/survivor(s) will be protected against any retaliation from the moment the complaint is made, during the entire formal process and after the case is closed. Any perceived retaliation or retaliatory actions should be immediately reported to the anti-harassment core group.

False or misleading claims

A participant should never knowingly make a false or misleading claim about prohibited conduct. Knowingly reporting false information is contrary to this Policy and, if it is determined further to investigation that the allegations of harassment were based on malicious intent, the Oversight and Ethics Committee, or where applicable the Secretary General, may decide to initiate disciplinary procedures or other appropriate action against the complainant according to applicable rules and policy.

Recusal

If any member of the Oversight and Ethics Committee is either a victim/survivor or an alleged perpetrator in a case, said member must recuse themselves from the deliberations and the decision on the matter in question. In addition, if a victim/survivor or an alleged perpetrator is from the same country as one of the members of the above-mentioned committee, that member must recuse him/herself from taking part in the deliberations and decision on the matter in question.

In addition, any other potential conflict of interest should be brought to the attention of the Oversight and Ethics Committee by the relevant member.

Due process

A formal complaint must be signed and dated; no anonymous complaints will be considered. The complaint must be as detailed and substantiated as possible. A complaint should normally be filed promptly and at the latest within two years from either the date of the incident or, in the case of repeated incidents, the date of the most recent incident of alleged harassment. The victim/survivor must be aware that, for reasons of due process, his/her complaint and/or information from the complaint will be shared with the alleged perpetrator within the framework of the investigation.

Investigation of a complaint should be dealt with quickly, reasonably and within established time frames, in line with the investigation guidelines related to this Policy (to be drafted). The investigation will be fair, balanced, based on relevant facts and conducted on a strictly confidential basis. Its findings will be reflected in an investigation report, which will include the views of the victim/survivor(s), the witness(es) and the alleged perpetrator(s).

If a victim/survivor wishes to withdraw a complaint at any stage, a written request must be made to the anti-harassment core group. On receipt of such a request, the core group or the Secretary General may seek information on the reasons underlying the victim/survivor's wish.

Potential consequences of harassment

Appropriate actions may include, but are not limited to:

- Temporarily suspending the perpetrator's access to all IPU Assemblies and events until certain conditions are satisfied. Such conditions may include clear acknowledgement of wrongdoing and assurances of non-repetition, completing anti-harassment training, etc.
- Suspending the possibility for the perpetrator to hold an official governance position within the IPU.
- Suspending or terminating the perpetrator's access to the IPU Assembly or event in question, or refusing to allow them to register for future IPU Assemblies and events, or both.
- Conveying the elements of the complaint to the perpetrator's delegation and engaging in a discussion with a view to the delegation taking appropriate follow-up action or where applicable conveying a report to the employer or entity.
- Conveying the elements of the complaint to any investigative or disciplinary authority with jurisdiction over the perpetrator, as well as to relevant national authorities, in particular when the investigation concludes that there are credible allegations of possible criminal conduct.
- The victim/survivor of harassment may also seek help from other relevant authorities, such as the police, bearing in mind the applicable legal framework.

Implementation and monitoring of the Policy

The IPU commits to implementing this Policy consistently.

The IPU Secretariat will develop and implement a plan of practical measures to accompany this Policy and ensure its effective implementation.

The IPU Gender Partnership Group will regularly monitor the implementation of this Policy and its related plan and present a report every two years to the IPU membership, setting out the results and the way forward, including any revisions identified on an as needed basis, but at least every four years, taking into account lessons learned from monitoring of the Policy and any changes in the structures, complementary policies and context that would impact the implementation of the Policy.