

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS

INTRODUCTION¹

In 2002, the General Assembly of the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS) approved a motion to create an Ad Hoc Joint Committee and for that committee to develop a universal declaration of ethical principles for psychologists.

The focus of this international initiative is on articulating principles and values that provide a common moral framework for psychologists throughout the world, and that can be used as a moral justification and guide for the development of differing standards as appropriate for differing cultural contexts.

The project is a tripartite endeavour. It involves the IUPsyS, the International Association of Applied Psychology and the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology.

The Ad Hoc Joint Committee includes representatives from all five continents. The Members are (in alphabetical order): Rubén Ardila (Colombia), Lutz Eckensberger (Germany), Janel Gauthier, Chair (Canada), Nasrin Jazani (Iran), Hassan Kassim Khan (Yemen), Catherine Love (New Zealand), Elizabeth Nair (Singapore), Kwadzi Nyanungo (Zimbabwe), Paul B. Pederson (United States), Tuomo Tikkanen (Finland), Ann Watts (South Africa), and Kan Zhang (China).

The draft *Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists* presented here is the third draft to be released for consultation (the first and second draft were released in 2005 and 2007, respectively). It is the result of a multi-year international process: comparisons were made among existing codes of ethics for psychologists from around the world to identify commonalities in ethical principles and values; ethical principles and values espoused by other international disciplines and communities also were examined; Eastern and Western history of modern-day ethical principles and values were explored; focus groups of psychologists were held at international meetings in Asia, Europe, India, North America, South America, and the Middle East; international symposia were organized in Singapore, Vienna, Beijing, Granada, Athens, and Prague. The current draft is a work in progress and, accordingly, it is recognized that other drafts may follow in response to further consultation to determine the cultural appropriateness of the definitions, concepts and language used in the document.

This *Universal Declaration* describes ethical principles and related values for the international psychology community. It provides a shared moral framework that will help members of the psychology community to recognize that they carry out their activities within a larger social context, and that they need to act with integrity in the development and application of psychological knowledge and skills and in a manner that benefits humanity and does not harm or oppress persons or peoples.

¹ The purpose of this Introduction is to provide a brief presentation of the *Universal Declaration*. It will not be a part of the *Declaration* itself.

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PROPOSED THIRD DRAFT – MARCH 28, 2008

PREAMBLE

Ethics is at the core of every discipline. The *Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists* speaks to the common moral framework that guides and inspires psychologists worldwide toward the highest ethical ideals in their professional and scientific work. Psychologists recognize that they carry out their activities within a larger social context. They recognize that the lives and identities of human beings both individually and collectively are connected across generations, and that there is a reciprocal relationship between human beings and their natural and social environments. Psychologists are committed to placing the welfare of society and its members above the self-interest of the discipline and its members. They recognize that adherence to ethical principles in the context of their work contributes to a stable society that enhances the quality of life for all human beings.

The objectives of the *Universal Declaration* are to provide: (a) a generic set of moral principles against which international, regional and national psychology organizations worldwide may evaluate the ethical and moral relevance of their codes of ethics; (b) a generic set of moral principles that may be used as a template by international, regional and national psychology organizations worldwide to guide the development or evolution of their ethics codes and standards; and (c) a shared moral framework that may be used by psychology organizations to speak with a collective voice on matters of ethical concern.

The *Universal Declaration* describes those ethical principles that are based on shared human values. It reaffirms the commitment of the psychology community to help build a better world where peace, freedom, responsibility, justice, humanity, and morality prevail. The description of each principle is followed by the presentation of a list of values that are related to the principle. These lists of values are included in the *Universal Declaration* to highlight ethical concepts that are valuable for promoting the “good” represented by each ethical principle. They do not necessarily cover all the implications of any specific principle.

The *Universal Declaration* articulates principles and related values that are general and aspirational rather than specific and prescriptive. Application of the principles and values to the development of specific standards of conduct will vary across cultures, and must occur locally or regionally in order to ensure their relevance to local or regional culture, customs, beliefs, and laws.

The significance of the *Universal Declaration* depends on its recognition and promotion by psychology organizations at national, regional and international levels. Every psychology organization is encouraged to keep this *Declaration* in mind and, through teaching, education, and other measures to promote respect for, and observance of, the *Declaration’s* principles and related values in the various activities of its members.

PRINCIPLE I

Respect for the Dignity of Persons and Peoples

Respect for the dignity of persons is the most fundamental and universally found ethical principle across geographical and cultural boundaries, and across professional disciplines. It provides the philosophical foundation for many of the other ethical principles put forward by professions. Respect for dignity recognizes the inherent worth of all human beings, regardless of perceived or real differences in social status, ethnic origin, gender, capacities, or other such characteristics. This inherent worth means that all human beings are worthy of equal moral consideration.

All human beings, as well as being individuals, are interdependent social beings that are born into, live in, and are a part of the history and ongoing evolution of their peoples. The different culture, ethnicity, religion, histories, social structures and other such characteristics of peoples are integral to the identity of their members and give meaning to their lives. The continuity of peoples and cultures over time connects the peoples of today with the peoples of past generations and the need to nurture future generations. As such, respect for dignity of persons includes moral consideration of and respect for the dignity of peoples.

Respect for the dignity of persons and peoples is expressed in different ways in different communities and cultures. It is important to acknowledge and respect such differences. On the other hand, it also is important that all communities and cultures adhere to moral values that respect and protect their members both as individual persons and as collective peoples.

THEREFORE, psychologists accept as fundamental the Principle of Respect for the Dignity of Persons and Peoples. In so doing, they accept the following related values:

- a) respect for the unique worth and inherent dignity of all human beings;
- b) respect for the diversity among persons and peoples;
- c) respect for the customs and beliefs of cultures, limited only when a custom or a belief seriously contravenes the principle of respect for the dignity of persons or peoples or causes serious harm to their well-being;
- d) free and informed consent, as culturally defined and relevant for individuals, families, groups, and communities;
- e) privacy for individuals, families, groups, and communities;
- f) protection of confidentiality of personal information, as culturally defined and relevant for individuals, families, groups, and communities;
- g) fairness and justice in the treatment of persons and peoples.

PRINCIPLE II

Competent Caring for the Well-Being of Persons and Peoples

Competent caring for the well-being of persons and peoples involves working for their benefit and, above all, doing no harm. It includes maximizing benefits, minimizing

potential harm, and offsetting or correcting harm. Competent caring requires the application of knowledge and skills that are appropriate for the nature of a situation as well as the social and cultural context. It also requires the ability to establish interpersonal relationships that enhance potential benefits and reduce potential harms. Another requirement is adequate self-knowledge of how one's values, experiences, culture, and social context might influence one's actions and interpretations.

THEREFORE, psychologists accept as fundamental the Principle of Competent Caring for the Well-Being of Persons and Peoples. In so doing, they accept the following related values:

- a) active concern for the well-being of individuals, families, groups, and communities;
- b) taking care to do no harm to individuals, families, groups, and communities;
- c) maximizing benefits and minimizing potential harms to individuals, families, groups, and communities;
- d) correcting or offsetting harmful effects that have occurred as a result of their activities;
- e) developing and maintaining competence;
- f) self-knowledge regarding how their own values, attitudes, experiences, and social context influence their actions, interpretations, choices, and recommendations;
- g) respect for the ability of individuals, families, groups, and communities to make decisions for themselves and to care for themselves and each other.

PRINCIPLE III **Integrity**

Integrity is vital to the advancement of scientific knowledge and to the maintenance of public confidence in the discipline of psychology. Integrity is based on honesty, and on truthful, open and accurate communications. It includes recognizing, monitoring, and managing potential biases, multiple relationships, and other conflicts of interest that could result in harm to or in the exploitation of persons or peoples.

Complete openness and disclosure of information must be balanced with other ethical considerations, including the need to protect the safety or confidentiality of persons and peoples, and the need to respect cultural expectations.

Cultural differences exist regarding appropriate professional boundaries, multiple relationships, and conflicts of interest. However, regardless of such differences, monitoring and management are needed to ensure that self-interest does not interfere with acting in the best interests of persons and peoples.

THEREFORE, psychologists accept as fundamental the Principle of Integrity. In so doing, they accept the following related values:

- a) honesty, and truthful, open and accurate communications;

- b) avoiding incomplete disclosure of information unless complete disclosure is culturally inappropriate, or violates confidentiality, or carries the potential to do serious harm to individuals, families, groups, or communities;
- c) maximizing impartiality and minimizing biases;
- d) not exploiting persons or peoples for personal, professional, or financial gain;
- e) avoiding conflicts of interest and declaring them when they cannot be avoided or are inappropriate to avoid.

PRINCIPLE IV

Professional and Scientific Responsibilities to Society

Psychology functions as a discipline within the context of human society. As a science and a profession, it has responsibilities to society. These responsibilities include contributing to the knowledge about human behavior and to persons' understanding of themselves and others, and using such knowledge to improve the condition of individuals, families, groups, communities, and society. They also include conducting its affairs within society in accordance with the highest ethical standards, and encouraging the development of social structures and policies that benefit all persons and peoples.

Differences exist in the way these responsibilities are interpreted by psychologists in different cultures. However, they need to be considered in a way that is culturally appropriate and consistent with the ethical principles and related values of this *Declaration*.

THEREFORE, psychologists accept as fundamental the Principle of Professional and Scientific Responsibilities to Society. In so doing, they accept the following related values:

- a) the discipline's responsibility to increase scientific and professional knowledge in ways that allows the promotion of the well-being of society and all its members;
- b) the discipline's responsibility to use psychological knowledge for beneficial purposes, and to protect such knowledge from being misused, used incompetently, or made useless;
- c) the discipline's responsibility to conduct its affairs in ways that are ethical and consistent with the promotion of the well-being of society and all its members;
- d) the discipline's responsibility to promote the highest ethical ideals in the scientific, professional and educational activities of its members;
- e) the discipline's responsibility to adequately train its members in their ethical responsibilities and required competencies;
- f) the discipline's responsibility to develop its ethical awareness and sensitivity, and to be as self-correcting as possible.