

Respecting Human Dignity and Integrity: Sexual Harassment Guidelines of WSCF Europe

Longer Version for Preparatory Committee Members and Staff

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (Galatians 5,22)

I. Principles, Definitions and Responsibilities

Statements of Principles and Intent

WSCF Europe is committed to affirming the dignity and integrity of all persons. WSCF Europe is meant to be an open and safe space where we meet each other in Christian community, respecting each other – a place free from intimidation.

In order to ensure that WSCF Europe is a safe space at all times, these guidelines have been developed to raise awareness, to prevent harassment from happening in our midst and address it when it does occur.

This document is primarily intended for members of preparatory committees of events where WSCF Europe is (co-)responsible and for volunteers and staff within the organisation, in order to inform them of our policies and procedures that will be followed in situations of sexual harassment.

The guidelines are not intended to control or limit mutually consensual behaviour between adults. The key point is that both partners must give their consent, and *consent* especially in a cross-cultural setting as within WSCF Europe, can be a tricky issue. WSCF Europe states that all forms of harassment and abuse are unacceptable and will be addressed when they come to light.

Within WSCF Europe, the gender co-ordinator, the regional secretary, and the chairperson are responsible for the implementation of these guidelines, for encouraging national movements to translate and circulate them, and from time to time for reviewing and updating them in light of developing good practices.

2. Cultural Diversity

Created all in God’s image, we are still different. This diversity is a great richness, which we can learn from and celebrate together. In a cross-cultural context we have different ways of behaving, approaches to people, spiritual traditions and cultural backgrounds.

Meeting together we cross the borders of difference, but we have to take care of each other and not impose our way of being upon others. What is normal and friendly for one person can be a hurtful invasion of space for someone else.

Relying on our culturally based common sense may not be enough, as words,

phrases, signals and gestures may carry different meanings in different cultures. We all share a responsibility to be sensitive and aware of other people's feelings so that everyone in the group can feel comfortable.

3. Defining Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is deliberate and/or repeated attention of a sexual nature that is *unwanted by the recipient*. Verbal harassment may include unnecessary or unwelcome comments on dress and appearance, "jokes" of a personal or sexual nature that cause discomfort or embarrassment, offensive language, propositions, or verbal abuse.

Non-verbal harassment can include unwelcome staring, gestures, touching, groping or physical assault. Harassment may also be conducted by unwanted telephone calls, SMS and emails.

In the majority of cases, women are harassed by men, so sexual harassment is more than an individual matter but rather reflects a wider pattern in society. Harassment, however, can also occur between people of the same gender, or by women harassing men.

The feelings of the person experiencing unwelcome behaviour are paramount in determining the nature of harassment. What counts is not what someone *intended* to do, but the impact of their action on the person receiving the attention.

In devising these guidelines we have attempted to distinguish between sexual harassment and *sexual abuse*. Although these demarcations are by no means absolute, for the purposes of WSCF's procedures and practices we have defined sexual abuse as behaviour and activities that would contravene the law in most parts of Europe.

Behaviours constituting sexual offences in most parts of Europe include, for example, rape (sexual intercourse without the consent of one of the persons involved), sexual and/or violent assault, sexual activity with a person unable to give informed consent, sexual activity with a minor (person under sixteen years old), or sexual activity involving a commercial transaction.

It is outside the competence of WSCF Europe to address these issues, which are more properly dealt with by the civil authorities in the country in which they occur (though WSCF Europe will attempt to provide appropriate pastoral support to participants in its activities who are affected by sexual abuse).

II. Preventing and Addressing Harassment

1. Group of Advisors

WSCF Europe will appoint a group of Advisors (three persons) at a European level to act as an informal source of information, advice and support on issues of sexual harassment and abuse.

In identifying suitable persons to be Advisors, WSCF Europe should seek to find

mature, experienced and wise persons, ensuring representation of a range of competences (for example, pastoral, legal or psychological expertise) and should take into account issues of diversity such as denominational, regional and gender balance.

Advisors may resign at any time, but will be appointed with the expectation that they will be available to provide some medium to longer-term continuity for the organisation. Advisors will not have specific responsibilities but will rather be asked to share their expertise and support when required.

The regional secretary and ERC should function as a search committee for appropriate advisors. The advisors will not be present at WSCF Europe events, but can always be contacted by the *pastoral care persons* and preparatory committee during the event.

2. Application to Events

All participants will be sent the shorter document before their participation. All national movements and applicants are reminded that participation at WSCF Europe events is not an automatic right; it is a privilege.

WSCF Europe reserves the right to accept or decline applications from individuals to participate at its events. Before meetings and conferences commence, the RS will check the participants' list.

Invitations to events will not be extended to persons whose behaviour has given cause for concern in the past and who have failed to give acceptable assurances that there will be no repetition of such behaviour.

It is highly unlikely that a person who has been asked to leave an event due to unacceptable behaviour will be invited to a future event. This also applies to events organised in co-operation with partner organisations.

Every conference should include a short introductory session on intercultural relationships and sexual harassment. Efforts should be made to ensure that all participants have an opportunity to voice the extent of their personal boundaries.

The regional secretary and the chairperson are responsible for keeping notes relating to instances of harassment, or copies of notes taken by others, in a confidential file documenting every stage of the process.

The regional secretary is responsible for reporting serious instances of sexual harassment to WSCF at the global level and for following up the process with national movements and, when necessary, relevant partner organisations.

3. Pastoral Care Persons

The preparatory committee, in co-operation with the regional secretary and advisors, will identify two persons, one woman and one man, to act as pastoral care persons at each event. These people will have some maturity and experience in dealing with

difficult situations, though they need not be experts or qualified counsellors.

They will offer confidential and supportive listening for all persons at events. The committee should be careful to ensure that other activities undertaken by these pastoral care persons during the event do not compromise this pastoral role.

For example, it may not be appropriate for a pastoral care person to deliver a thematic input, but may be acceptable for her or him to lead or facilitate worship. These persons should be present throughout the event.

The preparatory committee should consider regional, denominational and gender balance when identifying suitable pastoral care persons to attend events. When introducing guidelines and pastoral care persons, it is important to outline realistically what a pastoral care person can and cannot offer, emphasising that they are available primarily to listen and offer support.

All pastoral care persons should be familiar with WSCF Europe's procedures and guidelines on dealing with sexual harassment, including access to resource material and material with suggestions for games and group facilitation methods to address the issue of sexual harassment in a non-threatening, educative and informative way.

At every event, phone numbers and email addresses of the designated pastoral care persons should be made available to all participants so that it is possible to contact them after the conference. Often a person who experiences harassment is unable to talk about it at the time, or only comes to understand the nature of the harassment at a later date.

III. When Instances of Sexual Harassment Occur

1. Fairness and Transparency

WSCF Europe is committed to resolutely acknowledging and addressing instances of sexual harassment occurring in its midst. We aim to have transparent, fair, and proportional procedures aimed at maintaining a safe and comfortable environment for all.

The process should be fair both towards the person who has experienced harassment and the perpetrator(s) of the harassment. The whole community is responsible for one another. Silence is the best friend of violence.

Everyone should be mindful of signs that someone is being harassed, such as noticing that someone is uncomfortable or is withdrawing from the group. If we see or hear obvious harassment, it is our business and we each have a responsibility to tell the harasser to stop or tell other people.

The preparatory committee and the pastoral care persons have a particular responsibility in this. Do not walk past it. The pastoral care persons will be available to speak confidentially with any participant at events who wishes to talk with them. A pastoral care person will listen, will offer non-judgemental support and, if requested, will offer information and advice.

2. Informal Resolution through Dialogue

All sexual harassment is to be taken seriously. Some instances, however, can be resolved informally without recourse to formal procedures, through dialogue, clearing up of misunderstandings, or more clearly defining personal boundaries.

Persons involved may nevertheless wish to make for themselves a note of what happened, where, and when. They may wish to share this with a pastoral care person so that any repetitions, further incidents, or patterns of harassment, can be appropriately addressed.

3. Incidents Requiring Intervention

Both those experiencing and perpetrating sexual harassment may be extremely vulnerable when the behaviour is confronted and efforts should be made to ensure that neither party is left isolated or alone for any period of time.

Each should have access to a separate pastoral care person to offer confidential advice and support. In particular, efforts should be made to ensure that a person who has experienced harassment does not come into contact with the harasser while alone.

4. Talking to the Person Experiencing Harassment

Sometimes it is not so easy to resolve matters on your own. A person experiencing harassment may be frightened, embarrassed or upset, or be uncertain how to handle the situation alone.

If she or he tells a pastoral care person that she or he is experiencing sexual harassment, the pastoral care person will discuss with her or him the best way to address the situation. In offering advice the pastoral care person will take the feelings and needs of the person into account and be mindful of safety considerations.

The aim will be to decide together how to proceed. All efforts will be made to provide the person experiencing the harassment with appropriate advice, protection and support, and respect her or his wishes on how to deal with the situation.

5. Talking to the Perpetrator

Depending on the wishes of the person experiencing harassment and the nature of the harassment, one of the pastoral care persons along with a member of the preparatory committee (never alone), may meet with the person whose alleged behaviour has caused distress.

The persons at this meeting will not prejudge the situation and will listen to the person's perspective on events. At the outset, however, the pastoral care person will outline clearly the reasons for the meeting.

She or he lets the person know that her or his behaviour has caused concern, explains precisely what has been problematic and why (using the guidelines, which

all participants at all events have accepted in their application, as a reference point, where appropriate) and listens to anything the person has to say about circumstances and events.

In the course of such a meeting, if a person acknowledges that she or he has behaved in an inappropriate way, it may be possible to resolve the matter by gaining assurances from the person that there will be no repetition of the behaviour.

Notes of the meeting will be taken and agreed upon by all persons present, and these will include any assurances. The person whose behaviour has caused concern will be offered the opportunity to speak with a pastoral care person, and/or access to other appropriate support.

The pastoral care person will explain to the perpetrator of the harassment that the senior staff member (or chairperson) of her or his national movement will be informed with a view to providing them with support if it is so wished.

If the persons involved consent that the behaviour was misinterpreted, and the misunderstanding has been explained and cleared up for the relief of all persons involved, notes will be kept, but the national movement will not be informed about the case.

6. When Harassment is Denied

Situations where persons deny their actions, even though there are witnesses and/or other evidence, are more difficult to resolve. Denial is a common response when harassment is confronted.

Sometimes a person will acknowledge his/her actions, but cannot understand or accept the distress caused to another person. If a person cannot, or refuses to, give assurances that they will behave in accordance with the guidelines, they may be asked to leave the event by the moderator of the preparatory committee (preferably not a pastoral care person).

Any decision to ask a participant to leave an event will be made in consultation with the regional secretary and the chairperson who will also be responsible for following up with the person's national movement.

The person will be told that their national movement will be informed, with a view to offering them longer-term follow-up support. Efforts should be made to find alternative accommodation and support for a person asked to leave an event who is unable to return home immediately (for example, through local networks).

It is important that the person is not abandoned in this situation, is taken care of at all times, and does not come into contact with the person(s) harassed. Harassers who do not understand or acknowledge the seriousness of their behaviour should also be offered contact details for support, which they may utilise at a future date.

In a situation where a person denies harassment, or presents a very different version of events, there may, in the absence of other witnesses, be no way of

determining an accurate picture of what has happened.

In such cases, safety considerations are paramount. Where it is impossible to determine the facts, no presumption about what has actually happened will be made. In the case of serious allegations, however, there may be instances where, in the interests of safety, a participant will be asked to leave an event.

It is a precautionary measure if there are reasonable grounds to suppose that she or he poses a significant risk to the well-being or safety of another participant. Such decisions will be made in consultation with the regional secretary and the chairperson.

IV. Sexual Abuse

In these guidelines, we have attempted to distinguish between sexual harassment and sexual abuse. Persons responsible for running WSCF Europe meetings and events who become aware of instances, allegations, or disclosures of sexual abuse will immediately inform the appropriate civil authorities where ever reasonably possible, and will inform the regional secretary.

In situations where responsible persons are unable to inform the civic authorities, the emergency action they take will prioritise the safety of participants. They will inform the regional secretary as soon as possible.

If participants at an event have experienced an attack or sexual assault, they should not be left alone and medical attention should be sought. The person should be offered support and assistance in making decisions or contacting friends and family.

With the person's permission, her or his national movement should be contacted, and the movement encouraged to offer or facilitate longer term support for the person concerned. Contact should be maintained after the event, and a person's wish to leave or remain at an event should be respected and facilitated as far as possible.

A Safe Environment

The safety and well-being of participants in WSCF activities is paramount at all times. WSCF Europe is committed to affirming the integrity and dignity of those involved in our events.

We will therefore not tolerate sexual harassment or other violent or abusive behaviour. All participants and resource persons at WSCF Europe events have a responsibility to foster an environment and atmosphere conducive to the safety and well-being of all.