



Code of Conduct for Palestinian NGOs

Contact us at:

AMAN

Tel: +972 2-2974949

Fax: +972 2 2974948

Email: nazaha@aman-palestine.org

www.aman-palestine.org

Konrad Adenauer

Tel: +972 2 2959947

Fax: +972 2 2964816

www.kas.de/palaestina



NAZAHA Project is implemented by **AMAN** in cooperation with Konrad Adenauer Foundation and funded by the European Commission.

Introduction

Palestinian NGOs have always helped to develop and maintain Palestinian society. The process of the NGOs' development was linked to the social and political reality that had suffered, and still suffers, dramatic changes. These changes have equipped many of the NGOs with more spirit and steadfastness as well as the ability to work under the difficult conditions of the occupation, allowing them to provide significant aid services such as housing, food, education and training to members of their society. Despite the difficulty of the situation, Palestinian NGOs were able to contribute to the overall development of the society.

Furthermore, the role of the Palestinian NGOs did not decline with the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and the regress of the direct interference of the occupation. They continued to play an important role in the process of development as well as in the work towards liberation. This was done in continuation of their original mission to build a national democratic system.

In order to fulfill that goal, Palestinian NGOs find it necessary to commit to principles and values that are closely tied to good governance and democracy, and that are supported by competence, effectiveness and professionalism in performing their duties while using financial resources most efficiently.

In light of all that, NGOs pledge to avoid conflict of interest on both the higher administrative/board and the executive levels when conducting all activities or taking decisions. They also pledge not to discriminate between individuals or groups on any basis and shall follow strict procedures to prevent any forms of discrimination, whether individual or collective. Additionally, the NGOs and their staff are committed to abide by all laws concerning NGOs, in order to achieve their goals and work for the marginalized members of society.

Furthermore, NGOs pledge to work on the basis of partnership with institutions and individuals of the society. They will pay special attention

to marginalized groups knowing that success requires commitment to engage all related people and formal institutions and individuals when assessing the needs of the community and designing the goals of their work. NGOs also pledge to allow auditing and evaluation of their work, especially by their beneficiaries.

Palestinian NGOs have expressed their desire to commit to proper administration, characterized by the values of integrity, principles of transparency, and systems of accountability. They also commit to prioritize the development of the Palestinian society while refraining from any unprofessional acts in their relations with others.

Based on their recognition that transparency and accountability are two main principles for establishing good governance in the overall work of every sector of society, and the NGO work in particular, Palestinian NGOs announce their commitment to all articles in this document prepared by the Nazaha-project¹ of the AMAN coalition in cooperation with other Palestinian NGOs for the purpose of reinforcing transparency and accountability within their institution, as well as in society. It is noteworthy, that commitment to this document does not conflict with future using or adopting other means or committing to any other documents that enforce good governance in the Palestinian NGOs.

Purpose of the Code of Conduct:

This Code of Conduct (CoC) aims to define and specify moral guidelines in general, and those relating to transparency and accountability in particular, for NGOs' board members, administrative and executive committees, staff/employees or volunteers, to be followed while performing any duty. These guidelines define and unify the criteria by which interactions are to be conducted internally within the institution as well as its relations with other institutions, partners, beneficiaries, the public and funders. The CoC is not a legal document or a law but a voluntary commitment by those who sign it, whether the signatory is an institution or an individual.

The CoC is intended to capitalize on the fact, that the conscience is an effective internal monitoring tool that functions in accordance with moral criteria, where transparency and accountability are at the forefront for work with NGOs. Abiding by this CoC will also promote an anticorruption culture. This document does not contradict the rights of any NGO to formulate its own Code of Conduct based on the nature of its work and uniqueness as long as it stems from the values of this CoC and in harmony with its content. Finally, this document is part of the inclusive guide to good governance in the work of the Palestinian NGOs.

Objective

The goals of this Code of Conduct are:

- Providing a general guide for the work of NGOs and protecting them from distortion.
- Specifying the professional and moral values needed and expected of the NGOs and their employees.
- Defining the ideal professional behavior, both in its general and specific sense.
- Helping to make the work environment of NGOs transparent, convenient and constructive for the employees.
- Introducing citizens to the conduct expected from NGOs and their role in spreading an anti-corruption culture.

Target Group:

This Code of Conduct addresses individuals at the administrative level of NGOs, regardless of the definition of that group (e.g., administrative committee, board of directors, commission etc.) and any other individual who holds an executive position such as General Director or Executive Director.

Role of the Administrative Council

- Adopting the Code of Conduct and promoting it among employees of all levels.
- Adopting policies that insure commitment to the principles of this code, i.e. transparency, accountability and procedures that prevent conflict of interest.
- Involving beneficiaries in decision making and program planning concerning the services provided for them by the respective NGO.
- Adopting procedures that ensure the right of the general public to access to information.

With this commitment, NGOs aspire to reinforce the values of transparency and accountability, and pledge to respect all points outlined in this Code of Conduct. Following are the principles of transparency and accountability as they relate to the work of NGOs:

Financial and Administrative Transparency:

Transparency means providing archived and up-to-date information concerning the activities, procedures, decisions and policies made by the NGO and guaranteeing the freedom of access to this information through:

- Committing to openness, transparency and integrity as it relates to the organization, its mission, its policy and its activities on all levels of management in a way that allows for a serious inquiry regarding the organization and its employees, as it relates to the organization's interactions with all related parties, especially:
 - Its beneficiaries.
 - Its partners and other organizations that provide the same services.
 - The general public.

- PA institutions: executive, legislative, and judicial. This relationship should be conducted in accordance with the law while maintaining the independence of the respective NGO.
 - Funders and all institutions contracted with the NGO according to the terms of the contract and in accordance with the law.
- Working within clear and publicly declared procedures relating to the development and financial policies of the organization.
- Adopting a clear publishing policy that insures documentation and protection of all procedures related to the building and work of the institution as approved by the administrative council and ratified decisions that relate to all publications whether written, oral, or through the internet.
- Pledging to provide precise and accurate information to the public by establishing a department/unit, or designating at least one employee for this purpose. This will establish a direct channel of communication between the institution and the public providing that the procedures are easy to follow and insure accurate and proper documentation of the information, especially when relating to the structure and work of the institution. This will facilitate the dissemination of the information to those who request it.
- Pledging confidentiality of personal information, regarding employees affairs, clients and other related individuals, unless these individuals choose to forfeit this right, or when the law demands revealing this information.
- Adopting written and declared procedures and policies that protect the human resources within the institution from abuse and unprofessional conduct. This includes criteria for employment, evaluation, training, promotion, salary scales, and mechanism for selecting beneficiaries.
- Pledging to commit to implementing procedures that are based on professionalism and follow rules and regulations that reflect transparency and accountability, such as mechanisms for internal monitoring, financial auditing etc; and to fulfill all financial requirements including a commitment to publish financial reports regularly. Insuring that audit reports are compiled by an external auditor, and should include the sources of funds, allocation and expenditures, all in accordance with the relevant laws.
- Insuring access to information regarding financial issues, hierarchy of the institution, activities, employees and name list of partners.

Also ensuring easy access of this information to the general public in addition to exerting utmost efforts to let the public know about the NGO's work, its sources of funding and its expenditures.

Financial and Administrative Accountability:

Accountability means the existence of mechanisms within the institution for reporting on the use of resources of the NGO. It also means that the responsibility of “choices and actions” falls on the shoulders of those in decision making positions; i.e. they are held accountable for failing to achieve the set goals of the institution. Based on the above mentioned, the administrative council will:

- **Intent and management:** be obliged to show readiness at any time to be questioned by any related party regarding administrative and financial management of the institution. The council will also commit to improving the content of all published documents making them easy to understand by the public for serious questioning regarding the institution, its employees, and all decisions and actions taken by the council and institution.
- **Responsibility:** take full responsibility for the financial and administrative performance of the organization. A clear policy should be formulated to show the forms and requirements for submitting reports as well as the methods used for preparation and monitoring of the process.
- **Procedures for insuring and facilitating methods of accountability:** commit to documenting all decisions effecting policies and practices by preparing and documenting and protecting minutes of all meetings for both the administrative council and the board of directors; insure that all decisions, events, and other interactions at the executive level and those relating to the administrative council are documented.
- **Financial accountability:** establish an effective internal control system and insure implementation of that system in accordance with the professional standards and procedures for financial review to include precautionary procedures covering all aspects of financial payments.
- **Evaluation and mutual accountability:** conduct evaluations regularly in partnership with the beneficiaries, funders, partners and employees. These evaluations should review the mission of the organization and its

activities regularly, in order to reaffirm the effectiveness of the activities as well as their relation to the original goals of the institution. The evaluation should also examine if certain projects should be continued, revised or exchanged for new projects. The evaluation process needs to be open, honest and inclusive of all related parties.

- **Facilitating internal control and public accountability:** aspire to receive feedback from all parties concerned regularly in order to improve the work of the organization and to facilitate the process of complaints and comments regarding the work and services of the organization for interested parties and individuals that are directly affected by its work.
- **Reinforcing and encouraging external accountability:** take into consideration that the different partners commit to the values of integrity and accountability when establishing a coalition or cooperation.
- **Regular elections:** commit to hold administrative council elections with integrity and transparency on a regular basis. The elected body will bear the responsibility of publishing reports illustrating results and decisions taken by the council.
- **Public complaints:** commit to a clear and declared policy for receiving public complaints and to deal with these complaints seriously by investigating their legitimacy based on decisions taken by the administrative council or in accordance to a written and ratified internal system that is clear and publicly known. Clear procedures should be specified and made public regarding receiving complaints, encouraging the citizens to come forth and having mechanisms for dealing, investigating and responding to the public regarding all these issues.

Transparency of Information Relating to Officials: Declaring Conflicts of Interest

Conflict of interest in the work of NGOs refers to a contradiction between public and personal interest of the official in power. It directly refers to a situation in which a NGO official has the opportunity to receive a personal benefit that may negatively influence his/her performance in doing his/her job; or a situation where the official is required to take a decision or influence the issuance of decision relating to the general public that

conflicts with his/her personal interest.

Therefore, in order to prevent this, the administrative council and employees commit to put the interest of the organization above any other interest or consideration. They will also take serious measures to prevent any conflict of interest between the organization and their personal interests that might arise as a result of being in a responsible position. They will take decisions that will prevent misuse of their position for gains on the personal, political party or family levels.

Based on the above mentioned, members of the administrative council and the employees of the institution will:

- Ensure that they will not use their position to achieve personal, family political party, or any personal financial gains.
- Not accept any present, a reward of any kind, cash reward, in a direct or indirect way; through a medium, individual, or any middle party (Wasta) for the purpose of facilitation or giving or receiving information that could result in personal, family, political party, or any personal financial gains.
- Commit to reveal any conflict of interest as it arises whether personal or financial, and to clarify the nature of the conflict each time. They will commit to withdraw from any negotiations or any decision making process that is connected to an issue which might raise a conflict of interests between the NGO and any personal, financial or administrative interest.

The Freedom of Access to Information

Transparency in an NGO is centered on having clear policies for publishing and information management. These policies are ratified and made public by the administrative council through various means as long as the content is clear and includes the following:

- Insuring availability of information such as oral or written or taking the form of a document, minutes of meetings, activities or events, etc.
- Informing the public in all its sectors of information available and methods of accessing that information.
- Defining simple procedures that assist the public in accessing the information.

- Setting dates for publications that achieve the aim.
- Showing effects of policies on the structure of the institution, departments, qualification and competency of the technical and administrative cadre, units, equipment, and relations.
- **Publicly announced documents should include the following minimum information:**
 - Structure, services, aims and objectives, and mission of the organization.
 - Effectiveness and interest of its bodies, administrative council, board of directors, members etc.
 - Reports on the activities of the organization.
 - Bases for employment, appointments, promotions, and evaluations.
 - Standards and criteria for selecting beneficiaries.
 - List of its network.

Information Management

Policies should include information management within the institution relating to documentation and filing, instructions on how to file documents issued by the administrative councils, meetings of the general commission, financial and administrative interactions, programs and activities. Based on the above, the policies should illustrate clearly the mechanisms and tasks that ensure the following:

- Maintaining files and documents: managing and storing documents in a safe and secure manner.
- Documenting decisions: All decisions, which influence policies and practices of an NGO, should be transparent. Decisions and procedures should be documented, for the sake of all participants in taking the decision whether collectively or individually. Therefore, this policy should:
 - Ensure that minutes of all meetings of both the general commission and the administrative council are recorded, documented and stored.
 - Ensure that there are procedures for documenting all of the decisions, events, and interactions at the executive administrative level.

Use of confidential documented information: This refers to having a policy that will ensure the confidentiality of information relating to the privacy of the individual employees or the beneficiaries. It should include that:

- All confidential documents are dealt with properly.
- Respect for the confidential character of the information and dealing with any restrictions that are agreed upon by the council will be followed, while taking into account what is stated in all international agreements and covenants on the right to access to information.
- No one has the right to misuse any information received when the administrative council is conducting duty for a personal gain.
- Respecting the individuals' privacy.

Maintaining the safety of information: Designating the party responsible for storing information and dealing with the records in a way, which guarantees that all of the members of the administrative council have individual responsibility over any document, tape, CD or any record in their organization.

Maintaining or destroying records:

- Establishing restrictions which guarantee that records will not be destroyed by accident.
- Avoiding writing incorrect dates and never to erase any part of the information written in the documents.

Standards for the right to access to information: Responding to the aim of having access to information and ensuring that standards of the right to access to information are implemented by doing the following:

- Committing to publish information.
- Promoting the principle of open meetings.
- Helping the public to receive information and easing the process of access to the information.
- Providing information with the lowest costs possible.
- Protecting the privacy of the individual and avoiding ambiguity.
- Documenting facts and avoiding removal of any documented information from the files.