



## Quick Guide Responding to Conflict in AICS(ES)

We know that whenever an organization gathers together passionate people who want to change the world for the better, there are bound to be differences of opinion. Sometimes, though, those differences can lead to unresolved tension among activists. We define this as conflict.

When our different opinions lead to conflict, there are steps that can be taken to help us move through those disagreements in a healthy way and as effectively as possible – leaving us more focused time and energy to get on with the job of working for human rights. The policies outlined in this document are meant to guide members in moving through any conflicts they may find themselves experiencing as Amnesty activists.

*Every conflict we face in life is rich with positive and negative potential. It can be a source of inspiration, enlightenment, learning, transformation, and growth – or rage, fear, shame, entrapment, and resistance. The choice is not up to our opponents, but to us, and our willingness to face and work through them.*

Kenneth Cloke and Joan Goldsmith

Amnesty Canada has policies and supporting resources to help members work through conflict.

- The *Branch Policy on Conflict Resolution* is the core instrument for guiding members through conflict
- The *Harassment and Discrimination Policy* and the *Workplace Violence* policy also apply to members who are engaged in work with the Branch. Each of these policies covers very specific aspects of conflict, and have their own steps for resolution.

The *Branch Policy on Conflict Resolution* has the broadest application, and can be used in all circumstances where harassment, discrimination, or violence are not present. This guide summarizes the key steps in this process, and how to get support.

The Branch has a *Conflict Resolution Policy Coordinator* (CRPC) who is responsible for overseeing the policy. The role of the CRPC is to support all those who are experiencing conflict with others in the Branch. The CRPC can answer questions, provide advice on options to working through conflict, and initiate and provide support for resolution processes (eg. mediation) .

Contact the Conflict Resolution Policy Coordinator  
[crpcoordinator@amnesty.ca](mailto:crpcoordinator@amnesty.ca)

## Creating a Healthy Culture Within Our Branch

An organization with a healthy culture is one in which diverse ideas and opinions are welcomed and people are generally able to address, discuss and resolve the conflict between them in an open and respectful manner. Such an approach leads to the prevention, in most cases, of escalated, unhealthy conflict. In order to build that culture, members and staff are encouraged, and where possible, expected to:

- welcome and respect the many facets of culture that make up our individual lives within the communal work of the Branch;
- share diverse opinions, beliefs and ideas;
- name disagreements when they arise rather than avoiding conflict;
- work through disagreements in an open and respectful manner;
- recognize and name underlying conflict (unresolved negative tension and/or perception, emotions and assumptions) between them and discuss and seek to resolve such conflict in an open and respectful manner; and,
- take advantage of any educational opportunities and training the Branch may provide in effective communication, the role of culture in our interactions, as well as conflict resolution skills and tools.

Let's disagree well!

*It is possible to conceive conflict as not necessarily a wasteful outbreak of incompatibilities, but a normal process by which socially valuable differences register themselves for the enrichment of all concerned.*

Mary Parker Follett

### Branch Policy on Conflict Resolution

This policy applies to all members, volunteers, contract workers and staff who are experiencing unresolved disagreements that are negatively impacting their involvement with the Branch. It applies to conflict emerging in any Branch-related activities.

\*\*Notes: Fieldworkers can use this or the Conflict Resolution process within their program.

Staff and managers should refer to the Conflict Resolution procedures for employees after Step 5.01

#### **Overview of Procedures**

##### *Step 1 - Direct Communication*

With few exceptions, the first step in any conflict should be to speak directly with the other person(s) and share one's concerns, listen openly to the other's concerns and work to find a solution that meets everyone's needs.

Exceptions to Step 1: a) where there is a pre-existing pattern of difficult and unresolved conflict and unhealthy communication; b) conflicts involving large power differences between people; c) where there is a fear for personal safety; d) where illegal activities are part of the conflict; or, e) conflicts that include unwanted sexual attention or touching.

##### *Step 2: Assisted Direct Communication*

If Step 1 has not worked, or if one of the exceptions to Step 1 applies, members can ask someone within their group, network, program, or the Branch who is trusted by both/all parties to help them speak to each other directly. At this point, staff and management refer to their Collective Agreement for the next steps.

#### **Key Support People**

##### *Steps 1 & 2*

- Trusted person within your program
- Fieldworker who can direct you to someone for advice and/or support
- Staff person with responsibility for your activism area.
- Conflict Resolution Policy Coordinator (CRPC)

*Step 3: Mediation*

If direct communication (assisted or non-assisted) does not lead to resolution, members can access a trained and impartial mediator to help them work through the issues and come to a resolution that works for both/all parties.

*Step 4: Review*

If mediation is not successful, or if an agreement is reached and it is felt that one or more of the people involved is not following that agreement, the situation can be reviewed by an impartial, third-party reviewer.

- Information will be gathered from all of the parties involved in the conflict.
- Recommendations for action will be made to the Branch body responsible for the parties involved in the conflict (e.g. Executive Committee; Fieldworker Coordinating Committee ).

*Step 5: Other Branch Processes*

If review recommendations have been implemented but the conflict remains unresolved and is detrimental to the health of the organization, the Executive Committee may take steps under the appropriate Branch by-law (e.g. Dissolution and Revocation of Status of Activism Structures; Termination of Individual Membership; etc.).

*Steps 3 & 4*

- Conflict Resolution Policy Coordinator

### Harassment & Discrimination Policy

This policy applies to all employees and members undertaking either paid or volunteer work on behalf of the Branch, including contract and temporary or agency personnel. It covers all Branch-related activities, whether conducted at or away from the workplace, during or outside of working hours. Members and employees who are experiencing, or aware of others who are experiencing, harassment or discrimination can use this policy to report issues.

**Harassment is** a pattern of distressing comments or behaviours that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome. It can include, but is not limited to, unwanted remarks, behaviour or communication in any form which constitute a clear pattern of mistreatment that is severe enough to create a hostile, intimidating environment.

**Discrimination is** an individual's act, behaviour or practice, or an organization's policy, practice or procedure (systemic discrimination) that has the purpose or effect of imposing burdens, obligations, disadvantages, or preferences on a person, or class of persons, who are identified by a prohibited ground which are not imposed on others. Prohibited grounds include, but are not limited to, race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality, culture, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion or creed, health (including HIV/AIDS), physical appearance, status or class.

***Key Support People***

If you or someone you know in the Branch is experiencing harassment and/or discrimination, please get in touch with someone for assistance, or to file a complaint.

- Staff: contact a senior manager and/or the Conflict Resolution Policy Coordinator
- Members: contact the Conflict Resolution Policy Coordinator or a member of the Executive

	Committee
--	-----------

**Workplace Violence Policy**

This policy applies to staff, interns, and office volunteers who fear for their physical safety or the physical safety of others and all activities that occur while on AI premises or while engaging in AI business, activities, or social events. It also applies to interactions with people who conduct business with the Branch.

**Workplace violence is** the threat, exercise, or attempted exercise of physical force by a person against someone in the workplace that causes or could cause physical injury to that person. This includes verbal abuse that makes someone feel that their safety is at risk.

***Key Support People***

If you are concerned about workplace violence, please contact your Branch supervisor, manager, or if appropriate, the Toronto, Vancouver or Halifax Regional Coordinator.