



WORLD STUDENT CHRISTIAN FEDERATION

Sexual Harassment Policy and Procedures

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I. Principles and Intent

WSCF is committed to creating safe spaces for growth and protecting the well being of all persons. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to provide environments that affirm the dignity and worth of persons created in the image of God. To this end it is our responsibility to oppose oppression in all forms, including any sexual abuse, exploitation, or harassment in our midst. We believe that it is our responsibility to take whatever action may be needed to prevent and correct behaviour contrary to this commitment.

These guidelines have been created to raise awareness, to prevent harassment from happening in our midst, and to have a just and clear process for addressing it when it does happen.

This policy applies to all WSCF Inter-Regional and Regional programmes, meetings, and events. Any other policy developed on the Regional or National level should serve to apply the principles in this document more specifically within that regional or national context and should not in any way contradict this Inter-Regional policy.

II. Definition of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is defined as any unwanted physical, verbal, or visual sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other sexually oriented conduct that is offensive or objectionable to the recipient, including, but not limited to:

- Unwanted and unreturned suggestive looks or stares
- Obscene gestures
- Unnecessary or unwelcome comments on dress or appearance
- Teasing or jokes of a personal or sexual nature that cause discomfort or embarrassment
- Offensive language, propositions, or verbal abuse
- Telephone calls, SMS, emails, letters with sexual content directed at someone who has indicated that are not interested in this kind of contact
- Displaying drawings or publications of a sexual nature without permission or with the intention of upsetting someone
- Following or stalking
- Unwanted touching e.g. putting arm around shoulders, hugging, intentionally brushing or rubbing against someone
- Displaying genitals without mutual consent
- Rape and attempted rape

ABUSE

There is a wide spectrum, in variety and in severity, of what may constitute sexual harassment. Though all of it is serious and unacceptable, there is a point at which it becomes sexual abuse, a criminal offence, and will be referred to local police.

Though the 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. Examples are:

- Rape (sexual intercourse without the consent of one of the persons involved)
- Sexual activity with a person unable to give informed consent
- Sexual activity with a minor (person under the legal age of consent—varies by country)
- Sexual activity involving commercial transaction

CONSENT

These guidelines are not intended to control or limit mutually consensual behaviour between adults. The key point is that both people must give their consent.

Consent in a cross-cultural context such as within WSCF can be a difficult issue. Relying on your culturally based common sense may not be enough, as words, phrases, signals, and gestures carry different meanings in different cultures.

POWER

The roots of sexual harassment lie not in sexuality but in the abuse of power.

“Power” can be cumulative, and arises from a number of sources such as occupation, experience, physical size and/or attractiveness, gender, age, race, wealth, and charisma. It can be negative: a top-down mechanism primarily benefiting the one who holds it. It can be positive: used to serve and benefit others.

Societal patterns: In the majority of cases, women are harassed by men, indicating that 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 and is, in these cases, equally as offensive and unacceptable.

A word to WSCF leaders: In the case of those working for the WSCF, power is part of a sacred trust consciously and unconsciously granted to those charged to do such work and must not be used to violate, harass, or intimidate. Power begins when a position of authority and responsibility has been established and accepted.

Meaningful consent to sexual activity requires a context not merely of choice, but of equality; hence meaningful consent requires the absence of any constraint. Where there is an imbalance of power between two persons arising out of a role difference there is no true equality. And without equal power there can be no true and meaningful consent.

All WSCF leaders should take into account these realities when considering entering into romantic relationships with other WSCF people, and should be in conversation with the leadership to whom they are accountable.

In no case should adult leaders enter into a romantic relationship with a minor.

IV. Cross-Cultural Communication

WSCF has extraordinary opportunities to enrich its members and to influence the wider world because it gives people from many and diverse places and cultures ways to make connections, learn about each other, encourage each other, overcome prejudices, and work together for common goals. At the same time, the possibility for misunderstandings due to cultural differences is also high.

As we encounter one another's differences we should be careful not to assume that our way of being and behaving is comfortable for everyone else. Even between individuals of the same culture or background, what may be considered normal friendliness and sociability to one person can be interpreted differently by another; in a culturally mixed group, the potential for misunderstanding increases. Sometimes our differences of age, gender, culture, spirituality, confession, ability, language, caste, ethnicity, and class make it a challenge to understand and communicate effectively with one another. We are invited to take this challenge as a gift and a positive opportunity. In doing so, we need to take extra care and sensitivity in our behaviour and approach to one another.

IV. Recommendations and steps WSCF participants can take to prevent and deal with sexual harassment

There are steps you can take to make sure you are treated in ways that are comfortable and appropriate for you, and to make sure you are doing the same for others.

- Be clear with yourself and others about your personal boundaries—what sort of closeness with others feels comfortable or appropriate for you?
- Refuse any inappropriate gesture or contact.
- Respect other people's personal boundaries. If you are not sure, ask first. (For example, "Would it be okay if I gave you a hug?")
- If you experience harassment, make it clear that the behaviour is unwelcome. You can say "no" with a look, words, or gestures. If someone is making rude gestures or suggestions, laughing can be an effective strategy.
- If harassment persists, and you are in a public place, make your protests louder so that the public notices the harasser. **ESPECIALLY IF YOU FEEL YOURSELF TO BE IN DANGER.** It is your right to hit, kick, or push someone who is molesting you. This is self-defence.
- Trust your intuitions and feelings if someone's behaviour makes you feel uncomfortable. People who experience harassment sometimes have a response of trying to rationalise or deny what is really going on.
- Talk about it with people you trust, so that you may take the right steps for you and so that the name of the harasser and the objectionable things done are known. The latter is important so that others are not subjected to the same kind of treatment.

Silence may only provoke more harassment. The pastoral care team is there to listen to you!

- For any legal action, verbal and written reports are helpful. If you feel that you may want to report the harassment formally, write down or record what happened while it is still fresh in your memory.

If you feel uncomfortable with someone's behaviour toward you, do not diminish your feelings, even if you are embarrassed or aren't sure if you are really experiencing harassment. Your feelings are valid and they indicate that it would be valuable and helpful to talk with a trusted friend or counsellor, who can help you interpret what is going on.

v. WSCF Structure for creating a safe environment, sensitising people, and addressing complaints

POLICIES

1. This document will be printed and a copy handed to every participant before or at the beginning of every WSCF event.
2. This policy will be introduced to those present at the meeting.
3. Those people unwilling to abide by the policy are required to leave the event.
4. A pastoral team of at least one man and one woman will be appointed by or at the beginning of each event and will be introduced to participants at the beginning of the event.
 - a. The pastoral team will be nominated by the organisers of the event and approved by the participants.
 - b. It is preferable for members of the pastoral team to represent several languages.
 - c. It is desirable that the members of the pastoral team have significant pastoral experience, when possible specifically in counselling people over sexual harassment issues, and cultural sensitivity so as to be able to determine when a problem is due to cross-cultural communication and when it is more serious and to be able to effectively counsel the parties involved.
5. If a sexual harassment claim is made, action will be taken according to this statement.

PRINCIPLES

1. It is important that harassed persons tell harassers that their behaviour is unwelcome. However, in some cases people might be too frightened or shocked to do this, and no one will be blamed if they have not been able to confront their harasser.

2. WSCF will treat each case seriously and sensitively, with what we aim to be transparent, fair, and proportional procedures. The process should be fair towards both the person who has experienced harassment and the perpetrator (s) of the harassment.
3. In the process of determining what has happened and how it will be handled, every attempt will be made to maintain confidentiality, while at the same time providing for the physical and emotional safety of the recipient.
4. WSCF will try to provide or ensure that both parties have access to appropriate counselling and support.

PROCEDURES

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

1. The female pastoral care team member will talk privately with the female involved
2. The male pastoral care team member will talk with the male involved.
3. If it seems to be a possible misunderstanding, or a relatively minor offence resolvable through dialogue, and both consent to a conversation and seem able to engage in a constructive conversation, they will meet together in the presence of and facilitated by both a female and male member of the pastoral care team, and possibly the leadership of the meeting.
4. If the offence is deemed from the beginning to be significant, the harasser should be reprimanded, counselled, and monitored.
5. If the offence continues, or if the offence was a serious invasion of the recipient from the start, for example groping or any violent act, the harasser will be removed from the event and sent home at the earliest possibility; until that time he or she should not be left alone, should receive counselling if willing, and should have assistance in finding accommodation away from other the event.
6. In the case of such an action, the meeting will be informed who was sent home and why.
7. The harasser's home movement will also be informed of all events.
8. In no case will the identity of the harassed person be made public—to either the participants of the event, the harasser's home community, or her or his home community, as in some cases this could mean undue shame for the harassed person.
9. An account of events will be written up and filed at the Inter-Regional office if and only if a person has been sent home.
10. If a person has been sent home, they will be banned from future WSCF events.
11. In the case of abuse or suspected abuse, local police will be called.

VI. Concluding Remarks

Everyone, participants and leadership, at a WSCF event should be aware and responsible for their behaviour and prepared to account for it. In addition, we all have a responsibility to each other and the community. We hope that sexual harassment will not occur often among us, but we must be aware that it has been and is something that does happen and therefore injures those involved—and by extension our whole community. If you see or suspect sexual harassment taking place, do not keep it to yourself. You could approach the person being harassed to see how you can help. Tell the harasser that their words or actions are inappropriate and make everyone feel uncomfortable. Speak with the pastoral team or other event leaders. If the case is severe, call for help.