

# IRC EXTERNAL COMPLAINTS POLICY



This policy statement provides a single source of information on IRC's external complaints policy and procedures. It is global in intent and coverage and is a public document. Receiving feedback and responding to complaints from stakeholders is an important part of improving IRC's accountability mechanisms. Ensuring that our stakeholders can hold us accountable for what we do will improve the quality of our work in all areas of activity.

IRC

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THE NETHERLANDS

1/1/2013

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## Key information

- Title: IRC External Complaints Policy
- Author: Debby Gruiters
- Effective from: 01-01-2013
- First review planned in: December 2014

## Why an External Complaints Policy?

Receiving feedback from and responding to complaints from external stakeholders is an important part of improving IRC's accountability. IRC will therefore actively encourage receiving such feedback through a variety of mechanisms, and where this feedback represents a complaint about IRC's work or conduct to respond in a timely and appropriate manner. This policy will be made available to all external stakeholders and the wider public through the IRC website and targeted dissemination. The policy will be reviewed after its first year of implementation and then bi-annually, and reported upon annually through the INGO Accountability Charter reporting mechanisms.

## What this Policy is about

This policy statement provides a single source of information on IRC's complaints policy and procedures. It is global in intent and coverage and is a public document. Receiving feedback and responding to complaints from stakeholders is an important part of improving IRC's accountability mechanisms. Ensuring that our stakeholders can hold us accountable for what we do will improve the quality of our work in all areas of activity.

We have introduced these policy and procedures in the organisation to ensure that all our external stakeholders, donors and partners globally have a clear and accessible means to make a formal complaint about IRC and have it dealt with.

## Definition of a complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the standards of service, actions or lack of action, by an organisation or its staff. It is a criticism that expects a reply and would like things to be changed. In the context of this policy, a complaint is an external grievance made against IRC or any of its employees or associated "consultants" where the organization has allegedly made mistakes, acted wrongfully, breached the codes to which IRC subscribes or failed to meet a commitment. Such a commitment might be related to IRC's activities, our use of resources, our mission and values, staff conduct / behaviour or a legal requirement.

Complaints could include the following (which is not an exhaustive list):

- Concern from someone IRC works with about the quality of programme delivery
- Concern from a member of the public about a particular approach of IRC
- Concern about the behaviour of IRC staff members, associates or consultants

A complaint has to be about a certain action for which IRC is responsible or that is within our sphere of influence.

A complaint should:

- Include the name and contact details of the complainant;
- Be submitted in writing;
- Be precise, and possibly supported by evidence.

The complaints procedures do not apply to complaints that are subject to current investigation by any regulatory body or other legal or official authorities in The Netherlands or other countries in which we operate. Such issues will be dealt with under the relevant regulatory regime.

## **Procedures for making a complaint**

It is hoped that most complaints or concerns about IRC's work or behaviour can and will be dealt with informally by staff. However, it is recognised that not all issues can be resolved in this way and that a formal complaints mechanism is required for those occasions when an individual or organisation wishes to make their complaint a matter of record and to receive a formal response.

### **How to make a complaint**

All formal complaints should be made in writing either directly by the individual or organisation making the complaint or via someone acting on their behalf. On IRC's website an online complaints form can be found ([www.irc.nl/complaints](http://www.irc.nl/complaints)).

### **Who is not covered by this policy?**

Internal complaints by staff members are governed by the "Code of Conduct" and "Grievance Procedure" as described in IRC's HR manual.

### **Who is responsible for responding to complaints?**

To ensure consistency of response and to manage complaints effectively IRC's Programme Funding Office (PFO) will be the primary body responsible for responding to general complaints.

IRC - Programme Funding Office  
Attn.: Complaints Handling  
Bezuidenhoutseweg 2  
2594 AV The Hague  
The Netherlands  
Telephone +31 (0)70-3044000  
[www.irc.nl](http://www.irc.nl)

It is the responsibility of the PFO to develop procedures for handling external complaints and for responding to such complaints. A record of complaints made to the PFO, along with responses, will be maintained and confidentiality will be guaranteed. If complaints are made about PFO staff, these will be handled by IRC's Controller.

### **Confidentiality**

All complaints will be handled on a confidential basis. In some cases it may be necessary to disclose information to third parties. This will be decided on a case-by-case basis and only with the agreement of the complainant. IRC will not respond to complaints made anonymously.

### **Time Limit for making a complaint**

Any complaint should be made no later than three months from the date the complainant became aware of the incident that is the source of the complaint. This gives adequate time for the complainant to have considered his/her arguments, and for all relevant facts to remain fresh. Any departure from this time limit will be allowed only in exceptional circumstances, by the recipient of the complaint in conjunction with the PFO. This time limit does not apply if other, relevant organisational or legal procedures lay down a different time limit.

### **What happens after a complaint is made?**

IRC will aim to resolve complaints within fifteen working days of receipt. In the event that a complaint cannot be resolved within this timeframe the complainant will be informed, in writing, about when they can expect a full response.

### **What happens if I am unhappy with IRC's response to my complaint?**

Complainants are entitled to challenge any response received from IRC except where these challenges amount to persistent, habitual or vexatious complaints. In the event of a complainant being dissatisfied with the response from IRC to their complaint they may write to the Director of IRC who will consider what action should be taken and inform the complainant about what further action may or may not be taken. As a last step, because IRC is a member of the INGO Accountability Charter, it is also possible to contact their Independent Review Panel. The Independent Review Panel of the INGO Accountability Charter is responsible for reviewing complaints made against a Member Organisation, when such complaints have not been satisfied by the Member's internal complaints mechanism. Please see: <http://www.ingoaccountabilitycharter.org/about-the-charter/governance-and-management-of-the-charter/>

### **When will IRC not respond to a complaint?**

Everyone who makes a complaint to IRC will be treated with courtesy and respect. In return, IRC expects people who make a complaint to state their concerns fairly and appropriately. Where complainants harass staff, behave abusively, or unreasonably pursue complaints, IRC reserves the right to withdraw or modify its complaints process.

A decision about what constitutes a persistent, habitual or vexatious complaint will be taken by the PFO, except where the complaint is about the PFO staff, in which case it will be decided by the Controller. The PFO, or the Controller, will advise the complainant of the decision and the reasons for it. In such cases, the complainant will be advised that IRC does not propose to consider further, or correspond about, the complaint or any specific points raised in a complaint.

### **Monitoring and Reporting**

IRC will keep this policy under review, and complaints registers will be monitored regularly. An annual report on the implementation of this policy will be produced by the PFO to be included in the annual INGO Charter reporting round. This report will not be available to the public.

If you wish to contact IRC about any of the above then please contact the PFO +31-(0)70-3044000 or send an email at [general@irc.nl](mailto:general@irc.nl).

### **Dissemination of the Policy**

This policy will be made available on the IRC website, and a clause referring to it will be included in all contract templates of IRC. The operational procedures for handling complaints will be included in IRC's manual of internal procedures and brought to the attention of all staff.