

The Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists:

Third Draft

by

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Development of a Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists

International Union of Psychological Science

International Association of Applied Psychology

International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology

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Since 2002, an international initiative to develop of a universal declaration of ethical principles for psychologists is under way. This project is carried out under the auspices of the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS), the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP) and the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP).

The members of the Ad Hoc Joint Committee created to draft the *Universal Declaration* are (in alphabetical order): Rubén Ardila (Colombia), Lutz Eckensberger (Germany), Janel Gauthier, Chair (Canada), Nasrin Jazani (Iran), Hassan Kassim Khan (Yemen), Catherine Love (New Zealand), Elizabeth Nair (Singapore), Kwadzi Nyanungo (Zimbabwe), Paul B. Pederson (United States), Tuomo Tikkanen (Finland), Ann Watts (South Africa), and Kan Zhang (China).

The first draft of the *Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists* was released for international consultation in 2005 and was the focus of a progress report in 2006 (Gauthier, 2006). The original draft of the *Universal Declaration* was revised in 2007 in response to feedback from individual psychologists and psychology organizations worldwide. The revised document was presented in a brief progress

report that highlighted the main changes made to the original document as well as the rationale for those changes (Gauthier, 2007, 2008).

Since 2007, international consultations have continued to determine the cultural appropriateness of the definitions, concepts, and language used in the document. It gives me great pleasure to present here on behalf of the Ad Hoc Joint Committee for the Development of a Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists a new draft of the *Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists*. To avoid any confusion with previous drafts, this new draft is titled “Third Draft.”

The third draft of the *Universal Declaration* is the result of a multi-year process involving careful research and broad international consultation (for progress reports, see Gauthier, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007):

- Comparisons were made among existing codes of ethics for psychologists from around the world to identify commonalities in ethical principles and values;
- Ethical principles and values espoused by other international disciplines and communities were examined and compared to those most commonly found in codes of ethics for psychologists;
- Internationally accepted documents, such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *Universal Declaration of Global Ethic*, were reviewed to delineate the underlying moral principles and to compare them to the principles most frequently used to develop codes of ethics in psychology;
- Historical documents from China, Egypt, Greece, India, Japan, and Persia, were explored to identify the roots of the ethical principles most commonly found in modern codes of ethics in psychology;

- Focus groups of psychologists were held at international meetings in Asia, Europe, India, the Middle East, North America and South America;
- International symposia were organized in Singapore, Vienna, Beijing, Granada, Athens, Prague.

As shown in the box below, the current document has a preamble followed by four sections, each relating to a different ethical principle. Each section includes a statement defining the principle and outlining fundamental ethical values contained in the principle. The ethical principles and values presented in the document mirror the framework developed through research and consultation (Gauthier, 2005).

**UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS**

Third Draft – April 10, 2008

**PREAMBLE**

Ethics is at the core of every discipline. The *Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists* speaks to the common moral framework that guides and inspires psychologists worldwide toward the highest ethical ideals in their professional and scientific work. Psychologists recognize that they carry out their activities within a larger social context. They recognize that the lives and identities of human beings both individually and collectively are connected across generations, and that there is a reciprocal relationship between human beings and their natural and social environments. Psychologists are committed to placing the welfare of society and its members above the self-interest of the discipline and its members. They recognize that adherence to ethical principles in the context of their work contributes to a stable society that enhances the quality of life for all human beings.

The objectives of the *Universal Declaration* are to provide a moral framework and generic set of ethical principles for psychology organizations worldwide: (a) to evaluate the

ethical and moral relevance of their codes of ethics; (b) to use as a template to guide the development or evolution of their codes of ethics; (c) to encourage global thinking about ethics, while also encouraging action that is sensitive and responsive to local needs and values; and (d) to speak with a collective voice on matters of ethical concern.

The *Universal Declaration* describes those ethical principles that are based on shared human values. It reaffirms the commitment of the psychology community to help build a better world where peace, freedom, responsibility, justice, humanity, and morality prevail. The description of each principle is followed by the presentation of a list of values that are related to the principle. These lists of values highlight ethical concepts that are valuable for promoting each ethical principle.

The *Universal Declaration* articulates principles and related values that are general and aspirational rather than specific and prescriptive. Application of the principles and values to the development of specific standards of conduct will vary across cultures, and must occur locally or regionally in order to ensure their relevance to local or regional cultures, customs, beliefs, and laws.

The significance of the *Universal Declaration* depends on its recognition and promotion by psychology organizations at national, regional and international levels. Every psychology organization is encouraged to keep this *Declaration* in mind and, through teaching, education, and other measures to promote respect for, and observance of, the *Declaration's* principles and related values in the various activities of its members.

## **PRINCIPLE I**

### **Respect for the Dignity of Persons and Peoples**

Respect for the dignity of persons is the most fundamental and universally found ethical principle across geographical and cultural boundaries, and across professional disciplines. It provides the philosophical foundation for many of the other ethical principles put forward by professions. Respect for dignity recognizes the inherent worth of all human beings, regardless of perceived or real differences in social status, ethnic origin, gender, capacities, or other such characteristics. This inherent worth means that all human beings are worthy of equal moral consideration.

All human beings, as well as being individuals, are interdependent social beings that are born into, live in, and are a part of the history and ongoing evolution of their peoples. The

different cultures, ethnicities, religions, histories, social structures and other such characteristics of peoples are integral to the identity of their members and give meaning to their lives. The continuity of peoples and cultures over time connects the peoples of today with the peoples of past generations and the need to nurture future generations. As such, respect for the dignity of persons includes moral consideration of and respect for the dignity of peoples.

Respect for the dignity of persons and peoples is expressed in different ways in different communities and cultures. It is important to acknowledge and respect such differences. On the other hand, it also is important that all communities and cultures adhere to moral values that respect and protect their members both as individual persons and as collective peoples.

THEREFORE, psychologists accept as fundamental the Principle of Respect for the Dignity of Persons and Peoples. In so doing, they accept the following related values:

- a) respect for the unique worth and inherent dignity of all human beings;
- b) respect for the diversity among persons and peoples;
- c) respect for the customs and beliefs of cultures, to be limited only when a custom or a belief seriously contravenes the principle of respect for the dignity of persons or peoples or causes serious harm to their well-being;
- d) free and informed consent, as culturally defined and relevant for individuals, families, groups, and communities;
- e) privacy for individuals, families, groups, and communities;
- f) protection of confidentiality of personal information, as culturally defined and relevant for individuals, families, groups, and communities;
- g) fairness and justice in the treatment of persons and peoples.

## **PRINCIPLE II**

### **Competent Caring for the Well-Being of Persons and Peoples**

Competent caring for the well-being of persons and peoples involves working for their benefit and, above all, doing no harm. It includes maximizing benefits, minimizing potential harm, and offsetting or correcting harm. Competent caring requires the application of knowledge and skills that are appropriate for the nature of a situation as well as the social and cultural context. It also requires the ability to establish interpersonal relationships that

enhance potential benefits and reduce potential harm. Another requirement is adequate self-knowledge of how one's values, experiences, culture, and social context might influence one's actions and interpretations.

THEREFORE, psychologists accept as fundamental the Principle of Competent Caring for the Well-Being of Persons and Peoples. In so doing, they accept the following related values:

- a) active concern for the well-being of individuals, families, groups, and communities;
- b) taking care to do no harm to individuals, families, groups, and communities;
- c) maximizing benefits and minimizing potential harm to individuals, families, groups, and communities;
- d) correcting or offsetting harmful effects that have occurred as a result of their activities;
- e) developing and maintaining competence;
- f) self-knowledge regarding how their own values, attitudes, experiences, and social contexts influence their actions, interpretations, choices, and recommendations;
- g) respect for the ability of individuals, families, groups, and communities to make decisions for themselves and to care for themselves and each other.

### **PRINCIPLE III**

#### **Integrity**

Integrity is vital to the advancement of scientific knowledge and to the maintenance of public confidence in the discipline of psychology. Integrity is based on honesty, and on truthful, open and accurate communications. It includes recognizing, monitoring, and managing potential biases, multiple relationships, and other conflicts of interest that could result in harm and exploitation of persons or peoples.

Complete openness and disclosure of information must be balanced with other ethical considerations, including the need to protect the safety or confidentiality of persons and peoples, and the need to respect cultural expectations.

Cultural differences exist regarding appropriate professional boundaries, multiple relationships, and conflicts of interest. However, regardless of such differences, monitoring and management are needed to ensure that self-interest does not interfere with acting in the best interests of persons and peoples.

THEREFORE, psychologists accept as fundamental the Principle of Integrity. In so doing, they accept the following related values:

- a) honesty, and truthful, open and accurate communications;
- b) avoiding incomplete disclosure of information unless complete disclosure is culturally inappropriate, or violates confidentiality, or carries the potential to do serious harm to individuals, families, groups, or communities;
- c) maximizing impartiality and minimizing biases;
- d) not exploiting persons or peoples for personal, professional, or financial gain;
- e) avoiding conflicts of interest and declaring them when they cannot be avoided or are inappropriate to avoid.

#### **PRINCIPLE IV**

##### **Professional and Scientific Responsibilities to Society**

Psychology functions as a discipline within the context of human society. As a science and a profession, it has responsibilities to society. These responsibilities include contributing to the knowledge about human behavior and to persons' understanding of themselves and others, and using such knowledge to improve the condition of individuals, families, groups, communities, and society. They also include conducting its affairs within society in accordance with the highest ethical standards, and encouraging the development of social structures and policies that benefit all persons and peoples.

Differences exist in the way these responsibilities are interpreted by psychologists in different cultures. However, they need to be considered in a way that is culturally appropriate and consistent with the ethical principles and related values of this *Declaration*.

THEREFORE, psychologists accept as fundamental the Principle of Professional and Scientific Responsibilities to Society. In so doing, they accept the following related values:

- a) the discipline's responsibility to increase scientific and professional knowledge in ways that allow the promotion of the well-being of society and all its members;
- b) the discipline's responsibility to use psychological knowledge for beneficial purposes and to protect such knowledge from being misused, used incompetently, or made useless;
- c) the discipline's responsibility to conduct its affairs in ways that are ethical and consistent

- with the promotion of the well-being of society and all its members;
- d) the discipline's responsibility to promote the highest ethical ideals in the scientific, professional and educational activities of its members;
  - e) the discipline's responsibility to adequately train its members in their ethical responsibilities and required competencies;
  - f) the discipline's responsibility to develop its ethical awareness and sensitivity, and to be as self-correcting as possible.

### What's new?

Comparisons between the draft of the *Universal Declaration* presented here and the draft presented in 2007 (Gauthier, 2007) show that the structure of the document has remained unchanged. However, there are several differences in wording. While some of them may appear relatively minor, all of them are important. Whenever changes were made, it was in response to suggestions from individual psychologists or psychology organizations. The following provides a summary of the most important changes:

- a) The wording of several statements was revised to remove any word or term that might be perceived as prescriptive, and to replace each of them with a word or a term that is more aspirational.
- b) Some sentences were modified because they contained unrealistic expectancies. For example, in the last paragraph of the Preamble, psychology organizations are no longer asked to constantly keep the *Declaration* in mind. Instead, they are encouraged to keep the *Declaration* in mind. The word "asked" has been replaced by "encouraged", and the word "constantly" has been deleted.
- c) The wording and the ranking of the objectives of the *Declaration*, as stated in the Preamble, was revised to clarify the intent of the *Declaration*.

- d) The statements dealing with informed consent and confidentiality under Principle I were revised to better reflect the role of cultural factors in defining what is relevant.
- e) The word “others” in the document was replaced in most instances by “persons and peoples” to clarify the meaning of “others”. The word “others”, previously used 11 times in the document, was never defined. In some countries (e.g., South Africa), the term “others” is used in a negative, exclusionary way. Therefore, the term “others” in the document was replaced "persons and peoples."

A work in progress

The development of a universal declaration is an ambitious project and a challenging process. We need to have the contributions of as many people as possible. Please let us know what you think of this new and most recent draft of the *Universal Declaration*. If you find that you cannot endorse the document as it is, tell us what needs to be changed and we will look for ways to address your concerns. We truly depend on your feedback to develop a universal declaration that has widespread support and is of worldwide value.

The third draft of the *Universal Declaration* (or, if deemed appropriate, a newer one) will be reviewed, discussed and considered for adoption by the three sponsoring organizations at their respective business meetings in Germany during the second half of July. So, there is time for you to respond to our invitation for feedback. However, if there is any suggestion that you wish us to consider before those meetings, you may want to let us know as soon as possible. My e-mail address is:

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For more information regarding the development of the *Universal Declaration*, you are encouraged to visit the IUPsyS web site (<http://www.iupsys.org>) where you will find background papers, progress reports and discussions of important issues.

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