

Religious and Political Activity Policy

Responsible Officer	Chief Executive Officer		
Contact Officer	Chief Operating Officer		
Superseded Documents	Non-Development Activity Policy V1.2		
Review	Three years		
Associated Documents	Board Charter Communications Policy		
Policy Status	This policy may be amended or revoked by A4U at any time and at its discretion		
Version	Authorisation	Approval Date	Effective Date
1.0 Non-Development Activity	Board	2014	
1.2	Board	27/02/2020	March 2020
1.3 <i>Refined and tightened to reflect A4U policy template; expand the policy statement and include details on implementation</i>	Executive	11/03/2024	March 2024

Introduction

Australia for UNHCR is an independent registered not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation that is not affiliated with any religion or religious entity, nor any political party or other similar organisation that was established to raise funds for the achievement of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) humanitarian objectives for refugees and other persons of concern. This is outlined in the organisation's Constitution.

Australia for UNHCR was established for the purpose of

- (a) raising funds from the private sector in Australia and New Zealand (the "Territory") in support of UNHCR's protection and assistance programmes for refugees and other persons of concern worldwide;
- (b) raising awareness within civil society within Australia and New Zealand about the situation and needs of refugees worldwide and other persons of concern to UNHCR; and,
- (c) engaging advocacy activities for refugees and persons of concern for UNHCR through media and social media campaigns, public speaking, and the commissioning of research in order to facilitate civic engagement and fundraising.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to guide Australia for UNHCR, our staff and our partners to make a clear separation between development and humanitarian and non- development objectives and activities and to ensure that all funds and resources designated for the purpose of aid and development and/or providing emergency relief and assistance, will be used only for those purposes and will not be used to promote religious adherence or to support a political party, or to promote a candidate or organisation affiliated to a political party.

Principles

The following principles underpin and are intended to guide the application of this policy:

- **Impartiality:** Australia for UNHCR does not discriminate based on nationality, race, religious belief, class or political opinions.
- **Independence:** Australia for UNHCR is an independent and secular organisation that holds no membership or affiliation to any political or religious organisations. It formulates its own policies based on international human rights and humanitarian frameworks and independent of the Australian and foreign governments.
- **Neutrality:** Australia for UNCHR is a politically neutral organisation. It does not engage in ideological activity. Australia for UNHCR does not consider that the principle of neutrality precludes undertaking advocacy on issues related to refugee rights, accountability, and justice.
- **Respect and freedom from exploitation:** Australia for UNHCR respects the cultures and religions of all peoples and is committed to ensuring that all funds raised are not used to exploit people and communities who are vulnerable and do not place any conditions or obligations on recipients in terms of non-development, religious or political outcomes that would affect their access to services being offered.

Definitions

Aid and development activities: refers to the activities undertaken in order to reduce poverty and address global justice issues via direct engagement through community projects, emergency management, community education, advocacy, volunteer sending, provision of technical and professional services and resources, environmental protection and restoration, and promotion and protection of human rights.

Non-development activities: are all that fall outside the definition of aid and development activities. According to commonly used definition by ACFID and DFAT these primarily include:

- **Religious, Evangelical and Proselytism activities:** These activities are defined by DFAT as ‘supporting or promoting a particular religious adherence’. (DFAT, 2016) Australia for UNHCR does not provide support for any religious-based activities, including the promotion of religious adherence. In the course of its work, Australia for UNHCR and UNHCR (implementation partner) may work with religious-based organisations in order to further the work of A4U.
- **Partisan Political Activities:** This policy utilises the DFAT definition of partisan political activities as ‘supporting a political party, candidate or organisation affiliated to a political party’. (DFAT, 2016). Australia for UNHCR does not provide support to a political party, or promote a candidate or organisation affiliated to a particular party. This does not include advocacy which is aimed at raising public awareness about the plight of refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, and is not aimed at promoting partisan political objectives.

Policy Statement

Australia for UNHCR is a secular organisation and does not engage in or support any evangelical activities, does not proselytise or support religious teaching.

In some instances, Australia for UNHCR may partner with local faith-based organisations on the basis that their delivery is without evangelising or making participation conditional on conversion or adherence to a particular religious denomination. Australia for UNHCR also partners with advocacy organisations from time to time on the basis that their activities are not in support of a political party or candidate.

Australia for UNHCR is independent and not affiliated with any political party.

Australia for UNHCR formulates its own policies and does not seek to implement any government policy, except where it coincides with our own independent policy.

Australia for UNHCR recognises the need for transparent separation between aid and development and non-development objectives and activities in program designs, fundraising, advocacy, choice for donors and in public communications and expenditure reporting.

Australia for UNHCR respects that employees and directors are entitled to have their own political and religious beliefs and does not permit discrimination on this basis before or during employment. Employees and directors engage in political and religious activity at their own discretion and in a personal capacity and should refer to the organisation’s Communications Policy and/or Board Charter for further guidance.

Australia for UNHCR will not form partnerships with terrorist or extremist networks and personnel.

Australia for UNHCR will not accept funding that requires compliance with any political or religious ideology.

Australia for UNHCR will terminate any partnership with a religious or political organisation that compromises our ability to deliver development and humanitarian assistance in a non-discriminatory manner.

Australia for UNHCR will ensure that partisan politics does not influence our actions.

Australia for UNHCR will terminate partnerships that compromise our neutrality.

Control Procedures

Projects will be appraised and only development or humanitarian activities will be funded by Australia for UNHCR.

Partner capacity assessment processes will identify if the partner is engaged in non-development activities, and if so, how it is able to manage and account for them separately to aid and development activities to determine whether non-development components have been included.

The partner agreement or memorandum of understanding (MOU) or equivalent, will include definitions of development and non-development activity.

The partner agreement, MOU or equivalent, will require the partner to agree that the Australia for UNHCR or UNHCR funds designated for development and humanitarian purposes will not be used to fund any non-development activity

Compliance

This policy provides a framework for Australia for UNHCR's compliance with indicator 7.3 of the ACFID Code of Conduct. This principle outlines that to be compliant with this indicator, Members are required to have in place:

- Policy, statement or guidance document that addresses the separation of development activities from non-development activities in:
 - Programming, expenditure reporting, fundraising, advocacy campaigns, communications, choice of donors, and partners.
- Development initiatives that consistently show evidence of the separation of development and non-development activities
- Members are required to extend this requirement for separation of development and non-development activities to partners through agreements or similar.

Implementation

This policy will be reviewed every three years.

A copy of this policy will be maintained on The Hub (Australia for UNHCR's intranet) and on the website.

All staff will be directed to read and understand this policy as part of their induction process.

Resources

- ACFID Code of Conduct Principle 7.3.2 <https://acfid.asn.au/content/commitment-73-we-are-accountable-our-stakeholders>
- Statute of the Office of UNHCR <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c39e1.html>
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2016 Overseas Aid Gift Deduction Scheme: Guidelines <https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/oagds-guidelines.pdf>