

As a member of Dóchas, YMCA Ireland has formally adopted a [Code of Conduct on Images and Messages](#) for its public communications.

By signing the Code, YMCA Ireland commits to a set of principles, ensuring that it will avoid stereotypical or sensational images. The adoption of the Code means that aid agencies will choose images and messages that represent the full complexity of the situations in which they work, and that they will seek the permission of the people portrayed in the photos they use.

Dóchas is the association of Irish Non-Governmental Development Organisations. Dóchas provides a forum for consultation and co-operation between its members and helps them speak with a single voice on development issues.

Code of Conduct on Images and Messages

1. Preface

This Code of Conduct on Images and Messages has been written by NGOs working in the areas of emergency relief, long term development and development education. The purpose of this Code of Conduct is to provide a framework on which organisations can build when designing and implementing their public communications strategy. The Code offers a set of guiding principles that can assist practitioners in their efforts to communicate their organisation's programmes and values in a coherent and balanced way.

Signatories to this Code are acutely aware of the many challenges and difficulties entailed in conveying the scandal and injustice of poverty while striving to meet the ideals of the Code. It is a reality of our world today that many of the images of extreme poverty and humanitarian distress are negative and cannot be ignored. To ignore them would run counter to the spirit of this Code which is to portray the reality of the lives of people with sensitivity and respect for their dignity.

Images and messages should seek to represent a complete picture of both internal and external assistance and the partnership that often results between local and international NGOs.

The values of human dignity, respect and truthfulness as outlined in the Code, must underlie all communications. The signatories to this Code are committed to these principles, and will translate them into internal policies and procedures.

They are also committed to working constructively with others whose work involves communicating on issues of global poverty, to explore ways of reflecting these principles in other fields of communication.

By signing and promoting this Code, NGOs will continue to keep the development agenda very much in the public eye and to look beyond the sound bite or single image to reflect the values espoused in this Code.

2. Code of Conduct on Images and Messages

a. Guiding Principles

Choices of images and messages will be made based on the paramount principles of:

- Respect for the dignity of the people concerned;
- Belief in the equality of all people;
- Acceptance of the need to promote fairness, solidarity and justice.

Accordingly, in all our communications and where practical and reasonable within the need to reflect reality, we strive to:

- Choose images and related messages based on values of respect equality, solidarity and justice;
- Truthfully represent any image or depicted situation both in its immediate and in its wider context so as to improve public understanding of the realities and complexities of development;
- Avoid images and messages that potentially stereotype, sensationalise or discriminate against people, situations or places;
- Use images, messages and case studies with the full understanding, participation and permission of the subjects (or subjects' parents/guardian);
- Ensure those whose situation is being represented have the opportunity to communicate their stories themselves;
- Establish and record whether the subjects wish to be named or identifiable and always act accordingly;
- Conform to the highest standards in relation to human rights and protection of the vulnerable people.

b. Declaration of Commitment

As signatories to this Code, we confirm that our commitment to best practice in communications affects the entirety of our organisation.

By signing the Code, we commit to putting in place meaningful mechanisms to ensure that the Code's principles are implemented throughout all activities of our organisation.

Our responsibilities as a signatory to this Code lead us to be accountable in our public communications as follows:

1. We will make the existence of the Code known to the public and all our partners and will provide a feedback mechanism whereby anyone

can comment on the fulfilment of the Code and where any member of the public will have a 'right to challenge' our application of the Code.

2. We will communicate our commitment to best practice in the communication of images and messages in all our public policy statements by placing the following statement on our relevant public communications (annual reports, website, policy statements, governance documents, leaflets and communication materials etc):

YMCA Ireland has signed the code of conduct on images and messages www.ymca-ireland.net please send your feedback to admin@ymca-ireland.net

3. We commit to assess our public communications on an annual basis according to the guiding principles.

4. We will include reference to adherence to the Code in the guiding principles of our organisation and ensure that the top management take the responsibility of implementing and adhering to the code.

5. We will ensure that all relevant suppliers, contractors and media will adhere to the Code when working with our organisation.

6. We commit to training our staff on the use of images and messages.

7. We agree to share our experience of implementing the Code with other signatory organisations and will report annually to Dóchas on this experience.

If you have feedback or comments on YMCA Ireland's application of the code, send to admin@ymca-ireland.net