



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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Re Procedure adjustment prevention and awareness

Dear Sir, Madam,

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs wants all staff members, both at the missions and in The Hague, to feel safe when they are at work. It aims to provide a working environment where people are free to be themselves, where people feel heard and appreciated, and where there is zero tolerance of inappropriate behaviour, including sexual harassment. And we expect the same from our partner organisations.

#MeToo has brought a great many incidents to light involving sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour. The movement has revealed that sexual misconduct and abuse of power occur in many organisations and sectors, and despite the many procedures in place to prevent and report on such incidents we do not have a clear idea of the scale of the problems. This raises the question how we – and our partners – can strengthen prevention and awareness within our organisation.

The Ministry has drawn up an action plan to tackle all forms of inappropriate behaviour, including sexual harassment. The plan also covers our role as a partner to other organisations. In connection with this, ministers Stef Blok and Sigrid Kaag have established a comprehensive package of measures aimed at tightening procedures to prevent and combat sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour within partner organisations.

Until now the debate on tackling inappropriate behaviour, including sexual misconduct, has focused on aid and development NGOs and multilateral organisations like the United Nations. But other types of organisation are not immune from such incidents. The Ministry's new, stricter policy and rules therefore apply equally to all organisations and companies with which the Ministry has a financing relationship.

Below, I explain the new procedures recently adopted by the Ministry:

1. New applications for funding will also be assessed in light of aspiring partners' policy on sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour. This aspect is included in both internal assessment procedures and assessment criteria, which are published as part of grant policy frameworks.
2. The notification requirement in model grant decisions and model agreements on BZ contributions has been tightened, making it mandatory to report suspicions of serious sexual harassment and other forms of inappropriate conduct.
3. The ministry is setting up a reporting centre for inappropriate behaviour, including sexual misconduct. It will be responsible for ensuring uniform registration of any incidents or suspicions of misconduct, assessing the response to such cases by BZ grant recipients, and advising the relevant policy departments or embassies as well as the Ministry's senior management and political leadership. As per 1 September 2018, incidents can be reported at the following email address: [safeguarding@minbuza.nl](mailto:safeguarding@minbuza.nl)
4. The Ministry has a policy of 'zero tolerance for inaction'. Organisations must implement their integrity policy consistently in every case.
5. Over the coming period the Ministry will acquire additional capacity and expertise on integrity and inappropriate behaviour, including sexual misconduct, and set up an electronic registration system.
6. Specific conditions or obligations will be included in financing agreements or grant decisions so that, in the event of behaviour that is punishable or prohibited by law, it is possible to demand *proportionate* repayment or stop funding altogether.

The specific details of conditions to be applied will be based on proportionality, the size of the grant and the nature of the activities.

These measures also pertain to existing financed projects. I expect all partner organisations to report serious forms of inappropriate behaviour, including sexual misconduct, in compliance with the existing obligation to report any irregularities that occur during implementation of activities for which they have received Ministry funding.

Institutional measures alone are not enough to tackle inappropriate behaviour. A change in culture is needed as well. This will require a long-term effort and a willingness to discuss the issue openly and give it the attention it deserves. I therefore propose that we include this topic in regular policy consultations and work together to put a halt to all forms of inappropriate conduct.

Yours sincerely,



Carola van Rijnsoever,  
Director Inclusive Green Growth Department