

2011

**VENRO Code of Conduct for  
Development-Related Public Relations**

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## Preliminary remarks for a Code of Conduct on >Development-related public relations< of the Verband Entwicklungspolitik deutscher Nichtregierungsorganisationen e.V. (VENRO)

In the VENRO statutes, VENRO members have committed to make a contribution towards more justice in the world. Working together, the German non-governmental organisations (NGO) want to be even more committed to the fight against hunger, the realisation of human rights and the maintenance of natural resources. They accomplish this through concrete project work in the poor countries of the South and the East, and also through their advocacy and public relations activities in the North.

The establishment of VENRO demonstrates the efforts undertaken by all German NGO to address these needs by bundling their common objectives and putting their work on a joint basis. The creation of a quality standard to which the NGOs that have joined forces within VENRO are committed as a benchmark for the type and manner of their communication is particularly important in this context.

### I. TASKS AND OBJECTIVES OF DEVELOPMENT-RELATED PUBLIS RELATIONS

Development-oriented public relations by non-governmental organisations (NGO) want to encourage and enable people to actively and responsibly participate in shaping equitable development in a regional, national and international context. These activities actively contribute development policy issues into societal discussions. In this vein, development-related public relations informs about the issues of developing countries and our relationships with them. It informs about the work carried out by the organisations and shapes the dialogue about development policy concerns within and with the population, which respects them as active participants acting responsibility and asks them for

idea-related and material support. It wishes to create awareness for the development-related effects of people's consumption, living and production patterns, in order to improve the willingness to implement the required structural adjustment measures in the North. It wants to assist people with developing responsibility for a global public spirit and acting in solidarity. Development-related public relations consists of the entirety of advertising, informative and persuasive communication that is shaped by the press, media activities, development-related education and fund-raising.

## II. OBLIGATIONS

### 1. Obligation regarding VENRO objectives and concerns

In general, development-related public relations is committed to the objectives noted in the preamble of the VENRO statutes, namely to contribute towards more justice in the world, fight against poverty and a commitment to realising human rights and maintaining natural resources.

### 2. Obligation regarding dignity

Development-related public relations values the dignity of persons in a particular way: It assumes that people on all continents are the subjects of their actions, and not the objects of aid. It demonstrates this in all forms of expression such as word, image and sound.

### 3. Obligation regarding openness and truth

Development-related public relations ensures truthful and factual presentations, and makes its own value background, motives and actions transparent. It conveys a general sense of openness to various possible actions and wants to support people to be able to decide between the various approaches for solutions. Honest and credible development-related public relations does not generally make allegations that would indicate a specific development strategy, a certain form of aid or a certain development-pedagogical approach as the only solution. It realistically assesses the effectiveness of its own efforts and the work of the NGO in general. In addition, it is concerned with providing the appropriate presentation of government development aid and the changing longer-term challenges for development policy.

### 4. Obligation regarding tolerance

Development-related public relations contributes to awakening awareness of the problems, interests and hopes in the South. Therefore it promotes a change in perspective, which allows people to see things from the perspective of others, and to reflect on one's own standpoint in a self-critical manner. This is based on the idea of respect

towards other cultural orientations and tolerance of other points of view, as long as they do not harm the dignity of persons.

### 5. Obligation regarding constructive changes

Development-related public relations does not exhaust itself with illustrating individual suffering or general misery. It describes the causes and effects of poor living conditions, exploitation and repression, and identifies possible ways of achieving constructive change. This also includes measures designed to improve the political, economic and social framework conditions in industrial nations in favour of the countries in the South. Development-related public relations shows whether one's own performance corresponds with the objectives described in the VENRO statutes.

### 6. Obligation regarding partnerships

Development-related public relations highlights the fact that mutual dependencies in the world require joint responsibility for overcoming undesirable developments. Therefore it is committed to the principles of partnership. In this vein, it observes the general ability of humans to take responsibility in shaping their own lives. It seeks out open dialogue with various societal groups in the North and South, is self-critical in that sense, and convinced that the formation of opinions is based on mutual learning experiences. In societal and political opinion formation processes, development-related public relations takes the side of the poor in protest against poverty, exploitation and repression.

### 7. Obligation regarding appropriate communication tools

Development-related public relations addresses itself to emotion and reason. It uses simplification to illustrate complex facts, but it does not outthink or strain the target group with words or images. This also includes a need to avoid contents or formulations that may be understood as discriminating. It opens up opportunities for communication, and is therefore incompatible with

strategic methods designed to blindside people with indoctrinating opinions. The communication tools that are used cannot breach the concepts of partnership, openness and truth. Development-related public relations is not morally conceited, takes into account the local societal situation and thus endeavours to identify the interaction between life in our society and the problems of developing countries wherever possible.

#### **8. Obligation regarding women-appropriate representation**

Gender equality is a part of stable human development. Development-related public relations takes care to ensure that the life situation of women is generally taken into account, that women and their concerns are suitably represented in images and words, and that they are not stereotypically represented as dependent victims. It aims for creating greater awareness of the unequal gender-specific distribution of resources, co-determination and power, and wants to make a contribution to changing established modes of behaviour and structures that disdain women.

#### **9. Obligation to other competitors**

It is the task of development-related public relations to present the objectives and concerns of the respective NGO in the public, to advertise the same and to convince others. This also includes the need to demonstrate one's own concerns and positions as distinct from other VENRO members, or to represent the same vis-a-vis the other members. This is done respectfully, fairly and on the basis of the agreements described herein and established in the VENRO statutes.

#### **10. Obligation regarding transparent and responsible use of funds**

The NGOs combined within VENRO are dependent on the financial support of private and public donors. Particularly with respect to private donations there is a special trust relationship between donors and users. Therefore the NGOs that have joined VENRO commit to the responsible, diligent and economic use of funds (donations) that have been entrusted to them. Moreover, they commit to transparency regarding the origin and use of the funds, and to make this information accessible to the donors.

#### **11. Obligation regarding efficiency and honesty in acquisition of funds**

The marketing measures used by the NGOs that are part of VENRO are also used to procure funds. They must be efficient and success-oriented. They include appeals to the solidarity and shared dismay of the donors along the lines of >sympathy advertising<. The information they provide does not contain anything that would demonstrably damage or belittle the partners in the South or East.

#### **12. Obligation regarding compliance with data protection**

The data protection act is binding on the NGOs that have joined VENRO. This relates both to the donors or members of the organisations, as well as rented outside addresses. They commit not to rent or sell donor and member addresses for commercial purposes beyond what is permitted by law. They will request that a third party to whom data is exported commits to data protection.

#### **13. Obligation regarding generally applicable guidelines**

Development-related public relations must be shaped in accordance with the applicable principle of journalistic and ethical honesty. It is based on guidelines that were defined at the international (>Code d'Athène<) and national (press code of conduct) level.

#### **14. Obligation regarding professionalism**

The organisations and associations active in VENRO endeavour to ensure the professionalism of development-related public relations at all levels of their activities through quality assurance measures and for the continued education of the persons working in this area.

### III. BINDING NATURE

This code of conduct was agreed by the organisations and associations combined under VENRO, and was approved by the VENRO General Assembly in 1998. It represents a transparent and comprehensible benchmark for openness, partnership and the credibility of development-related and thus also societal communication, and is binding on all members and outsiders.

### IV. PROSECUTION OF BREACHES

#### 1. Arbitration tribunal

Possible breaches of the code of conduct >Development-related public relations< are reviewed by an independent arbitration tribunal on request. The tribunal views itself as a self-regulating body. It is responsible for clarifying facts, mediating solutions between the parties and seeking out suitable measures for limiting damages, if required. The work methods and authorisations of the arbitration tribunal are set out in the VENRO statutes and the tribunal's by-laws.

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