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CODE OF ETHICS FOR POLITICIANS

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PREAMBLE

The democratic health of a nation lies, to a large extent, in the ethical nature of its citizens and political representatives. The strengthening of political institutions depends on many factors, though it essentially derives from the capacity of such institutions to give confidence to their citizens.

Reliability is achieved by means of good practice and through the exercise of civic virtues. Honesty, loyalty, integrity, exemplary behaviour, austerity and capacity to provide service are basic attitudes that all citizens acknowledge as valuable, regardless of the political option they support. Only if these values are observed in the democratic exercise shall the citizenry be able to ascribe this noble profession and appraise it accordingly.

Honourable exercise of politics taken as a service to the general interest requires political actors that enhance the fundamental values of democratic life, among which equality, tolerance, eagerness to dialogue and participation stand out significantly.

This ethical code intends to be a tool beyond the diversity of political options that legitimately exist. It attempts to convey a model of behaviour to be respected and applied by those who exercise politics, regardless of territory, institution or administration.

We identify in this preamble some principles that must govern political activity and furthermore, an array of values beyond ideological choices which should be shared by those who participate in policy-making. Political activity must avoid harm to third parties and consistently search for the common good, respecting the autonomy of individuals and civil society, displaying equity and preventing any kind of arbitrary discrimination.

For social coexistence to be tidy and fruitful each individual must behave according to certain collective and ethical principles. Moreover, there are specific principles to different professions or occupations which have to be considered. We enclose some of the principles suggested for politicians, particularly when they hold responsibilities in the legislative or executive branch, or when they advise or rule a political party. Our aim has not been to prepare an unabridged list but to gather together some of the most relevant principles in order to guide politicians in the course of their activity and throughout their careers.

Justice: Involves no arbitrary discrimination, granting the fair share to each person and constantly fostering equity.

Respect: Involves an attentive and considerate treatment towards individuals and institutions, free of prejudice and discrimination, with the dignity that is right and proper.

Service: Being at the disposal of citizens according to the specific responsibilities attached to their duties, with an insight of the general needs of society.

Responsibility: Involves assuming the moral and legal consequences of past and current actions and omissions, being ready to be held accountable for them and sparing no effort to provide the means to handle their present and future decisions.

Integrity: Acting in a fair, righteous and honest manner, adapting words and behaviour to what politicians consider appropriate at each moment, refraining from improper advantages obtained through the activity that they undertake and making use of the inherent prerogatives derived from their position solely to carry out their duties.

Impartiality: Supporting their own ideas or those of the party shouldn't prevent politicians from judging objectively according to their own ethical criteria.

Professionalism: Carrying out their profession with dedication, effectiveness and celerity, with specific concern for their intellectual formation and the development of their abilities, updating them if necessary.

Transparency: Providing free and non discriminatory access to the information held by the politician himself, the party or the legislative and executive bodies where the politician carries out his duties, in case citizens wish to defend their rights and freedoms, including information about the very activity of the politician, in accordance with the provisions in laws and regulations.

An ethical code describes what is required from a profession. Its mere existence does not guarantee the compliance with its principles, but it sets a direction and a long term perspective which most citizens have already internalized, gradually, through education.

Life is more complex than any document can grasp, however, an ethical code has a guiding purpose and its goal is to stimulate good practices, to enhance democratic life and to restore the reputation of political commitment and vocation. This code is inspired in the letter and spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10. XII. 1948).

This code does not intend to substitute other codes that already exist in public administrations and political parties. It has the will to be of general nature, an instrument of discernment and understanding on political activity.

Naturally, this ethical code must be revised periodically and modified, if necessary, in order to be adapted to the circumstances and needs of each time.

I. RELATIONSHIP WITH CITIZENS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Political activity is aimed at citizenry. According to the representative nature of democracy, politicians have been elected by their fellow citizens to whom they are obliged. Politicians must find the most effective way to improve the dignity of their citizens, their welfare and the exercise of their rights and freedoms. Politicians shall express their plans and ideas with respect to all citizens and political players. Therefore:

1. Elected politicians shall act according to the trust citizens have placed on them by means of universal suffrage, defending the political project for which they have been elected.
2. Politicians must take into account any question or inquiry about their political activity or integrity. They must be held accountable for their public actions and shoulder any responsibility derived from them.

3. Politicians are constrained to listen to the different parties that are involved in a situation, and being properly advised by experts, communicate their decisions taken on well-reasoned grounds to the rest of society.
4. They must take into consideration the social movements and the demands that arise from civil society and its associations, without attempting to employ these claims for their own partisan purposes.
5. Politicians have the duty to respect the autonomy of organizations that constitute civil society and to be unbiased in their relationship with them.

II. RELATIONSHIP AMONG POLITICIANS

Relations among politicians must be shaped by mutual respect and by being careful with the use of language. Ideological disagreement, which is the basis of democratic society, should never translate into lack of respect. The consideration for human dignity is the core of democracy, thence it is a principle that cannot be waived.

Discussion and public disclosure of different options that lead to progress is an inherent characteristic of democratic life. For this reason the relationship between political players, necessary in itself in a healthy and democratic society, must be defined by a willingness to dialogue, fair play and truthfulness.

6. Politicians should try to reach agreements on general interest matters, paying attention to each other and looking for a compromise among the different positions they represent.
7. Politicians have the responsibility to submit well grounded proposals, being aware that certain political actions might be put into question.
8. Private life matters, beliefs and personal lifestyle must be respected and never be discussed openly in public debate.

III. POLITICIANS WITH EXECUTIVE DUTIES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Public administrations are the political framework for the rule of law, and as such they are expected to serve their citizens. The actions of public

administrations cannot be governed by arbitrary or partisan interests. Given that their legitimacy is based on democratic foundations, they must always establish their policy according to general interest.

9. Politicians with executive duties are obliged to explain their political priorities, will be held accountable for their activity, and shall transparently report about their actions.
10. They must secure that public property is used to good effect and cannot profit from their position to obtain personal benefits for themselves, their families, or for their party.
11. They must be mindful with the administration of public resources being guided by the following values: efficiency, equity and effectiveness.
12. Politicians with executive duties must reconcile respect to professional autonomy granted to those who carry out public functions with leadership that must be performed on the basis of mutual trust.
13. When making important decisions, politicians with executive duties must consult with all the parties involved, and seek for independent advice.
14. When awarding projects, public tenders or subsidies, their decision will have to be weighted and unbiased.
15. In the process of devolution of powers; transparency, cooperation and efficiency must prevail.

IV. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MEDIA

Political and public life increasingly takes place in a new environment created by mass media and information technology. The interdependence of the world of politics with the media demands a responsible interaction in order for the citizens to stay adequately informed and so the politicians can communicate their proposals.

The relationship between politicians and professional media must be always distinguished by the respect for the autonomy of each domain

while politicians should, at the same time, be able to disclose their plans and proposals through media.

16. Politicians have a duty to report their proposals and decisions to the citizens through the media.
17. They must respect the autonomy of media professionals without interfering, coercing or putting pressure on them.
18. As for communicating proposals and decisions through media, politicians must use a proper and educated language avoiding at all times demagoguery, manipulation and dishonesty.
19. Politicians are compelled to report about matters of general interest.
20. Politicians are compelled to amend the information they have given in case it does not conform to reality.

V. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICIANS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Representative democracies are organized, fundamentally, through political parties. If the quality of a democracy requires a respectful attitude from politicians towards democratic values, obviously the same is required from political parties, as far as their internal organization is concerned, and also regarding their external relations.

Politicians can freely express their opinions within the organs of the party and convey their disagreement with the party's guidelines through the channels the party has previously set and, if necessary, through the media and the courts of law.

21. Politicians shall be loyal to the political party. Their allegiance, however, will not be exempt from freedom to give critical opinion.
22. Politicians have the obligation to respect the code of ethics and professional conduct that regulates the activities undertaken by the members of the party, as well as its bylaws.

23. Politicians will cooperate with the organs of the party to promote values and ethical principles that allow the full development of democracy among its members, particularly the younger ones.
24. If politicians find out about malpractices within their own party, such as corruption or graft, they must warn the competent bodies of the party and if necessary, the courts of law.

VI. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

The separation of powers (*checks and balances*) is one of the principles of representative democracy. Thus, the executive and judiciary branches must be autonomous and respectful of each other.

25. Politicians must protect the autonomy of the Courts of Justice beyond their own interests and those of the party notwithstanding the free exercise of criticism.
26. Politicians must report to the courts any irregularity that they come across in the fulfilment of their political functions.

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