



## HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY NETWORK (HRDN) RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

November 2012 – updated February 2021

The Human Rights and Democracy Network (henceforth, HRDN, or ‘the Network’) is an informal gathering of NGOs working to promote the realisation of all human rights for all people everywhere. All members therefore subscribe to the human rights contained within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and within other key international human rights conventions and instruments.

### 1. PURPOSE

The HRDN has committed to work with the European Union (EU) institutions, primarily at headquarters level in Brussels, and with EU Member States to improve both their mainstreaming and their specific actions, which aim to promote, protect and fulfil the rights of individuals both within and outside the European Union. The Network considers that it is in situations of democracy and peace that human rights can best be realised, and that the realisation of human rights will mutually reinforce democracy and peace. It therefore works to improve the EU’s actions in both these areas. The Network addresses all three roles of the EU, namely policy-making, funding and promoting human rights, democracy and sustainable peace.

### 2. MEMBERSHIP

Membership is open to any non-governmental organisation or network that is committed to pursuing the agenda outlined under Purpose. Members<sup>1</sup> do not need to be based in Brussels but must do advocacy towards the EU institutions in Brussels and must commit to travelling to Brussels for HRDN meetings.

#### 2.1 PRINCIPLES OF MEMBERSHIP

In addition to adhering to the respect and realisation of all human rights, members agree to:

1. Promote a non-partisan message, be that political, religious, ideological or other, and work on a multi-country basis.
2. Contribute actively to the Network by appointing a representative to the network who will be the main contact point, **attending at least half of all regular<sup>2</sup>** meetings per calendar year in the case of Brussels-based members, or at least one regular meeting per calendar year in the case of non-Brussels-based members, and the Annual General Meeting, actively participating in at least one working group’s activities, or one ad hoc working group per year, sharing information, and volunteering for administrative tasks such as minute-taking.
3. Ensure that members’ representatives who attend meetings are mandated to take decisions on behalf of their organisations.
4. Propose actions proactively and participate fairly in agreed actions over the course of any calendar year, following through on commitments they do make. If it is not possible to follow

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<sup>1</sup> Members are defined as the member organisation or network belonging to HRDN and not the individuals belonging to that organisation or network

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘regular’ meeting is used to refer to the monthly or six-weekly meetings of the whole network. It does not refer to working group or ad hoc working group meetings

through on work committed to, the Troika should be notified as soon as possible, so that members can adjust the work accordingly.

Respect the rules of confidentiality as stated below.

6. Avoid undertaking activities that undermine those of the Network.

## **2.2 NEW MEMBERS**

Organisations wishing to join HRDN should contact the troika ([troika@hrdn.eu](mailto:troika@hrdn.eu)) by filling out the application form including the following:

- Statement of intent
- Description of activities
- Description of relations and engagement with the EU
- Added-value brought by the organisation to the network
- Full disclosure of funding sources.

### **Members should:**

1. Subscribe to the human rights contained within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and within other key international human rights conventions and instruments
2. Provide 3 HRDN members' references to support their application
3. Work on multiple countries, ideally more than 3 countries
4. Provide details about how it is funded, if possible indicating where the information is publicly available
5. Have existed as an organisation for 2 years with an advocacy capacity
6. Have clear EU related advocacy priorities.
7. Be registered in the EU Transparency Register

New membership applications will be reviewed by the Membership Review Committee (MRC). The Committee reviews new applications, and steer the HRDN membership on these new applications. Finally, it oversees the applications procedure.

The HRDN Membership Review Committee consists of a maximum of 5 HRDN members and 1 HRDN Troika member. Any HRDN member can integrate the MRC voluntarily, following a call by HRDN Troika Member. Membership to MRC can last up to the two years. HRDN member can leave the MRC at any time. In this case, there will be a call for volunteers issued to HRDN members.

As the recipient of membership applications, the member who is also on HRDN Troika coordinates the group's work. However, the Committee may appoint a lead member if preferred by deciding through a majority vote.

The Membership Review Committee will review applications three times a year, in January, May and October.

The MRC acts as a first screening mechanism on new applications with respect of HRDN's criteria for membership. The MRC decides by majority to reject, approve an application, refer to the Network or send a request for more information to the applicants and their sponsors before rejecting or approving the application.

If a member of the Committee happens to be a sponsor for an application, the concerned member will not be able to participate in discussion nor vote on the fate of the application. If an applicant does not meet the criteria, the Committee will explain to the applicant via emails.

If the Committee has a positive majority opinion on an application, it will forward its

recommendation via emails to HRDN ahead of the subsequent regular meeting. In this case, all of HRDN members have one week to put forward in writing a reasoned objection or a request for further information to the Committee.

Admittance of a new member is subject to the non-objection of any HRDN member, i.e. it is a unanimous decision. Silence is interpreted as acceptance. In the event that the Network refuses an application, a written explanation of the decision will be sent to the applicant organisation within three weeks after the examination of their application.

The fact of joining the Network implies the acceptance of and agreement with the present Rules of Engagement.

### **2.3 VOLUNTARY RENUNCIATION OF MEMBERSHIP**

Organisations wishing to leave the Network are free to do so at any time and should simply inform the troika of their decision. Organisations accept that:

- Their membership fee will not be reimbursed.
- The rule of confidentiality of information obtained through the Network applies even after having left (see Confidential Information below).

### **2.4 CANCELLATION OF MEMBERSHIP**

Membership may be cancelled for the following reasons:

- Should the troika be aware of any serious breaches of any membership obligations or principles by one member, the troika will contact the member in question and request an explanation. Any conflicts of interest are first and foremost intended to be addressed through discussion and dialogue. Should, however, discussions between the troika and the member not result in a mutually acceptable solution, the issue will be discussed with the Network, and may result in cancellation, upon a unanimous decision by the other HRDN members.
- Repeated non-respect of confidentiality of information shared between HRDN members (see Confidential Information below).
- Lack of participation in HRDN activities: if a member organisation has not contributed to the Network's activities over the course of a year, or not attended any HRDN meetings, the troika will give the member organisation a written warning. If the organisation has not played a more active role in the three following months, their membership will be cancelled.
- Non-payment of annual fees (see Subscriptions below).

In the case of cancellation of membership, subscriptions already paid will not be reimbursed.

## **3. STRUCTURE**

### **3.1 TROIKA**

A troika of three organisations leads and coordinates the work of the Network. The three organisations are self-selecting, i.e. volunteer, but are elected by the whole Network in a regular meeting or the Annual General Meeting by at least a simple majority. Ideally, at least two of the three troika organisations would be Brussels-based.

Troika members offer their services for a period of one year, which may be renewed subject to approval by the Network in a regular or Annual General Meeting.

If more than three organisations volunteer at any time to be part of the Troika, a vote will be conducted by secret ballot. Only those organisations present at the meeting may vote and a 'one vote per member organisation' system will apply. A member organisation may not give a proxy vote to another member.

Efforts will be made to avoid appointing a totally new Troika at any one time, but rather replacing the three members in a staggered manner. To this end, three months will elapse between any change in Troika membership, in order to allow for continuity and for the newest member to 'acclimatise'.

### **3.2 REGULAR & AD-HOC WORKING GROUPS**

Working groups commit to work together on a specific theme and to meet separately, and as often as circumstances require and participants are able. At least five members of HRDN must agree to be part of a working group before it is formalised.

The Network may create ad hoc working groups for specific tasks or projects of fixed/limited duration. At least three members of HRDN must agree to be part of an ad hoc working group before it is formalised. Creation of a regular or ad hoc working group needs to be agreed by the Network on a consensus basis. The working group appoints its lead person and sets its own agenda and work programme depending on the issues at hand and joint capacity of the group.

Members of a regular or ad hoc working group are self-selecting but should bear in mind the important consideration that all members should contribute to the work of at least one working group, or to one ad hoc working group per year.

There is no limit to the number of working groups that the Network may support, nor to the number of participants in any working group.

Decisions reached by the group that imply positions for or of the Network, must be shared with all members and discussed in a regular meeting where possible and if not, by email (see also Sign-off Procedure).

### **3.3 BANK ACCOUNT HOLDER**

The relationship between the Network and the bank account holder is governed by the terms of the letter of agreement regarding the holding of the HRDN bank account. The letter is signed between the bank account holder and the troika.

## **4. MANDATE AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **4.1 TROIKA**

The troika will:

- Coordinate and drive the Network.
- Act as ultimate decision-making authority of the Network and has a casting vote.
- Represent the Network and liaise with institutional interlocutors and other third parties on behalf of the Network.
- Ensure smooth coordination and administration of the Network's activities including regular and annual meetings.
- Ensure good management of the Network's financial capacities.
- Prepare the budget at the beginning of each calendar year and the financial report at year-end.
- Approve the budget and individual expenditures in collaboration with all members.

The troika is *not* responsible for note-taking during HRDN meetings.

Upon a decision from the Network, the troika can also delegate any of its duties to individual members.

## **4.2 REGULAR & AD HOC WORKING GROUPS**

Regular and ad hoc working groups will:

- Undertake to deal in greater depth with a particular subject or issue.
- Appoint a lead person to steer and coordinate the group's work.
- Feed back to the regular Network meetings on progress and activities over the last period.
- Inform all Network members of meetings and opportunities for engagement with EU officials,
- Share draft positions with the whole Network and follow the approved sign-off procedure (see below) for official and public positions (statements, letters, key messages for meetings etc.), even if these go under the name of the working group and not of the whole Network.

Ad hoc working groups will dissolve themselves once the task for which they were mandated has been accomplished.

## **5. WORKING METHODS**

The Network holds regular meetings, currently on a four-six weekly basis.

An Annual General Meeting is held in the first quarter of each calendar year during which the previous year is reviewed and priorities for the coming year are identified.

The Network operates as far as possible on a consensus basis, aiming at unanimity in decision-making. All meetings are held under the Chatham House Rule:  
<http://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chathamhouserule>

All other sections in the Rules of Engagement contribute to setting out the working methods of HRDN.

## **6. EXTERNAL REPRESENTATION and USE OF NETWORK NAME**

No organisation will undertake any activity on behalf of the HRDN, or use the HRDN logo or speak on behalf of the Network in public events, without prior agreement of the troika.

Members agree not to use powers conferred on them by the Network to pursue their own agenda.

## **7. SIGN-OFF PROCEDURE**

Only documents, statements, key messages etc. which have been through the sign-off procedure and approved by the Network can go out with the HRDN name and logo and be considered public and official positions of the Network. The Network and its working groups commit to a meaningful, participatory sign-off process which aims at consensus.

### **7.1 HRDN POSITIONS**

All statements, documents etc. will be circulated to members allowing a minimum of one week for comment whenever possible. Clear information about the timing for the sign-off process should be included in the original email. A final draft of the statement or document will be shared at least 24h before it is released publicly to allow for final red lines, or to allow for an organisation to request not to sign up to the document.

It is assumed that unless an objection is raised by the deadline, the member organisation agrees to endorse the statement or document. Silence is taken as consent. If one or more member organisation has specific and substantial concerns with a statement, for which arguments have been presented in writing, a footnote of that/those member organisation(s) which do not sign up should be included. However there must be a minimum of 75% of all members endorsing the statement or document, or remaining silent, for the HRDN name and logo to be used.

## **7.2 WORKING GROUP POSITIONS**

Working groups may produce documents, statements, key messages etc. and send them out under the working group's name, after appropriate consultation with the group and sign-off by at least 75% of the group. Silence is taken as consent. Such documents must list the organisations which are part of the working group, and state that the working group is part of the HRDN Network. If any organisation which is normally a member of the working group chooses not to sign-up to the document, their name should simply not be mentioned. However, issues of importance to the whole Network should be brought to the attention of the Network and undergo the HRDN sign-off procedure, as detailed above. In case of doubt as to what constitutes a matter of importance for the whole network, the working group will consult with the troika.

## **8. CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION**

When an organisation shares confidential information with the Network, they must be sure to state clearly that it is confidential and that it cannot be circulated further. If another organisation wants to use/share confidential information, they must verify with the person who has provided the information that this is possible and must respect the decision of that person.

Information that is labelled as confidential should not to be shared beyond the Network. It is the responsibility of the designated HRDN representative to ensure that this information is not shared outside the HRDN member organisation. If information is shared within an organisation it remains the responsibility of the HRDN representative to ensure rules on confidentiality are understood and respected. In exceptional circumstances, the troika may unanimously decide that it is possible to share this information outside of the network.

Guest speakers or "observers" at HRDN meetings must also respect the confidentiality rules.

## **9. COMMUNICATION & COOPERATION WITH NON-MEMBER ORGANISATIONS, PLATFORMS, AND NETWORKS**

When HRDN members are also members of other platforms or networks working on related policy themes, be they at Brussels or Member States/national level, they are asked to draw the attention of HRDN to any issues of interest that have been raised in such networks. Any ad hoc collaboration with non-members (individual organisations, platforms, networks etc.) would need to be agreed in advance at an HRDN regular meeting.

The general rule is that the Network is not able to share confidential information with non-members (cf. Confidential Information above).

In principle, the HRDN does not accept "observers" of its meetings. However, the Network may consider inviting an applicant organisation to one regular meeting.

## **10. SUBSCRIPTIONS**

Subscriptions are agreed in discussion with the whole Network during a regular or Annual General Meeting. Subscriptions must be paid within three months of the date of the invoice. One reminder will be sent at the end of this period and if fees are not paid within six weeks of the reminder, the organisation's membership will be cancelled. If the subscription is not paid by six months after the date of the original invoice, membership will be annulled and the organisation will thereafter be obliged to re-apply as per a first request.

## **11. AMENDMENT OF THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT**

The Rules of Engagement may be modified only on the agreement of a simple majority of participants present at an Annual General Meeting. This simple majority applies both to the fact of modifying the rules and to the changes made. During modification of the rules, the current ones apply.