

European Buddhist Union

Code of Ethics + Complaints Procedure 2023

EBU Code of Ethics

Introduction

The EBU is the organisation of national Buddhist unions and Buddhist organisations in Europe. As such it involves people assigned as representatives to the EBU as well as its office holders operating within the organisation and representing it externally.

The EBU code of Ethics applies to all those who operate within these settings. It is based on Buddhist ethical values. It aims to 1) ensure the well-being of those who partake in the activities of the EBU, 2) facilitate good relations between the EBU and its member organisations, and 3) protect the reputation of the EBU in relation to external partners and the society at large.

The members of the EBU accept, as a condition of membership, the applicability of the Code of Ethics for the relationship among members, and for the relationship between the members and the council. Acceptance applies to the version of the Code of Ethics valid at the time, but also to later versions duly approved by the AGM.

Ethical Values

Fundamental to Buddhism are the “Ten Wholesome Actions”. In terms of physical conduct, they include the abandoning of the taking of life, of the taking of what is not given and of sensual misconduct. In terms of verbal conduct they include abandoning false speech, divisive speech, abusive speech and idle chatter. In terms of mental conduct, they include not being covetous, not bearing ill will, and not having wrong views. They are positively expressed in many ways such as in this passage from Anguttara Nikāya 10.176 bearing upon verbal conduct:

Abandoning false speech, they abstain from false speech. They speak the truth, hold to the truth, are firm, reliable, no deceiver of the world. Abandoning divisive speech, they abstain from divisive speech. What they have heard here they do not tell there to break those people apart from these people here. What they have heard there they do not tell here to break these people apart from those people there. Thus, reconciling those who have broken apart or cementing those who are united, they love concord, delight in concord, enjoy concord, speak things that create concord. Abandoning abusive speech, they abstain from abusive speech. They speak words that are soothing to the ear, that are affectionate, that go to the heart, that are polite, appealing and pleasing to people at large. Abandoning idle chatter, they abstain from idle chatter. They speak in season, speak what is factual, what is in accordance with the goal, the Dharma, and the Vinaya. They speak words worth treasuring, seasonable, reasonable, circumscribed, connected with the goal.

Although all aspects of Buddhist ethics bear upon mutual relations and interactions in the EBU, these words relating to the way its members communicate have a particular relevance and should therefore inspire and guide them in their activities in the EBU.

The EBU subscribes to the European Convention on Human Rights, in particular the freedom from injustice, violence, oppression and exploitation, the equality of every human being and the right to self-determination. EBU members are therefore also inspired and

guided by these common human values in their application of Buddhist values to contemporary society.

Conflict resolution and related matters

Should a situation occur within the EBU where individuals have lost fundamental friendship and trust and are not able to resolve their differences amicably, EBU office holders may intervene and seek resolution of the conflict. Such resolution appropriate to the situation should involve both parties equally and seek a middle ground where polarisation is avoided and where constructive ways are sought to repair the relations between the parties involved.

In the case of individuals harassing others or showing other kinds of unacceptable behaviour, an EBU office holder may need to intervene and appropriate disciplinary measures may need to be taken including exclusion of individuals from EBU activities.

In the case of unlawful behaviour or suspicion of such by individuals in EBU settings, its office holders are required by national legislation to report such behaviour to relevant authorities according to national legislation.

EBU Complaints procedure 2023

Introduction

Submitting a complaint is a major step, the impact of which should not be underestimated for all parties.

When filing a complaint, the complainant or their spokesperson must clearly and plausibly explain their complaint, giving supporting details of the behaviour of concern: time and place, who else was present, etc. The reason may be any act that is perceived as unfair, unwise, unethical, or inappropriate.

Complaints may be submitted to the EBU Ethics Committee regarding any member organisation of the EBU or individual member or about the EBU itself. Complaints may be about organisations or persons associated with those organisations.

Any complaint should be submitted to the EBU Ethics Committee via its secure email address: europeanbuddhism@proton.me

What will happen next

On receipt of a complaint the Ethics Committee will assess what needs to be done and by whom.

Beyond the Committee, in keeping with European data protection law (GDPR) the Committee will share information only where another person has a reasonable need to know in order to address the matter.

If a complaint may be criminal and the complainant is over 18, it is the responsibility of the complainant to report to the relevant police force/s if they wish, with support from us if necessary.

However, where a complaint indicates that a child has been harmed or there is a risk of harm to a child, the Ethics Committee will share information with relevant police force/s and/or other agencies. This may also be the case where a complaint indicates that harm has been caused, or may be caused, to an adult who is or may be particularly 'at risk' or vulnerable, for example because of mental illness or physical or mental disability.

Where the EBU Ethics Committee and Council receive credible information indicating that a person or persons may pose a risk of criminal harm to adults or children they may be obliged to share information with the relevant police force/s, without identifying complainants/victims.

Membership of the EBU Ethics Committee

The Committee will comprise suitably experienced individuals (of differing sexes) from several different member organisations. No more than one person from the EBU Council will be a member of the Ethics Committee at any time.

Conflict of interest

Where parties to the complaint are members of the EBU Council or Ethics Committee, they will stand down from all Ethics Committee or Council business in which the complaint is discussed until the complaint is concluded.

Complaint handling

This section outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Ethics Committee, EBU Council and EBU Annual General Meeting

A. Complaints relating to the EBU Council or a person working for the EBU Council

1. Complaints will only be addressed by the Ethics committee if other means are ruled out. It should first be established whether it is appropriate and possible to resolve the matter in an informal conversation between those directly involved.
2. If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, the Ethics Committee may propose mediation providing this is appropriate and acceptable to all parties to the complaint.
3. Steps 1 and 2 will not be appropriate where the allegation may be criminal.
4. If mediation is not appropriate, acceptable, or effective, the Ethics committee will inform the EBU Council that a complaint has been received and is being investigated by the committee.
5. However, in keeping with data protection law not all members of the EBU Council will necessarily be entitled to know all details. Beyond the Ethics Committee, information will only be shared with anyone directly involved and anyone who needs to know in order to help address the matter.

This is because there must be a balance between openness about the fact that a complaint is being dealt with and the legal entitlement of the parties to the protection of confidentiality.

Accordingly, at this stage information to the Council may be limited unless there is good reason to give more detail.

We will not share with the EBU membership any information which would make a complaint identifiable, unless it is already in the 'public domain'; ie public knowledge.

6. All parties will be taken seriously. Any party may appoint a person to represent them and support them until the matter is resolved.
7. The Ethics Committee will indicate a timeline for the handling of the complaint, which may be subject to review.

8. The handling of a complaint against the EBU council itself must result in (a) the complaint being resolved to the satisfaction of those involved, or (b) the complaint being declared well-founded, or (c) the complaint being declared unfounded.
9. If the handling of the complaint does not lead to a resolution, but is deemed by the Ethics Committee to be well founded, the Committee will submit a report to the EBU Council with recommendations as to actions to be taken by the Council.
10. In deciding what action to take, the Council will give consideration to expressions of regret, willingness to make changes and so on.
11. If the EBU Council is satisfied that the matter is resolved, attention will be given to healing and reconciliation.
12. If in the opinion of the EBU Council the matter is not resolved satisfactorily, the Council may recommend that a sanction be imposed. This would be a last resort.
13. Any sanction will be decided by the EBU Council according to the conditions laid down in the Constitution and Standing Orders of the EBU and the EBU AGM will be informed.

B. Complaints relating to the conduct of an EBU member (organisation or individual)

1. Complaints will only be addressed by the Ethics committee if other means are ruled out. It should first be established whether it is appropriate and possible to resolve the matter in an informal conversation between those directly involved.
2. If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, the Committee may propose mediation providing this is appropriate and acceptable to all parties to the complaint.
3. Steps 1 and 2 will not be appropriate where the allegation may be criminal.
4. If mediation is not appropriate, acceptable, or effective, the Ethics committee will inform the EBU Council that a complaint has been received and is being investigated by the committee.
5. However, in keeping with data protection law not all members of the EBU Council will necessarily be entitled to know all details. Beyond the Ethics Committee, information will only be shared with anyone directly involved and anyone who needs to know in order to help address the matter.

This is because there must be a balance between openness about the fact that a complaint is being dealt with and the legal entitlement of the parties to the protection of confidentiality.

Accordingly, at this stage information to the Council may be limited unless there is good reason to give more detail.

We will not share with the EBU membership any information which would make a complaint identifiable, unless it is already in the 'public domain'; ie public knowledge.

6. All parties will be taken seriously. Any party may appoint a person to represent them and support them until the matter is resolved.

7. The Ethics Committee will indicate a timeline for the handling of the complaint, which may be subject to review.
8. The Committee may recommend to the EBU Council that a member organisation or individual be suspended from the EBU whilst the complaint is being handled, if there are reasonable and sufficient grounds to do so.
9. This does not affect the right of the suspended member organisation or individual to be heard and to respond to the complaint during the handling of the complaint.
10. The handling of a complaint against a EBU member (organisation or individual) itself must result in (a) the complaint being resolved to the satisfaction of those involved, (b) the complaint being declared well-founded, or (c) the complaint being declared unfounded.
11. If the handling of the complaint does not lead to a resolution, but is deemed by the Ethics Committee to be well founded, the Committee will submit a report to the EBU Council with recommendations as to actions to be taken by the Council.
12. In deciding what action to take, the Council will give consideration to expressions of regret, willingness to make changes and so on.
13. If the EBU Council is satisfied that the matter is resolved, attention will be given to healing and reconciliation.
14. If in the opinion of the Council the matter is not resolved satisfactorily, the Council may recommend that a sanction be imposed. This would be a last resort.
15. Any sanction will be decided by the Council according to the conditions laid down in the Constitution and Standing Orders of the EBU and the EBU AGM will be informed.

Revision

After each year, the Ethics Committee will evaluate any conflicts or complaints that have arisen in the past year and whether they indicate a need to revise the Code of Ethics or Complaints Procedure.

During the evaluation, suggestions from those directly involved in complaints, including complainants, supporters, discussion leaders and complaint handlers, will be actively collected and taken into account. It will also look at other insights from both inside and outside the EBU, including suggestions from critics, which could improve the Code of Ethics. Suggested revisions will then be referred to the EBU Council.

In the case of a limited revision, a written proposal from the Council to the members will suffice. In the case of a broader review, the Council should consider whether it is important to organise a separate meeting, open to all members, to evaluate and review the Code of Ethics or Complaints Procedure.

ENDS