

The Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists

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The Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists is a joint product of the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP) and International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS; 2008). The preparation of the Universal Declaration as it is commonly known followed years of discussions at international conferences (e.g., Nuttin, 1979). The members of the Ad Hoc Joint Committee who drafted it were psychologists with expertise in ethics coming from all five continents. The Committee chaired by professor Janel Gauthier commenced work in 2002 by exploring the ethical principles and values embraced by other international disciplines and communities; examining the Eastern and Western history of modern-day ethical principles and comparing existing codes of ethics for psychologists from around the world to identify similarities in the ethical principles and values that underpin them. The Committee also undertook focus groups of psychologists at international meetings in Asia, Europe, North America, and South America and reviewed several drafts of the Universal Declaration. The IUPsyS General Assembly and the IAAP Board of Directors unanimously adopted the Universal Declaration in Berlin in July 2008.

The Universal Declaration is not a code of ethics in the sense that it provides principles and minimum behaviour standards that reflect the law and cultural, political and social beliefs of psychologists within one country. It is rather an overarching “moral

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framework of universally acceptable ethical principles based on shared human values across cultures” (Gauthier et al., 2010, p. 180) that can serve as a template for those reviewing existing, or drafting new codes when they develop culturally appropriate behavioural standards. Developers and reviewers of ethical codes in several jurisdictions have used the Universal Declaration for this purpose (see Allan, in press).

The Universal Declaration provides a description of four ethical principles each followed by a list of values associated with the principle.

The *Respect for the Dignity of Persons and Peoples* principle recognises the inherent worth of all people irrespective of their real or perceived individual characteristics such as ethnic origins or gender. The associated values emphasise psychologists’ responsibility to respect the autonomy, privacy and diversity of people and peoples.

The *Competent Caring for the Well-Being of Persons and Peoples* principle points to the responsibility of psychologists to work for the benefit of people and peoples and not to do them harm. Value (c) specifically requires psychologists to maximise benefits and minimise potential harm to individuals, families, groups, and communities.

The third principle *Integrity* emphasises psychologists’ responsibility to engage in accurate honest, open and truthful communications. The related values include encouraging psychologists to maximise impartiality and minimise biases and to refrain from exploiting persons or peoples.

The final principle, *Professional and Scientific Responsibilities to Society*, recognises that psychology as a discipline and profession has social obligations. The associated values include psychologists’ responsibility to add to the knowledge about human behaviour “and to persons’ understanding of themselves and others and using such knowledge to improve the

condition of individuals, families, groups, communities, and society” (IAAP & IUPsyS, 2008, p. 4).

The Universal Declaration is a thought-provoking document even though it is not a code of ethics as such. It encourages psychologists to recognise that they have responsibilities that go beyond their individual clients to the groups and collective they form part of such as their families and communities. Those who developed the Universal Declaration further encourages psychologists to recognise their clients as individuals and members of collectives interconnected across generations. Finally, at a time when society is grappling its response to dramatic environmental and social changes, the Universal Declaration reminds psychologists of humans’ reciprocal connections with their natural and social environments.

Reference list

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- Nuttin, J. (1979). Are there universal standards that apply to psychologists in all countries. *International Journal of Psychology* 14, 111-114.