

International Bar Association

International Code of Ethics

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the global voice of
the legal profession

The International Bar Association is a federation of national Bar Associations and Law Societies and individual members. Most of the organisational members have established Codes of Legal Ethics as models for or governing the practice of law by their members. In some jurisdictions these Codes are imposed on all practitioners by their respective Bar Associations or Law Societies or by the courts or administrative agencies having jurisdiction over the admission of individuals to the practice of law.

Except where the context otherwise requires, this Code applies to any lawyer of one jurisdiction in relation to his contacts with a lawyer of another jurisdiction or to his activities in another jurisdiction.

Nothing in this Code absolves a lawyer from the obligation to comply with such requirements of the law or of rules of professional conduct as may apply to him in any relevant jurisdiction. It is a re-statement of much that is in these requirements and a guide as to what the International Bar Association considers to be a desirable course of conduct by all lawyers engaged in the international practice of law.

The International Bar Association may bring incidents of alleged violations to the attention of relevant organisations.

Rules

- 1** A lawyer who undertakes professional work in a jurisdiction where he is not a full member of the local profession shall adhere to the standards of professional ethics in the jurisdiction in which he has been admitted. He shall also observe all ethical standards which apply to lawyers of the country where he is working.
- 2** Lawyers shall at all times maintain the honour and dignity of their profession. They shall, in practice as well as in private life, abstain from any behaviour which may tend to discredit the profession of which they are members.
- 3** Lawyers shall preserve independence in the discharge of their professional duty. Lawyers practising on their own account or in partnership where permissible, shall not engage in any other business or occupation if by doing so they may cease to be independent.
- 4** Lawyers shall treat their professional colleagues with the utmost courtesy and fairness. Lawyers who undertake to render assistance to a foreign colleague shall always keep in mind that the foreign colleague has to depend on them to a much larger extent than in the case of another lawyer of the same country. Therefore their responsibility is much greater, both when giving advice and when handling a case.

For this reason it is improper for lawyers to accept a case unless they can handle it promptly and with due competence, without undue interference by the pressure of other work. To the fees in these cases Rule 19 applies.

- 5** Except where the law or custom of the country concerned otherwise requires, any oral or written communication between lawyers shall in principle be accorded a confidential character as far as the Court is concerned, unless certain promises or acknowledgements are made therein on behalf of a client.
- 6** Lawyers shall always maintain due respect towards the Court. Lawyers shall without fear defend the interests of their clients and without regard to any unpleasant consequences to themselves or to any other person. Lawyers shall never knowingly give to the Court incorrect information or advice which is to their knowledge contrary to the law.
- 7** It shall be considered improper for lawyers to communicate about a particular case directly with any person whom they know to be represented in that case by another lawyer without the latter's consent.
- 8** A lawyer should not advertise or solicit business except to the extent and in the manner permitted by the rules of the jurisdiction to which that lawyer is subject. A lawyer should not advertise or solicit business in any country in which such advertising or soliciting is prohibited.
- 9** A lawyer should never consent to handle a case unless: (a) the client gives direct instructions, or, (b) the case is assigned by a competent body or forwarded by another lawyer, or (c) instructions are given in any other manner permissible under the relevant local rules or regulations.
- 10** Lawyers shall at all times give clients a candid opinion on any case. They shall render assistance with scrupulous care and diligence. This applies also if they are assigned as counsel for an indigent person. Lawyers shall at any time be free to refuse to handle a case, unless it is assigned by a competent body. Lawyers should only withdraw from a case during its course for good cause, and if possible in such a manner that the client's interests are not adversely affected. The loyal defence of a client's case may never cause advocates to be other than perfectly candid, subject to any right or privilege to the contrary which clients choose them to exercise, or knowingly to go against the law.
- 11** Lawyers shall, when in the client's interest, endeavour to reach a solution by settlement out of court rather than start legal proceedings. Lawyers should never stir up litigation.
- 12** Lawyers should not acquire a financial interest in the subject matter of a case which they are conducting. Neither should they, directly or indirectly, acquire property about which litigation is pending before the Court in which they practice.

- 13** Lawyers should never represent conflicting interests in litigation. In non-litigation matters, lawyers should do so only after having disclosed all conflicts or possible conflicts of interest to all parties concerned and only with their consent. This Rule also applies to all lawyers in a firm.
- 14** Lawyers should never disclose, unless lawfully ordered to do so by the Court or as required by Statute, what has been communicated to them in their capacity as lawyers even after they have ceased to be the client's counsel. This duty extends to their partners, to junior lawyers assisting them and to their employees.
- 15** In pecuniary matters lawyers shall be most punctual and diligent. They should never mingle funds of others with their own and they should at all times be able to refund money they hold for others. They shall not retain money they receive for their clients for longer than is absolutely necessary.
- 16** Lawyers may require that a deposit is made to cover their expenses, but the deposit should be in accordance with the estimated amount of their charges and the probable expenses and labour required.
- 17** Lawyers shall never forget that they should put first not their right to compensation for their services, but the interests of their clients and the exigencies of the administration of justice. The Lawyer's right to ask for a deposit or to demand payment of out-of-pocket expenses and commitments, failing payment of which they may withdraw from the case or refuse to handle it, should never be exercised at a moment at which the client may be unable to find other assistance in time to prevent irreparable damage being done. Lawyers' fees should, in the absence or non-applicability of official scales, be fixed on a consideration of the amount involved in the controversy and the interest of it to the client, the time and labour involved and all other personal and factual circumstances of the case.
- 18** A contract for a contingent fee, where sanctioned by the law or by professional rules and practice, should be reasonable under all circumstances of the case, including the risk and uncertainty or the compensation and subject to supervision of a court as to its reasonableness.
- 19** Lawyers who engage a foreign colleague to advise on a case or to cooperate in handling it, are responsible for the payment of the latter's charges except where there has been express agreement to the contrary. When lawyers direct a client to a foreign colleague they are not responsible for the payment of the latter's charges, but neither are they entitled to a share of the fee of this foreign colleague.
- 20** Lawyers should not permit their professional services or their names to be used in any way which would make it possible for persons to practice law who are not legally authorised to do so. Lawyers shall not delegate to a legally unqualified person not in their employ and control any functions which are by the law or custom of the country in which they practice only to be performed by a qualified lawyer.
- 21** It is not unethical for lawyers to limit or exclude professional liability subject to the rules of their local Bar Association and to there being no statutory or constitutional prohibitions.