

# Ministerial Code of Conduct

Regulation no. 360/2011

## Introduction

In order to increase confidence in public administration, and upon consultation at a ministerial meeting, the Prime Minister of Iceland hereby approves the accompanying Ministerial Code of Conduct, cf. the second paragraph of Article 16 of Act No. 73/1969, on the Government Offices of Iceland. This Code provides a guide to the type of conduct befitting such an important office and should also enable the public to compare ministerial behaviour with recorded, published rules.

Each and every minister shall ensure compliance with this Code in their own regard. In case of doubt, a minister may seek advice from the Coordinating Committee for Public Administration Ethics, cf. Items a and d of the third paragraph of Article 17 of Act No. 73/1969, and item b of Article 8 of this Code.

Furthermore, issues may be raised with the Althing Ombudsman, who shall inter alia ensure that public administration functions in accordance with codes of conduct issued on the basis of the Act on the Government Offices of Iceland, cf. the first paragraph of Article 2 of the Act on the Althing Ombudsman, No. 85/1997. Should anyone feel that an infringement of this Code has also resulted in them personally being treated wrongly, a complaint may be lodged with the Althing Ombudsman, cf. the second paragraph of Article 4 of Act No. 85/1997.

This Code shall remain in force for as long as the current Government remains in office, cf. the second paragraph of Article 16 of Act No. 73/1969.

## Article 1

### Ministerial work

- a. Ministers shall carry out their work with dedication, loyalty and honesty. The powers inherent in ministerial office by virtue of law and the constitution are to be exercised with moderation and fairness and without regard to the minister's own interests.
- b. Ministers shall use public funds sparingly and shall encourage the staff of their ministry to do likewise.
- c. Ministers shall never use their position, nor information to which their position gives them special access, for their own personal benefit or that of parties close to them.
- d. Ministers shall bear in mind that their duties are primarily to the public.

## Article 2

### Shared interests and conflicts of interest

- a. Ministers shall avoid any conflict of interests and not allow personal connections to affect their work.
- b. Ministers shall endeavour to ensure that staff are appointed to office according to merit.
- c. Ministers must provide information on any shared financial interests or similar connections which might lead to a conflict of interests. A form to fill out for this purpose is available from the Althing Secretariat, cf. the rules on Althing members registering their financial interests and confidential positions outside of the Althing. Any minister who has not filled out this form as a member of the Althing must do so immediately on taking office. In consultation with the Cabinet, the Prime Minister may decide to call systematically for more information on ministers' shared interests which would be revealed to the general public.
- d. Within their ministry and bodies under it, each minister shall act to have conflicts of interest dealt with as soon as they become evident and come to the minister's attention. Furthermore, the minister shall act to keep staff aware of potential conflicts of interest and ways to prevent them.

### **Article 3**

#### **Financial affairs and remuneration**

- a. A minister's work (generally in addition to being a member of the Althing) is considered a full-time position. Ministers are not to be engaged in any other work during this period.
- b. Should ministers take on any other occasional assignment, they are not permitted to accept payment for it unless the payment is within moderate limits and has been approved by the Coordinating Committee for Public Administration Ethics, which operates pursuant to Article 17 of Act No. 73/1969.
- c. Ministers are prohibited from making any personal use of ministerial work resources, except to the extent allowed by acts and regulations.
- d. The gifts which ministers accept by virtue of their office shall be recorded and shall accrue to the ministry concerned. However, this does not apply to personal gifts of a minor nature.
- e. Normally, ministers are not to accept courtesy trips from private entities unless duties of public office are part of the trip agenda.

### **Article 4**

#### **Behaviour and conduct**

- a. Ministers shall avoid any action likely to provoke a suspicion of their exploiting the position for personal benefit.
- b. Ministers shall make certain that their conduct never gives staff any occasion to believe that offences against law or rules of conduct might be ignored.
- c. In regard to facilitating the interests of individual businesses overseas, ministers shall conform to principles of equality.
- d. Ministers shall never arrange any reception for groups or organisations which incurs expenditure, unless this is consistent with ministerial activities.

- e. Ministers shall take care not to detract from the dignity of their office by behaving reprehensibly, disregarding law or showing any disrespect for human values or human rights.

## **Article 5**

### **Ministerial relations with ministry personnel**

- a. Ministers shall respect the neutrality and professional independence of public officials and other general employees.
- b. As occasioned by the matter at hand, ministers shall seek professional opinions from their ministry staff before taking any decisions on particular cases.
- c. In every case, ministers shall clearly distinguish partisan political activities, for instance in connection with elections, from the tasks of their ministry. Ministers shall not request of ministry personnel, except of their political advisers, any tasks related to partisan political work.

## **Article 6**

### **Public relations and the dissemination of information**

- a. Ministers shall inform the public and the media of ministry activities in a regular and organised manner. Should any incorrect information or misunderstanding emerge about a minister's activities, it must be corrected as quickly as possible.
- b. Ministers shall endeavour to render information accessible insofar as legislation permits and make sure that ministry staff operate with the same purpose.
- c. Ministers are never to conceal any information concerning the public wellbeing unless required by law or otherwise demanded by the public interest. If giving such information is in the public interest, the minister must take initiative in making it public.
- d. As guided by the public interest, ministers shall strive to maintain free and open communication with non-governmental organisations, professional associations and interest groups.

## **Article 7**

### **Responsibility**

- a. In the event of any examination of ministerial work being undertaken on behalf of the Althing or its surveillance bodies, or when Althing members request information based on the Parliament Act, ministers must demonstrate a willingness to cooperate.
- b. Ministers shall respond whenever staff point out any ethically reprehensible or illegal actions within the ministry or the ministerial portfolio. The minister must ensure that employees who point out such actions do not suffer for it.

## **Article 8**

## **Coordinating Committee for Public Administration Ethics**

- a. The Prime Minister shall appoint a Coordinating Committee for Public Administration Ethics, pursuant to Article 17 of Act No. 73/1969. The Committee's most important missions include promoting the full respect of ethical criteria in the civil service and providing advice to the government on measures to prevent corruption and conflicts of interest. Furthermore, the Committee shall promote coordinated responses to any information on infringements of conduct codes or on risks of corruption within the national government.
- b. Ministers may submit unclear matters regarding the interpretation of this Code to the Coordinating Committee.

Prime Minister's Office, 22 March 2011  
Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir