



## CCIVS Political and Ethical Charter

### Preamble

“The motivation of a volunteer cannot be based solely on willingness to serve, but rather must engage with the social, economic, and political realities shaping their environment...

Volunteering is a lifelong process. Volunteers should act as agents of change, promoting justice by helping to meet immediate needs while also confronting systemic injustice and exploitation.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1975 when the above statement was written, the CCIVS General Conference rejected the idea that International Voluntary Service could be neutral. It named imperialism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism as forces that voluntary service must resist - not accommodate. It supported liberation struggles in Palestine, Southern Africa, Chile, and Brazil, it proposed coordinated solidarity with the workers' movement and it published information exposing oppression.

50 years later, we face new manifestations of the same struggles, genocide in Gaza and Sudan, Ecocide driven by exploitative capitalism, digital surveillance expanding state and corporate power, funding systems that silence dissent, digital and AI tools built on exploited labour and stolen resources threatening the very functioning of our society and our ability for critical thinking. This Charter was written to define what we are facing (funding, AI, shrinking of civil-society space, social and climate justice) and how we face this, what needs to be done to ensure that our values remain relevant for the IVS movement, guided by a decolonised approach and a shared vision.

This Charter complements the Volunteer Rights Framework (2025), the Universal Charter of IVS<sup>2</sup> and the work of the Decolonise IVS process ([www.ccivs.org/decolonise](http://www.ccivs.org/decolonise)). It outlines how CCIVS itself operates. It is not binding on member organisations, who face diverse legal frameworks, political contexts, and resource constraints. Members are invited to engage with these principles in ways appropriate to their realities. CCIVS commits to supporting members who seek to align with these values, while recognising the different challenges members navigate.

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<sup>1</sup> Volunteer Service Bulletin Service Volontaire Servicio Voluntario, Volume Xiii, Number 2 1975

<sup>2</sup> <https://ccivs.org/resource/universal-charter-of-international-voluntary-service-2018/>



## **Article 1: CCIVS as a Political Network**

CCIVS has existed as a political network throughout its history and is not a technical platform.

CCIVS commits to:

1. Remaining a space for critical thinking and free expression, providing the platform for organisations, youth workers, volunteers and the general public to understand the causes and consequences of imperialism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism ethno nationalism, populism, and religious extremism in all its forms, and identify appropriate roles for voluntary service actions in supporting self-reliance and the liberation of exploited groups.
2. Encouraging critical analysis of social issues and strengthening the political consciousness and responsibility of all stakeholders.
3. Naming systems of oppression: colonialism (in all its forms), imperialism, capitalism, racism, patriarchy, extractivism, genocide.
4. Support the workers' movement, particularly among migrant workers, through collaboration with allied organisations.
5. Taking institutional positions on matters of human rights and justice based on its foundational values and informed understanding. When specific contexts are concerned, CCIVS will only take a public stance upon request by members in the affected region, or after consultation with them, to ensure accuracy, relevance, and protection. In cases of grave and undeniable violations of human rights or international law, CCIVS may speak out directly in accordance with its ethical mandate, while immediately engaging members concerned to coordinate follow-up solidarity and safeguarding actions.
6. Calling out forms of volunteering that do not adhere to the Volunteer Rights Framework and could threaten the personal integrity of volunteers and the communities they work with.
7. Promoting and amplifying local volunteer initiatives led by communities themselves and maintaining the bottom-up, grassroots led structure of CCIVS.
8. Taking institutional positions on matters of justice and human rights, recognising that these positions reflect CCIVS's foundational commitments. Members who fundamentally disagree with these positions are not required to adopt them but should consider whether CCIVS membership aligns with their organisational values.



## **Article 2: CCIVS Funding Practices**

CCIVS must remain true to its values and mission, despite financial constraints and with the awareness that funding is never entirely neutral. Funding decisions should strengthen solidarity and collective autonomy, not dependence.

CCIVS commits to:

1. Rejecting funding that requires silence on injustice, CCIVS will remain faithful to its Strategic Plan and Plan of Action and the will of its members.
2. Prioritising decolonial and equitable funding mechanisms that do not reproduce donor-recipient hierarchies. Decision-making power over resources must be shared with organisations that have been historically marginalised or structurally under-resourced – whether in the Global South or in peripheral, rural, or minority communities in the Global North.
3. Rejecting funding that profits or enables injustice, including arms manufacturers, extractive industries, surveillance companies, green colonialism or institutions complicit in genocide. CCIVS will not accept funding that undermines local autonomy or comes with conditions contradicting this Charter.
4. Ensuring that funding enables the greatest possible participation of CCIVS members around the world.
5. Being transparent about funding sources and conditions in communications with members, acknowledging when funding creates tensions with CCIVS principles and explaining how those tensions are navigated.
6. Advocating publicly for a decolonised funding reform, including with EU institutions, UN agencies, and foundations, to make funding more accessible, less bureaucratic, and less extractive.

## **Article 3: Data Sovereignty and Storytelling in CCIVS operations**

This article addresses how the CCIVS handles data, images and stories in its own communications, archives and publications.



CCIVS commits to:

1. Respecting that volunteers and communities own their stories. Testimonies, images, data, and experiences belong to those who lived them. CCIVS operates as a temporary steward, not an owner.
2. Complying with [GDPR](#) and data protection standards in all CCIVS operations
3. Obtaining image rights for every photo used in CCIVS communications. CCIVS will avoid using images showing children's faces, recognising that children cannot provide informed consent themselves.
4. Protecting volunteers and communities from harm, recognising that stories shared in solidarity can become surveillance data and testimonies can be weaponised. CCIVS will gain informed consent before sharing content, especially for volunteers engaged in politically sensitive work, and will prioritise safety over visibility.
5. Refusing extraction and not using volunteer or community testimonies primarily as fundraising tools or marketing materials. When stories are shared, they will maintain political integrity and the agency of those who lived them.
6. Immediately correcting stories if they are used in ways individuals did not anticipate or approve.
7. Maintaining archives according to principles of community ownership and data sovereignty, ensuring that historical records serve the movement rather than external interests.

#### **Article 4: Artificial Intelligence and Digital Tools in CCIVS Work**

Digital and AI tools are not neutral, they are shaped by corporate and state interests and are powered by unsustainable energy sources. If CCIVS uses AI or high impact digital tools, they should extend CCIVS's work and not replace solidarity with efficiency or substitute for critical thought and human connection.

CCIVS commits to:

1. Ensuring AI is used only as a supporting tool, never to replace possible paid positions within CCIVS operations or the work of volunteers and members.
2. Questioning whether tools serve CCIVS's political work before adoption. Does it help coordinate solidarity campaigns? Does it amplify the voices of those resisting



oppression? Does it strengthen organising capacity? Does it protect activists from surveillance? Or does it primarily offer efficiency at unknown costs?

3. Investigating and regularly communicating about the environmental and social costs of AI. What energy powers it? (Whose land hosts the infrastructure?, whose work built it? (Exploited workers, Child Labour? Stolen Indigenous land for minerals?).
4. Being conscious of who controls AI tools and who profits from them. CCIVS will study tools before adopting them and make informed and transparent decisions about their use.
5. Ensuring AI and digital tools do not replace human interaction in CCIVS operations, particularly in governance, decision-making, and relationship-building with members.
6. Rejecting partnerships with surveillance companies, arms manufacturers, or corporations complicit in oppression.
7. Maintaining shared assessments of tools and platforms with members, learning collectively about risks and alternatives rather than individually navigating these decisions.
8. Sharing findings with members about technology assessments, recognising that members make their own technology decisions but may benefit from CCIVS's research and experience.
9. Prioritising open-source, solidarity-economy, and community-controlled technology where viable alternatives exist to corporate platforms.
10. Bridging the digital divide by supporting members and volunteers in low-connectivity areas, where electricity is scarce and internet access is expensive or unreliable. This includes providing offline resources (e.g., printable guides, audio summaries), low-bandwidth tools, and hybrid participation options (e.g., in-person hubs or postal exchanges) to ensure equitable involvement in CCIVS activities, without defaulting to digital-only formats.

#### **Article 5: Decolonial Positioning in CCIVS Governance and Partnerships**

CCIVS was founded in 1948 in Paris under the aegis of UNESCO. Its Secretariat remains in Europe. Most of its institutional partnerships are with European or UN entities. Its working language (English) reflects colonial histories.

Decolonial practice is not abstract for CCIVS, it requires confronting how the network itself reproduces Northern dominance, even as it advocates for decolonisation in IVS more broadly.



CCIVS commits to:

### In Governance

1. Continuing to ensure a balanced representation in the CCIVS EC including people from all regions of the world.
2. Continuing to host General Assemblies (GA) in different parts of the world, ensuring rotation.
3. Ensuring the engagement of diverse nationalities in the CCIVS Secretariat, while aiming to include individuals from member organisations in job-sharing or full-time staff roles to deepen grassroots integration and ensure a more global CCIVS participation bringing knowledge from different backgrounds.
4. Supporting where possible with translation, travel funding, 'lite' internet access and accessible meeting times so participation is genuinely possible.
5. Examining how General Assembly processes may perpetuate Northern dominance: Do European members dominate debates due to language, proximity, or institutional resources? Are decisions made in ways that require European institutional structures to implement? How can voting and deliberation processes ensure all regions have equal voice?

### Diversity and Intergenerational Engagement:

6. Fostering diversity across all ages, backgrounds, and experiences to enrich CCIVS's work, recognising that decolonial practice thrives on intergenerational solidarity by respecting elders as knowledge keepers, valuing their lived wisdom in guiding peace, environmental, and justice initiatives, while actively bringing young people into leadership roles to ensure fresh perspectives and continuity.
7. Promoting mutual learning between generations, countering age-based hierarchies that marginalise youth or overlook elder insights, as highlighted in the [Global Reflection Meeting report](#) (April 2025), where participants emphasised cross-generational music and volunteering as tools for resilience and equity.
8. Continuing to promote the intergenerational aspect of IVS exchanges, encouraging engagement from families, elders (third age) and young people (under 18) and those who may feel that 'volunteering is not for them'.
9. Strengthening the CCIVS Youth Committee as a dedicated space for young people (under 30) to co-lead advocacy on decolonisation, climate justice, and IVS innovation, with direct input into EC and GA decisions, including mentorship pairings with elders to bridge experiences and to support their potential engagement in the CCIVS EC.

10. Ensuring inclusive recruitment and training that draws from diverse socioeconomic, cultural, and skill backgrounds, providing the space for people to engage, learn by doing and grow in their positions.

#### In Resource Allocation:

11. Tracking how CCIVS resources flow across the network. If the majority of project funding, training opportunities, or visibility systematically benefit organisations already well-resourced – often based in Europe or in large urban centres – while those in historically under-represented or structurally marginalised regions receive less access, this reproduces colonial and unequal patterns.
12. Prioritising resources for organisations facing structural barriers to access – whether due to geography, size, political context, or socioeconomic inequality. This includes many organisations in the Global South and also those in the Global North working in marginalised, rural, or precarious settings.
13. Ensuring that “capacity building“ does not mean forcing organisations to adapt to dominant institutional models, but rather advocating for funding systems to recognise and respond to diverse realities and local approaches.

#### In Partnerships:

14. Interrogating partnerships with EU and UN institutions that may require CCIVS to soften its political positions, exclude Global South perspectives, or prioritise Northern agendas.
15. Refusing partnerships where CCIVS would become a legitimising token for institutions claiming “civil society consultation“ while making decisions unilaterally.
16. Building South-South cooperation as a priority, not an afterthought – supporting member organisations to collaborate regionally without Northern intermediaries.

#### In Communications and Knowledge Production:

17. Addressing language as a colonial barrier. While recognising resource constraints, CCIVS will value contributions in languages other than English and not treat English fluency as a proxy for expertise or leadership capacity.
18. Prioritising digital accessibility tools (e.g., real-time captioning, screen-reader compatibility) in meetings and resources to ensure equitable participation for all ages and abilities.



### In Self-Reflection:

19. Acknowledging that CCIVS itself is located within colonial power structures. The Secretariat's location in Paris, access to European institutional spaces, and reliance on European funding streams all shape the network's possibilities and limitations.
20. Committing to ongoing self-critique, regularly asking: Whose voices are centred? Whose work is valued? Whose knowledge is considered expertise? Who has decision-making power?
21. Supporting members who challenge CCIVS's own practices. When members point out ways CCIVS reproduces Northern dominance, CCIVS will receive this as political education, not as conflict.

### **Article 6: Climate and Social Justice and CCIVS**

Climate justice is inseparable from social justice in CCIVS's work, as environmental degradation disproportionately harms marginalised communities and often perpetuates colonial power imbalances. Drawing on the Living Earth campaign (<https://ccivs.org/livingearth/>) and the [Soil Manifesto](#), CCIVS views the Earth as a living entity of which we are all an inseparable part, International Voluntary Service must resist climate colonialism, such as greenwashing projects that extract resources from the Global South for Northern "sustainable" technologies while amplifying community-led resilience and decolonial practices.

CCIVS Commits to:

1. Rejecting all forms of climate colonialism, including green colonialism and big tech colonialism, where "eco-friendly" initiatives enable land grabs, resource extraction (e.g., minerals for renewables), or the displacement of indigenous peoples under the guise of sustainability. CCIVS will call out such dynamics in IVS projects and through the Living Earth Campaign and prioritise volunteer actions that honour and valorise local knowledge and sovereignty.
2. Highlighting stories of climate robustness and resilience to showcase the regenerative work of volunteers and communities on the ground. CCIVS will share these narratives rooted in practices like soil regeneration and community-led adaptation, not as isolated "success stories," but as calls to action that reveal needs, responses, and pathways for global solidarity, as emphasised in the Soil Manifesto.



3. Rejecting scaremongering and fear-driven language in communications. Instead, CCIVS promotes positive, empowering narratives of change, adaptation, and harmony with the Earth to inspire engagement, aligning with the belief that hope and agency, not despair, mobilise people toward environmental and personal health.
4. Adopting a critical lens on energy transitions and refusing to uncritically promote any energy sources, acknowledging that no current options are fully sustainable without addressing their social and ecological costs, such as exploitative mining or infrastructure that burdens vulnerable regions.
5. Scrutinising government and institutional climate programs, including the U.S. Green New Deal, European Green Deal, and similar initiatives, for their potential to reinforce Northern dominance or overlook Global South priorities. CCIVS will advocate for programs that centre equity, reparations, and community control.
6. Recognising climate offsetting as a mechanism that often shifts responsibility from polluters to affected nations, perpetuating injustice. CCIVS commits to promoting accountability models that prioritise direct regeneration and justice over compensatory schemes.
7. Ensuring IVS activities avoid green colonialism by valuing indigenous and local knowledge, rejecting projects that displace communities in the name of sustainability, and fostering regenerative practices, like soil stewardship and biodiversity restoration, that build long-term resilience without extraction.

## **Article 7: Research and Knowledge Production by CCIVS**

Research within CCIVS must challenge rather than reproduce extractive knowledge practices. This article addresses research that CCIVS conducts or publishes (such as needs assessments, impact evaluations, and position papers), not research by individual members.

CCIVS commits to:

1. Initiating critical research and evaluations to ensure voluntary service organisations examine the link between development and the types of voluntary service they undertake, avoiding structures that perpetuate injustice.
2. Centring communities and volunteers as knowledge producers, not just research subjects. Those experiencing oppression, displacement, or climate collapse hold



expertise that academic frameworks often erase. CCIVS research will prioritise participatory methodologies.

3. Sharing research findings freely, prioritising accessibility over academic gatekeeping. Knowledge produced within the IVS movement belongs to the movement. CCIVS publications will be open-access whenever possible.
4. Supporting participatory action research where volunteers, host communities, and member organisations co-create research questions, methodologies, and analyses, not where “experts“ study them.
5. Examining how IVS projects relate to systems of power. Do our projects challenge or accommodate unjust structures? Who benefits from our work? What unintended harms might we cause? CCIVS research will prioritise critical self-examination.
6. Building on member-driven needs assessments by making research responsive to what members actually need, not what is fundable or publishable in academic journals.
7. Ensuring research processes do not extract work from volunteers or member organisations without compensation, recognition, or shared ownership of findings.
8. Attributing knowledge appropriately, recognising when ideas originate from grassroots organisations, volunteers, or communities rather than claiming institutional authorship.
9. Sanctuarising a living reservoir of IVS memory by collecting, preserving, and digitising archives, maintaining accessible repositories of documents, testimonies, and materials. CCIVS will continue to develop its Memory Project and related research initiatives, ensuring that the history of the IVS movement is preserved with care, regularly updated, and used to strengthen collective learning and solidarity.

### **Article 8: Ethical Travel and Mobility Justice**

Travel and encounter have been at the heart of International Voluntary Service since its creation. Meeting face to face, sharing daily life, working side by side, and learning across borders remains the core of our movement. At the same time, travel is not neutral, it consumes resources and reproduces inequalities of access and representation. CCIVS will continue to review its travel and event practices annually, linking its ethical commitments to the indicators and recommendations in the [Living Earth Sustainability Guidelines](#).

CCIVS commits to:

1. Advocating for *fair mobility*, recognising that visa regimes reproduce colonial hierarchies and restrict the movement of volunteers from certain regions - in line with the *Decolonising Visa Mechanisms* policy paper<sup>3</sup>
2. Defending face-to-face exchange as the core of IVS, while digital tools can complement cooperation, they can never replace the transformative power of human encounter.
3. Continuing to promote opportunities for people from different regions to meet, learn from each other, and work together – in workcamps, mid- and long-term projects, and training activities.
4. Prioritising travel when it creates genuine learning, strengthens partnerships, or supports representation that cannot be achieved digitally.
5. Ensuring equitable representation, when international events take place, CCIVS will seek participation of CCIVS representatives and members based in the region where the event occurs, to limit unnecessary travel and reinforce local ownership.
6. Advocating for funding systems that recognise mobility as an essential right and a condition for equality in international cooperation, including ensuring that travel and participation costs are fairly covered for volunteers and representatives from under-resourced regions, and that funding mechanisms do not penalise participants based on geography, passport, or economic background.
7. Aligning mobility decisions with the principles set in the Living Earth Sustainability Guidelines<sup>4</sup>.

The Political and Ethical Charter guides CCIVS as a network. Members are invited to draw on these principles in their own work, adapting them to local contexts and legal frameworks. CCIVS will support members seeking to align with these values, while recognising the diverse realities and constraints members face.

This Charter will be reviewed by the General Assembly every two years as a living document, adapting to new challenges while maintaining our foundational commitments to justice, solidarity, and a peaceful world.

Validated by the CCIVS General Assembly in Pretoria, South Africa

16 November 2025

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<sup>3</sup> <https://ccivs.org/resource/decolonising-visa-mechanisms-policy-paper/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://ccivs.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Sustainability-Guidelines-EN.pdf>