



**EXTERNAL COMPLAINTS POLICY**  
First Edition

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**INTERNATIONAL TROPICAL TIMBER ORGANIZATION**

Adopted by the International Tropical Timber Council at its 58<sup>th</sup> Session

# EXTERNAL COMPLAINTS POLICY

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure transparency and accountability to all stakeholders in relation to complaints regarding ITTO and its operations. It seeks to make clear the mechanisms available for making complaints and the way in which complaints will be handled and resolved. ITTO acknowledges the value of receiving complaints as an important tool in understanding and responding to stakeholder's expectations where the ITTO Secretariat will respond to all complaints in a prompt, fair and sensitive manner. We therefore welcome complaints and will respond constructively and in a timely manner.

Complaints may be submitted by our supporters, donors, the general public, beneficiaries, official bodies and our partners. This policy deals only with external complaints and does not cover internal issues and/or complaints by staff member, interns or volunteers.

## Guiding Principles

**Confidentiality:** The ITTO Secretariat is committed to ensuring that all information related to complaints and their resolution will remain confidential. The privacy of individuals will be maintained and personal information will not be divulged.

**Accessibility:** complaints procedures should be easily accessible and well publicized to the people we work with and other stakeholders. Information relating to the process is accessible and options exist to make a complaint to ensure no complainants are disadvantaged.

**Objectivity:** complaints are treated with respect in a fair and equitable manner. Conflicts of interest will be identified to ensure objectivity.

**Responsiveness:** complaints are dealt with in a manner that is timely, responsive and will be taken seriously. Complainants will be kept informed on the progress of their complaint through the process.

## 2. Definitions

ITTO defines a complaint as an expression of dissatisfaction about the standards of service, actions or lack of actions by ITTO.

A complainant is any person or organization making a complaint.

## 3. Compliance

The consequence of not complying with the policy and procedures ranges from disciplinary action to performance management to cessation of employment or contract agreement, dependent on the seriousness of the non-compliance.

## **4. Procedures**

### **4.1 Complaints Handling Process**

ITTO will receive and respond to all complaints irrespective of who makes them or the nature of the complaint. It is acknowledged that some complaints are of a more minor nature and can be resolved quickly and informally (informal resolution).

Where a complaint cannot be resolved easily and informally, the Complaints Handling Process described below should be followed.

#### **4.1.1 Making a complaint**

How can a complaint be made?

Complaints should be made through the online contact form located on ITTO's website, which is the central point for all complaints.

Complaints can be forwarded in the three official ITTO languages.

#### **4.1.2 Receiving a complaint**

Who can receive a complaint?

Complaints lodged electronically will be received through the ITTO's general administration e-mail at [itto@itto.int](mailto:itto@itto.int) and logged through ITTO's established general internal administration procedures. Upon initial assessment by the Division of Operations on the veracity of any complaint received, a complaint will be referred to the manager responsible for the relevant area for appropriate action. In the event of a complaint being made verbally, it is important the staff member clarifies the issues, listens to what the complainant has to say and makes a brief and accurate written summary of the complaint. The staff member should also establish if the complainant needs assistance in making the complaint.

The employee receiving the complaint will record the following details:

- i. The name of the person/s making the complaint
- ii. The date, time and location the complaint is received
- iii. A brief description of the complaint and the expectations of the complainant

The primary officer in charge of investigating legitimate complaints will be the Director of Operations ([dop@itto.int](mailto:dop@itto.int)) or alternatively, the head of any other division ([dti@itto.int](mailto:dti@itto.int) / [dfm@itto.int](mailto:dfm@itto.int)) if the complaint relates to a particular division/staff member. If a complaint is made against the Executive Director, the complaint will be referred to the ITTC Chairperson who will decide on appropriate action as necessary, including referring the complaint in a neutral and factual manner to an appropriate professional investigative entity (such as consultants and/or a legal entity).

A complaint lodged through an ITTO member shall be sent by the member to the ITTO Executive Director, who will take the necessary action as appropriate and report back to the ITTO member. If the complaint lodged by an ITTO member is against the Executive Director, the complaint will be referred to the ITTC Chairperson who will determine in consultation with the ITTO Officials on appropriate action to be taken, if any, including referring the complaint in a neutral and factual manner to an appropriate professional fraud investigative entity (such as consultants and/or a legal entity).

In some instances, a complainant may request that their identity is not divulged however it should be acknowledged this may restrict the resolution of the complaint.

#### **4.1.3 Acknowledging a complaint has been received**

Each complaint must be acknowledged as it is received. Acknowledgement will also include an outline of the next steps. If an oral complaint is received, the staff member

should take the name and contact details so the outcome can be communicated without breaching privacy or confidentiality.

#### **4.1.4 Registering Complaints**

All complaints dealt with under the Complaints Handling Process, whether verbal or written are to be recorded in a Complaints Record log. These records will be used to ensure complaints are dealt with effectively, to monitor trends and to ensure continuous improvement of the complaints handling process.

#### **4.1.5 Assessing and reviewing a complaint**

Once a complaint has been received and acknowledged, the Director of Operations will make a preliminary assessment as to whether the issue raised merits further examination. In this context, the Director will take into account:

- The identity of the party concerned and its interest in the matter;
- Whether the issue is material and substantiated;
- Whether there seems to be a link between ITTO activities and the issue raised;
- How similar issues have been, or are being, treated in other domestic or international proceedings.

Following its preliminary assessment, the Director of Operations will respond to the parties concerned. If it is decided that the issue does not merit further consideration, the parties will be informed of the reasons for this decision.

If the Director of Operations determines that the complaint does merit further investigation, it will be referred to the manager responsible for the relevant area for appropriate action. Depending on the nature of the complaint, appropriate action can either constitute direct action by the relevant manager or potentially a more formal process by a third-party, independent investigator with appropriate expertise for the circumstances.

#### **4.1.6 Remedy or System Improvement**

At times, remedy and systems improvement may arise out of complaints dealt with under either Informal Resolution or under the Complaints Handling process. This procedure will be initiated by the relevant manager using the following steps.

1. Assess if remedy and/or systems improvement is warranted or no action is required.
2. Implement immediate remedy/system improvement or plan future implementation of remedy/system improvement.
3. Inform complainant of outcome

Remedy is action taken to correct or rectify a situation for an individual where it identified he/she has been treated poorly or unfairly by the system.

Systems improvement, where appropriate, is an opportunity to improve policies, procedures, organizational culture, or similar issues to prevent future problems.

#### **4.1.7 Informing complainant of outcome**

Once the complaint has been resolved, the complainant will be advised of the outcome ensuring the privacy of any individual involved in the matter.

#### **4.1.8 Timeframe for Response**

ITTO will seek to resolve complaints as quickly as possible and ensure complainants are regularly updated as to the progress or outcome of their complaint.

#### **4.1.9 Appeals Process**

- (1) If the complainant is dissatisfied with the responses received from ITTO or if they believe action has not been taken, they may appeal to the next management level. If the matter involves a Director, it should be referred immediately to the Executive Director (ED). If the complaint involves the Executive Director, it should be referred to the Council Officers.
- (2) Any response provided to an external complainant should be from the ED on behalf of the organization. External complainants dissatisfied with the outcome are permitted to appeal to Council Officers.

#### **4.2 Publication of the Policy**

ITTO will provide clear information to its stakeholders and members of the public on how to make a complaint and the ability to make a complaint for suspected breaches of the Code by a signatory organization.

This information will be publicly available on the ITTO website. ITTO staff will inform relevant stakeholders of the policy where appropriate and provide copies of the policy on request.

#### **4.3 Training of Policy**

New staff will be provided with the policy as part of their induction to the organization. The policy will also be available for all staff on a nominated share drive and placed on ITTO's website. Training and/or communication will also be provided following an update or change to the policy.

### **5. Responsibilities**

ITTO's Senior Management is responsible for ensuring that ITTO responds to complaints according to the policy and procedures.

The Executive Director (ED) is ultimately responsible for complaints which cannot be resolved by management.

The Council Officers are responsible for managing complaints relating to the ED. The Director of Operations acts as the Complaints Handling Officer and is responsible for:

- Initial assessment of complaints and identifying those which are to be actioned upon, those which can be dealt with informally and those which are clear, serious, or complex complaints to be addressed according to the complaints handling procedure;
- Ensuring complaints are appropriately referred, resolved and that follow up actions have taken place;
- Reporting such investigative activity (with due regard to confidentiality requirements) to Council; and
- Maintaining the Complaints Log.