

## INTERNATIONAL OMBUDSMAN INSTITUTE

### COVID-19 Resolution

**The International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) calls on all Ombudsman Offices to redouble their efforts to protect vulnerable people during the COVID-19 crisis and to ensure that lessons are learned for the future.**

The outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the subsequent rapid development of the pandemic have had a huge impact on all of us and confront us with unprecedented challenges.

The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on older people and people with underlying health problems. However, many other groups have suffered disproportionately. These include disabled people in institutional care, the unsheltered, children and adolescents, people from black and minority ethnic communities, Aboriginal, indigenous and first peoples, Roma and travellers, victims of family violence, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, people deprived of their liberty and people in poorer communities. Communication is also vital now, and we must make sure people without internet access, who do not speak the first language of the country in which they live, or who face other challenges are given the appropriate assistance so that they are fully aware of all of the restrictions and the available supports.

Ombudsman Offices are working across the globe to ensure that the rights of all people are respected. The Ombudsman is needed more than ever during a global pandemic. The role is crucial in making sure people have access to public services they need to keep them safe and that these services are delivered fairly.

Most public services – including the people and systems that deliver them – are operating under tremendous strain and struggling to adapt to challenging and rapidly evolving circumstances.

The IOI pays tribute to everyone in public service in all nationalities, who have worked very hard to save lives during this pandemic. Their efforts on the frontline cannot be praised enough.

The pandemic will also bring about a significant economic impact. Unemployment rates are growing rapidly, affecting many people, who became unemployed when businesses had to close

due to the emergency shutdowns in many countries. The pandemic will inevitably create and exacerbate financial hardship and social inequalities that already existed, potentially creating more demand for Ombudsman services, while at the same time, Ombudsman institutions themselves may face budget cuts and thus come under financial pressure. In times of crisis, it is vital to defend and support the Ombudsman, as it is now that Ombudsman institutions and the important role they are playing, are needed more than ever.

Even if fundamental principles such as the right to liberty, equality, and humane treatment do not always get the attention they deserve, it is of utmost importance that Ombudsman institutions make sure the values that underpin their mission are maintained in these difficult times. Fundamental rights do not cease to apply, even when a state declares a state of emergency or derogation from its human rights obligations. All measures against COVID-19 must meet these requirements. They must be set up proportionately on a legal and time-limited basis. Accountability and transparency must also be guaranteed during the decision making process. All actions related to COVID-19 response and recovery must be undertaken with high levels of good governance and measures must be in place to limit the risk of corruption, misconduct and maladministration.

The IOI encourages its members to continue to work closely with their governments as well as their local communities to uphold all these principles and to protect the most vulnerable in society.

The COVID-19 disease knows neither geographical nor social borders and it is not possible to predict when this global public health challenge will be overcome. The IOI calls upon its members to make sure that lessons are learnt to preserve lives in the future, improve inadequate services and uphold the rights of the vulnerable people.