

POSITIONING OF ARTAS FOUNDATION IN CONFLICTS

Here we describe the position *Artas Foundation* takes in its collaboration with people who live in countries that are in an unresolved political conflict with each other, or with political entities that restrict direct exchange between their citizens. The description serves as an orientation for state- and non-state institutions and partners, and also as a guideline for the team of *Artas Foundation*.

1. On Artas Foundation

Artas Foundation is an NGO that focuses on conducting art activities with/for people from conflict-affected regions. Operating on a grass-roots level, these art activities are aimed at opening new horizons for people who live there or also in regions not directly affected by the conflict. Thus they want to enable new encounters, or provide occasions for the unfolding of their creative potentials. In this way, *Artas Foundation* tries to contribute to peacebuilding, i.e., to non-violent conflict resolution and a long-term strengthening of peaceful coexistence.

2. General orientation of Artas Foundation

For its activities, *Artas Foundation* defines its stance as one that orients itself primarily towards artistic and human/social interests. This means that *Artas Foundation's* position is

- oriented towards the principle of non-violence and dialogue in the resolution of conflicts. Thereby, the voices of people who are directly affected by the conflict should be heard;
- based on the UN documents about human rights.¹ We see central elements of this orientation in an engagement for the freedom of expression and cultural rights of people (including the right to speak their own language), and an engagement for fair international collaboration, meeting at eye level, which demands a reduction of global injustices and structures of exploitation, in particular in the economic realm, in access to quality education and information, and in free mobility.

Conducting its work with a multi-national staff, *Artas Foundation* is registered in Switzerland and liable to the Swiss regulations applying to foundations. In addition to these, *Artas Foundation* actions in regard to political questions are based on

- political independence (->2.1.)
- neutrality (->2.2.),
- impartiality (->2.3.), and
- transparency (->2.4.).²

See the following points for further clarification to these terms.

¹ See: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

² In these principles, that also shall enable *Artas Foundation* to work in countries that are hostile to each other, the foundation orients itself towards principles of humanitarian organisations such as the *International Red Cross* or *Medecins Sans Frontieres*. In this respect it is interesting to follow a debate from the early 1990s when these organisations discussed their respective status of neutrality (e.g., in cases when one of the warring parties breaks international humanitarian law).

2.1. Political Independence

For us, political independence means that *Artas Foundation* is not bound to positions other institutions or entities may hold. This includes official representatives of Switzerland, e.g., the Swiss foreign policy, or other institutions, states or administrative bodies that enable the work of the foundation (e.g., granting access to certain regions). Political independence is also maintained in relation to an eventual political agenda of specific donors.

In defining its general orientation (-> Pt. 2 above), *Artas Foundation* restricts itself to what is relevant for its field of activities and for the purpose of its mission. The foundation's position regarding other fields remains unspecified (e.g., leaving unspecified its position regarding other issues of national, or party politics, regarding what a "just peace" should look like for any of the contending parties; regarding religious convictions, or regarding the validity of competing historical narratives). This means that cooperation partners or team members of *Artas Foundation* don't have to share the same political positions, except on the points that are mentioned above and directly relevant for the work of the foundation.

2.2. The Neutrality of Artas Foundation

We understand "neutrality" as not taking sides in political conflicts.³ In order to nurture and maintain the confidence of people on all sides of political divisions, *Artas Foundation* does not take sides in political conflicts or controversies of a political, racial, religious, or ideological nature.⁴

Artas Foundation is aware that with any activity in a conflict field, it becomes part of this field. For this reason, it commits itself to proceeding in a conflict-sensitive way⁵ and to promoting non-violent conflict solution equally on all sides. In accordance with this, *Artas Foundation* does not take part in political over-generalisations and the production of sweeping enemy images but intends to open horizons and create opportunities for examining stereotypes.

Three aspects of *Artas Foundation's* neutrality should be specially mentioned:

- The foundation holds a neutral position regarding the political status of the regions it is active in (see pt. B below for consequences on language use).
- *Artas Foundation* would only engage in spaces for dialogue and cooperation across dividing lines and borders, if those involved from all sides would consent to this, and only if it happens with a focus on art and culture.
- *Artas Foundation* is careful to prevent its activities from being instrumentalised by political powers or adversaries.

How can *Artas Foundation* commit to such neutrality when the foundation is, at the same time, also committed to specific political principles (see pt. 2. above)? The limitation to the definition of its position has to be seen in this light. In order to be

³ In German, we also call it "Unparteilichkeit". There are many different definitions of "neutrality", as neutrality is- and has to be a very contested practice. For our purpose, we orient ourselves on an understanding of neutrality as a "humanitarian principle". This differs, for example, from an understanding of neutrality as a political principle regulating the international relations of states (as, e.g., defined in Art. 5 and 13 of the Hague Convention of 1907).

⁴ In a humanitarian understanding of the term, "neutrality means standing apart from contending parties or ideologies, so that everyone will trust you. It is not an end in itself, but a means to an end." M. Harroff-Tavel, "Neutrality and Impartiality The importance of these principles for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the difficulties involved in applying them", p. 537. (Download 15.5.2023 from: <https://international-review.icrc.org/sites/default/files/S0020860400074878a.pdf>) In our case, the end, or purpose of the neutrality is to enable activities of *Artas Foundation* on both sides of a dividing line.

⁵ Here we refer to the internationally established standards of the "Do No Harm" and the later "Conflict Sensitivity" principles of work (<https://www.conflictsensitivityhub.net/index.php/conflict-sensitivity/>).

able to work on both sides of a political divide, *Artas Foundation* restricts eventual statements to its own area of competence, namely art activities in conflict-affected areas. For *Artas Foundation*, this must not mean being indifferent or remaining quiet. But it does mean not saying anything that would inflame political passions and provide material for propaganda. We are aware that there may not be a clear-cut solution to this ethical dilemma, and that deciding what can be said and what should not be said will depend on circumstances and on the consequences for the project and the people involved, as well as the foundation's wider work.

2.3. Impartiality

To us, the impartiality of *Artas Foundation* means two things:⁶

First, in the choice of its engagements *Artas Foundation* does not discriminate on the basis of the political systems or actions of the respective power holders (e.g. aggressor or defender). In conducting its activities, the foundation is guided by an evaluation as to where it is able to contribute with art in a meaningful and safe way, given its own capacities and the type and urgency of people's needs. Here, the relevant need might be one of Swiss or any Western European society just as much as of societies directly affected by war.

Secondly, *Artas Foundation* is oriented towards impartiality within its projects. This means, it does not discriminate between participants as to nationality, language, religious belief, gender, class, political opinion, or other individual or group-specific characteristics.

2.4. Transparency

The transparency of *Artas Foundation* means that the foundation lays open its guiding principles and plans, and the aims that it wants to reach with its projects, to any stakeholder, interested person, or institution. This transparency also includes laying open information about donors or organisations that fund *Artas Foundation's* work.

Consequences of this positioning for the language and terminology of *Artas Foundation's* documents

The described positioning of *Artas Foundation* in conflict settings leads to various consequences. They may, for example, concern potential emotional needs of team members, or they may eventually cause tensions between the restricted political positioning of the foundation and individual political stances, and so forth. Here we describe only the most immediate consequences for language and terminology in documents of *Artas Foundation*:

1. In its documents, on its website and in social media posts, *Artas Foundation* adds the following statement (often as a footnote):
English: Artas Foundation would like to underline that its use of names and titles particularly with regard to the conflict regions should not be construed as implying any form of recognition or non-recognition by the foundation or as having any political connotation whatsoever.
German: Artas Foundation betont, dass die Nutzung von Bezeichnungen und Namen, besonders im Hinblick auf die Konfliktregionen, nicht als Anerkennung oder Nichtanerkennung durch die Stiftung ausgelegt werden sollen. Sie haben in diesem Zusammenhang keinerlei politische Konnotationen.

⁶ In German, we call it: "Unvoreingenommenheit"

2. In referring to contested geographical names, *Artas Foundation* uses the versions of both sides that are in conflict with each other:
E.g.: use Gal/i (for both Georgian “Gali” and Abkhaz “Gal”)
3. *Artas Foundation* expresses its neutral position regarding the political status of the regions by preventing formulations like “Switzerland, Abkhazia and Georgia”, or “Artsakh, Switzerland and Armenia”, and uses formulations like “Zurich, Suchum/i, and Tbilisi”, or “Stepanakert, Basel, and Dilijan” instead.
4. In the case of political entities that are not recognised by most countries of the world, *Artas Foundation* specifies the use of these entities with an expression like: “Artsakh, a state that is not internationally recognised”, or “Abkhazia, a state that is internationally recognised by Russia and a handful of other states only”.
5. Translation of local names to German and English:

	Deutsch	English
Georgia	Georgien	Georgia
	Tiflis	Tbilisi
	Tskaltubo	Tskaltubo
	Zugdidi	Zugdidi
	Zemo Nikozi	Zemo Nikozi
	Innerkartlien	Shida Kartli
	Inguri	Enguri
	Imeretien	Imereti
Abkhazia	Abchasien	Abkhazia
	Gal/i	Gal/i
	Otschamtschire	Ochamchyra
	Tquartschal/Tqwartscheli	Tquarchal/Tquarcheli
	Suchum/i	Sukhum/i
	Gudauta	Gudauta
	Mingrelien, Mingrelier*innen	Mingrelia, Mingrelians
Armenia	Armenien	Armenia
	Jerewan	Yerevan
	Dilidschan	Dilijan
	Tawusch	Tavush
	Gegharkunik	Gegharkunik
	Tschambarak	Chambarak
Others	Republik Moldau	Republic of Moldova
	Republic Belarus	Republic of Belarus

6. Neutrality with respect to political terms and expressions
 - Because of neutrality regarding the distinction between refugees and IDPs (internally displaced persons) we either use “displaced persons”, or “refugees/IDPs” (IDPs sometimes with a * or footnote, explaining that it means “internally displaced persons”); or “people who had to leave their homes”.
Or in German: Anstatt “Flüchtlinge” bzw. “Geflüchtete”, “Vertriebene” oder “Intern Vertriebene” verwenden wir “Menschen, die ihr Zuhause verlassen mussten”.
 - For disputed international territorial demarcations we use both names with a slash: E.g.: Enguri bridge marks a border/administrative border
 - We call people who live in Samegrelo or in parts of Abkhazia, “People who speak the Mingrelian dialect”, not “Mingrelians”.