# Release International

# Supporters' Complaints Policy and Procedure

## Introduction

Release International is a Christian organisation and this is expressed in our Ethos Statement and Statement of Faith. The values, attitudes, motivation and relationships of staff and the way the work is achieved is as important as the work itself. We are committed to high standards and to providing an excellent level of service to our supporters and to everyone who engages with Release, and aim to treat everyone in accordance with the Christian values at the heart of our ministry.

However, sometimes, despite our best efforts to prevent them, there can unfortunately be misunderstandings, mistakes or even offences given which gives rise to complaints.

This policy outlines how we deal with supporters' complaints. Appendix A of this policy, Supporters' Complaints Procedure, sets out the procedure for supporters themselves to follow and clearly signposts how to make a complaint about any matter. It indicates how to make a separate appeal about a complaint about Release fundraising, communications and engagement to the Fundraising Regulator in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It further indicates how to make a complaint about Release fundraising, communications and engagement to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator. (OSCR.)

By supporters we mean people or organisations who are registered with an ID number on our database, whether or not they support us financially. If complaints are received from other individuals or organisations, they will be treated in the same way. The Supporters' Complaints Procedure, for supporters themselves to use, and reference to this supporting policy are found on our website and can be sent to anyone on request.

The policy does not apply to Staff, Volunteers, Church Reps or Trustees, who have their own procedures or Grievance Policy for making a complaint about a personal matter. However, all Staff, Volunteers, Church Reps or Trustees who wish to make a complaint as a Release supporter, whether or not it is about fundraising, must also follow Appendix A, the Supporters' Complaints Procedure.

## Aims

- To demonstrate Release's commitment to upholding the requirements of the Fundraising Regulator's Registration scheme (for England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (in Scotland).
- To demonstrate Release's commitment to upholding the requirements of the Information Commissioner's Office for personal data privacy under the Data Protection Act 1998, the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations and the European Union General Data Protection Regulations 2018.
- To define what is meant by a complaint.
- To reduce the likelihood of complaints being received.

- To explain the process by which supporters may make a complaint through the Supporters' Complaints Procedure, compliant with the Fundraising Regulator's Registration Scheme, the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator, the ICO and the Charity Commission.
- To establish a system for recording complaints, compliant with the Fundraising Regulator's Registration Scheme, the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator, the ICO and the Charity Commission.
- To establish a process to implement, monitor, evaluate and review the Supporters' Complaints Policy and Procedure.

## Fundraising Regulator (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)

Release is registered with the Fundraising Regulator and so has a legal duty to abide by their procedure for handling supporters' complaints about fundraising matters in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In order to rationalise complaints management, we use the procedure and timeline issued by the Regulator, for all complaints made to Release International whether of a general or a fundraising nature. This policy and the procedure are compliant with the requirements of the Fundraising Regulator.

Release International is not registered with the Charity Commission in Northern Ireland as we are a cross-border mission charity and there is no requirement for us to be registered in addition to our current registration with the Charity Commission in England and Wales.

## The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (Scotland)

Release is registered with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) and so has a legal duty to abide by their procedure for handling supporters' complaints about fundraising matters in Scotland. In order to rationalise complaints management, we use the procedure and timeline issued by the Regulator for all complaints made to Release International whether of a general or a fundraising nature. This policy and the procedure are compliant with the requirements of the OSCR.

## Definition of a complaint

It is difficult to give a definition of a complaint that would cover every situation. In simple terms, we define a complaint as a communication from a supporter made directly to us about something by which we have disappointed or upset them, even if the complaint is expressed very graciously, or as an enquiry, for example, and whether in writing or verbally.

Complaints can arise for many different reasons. We may receive complaints about our service standards, such as responding promptly enough to enquiries; or supporters may question our use of their data, which falls under data protection issues; and some may object or question our decision making, such as making observations or objections to our choice of international projects which we are able to support.

In the worst cases, the supporter may withdraw their support, and tell others about their displeasure or experience. We will therefore aim by our integrity, courtesy and graciousness to minimise this risk, and instead, by the way we deal with the complaint,

endeavour to demonstrate that we are an organisation that cares deeply about supporter relations, and strives for excellence in all we do, in order to glorify God.

All complaints will be referred to the Supporter Relations Team Leader (SRTL), the UK Operations Manager or the Director of Engagement. Complaints raised on social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook, and comments that could be perceived as a complaint, will be passed to the to the UK Operations Manager to determine any response required. The Head of Communications will agree any public response, which may be in addition to any private response deemed necessary. In accordance with this policy, the Head of Communications will inform the SRTL, the UK Operations Manager or the Director of Engagement of all complaints, or comments that could be perceived as such, received on social networking sites, which will be recorded as detailed below.

## Prevention

All staff receive full induction, including awareness of the Supporters' Complaints Policy, and appropriate training for their role. The Supporter Relations Team (SRT) follow comprehensive Standard Operating Procedures which are updated as required and set out the full process by which they handle all complaints.

## Process for dealing with a complaint

Appendix A of the this policy, available on the website, sets out the Supporters' Complaints Procedure which details how supporters can contact Release to make a complaint, the expected timescales, what we will do and who else can help them to resolve their complaint, including appealing to the Fundraising Regulator if necessary.

The SRT Standard Operating Procedures details for staff the process by which they handle all complaints.

If the complaint regards a Safeguarding issue, the complaint must be dealt with in accordance with the Safeguarding Policy.

## Recordkeeping

All complaints must be logged on our database ThankQ. If complaints are made directly to a member of staff outside the SRT, then they must report that complaint to the SRT within three working days. Where the supporter is not logged on our database, a record should be created.

Every complaint made must have an individual Complaint File set up on the Shared Drive, with a unique reference number, which will contain all communications documentation that has been received or sent for that complaint. The unique reference number must be used on all correspondence and recorded on ThankQ.

We are under an obligation under the Fundraising Regulator's Registration System to hold a full file of complaint correspondence in one place. This will need to be produced in the event that the complainant escalates the complaint to the Fundraising Regulator on appeal.

This is in the form of an Excel log of all complaints received, including those by telephone, which will be maintained by the SRTL and will include the date and nature of the complaint, the ThankQ ID number of the supporter and a summary of any action taken to resolve the complaint. There is a hyperlink from the Excel Supporters' Complaints Log to the individual Complaint File for each complaint. This record will be kept for 24 months following the resolution of the complaint.

At each Board Meeting, the Board of Trustees is informed through the Chair of the UKEC of the number of complaints, how they were dealt with and whether there are any compliance issues arising from the complaints received.

## Breach of Policy

If a member of staff is considered to have breached this policy it will be dealt with in accordance with Release's Disciplinary Policy.

## Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

This policy has been approved by the Trustees. It will be implemented by the SRTL; its effectiveness will be monitored by the UK Operations Manager and outcomes of complaints will be evaluated to feed into the review and future development of policies and practice as appropriate. The policy will be reviewed every two years or sooner as appropriate.

## Appendices

Appendix A – Supporters' Complaints Procedure

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| Lynnette Feist | August 2011 |
| Approved by Trustees | June 2012 |
| Reviewed | January 2015 |
| Reviewed | January 2017 |
| Revised | May 2018 |
| Review | April 2020 |

## Useful Contact Details

The Fundraising Regulator
https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/ 0300 999 3407

Charity Commission
www.charity-commission.gov.uk 0845 300 0218

Release International
www.releaseinternational.org 01689 823491

PO Box 54, Orpington, BR5 4RT
info@releaseinternational.org

**Release International**

**Supporters' Complaints Policy**

**Appendix A – Supporters' Complaints Procedure**

At Release International we care deeply about our Christian calling in Christ; and our vision of a world in which the whole Body of Christ understands persecution and responds prayerfully, pastorally and practically every time a Christian is persecuted.

Without the support of our friends, supporters and donors, we would not be able to help and encourage persecuted Christians around the world.

However, we know that there may be times when we do not meet your expectations.

If this happens we want you to let us know, so we can respond as quickly as possible and take any steps that are needed to stop it happening again.

We take complaints very seriously and we treat them as opportunities to improve, so that we can work better in the future. This is why we are always very grateful to hear from people who are willing to take the time to talk to us. We always thank people who contact us about their problems, concerns or worries about Release.

## How can you contact us with a complaint?

It is simple. You can decide exactly how you would like to get in touch with us:

- You can call us on 01689 823491. Please ask to speak to our Supporter Relations Team Leader or UK Operations Manager. Our phone lines are open Monday to Friday from 10am to 5pm. Outside of these hours you can always leave us a message and a contact number and someone will return your call before midday the next working day.
- You can email us at complaints@releaseinternational.org
- Or you can write to us at:

Complaints
Release International
PO Box 54
Orpington
BR5 4RT

Please let us know your name, home address, email address and contact telephone number in your email or letter so that we can get back in touch with you easily.

## How long will it take?

We will acknowledge all complaints in **writing (email or letter) within seven working days of receipt** of the complaint. We will respond fully and conclusively to all complaints within **28 working days of the acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint**.

Wherever possible we will deal with it more quickly, and if we think it will take longer we will let you know.

We will log the complaint and keep the details of the complaint on our record for **24 months.**

You can contact us in whichever way is most convenient to you and we will respond to you via the same method unless instructed otherwise. Our Supporter Relations Team Leader and UK Operations Manager are ready to help you over the phone, via email or mail.

From experience we have found that the best way to resolve a problem quickly is by telephone.

This way we can make sure that we fully understand the issue and can gather all of the information that we need to resolve the problem in a fast and effective way. We will always make notes of our phone calls to you and record agreed actions and time frames recommended.

In more complex situations where an immediate response is not possible, we will investigate the matter and get back to you as quickly as we can.

We will record your complaint on our Complaints Log and between us we will endeavour to agree on the best way and time to get back in contact with you.

## What we will do

We will work to fix problems, correct mistakes and address concerns as quickly as possible.

Please feel free when contacting us about a complaint, to let us know how you think it could be resolved.

We want to reach the best possible outcome and we want to ensure that we engage in a meaningful and constructive dialogue with you.

We will always treat you with courtesy and respect, listen to what you say, keep you informed about our progress, provide you with a prompt response and tell you who to go to if you want to escalate your complaint further.

We share your complaints with the relevant staff teams and departments for comment and resolution. We report on all complaints to the UK Engagement Committee, which is a Sub-Committee of the Board of Trustees of Release International and directly to our Board. This helps us to fully understand complaints made to us and to make improvements.

From time to time we receive complaints that do not relate directly to something that Release International has done or that we are not in a position to comment on. We are a Christian ministry with limited resources and we must use these in the best way possible. This can mean not engaging in lengthy debates on issues in which we have no direct involvement.

There may be rare occasions when we chose not to respond to a complaint at all. These include:

- When someone unreasonably pursues a complaint that we have already responded to. They will be given escalation points but we may choose not to reply again; we will always inform you of our decision to do this.
- When a complainant is being obviously abusive, prejudiced or offensive in their manner.
- When a complainant is harassing a staff member.
- When a complaint is incoherent or illegible.
- When a complaint has clearly been sent to us and numerous other organisations as part of a bulk mailing or email. In this instance we can chose whether it is necessary for us to reply or not.
- Release International cannot respond to complaints made anonymously. However, we will investigate the complaint and use the information to improve in any way that we can.

## Who else can help?

We trust that our Supporter Relations Team Leader or UK Operations Manager are able to resolve your complaint in an honest, open and satisfactory way. However, if after contacting our Supporter Relations Team Leader or UK Operations Manager you are still unhappy, then you can write and appeal, either by letter or email, directly to our Chair of the Board of Trustees.

Please outline the details of the complaint, why you have not been satisfied with our response up to now and what you would like us to do to put things right. You should contact the Chair of the Board of Trustees **within 14 days** of receipt of the final decision about your complaint given by the Supporter Relations Team Leader or the UK Operations Manager. The decision of the Chair of the Board of Trustees is final Please write to:

The Chair of the Board of Trustees
Release International
PO Box 54
Orpington
Kent
BR5 4RT

Telephone: 01689 823491

Email address: Please contact the Chair of the Board of Trustees, care of: lhayes@releaseinternational.org

Release International is committed to the highest standards in fundraising practice. It is a part of the **Fundraising Regulator's Registration System** for matters arising in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and **The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator in Scotland** . If your complaint is related to fundraising and you feel that it has been unresolved by us, then the Fundraising Regulator can investigate your complaint. **You must contact them within two months of receiving your final response from the Chair of the Board of Trustees.**

Contact can be made with the Fundraising Regulator for fundraising complaints in England, Wales and Northern Ireland via their online complaints form or via telephone: 0300 999 3404.

Contact can be made with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator for fundraising complaints in Scotland via their online complaints form or via telephone: 01382 220446.

**Complaints Unrelated to Fundraising in the UK**

Alternatively if your complaint is related to another area of our work at Release International and you do not feel completely satisfied by our response then you can contact the appropriate regulatory organisation depending on where you live in the UK.

**England and Wales**
If your complaint is for a matter arising in England or Wales, you should contact the Charity Commission at the address below.

The Charity Commission
PO Box 1227
Liverpool
L69 3UG
0845 3000 218
www.charity-commission.gov.uk

**Scotland**
If your complaint is for a matter in Scotland, you should contact the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator at the address below.

The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR)
2nd Floor
Quadrant House
9 Riverside Drive
Dundee
Scotland
DD1 4NY
https://www.oscr.org.uk
info@oscr.org.uk
01382 220446

**Northern Ireland**

If your complaint is related to a matter in Northern Ireland, you should contact the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland at the address below.

Charity Commission for Northern Ireland
257 Lough Road
Lurgan
Craigavon
Northern Ireland
BT66 6NQ
028 3832 0220

You can email the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland using their online form.
If you believe that Release International or its Directors have failed to comply with the law in some other respect, you should direct your complaint to the appropriate national police force:

For England and Wales, please go to: https://online.met.police.uk
For Scotland, please go to: http://www.scotland.police.uk
For Northern Ireland, please go to: https://www.psni.police.uk

## Our promise

We treat all comments and complaints as opportunities to improve our ministry to persecuted Christians worldwide. We are happy to acknowledge the mistakes that we have made, sincerely apologise for them and then try to prevent them from happening again in the future.

**Thank you for helping us to provide a better service.**