

# **SAFEGUARDING ATHLETES FROM HARASSMENT & ABUSE IN SPORTS (SAHAS)**

## **Introduction**

When it comes to sports, we often focus on the physical and mental aspects of the sport. However, it is important to also recognise that athletes are also at risk for harassment and abuse. Harassment and abuse can take many forms, including physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse, bullying, and many more. These have serious consequences for athletes, impacting their physical and mental health and well-being, their self worth, and their dignity.

Athletics Federation of India (AFI) is committed to safeguard our athletes and adopt practices aimed at creating a safe environment, while eliminating harassment and abuse. AFI has developed a Safeguarding Policy to guide the stakeholders against harassment and abuse. This policy outlines the scope, objectives, guiding principles as well as implementation framework.

## **What is Safeguarding**

Safeguarding is the process of protecting vulnerable persons, children and adults, from harassment, abuse and exploitation. Creating a safe and welcoming environment, where everyone is respected and valued, is at the heart of safeguarding. Everyone involved with athletics has a role to play in making sure they actively prevent harassment, abuse or exploitation, listen to accounts from children and adults of their experiences and respond safely and fully if there is a problem.

## **The Need for Safeguarding Policy**

It is important to recognise that harassment and abuse can happen in any sport and at any level. Therefore, it is necessary to have a comprehensive approach to safeguarding athletes as well as all other stakeholders in the system.

Harassment and abuse have also a deep impact at a sporting and an organisational level. The integrity of Athletics, the AFI and all Member Associations are at stake and will be damaged, resulting in athletes' suffering or dropping out, depletion of talent pools, and public disaffection. Prevention of all forms of harassment and abuse represent a major public health priority and the prevention of these behaviours within Athletics is a major concern for the AFI.

Harassment and abuse can occur within an organisational culture that ignores, denies, fails to prevent or even tacitly accepts such opportunities. Risks of harassment and abuse are greater when there is a lack of protection or implementation of policies, codes of conduct, whistleblowing channels and response mechanisms. It is for this reason that AFI has decided to implement the SAHAS policy, to protect and safeguard our athletes.

## **Scope**

This policy applies to AFI, states and districts units affiliated to AFI, its member associations, officials, coaches, concerned staff at coaching venues, camps, training centres, competition venues, athletes, AFI Office, AFI Staff, and any member associated with AFI.

Each stakeholder is required to comply with this Policy and any other policies related to safeguarding in athletics and to take all steps required by AFI to ensure everyone is protected from harassment and abuse. Everyone has the responsibility and ethical obligation to ensure that the athletic environment is respecting the right to safely take part in and enjoy the sport.

## **Principles**

- Everyone has the right to participate, enjoy, and develop personally through athletics in a safe, inclusive environment free from all forms of harassment, abuse and exploitation.
- Everyone, both children and adults, has the right to have their voices heard, particularly if raising a concern about their own or another person's welfare. Everyone should know who to ask help when raising concerns about harassment and abuse or while raising concerns about a particular individual's behaviour.
- Everyone, involved in planning or delivering programmes, or making decisions that affect an athlete (particularly a child), is responsible for care and protection of athletes and should make decisions in their best interest.
- Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and be free from discrimination, whether it is based on sex, caste, race, age, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, or gender identity, beliefs, religious or political affiliations.

## **Purpose**

AFI is committed to safeguarding all those associated with Indian athletics from abuse, harassment and exploitation as well as upholding these principles. In creating safe and positive environments everyone is able to work, compete and enjoy the sport with the confidence that AFI is taking its duty of care seriously. The policy is designed to ensure everyone understands their responsibilities within the safeguarding landscape. In brief, these are :

- The most important step in safeguarding our athletes is raising awareness about the issue. Parents, coaches, and other adults who work with young athletes should be educated about the signs of abuse, harassment, and exploitation and how to report it.

- Athletes should also be taught about what constitutes as abuse and how to speak up if they experience it. Athletes should be made aware of what constitutes harassment, abuse, and exploitation, through education and training programs and the importance of raising concerns expeditiously. These programs should not just be limited to tracks or fields, rather should be taken to schools and homes.
- Providing written materials: Athletes can be given information in the form of brochures, handbooks, or online resources that explain what constitutes harassment, exploitation, and abuse, and how to report it.
- Holding workshops or seminars: Athletes and other stakeholders (coaches, support staff etc) can attend workshops or seminars where they can learn about harassment, exploitation, and abuse and how to recognise it. These sessions can be led by experts in the field, such as social workers, psychologists, or other professionals.
- Incorporating education into existing training programs: Information about harassment, exploitation and abuse should be included in their training programs, such as team meetings or practices. For example, coaches can talk to their teams about the importance of respect, and how to recognise and report harassment and abuse.
- Online training: Offering online trainings that athletes can take on their own schedule.
- Supporting victims of abuse, harassment, and exploitation. This can also be done through establishing partnerships with organisations and institutions engaged in the prevention of abuse, harassment and exploitation within and beyond the sports sector.
- Responding to the concerned raised. Everyone should know to whom they can turn for help when they need to report a concern about a person associated with athletics, whether witnessed directly or through reports from others.
- Reporting concerns expeditiously.

### **Recognizing Harassment and Abusive Behaviours**

The following behaviour defined as different forms of harassment and abuse are strictly prohibited and shall warrant strict action against the perpetrators. If examples are included, it is important to note that they are not exhaustive and that harassment can include any conduct which is unwanted and unwelcome and makes the recipient uncomfortable.

**Harassment-** Harassment relates to unwanted attention or conduct, the violation of dignity and/or the creation of a threatening, hostile, intimidating, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. It includes gender harassment, psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual harassment and neglect. These forms of harassment and abuse may occur in combination or in isolation. Harassment can be perpetrated also through cyber mechanisms and social media, when communicating with peers and fans.

**Gender Harassment-** Gender harassment consists of derogatory treatment of one gender or another, which is systematic and repeated but not necessarily sexual.

**Sexual Harassment** -includes, without limitation, any one or more of the following unwelcome sexually determined acts or behaviour (whether directly or by implication) namely:-

- (i) unwelcome physical contact and advances, such as touching, pinching, pressing oneself onto the body of others, attempting to kiss or caress another person, and stalking;
- (ii) unwelcome sexual advances involving verbal, non-verbal, or physical conduct
- (iii) implicit or explicit unwelcome advances or molestation
- (iv) a demand or request for sexual favours;
- (v) making sexually coloured remarks, ;
- (vi) showing pornography;
- (vii) any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature,
- (viii) implied or explicit promise of preferential treatment in her/ his employment in return for sexual favours;
- (ix) implied or explicit threat of detrimental treatment in her/ his employment in return for sexual favours;
- (x) implied or explicit threat about her/ his present or future employment status in return for sexual favours;
- (xi) interference with her/ his work or creating an intimidating or offensive or hostile work environment for her/ his; or
- (xii) humiliating treatment likely to affect her/ his health or safety.

**Abuse-** Abuse implies that a person's rights are violated or infringed by another. This is based on an abuse of power and trust. It can take place both on and off the field of play and can include physical and psychological abuse, hazing and sexual abuse. It also includes discrimination of any kind whether due to a person's race, caste, sex, ethnic origin, colour, culture, religion, political opinion, marital status, sexual orientation or other difference. In the sport context, it can also involve the manipulation and entrapment of athletes

**Hazing-** Hazing involves abusive initiation rituals that often have sexual components and in which newcomers are targeted.

**Physical abuse** means any deliberate and unwelcome act - such as for example punching, beating, kicking, biting and burning - that causes physical trauma or injury. Such act can also consist of forced or inappropriate physical activity (e.g., age-, or physique-inappropriate training loads; when injured or in pain), forced alcohol consumption, or forced doping practices.

**Psychological abuse** means any unwelcome act including confinement, isolation, verbal assault, humiliation, intimidation, or any other treatment which may diminish the sense of identity, dignity and self-worth.

**Sexual Abuse-** Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing another person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the person is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving individuals in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a person in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse can be perpetrated by both males and females. It is usually committed by individuals in position of power and trust, such as coaches and members of the athlete entourage, as well as family and friends, peer athletes and sports fans.

**Neglect** within the meaning of this Policy means the failure of a coach or another person with a duty of care towards the athlete to provide a minimum level of care to the athlete, which is causing harm, allowing harm to be caused, or creating an imminent danger of harm

## **Responsibilities in Preventing and Tackling Abusive Behaviour**

### Guidelines for AFI and Affiliated Units

- Everyone who is involved at any level in Athletics has the responsibility to contribute to the creation of a safe and enjoyable environment for others to work, compete, assist and participate in the sport. Everyone contributes to the culture of sport; this includes AFI staff, Member Federation officials, athletes, coaches, athletes' supporting staff and spectators. Anyone actively involved in Athletics should be aware of the expected standards of behaviour and what to do when they become aware of behaviours that fall short of these expectations
- Every allegation of harassment or abuse must be properly assessed, and if the case warrants it, investigated and treated. Those responsible for organising athletics competitions, camps, events and opportunities are responsible for providing a safe and inclusive environment, and it must be clear that harassment and abuse will not be tolerated.
- AFI and its affiliated units must take formal action when so requested by the aggrieved person/athlete. It is imperative to provide people with support and by referring them to external support services.

### Guidelines For Athletes, Coaches, Supporting Staff, Volunteers, Officials

- People in positions of trust are responsible for acting as good role models and for recognising and praising positive achievements and behaviours, as well as taking appropriate actions when there are negative behaviours.
- Athletes need to know whom to talk to about any concerns, should feel confident that they will be listened to and actions can be taken. Speaking out can put the athlete at risk of repercussions, both personally and in terms of sport career. Therefore, it is crucial that once this step has been taken, the person reporting on the issue (be it the victim or a witness) feels safe and the response is prompt within the SAHAS system. Furthermore, they should be assured of a safe environment in which they can carry on practicing athletics and should not feel excluded from the sport at any time.
- Athletes need to know what will happen if they raise a concern and should be supported throughout the process by AFI and SAHAS. They should be provided with referrals to support lines and other sources of external help. Victims should be kept informed during the process and the way the issue is dealt with.
- All raised concerns will be investigated to verify their authenticity and to ensure a fair treatment of all parts involved. False accusations made in bad faith will be treated as breaches of the Rules.

## **Implementation**

AFI and affiliated units will work together to implement this policy. It is everyone's responsibility, and is important to raise awareness of the subject. AFI will ensure that this policy is widely disseminated to all relevant persons. All new staff must be informed about the content of this policy as part of their induction. It is the responsibility of every Coach to ensure that all their staff are aware of the policy.

The successful implementation of this policy depends on the mutual cooperation, networking, partnership and solidarity among the stakeholders.

1. Zero Tolerance Policy: The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) has a zero tolerance policy towards any form of harassment, abuse, and exploitation towards athletes, including sexual, physical, and emotional abuse.
2. Reporting Procedures: All the stakeholders are encouraged to report any incidents of harassment or abuse to the SAHAS committee, who will then investigate the matter and take appropriate action.
3. Education and Training: The AFI shall provide education and training to athletes, coaches, and officials on the issue of harassment, abuse, and exploitation, including how to recognise it and how to report it.
4. Support Services: The AFI shall provide support services to athletes who have experienced harassment or abuse, including counselling and therapy.
5. Sanctions: The AFI has the authority to impose sanctions on individuals who are found to have engaged in harassment or abuse, including disqualification from the competition and suspension or expulsion from the federation.
6. Independent Investigation: The AFI may also conduct independent investigations into any incidents of harassment or abuse, in order to ensure a fair and thorough examination of the facts.
7. Compliance with laws: The AFI complies with all relevant laws and regulations regarding harassment and abuse, and will cooperate with law enforcement agencies as necessary.
8. Victim protection: The AFI has a policy in place to protect victim from retaliation and will ensure confidentiality of the victim. Any coercion, retaliation or any other type of unethical behaviour on part of any individual, while the investigation is underway should be reported by the aggrieved person/Complainant immediately to the SAHAS Committee so that it may take appropriate disciplinary action
9. Regular review: The AFI will regularly review and update its policies and procedures to ensure they are in line with the best practices and current laws and regulations.
10. Affiliated Units: Units affiliated by AFI should adopt and implement the safeguarding policy. Proper procedures to be followed once a concern is reported, including investigative and disciplinary procedures.

Affiliated units should ensure that those recruited as a part of the workforce to meet the safeguarding criteria should be regularly trained in safeguarding to ensure they are capable of provide support and advice to those raising safeguarding concerns.

Member Associations must deal with allegations and concerns in a confidential

and discreet manner. AFI/Member Associations should not disclose personal information without prior consent and should do so only when necessary to protect an individual from harm or, where it is required by law.

### **SAHAS Committee**

A committee for “**S**afeguarding **A**thletes from **H**arassment & **A**buse in **S**ports - “SAHAS” can be contacted through email [safeguard@indianathletics.in](mailto:safeguard@indianathletics.in) or reaching out to the members of the SAHAS committee.

If the concern is such that requires involvement of Law Enforcement Agency(s), because of the nature of the incident, then it is essential that they are made aware of the matter as a priority. Medical Support, if required, should be sought in the first instance.

### **Complaint Mechanism**

1. **Who can file a Complaint:** Any aggrieved individual, including an “aggrieved woman” (“**Complainant**”), whether an athlete or whether employed by AFI, who has been subjected to sexual harassment at the workplace, can file a complaint under the Policy (“**Complaint**”).
  - (a) The Complainant can make a complaint against any person, man or woman, who is alleged to have committed harassment or abuse at the workplace and such a person will be referred to as “the **Respondent**.” The Respondent may be an employee, an athlete, or a support staff contracted by AFI.
2. **Particulars to be mentioned in the Complaint:** The Complaint should be (i) in writing; (ii) addressed to the SAHAS Chairman; (iii) and should include the following details:
  - (a) Name and address of the Complainant,
  - (b) Designation/occupation;
  - (c) Name of the Respondent and the designation he/she holds at AFI, if working there and the reporting structure between Complainant and Respondent, if any;
  - (d) Time, date and place where the incident(s) took place and all relevant details of the incident;
  - (e) True, brief and concise facts relevant to the incident;
  - (f) Name of all witnesses and the designation such witnesses hold in AFI;
  - (g) Supporting documents including relevant emails, screenshots of messages/WhatsApp, call details, photographs, recordings, if any; and
  - (h) Relief sought from the SAHAS Committee.
4. Where an aggrieved person is unable to make a complaint in writing, the Presiding Officer will provide all reasonable assistance to the Complainant for making the complaint in writing.
5. **Procedure for filing a complaint:**

- (a) If any individual believes that he/she has been subjected to harassment or abuse/exploitation, he/she may file a written Complaint with the Chair of SAHAS (along with supporting documents); or send an email to [safeguard@indianathletics.in](mailto:safeguard@indianathletics.in) , within three (3) months from the date of incident or from the date of last incident (in case of a series of incidents).
- (b) This time limit of three (3) months may be further extended to a time limit not exceeding three (3) months, if the SAHAS Committee is satisfied that the circumstances which prevented the Complainant from filing a Complaint within the said period warrant such extension. The Committee will record its reasons in writing for accepting such an extension.

## **2. Procedure to be followed on receiving a complaint**

2.1. On receiving a complaint, the Chairperson of the SAHAS Committee must send a copy of the complaint to all the members of the Committee and inform the Complainant in writing of the options available, and at his/her request :

- (a) Initiate conciliation proceedings to settle the matter between the parties.
- (b) Issue a general warning to staff in general without naming/ identifying in any manner either victim or perpetrator, or
- (c) File a complaint about the incident(s) to the police and/or
- (d) Conduct an inquiry by the Committee.

2.2. **Conciliation:** The SAHAS Committee, before initiating an inquiry, and at the Complainant's request, may attempt to settle the matter through conciliation. If the conciliation is successful, the settlement arrived at will be recorded in writing and signed by both the parties and the members of the Committee and forwarded to the AFI. The settlement can include an apology, written undertaking not to commit an act of abuse or harassment, transfer of either party, etc. However, no monetary settlement shall be the basis of conciliation. On the failure of conciliation proceedings to reach a settlement and at the request of the Complainant, the Chairperson will initiate an inquiry into the complaint.

2.3. **Inquiry:** In case no conciliation is requested by the Complainant, conciliation does not result in a settlement, or any term/ condition of the settlement has not been complied with by the Respondent, the SAHAS Committee shall - with the consent of the Complainant - move forward with the process of inquiry.

## **3. INQUIRY PROCESS**

3.1. The Presiding Officer shall make sure that the complaint contains all the relevant particulars, as required above, and give time to refile the complaint with all documents.

3.2. A copy of the final complaint (along with all supporting documents) shall be sent by the SAHAS Committee to the Respondent within seven working days of receiving the complaint



- 3.3. The Respondent will be asked to file a reply within ten (10) working days of receipt of the Complaint along with list of documents, names and addresses of witnesses
- 3.4. The Committee shall investigate the matter of the Complaint in detail. After receiving the reply, the Committee shall examine the Complainant and the respondent and their witnesses after giving them a notice of forty-eight hours.
- 3.5. The Committee may examine any other witnesses that it thinks necessary for a just decision of the case after giving them a notice of forty-eight hours.
- 3.6. The examination of the Complainant, respondent and the witnesses before the Committee will be recorded in writing and signed by the person examined.
- 3.7. The Committee shall have the right to terminate the inquiry proceedings or give an ex-parte decision on the complaint if either the Complainant or the respondent fail without sufficient cause, to present themselves before the IC for three consecutive hearings of the Committee. The termination or ex-parte order shall only be passed after giving a notice of 15 days in writing in advance to the party.

**3.8. Principles of conducting the inquiry:**

- (a) The SAHAS Committee will maintain confidentiality at all times and will direct the parties to do the same. The Committee will ensure that sufficient care is taken to prevent any retaliation against the witnesses
  - (b) During the inquiry process, the Complainant and the Respondent shall refrain from any form of threat, intimidation or influencing of witnesses. The parties shall not be allowed to bring any legal practitioner to represent them in their case at any stage of the proceedings before the Committee.
  - (c) The SAHAS Committee will conduct the inquiry in accordance with the principles of natural justice and will give both parties, the Complainant as well as the Respondent, an opportunity to be heard before the Committee. Based on the testimony of any party/witness, the Committee may put forth additional questions to the Complainant/Respondent/any witness, and ask them to come again.
  - (d) The past sexual history of the complainant shall not be probed into, as such information shall be deemed irrelevant to a complaint of sexual harassment
  - (e) The ICC while dealing with complaints of abuse or harassment at the workplace shall be sensitive to the covert, private and insidious nature of such abuse and harassment and shall take into account that often the complaint may not be able to present direct or corroborative evidence.
- 3.9. **Quorum:** A minimum of three (3) SAHAS Members, including the Chairperson, must be present during the inquiry. If there is any conflict of interest of any of the members of the Committee deciding a particular case, they shall be obliged to disclose their conflict of interest and not participate in the inquiry.

#### **4. FILING OF REPORTS**

- 4.1. The SAHAS Committee must try and complete its investigation within a period of 90 (ninety) days of receiving the written complaint. The Committee shall provide an inquiry report of its findings and recommendations (“**Investigation Report**”) to the President of AFI within a period of 10 (ten) days from the date of completion of the inquiry. A copy of the report including the findings shall be sent to both the Complainant and the Respondent. The Committee may at the request of any witness conceal the identity of witness in the report which is given to the parties.
- 4.2. The SAHAS Committee can recommend the following penalties in case of a finding of guilt:
- (a) Issuing a letter of warning
  - (b) Issue a written reprimand that will be placed in the personal file of the Respondent for an offence that is deemed minor by the Committee;
  - (c) Asking the respondent to tender a written apology;
  - (d) Asking the respondent to undergo counselling sessions or carry out community service
  - (e) Transfer or suspension without pay;
  - (f) Withholding of promotion and/or increments;
  - (g) Deducting fines from the salary of the Respondent for payment as compensation to the Complainant. Such compensation shall be decided keeping in mind the following: the mental trauma, pain, suffering and emotional distress caused to the Complainant; loss in career opportunity due to the incident of sexual harassment; medical expenses incurred by the Complainant for any physical/psychiatric treatment; income and financial status of the Respondent; and feasibility of such payment in lump sum or in instalments; and/or
  - (h) Dismissal of the Respondent or removal from the team.
- 4.3. AFI shall decide and act on the recommendations of the Committee within a period of thirty days from the receipt of the Investigation Report, unless an appeal against the findings and recommendations has been filed by either party before the President of AFI within 30 days.
- 4.4. The appeal shall be decided by the President of AFI.

#### **5. PUNISHMENT FOR FALSE COMPLAINT:**

In case a false Complaint is knowingly filed or false testimony is knowingly given by a witness, including the forging of documents, and the investigation proves that the motivation of the Complainant or the witness was malicious, the Committee may recommend disciplinary action to be initiated against the Complainant or the witness, which may include dismissal from service. The SAHAS Committee shall record its reasons in writing for reaching such a conclusion.

However, a mere inability to substantiate a complaint or provide adequate proof shall not attract action against the Complainant. Further, the Complainant’s

malicious intent shall only be established after completion of the investigation in accordance with the procedure prescribed under this Policy. AFI wishes to clarify that this provision is not intended to discourage an aggrieved person from coming forward with any Complaints. AFI recognises that some claims may be difficult to prove or support. These types of Complaints shall not be considered as false accusations.

#### **6. SAHAS COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

1. Ms. Anju Bobby George (Chairperson)
2. Ms. Vrinda Bhandari (Convener)
3. Ms. Soma Biswas (Member)
4. Dr. Abhishek Tandon (Member)
5. Ms. Harwant Kaur (Member)
6. Ms. Suman Rawat Mehta (Member)
7. Mr. Rajeev Kumar (Member)

#### Resources -

There are numerous resources available a few of which are the following -

- IOC Athlete Safeguarding Toolkit can be found [here](#).
- World Athletics Integrity Code of Conduct can be found [here](#).
- International Safeguards for Children in Sports can be found [here](#).
- Safe Sport website with resources can be found [here](#).
- World Athletics Strategy for Growth can be found [here](#).

#### Review -

The policy will be reviewed annually by the Athletics Federation of India.