

First Zen Institute of America Anti-Harassment Policy

Effective Date: August 8, 2026

1. Purpose

First Zen Institute of America (FZI) is a small, private, non-profit, all-volunteer Buddhist organization, governed by its bylaws and purpose and incorporated as a church under Article 10 of the New York Religious Corporations Law. The organization is committed to maintaining a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment for all FZI members as well as for non-member participants and visitors.

It is FZI's policy to prohibit discriminatory, sexual, and other forms of harassment of anyone insofar as they are on-site at FZI or otherwise involved in FZI activities off-site. This policy aligns with New York State Human Rights Law and New York City Human Rights Law, protecting against discrimination effected by threats or actions concerning membership in, or residence at, an all-volunteer organization such as FZI, and offering specific legal remedies. Further, the wider purpose of this policy is to envision that everyone in their involvement with FZI will be free from all forms of harassment on the basis of sex, age, race, color, national origin, religion, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, citizenship, as well as other personal characteristics, and to foster community cohesion by FZI procedures that recognize and address any such concerns that may arise.

In FZI's horizontally-structured religious organization, there is no hierarchy of religious authority among its members. All members learn from one another. And while there are administrative roles within the organization, these rotating roles confer no religious authority. However, FZI policy is sensitive to the risk of power imbalances and undue influence that may occur in religious and other organizations between senior members and those more junior, either members or visitors, due to unfounded perceptions of authority. To this end, senior members, including board members and officers, will endeavor to exemplify the standards of behavior consonant with those set forth in this policy.

Harassment of any kind undermines our mission. Processes will be introduced below to address each harassment complaint.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- Members
- Board members and officers
- Resident Students
- Visiting participants

It covers conduct:

- During FZI activities, events, and meetings
- In virtual spaces (email, messaging, social media)
- At off-site or informal gatherings connected to FZI

3. What is Harassment?

Harassment is any unwelcome behavior that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

Under **New York City law**, harassment does **not** need to be severe or pervasive. Even conduct that does not go beyond **petty slights or trivial inconveniences** may violate this policy.

4. Prohibited Conduct

4.1 Discriminatory Harassment

Harassment based on protected characteristics, including:

- Race, color, ethnicity, national origin
- Religion or creed
- Gender, gender identity, or expression
- Sexual orientation
- Age
- Disability
- Immigration or citizenship status
- Any other protected status under NYC law

4.2 Sexual Harassment

Includes:

- Unwanted sexual comments, jokes, or advances
- Requests for sexual favors
- Inappropriate touching or physical contact
- Sharing sexual images or messages

4.3 General Misconduct

Even if not based on a protected category, the following are prohibited:

- Bullying, intimidation, or threats
- Repeated disrespectful or degrading remarks
- Cyber harassment (e.g., texts, DMs -Direct Messages - social media posts)
- Disruptive or exclusionary behavior

5. Expectations for Members

All members of the organization are expected to:

- Treat others with respect and professionalism
- Help maintain a welcoming environment
- Speak up or report concerns

Board and senior members must:

- Model appropriate behavior consistent with this policy
- Take all concerns seriously
- Act promptly when issues arise

6. Reporting Concerns

Because this is a small organization, multiple reporting options are essential.

How to Report

Concerns may be reported to:

- Any board member
- Board President or another officer of FZI
- A designated contact person: [Name/Email]

Reports will be submitted in writing as outlined in section 14.

No one is required to report to a person involved in the concern.

7. Response & Resolution Process

Response

A. The organization will:

1. Review all reports promptly
2. Speak with involved individuals as appropriate
3. Maintain confidentiality to the extent possible
4. Take reasonable steps to resolve the issue

Because the organization is small and all-volunteer, responses may be informal but will always aim to be **fair, respectful, and timely**.

B. Resolution Process

1. Upon receipt of a complaint, the Board of Directors will establish an Investigatory Committee (IC) composed of three FZI senior members who have no involvement in the matter under review.
2. As a threshold matter, the IC will offer the complainant and the respondent the opportunity to directly address and resolve the issue at hand between them with the assistance of an independent neutral mediator assigned to facilitate the mediation - through a local NYC Conflict Dispute Resolution Center (CDRC) or other such mediation service (including the use of mediation or other restorative justice processes as appropriate at any point in the complaint process). No one else from FZI will be present at the mediation, which is voluntary and confidential, and which empowers the participants to hear each other out and come to their own outcome. Again, no one is compelled to participate in the mediation process, and no decision is made as to outcome except by the participants themselves; and the mediator does not judge the dispute or cast blame. CDRC mediations are usually free or performed for a nominal cost.
3. If the mediation does not result in direct resolution, the IC investigation will proceed, with a determination made as soon as possible, but no later than 4 months after the initiation of the complaint. At the discretion of the IC, the investigatory process may involve the use of an independent investigator.
4. When the IC has made its determination, it will be presented to the Board of Directors as a motion for a vote (excluding any Board member involved as a principal of, or witness to, the matter at hand) on the final disposition of the matter consistent with this policy.

8. Consequences for Violations

If this policy is violated, to the extent permitted by corporate law and the FZI bylaws, actions may include:

- Verbal or written warning
- Suspension and removal from specific activities and/or roles
- A request for the respondent to the complaint to attend an anti-harassment training
- Suspension or removal from all activities and/or roles.
- Removal from board and/or senior membership.
- Permanent termination of FZI membership and/or permanent prohibition from accessing FZI premises and participating in off-site activities.

9. Anti-Retaliation

Retaliation against anyone who:

- Raises a concern, or
- Participates in a review

is strictly prohibited.

Retaliation will be treated as a separate violation of this policy.

10. External Rights (NYC-Specific)

Members and other participants may also file complaints with:

- New York City Commission on Human Rights
- New York State Division of Human Rights

Please note that New York City law protects **volunteers and non-employees**, even in small organizations.

11. Training & Awareness

While formal training may not be legally required for all-volunteer organizations, FZI will:

- Share a **brief written harassment prevention guide with members and visitors.**
 - For example, in the introductory materials handout and online.
- Review expectations at onboarding or first meeting
- Training resources will be made available as appropriate in order to foster awareness of the issues at hand.

12. Communication & Accessibility

This policy will be:

- Shared with all volunteers and board members
- Available digitally (Google Drive, email, etc.)
- Provided upon request

13. Commitment to Community Standards

As an all-volunteer organization, we rely on mutual respect and trust. Everyone shares responsibility for maintaining a safe and inclusive environment.

14. Harassment Complaint Form

If you believe that you have been subjected to any kind of harassment or other form of discrimination, including sexual harassment, you are encouraged to complete this form and submit it to the person(s) identified in number 6 above. FZI has a zero-tolerance policy towards retaliation for filing a complaint.

Complainant Information

Name:

Email:

Phone number:

Preferred Communication Method: Email, Phone, In person

Complaint Information

1. Your complaint of harassment is made about:

Name:

Title:

2. What was the nature of the harassment or discrimination?

Please describe what happened and how it is affecting you. Please use additional sheets of paper if necessary and attach any relevant documents or evidence.

3. Date(s) harassment occurred: _____

Is the harassment continuing? yes or no

4. Please list the name and contact information of any witnesses or individuals who may have information related to your complaint

The last question is optional but may help the investigation.

5. Have you previously complained or provided information (verbal or written) about related incidents? If yes, when and to whom did you complain or provide information?

If you have retained legal counsel and would like us to work with them, please provide their contact information.

Signature: _____ Date: _____