

## South Asian Network for Secularism & Democracy

### Constitution and Bylaws

#### Preamble:

The people of South Asia, currently identified as citizens of various nation states in the geographical region of South Asia or scattered in diasporic communities across the nations of the globe, share a history and culture that is a complex weave of diversity, confluence, conflict, and mutual transformation.

Despite the current domination of differences along the lines of nation-state interests and religious identity that harden into and are consolidated by military and civil violence, the people of South Asia share a common interest in peace, friendship across borders, education, health, housing, and environmental, economic, and cultural well being.

The South Asian diaspora, though currently reflecting the dominant divisions afflicting the nation states in South Asia, has, by its positioning outside these states, the potentiality of forging a secular and democratic identity that can foreground and promote the common interest of the South Asian people against the current state of destructive violence and disabling militarization.

A secular and democratic South Asian diaspora can help to bring about peace and well-being in South Asia by affirming respect for human rights, guided but not limited by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, demanding the rule of law, promoting the full and equal participation of all people in the economic, cultural, social, and political life of the region, and supporting the people in this region who are working toward these goals.

The formation of such a secular democratic identity within the South Asian diaspora in Canada, with the aim of facilitating the realization of the above-mentioned common interest of the people of South Asia, shall be the goal of this organization.

The organization shall be a non-profit society.

#### 1.0 Name

The name of the Organization shall be South Asian Network for Secularism & Democracy, hereinafter SANSAD.

#### 2.0 Definitions

In this *Constitution and Bylaws*,

“Democracy” means a non-ascriptive system of citizenship that affords an individual full and unrestricted participation in the political, social, economic, legal organization and decision-making of the state.

“Diaspora” means a collective of individuals who identify themselves as of South Asian origin but are residing outside of South Asia.

“Secularism” means the separation between religious institutions and the state. It is based upon the unequivocal recognition and acceptance of all faiths or non-faith based humanist persuasions.

“Secular society” means a society where an individual is not persecuted or discriminated against for their religious, spiritual, or intellectual choices or practices.

“South Asia” means a geographic region consisting of the following sovereign countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

### **3.0 Aims and Objectives**

The purpose of the SANSAD will be:

- a. To promote the appreciation of the multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, multi-religious, multi-national, and multi-state heritage of South Asia.
- b. To promote the tenets of democracy, the rule of law, constitutionalism, and secularism in South Asia.
- c. To promote peace, harmony, and mutual respect between peoples belonging to different countries of South Asia as well as between the various religious and cultural groups throughout South Asia.
- d. To educate the South Asian diaspora in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia in particular and North America in general regarding the social economic, political challenges and strengths of the various South Asian peoples.
- e. To disseminate information on human and civil rights of South Asian people, especially the minorities in the various states.
- f. To publish journals, pamphlets and newspaper articles, and disseminate such materials in the Lower Mainland of BC, in South Asia and elsewhere in the world which may be conducive to the attainment of the aforesaid objectives.
- g. To invite speakers, artists and other persons from South Asia and elsewhere to promote the aforesaid objectives.
- h. To raise funds to support the above objectives.
- i. To arrange such activities and functions as may be necessary to raise the finances required to carry out the aforesaid objectives.
- j. To do all such other things and matters to enable the attainment of the aforesaid objectives and any matters incidental thereto.
- k. To maintain solidarity and communication with organisations of all nationalities pursuing objectives similar to the foregoing in this section in South Asia and elsewhere and give them any lawful support.

### **4.0 Membership**

#### **3.01 General**

The membership of SANSAD is open to any individual or organization subscribing to its objectives.

## **5.0 Composition**

SANSAD shall consist of all members in good standing. A member in good standing is the one who

- a) Agrees with the objectives of SANSAD.
- b) Has paid all membership dues as determined by SANSAD.

## **6.0 Honorary Life Members**

- a) SANSAD, through a simple majority vote, may elect any person to honorary life membership.
- b) Honorary life members are absolved from payment of annual membership fees and may attend all meetings of SANSAD.
- c) Honorary Life members may hold office and vote at meetings of the SANSAD.

## **7.0 The Board of Directors**

### **7.01 General**

The governance of SANSAD shall be vested in a Board of Directors (hereinafter called the Board).

### **7.02 Principles**

The Board operates by the following principles:

- a) SANSAD members are the owners of the SANSAD and its assets.
- b) The Board acts for the membership as trustees. The Board speaks for SANSAD and provides leadership.
- c) The Board is mandated to liaise with the like-minded organisations or individuals for the purpose of furthering the beliefs, values and goals of SANSAD.

### **7.03 Composition of the Board**

- a) The Board shall consist of no less than 7 and no more than 25 members.
- b) The Board may co-opt members between AGM's on the recommendation of the Executive.

### **7.04 Election of the Board**

SANSAD at its Annual General Meeting shall elect the members of the Board.

### **7.05 Term of Office of the Board**

The Board shall be elected for a one-year term.

### **7.06 Meetings of the Board**

- a) The Board shall meet at least once every three months.
- b) The Board shall determine how its meetings are chaired.
- c) The quorum for a meeting of the Board shall be 25% of the Board.

### **7.07 Expectation of a Board Member**

The nominal expectations of a Board member are set out in Appendix 1 to this Constitution and Bylaws.

### **7.08 The Board Procedures**

The Board shall

- a) Follow a consensus model, failing which 'the Robert's rules of order'

shall apply;

- b) Board members will not be remunerated for their work. They may be reimbursed for travel and out of pocket expenses when on SANSAD business.

## **8.0 Committees of the Board**

### **8.01 General**

The Board may organize and direct its business by establishing ad-hoc Committees and by working with the standing Committees.

### **8.02 Ad Hoc Committees**

- a) The Board may establish Ad Hoc Committees.
- b) When establishing an Ad Hoc Committee the Board must provide written terms of reference clearly articulating the following:
  - I. The purpose and mandate;
  - II. Date by which the committee business must be finished;
  - III. Membership.

### **8.03 Standing Committees**

The Board shall appoint the following Standing Committees:

The Communications Committee. The terms of reference of this Committee are contained in Appendix 2.

The Committee on Women and Gender Issues. The terms of reference of this committee are contained in Appendix 3.

The Board may appoint other standing committees.

## **9.0 Duties of the Board**

The Board shall

- a. Provide guidance and leadership.
- b. Liaise and communicate with other professional and fraternal organizations.
- c. Present to the membership an Annual Report.

## **10.0 Signature on Documents**

- a) Any documents to be signed on behalf of SANSAD shall be deemed valid when signed by any of its Officers as set out in section 11 below.
- b) All cheques shall be valid when signed by the Treasurer and another member of the Executive so designated.

## **11.0 Officers of the Board**

### **11.01 Composition**

The Executive Committee, hereinafter the Executive, shall consist of the following officers:

- a) President
- b) Vice President
- c) Secretary
- d) Treasurer
- e) A member elected at the AGM for a designated task.

### **11.02 Election of the Executive**

The Executive officers shall be elected at the Annual General Meeting.

### **11.03 Term of Office of the Board**

The Executive officers shall be selected for a period of 1 year.

### **11.04 Executive Vacancies**

In the event of a vacancy caused due to resignation, retirement or death of an officer, the Board may appoint a member in good standing for the remainder of the term.

### **11.05 Executive Meetings**

The Executive may meet on a need-basis.

### **11.06 Executive Procedures**

The Board shall follow a consensus model, failing which 'the Robert's rules of order' shall apply.

## **12.0 Financial Powers of the Board and the Executive**

- a) The Executive Committee shall have the power to authorize all regular and routine expenses. Any expense deemed to be otherwise and not falling within subsection (b) or (c) below, shall be approved by the Board. All ambiguity as to the status of the expense shall be determined by the Board.
- b) An ad-hoc committee shall approve all expenses pertaining to its mandate.
- c) The Standing Committees shall approve all expenses pertaining to their mandate.
- d) The Board may set limits or budget for expenses under sub-section (b) and (c) above.

## **13.0 Functions and Responsibilities of the President**

- a) To act as the Chief Spokesperson for the SANSAD.
- b) To liaise with outside entities.
- c) To sign legal documents when necessary.
- d) May delegate any or all his/her duties to other members of the Executive.

## **14.0 Functions and responsibilities of the Vice President**

In the absence of the President, the Vice-President shall exercise all the responsibilities of the President.

## **15.0 Functions and responsibilities of the Secretary**

The Secretary shall

- a) In consultation with the Executive or the President, develop and distribute an agenda for all SANSAD and Board meetings.
- c) Take minutes at all meetings.
- d) Maintain all SANSAD records.
- e) Share with the President the task of maintaining communication.

## **16.0 Functions and responsibilities of the Treasurer**

The Treasurer shall

- a) Maintain all financial records of SANSAD.
- b) Collect all membership dues
- c) Operate a bank account.
- d) Present financial reports at all meetings of the Board and prepare and present annual financial report at the Annual SANSAD Meeting.

## **17.0 SANSAD Meetings**

### **17.01 Annual General Meeting**

- a) The annual general meeting (AGM) of the SANSAD shall be held annually.
- b) A minimum of 21 days' notice shall be given for the AGM.

### **17.02 Special Meetings**

A minimum of 10% of all members in good standing may ask for a special meeting of the SANSAD. A notice for such meeting, including a clearly laid out agenda, must be filed with the Secretary. Upon receiving a petition signed by a requisite number of members, the Secretary shall convene a special meeting within 30 days

## **18.0 Quorum**

25% of members in good standing shall constitute a quorum of SANSAD.

## **19.0 Amendments**

- a) Any amendments to this Constitution shall require a notice of motion presented in writing signed by at least 3 members in good standing, filed with the Secretary, and such notice of motion shall be forwarded to all members for consideration at the AGM.
- b) Amendments to the constitution shall require a 2/3 majority of those present..

## APPENDIX 1

### Constitution and Bylaws of

South Asian Network for Secularism & Democracy

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#### BOARD MEMBERS TIME COMMITMENT

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##### *GUIDING PRINCIPLES*



Membership on Board reflects a commitment to human rights, peace, democracy, the rule of law, and secularism.



The Board operations will be efficient.



##### **TIME REQUIREMENTS FOR BOARD MEMBERS**

###### 2.1 ***REGULAR MEETINGS***

- a) Regular Board meetings shall be held at least once every three months.
- b) ***Annual General Meeting:*** Members are expected to attend the SANSAD AGM to be held once every year.

###### 2.2 ***COMMITTEE WORK***

- a) Board members will be expected to sit on committees.
- b) The committees may have regular meetings.

###### 2.3 ***OTHER TIME COMMITMENT***

Members are expected to act as a linkage between the Board and community groups.

## APPENDIX 2

**SOUTH ASIAN NETWORK FOR  
SECULARISM & DEMOCRACY  
COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE**

**Terms of Reference**

## Why Communications Committee

Communication is the most basic task of our organization in our goal to mobilize the South Asian community, inform the wider community in Canada, maintain links with other organizations like ours across the globe, and counter the anti-democratic, divisive, and militaristic propaganda of those who benefit from and foster the state of violent division among people and states in South Asia.

The Communications Committee shall be the instrument of SANSAD in performing this essential task. It will coordinate a process of on-going communication with organizations in the South Asian community, maintain channels of communication with various media, both locally and internationally, and develop means of widely disseminating our views and countering views that oppose democratic and secular values, particularly with reference to South Asia.

1.0

Name

The official name of the committee shall be *Communications Committee*, hereinafter the Committee.

2.0

Status

The Committee shall

- a) be a specialised standing committee of the Board of Directors (the Board) of South Asian Network for Secularism and Democracy (SANSAD).
- b) advise the Board in all matters related to internal and external communications
- c) ensure dissemination of SANSAD views and policies within membership and beyond as per section 3.0 below.

3.0

Purpose

The Committee shall:

- a) **Develop and Implement** a comprehensive communications strategy supporting goals, vision, mission, and policies of SANSAD as well as information regarding its activities and about the issues requiring immediate concern or action.

- b) **Provide** leadership in development and implementation of a large variety of methods in which SANSAD communicates with membership and with external partnerships, coalitions, media, and general public at large.
- c) **Publish** newsletters, press releases, notices using traditional and electronic methods.
- e) **Mobilise** the targeted entities, the South Asian Diaspora community at large, community collectives, fraternal organisations and groups, the media, academic institutions etc.
- d) **Participate** in organising events.

4.0

Membership

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The Committee shall consist of five (5) members.  
The Committee may co-opt any number of members from within and outside the organization.

5.0

Committee Officers

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The Committee shall have the following officers:

- a) Chair person
- b) Secretary

6.0

Tasks

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**a) Data Management:**

- Maintain a database on SANSAD supporters, friends, community groups, media, and other fraternal organisations
- Develop and manage a news clipping service.

**b) Publish, Develop, and Maintain:**

- A quarterly newsletter for members and supporters.
- Other SANSAD publications.
- A SANSAD website.
- A web-based list concerning secularism and democracy.

**c) Other tasks:**

- Make regular reports, recommendations, and presentations to the Board respecting the communications objectives of SANSAD.
- Subscribe to, monitor, and scan various related lists and web-sites.

- Organize letter writing to politicians in and outside of Canada and South Asia.
- Contribute regular “guest columns” to community newspapers and try to get on talk shows, etc.
- Develop a comprehensive plan for communicating with youth and women.
- Organize movies and video shows on issues concerning SANSAD.