The Evidence and Integrity (E&I) Framework

Evidence, Not Assurances

Independent scrutiny of claims and research in the human rights and humanitarian sectors



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EIGHT | PROPOSAL | NOV 2026

Human rights and humanitarian organizations operate in distinct but overlapping sectors, wielding considerable influence over policy, courts, funding, media and public debate. Yet while their finances and governance may face external oversight, the evidence, methods and claims underpinning their influence are not subject to a consistent system of independent scrutiny.

Repeated controversies expose a longstanding anomaly: despite established professional standards and some external oversight, organizations largely assess their own research practices and claims. No consistent system independently verifies application of standards governing evidence, research and public claims — an accountability gap out of step with expectations in fields including scientific research, clinical trials and financial reporting.

The E&I Framework proposes four connected mechanisms for independently scrutinizing organizations' research, public claims and the institutional practices underpinning them. It helps organizations demonstrate the quality of their work and strengthen the confidence of those who rely on it.

This proposal is a basis for structured consultation and piloting with human rights and humanitarian professionals, organizations, governments, regulators, and independent experts. Its standards, governance, verification procedures, participation and implementation would be developed with regard to relevant national laws and regulatory requirements.

EXISTING STANDARDS AND THE ACCOUNTABILITY GAP

Human rights and humanitarian organizations have long asserted the rigor and reliability of their research and public claims. Yet their credibility has rested primarily on one source of assurance: themselves. Whether the standards they profess to uphold are actually implemented and followed has rarely been subject to systematic independent verification.

Important standards and accountability initiatives already exist in both sectors. But their existence must be distinguished from their visibility, adoption, implementation and independent verification. Guidelines may exist for decades without becoming part of how professionals are trained, investigations conducted or reports reviewed and approved.

Formal policies, internal investigations and institutional assurances do not, by themselves, establish that standards have been followed or that serious failures have been adequately disclosed to those relying on an organization's work.

Humanitarian sector. The Sphere Standards establish minimum standards for humanitarian assistance, while the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) addresses quality, accountability, professional conduct and complaints, with mechanisms for independent verification and certification. These are significant initiatives but focus primarily on humanitarian operations rather than scrutiny of organizations' evidence, research and public claims.

Human rights sector. The Lund–London Guidelines, OHCHR's Manual on Human Rights Monitoring and the Berkeley Protocol provide guidance on fact-finding, evidence collection, verification and reporting. Yet the extent to which these standards are adopted, implemented and consistently applied within organizations' research and editorial processes is not systematically assessed across the sector.

The remaining gap. Across both sectors, there is no consistent system for independently verifying the application of standards governing evidence, research and public claims; investigating credible allegations of methodological misconduct outside organizational management; publicly documenting findings and corrective action; or protecting professionals who raise concerns.

The proposed E&I Framework seeks to close this gap by building on existing standards, making their implementation independently assessable and establishing a public record of findings.

THE FOUR MECHANISMS AT A GLANCE

01 The E&I Pact
SETS THE STANDARDS

Eight public standards turn professional commitments into demonstrable, independently assessable requirements for organizations' claims, work and responses to failures.

02 The E&I Check
MAKES THE COMMITMENT VISIBLE

A recognizable mark on outputs links to the organization's own declaration of which quality controls it completed. The declaration is auditable, not independent certification.

03 The E&I Council
PROVIDES INDEPENDENT OVERSIGHT

An independent Council safeguards standards, oversees methodology and issues findings. It offers a confidential channel for professionals to report research concerns and abusive practices, including retaliation and misuse of NDAs, breaking the closed loop of organizational self-investigation. Professional staff examine records, test outputs, investigate concerns and assess compliance, including scrutiny of specific claims and practices of nonparticipating organizations.

04 The E&I Index
MAKES ACCOUNTABILITY VISIBLE

A public record tracks independently assessed findings, deficiencies, corrections, remedial action, verified improvements and non-cooperation, distinguishing output-specific findings from broader institutional assessments.

PACT
= Standards

CHECK
= Commitment

COUNCIL
= Independent Verification

INDEX
= Public Accountability

01 The E&I Pact

SETS THE STANDARDS

PROFESSIONAL INDEPENDENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The credibility of human rights and humanitarian work rests on a fundamental principle: professional duties to evidence, accuracy and methodological integrity must take precedence over institutional interests and personal convictions alike. As in other professions whose work carries public consequences, researchers' first obligation is to the evidence and to shared professional standards, not to the institution that employs them. Organizations must not dictate findings to serve advocacy, fundraising or reputational interests, and researchers must not allow personal convictions or advocacy goals to override evidence. Both must be accountable to shared professional standards, with independent scrutiny where those standards may have been breached.

The Pact proposes eight standards for the evidence, research and public claims of human rights and humanitarian organizations, and the institutional practices underpinning them.

The standards apply to organizational claims and outputs — including reports, briefings, submissions, testimony, press releases, interviews, websites and social media — and to the institutional practices that underpin them.

1 Evidence & Sourcing

To ensure claims rest on identifiable and assessable evidence, material factual claims must have a traceable evidentiary basis. Organizations must record the sources supporting significant claims, assess their reliability and distinguish genuinely independent corroboration from repetition of the same underlying source.

2 Methodology

To make clear how evidence became findings and allow the process to be independently assessed, organizations must disclose how evidence was gathered, selected, tested and analyzed, and how findings and conclusions were reached. Substantive research outputs must publish or link to the methodology used and identify any significant departure from it.

3 Review, Verification & Investigation

Organizations must retain auditable records of sources, verification, methodological and editorial review, contrary evidence, right of reply and approvals, demonstrating that safeguards were followed in practice. Credible allegations of methodological misconduct, suppressed evidence or manipulated findings must be independently investigated, with outcomes and corrective action documented. Policies and assurances alone do not establish compliance. Confidentiality must be protected through secure review, redaction or alternative verification, without becoming a blanket exemption from scrutiny. Where verification is impossible, findings must distinguish unverified compliance from demonstrated deficiencies.

4 Research Conditions

To account for conditions that may limit, shape or distort the evidence, each output must disclose significant restrictions on access, sources or verification, and any control, coercion or interference affecting the research. Those conditions must be reflected in the scope, certainty and language of the findings.

5 Consistency, Context & Fairness

To guard against selective or outcome-driven research, organizations must publicly explain significant decisions about what to investigate, include or omit that could materially affect findings, with supporting records available for independent assessment. They must demonstrate how material contrary evidence and plausible alternative explanations were addressed, apply consistent standards to comparable cases, justify significant differences in treatment, and give subjects of serious criticism a meaningful opportunity to respond. Independent assessments must examine whether selection, omission or framing materially distorted findings.

6 Transparency & Public Communications

To ensure consistent standards across all outputs, public communications — including social media — must meet the same standards of accuracy, evidence and qualification as formal research. Organizations must be able to demonstrate that public claims faithfully reflect the underlying evidence, limitations and degree of certainty, without omitting material qualifications, overstating conclusions or presenting allegations as established fact. Significant challenges or new evidence must be assessed, with decisions to correct, qualify or retain disputed claims documented and open to independent review.

7 Corrections & Remedial Action

To ensure the public record reflects known errors, organizations must promptly and prominently correct material errors, omissions, and misleading claims wherever they appeared, document remedial action and track whether identified problems have been resolved. Corrections must appear on the original content and in a searchable public record stating what changed and why and extend to subsequent outputs that repeated or relied on the error. Where deficiencies are identified, organizations must document corrective measures, responsible decision-makers and implementation deadlines. The Council may subsequently assess whether the measures were implemented and whether they addressed the underlying failure. Where identified deficiencies materially affect the reliability of published findings or claims, organizations must promptly disclose their significance to relevant audiences, including funders and institutional users who relied on the affected work.

8 Safe Reporting

To ensure concerns can be raised and investigated independently of organizational management, the Pact provides a confidential reporting channel for staff, former staff, partners and affected communities. Council staff assess and investigate credible allegations of research misconduct, retaliation and misuse of NDAs or other restrictions to suppress evidence or disclosures. An anonymized public record documents concerns, findings and corrective action, while protecting those who report. Insufficient evidence and non-cooperation are recorded separately.

02 The E&I Check

MAKES THE COMMITMENT VISIBLE

A recognizable public mark on organizational outputs — from research reports and submissions to press releases, interviews and social media — links to a standardized checklist declaring which quality controls the organization completed before publication. These include source verification, fact-checking, methodological and editorial review, consideration of alternative explanations and contrary evidence, consistent treatment of comparable cases, right of reply, legal review and final approval.

Each control is marked completed, not completed or not applicable, with a brief explanation for any control not completed or deemed inapplicable. Each Check carries a unique reference number linking to the public declaration. The controls required depend on the nature and significance of the output, but their definitions remain consistent. Declarations must be supported by records available for independent audit.

The Check is an organizational declaration, not a certification or award based on an E&I Index assessment. Its declarations remain subject to independent scrutiny, with findings recorded separately in the Index.

The mark makes quality controls visible to the public, creates a traceable declaration for independent scrutiny, and makes the absence of a Check immediately apparent.

ILLUSTRATIVE E&I CHECK

E&I CHECK · Organizational attestation — not independently verified

QUALITY CONTROL	DECLARED STATUS
Source verification	Declared completed
Fact-checking	Declared completed
Methodological review	Declared completed
Editorial review	Declared completed
Alternative explanations and contrary evidence	Declared completed
Consistency across comparable cases	Declared completed
Right of reply	Not completed — reason recorded
Legal review	Not applicable — reason recorded
Final approval	Declared completed
RECORD: EIC-2027-00481 (ILLUSTRATIVE)	

Completion of a control does not establish its adequacy: independent assessment may examine both whether the procedure occurred and whether it met the applicable standard.

03 The E&I Council

PROVIDES INDEPENDENT OVERSIGHT

Independent scrutiny is routine in fields where evidence and claims carry significant consequences, from scientific research and financial reporting to official statistics and advertising. While oversight mechanisms differ, the principle is the same: consequential claims should not depend solely on the assurances of those making them.

The E&I Council is a proposed independent, non-governmental oversight body for the human rights and humanitarian sectors. Its remit covers organizations' research, claims and the institutional practices underpinning them, including the treatment of staff and others who raise concerns about misconduct or failures of integrity. Compliance must be demonstrated through evidence and practice, not policies, reputation or internal assurances.

Council members safeguard standards, oversee methodology and issue findings; professional staff examine records, test outputs, assess compliance and investigate credible concerns.

Members would be appointed through an open, transparent and merit-based process, with independent screening of qualifications and conflicts of interest. Founding appointments would be overseen by an independent selection panel, whose composition and appointment procedures would be developed via consultation and piloting. Members would serve fixed, staggered terms and be subject to conflict-of-interest, recusal and cooling-off rules. Membership would draw on relevant expertise while safeguarding independence from organizations subject to oversight. No organization, government, donor, founder or political interest may control appointments, assessments or findings. Governance, membership, funding and methodology would be public, with diversified funding and periodic independent reviews of Council performance.

The Council assesses, verifies and publishes findings; it does not fine, deregister or defund organizations. Its model combines verification of participating organizations with selective scrutiny of consequential claims and credible concerns involving nonparticipants.

The Framework distinguishes methodological failure from institutional wrongdoing. A report may be deficient without misconduct, while an organization may have sound written procedures yet suppress criticism, manipulate findings or retaliate against staff. The Council's confidential reporting mechanism enables scrutiny of practices that published outputs alone cannot reveal.

Participation and Independent Scrutiny

The Council's hybrid model distinguishes two routes:

Participating organizations undertake to maintain auditable records, cooperate with defined reviews and respond to findings.

Nonparticipating organizations may be examined on the basis of publicly available information, credible disclosures and other lawfully obtained evidence, without any presumption of noncompliance.

The Council can make findings about substantiated failures in either case, but it does not assign an overall compliance rating to an organization that has not undergone an appropriately comprehensive assessment.

ILLUSTRATIVE ANALOGUE · not an equivalent mandate

The UK Office for Statistics Regulation is separated from the production of the statistics it assesses and publicly evaluates them against a published Code of Practice—separating the producer of consequential information from the body assessing its quality.

Demonstrating Compliance

Participating organizations bear the burden of demonstrating compliance. Commitments, policies and internal reviews are no substitute for independently verifiable evidence that standards were followed. Where compliance cannot be established, it is recorded as unverified, not deficient. Findings of deficiency or wrongdoing, whether involving participants or nonparticipants, require sufficient independently assessed evidence. Refusal to meet reasonable evidentiary requests after an opportunity to respond is recorded as non-cooperation; nonparticipation alone is not.

Verification must protect confidential sources, vulnerable individuals and sensitive operational information, while distinguishing genuine protection concerns from attempts to avoid scrutiny. Where direct access poses disproportionate risks, alternative verification methods should be considered and their limitations documented. The Check may be displayed with incomplete controls, provided these are clearly declared. Displaying the mark does not itself establish compliance with the Pact.

ILLUSTRATIVE ANALOGUE · not an equivalent mandate

Financial auditors must obtain sufficient appropriate evidence on which to base an opinion. Where necessary evidence cannot be obtained, management's assurance cannot substitute for independent verification.

Independent Selection

The Council—not the organization—determines what it reviews within its defined remit. Selection combines risk- and consequence-based review, using published, viewpoint-neutral criteria, with random review of a defined proportion of participating organizations' eligible outputs. Nonparticipant reviews rely on public evidence, credible disclosures and other lawfully obtained material. This focuses scrutiny on influential work while reducing the risk, or perception, of selective or politically motivated review. Selection does not imply wrongdoing.

ILLUSTRATIVE ANALOGUE · not an equivalent mandate

The U.S. Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (PCAOB) uses both risk-based and random selection in inspecting public-company audits; firms do not choose which engagements are examined.

Procedural Fairness

Before an adverse finding is finalized, the organization may identify factual errors, provide evidence and respond to proposed findings. Material responses are considered before publication, and the organization has a right of reply.

An allegation credible enough to investigate is not thereby substantiated. Publication of a finding requires sufficient evidence under the Council's published thresholds, applied consistently and with particular care for serious allegations of institutional wrongdoing. Findings may be reviewed for material factual error, significant new evidence, procedural failure or an undisclosed conflict of interest, independently of the original determination.

ILLUSTRATIVE ANALOGUE · not an equivalent mandate

U.S. federal research-misconduct procedures provide notice, access to relevant evidence and an opportunity to comment before findings are finalized; the UK Advertising Standards Authority provides an independent review mechanism for eligible challenges to its rulings.

Scrutiny, Not Regulation

The Council may investigate, assess and publish findings. It cannot compel evidence or testimony without lawful authority, or fine, deregister, defund or impose regulatory penalties. Demonstrated failure is recorded as deficient; compliance that cannot be established as unverified; and non-cooperation as such. Further consequences rest with governments, donors, charity evaluators, ratings services, regulators, courts, media and others deciding whether to fund, recognize, cite or rely on an organization's work.

Governments and institutional donors should consider incorporating independent evidentiary review into funding and reliance arrangements for consequential human rights and humanitarian research. Independent findings can inform public and private funding decisions: donors should be able to distinguish independently demonstrated compliance from institutional declarations, unverified assurances and substantiated deficiencies, taking account of the scope of each assessment and verified corrective action.

ILLUSTRATIVE ANALOGUE · not an equivalent mandate

The United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) independently assesses testing, inspection and certification bodies against defined standards. It is recognized by government but is not itself a regulator and has no regulatory enforcement powers.

Safe Reporting and Protection from Retaliation

Participating organizations would commit to prohibiting retaliation against current or former staff, whistleblowers, partners and others raising concerns about research integrity, claims or related practices. The Council provides a confidential, independent channel for those experiencing or fearing retaliation, including exclusion, professional disadvantage, intimidation or reputational harm. It assesses credible concerns, investigates where warranted and records substantiated retaliation as a Framework failure. While unable to guarantee protection or replace legal remedies, it can document patterns and identify avenues for support or redress.

Accountability of the Council

To test the consistency of its assessments, the Council should conduct periodic independent reviews of a sample of the same outputs and practices by different assessors, examine significant differences in findings and publish the results as part of its own accountability reporting. Its credibility rests not only on its structural independence but on demonstrable consistency, fairness and evidentiary rigor of its assessments.

ILLUSTRATIVE ANALOGUE · not an equivalent mandate

Audit organizations operating under U.S. Government Auditing Standards are themselves subject to periodic external peer review of their quality-control systems and practice.

04 The E&I Index

MAKES ACCOUNTABILITY VISIBLE

The E&I Index is a proposed public, searchable record of independent findings on human rights and humanitarian organizations' research, claims and related institutional practices, updated on a published schedule and when significant new findings, corrections or evidence emerge.

The Index would provide donors, foundations, charity evaluators, policymakers, journalists and the public with independently assessed information to inform decisions about the reliability of organizations' research and public claims.

The Index would also allow funders and other institutional users to establish whether identified deficiencies were addressed and whether corrective action was independently verified and reflected in subsequent research and public communications.

Each entry identifies the scope assessed — individual outputs, specific practices or organization-level assessment — and records findings as compliant, deficient or unverified, with supporting reasons, evidentiary limitations, non-cooperation where relevant, and corrections or improvements. Corrected deficiencies remain visible, while unassessed standards cannot be presented as compliant. Organization-wide findings require a defined evidentiary threshold, covering a sample of outputs and relevant institutional practices, set out in the Council's published methodology.

Each finding links to the Council's assessment and available supporting evidence, subject to confidentiality protections. Organizations have an opportunity to respond before publication, with their responses published alongside findings. Where deficiencies are identified, the Council may assess subsequent corrective action and record verified improvements.

Findings are limited to the scope assessed: a deficiency in one output or practice does not establish organization-wide failure.

A RECORD MIGHT SHOW

ILLUSTRATIVE E&I RECORD · assessed scope only	
SCOPE ASSESSED	Selected outputs and specified institutional practices — not an organization-wide assessment
STANDARD	**FINDING**
Evidence & Sourcing	Compliant
Methodology	Deficient
Review, Verification & Investigation	Unverified
Research Conditions	Compliant
Consistency, Context & Fairness	Compliant
Transparency & Public Communications	Deficient — corrected
Corrections & Remedial Action	Compliant
Safe Reporting	Unverified
Non-cooperation	None recorded
LAST ASSESSED: MARCH 2027	

Evidence, Not Assurances

The E&I Framework offers human rights and humanitarian organizations a means to demonstrate, rather than merely profess, their commitments to evidentiary rigor, transparency and accountability. Independent verification would allow those who rely on their work to distinguish demonstrated compliance from institutional assurances.

The Framework seeks to bring the sectors into line with standards of independent accountability expected in other influential fields, commensurate with their size, influence and public responsibilities.

Independent scrutiny cannot depend on voluntary participation. Consequential claims, serious failures and related institutional misconduct must remain open to independent scrutiny whether or not an organization participates.

An organization's mission or the strength of its reputation should not exempt it from independent scrutiny.