

AUROVILLE CONFLICT RESOLUTION POLICY 2015

This policy applies to disputes between any of the below:

- Auroville residents including newcomers,
- Auroville commercial units including Auroville trusts,
- Auroville projects,
- Auroville services or working groups,
- Registered Friends of Auroville.
- Employees, volunteers or guests of Auroville who have a conflict with any of the above, and wishes to resolve the conflict within Auroville.

Aurovilians and Newcomers will not apply to court against another Aurovilian or Newcomer in relation to conflicts which can be solved under this policy.

This policy is **not** applicable:

- In a case where the Indian criminal law prescribes a different process to be followed,
- In a case brought to the Review Committee under the Auroville Foundation (Entry and Removal of Names of Persons in the Register of Residents) Regulations 2013.
- In a case where an individual appeals against the decision of a working group.

In case of lack of clarity the WC/ AVC will decide whether the policy is applicable or not.

1. Introduction

As a community, it's a given that individuals and groups go through moments of division and conflict, and sometimes these become deep and longstanding.

Although something many of us may like to do without, conflicts are a fact of life. They happen when people who depend on each other have ideas, goals or behaviors that are, or seem, not compatible.

What we tend to ignore is the fact that conflicts often have a great creative potential that can lead to positive change – when dealt with constructively. How we deal with conflict is important, so we can create honest and compassionate communication that leads to lasting resolutions. If our approach to conflict is superficial, we may resolve the wrong issues, communicate at an ineffective level, or address concerns that distract us from resolving core problems.

In the past, conflicts were often brought to one of the working groups - mainly the Auroville Council (AVC) and the Working Committee (WC) - with the approach of “demanding justice”. Individuals who brought their conflicts expected the working group to become a judiciary body that listens to all concerned and then arrives at a verdict. This approach to conflict usually leads to creating a winner and a loser and blocks the opportunity to enable people to create a positive transformation for their own conflict.

The Working Committee and the Auroville Council have expressed that they do not wish to be the ‘Auroville judiciary’. They don't have the relevant tools, and the time and energy spent on the great amount of conflict cases prevents them from concentrating on their actual mandates.

In Auroville, we aim to enable a shift in our attitude towards conflict: away from the idea of truth vs. lies and a judiciary system, towards the idea of multiple truths, conflict transformation and taking responsibility to engage with our own challenges.

This policy outlines a step-by-step process to guide Aurovilians when involved in a conflict situation in Auroville.

2. Conflict Resolution Process Steps

2.1 Step 1 Direct conversation: People are encouraged to sort out their conflict themselves or with the support of the community or group within which the conflict occurs. This could be a neighbourhood, a circle of common friends, family or workplace.

2.2 Step 2 Facilitated process: If Step 1 fails, the parties in conflict can choose one of the alternative dispute resolution methods available in Auroville. Ideally, the parties themselves agree on the specific method and facilitator. Auroville Koodam, in cooperation with the AV Council, is a platform that can support this choice by analysing the situation, explaining appropriate processes and referring to the relevant practitioners. There are a number of Aurovilians trained in methods that aim at supporting people in a conflict situation to find a solution acceptable to both parties. Some of these methods are:

- Mediation: a structured process for solving disputes, with assistance of one or more mediators. The mediators support the disputing parties by creating a safe space to have a constructive conversation and reach an agreement that is acceptable to both parties. Mediation is a voluntary and confidential process where at any moment either side can decide to stop the process. For detailed information see *Annex 1*.
- Restorative Circles: a process for addressing conflicts between people within the context of their community. Restorative Circles (RC) is a series of meetings amongst those involved in a conflict either directly, indirectly or structurally. RC meetings rely on reflective listening to offer everyone an opportunity to speak and be heard. For detailed information see *Annex 2*.

2.3 Step 3 Arbitration: If any or both parties are unwilling to follow step 2 or if step 2 doesn't lead to a closure, the AVC can - with or without prior request from the parties or any one of them – initiate an arbitration process if AVC finds it necessary in order to protect the interests of Auroville. In arbitration, the arbiters are entrusted with the responsibility to make a binding decision that brings closure to the

conflict situation. Auroville arbiters are committed to finding the best solution for all parties in the light of Auroville's interests and ideals. The formation of an arbitration body is coordinated by the AVC. For detailed information about the arbitration process see *Annex 3*.

2.4 Status Quo and/or temporary measures: If a situation needs a minimum of stability to allow a conflict resolution process to happen, the AVC may recommend a specific status quo and/ or temporary measures to be maintained for the period of the process. This will be formulated in consultation with the person(s) who have been chosen to facilitate, mediate or arbitrate.

2.5 Spokesperson: The AVC, in cooperation with Auroville Koodam, will assist people who have difficulty expressing themselves to find a 'spokesperson'.

3. Exceptions

3.1 If any of the following applies, and only then, a formal request for intervention can be submitted to the AVC directly, without going through the above process:

3.1.1 Violence or threat of violence,

3.1.2 Substance abuse (alcohol or drugs),

3.1.3 Psychological health issues,

3.1.4 Offence under the Indian Criminal Law,

3.2 The formal request for intervention needs to be signed by the Aurovilian submitting it, using the format to be approved by the AVC.

3.3 The AVC, if necessary together with the Working Committee (WC) and/or other experts (e.g. qualified psychotherapists, lawyers) will decide on the suitable course of action. This can, amongst others, include any of the above steps (see point 2.).

3.4 If a formal request for intervention contains statements that are found to be false, submitting it will be considered as an action against the ideals of Auroville and the AVC will decide on an appropriate consequence.

3.5 In case of an immediate threat of physical injury the formal request can be submitted after emergency measures have been taken by the AVC or WC.

4. Implementation of Agreements and Decisions

4.1 Agreements and decisions reached through any of the above processes are binding. In case the agreement / the decision is not respected, the AVC and the WC, if necessary in consultation with other AV bodies (e.g. FAMC, BCC, Auroville Foundation etc.), will decide together on an appropriate course of action, in relation to any individual or group who refuses to cooperate with the agreement or the decision, which may include but is not limited to:

4.1.1 Removal of a person as member of a Working Group, Unit or Project and /or ensure that they don't take any such position for a specified period of time;

4.1.2 Ending monetary support from Auroville or from any of its units and trusts to a resident, unit or project for a specified period;

4.1.3 Advising the Working Committee to start a review process which may lead to the removal of the person's name from the Register of Residents and/or Master List.