A Call for Greater Cultural Inclusivity in the ICF Code of Ethics

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As Muslim coaches, we advocate for a truly global coaching practice—one in which ethical standards reflect the diversity of cultures and worldviews they are meant to serve.

As coaching evolves globally, so must its ethical framework. This letter highlights key considerations and proposes a direction to strengthen inclusivity and clarity. ICF has confirmed that this feedback is recorded for the 2028 Code Review.

Key considerations[1]

1- **Obligation & Pledge Tone:** No individual may opt out, nor are they permitted to delete or modify.
The language can feel forceful and legalistic rather than inviting commitment. This "policing" tone may reduce psychological safety and trust, especially in cultures valuing relationship over rigid contracts.

2- **Specific Anti-Discrimination Lists:** Enumerating specific groups (gender identity, sexual orientation, etc.)
Explicitly listing categories can be seen as culturally prescriptive or exclusionary of unlisted groups. A principles-based approach (e.g., "discrimination on any grounds") is more universally applicable and less contentious.

3- **Cultural Filters & Identity:** Respecting all identity groups (often implies full endorsement of behaviors)
While inclusion is key, wording should distinguish between respecting the person (Adab/Courtesy) and necessarily validating all behaviors or identities that may conflict with religious beliefs. Respect can rest on human dignity (Quran 17:70) and be expressed as adab, a term also used in coaching literature (Hawkins, 2014).

4- **Systemic Equality, Activism & DEIB Terms:** "Systemic oppression," "actively address," DEIB definitions.
These terms often carry specific Western political connotations. Including them in a global code can be perceived as imposing a political agenda rather than establishing neutral professional ethical standards. The commitment to "actively address" systemic oppression can also be read as a call to political activism, which is prohibited in most Muslim-majority countries and could expose coaches to serious legal risk. Neutral wording such as "systemic inequalities," addressed through strategies agreed with system leaders and stakeholders, would serve the same aim.

Proposed Direction

Adopt principle-based language: **Move from prescriptive to principle-based**
Adopt general, context-sensitive phrasing. Avoid exhaustive identity lists that risk exclusion or cultural conflict. Focus on universal applicability.

Cultural Respect (Adab): **Emphasize** respect (Adab) **without enforcing ideology**
Remain alert to cultural filters, engage differences with courtesy (Adab), seeking understanding without imposing behavioral change or ideological conformity.

Governance & Review: **Create Cross-Cultural Ethics & Translation Board**
Establish a Cross-Cultural Ethics & Translation Review Board. Ensure representation from Muslim-majority cultures and academic linguists and societies across the region to audit translations and core concepts.

Implementation Strategy: **Pilot changes in diverse regions**

[1] Please see the attached comments and footnotes on the Code of Ethics (October 2026) for further elaboration.

Pilot revised language in select regions. Gather structured feedback from accredited schools (including Islamic institutions). Iterate before global rollout to ensure true inclusivity.
Our intention is not to dilute ethical standards, but to strengthen their global relevance and impact. A truly global Code of Ethics should unite cultures under shared human values—without imposing one perspective over others.
Name and ICF credential: _____
Chapter / country: _____
Date: _____