THE VALUES AND STANDARDS
OF THE NORWEGIAN ARMED FORCES
The document you are now reading is one of the most important documents in the Norwegian Armed Forces. In order to defend what we have and what we stand for, we must live in accordance with the values we are set to defend. This will provide us with the legitimacy required to interact with the rest of society in the most beneficial manner, and at the same time enable us to recruit the right people.

The Armed Forces’ values and standards are based on important virtues of Norwegian society. We are subject to democratic political control, we adhere to International Humanitarian Law (IHL), and we observe all other regulations pertaining to the use of force in military operations. We respect each other and our surroundings, we manage the considerable resources society has provided to us in the best possible way, and we safeguard the security of our nation and that of our personnel. Most important, we recognize the value of human life – the lives of others as well as our own – and furthermore that it is our job to protect the life, freedom, and safety of the individual.

At the same time personnel from the Armed Forces are often faced with situations which can demand tough decisions to be made within short time. In these situations our values must be the foundation in our decision-making. This is why the Armed Forces work systematically to raise awareness among us all of the ethical dilemmas we can encounter. As individuals and leaders we must live by our values and handle the dilemmas we encounter. The Armed Forces’ HEL programme is designed to train and reflect on our attitudes, ethics and leadership.

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Chief of Defence
Exercise of the particular authority assigned to the Armed Forces is governed by law. All activities are to be carried out in accordance with current legislation. We all have a duty to carry out orders that are in accordance with the law; however we also have a duty to refuse to carry out an order that is in contravention of the law. We must keep our values and standards in mind at all times so that we act appropriately in situations where there are no clear, specific rules.

The legitimacy of the Armed Forces depends on democratic political control and the support of the population. We seek to build confidence and credibility by:

- Complying closely with the provisions of national and international law and other frameworks for the use of force in military operations
- Treating all members of the Armed Forces, including those in compulsory military service, with respect
- Ensuring sound and ethical management of the considerable human, material and financial resources at our disposal
- maintaining the safety of personnel in the best possible way
- cooperating closely with civil society
All people have inherent dignity, regardless of their background, qualities or achievements. The Armed Forces should reflect the diversity of our society. For modern Armed Forces, diversity is a value in its own right. Ethnicity, religion, age, gender and sexual orientation have absolutely no bearing on human dignity. Trust and respect depend on an individual’s loyalty to his or her fellow soldiers, unit and assigned tasks.

The Armed Forces are to reflect the perspectives and values of both men and women. The same fundamental attitude should apply to colleagues from other cultures or religions. Respect for others builds upon awareness and knowledge of one’s own culture and religious roots. Combat operations can entail a risk of desensitisation, where respect for the individual may be severely tested. Under such circumstances, it is vital to uphold the principle of human dignity, and in particular the individual’s right to life, freedom and security. Situations may arise where a member of the Armed Forces has to make extremely difficult choices between more or less unethical alternatives. Nevertheless, he or she must make a choice, fully aware of the consequences. These are the toughest ethical dilemmas for military personnel.

Human dignity and other core social values must be safeguarded, but in an extreme situation it may be necessary to take another person’s life, or risk or sacrifice your own life or those of your subordinates. The principle of human dignity must guide all use of military force. This means treating all parties to a conflict with respect, distinguishing between civilians and civilian objects and military targets, and avoiding the infliction of unnecessary suffering and excessive collateral damage.
Our core values – respect, responsibility and courage – are to form the basis of all activities and are to be embraced by all of us. However, values cannot be introduced simply through directives. They are closely related to the professional culture, and can only be internalised through constant practice over time. In other words, assimilating these values is not primarily a matter of following orders, but of building up a professional identity and culture where they are an integral part of the team spirit.

A strong professional culture is one where individuals and individual units see themselves as part of a larger context with common objectives. This is the case regardless of the type of service they are engaged in, whether operational activities or support services, whether they are soldiers, officers or civilians. A common identity means that all the various parts of an organisation can identify with the organisation as a whole and with each other, and can rely on and support each other.
RESPECT
RESPONSIBILITY
COURAGE
Respect is not a right; it is a moral duty that is expressed through attitudes and actions. Respect builds upon self-respect. Self-respect gives a person the strength to stand upright in difficult situations. Self-respect is reinforced through a conscious pattern of behaviour based on ethical principles, doing your best to do the right thing. In the Armed Forces, we are all expected to show respect for one another, for our colleagues, for our superiors and for our subordinates. In difficult situations, when living in cramped conditions, our ability to treat others with respect will be tested. The key indicator in all situations is whether we treat others as we expect to be treated ourselves. We must also show respect in our dealings with others, such as the civilian population, other parties to conflicts, and adversaries. The Norwegian Armed Forces will not accept any form of racism or inhuman, degrading or disrespectful treatment of others.

Sexual harassment is likewise unacceptable. Armed Forces personnel are to show respect for the fundamental values and cultural traditions of the area in which they are operating. We must show respect for decisions and missions. Once a decision has been taken and a mission is to be carried out, we must comply with that decision and carry out the mission as best we can. In decision-making processes relating to peacetime activities, we are free to make our views known within the organisation. As citizens, we are also entitled to take part in the public debate on defence and other issues. However, when we express ourselves outside our organisation, we must show proper restraint for reasons of security and the integrity of the Armed Forces. Respect for decisions and missions is enhanced when superior officers listen to advice and comments from their subordinates and from other parts of the organisation.
Responsibility entails taking responsibility for ourselves, for each other and for the Armed Forces’ activities. Responsibility is shown through a willingness to take initiative, decisiveness and perseverance. This requires self-discipline on the part of the individual. Self-discipline is crucial for developing responsible patterns of behaviour in a difficult situation. Personnel are to take responsibility for one another at all times, and the Armed Forces are to take responsibility for their personnel. This fosters trust at both personal and professional level. All military personnel are to support and help one another and ultimately, if necessary, to give their lives for one another. This is the mainstay of the collective discipline and loyalty that are vital for maintaining and reinforcing solidarity in a military organisation, particularly in difficult situations.

Trust, care, loyalty and discipline build team spirit. This forms the basis for a common sense of responsibility for each other and for the mission. We will not let each other or the mission down. We are responsible for carrying out political decisions on the use of military force. In all our actions, we are aware that we represent Norway and the Norwegian authorities. The responsibility that rests with the Armed Forces and their personnel is expressed in the loyalty we show to Norwegian society, our constitution and our national institutions. This responsibility is also shown in the way we carry out orders, the way we behave in general and the way we consider the consequences of the use of force.
Military operations are inevitably associated with the risk of loss of life – our own and others’. Setting aside all thoughts of our own lives and wellbeing in order to carry out an assignment requires both physical and moral courage. Courage is the moral and physical strength to act appropriately in daily service as well as in combat situations. Courage means overcoming fear or hate, and speaking out if we see something that is not right, even in situations fraught with difficult choices. Courage requires sound judgement. Without sound judgement, courage can easily lead to recklessness. Sound judgement depends on a clear sense of right and wrong, self-knowledge and humility.

It requires awareness of the moral implications and the consequences of our actions, so that each one of us can defend our actions in retrospect. This means that we must know our capacity as well as our limitations. Courage is expressed through the ability to take action and initiatives, through strength and the determination not to give up. We must be able to identify opportunities, act independently, and at the same time cooperate with others to find good solutions. Training helps to develop military competence, as well as physical and psychological strength to withstand severe strain.
Our values and standards apply to everyone in the Norwegian Armed Forces: those involved in day-to-day peacetime operations as well as those engaged in situations of conflict, crisis or war. They are lasting values, and are to be reflected in all our steering documents. Our values and standards must be internalised and kept alive through reflection and discussion on how they affect each and every one of us, and how they affect our choices, our behaviour and our professional culture. Our leaders have an important part to play as role models.

In situations of danger, severe pressure or other forms of stress, leaders must maintain team spirit and demonstrate clear leadership. Through our collective effort, we will ensure that the Norwegian Armed Forces’ activities are based on the principle of human dignity and justify the legitimacy we have earned. Our core values - respect, responsibility and courage - are to guide us. They will help us build a common identity and a professional culture that we can be truly proud of.

PUTTING WORDS INTO ACTION