



# CENTRO DE IDIOMAS INTERCULTURA

Heredia Colonial & Playa Sámara  
Costa Rica

7 de abril del 2015

## INTERCULTURA COSTA RICA 2015 COMMUNICATION ON PROGRESS UNGLOBAL COMPACT

Letter from our Founding Directors

### **TO OUR PARTNERS:**

Intercultura Costa Rica Language and Cultural Center is pleased to continue to support the United Nations Global Compact. We are proud to have furthered efforts to improve our company and community through the Ten Principles of the Global Compact, as they relate to human rights, labor rights, environmental protection, and anti-corruption. We have committed to making the Global Compact and its principles part of the strategy, culture, and day-to-day operations of our company and to sharing the principles with our employees, partners, clients, and the public. We have implemented the processes as best we can to help us monitor our progress in achieving the goals set forth in the Ten Principles. We have pledged to challenge ourselves and everyone around us – suppliers, customers, competitors, and neighboring businesses – to improve our global community. In our annual Communication on Progress, we describe our latest actions to improve the integration of the Global Compact and its principles into our business strategy, culture and daily operations. We also commit to sharing this information with our stakeholders using our primary channels of communication.

Sincerely yours,

*Laura Ellington & Adelita Jiménez*  
Founding Directors

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## HUMAN RIGHTS

Intercultura provides our employees with safe and healthy working conditions, employee training and incentives, protection of employee privacy, viable grievance mechanisms to express legal, personal and professional concerns, equal gender rights, published policy against sexual harassment in the workplace, and encouragement of employee diversity and hiring practices that promote ethnic and GLBT diversity and presence in the workplace.

Intercultura abides by all aspects of Costa Rican Labor Laws, which includes the grievance mechanisms set up by the Labor Ministry. To date we have never had an official complaint filed against the company through the Labor Ministry or any other governmental organization.

Aspects of our support for human rights include the following:

1. We host free English classes, meals and childcare for single mothers from low income communities in our Heredia campus.
2. We provide logistical and financial support for the non-profit CREAR children's association at our Sámara campus, which offers free supplemental in the arts, sports, technology and languages to local children, specifically those from disadvantaged communities.
3. We continue to organize a health fair on campus in Heredia, and sponsor a community-wide health fair in Sámara.
4. We continue to host cultural activities which are offered free to community and staff.
5. We have made a point of non-discrimination in our hiring practices and of supporting those from the GLBT community who join our staff. We have 3 openly gay teachers at our Heredia campus, who sponsor outings and cultural activities within and outside the Costa Rican GLBT community.
6. We have a variety of ethnicities represented in our schools: we have 2 employees of African-American origin, a majority of Latin Americans as dictated by our geographic location, and a number of Caucasians from the US, Canada, and Europe.
7. We promote gender equality, and in fact have a higher percentage of female employees than male (70% - 30%).
8. Our upper-level management positions are all held by women at our Sámara Campus (4), and in Heredia are divided equally (2-2).
9. We also promote diversity in age, which employees ranging from 21 to 73 years of age.
10. Twice a year we hold company social gatherings and/or outings for staff and homestay mothers, with gifts and raffle prizes.
11. 100% of employees receive the 13<sup>th</sup> month Aguinaldo pay as mandated by Costa Rican Labor Law, equal to one month's extra salary.

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12. 100% of employees are eligible for additional incentives (monetary, emergency assistance, interest-free loans, study-sponsorship, flexible scheduling and other).
13. We invested \$6500 in total last year in training, education and free-time incentives for employees.
14. We have grievance mechanisms set in place with trained administrative employees who handle complaints. Periodically, an outside trained psychiatrist leads our employees in workshops include a review of anonymous comments regarding their employment and evaluation of staff and school directors.
15. We have yearly team-building workshops offered by outside companies which offer a further avenue for expressing employee concerns in a safe environment.
16. We have an Occupational Health Policy Manual as a guide for employees regarding health and safety requirements in the workplace. It provides employees with a safe working environment by ensuring all cleaning and working materials are safe and nontoxic; addresses fire prevention and emergency procedures in case of fire, earthquake or tsunami; acts as a guide for our committee to prevent possible accidents and investigate any that do occur, and to ensure the Health Manual guidelines are followed; schedules periodic inspections of all workplaces and employees to prevent illnesses and mishaps.
17. We value the individual skills of employees. We believe they are our strongest asset and strive to help them improve wherever possible by continuing personal and professional development. This includes workshops for teachers and administrative staff, second or third language courses (Portuguese, English, German, French), and higher education programs.
18. Intercultura is committed to helping further international proclaimed human rights in our communities in all possible ways:
  - a. We offer need-based scholarships to foreign teen students for our Teen Spanish Immersion in Costa Rica program; in 2014 we will help 6% of students with costs.
  - b. As a commitment to our communities we provide nonprofit coordination of foreign volunteer programs and encourage students to get involved in the communities. Last year we have a total of 500 volunteers. On average, 50% of volunteers are involved in social programs (daycares, orphanages, elderly homes), 30% worked in teaching programs, 10% were involved in animal care, 8% in environment, and 2% in medical programs. The Costa Rican Ministry of Public Education Program requested our help in sending them volunteer teachers for help in the public school systems.
  - c. We support all social placements with a donation of \$30-\$50 per volunteer, in addition to their fees and lodging costs.

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#### LABOUR

We support our employees right to full protection via labour laws and our own ethical application of said laws. Intercultura is categorically opposed to all forms of forced labor throughout all levels of the entire company.

1. Every employee is aware of the terms and conditions of their employment, the voluntary nature of their employment and their freedom to leave. Intercultura is in accordance with all Costa Rican labor laws and employees are aware of their rights through the Labor Ministry. Each employee knows his or her job description and employees are kept current, up to date, and involved in the decision process on any changes that may occur to their positions. Intercultura has never been charged with, indicated for, or in any way whatsoever involved in forced labor.
2. There exist no false promises or threats, and we do not engage in withholding wages under any circumstance. Everyone in the company works with full knowledge of their pay rates, overtime rates, and time off policies. This information is readily available to all employees. Employees conduct both their regular work and overtime hours of their own free will, and are reimbursed for any overtime.
3. Management maintains current, annual research to confirm fair wages including living costs and wage rates for similar jobs in the industry to ensure our employees are receiving the highest salary they deserve and that the company can afford to pay. We consistently pay above the country-wide minimum and average wages for each position.
4. We continue to distribute a Welcome Pack for our new employees, a manual with our company's policy for the teachers and administrative staff, safety issues, contingency plan and more.
5. We have implemented a yearly company evaluation called "Help Us to Improve", so our staff members can evaluate the company in general, colleagues, environment, and more.
6. We do a Team-Work workshop once or twice a year to improve and strengthen our team and skills. We also have some informal meetings and gatherings to get to know each other and share time outside our working area. This has been proven beneficial to interactions within the work environment.
7. English Department sends teachers links to videos that show common processes of their best work, so they can review and better understand the information before coming to the training. This is a concept call Blended Learning and we implement this in the English classes too.
8. **Recognition and personal motivation (English Department):** We acknowledge and recognize "The Teacher of the Month" according to the students' evaluations and which teacher decorated the classroom the best. Also, in each meeting we do a "big ups" in which teachers can write reviews of other teachers who have helped them with something and this is read to the whole staff. In 2014 we started with Portuguese classes, and now all staff can take courses free.
9. We are committed to reducing all forms of child labor and exploitation within our network. Intercultura has adequate and provable mechanisms of age verification maintaining copies of every employee's official government issued identification cards and/or passports. For all employees, a minimum age of 18 is required.

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10. Through our volunteer program, we work with under-privileged youth via orphanages, rehabilitation centers and after school programs, helping keep children and young people off the street and in educational programs.
11. This month, our Spanish director will be teaching a week-long seminar to our Spanish department staff on topics in Communication between Cultures. We will also be having a team-building workshop at the Sámara campus for our entire staff. Last year, one of our teachers went to Brazil for one month to complete an internship which is about Latin American specific topics to choose her master's degree in Latin American Studies. Another teacher completed his Final Graduation Paper proposing incorporation of TCI in a Linguistics course that Intercultura offers universities to promote technological innovation in the classes and ensure the need to implement virtual environments to diversify academic offerings in Intercultura Language School. Our Spanish Director is teaching at two state universities (UNA and TEC) to train teachers of Spanish as a second language so they can have an integrated view of language with the Costa Rican culture. The teachers work primarily in Spanish language teaching, but also design physical and online materials (such as Web Quest) make level assessments of new students, and collaborate with clients in care linked to learning in general areas of Spanish/English/Portuguese as target language.
12. We also ensure our employees are provided with enough work and high enough wages compared to living standards, so that adults are able to support their families. Therefore, children need not supplement the incomes of our employees. We have confirmed non-existence of child labor in our company as the chart below demonstrates.
13. We offer 50% financing of relevant study programs, with no obligation to repay the company in any way except a commitment to remain with the company for 3 years upon finishing the degree. We also allow employees paid time off to schedule further education, and 5% of our employees are currently taking advantage of these further education benefits. All company employees can take free foreign language courses, Latin dance, cooking, and arts classes. 8% of employees have been sent to training workshops or courses to increase their ability in their positions and 6% of current employees have had programs to study English in the United States financed, covering all costs, including study, lodging, food and airfare. We organize free courses in nutrition, first aid, exercise and other, aimed at promoting employee satisfaction and offer free continuing education in a variety of areas. The working hours of teachers, are adapted to their study needs.
14. We offered 12 scholarships to local children and adults for English classes at our Heredia campus last year, and continue to offer for this year.
15. Intercultura Sámara co-managed the Social Services IMAS 2014 program which employed 12 women and one man from severely disadvantaged communities, obtaining government funding to pay their wages.
16. The CREAR association continues to develop the teen and pre-teen program with Intercultura's support: these programs are aimed at keeping teens in school through graduation, aiding them in applying to and attending college, and providing marketable workplace skills.

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## THE ENVIRONMENT

1. This year, Playa Sámara received the Blue Flag award 2015, in recognition of the environmental protection and clean-up activities implemented throughout the preceding year. Intercultura participated in this process via its management of the staff of 13 personnel members who cleaned the beach 6 days a week; through environmental programs run through the CREAR association for local children and teens; and through financial and logistical support for monthly volunteer clean-up efforts (\$730 in the last year).
2. We campaigned against the local Walmart supermarket which was dumping waste waters in the river leading to the beach. This February, as a result of public pressure from this campaign, they switched their septic tank to a recycling of used water system that now uses waste water for gardening and re-use toilets. They no longer dump water into the river and fecal coliform levels have diminished by 64%.
3. At our campuses, we have replaced paper towels with hot air hand dryers, faucets with auto-turn-off pressure knobs, and we have recycling bins throughout each campus for students and staff to use.
4. We no longer use photocopies in our classrooms, but instead digital copies via our interactive whiteboards.
5. Any food sold on campus must be done using recyclable materials.
6. We have installed solar panels in our Sámara campus which will reduce costs and use by an estimated 80%.
7. We reforested the palm tree cover on the beach in front our of campus with 10 royal palms.
8. Last year, the company donated \$2,400 to various community organizations including local public schools, community churches, for children who want to participate in national athletics, tree planting projects, community clean-ups, recycling centers, child orphanages, animal shelters, and environmental reserves.
9. We loan our beachfront rancho to any community organization, association or public school that needs it for graduations, activities, meeting, etc., free of charge.
10. We have taken an active role in the municipal council to improve transparency in governance, and to implement a 30-year plan that prioritizes environmental protection, social development and sustainable infrastructure development.
11. We co-sponsored the SAMARUN Race to raise funds for beach cleanup and redevelopment of public school's dining room,
12. We participated in the development of the plan (approved in Municipal council in January 2014) for the Cultural Park of Sámara, maintaining a forested area in the middle of town for a public park.
13. We hosted the Free International Film Series and used books sale, planted trees donated by ICE and local associations in schools and public areas, sponsored 4 low-cost castration campaigns of dogs and cats at low cost, organized 4 entire-beach cleanups, with organized groups, filled in the eroded entrance to the beach, contributed to materials to fix town sewers in collaboration with City Hall, maintained 10 common waste and recycling cans, offered/hosted 2 free computing courses to the Sámara community, subsidized German and French courses (\$20 per month, free for Intercultura staff), Free Food Handling Course in collaboration with INA, Free course for Tour Guides, with the INA, and a free journalism course with "The Voice of Guanacaste".

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## ANTI-CORRUPTION

Intercultura is committed to fighting all forms of government corruption. We strive to eliminate corruptive actions by filing official complaints, documenting corruption with real photographs and witness records and creating as much objective input as needed to begin the process of change.

Intercultura started and continues to co-manage the Sámara Security Committee in 2011, which works in conjunction with local authorities to eliminate police corruption and improve public security efforts in our town. We have denounced inhabitants engaging in illicit activities such as drug dealing and bribery of government officials aimed to cover up environmental abuses and allow the perpetuation of enrichment at the cost of the environment.

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