

Our position on institutional neutrality

The Royal College of Ophthalmologists (RCOphth) is the professional body for medically qualified eye doctors in the UK and beyond. We educate and support a community of practitioners, set clinical standards, promote research, champion the profession and influence national eye care policy to ensure excellence in the prevention, treatment and management of eye diseases.

Our charitable purpose, as defined in our Royal Charter, is to advance the science and practice of ophthalmology and promote the public's eye health through education, training, research, and professional standards. All our work must be consistent with this purpose.

In line with this, and consistent with guidance from the Charity Commission on political activity by charities, we maintain a position of institutional neutrality on geopolitical issues. This means we do not issue public statements on matters such as armed conflict, territorial disputes, or political ideologies unless doing so directly supports our charitable objective.

Why we take this position

We recognise that international events can have profound impacts on individuals and communities, including our members. However, we believe that commenting on complex geopolitical issues falls outside of our remit as a medical and scientific professional body – and is not justifiable under our charitable purpose as defined by our charter and charity law.

We have adopted this position for the following reasons:

- **Staying focused on our core purpose:** our primary responsibility is to support the professional and clinical excellence of ophthalmologists. Commenting on global political issues risks diverting attention and resources away from this mission and diluting our organisational identity.
- **Respecting the diversity of our membership:** our members come from a wide range of national, cultural, political, and religious backgrounds. Taking public positions on divisive issues risks alienating some members and weakening the cohesion of our inclusive professional community.
- **Preserving our credibility and impartiality:** we are an apolitical organisation, grounded in science and healthcare. Remaining neutral reinforces our reputation as an impartial, evidence-driven body and allows us to foster collaboration across political and geographic boundaries.
- **Safeguarding operational integrity:** political advocacy unrelated to our charitable remit could present legal or reputational risks and jeopardise relationships with regulators, governments, funders, and international stakeholders – especially given the College's global reach.

- **Recognising practical constraints:** as a relatively small organisation, we are not resourced to issue informed, consistent commentary on evolving global events or to manage the potential volume of public, media or stakeholder engagement that may result.

Supporting our members

We recognise that many of our members may be personally or professionally affected by international events. We are committed to supporting them by fostering an inclusive environment and signposting to wellbeing resources.

We also encourage members wishing to support humanitarian relief to do so through established, trusted international organisations.