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GENERAL SERVICES DIVISION

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ADMINISTRATIVE INSTRUCTION

To: Members of the staff

From: The Assistant Secretary-General for
General Services

Subject: GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES
GOVERNING OUTGOING OFFICIAL UNITED
NATIONS MAIL AT HEADQUARTERS

Introduction

1. The purpose of this administrative instruction is to provide information on the general principles and procedures governing the mailing of official documentation, information material and correspondence from Headquarters to individuals or organizations located all over the world. Much of this official mail goes to distant points by diplomatic pouch or airmail, and a lesser amount goes by surface or sea mail.

2. The instruction contains information on:

- A. Basic authority for dispatch of official mail;
- B. Definition of official mail;
- C. Distribution of United Nations documentation through official mail;
- D. Means of communication in use;
- E. Types of delivery;
- F. Preparing the mail for dispatch (letter mail and other material);
- G. Ensuring timeliness of delivery;
- H. Budgeting for cost of mail and pouch services.

A. Basic authority for dispatch of official mail

3. Though the present instruction consolidates much of the information on existing procedures with regard to official mail dispatched by departments and offices in the conduct of their official business, attention is invited to the following issuances which have a bearing on the subject:

(a) ST/AI/174/Rev.1. This instruction describes the conditions under which material may be sent through the diplomatic pouch. Information relevant to the dispatch of official documentation, information material and correspondence has been incorporated in the present administrative instruction. A diplomatic pouch schedule issued periodically lists the days of departure and destinations to which regular pouch service is maintained and is available from the Secretariat Distribution Unit of the Publishing Division.

(b) ST/AI/189/Add.3/Rev.1. This instruction describes the arrangements for the distribution of United Nations documents and meeting records, establishes the official distribution lists and indicates the criteria under which substantive departments may be permitted to maintain special distribution lists for their own publication.

(c) ST/AI/189/Add.4. This instruction describes the principles and arrangements governing the exchange of documents and publications between the United Nations and other organizations and institutions.

(d) ST/AI/189/Add.10. This instruction describes the arrangements for mailing of official documentation at Headquarters.

(e) ST/AI/189/Add.11/Rev.1. This instruction describes the arrangements authorized by the Publications Board for providing copies of official documentation to depository libraries.

(f) ST/AI/228. This instruction describes the procedures for use of unogrammes.

(g) ST/AI/237. This instruction comprises the correspondence manual which provides standards for the preparation and disposition of all official correspondence.

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B. Definition of official mail

4. The materials which may be sent as official United Nations mail are: official correspondence, documents (bearing United Nations symbol or sales code), cheques, purchase orders, speeches, publications, newsletters, information circulars, press releases (weekly news summaries), invoices, stamps, computer printouts, index cards, posters, radio programmes on tapes or discs (recordings), films and photographs.

C. Distribution of United Nations documentation through official mail

(a) Automatic distribution

5. Apart from official correspondence (letters, cables, memoranda, unogrammes etc.) the materials sent as official United Nations mail are generally given bulk distribution, that is, copies of the same items are dispatched at the same time to several addresses. Under the policy set by the Publications Board, official United Nations documentation is distributed automatically to ministries, embassies and other government addresses, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, permanent missions, specialized agencies, United Nations offices away from Headquarters, information centres, depository libraries, the press and the public.

6. Official distribution lists for the above purpose are maintained at Headquarters by the Department of Conference Services (DCS) and the Department of Public Information (DPI), and distribution is carried out by the Distribution Section, DCS.

(b) Departmental distribution

7. In addition to the official lists maintained by DCS and DPI for automatic distribution of documents, the Publications Board has also established criteria under which substantive departments are permitted to maintain special distribution lists for their own publications. These lists should include only persons or organizations who have contributed to the preparation of a given

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publication or provide substantive assistance to the work of the department or whose interest in its work should be enlisted or retained.

8. In the case of proposals for establishing a new list, the substantive unit initiating the proposal should submit it to the Publishing Division, through the departmental executive office, with information on the following: purpose, physical characteristics of material to be mailed (including unit weight which is the major determining factor in the cost of mailing), type of delivery and cost of mailing. The substantive unit should consult the services concerned as to the possibility of using available mechanical facilities for collating and sorting and the most appropriate format^{1/} for maintaining the list. It should also consult the Outgoing Mail Unit on the type of delivery desired and the cost of mailing, with a view to using concessional postal rates where available.

9. Duplication in mailing can occur when departmental distribution lists are not carefully screened to avoid the listing of names of persons or institutions included in the lists maintained by DCS and DPI. In view of this potential for duplication, within each department engaged in the bulk distribution of materials through official mail the executive office or its equivalent should exercise over-all control of all departmental distribution lists. The executive office should keep a record of all such lists and ensure their periodic review. It should forward copies of distribution lists to the Records Management Service to ensure that returned mail is sent to the relevant originating office for correction or deletion of addresses.

^{1/} Departmental lists are currently maintained in four distinct formats: addressograph, computer, manual and the use of facilities external to the United Nations. The choice as to the best format for a particular distribution list should be made after taking into account such factors as size of the list, frequency of use, physical characteristics of material to be distributed, ease of making changes and degree of selective capacity required.

10. Duplication in mailing can also occur when staff members, responding to individual requests, mail out the same material to addressees whose requirements are already provided for under the arrangements for automatic distribution of United Nations documentation. Information on whether an individual or an institution is included in the official distribution list may be obtained by calling the Mechanical Addressing Unit (extension 7299). In certain instances, individual requests for documents can be met by referring the individual concerned to the nearest United Nations information centre or to a local library which receives official United Nations documentation on a regular basis. Information on the location of depository libraries can be obtained by calling the Dag Hammarskjöld Library (extension 7417).

D. Means of communication in use

11. The means of communication used at the United Nations are the telephone, telegram, facsimile transmission, unogrammes and letters or equivalent (memoranda, circulars, notes verbale etc.). The telephone and the telegram are the most rapid means of communicating an urgent message, but both are more costly than correspondence by airmail or pouch and should therefore be reserved for urgent communications when their use is warranted by the importance of the communication in relation to the cost, the location of the addressee and the time by which the communication must be received. Studies of telegrams dispatched indicate that their use is not always consistent with the urgency of the messages sent. In many instances, the messages could have been sent by unogramme or airmail or diplomatic pouch.

12. Facsimile is a rapid method of generating reproduction of paper of printed or graphic material at distances remote from the office of origin by means of telecommunications. It can be used to transmit text, charts, maps, graphs etc. It can also be used to transmit translation material for conference services. Here

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again, the urgency of the situation and the cost factor should be considered in deciding to send the material by facsimile transmission in preference to sending a carbon or photocopy of the same by diplomatic pouch. At the present time, facsimile transmission is available between New York and Geneva and between New York and Vienna.

E. Types of delivery

(a) Letter mail

13. Letters and their equivalent sent by first class, airmail or diplomatic pouch are the means of communication used for most day-to-day non-urgent business.

14. Surface mail and airmail to destinations within North America arrive at approximately the same time. As airmail rates are much higher than postage for surface mail of identical weight, staff members should utilize surface mail when preparing communications for dispatch. Outgoing correspondence prepared as airmail for North American delivery will not be accepted by the Outgoing Mail Unit and will be returned to the sender.

15. Most official outgoing letter mail to be sent by air overseas is dispatched from Headquarters via the United Nations diplomatic pouch.

16. The use of airmail for official correspondence is restricted to those countries not serviced by diplomatic pouch.

17. All letter mail and other material for dispatch via diplomatic pouch service should be prepared in standard white or manila envelopes with the notation "By Pouch" in the upper right corner of the envelope. The United Nations overseas office receiving the diplomatic pouch material to be forwarded affixes local postage and forwards the mail, using the domestic postal facilities of the country. Only official mail may be sent through the diplomatic pouch. Instructions governing United Nations diplomatic pouch service are contained in document ST/AI/174/Rev.1.

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(b) Material other than letter mail

18. Airmail delivery should be used for packages only in urgent situations. Because of the high cost of sending packages by air-mail, the sender should consult the Outgoing Mail Unit regarding the availability of less expensive means of delivery. The cost factor is equally important in the delivery of materials intended for bulk distribution, that is, materials to be dispatched to several addresses at the same time. Postal regulations provide concessional rates for certain materials or classes of mail. Departments and offices engaged in bulk distribution of such materials as documents, publications or newsletters should consult the Outgoing Mail Unit regarding the use of these concessional rates.^{2/}

F. Preparing mail for dispatch (letter mail and other materials)

19. The choice of envelope or packaging material, restrictions of size and weight for packages, addressing, labelling and use of zip codes, unogramme, facsimile transmission, mailing to multiple addresses and mailing large quantities, and the availability of special postal rates for certain classes of mail should be taken into account in preparing official United Nations mail for dispatch.

^{2/} Domestic postal rates in use, in order of decreasing costs, are: (a) first-class letter rate or airmail; (b) third-class single piece or non-permit rates for mailing printed matter weighing less than 16 ounces; (c) special fourth-class or book rate, which can be used if the material to be mailed consists of 24 or more pages stapled together; (d) library rate, which can be used under certain conditions for certain types of material loaned or exchanged between the United Nations and schools, colleges, libraries, or mailed to schools, colleges, libraries or certain non-profit organizations; (e) third-class, bulk-mail permit rate, which can be used when mailing 200 or more identical pieces of printed matter that are sorted by zip code and bundled or sacked; and (f) second-class permit rates, which can be used when mailing periodicals issued at least four times a year to paid subscribers.

In the order of decreasing costs, the international postal rates (as distinct from international parcel post) in use are: (a) airmail letter and letter-package rate; (b) surface mail letter and letter-package rate; (c) general printed matter rate; and (d) book rate.

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(a) Envelope or packaging material

20. With the exception of airmail, all outgoing correspondence should be placed in regular or manila envelopes. As all mail is transported in cloth sacks, special attention should be given to the size of the envelope or type of packaging needed to adequately contain its contents.

(b) Airmail envelopes

21. Airmail envelopes should not be used for letter mail to be sent to destinations serviced by the United Nations diplomatic pouch. Mail to such areas is normally dispatched from Headquarters via pouch for onforwarding by the local United Nations office. This saves a substantial amount in postal expenditure.

22. Airmail envelopes should be used for letter mail going to countries not served by the United Nations diplomatic pouch.

(c) Restrictions of size and weight

23. The maximum allowable weight of packages sent via the diplomatic pouch is 35 pounds (16 kilogrammes) and the maximum allowable length and width of such packages is 28 inches by 27 inches (70 centimetres by 68 centimetres). The maximum allowable weights and sizes of packages processed by the United States Postal Service varies depending on the country of destination. Packages to be mailed to destinations within the United States may not exceed 70 pounds (31.8 kilogrammes) in weight or 72 inches (180 centimetres) in combined length, width and depth. The Outgoing Mail Unit should be consulted for information on the exact size and weight restrictions and the necessary forms to be filled out for packages addressed to other countries.

24. First class letter mail which is less than 3.5 inches in height and/or less than 5 inches in length will not be accepted for mailing by the United States Postal Service. Letter mail weighing

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1 ounce or less which is more than 6 1/8 inches high or 11 1/2 inches long or 1/4 inches thick will be subject to a 7 cents surcharge because such items can not be machine processed. Originating offices should ensure that outgoing mail does not exceed the above specifications.

25. For destinations in Canada and the United States, if a package must be sent by air, the notation "AIRMAIL" or "FIRST CLASS" must appear on the wrapper to the left of the address block, and form RMS.12 (Authorization for air shipment of mail matter), must be completed and sent with the package for processing. In any event, the sender should first consult the Outgoing Mail Unit regarding less costly means of dispatching the same.

(d) Identification of originating office

26. The sender must be clearly identified on all outgoing mail. The contents of all packages to be sent via pouch must be certified by a designated pouch-certifying officer. The Mail Operations Section is not authorized to accept items for processing unless these requirements are met. It may open a package for examination in case of doubt about the propriety of sending the item by the diplomatic pouch. In addition to the address block on the envelope or label, the name, department and room number of the signatory or sender must be typed above the heading "United Nations (emblem) Nations Unies" in the upper left corner. This will facilitate return of undeliverable mail to the sender.

(e) Printed matter

27. Envelopes or parcels containing only printed matter should be marked with the notation "Printed Matter" in the lower left corner of the envelope or package to take advantage of less expensive postal rates and air freight rates for pouch material. Both postal and air freight regulations prohibit the inclusion of correspondence in such envelopes and parcels.

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(f) Use of "Return Requested"

28. Because the Organization is required to pay return postage costs, special care should be taken to delete the term "Return Requested" from the address block if an undeliverable item is not to be returned.

(g) Zip codes

29. The United Nations Postal Service will not process second-, third- or fourth-class domestic mail, if the address does not bear a zip code. While this applies to the mailing of printed matter and other bulk mailings, originating offices are urged to take special care to use zip codes on all correspondence, as this greatly facilitates processing.

(h) Unogramme

30. This is a form designed to transmit short administrative messages which should receive the immediate attention of the addressees. They are dispatched via pouch or airmail. The address on the unogramme when folded must appear clearly in the window of specially designed airmail envelope.

(i) Facsimile transmission

31. For facsimile transmission of material, the covering message should be typed on form COM.7 (Cable form). The decision to send material via facsimile rests with the Cable Operations Unit. The completed form and attachments should be sent to the Unit in a messenger envelope. Only documents, graphs, charts and similar material consisting of numerous pages and/or graphic symbols which cannot be transmitted by normal teleprinter equipment will be transmitted by facsimile.

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(j) Mailing to multiple addresses and bulk mailing

32. Departments originating multiple-address mailing of documents and information material or mailing of large quantities of material should consult the Outgoing Mail Unit to take advantage of less costly postal rates by preparing the mailings in accordance with prescribed postal regulations. They should also give special attention to time requirements for delivery of bulk shipments to overseas offices. These should be prepared well in advance to allow shipment by sea mail. Departments and offices are requested to keep the use of the diplomatic pouch service for bulk shipment of documents to a minimum.

G. Ensuring timeliness of delivery

33. To allow sufficient time for processing the large volume of mail and printed matter transmitted via the diplomatic pouch service, pouch items must be received in the Diplomatic Pouch Unit, room 3B-2B, at least 24 hours prior to dispatch date. Departments requiring exception to this limit should make special arrangements with the Diplomatic Pouch Unit. Letters for dispatch via pouch should not be sent loose in the interoffice mail. They should be transmitted in messenger envelopes addressed to Diplomatic Pouch Unit, room 3B-2B.

34. Outgoing postal mail prepared at the end of the working day and requiring immediate dispatch must be hand-delivered to the Supervisor of the Outgoing Mail Unit.

H. Budgeting for cost of mail and pouch services

35. Most direct costs of postage, pouch and air freight for programmes financed by the regular budget are included in the regular budget provision for "common services not distributed to programmes". However, communications costs in respect of UNDP, UNICEF, other programmes financed from voluntary contributions, major conferences, peace-keeping missions and revenue-producing activities are charged to the programmes concerned. Provision should therefore be included for these costs in budget estimates for these activities.

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36. Officials responsible for preparing budget estimates for new programmes, major conferences and missions financed by either the regular budget or voluntary contributions should take particular care to include provision for cost of communications which are often substantial. An estimating guide on the subject is available from the Executive Office of the Office of General Services.