



Secretariat

ST/AI/368
10 January 1991

ADMINISTRATIVE INSTRUCTION

To: Members of the staff

From: The Assistant Secretary-General for General Services

Subject: INSTRUCTIONS GOVERNING UNITED NATIONS DIPLOMATIC
POUCH SERVICE

1. The purpose of the present instruction is to set out the guidelines and procedures for pouch certifying officers and users of the diplomatic pouch service at Headquarters and United Nations offices away from Headquarters. Attention is drawn in particular to paragraph 15 which places full responsibility for pouch contents on pouch certifying officers. The present instruction cancels and supersedes administrative instructions ST/AI/174/Rev.3 of 1 September 1983 and ST/AI/328 of 19 February 1985.

Establishment of diplomatic pouch service

2. Under section 10 of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, the United Nations has the right "to dispatch and receive its correspondence ... in bags, which shall have the same immunities and privileges as diplomatic ... bags". By virtue of the Convention, a diplomatic pouch service has been established to ensure the security and speedy transmission of the official correspondence of the United Nations. The service is administered by the Buildings Management Service.

Restrictions on the contents of the diplomatic pouch

3. The following matter may be sent in the diplomatic pouch:

(a) Official correspondence, documents and printed matter of which individual packages must not exceed 35 pounds or 16 kilograms;

(b) Articles intended for official use appropriate for inclusion in the pouch, where shipment by other means is not feasible;

(c) Urgently needed health supplies, including medicines, spectacles and hearing aids prescribed by a physician for the use of United Nations staff members or their dependants when such items are not obtainable locally and are requested in reasonable quantities. All shipments of health supplies must be certified by a United Nations medical officer;

(d) In exceptional circumstances, where mail service is unavailable or inadequate, a limited number of personal letters and periodicals will be accepted for pouching to or from staff in an office away from Headquarters. In such cases, request for permission to include these items in the pouch shall be made by the head of the office away from Headquarters concerned to the Chief, Buildings Management Service. It is the responsibility of the field office to notify Headquarters when pouch service for personal mail is no longer required.

4. Letter mail originating from field staff for forwarding from Headquarters through the United States Postal Service must bear the appropriate postage in uncanceled United Nations stamps (United States dollar denominations only). Mail requiring additional postage will be returned to the sender. Items for personal use, such as food, clothing, etc., are NOT permitted in the pouch.

5. Every effort must be made by executive/administrative officers and pouch certifying officers to limit the weight and quantity of material transmitted by pouch. Originating offices of bulk shipments of documentation and information material are urged to review regularly their distribution requirements and to ensure that less costly means of transport have been explored prior to requesting pouch service. Bulk-rate mail should not be forwarded via pouch under any circumstances.

Diplomatic pouch service between offices away from Headquarters

6. Where the volume of material meets the minimum pouch weight required to obtain economical rates, offices away from Headquarters should consider establishing direct pouch service between field offices - either on a continuing or ad hoc basis - rather than routing the material through New York. Such service would save time and also reduce expenditures. Direct pouch service can only be established after obtaining the concurrence of the Governments concerned. Field offices are requested to report to the Chief of the Buildings Management Service, on a post facto basis, the establishment of new direct pouch routes.

Preparation and handling of material for pouch

7. As a means of identifying the originating office and for accounting purposes, all pouch items larger than a letter-sized envelope must have a bar-code label affixed thereto and the name and return address of the sender clearly indicated. Items not bearing a bar-code label will be returned to the sender. Items without the name and return address of the sender will be opened, inspected and handed over to the Security and Safety Service for disposition. This also applies to shipments originating at overseas offices destined through Headquarters to another overseas office via pouch.

8. In those cases where the Department of Conference Services is requested to prepare documents for pouch shipments, the Distribution Section of that Department will require sufficient pouch charge-back labels and address labels to cover the order. The P.S. 16 form (Request for documents) must be forwarded to the Co-ordination Unit, Distribution Section, Department of Conference Services, room NL-318, when pouch shipments of first-run material is required and to the Secretariat Distribution, room 1B-44, when dispatch of stock documents is required. This request must be accompanied by sufficient bar-code and address labels. Any question concerning pouch shipments of documents prepared by the Distribution Section, Department of Conference Services, should be directed to the Office of the Chief of the Distribution Section (room NL-314, ext. 3.7345).

9. Letters for the pouch should not be in airmail envelopes. Pouch material prepared in manila envelopes will be processed as printed matter unless the envelope is clearly marked "correspondence" below the address block. Official pouch items of value or of special importance should be listed in the "Summary of enclosures". This should be requested on the envelope or wrapper and must be legibly signed by a duly authorized pouch certifying officer and hand-carried to the Diplomatic Pouch Unit, room 3B-2D.

10. To allow sufficient time for sorting and processing of mail transmitted via pouch, items should be sent to the Diplomatic Pouch Unit as soon as possible and at least 24 hours before the scheduled closing time for the destination concerned. Incoming pouches arrive at irregular times. Information on the arrival of a particular pouch may be obtained by calling extensions 3.7244 or 3.7246.

Requisition and distribution of pouch bar-code labels

11. Distribution of pouch bar-code labels will be made by the Mail Operations Section, Buildings Management Service, to departmental executive or administrative offices and to liaison offices at Headquarters for agencies, commissions, etc. Since approximately two weeks is required to process requests for labels, orders should be submitted as early in advance as possible.

12. Staff authorized to send material via the United Nations diplomatic pouch should contact their executive or administrative office to obtain the number of bar-code labels required.

Diplomatic pouch certifying officers

13. The Chief of the Buildings Management Service will delegate pouch certifying authority by approving the appointment and registration of:

(a) Officials at Headquarters who are authorized to transmit confidential sealed correspondence through the diplomatic pouch service or to distribute bar-code labels;

(b) Diplomatic pouch certifying officers and alternates at United Nations offices away from Headquarters who are authorized to seal and transmit official United Nations diplomatic pouch bags and/or confidential sealed items transmitted via pouch.

14. This authority is delegated on form P.86, a copy of which, bearing the signature of the authorized official, is kept on file at Headquarters. Alternate pouch certifying officers may act in the absence of the regular pouch certifying officers.

15. The signature of a pouch certifying officer on a sealed envelope or a bar-code label on a package constitutes certification by that officer that the contents are in accordance with diplomatic pouch regulations. For this reason, pouch certifying officers are urged to exercise strict control over the issuance of bar-code labels and otherwise to verify the contents of packages to ensure that they conform to these regulations.

16. Diplomatic pouch certifying officers at field offices are also responsible for all United Nations pouch operations, including preparing, sealing and shipping outgoing pouches and receiving, opening and checking the contents of incoming pouches.

Violations

17. Officials to whom authority to certify or transmit mail has been delegated are accountable for any violations of the regulations by virtue of the authority delegated to them. Regular spot checks are made of the contents of pouches, packages and envelopes by the Diplomatic Pouch Unit at Headquarters, but it should be emphasized that such checks are not intended to relieve authorized officials of their responsibilities. Failure to abide by the diplomatic pouch regulations may result in disciplinary action.

18. Any inquiries relating to these instructions should be addressed to the Chief, Buildings Management Service, Office of General Services.
