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INFORMATION CIRCULAR NO. 39

Subject: Alcohol and other substances in the workplace

The United Nations has a policy of many years' standing for helping its staff, whether male or female, to resolve any problems they may have in connection with the abuse of alcohol and/or other substances in the workplace. The United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) has decided on additional measures to help everyone who may find themselves in need in this regard.

The purpose of this circular is therefore to remind staff members of the Organization's policy regarding the prevention and treatment of problems connected with alcohol and other substance abuse in the workplace (see administrative instruction ST/AI/372 of 25 September 1991, in annex I below) and to make clear how that policy will henceforth be implemented at UNOG.

The policy has been updated by a working group established to do that and to ensure that all staff members are aware what assistance is available.

The working group proposed a plan of action which has been approved by the Director-General. The activities under the plan include:

- Issuing this circular to remind staff of the existing arrangements and inform them of the adjustments in them at UNOG;
- Promoting comprehensive staff awareness by holding lectures, discussions and interactive workshops and distributing documentation;
- Training supervisors in the early detection of performance difficulties connected with the abuse of alcohol or other substances.

I. Where help can be found

Many entities outside the Organization can provide staff members having problems with alcohol and/or substance abuse with confidential help and support.

The Organization wants to help staff members in their efforts, whether as individuals or as supervisors, to deal with and prevent such problems. It is open to everyone who feels that they may themselves have a dependency problem to contact the UNOG Medical Service and/or Staff Counsellor on their own initiative for information and support.

The Medical Service and/or the Staff Counsellor can also be called in to help when a

supervisor feels that the performance difficulties of a member of his/her team may be connected with IC/Geneva/2003/39
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alcohol and/or substance abuse (see ST/AI/372, chapter III). The assistance of these services can be requested either by the supervisor initiating the support procedure or by the staff member for whom the support is intended.

I.1 The role of the Staff Counsellor

The Staff Counsellor is available to provide a friendly ear, guidance and an assessment of the situation to any staff member or any member of a staff member's family who so requests. She will only take the matter further if the staff member in question agrees, and all information entrusted to her will remain strictly confidential.

Like the Medical Service, the Staff Counsellor has a large amount of informative documentation on dependency-treatment centres in the region (cantons of Geneva and Vaud and nearby France) and works in conjunction with local specialists in a variety of disciplines.

I.2 The role of the Medical Service

The Medical Service is equipped to inform staff about the problems associated with the abuse of alcohol and other substances, about specialized medical advice, treatment and rehabilitation schemes, and about the reimbursement of expenses (in accordance with the rules of the Staff Mutual Insurance Society).

The Medical Service is always ready to help, listen to and support any staff member who feels he or she has a dependency problem. If the staff member so requests, the Medical Service will make an initial assessment of the situation. Following it, the staff member will, if necessary, be put in touch with appropriate specialized entities for treatment.

Staff with performance difficulties that may be connected with substance abuse can also be referred to the Medical Service by the Administration. If its examination of them so warrants, the Service will suggest to them a confidential programme of medical assistance.

I.3 The role of the Security and Safety Section

The Security and Safety Section has authority to take any action that may be needed to maintain safety on United Nations premises and to protect the Organization's property, including the authority to intervene if any staff member or other person in any United Nations building behaves under the influence of alcohol or any other intoxicant in a way that puts themselves, their colleagues or third parties at risk and/or causes them mental and/or physical harm.

II. Staff members' obligations

In the workplace and during working hours, all staff members must be capable of meeting the standards that UNOG expects of them. This applies both to the quality of their work and to their behaviour, which must be consistent with the Code of Conduct for United Nations Staff.

While each staff member is responsible for managing his/her own health, the Office cannot condone circumstances where, because of the consumption of alcohol and/or other intoxicants, any staff member acts when on duty in such a way as to endanger himself/herself and/or colleagues or third parties and/or to cause them mental and/or physical harm.

III. Supervisors' obligations

Supervisors are responsible for the smooth functioning of their units and for the quality of their output. Within a work team, direct supervisors play a key role in the early detection of any persistent underperformance that might be a sign of dependency. Common examples include:

- Absenteeism (lateness, repeated unauthorized absence from work);
- A decline in the quality, efficiency or amount of work, with a consequent increase in colleagues' workload;
- Concentration, learning and memory problems;
- Extended reaction times and lack of initiative;
- Excessive risk-taking at work, particularly in jobs where safety is an important consideration;
- Greater-than-usual irritability, aggressivity, nervousness or instability, causing a deterioration in relations with other persons;
- Refusal or, on the other hand, constant need of colleagues' help.

It is essential to react to and deal with such dysfunctions before the situation gets out of hand.

When staff behave in a way suggestive of dependency on, or regular consumption of alcohol and/or other intoxicants, their supervisors **must** apply the plan of action recommended in ST/AI/372 (see chapter III, "Procedures for providing assistance", of the instruction). They will have the support of their own managers in this regard. Supervisors are strongly encouraged to seek the support and advice of the Staff Counsellor and/or the Medical Service before taking any action concerning a staff member with a possible dependency problem and to include the Staff Counsellor and the Medical Service in the implementation of the steps listed in chapter III of the instruction.

IV. Conclusion

UNOG hopes that, thanks to the information given in this circular, staff will have the benefit of early detection of any performance difficulties linked to consumption of intoxicants.

Staff members are warmly encouraged to seek assistance when necessary from the various competent bodies inside and outside UNOG. They can be assured of their managers' support in that event.

In their turn, supervisors are reminded that it is their responsibility to act, with, if they wish, the support of the Staff Counsellor and/or the Medical Service, when abuse of alcohol and/or other substances is diminishing a staff member's ability to perform his/her duties.

(Signed): **Bertrand Juppín de Fondaumière**
Director, Division of Administration