

# **Media guidelines for United Nations officials**

## **United Nations Secretariat relations with the media**

---

### **The policy**

1. The United Nations is committed to being open and transparent in its dealings with the press. It is in our interest to work with the media quickly and honestly, and to develop a coherent communications strategy based on those same principles. We should not only react to events but, where appropriate, project the Organization's point of view on important international developments. However, we must sometimes keep confidences – not to mislead or conceal, but to protect a diplomatic process. Our media policy must, therefore, balance the need to be open and the need to respect confidentiality.

### **Speaking to the press**

2. The principal voice of the Organization is the Secretary-General. He speaks to the media frequently, at Headquarters and when traveling.
3. Media policy is an integral component of the broader communications and public information work of the Organization, headed by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information. The Director of Communications in the Office of the Secretary-General is responsible for coordinating the development of a communications strategy that would help project to the world's media a coherent and consistent message for the Organization.
4. The Secretary-General's Spokesman and his staff speak to journalists on the Secretary-General's behalf throughout the day. The Spokesman gets his guidance directly from the Secretary-General and senior members of his staff. As the Spokesman's staff cannot be expert in all subjects, they seek the assistance of UN specialists – either to provide them with information that they can pass on to the press or to speak directly to the journalists themselves.
5. As a matter of principle, every member of the Secretariat may speak to the press, within limits:
  - speak only within your area of competence and responsibility;
  - provide facts, not opinions or comment;
  - leave sensitive issues to officials who are specifically authorized to speak on them (see paragraph 6 below).

### **Sensitive issues**

6. The number of officials speaking on sensitive issues is necessarily limited to:

- The Spokesman, on the basis of guidance;
  - Designated members of the Secretary-General's staff and Heads of Department, within their areas of competence;
  - Staff authorized by their Heads of Department, on the basis of guidance; and
  - Directors of UNICs, on the basis of guidance from Headquarters.
7. For those speaking on sensitive issues, knowing the journalist's particular interest in a story can be useful. Such information can usually be provided by the Director of Communications or the Spokesman.
  8. No staff member should presume or pretend to speak for the Secretary-General or characterize his views without his explicit consent.

### **Sharing information**

9. For the United Nations to communicate effectively with the outside world, it needs to do the same internally. Senior officials should share information with those under their supervision and should keep each other informed of their media activities.

### **Ground rules**

10. All UN officials should normally speak to journalists on the record – that is, for attribution. Sometimes, though, officials specifically authorized to address sensitive issues can give a journalist a deeper understanding of an issue by speaking on background. However, it is very important that the journalist know on which of the following bases the conversation is being conducted:

**On the record:** “Everything I say can be attributed to me by name.”

**Not for attribution (on background):** “Don't attribute this to me by name, but rather to a UN official.”

**On deep background:** “Use my ideas but not my words; don't attribute to anyone.”

11. Keeping the Secretary-General's Spokesman informed of important background briefings will help provide an indication of the issues that the media is interested in.
12. It is unwise, and may sometimes be unethical, to tell one journalist what another is working on, or to suggest that one journalist discuss a pending story with another.
13. Officials should not feel that they have to answer every question, in particular any hypothetical ones.