

## Annex XIII

### Standards of conduct for the international civil service

#### Introduction

1. The United Nations and the specialized agencies embody the highest aspirations of the peoples of the world. Their aim is to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and to enable every man, woman and child to live in dignity and freedom.
2. The international civil service bears responsibility for translating these ideals into reality. It relies on the great traditions of public administration that have grown up in Member States: competence, integrity, impartiality, independence and discretion. But over and above this, international civil servants have a special calling: to serve the ideals of peace, respect for fundamental rights, economic and social progress, and international cooperation. It is therefore incumbent on international civil servants to adhere to the highest standards of conduct; for, ultimately, it is the international civil service that will enable the United Nations system to bring about a just and peaceful world.

#### Guiding principles

3. The values that are enshrined in the United Nations organizations must also be those that guide international civil servants in all their actions: fundamental human rights, social justice, the dignity and worth of the human person and respect for the equal rights of men and women and of nations great and small.
4. International civil servants should share the vision of their organizations. It is loyalty to this vision that ensures the integrity and international outlook of international civil servants; a shared vision guarantees that they will place the interests of their organization above their own and use its resources in a responsible manner.
5. The concept of integrity enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations embraces all aspects of an international civil servant's behaviour, including such qualities as honesty, truthfulness, impartiality and incorruptibility. These qualities are as basic as those of competence and efficiency, also enshrined in the Charter.
6. Tolerance and understanding are basic human values. They are essential for international civil servants, who must respect all persons equally, without any distinction whatsoever. This respect fosters a climate and a working environment sensitive to the needs of all. To achieve this in a multicultural setting calls for a positive affirmation going well beyond passive acceptance.
7. International loyalty means loyalty to the whole United Nations system and not only to the organization for which one works; international civil servants have an obligation to understand and exemplify this wider loyalty. The need for a cooperative and understanding attitude towards international civil servants of other United Nations organizations is most important where international civil servants of several organizations are serving in the same country or region.
8. International civil servants must remain independent of any authority external to their organization. Their conduct must reflect that independence. This includes considering how their conduct may be perceived. Consistent with the Charter and any corresponding constitutional instruments, and in keeping with their oath or declaration of office and the exclusively international character of their responsibilities, they shall neither seek nor receive instructions from any Government, person or entity external to the organization. They shall refrain from

any action which might reflect on their position as international officials responsible only to the Organization. It cannot be too strongly stressed that international civil servants are not, in any sense, representatives of Governments or other entities, nor are they proponents of their policies. This applies equally to those on secondment from Governments and to those whose services have been made available from elsewhere. International civil servants should be constantly aware that, through their allegiance to the Charter and the corresponding instruments of each organization, Member States and their representatives are committed to respect their independent status.

9. Impartiality implies tolerance and restraint, particularly in dealing with political or religious convictions. While their personal views remain inviolate, international civil servants do not have the freedom of private persons to take sides or to express their convictions publicly on controversial matters, either individually or as members of a group, irrespective of the medium used. This includes on social media and as participants in public events. This means that, in certain situations, personal views should be expressed only with tact and discretion.

10. This does not mean that international civil servants have to give up their personal political views or national perspectives. It does mean, however, that they must at all times maintain a broad international outlook and an understanding of the international community as a whole.

11. International civil servants may express themselves publicly in support of positions taken by the Secretary-General or the head of their organization, including on questions of human rights and other social issues. When doing so, they must remain mindful of their individual responsibility for preserving trust in the independence and impartiality of the international civil service. This means ensuring that their public expressions are consistent with those of the Secretary-General or the head of their organization and reflect the international outlook required by their status. Where the Secretary-General or the head of their organization has not taken a position on a specific matter of controversy, to safeguard the organization's ability to perform its mission in addressing such matters, international civil servants should exercise caution in public expression.

12. There may be situations where international civil servants disagree with the positions taken by the Secretary-General or the head of their organization on controversial matters. There may also be situations where international civil servants consider that their organization should take positions on controversial matters when it has not yet done so. International civil servants should have an opportunity to express their views in this regard within their organizations. Where needed, the organizations should establish appropriate mechanisms whereby, on controversial matters, international civil servants can express dissenting views or call upon their organizations to take an official position. When expressed respectfully and solely through designated internal channels, these views will be deemed to be compatible with the standards.

13. The independence of the international civil service does not conflict with, or obscure, the fact that it is the Member States that collectively make up – in some cases with other constituents – the organization. Conduct that furthers good relations with individual Member States and that contributes to their trust and confidence in the organizations' secretariat strengthens the organizations and promotes their interest.

14. International civil servants who are responsible for projects in a given country or region may be called upon to exercise special care in maintaining their independence. At times they might receive instructions from the host country, but this

should not compromise their independence. If at any time they consider that such instructions threaten their independence, they must consult their supervisors.

15. International civil servants at all levels are accountable and answerable for all actions carried out, as well as decisions taken, and commitments made by them in performing their functions.

16. An international outlook stems from an understanding of and loyalty to the objectives and purposes of the organizations of the United Nations system as set forth in their legal instruments. It implies, inter alia, respect for the right of others to hold different points of view and follow different cultural practices. It requires a willingness and commitment to work without bias with persons of all ethnicities, nationalities, identities, religions and cultures; it calls for constant sensitivity as to how words and actions may be perceived by others. It requires avoidance of any expressions or behaviours that could be interpreted as biased or intolerant. As working methods can be different in different cultures, international civil servants should not be wedded to the attitudes, working methods or work habits of their own country or region.

17. Freedom from discrimination is a basic human right. International civil servants are required to respect fundamental rights, including the dignity, worth and equality of all people, without any distinction whatsoever. Assumptions based on stereotypes must be assiduously avoided. One of the main tenets of the Charter is the equality of men and women, and organizations should therefore do their utmost to promote gender equality.

18. Racism and racial discrimination violate the basic principles of the Charter and are fundamentally incompatible with the standards of conduct for the international civil service.

### **Working relations**

19. Managers and supervisors are in positions of leadership, and it is their responsibility to manage performance as well as ensure a harmonious workplace based on mutual respect and free from all forms of discrimination, violence, harassment and abuse. They should ensure that every member of their team has an opportunity to express their views and opinions, be open to them and make sure that the merits of staff are properly recognized. They need to build inclusive and supportive teams and are expected to support staff under their supervision, including when they are subject to criticism arising from the performance of their duties. In addition, they are responsible for guiding and motivating staff under their supervision and promoting their professional development.

20. Managers and supervisors serve as role models and they have therefore a special obligation to uphold the highest standards of conduct, including addressing behaviour that is incompatible with these standards. It is unacceptable for them to solicit favours, gifts or loans from their staff; they must act impartially, without favouritism or intimidation. In matters relating to the appointment or career of others, international civil servants should not try to influence colleagues for personal reasons.

21. Managers and supervisors should communicate effectively with their staff and share relevant information with them. International civil servants have a reciprocal responsibility to provide all pertinent facts and information to their supervisors and to abide by and defend any decisions taken, even when those do not accord with their personal views.

22. International civil servants must follow the instructions they receive in connection with their official functions and, if they have doubts as to whether an

instruction is consistent with the Charter or any other constitutional instrument, decisions of the governing bodies or administrative rules and regulations, they should first consult their supervisors. If the international civil servant and supervisor cannot agree, the international civil servant may ask for written instructions. These may be challenged through the proper institutional mechanisms, but any challenge should not delay carrying out the instruction. International civil servants should not follow verbal or written instructions that are manifestly inconsistent with their official functions or that threaten their safety or that of others. International civil servants may also record their views in official files.

23. International civil servants have the duty to report any breach of the organization's regulations and rules to the official or entity within their organizations whose responsibility it is to take appropriate action, and to cooperate with duly authorized audits and investigations. This contributes to a culture of integrity, accountability and transparency in the United Nations organizations. An international civil servant who reports such a breach in good faith or who cooperates with an audit or investigation has the right to be protected against retaliation for doing so.

24. Reprisals that do not constitute retaliation under an organization's framework should be separately prohibited and addressed under relevant policies. International civil servants have a right to, and must respect, due process.

#### **Discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority**

25. Discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority in any shape or form are an affront to human dignity and international civil servants must not engage in any form thereof, irrespective of the medium used, including online. International civil servants have the right to a workplace environment free from discrimination, harassment and abuse of authority. All organizations must prohibit any such behaviour. Organizations have a duty to establish rules and provide guidance on what constitutes discrimination, harassment and abuse of authority, and how unacceptable behaviour should be prevented and will be addressed.

26. Sexual harassment, in any form, irrespective of the medium used, including online, has no place in the United Nations organizations. International civil servants who report, experience or witness sexual harassment should be supported by organizations, including through a victim-centred approach and protection from retaliation. International civil servants who perpetrate sexual harassment should be held accountable, regardless of position or seniority.

27. International civil servants must not discriminate, abuse their authority, or use their power or position in a manner that is offensive, humiliating, embarrassing or intimidating to another person.

#### **Sexual exploitation and abuse**

28. When engaging with external parties, including those served by the organization international civil servants should be constantly mindful of humanitarian principles and of the power imbalances and vulnerabilities that may be present. Sexual exploitation and abuse constitute a fundamental breach of the trust placed in the international civil service and there must be no tolerance for these acts. A victim-centred approach must be applied in addressing sexual exploitation and abuse.

#### **Conflict of interest**

29. Conflicts of interest may occur when international civil servants' personal interests interfere with the performance of their official duties or call into question

the qualities of integrity, independence and impartiality required by the status of an international civil servant. Conflicts of interest include circumstances in which international civil servants, directly or indirectly, may benefit improperly, or allow a third party to benefit improperly, from their association with their organization. Conflicts of interest can arise from an international civil servant's personal or familial dealings with third parties, individuals, beneficiaries, or other institutions. If a conflict of interest or possible conflict of interest does arise, the conflict shall be disclosed, addressed and resolved in the best interest of the organization. Questions entailing a conflict of interest can be very sensitive and need to be treated with care.

30. Early detection and timely management of potential conflicts of interest, with the necessary internal accountability framework in place, are important to keep all staff members independent and impartial as international civil servants and to ensure that their personal interests or positions do not interfere with the performance of their duties.

#### **Disclosure of information and third-party dealings**

31. International civil servants should avoid assisting third parties in their dealings with their organization where this might lead to actual or perceived preferential treatment. This includes representatives of Member States, as well as non-State donors, private sector and implementing partners, and any other third parties. This is particularly important in procurement matters and partnership agreements, or when negotiating prospective employment. At times, international civil servants may, owing to their position or functions in accordance with the organization's policies, be required to disclose certain personal assets and relationships if this is necessary to enable their organizations to make sure that there is no conflict. The organizations must ensure confidentiality of any information so disclosed, and must use it only for defined purposes or as authorized by the international civil servant concerned. International civil servants should also disclose in advance possible conflicts of interest that may arise in the course of carrying out their duties and seek advice on mitigation and remediation. They should perform their official duties and conduct their personal affairs in a manner that preserves and enhances public confidence in their own integrity and that of their organization.

#### **Use of the resources of United Nations organizations**

32. International civil servants are responsible for safeguarding the resources of United Nations organizations which are to be used for the purpose of delivering an organization's mandate and to advance the best interests of the organization. Misuse of the resources of the organization, such as by the commission of fraudulent acts, undermines trust in the United Nations system and harms the interests of the organizations. International civil servants shall use the assets, property, information and other resources of their organizations for authorized purposes only and with care. International civil servants should be mindful of sustainability considerations, including by taking into account the social and environmental impact of their use of their organization's resources. Limited personal use of the resources of an organization, such as electronic and communications resources, may be permitted by the organization in accordance with applicable policies.

33. International civil servants should follow relevant guidance issued by their organization on the ethical use of emerging technologies, including the use of artificial intelligence.

### **Post-employment restrictions**

34. After leaving service with organizations of the United Nations system, international civil servants should not take improper advantage of their former official functions and positions, including through the unauthorized use or distribution of privileged or confidential information. International civil servants, including those working in procurement services and as requisitioning officers, should not attempt to unduly influence the decisions of the organization in the interest or at the request of third parties with a view to seeking an opportunity to be employed by such third parties. This includes those engaging in their official capacity with representatives of Member States and parties external to the organization. Similarly, consistent with their commitment under Article 100 of the Charter, it is understood that Governments will refrain from attempts to unduly influence the decisions of international civil servants, including when the international civil servants are seeking employment with the Governments.

### **Role of the secretariats (headquarters and field duty stations)**

35. The main function of all secretariats is to assist legislative bodies in their work and to carry out their decisions. The executive heads are responsible for directing and controlling the work of the secretariats. Accordingly, when submitting proposals or advocating positions before a legislative body or committee, international civil servants are presenting the position of the executive head, not that of an individual or organizational unit.

36. In providing services to a legislative or representative body, international civil servants should serve only the interests of the organization, not those of an individual or organizational unit. It would not be appropriate for international civil servants to prepare for Government or other international civil service representatives any speeches, arguments or proposals on questions under discussion without approval of the executive head. It could, however, be quite appropriate to provide factual information, technical advice or assistance with such tasks as the preparation of draft resolutions.

37. It is entirely improper for international civil servants to lobby or seek support from Government representatives or members of legislative organs to obtain advancement either for themselves or for others or to block or reverse unfavourable decisions regarding their status. By adhering to the Charter and the constitutions of the organizations of the United Nations system, Governments have undertaken to safeguard the independence of the international civil service; it is therefore understood that Government representatives and members of legislative bodies will neither accede to such requests nor intervene in such matters, regardless of whether they have been requested to do so. This includes refraining from seeking to influence any career processes, including recruitment, in favour of specific candidates or existing international civil servants. Requests of this nature, or acceding thereto, call into question the independence of international civil servants. The proper method for an international civil servant to address grievances and disputes concerning such matters is through administrative channels; each organization is responsible for providing these.

### **Staff-management relations**

38. An enabling and inclusive environment is essential for constructive staff-management relations and serves the interests of the organizations. Relations between management and staff should be guided by mutual respect. Elected staff representatives have a cardinal role to play in the consideration of conditions of employment and work, as well as in matters of staff welfare. Freedom of association

is a fundamental human right and international civil servants have the right to form and join associations, unions or other groupings to promote and defend their interests. Continuing dialogue between staff and management is indispensable. Management should facilitate this dialogue.

39. Elected staff representatives enjoy rights that derive from their status; this may include the opportunity to address the legislative organs of their organization. These rights should be exercised in a manner that is consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international covenants on human rights, and does not undermine the independence and integrity of the international civil service. In using the broad freedom of expression they enjoy, staff representatives must exercise a sense of responsibility and avoid undue criticism of the organization.

40. Staff representatives must be protected against discriminatory or prejudicial treatment based on their status or activities as staff representatives, both during their term of office and after it has ended. Organizations should avoid unwarranted interference in the administration of their staff unions or associations.

#### **Relations with Member States and legislative bodies**

41. It is the clear duty of all international civil servants to maintain the best possible relations with Governments and avoid any action that might impair this. They should not interfere in the policies or affairs of Governments. It is unacceptable for them, either individually or collectively, to criticize or try to discredit a Government. At the same time, it is understood that international civil servants may speak freely in support of their organizations' policies. Any activity, direct or indirect, to undermine or overthrow a Government constitutes serious misconduct. These provisions apply including in the context of social media, public events or other public forums.

42. International civil servants are not representatives of their countries, nor do they have authority to act as liaison agents between organizations of the United Nations system and their Governments. The executive head may, however, request an international civil servant to undertake such duties, a unique role for which international loyalty and integrity are essential. For their part, neither Governments nor organizations should place international civil servants in a position where their international and national loyalties may conflict.

#### **Relations with the public**

43. For an organization of the United Nations system to function successfully, it must have the support of the public. All international civil servants therefore have a continuing responsibility to promote a better understanding of the objectives and work of their organizations. This requires them to be well informed of the achievements of their own organizations and to familiarize themselves with the work of the United Nations system as a whole.

44. There is a risk that on occasion international civil servants may be subject to criticism from outside their organizations; in keeping with their responsibility as international civil servants, they should respond with tact and restraint. It is the obligation of their organizations to defend them against criticism for actions taken in fulfilment of their duties.

45. It would not be proper for international civil servants to air personal grievances or criticize their organizations in public. International civil servants should endeavour at all times to promote a positive image of the international civil service, in conformity with their oath of loyalty.

### **Relations with the media**

46. Openness and transparency in relations with the media are effective means of communicating the organizations' messages. The organizations should have guidelines and procedures in place for which the following principles should apply: international civil servants should regard themselves as speaking in the name of their organizations and avoid personal references and views; and in no circumstances should they use the media to further their own interests, to air their own grievances, to reveal unauthorized information or attempt to influence their organizations' policy decisions.

### **Use and protection of information**

47. Because disclosure of confidential information may seriously jeopardize the efficiency and credibility of an organization, international civil servants are responsible for exercising discretion in all matters of official business. They must not divulge confidential information without authorization. International civil servants should not use information to personal advantage that has not been made public and is known to them by virtue of their official position. These obligations do not cease upon separation from service.

48. Organizations must maintain guidelines for the use and protection of confidential information, and it is equally necessary for such guidelines to keep pace with developments in communications and other new technology. It is understood that these provisions do not affect established practices governing the exchange of information between the secretariats and Member States, which ensure the fullest participation of Member States in the life and work of the organizations. International civil servants should adhere to standards established by their organization to ensure and uphold adequate data privacy and protection.

### **Respect for different customs and culture**

49. The world is home to a myriad of different peoples, languages, cultures, customs and traditions. A genuine respect for them all is a fundamental requirement for an international civil servant. Any behaviour that is not acceptable in a particular cultural context must be avoided. However, if a tradition is directly contrary to any human rights instrument adopted by the United Nations system, the international civil servant must be guided by the latter. International civil servants should avoid an ostentatious lifestyle and any display of an inflated sense of personal importance.

### **Security and occupational health and safety**

50. While an executive head assigns staff in accordance with the exigencies of the service, it is the responsibility of organizations to ensure that the physical and mental health, well-being, security and lives of their staff, without any discrimination whatsoever, will not be subject to undue risk. The organizations should take measures to protect the safety of their staff and that of their family members. At the same time, it is incumbent on international civil servants to comply with all instructions designed to protect their safety, including when working remotely.

51. Occupational health and safety is required for the United Nations organizations to meet their mandates. This includes considering and addressing, as appropriate, physical and psychosocial risks and putting mitigation strategies in place.

52. Organizations should identify ways to support staff and their household members who are victims of any kind of violence, including domestic violence.



**Personal conduct**

53. The private life of international civil servants is their own concern and organizations should not intrude upon it. There may be situations, however, in which the behaviour of an international civil servant may reflect on the organization. International civil servants must therefore bear in mind that their conduct and activities outside the workplace, even if unrelated to official duties, can compromise the image and the interests of the organizations. This can also result from the conduct of members of international civil servants' households, and it is the responsibility of international civil servants to make sure that their households are fully aware of this. Domestic violence committed by an international civil servant against any member of the household is a violation of these standards of conduct.

54. The privileges and immunities that international civil servants enjoy are conferred upon them solely in the interests of the organizations. They do not exempt international civil servants from observing local laws, nor do they provide an excuse for ignoring private legal or financial obligations. It should be remembered that only the executive head is competent to waive the immunity accorded to international civil servants or to determine its scope.

55. Violations of the law can range from serious criminal activities to trivial offences, and organizations may be called upon to exercise judgment depending on the nature and circumstances of individual cases. In accordance with the organization's relevant regulations, rules and procedures, credible allegations of criminal conduct may be referred to the national authorities. A conviction by a national court will usually, although not always, be persuasive evidence of the act for which an international civil servant was prosecuted; acts that are generally recognized as offences by national criminal laws will normally also be considered violations of the standards of conduct for the international civil service.

**Outside employment and activities**

56. The primary obligation of international civil servants is to devote their energies to the work of their organizations. Therefore, international civil servants should not engage, without prior authorization, in any outside activity, whether remunerated or not, that interferes with that obligation or is incompatible with their status or conflicts with the interests of the organization. For international civil servants in senior leadership positions, such activities are more likely to have an impact on the interests of the organizations. Any questions about this should be referred to the executive head.

57. Subject to the above, outside activities may, of course, be beneficial both to staff members and to their organizations. Organizations should allow, encourage and facilitate the participation of international civil servants in professional activities that foster contacts with private and public bodies and thus serve to maintain and enhance their professional and technical competencies.

58. International civil servants on leave, either with or without pay, should bear in mind that they remain international civil servants in the employ of their organization and remain subject to its rules and these standards of conduct. They may, therefore, accept employment, paid or unpaid, during their leave only with proper authorization.

59. In view of the independence and impartiality that they must maintain, international civil servants, while retaining the right to vote, should not participate in political activities, such as standing for or holding local or national political office. This does not, however, preclude participation in local community or civic activities, provided that such participation is consistent with the oath of service in the United Nations system. It is necessary for international civil servants to exercise discretion

in their support for a political party or campaign, including on social media, and they should not accept or solicit funds, write articles or make public speeches or statements to the press. As role models, managers and supervisors have a special obligation to uphold the highest standards of conduct, including in relation to such activities. These cases require the exercise of judgment and, in case of doubt, should be referred to the executive head.

60. The significance of membership in a political party varies from country to country and it is difficult to formulate standards that will apply in all cases. In general, international civil servants may be members of a political party, provided its prevailing views and the obligations imposed on its members are consistent with the oath of service in the United Nations system.

### **Gifts, honours and remuneration from outside sources**

61. To protect the international civil service from any appearance of impropriety, international civil servants must not accept, without authorization from the executive head, any honour, decoration, gift, remuneration, favour or economic benefit of more than nominal value from any source external to their organizations; it is understood that this includes Governments as well as non-State donors, private sector and implementing partners, and any other entities.

62. International civil servants should not accept supplementary payments or other subsidies from a Government or any other source prior to, during or after their assignment with an organization of the United Nations system if the payment is related to that assignment. Balancing this requirement, it is understood that Governments or other entities, recognizing that they are at variance with the spirit of the Charter and the constitutions of the organizations of the United Nations system, should not make or offer such payments.

### **Conclusion**

63. The attainment of the standards of conduct for the international civil service requires the highest commitment of all parties. International civil servants, both locally and internationally recruited, must be committed to and model the values, principles and standards set forth herein. They are expected to uphold them in a positive and active manner. They should feel responsible for contributing to the broad ideals to which they dedicated themselves in joining the United Nations system. Organizations have the obligation to implement these standards through their policy framework, including regulations, rules and other administrative instruments. For their part, Member States are expected, through their allegiance to the Charter and other constituent instruments, to preserve the independence and impartiality of the international civil service.

64. For these standards to be effectively applied, it is essential that they be widely disseminated and that measures be taken and mechanisms put in place to ensure that their scope and importance are understood throughout the international civil service, the Member States and the organizations of the United Nations system.

65. Respect for these standards assures that the international civil service will continue to be an effective instrument in fulfilling its responsibilities and in meeting the aspirations of the peoples of the world.