

Ethics Panel of the United Nations Guidance to Staff on Current Demonstrations

Staff Regulations Concerning Political Expression

Staff Regulation 1.2 (f) provides as follows:

“While staff members’ personal views and convictions, including their political and religious convictions, remain inviolable, staff members shall ensure that those views and convictions do not adversely affect their official duties or the interests of the United Nations. They shall conduct themselves at all times in a manner befitting their status as international civil servants and shall not engage in any activity that is incompatible with the proper discharge of their duties with the United Nations. They shall avoid any action and, in particular, any kind of public pronouncement that may adversely reflect on their status, or on the integrity, independence and impartiality that are required by that status.”

The I.C.S.C.’s 2013 Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service states, in paragraph 9, further explains the meaning of Staff Regulation 1.2(f) as follows:

“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 can mean that, in certain situations, personal views should be expressed only with tact and discretion.”

Staff Regulation 1.2 (h) further stipulates as follows:

“Staff members may exercise the right to vote but shall ensure that their participation in any political activity is consistent with, and does not reflect adversely upon, the independence and impartiality required by their status as international civil servants.”

The Comment 4 to Staff Regulation 1.2 (h), as set forth in the Secretary-General’s Bulletin on The Status, Basic Rights and Duties of Staff Members, ST/SGB/2016/9, is as follows:

“Staff regulation 1.2 (h) also addresses participation in political events in public such as a political rally. While staff may have political views, their status as impartial international civil servants never ceases while in service, and expression of a particular political opinion or opinion about a particularly sensitive political matter in public may not be compatible with that status.”

Given the obligations of staff members under Staff Regulations 1.2 (f) and 1.2 (h), as elaborated by the comments of the I.C.S.C. and the Secretary-General, *participation in public demonstrations in the current circumstances may not be consistent with the independence and impartiality required of us as international civil servants.*

Observance of the Law and Regulations

Pursuant to Staff Regulation 1.1 (f), the privileges and immunities of the United Nations pursuant to Article 105 of the Charter of the United Nations do not furnish any excuse to staff members “to fail to observe laws and police regulations of the State in which they are located.” Staff Rule 1.2 (b) requires staff members to “comply with local laws.”

Thus, staff members should consider the consequences of participating in public demonstrations given the public health orders during the ongoing novel coronavirus pandemic to maintain social distancing, to avoid large gatherings and to practice other public health measures that may be incompatible with participation in mass protests.

Moreover, insofar as some of the protests have given rise to violence and property damage, the risk that a United Nations staff member could be swept up in an uncontrolled demonstration, including facing arrest or detention, could bring substantial disrepute to the Organization.

In New York City or other locations in which curfews have been imposed, staff members must observe such curfews and similar public orders, for which public authorities have made exceptions, such as for essential workers and for health or similar emergencies. Staff should check with their local Security and Safety officials about these public orders.

Finally, pursuant to Staff Rule 1.5(d), “any staff member who has been arrested, charged with an offence other than a minor traffic violation or summoned before a court as a defendant in a criminal proceeding, or who has been convicted, fined or imprisoned for any offence other than a minor traffic violation shall immediately report the fact to the Secretary-General.”

Possible Ways to Express Solidarity

Given all the foregoing concerns, staff members who wish to express their personal views on the current situation or in general about matters of human rights, racism and/or social justice should consider doing so by amplifying the UN’s stated position on these matters through the staff members’ own social media platforms. Some examples of resources available to staff members for these purposes, such as UN press releases, statements, quotes from UN leaders, social media posts, etc., tweets, etc., are set forth below.

Staff members should recall that all participation in social media is subject to United Nations core values as well as its regulations and standards. Staff are strongly encouraged to follow the latest [Guidelines for the Personal Use of Social Media](#) for Secretariat staff and respective entities’ guidance.

Secretary General:

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/antonioguterres/>

UN News:

[UN appeals for restraint, ‘social cohesion’ as protests across the US continue](#)

High commissioner for Human Rights

Twitter: [@mbachelet](#)

OHCHR Media page:

28 May 2020 [Statement](#) issued by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet

3 June 2020 [Statement](#) issued by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet

Website: <https://www.un.org/en/letsfightracism/>

Twitter: [#FightRacism](#)

Website: <https://www.standup4humanrights.org/en/index.html>

Twitter: [#StandUp4HumanRights](#)

Twitter: [@UN](#)

United Nations Secretary-General Twitter: [@antonioguterres](#)

Facebook: [United Nations](#)

Twitter: [@UNHumanRights](#)

Facebook: [United Nations Human Rights](#)