



UNITED NATIONS Ombudsman & Mediation Services

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Delivering in Europe - Portrait of the **Regional Branch in Geneva**

The United Nations Office of Ombudsman and Mediation Services (UNOMS) has seven regional branches that provide informal conflict resolution services to employees of the UN Secretariat including staff in peacekeeping missions. One of those branches is located in Geneva (Switzerland), serving the staff at UNOG and other Secretariat entities located in Western Europe.

The branch in Geneva is headed by Regional Ombudsman, Mr. Louis Germain (Haiti) who has extensive experience in the field of dispute resolution and human resources management. The Office provides services such as conflict resolution, coaching, shuttle diplomacy and mediation.

“Informal conflict resolution provides an opportunity for both sides in a conflict to resolve their differences through an informal process which seeks to empower them to reach their own solution rather than having an outcome which has been imposed.”

Louis Germain, Regional Ombudsman

The nature of informal resolution

The Ombudsmen and Mediators use a collaborative approach to look at disputes from all perspectives with the objective to identify possible ways forward. The parties remain in control of the resolution process and determine the outcome that best meets their needs. Such an informal approach also allows for swift and sustainable solutions to disputes.

The work of the Regional Branch in Geneva



Regional Ombudsman Louis Germain (Geneva)

Mr. Germain notes: *“The response to the establishment of the Regional Office in Geneva has been overwhelmingly positive. While visitors to the office expressed appreciation for the efforts of the New York office to attend to their needs and concerns prior to the establishment of the Geneva office, they are grateful for the opportunity to speak face to face with a representative who can locally address their concerns. With the creation of the regional branch, follow-up action is immediate, accessibility greatly improved and there is a renewed confidence in the confidentiality principle of the informal process.”*

In this regard emphasis has been placed on providing quality and confidential service to earn the respect of staff and the administration alike. While trust building is an on-going process, based on feedback received in the past year, we are confident that we are on the right track. We are also working with key stakeholders to develop more mechanisms for handling conflict resolution in the workplace. This includes a proposal to introduce more conflict resolution training for managers because we recognize that the office may only be handling a fraction of actual cases, since visits to the office are on a strictly voluntary basis. We recognize that more often than not, managers are aware of conflicts in their immediate work environment which may not end up on our agenda and this puts them in a very strategic position when it comes to addressing them as first responders”.

Types of issues

Since the Office's establishment in 2010, issues brought to the Ombudsman in Geneva for informal resolution were mainly related to: (1) job and career; (2) interpersonal relationships; and (3) compensation and benefits. Other issues relate to unfair treatment, abuse of authority, safety, health and work/life balance.



United Nations Headquarters in Geneva

Guiding principles of an Ombudsman

Independent – An Ombudsman is independent in structure and function from all United Nations organs and officials and has direct access to the Secretary-General.

Neutral and Impartial – An Ombudsman does not take sides in a conflict. S/he reviews each situation objectively and treats all parties equally.

Confidential – An Ombudsman does not keep records for the United Nations or any other party. S/he holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence, and does not disclose confidential communications unless given permission to do so.

Informal – An Ombudsman does not participate in any formal adjudicative or administrative procedure relating to concerns brought to his/her attention.

Contact the Ombudsman if you have a work related concern and you:

- Don't know who to talk to
- Would like a confidential or "off-the-record" conversation
- Don't know how to address your concerns
- Have not yet decided on a course of action
- Are uncertain of possible consequences
- Have pursued formal redress and want to explore alternatives

Contacting an Ombudsman is always a good first step!

The Regional Office in Geneva is located in the Villa les Feuillantines, Room 13, Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland.

Central case intake:

Use the Secure Contact Form to contact one of the Ombudsmen or Mediators confidentially, send an email to ombudsmediation@un.org or call +1 917 367 5731 (New York).

Services are available in all six UN languages. Find out more at: www.un.org/ombudsman.

"Just as the United Nations addresses conflicts around the world, so must we also pay close attention to resolving and managing conflicts within the organization. I therefore encourage all of you to make use of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services".

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon