

## Delivering in Africa: the regional branch in Nairobi

The Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services has seven regional branches that provide informal conflict resolution services to staff worldwide. The regional branch in Nairobi serves staff at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and other Secretariat entities in Southern and South-East Africa.

The Nairobi branch is headed by Regional Ombudsman Nicholas Theotocatos, an attorney specialized in conflict resolution and mediation with extensive experience in human rights. Before joining the United Nations, Mr. Theotocatos was the Ombudsman of the International Organization for Migration. In his work, he is supported by Caroline Gitau.



Nicholas Theotocatos , Regional Ombudsman in Nairobi, (right) and Caroline Gitau, Administrative Assistant (left)

### How do we work?

Ombudsmen and mediators use a collaborative approach that emphasizes looking at disputes together from all perspectives. The objective is to identify ways of moving towards a resolution of the conflict by assessing options, clarifying positions and understanding needs. From the moment a staff member contacts an ombudsman, he or she remains in control of the process, as no steps are taken without his or her consent, consultations are confidential and no records are kept. Moreover, ombudsmen cannot be called to testify in formal proceedings.

*As an impartial and neutral ombudsman and mediator, my role is not to deliver a Solomonic judgement but to empower staff to find amicable solutions agreeable to all parties involved. This is achieved by expanding the options of the parties rather than focusing on outcomes on the basis of right and wrong.*

Nicholas Theotocatos

In some cases, it is appropriate to try mediation. For mediation to be an option, all those involved must agree to participate. Successfully mediated cases have the benefit of being acceptable to everyone involved because the parties have determined the outcome that best meets their needs (win-win solution).

## **Types of issues**

The Office facilitates the resolution of a wide variety of workplace concerns. No issue is too small or too big. Every case is treated seriously and staff are encouraged to contact the Office as early as possible, before the issue escalates and becomes more complicated.

## **Core principles**

**Independence** The Office is independent in structure and function from all United Nations organs and officials. It is guided by the Charter of the United Nations, the staff rules and regulations and the principles of fairness and justice, not by the interests of a particular entity, department or individual within the Organization. The United Nations Ombudsman has direct access to the Secretary-General.

**Neutrality and impartiality** Ombudsmen do not take sides in a conflict. They review each situation objectively and treat all parties equally.

**Confidentiality** All communication with an ombudsman is confidential. Information shared with an ombudsman will not be disclosed without permission.

**Informality** Ombudsmen do not participate in formal adjudicative or administrative procedures relating to concerns brought to their attention, nor do they keep records for the United Nations or any other party. They do not make binding decisions or mandate policies. They do, however, identify trends, issues and concerns, and report them to the Organization.

## **Contact the Office if you have a work-related concern and you:**

- Don't know who to talk to and need a sounding board
- Would like a confidential, 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 started to pursue formal redress and want to explore alternatives

## **Contacting an ombudsman is always a good first step!**

The regional branch is located on UN Avenue, Gigiri, Block X-level 2, East Wing, Room 225, P.O. Box. 67578-00200, Nairobi, Kenya. Tel.: +254 20 762 6714. Intermission: 124-26714.

The Office's ombudsmen and mediators can be contacted confidentially by e-mail (unoms@un.org), telephone (+19173675731) or secure contact form ([www.un.org/ombudsman](http://www.un.org/ombudsman)).

Informal conflict resolution services are available in the six languages of the United Nations.