Delivering in Latin America and the Caribbean: the regional branch in Santiago

The Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services has seven regional branches that provide informal conflict resolution services to Secretariat staff worldwide. The regional branch in Santiago serves about 3,800 staff from the Secretariat entities in Latin America and the Caribbean, namely, ECLAC, OCHA, OHCHR, UNEP, UN-Habitat, UNIC, UNISDR, UNLIREC, UNODC, and the UN Missions in Haiti and Colombia.

The Santiago branch is headed by Regional Ombudsman Francisco Espejo. In his work, Mr. Espejo is assisted by Ms. Isabel Godoy. In addition to his specialty in psychiatry and public health background, Francisco was trained by the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) as Ombudsman and by the ACAS institute, UK, as a mediator. He has also been trained in the Biology of Knowledge Paradigm by the Instituto Matriztico, Chile. That training has inspired his conflict-coaching approach to assist managers and general staff.

How do we work?

We use a collaborative approach to informally resolve disputes or to address grievances. 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.

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. Staff are encouraged to contact the Office as early as possible, before the issue escalates and becomes more complicated. Most frequent issues identified in 2016 were observed in the following areas: respect and treatment; communication; harassment (excluding sexual); team climate & morale; and leadership & management.

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 look at each situation in a non-judgmental manner and treat all parties equally.

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

**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 UNOMS 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 office in Santiago is located in CLADES building CL-01 at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Av. Dag Hammarskjöld 3477, Santiago.

The Office’s ombudsmen and mediators can be contacted confidentially through the general e-mail at unoms@un.org or santiago.regionalombudsman@cepal.org, by telephone at +56 2 2210 2721 or through our online secure contact form.

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

“Many times we think that people have to change. What we need to change are the conversations we hold with them”

Francisco Espejo