

INFORMAL FIRST CHAMPIONS

Communications Toolkit



**United
Nations**

**Ombudsman and
Mediation Services**

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FOREWORD BY THE UNITED NATIONS OMBUDSMAN

In the ever-evolving landscape of global diplomacy and cooperation, the United Nations stands as a symbol of unity and shared aspirations. For over seven decades, our Organization has been dedicated to promoting peace, fostering development, and advancing human rights. In our pursuit of these noble goals, it is essential to recognize that discord and disputes may arise in the workplace where so many employees come together.

We, at the United Nations, work across a complex interconnection of individuals, cultures, and perspectives. Our daily work is characterized by a multitude of interactions and collaborations, each an opportunity for mutual understanding or misunderstanding. These encounters, both formal and informal, may lead to differences in opinion, approach, and interpretation. Conflict, whether large or small, is a natural outcome when such diversity converges - what matters is how we choose to address these conflicts.

As the United Nations Ombudsman, it is my honor to introduce this Communications Toolkit for "*Informal First*" Champions, designed to promote the "*Informal First*" approach to conflict resolution within our Organization. By embracing this approach, we take an active stance in preventing and resolving conflicts at their earliest stages, ensuring that the spirit of collaboration and solidarity is maintained. The essence of the "*Informal First*" approach lies in acknowledging that not all conflicts require formal and structured interventions. In fact, most workplace disputes can be effectively resolved through open and honest communication, avoiding escalation and lengthy formal processes.

This toolkit is a comprehensive resource designed to empower you as *Informal First Champions* within your respective Entities. It provides practical guidance on key facts around *Informal First*, and sample messaging to use as it is or adapt to your Entity' needs; it also includes an overview of resources available.

Your commitment to this novel approach will make a profound difference in the lives of your colleagues in the way we work together, as well as in the effectiveness of our Organization. Thank you for your dedication and may your journey as "*Informal First Champions*" be marked by success, understanding, and a lasting commitment to the values of the United Nations.



Shireen L. Dodson

United Nations Ombudsman

KEY FACTS ON INFORMAL FIRST

What is “Informal First”

- By “Informal First” we mean the use of informal channels as the preferred method for the resolution of workplace conflicts whenever possible.
- “Informal” means that resolution takes place outside formal complaints channels. No record is created or kept for the Organization and no action is triggered. No protocol or formal application is needed.

Why Informal First?

- Informal resolution is an efficient and effective option to address workplace conflict, both for the Organization and for individuals. Ultimately, it strengthens dignity and respect in the workplace.
- In its resolution 77/260, the UN General Assembly reaffirmed that informal dispute resolution is a key component of the system of administration of justice and emphasized that all possible use should be made of the informal component of the system to avoid unnecessary litigation.
- As a senior leader of this Organization, you are responsible for ensuring dignity in the workplace by promoting an environment of civility and mutual respect – a responsibility that is also reflected in your Compacts with the Secretary-General.

Benefits of Informal First

- Informal resolution is an **amicable** and **confidential** way to explore a mutually workable resolution.
- Informal resolution is **cost and time efficient**.
- **Creative options** can be identified, where you have **full control** over the process.
- It gives you a **holistic understanding** of what to do, where to go for addressing workplace concerns, and how to navigate this process.

Did you know?

Resorting to informal resolution first does not preclude staff from using other **formal mechanisms** –all rights are retained while informally pursuing your interests. By choosing informal first, you retain the right to pursue formal conflict resolution mechanisms prior to, during and after the informal process.

HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

As *Informal First Champions*, you can positively impact the employees you work with, by promoting an environment of civility and mutual respect. Actions you can take are related to **prevention and communication, use of informal channels, and skill and capacity building.**

PREVENTION AND COMMUNICATION

- Promote early informal resolution regularly in your communications.
- Promote a culture of dialogue to resolve conflict at the earliest opportunity by creating a safe and encouraging environment. Ensure employees know about UNOMS.
- Invite UNOMS to provide presentations and information sessions in your Entity/ team.



See suggested messaging in **“Communications Material”** (Page 4).

USE OF INFORMAL CHANNELS

- Commit to normalizing the use of informal conflict resolution services and first conversations.
- Encourage and expect both staff and managers to participate in informal conflict resolution, including mediation, prior to raising a formal complaint.



See a list of services in **“UNOMS Services”** (Page 8).

SKILL AND CAPACITY BUILDING

- Encourage participation in capacity and skill-building workshops and presentations organized by UNOMS.



See a list of available workshops in the **“UNOMS workshops and presentations”** (Page 9).

COMMUNICATION MATERIAL

Talking points

- I am pleased to announce my endorsement, as Head of Entity, of the “Informal First” approach for the resolution of workplace conflicts.
- The Informal First approach is a key feature in resolving conflicts early through open and honest communication.
- Key elements of using informal first include empowering personnel, promoting proactive dialogue, active listening, and empathy.
- The informal resolution of workplace conflicts entails a lighter, quicker process for the parties involved. It’s cost-effective and does not preclude staff from using other mechanisms.
- With the Informal First approach, we uphold values of inclusion, integrity, humility, and humanity in the workplace.
- I invite everyone to use the services of the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services. The Office is a great resource to access valuable services for addressing workplace conflict.
- Please do take advantage of a neutral and confidential space for dialogue and mediation.
- By using the Informal First approach, we can foster a work environment where conflicts are seen as opportunities for strengthening bonds and achieving shared goals.

Sample messaging to personnel

a) Email

Subject: Embrace "Informal First" for Conflict Resolution in the Workplace

Dear colleagues,

As an Informal First Champion, I am writing to inform you about the "Informal First" approach, a powerful way for resolving conflicts within our Organization. This approach empowers us to address conflicts at their initial stages through open and honest communication. The "Informal First" approach promotes proactive dialogue, active listening, and empathy, allowing us to uphold the values of inclusion, integrity, humility, and humanity that are central to our mandate.

In this spirit, I would like to remind you of the valuable services offered by the [Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services](#) (UNOMS). UNOMS can assist you in addressing workplace conflicts, providing a neutral and confidential space for dialogue and mediation. I encourage you to reach out to UNOMS (unoms@un.org) whenever you find yourself in need of support.

Our commitment to the "Informal First" approach will undoubtedly contribute to a more inclusive and harmonious work environment. Conflict, when addressed with empathy and a commitment to dialogue, can be an opportunity for growth and innovation.

Let us work together to foster an environment where conflicts are not viewed as obstacles but as opportunities to strengthen our bonds, deepen our understanding, and advance our shared goals.

Thank you for your dedication to the principles and values of the United Nations.

Warm regards,

[Your Name]

b) Newsletter/ Intranet article

Title: " Conflict Resolution in the UN workplace: Introducing the 'Informal First' Approach

We live in a diverse and dynamic world, and the United Nations is at the forefront of addressing global challenges. In our daily interactions, diversity can lead to differences in opinion, misunderstandings, and sometimes, conflicts. It is how we handle these conflicts that shapes our ability to foster a culture of collaboration and unity.

Introducing the "Informal First" approach—an innovative tool for conflict resolution within our Organization. This approach encourages us to address conflicts at their earliest stages through open and honest communication, guided by "Informal First" champions across our UN Organization.

The "Informal First" approach promotes proactive dialogue, active listening, and empathy. By embracing these principles, we uphold the values of inclusion, integrity, humility, and humanity that are central to our mandate.

We also want to remind you of the valuable services offered by the [Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services](#) (UNOMS). UNOMS offers a neutral and confidential space for dialogue and mediation, providing support in resolving workplace conflicts. If you find yourself in need of assistance, we encourage you to reach out to unoms@un.org.

Embracing the "Informal First" approach and utilizing the services of UNOMS can contribute to a more inclusive and harmonious work environment. Conflict, when addressed with empathy and a commitment to dialogue, can be an opportunity for growth and innovation.

Let us work together to create an environment where conflicts are not viewed as obstacles but as opportunities to strengthen our bonds, deepen our understanding, and advance our shared goals.

Together, we can build a more harmonious and productive workplace.

c) Internal social media posts

Post 1:

💛 Embrace the "Informal First" approach at work! 💛

Conflict is a part of any workplace, but how we deal with it makes all the difference. The "Informal First" approach encourages open and honest communication to resolve conflicts early on. Be part of the change – become an "Informal First" champion today! Visit un.org/ombudsman

Post 2:

💛 Conflict doesn't have to be disruptive. 💛

Discover the power of "Informal First" conflict resolution! Encourage proactive dialogue, active listening, and empathy in your workplace. By embracing this approach, you can create a more inclusive and harmonious work environment. Let's work together to turn conflicts into opportunities for growth and understanding. 🙌 ✨ Visit un.org/ombudsman

Inventory of Available Visual Resources

The Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services can provide your Entity or team with a digital version of the following materials:



Brochures (EN, FR, AR, CH, RU, SP)



Posters (EN, FR, AR, CH, RU, SP)



Rollup banners (EN, FR, AR, CH, RU, SP)

UNOMS SERVICES

The following services are available to all UN Secretariat personnel, regardless of their contractual status, and at no cost. Reach out to UNOMS via email (unoms@un.org) or phone (+1-917-367-5731) and we will get back to you within 48 hours. Our team of ombudsman and conflict-resolution experts provide confidential services to anyone in any duty station in any of the six official United Nations languages.

Discussion of options

Following an exploration of the concerns raised, the various perspectives and the underlying needs and interests, the conflict resolution practitioner helps the visitor to brainstorm a variety of options that could potentially address the issue. Options are assessed together with the visitor, considering the advantages and disadvantages of each, thereby enabling the visitor to make an informed choice.

Conflict coaching

Visitors may opt to avail themselves of one-on-one conflict coaching with a conflict resolution practitioner. The aim of such coaching is to improve current or future professional relationships and empower individual staff to handle and take control of issues involving workplace relationships.

Mediation/facilitated conversations

Mediation is a structured, collaborative process to manage and help to resolve workplace disputes, concerns, and differences with the assistance of an impartial third party. It is most useful when parties are looking to resolve a specific identified issue or issues.

Shuttle diplomacy

When parties are unable or unwilling to interact directly with one another, for whatever reasons, an ombudsman acts as the intermediary, conveying each party's positions and interests to the other to help find a solution acceptable to all.

Services to groups and teams

When a situation affects a group or team, the Office may offer to work with the entire team to help restore a productive work environment. Situations that are ripe for such interventions include those where groups or teams are grappling with workplace challenges such as difficult relationships among colleagues resulting from an ongoing or completed change process, a series of crises, problems arising from perceptions of staff or management as toxic or following an investigation into the conduct of a team member that has polarized the team.

UNOMS WORKSHOPS AND PRESENTATIONS

The following workshops and presentations can be organized to respond to teams and groups' specific needs, both virtually and in person, at no cost. They can be delivered in all UN official languages. Reach out to UNOMS via email (unoms@un.org) or phone (+1-917-367-5731) or contact your Regional Ombudsman.

Community Civility Communication (C3) Workshops

This interactive, three-hour workshop is being delivered across the Organization by the staff of the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman. Acknowledging the fundamental importance of dignity as stated in the Charter of the United Nations, the workshop aims to illustrate a new dynamic of workplace interactions, provide participants with a language to describe this dynamic, shift mindsets towards civility and inspire participants to take concrete actions.

Civility Cafés

The Civility Cafés offer a unique opportunity for United Nations employees at all levels to come together and discuss issues that matter to them. Based on the World Café conversation model, the Civility Cafés allow decentralized, self-directed groupings (duty stations, work teams, offices) to establish an environment where individuals or groups can offer diverse perspectives to explore the topic, listen to one another and leave with a greater sense of understanding and, ideally, with some action steps they can take to improve the quality of civility in their workplace.

Dialogues on Racism

To promote diversity and inclusion and to explore how racism manifests itself within the Organization, our conflict-resolution experts developed a dialogue model that provides a framework using conversation guidelines and carefully considered questions. The goal is to create a safe space for participants to exchange perspectives and experiences relating to racism in the workplace. By sharing their ideas and comments, participants contribute to changing the culture of the United Nations.

UNOMS Briefing

One-hour interactive presentation on the role of the Office and on services available to personnel. The presentation can be tailored to Entities or teams' needs.

Presentation on Mediation

By assisting to this presentation, participants can learn how mediation, and other informal options, can offer effective ways to resolve conflict, improve relationships, and avoid escalation. The presentation is relevant to all personnel, regardless of their role and the stage of the conflict, and whether experiencing a difficult relationship with a peer, supervisee, or supervisor, are considering or started a formal complaint, or simply want to know about options should conflict arise.

CONTACT

We are ready to help anyone working at the United Nations Secretariat, regardless of employment categories and levels, type of contract, or geographical location, as well as former employees and retirees. You can send a confidential email to unoms@un.org , call +1-917-367-5731 or contact your Regional Ombudsman directly.

For more information visit: un.org/ombudsman/



UNOMS REGIONAL OFFICES



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