



unrwa and neutrality

Neutrality is a UN commitment as one of the four “humanitarian principles” formally adopted by the General Assembly, and endorsed by UNRWA. The humanitarian principles ultimately derive from the UN Charter and are the standards against which the UN and other agencies carrying out humanitarian work are assessed by all stakeholders. Neutrality is understood to mean that irrespective of their personal beliefs and opinions “[h]umanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.”¹

For the international humanitarian community, neutrality is a key requirement to carry out its work. It is a crucial element for the independent operation of the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies. Neutrality helps create what is often referred to as “humanitarian space”, which is essential for the effective delivery of services during peace and conflict.

The Agency’s mandate is to assist and protect Palestine refugees. Neutrality is essential for implementing that mandate. Neutrality is a core obligation and value of UN staff. It is essential for maintaining trust in the Agency and an important condition to attract and secure donor funding.

The Agency’s adherence to UN values and neutrality also means that there are restrictions on the provision of assistance to any person named on relevant UN Sanctions lists, persons who have financed terrorist acts contrary to the Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, or persons who are militants or involved in militant organizations.

As a neutral, impartial UN agency providing humanitarian assistance, UNRWA has a legal framework for operations that safeguards UN neutrality vis-à-vis staff, third parties, including partners, use of UNRWA installations and the provision of assistance to beneficiaries. In February 2017, the Agency issued the Neutrality Framework, which is a repository of standards, practices and procedures with regard to neutrality.

The UNRWA Neutrality Framework proscribes a broad range of conduct, including – but going beyond – conduct falling within donor conditions relating to neutrality. For example, staff member involvement in a militant group or terrorist activities would be a serious breach of UNRWA’s Staff Regulations and Rules and result in dismissal from service.

UNRWA processes and mechanisms supporting UN neutrality

There are many Agency processes and mechanisms for implementation and enforcement of its rules, regulations and policies relating to UN neutrality vis-à-vis staff, partners, suppliers, donors and Palestine refugees. The Agency’s Chief of Staff is the focal point for neutrality and plays a fundamental role in strengthening processes for ensuring neutrality.

¹ OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles, available at: https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/OOM_HumPrinciple_English.pdf



Personnel

From recruitment to separation there are a variety of UNRWA processes and mechanisms to ensure UN staff neutrality:

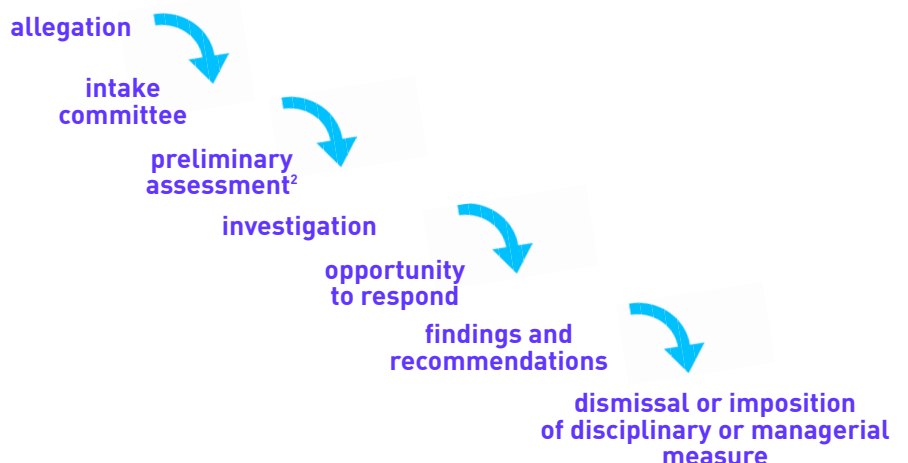
- All vacancy announcements for staff members include neutrality statement in Arabic/English;
- Application forms include question about prior convictions or investigations;
- Assessment of candidate suitability for UN during recruitment process - interview panels take into account the need to uphold the values of integrity, neutrality and impartiality;
- Letter of appointment refers to neutrality provisions of Staff Regulations and Rules;
- Applications to governmental authorities for visas for all international staff members;
- Induction for staff members and training address UN neutrality;
- Mandatory ethics e-learning course includes lesson on UN neutrality;
- Mandatory electronic course on social media and neutrality;
- Operations Support Officer (OSO) Programmes regularly conduct sensitization training, with a focus on UN humanitarian principles, including neutrality;
- Social media and neutrality training provided to staff to further support compliance with the Agency's Staff Regulations and Rules, including UNRWA "Website and Social Media Policy Regarding Personal Use";
- Regular circulars and agency-wide dissemination of the Neutrality Framework and Inspection SOPs (adopted in February 2017);
- Regular staff meetings with Agency management that address or reinforce neutrality;
- Promoting UN values at workplace through training and leadership development;

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- Monitoring of staff activity by management during work hours and, at all times, inappropriate conduct from media or other sources would be brought to the attention of management;
- Staff members have an obligation to report misconduct and are protected from retaliation;
- Information sought from authorities whenever staff are detained, convicted, refused a permit or targeted;
- Field and HQ investigation mechanisms operating in accordance with the Agency's Investigation Policy as well as the Guide to Conducting Misconduct Investigations;
- Robust disciplinary action taken whenever involvement of staff members in inappropriate political activities or in military activities is established in accordance with the Agency's regulatory framework;
- Agency has imposed disciplinary action against staff for misconduct, up to and including separation from service;
- Six-monthly checks of all personnel names against relevant UN lists of terrorists and terrorist entities, including the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions List. (There have been no matches);
- Annually lists of all staff members provided to governments including Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel and the State of Palestine, as well as other states upon request. List provided to Israel in digital format with Israeli/Palestinian ID.

UNRWA Neutrality Training

The Agency has developed and implemented a range of measures to enhance awareness among Agency personnel regarding neutrality and social media. It has adopted guidelines and policies regarding the use of social media; there is a mandatory ethics e-learning course, including a lesson on neutrality and, since 2013, 30,000 staff and other personnel have taken the ethics e-learning course. Social media training was delivered to senior Agency staff in all fields in 2016, and the Agency introduced has also introduced a mandatory online course on social media and neutrality.

Disciplinary process at UNRWA



²Performed on a case by case basis

Third parties including suppliers and partners

Agency processes and mechanisms to ensure UN neutrality obligations vis-à-vis engagement with any third party are strictly upheld in accordance with UNRWA Neutrality Framework include:

- Six-monthly checks of names of all suppliers and other payees against relevant UN lists of terrorists and terrorist entities, including the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions List (There have been no matches);
- Checks of suppliers against UN Procurement Division Suspended/Removed/Reinstated reports;
- Specific neutrality commitments, representations and warranties in standard form contracts and templates for memoranda of understanding (MOUs), including use of Agency premises by third parties;
- Contributions to the Agency must be compliant with the UNRWA Vetting/Due Diligence Policy;
- Contracts supervised in accordance with Standard Contract Management practices as set out in the Agency's Procurement Manual;
- Inappropriate conduct from media or other sources would be brought to attention of management and/or relevant authorities and would result in termination of contract for breach of standard representation and warranty regarding neutrality where corroborated.

Beneficiaries

Agency processes and mechanisms to ensure assistance to beneficiaries is provided strictly in accordance with the Agency's Neutrality Framework, including:

- Six-monthly checks of names of all registered Palestine refugees and microfinance loan recipients against UN lists of terrorists and terrorist entities, including the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions List (There have been no matches);

- Social Safety Net food, cash, and e-card assistance is only provided to registered persons, all of whom have been screened against relevant UN Sanctions lists;
- Applications for selective cash assistance, for either Social Safety Net or emergency assistance cases, are individually screened by Agency for eligibility against Relief Instructions. Screening process includes home visit by social worker plus spot checks and follow-up that assistance has been used for the purpose provided;
- Inappropriate conduct triggers Agency assessment and could result in denial of discretionary assistance such as burial expenses, shelter rehabilitation or re-housing assistance. (Agency does not deny education to children or health services. UNRWA does not deny assistance to family members solely on the basis of their family ties to persons who would otherwise be excluded from assistance);
- Cash-for-Work or job creation programme assistance supervised by hiring department. Inappropriate conduct from media or other sources would be brought to attention of management and/or relevant authorities and would result in termination of contract for breach of standard representation and warranty regarding neutrality where corroborated.

Installations

Agency processes and mechanisms to ensure UNRWA premises appear and are used as UN premises in accordance with the principles and purposes of the United Nations include:

- Facilities monitored by UNRWA staff members taking into account security and access considerations. Installation heads responsible for facility use and accountable to Front Office for proper use. Regular visits by senior staff;
- The OSO Programme conducts regular installation inspections and documents as well as follows-up on concerns in accordance with the UNRWA Standard Operating Procedures for Installation Neutrality Inspections;
- Third party use of an UNRWA installation must be approved by a senior UNRWA official, is governed by standard-form Undertaking & Guarantee and always monitored by an UNRWA staff member;
- No weapons policy in UNRWA installations;
- Signs indicating 'no weapons policy' at all entry points of UNRWA installations;
- Premises must promote UN values;
- The Agency protests military use of, incursions into, and other unauthorised entry into UNRWA installations;
- Specific Standard Operating procedures in place in case weapon(s), ammunition and/or Explosive Remnants of War found in facilities.



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General

The above specific processes are supported by more general Agency processes and mechanisms, including:

- The Agency's results based management, programme cycle management and enterprise risk management systems aim to ensure that financial (and other) resources are effectively and efficiently used to deliver strategic outcomes and outputs set out in the Agency's Medium Term Strategy. Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and other oversight structures, systems, procedures and personnel are in place in each Field and corporately in Headquarters to support this effort;
- Amongst other things, UNRWA monitoring framework includes indicators relating to neutrality and oversight and which are reported on externally on an annual basis through its Annual Operations Report;
- The Agency's automated Information Systems enables efficient six-monthly checks of all personnel and other payee or partner names against relevant UN lists of terrorists and terrorist entities, including the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions List. (There have been no matches);
- The Agency's internal and external audit function - through Department of Internal Oversight Services and UN Board of Auditors, with oversight by Advisory Committee on Internal Oversight, which has only external members - ensure strong oversight services that support UNRWA in fulfilling its accountabilities including with regard to neutrality;
- Financial and management controls, in accordance with Financial Rules and Regulations and UN processes, e.g., UN Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), UN General Assembly Fifth Committee and UN Board of Auditors;
- Donors such as the EC conduct verification reviews that their funds have been used in accordance with grant agreements;
- Finance Department and the Agency's enterprise resources management system assures donor conditionality is observed.



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united nations relief and works agency
for palestine refugees in the near east

www.unrwa.org

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and is mandated to provide assistance and protection to a population of some 5.4 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip to achieve their full potential in human development, pending a just solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance and emergency assistance. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions.