



**UNHCR**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

***UNHCR/AI/2014/4***

## **Administrative Instruction**

### **on Working with the News Media**

Approved by: T. Alexander Aleinikoff, Deputy High Commissioner

Signature:

Approval date:

5/9/2014

Contact: Division of External Relations

Date of entry into force: 5 September 2014

Review Date: 4 September 2016

*This and other official UNHCR guidance material is available on the Policy and other Guidance page of the UNHCR-net*

- Chapters:
1. Purpose
  2. Scope
  3. Rationale
  4. Terms and Definitions
  5. Principles
  6. UNHCR Staff and Media
  7. Sensitive Issues – Who Can Speak
  8. Sharing Information
  9. Ground Rules
  10. Resources
  11. References
  12. Monitoring and Compliance
  13. Date
  14. Contact
  15. History

## **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 This Administrative Instruction outlines a set of principles to guide and inform staff engagement with the media. It closely follows the language and spirit of the UN Secretariat's Media Guidelines for United Nations Officials (DPI/2189), with some modifications that help apply them to UNHCR's work and update them for the smartphone era.

## **2. Scope**

- 2.1 This Administrative Instruction is for all UNHCR personnel (including affiliate workforce).
- 2.2 Compliance with this Administrative Instruction is mandatory.

## **3. Rationale**

- 3.1 Many aspects of UNHCR's work are of interest to journalists and the wider public. In addition, media coverage of UNHCR's work is an important tool for getting the Organization's views across to potential donors, political decision-makers and the wider public. To ensure our credibility, promote transparency and increase visibility, clear and consistent instruction is needed to guide staff when speaking to the news media.

## **4. Terms and Definitions**

- 4.1. *"On Record"* means that everything you say can be attributed to you by name.
- 4.2. *"Not for attribution"* (on background) means that what you say may be attributed to you not by name but as a UNHCR official.
- 4.3. *"On deep background and not for attribution"* means your ideas can be used but your words cannot be attributed to anyone.

## **5. Principles**

- 5.1. UNHCR is committed to openness and transparency in our dealings with external partners. One of these partners is the media, with whom we seek to maintain a positive and ongoing close relationship.
- 5.2. UNHCR media policy is based on the Secretary General's guidelines on relations with the media (DPI/2189, May 2001).
- 5.3. UNHCR media policy also applies to social media (see Administrative Instruction on Staff Use of Social Media, UNHCR/AI/2014/2).
- 5.4. UNHCR has a human rights-based mandate and our foremost responsibility is the protection of People of Concern. To avoid putting people and processes at risk we will always have to balance the need to be open with the need to respect vital

confidentialities. Moreover, we must always uphold humanitarian principles, including impartiality, neutrality and independence.

- 5.5. UNHCR does not suppress, conceal or mislead. Problem issues with potential to become matters of public and media interest should always be dealt with quickly, honestly and proactively.

## **6. UNHCR Staff and Media**

- 6.1. All members of staff may speak to media representatives, within limits:

- Stick to your area of competence and responsibility;
- Provide facts, not opinions, comment or conjecture (although staff may use UNHCR-wide strategic messaging where relevant);
- Leave sensitive issues to staff specifically authorized to speak on them (see paragraph 7.1);
- Assume that anything you say is 'on record'.

- 6.2. Staff members may give spontaneous interviews (e.g. you are approached by a TV crew or individual journalist in situ in an emergency setting), again keeping in mind the limits listed in 6.1. Let your supervisor know as soon as possible afterwards, or in advance where possibility exists to do so.

- 6.3. Requests for written information and formal interviews should normally be referred to or dealt with by public information (PI) staff, including national, regional and global PI. In the absence of a PI officer, the Representative or her/his assigned PI focal point is responsible. As PI officers cannot be experts in all subjects, they will frequently seek help from UNHCR specialists to provide them with information or speak directly to journalists.

- 6.4. Staff must only engage with media or via social media on an informed basis, to avoid providing misleading information. Staff likely to be working in environments where media are present should keep themselves informed of the surrounding sensitivities, and keep awareness of issues that media are reporting.

- 6.5. Staff approached by journalists seeking to profile them or their work should seek the approval of their Representative or supervisor, and let the relevant PI official in their duty station or region know ([www.unhcr.org/pages/49e6e9c42e.html](http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e6e9c42e.html)). Using relationships with journalists for self-promotion purposes creates conflicts of interest that could be considered misconduct under UN Staff Rules [see ST/SGB/2014/1, Regulation 1.2 (e), (g) and (m)].

- 6.6. Staff asked by external organizations to write articles or books, or appear in films or otherwise participate in public events beyond their expected regular duties must seek prior approval. Procedures for doing so are set out in UN Staff Rules ST/SGB/2014/1, Regulation 1.2 (o) and (p), as well as Rule 1.2 (t), ST/AI/2000.13, [ST/IC/2006/30](#) and UNHCR IOM/60-FOM/31/2000.

- 6.7. Staff should try to be helpful to journalists to the extent they can.

## **7. Sensitive Issues – Who Can Speak**

7.1. The number of staff speaking on sensitive issues (for example, high-profile individuals, security incidents and staff safety, public controversies etc.) is necessarily limited to:

- The High Commissioner, Deputy High Commissioner and Assistant High Commissioners;
- Bureau and Division Directors, and their designated deputies and staff on the basis of guidance and within their areas of competence;
- Country and Regional Representatives and their designated staff, within their areas of competence;
- Global, Regional and Country Spokespersons, on the basis of guidance.

## **8. Sharing Information**

8.1. Effective communication between UNHCR and the outside world is only possible if we communicate effectively internally. Senior officials are expected to share information with PI staff and others under their supervision, to include PI staff in meetings necessary for them to do their work, and to keep each other informed of their media activities.

8.2. Spokespersons and other officials who speak to journalists represent UNHCR's external credibility. As a matter of routine, they must be kept comprehensively informed – including about related sensitivities. This is important so that we do not inadvertently mislead.

## **9. Ground Rules**

9.1. When speaking to journalists always do so on the understanding that what you say may be used or quoted.

9.2. In certain circumstances officials authorized to address sensitive issues can give a journalist a deeper understanding of an issue by speaking on background. In this case always agree the ground rules with the journalist *in advance*. See Paragraph 4.1 for definitions of the following key terms: “on record,” “not for attribution” and “on deep background and not for attribution.”

9.3. When giving media interviews, staff are encouraged to highlight UNHCR's funding needs as appropriate.

9.4. Keep PI colleagues informed of important background briefings or interviews. This is necessary to avoid conflicting briefings or misleading information being provided through a lack of awareness.

9.5. Letting one journalist know what another is working on is seen by journalists as a breach of professional media ethics, and should be avoided.

- 9.6. UNHCR does not pay journalists or media organizations for news coverage or for attending events in which UNHCR is involved. Support for press trips is limited to logistical support only (i.e. flights, transport, access), to be determined by the relevant Senior Regional PI in consultation with the Chief of News and Media in DER on a case-by-case basis.
- 9.7. UNHCR respects media freedoms and independence and while we may in some circumstances suggest story ideas to media we do not ask or tell journalists what to report.
- 9.8. UNHCR respects views and opinions that differ from our own. However, media reporting containing significant and damaging *factual* errors should be immediately referred to PI to discuss correction possibilities with the media organization involved. Rebuttals usually only work if done quickly.
- 10. Resources**
- 10.1 For more information about speaking with the media, contact the nearest Senior Regional or Country Spokesperson, or the News Section in Geneva.
- 11. References**
- 11.1 Normative or superior references
- Media Guidelines for United Nations Officials (DPI/2189)
  - UNHCR Code of Conduct
  - Administrative Instruction on Staff Use of Social Media (UNHCR/AI/2014/2)
- 12. Monitoring and Compliance**
- 12.1 Compliance with this Administrative Instruction shall be monitored by the Division of External Relations.
- 13. Date**
- 13.1 This Administrative Instruction is effective 5 September 2014. It will be reviewed and updated regularly, at a minimum of once every two years.
- 14. Contact**
- 14.1 Contact for this Administrative Instruction is the Chief, News Section, within the Communications and Public Information Service of DER.
- 15. History**
- 15.1 This Administrative Instruction supersedes UNHCR/IOM/92/1999.