



**UNITED NATIONS**  
Department of Management  
Archives and Records Management Section

# **Guideline**

**April 2006**

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Distinguishing personal files from  
United Nations business records  
and removing records upon  
separation from service

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Contact:  
Review date:

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## **Guideline**

### **Distinguishing personal files from United Nations business records**

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Many factors contribute to the determination that documentary materials are United Nations records and are the property of the Organization. If the answer to any of the following questions is "yes," the document is a United Nations record.

- Was the document created or submitted and maintained to meet United Nations business needs?
- Was the document used to conduct or facilitate Secretariat business?
- If the document is a draft or preliminary document created for background or a similar purpose, does it contain unique information that explains formulation of programme decisions and/or policies?
- Was the document distributed to other offices or United Nations agencies for formal approval or clearance?
- Was the document placed in an official paper or electronic file?
- Is the document part of an electronic information system used to conduct United Nations business?
- Is the document covered by a United Nations records schedule or other regulation governing its disposition?

### **PERSONAL FILES**

This term refers to documentary materials that are either:

- unrelated to the conduct of United Nations business (e.g., files relating to personal and family matters, or social or civic activities), or
- indirectly related to agency business but outside the scope of the definition of United Nations records (i.e., not used to conduct official business).

Personal files are those materials that belong to an individual, not to the United Nations. Certain files are clearly personal, such as those that are not used in the transaction of agency business. Personal files may contain references to or

comments on agency business, but they are considered personal if they are not used in the conduct of business.

Traditionally, personal files have included the following categories of material:

- business or professional files created before entering United Nations service; files created during or relating to previously held positions and reference files;
- private files brought into, created, or received in the office; family and personal correspondence and materials documenting professional activities and outside pursuits, including manuscripts and drafts for articles and books and volunteer and community service records that are considered personal, even if created or received while in office, because they do not relate to United Nations business.
- work-related personal files including diaries, journals, notes, and personal calendars and appointment schedules; though work-related, they may be personal if they are used only as reminders and personal observations on work-related topics, not for the transaction of United Nations business.

## **MANAGEMENT OF PERSONAL FILES**

Personal files should be maintained separately from the records of official business. Staff members should consult the departmental records management officer or other designated official to help determine whether files are personal or are records of United Nations business.

## **REMOVAL OF PERSONAL FILES AND EXTRA COPIES OF RECORDS**

You may remove personal files at your discretion without permission. If you are unsure whether materials are personal or United Nations records, staff members should consult with the departmental records officer or other designated official.

When leaving United Nations service, staff members are authorized to remove:

- extra copies of selected United Nations records, such as materials you drafted, reviewed, or otherwise acted upon, and
- copies of public affairs records such as news clippings and photographs taken at official functions and celebrations.

Departments may approve or disapprove requests to remove additional copies of United Nations records. Approval should be granted only if all of the following conditions are met:

- Removal would not diminish the official records of the Department.
- Removal would not exceed normal administrative economies.
- The materials do not contain classified, sensitive, non-disclosable or restricted information.

**A designated official of the Department should review and approve the removal of additional copies of work-related files for personal use.**