Outside Activities FAQs

1. **Q**: I was invited to become a member of a board of an NGO that does business with my Country Office. I accepted the invitation and told a colleague. She says I should have asked for permission. Is she correct?

**A**: Yes. You need prior approval to take on a leadership or management role such as membership on boards of external organizations. Also, you should not become a member of a board of an NGO with which the Country Office is doing business where you have an official decision-making role. Such an involvement raises questions of conflicts of interest, including allegations of favouritism. Conflicts of interest and favouritism can undermine the reputation of UNDP.

1. **Q**: I would like to teach one course at a university. May I be allowed to do this and accept payment?

**A**: This depends. Staff members may be allowed to undertake limited teaching activities. UNDP recognizes that teaching activities can enhance professional skills and benefit the Organization. If the course is related to your functions, you may be asked to decline the remuneration in order to avoid a potential conflict of interest.

1. **Q**: The host government has invited me to become a member of a board which reports to the minister of national security. There is no remuneration. The CO works closely with the ministry of national security in implementing UNDP projects, and this is a good opportunity to influence the strategic planning of the ministry. Can I accept?

**A**: No. As international civil servants, we are required to remain independent, impartial and neutral in our dealings with governments. To sit on a board that reports to the minister may give the impression that you are working for and taking instructions from the government. Such a situation is not compatible with your status as an international civil servant. If the work of the board is so important to the CO, the Resident Coordinator/Resident Representative could examine whether you could assist the board in an advisory capacity, without becoming a member.

1. **Q**: My church group operates a soup kitchen. I would like to serve food on Saturdays. Am I allowed to do this?

**A**: Yes. You do not need prior approval as this is charitable work and unrelated to the UN.

1. **Q**: I would like to go back to school to get a master’s degree. I will attend evening and weekend classes. I am not sure if this is allowed.

**A**: Yes, this is allowed. No prior approval is needed to undertake studies during your own time.

1. **Q:** I have been working for UNDP for many years in the area of democratic governance and women’s empowerment. I recently completed my master’s degree and would like to publish my thesis. The thesis is in the area of democratic governance. Do I need approval to get it published?

**A:** Yes, especially since this is a proposed publication that is related to your functions and to the activities, purpose and interests of UNDP. You should seek a review from Ethics, followed by formal approval from OHR, through your supervisor. Before approval is granted, the text may be reviewed by technical experts in UNDP, to ensure that publication would not be against the interest of UNDP and is not incompatible with your functions and status. UNDP will also review the text to make sure that no confidential information is disclosed. If the publication is allowed, you will be advised to include the following disclaimer “The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the UNDP.”

1. **Q:** I am a gym instructor in my spare time and would like to offer classes to my UNDP colleagues after work and on weekends. I will charge a small fee for each class. I would also like to use the conference room at the CO. Is this permitted?

**A**: No. First, if you are receiving pay for working as a gym instructor, you need to seek approval to engage in this outside employment. Second, you cannot use UNDP resources (e.g., conference room, or even email to solicit clients) for an outside business, even if you receive approval to engage in the activity. Also, where other colleagues will be paying a fee, you would be using your UNDP position for a personal financial gain. It is better for these classes to be held away from UNDP premises. If colleagues wish to join, they can do so. However, you should not use your position in UNDP to solicit membership for your classes.

1. **Q**: I am a senior UNDP official and was invited to give a speech at a university on the MDGs. There is no remuneration, but the university has offered to pay for my travel and provide me with a per diem. I am not sure whether I am allowed to accept the invitation or the payment.

**A**: You may be permitted to accept the invitation to give the speech in either your official capacity or your personal capacity. However, it is the head of your office (often in consultation with the Legal Support Office) who will determine whether you can participate in your official capacity, after determining that your participation is in the Organization’s interest. If it is to be in your personal capacity, you should seek review and vetting by Ethics, followed by formal approval from OHR, through your supervisor. If in your personal capacity, you must undertake this activity on your own time. In either case, you may be permitted to accept the travel and per diem offered, as long as the amount is in line with the amounts payable by the UN.

1. **Q**: I am the owner of, and the chief consultant for, a small firm that was hired by UNDP to work on an environment project in 2010. I have since applied for a UNDP position, in the field of environment, and was offered a Fixed Term Appointment (FTA) for one year. I would like to know if I will still be able to operate the business while working for UNDP.

**A:** No. To continue to operate the firm, while you are working on an FTA, creates conflicts of interest. That is, you would be actively associated with the management of, or hold a financial interest in, a profit-making business (here a UNDP vendor), where it is possible for you or the business to benefit from such association by reason of your position with UNDP. Instead, with the approval of OHR and the head of your office, you may transfer the management of the company to a third party and have no input in the operations of the business, while you are working with UNDP. Additionally during this time the business should not seek any UNDP contracts. Alternatively, you could allow the business to stop (go dormant) and only be involved in it to conclude any current contracts and settle legal liabilities, such as the payment of taxes. However you are still obligated to seek approval to engage in an outside activity even to wind down the business.

1. **Q:** I deal with procurement for UNDP, and I have met a lot of influential officials in the customs department. My cousin operates a business that imports goods for resale. I would like to help him with his business, although I won’t hold any official position in the business, and I will not be paid. With these contacts in the customs department, I should be able to get the goods cleared quickly and may even be able to help him to pay lower customs duty. Am I likely to get approval to assist him with this business?

**A:** No. You should not use your position with UNDP, or knowledge gained through your work, for personal gain or for the benefit of others. In addition, you have a duty to obey local laws. You should not try to assist your cousin to avoid payment of appropriate tariffs, taxes or customs duty. You have to maintain the highest standards of ethics and integrity and be careful not to let your private interests create conflicts with your obligations to UNDP.

1. **Q:** I have become good friends with a colleague I met in the CO. I notice that she is very active on Facebook and Twitter through her personal accounts. She sometimes posts and tweets about a project she is working on. She does not refer to her affiliation with UNDP. However, as the CO is small, she is well known in her field, and many people know that she works for UNDP. I have spoken to her about her postings, and she says this is social media, not work. She is free to do what she wants on her private time. She says it doesn’t matter what she says, since she has not included her position with UNDP in her profile. Am I right to be concerned about the image and reputation of the Organization?

**A:** You are right to be concerned. Although the Organization does not try to control staff members’ private lives, we have to be conscious about how what we say and do reflect on the image and reputation of the Organization. Staff members must guard against any conduct that is inconsistent with their status as international civil servants, or with the proper discharge of their official functions. Staff members must exercise discretion in any posts, tweets or other utterances made via social media, especially where these are related to the work of the Organization. Seemingly innocent comments can have unintended implications and consequences. We also have to be careful not to disclose confidential information. Before making any posts or tweets, staff members should consider the impact on the Organization, if it were to become known that they are affiliated with UNDP. We are also not permitted to speak on behalf of UNDP unless it is within our official duties to do so. Guidance on personal use of social media may be obtained at <https://www.unteamworks.org/node/90157>.

1. **Q**: I have applied for special leave without pay (SLWOP) for 12 months to return home in order to assist my parents who are ill. Before joining UNDP, I represented my government on various human rights commissions and panels. I have been approached by the Ministry of Justice to chair a Commission of Enquiry into alleged human rights abuses that were carried out by the security forces during the last elections. I would like to accept this assignment, since I am here and will not have much to do during the daytime.

**A**: You may not accept an assignment to be the Chairperson of this Commission. As an international civil servant, you are expected to be independent and impartial even while on SLWOP. With the very minor exception of a purely technical role, you may not accept a position with a government while on SLWOP. Certainly here, you may not accept an assignment of this magnitude reporting to the government. Staff members, including those on SLWOP, are not allowed to take appointments in a political office, in a diplomatic or representational role or to discharge any functions that are not compatible with their status.