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Human resources management

Placement of United Nations staff members who have been adversely affected by natural disasters, malicious acts and other critical incidents

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The General Assembly, in its resolution [64/260](#), requested the Secretary-General to address the needs of United Nations staff who have been adversely affected by natural disasters, malicious acts and other emergency incidents. The present report responds to that request with respect to the placement of staff who have been injured or otherwise adversely affected and who are therefore unable to return to their previous function or duty station.



I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in section II, paragraphs 4 and 5, of its resolution [64/260](#), requested the Secretary-General to address, as a matter of priority, the needs of United Nations staff and their families directly affected by malicious acts, natural disasters and other critical emergencies. The Secretary-General has already taken a number of steps to strengthen the capacity of the Organization to respond to crisis and support those who have been adversely affected by such incidents. The present report responds to that request in respect of the specific need to place internationally recruited staff who have been injured or otherwise adversely affected by critical incidents and who consequently are not able to return to their previous function or duty station, but who can continue to successfully contribute to the work of the United Nations.

II. Background

2. The welfare of the staff is a key priority of the Secretary-General, who thus attaches the utmost importance to providing appropriate levels of support to staff who suffer death or injury or are otherwise adversely affected by malicious acts, natural disasters or other critical incidents and their families. A critical (or traumatic) incident is defined as a stressful event that is outside the range of usual human experience that would be markedly distressing to almost anyone. It is unexpected, beyond one's control and threatening to life or integrity. It may be a major large-scale incident that has an impact on multiple individuals or groups of persons or a single isolated incident that has an impact on an individual or small group of persons as a result of malicious acts, natural disasters or other critical incidents, including torture and kidnapping.

3. The Secretary-General has taken numerous steps to support staff who have been affected by critical incidents, including the introduction of advocacy and awareness campaigns, psychological first-aid training, mental health and psychosocial support networks and a proposal for a unified system-wide policy for medical emergency evacuation; the facilitation of financial assistance; and the establishment of a standard operating procedure for critical incidents requiring a single operational response (see [A/67/266](#)).

4. A key issue that remains to be addressed, however, relates to the treatment of staff who have been adversely affected by critical incidents who need to be removed expeditiously from the location where the trauma occurred in order to facilitate their continued service with the Organization.

III. Current arrangements

5. Article 101 (1) of the Charter of the United Nations provides that staff shall be appointed by the Secretary-General under regulations established by the General Assembly. Regulation 1.2 (c) of the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations states:

Staff members are subject to the authority of the Secretary-General and to assignment by him or her to any of the activities or offices of the United

Nations. In exercising this authority the Secretary-General shall seek to ensure ... that all necessary safety and security arrangements are made for staff carrying out the responsibilities entrusted to them.

However, over time, this authority has been subject to certain conditions. In its resolution [51/226](#), the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to announce all vacancies and limited his discretionary authority to appoint and promote staff outside the established procedures to staff in his Executive Office, senior officials at the levels of Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General and special envoys. This structured method of staff selection is envisaged by both staff regulation 4.3, which provides that so far as practicable, selection should be made on a competitive basis, and staff rule 4.15 (h), which provides for central review bodies to ensure compliance with pre-approved selection criteria.

6. The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management has the authority to place in a suitable position the following categories of personnel outside the normal process:

- (a) Incumbents of posts that have been reclassified upward;
- (b) Staff affected by the abolishment of posts or funding cutbacks, in accordance with staff rule 9.6 (c) (i);
- (c) Staff returning from secondment when a parent department has made every effort to place them (see [ST/AI/2010/3](#), sect. 11).

IV. Proposal

7. In order to address the needs of staff members who have been adversely affected by malicious acts, natural disasters or other critical incidents and who need to be moved expeditiously from the duty station where the trauma occurred, the Secretary-General seeks approval to be able, under these exceptional circumstances, to place such staff outside the regular staff selection system laterally into a position in another duty station, mission, office or department, as long as certain conditions are met.

Eligibility

8. To be eligible for lateral placement in these exceptional circumstances, a staff member must:

- (a) Meet clearly defined criteria for exceptional placement, to be established by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management, which would be used to determine whether (i) a critical incident had occurred and (ii) the staff member had been affected by it;
- (b) Undergo a medical evaluation by the Medical Services Division as soon as it has been determined that a critical incident has occurred and that the staff member had been affected by it, in order to determine whether the trauma or critical incident has rendered the staff member no longer able or fit to perform certain functions or to continue service at a particular duty station or location and whether he or she would be able to satisfactorily carry out similar functions elsewhere;

(c) Meet the qualifications of the new position (or generic job profile), including language requirements;

(d) Be medically cleared to work in the receiving mission or duty station;

(e) Hold a fixed-term, permanent or continuing appointment, in the case of regularized staff members, or, at a minimum, a fixed-term appointment in the case of non-regularized staff members.

9. If a staff member develops delayed trauma/incident symptoms some time after the incident, the staff member would still be subject to a medical evaluation and the other eligibility criteria specified above.

10. The Office of Human Resources Management would seek to find the best possible match between available positions across the Secretariat and the staff member's profile, considering the staff member's expertise and substantive knowledge and suitability for the position. No formal assessments or further endorsement by a central review body would be required under those arrangements. For non-regularized staff, reference checks would be at the discretion of the receiving department.

Regularized staff

11. With regard to regularized staff who have been adversely affected by a critical incident and need to be expeditiously removed from the location where the incident occurred, the Secretary-General wishes to place such staff in suitable vacant positions at the same level in any department of the global Secretariat, without needing to advertise the position or go through a central review body, to expedite the process of placing them, as they have already gone through a competitive process and been found suitable for similar functions at their current level.

12. The Secretary-General's authority to place staff under this proposal would be limited to internationally recruited staff at the D-2 level and below and staff in the Field Service category recruited through established procedures. They would be subject to the eligibility criteria set out in paragraphs 8 to 10 above. The Secretary-General would consult with the head of department or office and with the staff member concerned prior to any such placement. Any resulting vacancies would be filled through the normal staff selection procedures.

13. For staff in the Field Service category who were recruited through the established procedures, the Under-Secretary-General for Field Support, who retains the authority to transfer staff between missions, would utilize his or her existing authority to laterally move staff into positions in the Field Service category between missions.

Non-regularized staff

14. With regard to non-regularized staff holding appointments limited to a particular mission who have been adversely affected by a critical incident and need to be expeditiously removed from the location where the incident occurred, the Secretary-General will request the placement of such staff in suitable vacant positions at the same level in any department of the global Secretariat.

15. The Secretary-General's authority to place staff under this proposal would be limited to internationally recruited staff members at the D-2 level and below and staff in the Field Service category. Given that they would be subject to the eligibility criteria set out in paragraphs 8 to 10 above, and based on the exceptional circumstances faced by such staff, it is considered reasonable to absorb such staff members into the global Secretariat without limitations on appointment. The Secretary-General would consult with the head of department or office and with the staff member concerned prior to any such placement. Any resulting vacancies would be filled through the normal staff selection procedures.

V. Action to be taken by the General Assembly

16. **The General Assembly is requested to approve the arrangements for the placement of staff affected by malicious acts, natural disasters and other critical incidents as set out in section IV of the present report.**
