



General guidance on official UN statements

Only authorised spokespeople speak on behalf of the UN. Each agency in the UNCT has their own arrangements for this. On matters that pertain to the Bougainville Peace process and especially the Referendum, only the UN RC, or a spokesperson delegated by the UN RC, will speak on the matter.

If you speak informally to a journalist or blogger, even in what seems a private chat, you have to assume that this could go public and you could be quoted by name or as a “source” and the information you are divulging could have consequences on the UN and your agency. All staff should follow their agency’s procedures for handling media inquiries at all times.

Impartiality

As a UN staff member, you are considered an international civil servant and as part of your hiring process you signed a declaration of impartiality. You of course have the right to vote and to hold political opinions, but by joining the UN you have voluntarily agreed to suspend your right to publicly advocate for political parties, candidates or public policies during your employment. This includes public advocating for referendum options. This is because any expression of personal views on political issues can impact perceptions of your impartiality and independence, and that of the UN agency for which you work, as well as the wider UN.

As the UN is, however, a strong supporter of democratic governance around the world, we encourage all our staff to enrol and then to vote at the referendum if they are eligible to do so.

Social media

The spread of social media, and its use by some UN staff for a mix of personal and public interactions, can lead to staff acting against their declaration of impartiality. Now that the referendum date has been announced, UN staff must take care to ensure that they do not endanger the UN’s impartiality, or go against their agency’s code of conduct, through their social media postings.

If in doubt, don’t post, share or like

UN staff should use care, discretion and good judgment when posting on personal web pages, blogs, and discussion forums, including on Facebook, and when leaving comments on online articles and social networking sites. You must ensure that any personal views expressed on such sites do not reflect adversely on your independence and impartiality as required by your status as an international civil servant. This can be the case even if your posting or comment is restricted to friends and family.

Do not use the UN or your agency’s emblem on your personal web pages or social networking sites.

Avoid expressing your opinion about controversial religious, ethnic, political, or security matters that might be related, directly or indirectly, to events that are taking place in relation to the referendum. This could harm the credibility and the impartiality of the UN, as your opinion could be construed as a “UN Official's opinion”.

UN staff **must not post** partisan or political messages, even on personal social media accounts, and **must not share, like** or otherwise appear to **endorse** the partisan or political postings of others. This includes postings about the referendum options and possible post-referendum actions.

UN staff are encouraged to review their social media accounts, and to consider if any pages need to be 'unliked' or 'unfollowed' to maintain impartiality. Similarly, review all groups to which you are subscribed on WhatsApp and similar applications and consider if membership of a social media group could be seen as membership of a referendum organisation or campaign. If you follow political parties or groups to inform your work, you should note that you do, and why, to your supervisor.

As at other times, during elections misleading or inaccurate information can circulate on social media. UN staff should avoid circulating or commenting on posts discussing referendum arrangements, campaign behaviour and campaign group actions. If staff receive unexpected information about the referendum through social media, they should forward this information to DSS if it relates to physical security, or the referendum team in UNDP for all other issues.

On a practical level, you can see below examples of some typical Facebook postings, indicating if they are acceptable to post or not while you remain a UN staff member.

Posting	Acceptable?	Why?
Enrolment starts today! Everyone should register.	Yes	This post supports an important process, not a specific outcome.
I heard [campaign activist name] on the radio, they are rubbish! Bougainville will be	No	This clearly expresses a political opinion, even though it opposes rather than supports a campaign
[great/terrible] if independence wins the referendum	No	This clearly expresses a political opinion in favour of one referendum outcome.
Don't forget, campaign forum is on this Saturday after the footy, everyone should go!	Maybe	If you are sure the forum referred to is impartial, and has invited all the campaign groups, then it is ok to let people know there is an opportunity to hear their views.
Polling day tomorrow, can't wait to have my say!	Yes	Again, this supports the referendum process, not an individual candidate or party.
Polling day tomorrow, can't wait to vote for [referendum option]	No	This is expressing a political opinion for one option and so is not impartial.
Everyone vote for [referendum option] or the UN will leave Bougainville.	No	This is expressing a political opinion and attributing it to the UN. The UN is politically impartial and does not leave in this manner.

Learning more from standards of conduct

Openness and transparency in relations with the media are effective means of communicating organisational messages. However in no circumstance should we use the media – including social media - to further our own interests or views. If a staff member fails to comply with the obligations, this may amount to misconduct and may lead to a disciplinary process and the imposition of disciplinary measures.

Resources and references

United Nations Department of Public Information Social Media Guidelines (DPI/2573)
T/AI/2000/13, *Outside Activities*