

United Nations Department of Political Affairs

Academic Advisory Council on Mediation

TERMS OF REFERENCE

In the report on *Strengthening the Role of Mediation in the Peaceful Settlement of Disputes, Conflict Prevention and Resolution (A/66/811)*, the Secretary-General expressed the need to better connect theory and practice in the field of mediation. In order to allow the United Nations to tap into the best research and knowledge available from the global academic community, the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) established an Academic Advisory Council on Mediation.

I. PURPOSE

The Academic Advisory Council on Mediation (referred to as the Academic Council) is intended to promote more systematic exchanges between leading academics/institutions working on conflict prevention and mediation in different regions and DPA – linking theory and academic analysis with practice. The Academic Council also aims to support the generation and dissemination of knowledge for mediation practitioners and their support staff, to foster debate between academics and practitioners, and to build a broad network among academics on mediation.

II. FUNCTIONS

The functions of the Academic Council and its work with DPA include:

- **Research/Analysis**
 - Provide a link with academic institutions involved in conflict prevention and mediation, and to stimulate relevant research.
 - Identify links between longer-term research agendas and specific areas of interest for UN mediation practitioners, including challenges for the UN approaches to mediation.
 - Assist the UN in navigating and filtering relevant academic research.
 - Assist in translating academic research into useful inputs for practitioners.
 - Draw on databases and existing research to provide operational analytical inputs (including thematic, process and country-specific expertise), for instance, in response to specific real-time requests from the field.¹
 - Assist in debriefing envoys and synthesizing lessons learned.

- **Guidance**
 - Provide a sounding board for mediation guidance and analyses produced by DPA
 - Provide feedback on mediation strategies
 - Provide advice on developing relevant methodologies

¹ In such instances, the drafting of the final product is the responsibility of DPA; these pieces will not generally be made available in the public domain.

- **Training support**
 - Provide theoretical inputs/case study analysis for DPA trainings
 - Review training modalities and contents.

III. COMPOSITION

The work of the Academic Council is organized through a Steering Committee with approximately 12-15 members and DPA's Mediation Support Unit (MSU). A senior mediator may also be selected by DPA to be a member of the Academic Council.

Members of the Steering Committee are recognized scholars in the field of mediation and conflict resolution, linked to leading academic institutions in their region.

The members of the Steering Committee are selected by DPA, in consultation with other Steering Committee members. In selecting members, DPA takes into account regional representation, gender balance and the inclusion of different schools of thought and methodologies.

The composition of the Steering Committee may evolve over time, depending on the active involvement and the research focus of its members.

The reach of the Steering Committee is extended through a system of affiliated academic institutions, which would be invited to participate in specific meetings or to collaborate on particular projects.

IV. WORKING METHODS

The Academic Council functions as a network of academic institutions in the field of mediation and conflict resolution. The Academic Council will meet one or two times a year. The meetings will rotate between New York, in order to engage with the DPA's divisions involved in mediation, and other locations to be determined by its members. Teleconferences will be held on an as-required basis.

The meetings of the Academic Council may consist of closed sessions, with the participation of the Steering Committee, affiliates and DPA staff, and open sessions, where other relevant mediation actors are invited.

In cooperation with DPA, the Steering Committee decides on the agenda of each meeting, which may have a thematic and geographic focus.

Based on their specific expertise and capacities, different members of the Steering Committee may take the lead on initiatives conducted under the auspices of the Academic Council.² Such initiatives may include research projects, the development of methodologies, operational inputs and outreach. For purpose of carrying out these initiatives, they may draw on the support of other academics and academics institutions.

The members of Steering Committee participate in the work of the Academic Council on an honorary basis.³ In addition to their personal involvement, they may

² It is not foreseen that all members will be equally engaged in all the activities listed under functions.

³ This does not impact on the possibility of separate contractual arrangements with some members.

contribute to the work of the Academic Council through the research capacities of their academic institutions, as appropriate, and provide links to relevant regional and global networks of academics.

Members consult with MSU and the broader Steering Committee, before profiling any initiative or raising funds in the name of the Academic Council.⁴

MSU functions as the secretariat of the Academic Council and is responsible for coordinating the overall work of the Academic Council and participating in all meetings.

The Steering Committee will annually review the work of the Academic Council and prepare a report for DPA senior management.

V. BUDGET

The Academic Council does not administer a dedicated budget. Wherever possible, members of the Steering Committee and other participants in the meeting of the Academic Council cover the costs of their own participation in meetings. DPA may provide and administer funds to support the work of the Academic Council on an occasional basis.

In consultation with MSU, members of the Steering Committee may do fundraising to support a meeting or specific initiatives of the Academic Council.

Where possible, meetings of the Academic Council will be organized around relevant academic seminars and conferences in order to facilitate and economise participation.

⁴ This has no bearing on the full independence of the academic institutions and only relates to work conducted in the name of the Academic Council.