13 May 1966

Office Circular No. 88/Rev.1

INSTRUCTIONS TO SECRETARIES ON CORRESPONDENCE AND
REGISTRY PROCEDURES

1. Introduction

Full details on the form and layout of all types of correspondence, grammar, punctuation, etc. are dealt with in the document entitled "Secretarial Handbook", already distributed to staff members.

2. For the purpose of classification, indexing and filing, both IN and OUT correspondence divides itself into two categories, the Chief of Registry being mainly responsible for implementing the division between the two categories.

(a) Centrally-controlled (Registry-filed) correspondence. This is the material which can be identified by "SUBJECT" and which, in principle, covers all communications dealing with policy, procedural and technical subjects of all kinds, and all other subject material which must always be readily available centrally for immediate action or future reference. It is classified by subject, recorded and filed centrally by Registry before release for action or information.

(b) Non-centrally-controlled (non-Registry-filed) material

(i) This is material which cannot be classified or filed centrally by "subject", such as finance and budget documentation of a non-policy kind, statistical returns, job applications, correspondence dealing with the sale of GATT publications, and other similar types of correspondence. This material is more properly filed in the offices concerned according to their working needs. Included in non-centrally-controlled material are requests for free documents or publications and requests from the public and others for general information, and similar "one time" matters, the value of which ceases once the request has been answered. None of this non-centrally-controlled material is recorded in Registry although in special cases Registry will place it on central files, if files already exist.

(ii) Except in particular cases when the Deputy Director-General may instruct otherwise, correspondence for the Trade Centre is not recorded or filed centrally by Registry. It is forwarded by Registry to the Trade Centre.

3. <u>Registry-filed correspondence</u>

Incoming correspondence is never circulated loose, but is always first placed in the appropriate Registry file. If the correspondence is received at a time when the main Registry file is out of Registry, the correspondence is placed on a temporary Registry file and circulated therein until Registry can incorporate it into the main file. All temporary files bear the same number as the main file, the page number of the enclosed correspondence, and also indicate on the front cover the position of the main file as last reported to the Registry.

(a) Registry files are made up from:

(i) incoming correspondence on the subject concerned;

(ii) yellow copies of outgoing correspondence;

(iii) "notes for file";

(iv) internal memoranda which should be centrally recorded;

(v) any other papers or documents which are required to present a complete picture of the subject;

(vi) photo copies of multi-subject incoming correspondence.

(b) All papers on Registry files are numbered except "notes for file" and documentation. The number of the piece of incoming correspondence on which action is to be taken or comment invited, is quoted on the front of the file cover against the name of the recipient(s). Where appropriate, cross-references to previous correspondence are made on new incoming pieces.

4. <u>Non-Registry-filed correspondence</u>

This material is never placed on a Registry file. Loose papers are clearly marked with a suitable routing symbol, stamped with date of receipt and are then sent directly to the department or service concerned, without being recorded. It is for the receiving department or service to decide how this type of material shall be filed or disposed of. If an official receives a piece of non-centrally-controlled correspondence which he feels should have been treated as centrally-controlled material, he should return it to Registry with his comments before taking further action.

5. <u>Handling of Registry-filed correspondence by non-Registry staff</u>

All central correspondence is recorded to its exact position within the Registry file concerned. Correspondence must never be removed from either a main or temporary file except by Registry staff. If the views, or clearance, by other officials are required, any necessary memoranda, drafts, etc. must be sent on together with the Registry file, main or temporary. When central files are returned to Registry, they are examined to ensure that:

(a) incoming correspondence has been seen and initialled by the staff members to whom it was originally or subsequently sent and that the type of action taken has been noted on date stamp boxes of the correspondence concerned;

(b) all staff members whose names appear on the yellow file copy either for clearance of outgoing correspondence before despatch or information after despatch, have initialled the copy to show that they have seen it.

If the initials of any staff members are missing in either of the above cases, the file is returned to the staff members concerned.

6. <u>Movement of Registry files (by non-Registry staff)</u>

When a file leaves Registry, Registry keeps a record of the name of the staff member to whom the file is sent. If a staff member sends a file to a person <u>not</u> already noted on the file cover by Registry, the staff member concerned must advise Registry of a change in routing by completing a "File Transfer Slip". A supply of these slips is to be found in all Registry files.

(a) <u>Main files</u>. The Transfer Slips in all cases have the appropriate file number already typed in, in advance. It is only necessary to fill in the new destination, detach the slip and send it to Registry. The front of the file cover should, of course, be annotated as to the new destination.

(b) <u>Temporary Registry files</u>. Because file numbers for Temporary Covers change every time Registry issues them, such file numbers cannot be typed on the Transfer Slip in advance. Staff members are therefore obliged to fill in both the file <u>and page number</u> of content on the Transfer Slip before detaching and returning to Registry.

If a file gets "lost" as a result of non-compliance with the above rules it is the responsibility of the staff member last known by Registry to have the file, to trace it.

7. Recall of Registry files

Staff members are entitled to keep files during the period when action is being taken. However, as soon as no further action is contemplated, files should be returned promptly to Registry for servicing. Only in this way can files be kept fully up to date. Files which remain in offices for lengthy periods will be recalled by Registry as and when material is accumulating in Registry for filing.

8. "Bringing Forward" of Registry files

If a staff member is expecting an answer to his outgoing communication within a specified time, he should not keep the Registry file in his office, but return it to Registry with a request that the file be sent back to him on a specific date. In this way, the answer can be immediately placed on the file should it be received before the specified date, or if no answer is forthcoming, the file will automatically be sent to the staff member as requested. A column is provided on the front of all main file covers on which to record "Bring Forward" requests.

9. Inclusion of printed matter in Registry files

Normally it is not necessary to place GATT-numbered documents on Registry files. However, when a document or piece of printed matter from external sources is relevant to the file and its inclusion therein would make the file story complete, Registry will place the material on file if so requested by the responsible staff member.

10. Opening and handling of incoming correspondence in Registry

All mail and telegrams addressed either to GATT or to individual staff members by name is passed immediately to the Registry without prior examination by any other staff member. Registry will pre-sort all correspondence before it is opened and will release directly to the staff member concerned correspondence which can be identified as personal. All other correspondence will be opened and read. Registry will divide it into the two categories mentioned in paragraph 2. The portion dealing with non-centrally-controlled material will receive a simple "date received" stamp and will be transmitted to the department or service concerned. Registry does not record receipt of non-centrally-controlled material. The centrally-controlled material is classified according to subject, fully recorded, stamped with a special date received stamp, placed in a Registry file, given a page number and, when appropriate, cross referenced to any back correspondence in the file.

11. Routing of incoming correspondence

All correspondence, other than non-centrally controlled correspondence, and that of a purely administrative and financial character, is routed by the office of the Director-General to the Head or Heads of department concerned with the subject matter, regardless of to whom the correspondence is addressed. When correspondence has to be seen by more than one staff member, each recipient must initial against his name on the correspondence before passing it on. The special date received stamp on all incoming controlled correspondence has special "boxes" bearing the words "answered", "doc issued" and "folio". A cross should be inserted in the box "answered" if a reply to the communication has been sent. If no reply is called for the word "no" should be inserted in the box. If a document is issued the document number should be inserted in the box "doc issued". The box "folio" is for the use of the Registry. If any other action is taken by the officer concerned it should be so indicated outside the stamp.

12. Internal correspondence for Registry files

This includes internal memoranda exchanged between staff members of the secretariat and also "notes for the file". For the purpose of centrally-controlled subjects, there are two kinds of memoranda:

(a) when incoming correspondence is being passed from one staff member to another, a simple memorandum may sometimes be required containing information, instructions or guidance on the subject involved. Special memo blocs are available for this purpose. No copies are required since the memorandum will travel to the next staff member in the Registry file concerned;

(b) the other kind of internal memorandum is more important and generally concerns policy or procedural questions. It may even introduce a new subject for which no Registry file exists. In such cases, the memorandum must be sent to Registry for prior recording and filing. This prior classification, recording and filing by Registry prevents any possible loss during circulation (or possible misfiling elsewhere), and also gives Registry a chance to open a new file should one be necessary;

(c) finally there is the "note for the file". Such notes usually record a verbal understanding reached during a discussion or are merely "pro memori". They cannot be considered as correspondence in the strict sense of the word. However, like the internal memoranda mentioned under (a) above the "note for the file" travels with the Registry file concerned. No copies are therefore required.

13. **Internal correspondence, non-Registry files**

In the case of internal memoranda on non-Registry file matters, it is left to the discretion of the department or service concerned as to the copies they may need for their non-central files.

14. **Outgoing correspondence**

(a) The Correspondence Officer in the office of the Director-General ensures, as necessary, that the form of outgoing communications is consistent with the established procedures.

(b) In principle, correspondence should be answered promptly but, if any delay is anticipated an interim acknowledgment is to be sent giving the approximate date when a full answer may be expected.

(c) When a communication is answered orally or when discussions take place which result in an oral decision, a suitable memorandum is to be prepared for the appropriate file.

(d) In principle, no underline outgoing letter should deal with more than one subject because multi-subject letters cause difficult filing problems. However, when underline incoming multi-subject letters are being answered, sufficient yellow copies must be provided for the appropriate Registry files.

15. **Presentation of correspondence to Registry for despatch**

(a) Correspondence for Registry files

(i) File reference numbers. When incoming Registry-filed correspondence is being answered, the Registry file number must be typed in the appropriate position on the letter and all copies: see 14(d) above. If a letter is being typed which is not in answer to an incoming enquiry, the file number may be typed in, if it is known for certain. If the number is not known, Registry will fill it in at despatch time.

(ii) Registry file movement. When Registry-filed replies are sent to Registry for despatch, the Registry file must accompany the replies. If the staff member who originates the correspondence wishes to have the file returned to him, Registry will arrange this on request.

(iii) Copies. Below is listed the minimum copies which are all required for Registry record purposes.

Letters

> Yellow for Registry file. More than one copy may be needed if the letter deals with more than one subject: see 14(d) above;
>
> Blue for Registry chrono file;
>
> Pink for circulation file;
>
> White may be required for liaison officers and for internal office use.

Airgrams

> Three record copies are required which Registry uses in place of yellow, blue and pink, mentioned above.

PTT cables

> PTT forms in duplicate plus yellow, which should bear the signature of the authorizing official, plus blue and pink.

United Nations radio messages

> United Nations form in duplicate plus yellow with its authorizing signature, blue, pink and white. At the time of despatch Registry gives all United Nations radio messages a serial number.

(b) Non-Registry-filed correspondence. Although this is not filed centrally it is still necessary to follow a standard pattern for despatch purposes.

(i) Copies

Yellow. No yellow copies of letters are required by Registry, but the division or service concerned may wish to retain a yellow copy for their own internal files.

Yellow copies must be furnished to Registry for telegrams and United Nations radio messages. In both these cases, the yellow copies carry the authorizing despatch signature, which Registry should check. The United Nations radio messages are given a serial number as a correspondence reference. Registry adds the serial number to the original and yellow copies and returns the yellow copy to the originating office.

Blue and pink. Both these record copies are required by Registry for all non-Registry-filed correspondence.

(ii) <u>Reference code</u>. Because Registry reference numbers do not apply, all non-Registry-filed correspondence should bear a symbol to denote the originating division or service. This is essential to Registry when handling incoming replies.

(c) <u>Despatch - general notes</u>. The following additional points are applicable to both Registry-controlled and non-Registry-controlled outgoing correspondence.

(i) Should it be necessary to have white information copies for internal office use, it would be safer to send them to Registry with the original. Registry will then distribute these copies as requested.

(ii) <u>Enclosures with letters</u>. Although there will occasionally be the exception, such as confidential enclosures, enclosures which are despatched in a sealed envelope under cover of a letter, should only be so light as not to make an appreciable difference to the cost of postage. When heavy enclosures are sent in a sealed envelope by air mail, the cost is four times greater than sending the letter separately and the enclosures as "printed matter" (imprimé) by air mail in an unsealed envelope. In most cases, the unsealed air mailed printed matter reaches its destination at the same time as a sealed air mailed letter. In any case, unsealed air mailed "printed matter" is never more than twenty-four hours behind the letter. This point is especially important when enclosures are despatched to far distant places. When enclosures are sent separately, it is not possible to include a copy of the letter with the unsealed "printed matter". A compliments slip should be used on which are <u>typed</u> the name of the sender.

(iii) <u>Method of despatch of letters</u>. Letters for European countries are automatically sent by air mail. Letters for other countries will normally be sent by air mail unless the contents do not warrant the extra expense.

(iv) <u>Sealed envelopes</u>. Addressed and sealed envelopes which are received in Registry without the necessary record copies cannot be despatched. All such envelopes will be opened by Registry and returned to the originator for the necessary record

copies. In exceptional cases where no record copies for Registry are appropriate, the staff member should contact the Registry in advance of despatch so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

(v)   <u>Latest time of posting</u>. All staff members are urged to get their outgoing correspondence to Registry as early in the day as possible. The latest safe time for same day posting is 5 p.m., after which mail runs the risk of not being despatched until the next working day. On Fridays, this is particularly important because the United Nations postal service is closed on Saturdays and the next working day is therefore Monday.