A. Introduction

1. As the organizations of the United Nations Security Management System (UNSMS) are increasingly called upon to operate in insecure areas, the risk of United Nations personnel or their families becoming the victims of a hostage incident has increased as well. This policy provides actors within the UNSMS with an overview of how the United Nations manages a hostage situation.

2. This policy must be read in conjunction with UNSMS “Guidelines on Hostage Incident Management” available for Designated Officials (DOs), members of a Security Management Team (SMT) and Security Officials within the organizations of the UNSMS.

B. Purpose

3. The purpose of this policy is to outline the UNSMS strategy and approach to managing the risk from hostage-taking.

C. Application/Scope

4. The policy is applicable to all individuals covered by the UNSMS, as defined in Chapter III of the Security Policy Manual (SPM) (“Applicability of United Nations Security Management System”). These individuals include the categories of “United Nations Personnel” and “Other Individuals Covered” (the latter of which includes eligible family members).

5. The UNSMS hostage incident management processes may be applied to secure the release of individuals not covered by paragraph 4 above in extremis situations.

D. Conceptual Framework

6. The policy of the organizations of the UNSMS with regard to hostage-taking of personnel and other individuals covered is based on the existing norms of international law as reflected in the 1979 International Convention against the Taking of Hostages which, inter alia, provides that the taking of hostages is an offence of grave concern to the international community, that any person committing an offence of taking hostages shall either be prosecuted or extradited, and that States shall make such offences punishable by appropriate penalties which take into account the grave nature of these offences.

7. The policy of the UNSMS regarding hostage-taking is also based on the relevant decisions of its principal organs adopted in furtherance to the aforementioned norms of international law and, in particular, on Security Council resolution 579 (1985) by which the Council unequivocally condemned hostage-taking, called for the immediate release of all hostages wherever and by whomever they were being held, and affirmed the obligation of all States in whose territory hostages were held to urgently take all appropriate measures to secure their safe release and to prevent the commission of acts of hostage-taking in the future.

8. For the purposes of the present policy, hostage-taking is defined as the seizure or detention with a threat to kill, injure or to continue to detain individuals (hostages) in order to compel
a third party, namely a State, an organization of the UNSMS, a natural or juridical person or group of persons, to do or to abstain from doing any act as an explicit or implicit condition for the release of the hostages.

E. Hostage Incident Management Policy

9. Should individuals covered by the UNSMS be taken hostage, the organization shall make every effort to secure their speedy and safe release. To achieve this goal, the organization may establish contact or start a dialogue with the hostage-takers if it is determined that this would promote the speedy and safe release of the hostages. Such contact or dialogue should be aimed at trying to convince the hostage-takers of the inhumanity, illegality and futility of their actions as a means of attaining their objectives.

10. The Organization shall neither pay ransom nor make any substantial concessions to hostage-takers to secure the release of hostages, nor shall it intervene with the Member State concerned to make concessions in exchange for hostages because this would encourage potential hostage-takers, and thus increase the danger that other staff members might face in the future.

F. Planning and Prevention

11. Good security planning and coordination will greatly reduce the risk of United Nations personnel and other individuals covered becoming hostages and assist adherence to and compliance with this policy. To assist DOs in this effort, a simple hostage risk assessment methodology has been included in the UNSMS “Guidelines on Hostage Incident Management”. Assessments should be undertaken before, during and after the conclusion of an incident. This is essential in the development of strategy, tactics and security.

12. Every hostage situation is different. There are no strict rules of behaviour; however, there are techniques which can be used by personnel to minimize the effects of a detention in the unlikely event they are taken hostage. Information on how to survive as a hostage is contained in Annex A below. This information should be made available to all United Nations personnel in the context of a security training programme at those duty stations where there is a threat of hostage-taking.

G. Responsibilities of Member States

13. Notwithstanding the provisions of the present procedures, the Government of the State in which the hostage-taking has occurred, or, if applicable, the Government of the State where the hostages are held by the offenders, has the primary responsibility under international law to take all measures it considers appropriate to ease the situation of the hostages, in particular to secure their release and, after their release, to facilitate, when relevant, their departure. Any request for United Nations assistance in mediating an agreement to secure the release of hostages, made either by a Member State or an organization involved in the

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1 Ransom is defined as the money or other consideration paid for the release of a hostage.
hostage incident, must be forwarded to the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security for approval.

H. Decision-Making Authority

14. The Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security is directly accountable and reports to the Secretary-General. He/she is responsible for developing security policies, practices and procedures for the UNSMS to ensure implementation, compliance and support for security aspects of their activities. In the event of a hostage-taking, the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security will take the necessary policy decisions and ensure a coherent response by the Organization.

15. Should United Nations personnel, or other individuals covered, be taken hostage, it is the responsibility of the DO, who, in accordance with the Framework of Accountability of the United Nations Security Management System, is the key person in the security arrangements at the duty station, to take all necessary actions on behalf of the Organization to secure the speedy and safe release of the hostage(s). Such actions should be taken by the DO in consultation with the SMT and the United Nations Department of Safety and Security. In those instances where the issues involved are so sensitive as to cause damage to other United Nations personnel or have an impact on United Nations operations inside or outside that particular duty station, the DO should not proceed with any decisions which might have significant implications for the Organization and its personnel without obtaining the concurrence of the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security. Throughout the hostage incident, the DO should consult with the senior official of each organization at the duty station which has personnel being held hostage.

I. Hostage Incident Management

16. The UNSMS will manage the risk posed by hostage-taking, as well as hostage incidents themselves, in accordance with the “Guidelines on Hostage Incident Management” available for DOs, members of a SMT and Security Officials with the organizations of the UNSMS.

17. Coordinated planning and a unified response by the United Nations, host Governments and any other national representatives of the hostages is critical to prevent negotiations being compromised by differing interests and is crucial to securing the release of the hostage(s).

J. Lessons Learned Report

18. After the incident is over, a review and evaluation of the Hostage Incident Management Plan and the way personnel responded should be conducted. The lessons learned not only enable the DO to make improvements to the local plan, but also can help other duty stations in reviewing or preparing their plans. UNSMS “Guidelines on Hostage Incident Management” provide methods for conducting and reporting on this evaluation.

19. A copy of the evaluation report prepared by the DO must be forwarded to the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security not later than 30 days after the termination of the incident. The United Nations Department of Safety and Security will consolidate the
key lessons learned and share them with Senior Security Managers/Security Focal Points at the Headquarters of organizations participating in the UNSMS, as appropriate.

K. Enforcement

20. In the event of an investigation into a hostage incident, findings that any United Nations personnel failed to abide by the terms of this policy may lead to administrative or disciplinary proceedings.

L. Final Provisions

21. This policy is meant to be distributed to all United Nations personnel.

22. This policy enters into force on 15 April 2012.

Annex A

Surviving as a Hostage

1. Every hostage or kidnap situation is different. There are no strict rules of behaviour; however, there are steps which can be taken to minimize the effects of detention.

2. If you are taken hostage or kidnapped, there are a number of options which could enhance your ability to cope and to see the incident through to a successful release. The following techniques have been successfully employed by persons taken hostage:

   (a) At the time of your seizure, do not fight back or attempt to aggravate the hostage-takers. You may be injured if you attempt to resist armed individuals. There is a possibility that you will be blindfolded and drugged;

   (b) Be prepared to explain everything you have on your person;

   (c) Immediately after you have been taken, pause, take a deep breath and try to relax. Fear of death or injury is a normal reaction to this situation. Recognizing your reactions may help you adapt more effectively;

   (d) Do not be a hero; do not talk back or act "tough." Accept your situation. Any action on your part could result in a violent reaction from your captors;

   (e) The first 15 to 45 minutes of a hostage situation are the most dangerous. Follow the instructions of your captors. Your captors are in a highly emotional state, regardless of whether they are psychologically unstable or caught in an untenable situation. They are in a fight or flight reactive state and could strike out. Your job is to survive. After the initial shock wears off, your captors are able to better recognize their position;

   (f) Keep a low profile. Avoid appearing to study your abductors, although, to the extent possible, you should make mental notes about their mannerisms, clothes and apparent rank structure. This may help investigators after your release;

   (g) Be cooperative and obey hostage-takers' demands without appearing either servile or antagonistic. Be conscious of your body language as well as your speech. Do not say or do anything to arouse the hostility or suspicions of your captors. Do not be argumentative. Act neutral and be a good listener to your captors. Do not speak unless spoken to, and then only when necessary. Be cautious about making suggestions to your captors, as you may be held responsible if something you suggest goes wrong;

   (h) Anticipate isolation and possible efforts by the hostage-takers to disorient you, including unverifiable stories by your captors or frequent movements to different locations;

   (i) Try to keep cool by focusing your mind on pleasant scenes or memories or prayers. Create games and amusement in your mind. Try to recall the plots of movies or books.
This will keep you **mentally active**;

(j) Ask for anything you need or want (medicines, books, and paper). All they can say is no;

(k) **Build rapport** with your captors. Find areas of mutual interest which emphasize personal rather than political interests. An excellent topic of discussion is family and children. If you speak their language, use it -- it will enhance communications and rapport;

(l) **Exercise daily**. Develop a daily physical fitness programme and stick to it;

(m) As a result of the hostage situation, you may have difficulty retaining fluids and may experience a loss of appetite and weight. Try to drink water and eat even if you are not hungry. It is important to maintain strength;

(n) Do not make threats against hostage-takers or give any indication that you would testify against them. If hostage-takers are attempting to conceal their identities, give no indication that you recognize them;

(o) Try to think of persuasive reasons why hostage-takers should not harm you. Encourage them to let authorities know your whereabouts and condition. Suggest ways in which you may benefit your captors in negotiations that would free you. It is important that your abductors view you as a person worthy of compassion and mercy. Never beg, plead or cry. You must gain your captors' respect as well as sympathy;

(p) If you end up serving as negotiator between hostage-takers and authorities, make sure the messages are conveyed accurately. Be prepared to speak on the radio or telephone;

(q) If there is a rescue attempt by force, drop quickly to the floor and seek cover. Keep your hands on your head. When appropriate, identify yourself;

(r) Escape only if you are sure you will be successful. If you are caught, your captors may use violence to teach you and possibly others a lesson;

(s) If possible, stay well-groomed and clean;

(t) At every opportunity, emphasize that, as a United Nations employee, you are neutral and not involved in politics; and

(u) **Be patient**