

Ministry of Public Administration,
Independence Square,
Colombo 7.

14th March, 1984.

All Secretaries of Ministries
and Heads of Departments.

Counter-signature

Chapter XXIV of the Establishments Code Sections 2:3
and 2:4 (Part) reads as follows:

"Letters from Heads of Departments must, in all
important cases, be signed by them.

When this is not possible, owing to absence or other
cause, if the Head of the Department has either
drafted the letter or specifically directed the
particular information to be furnished, the officer
signing should insert the name of the Head of the
Department in its proper place, adding " signed "
before it, and put his own signature and designation
on the left side of the page, thus, in the case of a
Government Agent:

Yours faithfully,

(Signed) C.D.,

Government Agent.

Signature of A.B.,
Office Assistant.

In other cases the signature should be that of the
individual responsible for the letter, who should
sign on behalf of the Head of the Department, thus,

A.B.,

for Government Agent.

Officers authorized to sign for a Head of a Department
may frank endorsements, letters and memoranda on minor
and routine matters.

Correspondence of Secretaries will be regulated by the
same procedure".

2. The practice in the example given in the first part of the quotation above is commonly referred to as "counter-signing". There have been many instances in which counter-signing of letters has led to serious problems as a result of the counter-signed letter not conveying precisely what the Secretary to the Ministry/Head of Department wished to convey whether as an order or as a communication. The counter-signed letter has sometimes been an inadequate or incorrect or distorted version of what was intended and of course, the counter-signed letter is despatched without the Secretary to the Ministry/Head of Department having actually seen the contents.

3. I shall therefore be grateful if you would kindly adopt the following procedure:

- (i) Each Secretary to a Ministry/Head of Department to issue to his officers, a list of designations, the holders of which only, can have their orders/communications issued under counter-signature.
- (ii) Each Secretary to a Ministry/Head of Department to issue a list of designations of those officers only, who may counter-sign.
- (iii) At the appropriate places, the designation and name of the officer whose order/communication is being conveyed under counter-signature should be given as well as the designation and name of the officer counter-signing.

4. It is essential that the officer whose order/communication is permitted to be conveyed using the device of counter-signature, should allow it to be adopted only where the order/communication is expressed by him in writing in definite unambiguous form, exactly as it is to be conveyed in the counter-signed letter. Particularly where the letter is not merely a reply in the negative or in the positive, it is necessary that he should, give a specific draft text to be conveyed counter-signed exactly as drafted.

Sgd:D.B.I.P.S.Siriwardhana

Secretary,
Ministry of Public Administration.