



4 September 2019

Secretary-General's bulletin

Environmental policy for the United Nations Secretariat

1. The fate of humankind depends on how we collectively rise to the challenges posed by climate change and other environmental concerns. Given the urgency, I intend to accelerate our own internal sustainability efforts.
2. The Secretariat, in its leadership role, global reach and servicing of the other principal and subsidiary organs of the United Nations, will endeavour to align its own practices with the aims and goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹ and international agreements on climate change and protection of the environment.
3. To accelerate the Secretariat's sustainability efforts, building on previous work and systematically integrating environmental sustainability into its operations, I hereby promulgate the environmental policy for the United Nations Secretariat, which is set out in the annex to the present bulletin.
4. The policy provides the framework and overarching principles to guide the mainstreaming of environmental sustainability considerations into the Secretariat's activities worldwide. It supports the implementation of the Secretary-General's action plan,² as endorsed by the General Assembly, for integrating sustainable development practices into Secretariat-wide operations, and Security Council and General Assembly resolutions concerning the reduction of the overall environmental footprint of peacekeeping missions.³ The purpose of the policy is to further implement the commitments made by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for

¹ In its resolution [70/1](#) of 25 September 2015, the General Assembly adopted the outcome document of the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda.

² On 27 April 2017, the Secretary-General presented a report that included an action plan for integrating sustainable development practices into Secretariat-wide operations and facilities management ([A/72/82](#)). In paragraph 19 of its resolution [72/219](#) of 20 December 2017, the General Assembly endorsed the Secretary-General's action plan for integrating sustainable development practices into Secretariat-wide operations and facilities management and requested the Secretary-General to implement his relevant recommendations within existing resources.

³ In paragraph 31 of its resolution [70/286](#) of 17 June 2016, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to reduce the overall environmental footprint of each peacekeeping mission, including by implementing environmentally friendly waste management and power generation systems, in full compliance with the relevant rules and regulations. Similar mandates were included in previous Security Council and General Assembly resolutions specific to peacekeeping missions.



Coordination on environmental sustainability management within the United Nations system.⁴

5. The Secretariat commits itself, through the policy, to five guiding principles: (a) stewardship of the environment with respect to all operations; (b) efficiency in resource use and operations; (c) continuous improvement of environmental performance; (d) stakeholder engagement at all levels; and (e) adaptation and resilience.

6. The Secretariat also commits itself, through the policy, to specific objectives in the application of the guiding principles, including a commitment to environmental sustainability management through the establishment and maintenance of environmental management systems across all of its geographic locations.

7. In implementing the guiding principles, I urge United Nations staff members and other United Nations personnel to play an active part in protecting the environment in the conduct of the Organization's activities and in strengthening the Organization's response to the challenges posed by climate change, within both the workplace and the wider community.

8. Detailed guidance on implementing the environmental policy will be issued separately and will be revised as required.

9. The present bulletin shall enter into force on the date of its issuance.

(Signed) António **Guterres**
Secretary-General

⁴ Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System 2020–2030 (CEB/2019/3/Add.2).

Annex

Environmental policy for the United Nations Secretariat

I. Overview

1. Member States are brought together by the Organization to protect the fundamental right of all human beings to freedom, equality and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being. The United Nations itself, like its Member States, bears a solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations.¹

2. The General Assembly affirmed its commitment to sustainability through the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is aimed at ending poverty, protecting the environment and ensuring peace and prosperity for the world's population.

3. The Secretariat, in its leadership role, global reach and servicing of the other principal and subsidiary organs of the United Nations, will endeavour to align its own practices with the aims and goals of the 2030 Agenda and international agreements on climate change and protection of the environment, including the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the Paris Agreement.²

4. Accordingly, and building on previous efforts, the Secretariat pledges to systematically integrate environmental sustainability into the way in which it operates, enhancing institutional capabilities and credibility to contribute effectively to all of the Sustainable Development Goals. Of specific and direct relevance in aligning the management of internal operations with the environmental dimension of sustainable development are Goals 6, 7, 12, 13 and 16 and their targets 6.3, 6.4, 7.2, 7.3, 12.2, 12.4, 12.5, 12.6, 12.7, 12.8, 13.1, 13.2, 13.3 and 16.6.

II. Purpose

5. The environmental policy is aimed at providing the framework and overarching principles to guide the mainstreaming of environmental sustainability considerations into the Secretariat's activities worldwide. It fulfils a commitment made by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination to environmental sustainability and to implement environmental management systems³ within the Organization. It supports the implementation of the Secretary-General's action plan, as endorsed by the General Assembly, for integrating sustainable development practices into Secretariat-wide operations, and of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions concerning the reduction of the overall environmental footprint of peacekeeping missions.⁴

6. The policy has been developed through engagement with stakeholders and is aligned with the United Nations system-wide strategic direction, requirements and best practices on environmental sustainability management provided by the United

¹ Principle 1 of the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, contained in the *Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 5–16 June 1972 (A/CONF.48/14/Rev.1)*.

² The Paris Agreement adopted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change by the Conference of the Parties at its twenty-first session, held in Paris from 30 November to 13 December 2015 (see [FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1](#), decision 1/CP.21, annex).

³ Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System 2020–2030 ([CEB/2019/3/Add.2](#)).

⁴ See resolutions [70/286](#) and [72/219](#); see also [A/72/82](#).

Nations Environment Programme and the Environment Management Group. It is ultimately intended to ensure that all activities of the Secretariat across all locations do not have a negative impact on the climate and contribute positively to protecting the environment, whenever feasible.

III. Scope

7. The policy primarily concerns the environmental impact of Secretariat operations and facilities at all of its locations. In recognition of the fact that environmental sustainability can only be achieved through collective action, all staff and entities of the Secretariat are to strive to apply the guiding principles and objectives to all aspects of the Secretariat's operations.

8. Implementation of the policy will respect all existing United Nations regulations, rules and policies and will also require the Secretariat to apply the policy to activities carried out by any third party on its behalf.

IV. Principles and objectives

9. The Secretariat commits itself, through the policy, to the following principles and objectives, with the purpose of protecting the environment and the communities in which the Organization operates, through systematic and continuous improvements that take into account local and regional conditions.⁵

Principle 1: stewardship of the environment

- 1.1 Seek to do no harm to the environment and communities
- 1.2 Observe, on a voluntary basis, the highest environmental standards, and exceed them when feasible
- 1.3 Maximize opportunities to contribute positively to the environment

Related objectives

- a. Prevention of pollution to water, land and air
- b. Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions
- c. Provision of safe and healthy workplaces
- d. Contribution to the preservation and rehabilitation of ecosystems and cultural heritage

Principle 2: efficiency in resource use and operations

- 2.1 Conserve natural resources
- 2.2 Optimize sustainable energy consumption
- 2.3 Reduce the generation of waste and aim for zero waste

⁵ The related objectives of the principles are not hierarchical and may apply to any or all aspects of the related principle.

Related objectives

- a. Reduction in energy consumption
- b. Increase in conversion to renewable sources of energy
- c. Reduction in water consumption
- d. Reduction in wasteful consumption and waste generation
- e. Increase in recycling and reuse of materials

Principle 3: continuous improvement of environmental performance

- 3.1 Integrate environmental sustainability management into the delivery of activities
- 3.2 Continuously expand the scope of environmental management systems
- 3.3 Encourage innovation and adopt best practices

Related objectives

- a. Integrated environmental management systems
- b. Continuous performance measurement, monitoring and auditing
- c. Systematic review and revision of environmental objectives and targets
- d. An established framework for adopting emerging best practices

Principle 4: stakeholder engagement at all levels

- 4.1 Communicate the environmental policy to internal and external stakeholders
- 4.2 Promote environmental awareness, participation, knowledge-sharing and training
- 4.3 Report internally and externally on environmental performance and efficiencies

Related objectives

- a. Increase in environmental awareness and engagement of personnel at all levels
- b. Comprehensive reporting on environmental performance and resource efficiencies
- c. Active sustainability networks interconnected with existing United Nations system networks and initiatives

Principle 5: adaptation and resilience

- 5.1 Manage risks to the Organization from climate change and natural resource depletion
- 5.2 Interlink the Organization's environmental sustainability and resilience management frameworks

Related objectives

- a. Effective and integrated organizational risk management
- b. Preparedness and effective adaptation to environmental threats
- c. Effective emergency response to and remediation for environment-related incidents

V. Implementation

A. Systematic environmental sustainability management

10. The primary instrument for implementing the policy is the adoption of a systematic environmental sustainability management approach to achieving environmental benefits and addressing related risks.

Environmental management systems

11. The Secretariat will establish and maintain an environmental management system at each of its geographic locations, in accordance with the relevant guidance that is to be issued.

12. An environmental management system is a set of management procedures allowing the Organization to identify, evaluate and reduce the environmental impact of its activities and continuously improve its environmental performance and management of related risks in successive “plan-do-check-act” cycles. It integrates environmental considerations into existing management systems, including programme planning and budgeting, to ensure that appropriate resources are allocated to areas of priority. Within a common framework, the Secretariat is to use a structured process at each location that takes into consideration its particular circumstances, in order for the specific objectives, targets and responses to risks at each location to be set on the basis of the most significant environmental impacts, capabilities and readiness.

Staged approach

13. In recognition of the complexity and global nature of the Secretariat, the implementation of environmental management systems is to follow a staged approach. Initially, such systems will cover operations and facilities management at geographic locations where facilities and infrastructure are managed by the Secretariat. Ultimately, through integrated and interlocking environmental management systems, each entity of the Secretariat will commit to environmental management within its particular context, including by assessing the significant environmental aspects of its operations and developing action plans to improve its areas of focus and address risks, monitoring, auditing and reporting on its environmental performance and resource efficiencies. Under a common framework that integrates sustainability practices into the management systems of the Secretariat, environmental management efforts will be pursued that are specific to each location and entity, reinforce each other and are aimed at achieving the Organization’s environmental objectives.

Commitment to observing environmental standards

14. The Secretariat will observe, on a voluntary basis, the highest environmental standards and exceed them when feasible. Such standards may include, as

appropriate: (a) international environmental agreements, conventions or protocols; (b) international environmental norms and standards agreed at intergovernmental negotiations and conferences organized by the United Nations; (c) host country laws and regulations governing the environment; and (d) organizational and industry standards, codes of practice or other relevant agreements on environmental management. In order to be observed, such standards must be consistent with relevant United Nations regulations, rules and policies.

B. Governance and responsibilities

15. The successful implementation of the policy is the responsibility of the senior management of the Secretariat and, ultimately, the Secretary-General. It is led and coordinated by a Secretariat steering group on environmental sustainability management, which brings together parts of the Organization that are primarily responsible for environmental performance in the management of their activities. In addition, local governance bodies are to be established at each location. Such bodies are to include participation by staff representatives, as appropriate, on matters affecting staff in accordance with staff rule 8.1. A network of local steering groups or environmental committees on environmental sustainability management is to implement the policy and coordinate the establishment and maintenance of local environmental management systems.

16. Ultimately, all Secretariat staff are to contribute, through their professional actions and decisions in the workplace, to the environmental objectives and performance of the Organization. All staff and entities of the Secretariat are to strive to exemplify the guiding principles of the policy and to observe environmental guidance documents⁶ and any associated directives, instructions and operating procedures issued globally or locally in support of the environmental management system in all aspects of the Secretariat's operations.

17. Detailed implementation guidance will be issued separately and will be revised and updated as required. It will be developed progressively in accordance with best practices, building on existing environmental guidance, and will contribute to and be aligned with United Nations system-wide environmental commitments agreed upon by the Chief Executives Board and the Environment Management Group.

C. Monitoring and reporting

18. Integral aspects of the environmental management systems are the monitoring of performance against targets, the auditing of the systems against standard requirements and the review of results by management. Through the policy, the Secretariat further commits itself, in accordance with the mandates of the General Assembly, to transparent and regular reporting on its global environmental performance to internal and external stakeholders, including participation in relevant United Nations system-wide reporting. In addition, such reporting is to include periodic reports that document results against targets for the significant environmental aspects addressed by the Secretariat at each of its locations.

19. The policy shall be reviewed, at a minimum, every five years.

⁶ These include existing environmental guidance documents covering United Nations field missions, such as the Environmental Policy for United Nations Field Missions and the environment strategy of the Department of Field Support.