

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

12 January/H1 ~~MCI/MCI(L)~~(79m)Tj1

My Administration welcomes the Panel's suggestion to adopt a risk-based coordination approach within the United Nations system to achieve a globally consistent risk assessment and build consensus on priorities and processes to enhance the support of the United Nations to Member States for more effective reporting on their efforts to tackle climate change.

Meanwhile, the United Nations system continues to lead on the slow, painstaking, but essential task of achieving the full implementation of international climate agreements and to urge all countries to deliver on their commitments. Along these lines, I am planning to convene a Climate Ambition Summit in September 2023 with the expectation that every leader – from governments, business, cities and regions, civil society and finance – steps up and comes up with new, tangible and credible actions to accelerate the pace of change to combat this crisis.

### *Sustainability reporting*

The sustainability efforts of the United Nations system are implemented following the Strategy for Sustainability Management in the United Nations System 2020-2030. The Strategy was drafted by the [Environment Management Group](#) and was endorsed by the United Nations System [Chief Executives Board for Coordination \(CEB\)](#). The Strategy contains ambitious objectives at the system-wide level that are annually tracked via the Greening the Blue report. In addition, the entities within the United Nations development system have been called upon by the 2020 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) to integrate environment and climate in all activities and operations<sup>1</sup>. These objectives and indicators cover both the integration of environmental and social safeguards and standards in programmes, as well as environmental performance indicators, such as greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, waste, water consumption, percentages of renewables and more. Based on this system-wide Strategy, each individual entity is responsible for setting up its targets and indicators and reporting on achievement via the Greening the Blue report. The indicators and reporting are based on international best practice, such as the GHG Protocol and ISO 14001, where relevant, in a United Nations context. To maintain this system in place, expand it and accelerate results, the United Nations System needs to develop technical collaborations and generate financing streams for improving all operations and programmes, to mainstream sustainability, upgrade the United Nations infrastructures and for energy transition.

### *Role of Supreme Audit Institutions*

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<sup>1</sup> QCPR 2020 (Article 29 (b) Advance the development of a system-wide approach, implement measures and report regularly to their respective governing bodies, through existing reporting and mandates, on their efforts to reduce their climate and environmental footprint; ensure consistency of their operations and programmes with low emissions and climate-resilient development pathways; stressing the urgency of climate action and contribute to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.)

My Administration welcomes the role of the external audit community in helping the United Nations entities to more effectively address climate change. We appreciate the priority given by the Supreme Audit Institutions to providing assurance on the climate change global framework and conducting audits on national responses to climate change and climate action (SDG13), and interrelated SDG areas, such as biodiversity (SDG15), water (SDG6) and affordable and clean energy (SDG7), among others. The Panel, for example, could provide guidance to United Nations entities in their efforts to support Member States to fulfil their national commitments to address climate change and make progress on climate goals drawing on the results of these independent assessments.

In recent years, the United Nations Secretariat has worked closely with the International Organizaonal[5), waforts toworked closortt(i)-2 (t) (w)2 8a 3oyeworked clwcd chd

UN-SWAP 2.0 (2018-2022) raised the bar for accountability by strengthening existing indicators and anchoring the framework within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. UN-SWAP 2.0 and the equivalent framework at the United Nations Country Team level, the United Nations Country Team System-wide Action Plan (UNCT-SWAP) Gender Equality Scorecard, have been contextualized to the United Nations reform and the planned move to system-wide reporting on collective results linked to gender-related targets of the SDGs, including SDG 5. The gender dimensions of the United Nations response to the health and development crisis emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic have also been integrated in the accountability frameworks for the period 2020-2022.

### *Projects and Implementing Partners*

The High-level Committee on Management of the CEB, together with its Finance and Budget Network, have facilitated various discussions and working groups related to the management of implementing partners over the past several years, addressing specific issues relevant to the United Nations system, such as common definitions related to fraud and implementing partners, and reporting of fraud and corruption issues to donors. Most recently, in May 2022, the Finance and Budget Network discussed the Note by the Secretary-General on the JIU review of the management of implementing partners in the United Nations system organizations (A/77/317/Add.1) and agreed that relevant JIU recommendations should be included in the workplan of the United Nations Partner Portal group. The Finance and Budget Network further encouraged entities that have not yet joined the Partner Portal group to do so and leverage policies and practices that have already been established with respect to implementing partners, within the framework of their Financial Regulations and Rules. The Finance and Budget Network has planned a follow-up discussion in 2023 to explore more ways to strengthen the use and management of implementing partners to advance our collective goals.

### *Knowledge management*

The Secretariat attaches great importance to effective knowledge management across its various entities and within the broader United Nations system. Recognizing the complexity and diversity of the entities comprising the United Nations common system, the Secretariat is working to achieve greater coherence and consistency through agile, organic and cooperative approaches, such as the integrated policy and guidance framework. This solution comprises the publicly accessible Policy Portal website, managed by the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance (DMSPC), the internally focused Knowledge Gateway, led by the Department of Operational Support (DOS), and the Peace and Security Policy and Practice Database, overseen by the Department of Peace Operations (DPO). All these platforms are tightly interconnected, resulting in a coherent knowledge management taxonomy, up-to-date content is ensured through a shared network of content managers and an improved experience for users who navigate seamlessly across the platforms.

One part of that framework – the [Knowledge Gateway](#) – increasingly caters to staff members beyond the Secretariat, especially with guidance related to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, behavioural science, and occupational safety and health, where both the content and the site users originate from across the United Nations system.

The Office of Information and Communications Technology (OICT) has,

Funding remains a challenge to the full implementation of the development reform. To this effect, we are taking all possible measures to ensure increased voluntary contributions to the Special Purpose Trust Fund of the Resident Coordinator system. As part of this effort, DCO in close collaboration with my office, is organizing a high-level round-table meeting to be held at the end of this month, co-convened by the United States and Kenya, to discuss the funding of the Resident Coordinator system. The objective is equally to reinvigorate the conversation on stability and predictability for funding of the Resident Coordinator system in the longer term, as well as to mobilize immediate funding.

### **Financial issues**

*Engagement with External Auditors for Review of Draft Guidance prior to implementation of new standards:* The International Public Sector Accounting Standards Board (IPSASB) pronouncements and standards are principle-based, designed to be interpreted and adopted as per the entity's operating model. The fact that they have been interpreted differently and inconsistently by the Auditors of the United Nations family has caused some challenges with new auditors coming to overturn the settled and agreed accounting policies and the unqualified audit opinions issued by previous auditors. This has resulted in restatements of financial statements to the frustration of those preparing the statements and confusion of the users of the financial statements. The Task Force on Accounting Standards (TFAS) is therefore keen to work out a mechanism to resolve these concerns and is planning on developing a United Nations system guidance upon the issue of new standards on revenue and transfer expenses (update of IPSAS 23). It will share and request consolidated comments from the United Nations Board of Auditors and from the Technical Group of the Panel of External Auditors, prior to issuing same to minimize differences in interpretation of the IPSAS.

*Guidance on Financial Instruments, Leases, Classification of Employee Benefits, Capitalization Thresholds:* The TFAS provides an environment that either establishes working groups for issues or supports initiatives which are led by United Nations system individual organizations on these issues. For example, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is spearheading an initiative on Financial Instruments and has invited other TFAS organizations to join. It will share the guidance as well as the training on this project.

TFAS organizations shared experiences on leases at the recent annual face-to-face meeting of the Task Force held in October 2022, where the United Nations Secretariat shared its experience on preparations for the implementation of the new IPSAS on leases. Guidance developed by the individual organizations will be shared with all TFAS organizations to disseminate different approaches that may meet differing operational needs. Capitalization thresholds are not mandated by the IPSAS and given the vast differences between the United Nations system organizations in terms of size, complexity and business models, harmonization of such would be imprudent.

The Panel should rest assured that TFAS does its best to ensure cohesion and greater c

The Digital and Technology Network (DTN) reports to the High-level Committee on Management (HLCM) and is co-chaired by the United Nations Secretariat Chief Information Technology Officer (CITO) and one rotational DTN member organization. The DTN is the principal interagency mechanism within the United Nations system for the promotion of cooperation and collaboration on digital and technology related matters. Its mission is to advance the digitalization of the United Nations system organizations and to align the ICT-related priorities and undertakings of its membership in a manner commensurate with this collective aim. DTN introduced the United Nations system-wide updated minimum cybersecurity standard. This initiative was aimed at strengthening the collective resilience of the United Nations system organizations confronting an increasing number of high-profile incidents, breaches and cyber-attacks. The updated security baseline covers the cybersecurity programme, technical best practices and information security incident management.

In response to the exacerbated cyber threats and IT security risks, the Secretariat has deployed advanced security solutions to significantly improve the level of protection, as well as the ability to respond to such threats. This includes the deployment of the Microsoft E5 Security suite of tools in the form of (a) “Microsoft Office 365 Defender” to protect the email and other collaboration tools to the entire Secretariat; (b) “Microsoft Windows Defender” to more than 45,000 workstations across the Secretariat (deployment across the Secretariat is expected to be completed in 2023); and (c) tools for identity protection and other back-office functionality (to be deployed in 2023). This deployment supplemented interim measures that had been implemented to protect the remote workforce during the early stages of the pandemic.

In addition, an internally developed “threat hunting solution”, based largely on open-source tools, has been deployed to over 6,000 hosts to allow proactive monitoring of the environment for sophisticated, targeted cyberattacks; deployment to additional environments is ongoing and expected to continue in 2023.

In order to improve the state of cybersecurity across the United Nations Secretariat in a more systematic and sustainable manner, a proposal to strengthen internal capacity in this area and to align the cybersecurity programme of work across the Secretariat has been included in a report on Capital Investment.

With regard to the recognized and systematic frameworks, OICT established a governance framework comprising governance bodies, policies and standards that ensure ICT functions align with, support and enable organizational goals.



Please accept my thanks and appreciation for the ongoing constructive engagement. My Administration looks forward to continuing the fruitful and cooperative relationship with the Panel.

Yours sincerely,

  
  
  
António Guterres