

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
--
BRIEFING ON THE UN80 INITIATIVE

New York, 12 May 2025

[all-English]

Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Next month marks the 80th anniversary of the United Nations Charter.

The Charter is our roadmap to a better world – our owner’s manual setting out purposes and principles – and our practical guide to advancing the three pillars of our work: peace and security, development and human rights.

Anniversaries are a time to look back and celebrate – but they are even more a time to cast our eyes to the future.

It is only natural – especially in a period of turbulence and tumult – to look ahead and ask central questions:

How can we be the most effective Organization that we can be?

How can we be more nimble, coordinated and fit to face the challenges of today, the next decade, and indeed the next 80 years?

The UN80 Initiative is anchored in answering these questions – and equipping our organization in an era of extraordinary uncertainty.

Yes, these are times of peril.

But they are also times of profound opportunity and obligation. The mission of the United Nations is more urgent than ever.

And it is up to us to intensify our efforts to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals and be laser-focused on implementing the Pact for the Future with its many pathways to strengthen multilateralism.

Excellencies,

From day one of my mandate, we embarked on an ambitious reform agenda to strengthen how we work and deliver. The reimagined development system is one example.

Our shared goal has always been to make our Organization more efficient, to simplify procedures, eliminate overlaps, and enhance transparency and accountability.

The liquidity crisis we now face is not new.

But today's financial and political situation adds even greater urgency to our efforts.

We face real threats to the very fabric, values, principles, and sustainability of multilateralism.

But I also sense from many of you a robust determination and political will to ensure the strongest possible United Nations for the 21st century.

We must rise to this moment.

Excellencies,

As indicated in my letter of 11 March, the UN80 Initiative is structured around three key workstreams:

First, we are striving to rapidly identify efficiencies and improvements under current arrangements.

Second, we are reviewing the implementation of all mandates given to us by Member States.

And third, we are undertaking consideration of the need for structural changes and programme realignment across the UN system.

Under the first workstream on efficiencies and improvements, Under-Secretary-General Catherine Pollard is leading a Working Group for the Secretariat that is developing a management strategy to design a new business model for the Organization.

The Working Group is focused on developing cost-reduction and efficiency-enhancement proposals in management and operations across the UN Secretariat.

It is reviewing administrative functions to identify redundancies, streamline processes, and design integrated solutions – with cost-benefit analyses and clear implementation roadmaps.

Priority areas include:

- Functional and structural consolidation;
- Workforce streamlining;
- Relocating services from high-cost duty stations;

- Centralizing IT and support services, and
- Expanding automation and digital platforms.

While the Working Group's immediate focus is on management and operational areas, the rest of the Secretariat will be expected to contribute towards the efficiency agenda.

For example, all Secretariat entities in New York and Geneva have been asked to review their functions to determine if any can be performed from existing, lower-cost locations, or may otherwise be reduced or abolished.

This especially pertains to those functions that do not directly support inter-governmental bodies in New York and Geneva.

With respect to the broader UN system, in April, the High-Level Committee on Management identified potential system-wide efficiency measures in areas such as human resources management, supply chain management and information and communications technologies.

Concrete proposals are now being developed, including identifying services that system organizations can provide quicker, at a lower price or through more competitive contracts.

This brings me to the second workstream: mandate implementation review.

As stated in my 11 March letter, this workstream is about how the UN system implements mandates entrusted by Member States.

We will not review the mandates themselves. Those are yours to decide on.

Our job is to examine and report on how we carry them out, and our goal is to simplify and optimize how we do so.

Nearly twenty years ago, in 2006, an analysis of mandates and the "mandate-generation cycle" was carried out by the Secretariat.

A number of problems were identified, including burdensome reporting requirements, overlap between and within organs, an unwieldy and duplicative architecture for implementation, and gaps between mandates and resources.

But let's be frank.

Most of these problems are not only still with us – they have intensified.

We must do better.

Our review will be conducted holistically – looking at the entire universe of mandates, and at the entirety of their implementation.

This review, therefore, cannot be limited to the UN Secretariat, but it will start there.

We have already completed an identification of all mandates reflected in the programme budget - and will soon do so for the rest of the system.

The review has so far identified over 3,600 unique mandates for the Secretariat alone.

It is now deepening its examination, clustering these mandates using various analytical lenses.

After this analytical work, relevant entities and departments will be invited to identify opportunities for improvements and consolidation of efforts.

This should result in the identification of duplications, redundancies, or opportunities for greater synergy on implementation.

Naturally, based on this work, Member States may wish to consider the opportunity to conduct themselves a review of the mandates.

There can be no doubt that the thousands of mandates in place today – and our machinery to implement them – stretch the capacities of Member States, especially those with smaller missions, and the UN system beyond reason.

It is as if we have allowed the formalism and quantity of reports and meetings to become ends in themselves.

The measure of success is not the volume of reports we generate or the number of meetings we convene. The measure of success – the value, purpose and aim of our work – is in the real-world difference we make in the lives of people.

This brings me to the third workstream: structural changes.

Proposals on structural change and programme realignment are likely to emerge from the mandate implementation review.

But we have already got the ball rolling by soliciting the views of a number of UN senior leaders.

Their initial submissions – nearly 50 in all – show a high level of ambition and creativity.

Last week, we deepened some of our ideas and thinking about structural changes in a dedicated session of the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination.

I felt a strong sense of collective determination and responsibility from the leaders of UN entities – a shared resolve to strengthen the system and assume the challenge of change and renewal – and a united commitment to bring to you, our Member States, concrete and ambitious proposals for a renewed United Nations.

The UN system is highly diverse consisting of organizations with a wide variety of structures and mandates.

To advance our three workstreams, I have established seven UN80 clusters – under the coordination of the UN80 Task Force and in close cooperation with the Secretariat Working Group.

Each of the seven clusters bring together the organizations that contribute to a similar specific global objectives and similar areas of work.

They will advance efforts in the three UN80 workstreams – identifying efficiencies and improvements, mandate implementation review, and possible structural changes.

They will be managed at the Principals' level and will consist of the following:

- Peace and security, coordinated by DPPA, DPO, OCT, and ODA;
- Development in the Secretariat and in development we have two clusters because the work in the Secretariat is very different from the work in the Agencies, but the two clusters will be working very closely together. So development in the Secretariat is coordinated by DESA, UNCTAD, ECA, and UNEP;
- Development (UN System), coordinated by UNDP, UNOPS, UNICEF and DCO;
- Humanitarian, coordinated by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR, and IOM;
- Human Rights, coordinated by OHCHR;
- Training and Research, coordinated by UNU and UNITAR; and finally
- Specialized Agencies, coordinated by ITU and ILO.

They will be the locomotive force for concrete proposals. And they will operate at the high level of ambition that our times demand – and that also echo in large measure the calls contained in the Pact for the Future.

Excellencies,

In all three workstreams, my objective is to move as quickly as possible.

Initiatives impacting on the [Proposed] Programme Budget for 2026 prepared under the coordination of the Secretariat Working Group will be included in the revised estimates for the 2026 budget to be presented in September.

As you know, the budget for 2026, the proposal was already given to ACABQ some time ago and it will be impossible to change it at the present moment. We will revise our proposals and present the revised version in September on time for the process to take place for the approval of the budget before the end of the year.

Additional changes that require more detailed analysis will be presented in the proposal for the Proposed Programme Budget for 2027.

We expect meaningful reductions in the overall budget level.

For example, let me describe what is under consideration in the peace and security cluster.

First – resetting DPPA and DPO, merging units, eliminating functional and structural duplications, getting rid of functions that are also exercised in other parts of the system. I believe we'll be able to eliminate 20% of the posts of the two departments.

Second – a similar exercise of streamlining the civilian part of Peacekeeping.

Third - The consolidation within OCT of all counterterrorism activities spread in the system.

Fourth – a review of the present structure of Regional Offices, Special Representatives and Envoys aiming at a consolidation of the system – with increased functionality and meaningful savings.

The level of reduction of posts that I have outlined for DPPA and DPO must be seen as a reference for the wider UN80 exercise, naturally taking into account the specificities of each area of work.

There might be immediate, one-off costs involved in relocating staff and providing potential termination packages.

But by moving posts from high-cost locations, we can reduce our commercial footprint in those cities and reduce our post and non-post costs.

We have already seen considerable savings in New York by terminating the lease of one building and moving staff into other existing premises – and we expect to close two more buildings when their leases expire in 2027 with considerable savings.

While the regular budget is our immediate focus, the efficiency efforts will include the entire Secretariat across all funding streams.

This will entail some difficult decisions as we assess structures and processes and seek meaningful efficiencies.

The impact on Member State contributions will be visible for years.

But we cannot achieve the efficiencies required unless we also focus on the programmatic areas of our work.

Dedicated outreach with the wider UN system is now underway, and will take profit of the work of the established clusters.

Additional proposals resulting from the other workstreams will be submitted to Member States for consideration as appropriate.

Many changes will require the approval by the General Assembly this year and next.

I will consult closely and regularly with Member States on progress, seeking guidance on the way forward, and presenting concrete proposals for discussion and decision-making when appropriate.

We know that some of these changes will be painful for our UN family.

Staff and their representatives are being consulted and heard. Our concern is to be humane and professional in dealing with any aspect of the required restructuring.

Excellencies,

The UN80 Initiative is a significant opportunity to strengthen the UN system and deliver for those who depend on us.

It is central for implementing the Pact for the Future.

It is crucial for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals.

The needs of the people we serve must remain our guiding star.

We must always stick to principles.

We must never compromise core values. We must forever uphold the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.

We will advance all this work so that our three pillars – peace and security, development and human rights – are mutually reinforced, and the geographical balance of our workforce and our gender and disability strategies will be preserved.

And we will be ever mindful of the interests of all Member States – developing countries, in particular.

Your active engagement and support for the UN80 Initiative is vital to ensure that efforts are inclusive, innovative, and representative of the needs of all Member States.

The success of the UN80 Initiative depends on all of us living up to our shared and complementary responsibilities.

Many decisions ultimately are in your hands as Member States.

Many of you have agreed that this must be the moment to be bold and ambitious.

That is what our Organization needs – and that is what our times demand.

Make no mistake – uncomfortable and difficult decisions lie ahead.

It may be easier – and even tempting – to ignore them or kick the can down the road.

But that road is a dead end.

We cannot afford to act in any other way than with the highest level of ambition and common purpose.

Let us seize this momentum with urgency and determination, and work together to build the strongest and most effective United Nations for today and tomorrow.

And I thank you.