

# UNITED NATIONS SECRETARIAT CLIMATE ACTION PLAN 2020-2030

SEPTEMBER 2019

## UN Secretariat Climate Action Plan (UNSCAP) - Executive summary

<p>Climate Change is the defining crisis of our time. The urgency to act, to respond to the climate emergency, as well as the serious consequences of continued inaction, are very clear. The Secretary-General has committed the United Nations system to accelerate internal climate action for the Organization to demonstrate its leadership.</p> <p>Within the UN system, the United Nations Secretariat is the largest contributor to climate change with approximately 60% of the total reported greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, mainly from peace operations faced with difficult security, logistical and political conditions. The UN Secretariat is responding to the climate challenge with a 10-year plan that sets out the fundamentals of transforming its operations to achieve ambitious reduction in GHG emissions while generating long-term efficiencies and benefits to sustainable development efforts overall. The UN Secretariat Climate Action Plan is designed to align operations with the requirements of the 2018 recommendations on climate action from the IPCC [IPCC, (2018)] and the UN system strategy for sustainability management.</p> <p>The plan proposes an integrated and simultaneous three track implementation approach to realize rapid results and progress, accelerating proven innovative solutions and partnerships.</p>	<p><b>Track 1 - Intensification</b> aims at accelerating current efforts, including those underway with the implementation of the Environment Strategy for Field Missions, with reinforced existing systems and capacity. The main focus would be on behavioural change linked to consumption, energy efficiency, connection to existing renewable grids where possible, and some limited renewable energy self-generation.</p> <p><b>Track 2 - Innovation</b> would be a major new effort focused on innovative and complex solutions that require external interventions and partnerships, including, scaling up new technology and purchasing renewable energy in field locations from new private or public sector-owned renewable energy facilities.</p> <p><b>Track 3 - Internal and external outreach</b> would support track 1 and track 2 with sustained communication and educational campaign to effect institutional change and facilitate resource mobilization efforts.</p>
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### EIGHT TARGETS FOR UN SECRETARIAT CLIMATE ACTION

1. **Carbon emissions:** Absolute and per capita reductions of 25% by 2025 and 45% by 2030.
2. **Electricity consumption:** Per capita reductions of 20% by 2025 and 35% by 2030.
3. **Renewable energy:** 40% by 2025 and 80% by 2030 of consumed electricity.
4. **Commercial air travel:** Per capita emissions reductions of 10% by 2025 and 15% by 2030.
5. **Events:** 100% of events (over 300 participants) meet established sustainability standards.
6. **Climate neutrality:** 100% of unavoidable carbon emissions are offset yearly from 2019 via certified carbon credits.
7. **Operational efficiencies:** demonstrated long term economic benefits from the Plan implementation.
8. **Sustainable Development co-benefits:** demonstrated increase in climate smart infrastructure and other sustainable development benefits to local communities from Plan implementation.

## The Context

<p><b>Call for action</b></p> <p>Climate change is the defining crisis of our time. The urgency to act and the serious consequences of continued inaction, are highlighted in the 1.5°C report of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [IPCC, (2018)].</p> <p>To demonstrate leadership, and to ensure the United Nations makes its own contribution to address the climate challenge, the Secretary-General has also urged the UN system to accelerate internal climate action in the workplace.</p> <p>As the largest entity within the UN system, representing approximately 60% of the total reported greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the Secretariat has a critical contribution to make to the UN's internal action and impact on climate change. An ambitious UN Secretariat Climate Action Plan aims to rise to this challenge.</p>	<p><b>Rationale for the plan</b></p> <p><b>Mandates from the Governing Bodies:</b> beyond the sustainable development agenda, which provides a broad framework for UN system's own sustainability, the most relevant mandates are on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Environmental management and sustainability: General Assembly resolution 72/219 (operative para. 19), requests the Secretary-General to implement his action plan for integrating sustainable development practices into Secretariat-wide operations (A/72/82), complementing earlier mandates specific to field missions. The goal, per resolutions 70/205 and 71/228, is to ensure that the Secretariat operations and facilities management do not negatively impact on the climate.</li> <li>▪ Sustainable energy for all, renewable energy and energy efficiency: General Assembly resolution A/73/236 (operative para. 29) "Calls upon the Secretary-General to promote renewable energy, energy efficiency and related sustainable practices in all United Nations facilities and operations around the world, set implementation targets and timelines by the end of 2019".</li> </ul> <p><b>UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination commitments:</b> the UN system adopted a new sustainability management strategy for the period 2020-2030 that includes climate action objectives aligned with the IPCC recommendation.</p>
<p>There is also potential for <b>direct economic and Sustainable Development co-benefits</b> from the Plan in the form of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Long-term operational efficiencies for the Secretariat.</b> The transition to '<b>climate smart operations</b>' [i.e. climate-friendly infrastructure, clean and affordable energy, other low carbon and innovative solutions in greener UN operations] yields substantial and permanent operational efficiencies. These may come from lower energy consumption and self-generation of renewable energy after an initial period of significant investment as well as lower cost electricity from third party renewable grids facilitated under the Plan's implementation.</li> <li>2. <b>Improved integration of UN entity joint operations at the country level.</b> Two of the ongoing and planned solutions to improve coherence, cost effectiveness and impact of country level UN activities are shared facilities and shared services. Transportation, electricity generation and facilities management are services that could be improved through enhanced cooperation.</li> <li>3. <b>Positive impact for the communities where the UN Secretariat is present.</b> The Organization has a combined operational footprint in over 100 countries. The largest peacekeeping operations are in fragile states that face severe sustainable development and climate change adaptation challenges. The Plan aims to serve as a catalyst for increased support to climate related national efforts without reducing or redirecting resources devoted to mandated peacekeeping and peacebuilding support.</li> </ol>	

## The Scope, Purpose and Analysis

### Scope and Purpose: A “Climate Smart” Secretariat

The Plan is designed to ensure the UN Secretariat is able to reach the UN system goals of alignment with the 2018 IPCC report recommendations to “reduce absolute greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 to limit increase in global temperature to 1.5°C” [IPCC, (2018)] from its operations and facilities. The Plan is a critical tool to help mobilize and direct a decade-long transition towards climate smart operations.

1. **Achieve significant and permanent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from its global operations in line with the IPCC recommendations.**
2. **Reduce energy consumption and transition to significantly greater reliance on renewable energy** while generating operational and financial co-benefits.
3. **Maintain climate neutrality for the Organization.**
4. **Better contribute to the UN system** in its work to help address the global climate mitigation and adaptation challenge.
5. **Deliver practical sustainable development co-benefits to the communities** that host UN Secretariat facilities via its own transformation process and increased multi-stakeholders’ investment for innovative climate smart operations.

### UN Secretariat climate performance and analysis

In 2017, as reported in the 2018 Greening the Blue report, the UN Secretariat generated 1.1 million tCO<sub>2</sub>, over 90% of which was from field missions mandated by the legislative bodies. These include the carbon impact of civilian and uniformed personnel.

**Total UN Secretariat Greenhouse Gas Emissions for 2017**  
1.11 Million tCO<sub>2</sub>eq

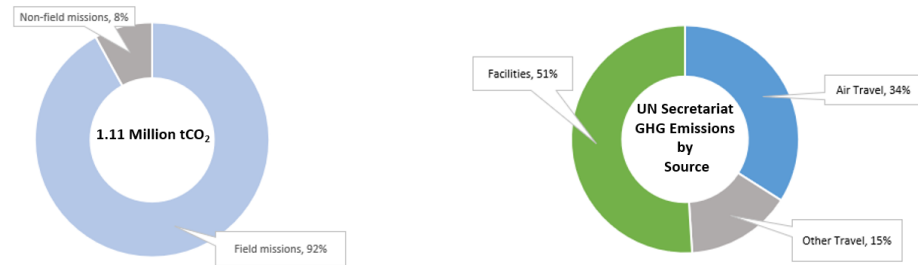


Figure 1. UN Secretariat GHG emissions profile.

Travel and facilities account for approximately 50% of the total emissions respectively. Within those two components, stationary combustion, mainly from diesel for electric generators, and non-commercial air travel and transportation have the highest carbon impact. The third largest contributor to the Secretariat carbon emissions is commercial air travel.

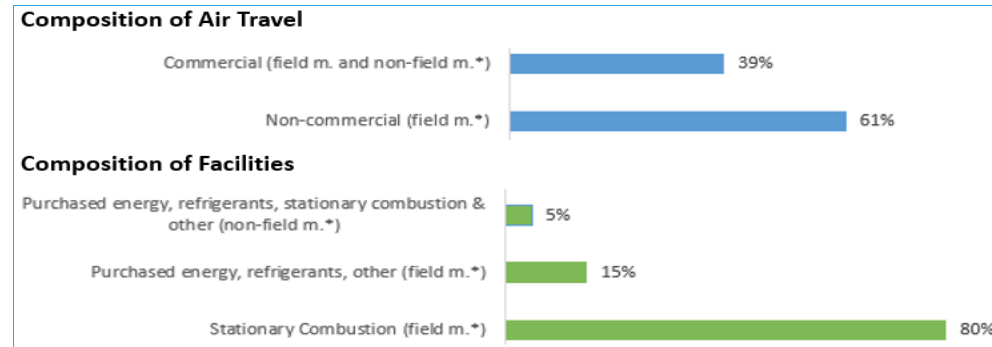


Figure 2. UN Secretariat greenhouse gas emissions composition for air travel and facilities.  
\*Note: Field Missions include Peacekeeping, Special Political Missions and service centres that manage infrastructure and facilities.

## Trends

There is a clear downward trend in greenhouse gas emissions, both in absolute and carbon intensity terms, in the operations of entities with consistent data over the past eight years. The greenhouse gas data covers the UN Secretariat Headquarters (New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi), Regional Commissions, as well as UNEP (Figure 4). The trend has been driven by environmental measures mainstreamed in facilities management from capital improvements and sourcing of renewable energy. It provides an indication that investing in environmental management and particularly climate smart infrastructure can ensure that the UN Secretariat is on the pathway recommended by the IPCC.

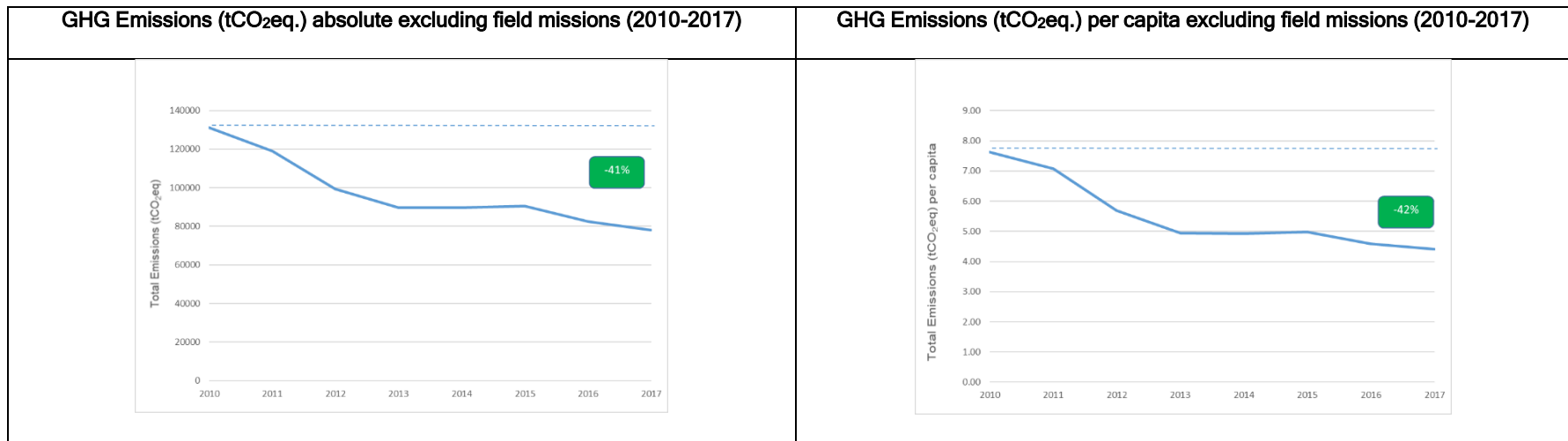


Figure 3. Total and per capita aggregated UN Secretariat Greenhouse Gas emissions excluding field missions (2010-2017) as reported in the yearly Greening the Blue reports [UNEP, (2018)]

Data on the field missions' carbon footprint remains too recent and the measurements will need to become more robust to derive reliable trends. The establishment, transitions and closure of field missions will also need to be taken into account, as these affect the carbon footprint of the Organization.

## Key findings, challenges and opportunities

### Analysis of Secretariat climate performance data

- The achievement by the UN system of its environmental sustainability and climate neutrality goals is dependent on the Secretariat fulfilling its part.
- The UN Secretariat invests significantly in performance data collection and its reporting is substantially complete for analysis purposes. Further improvements are needed for the determination of a robust baseline for 2019 to be completed in 2020.
- The operational footprint of the Secretariat varies annually, particularly with the establishment, transition and closing of field missions. Taking this into account, the Plan will measure per capita performance targets in addition to absolute targets.
- Data from 2010 to 2017 from Headquarters, Regional Commissions and UNEP present a solid trend of emission reductions.
- While progress has been made, historical data from field missions at this time is limited but positive results from multiple completed projects have demonstrated emission reduction benefits.
- Field missions operating and managing their own facilities and infrastructure emitted over 90% of total Secretariat carbon emissions in 2017, partially due to their size, with the majority of emissions concentrated across a few of the larger missions.
- The most carbon intensive activities are in-house electricity production from diesel generators, and air travel and transportation. Interventions that reduce emissions from these sources are also expected to reduce these specific operational costs.
- The analysis of the levelized cost of electricity in field mission locations suggests that there may be opportunities to lower the cost of electricity via both energy efficiency and renewable energy investments at significant long-term economic benefits to the Organization after a period of material initial investment.

### Analysis of challenges and opportunities

- The UN Secretariat is faced with a difficult, complex, but solvable set of challenges in its ambition to reduce its carbon footprint to IPCC recommended levels.
- Current practice in the Secretariat on climate performance indicates many positive and well-established practices, best practice case studies, and important initiatives in the early rollout stage. There are also multiple areas for improvement.
- The rest of the UN system is overall slightly more advanced in its transition to climate smart operations, providing many examples of good practice that the Secretariat can draw from.
- Outside of the UN system, there are entire business sectors devoted to the issues the Plan aims to tackle.
- The background research indicates that significant improvements in Secretariat climate performance could be achieved essentially through improved issue management, more widespread and professional implementation of existing ideas and technologies, and a partial shift from purchasing equipment to purchasing services.
- There are numerous potential technical and commercial solutions that the Secretariat can select to improve its climate performance. An initial screening from UNEP identified 55 solutions, of which more than 70% were considered low to medium difficulty.
- Local Sustainable Development co-benefits and gender issues need to be integrated into the Plan and its implementation.
- One key requirement is the reprioritization of ongoing internal investments, based on business cases that examined the expected rate of economic and climate action return.
- A major opportunity to reduce carbon emissions is to transition power supplies from on-site diesel generation to purchased off-site renewable energy and self-generation from renewable sources, supplemented as needed with on-site battery banks for both UN Owned Equipment (UNOE) and Contingent Owned Equipment (COE) diesel generator fleets. An energy transition of significant magnitude, such as this, will be necessary to achieve a greenhouse gas emission reduction at IPCC-recommended levels.

## Target scenarios for the UN Secretariat Climate Action Plan

### Economic and emissions model

Four scenarios were modelled:

- Business As Usual (BAU):** The BAU Scenario is considered the no-action, no-risk alternative to the Plan. It assumes incremental progress from the 2019 baseline at a pace controlled by existing and planned efforts, resources and processes. It does not address the external political and larger UN system context or attempt to systematically deliver any global or national co-benefits.
- Intensification:** The Intensification Scenario is considered as a modest approach that does not attempt to proactively address the external political and larger UN system context or deliver any global or national co-benefits. It assumes an intensification, with some additional resources, of existing and proven intervention options rated as high to medium priority and low to medium difficulty.
- Innovation:** The Innovation Scenario is based upon an innovative programme focused on implementable solutions rated as High and Medium potential and High difficulty. As such, there is no scope overlap with the interventions in the Intensification Scenario. The Innovation Scenario is ambitious, with associated risks of not achieving the modelled performance. It will require an additional dedicated effort and new in-house organizational structures, processes and external partnerships to bring in climate and development financing.
- Transformation:** The Transformation Climate Performance Scenario is the combination of the Intensification and Innovation interventions within the same timeline. This captures all Medium and High priority interventions, irrespective of difficulty and novelty.

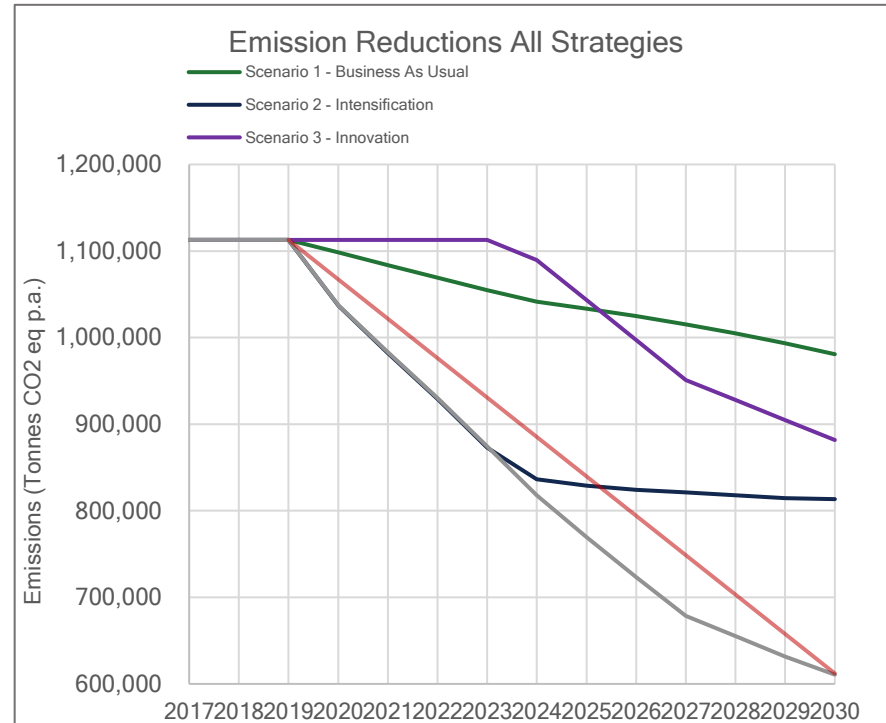


Figure 4. Total emission reduction all strategies from the Plan model.

- The modelled 2030 result of the Business as Usual Scenario falls well short of the IPCC benchmark at 11%.
- The modelled 2030 result of the Intensification Scenario is a major improvement, but still short of the benchmark at 27%.
- The modelled 2030 result of the Innovation Scenario alone is also a major improvement, but still short of the benchmark at 21%.
- The modelled 2030 result of the Transformation Scenario (Intensification + Innovation) matches the IPCC benchmark at 45%. **Hence this scenario is selected as the basis for the Plan targets and the implementation strategy.**

## Implementation of the UN Secretariat Climate Action Plan

Key elements of success	
<p><b>1. Policy and environmental management leadership</b> to drive the transformation towards climate smart operations and accelerate the mainstreaming of environmental sustainability management at all levels of the Organization.</p> <p><b>2. Targeted high impact climate actions</b> as reflected in the Plan targets. These are in areas of operations that have a high impact on the carbon footprint or significant potential for reduction as identified in the analysis conducted for the Plan's development. They include implementing solutions on energy efficiencies, renewable energy, commercial air travel and events management among others. The compendium of solutions will continue to be developed further in a collaborative process with various partners to support the intensification and innovation approaches of the modelled transformation scenario. Achieving the specific targets will aggregate to the overall carbon reduction targets of 25% by 2025 and 45% by 2030.</p> <p><b>3. Entity-specific commitments</b> in contribution to the achievement of the Plan's targets. Heads of entities will be required to contribute to attaining all targets as applicable to their respective areas of responsibilities in support of the Plan and the broader UN system strategy. The specific climate action commitments from senior management would enable every sector of the Secretariat to take part in the collective efforts.</p> <p><b>4. Investments in the form of additional resources</b> to achieve the Plan targets and improved environmental management, unlocking long-term operational efficiencies. Meeting some of the goals and targets outlined above will require significant investments, while others will be less costly to achieve.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Intensifying existing efforts and scaling up known solutions will lean heavily on current budget and structures. It will however require additional funding to accelerate the implementation of High Return On Investment solutions.</li> <li>▪ The innovative interventions on energy transition needed to take the Organization the most challenging last steps to the 45% reduction goal will require large and sustained investment.</li> </ul>	<p>This investment will be largely dependent on external capital raised by third parties but facilitated by development and partnership building work funded from extrabudgetary contributions and undertaken as part of the Plan implementation. The UN Secretariat purchasing power and the high levelized cost of electricity in field missions create an incentive for private and public investments in new climate smart infrastructure that could in turn supply the UN Secretariat with renewable energy.</p> <p>Actioning the Plan and implementing the UN system sustainability strategy to 2030 throughout the UN Secretariat would also necessitate dedicated capacity and specialized expertise, including for training and change management to encourage and drive a culture of sustainability and shift behaviours throughout the Organization. This should be both in the form of long term and temporary dedicated capacity.</p> <p><b>5. Innovations to leverage technological advances and good practices.</b> The UN Secretariat is perceived as a leader in the field and its institutional knowledge is leveraged by other institutions. Against this background, and beyond the large-scale interventions on renewable energy infrastructure, the UN Secretariat is ideally placed to highlight the feasibility of new technologies by testing them in its own operations, showcase innovations, and increase the visibility of climate solutions. This element includes the development of institutional mechanisms that fast track the piloting of new technologies and the adoption of innovative solutions and emerging good practices in sustainability management. The creation of an "incubation fund" from funding mobilized for climate action and sustainability, is also proposed. Resources could be used to bridge funding gaps, to provide proof of concept for technologies with high potential, and for demonstration projects.</p> <p><b>6. Partnerships.</b> The transformation carbon reduction pathway and realization of sustainable development benefits cannot be achieved by the Secretariat alone, even if a heightened priority is given to climate action. The Plan's roadmap and implementation will need to define how to integrate Member States, other UN system agencies, and private sector partners in the funding and delivery of solutions that would benefit both UN Secretariat operations and the larger community.</p>



The Plan proposes to be a link between peace and security and climate action to support efforts for Sustaining Peace, leveraging actions with the coalition for Action for Peacekeeping in coordination with the UN Peacebuilding Fund, the Human Security Trust Fund and other funds.

The development of projects will benefit from coordination with the Development Coordination Office and integration with the Business Operations Strategy (BOS) as the main instrument for country level efficiency mandated by the Secretary-General. The Business Operations Strategy focusses on joint approaches for operational support at the country level and includes interventions in the areas of renewable energy for UN Operations, waste management and energy efficiency measures that would facilitate the implementation and scaling up of climate action efforts.

**7. Outreach and communication** to catalyze action and change the organizational culture, through an effective communication strategy. The international focus on the climate crisis and, at a smaller scale, existing environmental management efforts within the UN Secretariat and the UN system have highlighted the importance of communication to drive action, create alliances, and change the everyday behaviors necessary to support sustainability initiatives. Communication and strategic outreach will be necessary to engage UN personnel, Members States, and all stakeholders in an on-going dialogue from the inception of the Plan to the achievement of its targets.

### Approach

Three tracks will be implemented simultaneously and in an integrated manner to realize rapid results and progress.

- **Track 1 - Intensification** would build on existing systems and capacity but reinforced and supported by some additional dedicated implementation capacity. The focus would be on behavioural and managerial changes, energy efficiency, connection to existing renewable grids where possible, and some limited renewable energy self-generation. The core funding source for Track 1 is the annual operating budgets of the Secretariat entities with a more systematic emphasis on prioritizing high impact projects. However, the Plan cannot mobilize to scale without additional seed funding from either internal or external resource mobilization.

- **Track 2 - Innovation** would be a major new effort focused on innovative and complex solutions that require external interventions and partnerships, including scaling up new technology, purchasing renewable energy in field locations from new private or public sector-owned renewable energy facilities, and leasing arrangements for high performance and renewable energy equipment. It is proposed that Track 2 be funded through blended finance, as a structural approach that allows/designs for different types of capital (whether impact or commercial oriented), to invest alongside each other while each achieving their own objectives (whether financial, social, or a blend).

- **Track 3 - Internal and external outreach.** The key to the success of the proposed institutional change lies in the active involvement of UN staff and non-staff personnel, and the participation from Member States. Much as in the existing UN system Greening the Blue campaign, a large part of the results and motivation is driven by the participation of management and staff in UN Secretariat entities. At the same time, progress in environmental management in UN organizations is of interest and serves as a model to other public sector organizations whether these are other international inter-governmental organizations or Member States.

### Crosscutting themes to be addressed in all tracks

**Safeguarding.** Any work entailing infrastructure and logistics needs to be subject to a comprehensive human rights-based safeguarding process and a forecast impact on local communities.

**Gender.** A gender-sensitive approach is required in the planning and implementation of all components of the Plan.

**Sustainable development co-benefits.** Local co-benefits will be maximized to the extent possible without diverting funds from mandates approved by legislative bodies. This will require a strategic and balanced approach in all stages of the program and project lifecycle. Examples of proactive measures include:

- Ensuring national level design and planning choices are informed by and in alignment with national and UN system master planning instruments, such as national infrastructure masterplans and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.
- Where viable, connecting directly to UN system partners national sustainable development and peacebuilding projects, via measures such as joint programming and co-financing infrastructure.

- Choosing project options with increased local content as possible and a bias towards permanent rather than temporary installations and infrastructure where operationally feasible.
- Integrating local capacity building requirements into projects to the extent possible.

**Internal partnerships.** Implementation of the Plan will require proactive measures to move beyond information sharing into substantive and true joint efforts, both within the Secretariat and with the rest of the UN system.

**External partnerships.** Implementation of the Plan must entail analysing and reframing partnership opportunities at the earliest stage, moving beyond simple procurement but in compliance with the Secretariat legal framework. Consequently, all partnerships should follow General Assembly resolution 73/254

### The implementation team

In order to respond to the climate emergency and make rapid progress, a dedicated team will be required to focus on the implementation of the Plan.

The team will need to be multi-functional with expertise in the following areas:

**Policy, Strategic Planning and Monitoring** to align actions with policy priorities while developing an actionable work plan and continuously review progress to sustain a results-oriented approach that will maximize impact.

**Engineering and information technology**, building on existing in-house expertise, to support the entities for the rapid implementation of the Plan, including expertise in off-grid and on-grid sustainable energy installations, civil and environmental engineering as well as capacity building experience to deliver projects with local partners for the benefit of the community.

**Military and police planning** to ensure environmental considerations are mainstreamed in all force generation and uniformed planning efforts.

**Strategic engagement** to bring forward political solutions with the UN system entities, Member States and other partners to maximize the linkages between climate action, sustainable development, peace and human rights.

**Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation** to ensure alignment and implementation of UN Secretariat climate actions with ongoing efforts by partners and organizations, including mainstreaming of gender and other critical perspectives for impactful climate action.

**Project development, planning and implementation** as well as change management expertise will be also essential to the effectiveness of the team in delivering results

### Coalition

In order to achieve its climate action ambition, the UN Secretariat will need to unite a broad range of partners and stakeholders around its vision to action three key implementation elements: investments, innovations and partnerships.

The Plan therefore considers the formation of a coalition that would be as universal as possible and would make the link between relevant existing coalitions and group of friends. This coalition would include Member States, the private sector, and other relevant stakeholders such as academia and civil society.

### Conclusion

This UN Secretariat Climate Action Plan is part of the UN climate action response to the climate emergency. To achieve its ambitious targets, the UN Secretariat will require the commitment of all Secretariat entities to transform current practices, synergies with other UN system entities to leverage results, and the engagement with external partners to collaborate on innovations and investments.

The Plan provides a starting point and the steps can already be taken to mobilize resources, build bridges with relevant UN initiatives, intensify existing efforts while solutions and detailed implementation roadmap continue to be developed in a consultative process.