

Holhuashi Dialogue 9

Greening the Blue: UN System Coherence Between Words and Actions in Fighting Global Warming

9 JUNE 2022

SUMMARY

The President of the 76th session of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Abdullah Shahid, convened the ninth Holhuashi Dialogue on the theme, “Greening the Blue – How the UN System Secures Coherence between Words and Actions in Fighting Global Warming” on Thursday 9 June 2022.

Placed below is the summary of the discussions.

- The United Nations system, under the interagency coordination of [the Environment Management Group \(EMG\)](https://unemg.org/)¹ and the UNEP-led “[Greening the Blue](http://www.greeningtheblue.org/)”² initiative is actively working to reduce its environmental footprint in countries.
- Over 50 United Nations entities and their worldwide facilities and operations are taking part in the Greening the Blue initiative. Their regular progress towards environmental sustainability management is reported annually. [The 2021 Greening the Blue Report](https://www.greeningtheblue.org/reports/greening-blue-report-2021)³ shows how UN operations have managed to drastically reduce their environmental footprint which has already had multiple positive consequences in countries in terms of pollution, biodiversity, and climate.
- The United Nations is looked to, as a model when it comes to establishing policies to further environmental sustainability. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the UN Headquarters, country and multi-country offices, premises and operations are in line with the highest standards of eco-friendly facilities and operations. **Bolder actions are needed in UN Headquarters to build momentum for significant impact elsewhere.**
- The issue of **reputational risk** was brought up in the context of challenges faced in upholding environmental standards. **Potential solutions** to avoid the UN System and Member States suffering from a credibility gap were proposed, such as **creating incentives to reward improved efficiencies, as well as bringing eco-friendly discussions and activities occurring between entities to the attention of Member States and stakeholders.** Multilateral

¹ <https://unemg.org/>

² <http://www.greeningtheblue.org/>

³ <https://www.greeningtheblue.org/reports/greening-blue-report-2021>

environmental efforts' credibility must be shored up, to gain the trust and achieve the required buy in from the wider public to take action.

- **Greener UN operations and facilities can contribute to host countries' efforts to mitigate climate change by sharing of best practices and acceleration of multi-stakeholder partnerships guided by national priorities.**
- Public sector organizations and Member States are key actors and leaders in creating a greener system. **A concerted effort between the UN and Member States is necessary to accelerate the uptake and roll-out of system-wide improvements** to data collection to set baselines and targets, reporting, procurement, facility operations, and innovation for new ways of working, from remote meetings to securing of environmental sound, climate resilient facilities and sustainable energy sources.
- **UN Peacekeeping operations** often take place in challenging, remote, and difficult landscapes which lead to the use of fossil fuels. Greening the Blue in the context of Peacekeeping operations was thus highlighted as an opportunity to not only reduce overall emissions but also to foster stronger bonds and confidence with host countries and local communities as well as contribute to the host country's sustainable development and positive legacy. In this regard, references were made to [the UN Department of Operational Support \(DOS\) environmental management strategy](#)⁴, and to [the Group of Friends leading on environmental management in the field](#).⁵
- Deploying renewables in Peacekeeping Operations, including through partnerships between DOS, IRENA⁶ and Member States, was suggested by several participants as means to reduce operational costs and risks to fuel supply/disruptions. Such steps were stressed as **necessary strategic investments in resilience to meet [the UN secretariat's commitment of sourcing 80% of its electricity from renewables by 2030](#)**.⁷
- In this regard, several delegations also stressed the importance of addressing **sustainable transportation**, including by requiring that all vehicles in the UN system be sustainable by 2025, and **deploying electric car charging stations in UNHQ and on premises** to allow for more enabling environment. Delegates also stressed the need for all new and existing facilities to be **disaster risk informed**, and to incorporate strategies on how UN infrastructure and investment decisions can positively impact local communities in virtuous cycles of sustainable

⁴ <https://operationalsupport.un.org/en/environment>

⁵ https://italyun.esteri.it/rappresentanza_onu/en/comunicazione/archivio-news/2018/02/comunicato-stampa-lancio-assieme.html

⁶ <https://www.irena.org/newsroom/pressreleases/2021/Jun/IRENA-and-the-UN-Agree-to-Advance-Renewables-in-Peacekeeping-Operations>

⁷ <https://www.un.org/management/news/un-secretariat-adopts-climate-action-plan#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20Secretariat%20has,from%20renewable%20energy%20by%202030.>

consumption and production. Some participants mentioned that UN Resident Coordinators could help coordinate such efforts.

- Upscaling efforts will also require **technical support in key areas, including logistics, shifts to more sustainable sources of energy, and waste management** among others, as well as the needed support for **localizing and upscaling these innovations to all offices and locations**.
- In this regard, more work can be done **to identify a set of technical and management solutions that can be implemented and replicated by the UN system and in host countries via [the UN Sustainable Development Group](#),⁸ the Resident Coordinator's system and other interagency mechanisms such as [the UN High-level Committee on Management \(HLCM\)](#)⁹ and the Environment Management Group**.
- Delegations noted that apart from discussions among UN entities and [the UN Chief Executive Board adoption of the Strategy for Sustainability Management 2020-2030](#),¹⁰ **Member States are not very active in the Greening the Blue process, and that greater Member State ownership would be needed to accelerate action and partnership**. Greater ownership could be generated by **crowd-sourcing solutions** and best practices across the Membership, UN system, the public and stakeholders at all levels.
- Relatedly, **participants expressed their interest in mainstreaming sustainable consumption and production practices in their daily operations**, including waste management, and in this regard **asked for more outreach and guidance to help facilitate Permanent Missions and offices all over the world, including all UN duty stations**, on how to further be mindful of their own processes and procurement.
- Participants also suggested implementing **more measures at UNHQ to reflect these priorities, including a bicycle gate, electric car charging ports, and moving to fully paperless operations**. The UN and Member States should also consider **more partnerships with the host city to leverage synergies on local greening efforts**.
- Participants also noted the need to prioritize **staff involvement at all levels**, at UNHQ as well as those in duty stations, as staff are the ones who will implement and uphold sustainable rules and regulations. Therefore, sharing a variety of best practices—and practices that cover a range of budgets—as well conducting strategic-level **behaviour change campaigns** within the UN system and the Membership is crucial.

⁸ <https://unsdg.un.org/>

⁹ <https://unsceb.org/high-level-committee-management-hlcm>

¹⁰ <https://unsceb.org/strategy-sustainability-management-united-nations-system-2020-2030>

- The United Nations must continue to uphold and exceed its current target for sustainability, especially as we call on Member States to submit **more ambitious NDCs at COP28**. The Road to COP28 can also be leveraged to encourage more action on Greening the Blue by all stakeholders.