



Accountability is the obligation of the Secretariat and its staff members to be answerable for all decisions made and actions taken by them, and to be responsible for honouring their commitments, without qualification or exception. Accountability includes

- achieving objectives and high-quality results in a timely and cost-effective manner,
- in fully implementing and delivering on all mandates to the Secretariat approved by the United Nations intergovernmental bodies and other subsidiary organs established by them in compliance with all resolutions, regulations, rules and ethical standards;
- truthful, objective, accurate and timely reporting on performance results;
- responsible stewardship of funds and resources;
- all aspects of performance, including a clearly defined system of rewards and sanctions; and with due recognition to the important role of the oversight bodies and in full compliance with accepted recommendations.

A/RES/64/259

Introduction

Rooted in the Charter of the United Nations, accountability is a standing priority of the Organization and has been on the agenda of the United Nations Secretariat, Agencies, Funds and Programmes for many years.

Over time, a complex accountability system has evolved, comprising governance instruments, internal systems and controls, ethical standards as well as oversight mechanisms, that cover all aspects of accountability, ranging from mandated objectives to the delivery of results. (See A/64/640, Annex 1 for “Components of the accountability system in the United Nations Secretariat”).

Recent milestones

Institutionally, 2005 and 2006 marked a watershed period for the Organization that saw the introduction of several new mechanisms and policies aimed at closing accountability gaps and at strengthening both organizational and personal accountability. Key initiatives include

- Establishment of the UN Ethics Office;
- Establishment of the Management Performance Board;
- Introduction of the Senior Managers’ Compacts;
- Promulgation of a whistleblower protection policy;
- Introduction of the Financial Disclosure Programme;
- Launch of the Integrity Awareness Initiative;
- Strengthening of the independent oversight bodies.

Integral part of the UN culture

Mainstreaming the culture of accountability in the day-to-day operations of the United Nations is a priority that has been driving initiatives over the last few years.

- In 2007, the rigorous implementation of the **financial disclosure programme** commenced that seeks to ensure that potential conflicts of interest that may arise from staff members’ private holdings, affiliations, or activities can be identified and addressed appropriately. Currently,

compliance with the programme stands at 99.61% for the 2009 cycle, when a total of 3,618 staff members were required to file.

- As of 2008, **Senior Managers' Compacts** are being published on the organizational intranet for added transparency. In another first, in 2010 Heads of Peacekeeping and Special Political Missions signed Compacts as well. The compacts, annual agreements between the Secretary-General and his senior-most officials, set specific programmatic objectives and managerial targets for a given year and outline clear roles and responsibilities at the highest levels. At the end of each review period, the Management Performance Board assesses the performance of each senior manager and requests an action plan to remedy identified weaknesses, as necessary.
- In 2009, a new **Internal Justice System** was introduced to professionalize internal dispute resolution at the United Nations Secretariat.
- In 2009, "**Guidelines on the cooperation between the United Nations and the Business Sector**" were issued to ensure the integrity and independence of the Organization while fostering new partnerships.
- In 2010, a policy on the "**Reporting, Retaining and Disposing of Honours, Decorations, Favours, Gifts or Remuneration**" was introduced.
- In 2010, the **Award Review Board** and the **Senior Vendor Review Committee** were formed to strengthen internal control, transparency, accountability and risk mitigation in the UN procurement process.
- In 2011, an **internal website, "Accountability A to Z"** was launched on the intranet (iSeek) to strengthen the culture of accountability in the Secretariat. The site provides staff with practical guidance and a library of relevant administrative documents.
- Over the last few years, a framework was established to **address misconduct in peace-keeping missions** (including the deployment of Conduct and Discipline Teams in most missions and the maintenance of an oversight and advisory capacity at Headquarters).

Ongoing commitment

By its very nature, accountability has to be a work in progress as expectations and demands on the system continue to evolve. Ongoing initiatives include the

- Comprehensive review of delegation of authority;
- Strengthening/establishment of capacity relating to Results-Based Management and Enterprise Risk Management;
- Review of the performance assessment system as part of the larger Human Resources Reform;
- Introduction of the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) to improve the quality and transparency of financial reporting.

The Secretary-General and all United Nations staff remain committed to fulfil their responsibilities in an accountable and transparent manner

The latest report "Progress towards an accountability system in the United Nations Secretariat" (A/66/692) by the Secretary-General was issued in February 2012.