

The United Nations Secretary-General's Scientific Advisory Board | Terms of Reference

A. Context

The rapid pace of scientific and technological advances presents opportunities to enhance sustainable development. But they also create complex ethical, social, technical, and political challenges and risks that must be understood and addressed.

Empowered by broad General Assembly support (A/RES/76/6) for Our Common Agenda (A/75/982), the United Nations Secretary-General's Scientific Advisory Board will play a crucial role in providing scientific advice to the Secretary-General and his senior management team to inform policies and decisions. Through the Board, and its associated network of scientific institutions, the UN will be better able to anticipate emerging issues, harness the benefits of these advances, and mitigate potential risks.

B. Mission and Objectives

The Scientific Advisory Board will:

1. Bring emerging scientific breakthroughs to the attention of the UN Secretary-General and his senior management team.
2. Support UN leaders in drawing attention to the ethical, social, technical, and political issues arising from rapidly evolving scientific and technological advancements.
3. Support the UN in promoting science-based policy and decision-making.

C. Composition

The Advisory Board will comprise a number of external eminent scientists, the Chief Scientists of UN System entities (UNEP, FAO, WHO, WMO, and UNESCO), the Envoy on Technology of the Secretary-General, the United Nations University Rector, as well as different scientific networks.

The networks will include a broad range of scientific institutions that represent diverse voices from all geographic, linguistic, and age groups with a particular focus on developing countries. Network institutions will be associated and collaborate with the Board. This can include participating in working groups on specific issues, conducting annual horizon scanning to anticipate new science and technology developments, disseminating analysis and reports, and supporting capacity building activities.

Co-Chairs

Two Co-Chairs will be selected among the Board members. The Co-Chairs will lead and facilitate the Board's work, with the support of the Secretariat. They will work with the UN Secretary-General to set its priorities. They will serve for one year and can be re-elected.

D. Functions

Rapid advice to the Secretary-General and UN senior management team:

The Board members will provide rapid advice to the Secretary-General and UN senior management team on emerging issues.

Implications of emerging scientific topics and trends:

The Board will have opportunities to brief the Secretary-General and UN senior management team of emerging trends, risks, and benefits, and discuss their implications for the UN system and policymaking. To do so, it will draw on the expertise of the Board members, as well as knowledge from the network.

Insights on scientific areas not covered in UN system:

The Board, with direction from the UN Secretary-General, will advise on critical areas at the intersection of science, technology, ethics, governance, and sustainable development, not currently addressed by the UN system. The Board will provide a scientific perspective and advise the Secretary-General and UN senior management team on the topic.

Meetings

The Board will meet at least once a year in-person with attendance of all Board members. Moreover, the Board may meet with the Secretary-General and other members of the senior management team virtually or in-person as needed.

Ad-hoc small group meetings on specific issues may be organized to respond to specific questions, combining the expertise of the Board members and the network.

Secretariat

The Board will be supported in these activities by a small Secretariat in the Executive Office of the UN Secretary-General. The Secretariat will work closely with the Co-Chairs of the Board and other Board members, liaise with Network institutions, and support communications between UN senior leaders and the Board. The Secretariat will also develop and manage the Board website.

E. Basic principles

The Board will operate according to the following principles:

1. **Representation:** Board members act in their personal capacity. They may engage with the media but do not represent the views of the Board or the United Nations, unless specifically requested.
2. **Confidentiality:** Board members and Network institutions are expected to maintain confidentiality regarding discussions and documents shared at the Board.
3. **Conflict of interest:** Members shall declare any potential conflict of interest related to any deliberation by the Board.
4. **Remuneration:** Board members will serve on a pro bono basis. However, travel costs and per diems will be covered by the United Nations.