



Secretary-General's bulletin

Organization of the Office of Legal Affairs

The Secretary-General, pursuant to Secretary-General's bulletin [ST/SGB/2015/3](#), entitled "Organization of the Secretariat of the United Nations", and for the purpose of establishing the organizational structure of the Office of Legal Affairs,¹ promulgates the following:

Section 1

General provision

The present bulletin shall apply pursuant to Secretary-General's bulletin [ST/SGB/2015/3](#), entitled "Organization of the Secretariat of the United Nations".

Section 2

Functions and organization

2.1 The Office of Legal Affairs is the central legal service of the Organization and performs the following functions:

(a) Provides legal advice to the Secretary-General, Secretariat departments and offices, funds and programmes and other United Nations organs, including in support of the Organization's efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals as reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

(b) Represents the Secretary-General in legal conferences and in judicial proceedings;

(c) Performs substantive and secretariat functions for legal organs involved in public international law generally, as well as those involved in the law of the sea and ocean affairs and international trade law; and

(d) Performs the functions conferred on the Secretary-General in Article 102 of the Charter of the United Nations, in the Statute of the International Court of Justice and in other relevant instruments of international law.

2.2 The Office is divided into organizational units, as described in the present bulletin.

2.3 The Office is headed by the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, the United Nations Legal Counsel. The United Nations Legal Counsel and the officials

¹ The Office of Legal Affairs was established by the General Assembly in its resolution [13 \(I\)](#) of 13 February 1946 as the central legal service for the Secretary-General and the Secretariat and United Nations organs.



in charge of each organizational unit, in addition to the specific functions set out in the present bulletin, perform the general functions applicable to their positions, as set out in Secretary-General's bulletin [ST/SGB/2015/3](#).

Section 3

Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, the United Nations Legal Counsel

3.1 The Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, the United Nations Legal Counsel, is accountable to the Secretary-General.

3.2 The United Nations Legal Counsel heads the Office of Legal Affairs, is responsible for the leadership, management and administration of the Office and reports directly to the Secretary-General. The United Nations Legal Counsel is responsible for ensuring efficiency, transparency and accountability in the work of the Office.

3.3 The United Nations Legal Counsel is the senior legal adviser to the Secretary-General, the Secretariat, funds and programmes and other organs of the United Nations. The legal advice the United Nations Legal Counsel provides relates to matters including public international law and the internal administrative law of the United Nations, as well as private international law. The United Nations Legal Counsel is a member of senior-level advisory bodies established by the Secretary-General.

3.4 The United Nations Legal Counsel leads the coordination of the system-wide legal advisers networks, composed of (a) legal advisers of specialized agencies and related organizations, (b) legal advisers and legal liaison officers of entities including United Nations offices away from Headquarters, funds and programmes, regional commissions, ad hoc tribunals and non-judicial accountability mechanisms and (c) field legal officers for United Nations peace operations (peacekeeping operations and special political missions). The United Nations Legal Counsel also monitors the work programme and activities of the High-level Committee on Management of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, and provides legal advice to those bodies.

3.5 The United Nations Legal Counsel has operational responsibilities, in particular, for supporting United Nations and United Nations-assisted criminal tribunals – including leading their establishment and the implementation of completion strategies, and leading and guiding their cooperation with the International Criminal Court – and for supporting United Nations non-judicial accountability mechanisms, as well as commissions of inquiry, boards of inquiry, investigations and fact-finding missions established by the Secretary-General.

3.6 The United Nations Legal Counsel represents the Secretary-General at meetings and conferences of a legal nature, and in judicial and arbitral proceedings, and certifies legal instruments issued on behalf of the United Nations.

Section 4

Assistant Secretary-General for Legal Affairs

4.1 The Assistant Secretary-General for Legal Affairs serves as deputy to the Under-Secretary-General and is accountable to the United Nations Legal Counsel.

Section 5

Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs

5.1 The Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs supports the United Nations Legal Counsel in the discharge of his or her responsibilities and assists the United Nations Legal Counsel in the overall direction and management of the Office of Legal Affairs. The Office of the Under-Secretary-General also supports the United

Nations Legal Counsel in the management of the coordination of the legal advisers networks and the provision of legal advice to high-level inter-agency bodies. As regards the overall direction and management of the Office of Legal Affairs, the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs is headed by a Special Assistant to the United Nations Legal Counsel who is accountable, and reports directly, to the United Nations Legal Counsel. The system-wide coordination and inter-agency activities are headed by a Senior Legal Officer who reports directly to the United Nations Legal Counsel.

5.2 The core functions of the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs are as follows:

(a) Monitoring the implementation of the programme of work of the Office of Legal Affairs, including the strengthening of monitoring and evaluation practices by establishing dedicated mechanisms to periodically review performance within the Office of Legal Affairs;

(b) Advising the United Nations Legal Counsel on, and promoting, departmental policies and guidelines dealing with specific management issues;

(c) Acting as the focal point for information on all aspects of the work of the Office of Legal Affairs;

(d) Coordinating interdepartmental activities and undertaking the necessary follow-up;

(e) Consulting, negotiating and coordinating with other departments, offices, subsidiary bodies, including funds and programmes, and specialized agencies and related organizations of the United Nations system on matters of mutual concern, without prejudice to the specific responsibilities of the other units of the Office;

(f) Maintaining sustained and systematic contacts with legal advisers and legal liaison officers of the legal advisers networks, including managing the preparation of periodic meetings with members of the legal advisers networks and ensuring follow-up to them;

(g) Providing support to the United Nations Legal Counsel in relation to the legal advisers networks' contribution to high-level inter-agency bodies;

(h) Assisting the United Nations Legal Counsel in formulating recommendations to the Secretary-General in interdepartmental and inter-agency bodies.

Section 6

Office of the Legal Counsel

6.1 The Office of the Legal Counsel is headed by the Assistant Secretary-General for Legal Affairs.

6.2 The core functions of the Office of the Legal Counsel are as follows:

(a) Preparing legal opinions, studies and advice on the interpretation of the Charter of the United Nations and on the interpretation and drafting of rules of public international law, including international criminal law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and United Nations resolutions, as well as preparing and reviewing agreements and other legal instruments regulating relations between the United Nations and Member States, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and other legal entities;

(b) Preparing legal arrangements for and providing advice on legal aspects of United Nations peace operations (peacekeeping operations and special political missions) and other United Nations operations and activities;

(c) Preparing draft rules of procedure and advising United Nations organs and conferences on the conduct of business;

(d) Providing advice on United Nations privileges and immunities, including on the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, to the Secretariat, including in connection with the resident coordinator system, funds and programmes, and other United Nations system entities; asserting and waiving privileges and immunities of the Organization and relevant personnel, as appropriate; and preparing host country agreements and other legal instruments governing the Organization's relations with Member States for United Nations offices, conferences and other events held away from headquarters;

(e) Providing secretariat services to the Committee on Relations with the Host Country and dealing with questions arising out of the Headquarters Agreement with the United States of America and other host Governments;

(f) Maintaining liaison with the International Court of Justice and discharging the legal responsibilities of the Secretary-General under the Statute of the Court;

(g) Developing the legal framework for the establishment of judicial and non-judicial accountability mechanisms, assisting in their practical implementation and providing continuous legal advice for their duration, as well as providing legal advice to the Secretariat and the funds and programmes on cooperation with such mechanisms;

(h) Acting as focal point within the Secretariat and the funds and programmes for cooperation between the United Nations and the International Criminal Court and providing legal advice regarding such cooperation;

(i) Other than in cases described in Section 7.2 (h) below, providing advice to the Secretariat and the funds and programmes on cooperation with national courts and tribunals regarding requests for judicial cooperation from national authorities;

(j) Advising on questions relating to the credentials of permanent representatives to the United Nations and representatives to United Nations organs, and providing secretariat services to the Credentials Committee;

(k) Providing legal advice to the Department of Safety and Security and to the Inter-Agency Security Management Network of the United Nations security management system.

Section 7

General Legal Division

7.1 The General Legal Division is headed by a Director who is accountable to the United Nations Legal Counsel.

7.2 The core functions of the Division are as follows:

(a) Preparing legal opinions, studies and advice on the administrative law of the Organization, on private international law and on United Nations resolutions and regulations dealing with such matters;

(b) Providing legal advice:

(i) On operational and technical assistance activities of the Organization, its organs and funds and programmes, including in the economic, social and humanitarian fields, the interpretation of their mandates, regulations and rules, and the preparation and negotiation of appropriate legal instruments; and

(ii) On administrative and operational arrangements in connection with the resident coordinator system;

(c) Providing legal advice on procurement and substantive contracts, the drafting and negotiation of contracts and other commercial matters, as well as claims and disputes arising from them, involving operational activities of the Organization, its organs and funds and programmes;

(d) Providing legal advice on the resolution of disputes with commercial suppliers, consultants and individual contractors and other third parties, and representing the Organization in settlement negotiations and in arbitral proceedings;

(e) Providing legal advice on the legislative and operational arrangements governing the staffing, supply and provisioning of peace operations (peacekeeping operations and special political missions) and other missions, as well as claims arising from them;

(f) Providing legal advice on partnerships with the private sector, including their modalities, and the preparation and negotiation of appropriate legal instruments;

(g) Determining whether to appeal against a judgment of the United Nations Dispute Tribunal and representing the Secretary-General before the United Nations Appeals Tribunal;

(h) Assisting the process of ensuring external accountability of United Nations or related personnel who may have engaged in criminal conduct by referring their cases to national authorities, and coordinating the Organization's response to requests for judicial cooperation from national authorities that are conducting related criminal investigations or proceedings;

(i) Providing legal advice on the use of the name and emblem of the United Nations;

(j) Providing legal advice on the development and implementation of new initiatives and policies of the Organization; and

(k) Serving as a key unit within the Office of Legal Affairs for preventing or minimizing the risk of legal liability arising from United Nations operations.

Section 8

Codification Division

8.1 The Codification Division is headed by a Director who is accountable to the United Nations Legal Counsel.

8.2 The core functions of the Division are as follows:

(a) Providing substantive secretariat services to the Sixth Committee of the General Assembly, the International Law Commission, the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization, the Advisory Committee on the United Nations Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law and other bodies of the United Nations, as well as diplomatic conferences, in the progressive development of international law and its codification;

(b) Conducting research and preparing analytical legal and policy papers and background studies on various topics of public international law that have been selected or are being considered for codification or progressive development;

(c) Assisting in the preparation of drafts of international conventions and other forms of legal instruments on topics of public international law and commentaries explaining various provisions of the legal instruments;

(d) Implementing the United Nations Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Study, Dissemination and Wider Appreciation of International Law,

including by organizing and conducting capacity-building training programmes in international law for young professionals in developing countries, such as regional courses in international law and the International Law Fellowship Programme. Implementing the Programme of Assistance also includes developing and maintaining the United Nations Audiovisual Library of International Law, preparing publications such as the *United Nations Juridical Yearbook*, the *Reports of International Arbitral Awards*, the *United Nations Legislative Series*, the *Summaries of Judgments, Advisory Opinions and Orders of the International Court of Justice* and other publications on questions of international law and maintaining an electronic information system on the work of the legal bodies involved in the progressive development of international law and its codification;

(e) Maintaining liaison with intergovernmental bodies and institutions involved in the progressive development of international law and its codification;

(f) Preparing studies on relevant articles of the Charter, and reviewing and coordinating studies for the *Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs*.

Section 9

Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea

9.1 The Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea is headed by a Director who is accountable to the United Nations Legal Counsel.

9.2 The core functions of the Division are as follows:

(a) Promoting better understanding and wider appreciation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (the Convention), the Agreement relating to the implementation of Part XI of the Convention and the Agreement for the Implementation of the Convention relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement) and assisting with their uniform and consistent application and implementation through the provision of information, advice and assistance to States and intergovernmental organizations;

(b) Discharging depositary responsibilities of the Secretary-General under the Convention, other than treaty depositary functions, by maintaining and improving the existing geographic information system for the deposit by States of charts and geographical coordinates concerning maritime zones, including lines of delimitation, submitted pursuant to the Convention, and giving due publicity thereto;

(c) Providing substantive servicing to the Meeting of States Parties to the Convention, as well as to the Review Conference on the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement and to meetings and/or consultations of States parties to that Agreement;

(d) Providing substantive advice and support to the organizations of the United Nations system to ensure the consistency of instruments and programmes in the respective areas of competence of these organizations with the Convention and the Agreements;

(e) Providing substantive servicing, including geospatial information management servicing and technical facilities, to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in its examination of submissions by coastal States relating to the delineation of the outer limits of their continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles from the baselines, and supporting training and other activities to assist developing States in the preparation and presentation of their submissions to the Commission;

(f) Implementing relevant provisions of the respective relationship agreements with the International Seabed Authority and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea and maintaining liaison with these bodies;

(g) Providing substantive servicing to the General Assembly and to its subsidiary bodies and/or intergovernmental conferences or other processes relating to oceans which the Assembly may establish in respect of issues related to oceans and the law of the sea, such as the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea or the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects, including by monitoring and reviewing developments in ocean affairs and the law of the sea and reporting thereon to the General Assembly through annual reports on oceans and the law of the sea, on issues related to sustainable fisheries or on other specific topics of interest related to oceans and the law of the sea;

(h) Providing support for the implementation by Member States of the oceans-related Sustainable Development Goals in the 2030 Agenda;

(i) Providing capacity-building and other assistance to developing States, in particular the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, as well as coastal African States, in the field of ocean affairs and the law of the sea, through training, fellowships and technical assistance, as well as through financial support from voluntary trust funds managed by the Division;

(j) Supporting the United Nations Legal Counsel in the discharge of the focal point responsibilities related to UN-Oceans, the inter-agency coordination mechanism on oceans and coastal issues within the United Nations system;

(k) Conducting research and preparing substantive publications on the provisions of the Convention and on diverse issues relating to ocean affairs and the law of the sea, such as the *Law of the Sea Bulletin*;

(l) Maintaining a comprehensive information system, a website and a research library containing materials on ocean affairs and the law of the sea.

Section 10

International Trade Law Division

10.1 The International Trade Law Division is headed by a Director who is accountable to the United Nations Legal Counsel.

10.2 The core functions of the Division are as follows:

(a) Providing substantive secretariat services to the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law, its intergovernmental subsidiary bodies and other bodies of the United Nations, as well as diplomatic conferences in matters relating to the progressive harmonization and modernization of international trade law;

(b) Preparing drafts of international conventions and model laws, including commentaries thereon, as well as legislative guides and legal standards for aspects of international trade law that have been selected or are being considered for progressive harmonization and modernization;

(c) Conducting research and preparing studies and policy papers on aspects of international trade law to assist the Commission in the implementation of its mandate;

(d) Preparing the *United Nations Commission on International Trade Law Yearbook* and collecting and disseminating information on legal developments in the field of international trade law, including case law, and guidance on the application of texts prepared by the Commission;

(e) Developing and implementing a technical assistance programme to promote the work of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law and the use and adoption of the legislative and non-legislative texts it has developed to further the progressive harmonization and modernization of international trade law

and assist States in their efforts to modernize and further develop their national laws in areas related to the Commission's mandate;

(f) Assisting the Commission, in accordance with its mandate, to coordinate the work of other bodies of the United Nations and international organizations in the field of international trade law;

(g) Maintaining close cooperation with other international organs and organizations, including regional organizations, that are active in the field of international trade law in order to assist the Commission in performing its coordination functions as the core legal body within the United Nations system in the field of international trade law.

Section 11

Treaty Section

11.1 The Treaty Section is headed by a Chief who is accountable to the United Nations Legal Counsel.

11.2 The core functions of the Section are as follows:

(a) Discharging the Secretary-General's functions with regard to multilateral treaties deposited with him or her, including preparing legal advice and studies and providing assistance regarding treaty law and practice, in particular the depositary practice, and interacting, as appropriate, with relevant Member States, regional commissions, specialized agencies, other United Nations offices and treaty bodies;

(b) Assisting in the drafting of and commenting on final clauses of treaties concluded under the auspices of the United Nations and other treaties to be deposited with the Secretary-General;

(c) Preparing the originals of treaties deposited with the Secretary-General and the certified true copies thereof;

(d) Organizing treaty events in respect of the multilateral treaties deposited with the Secretary-General;

(e) Analysing, registering, filing, recording and publishing treaties and other international agreements in the *United Nations Treaty Series* pursuant to Article 102 of the Charter and the General Assembly regulations that give effect to Article 102;

(f) Providing assistance and advice to Member States, regional commissions, specialized agencies, other United Nations offices and treaty bodies on the legal, procedural and technological requirements for the registration of treaties and other international agreements under Article 102 of the Charter;

(g) Providing substantive secretariat services to the Sixth Committee of the General Assembly in matters relating to the international treaty framework;

(h) Organizing seminars and other training programmes at Headquarters and at the national and regional levels on general aspects of treaty law and practice;

(i) Preparing and updating various publications, including the *Summary of Practice of the Secretary-General as Depositary of Multilateral Treaties*, the *Treaty Handbook*, the *Handbook of Final Clauses* and other publications;

(j) Maintaining and updating the United Nations Treaty Collection on the Internet, including the database containing the status of multilateral treaties deposited with the Secretary-General, as well as the database of treaties registered or filed and recorded and related treaty actions published in the *United Nations Treaty Series*;

(k) Preparing studies on relevant Articles of the Charter for the *Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs*.

Section 12
Executive Office

12.1 The Executive Office is headed by an Executive Officer who is accountable to the United Nations Legal Counsel.

12.2 The core functions of the Office are set out in section 7 of Secretary-General's bulletin [ST/SGB/2015/3](#).

Section 13
Final provisions

13.1 The present bulletin shall enter into force on the date of its issuance.

13.2 Secretary-General's bulletin [ST/SGB/2008/13](#), entitled "Organization of the Office of Legal Affairs", is hereby superseded.

(Signed) António **Guterres**
Secretary-General
