

Committee of Permanent Representatives
Subcommittee meeting
Thursday 31 August 2017
09:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.,
United Nations Office at Nairobi, Gigiri
Conference Room 4
Agenda item 3

“UN Environment”: Communicating in a More Straightforward and Impactful Way

This note of the Executive Director sets out the rationale for using the short form “UN Environment” for the United Nations Environment Programme instead of the acronym “UNEP”, without prejudice to the name, present mandate, aims and purposes of the United Nations Environment Programme.

Across the United Nations, there is growing recognition that the organization must urgently change the way in which it works and communicates if it is to achieve its goals as per the Charter. “We the People” implies reaching out to citizens in a much more effective way to mobilize them for the values of the United Nations.

Secretary-General Guterres has called on the organization’s leadership and all staff to embrace management reform and to speak and write in a clear and simple language. He himself avoids the use of acronyms, and indeed this is a characteristic shared by politicians, business leaders, and public figures all over the world.

The mission of the United Nations Environment Programme is to inspire, inform and encourage all regions, countries, and people across the globe to protect our planet and live more sustainably. To communicate our mission, we must follow the Secretary-General’s example and use plain and direct language that is free of acronyms and jargon. We need to ensure that our communications are accessible and concrete so people understand what we stand for and are mandated to achieve.

This is why I have requested all Directors to come up with shorter names for all our divisions and regional offices. In the same way, I have asked that the acronym “UNEP” no longer be used but instead the short form “UN Environment”. Other UN entities have done the same. For instance, we speak about UN Climate Action or the UN Refugee Agency.

Using “UN Environment” does not imply any change in the name of the United Nations Environment Programme, as adopted by General Assembly in its resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972. Instead of using an acronym, we intend to use the term “UN Environment” as a short form.

“UNEP” has long been used by internal stakeholders, as a matter of common practice. Such acronym was not formally approved as such by the United Nations General Assembly. It is unknown to the great majority of people. “UN Environment” has, on the other hand, a much more straightforward and broader resonance. Matching the universally recognized “UN” with the universally engaging “environment” builds an immediate connection to our mandate. Even someone with no knowledge of our work can instantly identify “UN Environment” as a global environmental authority. The same cannot be said of “UNEP”.

Dropping the use of an acronym will eliminate a critical communication barrier with the outside world. This will allow us to reach more people more directly and fulfill our mandate more effectively. It will help realize the Secretary-General’s vision of a United Nations that uses clear, simple and concrete language in all its communications. Political leaders and public figures all over the world have welcomed the use of “UN Environment” with great enthusiasm. However, I recognize that to fully achieve this objective, the support of the Committee of Permanent Representatives is fundamental.

The use of the full name, United Nations Environment Programme, will remain unchanged. There will be no change to the mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme and any eventual costs related to this change can be absorbed within our existing budget.

In line with the short form name, the organization’s visual identity using “UN Environment” is provided below. The new identity is a revision of the existing logo. It maintains the same cyan colour as well as the central image of the “blue angel”, a human inside a blue circle that is surrounded by a laurel crown, which the organization has used since its founding. Unlike the previous iteration, the text of the logo now appears in an open-source font, with the word “environment” now appearing in lower case, making it more open and approachable. That single word, “environment”, now clearly and simply encapsulates all of the organization’s work.

The changes introduced in the new visual identity are in keeping with the United Nations broader push for simpler and more direct communication, a shift that should be evident in our visual language as well as our written and spoken words. The new visual identity has been developed in all official United Nations languages; these can be accessed in Annex A as well as in the organization’s visual identity manual.

I look forward to the guidance and support of the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

Erik Solheim
Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director

Annex A: UN Environment Programme Visual Identity

Full signature:



Short signature:



Link to new Visual Identity Manual (Dropbox):

<https://tinyurl.com/mxl343a>

Link to new Visual Identity Manual (Intranet):

<https://tinyurl.com/ljgs3jl>