

Board of Trustees

2025 Special Session

19 June 2025

UNITAR/BT/2025/SS.Corr.1

10 July 2025

Geneva, Switzerland

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 2025 SPECIAL SESSION OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

1. The Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) convened on 19 June 2025 for a Special Session. A list of the session's main conclusions and recommendations, as adopted at the session, is attached as Annex I.
2. The following members of the Board were present or represented at the session:

Trustees:

Dr. Adriana Abdenur

His Excellency Mr. Ali Ben Fetais Al-Marri

His Excellency Mr. Arindam Bagchi

Ms. Dorothea Gieselmann

Mr. Nikolaj Gilbert

Mr. Petr Ilichev

Her Excellency Ms. Mathu Joyini

His Excellency Mr. Jürg Lauber

Her Excellency Dr. Amina Mohamed (Vice Chair)

His Excellency Mr. Ib Petersen (Chair)

His Excellency Mr. Jian Shen

His Excellency Dr. Bosun Tijani

Professor Akiko Yuge

Ex Officio:

Ms. Michelle Gyles-McDonnough, Executive Director, UNITAR

Secretary of the Board:

Mr. Brook Boyer, UNITAR

Observers:

Mr. Jonas Haertle, Chief, Office of the Executive Director and Deputy Secretary of the Board

Mr. Osibo Imhoitsike

Mr. Anton Minaev

Mr. Samir Yeddes

3. Under item 1, Opening of the session, the Chair welcomed the Trustees to the session and extended a particularly warm welcome to the in-coming Executive Director. He recalled that the 2025 Special Session was requested by the Executive Director earlier this year, subsequent to the Board's request at its Sixty-Fifth Session that Management provide a mid-year financial update in 2025 on the delivery of the 2024-2025 programme budget and an update on the preparation for the 2026-2029 Strategic Framework. The Chair announced that a quorum was established with all Trustees present and declared the session open.
4. Under item 2, Introductory remarks from the Executive Director, the Executive Director expressed her honour in addressing the Board for the first time and extended her appreciation to the Board's Chair and Vice-Chair and to her predecessor for their leadership and contributions. At the outset, she announced that the Economic and Social Council had recently adopted a resolution on UNITAR, which reflected continued and strong support of Member States for the Institute's mandate and strategic direction, as well as alignment of UNITAR's work with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She also noted the Council's encouragement for the Institute to further strengthen its engagement with the United Nations system, to expand its partnerships and to scale up support for national capacity building and enhance the Institute's impact at the country level. She said the Council's recognition highlighted the value that Member States placed on UNITAR's contribution to learning, training and capacity enhancement, and to the strengthening of institutions and systems in developing countries, including at the local level.
5. The Executive Director then highlighted two main takeaways from the unfolding changes to the multilateral development system and from her engagements over the past months with UNITAR staff, Member States and with other UN entities and external partners. The first was the acknowledgement of the vital work that UNITAR is doing for developing countries across its various thematic workstreams, from diplomacy and peace to climate change, chemicals and waste management, health and emergency mapping. The second takeaway was the need to expand and scale up these assets and invest in the Institute's long-term sustainability. She outlined four key priorities for the coming year, including the need to clarify the UNITAR offer (i.e. capacity building or simply beneficiary growth, training only or training and research); the need to update the systems, procedures and practices; the need to address cost recovery and the management of the operational reserve, with investments to be made in the Institute's learning services, including its own organizational learning; and the need for UNITAR to be more mission aligned, with cost

recovery and operational reserve in alignment with the strategy. The Executive Director said that the Institute's senior management discussed these issues at a recent strategy retreat and with the backdrop of the UN80 initiative, and that she looked forward to the discussions with the Board and to its advice, guidance and support as UNITAR moves towards a new strategic framework.

6. The Chair noted that the session's agenda reflected a number of the issues raised in the Executive Director's remarks, and he requested that her statement be circulated to the Board as a follow-up to the session. **The Board took note of the introductory remarks of the Executive Director.**
7. Under item 3, Adoption of the agenda, the Chair introduced the provisional agenda as prepared by the Executive Director in accordance with the Board's Rules of Procedure. **The Board adopted the agenda as proposed.**
8. Under item 4, Membership matters, the Chair announced that His Excellency Mr. Luis Gallegos completed his second consecutive term on 31 May 2025 and that since the Sixty-Fifth Session, the Secretary-General has not made any new appointments and that the Board's membership stands at 13 Trustees. **The Board took note.**
9. Under item 5, Matters related to the evolution of the multilateral development system and its impact on UNITAR, the Chair referred to the significant shifts underway in the multilateral system and their implications on UNITAR. The Executive Director outlined key developments affecting the multilateral system, particularly how recent geopolitical shifts, their economic realignments and challenges to global governance are reshaping cooperation and the role of the United Nations across its three pillars of peace, development and human rights. She said that while UNITAR as a 100 percent extra budgetary United Nations entity has been largely shielded from the immediate financial impacts of these changes, the Institute nonetheless faces a rapidly changing development and financial landscape, creating an urgent need for UNITAR to adapt and reposition itself strategically. Internally, she referenced UNITAR's intensive consultations including those during the strategy retreat to define a stronger future role. The Executive Director also referenced UNITAR's co-leadership together with the United Nations University (UNU) of the UN80 Research and Training Cluster, under the Secretary-General's UN80 reform initiative, aiming to improve effectiveness, assess mandates and explore potential structural reforms in the UN's research and training ecosystem. In addition to UNITAR and UNU, participating entities in this cluster include the other research and training institutes, namely the United Nations System Staff College, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute and the United Nations Research Institute on Social Development. She indicated that other UN entities expressed interest in the cluster and included the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization, the International Telecommunications Union and the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime. The Executive Director also indicated that eventually, there would be the need to look not only at the core cluster with dedicated mandates to research, training and learning, but more broadly at the specialized agencies with their own institutes and/or dedicated research departments. She mentioned that the cluster's work has been very constructive and is ongoing, with proposals to be submitted by the end of July, and aims to strengthen the UN's capacity building efforts at the global, regional and country levels. The Executive Director also mentioned, by way of example, a recent initiative on the future of learning, co-organized with the Villars Institute and the Global Learning Council, and that the event provided an opportunity for the other research and training institutes of the United Nations to join and continue discussions around the UN80's three workstreams.
10. The Board engaged in a rich and thoughtful discussion on the changes to the multilateral development system and the UN80 reform initiative and its implications for the Institute, with Trustees sharing numerous perspectives. The Board acknowledged the necessity and timeliness of the UN80 reforms to enhance the efficiency, coherence and impact of the UN system, and welcomed UNITAR's co-leadership role in the initiative's Training and Research Cluster. While Trustees widely supported the need for increased efficiencies, going beyond growth in beneficiaries and achieving better outcomes, caution was expressed that reform be guided by comprehensive assessment and strategic thinking rather than short-term financial pressure. Reference was made to the growth that UNITAR realized in recent years and to the Executive Director's report to the Board at its Sixty-Fifth Session, as well as to the abandoning of the proposed consolidation of the research and training institutes over a decade ago, given the institutes' respective mandates, unique identity and business models, at the same time acknowledging that the context has

changed. Concern was expressed that the current reform momentum appeared to be driven largely by the constraints of the United Nations regular budget, and that there was a risk of fragmenting the system and dismantling effective, well-established structures. Concern was also raised on the need to avoid reforms that prioritize immediate savings over sustainable impact, and that such an approach could ultimately increase costs and reduce effectiveness. A reference was made to established hubs like Geneva where synergies have been built over time, and the need to avoid undermining efforts at strengthening coherence through hasty restructuring. Trustees put forward questions, including what enhanced cooperation might look like, whether other UN institutions with training academies would ultimately be included in this reform exercise, and what were the main takeaways from the recent UNITAR strategy retreat.

11. The Institute was recognized for its unique position in the UN system, with its autonomy, extra-budgetary funding model and growing demand for services being key strengths. Recognizing the competitive training and research landscape in which UNITAR operates, Trustees emphasized the importance of clearly articulating UNITAR's institutional identity and comparative advantage, and concurred with the Executive Director on the need for the Institute to sharpen its strategic focus and differentiate its offerings, particularly in areas where other UN agencies provide similar services. UNITAR's leadership in collaborative online platforms—such as the One UN Climate Change Learning Partnership, UN SDG : Learn and the e-waste coalition—was praised as a demonstration of its ability to act as a central hub for knowledge-sharing and coordination. It was suggested that this partnership approach could be replicated in other cross-cutting areas like digital transformation and youth training. The importance of ensuring that UNITAR's programming remain globally impactful while being tailored to local needs was highlighted. The Institute was encouraged to leverage its alumni network more effectively and to continue fostering partnerships, particularly in the Global South.
12. Trustees acknowledged that UNITAR is not immune to funding challenges, especially given the global economic climate and the increasingly competitive landscape for funding. The need to diversify funding was a recurring theme, with UNITAR encouraged to expand its donor base by engaging more actively with the private sector, including with the technology sector, philanthropic foundations and non-traditional donors, as well as by seeking to secure more multi-year funding agreements to ensure financial stability and planning. The need to accelerate efforts at mobilizing funds to be better prepared for future funding challenges was emphasized. In reference to past discussions of the Board, the concern on the Institute's reliance on one or two large programme areas for funding was expressed, and the need to closely monitor the funding of those programmes' income streams would be paramount. The need for operational efficiency was another key focus, with support expressed for efforts to improve internal processes. The Board also encouraged the exploration of shared services and administrative collaboration with other entities.
13. The Executive Director expressed appreciation for the Board's feedback and provided a detailed response to concerns raised about UNITAR's strategic direction, financial health and role within the UN80 reform process. She acknowledged the solid foundations laid by the previous leadership but emphasized that while UNITAR is growing, the Institute's financial health was fragile and required greater stability and sustainability, as growth was opportunistic and uneven, with internal competition leading to fragmentation and, often, duplication. The Executive Director stressed the need to clarify the Institute's service offer, be unified in its external outreach, better communicate its value proposition in the competitive and evolving multilateral landscape, and ensure a more effective positioning and plug-in with UN operational entities. She underscored the importance of clarifying UNITAR's role as a capacity-building partner that enables scale and acceleration of impact, particularly through partnerships with other UN entities, and provided examples such as UNITAR's potential to support large-scale customs training programmes or serve as the secretariat for multi-agency platforms (e.g., chemicals and waste management and UN CC: Learn). The Institute's expertise in instructional design, quality assurance and training-of-trainers was highlighted as a unique contribution that complements the operational work of other agencies. The Executive Director also underscored the need to strengthen UNITAR's delivery mechanisms, especially at the local level, leveraging existing platforms like the Global Network of Affiliated Training Centres for Authorities and Leaders (CIFAL) and aligning with broader UN initiatives such as Local2030, and to better integrate its various functions into a coherent institutional identity. The reply emphasized that many elements of the current strategy remain valid but also needs to be sharpened to reflect emerging global challenges and ensure that UNITAR can deliver effectively at scale and in partnership.

14. On governance and positioning, she reaffirmed UNITAR's autonomy while stressing the importance of being an integral part of, and acting in coherence with, the UN system, upholding shared values and principles. The Institute's diverse funding model—engaging governments, private sector, foundations and academia—is seen as a strength, but the Executive Director cautioned on overreliance of a few donors and agreed with the Board on the need for more diversified and sustainable funding. The reply also highlighted the strategic importance of the United Nations Satellite Centre (UNOSAT), particularly for developing countries, and urged proactive investment to preserve and enhance this critical asset. She called for a focus on stabilizing UNITAR's operations and systems to ensure long-term effectiveness and resilience, with the goal to make UNITAR a more unified, efficient and strategically positioned institution that can meet the evolving needs of Member States and contribute meaningfully to the broader UN reform agenda. She indicated that it would be important for UNITAR to be better plugged in with the system and to have a clear offer. On concerns raised regarding the UN80 Initiative, particularly the caution that reform be guided by comprehensive assessment and strategic thinking rather than short-term financial pressure, the Executive Director noted that seeking efficiencies was only one of three work streams and the aim was a fit-for-purpose UN architecture for now and the next 80 years. **The Board took note of the observations made on the ongoing changes to the multilateral development system, the Secretary-General's UN80 Initiative as a system-wide response and the implications for UNITAR and the UN system's work on training and research, and requested the Executive Director to keep the Board apprised of the implications on the work of the UN80 Task Force for UNITAR as well as report to the Board at its Sixty-Sixth Session.**
15. Upon adoption of the decision and in reference to the end of July deadline for the submission of proposals, a point of clarification was raised on the possibility of the Board being apprised of proposals from the UN80 Training and Research Cluster that may have an impact on UNITAR. The Executive Director noted the statutory role of the Board in approving the structure, posts and budget. Informing that the clusters were requested to come up with proposals to the Secretary-General, the Executive Director recognized that the UN80 Task Force and its seven clusters were part of the Secretary-General's internal reflection and analytical process. The Executive Director agreed to keep the Board apprised of the implications on the work of the UN80 Task Force. The Executive Director also drew the Board's attention to the informal briefing for Member States scheduled for the week following the present Special Session.
16. Under item 6, Consultations on the development of the 2026-2029 strategic framework, the Chair recalled the Board's decision of its Sixty-Fifth Session for Management to keep the Board apprised on the preparations of the strategic framework and to report to the Board at its Sixty-Sixth Session. The Executive Director reported that the Institute held at the end of May a highly productive leadership retreat focused on strengthening organizational cohesion and strategic direction. The first day involved the senior leadership team, followed by a broader session including program managers, division representatives, and members of a strategic task force. A key outcome was the shared commitment to creating a unified UNITAR identity—moving away from fragmented, inconsistent representations and toward a single, cohesive framework that supports clearer communication and stronger positioning within the UN system.
17. Participants also agreed on the importance of retaining UNITAR's strengths—its agility, responsiveness and entrepreneurial spirit—while aligning operations more closely with a strategic framework. Longstanding structural and operational challenges, such as cost recovery and inefficiencies, were acknowledged as persistent issues that require action in the near term rather than further discussion. The retreat, along with recent town halls, marked a clear shift toward resolving these legacy issues and building a more effective, efficient and strategically focused UNITAR.
18. Several key themes emerged from the discussion regarding UNITAR's future strategic direction. A central concern of Board Members was how UNITAR can better integrate with the broader UN system, especially at the country level, to enhance its relevance, scale and impact—particularly in vulnerable and underserved contexts. Given the absence of field offices in developing countries, suggestions included selectively participating in key UN Country Team meetings—especially during the development of UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks—as well as leveraging existing missions and closer coordination with Resident Coordinators to improve strategic alignment, positioning and plug-in and visibility.

19. The upcoming strategic framework for 2026-2029 was seen as a critical opportunity to unify UNITAR's operations, address longstanding internal fragmentation, and ensure that its services remain responsive to both global demands and country-specific needs, including local conditions. Board members emphasized the importance of aligning with other UN entities, adopting a balanced approach to the Pact for the Future, and developing together with the strategic framework, a results framework with key performance indicators and evaluation and risk management strategies. A unified institutional culture, shared incentives, and clear accountabilities were identified as necessary for long-term transformation, recognizing that culture change will require sustained attention in the years ahead.
20. The Executive Director agreed that for UNITAR's long-term success, a cultural shift and deeper integration into the broader UN system are essential. The Executive Director also acknowledged that changing institutional culture is difficult but necessary, and committed that the strategic framework will reflect this, particularly by rethinking the business model and its incentive structures—such as cost recovery and the operational reserve—to better support Member States in capacity building. Efforts are already underway to improve engagement with UN Country Teams and Resident Coordinators, even without a local physical presence on the ground. This includes direct meetings and analysis of UN Cooperation Frameworks to align UNITAR's work with country priorities more effectively. It was acknowledged that UNITAR's exceptional focus on its institutional autonomy has limited its integration, but steps are being taken to plug into relevant UN governance bodies and improve local delivery. These actions aim to position UNITAR as a key contributor in UN system-wide efforts to enable and support major global transitions—such as digital transformation, the transformation of education and learning, and the energy transition—while ensuring relevance and impact at the local level. **The Board took note of the observations made and expressed its support to Management for its leadership in navigating the current uncertainties, welcoming the inclusive internal approach in preparing the strategic framework and requested Management to adopt a flexible, adaptive and future facing approach, but focus on the link to the county level activities, including the UN country team activities, ensure effective alignment of UNITAR's operating model with the new strategic framework, keep the Board informed of major shifts that may influence strategic priorities, and submit the draft strategic framework by 30 September 2025.**
21. Under item 7a, Implementation of the programme budget for the biennium 2024-2025, the Chair recalled that the Board requested Management to provide a mid-year financial update in 2025, and noted the item's annotation and the contributions received as at 31 May 2025. The Executive Director reported that the revised biennium budget for 2024–2025 has increased to \$97.32 million, up by \$7.81 million from the originally approved \$89.57 million. As of 31 May 2025, UNITAR had mobilized \$116.96 million in contributions—118% of the planned amount of \$98.73 million—driven primarily by successful resource mobilization efforts from the Division for Peace, particularly its Peacekeeping Training Programme. She reported that no significant shortfalls were expected from other Programme Units. A major contribution from Germany, anticipated in November but received at the end of the year, accounted for a large portion of the increase.
22. In discussion under this item, it was noted that the Institute's cost recovery and accumulated reserves provide strong financial stability and ensure business continuity. However, given the substantial size of these reserves, there is a need to consider how they might be strategically utilized—particularly to strengthen operational capacity in areas most in demand by developing countries. It was also noted that a comparative analysis on cost recovery practices across other UN training and research institutions would be useful to help identify opportunities for enhancing UNITAR's comparative advantage. Additionally, the ongoing Joint Inspection Unit's review of programme support cost policies across the UN system would provide valuable context for future decisions. **The Board took note of Management's financial update of the revised programme budget for the biennium 2024-2025.**
23. Under item 7b, Update on progress on cost recovery, the Chair recalled that the Board took note of Management's report on cost recovery and the update on the General Fund and the observations made at its Sixty-Fifth Session, and requested Management to report to the Board with the results of the study on cost recovery, including the operational reserve matter, at its Sixty-Sixth Session. The Executive Director made reference to the ongoing review to assess UNITAR's cost recovery

mechanism, management of the operational reserve and the overall business model. She reported that two advisors were engaged to support this work, and that the aim is to align the revised business model with the upcoming strategic framework and present a comprehensive proposal at the Board's session in November. The review includes ensuring sufficient reserves to meet liabilities while also identifying opportunities for institutional investment to strengthen UNITAR's capacity to deliver core services effectively.

24. In discussion under this item, it was acknowledged that while the original focus of the advisors' review was on cost recovery and the operational reserve, it is now clear that the study should be expanded to include UNITAR's broader business model and structural arrangements. This broader scope was seen as timely given the concurrent development of the new strategic framework and the ongoing review of the cost recovery and operational reserve matter. Given the two ongoing processes, a question was raised how the findings of the cost recovery and business model review will align with the preparation and approval of the strategic framework, since both are expected to be presented to the Board at the same time, with a request that they come as an integrated package. The Executive Director committed that Management would present to the Board a strategic framework that is very clear on the business model and address the related implications for organizational culture that will enable the delivery of the strategy. **The Board 1) took note of the observation made and the update on cost recovery and the situation of the General Fund, including the operational reserve, as well as the work and the wider context of the study being undertaken by consultants in pursuance of the Board's request for Management to report to the Board with the results of a study on cost recovery, including the operational reserve, at its Sixty-Sixth Session; and 2) expanded the scope of the study on cost recovery, including the operational reserve, to review also UNITAR's operating model to clarify how UNITAR defines and delivers value, ensures alignment between service offerings and its funding logic, and whether structural arrangements and financial practices are fit for purpose in light of UN80 and UNITAR's global footprint, diversified portfolio and the expectations of its partners.**
25. Under item 8, Any other business, the Chair confirmed that there was no further business that Trustees wished to raise. The Executive Director expressed her appreciation for the Board's feedback, advice and guidance, as well as for the constructive engagement.
26. The session was adjourned.

ANNEX I

KEY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 2025 SPECIAL SESSION OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Item 5: Matters related to the evolution of the multilateral development system and its impact on UNITAR

The Board took note of the observations made on the ongoing changes to the multilateral development system, the Secretary-General's UN80 Initiative as a system-wide response and the implications for UNITAR and the UN system's work on training and research, and requested the Executive Director to keep the Board apprised of the implications on the work of the UN80 Task Force for UNITAR and to report to the Board at its Sixty-Sixth Session.

Item 6: Consultations on the development of the 2026-2029 strategic framework

The Board took note of the observations made and expressed its support to Management for its leadership in navigating the current uncertainties, welcoming the inclusive internal approach in preparing the strategic framework and requested Management to adopt a flexible, adaptive and future facing approach, focusing on the link to the country level activities, including the UN country teams, ensuring effective alignment of UNITAR's operating model with the new strategic framework, keep the Board informed of major shifts that may influence strategic priorities, and submit the draft strategic framework by 30 September 2025.

Item 7a: Implementation of the programme budget for the biennium 2024-2025

The Board took note of Management's financial update of the revised programme budget for the biennium 2024-2025.

Item 7b: Update on progress on cost recovery

The Board 1) took note of the observation made and the update on cost recovery and the situation of the General Fund, including the operational reserve, as well as the work and the wider context of the study being undertaken by a consultant in pursuance of the Board's request for Management to report to the Board with the results of a study on cost recovery including the operational reserve at its Sixty-Sixth Session; and 2) expanded the scope of the study on cost recovery, including the operational reserve, to review also UNITAR's operating model to clarify how UNITAR defines and delivers value, ensures alignment between service offerings and its funding logic, and whether structural arrangements and financial practices are fit for purpose in light of UN80 and UNITAR's global footprint, diversified portfolio and the expectations of its partners.