



## Trump announces withdrawal from 66 global organisations

Several health-related organisations are targeted by the USA's announcement, although the details of how withdrawal will work in practice are unclear. Faith McLellan reports.

On Jan 7, 2026, US President Donald Trump issued a presidential memorandum announcing the country's withdrawal from 66 "organizations, conventions, and treaties [that] are contrary to the interests of the United States". These include 31 UN and 35 non-UN organisations, several related to global health.

Reponses reflected a range of opinions, from the idea that the memo is actually of little consequence to regret and despair. The American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a conservative think tank, characterised the memo as "underwhelming". Nina Schwalbe, CEO of Spark Street Advisors and Senior Scholar at Georgetown's Center for Global Health Policy and Politics, called it "a huge blow". "A colossal own goal" was how the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Simon Stiell, described it. Myron Ebell, formerly of the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI), which focuses on "America's unaccountable regulatory state", celebrated, according to *The New York Times*, by exclaiming, "break out the champagne".

These contrasting reactions reflect in part the range of budget, influence, and practical effects of the work of the organisations involved. They include UN Women, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), Education Cannot Wait, the Offices of the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict, on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and on Violence Against Children, the UNFCCC, the Global Forum on Migration and Development, International Law Commission, UN Oceans, and UN Water.

But the far-reaching intentions of the administration are not entirely clear. Brett D Schaefer, a senior

fellow at the AEI, described many of the organisations as "obscure", noting that the memo shows general US opposition to their operations but fails to address issues such as consolidation, overlaps, and greater reform efforts. He also noted that the organisations are a mix of distinct groups and entities that are merely non-membership departments within the UN Secretariat. The USA has already stopped contributing its share of UN regular budget assessment; thus, the overall thinking behind the choice of organisations is opaque.

Those publicly welcoming the decision seem mainly opposed to the organisations working on climate change. The CEI maintains that climate change "is not a hoax...but a persistent pretext for expanding government control over the economy". It applauded the "clear signal that our country won't be part of global efforts to tell people how to live their lives and how to produce and use energy".

Ironically, especially because the USA was essential to the establishment of the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement (from which the USA withdrew in the first Trump administration, a decision then reversed by President Biden and reinstated on the first day of Trump's second term), it is Americans who could suffer most. Stiell observed that turning away from renewable energy sources will have knock-on effects on the US economy and jobs, aside from making people more vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

The consequences for some organisations, including those involved with women's rights, gender issues, maternal mortality, family planning, education in humanitarian emergencies, conflict, and sexual violence, will disproportionately affect vulnerable groups. As is

apparently the case with other organisations, the UNFPA said it has not been contacted by the Trump administration about the memo and has no additional information about it. The UNFPA echoed the sentiments of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who said that "All United Nations entities will go on with the implementation of their mandates as given by Member States. The United Nations has a responsibility to deliver for those who depend on us."

Schwalbe, who announced her decision to run for the US Congress the day she spoke to *The Lancet*, described Trump's cuts as "just malicious. He's cutting good people doing good work". She surmised, as have others, that it is likely that no review of the organisations has been done. Such a review would have specified the shortcomings, failures, and potential redundancies and overlaps of the organisations involved.

Another major and unresolved issue is the distinction between non-UN organisations and UN entities, such as the Economic and Social Council of the UN (ECOSOC), one of the UN's six main structures created in 1945. Schwalbe said, "You cannot unilaterally pull out of ECOSOC, because it is an integral part of the UN. The memo's language appears to acknowledge this, as it contains the caveat that withdrawal from UN agencies will occur 'to the extent permitted by law.'" Roger Pielke Jr, another senior fellow at the AEI, writing in his Substack newsletter, *The Honest Broker*, agreed that "it remains legally unresolved whether or not a president can withdraw from such an agreement unilaterally".

Faith McLellan

For Myron Ebell's quote see <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/07/climate/trump-un-climate-treaty.html>

For Roger Pielke Jr's article see <https://rogerpielkejr.substack.com/p/leaving-the-ipcc-and-unfccc-is-bad>