



# General Assembly

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**Seventy-sixth session**

Agenda item 82

**Report of the International Law Commission on the work of  
its seventy-second session**

## **Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 9 December 2021**

[*on the report of the Sixth Committee (A/76/473, para. 12)*]

**76/112. Protection of the atmosphere**

*The General Assembly,*

*Having considered* chapter IV of the report of the International Law Commission on the work of its seventy-second session,<sup>1</sup> which contains the draft preamble and guidelines on the protection of the atmosphere,

*Taking note* of the recommendation of the International Law Commission contained in paragraph 37 of its report,

*Emphasizing* the continuing importance of the codification and progressive development of international law, as referred to in Article 13, paragraph 1 (a), of the Charter of the United Nations,

*Noting* that the subject of protection of the atmosphere is of major importance in international relations,

1. *Welcomes* the conclusion of the work of the International Law Commission on the protection of the atmosphere and its adoption of the draft preamble and guidelines on the protection of the atmosphere and commentaries thereto;<sup>2</sup>

2. *Expresses its appreciation* to the International Law Commission for its continuing contribution to the codification and progressive development of international law;

3. *Takes note* of the views and comments expressed in the debates of the Sixth Committee on the subject, including those made at the seventy-sixth session of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Official Records of the General Assembly, Seventy-sixth Session, Supplement No. 10 (A/76/10).*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, paras. 39 and 40.



General Assembly,<sup>3</sup> after the International Law Commission had completed its consideration of this topic in accordance with its statute;

4. *Also takes note* of the preamble and guidelines on the protection of the atmosphere, the text of which is annexed to the present resolution, with the commentaries thereto, brings them to the attention of States, international organizations and all who may be called upon to deal with the subject, and encourages their widest possible dissemination.

*49th plenary meeting  
9 December 2021*

## Annex

### Guidelines on the protection of the atmosphere

#### Preamble

*Acknowledging* that the atmosphere is a natural resource, with a limited assimilation capacity, essential for sustaining life on Earth, human health and welfare, and aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems,

*Bearing in mind* that the transport and dispersion of polluting and degrading substances occur within the atmosphere,

*Considering* that atmospheric pollution and atmospheric degradation are a common concern of humankind,

*Aware* of the special situation and needs of developing countries,

*Noting* the close interaction between the atmosphere and the oceans,

*Noting in particular* the special situation of low-lying coastal areas and small island developing States due to sea-level rise,

*Recognizing* that the interests of future generations of humankind in the long-term conservation of the quality of the atmosphere should be fully taken into account,

*Recalling* that the present guidelines were elaborated on the understanding that they were not intended to interfere with relevant political negotiations or to impose on current treaty regimes rules or principles not already contained therein,

#### Guideline 1

##### Use of terms

For the purposes of the present guidelines:

(a) “atmosphere” means the envelope of gases surrounding the Earth;

(b) “atmospheric pollution” means the introduction or release by humans, directly or indirectly, into the atmosphere of substances or energy contributing to significant deleterious effects extending beyond the State of origin of such a nature as to endanger human life and health and the Earth’s natural environment;

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<sup>3</sup> See A/C.6/76/SR.16, A/C.6/76/SR.17, A/C.6/76/SR.18, A/C.6/76/SR.19, A/C.6/76/SR.20, A/C.6/76/SR.21, A/C.6/76/SR.22, A/C.6/76/SR.23, A/C.6/76/SR.24, A/C.6/76/SR.25 and A/C.6/76/SR.29. The statements made in the Sixth Committee are available in full (in the original languages) on the website of the Sixth Committee, at [www.un.org/en/ga/sixth/](http://www.un.org/en/ga/sixth/).

(c) “atmospheric degradation” means the alteration by humans, directly or indirectly, of atmospheric conditions having significant deleterious effects of such a nature as to endanger human life and health and the Earth’s natural environment.

## **Guideline 2**

### **Scope**

1. The present guidelines concern the protection of the atmosphere from atmospheric pollution and atmospheric degradation.
2. The present guidelines do not deal with and are without prejudice to questions concerning the polluter-pays principle, the precautionary principle and the common but differentiated responsibilities principle.
3. Nothing in the present guidelines affects the status of airspace under international law nor questions related to outer space, including its delimitation.

## **Guideline 3**

### **Obligation to protect the atmosphere**

States have the obligation to protect the atmosphere by exercising due diligence in taking appropriate measures, in accordance with applicable rules of international law, to prevent, reduce or control atmospheric pollution and atmospheric degradation.

## **Guideline 4**

### **Environmental impact assessment**

States have the obligation to ensure that an environmental impact assessment is undertaken of proposed activities under their jurisdiction or control which are likely to cause significant adverse impact on the atmosphere in terms of atmospheric pollution or atmospheric degradation.

## **Guideline 5**

### **Sustainable utilization of the atmosphere**

1. Given that the atmosphere is a natural resource with a limited assimilation capacity, its utilization should be undertaken in a sustainable manner.
2. Sustainable utilization of the atmosphere includes the need to reconcile economic development with the protection of the atmosphere.

## **Guideline 6**

### **Equitable and reasonable utilization of the atmosphere**

The atmosphere should be utilized in an equitable and reasonable manner, taking fully into account the interests of present and future generations.

## **Guideline 7**

### **Intentional large-scale modification of the atmosphere**

Activities aimed at intentional large-scale modification of the atmosphere should only be conducted with prudence and caution, and subject to any applicable rules of international law, including those relating to environmental impact assessment.

**Guideline 8  
International cooperation**

1. States have the obligation to cooperate, as appropriate, with each other and with relevant international organizations for the protection of the atmosphere from atmospheric pollution and atmospheric degradation.
2. States should cooperate in further enhancing scientific and technical knowledge relating to the causes and impacts of atmospheric pollution and atmospheric degradation. Cooperation could include exchange of information and joint monitoring.

**Guideline 9  
Interrelationship among relevant rules**

1. The rules of international law relating to the protection of the atmosphere and other relevant rules of international law, including, inter alia, the rules of international trade and investment law, of the law of the sea and of international human rights law, should, to the extent possible, be identified, interpreted and applied in order to give rise to a single set of compatible obligations, in line with the principles of harmonization and systemic integration, and with a view to avoiding conflicts. This should be done in accordance with the relevant rules set forth in the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, including articles 30 and 31, paragraph 3 (c), and the principles and rules of customary international law.
2. States should, to the extent possible, when developing new rules of international law relating to the protection of the atmosphere and other relevant rules of international law, endeavour to do so in a harmonious manner.
3. When applying paragraphs 1 and 2, special consideration should be given to persons and groups particularly vulnerable to atmospheric pollution and atmospheric degradation. Such groups may include, inter alia, indigenous peoples, people of the least developed countries and people of low-lying coastal areas and small island developing States affected by sea-level rise.

**Guideline 10  
Implementation**

1. National implementation of obligations under international law relating to the protection of the atmosphere from atmospheric pollution and atmospheric degradation, including those referred to in the present guidelines, may take the form of legislative, administrative, judicial and other actions.
2. States should endeavour to give effect to the recommendations contained in the present guidelines.

**Guideline 11  
Compliance**

1. States are required to abide by their obligations under international law relating to the protection of the atmosphere from atmospheric pollution and atmospheric degradation in good faith, including through compliance with the rules and procedures in the relevant agreements to which they are parties.
2. To achieve compliance, facilitative or enforcement procedures may be used as appropriate, in accordance with the relevant agreements:
  - (a) facilitative procedures may include providing assistance to States, in cases of non-compliance, in a transparent, non-adversarial and non-punitive manner to

ensure that the States concerned comply with their obligations under international law, taking into account their capabilities and special conditions;

(b) enforcement procedures may include issuing a caution of non-compliance, termination of rights and privileges under the relevant agreements, and other forms of enforcement measures.

**Guideline 12**  
**Dispute settlement**

1. Disputes between States relating to the protection of the atmosphere from atmospheric pollution and atmospheric degradation are to be settled by peaceful means.
  2. Since such disputes may be of a fact-intensive and science-dependent character, due consideration should be given to the use of scientific and technical experts.
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