



## DECLARING A RECORD

Only about 5-10 percent of the UN's official records have permanent value as archives. But many records must still be kept for a defined period, from several months to several years, to fulfill legal, administrative, financial, or historical obligations.

Deciding which records need to be kept is not a simple "yes or no" question. Decisions about which records are kept, and for how long, are so important that the UN requires offices to consult with the record-keeping experts at UN ARMS for advice and guidance. The decisions made in consultation with UN ARMS are incorporated into the office's records **retention schedules**. This document identifies how long records will be kept and whether – at the end of a set time – they will be destroyed or transferred to UN ARMS for preservation as archives.

In order to ensure records are safe, all UN personnel need to know how to **distinguish** between information, documents, and records. Personnel also need to know how to **"declare" a record** so that it is stored in official record-keeping systems and can be managed according to approved retention schedules. This information sheet explains those two steps: distinguishing information, documents, and records, and "declaring" records by storing them safely.

### STEP 1: DISTINGUISHING INFORMATION, DOCUMENTS, AND RECORDS

**Information** is "data, ideas, thoughts, or memories irrespective of medium." Information sources are considered "non-records"; they are useful but do not provide evidence.

**Examples** include journals, newspapers, publications, or reference sources not created by the UN.

**Documents** are any "recorded information or objects that can be treated as individual units."

**Examples** include works in progress such as draft communications or "to do" lists, and transitory records such as emails confirming a meeting or acknowledging receipt of a document.

**Records** are "information created, received, and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business."

**Examples** include final reports, emails confirming an action or decision, spreadsheets showing budget figures, or photographs or maps of field missions, which will be kept for as long as needed as evidence.

Information that does not serve as evidence is not an official record. Transitory documents – such as emails confirming lunch dates – and should not be declared official records. But whenever you create or receive a document that can serve as evidence – that confirms something you did, said, or decided – you need to declare that document as a record, which means storing that record in your official records system.

**STEP 2: DECLARING A RECORD**

To decide whether to declare a document as an official record, ask the questions below.  
Is the document an official UN record?

<p><b>Is the document an official UN record?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does it document a UN business activity?</li> <li>Does it provide evidence of UN accountability?</li> <li>Is it needed to protect the interests or rights of the UN?</li> <li>Does it relate to the function or mandate of your office?</li> </ul>	<b>NO</b>	<b>DESTROY THE DOCUMENT AS SOON AS YOU NO LONGER NEED IT.</b>
<b>YES</b>		
<p><b>Are you the person who should keep that record?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are you the creator of the document?</li> <li>Are you the primary recipient of the document, if it came from a source outside your office?</li> <li>Is your office the Office of Record for work related to the document in question?</li> <li>Are you the person in your office responsible for managing this type of document?</li> </ul>	<b>NO</b>	<b>DESTROY THE DOCUMENT AS SOON AS YOU NO LONGER NEED IT.</b>
<b>YES</b>		
<b>“DECLARE” THE DOCUMENT TO BE A RECORD BY STORING IN YOUR OFFICE’S OFFICIAL RECORDS SYSTEM.</b>		

**FOR EXAMPLE**

A copy of an article from an external publication...	...MAY provide useful information related to the function and mandate of your office but does NOT document an UN business activity, does NOT provide evidence of UN accountability, and is NOT needed to protect the interests or rights of the UN.	<b>NO</b>	<b>Destroy the document as soon as you no longer need it.</b>
A copy of a report created by another UN office, sent to you for background information only...	...DOES provide useful information related to the function and mandate of your office, but you are NOT the creator of the document, and your office is NOT the Office of Record for the work related to that document.	<b>NO</b>	<b>Destroy the document as soon as you no longer need it.</b>
An email you send advising of a new programme activity, expenditure, or staff change...	...DOES provide useful information related to the function and mandate of your office, DOES document an official UN activity, DOES provide evidence of UN accountability, WILL protect the interests or rights of the UN, WAS created by you, and your office IS the Office of Record for the work related to that document.	<b>YES</b>	<b>Declare” the document to be a record by storing it your official records system.</b>

**When in doubt, the best decision is to declare the document as a record and store it in the right place in your official records system.**