

GENERAL STUDIES II

US Withdrawal from 66 International Organisations 2026 | UPSC

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On 7 January 2026, US President Donald Trump signed a presidential memorandum directing American agencies to end participation in and funding for 66 international bodies, comprising 35 non-UN organisations and 31 UN entities. This decision reflects the administration's America First approach and raises important questions about sovereignty, multilateralism, climate diplomacy, international development and global governance. For India, the decision has particular significance because the International Solar Alliance, a flagship India-France initiative, is among the affected organisations. This UPSC-focused analysis covers the policy aspects, global consequences, India's interests, verified previous-year questions, and high-priority revision topics.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS | OCTOBER 2026

The United States' withdrawal initiative is reshaping debates on multilateralism, climate diplomacy, development financing, international institutions and the future of global governance.

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1. Why Is This Issue in the News?

On 7 January 2026, US President Donald Trump signed a presidential memorandum directing American government agencies to withdraw from or cease participation in and funding for 66 international organisations and entities.

66

Total bodies listed

35

Non-UN organisations

31

UN entities

The memorandum followed a review initiated under Executive Order 14190 in February 2025. The administration argued that the affected bodies did not sufficiently serve American national interests.

Critical UPSC Fact

The memorandum directs steps to implement withdrawal. It does not automatically mean every treaty withdrawal, membership change or funding termination became legally effective on 7 January 2026.

For UN entities, the memorandum explicitly connects implementation with applicable US law.

The decision is an important example of growing tensions between national sovereignty and multilateral cooperation.

2. What's Multilateralism?

Multilateralism refers to cooperation among three or more countries through common rules, institutions or coordinated arrangements to address shared problems.

Examples include the United Nations, World Trade Organization, international climate conventions and other global cooperation frameworks.

Multilateralism	Unilateralism	Bilateralism
Multiple countries cooperate	A state acts primarily on its own	Two countries cooperate
Common institutions and negotiated rules	Independent national policy decisions	Two-party agreements
Example: UNFCCC climate negotiations	Unilateral trade restrictions	India–US bilateral agreements

Multilateralism is especially important for global public goods: climate stability, disease prevention, international peace, humanitarian assistance and financial stability.

3. Why Is the United States Withdrawing?

A. America First Policy

The administration prioritises US national interests, economic competitiveness and domestic political commitments over participation in certain international arrangements.

B. Financial Burden

US officials argue that some international institutions are costly, inefficient or insufficiently accountable for taxpayer funds.

C. National Sovereignty

The administration objects to international arrangements it believes constrain domestic policy choices or create external political pressure.

D. Climate and Energy Policy

The administration rejects some international decarbonisation approaches as incompatible with its preferred energy and industrial policies.

E. Ideological Differences

Disagreements concerning international social, development and governance priorities have influenced decisions to reduce participation.

F. Institutional Effectiveness

The administration argues that certain bodies provide insufficient practical results relative to their costs.

Balanced Analytical Perspective

Supporters of the policy emphasise democratic accountability, sovereignty and resource efficiency. Critics argue that withdrawal may undermine global cooperation, reduce US influence and weaken institutions needed to address cross-border challenges.

4. Important Organisations Affected

A. Climate, Environment and Energy

Organisation	Primary Role	UPSC Relevance
UNFCCC	Framework for international climate negotiations	COP, Paris Agreement, NDCs
IPCC	Assessment of scientific knowledge on climate change	Climate science, assessment reports
International Solar Alliance (ISA)	International cooperation on solar energy	India–France initiative, solar diplomacy
IRENA	International cooperation on renewable energy	Energy transition and renewables
IUCN	Nature conservation and biodiversity cooperation	Red List, conservation governance
IPBES	Scientific-policy assessment of biodiversity and ecosystem services	Biodiversity, scientific assessments

B. Social Development and Gender

The 2026 memorandum lists the following among the UN entities affected:

- UN Women: Gender equality and women's empowerment.
- UN Population Fund (UNFPA): Reproductive health and population-related development.
- UN-Habitat: Human settlements and sustainable urban development.
- UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Economic and social development policy work.

C. Peace, Security and Development

- UN Peacebuilding Commission.
- UN Peacebuilding Fund.
- UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).
- International Law Commission.
- UN Register of Conventional Arms.
- Global Counterterrorism Forum.
- International Development Law Organization.

D. Related US Withdrawal Decisions

The World Health Organization, UNESCO, UN Human Rights Council and UNRWA have also been affected by American decisions, but their relevant executive actions and timelines are not identical to the January 2026 list of 66 bodies.

Important Prelims Distinction

WHO and UNESCO should not be mistakenly counted among the 66 bodies named in the 7 January memorandum. The wider US disengagement agenda includes separate decisions concerning these institutions.

5. Understanding the Most Important Institutions

5.1 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

- Adopted in 1992.
- Entered into force in 1994.
- Provides the framework for international climate negotiations.
- Associated with annual Conferences of the Parties (COP).
- The Paris Agreement was adopted under the UNFCCC process in 2015.

The UNFCCC framework is important for international cooperation on mitigation, adaptation, finance and reporting.

5.2 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

- Established in 1988.
- Created by WMO and UNEP.
- Assesses scientific, technical and socioeconomic information about climate change.
- Publishes assessment and special reports.

The IPCC does not function as a global climate treaty and does not itself prescribe binding emission limits.

5.3 International Solar Alliance

- Launched by India and France in 2015.
- Announced during the Paris climate conference.

- Headquarters: Gurugram, Haryana, India.
- Promotes international cooperation for solar deployment.
- Membership eligibility has expanded beyond tropical countries.

US disengagement from the ISA may present challenges for international financing and diplomatic participation, but it does not end the organisation's operations.

5.4 International Renewable Energy Agency

- Established in 2009.
- Headquarters: Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.
- Supports renewable-energy cooperation and knowledge sharing.
- Covers a range of renewable technologies, not only solar energy.

5.5 World Health Organization

- Established in 1948.
- Headquarters: Geneva, Switzerland.
- UN specialised agency for international public health.
- Important for disease surveillance and health emergencies.

WHO is relevant to the wider US disengagement discussion, although its withdrawal process originated through a separate presidential action.

5.6 UN Women, UNFPA and UN-Habitat

These entities work respectively on gender equality, population and reproductive health, and sustainable urban development.

A reduction in support can affect programmes depending on the availability of alternative funding, national partnerships and implementation capacity.

6. Potential Global Impacts

A. Global Health and Humanitarian Assistance

Reduced international aid and institutional participation could create financing difficulties for health, humanitarian and development programmes.

Potential consequences include weaker disease-prevention capacity, disruption of humanitarian services and increased pressure on vulnerable populations.

B. Climate Governance

US disengagement could make international climate negotiations and financing more difficult.

It may also weaken confidence in long-term commitments, although other states and non-state actors can continue cooperating.

C. Geopolitical Influence

Reduced American participation may create additional opportunities for China, the European Union and emerging economies to shape global governance.

However, expanded influence is not automatic; it depends on diplomacy, financial resources and institutional acceptance.

D. International Development Finance

Many international programmes depend on both assessed contributions and voluntary funding.

Withdrawal or funding reductions can create financial uncertainty, staff reductions, project delays and competing demands on donors.

E. Fragmentation of Global Governance

Countries may increasingly rely on bilateral, regional or issue-specific arrangements instead of universal institutions.

Such arrangements can be flexible, but they may also produce inconsistent rules and unequal bargaining power.

F. Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention

Funding uncertainty may affect technical assistance, mediation support and post-conflict recovery programmes.

The outcome will vary by programme and the ability of other donors to compensate.

Core Mains Argument

The withdrawal initiative may reduce short-term US funding commitments but could also reduce American influence over the institutions responsible for shaping international rules.

7. Implications for India

A. International Solar Alliance

As a co-founder of the ISA, India has a direct interest in preserving the organisation's credibility and effectiveness.

India can strengthen cooperation with France, other member countries, multilateral development banks and private investors.

B. India's Climate Diplomacy

International uncertainty may create additional challenges in climate finance and negotiations.

India's interests include climate justice, adaptation funding, equitable energy transitions and recognition of differentiated responsibilities.

C. India's Strategic Autonomy

India can maintain constructive bilateral relations with the United States while supporting reformed and effective multilateral institutions.

D. Global South Leadership

India may use platforms such as the G20, Voice of Global South initiatives and South-South cooperation to promote development-focused international engagement.

E. Trade and Economic Governance

Fragmented rules may increase policy uncertainty for international trade, investment and sustainable development.

India should support predictable trade arrangements, technological partnerships and institutional reform.

India's Strategic Opportunity

Strengthen multilateral reform, diversify financing partnerships, protect the ISA's effectiveness and act as a bridge between developed and developing countries.

8. Multilateralism vs Minilateralism

Multilateralism	Minilateralism

Broader participation	Small groups of selected states
Emphasis on widespread representation	Emphasis on targeted coordination
May face slower consensus-building	May allow quicker issue-specific decisions
Example: UNFCCC negotiations	Example: Quad cooperation

Both approaches can coexist. The challenge is ensuring that smaller arrangements do not undermine broader international legitimacy or exclude countries affected by major decisions.

9. The Way Forward: Reforming Multilateral Institutions

1. **Financial diversification:** Reduce excessive reliance on individual donors.
2. **Institutional accountability:** Improve financial transparency and programme evaluation.
3. **Representative governance:** Strengthen developing-country participation.
4. **UN reform:** Improve effectiveness and representation in relevant institutions.
5. **Regional partnerships:** Encourage complementary cooperation without abandoning universal rules.
6. **Evidence-based climate diplomacy:** Preserve scientific cooperation despite political disagreement.
7. **South-South cooperation:** Strengthen development partnerships and technical capacity.

10. Verified UPSC Previous Year Questions

The following six questions appeared in UPSC Civil Services Prelims or Mains examinations. Their relevance lies in institutional governance, climate conventions, international cooperation and renewable energy.

PYQ Authenticity Note

Five questions are from Prelims and include the original answer options. One is a descriptive Mains question. The explanations are editorial study notes. These questions should not be described as direct PYQs on the 2026 US withdrawal.

UPSC PRELIMS 2014

PYQ 1. Global Environment Facility (GEF)

With reference to 'Global Environment Facility', which of the following statements is/are correct?

- (a) It serves as financial mechanism for 'Convention on Biological Diversity' and 'United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change'.
- (b) It undertakes scientific research on environmental issues at global level.
- (c) It is an agency under OECD to facilitate the transfer of technology and funds to underdeveloped countries with specific aim to protect their environment.
- (d) Both (a) and (b).

Correct Answer: (a)

The GEF serves as a financial mechanism for major international environmental agreements, including the CBD and UNFCCC. It is not primarily a scientific research institution or an OECD agency.

UPSC Lesson: Distinguish financial mechanisms from scientific assessment institutions.

UPSC PRELIMS 2016

PYQ 2. International Solar Alliance

Consider the following statements:

- 1. The International Solar Alliance was launched at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2015.
- 2. The Alliance includes all the member countries of the United Nations.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Correct Answer: (a) 1 only

The ISA was launched by India and France during the 2015 Paris climate conference. It does not include every UN member state. Its eligibility rules have expanded since inception.

UPSC Lesson: Study the founding event, membership criteria, headquarters and institutional purpose.

UPSC PRELIMS 2016

PYQ 3. Agenda 21

With reference to 'Agenda 21', sometimes seen in the news, consider the following statements:

1. It is a global action plan for sustainable development.
2. It originated in the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Correct Answer: (a) 1 only

Agenda 21 is a non-binding global action plan adopted at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. It did not originate at the Johannesburg Summit in 2002.

UPSC Lesson: Differentiate international declarations, action plans, treaties and summit outcomes.

UPSC PRELIMS 2021

PYQ 4. UN Organisations and Tree Cities

Consider the following statements:

Statement 1: The United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and the Arbor Day Foundation have recently recognised Hyderabad as 2020 Tree City of the World.

Statement 2: Hyderabad was selected for the recognition for a year following its commitment to grow and maintain the urban forests.

Which one of the following is correct?

- (a) Both statements are correct and Statement 2 is the correct explanation of Statement 1.
- (b) Both statements are correct but Statement 2 is not the correct explanation of Statement 1.
- (c) Statement 1 is correct but Statement 2 is incorrect.
- (d) Statement 1 is incorrect but Statement 2 is correct.

Correct Answer: (d)

The Tree Cities of the World programme is associated with FAO and the Arbor Day Foundation, not UNCDF. Hyderabad was recognised for its urban forestry commitments.

UPSC Lesson: Identify the correct institutional partners rather than relying on similar-sounding UN names.

UPSC PRELIMS 2022

PYQ 5. Climate Action Tracker

'Climate Action Tracker' which monitors the emission reduction pledges of different countries is a:

- (a) Database created by coalition of research organisations.
- (b) Wing of 'International Panel of Climate Change'.
- (c) Committee under 'United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change'.
- (d) Agency promoted and financed by United Nations Environment Programme and World Bank.

Correct Answer: (a)

Climate Action Tracker is an independent scientific analysis initiative maintained by research organisations. It is not a formal subsidiary of IPCC, UNFCCC or UNEP.

UPSC Lesson: Study institutional independence, parent organisations and exact functions.

UPSC MAINS 2020 | GS-III MARKS

PYQ 6. India's Solar Energy Potential

"India has immense potential of solar energy though there are regional variations in its development. Elaborate."

Model Answer Framework

India benefits from substantial solar irradiation across many regions, but resource availability, terrain, cloud cover, land access, transmission capacity and policy implementation create regional differences.

Rajasthan and Gujarat offer favourable conditions for large utility-scale installations, while other regions may require rooftop, distributed or specialised solutions.

National measures and international cooperation through the ISA can support investment, technology diffusion and capacity development.

UPSC Lesson: Connect geographic potential with economic, technological, institutional and policy constraints.

11. PYQ Trend Analysis: Prelims and Mains

These six relevant questions cover 2014–2022. They are a selected question-linked sample, not an exhaustive count of every UPSC international-relations PYQ.

A. Prelims: Observed Patterns

Pattern	Sample Evidence	What to Prepare
Institution-function matching	GEF, 2014	Scientific, financial and policy roles
Founding and membership	ISA, 2016	Founding year, founders, eligibility
Summit chronology	Agenda 21, 2013	Rio 1992, Paris 2015, later developments
Parent body identification	Treaties, 2021	FAO, WHO, UNESCO, UNFPA and other mandates
Institutional independence	Climate Action Tracker, 2022	IPCC versus UNFCCC versus independent research

B. Mains: Observed Analytical Demands

The selected 2020 Mains question requires students to examine resource potential alongside regional constraints and implementation challenges.

For the 2026 withdrawal topic, the same multidimensional approach can be applied to sovereignty, institutional financing, global governance, climate action and India's interests.

Examination Trend Inference

Prelims preparation should prioritise institutional identity, membership, functions and historical chronology.

Mains preparation should prioritise comparative analysis, consequences, Indian interests and practical reforms.

These are preparation inferences, not statistically established predictions of future UPSC questions.

12. Most Important Topics to Revise

Priority I: Very High

VERY HIGH

1. UNFCCC, Paris Agreement and IPCC

- UNFCCC adoption and entry into force
- COP process
- Paris Agreement, 2015
- Nationally Determined Contributions
- IPCC formation and functions
- Difference between treaty, scientific panel and fund
- Legal process of treaty withdrawal

VERY HIGH

2. International Solar Alliance

India–France initiative

- Launch at Paris COP21
- Headquarters: Gurugram
- Membership eligibility and expansion
- Solar energy access and financing
- Impact of US disengagement
- India's leadership opportunities

VERY HIGH

3. Important UN Institutions

- WHO and global public health
- UNESCO and its mandate

- UN Women and UNFPA
- UNCTAD and development trade
- Peacebuilding Commission and Fund
- UN-Habitat
- UNHRC and UNRWA
- UN specialised agency versus fund or programme

VERY HIGH

4. Multilateralism and Global Governance

- Multilateralism versus unilateralism
- Multilateralism versus minilateralism
- National sovereignty
- Global public goods
- Collective action problems
- Institutional financing and accountability
- UN reforms and legitimacy

Priority II: High

HIGH

5. India's Climate Diplomacy

- Climate justice
- Common but Differentiated Responsibilities
- Climate finance
- India's renewable-energy diplomacy
- Global South cooperation
- India's strategic autonomy

HIGH

6. Global Health Governance

- WHO structure and functions
- International Health Regulations
- Gavi and vaccine cooperation
- Humanitarian funding systems
- Public-health global goods
- Implications of donor withdrawal

HIGH

7. International Environmental Institutions

- IRENA
- IUCN and Red List
- IPBES
- GEF
- UNEP
- Climate Action Tracker
- Differences among institutional functions

Priority III: Selective Current Affairs

MEDIUM

8. The 2026 US Presidential Memorandum

- Date: 7 January 2026
- 66 listed international bodies
- 35 non-UN and 31 UN entities
- Earlier Executive Order 14199
- Separate WHO and UNESCO decisions
- Implementation and legal limitations

MEDIUM

9. Global Power Competition

- China's role in global governance
- EU and emerging-economy influence
- Financial dependence of global bodies
- South-South cooperation
- Fragmentation of international institutions

13. Quick Comparison: Institutions UPSC Can Confuse

Institution	Type / Function	Remember
UNFCCC	International climate treaty / framework	COP and Paris Agreement
IPCC	Scientific assessment panel	WMO and UNEP, 1988
GEF	Environmental financial mechanism	Funding and grants
ISA	Global energy alliance	India–France, 2015
IRENA	Renewable-energy intergovernmental agency	Abu Dhabi
IUCN	Nature conservation union	Red List
WHO	UN specialised agency	Global public health
UN Women	UN gender equality entity	Women's empowerment
UNFPA	UN population fund	Reproductive health

14. Original UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question Status: The following are original practice MCQs, not historical UPSC PYQs.

Practice MCQ 1

Consider the following statements:

1. The IPCC is a climate science assessment body.
2. UNFCCC is an international climate treaty framework.
3. IRENA is exclusively a solar energy organisation.

Which statements are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) All three

Answer: (a)

IPCC assesses climate science, UNFCCC provides a treaty framework, and IRENA covers renewable energy more broadly.

Practice MCQ 2

Which of the following statements about ISA are correct?

1. It was launched by India and France.
2. Its headquarters is in Gurugram.
3. Every UN member is automatically an ISA member.

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) All three

Answer: (b)

India and France launched ISA, and its headquarters is in Gurugram. Eligibility does not imply automatic membership.

Practice MCQ 3

The US presidential memorandum of 7 January 2026 identified which combination?

- (a) 31 non-UN organisations and 35 UN entities
- (b) 35 non-UN organisations and 31 UN entities
- (c) 66 UN specialised agencies
- (d) 66 WHO programmes

Answer: (b)

The memorandum lists 35 non-UN organisations and 31 UN entities, totalling 66 bodies.

Practice MCQ 4

Which of the following is primarily a financial mechanism for global environmental agreements?

- (a) IPCC
- (b) IRENA
- (c) GEF
- (d) UNFCCC Secretariat

Answer: (c)

The Global Environment Facility provides environmental financing. IPCC primarily assesses science while IRENA promotes renewable-energy cooperation.

15. Expected UPSC Mains Practice Questions

GS II | International Relations | 15 Marks

"The withdrawal of major powers from international institutions reflects the growing tension between national sovereignty and global collective action." Critically examine.

GS II | International Institutions | 15 Marks

Discuss the implications of US disengagement from multilateral organisations for global governance and international cooperation.

GS III | Climate Change | 15 Marks

Examine how the withdrawal of major economies from climate cooperation frameworks can affect international mitigation, adaptation and finance commitments.

GS II | India's Foreign Policy | 10 Marks

Assess the challenges and opportunities for India's climate diplomacy arising from US disengagement from the International Solar Alliance.

Suggested Mains Answer Structure

1. Introduction: Define the withdrawal initiative and multilateralism.
2. Causes: National interests, financial concerns and sovereignty.
3. Global implications: Climate, health, development and geopolitics.
4. India: ISA, climate finance, strategic economy and Global South.
5. Conclusion: Effective reform, inclusive representation and sustainable cooperation.

16. Three Day Revision Plan

Day	Revision Topics	Task
Day 1	UN system, WHO, UNFCCC, IPCC, GEF	Institution chart + 20 MCQs
Day 2	ISA, IRENA, climate diplomacy, India	Revise ISA and climate PYQs
Day 3	Multilateralism, UN reform, geopolitical impacts	Two Mains answers + mock test

17. Fifteen Facts for Last-Minute Revision

1. The US memorandum was signed on 7 January 2026.
2. It covered 66 international bodies.
3. Of these, 35 were non-UN and 31 were UN entities.
4. The policy is associated with the America First approach.
5. UNFCCC was adopted in 1992.

6. The Paris Agreement was adopted in 2015.
7. IPCC was established by WMO and UNEP in 1988.
8. ISA was launched by India and France in 2015.
9. ISA headquarters is in Gurugram.
10. IRENA headquarters is in Abu Dhabi.
11. WHO was established in 1948.
12. GEF serves as a financial mechanism for major environmental conventions.
13. UN Women promotes gender equality.
14. UNFPA works on reproductive health and population-related development.
15. Withdrawal from institutions does not necessarily eliminate global cooperation; other participants can continue their activities.

18. Conclusion

The US withdrawal initiative marks a significant challenge to modern multilateral cooperation. It raises fundamental questions about national sovereignty, financing, international legitimacy and global public goods.

The implications extend beyond diplomacy to climate change, humanitarian assistance, development and the distribution of global influence.

For India, the challenge is to safeguard its partnerships with major powers while promoting effective and inclusive international institutions.

Final UPSC Takeaway

Prepare this topic by linking the January 2026 decision with five major themes: international institutions, climate governance, global development finance, India's foreign policy and reform of multilateralism.

19. Frequently Asked Questions

How many organisations were included in the US withdrawal memorandum?

The 7 January 2026 memorandum covered 66 bodies: 35 non-UN organisations and 31 UN entities.

Is the International Solar Alliance affected?

Yes. The ISA was listed among the non-UN organisations covered by the US memorandum.

Are UNFCCC and IPCC the same organisation?

No. UNFCCC is an international climate treaty framework, whereas IPCC is a scientific assessment body.

Did the memorandum itself list WHO and UNESCO?

No. Their relevant US withdrawal decisions followed separate actions and timelines.

Why is this issue important for India?

It affects discussions concerning the ISA, climate finance, development cooperation, strategic autonomy and global governance reform.

UPSC Syllabus Relevance

GS II – International Relations

GS II – International Organisations

GS II – India's Foreign Policy

GS III – Climate Change

GS III – Energy Security

UN Reform, UPSC Prelims 2027

UPSC Mains 2027

Current Affairs 2026

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