

## Security Level System (SLS) – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1) Q. **What is the Security Level System (SLS)?**

A. The SLS is a new addition to the United Nations Security Risk Management (SRM) framework, and it is used for assigning a security grade or level to an area where the United Nations operates to identify the overall level of threat or danger in that area. Although it may appear superficially similar to the Security Phase System, the SLS is actually a significant departure in terms of the methods, ideas and usage.

2) Q. **What is Security Risk Management (SRM)?**

A. The Security Risk Management (SRM) is the fundamental managerial process for dealing with security problems that affect United Nations personnel, assets and operations. SRM is an analytical procedure that has three main steps: 1) assesses the specific operational context in which the United Nations operates; 2) identifies the risk from threats that may affect United Nations personnel, assets, and operations in that context; and 3) provides specific, cost-effective strategies and measures for lowering risk by reducing the impact and likelihood of these threats. The SLS, in addition to assigning a security grade or level, also enhances the SRM process by improving the assessment of the threats in any specific operational context.

3) Q. **What is Security Risk Assessment (SRA)?**

A. SRA is the main part of the SRM process. It is the process of 1) identifying the undesirable events that could affect United Nations personnel, assets or operations; 2) assessing the United Nations vulnerability to these events; 2) assessing the risk to the United Nations in terms of likelihood and impact; 3) prioritizing those risks and 4) identifying strategies and measures to reduce the likelihood and impact of these undesirable events by lowering our vulnerability to them.

4) Q. **What is the difference between threat and risk?**

A. Threat is the possible *cause* of harm while risk is measure of our vulnerability to the threat. We manage our risk by lowering our vulnerability. SLS is threat-based, whereas the SRA is risk-based. The SLS and the SRA are both part of the broader SRM process.

5) Q. **What are the main differences between the SLS and the Phase System?**

A. There are two significant differences. First, the determination of a Security Level is more objective, fact-based and globally comparable. Second, there are no mandatory security measures linked to any Security Level.

6) Q. **Why did the United Nations abolish the Security Phase System?**

A. In its June 2008 report “Towards a Culture of Security and Accountability”, the Independent Panel on Safety and Security led by Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi recommended, as a matter of priority, the replacement of the current UN Security Phase System, as it was considered to be one of the main difficulties which UN managers face in the field. The Security Phase System, adopted in 1980, has been criticized for being inconsistent from country to country, often because security phase decisions were blurred by political pressures or driven by administrative or financial considerations.

7) Q. **How many Security Levels are there and what do they mean?**

A. The SLS has 6 Levels going from 1 (least dangerous environment) to 6 (most dangerous environment). Each level has a specific name as follows: 1 – Minimal, 2 – Low, 3 – Moderate, 4 – substantial, 5 – High, and 6 – Extreme.

- 8) Q. **How is a Security Level determined?**  
A. A Security Level is determined using a Structured Threat Assessment. The Structured Threat Assessment evaluates five categories: Armed Conflict, Terrorism, Crime, Civil Unrest and Hazards (such as earthquakes or floods). Each category is evaluated using a point system, and the combination of these separate scores automatically determines the Security Level. Structured Threat Assessments are web-based for ease of use and data analysis.
- 9) Q. **Who conducts the Structured Threat Assessment?**  
A. The Structured Threat Assessment is first conducted at each duty station by the senior-most security professional, who is usually the Chief Security Advisor (CSA), Chief Security Officer (CSO), or Security Advisor (SA) employed by the Department of Safety and Security. The process of conducting the Structured Threat Assessment is done in the Security Cell, a body that comprises security professionals or other staff with security responsibility of UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes present. After this preliminary process, the Structured Threat Assessment is presented to the Security Management Team (SMT) in that country for review and to the Designated Official (DO) for approval. All Structured Threat Assessments are reviewed and validated by DSS Headquarters.
- 10) Q. **Who approves the Security Level?**  
A. The DO approves Security Levels 1 to 5. The Secretary General, through the USG DSS, approves Level 6.
- 11) Q. **What other information can the SLS provide?**  
A. The SLS can also be used to compare different threats (Armed Conflict, Terrorism, Crime, Civil Unrest and Hazards) to each other so that staff and managers can identify the most important threats in their area. It can also compare one threat across different locations.
- 12) Q. **Will there be a Security Level of an entire country?**  
A. For maximum reliability, the Structured Threat Assessment must have a clearly defined geographical area of analysis, called the “Security Level Area”. It will be rare for threats to be the same throughout an entire country, so most countries will have more than one Security Level Area.
- 13) Q. **How often will the Security Level change?**  
A. The Security Level will be a standing agenda item for all SMT meetings. As such, the Security Level, whether revised or not, will be approved/confirmed at every SMT meeting.
- 14) Q. **What is the required frequency of Security Management Team (SMT) meetings in the SLS?**  
A. In Security Levels 1 and 2, it is recommended that SMT meetings be held at least twice a year; in Security Level 3, at least monthly; and in Security Levels 4, 5 and 6, at least weekly.
- 15) Q. **How does the SLS deal with Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS) and Minimum Operating Residential Security Standards (MORSS)?**  
A. In 2009, the UN policy on MOSS de-linked MOSS from Security Phases. The SLS takes this one step further by de-linking other security-related entitlements such as hazard (now danger) pay and relocation/evacuation. MORSS was never linked to Security Phases and is not linked to the SLS.
- 16) Q. **How will decisions be made about relocation and evacuation once the Security Phase System is abolished?**

- A. The Security Level approved after a Structured Threat Assessment does not automatically trigger a relocation or evacuation. Relocation and evacuation are risk management measures and considered after the Security Risk Assessment (SRA) is conducted. If an SRA indicates that the risk to staff and/or eligible family members is too high, then the DO, in consultation with the SMT, will recommend, through the USG DSS to the Secretary-General, relocation or evacuation. If approved, the USG DSS will send an “All Agency Communiqué” to the UN system announcing relocation or evacuation.
- 17) Q. **What are the Security clearance requirements in the SLS?**
- A. UN personnel will require security clearance for all official travel, regardless of Security Level. In most cases, this clearance will be automatic. However, when the DO needs to control the number and movement of personnel, security clearances will be done manually.
- 18) Q. **Are UN Administrative and Financial actions linked to the SLS?**
- A. There are no administrative or financial actions, such as security-related entitlements, linked to the SLS.
- 19) Q. **How will administrative actions related to security decisions, as well as security-related entitlements, be determined once the Security Phase system is abolished?**
- A. DSS will continue to issue “All Agency Communiqués” throughout the UN system, as is the current procedure. However, instead of the communiqués referring to a change in “Security Phase”, the communiqués will reflect the particular actions that have been declared, such as relocation, evacuation or partial relocation. Existing entitlements connected to these security actions remain as they are now, unless further amended through the inter-agency system. The responsibility for determining the applicability, scope and amount of the security-related entitlements does not rest with DSS.
- 20) Q. **When will the Field Security Handbook (FSH) be amended to reflect the SLS policy?**
- A. The Field Security Handbook is being replaced by a new UN Security Policy Manual, which will be available on the DSS web site. The UN Security Policy Manual will contain details of the SLS, as well as other security policies. It will be regularly updated.
- 21) Q. **When will the security training packages “Basic Security in the Field” (BSITF) and “Advanced Security in the Field” (ASITF) be updated to reflect the SLS policy?**
- A. DSS expects to have the English version of the revised BSITF (called "Security for United Nations Personnel") available on line by early 2011. Because the SLS is covered in the revised BSITF (“Security for United Nations Personnel”), there is no need to revise the ASITF in this regard.
- 22) Q. **I have just completed BSITF and ASITF. Do I have to redo them when they are updated?**
- A. All UN personnel will be required to successfully complete “Security for United Nations Personnel” once it is available, regardless of how recently they may have completed BSITF. As with BSITF, certification in “Security for United Nations Personnel” is valid for 3 years, after which personnel will have to redo the training. Certification in ASITF remains valid for 3 years as well.
- 23) Q. **When does the SLS officially come into effect?**
- A. The Security Phase System will be abolished as of 1 January 2011, at which time the SLS will come into effect.