



# WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL *of Philadelphia*

*The William R. Sasso, Esq.*  
.....Student Diplomat Program



*The United Nations:  
A Handbook for Middle School Students*

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# What is the UN? . . . . .

## A Brief History...

The United Nations dates back to the **Second World War**. At the time, the world was in turmoil. Millions of people were being killed, and millions more were forced from their homes. Cities lay in ruins. World leaders realized that to prevent another global war, **future wars could only be prevented if countries joined together in an international organization**. Hence, the UN was born.

This was not the first time such an organization had been created. The **League of Nations** was created in 1919, after the First World War, for a similar purpose. However, the League failed. Many important countries, including the United States, either did not join or soon quit. A team can't work without cooperation! The League had no power to enforce its decisions, such as using military force. Therefore, it was helpless in preventing the outbreak of World War II.

**After WWII, the dreams of the League were reignited, this time with countries putting their money where their mouths were...**

The name "United Nations" was coined by American President Franklin D. Roosevelt. It was first used in the "Declaration by United Nations" on January 1, 1942, when representatives of 26 countries pledged to fight against the Axis Powers. (The Axis Powers, headed by Germany, Italy and Japan, opposed the Allied Powers, led by the United States, Britain, France and the Soviet Union, in World War II.) Towards the end of the war, representatives of 50 countries gathered in San Francisco to hammer out the final text that would lay the foundation of international cooperation. The final draft was the Charter of the United Nations.

The UN officially came into existence on **October 24, 1945**. Its Charter was ratified by 50 countries, including those most powerful at the time: China, France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States. These five countries now make up the Security Council.

## Essential Facts

- The UN Headquarters is located in New York City, but the land and buildings are considered international territory.
- The UN has its own flag, its own post office and its own postage stamps.
- Six official languages are used by its staff.
- The UN European Headquarters is located in the Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland.
- The senior officer of the United Nations Secretariat is the Secretary-General.
- United Nations Day is celebrated on October 24 every year.

## The UN Today

- The United Nations is one of the more important international organizations in the world, with 192 member states, dozens of observer groups, as well as scientific, humanitarian and peacekeeping missions around the world.
- The UN has recently passed reforms that would make its actions more transparent and effective.
- Plans to expand the Security Council to make it reflect the world of today and not of 1945 are still on the table.



The United Nations (UN) is a unique organization of independent countries voluntarily working for world peace and social justice.

The UN logo shows the world held in the "olive branches of peace."

## Official Languages of the UN:

**Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish.**

A delegate may speak in any of these languages and the speech will be interpreted simultaneously into the other official languages. Most UN documents are issued in all six official languages.

## The UN has six main organs:

- General Assembly (GA)
- Security Council
- Secretariat
- Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
- International Court of Justice (ICJ)
- Trusteeship Council

These departments are all found at the UN headquarters in New York City, except for the ICJ, which is located in the Netherlands. The United Nations family, however, is much larger, encompassing 15 agencies and many other programs throughout the world. (See UN organization chart in the Appendix.)

United Nations Membership is open to all peace-loving and sovereign nations that accept the obligations of the Charter, and, in the judgment of the Organization, are willing and able to carry out these obligations.

A Non-Governmental Organization's staff member (left) explains to children of the Al Solum Internally Displaced Persons' camp (IDPs) in Ondurman, the meaning of mines warning boards, as part of the activities for the observance of the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance. This program was organized by the Public Information Office of the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Khartoum, Sudan.  
Photo: UN Photo/Flash News





## How Does the UN Work?

The UN is a place or forum where delegates come together to discuss issues that affect their countries both individually and collectively.

The UN can only take action on global issues when a majority of member states come to an agreement. It can only do as much as its member states allow.

The United Nations is careful to respect the **sovereignty** of each member state.

**Sovereignty** means that a national government is the ultimate authority in decisions about policy and security for that country.

In most cases, the UN cannot force member states to take action. Rather, countries only take action if they agree to do so.

When debating issues, member states try to reach a **consensus**.

**Consensus** means that there is a collective opinion or agreement reached among member states about a position or policy recommendation.

It is very difficult to reach consensus in the UN because nations often disagree about the best way to solve problems. They will debate...and debate...and debate... and debate some more until an agreement (consensus) is reached.



The General Assembly debates on development at United Nations Headquarters in New York. Left to right are: Jeffrey Sachs, Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on the Millennium Development Goals; Markku Niskala, Secretary-General of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; Maureen Harrington, Vice President of the Millennium Challenge Corporation; Hisham Alwugayyan, Deputy Director-General of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development; Shashi Tharoor, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information; Fatima Al-Balooshi, Minister for Social Development, Bahrain; George Soros, Soros Foundation; Tokyo Sexwale, Executive Chairman of Mvelaphanda Group of Companies and Chairman, African-Arab Civil Council Initiative; Joanna Kerr, Executive Director of the Association for Women in Development; and Gary Cohen, President of Becton Dickinson Medical. Photo: UN Photo/Eskinder Denze

## The UN Charter

The **United Nations Charter** was signed on June 26, 1945, in San Francisco by representatives of 50 countries.

*We the Peoples,  
Of the United Nations,  
United for a Better World...*

**A charter is a written contract that defines the rights and responsibilities of an organization or group.**

The UN Charter is recognized as an international treaty. The original copy of the Charter is kept at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. A replica is on display at UN Headquarters in New York.

The UN Charter sets forth the purposes of the United Nations as:

- Maintaining international peace and security;
- Development of friendly relations between states;
- Promoting international cooperation in solving economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian problems and respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- Serving as a center for nations to achieve these goals.

The Charter opens with a Preamble and is made up of 19 chapters divided into 111 articles.

It expresses a strong hope for the equality of all people and the expansion of basic freedoms in countries throughout the world.

*\* You can read the full Charter online at <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/index.html>*

An informal meeting of the General Assembly considering the report of the High-Level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations with the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey participating.  
Photo: UN Photo/Mike Gwosd



## Preamble to the UN Charter

### WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED

- to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and
- to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and
- to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and
- to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

### AND FOR THESE ENDS

- to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors, and
- to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and
- to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and
- to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples,

### HAVE RESOLVED TO COMBINE OUR EFFORTS TO ACCOMPLISH THESE AIMS

Accordingly, our respective Governments, through representatives assembled in the city of San Francisco, who have exhibited their full powers found to be in good and due form, have agreed to the present Charter of the United Nations and do hereby establish an international organization to be known as the United Nations.

*\* Does this **Preamble** remind you of any other important document you've learned about in American history that promises human rights to all its citizens?*



A Cambodian girl is holding a United Nations Flag.  
Photo: UN Photo/P. Szymanski



# • • • • • The Six Main Organs

## The General Assembly

The **General Assembly (GA)** is the central organ of the UN. This is where all 192 Member States can gather to discuss international issues and concerns. Each nation has one vote and is represented by a delegation of diplomats headed by an **ambassador**. The General Assembly reaches decisions through a majority vote.

### What does the GA do?

Because the GA is so large, it can be difficult to get things accomplished. Think of how difficult it is to decide what to do on a Friday evening with your friends! Now, imagine 192 delegates trying to agree on a single issue in the context of competing national interests.

To make the assembly more productive and focused, the GA is divided into six main committees:

- **The Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC)**
- **The Economic and Financial Committee**
- **The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM)**
- **The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL)**
- **The Administrative and Budgetary Committee**
- **The Legal Committee**

Each committee presents its work in the form of written **resolutions** to the General Assembly Plenary (all 192 member states). In the Plenary, all member nations discuss, debate and amend resolutions before voting on them in the General Assembly.

**A resolution is a statement used to identify a position or recommend action on a particular issue.**

The General Assembly's regular session begins each year in September and continues throughout the year. Each year, the Assembly elects a president who presides over (runs) the Assembly meetings. These meetings are similar to sessions of the United States Congress; however, the UN is not considered a world government. It only has authority to make policy suggestions and cannot force countries to follow those suggestions. In other words, what the General Assembly decides upon is **not binding**.

The General Assembly Hall during a meeting on the revitalization of its work at UN Headquarters in New York.  
Photo: UN Photo/Eskinder Dezaie





## Security Council

The founders of the UN designed the **Security Council (SC)** to be the main guardian of world peace. While the General Assembly can discuss any world concern, the SC only deals with questions of peace and security. **The SC is the only UN organ that has the authority to demand action on the part of Member States; all other UN resolutions are non-binding.**

### What does the SC do?

The UN Charter gives the SC the following responsibilities:

- To **maintain international peace and security** in accordance with the principles and purposes of the United Nations;
- To **investigate any dispute or situation** that might lead to international conflict and to identify the aggressor nation;
- To **recommend ways to settle disputes** through treaties, economic sanctions and other forms of non-military diplomacy;
- To **take military action** against an aggressor (through UN Peacekeeping Operations);
- To **recommend the admission of new members**;
- To **exercise the trusteeship functions** of the United Nations in "strategic areas";
- To **recommend to the General Assembly the appointment of the Secretary-General** and, together with the Assembly, to **elect the Judges of the International Court of Justice**.

There are **15 countries** represented on the Security Council.

Five countries are always represented on the council; they are permanent members. They are often called the "**Big Five**": **China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States**. These five permanent members have powers that the other ten do not have.

The other ten countries on the Security Council are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms. They are chosen on the basis of geography so that different areas of the world are always represented. As of 2007, the following countries were members of the Security Council.

Belgium (2008)	Italy (2008)	Qatar (2007)
Congo (Republic of the) (2007)	Panama (2008)	Slovakia (2007)
Ghana (2007)	Peru (2007)	South Africa (2008)
Indonesia (2008)		



Nicolas Michel, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, addresses the Security Council meeting on strengthening international law at UN Headquarters in New York.

Photo: UN Photo/Chris Brown

The Security Council meeting considering the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Sudan at UN Headquarters in New York.

Photo: UN Photo/Denis Brizovitz



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon addresses the Millennium Development Goals' event in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library Auditorium of UN Headquarters in New York.  
Photo: UN Photo/Mark Gerns

## Voting Procedures

Voting in the Security Council is not like voting in the General Assembly. To pass, a resolution must get at least nine "yes" votes. But, if any one of the five permanent members votes "no," the resolution is **defeated** — it does not pass. This is called a **veto**. Because of a veto threat, resolutions are passed by consensus.

Number of times a veto has been cast:

• USSR/Russia	122
• The United States	81
• The United Kingdom	32
• France	18
• China	5

Why do only five countries have veto power?

These five major world powers played key roles in the establishment of the UN. They were also the victors of the Second World War. The best way to ensure peace was to get these important countries to work together through common agreement, especially on questions of war and peace. Thus, it was agreed that if any one of the "Big Five" did not agree to a recommendation, the Security Council would not act upon it. This special power given to the permanent members is called "veto power."

**Is it fair?** Lots of countries say it is not fair, but there are two big reasons why it stays like this.

1. *Money:* The five permanent members pay for nearly half the cost of running the UN — even though there are 192 members.
2. *Rules:* If you had a vote on getting rid of the veto, the countries with veto power could veto it!

Members of the Security Council unanimously adopt a resolution imposing sanctions on the Islamic Republic of Iran.  
Photo: UN Photo/Deviz Brekowitz





## Secretariat

The Secretariat, the UN bureaucracy and international staff working in duty stations around the world carry out the diverse day-to-day operations of the United Nations. The people that work for the Secretariat's offices represent 170 different countries in offices around the world. It is represented by the Secretary General.

The Secretariat answers to the United Nations alone for its activities. Its members take an oath not to seek or receive instructions from any government or outside authority.

### What does the Secretariat do?

The Secretariat is responsible for carrying out the decisions laid down by the other principle organs of the United Nations. It does this by:

- Strengthening the three pillars of the UN — security, development and human rights;
- Breathing new life and injecting renewed confidence into the Secretariat;
- Seeking to set the highest standards of ethics, professionalism and accountability;
- Working to usher in a new day in relations between the Secretariat and member states.

The specific duties of the Secretariat are as varied as the problems dealt with by the UN. These range from organizing peacekeeping operations to mediating international disputes, from surveying economic and social trends to preparing studies on **human rights** and **sustainable development**. Secretariat members include interpreters, translators, librarians, lawyers, engineers and editors.

### Who is the Secretary-General?

The Secretary-General is the chief officer of the entire United Nations. He is the ultimate "boss"; he is in charge of the thousands of people who work at the UN in New York and throughout the world.

The Secretary-General follows a policy of **preventive diplomacy**. This means that he takes steps to prevent international disputes from developing, growing or spreading to other countries.

**How can you be the next Secretary General?** The Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council for a five-year, renewable term. Although there is no written rule, the role of Secretary-General is rotated among the various regions of the world.

There have been eight Secretaries-General since the UN was formed:

**Trygve Lie** of Norway (1945-1952)

**Dag Hammarskjöld** of Sweden (1953-1961)

**U Thant** of Burma (1961-1971)

**Kurt Waldheim** of Austria (1972-1981)

**Javier Perez de Cuellar** of Peru (1982-1991)

**Boutros Boutros-Ghali** of Egypt (1992-1996)

**Kofi Annan** of Ghana (1996-2006)

## Ban Ki-Moon is the present Secretary-General of the UN

He took office on January 1, 2007. He is from the Republic of Korea (also known as South Korea). Prior to becoming Secretary-General, Ki-Moon served in many posts in the Foreign Ministry, including Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade. He has worked in the UN since 1975.

Ki-Moon is continuing where his predecessors left off, pushing for reforms that will strengthen the overall effectiveness of the UN.



Ismael Gaspár Martins, Permanent Representative of Angola, who was elected by acclamation as the Peacebuilding Commission's first Chairman, addresses the Peacebuilding Commission's inaugural session at UN Headquarters in New York. Photo: UN Photo/Pablo Fonseca

## The Secretary-General wants YOUR help!

The UN holds extra importance for young people. Its main purpose is to ensure a peaceful future for the world — the world that kids will one day inherit and lead.

Here's part of a letter from former Secretary General Kofi Annan:

More and more, young people are asking me this encouraging question: What can I do to make things better? My advice is to always start by learning and looking around you. Get to know people whose lives are different from yours. Find out what you have in common with them. Build bridges of understanding with them. It is only by doing so that we can truly appreciate the worth of others. We do so whether we are sharing our lunch with someone sitting next to us or exchanging e-mail greetings with someone at the other end of the world.

Once you have created a bridge with others, keep it open by talking to each other and, above all, by listening. This is what I try to do in my job as Secretary-General, because I know that once I have built up trust with someone, we can work to change things together. So can you. When you see something that is wrong, no matter how big the problem is, ask yourself: Who else would like to change this? How can we work together? Take action with others who share your conviction. Have the courage to believe you can make a difference. As with everything in life, small steps count. If something has not been done before, it does not mean it can't be done; it only means you could be the first to do it. (Kofi Annan, *From remarks made at the Festival Mondial des Enfants in Basil, Switzerland, June 24, 2000*)

\* You can visit the Secretary-General's homepage by visiting <http://www.un.org/News/press/sg/index.shtml>



## Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

The **Economic and Social Council**, called **ECOSOC** for short, is the central place at the United Nations for discussing **economic and social problems**. Its goal is to promote higher standards of living, full employment, economic and social progress, respect for human rights and freedoms, and international cooperation.

**Economics is the study of how a society uses its scarce resources.**

Economic problems include those related to the development of:

- Trade
- Transportation
- Technology and Industry
- Farming
- Communications

Social problems include those concerning:

- Children
- Discrimination
- Crime
- Refugees
- Education
- Healthcare

ECOSOC addresses these problems by coordinating the work of the **14 UN specialized agencies**, **ten functional commissions** (like committees) and **five regional commissions**.

- One example of a **specialized agency** is **WHO**, the World Health Organization. WHO is the directing and coordinating authority for healthcare within the United Nations system. It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters.
- The **Commission on Human Rights** is an example of a **functional commission**. The CHR is mandated to examine, monitor and publicly report either on human rights situations in specific countries or territories or on major phenomena of human rights violations worldwide.
- An example of a **regional commission** is the **Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)**. ECA's mandate is to promote the economic and social development of its member States, foster intra-regional integration and promote international cooperation for Africa's development.



School girls attend classes in a school built by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on Wad Sjerale refugee camp. The school operates two shifts, one in the morning for girls and the other in the afternoon for boys, to provide education to the many refugee children in Sudan.

Photo: UN Photo/Steve Nouri

Louise Arbour (second from right at table), United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; Pierre-Claire Mbonimpa (right), founder and president of the Burundian Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Detained Persons (APRODH); and Martin Ennals (left), 2007 Award laureate, are participating in a meeting with victims of violence at the APRODH office in Burundi.

Photo: UN Photo/Mario Razzou





General view of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in session.  
Photo: UN Photo/Andrea Bazzi

## United Nations Millennium Development Goals

The work of the ECOSOC laid the foundation for the UN Millennium Goals, which address the hundreds of millions of people across the planet who do not have regular access to clean water, food, shelter or life-saving medical care. These goals also speak to the hundred million plus children who are never given a chance to attend school, even to learn the basics of reading and writing.

In an effort to increase the standard of living for every person on the planet, the United Nations adopted the Millennium Development Goals in 2000. Accepted by all 192 member nations, the goals spell out in no uncertain terms that quality of life should be a right rather than a privilege. By creating a global community, the UN is paving the way for the richer nations in the world to contribute to the growth and well being of developing countries.

The Millennium Development Goals, which have a target date of 2015, consist of the following eight objectives:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

These goals provide a framework by which all nations of the world can pool together their resources with the aim of providing to every man, woman and child a future that is marked by equal dignity and opportunity. The results so far have been mixed. You can visit the United Nations website to see how it evaluates its progress to date on these goals.

A United Nations vehicle drives through the village of Alaimbala that was burnt to the ground during the recent civil unrest in Timor-Leste.  
Photo: UN Photo/Manne Preet





## International Court of Justice (ICJ)

The **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** is the judicial organ of the United Nations.

Also known as the World Court, the ICJ is unique because it only hears cases **between nations – not individuals, companies or other groups like in a regular court**. Nations cannot be forced to take their problems to the ICJ. However, once a nation agrees to allow the ICJ to discuss its case, it is obliged to adhere to the Court's decision, whether it wins or loses. Since 1947, the court has heard 136 cases.

### How does the ICJ work?

The Court has two functions:

1. to settle, according to international law, the legal disputes submitted to it by nations;
2. to give advisory opinions on legal questions asked by international agencies, specifically the UN General Assembly.

**International law is the body of rules that nations follow when dealing with one another.**

There are 15 judges from different nations on the ICJ. Only one judge of each nationality is permitted. These judges are experts in international law, and they make decisions about what nations should do when they have a dispute.

### Where is the ICJ?

You won't find the ICJ when you visit the UN in New York. That's because it is located in a city in the Netherlands called **The Hague**. The ICJ is the only one of the six main organs of the UN located outside of New York City.

The building that the ICJ is located in is called the **Peace Palace**. Every country in the world contributed something to it (building material, furniture, paintings and more), so it is truly an international building.



Jon Eliasson (left), Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Darfur, meets with the former traditional leader of the Fur Tribe in Nyala, Sudan.  
Photo: UN Photo/Foto Nov



Rwandan troops mount the guard during the commemoration of the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers at the Headquarters of the United Nations Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS) in Khartoum, Sudan.  
Photo: UN Photo/Foto Nov

## Decolonization and the UN

In 1945, when the UN was established, half the world's people lived in colonies that were being controlled by outside countries. Colonies were divided among a handful of major powers, including Great Britain, France and Portugal.

Through a process called decolonization, the UN has helped most of these countries become independent states. Today, more than 80 former colonies are now members themselves of the United Nations.

*Can you name some countries that were former colonies? What country used to rule them? Can you name some territories that are still dependent on other countries?*

## Special Tribunals

Because the ICJ only addresses disputes between two nations, it cannot bring charges against a state or individual(s) for their actions. Therefore, the UN has set up special tribunals who have the authority to investigate and, where appropriate, prosecute conflicts between peoples of the same nation or region that result in horrific acts. These special tribunals have the power to try individuals — both civilians and those serving in the government — who committed such atrocities as genocide and ethnic cleansing.

To date, two tribunals have been established by the Security Council:

### 1. International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

- This tribunal, located in The Hague, the Netherlands, tries government officials, generals and guerillas suspected of committing war crimes during the country's civil war in the 1990s.
- The tribunal covers Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Kosovo.
- One well-known criminal was Slobodan Milosevic.

### 2. International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

- Located in Tanzania, this tribunal tries government officials involved in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.
- Civilians complicit in the genocide are tried by local courts in Rwanda.

There are also courts in East Timor, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Cambodia supported by the international community.

## Trusteeship Council

When the UN was first established, there were some parts of the world that did not have independent governments. Some were operating under a **mandate**, a form of colonial rule set up after World War I by the League of Nations for Great Britain and France. Others were liberated from occupying countries after World War II. Many of these countries had little or no experience at governing themselves.

Once the UN was set up, these areas were called "Trust Territories" and were placed under its special protection. When the Trusteeship Council was formed, there were 11 Trust Territories, mostly in Africa and the Pacific Ocean.

Today, all of these Territories have attained self-government or independence, either as separate states or by joining neighboring independent countries.

The Trusteeship Council formally ceased operations in 1994, when the last territory, the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, now Palau, became independent. The Council will only meet if the need arises.



# Global Issues on the UN Agenda . . . . .

As you now know, the UN tackles five main topics worldwide:

1. **peace and security**
2. **economic and social development**
3. **human rights**
4. **humanitarian affairs**
5. **international law**

Some of the most important issues currently on the UN agenda are:

AIDS	Indigenous People
Climate Change	International Law
Disarmament	Iraq
Drugs and Crime	Outer Space
Education	Question of Palestine
Elections	Refugees
Energy	Science and Technology
Environment	Sustainable Development
Family	Terrorism
Food	Water
Health	Women
Human Rights	Youth

*\* Go to <http://www.un.org/issues/> to see a full list of issues. Choose one that interests you and click on its link. Why is the UN involved? In what ways is it trying to help? What countries are especially involved in the issue? How can you help too?*



Two children in a Bronx school solidifying their friendship with a spontaneous expression of mutual understanding.  
Photo: UN Photo/Melisa Winstanley



Young refugees are returning from Ntabila camp in the United Republic of Tanzania.  
Photo: UN Photo/Melisa Rizzuto



A helicopter and a ship's crew of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) prepare to take-off.  
Photo: UN Photo/Josée Amélie

## What has the UN Accomplished?

With the help of governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private businesses, the United Nations has played a key role in many global achievements during the last 50 years:

- **UN Peacekeeping** is a vital instrument for peace. Currently some 74,000 military personnel, provided by 117 countries, are engaged in 18 operations throughout the world.
- **UN environmental** conventions have helped reduce acid rain in Europe and North America, cut marine pollution worldwide and phased out production of gases destroying Earth's ozone layer.
- The UN and its agencies, such as the **UN Development Program**, along with other organizations like the **World Bank**, help poor countries develop their economies, providing more than \$30 billion in assistance each year.
- More **international law** has been developed through the UN in the past five decades than in all previous history.
- Every year, the lives of up to 3 million **children are saved by immunization**. UNICEF, WHO, the World Bank Group, private foundations, the pharmaceutical industry and governments have joined hands in a new initiative — the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization — that aims to reduce child death rates to zero.
- The **World Food Program** each year provides about one-third of the world's food aid.
- Air traffic is safer, thanks to the rules and regulations agreed on through the International Civil Aviation Organization.
- UN appeals raise more than \$1 billion per year for **emergency assistance** to victims of war and natural disaster.
- **Smallpox was eradicated** from the world due to a global campaign coordinated by **WHO**. Another WHO campaign has eliminated polio from the Americas and aims at eradicating it globally.

Three young women patients wait to check in for treatment under a tent in the compound of the Fistula Unit of Zangeneh Hospital in Sudan.  
Photo: UN Photo/Foto Niv





## The UN and Human Rights

Throughout its history, the UN has been concerned about the welfare of people around the world. **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, adopted unanimously in 1948 and translated into over 300 languages, is the best known and the most cited human rights document in the world.

It states that all people are born free and equal and should not be mistreated due to their political views, religion, gender, nationality or race. All people also have the right to adequate health and living standards and the right to an education.

- More than 80 international human rights principles have been created since 1948.
- The office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN official with principal responsibility for human rights activities, receives reports of over 200,000 violations per year.
- **The International Criminal Court** was established in 2002. By 2005, over 100 member states had joined in signing the treaty establishing the Court.

*It is important to remember that **a declaration is not the same as a law**. This means that the UN **cannot force** countries to protect these rights.*

Instead, when a country has ratified the Declaration, the UN has the right to monitor and report on human rights in that country. UN diplomats can put moral pressure on a country's representatives to respect the rights stated in the Declaration.

*\* Find a real-life example of a place where the UN has helped to ensure human rights are respected by visiting: <http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/briefing/rights/index.htm>*



Operation Lifeline Sudan helps about 2.5 million displaced people facing famine in the Sudan. A baby is being given oral rehydration solution by a nurse belonging to Doctors without Borders, a non-governmental organization based in Belgium. Photo: UN Photo/Eskinder Demse

# Appendix

## Glossary

**Ambassador** – a diplomatic official or representative of a country

**Charter** – a written contract defining the rights and responsibilities of an organization or group

**Consensus** – when a general agreement is reached among member states about a policy recommendation

**Convention** – an agreement between countries about basic principles or international conduct

**Diplomat** – a person who represents their country (also called a delegate) and negotiates with other delegates about important international issues

**Human Rights** – the basic rights and freedoms to which every human being is entitled

**International Law** – the body of rules that nations follow in dealing with one another

**Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)** – organizations that are not associated with the government of a specific country or international political organization. Their aims can be broad (e.g., Amnesty International, Greenpeace), or quite specific (Doctors Without Borders) in their activities and goals. They may influence policy, organize communities around special issues or provide medical or technical assistance. The UN works with NGOs on many international issues.

**Peacekeeping** – when people (both civilian and military) come between two hostile parties to help control and resolve a conflict

**Preventive Diplomacy** – steps taken by the UN to prevent international disputes from developing, growing or spreading to other countries

**Ratify** – the action taken when a country formally approves a treaty or convention

**Resolution** – a statement used to identify a position or recommend an action on a particular issue. UN resolutions have headings, perambulatory clauses and operative clauses.

**Sovereignty** – the idea that national government is the ultimate authority in policy decisions and national security

**Sustainable Development** – development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs

**Veto** – the power of a nation to vote “no” (reserved for the “Big Five” of the Security Council), making a resolution fail automatically



# Member States of the United Nations

Following is a list of the 192 member states, in alphabetical order, of the United Nations with dates on which they joined the organization.

## Member — (Date of Admission)

Afghanistan — (19 Nov. 1946)	Denmark — (24 Oct. 1945)
Albania — (14 Dec. 1955)	Djibouti — (20 Sep. 1977)
Algeria — (8 Oct. 1962)	Dominica — (18 Dec. 1978)
Andorra — (28 July 1993)	Dominican Republic — (24 Oct. 1945)
Angola — (1 Dec. 1976)	
Antigua and Barbuda — (11 Nov. 1981)	Ecuador — (21 Dec. 1945)
Argentina — (24 Oct. 1945)	Egypt — (24 Oct. 1945)
Armenia — (2 Mar. 1992)	El Salvador — (24 Oct. 1945)
Australia — (1 Nov. 1945)	Equatorial Guinea — (12 Nov. 1968)
Austria — (14 Dec. 1955)	Eritrea — (28 May 1993)
Azerbaijan — (2 Mar. 1992)	Estonia — (17 Sep. 1991)
	Ethiopia — (13 Nov. 1945)
Bahamas — (18 Sep. 1973)	
Bahrain — (21 Sep. 1971)	Fiji — (13 Oct. 1970)
Bangladesh — (17 Sep. 1974)	Finland — (14 Dec. 1955)
Barbados — (9 Dec. 1966)	France — (24 Oct. 1945)
Belarus — (24 Oct. 1945)	
Belgium — (27 Dec. 1945)	Gabon — (20 Sep. 1960)
Belize — (25 Sep. 1981)	Gambia — (21 Sep. 1965)
Benin — (20 Sep. 1960)	Georgia — (31 July 1992)
Bhutan — (21 Sep. 1971)	Germany — (18 Sep. 1973)
Bolivia — (14 Nov. 1945)	Ghana — (8 Mar. 1957)
Bosnia and Herzegovina — (22 May 1992)	Greece — (25 Oct. 1945)
Botswana — (17 Oct. 1966)	Grenada — (17 Sep. 1974)
Brazil — (24 Oct. 1945)	Guatemala — (21 Nov. 1945)
Brunei Darussalam — (21 Sep. 1984)	Guinea — (12 Dec. 1958)
Bulgaria — (14 Dec. 1955)	Guinea-Bissau — (17 Sep. 1974)
Burkina Faso — (20 Sep. 1960)	Guyana — (20 Sep. 1966)
Burundi — (18 Sep. 1962)	
	Haiti — (24 Oct. 1945)
Cambodia — (14 Dec. 1955)	Honduras — (17 Dec. 1945)
Cameroon — (20 Sep. 1960)	Hungary — (14 Dec. 1955)
Canada — (9 Nov. 1945)	
Cape Verde — (16 Sep. 1975)	Iceland — (19 Nov. 1946)
Central African Republic — (20 Sep. 1960)	India — (30 Oct. 1945)
Chad — (20 Sep. 1960)	Indonesia — (28 Sep. 1950)
Chile — (24 Oct. 1945)	Iran (Islamic Republic of) — (24 Oct. 1945)
China — (24 Oct. 1945)	Iraq — (21 Dec. 1945)
Colombia — (5 Nov. 1945)	Ireland — (14 Dec. 1955)
Comoros — (12 Nov. 1975)	Israel — (11 May 1949)
Congo — (20 Sep. 1960)	Italy — (14 Dec. 1955)
Costa Rica — (2 Nov. 1945)	
Côte d'Ivoire — (20 Sep. 1960)	Jamaica — (18 Sep. 1962)
Croatia — (22 May 1992)	Japan — (18 Dec. 1956)
Cuba — (24 Oct. 1945)	Jordan — (14 Dec. 1955)
Cyprus — (20 Sep. 1960)	
Czech Republic — (19 Jan. 1993)	Kazakhstan — (2 Mar. 1992)
Democratic People's Republic of Korea — (17 Sep. 1991)	Kenya — (16 Dec. 1963)
Democratic Republic of the Congo — (20 Sep. 1960)	Kiribati — (14 Sept. 1999)
	Kuwait — (14 May 1963)
	Kyrgyzstan — (2 Mar. 1992)

Lao People's Democratic Republic — (14 Dec. 1955)  
 Latvia — (17 Sep. 1991)  
 Lebanon — (24 Oct. 1945)  
 Lesotho — (17 Oct. 1966)  
 Liberia — (2 Nov. 1945)  
 Libyan Arab Jamahiriya — (14 Dec. 1955)  
 Liechtenstein — (18 Sep. 1990)  
 Lithuania — (17 Sep. 1991)  
 Luxembourg — (24 Oct. 1945)  
 Madagascar — (20 Sep. 1960)  
 Malawi — (1 Dec. 1964)  
 Malaysia — (17 Sep. 1957)  
 Maldives — (21 Sep. 1965)  
 Mali — (28 Sep. 1960)  
 Malta — (1 Dec. 1964)  
 Marshall Islands — (17 Sep. 1991)  
 Mauritania — (27 Oct. 1961)  
 Mauritius — (24 Apr. 1968)  
 Mexico — (7 Nov. 1945)  
 Micronesia — (17 Sep. 1991)  
 Monaco — (28 May 1993)  
 Mongolia — (27 Oct. 1961)  
 Montenegro — (28 June 2006)  
 Morocco — (12 Nov. 1956)  
 Mozambique — (16 Sep. 1975)  
 Myanmar — (19 Apr. 1948)  
  
 Namibia — (23 Apr. 1990)  
 Nauru — (14 Sept. 1999)  
 Nepal — (14 Dec. 1955)  
 Netherlands — (10 Dec. 1945)  
 New Zealand — (24 Oct. 1945)  
 Nicaragua — (24 Oct. 1945)  
 Niger — (20 Sep. 1960)  
 Nigeria — (7 Oct. 1960)  
 Norway — (27 Nov. 1945)  
  
 Oman — (7 Oct. 1971)  
  
 Pakistan — (30 Sep. 1947)  
 Palau — (15 Dec. 1994)  
 Panama — (13 Nov. 1945)  
 Papua New Guinea — (10 Oct. 1975)  
 Paraguay — (24 Oct. 1945)  
 Peru — (31 Oct. 1945)  
 Philippines — (24 Oct. 1945)  
 Poland — (24 Oct. 1945)  
 Portugal — (14 Dec. 1955)  
  
 Qatar — (21 Sep. 1971)  
  
 Republic of Korea — (17 Sep. 1991)  
 Republic of Moldova — (2 Mar. 1992)  
 Romania — (14 Dec. 1955)  
 Russian Federation — (24 Oct. 1945)  
 Rwanda — (18 Sep. 1962)  
  
 Saint Kitts and Nevis — (23 Sep. 1983)  
 Saint Lucia — (18 Sep. 1979)  
 Saint Vincent and the Grenadines — (16 Sep. 1980)  
 Samoa — (15 Dec. 1976)  
 San Marino — (2 Mar. 1992)  
 Sao Tome and Principe — (16 Sep. 1975)  
 Saudi Arabia — (24 Oct. 1945)  
 Senegal — (28 Sep. 1960)  
 Serbia — (1 Nov. 2000)  
 Seychelles — (21 Sep. 1976)  
 Sierra Leone — (27 Sep. 1961)  
 Singapore — (21 Sep. 1965)  
 Slovakia — (19 Jan. 1993)  
 Slovenia — (22 May 1992)  
 Solomon Islands — (19 Sep. 1978)  
 Somalia — (20 Sep. 1960)  
 South Africa — (7 Nov. 1945)  
 Spain — (14 Dec. 1955)  
 Sri Lanka — (14 Dec. 1955)  
 Sudan — (12 Nov. 1956)  
 Suriname — (4 Dec. 1975)  
 Swaziland — (24 Sep. 1968)  
 Sweden — (19 Nov. 1946)  
 Switzerland — (10 Sep. 2002)  
 Syrian Arab Republic — (24 Oct. 1945)  
  
 Tajikistan — (2 Mar. 1992)  
 Thailand — (16 Dec. 1946)  
 The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia — (8 Apr. 1993)  
 Timor-Leste — (27 Sep. 2002)  
 Togo — (20 Sep. 1960)  
 Tonga — (14 Sep. 1999)  
 Trinidad and Tobago — (18 Sep. 1962)  
 Tunisia — (12 Nov. 1956)  
 Turkey — (24 Oct. 1945)  
 Turkmenistan — (2 Mar. 1992)  
 Tuvalu — (5 Sept. 2000)  
  
 Uganda — (25 Oct. 1962)  
 Ukraine — (24 Oct. 1945)  
 United Arab Emirates — (9 Dec. 1971)  
 United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland — (24 Oct. 1945)  
 United Republic of Tanzania — (14 Dec. 1961)  
 United States of America — (24 Oct. 1945)  
 Uruguay — (18 Dec. 1945)  
 Uzbekistan — (2 Mar. 1992)  
  
 Vanuatu — (15 Sep. 1981)  
 Venezuela — (15 Nov. 1945)  
 Viet Nam — (20 Sep. 1977)  
  
 Yemen — (30 Sep. 1947)  
  
 Zambia — (1 Dec. 1964)  
 Zimbabwe — (25 Aug. 1980)



## Growth in UN Membership, 1945-2006

Year	Number	Member States
1945	Original 51	Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Belarus, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, France, Greece, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, India, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Liberia, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, USSR (now Russian Federation), Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela, Yugoslavia
1946	55	Afghanistan, Iceland, Sweden, Thailand
1947	57	Pakistan, Yemen
1948	58	Myanmar (formerly Burma)
1949	59	Israel
1950	60	Indonesia
1955	76	Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Nepal, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sri Lanka
1956	80	Japan, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia
1957	82	Ghana, Malaysia
1958	83	Guinea
1960	99	Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Togo
1961	104	Mauritania, Mongolia, Sierra Leone, United Republic of Tanzania
1962	110	Algeria, Burundi, Jamaica, Rwanda, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda
1963	112	Kenya, Kuwait
1964	115	Malawi, Malta, Zambia
1965	117	Gambia, Maldives, Singapore
1966	122	Barbados, Botswana, Guyana, Lesotho
1967	123	Democratic Yemen
1968	126	Equatorial Guinea, Mauritius, Swaziland
1970	127	Fiji
1971	132	Bahrain, Bhutan, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates
1973	135	Bahamas, Federal Republic of Germany, German Democratic Republic
1974	138	Bangladesh, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau

Year	Number	Member States
1975	144	Cape Verde, Comoros, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe, Suriname
1976	147	Angola, Samoa, Seychelles
1977	149	Djibouti, Viet Nam
1978	151	Dominica, Solomon Islands
1979	152	Saint Lucia
1980	154	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Zimbabwe
1981	157	Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Vanuatu
1983	158	Saint Kitts and Nevis
1984	159	Brunei Darussalam
1990	159	Liechtenstein, Namibia
1991	166	Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Estonia, Federated States of Micronesia, Latvia, Lithuania, Marshall Islands, Republic of Korea
1992	179	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, San Marino, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
1993	184	Andorra, Czech Republic, Eritrea, Monaco, Slovak Republic, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
1994	185	Palau
1999	188	Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga
2000	189	Tuvalu, Serbia (formerly Yugoslavia)
2002	191	Switzerland, Timor-Leste
2006	192	Montenegro

\* There are also currently 17 Permanent Observer missions to the United Nations.

Although they are not countries, these groups are important enough in international diplomacy to have a presence at the UN. However, Permanent Observer missions do not have any voting power. These include:

**Non-member state:** The Holy See (The Vatican)

**Entity:** Palestine

**Intergovernmental Organizations:** African Union, Commonwealth, European Community, INTERPOL, League of Arab states, Organization of the Islamic Conference, and many more.



# Test Yourself! .....

Now that you have learned all about the United Nations, let's review some of the most important points about the United Nations that a good diplomat should know. Fill in the blank spaces. Answers are found on page 25.

## Question #1: What is the UN?

- a. The United Nations is made up of \_\_\_\_\_ countries from around the world. It is better known by its acronym, the UN.
- b. The UN was established in 1945, after the Second World War. Its primary purpose was to \_\_\_\_\_.
- c. The document that sets forth all the rights and responsibilities of the United Nations is called a \_\_\_\_\_.
- d. The UN Charter is considered an \_\_\_\_\_ treaty and the original copy of the Charter is housed at the \_\_\_\_\_ in Washington, D.C.
- 4. Describe the United Nations logo. \_\_\_\_\_

## Question #2: Where is it based?

- a. The United Nations' headquarters is located in \_\_\_\_\_.
- b. But the land and buildings do not belong to the USA. The UN buildings are considered \_\_\_\_\_; this means that they belong to every country that is part of the UN.

## Question #3: What does The United Nations do?

The UN works for world peace and development in many different ways.

- a. It organizes \_\_\_\_\_ forces for trouble-spots around the world, such as Kosovo or in Africa.
- b. The \_\_\_\_\_ addresses economic and social issues.
- c. The \_\_\_\_\_ is a UN agency that specializes in international health issues.

## Question #4: A Global Game Plan to Reduce Poverty, Hunger and Disease

- a. In 2000, the UN established the \_\_\_\_\_ Goals, whose primary purpose was to \_\_\_\_\_.
- b. Name three goals identified in the UN Millennium Development Goals. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. In what year does the UN hope to meet the Millennium Development Goals? \_\_\_\_\_

### Question #5: Who's in charge?

- a. The head of the UN is called the \_\_\_\_\_.
- b. The current Secretary-General is \_\_\_\_\_, from the Republic of Korea. He is the eighth UN Secretary-General.

### Question #6: What is a resolution?

- a. Representatives of each member country meet in the \_\_\_\_\_; this is the closest thing to a world parliament.
- b. Each country has \_\_\_\_\_ vote. Resolutions pass when a majority of the member states vote in favor.
- c. Major decisions about important issues, like who can join the UN, need the support of two-\_\_\_\_\_ of the Assembly. Less important decisions need the support of over one-half of the Assembly.
- d. The Assembly's decisions are not \_\_\_\_\_. Governments follow resolutions because they represent the world's opinion on major international issues.

### Question #7: What is the Security Council?

- a. The \_\_\_\_\_ members of the UN Security Council try to keep the world a peaceful and secure place. They vote on the best ways to prevent countries from fighting. There are two groups of members.
- b. **Five permanent members:** These countries are always on the council because they had a vital role in establishing the United Nations in 1945. Name them:
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Ten temporary members: These members are voted for every \_\_\_\_\_ years by the rest of the UN.
- d. The rules for voting:
  - 1. One member, \_\_\_\_\_ vote.
  - 2. Each of the five permanent members can stop the UN from making decisions with which they disagree. This is called the power of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - 3. Nine votes in favor are needed to make a decision.
  - 4. Five of the nine votes must come from permanent members.

### Question #8: What is UNICEF?

- a. UNICEF stands for the United Nations \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. It looks after the needs of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in developing countries around the world.
- It works with local communities and governments in more than 160 countries to help every child reach their full potential.
- UNICEF was created in December 1946 by the United Nations.



## Answers

- 1a. 192
- 1b. maintain peace and security in the world.
- 1c. Charter
- 1d. international; National Archives
- 1e. The United Nations logo shows a map of the world encircled by the “olive branches of peace.”
  
- 2a. New York City.
- 2b. international
  
- 3a. peacekeeping
- 3b. The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
- 3c. The World Health Organization (WHO)
  
- 4a. Development Millennium
- 4b. eradicate and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; develop a global partnership for development.
- 4c. 2015
  
- 5a. Secretary-General
- 5b. Ban Ki-moon of the Republic of Korea
  
- 6a. General Assembly
- 6b. one
- 6c. thirds
- 6d. binding
  
- 7a. 15
- 7b. People’s Republic of China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the U.S.
- 7c. two
- 7d(1) one; (2) veto
  
- 8a. Children’s Fund
- 8b. children and mothers



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