



THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations is a global organization that was founded in 1945 after World War II. As the largest IGO in the world, its original purpose was to prevent a third World War. However, over its 68 years of existence the UN has greatly impacted the world across a myriad of other subjects as well. Many issues transcend national borders, so the UN is often a vital tool in the solution. The Charter of the United Nations lays out four express purposes for the organization:

1. To maintain international peace and security;
2. To develop friendly relations among nations;
3. To help nations work together to solve economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems, and to standardize the universal respect for human rights around the world; and
4. To be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations to achieve these goals.

GENESIS

The grandfather of the United Nations is Woodrow Wilson, who helped to establish the League of Nations at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. The goal of the organization was to prevent another conflict like World War I. However, numerous shortcomings that culminated in the outbreak of the Second World War rendered the League of Nations obsolete. The world needed a more effective platform for global dialogue.

A series of agreements and events between 1943 and 1945 preceded the establishment of the United Nations: the London Declaration, the Atlantic Charter, the Moscow and Tehran conferences, and the Yalta conference, *inter alia*. The Allied powers hoped to emerge victorious, and create a world where “men in all lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want.” In June of 1945, 50 countries signed the United Nations Charter in San Francisco. Four months later on October 24th, 51 countries ratified the charter. And so the United Nations was born.

STRUCTURE

The UN is headquartered on international territory within New York City, but has offices all over the world. Since its inception, the United Nations has grown from 51 member-states to 193. Because of the sheer size and scope of the organization, Chapter III of the United Nations Charter necessarily divides the UN into six principal “organs.”

The **General Assembly (UNGA)** is the main deliberative body of the UN in which all 193 member-states take part. Several powers are reserved to the UNGA Plenary alone, including the authority to admit or deny new members to the UN, to elect the judges of the International Court of Justice, and to elect the non-permanent members of the Security Council. The **Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** debates policies and coordinates activities in the economic and social spheres. The **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** settles legal disputes between nations and advises other UN organs on legal matters. The **Security Council (UNSC)** is responsible for preserving international peace, stability, and security. The **Trusteeship Council** is tasked with preparing UN trust territories for self-governance and independence (currently inactive). The **Secretariat** provides administrative and executive assistance to the other organs, and carries out the day-to-day activities of the UN. The working languages of the Secretariat are English and French, but translations are provided for all six of the official UN languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish.

Aside from the six principal organs, the UN also sponsors a plethora of agencies, programs, funds, subsidiary bodies, and affiliated organizations that each support the maintenance and progress of the international order in some way. Just a few of them are listed here: Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO); Peacebuilding Commission (PBC); Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); Children’s Fund (UNICEF); Population Fund (UNFPA); The Refugee Agency (UNHCR); World Food Program (WFP); Food



and Agricultural Organization (FAO); World Health Organization (WHO); International Labour Organization (ILO); International Monetary Fund (IMF); World Trade Organization (WTO); World Bank Group (World Bank); International Telecommunication Union (ITU); World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO); International Maritime Organization (IMO); International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO); Universal Postal Union (UPU).

CORE DOCUMENTS

The United Nations has been at the heart of a great many seminal agreements. These compromise not only treaties, but also famous declarations and conventions. Three that every delegate should be familiar with are the United Nations Charter, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Millennium Development Goals.

The **Charter of the United Nations** is to the UN as the U.S. Constitution is to the United States of America. It establishes the basic structure of the UN, lays out its core purposes, describes its functions, and provides for the operations of its principal organs. *All delegates should be intimately familiar with the Preamble, Chapters I-III, Chapter XVI, and Chapter XVIII. Delegates should also be familiar with any other chapters that are relevant to their committee. In addition, ICJ delegates should peruse the Statue of the International Court of Justice, which is annexed to the UN Charter.*

The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** remains one of the most important documents the United Nations has ever produced. It states that all people are equally entitled to certain inalienable rights, and that human rights should be protected by the rule of law. All UN Member States are obligated to cooperate with the UN in pursuit of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms. This is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations, justice, peace, social progress, and better standards of life in larger freedom. The UDHR, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights comprise the International Bill of Rights. *All delegates should be intimately familiar with the entirety of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.*

The **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** are a broad program of development that serves to energize and focus the efforts of the international community. The Millennium Declaration established the eight goals in 2000, with the hope of achieving them by 2015. The goals aim to eradicate worldwide issues such as illiteracy, gender inequality, and extreme poverty, *inter alia*. Although the MDGs will most likely not be met by the target year, the program has still created tangible progress in many countries. Several follow-up evaluations have been conducted on the MDGs, including the 2005 World Summit and the MDG Summit 2010. *All delegates should be intimately familiar with the eight MDGs and their respective targets.*

There are a multitude of other important agreements and documents that rest within the United Nations system. Just a few of them are listed here: the Geneva Conventions, which dictate humanitarian treatment in war; the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons; the Law of the Sea Conventions, which define maritime boundaries and natural resource ownership; the Earth Charter, which links ecologically sustainable development with human rights and democratic peace; the UN Global Compact, which reconciles globalized commerce and private business with human rights, environmental protection, and ethical transparency; and the 2003 Human Security Now report, which represents the idea of people-centered security, including the importance of public health.

CRITICISM

The United Nations is uniquely positioned to facilitate human progress, which it has done so with astounding vigor over the 68 years of its existence. However, it is not so unique as to be free from failure. Criticisms include inefficiency, waste, corruption, antiquated representation, inaction, and impotency, *inter alia*.



A basic critique endemic to organizations everywhere is the accusation of bureaucratic inefficiency and waste. This is indeed a problem, as an estimated 90% of aid to Iraq following the Iraq War was lost to bureaucratic inefficiency, e.g. too many layers of administration. Likewise, the UN has been accused of corruption from time to time, e.g. the “oil-for-food” scandal. In a different vein, biased representation is a well-known issue; the UN itself has called for reform of the Security Council, whose representation is skewed in favor of the great power victors of World War II (the “P5”). Similarly, the institutional structure of the UN has also been accused of permitting obstructionism, which has led to a number of infamous security failures, e.g. the Rwandan genocide. Again, this is most obvious in the Security Council, where Russia and China (P5 members) frequently veto any form of humanitarian intervention. However, the UN as a whole suffers from the problem of impotent enforcement. Only Security Council resolutions are binding, and so most other organs rely on the cooperation of member states in order to function.

This has made reform difficult, as those states on which the UN is most dependent for financial contributions (e.g. United States) and legitimacy (e.g. US-China-Russia) are the very same states that stand to lose the most from reform. The institutional structure of the United Nations needs to be reformed for the sake of managerial integrity, equitable representation, efficient decision-making, and effective enforcement.

THE UN TODAY

The United Nations has been evolving to fit the international needs of humanity since 1945. The goals of the UN have evolved from simply the prevention of WWII to the universal protection of human rights, global social & economic progress, and the maintenance of international political stability. As a delegate of your country to the UN, you will attempt to solve these issues – among others – while staying true to the core values of the United Nations.

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