Introduction to the UN System: Orientation for Serving on a UN Field Mission

Course Author
Mr. Julian Harston, Assistant Secretary-General to the United Nations (Retired)

Series Editor
Harvey J. Langholtz, Ph.D.
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Welcome to this course, which will introduce you to the United Nations and its role in international peace and security. I’ve been in the business of peace and security and diplomacy most of my working life, and I really don’t remember a moment when the world faced such problems as it does today.

In order to meet the unique obligations placed on it by the world community, the United Nations needs people, both civilian and military, to work in the field around the world. It needs people, civilian and military, who understand the United Nations – its history and its activities, both past and present. Activities which make it a vital part of the process of mitigating and even from time to time solving some of the world’s greatest challenges.

The United Nations is not easy. It is a complex organization made up of many different parts which are independent but are expected to work together in the integrated operations which now form the largest part of what we do. What we must do together as you follow this course is equip you with some of the knowledge and background information that you will need in order to become a valuable member of a UN team.

The breadth of activities now carried out by integrated missions in the field require not just military and police and the more traditional civilian political and administrative components, but now include civil affairs, humanitarian work, communications, elections, security sector reform, rule of law, gender affairs, and a wide variety of peacebuilding and development activities. When I was serving in UNTAES, the mission in Eastern Slavonia in the former Yugoslavia, I had colleagues who were running the railways, who were running the sewage systems, who were running most of the government in that small place – a multitude of activities. The question of whether UN peace operations can take on more has to been seen in the fact that there are so few global alternatives. Of all the world’s organizations, the UN is least able to turn its back on people most in need of safety and security.

In 2000, the Brahimi Report called on the leaders of the world to “renew their commitment to the ideals of the United Nations, to commit as well as to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations to fully accomplish the mission which is, indeed, its very raison d’être: to help communities engulfed in strife and to maintain or restore peace.” Today, as the United Nations celebrates its 70th anniversary in the year 2015, this call to action remains relevant and imperative. As observed by Mr. Brahimi himself: “peacekeeping shall continue to be in high demand.”

—Mr. Julian Harston, 2015.
Method of Study

This self-paced course aims to give students flexibility in their approach to learning. The following steps are meant to provide motivation and guidance about some possible strategies and minimum expectations for completing this course successfully:

• Before you begin studying, first browse through the entire course material. Notice the lesson and section titles to get an overall idea of what will be involved as you proceed.

• The material is meant to be relevant and practical. Instead of memorizing individual details, strive to understand concepts and overall perspectives in regard to the United Nations system.

• Set personal guidelines and benchmarks regarding how you want to schedule your time.

• Study the lesson content and the learning objectives. At the beginning of each lesson, orient yourself to the main points. If possible, read the material twice to ensure maximum understanding and retention, and let time elapse between readings.

• At the end of each lesson, take the Practice Quiz. Clarify any missed questions by re-reading the appropriate sections, and focus on retaining the correct information.

• After you complete all of the lessons, prepare for the End-of-Course Examination by taking time to review the main points of each lesson. Then, when ready, log into your online student classroom and take the End-of-Course Examination in one sitting.

» Access your online classroom at
<www.peaceopstraining.org/users/user_login>
from virtually anywhere in the world.

• Your exam will be scored electronically. If you achieve a passing grade of 75 per cent or higher on the exam, you will be awarded a Certificate of Completion. If you score below 75 per cent, you will be given one opportunity to take a second version of the End-of-Course Examination.

• A note about language: This course uses English spelling according to the standards of the Oxford English Dictionary (United Kingdom) and the United Nations Editorial Manual.

Key Features of Your Online Classroom »

• Access to all of your courses;
• A secure testing environment in which to complete your training;
• Access to additional training resources, including multimedia course supplements;
• The ability to download your Certificate of Completion for any completed course; and
• Forums where you can discuss relevant topics with the POTI community.
In this lesson » Lesson Objectives  »

PEACE OPERATIONS TRAINING INSTITUTE
INTRODUCTION TO THE UN SYSTEM: ORIENTATION FOR SERVING ON A UN FIELD MISSION
LESSON

In order to understand the United Nations and its field operations, it is necessary to have an awareness of the institutions that comprise the Organization, its general principles, and its structure.

In this lesson »

- Section 1.1 The Founding of the United Nations and its Charter
- Section 1.2 Purposes and Principles of the United Nations
- Section 1.3 Legal Framework and Authority
- Section 1.4 Financial Principles and Budget of the United Nations
- Section 1.5 The United Nations System
- Section 1.6 Measurable Global Impact

Lesson Objectives »

- Explain the reasons for founding the United Nations.
- Describe the purposes and principles of the United Nations.
- Recognize the contents of the Charter of the United Nations, its founding document.
- Be aware of the legal framework for a peace operation, as well as basic financial guidelines.
- Identify the main bodies of the UN system.
- Consider the extensive reach of the UN’s impact on global development, both historically and presently.
By the end of this lesson, the student should be able to conceptualize the overall framework of the UN, as well as the basic principles that guide its global effort to maintain international peace and security.

Although some of the legal and financial principles are complicated, the student should strive to develop an understanding of the fundamentals.

The lesson will also explore interrelations between various agencies, programmes, funds, and other bodies, while also highlighting the UN’s practical work in the field and its historic impact on global human development.
Section 1.1 The Founding of the United Nations and its Charter

History

The United Nations was established in the shadow of two global conflicts with the major purpose of preventing the repeated tragedy. “To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”\(^1\) is expressly stated in the Organization’s founding document, the UN Charter. This ideal has guided the United Nations since its founding in 1945 and carries it forward to face the challenges of the 21\(^{st}\) Century.

In the aftermath of the First World War, a predecessor to the UN, the League of Nations, was established. Its primary goals included preventing future wars through collective security, disarmament, and settling disputes diplomatically through negotiation and arbitration. The League was fatally weakened by the reluctance of the United States to join and was unable to take action in the face of Italian aggression in Africa. Consequently, the League also failed to avert the Second World War.

Thus, the United Nations was brought into being through successive meetings and conferences among the Allied states, the victors of the Second World War. Between 1941 and 1944, a series of conferences were held where the Allies discussed the establishment of an international organization to maintain international peace and security.

Although many crucial questions were resolved at the Yalta Conference in 1944, it was not until the San Francisco Conference in April 1945, with the participation of 50 states, that the UN Charter was officially drafted.

As originally envisioned, the majority of the United Nations’ power would rest with these Allied nations, and they became the five major powers sitting permanently on the Security Council: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. However, during the United Nations Conference on International Organization (UNCIO) in San Francisco, the smaller states successfully argued for stronger roles through the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, and the International Court of Justice. As a result, the Charter was broadened, and these nations, now more truly “united”, were empowered to act in economic and social areas as well. At the conclusion of UNCIO on 26 June 1945, the Charter was signed by all participating nations and came into force 24 October 1945. The Charter was ratified by the present five permanent members of the Security Council and by a majority of the signatory Member States.

Aims

The United Nations Charter was, and still is, a bold prescription for maintaining international peace and security and promoting economic and social development. The founders were guided by the trauma of two world wars, the suffering of mankind, and a deep longing for lasting peace based on equality, dignity, and social and economic progress. Other themes throughout the document are peace, human rights, freedom, sovereignty, and respect for treaties and international law, all of which are to be achieved through tolerance, maintenance of international peace and security, and the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all people. The Charter presents the purposes and principles of the United Nations and sets out the structure of the United Nations, as well as the interrelations, principles, and rules forming its institutional framework. It begins with an inspiring Preamble, which expresses the

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aims and ideals of the United Nations and ends with a formal declaration by all the signatory States agreeing to the Charter and the establishment of an organization “to be known as the United Nations.”

One of the key differences from the Covenant of the League of Nations was the consideration of collective security. The UN Charter maintains that Member States were to place armed forces at the disposal of the Security Council toward the task of preventing war and suppressing acts of aggression, as stated in Article 43. The Statute of the International Court of Justice in Chapter XIV is a distinguishing part of the UN Charter as well, as it established the International Court of Justice, the official judicial body of the United Nations. This “World Court” as it is sometimes referred to is unique because of its function to hear disputes between states.

Contents of the Charter

The Preamble is followed by 19 chapters, or 111 articles. The Chapters address four major areas: peace and security; economic and social issues; the trusteeship system; and the judicial organs. The articles describe the functions, rules, and procedures of the six principal organs, of which the General Assembly can be considered as the principal legislative organ and the Secretariat as the executive body. The Charter ends with Provisional Rules (among others, the privileges and immunities of United Nations officials), Transitional Arrangements (needed at the end of World War II), Amendments, and the Ratification and Signature.

Knowledge about the Charter is a prerequisite for understanding decision-making in international affairs, the interrelationship between Member States and the United Nations, as well as the relations between the Organization’s various entities. The United Nations family of organizations – known as the UN system – is complex, as it tries to address almost all global areas of political, economic, and social activity. The “system” consists of six principal organs, their subsidiary bodies, programmes and funds, research and training institutes, functional and regional commissions, expert and ad hoc bodies, as well as 15 specialized agencies, trust funds, secretariats of conventions, and other related organizations.

In addition, there is a large number of other international, governmental, non-governmental, and civil society organizations which are in some way linked to the UN system. All of those actors, together with other entities outside the system that are concerned with international issues, constitute what is generally called the international community.

Section 1.2 Purposes and Principles of the United Nations

Purposes

According to the Charter, the UN has four purposes:

1. To maintain international peace and security;
2. To develop friendly relations among nations;
3. To cooperate in solving international problems and in promoting respect for human rights;
4. To be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations.

Articles 1 and 2 are the most important articles of the Charter because they describe the overall objectives and principles of the United Nations. Article 1 sets out the primary purposes of the United Nations by authorizing the Organization to maintain international peace and security by the following actions:

“To take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of peace, and to bring by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of peace.”
The article also mandates the Organization to develop friendly relations among nations and to achieve international cooperation in addressing economic, social, and cultural matters, and to address fundamental rights issues concerning groups and individuals. The United Nations is to bring the family of nations together to achieve these common ends.

**Principles**

According to the Charter, the UN has seven Principles:

1. Sovereign equality of all Member States;
2. All Member States should fulfil obligations in accordance with the Charter;
3. Peaceful settlement of international disputes;
4. No threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state;
5. All Members shall assist the UN in any action taken in accordance with the Charter;
6. Non-Member States should act in accordance with these Principles related to the maintenance of international peace and security;
7. Non-interference in internal affairs.

Article 2 stipulates the principles behind the United Nations’ and the Member States’ actions in pursuit of the purposes of Article 1. The Article is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all Member States that fulfil in good faith their obligations to the Charter. States are to refrain from the threat or use of force against any other State, and international disputes are to be settled by peaceful means without endangering peace, security, or justice. Members shall give the United Nations every assistance in any action it takes in accordance with the Charter and shall not assist States against which the United Nations is taking preventive or enforcement action.

However, it should be stressed that traditionally these two articles have been secondary to the principles of sovereignty and non-interference or non-intervention in domestic affairs. Article 2.7 states that “nothing in the Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essential within the domestic jurisdiction of any state.” This principle is, however, not immune to the application of enforcement measures when authorized by the Security Council. The call for the unambiguous protection of humanity and human rights has since spurred the international community to act collectively and not always with the consent of the states concerned. In this way, the principles surrounding Right to Protect (R2P) are gaining more traction in recent times as an ethical argument for the justification of interference with a domestic situation, but this is not without controversy and struggle to interpret effective practice.\(^3\) This will be discussed further later in the lesson.

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Experiences

The architects of the United Nations envisioned a framework for relations between states, which would act through cooperation instead of force as a means of achieving foreign policy goals or settling conflicts. National sovereignty, non-intervention in the internal affairs of a Member State, and the prohibition of the use of force in international relations are some of the Charter’s fundamental principles. The United Nations Charter permits a departure from these principles only when action is necessary to prevent a threat to intentional peace or to restore peace. The Charter calls on the Organization to assist in the settlement of international disputes and in maintaining international peace and security. This is the primary responsibility of the UN Security Council, which may, in fulfilling its duties, adopt a range of measures as provided for in Chapter VI (Pacific Settlements of Disputes), Chapter VII (Action with Respect to Peace), and Chapter VIII (Regional Arrangements).

Despite the Charter’s establishment of a framework for relations between states, the purposes and the principles of the United Nations were constantly challenged during the Cold War era. Those years witnessed competition between the superpowers, and their exercise of veto power in the Security Council significantly hampered the effective discharge of responsibilities by the United Nations’ chief security organ – the Security Council. The circumstances became an everyday political reality, and to a certain extent, this inertia carried over from the Security Council to the rest of the UN system.

With the end of the Cold War and the easing of superpower rivalries and tensions, the Charter’s relevance to the contemporary political environment improved. On the other hand, the end of the Cold War and the years to follow witnessed conflicts of more internal character, where states’ functions failed, did not exist, or were very limited, and consequently, the fundamental rights of the individuals became increasingly abused. The tragic events of 11 September 2001 in the United States, the issue of international terrorism, and the military and non-military aspects of security have further complicated the general perception of the UN’s role in maintaining international peace and security.

Because the Security Council is still grounded by the hegemonic powers of the World War era, some have questioned the relevance of the council structure for today’s world. Critics have pointed out that while the permanent five once spoke for 40 percent of the world’s population, these days they speak for only about 29 percent.4 This change can be explained by factors such as, at the time of the UN’s founding in 1945, only three African nations participated. Now there are more than 50 Member States from the African continent, yet none with veto power.5 Divisions in the Council and its paralysis in times of danger strengthen the arguments for reforms to its composition to better reflect the reality of the world in the present day.

Intervention and Use of Force

Following the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, war crimes, and crimes against humanity committed in other internal conflicts, one of the Charter’s fundamental principles, “not to intervene in matters which are essential within the domestic jurisdiction of any state,” has come under scrutiny. In 2005, the UN General Assembly and the Security Council adopted respective resolutions on R2P, which stipulate

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that in cases of the worst atrocities against civilian populations, the UN has not only the right, but the obligation to intervene. It is important to emphasize, however, that even in such cases, the intervention must be authorized by the Security Council in order to be legal. The application of R2P in practice has been highly controversial following the military intervention in Libya in 2011. This was the first case that the UN Security Council authorized military intervention citing R2P. Controversy ensued over the conduct and objectives of NATO military intervention in Libya, with the consequences of a high number of civilian casualties and regime change. India’s UN Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri has been quoted as saying that: “Libya has given R2P a bad name.” Consequently, the Security Council has been divided over the application of R2P in the case of the Syrian Civil War. The development of an intervention norm, in favour of protecting civilians from the worst abuses, has no doubt challenged the expectations of the international community.

Article 2.4 of the UN Charter defines that the use of force is legal only in two instances: in self-defence or when authorized by the Security Council. Practical application and interpretation of this principle has been controversial. Some say that this Charter principle was challenged during the NATO military intervention against Serbia and Montenegro in 1999 and also during the US-led coalition military invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The invasion of Iraq by the United States and its allies in 2003 was strongly opposed by a large number of Member States who argued that invading the country was not justified in the context of the UN report of 12 February 2003 by the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and that it was not in accordance with the aims and principles of the UN Charter. Consequently, the Security Council did not agree to authorize military action taken by the United States and the United Kingdom. However, some have argued that specific interpretations of UN Security Council Resolution 1441 (2002) did provide the legal justification for military action. This uneven disagreement continues to fuel tension among the members of the Council.

Section 1.3 Legal Framework and Authority

The ratification of the Charter by the five major allies – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States – and by a majority of the other signatory states provides the basis for its constituent authority.

The United Nations is an international body subject to international laws, treaties, and conventions. It is capable of possessing international rights and duties and it has the capacity to maintain its rights by bringing international claims. The development of conventions, treaties, and standards within the area of international law, which play a crucial role in economic and social development, human rights, international peacekeeping, and security, represents some of the UN’s most impressive achievements.

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Courts and Tribunals

The International Court of Justice is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. All members of the United Nations are automatically parties to the Statute of the Court. Consequently, they and a few others can be parties to cases. The General Assembly and the Security Council can ask the Court for advisory opinions on legal matters, while other organs of the United Nations and specialized agencies can do so by authorization from the General Assembly.

The jurisdiction of the Court covers all questions that Member States may refer to and all matters as provided in the Charter or in treaties and conventions in force. This will be explained further in Lesson 2.

The serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda led the Security Council to establish two international tribunals with the power to prosecute those individuals responsible for such violations. Thus, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia was established in 1993 and the International Tribunal for Rwanda in 1994. Special courts were also set up for Sierra Leone, Lebanon, Cambodia, and East Timor.12

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is an independent judicial body with jurisdiction over persons charged with genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. The Court was established by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court on 17 July 1998, when 120 States participating in the “United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court” adopted the Statute.13 The United States has not ratified the Rome Statute. However, the statute did not enter into force until 1 July 2002. In accordance with Article 2 of the Rome Statute, the relationship with the United Nations system is governed by an agreement between the two organizations.

» Learn more about the International Criminal Court (ICC) at <www.icc-cpi.int>.

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Principal Legal Bodies within the UN

The Sixth Committee of the General Assembly, one of the six Main Committees of the General Assembly, deals with legal items on the Assembly’s agenda. The decisions and resolutions of the Assembly are based on the recommendations from this Committee.

Among the principal legal bodies is the International Law Commission, with its main objective of promoting the progressive development of international law and its codification. The United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) develops conventions, model laws, rules, and legal guides in order to facilitate and harmonize world trade. Under the Law of the Sea Convention, there are three bodies: International Seabed Authority, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, and the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

Within the Secretariat, the Office of Legal Affairs provides legal advice to the Secretary-General and acts on his or her behalf on legal matters. It also advises the Secretariat and other organs of the United Nations on matters related to international, public, private and administrative laws. The Office is also responsible for the registration and publication of treaties and conventions and, thus, publishes the United Nations Treaty Series.

» Learn more about the Office of Legal Affairs: <legal.un.org/ola/>.

Legal Framework for Peacekeeping and Other Similar Operations

Peacekeeping was not foreseen by the founders of the United Nations and, therefore, was neither mentioned nor provided for in the Charter. However, Article 29 of the UN Charter authorizes that the Security Council “may establish such subsidiary organs as it deems necessary for the performance of its functions.” Therefore, it has been concluded and generally accepted that the Security Council and the General Assembly are legally justified in creating and mandating peacekeeping forces – and other similar entities – as additional mechanisms toward fulfilling the UN’s task of maintaining international peace and security.

As peacekeeping increasingly becomes a normative mechanism in maintaining peace and security, it should be remembered that the Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) are the guiding principles of all peacekeeping operations. While performing peacekeeping duties, the United Nations must adhere to the Charter and the recognition of human rights as a fundamental means of promoting peace and security. International Humanitarian Law, or the law of armed conflict as it is also known, provides additional protection to those who do not participate in hostilities, known as “non-combatants”. This will be discussed further in Lesson 4.

Some additional legal relationships must be established in order to facilitate relations between the United Nations and the host country (the country where the operation is taking place), and also between the United Nations and the troop-contributing countries (those countries offering military


Treaties, not war >>

Over the years, the United Nations has facilitated the important work of bringing nations together in diplomatic agreements.

A list of such treaties can be found at <https://treaties.un.org>.

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forces to an operation, known as TCCs). These Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA) and Status of Mission Agreements (SOMA) concern the way the mission or operation conducts itself legally and bureaucratically. The SOFA/SOMA regulates jurisdiction, taxation, status of UN personnel, freedom of movement, use of facilities, etc. The UN Police must follow the rules and regulations stipulated by the United Nations Criminal Law and Justice Branch in their assigned duties.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is a similar agreement between the UN and the troop-contributing country. It addresses the TCC’s responsibilities to United Nations, such as the size, type, and duration of the contingents to be used, equipment, liability, claim, and compensation, administrative and budgetary matters, etc.


Section 1.4 Financial Principles and Budget of the United Nations

Regular Budget

The regular budget of the United Nations covers two years’ cost for the staff, infrastructure, and activities of the principal organs, offices and regional commissions. The budget is submitted by the Secretary-General and approved by the General Assembly after review by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), one of the most powerful committees in the UN system. The main source of funds is the mandatory contributions from Member States, based on an
assessment scale approved by the General Assembly. The maximum contribution is 22 per cent, which is paid by the United States. The minimum contribution is fixed at 0.001 per cent.\textsuperscript{15} As approved for 2014/15, the regular budget totalled approximately $5.53 billion.\textsuperscript{16}

**Extra Ordinary Budget**

The extra ordinary budget makes up a large part of the funding acquired through voluntary contributions from Member States. The budget covers the cost for the operational programmes and funds: the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and others. UN specialized agencies have separate budgets, which are voluntarily supplemented by states, but not all funding comes from the Member States. The United Nations sometimes receives grants from private institutions or foundations such as the Turner Foundation and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

**Peacekeeping Budget**

The costs of the United Nations peacekeeping operations are covered by the Member States in accordance with the Special Scale of Assessments. Since 2001, the Member States’ regular assessment levels are adjusted according to their placement in one of ten levels, ranging from a premium payable by permanent Members of the Security Council (Level A) to a 90 per cent discount for Last Developed Countries (Level J). The total budget for the operations has increased from USD 2.5 billion in 2003 to USD 7 billion in 2015.\textsuperscript{17} The General Assembly approves this peacekeeping budget with the recommendations of its Fifth Committee and after review by the ACABQ.

**Section 1.5 The United Nations System**

The six principal organs of the United Nations, including the General Assembly and Security Council, are relatively well known. Though these entities have general oversight of the United Nations’ array of global activities, the UN system goes well beyond them. The work of the Organization is controlled and divided among many specialized entities known as funds, programmes, commissions, and agencies. This section describes the main actors, including the principal organs, who make up what is called the UN system, focusing on four main categories. Because of the complexity and comprehensiveness of the system, a number of entities are not listed in this section.

The coordinating body of these entities is the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). It is chaired by the Secretary-General and meets twice a year.

**The Principal Organs**

The principal organs of the United Nations as provided for in the Charter of the United Nations are: the General Assembly (GA), the Security Council (SC), the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and the Secretariat. These six organs, described in Lesson 2, form the core of the United Nations system. The principal organs are mainly located at the Headquarters in New York (UNNY), except for the International Court of Justice, which is

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Based on the chart found at <www.un.org/aboutun/chart_en.pdf>. Full documentation and the complete list of all organizations of the UN system can be found at <www.unscerb.org/directory>.

NOTES:
1. UNRWA and UNIDO report only to the General Assembly.
2. IAEA reports to the Security Council and the General Assembly.
3. WTO has no reporting obligation to the General Assembly (GA) but contributes on an ad-hoc basis to GA and ECOSOC work inter alia on finance and developmental issues.
4. Specialized agencies are autonomous organizations working with the UN and each other through the coordinating machinery of ECOSOC at the intergovernmental level, and through the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) at the intersecretarial level. This section is listed in order of establishment of these organisations as specialized agencies of the United Nations.
5. The Trusteeship Council suspended operation on 1 November 1994 with the independence of Palau, the last remaining United Nations Trust Territory, on 1 October 1994.

This is not an official document of the United Nations, nor is it intended to be all-inclusive.
located in The Hague, Netherlands. The United Nations Offices in Nairobi (UNON), Vienna (UNOV), and Geneva (UNOG) – the latter located in the same building as the former League of Nations – are also all considered part of the United Nations’ Headquarters.

The Charter also provides for the establishment of subsidiary bodies as the principal organs may find necessary (e.g., various commissions, committees, temporarily constituted peacekeeping operations, as well as a variety of observer, verification missions, etc.).

Reporting to the ECOSOC and operating under the authority of the Secretary-General are the five Economic and Social Regional Commissions (Article 68). The basic mandate of these commissions is to facilitate the promotion of the regional economic and social development of each region and to strengthen the economic relations of the countries in that region both among themselves and with other countries of the world. The five Commissions, with their own structures and secretariats, are grouped as follows: The UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in Bangkok, Thailand; UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in Geneva, Switzerland; the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in Santiago, Chile; and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA) in Beirut, Lebanon. These organs, offices, and commissions are financed through the United Nations Regular Budget.

**Programmes, Funds, and Bodies of the United Nations**

The core of the United Nations includes various programmes and funds, which are generally responsible for the operational development in programme countries. Today, there are 14 programmes and funds including: the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Food Programme (WFP), and United Nations Volunteers (UNV).

Although these programmes and offices are effectively autonomous, they all report through ECOSOC to the General Assembly. They have their own governing bodies and set their own standards and guidance. Their budgets are in large part funded through voluntary contributions from governments and the private sector through the Extra Budgetary Resources.

In addition, there are a number of related programmes, such as the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and UN Institute for Disarmament Research. Other entities include the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), United Nations University (UNU), and the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), among others.
Specialized Agencies

These agencies provide support and assistance to the development programmes. They are all autonomous and work at the inter-governmental level through ECOSOC and at the inter-secretarial level through the Chief Executives Board.

» Major Specialized Agencies

The major specialized agencies and the Bretton Woods Institutions (the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank founded at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944) are separately established by governments and have their own constitutions, budgets, and governing boards and secretariats.

One group consists of five agencies: the International Labour Organization (ILO); the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); and the World Health Organization (WHO). These organizations have all been brought into agreement with the United Nations and, thus, are formally recognized under the Charter. Their budgets are raised by assessment from their Member States but not as part of the United Nations’ regular budget.

The Bretton Woods Institutions consist of the IMF and the World Bank Group. The World Bank is the lender of commercially raised capital for development projects, while the IMF, among other things, promotes monetary cooperation and expansion of international trade. The World Bank Group encompasses the main commercial-rate International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the soft-loan International Development Association (IDA), the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), and the International Centre for Settlements of Investment Disputes (ICSID). Their budgets are raised through the usual capital market procedures. These two major organizations – IMF and the World Bank – have adopted a voting system where voting is weighted in accordance to the members’ shares.

The History of Bretton Woods »

Prior to the formation of the United Nations in June 1945, a number of meetings and events helped set the stage for the creation of the new international organization.

Forty-four United Nations and associated nations met in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, to discuss monetary stabilization as an aid to post-war trade. The United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference was held in July 1944. One subsequent result was the establishment of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
The third group includes the IFAD, the WTO, and the CD. The International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) has a separate legal status within the system. In 1995, the World Trade Organization (WTO) replaced the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) as the mechanism to help trade flow as freely as possible. The WTO does not fall under the Charter as a specialized agency but has cooperative arrangements with the United Nations. The International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO operates as the technical cooperation agency of the WTO. The Conference on Disarmament (CD) is the single global negotiating forum and was established under the General Assembly’s 10th Special Session. The Conference has a special relationship with the United Nations, since it reports to the GA and is funded from the regular budget.

» Technical Specialized Agencies

The technical specialized agencies, with the same relations as those above, are some of the most important technical organizations in the world. All agencies except the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) had predecessors under the former League of Nations. The Universal Postal Union (UPU), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) were established more than a century ago. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) were present before World War II, but after the war they were restructured into the existing organizations.

Outside Organizations Linked to the System

Non-government organizations (NGOs) have an important role in the United Nations’ activities. In order to avoid a political dependency, most of the NGOs stand outside the governmental system. Their experiences and technical knowledge are of great value to the United Nations, and, therefore, approximately 2,100 NGOs have some sort of consultative status with ECOSOC. They are divided into three categories: (i) NGOs concerned with most ECOSOC activities; (ii) NGOs with specific knowledge in specific areas; and (iii) NGOs for ad hoc consultations. The most eminent member of the NGO group is the International Committee of the Red Cross, which, in recognition of its formal mandate under the Geneva Convention, is invited to participate in the work of the General Assembly.
Additionally, there are a number of regional organizations involved in peace, security, and social and economic development. Some of them have entered into a framework agreement with the United Nations, some are seeking observer status, and some have neither formal nor informal UN status. Their links to the United Nations may fall under Article 52 of the Charter, which states that “Nothing in the present Charter precludes the existence of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security as are appropriate for regional action provided that such arrangements or agencies and their activities are consistent with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations.”

Examples of regional organizations include African Union (AU), Organization of American States (OAS), Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), European Union (EU), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), etc.

Examples of inter-governmental organizations are the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which facilitates cooperation among governments on issues of technology and nuclear policy. The IAEA works in cooperation with the United Nations, submitting its reports to the General Assembly, Security Council, and other UN entities. However, it exists as a separate and independent organization.18

The Committee of Non-Governmental Organizations (CNGO) is responsible to examine and report on the consultative relationship that ECOSOC should accord to NGOs.

Further information about the various organizations linked to the UN system can be found in Lesson 9.

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Section 1.6 Measurable Global Impact

The United Nations celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2015. While the Organization has faced its share of criticism throughout that time, the world would be a much different place without the work it has achieved in the past seven decades. Reviewing the following facts and figures corroborates this in a very quantifiable way.

Since its beginning, the United Nations has assisted more than 80 countries in their transition to independence from colonialism.19 Within the field of International Law, more than 500 multilateral treaties have been concluded.20

Now more than ever, the United Nations is engaged in service to all the world’s nations and peoples. As of 2014, the Secretariat had a staff of approximately 40,000 around the world.21

Furthermore, the UN achieves these accomplishments at a fraction of the cost of conflict. Costs of the UN system’s operational activities for development are estimated at USD 8 billion a year (excluding the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and International Fund for Agriculture Development). This is equal to 0.60 per cent of world total military expenditures of over USD 1.2 trillion.22 Seventy per cent of the work of the UN system is devoted to helping developing countries build the capacity to help themselves. This includes: promoting and protecting democracy and human rights; saving children from starvation and disease; providing relief assistance to refugees and disaster victims; countering global crime, drugs, and disease; and assisting countries devastated by war and the long-term threat of landmines.23

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20) Ibid.
Practice Quiz

1. **Which world event inspired the founding of the United Nations?**
   A. The Great Depression
   B. The Second World War
   C. The Cold War
   D. The Israel-Palestine Conflict

2. **The _________ was in many ways a predecessor to the United Nations.**
   A. United States
   B. World Court
   C. League of Nations
   D. Organization of American States

3. **Which Member State is NOT a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council?**
   A. China
   B. France
   C. Nigeria
   D. Russia

4. **Name the four purposes for the United Nations’ founding.**

5. **Which of the following is one of the principles of the United Nations?**
   A. Interference in internal affairs
   B. Use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state
   C. Sovereignty removed from all Member States
   D. Non-interference in internal affairs

6. **Article 2.4 of the UN Charter defines that the use of force is legal in which two instances only?**
   A. In self-defence or when authorized by the Security Council
   B. As a preemptive means or in self-defence
   C. When authorized by the General Assembly or the Security Council
   D. When authorized by each nation-state’s Constitution

7. **The principal judicial organ of the United Nations is the:**
   A. International Court of Justice
   B. International Criminal Court
   C. Supreme Court
   D. Security Council

8. **The International Criminal Court (ICC) has jurisdiction over whom?**
   A. Nation states and territories, exclusively
   B. Persons charged with genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes
   C. Former colonies and territories
   D. Persons charged with civil suits in international settings

9. **What is the main source of funds for the United Nations?**
   A. Private donations
   B. Voluntary contributions from Member States
   C. Mandatory contributions from Member States, at a required flat rate
   D. Mandatory contributions from Member States, with payments based on a scale

10. **How many principle organs does the UN system contain?**
    A. One
    B. Four
    C. Six
    D. 193

*Answer Key provided on the next page.*
Practice Quiz »

Discussion Questions

1. What are the fundamental principles for relations between Member States stated in the UN Charter and how are they changing or being challenged today?

2. How do regionally focused development organizations relate to the work of the UN system?

3. How would you explain the UN’s impact on the world’s course of development to a friend?

No answers are provided for discussion questions. They are for reflection and consideration only.

Answer Key »

1. B
2. C
3. C
4. To maintain international peace and security; To develop friendly relations among nations; To cooperate in solving international problems and in promoting respect for human rights; To be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations.
5. D
6. A
7. A
8. B
9. D
10. C