United Nations Overview

The name "United Nations," coined by United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt, was first used in the "Declaration by United Nations," January 1, 1942, during the Second World War, when representatives of 26 nations pledged their Governments to continue fighting together against the Axis Powers.

States first established international organizations to cooperate on specific matters. The International Telecommunication Union was founded in 1865 as the International Telegraph Union, and the Universal Postal Union was established in 1874. Both are now the United Nations' specialized agencies.

In 1899, the International Peace Conference was held in The Hague to elaborate instruments for settling crises peacefully, preventing wars and codifying rules of warfare. It adopted the Convention for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes and established the Permanent Court of Arbitration, which began work in 1902.

The forerunner of the United Nations was the League of Nations, an organization conceived in similar circumstances during the First World War, and established in 1919 under the Treaty of Versailles "to promote international cooperation and to achieve peace and security." The International Labour Organization was also created under the Treaty of Versailles as an affiliated agency of the League. The League of Nations ceased its activities after failing to prevent the Second World War.

In 1945, representatives of 50 countries met in San Francisco at the United Nations Conference on International Organization to draw up the United Nations Charter. Those delegates deliberated on the basis of proposals worked out by the representatives of China, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States at Dumbarton Oaks, United States in August-October 1944. The representatives of the 50 countries signed the Charter on 26 June 1945. Poland, which was not represented at the Conference, signed it later and became one of the original 51 Member States.

The United Nations officially came into existence on 24 October 1945, when the Charter had been ratified by China, France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, the United States and by a majority of other signatories. **United Nations Day** is celebrated on 24 October each year.

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Organization of the United Nations

The primary decision-making organization representing all 189-member nations is called the General Assembly. The Security Council discusses and votes on major security issues facing the United Nations. It is charged with keeping world peace and may vote to take action against a member nation or non-member nation in order to keep peace and protect lives at risk. One of the most recent actions sought protection of the Kurdish population in northern Iraq. There are five permanent members: the United States, Russia, United Kingdom, France and China. All five permanent members of the Security Council must agree before any action is approved, such as sending inspections teams into Iraq. The other members of the Security Council are elected to serve for two years.

There are several main arteries such as the Economic and Social Council which established regional committees for Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific and western Asia. There is the Trusteeship Council, Office of the Secretary General called the Secretariat, and the International Court of Justice. Permanent commissions and committees, serving to better the lives of people, work worldwide as international philanthropic organizations. You may be familiar with UNICEF, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, for their fundraising activities on October 31 of each year. UNICEF helps provide for child development programs, education and training to youth worldwide.

In addition to UNICEF, some of the most important commissions of the United Nations are:

- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees which works to protect refugees in foreign countries who may have fled their native country because of drought, famine, ethnic intolerance and war. This commission has fought the ravages of African famine, sought to bring food and shelter to those fleeing war and victims of natural disasters.
- Commission on Human Rights wrote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to address issues of genocide, ethnic discrimination and intimidation and gender bias. Successes have been seen recently in Haiti, El Salvador, Syria and Indonesia.
- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization was founded in 1947 in the firm belief that through education, development of peaceful uses of science and technology and cultural cooperation, nations could establish peace.

There are many more important agencies of the United Nations and through your study and research you will certainly find that since its founding, the United Nations has helped foster peace and economic development throughout the world.