

Study Material

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Topic: United Nations

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The United Nations (UN) is an international organization founded in 1945, after the end of World War II, to promote peace, security, cooperation, and social and economic development. It currently has 193 member states. The UN is tasked with addressing issues that affect global security, human rights, humanitarian aid, economic progress, and environmental sustainability.

The Main Organs of the United Nations

The UN is structured around six principal organs, each with distinct responsibilities and functions. Here's a detailed look at each:

1. General Assembly (GA)

Composition: All 193 member states have equal representation, with each country having one vote.

Functions:

It serves as a forum for member states to discuss international issues, including peace and security, economic development, and human rights.

It adopts resolutions on a wide range of issues, though these are generally non-binding.

The GA also elects non-permanent members to the Security Council, selects the UN Secretary-General, and approves the UN's budget.

Meetings: The General Assembly meets annually, and special sessions can be convened as necessary.

2. Security Council

Composition: The Security Council has 15 members, consisting of 5 permanent members (P5) — China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States — and 10 elected non-permanent members, serving two-year terms.

Functions:

It is primarily responsible for maintaining international peace and security.

It can authorize military action, impose sanctions, or send peacekeeping forces.

The permanent members have veto power over substantive resolutions, meaning any of the P5 can block a decision.

The Council's decisions are binding on all UN members.

Meetings: The Security Council meets regularly, but it can convene urgently in response to crises.

3. International Court of Justice (ICJ)

Composition: The ICJ consists of 15 judges, elected for nine-year terms by the General Assembly and the Security Council.

Functions:

The ICJ is the principal judicial body of the UN, resolving legal disputes between states according to international law.

It provides advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by the General Assembly, the Security Council, or other UN organs.

The Court settles disputes involving treaties, territorial disputes, and other legal matters between states.

Location: The ICJ is based in The Hague, Netherlands.

4. Secretariat

Composition: The Secretariat is headed by the Secretary-General, who is appointed for a five-year term by the General Assembly upon recommendation by the Security Council.

Functions:

The Secretariat carries out the day-to-day work of the UN, implementing decisions made by other organs.

It organizes and coordinates peacekeeping operations, humanitarian aid efforts, and conducts studies on various global issues.

It provides administrative support to other UN organs and ensures smooth coordination among them.

Location: The Secretariat is headquartered in New York City, USA.

5. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Composition: ECOSOC has 54 members, which are elected by the General Assembly for three-year terms.

Functions:

ECOSOC coordinates the economic and social work of 15 specialized agencies, including the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

It holds a central role in promoting international economic and social cooperation, focusing on development, health, education, social progress, and human rights.

It convenes annual meetings and special sessions, and it issues reports on global economic and social issues.

Location: ECOSOC meets in New York and Geneva.

6. Trusteeship Council

Composition: The Trusteeship Council originally consisted of the 5 permanent members of the Security Council and certain other member states administering trust territories.

Functions:

The Trusteeship Council was established to oversee the administration of trust territories and ensure that the rights and welfare of the inhabitants were respected.

Its work has largely been completed since the last trust territory, Palau, gained independence in 1994. As such, the Trusteeship Council is effectively inactive today.

Location: The Trusteeship Council chamber is located in New York, though the Council no longer meets regularly.

Specialized Agencies and Bodies

Apart from the main organs, the UN has numerous specialized agencies, bodies, and programs that focus on specific areas of international cooperation, including:

World Health Organization (WHO): Focuses on international health issues.

UNESCO: Promotes education, science, and culture.

World Bank: Works to reduce poverty and promote economic development.

International Labour Organization (ILO): Promotes social justice and fair labour standards.

Conclusion

The United Nations is a complex and multifaceted organization designed to address global challenges. Its six principal organs play complementary roles in promoting international peace, security, and cooperation across various sectors. Despite criticisms and challenges, the UN remains a crucial platform for diplomacy and international collaboration.

Thank You