

JUST FACTS

A RESOURCE FOR SCHOOLS FROM
THE EDMUND RICE CENTRE
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THE UNITED NATIONS

This resource contains:

- A Guide for Teachers
- A Fact Sheet with answers to Frequently Asked Questions
- Cross-curricular activities

Guide for Teachers

The United Nations is an international organisation founded in 1945. It is currently made up of 193 Member States. The mission and work of the United Nations are guided by the purposes and principles contained in its founding Charter.

Due to the powers vested in its Charter and its unique international character, the United Nations can take action on the issues confronting humanity in the 21st

century, such as peace and security, climate change, sustainable development, human rights, disarmament, terrorism, humanitarian and health emergencies, gender equality, governance, food production, and more. The UN also provides a forum for its members to express their views in the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, and other bodies and committees.

By enabling dialogue between its members, and by hosting negotiations, the Organization has become a mechanism for governments to find areas of agreement and solve problems together.

Goals

The Fact Sheet (FAQ) and questions should assist students to:

- Understand the history of the United Nations
- Acquire knowledge of the structure of the main Organs of the organization
- Develop informed opinions on the role of the United Nations and discuss its accomplishments and continuing goals

Introducing the material

Learning Objective:

To provide a means of seeing how much prior knowledge the students have about the United Nations.

Have the students brainstorm the topic 'The United Nations' using the following questions and write their responses on the board:

- What does the UN do
- What is the UN's main goal?
- Where is the UN present?

- What organisations work with or for the UN?
- Does anyone know of any Peacekeeping operation
- Does the UN affect the student's daily life? If so, how?

The activities can be adapted to suit your classroom requirements.

For more resources:

www.erc.org.au/resources_for_schools

JUST FACTS - UNITED NATIONS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



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What is the UN?

The United Nations is an international body of 193 countries working to maintain global peace and security, address humanitarian concerns, promote cultural heritage, and administer systems of international law, transportation, commerce and justice. Australia is a founding member and continues to play an important role.

When and why was it founded?

The UN was founded after the end of World War II by the victorious allied powers with the hope that it would act to prevent and intervene in conflicts between nations and make future wars impossible or limited.

It was established in 1945 at the signing of the United Nations Charter by 51 countries, replacing the League of Nations founded in 1919. It officially came into existence on 24th October 1945.

What is its purpose?

The UN was designed to promote co-operation among sovereign states in which each would give up some of its sovereignty in the common interest of all

nations to promote peace, security, economic development, social justice and fundamental human rights and freedoms.

What is the UN's main work?

- Maintain International Peace and Security
- Promote Sustainable Development
- Protect Human Rights
- Uphold International Law
- Deliver Humanitarian Aid

What preceded the UN?

The forerunner of the United Nations was the League of Nations, which was an organisation conceived 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 League of Nations ceased its activities after failing to prevent WWII.

What are its key documents?

- The UN Charter
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Statute of the International Court of Human Justice

What are the key issues for the UN?

- Economic Growth and Sustainable Development
- International Peace and Security
- Development of Africa
- Human Rights
- Humanitarian Assistance
- Justice and International Law
- Nuclear, Chemical and Conventional Weapons Disarmament
- Drug Control, Crime Prevention and Counter-terrorism

Where is the UN's headquarters?

The headquarters of the United Nations is in New York, USA.

There are three additional, regional headquarters: Geneva, Switzerland; Vienna, Austria; and Nairobi, Kenya.

What are the UN's official languages?

There are six official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

When did Australia join?

1 November 1945 when the Federal Parliament ratified the UN Charter.

What are its main bodies?

Security Council

It has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. It has 15 Members (5 permanent and 10 non-permanent). Each Member has one vote. Under the Charter, all Member States are obligated to comply with Council decisions. The Security Council takes the lead in determining the existence of a threat to the peace or act of aggression. It calls upon the parties to a dispute to settle it by peaceful means and recommends methods of adjustment or terms of settlement. In some cases, the Security Council can resort to imposing sanctions or even authorise the use of force to maintain or restore international peace and security.

General Assembly

The main deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the UN. All 193 member states of the UN are represented in the General Assembly, making it the only UN body with universal representation. Each year, in September, the full UN membership meets in New York for the annual General Assembly session, which many heads of state attend and address. Decisions on important questions, such as those on peace and security, admission of new

members and budgetary matters, require a two-thirds majority of the General Assembly. Decisions on other questions are by simple majority.

Economic and Social Council

This is the principal body for coordination, policy review, policy dialogue and recommendations on economic, social and environmental issues, as well as implementation of internationally agreed development goals. It serves as the central mechanism for activities of the UN system and its specialised agencies in the economic, social and environmental fields, supervising subsidiary and expert bodies. It has 54 members, elected by the General Assembly for overlapping three-year terms. It is the United Nations' central platform for reflection, debate, and innovative thinking on sustainable development.

International Court of Justice

This is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. Its seat is at the Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands). The Court's role is to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States and to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorised United Nations organs and specialised agencies.

Secretariat

It comprises the Secretary-General and tens of thousands of international staff members who carry out the day-to-day work of the UN. The Secretary-General is the Chief Administrative Officer of the Organisation, appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council for a five-year, renewable term. UN staff members are recruited internationally and locally, and work in duty stations and peace keeping missions all around the world.

What are some of its agencies & bodies?

- The United Nations Development Programme - UNDP
- The United Nations Children's Fund - UNICEF
- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees - UNHCR
- The World Food Programme - WFP
- UN Women
- The World Bank
- The International Monetary Fund - IMF
- The World Health Organisation - WHO
- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation - UNESCO
- The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS - UNAIDS

JUST FACTS - UNITED NATIONS RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Learning objectives:

To research and study what the UN does practically as well as administratively and politically and to engage the student to learn more about the work of the UN around the world.

Questions

1. Choose one of the main areas of work of the UN (Peace & Security; Sustainable Development; Human Rights; International Law and Humanitarian Aid) and examine one of the projects that are currently underway.

2. (a) List the earlier international agencies from the nineteenth century that were taken over by the United Nations.
(b) Describe their roles and work?

3. Draw an organisational plan of the United Nations, including its main bodies and programmes and agencies.

4. (a) Explain the role of the Security Council. Who are its members.
(b) Who has the right of veto?
(c) What are its powers?
(d) How effective has it been?

5. (a) Explain the role of the General Assembly do.
(b) Describe how it operates?

6. (a) How does the International Court of Justice operate?
(b) Using recent examples, how effective do you think it has been in solving disputes?

7. (a) How effective do you think that the work of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has been since the end of the Second World War and why? Use specific examples.

8. Describe the work of one of these UN agencies: The United Nations Children's Fund; The World Health Organization; UN Women.

9. (a) What is sustainable development?
(b) How does the UN contribute to and work in this area?
(c) Give some current examples of UN programmes in sustainable development.

10. (a) Describe the United Nations Volunteer Programme.
(b) What do the volunteers do and where do they work?
(c) Where would you like to volunteer? Why?

11. Look at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
(a) How important do you think it is?
(b) How relevant is it in today's world?

12. (a) What do you think this statement means? "The UN is only as strong as its member states."
(b) What are the benefits and difficulties that come with being 193 member states that need to agree?

13. (a) How can empowering vulnerable groups or people contribute to development?
(b) What role does the UN play in this?

14. (a) What are the Three Pillars of the United Nations?
(b) How are they linked with Human Rights and Development?

15. (a) In which countries are United Nations Peace Keeping forces operating at the moment?
(b) Which nations contribute personnel to the peace keeping forces?
(c) What is their role?

16. Using a world map, show where there is conflict and how long it has been going on.