

Overview of the United Nations

**Cleveland Council on
WORLD AFFAIRS**

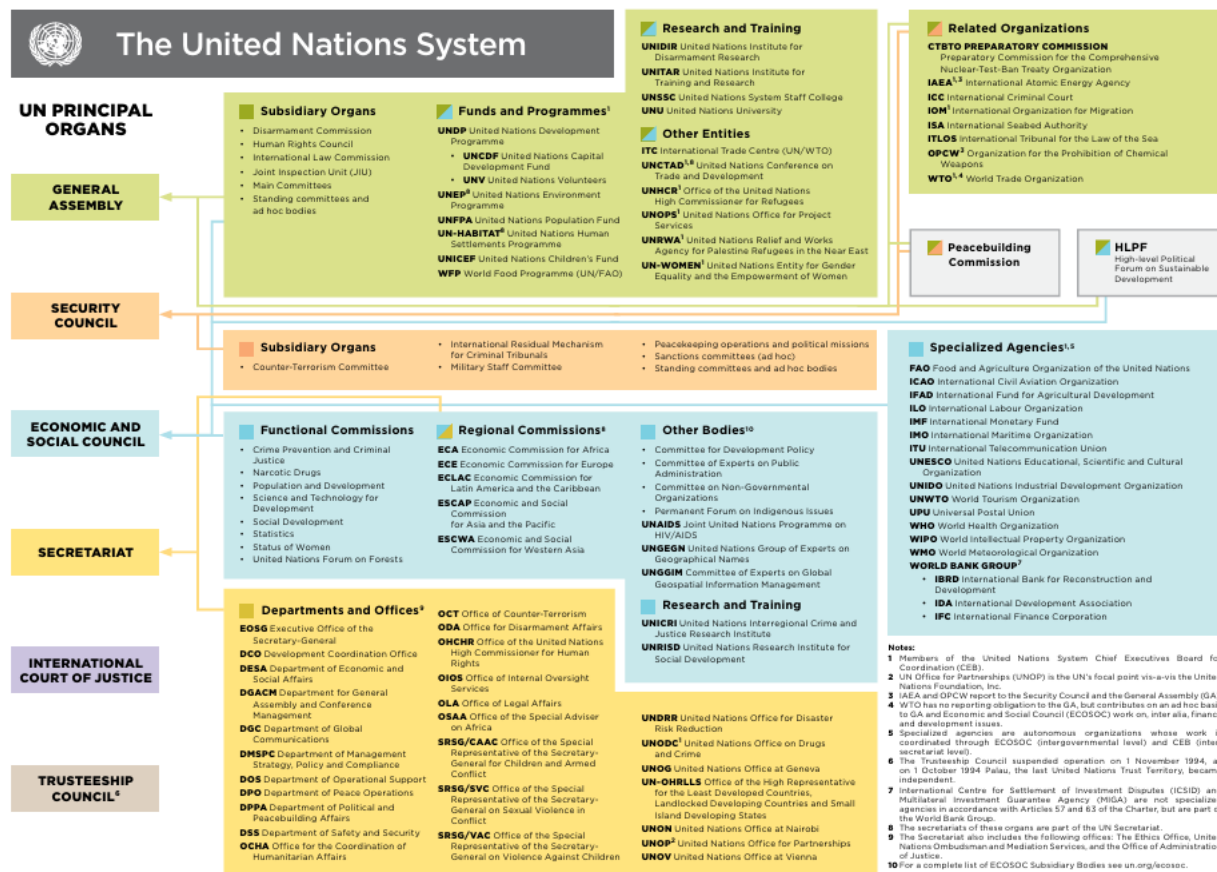




Overview of the United Nations

To be truly successful as a Model UN delegate, you must first have a strong understanding of the United Nations system, as well as its history, structure, and operations. Having a strong understanding of the committees within the UN system and the types of documents and recommendations that committees make is essential for ensuring that your ideas will be communicated in a way that is realistic and most closely resembles diplomatic work at the United Nations.

At its core, the United Nations was designed to serve as a forum through which the nations of the world can solve international issues in a collective and peaceful way. The UN is an *Intergovernmental Organization* (IGO) and one of many to operate in the world today. With the broadest mandate and near-universal membership for the world's states, the UN has the ability not only to coordinate and promote cooperation between member states, but also other IGOs as well. Referred to as *specialized agencies*, these organizations are politically and structurally independent of the UN but have entered into cooperative agreements with the UN. Some well-known specialized agencies include the International Criminal Court, the World Health Organization, and the World Bank. While these specialized agencies are a part of what is referred to as "the UN system," they are entirely independent organizations, with their own charters, procedures, mandates, financial structures, and memberships.



As illustrated in the graphic above, the United Nations is composed of six principal organs, which include the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Secretariat, the International Court of Justice, and the Trusteeship Council, which is suspended but meets annually. Each of these organs is tasked with their area of responsibility.

Additionally, the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the Economic and Social Council have the capacity to create subsidiary bodies to assist in specified areas. These subsidiary bodies act under the auspices of their parent organ, providing specialized expertise on specific topics and recommendations to the principal body for action. These bodies are often created and dissolved at the will of the principal organs in relation to their changing agendas.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY (GA)

The General Assembly is the main organ of the United Nations. Comprised of six main committees, all states that are members of the United Nations (Member States) are represented; each has one vote in accordance with the principle of sovereign equality. The duties of the General Assembly consist mainly of the peaceful settlement of disputes, the establishment of international law, economic and social development, addressing issues of human rights, and the maintenance of international peace and security in matters that are not under consideration by the Security Council – or “on the agenda” of the Security Council. The General Assembly further elects the non-permanent members of the Security Council, the members of ECOSOC, the Secretary-General, and the Justices of the International Court of Justice.

GA MAIN COMMITTEES:

1. First Committee: Disarmament & International Security (DISEC)
2. Second Committee: Economic & Finance
3. Third Committee: Social, Humanitarian & Cultural (SOCHUM)
4. Fourth Committee: Special Political & Decolonization
5. Fifth Committee: Administrative & Budgetary
6. Sixth Committee: Legal

SECURITY COUNCIL (UNSC)

The Security Council is charged solely with the maintenance and enforcement of international peace and security. It is composed of fifteen Member States, of which five are permanent and ten are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms. The five permanent members are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, all of which have the exclusive right to veto any substantive matter proposed by the Council with a single dissenting vote, causing the resolution to fail. While resolutions passed by other United Nations bodies take the form of recommendations, resolutions passed by the Security Council have binding power over Member States.



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (ECOSOC)

The Economic and Social Council holds authority for the economic and social issues of the United Nations. The Council is composed of 52 Member States, each elected by the General Assembly for three-year terms. ECOSOC oversees a number of specialized agencies, programs, and funds within the UN systems well as coordinates activities among these agencies and outside organizations working in cooperation.

SECRETARIAT

The Secretariat forms the administrative arm of the United Nations. Headed by the Secretary-General, the Secretariat works to support the work of the various organs and committees by providing research, data, guidance, and expertise on the issues under consideration.

INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE (ICJ)

The International Court of Justice is the primary judicial branch of the United Nations. Composed of 15 judges elected by the General Assembly for nine-year terms, the ICJ is tasked with settling legal disputes submitted by states in accordance with existing international law. Additionally, the ICJ may provide advisory opinions regarding questions of international law.