

*After dealing with two world wars within the lifetime of one generation, and facing the danger of nuclear weapons that could wipe out entire populations, a large number of countries of the world decided that the only way to start solving their conflicts was to get together and use the skills of dialogue, cooperation and international organization to get along amongst themselves.*



On June 4, 1945, fifty-one countries came together in San Francisco, U.S. to sign the UN Charter. This Charter is a set of rules agreed to by all members of the UN to ensure that countries cooperate and communicate. The Charter helps countries work together to avoid war. The Charter came into force on October 24, 1945, a day that is now observed every year worldwide as UN Day.

191 countries are now members of the UN, almost every country in the world, including the two which joined in 2002: Switzerland and East Timor.

The UN General Assembly meets in New York, where the UN headquarters are located. It works in six official languages: English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, and Russian. All member countries come to the UN and meet in the General Assembly to discuss and decide on any issue of international concern. According to one of the rules in the UN Charter, all countries are equal, so each gets one vote, and decisions are made by a majority.

The General Assembly is the central body of the UN, and all member countries send representatives or ambassadors to its meetings. Because the UN has many different roles, it is composed of many other organizations, each with its own task.

- The **Security Council** is in charge of maintaining international peace and security and is able to call the UN into action against an aggressive country. The Security Council has 15 members, 5 of which are permanent (US, UK, Russia, France and China). For the Security Council to pass a resolution, there must be a majority vote, but if any one of the five permanent members votes against it, the resolution is not passed. This is called "the veto."
- The **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** solves arguments that countries bring to it. It works on disputes between countries only, not between people. It has 15 judges, from 15 different countries, and sits in The Hague, in the Netherlands.

- The **Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** takes in the world's problems (problems of population, drugs, crime, environment, trade, etc) and digests them, figuring out ways to deal with them. It has 54 members and many Specialized Agencies and Programmes to help it deal with all its work.
- The **Secretariat** is the external part of the UN, carrying out the day-to-day operations, protecting and representing the organization around the world. It is made of a staff of almost 10,000 from 170 different countries. The Secretariat, and the UN in general, is led by the Secretary-General.

**Canada's Role in the UN:** Canada has played an important role in nearly every part of the United Nations from its beginning. Canadians were involved in drafting the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A former Prime Minister, Lester B. Pearson, won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in establishing the first ever UN Peacekeeping force in Egypt in the 1950s.

*Source: United Nations Association in Canada fact sheets on-line:  
<[www.unac.org/en/index.asp](http://www.unac.org/en/index.asp)>*

### Main Bodies of the United Nations

- Security Council
- General Assembly
- Secretariat
- International Court of Justice
- Economic and Social Council:
  - UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)
  - Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
  - World Health Organization (WHO)
  - UN Environment Program (UNEP)
  - UN Scientific Cultural and Educational Organization (UNESCO)
  - UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)
  - World Trade Organization (WTO)
  - UN Center for Human Settlements (Habitat)

