



WHY IT MATTERS

75 Milestones in International Cooperation

**DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD
LIBRARY
UNITED NATIONS**



UN75
2020 AND BEYOND

WHY IT MATTERS, AN ANNUAL SERIES
VOL. I, **75 MILESTONES IN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

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WHY IT MATTERS

**75 MILESTONES IN
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

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FOREWORD

On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library launches a new annual series entitled “Why it matters”. The series builds on the professional research service the Library offers to members of Permanent Missions to the United Nations, employees of the Organization, as well as researchers and citizens worldwide. Each volume of the series will focus on one of the many deliberations of the United Nations. It will provide readers with a comprehensive overview as well as an insightful backgrounder on the internal workings and the accomplishments of the Organization, backed by selected, credible knowledge sources and research expertise.

Our first volume of the series, “75 Milestones in International Cooperation”, chronicles pivotal moments that shaped the history of the United Nations and our world in the last 75 years. While acknowledging that selection may entail omission, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library’s picks track the history of the creation of the United Nations in 1945 and traverse until the UN’s call for global unity to fight COVID-19 in 2020. They highlight the context of historical occasions that have influenced international relations and led to remarkable changes in the lives of the people around the world. They showcase decisive turns in the history of the Organization itself that echoed in the chambers of its principal organs as the world’s diplomats and international civil service worked to reach consensus after careful, detailed and informed rounds of negotiations. These key achievements represent the diversity of those deliberations and the concert of the commitments by United Nations Member States for the present and the future of the world, the collective memory of human civilization on Earth, a planet often in crisis but always in hope.

We aspire for this series to become an inspiration for enhanced international collaboration, another spark of hope for the future. In the words of Secretary-General António Guterres, **“there is still so much to be done”**.

Thanos Giannakopoulos, Chief Librarian



1941–1945: CHARTING THE COURSE FOR A UNITED WORLD

Several meetings by allied governments took place from 1941 to 1944 and culminated in the establishment of the United Nations in 1945.

In the midst of the Second World War, representatives from these allied governments, as well as the exiled governments, met in June 1941 at St. James's Palace in London and signed a declaration containing these striking words: ***"The only true basis of enduring peace is the willing cooperation of free peoples in a world in which, relieved of the menace of aggression, all may enjoy economic and social security ... It is our intention to work together, and with other free peoples, both in war and peace, to this end."***

As the Second World War continued to rage, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt of the United States and Prime Minister Winston Churchill of the United Kingdom met in August 1941 on a ship in the Atlantic Ocean to lay down a vision for a post-war world. There they would agree to a ***"common program of purposes and principles"*** embodied in the text of the Atlantic Charter which was later signed by the rest of the allied governments.

On 1 January 1942, President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, Maxim Litvinov of the USSR and T.V. Soong of China signed a short document which later came to be known as the [Declaration by United Nations](#)¹.

PHOTO ON PREVIOUS PAGE:
President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill chat
following church services during Atlantic Charter meeting /
UN Photo #51615

¹ US Treaties - Signed at Washington, 1 January 1942. 55 Stat. 1600; Executive Agreement Series 236



Declaration by United Nations / UN Photo #31319

The next day, representatives of 22 other nations added their signatures. This important document pledged the signatory governments to the maximum war effort and bound them against making a separate peace. It marks the first time the term “United Nations” was ever used.

On 30 October 1943, the Foreign Ministers of the United States, the United Kingdom, the USSR, and the Chinese Ambassador to Moscow issued the [Declaration of Four Nations on General Security](#), which contemplated the establishment at the earliest practicable date of a general international organization. But the practical steps of how such an international body would work were formulated later at Dumbarton Oaks.

Between 28 November and 1 December 1943, President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill and Soviet Premier Stalin held a meeting in Teheran, Iran. It was during this Conference that the three leaders coordinated their military strategy. They confirmed their common policy for the future notably expressing their determination that their nations ***“shall work together in war and in the peace that will follow”***, recognizing ***“the supreme responsibility resting upon us and all the United Nations to make a peace which will command the goodwill of the overwhelming mass of the peoples of the world and banish the scourge and terror of war for many generations”*** (Declaration of the Three Powers, Teheran, 1 December 1943).

The 1944 Dumbarton Oaks conversations and the February 1945 Yalta Conference paved the final steps towards the creation of a general international organization. At Dumbarton Oaks, a private mansion in Washington, DC, there were two phases of meetings: the first phase included the representatives of the USSR, the United Kingdom and the United States, and in the second phase representatives of China, the United Kingdom and the United States met. As a result of these conversations, the four powers reached several agreements embodied in [the Dumbarton Oaks Proposals](#)².

The framework of the United Nations as it is known today can be seen in the text of the [Proposals for the Establishment of a General International Organization](#).

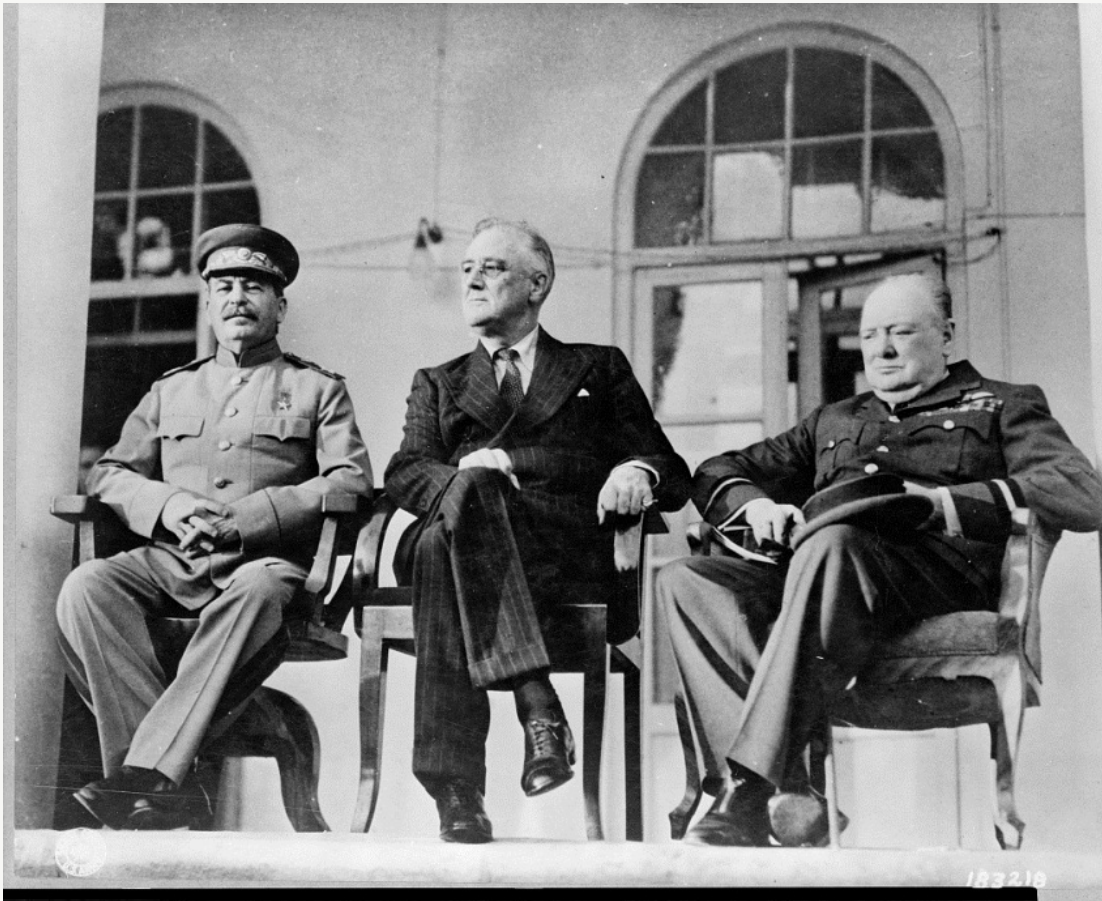
“1. The Organization should have as its principal organs:

- a. A General Assembly;***
- b. A Security Council;***
- c. An International Court of Justice; and***
- d. A Secretariat.”***

Within the United Nations, the Security Council would have the ***“primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security”***. However, the voting structure of the Security Council could not be finalized and was left open by the representatives of the Dumbarton Oaks Conference for further discussion.

The issue of voting in the Security Council was resolved during the 1945 Conference in Yalta. From there it was decided that a conference would be held in the city of San Francisco in the United States to establish a general international organization. The nations to be invited included the countries who were signatories of the 1942 Declaration of United Nations as well as the nations that had declared war on Germany and its allies by 1 March 1945. Invitations were sent out on 5 March 1945.

² The United Nations. Dumbarton Oaks Proposals for a General International Organization Department of State Publication 2297, Conference Series 66, Washington, DC, 1945



Allied leaders meet at Teheran Conference / UN Photo

The world was preparing for the establishment of a general international organization and the end of the war. In the lead up to the United Nations Conference on International Organization, governments were coming together to lay the foundation in a number of areas. In November 1943, 44 nations signed an agreement to establish the [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration \(UNRRA\)](#) to provide assistance to the victims of war. In July 1944, at [Bretton Woods](#), delegates from 44 nations would work to create a new international monetary system that would lead to the establishment of the International Monetary Fund and what would become the World Bank. In December 1944, delegates from 52 States met in Chicago, Illinois, and agreed upon the [Convention on International Civil Aviation](#) (also known as the Chicago Convention) which formed the basis of air law both domestically and internationally and established the [International Civil Aviation Organization \(ICAO\)](#).

The United Nations Conference on International Organization: the 1945 San Francisco Conference

The United Nations Conference on International Organization, commonly known as the San Francisco Conference, was held from 25 April to 26 June 1945. It is here that the Charter of the United Nations would be discussed, debated and on 26 June 1945, signed. The Charter would come into force on 24 October 1945.

The San Francisco Conference was an historic occasion that brought together around 6,000 people: 850 delegates from 50 nations with advisors and staff, the conference secretariat, more than 2,500 press, radio and newsreel representatives, and observers from many societies and organizations.



San Francisco Conference / UN Photo #98201 Yould

The Charter of the United Nations is the founding document of the United Nations and its first Article states:

“The Purposes of the United Nations are:

- 1. To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace;*
- 2. To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace;*
- 3. To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion; and*
- 4. To be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends.”*

A vital part of the Charter was the Statute of the International Court of Justice, laid out in Articles 92–96.

“The International Court of Justice shall be the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. It shall function in accordance with the annexed Statute, which is based upon the Statute of the Permanent Court of International Justice and forms an integral part of the present Charter.”

The Preparatory Commission of the United Nations was established by the San Francisco Conference on 25 June 1945 through the adoption of the "Interim Arrangements Concluded by the Governments Represented at the United Nations Conference on International Organization".

It was established to make practical arrangements for the transition from a proposal embodied in the Charter to a functioning organization and ceased to exist "upon the election of the Secretary-General" of the United Nations.





1946–1955: THE WORK BEGINS

1946 – General Assembly adopts its first resolution to address concerns with the use of atomic energy

After the end of the Second World War, that had included the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the nuclear issue was high on the international agenda. President Truman of the United States, Prime Minister Attlee of the United Kingdom and Prime Minister King of Canada deliberated on the possibilities of how to prevent the use of atomic energy for destructive means and instead use it for peaceful purposes. Together these Heads of Government issued a declaration on 15 November 1945 that a Commission should be created under the United Nations Organization.

In December 1945, the topic was discussed by the Foreign Ministers of the USSR, the United Kingdom and the United States who also recommended to establish such a Commission. After inviting the other permanent members of the Security Council, as well as Canada, the need to establish this body was attended to in a draft resolution to the General Assembly.

On 10 January 1946, when 51 members of the newly formed United Nations started the first session of the General Assembly at Central Hall in London, United Kingdom, they made it their first order of business to address the use of atomic energy.

On 24 January 1946, the General Assembly adopted its first resolution, [Establishment of a Commission to Deal with the Problems Raised by the Discovery of Atomic Energy A/RES/1\(I\)](#), to address the role of peaceful uses of nuclear energy and the elimination of atomic weapons. The Commission was set up to report and make recommendations to the Security Council. ***“In view of the Security Council’s primary responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Security Council shall issue directions to the Commission in matters affecting security.”***

PHOTO ON PREVIOUS PAGE:
First session of the UN General Assembly /
UN Photo #332299 Marcel Bolomey

The first meeting of the Commission was convened by the Secretary-General on 14 June 1946.

1947 – A commission on international law is established



International Law Commission holds first session / UN Photo #176889
Marcel Bolomey

Throughout the San Francisco Conference, where the Charter of the United Nations would later be signed, conference attendees discussed and debated how international law would develop and be followed in the post-war world. There was [concern](#) about the role the new organization would play in matters of international law and agreed to further study. Indeed, Article 13, paragraph 1 of the Charter states:

“The General Assembly shall initiate studies and make recommendations for the purpose of ... promoting international co-operation in the political field and encouraging the progressive development of international law and its codification ...”

Following the decree of the Charter, the General Assembly [established](#) the Committee on the Progressive Development of International Law and its Codification during its first session. The Committee’s purpose was to recommend ways the United Nations could meet its mandate laid out in Article 13. Its [report](#) calling for the creation of an international law commission was submitted to the General Assembly who referred it to its Sixth (Legal) Committee for further debate.

Due to the complexity and variety of proposals submitted by Member States, the Sixth Committee established a sub-committee which included all five permanent members of the Security Council. After the Sixth Committee decided to establish the International Law Commission in the second session but wait until the third session to elect members, the sub-committee undertook a paragraph-by-paragraph analysis of the report of the Committee on the Progressive Development of International Law and its Codification. The sub-committee presented its draft resolution and statute to the Sixth Committee, who adopted it with amendments and submitted it back to the General Assembly.

On 21 November 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution [174 \(II\)](#) establishing the International Law Commission (ILC) and approving its Statute. The Commission would be a subsidiary organ of the United Nations General Assembly. At its first session in 1949, the ILC would tackle major issues in international law, including the formulation of the Nuremberg Principles and the question of international criminal jurisdiction.

1948 – Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in Paris

World leaders agreed to complement the UN Charter with a “universal bill of rights” to ensure that the atrocities of the Second World War would not be repeated. In early 1947, the Human Rights Commission, comprised of 18 members from various political, cultural and religious backgrounds, and chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, began working on what would become the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



“It’s Human Rights Day for them, too” /
UN Photo #123898

Less than two years later, the UN General Assembly adopted the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR) by resolution 217 A (III) on 10 December 1948 in Paris. The Declaration states that:

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights ... Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs ...”

The UDHR is a groundbreaking document that set out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected. The 30 articles that it comprises underpin international human rights law and provide a common global standard for human rights at the country and regional level.

The Declaration is now the most translated document in the world, available in more than [500 languages](#), and it is still just as relevant in our world today as it was at the time of its adoption more than 70 years ago.

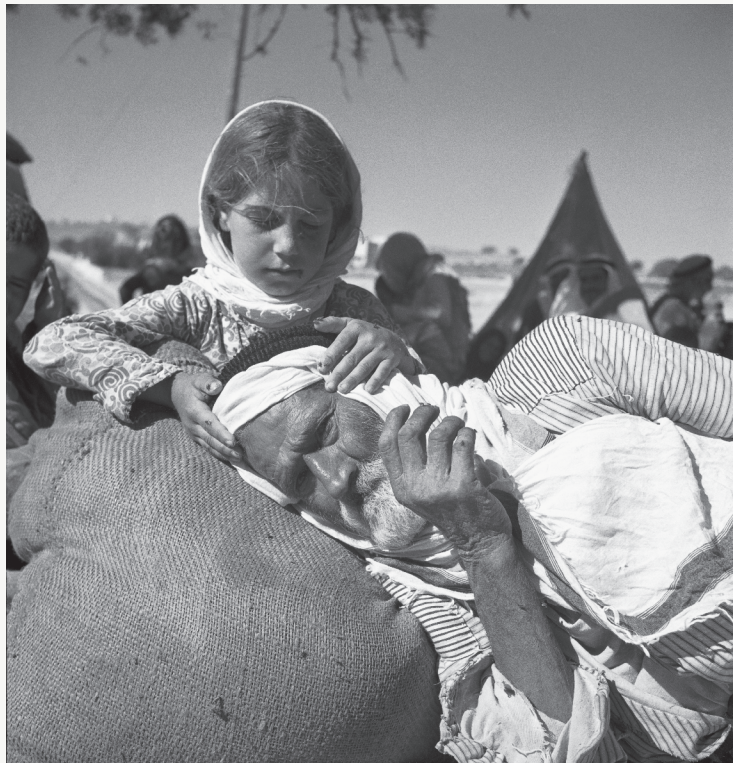
1949 – UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is established

In 1922, the League of Nations placed Palestine under the administration of the United Kingdom. More than 20 years later, the United Kingdom turned to the United Nations for a solution to tensions in the region.

The General Assembly investigated various options to bring stability to the land and proposed to partition Palestine into two independent States – one Arab and the other Jewish. The proposal did not bring the hoped-for peace and tensions continued, leading to war between Arab States and Israel in 1948. Over half of the Palestinian Arab population fled or were expelled.

The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established by General Assembly resolution [302 \(IV\)](#) of 8 December 1949 to carry out direct relief and work programmes for Palestine refugees.

When UNRWA began operations in 1950, it was responding to the needs of about 750,000 refugees with the initial mandate to ***“prevent conditions of starvation and distress ... and to further conditions of peace and stability”***.



United Nations aids Arab Refugees in the Near East /
UN Photo #349852

Today, UNRWA has operations in five fields – Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

“UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, infrastructure and camp improvement, microfinance, and emergenc response programming, including in times of armed conflict. These services are framed within four human development goals to which the Agency is committed: acquired knowledge and skills; a long and healthy life; a decent standard of living; and human rights enjoyed to the fullest.” ([About UNRWA](#))

1950 – UN Security Council negotiates peace along the 38th parallel

Korea was under Japanese rule from 1910 to 1945. The occupation ended on 15 August 1945, when Imperial Japan surrendered to the allied forces at the end of the Second World War. After Japan's surrender, the United States and the Soviet Union took over the occupation of Korea and divided the country along the 38th parallel. North Korea was under the Soviet Union's communist government, while South Korea remained under the influence of the United States.



French contributions to Unified Forces /
UN Photo #187834 TW

The Korean peninsula had been on the UN agenda since 1947 when the General Assembly in resolution [112 \(II\)](#) recommended the establishment of a United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea to support the people towards self-governance. The resolution also ***“called upon all Members of the United Nations to refrain from interfering in the affairs of the Korean people and from all acts derogatory to the independence and sovereignty of Korea”***.

In 1948, in resolution [195 \(III\)](#), the General Assembly called for the immediate cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of armed forces from the 38th parallel.

In a letter ([S/1886](#)) dated 6 November 1950, the United States asked the Security Council to address the concern ***“of the issue of aggression upon the Republic of Korea”***. The following day, the Council convened a meeting and passed resolution [S/1588](#) which condemned the armed attack upon the Republic of South Korea by North Korea as a breach of peace and called on Member States to support the maintenance of peace along the 38th parallel.

The region experienced more conflict arising from the invasion of China. To address the issue, the Security Council passed resolutions [82 \(1950\)](#) and [83 \(1950\)](#), and the General Assembly adopted resolution [498 \(V\)](#) calling on Member States to restore peace and security in the area. In response, Member States contributed troops to the [United Nations Command \(UNC\)](#), which served as a multinational military force to support the Republic of Korea during the invasion.

The UN negotiated the Korean [Armistice Agreement](#) on 27 July 1953, to ***“ensure a complete cessation of hostilities and of all acts of armed force in Korea until a final peaceful settlement is achieved”***.

After the Armistice Agreement was signed, the UNC remained in Korea to oversee the rebuilding, security and stability of the peninsula. It continues to maintain peace along the 38th parallel and has prevented further aggression against the peoples of the Republic of Korea.

1951 – International protection of refugees is strengthened

Article 14 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) states: ***“Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.”***

In 1951, the United Nations took two important steps in its efforts to protect international refugees and their right to seek asylum from persecution.

The first occurred in Geneva, Switzerland, where a diplomatic conference was convened to draft a framework for defining who is a refugee, their rights and the legal obligations of States. The end result was the [Convention relating to the Status of Refugees](#).

The Convention was more comprehensive than earlier international refugee instruments, which applied only to select groups of refugees. The Convention endorsed a single definition of “refugee” in Article 1: a person who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin ***“owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion”***.

The second milestone was that the [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#) began operations with a mandate to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. UNHCR was initially tasked with coordinating the relocation of the one million European refugees displaced by the Second World War. The organization would receive its first Nobel Peace Prize for these efforts in 1954. The second was to follow in 1981.



The International Refugee Organization (IRO) aided 1,600,000 displaced persons / UN Photo #190004

1952 – First Secretary-General resigns from a job he describes as *“the most difficult job in the world”*

Norwegian lawyer and politician, Trygve Lie, was appointed Norway's Minister of Foreign Affairs during the Second World War. When the war ended, world leaders met in San Francisco for the United Nations Conference on International Organization. Lie led the Norwegian delegation to the Conference.

Lie also led Norway's delegation to the first session of the UN General Assembly. On 1 February 1946, he was [elected](#) to serve as the first Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Political events in the early 1950s caused tension among members of the United Nations and Lie found his role as Secretary-General a difficult one to perform.



Trygve Lie addresses the General Assembly / UN Photo #1305 Marcel Bolomey

On 10 November 1952, Secretary-General Trygve Lie announced his intention to resign from what he famously described as *“the most difficult job in the world”*.

In a speech to the General Assembly, he stated: *“I shall be grateful if you would propose as a new item on the agenda, ‘Appointment of the Secretary-General of the United Nations’.”*

He would remain in office until Swedish diplomat Dag Hammarskjöld assumed the post in April 1953.

1953 – UN agency on children changes its name and enhances the protection of all children



UNICEF supplies milk for Guatemalan children / UN Photo #396478 GG

The UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) was founded in 1946 for an immediate purpose – giving relief to children in countries devastated by the Second World War.

By the early 1950s, the emphasis of UNICEF activities had moved from aiding children in Europe to assisting those in developing countries. UNICEF also moved from providing aid on an emergency

basis to creating long-range programmes for economic and social development. These significant changes were recognized by the General Assembly when it unanimously adopted resolution [802 \(VIII\)](#). It renamed the organization to United Nations Children's Fund, but kept the now-famous acronym and amended the Fund's temporary nature.

No longer an emergency agency, UNICEF was empowered to continue its mission to support children all over the world. Today, UNICEF is at work in more than 190 countries.

"We believe that nurturing and caring for children are the cornerstones of human progress. UNICEF was created with this purpose in mind – to work with others to overcome the obstacles that poverty, violence, disease and discrimination place in a child's path. We believe that we can, together, advance the cause of humanity." ([UNICEF](#))

1954 – Dag Hammarskjöld expands the political role of the Secretary-General



Dag Hammarskjöld in Peking / UN Photo #396850 Peder Hammarskjöld

Dag Hammarskjöld was recommended by the Security Council as a compromise candidate for the office of Secretary-General. Members of the Security Council believed he would focus on the administrative role of the Secretary-General and not engage in political issues. But from the beginning, Hammarskjöld saw his role as Secretary-General as more than an administrative one.

“The public servant is there in order to assist, so to say from the inside, those who make the decisions which frame history. He should – as I see it – listen, analyze and learn to understand fully the forces at work and the interests at stake ... Don’t think that he – in following this line of personal policy – takes but a passive part in the development. It is a most active one.”
(UN Press Release, SG/287, 9 April 1953)

On 10 December 1954, the General Assembly asked Hammarskjöld to take an active role in an international conflict. It was without precedent that the Assembly should want the Secretary-General to intercede for reasons other than humanitarian. Resolution [906 \(IX\)](#) requested that – in the name of the United Nations – he seek the release of 11 American airmen of the United Nations Command in Korea and all other captured personnel of that Command desiring repatriation.

Hammarskjöld sent a personal cablegram to Chou En-lai, Prime Minister of the People’s Republic of China, expressing the desire to meet with him for direct discussions. During his visit to Peking, from 30 December 1954 to 13 January 1955, the Secretary-General [secured the release of 15 airmen](#).

As Secretary-General, Hammarskjöld would continue to use his role to promote diplomatic solutions to conflicts in many areas of the world, including the Middle East, India and Africa. He paved the way for future UN leaders to build on his accomplishments and continue to expand the role of the Secretary-General in the political arena.

1955 – UN membership begins a period of growth

At the end of 1955, the Security Council [recommended 16 countries](#) for admission to the United Nations – Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Ceylon, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Laos, Libya, Nepal, Portugal, Romania and Spain. With this leap from 60 to 76, States began the first period of significant expansion of UN membership since the Organization's founding ten years earlier.

Over the next decade, the process of decolonization would bring many more newly independent countries to a seat at the United Nations. The next big step up in [membership](#) took place in 1960 when it grew from 82 to 99 Member States.

Membership to the United Nations can only be granted to States, as it is specified in [Article 4](#) of the UN Charter:



Security Council votes the admission of 16 new members to the UN / UN Photo #147487

"1. Membership in the United Nations is open to all ... peace-loving states which accept the obligations contained in the present Charter and, in the judgment of the Organization, are able and willing to carry out these obligations.

2. The admission of any such state to membership in the United Nations will be effected by a decision of the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council."

II.

Each Member State has one seat and one vote in the General Assembly, but membership varies across different UN organs. For the principal organs, it is determined by the [Charter of the United Nations](#) and the [Statute of the International Court of Justice](#).

Today, the United Nations has 193 Member States, the latest to join being South Sudan which became an independent State and part of the UN community of nations in 2011.



1956–1965: PEACEKEEPING, DEVELOPMENT AND MAJOR FREEDOMS

1956 – First UN peacekeeping mission established

In 1948 and 1949 respectively, unarmed military observers were sent to the Middle East (UNTSO) and India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP). It was the dispute over the ownership of the Suez Canal that would lead to the establishment of the first armed UN peacekeeping operation.

Between 26 September and 1 November 1956, the Security Council held 14 meetings to discuss the international operation of the Suez Canal, including four between 30 October and 1 November as the situation escalated on the ground (Security Council meetings 734–743, 748–751). No intervention was adopted as the Council was unable to reach a consensus and referred the matter to an emergency special session of the General Assembly in Security Council resolution [119 \(1956\)](#) on 31 October.

The General Assembly then convened the first emergency special session under [General Assembly resolution 377 A \(V\)](#), “Uniting for Peace”, which states that if the Security Council is unable to reach an agreement on a matter of peace and security, ***“the General Assembly shall consider the matter immediately with a view to making appropriate recommendations to Members for collective measures, including in the case of a breach of the peace or act of aggression the use of armed force when necessary, to maintain or restore international peace and security.”***

PHOTO ON CORRESPONDING PAGE:
United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) /
UN Photo #141087



On 7 November 1956, the General Assembly passed resolution [1001 \(ES-I\)](#), establishing the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF).

“The creation of UNEF, the first United Nations peacekeeping force, represented a significant innovation within the United Nations. It was not a peace-enforcement operation, as envisaged in Article 42 of the United Nations Charter, but a peacekeeping operation to be carried out with the consent and the cooperation of the parties to the conflict. It was armed, but the units were to use their weapons only in self-defence and even then with utmost restraint.” ([UN Peacekeeping](#))

Currently, the light blue helmets of United Nations peacekeepers can be seen on the ground in 13 ongoing UN peacekeeping operations on three continents.

1957 – International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and UN work together on the peaceful uses of atomic energy

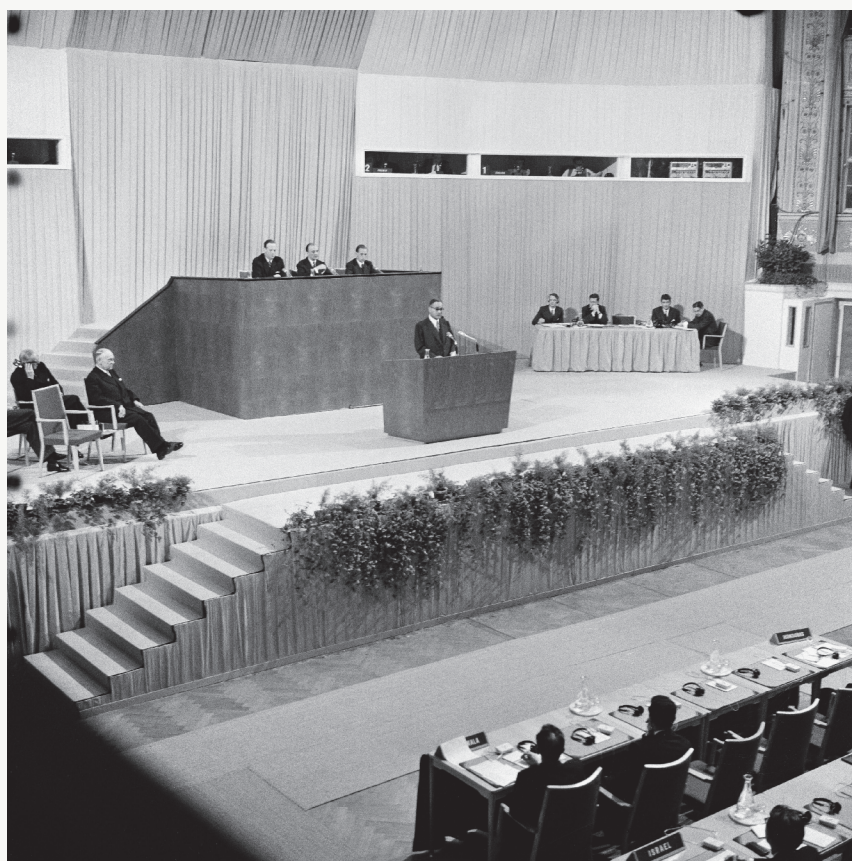
Nuclear disarmament and the peaceful use of atomic energy was a founding principle of the United Nations.

In 1953, United States President Dwight D. Eisenhower gave his famous “Atoms for Peace” speech before the General Assembly, calling for the establishment of an international atomic agency created under the aegis of the United Nations.

“The more important responsibility of this atomic energy agency would be to devise methods whereby this fissionable material would be allocated to serve the peaceful pursuits of mankind ... Thus the contributing Powers would be dedicating some of their strength to serve the needs rather than the fears of mankind.” (Eisenhower, 1953)

During its ninth session in December 1954, the General Assembly unanimously endorsed the creation of an atomic energy agency and the [Statute](#) of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was approved on 23 October 1956. The Agency began operations the following year.

The cooperative relationship between the UN and the IAEA was established on 14 November 1957, when the General Assembly passed resolution [1145 \(XXII\)](#), clearly stating the arrangements between the IAEA and various UN bodies.



General Conference of the IAEA / UN Photo #102561 FK

The role of the IAEA has evolved over the years. As its former Director General Yukiya Amano stated in his November 2013 address to the General Assembly:

"[I]n 1957, the IAEA began work in Vienna. Since then, the Agency has worked hard to bring the benefits of peaceful nuclear technology to all parts of the globe and to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. The world has changed enormously in that time. But the Atoms for Peace mission has lost none of its relevance. The Agency has successfully adapted to changing times and the evolving needs of Member States."

1958 – Special fund becomes the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)



Increasing agriculture production in Republic of Korea / UN Photo #191716 PB

The precursor of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – the UN's global development network – was the United Nations Special Fund. In 1958, the General Assembly took action to ***"employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples ..."***, as stated in the Charter of the UN, and adopted resolution [1240 \(XIII\)](#) which established the Special Fund:

"The Special Fund is thus envisaged as a constructive advance in the United Nations assistance to the less developed countries which should be of immediate significance in accelerating their economic development ..."

The Fund would be equipped to carry out large-scale projects of a pre-investment nature. Its operations would speed the economic development of less-developed countries by creating conditions that facilitated new capital investments of all types. It began financing programmes of economic development all over the world: a scheme to increase agricultural production in the Republic of Korea, a job training centre in Yugoslavia and a geological study of mineral deposits in Mexico are just a few out of many examples.

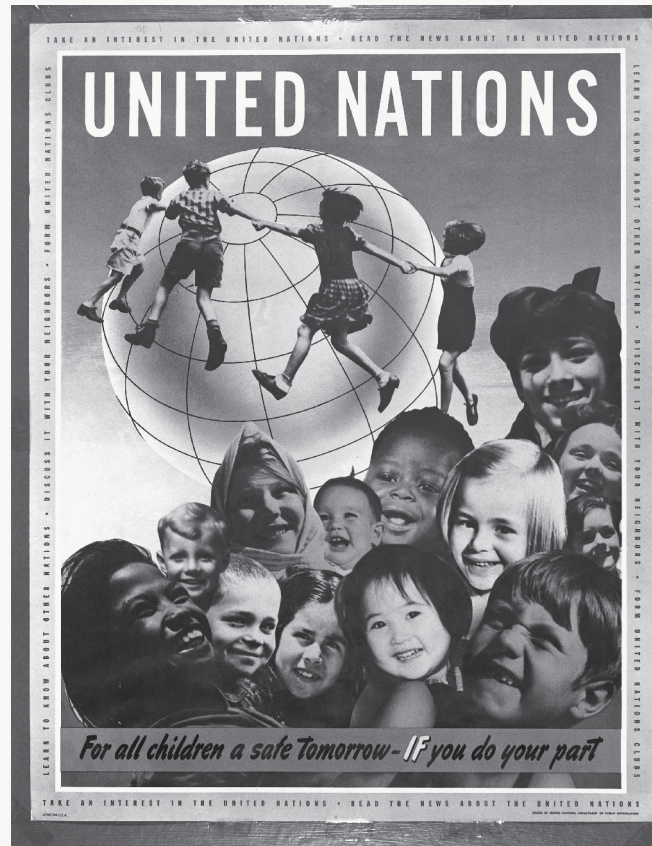
The Fund, along with the [Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance](#), would be combined in 1966 to form the [United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)](#).

Today, UNDP *“partners with people at all levels of society to help build nations that can withstand crisis, and drive and sustain the kind of growth that improves the quality of life for everyone”* and offers a *“global perspective and local insight to help empower lives and build resilient nations”*. ([UNDP](#))

1959 – United Nations “owes to the child the best that it has to give”

In 1924, the League of Nations, the predecessor to the United Nations, adopted the [Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child](#), recognizing *“that mankind owes to the child the best that it has to give”*. The United Nations adopted the Geneva Declaration and built upon it with the 1948 [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).

The General Assembly believed that the special rights of children needed to be expanded and on 20 November 1959, it unanimously adopted the [Declaration of the Rights of the Child, A/RES/1386 \(XIV\)](#).

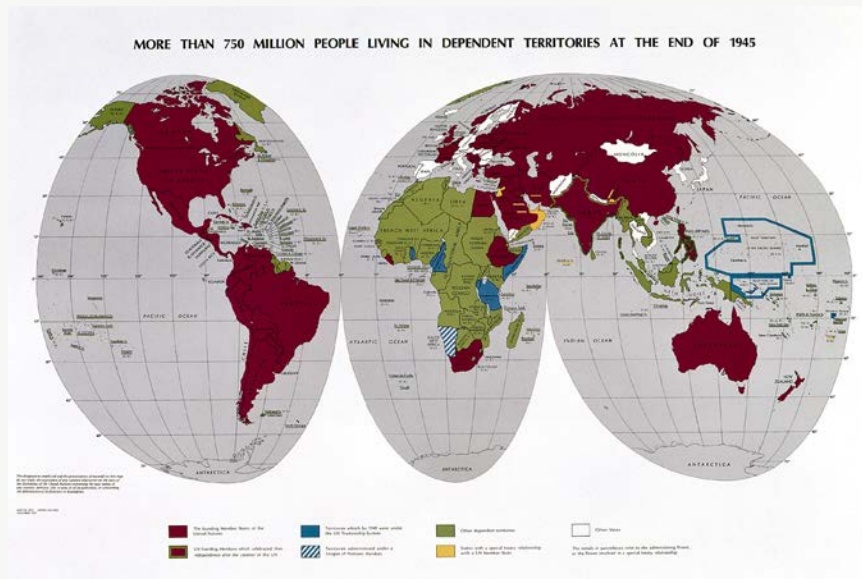


United Nations "Children's Poster" / UN Photo #308642

*"Whereas mankind owes to the child the best it has to give,
Now therefore,
The General Assembly
Proclaims this Declaration of the Rights of the Child to the end
that he may have a happy childhood and enjoy for his own good
and for the good of society the rights and freedoms herein
set forth, and calls upon parents, upon men and women as
individuals, and upon voluntary organizations, local authorities
and national Governments to recognize these rights ...
Every child, without any exception whatsoever, shall be entitled
to these rights, without distinction or discrimination on account
of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion,
national or social origin, property, birth or other status, whether
of himself or of his family."*

The Declaration of the Rights of the Child was the first United Nations statement devoted exclusively to the rights of children. Though non-binding, it would become the basis for the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), which was adopted on 20 November 1989, the 30th anniversary of the Declaration.

1960 – Speeding the progress of decolonization: “All peoples have the right to self-determination”



Photographic reproduction of one of the three maps showing the world as it was in 1945 / UN Photo #169092

When the United Nations came into being in 1945, over a third of the world's people lived in territories that were dependent on colonial powers.

Hoping to speed the progress of decolonization, the General Assembly adopted resolution [1514 \(XV\)](#), the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, on 14 December 1960. Known as the Declaration on Decolonization, it proclaims

“the necessity of bringing to a speedy and unconditional end colonialism in all its forms and manifestations ... All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”

The Special Committee on Decolonization, or C-24, was established to monitor the implementation of the Declaration. The Special Committee annually reviews the list of Territories to which the Declaration is applicable and makes recommendations as to its implementation.

“Since the birth of the United Nations, more than 80 former colonies comprising some 750 million people have gained independence. At present, 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories (NSGTs) across the globe remain on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories, home to nearly 2 million people. Thus, the process of decolonization is not complete.”
([UN and Decolonization](#))

1961 – Death of Dag Hammarskjöld shakes the United Nations but not its resolve for peace

Dag Hammarskjöld, the second UN Secretary-General, died on 18 September 1961 when his plane crashed on his way to peace talks between the Congolese Government and the separatists near Ndola airport in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). The Secretary-General had been in the Congolese capital to discuss details of UN aid when he learned of fighting between United Nations peacekeeping troops and forces striving for independence in the province of Katanga.



UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld / UN Photo #60998 JO

The [General Assembly's tribute](#) to his and the other lives lost in the pursuit of peace recognizes: ***"Dag Hammarskjöld's untiring efforts and unfailing courage were an incessant inspiration to all the work in international affairs ... His death and that of those with him symbolize the utmost sacrifice of the people who devote their lives to the cause of the United Nations."*** (Mr. Krag, Denmark)

Five days later, [United States President John F. Kennedy took to the General Assembly floor to eulogize the Secretary-General's passing](#), saying: ***"Dag Hammarskjöld is dead. But the United Nations lives ... A noble servant of peace is gone. But the quest for peace lies before us."***

A UN Commission of Inquiry, meeting between 1961 and 1962, reached an open verdict on the cause of the crash. The General Assembly passed resolution [1759 \(XVII\)](#) in 1962 requesting the Secretary-General to inform the Assembly of ***“any new evidence which may come to his attention.”***

After new accounts of the incident brought additional details to light, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the General Assembly convened an [independent panel](#) to examine the new information. In [2015](#), [2017](#) and [2019](#), UN reports on further inquiries into the death of Dag Hammarskjöld were submitted to the General Assembly. In 2019, resolution [74/248](#) was adopted requesting another report for its consideration before the end of the 75th session.

In 1961, the Nobel Committee awarded Dag Hammarskjöld the Peace Prize posthumously ***“in gratitude for all he did, for what he achieved, for what he fought for: to create peace and goodwill among nations and men.”*** ([UN and the Nobel Peace Prize](#))

1962 – Cuban Missile Crisis tests the UN

In 1962, U Thant, the Acting UN Secretary-General, and the Security Council played a vital role in averting an international crisis when a dispute in the Caribbean between the United States of America and the Soviet Union escalated.

On [24 October 1962](#), [U Thant addressed the Security Council](#), stressing that the fate of mankind was in the balance:

“Today the United Nations faces a moment of grave responsibility. What is at stake is not just the interests of the parties directly involved, nor just the interests of all Member States, but the very fate of mankind. If today the United Nations should prove itself ineffective, it may have proved itself so for all time.”



Security Council continues its debate on Cuba / UN Photo #143532 Yutaka Nagata

The following day, the replies of US President Kennedy and USSR Premier Khrushchev to Acting Secretary-General U Thant's appeal were read to the Security Council. [The US ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai E. Stevenson, and the Soviet representative, Valerian A. Zorin, would heatedly defend the claims of their respective countries.](#)

Behind the scenes, Thant worked as a mediator between Kennedy and Khrushchev, appealing to both to find a solution without military action.

The world anxiously awaited the outcome of the discussions between Kennedy and Khrushchev and, in the end, a peaceful solution to the crisis was found. The Acting Secretary-General [participated](#) in the negotiations with all parties throughout the crisis. The UN's involvement brought the negotiations to the world stage which increased pressure for a peaceful solution.

1963 – Arms embargo calls on Member States to stand against apartheid



Apartheid – a crime against humanity / UN Photo #32251

Since its founding, the United Nations had grappled with South Africa's system of legalized racial discrimination, apartheid. The Indian Government requested that the discriminatory treatment of Indians in the Union of South Africa be included in the agenda of the first session of the General Assembly.

In 1963, South Africa began an arms build-up and it was feared it would be used to enforce the government's racial policies. In response, the Security Council passed its first voluntary arms embargo on 7 August 1963.

Security Council resolution [181 \(1963\)](#) called ***"upon all States to cease forthwith the sale and shipment of arms, ammunition of all types and military vehicles to South Africa."***

The embargo was the UN's strongest condemnation of apartheid and strengthened the General Assembly's previous resolutions calling on South Africa to reject apartheid and release all political prisoners. The UN continued to fight in the global struggle against South Africa's racial policies and 31 years later, in 1994, it would observe South Africa's first multi-racial elections in which former political prisoner Nelson Mandela would be elected the country's first black president.

On 3 October 1994, President Mandela [addressed](#) the UN General Assembly for the first time and in his speech acknowledged ***"that historic change has come about not least because of the great efforts in which the United Nations engaged to ensure the suppression of the apartheid crime against humanity."***

1964 – Maintaining peace in Cyprus

When the Republic of Cyprus became [independent](#) from Britain on 16 August 1960, it created a constitution intended to balance the needs of its Greek and Turkish communities. However, the Constitution could not ease the conflict and on 15 February 1964, representatives of Britain and Cyprus requested urgent action by the Security Council in an attempt to restore peace. On 4 March 1964, the Council adopted resolution [186 \(1964\)](#) that recommended the establishment of the [United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus \(UNFICYP\)](#):

“The function of the Force should be, in the interest of preserving international peace and security, to use its best efforts to prevent a recurrence of fighting and, as necessary, to contribute to the maintenance and restoration of law and order and a return to normal conditions.”

UNFICYP became operational on 27 March 1964.



United Nations Peacekeeping Force
in Cyprus (UNFICYP) /
UN Photo #55518 BZ

In 1964, the Security Council called upon Secretary-General U Thant to use his good offices to assist in obtaining peace, and the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus was established. In the years since, Secretaries-General and their Special Representatives have tried to find a formula acceptable to both the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot communities.

After fighting broke out again in 1967, the Secretary-General worked to restore the peace and made an [appeal](#) to the parties involved that included expanding the mandate of UNFICYP:

“With regard to any further role that it might be considered desirable for UNFICYP to undertake, I gather that this could involve, subject to the necessary action by the Security Council, enlarging the mandate of the force so as to give it broader functions in regard to the realization of quiet and peace in Cyprus, including supervision of disarmament and the devising of practical arrangements to safeguard internal security, embracing the safety of all the people of Cyprus.”

The parties concerned welcomed the appeal ([S/8248/Add.7](#)). On 22 December 1967, the Security Council adopted resolution [244 \(1967\)](#), noting the appeals of the Secretary-General.

In 1974, UNFICYP, facing large-scale hostilities in the midst of a coup d'état, increased observation and took special measures to ensure the security of civilians. The mandate of UNFICYP was [extended and expanded](#).

UNFICYP remains on the island to supervise ceasefire lines, maintain a buffer zone, undertake humanitarian activities and support the good offices mission of the Secretary-General.

1965 – Protecting the “fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion”



Children drawing together for the camera /
UN Photo #64263 John Isaac

The [Charter of the United Nations](#) declares that the United Nations shall be engaged in ***“promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion”***.

On 7 December 1962, the General Assembly adopted resolution [1780 \(XVII\)](#), in which it stated that it was ***“deeply disturbed by the manifestations of discrimination based on differences of race, colour and religion still in evidence throughout the world”*** and requested the Economic and Social Council to ask the Commission on Human Rights to prepare both a draft declaration and a draft convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination.

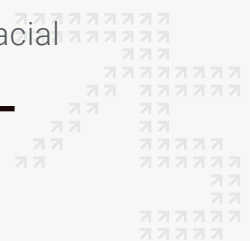
On 21 December 1965, the General Assembly approved the text of what would become the principle international treaty for the elimination of racism: [The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, A/RES/2106 \(XX\)](#).

The States Parties to the Convention agree:

“[To] adopt all necessary measures for speedily eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms and manifestations, and to prevent and combat racist doctrines and practices in order to promote understanding between races and to build an international community free from all forms of racial segregation and racial discrimination.”

The Convention came into force on 4 January 1969. It also established the [Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination \(CERD\)](#), made up of independent experts, which monitors the implementation of the Convention by State Parties through regular reporting. The Convention established three other mechanisms through which the Committee performs its monitoring functions: the [early-warning procedures](#), the examination of [inter-State complaints](#) and the examination of [individual complaints](#).

To this day, the UN continues to work against all forms of racial discrimination.



IV.



1966–1975: SECURITY COUNCIL EXPANDS, YOUTH, ENVIRONMENT, WOMEN AND NUCLEAR ISSUES ADDRESSED

1966 – Security Council expands membership from 11 to 15 members

Equal representation in the United Nations Security Council was discussed at its first session held on 17 January 1946 in Westminster, London. Here, according to the Repertory of Practice of the Security Council (1945–1954), a [Gentleman's Agreement](#) on equitable geographic representation in the Security Council was made. It was an oral agreement and never recorded in any official document; however, in 1953 it was referred to in the General Assembly by the delegate of the USSR ([A/PV.450](#)).

As new members joined the United Nations, the idea of equitable geographic representation was debated in various General Assembly sessions and on 17 December 1963, the Assembly adopted resolution [1991 A \(XVIII\)](#), “[Question of equitable representation on the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council](#)” in which it considered ***“that the present composition of the Security Council is inequitable and unbalanced”***, and recognized ***“that the increase in the membership of the United Nations makes it necessary to enlarge the membership of the Security Council, thus providing for a more adequate geographical representation of non-permanent members and making it a more effective organ for carrying out its functions under the Charter of the United Nations ...”***

The amendment to [Article 23](#) of the Charter entered into force on 31 August 1965, and membership in the Security Council was enlarged from 11 to 15 as of January 1966.

PHOTO ON PREVIOUS PAGE:
The Security Council Chamber /
UN Photo #51629 DN

IV.

On 1 February 1966, the Security Council met for the first time in the history of the United Nations with an expanded membership of 15 and a more equitable representation of all the regions of the world.

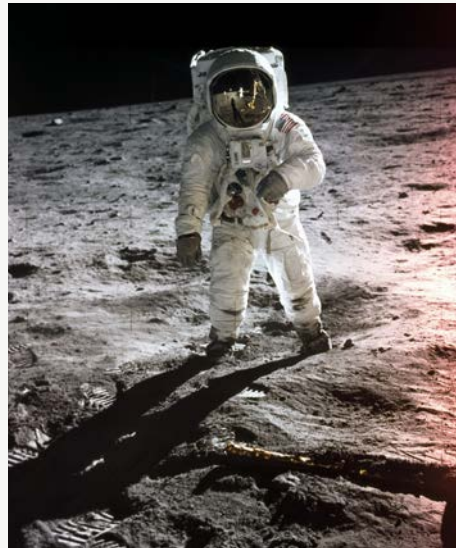
The composition of the Security Council is still debated today. At the [request of Member States](#), the ***“Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council”*** was added to the [agenda of the General Assembly](#) in 1979. An [Open-ended Working Group](#) was established in 1993 and there have been ongoing formal and informal discussions since. The issue remains on the [agenda of the General Assembly](#).

1967 – UN promotes international cooperation in the peaceful exploration and use of outer space

In 1958, shortly after the launch of the first artificial satellite, the United Nations recognized ***“the great importance of international cooperation in the study and utilization of outer space for peaceful purposes”*** and resolution [1348 \(XIII\)](#) established an Ad Hoc Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS). COPUOS would review the scope and organizational arrangements of international cooperation in this area, continue and promote scientific research and report on legal problems arising from the exploration of outer space.

The exploration of space expanded rapidly in the 1960s. In 1961, Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human being to orbit the Earth. As the space race heated up, the United Nations discussed ways to ensure the development could benefit all humankind.

In December 1967, the Legal Sub-Committee of COPUOS met in [a special session](#), where it approved an [Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space](#). On 19 December, the General Assembly unanimously adopted the text in resolution [2345 \(XXII\)](#).



Men land on the moon /
UN Photo #143854 NASA

The Rescue Agreement entered into force in December 1968 and provides that States shall take all possible steps to rescue and assist astronauts in distress and promptly return them to the launching State, and that States shall, upon request, provide assistance to launching States in recovering space objects that return to Earth outside the territory of the launching State.

On 20 July 1969, three years after the General Assembly had adopted the Rescue Agreement, astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin of the United States would walk on the moon.

Today, the [United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs](#) serves as the secretariat for COPUOS. It is responsible for promoting international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space and for implementing the Secretary-General's responsibilities under international space law.

IV.

1968 – UN passes landmark treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons



A-bomb terror / UN Photo #84773
Nagasaki International Cultural Hall

Over the course of the first 20 years of the UN, many efforts were made to put in place the systems that would prevent a nuclear conflict. In December 1961, the General Assembly [endorsed](#) the establishment of the Conference of the Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee, whose main purpose was the negotiation of an international instrument

to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The Committee submitted [their report](#), including the text of a draft treaty, to the General Assembly in March 1968.

On 12 June 1968, the General Assembly approved resolution [2373 \(XXII\)](#), [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons \(NPT\)](#) and called for its ratification, ***“convinced of the urgency and great importance of preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and of intensifying international co-operation in the development of peaceful applications of atomic energy.”***

By this Treaty, non-nuclear-weapon States agree never to acquire nuclear weapons and, in exchange, are promised access to assistance in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy; nuclear-weapon States pledge to carry out negotiations relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race and to nuclear disarmament.

The Treaty entered into force in 1970 and was extended indefinitely on 11 May 1995. A total of 191 parties have joined the Treaty, including the five nuclear-weapon States. More countries have ratified the Treaty of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons than any other disarmament agreement.

Building on the work of the NPT and the Geneva Conventions, the Conference of the Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee and the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD) submitted drafts of the [Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological \(Biological\) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction](#) in 1969 to the General Assembly. The Convention was adopted by the Assembly in resolution [2826 \(XXVI\)](#) of 16 December 1971 and entered into force on 26 March 1975. Due to a lack of consensus, chemical weapons were not included.

After 20 years of negotiations, the [Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction \(CWC\)](#) was adopted by the General Assembly in resolution [47/39](#) in 1992. It entered into force in 1997. The CWC provided for the establishment of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). It held its first session in 1997, one week after the CWC entered into force. In 2013, the OPCW won the Nobel Peace Prize ***“for its extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons”***.

1969 – Principles to guide social progress and development are declared

General Assembly resolution [2215 \(XXI\)](#) of 19 December 1966 noted with deep concern that ***“the world situation is far from satisfactory”*** and called upon the Economic and Social Council to prepare a draft declaration on social development which would, in general terms, define the objectives of social development and the methods and means of achieving them.

IV.

Over the next three years, institutions across the UN system developed and negotiated a draft declaration which was submitted to the General Assembly on 11 December 1969 for consideration. In presenting the draft, the Rapporteur of the Third Committee of the General Assembly, explained:

“In a sense, the preparation of the draft declaration by the Commission for Social Development, by the Economic and Social Council and eventually by the Third Committee of the General Assembly has been a pioneering work, as for the first time an effort has been made to include all the complicated and sometimes delicate problems connected with the social aspects of development into one comprehensive document ... The draft declaration on social progress and development now submitted for action by the General Assembly does not deal with social problems in an isolated manner. It sees social progress and development in its interrelation with economic development and with the general political situation in the world. Thus it strives to put social problems in their proper perspective.”



Children are taught in their mother-tongue at a multilingual primary school in Bangladesh / UNDP Salman Saeed

The General Assembly adopted the Declaration on Social Progress and Development in resolution [2542 \(XXIV\)](#). This was the first time an international instrument provided clear guidelines, not only for social policies, but also for the integration of economic and social action for the improvement of the social environment and the well-being of the individual.

Today, various UN offices and programmes – including the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – continue to build on the principles of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development.

“The global understanding of development has changed over the years, and countries now have agreed that sustainable development – development that promotes prosperity and economic opportunity, greater social well-being and protection of the environment – offers the best path forward for improving the lives of people everywhere.” ([UN: Promoting Sustainable Development](#))

1970 – UN holds First World Youth Assembly

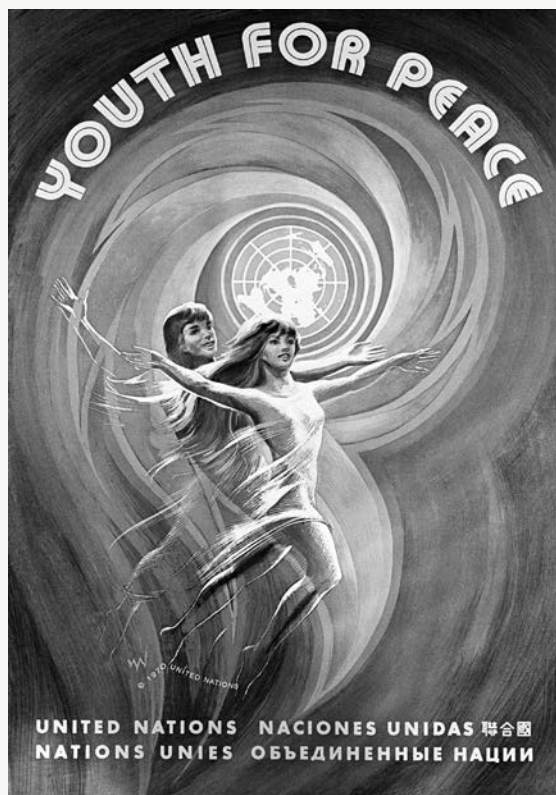
In 1969, Secretary-General U Thant commented on the growing need to bring the voices of the youth to the UN table.

“Since tomorrow’s leaders will come from the generation of today’s students, we must make every possible effort to involve these idealistic young people usefully and wisely in world-wide development efforts.” ([Secretary-General U Thant, 1969](#))

IV.

As part of the celebrations for the UN's silver jubilee, the Preparatory Committee for the 25th Anniversary, building upon the Secretary-General's message, [recommended](#) that a World Youth Assembly should take place in the summer of 1970, which was confirmed in resolution [2499 \(XXIV\)](#).

From 9 to 17 July 1970, young people from all over the world gathered at UN Headquarters in New York for the [World Youth Assembly](#), the first international youth convocation organized by the United Nations. Over nine days, 646 participants – nominated by their countries or selected by student and youth organizations – used this international platform to discuss global issues important to them, such as education, peace, development and the environment.



United Nations "Youth for Peace" poster /
UN Photo #238563 Teddy Chen

Over the last 50 years, youth have remained a priority for the Organization, with many efforts to further engage with their ideas and to provide platforms for their collaboration and participation. 1985 was [declared](#) as the International Youth Year. The adoption of the [World Programme of Action for Youth](#) by the General Assembly in 1995 provided a milestone policy framework for national action and international support to improve the situation of young people around the world.

In 2013, the first Special Envoy on Youth was [appointed](#) to ***“address the needs of the largest generation of youth the world has ever known”*** and whose leadership has led to programmes for peace, climate and humanitarian action. In 2018, [Youth2030: The United Nations Strategy on Youth](#), the first UN Youth Strategy, was launched to ***“scale up global, regional and national actions to meet young people’s needs, realize their rights and tap their possibilities as agents of change”***.

1971 – General Assembly votes to seat representatives of the People’s Republic of China



Delegation of the People’s Republic of China was formally seated in the UN General Assembly / UN Photo #122401 Yutaka Nagata

IV.

On 25 October 1971, the General Assembly adopted resolution [2758 \(XXVI\)](#) on the restoration of the lawful rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations, ***"recognizing that the representatives of the Government of the People's Republic of China are the only lawful representatives of China to the United Nations and that the People's Republic of China is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council."***

By this action, the General Assembly recalled the principles of the Charter and considered that this restoration of rights was essential both for the protection of the Charter and for the cause that the United Nations must serve under the Charter.

"The question of the representation of China in the United Nations was first raised in 1949 by the Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China. It came before the Security Council in January 1950, when a proposal not to recognize the credentials of the existing representative of China failed to receive a majority of votes. The question was raised in the General Assembly later in 1950. From 1951 through 1960, the Assembly decided each year not to consider the matter." ([GA/4220](#)) The item was considered from 1961 to 1963 and from 1965 to 1971.

The first Security Council meeting at which a representative of the People's Republic of China participated took place on 23 November 1971 ([S/PV.1599](#)). He addressed the Council with the following words: ***"According to the purposes of the United Nations Charter, the Security Council should play its due role in maintaining international peace and opposing aggression and interference. It is our hope that the spirit of the United Nations Charter will be followed out. To this end we will stand together with all the countries and peoples that love peace and uphold justice, to work for the defence of national independence and State sovereignty of various countries and for the safeguarding of international peace and the promotion of human progress."***

1972 – United Nations Environment Programme is born

By the 1970s, governments and their citizens – concerned with species loss, acid rain and pollution – agreed that a UN body should be created to coordinate the global response to environmental challenges. In 1972, the United Nations held its first major conference on international environmental issues. The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, also known as the Stockholm Conference, was held from 5 to 16 June 1972. Its [final report](#) contained recommendations for what would become the [United Nations Environment Programme \(UNEP\)](#).



Headquarters of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) / UN Photo #83957

On 15 December 1972, the General Assembly adopted resolution [2997 \(XXVII\) on “Institutional and financial arrangements for international environmental cooperation”](#). With the passage of this resolution, the new United Nations Environment Programme was officially created.

IV.

The UNEP headquarters is located in Nairobi, Kenya. The programme's mission is ***"to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations."***

Close to five decades since its creation, UNEP has worked to provide a bridge between science on a wide range of environmental issues and strong policies to support sustainable development. Today, this UN body appears to be more important than ever, because ***"we stand at a critical juncture in our collective efforts to address the climate emergency. Our war against nature must stop."*** ([Secretary-General António Guterres, 2019](#))

1973 – Chinese and Arabic become official working languages of the United Nations

With over 6,000 different languages spoken around the world, which ones should a global organization use in its daily work? The General Assembly, in resolution [2\(1\)](#), settled on five official languages: Chinese, French, English, Russian and Spanish. Of these, only two – English and French – were recommended as working languages.

"In all the organs of the United Nations, other than the International Court of Justice, Chinese, French, English, Russian and Spanish shall be the official languages, and English and French the working languages."

In the years that followed, as new Member States from all around the world joined the UN, discussions about the inclusion of the remaining official languages as working languages were held in the General Assembly and the Security Council. Spanish was added as a working language in 1948 and Russian in 1968.



Chinese interpreters at Headquarters / UN Photo #182918 Yutaka Nagata

By adopting resolutions [3189 \(XXVIII\)](#) and [3190 \(XXVIII\)](#) on 18 December 1973 the General Assembly included Chinese among the working languages of the General Assembly and the Security Council and acknowledged the importance of the Arabic language among Member States.

After Arabic was made an official and working language of the General Assembly and its Main Committees, for the first time, official UN documents would be published in Arabic and the UN would offer Arabic speakers simultaneous interpretation of statements made at meetings.

In 2010, the [United Nations launched UN Language Days](#), an initiative that celebrates multilingualism and cultural diversity while promoting equal use of all six of its official working languages throughout the Organization.

IV.

1974 – Developing countries call for a New International Economic Order

In the 1970s, developing countries expressed the need to address the continuing economic imbalance in the relations between developed and developing countries.

The issue of the establishment of a new international economic order was first raised in a [political declaration](#) adopted at the Fourth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, held at Algiers from 5 to 9 September 1973. The declaration invited the Secretary-General of the United Nations to convene a sixth special session of the General Assembly which would be devoted to development and international economic cooperation. ([UN Audiovisual Library of International Law](#))



Algeria and Argentina open General Assembly debate on raw materials and development / UN Photo #190741 Yutaka Nagata

The sixth special session was held from 9 April to 2 May 1974. UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim addressed the General Assembly and outlined the purpose of the session:

“This special session is a recognition of the necessity to redress the disparities that afflict our world and the contrasts between affluence and poverty, frustration and opportunity, conspicuous consumption and destitution ... It recognizes the burning need for greater international economic and social justice. It recognizes the role of international co-operation and organization as the lifeline to the future ... This Assembly affords an opportunity ... to lay the foundations for a world-wide economic system founded in equity and justice.” ([A/PV.2207](#))

At the closing meetings, the Assembly adopted a Declaration and a Programme of Action on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order in resolutions [3201 \(S-VI\)](#) and [3202 \(S-VI\)](#).

By adopting the Declaration, the General Assembly proclaimed its ***“determination to work urgently for the establishment of a new international economic order, based on equity, sovereign equality, interdependence, common interest and co-operation among all States, which was to correct inequalities and redress existing injustices, eliminate the gap between developed and developing countries and ensure economic and social development, peace and justice for present and future generations.”*** ([3201 \(S-VI\)](#))

IV.

1975 – UN calls for action on gender equality and women’s empowerment

In 1972, the General Assembly adopted resolution [3010 \(XXVII\)](#), designating 1975 as the International Women’s Year, with the objective ***“to promote equality between men and women, to ensure the full integration of women in the total development effort, and to recognize the importance of the increasing contribution of women to the development of friendly relations among States and the strengthening of international peace.”***

The main event was the World Conference of the International Women’s Year, held in Mexico City from 19 June to 2 July 1975. 133 governments participated, while 6,000 NGO representatives attended a parallel forum, the International Women’s Year Tribune.

The Conference’s outcome document, the [Report of the World Conference of the International Women’s Year \(E/CONF.66/34\)](#), contained the Declaration on the Equality of Women and their Contribution to Development and Peace and defined a World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Women’s Year.

The General Assembly endorsed the results of the Conference by passing resolution [3520 \(XXX\)](#) and designated 1976–1985 as the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace. The Decade would be devoted to implementing the recommendations of the Conference.

Coinciding with the International Women’s Year, the United Nations celebrated [International Women’s Day](#) for the first time on 8 March 1975. Two years later, the General Assembly adopted a resolution proclaiming a United Nations Day for Women’s Rights and International Peace, to be observed on any day of the year by Member States, in accordance with their historical and national traditions.

Since then, the United Nations has organized three world conferences on women; [Copenhagen](#) in 1980, [Nairobi](#) in 1985 and [Beijing](#) in 1995. From the Beijing Conference came the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), the most progressive blueprint ever for advancing women's rights. According to [UN Women](#), by 2020, the Beijing Declaration has spurred 274 legal and regulatory reforms in 131 countries.



World Conference of the International Women's Year / UN Photo #122986 B Lane



V.



1976–1985: A DECADE FOR DEVELOPMENT, PEACE AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

1976 – UN addresses urban growth and provides a blueprint to improve living places for all

The 1970s were a time of rapid and often uncontrolled growth of cities, especially in developing countries. Unchecked urbanization impacted the human, social and economic development of human settlements and had severe environmental and ecological impacts as well.

Recognizing the need to address global housing, building and environmental planning issues, the United Nations organized the first international UN Conference on Human Settlements ([Habitat I](#)), held in Vancouver, Canada, from 31 May to 11 June 1976. On 11 June 1976, the Conference adopted the [Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements and Action Plan \(A/CONF.70/15\)](#), which outlined the first strategies at an international level to address and control the issues of urban growth.

The approach towards urbanization was already holistic and global, linking political, spatial, social, cultural, economic and environmental concerns. Governments discussed specific recommendations and were urged to develop national strategies and policies to deal with land use and tenure, population growth, infrastructure and basic services. They were also to review the provision of adequate housing and employment while considering human and social dimensions, including the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized population groups.

PHOTO ON PREVIOUS PAGE:
Human settlements – places
where people live and work /
UN Photo #32844 Frank

On 19 December 1977, building on the results of Habitat I, the General Assembly adopted resolution [32/162](#), creating the UN Commission on Human Settlements – an intergovernmental body – and the UN Centre for Human Settlements, which served as the Commission’s executive secretariat. These two organizations were the precursors of the UN Human Settlements Programme ([UN-Habitat](#)).

In 1996, the UN held a second conference on cities – [Habitat II](#) – in Istanbul, Turkey to assess two decades of progress since Habitat I and to set fresh goals for the new millennium. A third conference – [Habitat III](#) – took place in Quito, Ecuador, in 2016 and was mandated by General Assembly resolution [66/207](#) ***“to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable urbanization that should focus on the implementation of a ‘New Urban Agenda’”***.

The conference approved the [New Urban Agenda](#) which was officially adopted by General Assembly resolution [71/256](#), in which the Member States committed to implementing actions outlined in the Urban Agenda at the national level.

UN-Habitat remains the focal point for all urbanization and human settlement matters within the UN system.

1977 – UN Water Conference addresses the challenge of adequate water for the Earth’s growing population

The United Nations began to address the global crisis caused by insufficient water supply to satisfy basic human needs in the 1970s. The international community recognized that the lack of or an inferior quality of water was a limiting factor in development processes, especially in developing countries. The growing demands on the world’s water resources to meet human, commercial and agricultural needs urgently needed to be addressed.



Water is vital for life /
UN Photo #149513 B Wolff

Between 14 and 25 March 1977, the UN held the first world intergovernmental Water Conference in Mar del Plata, Argentina. Representatives from 116 countries agreed on goals and plans to address issues surrounding access to water by all. [The Outcome Report of the United Nations Water Conference \(E/CONF.70/29\)](#) contained the Plan of Action which recognized water as a right for all for the first time: ***"All peoples, whatever their stage of development and social and economic conditions, have the right to have access to drinking water in quantities and of a quality equal to their basic needs."***

The Plan of Action set out eight recommendations including the assessment of water resources, water efficiency, environmental, pollution and health issues, policy planning and management, natural hazards, public information, regional and international cooperation. The Action Plan provided the framework for the activities of international organizations.

As a result of the Conference, the General Assembly adopted resolution [35/18](#), proclaiming 1981–1990 as the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade. In 1993, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution [47/193](#), designating 22 March as [World Water Day](#).

[UN-Water](#), an inter-agency coordination mechanism, was formalized in 2003 to coordinate cross-cutting issues related to freshwater, including the provision of policy guidelines, monitoring, and inspiring actions that support access to clean water.

1978 – UN Interim Force in Lebanon is created to maintain peace along Blue Line

Conflict along the Israel-Lebanon border in 1978 prompted the Security Council to intervene. In resolutions [425 \(1978\)](#) and [426 \(1978\)](#) of 19 March 1978, the Council called ***“for strict respect for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon within its internationally recognized boundaries”***.

In response to the request by the Government of Lebanon, the Council also established the [United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon \(UNIFIL\)](#) with a mandate to confirm the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, restore international peace and security, and assist the Lebanese Government in restoring its effective authority in the area. The first UNIFIL troops arrived on 23 March 1978.



UN Interim Force in Lebanon /
UN Photo #122770 John Isaac

As volatility in the region continued, the Council advanced negotiations for peace and adopted several resolutions. In resolution [519 \(1982\)](#), UNIFIL'S mandate was extended to continue with humanitarian and administrative tasks while in resolution [523 \(1982\)](#), the Council decided to invite a representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights to the Palestinian People to participate in the discussions.

In a [letter](#) dated 6 April and a [second one](#) dated 17 April 2000, Israel informed the UN Security Council that it would be withdrawing its troops ***“in full accordance with Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978) and that Israel intends to cooperate fully with the United Nations”***. The Lebanese President responded in a [letter](#) to the Security Council in which, while seeking clarification about the unilateral Israeli withdrawal, he committed his country to a just and comprehensive peace and viewed the withdrawal as ***“a major victory for Lebanon and for resolution 425 (1978) itself”***. After the withdrawal of troops, UNIFIL resumed its peacekeeping functions, and the United Nations, in cooperation with Lebanese and Israeli officials, identified a withdrawal line (commonly known as the Blue Line).

The presence of the Interim Force remains necessary in preventing a recurrence of hostilities across the Blue Line and the Security Council renews its mandate every year.

1979 – Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women



Women's Conference meets in Copenhagen, 14–30 July 1980 /
UN Photo #66216 Per Jacobsen

Equality of rights for women is a basic principle of the United Nations. The [Preamble to the UN Charter](#) sets as one of the Organization's central goals the reaffirmation of ***"faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women"***.

Discussions on women's rights have been on the UN agenda since the 1945 San Francisco Conference. In 1946, the [Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW\)](#) was established by UN Economic and Social Council resolution [11 \(II\)](#) of 21 June 1946 to address issues related to women. Women's rights were a major point on the agenda during the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

To consolidate standards on women's rights, the General Assembly requested the Commission on the Status of Women in 1963 to draft a Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The CSW began its work two years later and the Declaration was adopted by the General Assembly on 7 November 1967 in resolution [2263 \(XXII\)](#).

The Commission continued to work towards women's equality and, in 1974, decided to prepare a single, comprehensive and internationally binding instrument to eliminate discrimination against women. On 18 March 1979, the 34th session of the General Assembly adopted resolution [34/180](#) on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, ***"considering that discrimination against women is incompatible with human dignity and the welfare of society"***.

The Convention defined discrimination against women as any distinction, exclusion or restriction made based on sex that impairs women's equal enjoyment of fundamental rights. It entered into force on 3 September 1981 as the first comprehensive and legally binding global treaty aimed at the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

Since the Convention was passed, the UN has continued to include gender equality and women's empowerment in its agenda.

In General Assembly resolution [64/289](#) of 2 July 2010, [UN Women](#) was established as a UN entity to provide system-wide coherence in addressing issues that pertain to women's empowerment, gender equality and overall progress of issues affecting women and girls.

1980 – Emergency special session on Afghanistan held under “Uniting for Peace” resolution

Under the [United Nations Charter](#), the main responsibility of the Security Council is to maintain international peace and security. In 1980, the Security Council faced a challenge when its members could not agree on resolving the conflict situation in Afghanistan. At a stalemate, the Council passed resolution [462 \(1980\)](#), calling for an emergency special session of the General Assembly to be held to address the issue.

The Assembly was able to take action by invoking the 1950 resolution [377 \(V\)](#), commonly known as the “Uniting for Peace” resolution, which states that ***“if the Security Council, because of lack of unanimity of the permanent members, fails to exercise its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security in any case where there appears to be a threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression, the General Assembly shall consider the matter immediately ... If not in session at the time, the General Assembly may meet in emergency special session within twenty-four hours of the request therefor.”***



Nomadic Afghan family moving to a new location / UN Photo #295082 Kate Bader

The General Assembly, therefore, held an emergency special session on Afghanistan from 10 to 14 January 1980 and adopted resolution [ES-6/2](#) which called ***“for the immediate, unconditional and total withdrawal of the foreign troops from Afghanistan in order to enable its people to determine their own form of government and choose their economic, political and social system free from outside intervention, subversion, coercion or constraint of any kind whatsoever.”***

The emergency special session on Afghanistan was the sixth emergency session held by the General Assembly. Out of the ten emergency special sessions, nine have been convened under the “Uniting for Peace” resolution.

1981 – UN conference to support the least developed countries (LDCs)

The UN General Assembly convened the First United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in Paris from 1 to 14 September 1981. The Conference agenda was to respond to the special needs of low-income countries and address severe structural impediments to sustainable development.



Farming for development / UN Photo #36519 John Isaac

The Conference unanimously adopted the “Substantial New Programme of Action for the 1980s for the Least Developed Countries” in its report [A/CONF.104/22/Rev.1](#). The document provides guidelines for domestic action by the least developed countries and strategies to complement these by international support.

The immediate implementation of this Programme of Action was recommended, ***“including the necessary international support measures, which would be undertaken within the framework of the [International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade](#)”***. Other relevant resolutions that were considered included UNCTAD resolution [122 \(V\)](#) as well as General Assembly resolutions [S-11/4](#) and [35/205](#), in accordance with the plans and programmes of each least developed country.

The United Nations has since held three more Conferences on the Least Developed Countries in [1990](#), [2001](#) and [2011](#). The [UN’s Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States](#) and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs monitor the development of these countries and provide a [reporting platform](#), as well as access to international support measures for countries in need.

There are currently [47 countries](#) on the [list of LDCs](#). The number is expected to decrease as countries continue to graduate from this category.

1982 – “A constitution for the oceans” is created

In 1967, [Ambassador Arvid Pardo of Malta gave a speech](#) to the General Assembly calling for ***“an effective international regime over the seabed and the ocean floor beyond a clearly defined national jurisdiction”***. The General Assembly, by resolution [2340 \(XXII\)](#) of 18 December 1967, established an Ad Hoc Committee to Study the Peaceful Uses of the Sea-Bed and the Ocean Floor Beyond the Limits of National Jurisdiction. The Committee consisted of 36 Member States.



Fisherman casts net / UN Photo #256287 Martine Perret

Many in the international community agreed that there was a need to protect marine environments, negotiate navigational rights, institute the legal status of resources on the seabed beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, and establish a binding procedure for settlement of disputes between States.

The General Assembly heeded the global call for international action on oceans and on 17 December 1970, passed resolution [2750 \(XXV\)](#) which called for the convening of the [Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea](#).

The Ad Hoc Committee had begun the process of creating a comprehensive treaty of the oceans in 1973. Nine years later, on 10 December 1982, the [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea](#) was opened for signature in Montego Bay, Jamaica. The treaty, a culmination of more than 14 years of work, would enter into force on 16 November 1994.

The 1982 Convention charted a path to discussions on shared water resources and has helped address several important issues related to ocean usage and sovereignty, including setting territorial sea boundaries, exclusive economic zones and continental shelf rights. It also commissioned the creation of the [International Seabed Authority](#) and the [UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf \(CLCS\)](#) to serve as reporting and conflict-resolution mechanisms.

The [United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea](#) is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention, and works toward progress in the area of conservation of oceans, seas and marine living resources.

1983 – International conference focuses on the question of Palestine

The question of Palestine has been on the United Nations agenda since 1947. In the years 1947 to 1975, the General Assembly and the Security Council between them adopted 188 resolutions dealing directly or indirectly with various aspects of this issue. In the 1980s, events in the Middle East once again compelled the Assembly to address the Arab-Israeli conflict.



UN-sponsored News Mission visits Middle East, in connection with international Conference on the Question of Palestine / UN Photo #138499 Milton Grant

The International Conference on the Question of Palestine was convened by the United Nations in Geneva from 29 August to 7 September 1983. The Conference issued the [final report \(A/CONF.114/42\)](#) containing two main documents that had been adopted: the Geneva Declaration on Palestine and the Programme of Action for the Achievement of Palestinian Rights.

The Geneva Declaration set forth guidelines for international efforts to find a political settlement of the question of Palestine and recognized ***“the right of all States in the region to existence within secure and internationally recognized boundaries, with justice and security for all the people, the sine qua non of which is the recognition and attainment of the legitimate, inalienable rights of the Palestinian people”.***

The Conference recommended a Programme of Action which called for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within the framework of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. The Programme of Action also highlighted measures to alleviate the economic and social burdens borne by the Palestinian people, including an increase of special contributions to the proposed budgets, programmes and projects to enhance humanitarian, economic and social assistance to the Palestinian people.

In endorsing the Geneva Declaration, the General Assembly invited all parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict to participate in an international peace conference on an equal footing and with equal rights. The question of Palestine continues to be addressed by the [UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People \(CEIRPP\)](#), whose mandate, as per General Assembly resolution [3376 \(XXX\)](#) of 10 November 1975, is to advise and report progress to the Assembly.

On 29 November 2012, the General Assembly in resolution [67/19](#) accorded Palestine a non-member observer status which allows representatives to participate in all discussions under the auspices of the General Assembly and also contribute agenda items for discussion in the Security Council.

1984 – Providing urgent aid to a continent in crisis



Drought in Africa /
UN Photo #317390 John Isaac

In 1984, millions of Africans faced hunger, malnutrition and death due to an extreme shortage of food. Alarmed by the famine and drought, coupled with the deteriorating economic situation, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for the first time included the critical economic situation in Africa in their agendas.

Between 12 and 15 November 1984, Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to address the hunger crisis. During its session, the General Assembly considered the resolutions adopted

by the OAU, and on 3 December 1984, it passed the Declaration on the Critical Economic Situation in Africa (resolution [39/29](#)), which called for measures to help alleviate the economic problems affecting the continent and appealed for international assistance.

Several other resolutions were adopted including ECOSOC resolution [1985/80](#), which strongly urged the international community ***“to intensify its efforts in order to increase substantially the flow of resources to Africa”*** and appealed to countries, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to donate generously to the Special Assistance Fund for Drought and Famine in Africa.

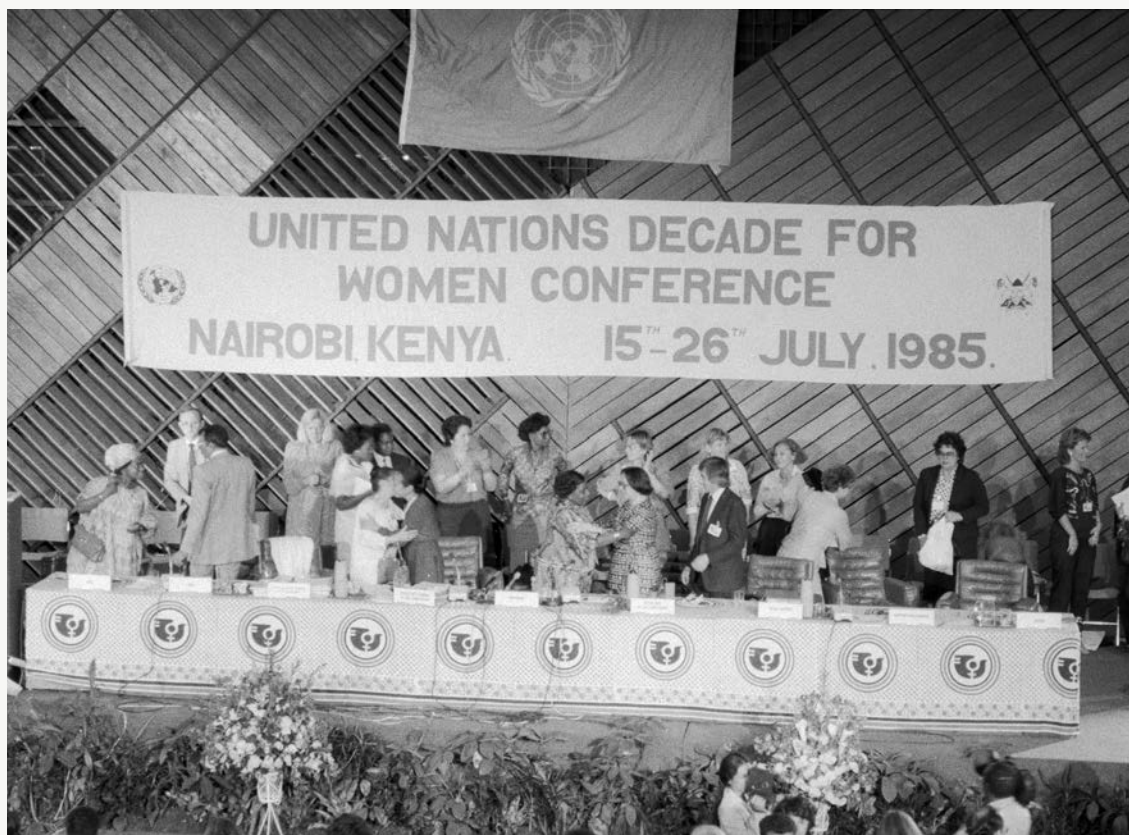
In addition, Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar established the Office of Emergency Operations for Africa. It was headed by the Administrator of the UN Development Programme and backed by a high-level, inter-agency task force to monitor the emergency situation and to mobilize support for relief operations.

In 2003, the General Assembly in resolution [57/7](#) established the [Office of the Special Adviser on Africa \(OSAA\)](#) that serves as the mechanism for addressing the African development agenda within the UN system.

1985 – UN Decade for Women concludes with lasting deliberations

In order to address issues affecting women and girls, the United Nations had organized the first World Conference of the International Women's Year in Mexico City from 19 June to 2 July 1975. It was during this Conference that a Plan of Action on women's issues was drawn up and the resolution on a Decade for Women from 1976 to 1985 was adopted. A second Conference – the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace – was held in Copenhagen in 1980.

As the UN Decade for Women drew to a close, a [Third Women's Conference](#) was held in Nairobi from 15 to 26 July 1985. The aim of this gathering was to evaluate the progress made during the Decade on issues affecting women, including health, human rights, economic progress, education and overall integration of women in development. It also focused on special areas of concern, such as women affected by drought, urban poor women, elderly, abused, refugee, migrant and indigenous women.



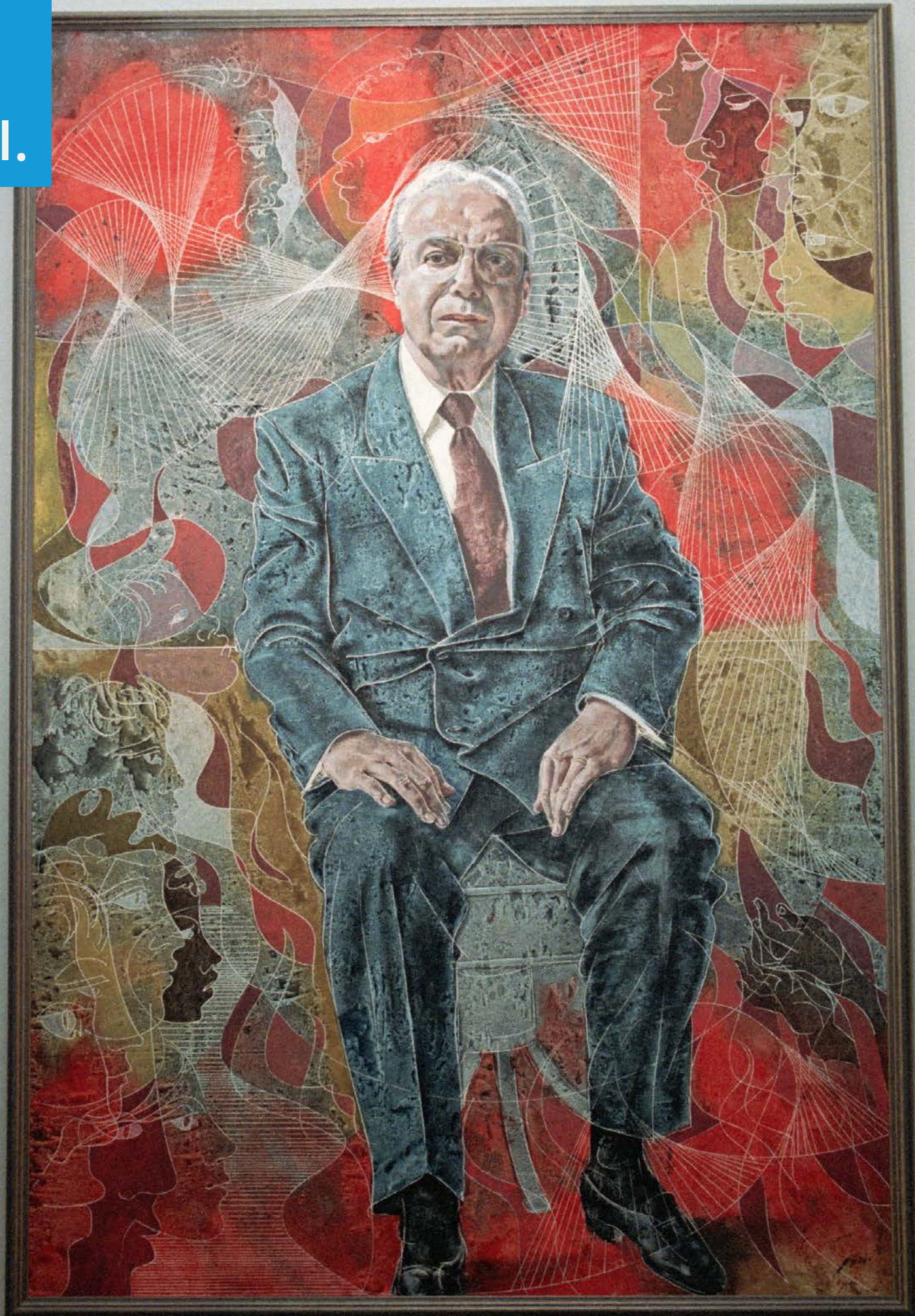
Conference on UN Women's Decade meets in Nairobi, 15–26 July 1985 /
UN Photo #66221 Milton Grant

About 13,500 participants and representatives from 157 Member States attended the Conference. Their deliberations resulted in [The Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women](#). This strategy document addressed specific areas of action, such as employment, education, health, women and peace, and basic strategies to address these issues. It provided a framework for a renewed commitment to the advancement of women and the elimination of gender-based discrimination, issues the United Nations continues to promote today.

The UN ensured that issues addressed during the Nairobi Conference were followed up by organizing another conference five years later and by mandating the [Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW\)](#) to organize follow-up review sessions. Today, all issues on women are addressed by [UN Women](#), an entity mandated to have a cohesive approach to supporting the empowerment of women globally.



VI.



1986–1995: UN TURNS 50

1986 – Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar reappointed, UN earns a Nobel Prize

On 10 October 1986, the Security Council in resolution [589 \(1986\)](#) unanimously agreed to the election of Javier Pérez de Cuéllar for a second term in office. He was sworn in the same day. In his [acceptance speech](#), Pérez de Cuéllar called the Member States to recognize **“the indissoluble link between peace and development and social justice”**, a call that he committed to during his tenure.

A lawyer and career diplomat with the Foreign Ministry of Peru, Pérez de Cuéllar represented his country at the United Nations and was a member of the Peruvian delegation to the first session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1946.

He was the President of the Security Council in 1974 where he successfully managed negotiations on the security issues in Cyprus.

He joined the United Nations as the Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs in 1979, then returned to Peru before he was appointed the fifth Secretary-General in 1982.

During his two terms as the UN Chief, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar concentrated his efforts in negotiating for peace – his achievements included the peace agreement to end the Iran-Iraq war, the release of American hostages held in Lebanon, the peace accord in Cambodia, the historic peace agreement in El Salvador and political stability in Nicaragua.

PHOTO ON PREVIOUS PAGE:
Portrait of the former
Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar /
UN Photo #986 Evan Schneider

VI.

It was during his second term that the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1988. With this award, the Nobel Committee recognized the efforts and contributions the UN had made to maintaining peace and honoured the memory of the 733 peacekeepers who had lost their lives in service.

One year before completing his term, Pérez de Cuéllar successfully led the negotiations that saw Namibia, the last colony, gain independence on 21 March 1990. Pérez de Cuéllar administered the Oath of Office to Sam Nujoma as President of the newly independent State and welcomed Namibia as the 160th member of the United Nations.

Javier Pérez de Cuéllar died on 4 March 2020 aged 100 years. In his condolences, Secretary-General António Guterres described him as ***“an accomplished statesman, a committed diplomat and a personal inspiration who left a profound impact on the United Nations and our world.”***

1987 – UN adopts a protocol to defend the Earth’s protective ozone layer

In 1974, acclaimed scientists and Nobel prize winners Mario Molina and F. Sherwood Rowland published their first scientific hypotheses arguing that chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) harmed the stratospheric ozone layer. The study showed that chemicals produced on Earth could reach the ozone layer and expose the planet to excessive ultraviolet radiation, which could damage human, plant and animal cells.



UN flag / UN Photo #447662 Mark Garten

In 1972, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) had been established to deal with global environmental concerns, and in 1977, the UNEP Governing Council called for intensive international research and monitoring of the ozone layer. In 1985, British Antarctic Survey scientists reported on the recurring springtime ozone hole over Antarctica.

To address these concerns, UN Member States, scientists and stakeholders convened a meeting in Montreal. The outcome was the [Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer](#), adopted on 16 September 1987. The principal aim of the Protocol was to protect the stratospheric ozone layer by phasing out the production and consumption of ozone-depleting substances (ODS).

In order to become a party to the Montreal Protocol, a State must be party to the [Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer](#), which was adopted in 1985 and came into force in September 1988. The Montreal Protocol would enter into force on 1 January 1989.

To increase awareness of the dangers of depleting the ozone layer, in 1995, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 16 September as the International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer (resolution [49/114](#)).

The Montreal Protocol has been [ratified](#) by 198 countries – the first treaty in the history of the United Nations to achieve universal ratification – and so far, the Parties to the Protocol have phased out 98% of ozone-depleting substances globally.

VI.

1988 – Panel to protect the global climate for present and future generations is created

On 6 December 1988, the UN General Assembly in resolution [43/53](#) endorsed the action of the [World Meteorological Organization \(WMO\)](#) and the [United Nations Environmental Programme \(UNEP\)](#) in jointly establishing the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#).

In the resolution, the Assembly recognized the ***“conservation of climate as part of the common heritage of mankind”*** and mandated the IPCC to initiate a comprehensive review, of the state of the science on climate change, review the implications of climate issues, initiate possible strategies to delay, limit or mitigate the impact of climate change, and strengthen existing legal instruments. The General Assembly also requested the Panel to consider elements for a future convention on climate issues.



Intergovernmental negotiating committee for Framework Convention on Climate Change concludes second session at Geneva / UN Photo #319442

The Panel committed to providing an internationally coordinated scientific assessment of the environmental and socio-economic impacts of climate change and constant review of realistic responses, strategies and reporting mechanisms.

The first session of the IPCC was held in Geneva from 9–11 November 1988. The session's [report](#) underlined the importance of recognizing climate change as a challenge requiring international cooperation and laid the foundation for follow-up sessions.

With its efforts in addressing climate change the IPCC won the [2007 Nobel Peace Prize](#), together with American environmentalist Albert Arnold (Al) Gore Jr. In awarding the prize, the Nobel Committee recognized the ***“efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change.”***

The IPCC continues to provide scientific reports and guidelines on curbing climate change while providing a cohesive platform for research, monitoring and reporting.

1989 – USSR and United States co-sponsor a peace resolution for the first time

After the Second World War, geopolitical hostility prevailed between the Soviet Union and the United States and their former allies. From the late 1940s to the early 1990s, the two major powers entered into a period of “cold war”, where despite lack of direct fighting there was tension in their diplomatic relations and a struggle for supremacy in military deployment, nuclear development, trade and technology.



View of the General Assembly Hall / UN Photo #119822 Eskinder Debebe

1989 saw a rebirth of nations and a new move towards nationalism. The communist regimes across Europe collapsed, the Berlin Wall fell on 9 November 1989 and the cold war began to thaw.

Six days later, on 15 November 1989, the United States and the USSR for the first time in 44 years of United Nations history co-sponsored a resolution in support of the Organization's commitment to international peace. In General Assembly resolution [44/21](#), the two Member States recognized ***"the potential of the United Nations to be even more effective in achieving international cooperation"***, reaffirmed their commitment for budgetary support to the Organization's work, and called for a strengthening of the UN's role in maintaining international peace and security.

The USSR and the United States jointly recognized the UN as the international mechanism for the achievement of international peace and called on the Member States to respect the principles of sovereign equality, political independence, and integrity and sovereignty of States. The resolution also underlined the importance of the peaceful settlement of disputes and the commitment to the principles of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, values that the UN upholds until today.

1990 – Namibia, the last remaining colony in Africa, gains independence



Namibia – birth of a nation / UN Photo #122606 John Isaac

Namibia's struggle for independence had been on the United Nations agenda for many years.

VI.

In 1946, the UN issued the [Report by the Ad Hoc Drafting Committee on Questions to be Transmitted to the Government of the Union of South Africa](#) presenting 50 questions relating to the administration and the freedom of the peoples of South West Africa (Namibia). In their response in document [T/175](#) of 31 May 1948, the South African Government refused to cooperate and indicated that reporting to the UN Trusteeship Council was not an obligation but ***“for information only”***.

The UN persisted in advocating for Namibia’s independence and on 28 November 1957, the General Assembly established in resolution [1143 \(XII\)](#) the Committee on South West Africa to supervise the South African administration of the South West Africa mandate. Once again, South Africa refused to cooperate with the UN Committee.

After 20 years of negotiating with the Union of South Africa, the General Assembly decided in resolution [2145 \(XXI\)](#) of 27 October 1966 to terminate South Africa’s right to administer the Territory.

In 1967, General Assembly resolution [2248 \(S-V\)](#) established the United Nations Council for South West Africa to administer the Territory until independence. It thus became the only Territory for which the United Nations assumed direct responsibility.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) had issued an [Advisory Opinion](#) on 11 July 1950 stating that the Union of South Africa was not obligated to convert South West Africa into a United Nations Trust Territory. The Court issued another [Advisory Opinion](#) on 21 June 1971, ruling that the continued presence of South Africa in Namibia was illegal.

The fight for freedom persisted through decades and the UN continued to offer unwavering support. In 1978, the Security Council in resolution [435 \(1978\)](#) presented a settlement proposal and established the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) to monitor the process towards independence. Although UNTAG suffered several casualties, the mandate was successfully implemented and the South African military finally withdrew from the Territory on 22 November 1989.

On 21 March 1990, Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar swore in Sam Nujoma as Namibia's first President, and on 28 March, he announced in his report ([S/21215](#)) to the Security Council that the independence of the last Territory in Africa ***"was achieved, in dignity and with great rejoicing"***.

1991 – Post cold war, UN peacekeeping expands in size and scope

The deployment of the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador in 1991 was part of an expansion of UN peacekeeping in the early 1990s. With the cold war being over, the Security Council found a new consensus and a common sense of purpose. It authorized a total of 20 new operations between 1989 and 1994, raising the number of peacekeepers from 11,000 to 75,000.



UN Observer Mission in
El Salvador (ONUSAL) /
UN Photo #160270 J Bleibtreu

Since 1980, El Salvador had been in a civil war between the Government and the insurgent group, the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN). In September 1989, following a formal request from both parties, Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar began assisting in talks aimed at ending the war. The UN-supported negotiations began bearing fruit when the two warring parties agreed to sign a human rights agreement on 26 July 1990 which was later endorsed by the General Assembly on 16 August 1990 in document [A/44/971](#).

VI.

This agreement paved the way for the establishment of a United Nations verification mission to monitor human rights and fundamental freedoms in El Salvador. The Secretary-General sent a preliminary mission to determine the feasibility of a peacekeeping mission. On 20 May 1991, following the Secretary-General's recommendation, the Security Council adopted resolution [693 \(1991\)](#) establishing the [UN Observer Mission in El Salvador \(ONUSAL\)](#) which became a fully operational peacekeeping mission on 26 July 1991.

UN-sponsored talks culminated in the signing of several peace agreements and a final accord on 16 January 1992 in Mexico City, ending 12 years of civil war. ONUSAL's mandate was expanded when El Salvador requested support in the monitoring of the 1994 elections. The mission successfully observed the elections, concluded its mandate and closed at the end of April 1995.

The [Security Council paid tribute](#) to the accomplishments of the peacekeeping mission and recognized ***"with satisfaction that El Salvador had evolved from a country riven by conflict into a democratic and peaceful nation"***.

1992 – “An Agenda for Peace”: a guideline for preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping is adopted



Security Council holds first Summit-Level meeting and issues declaration on its central role in maintaining world peace and security / UN Photo #185270 Milton Grant

On 31 January 1992, the first Security Council Summit, with leaders from all fifteen members in attendance, was held in New York.

The meeting reaffirmed the central role of the Council in maintaining world peace and upholding the principle of collective security as envisioned in the UN Charter.

The [meeting concluded](#) with a request by the members to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to circulate to the Member States ***“his analysis and recommendations on ways of strengthening and making more efficient within the framework and provisions of the Charter the capacity of the United Nations for preventive diplomacy, for peacemaking and peace-keeping”***.

Boutros Boutros-Ghali responded in June 1992 with a report transmitting what would become the UN landmark document for preventive diplomacy titled “An Agenda for Peace” ([A/47/277](#)). In addition to an analysis of the current peace and security framework, the Secretary-General added the new concept of post-conflict peace-building, defined as ***“action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict”***.

He believed that preventing conflict before it happens, post-conflict peace-building, peacemaking, peace-keeping, and preventative diplomacy were essential to the UN’s work.

Since 1992, the United Nations has applied the guidelines of the Agenda to prevent conflict outbreaks, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict. In 2010, the UN worked with partners in Kyrgyzstan to prevent the escalation of ethnic conflicts between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek. The UN Special Envoy led negotiations that facilitated capacity-building, regional dialogues which led to a de-escalation of tensions and an environment for dialogue, reform and eventual elections. In 2011, the UN Envoy for Peace negotiated with the Malawi Government after weeks of protests that caused many deaths. The UN-facilitated dialogue deescalated the situation and paved the way for peaceful negotiations.

VI.

In 2012, Kofi Annan was assigned to negotiate a peace accord in Kenya and brought two presidential rivals, President Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga, to share power after the 2012 post-election conflict. The United Nations continues to use the principles provided by the “Agenda for Peace” and the Secretary-General’s [representatives, mediators, coordinators and good offices](#) to address conflicts and prevent escalation.

1993 – International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia is established

The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed dramatic political and social change across Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union with the collapse of the majority of communist systems and a resurgence of nationalism.



Croatia – UN Transitional Authority in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES) / UN Photo #106563
Erica Kanalstein

Following the violent break-up of Yugoslavia, reports of mass atrocities (massacres of thousands of civilians, rape and torture in detention camps, hundreds of thousands expelled from their homes) led the Security Council to establish an international tribunal to address these crimes.

On 25 May 1993, the Council passed resolution [827 \(1993\)](#), formally establishing the [International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia \(ICTY\)](#). This was the first time that the United Nations established a war crimes tribunal since the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals after the Second World War.

The Tribunal had the authority to prosecute individuals on four categories of offences: grave breaches of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, violations of the laws or customs of war, genocide, and crimes against humanity as defined in its Statute. It addressed crimes committed from 1991 to 2001 against members of various ethnic groups in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (now: Republic of North Macedonia) and has [charged](#) over 161 persons.

The ICTY has provided an invaluable platform for victims to testify to the horrors they experienced and witnessed. By bringing perpetrators to trial, the Tribunal aimed to bring justice to thousands of victims and their families, thus contributing to lasting peace in the former Yugoslavia.

1994 – UN Trusteeship Council ends its historic task



UN Headquarters – Trusteeship Council /
UN Photo #64538 Andrea Brizzi

VI.

At the end of the Second World War, over a third of the world's population lived in dependent Territories. The General Assembly, in resolution [66 \(I\)](#) of 14 December 1946, identified 72 Territories that were under colonial or administrative governments.

The [Trusteeship Council](#), one of the main organs of the United Nations, was established by the Charter to supervise the ***"administration and supervision of such territories as may be placed thereunder by subsequent individual agreements"***, called Trust Territories. The Council was also to ensure that governments responsible for their administration took adequate steps to prepare them to, among other responsibilities, ***"develop self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of the peoples, and to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institutions, according to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and their varying stages of advancement"***.

The supervision of Trust Territories involved grueling negotiations between administrative governments and the Territories. The United Nations worked closely with the Territories and addressed petitions presented to the Trusteeship Council on all issues concerning self-determination and self-governance. The Council mandated the governments to respond through regular reports on steps they were taking to not only ensure that the petitions were addressed but that they were taking adequate steps towards the Territories' independence.

The United Nations had placed 11 Territories under the International Trusteeship System and by 1993, all except the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (Palau) had gained independence. In 1994, Palau became independent and the Security Council terminated the United Nations Trusteeship Agreement for the last of the Territories on its agenda.

With its historic mission completed, the Trusteeship Council voted to suspend operation and meets only as occasion requires.

1995 – The United Nations turns 50

On 24 October 1995, the largest gathering of world leaders took place to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations.



UN lights up in commemoration of its fiftieth anniversary / UN Photo #64541 Evan Schneider

VI.

To mark the anniversary, the UN reviewed the progress made, challenges met, accomplishments achieved, and declared that it had been tested by global and regional conflicts, humanitarian crises and turbulent change. Yet, it had survived and played an important role in preventing another global war and achieved much for people all over the world.

In 50 years, the UN had keenly observed all responsibilities entrusted to it under the Charter, which included: maintaining international peace and security, protection of human rights, delivering humanitarian aid, promoting sustainable development and upholding international law.

At 50, the United Nations had helped to shape the structure of relations between nations in many ways. It had successfully negotiated the process of decolonization, mediated between warring parties, created mechanisms to advance human rights for all, supported sustainable development for the developing countries and sprang into action for those who needed humanitarian assistance. The UN had walked with nations as they fought for their right to self-determination and setup tribunals and courts to bring to justice those who committed crimes against humanity.

During the Summit, Member States reaffirmed the purposes of the UN Charter in a declaration pledging their faith in the work of the Organization, ***“determined that the United Nations of the future will work with renewed vigour and effectiveness in promoting peace, development, equality and justice and understanding among the peoples of the world”***. The General Assembly adopted this [Declaration on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations in resolution 50/6](#).



1996–2005: UN TACKLES 21st CENTURY CHALLENGES

1996 – Taking steps towards nuclear disarmament

The end of the Second World War saw the beginning of the cold war and the nuclear arms race. Between 1945 and 1996, over 2,000 nuclear tests were carried out all over the world.

Concern about the effects of nuclear testing on human health and the environment led to the 1963 [Partial Test-Ban Treaty](#). It banned nuclear testing in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water. However, underground nuclear tests still continued.

The United Nations' sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, the [Conference on Disarmament](#), negotiated a comprehensive nuclear test-ban treaty from 1994 to 1996. The [Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty \(CTBT\)](#) was adopted by General Assembly resolution [50/245](#) on 10 September 1996.

The CTBT bans any nuclear weapon test explosion or any other nuclear explosion, maintains an International Monitoring System (IMS) and provides for measures to redress a violation of the Treaty and to ensure compliance, including sanctions, and for settlement of disputes.

As of October 2020, 184 countries have signed the Treaty and 168 have ratified it, but it [has not yet entered into force](#).

PHOTO ON CORRESPONDING PAGE:
Fiftieth session of the General Assembly adopts
Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty /
UN Photo #179108 Evan Schneider



VII.

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VOTING

1997 – Combating climate change by targeting the reduction of greenhouse gases

At the [Earth Summit in Rio](#) in 1992, countries signed onto the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\)](#).

Key provisions of this international treaty call for developed countries and countries undergoing transition to a market economy to set goals of limiting the emission of greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, to 1990 levels. By 1995, countries realized that the provisions in the UNFCCC were inadequate.



Climate Change Conference meets in Kyoto, Japan, 1–10 December 1997 / UN Photo #173166 Frank Leather

VII.

Work began on negotiating a protocol to create stricter targets for reducing greenhouse gases. The result of these negotiations was the [Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#). On 11 December 1997, it was adopted unanimously at the third session of the Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC – COP3) in Kyoto, Japan. Due to a complex ratification process, it entered into force on 16 February 2005.

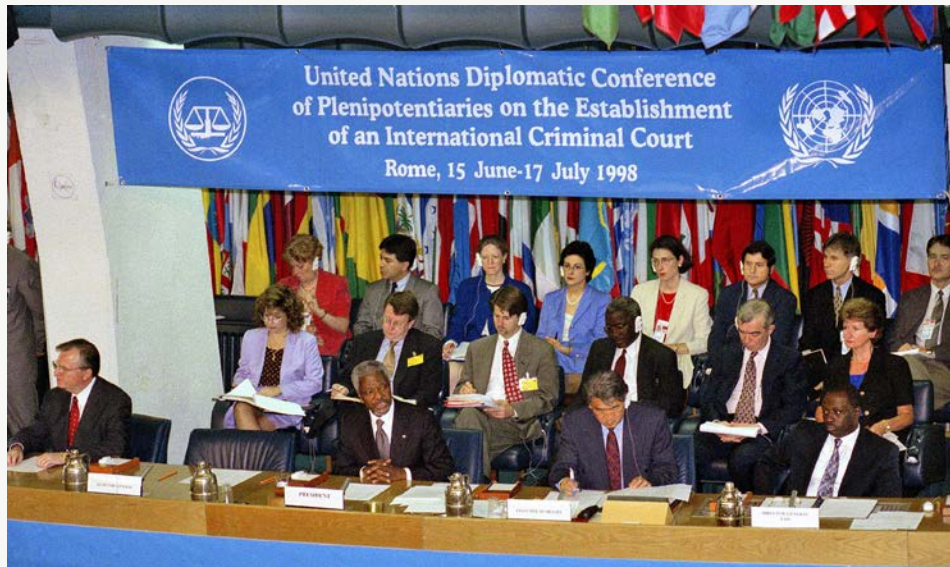
The Kyoto Protocol set internationally binding emission reduction targets. Developed countries accepted their historical responsibility for the high levels of greenhouse gases and were given higher targets to achieve.

When the Kyoto Protocol entered into force in 2005, [Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon](#) remarked:

“This is a great stride forward in our struggle to confront one of the biggest challenges we face in the twenty-first century: climate change ... I call on the world community to be bold, to adhere to the Kyoto Protocol, and to act quickly in taking the next steps. There is no time to lose!”

1998 – A permanent International Criminal Court is established

In 1945, the Governments of the allied powers created the International Military Tribunal to prosecute the criminals of the Second World War. Decades later, in the 1990s, the atrocities committed in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda would compel the United Nations to establish tribunals to bring justice to victims. These past tribunals were set up to deal with specific conflicts over a specific time, but the United Nations and the international community recognized the need for a permanent criminal court.



UN Diplomatic Conference opens in Rome / UN Photo #173783 Evan Schneider

To that end, the [International Law Commission \(ILC\)](#) and General Assembly Committees carried out six years of preparatory work. The final push for such a court began at the [United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court](#) taking place in Rome, Italy from 15 June to 17 July 1998. [The Rome Statue of the International Criminal Court](#), adopted on 17 July 1998, provided the legal basis for establishing the world's first permanent [International Criminal Court \(ICC\)](#).

The ICC would investigate, prosecute and try individuals accused of committing the most serious crimes of concern to the international community: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression.

VII.

When the Rome Statute entered into force in 1992, [Secretary-General Kofi Annan](#) stated:

“The entry into force of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court is an historic occasion. It reaffirms the centrality of the rule of law in international relations. It holds the promise of a world in which the perpetrators of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes are prosecuted when individual States are unable or unwilling to bring them to justice. And it gives the world a potential deterrent to future atrocities.”

1999 – Assisting East Timor’s journey to independence



East Timor during the transition to independence / UN Photo #31573
Eskinder Debebe

The “question of East Timor” was put on the agenda of the United Nations in 1960 when the Portuguese colony was listed as a Non-Self-Governing Territory with the [UN Special Committee on Decolonization](#). After the withdrawal of Portugal in 1976, Indonesia declared East Timor its 27th province. Given the opportunity to vote, the people of East Timor chose independence over special autonomy within the Republic of Indonesia on 30 August 1999.

On 25 October, the Security Council adopted resolution [1272 \(1999\)](#) and established the [United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor \(UNTAET\)](#). UNTAET would be an integrated, multidimensional peacekeeping operation fully responsible for the administration of East Timor during its transition to independence.

The resolution ***“decides to establish, in accordance with the report of the Secretary-General, a United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), which will be endowed with overall responsibility for the administration of East Timor and will be empowered to exercise all legislative and executive authority, including the administration of justice”.***

When East Timor became independent three years later, Secretary-General Kofi Annan handed over the UN’s authority to the speaker of East Timor’s National Parliament. UNTAET, its mandate fulfilled, was succeeded by the [United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor \(UNMISET\)](#).

On 27 September 2002, East Timor, now known as the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, became the [191st Member State of the United Nations](#).

2000 – United Nations welcomes the new Millennium

In September 2000, the Millennium Summit was held at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The Summit’s theme was “The United Nations in the twenty-first century” and encompassed the topics of peace and security, including disarmament, development, poverty eradication, human rights and strengthening the international organization.

VII.



UN Millennium Summit group photo / UN Photo #84171 Terry Deglau (Eastman Kodak)

At the time, it was the largest-ever gathering of world leaders. They had come together to unanimously adopt the [United Nations Millennium Declaration](#). It reaffirmed the faith of Member States in the United Nations and its Charter as ***“indispensable foundations for a more peaceful, prosperous and just world”***.

In the Declaration, world leaders recognized ***“that in addition to our separate responsibilities to our individual societies, we have a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level. As leaders we have a duty therefore to all the world’s people, especially the most vulnerable and, in particular, the children of the world, to whom the future belongs”***.

The Declaration committed world leaders to new global partnerships and set out a series of time-bound targets – with a deadline of 2015 – that became known as the [Millennium Development Goals \(MDGs\)](#).

The eight MDGs ranged from halving extreme poverty rates to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education. They served as the focus for the work of the UN in the years to come and marked an historic approach of global mobilization to improve living standards for all people around the world.

2001 – A global response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic

At the United Nations Millennium Summit, the HIV/AIDS epidemic was placed firmly on the global development agenda as one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). [Goal number six](#) called for a coordinated global effort by the international community to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015.



AIDS memorial quilt displayed at UN Headquarters, as General Assembly holds special session on HIV/AIDS epidemic / UN Photo #158047 Eskinder Debebe

In an [April 2001 address](#) to African leaders, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan made clear that the battle against AIDS was a ***“personal priority”***.

VII.

A special session of the General Assembly, focusing on an expanded global response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, was held in New York in June 2001. The 189 UN Member States unanimously adopted the [Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS](#) in which they expressed their deep concern ***“that the global HIV/AIDS epidemic, through its devastating scale and impact, constitutes a global emergency and one of the most formidable challenges to human life and dignity, as well as to the effective enjoyment of human rights, which undermines social and economic development throughout the world and affects all levels of society – national, community, family and individual”***.

With this declaration, entitled “Global Crisis – Global Action”, world leaders committed themselves to set common targets for reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS and alleviating its impact.

UN entities – including [UNAIDS](#) as the agency leading the global effort to combat the disease – continue to discuss and address issues related to HIV/AIDS with concrete targets to be met to end this threat to public health by 2030.

2002 – For the first time, a special session is devoted entirely to children

In May 2002, for the first time the General Assembly held a special session devoted entirely to children. The proceedings included over 600 children as delegates and participants. [Secretary-General Kofi Annan](#) opened the session with the following words:



Secretary-General meets with child delegate from Bolivia / UN Photo #50815 Eskinder Debebe

"I would ... like to address my words to them – the children of the world. I would like to tell you that, wherever you may live, you have the right to grow up free of poverty and hunger. You have the right to a quality education, whether you are a girl or a boy. You have a right to be protected from infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS. You have a right to grow up on a clean and healthy planet, with access to safe drinking water. You have a right to live safe from the threat of war, abuse, and exploitation.

These rights are obvious. Yet we, the grown-ups, have failed you deplorably in upholding many of them."

VII.

The special session was convened to review the progress that had been made since the 1990 World Summit for Children, to set far-reaching goals for the 21st century and to devise a strategy for achieving them. Progress had been made, as was documented in the Secretary-General's report "[We the Children](#)", but the agenda of the 1990 Summit was still unfinished.

When the session ended on 10 May, world leaders had committed to "[A World Fit for Children](#)" – a document that combined a declaration, a progress review and a plan of action. This action plan included specific goals and targets in four priority areas: promoting healthy lives, providing quality education, protection against abuse, exploitation and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS.

In the declaration, it was stated:

"We stress our commitment to create a world fit for children, in which sustainable human development, taking into account the best interests of the child, is founded on principles of democracy, equality, non-discrimination, peace and social justice and the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of all human rights, including the right to development."

2003 – UN addresses the global digital divide

In 2003, with the exponential growth in technology evident in the daily lives of millions, the United Nations was concerned that the benefits of new technologies – especially information and communications technologies – were not available to all.

Sierra Leone – youth employment /
Natsuko Kaneyama (UNDP)



In his speech at a conference about [“The Net World Order”](#) in June 2003, Secretary-General Kofi Annan said:

“The swift emergence of a global ‘information society’ is changing the way people live, learn, work and relate. An explosion in the free flow of information and ideas has brought knowledge and its myriad applications to many millions of people, creating new choices and opportunities in some of the most vital realms of human endeavour. Yet too many of the world’s people remain untouched by this revolution. A ‘digital divide’ threatens to exacerbate already-wide gaps between rich and poor, within and among countries.”

In December 2003, the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society was held in Geneva. At the Summit, international organizations, governments, the private sector and civil society came together and adopted a [Declaration of Principles](#) as well as a [Plan of Action](#) that outlined specific goals for bridging the digital divide.

In the Declaration, participants reaffirmed that ***“as an essential foundation of the Information Society, and as outlined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that everyone had the right to freedom of opinion and expression; that this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”***

In 2020, growing digital divides are still a challenge, as are cyber threats and human rights violations online. A [report of the Secretary-General](#) laid out a road map for digital cooperation in which all stakeholders play a role in advancing a safer, more equitable digital world.

VII.

2004 – UN faces the greatest threats to security in the 21st century

On 19 August 2003, a truck bomb exploded at the UN headquarters in Baghdad, killing 22 people, among them the top United Nations Envoy in Iraq, [Sergio Vieira de Mello](#). Secretary-General Kofi Annan denounced the bombing as an inexcusable **“act of unprovoked and murderous violence”**. A month later, on 22 September, another suicide bomber struck a police checkpoint outside the UN headquarters killing an Iraqi policeman and wounding 19 people, including two UN workers.



Secretary-General receives report of High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change / UN Photo #58954 Eskinder Debebe

After the second attack, Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced the creation of a High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change. On 2 December 2004, the Panel released their report: ["A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility"](#). It made recommendations for change in six areas identified as the greatest threats to security in the 21st century: poverty and environmental degradation, terrorism, civil war, conflict between States, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and organized crime. The document made clear that ***"today's threats recognize no national boundaries, are connected, and must be addressed at the global and regional as well as national levels"***.

Kofi Annan addressed the General Assembly on the [recommendations of the report](#):

"One of its key messages is this: because of globalization we live in a world of interconnected threats and mutual vulnerability between rich and poor and weak and strong. No country can afford to deal with today's threats alone, and no threat can be dealt with effectively unless other threats are addressed at the same time ..."

It is hardly possible to overstate what is at stake, not only for this Organization but for all the peoples of this world, for whose safety this Organization was created. If we do not act resolutely, and together, the threats described in the report can overwhelm us."

VII.

2005 – Building peace in countries emerging from conflict

In a [2005 report](#), titled “In larger freedom: towards development, Security and human rights for all”, Secretary-General Kofi Annan noted that ***“roughly half of all countries that emerge from war lapse back into violence within five years.”*** He further concluded that ***“if we are going to prevent conflict we must ensure that peace agreements are implemented in a sustained and sustainable manner”***.

To achieve this goal, the Secretary-General proposed the establishment of a Peacebuilding Commission, thereby responding to the ***“gaping hole in the United Nations institutional machinery: no part of the United Nations system effectively addresses the challenge of helping countries with the transition from war to lasting peace”***.

On 20 December 2005, the General Assembly and the Security Council passed resolutions [A/RES/60/180](#) and [S/RES/1645 \(2005\)](#) respectively to create the Peacebuilding Commission. One of the Commission’s main purposes was ***“to bring together all relevant actors to marshal resources and to advise and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery”***.

These resolutions also requested the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly on the arrangements for establishing a [Peacebuilding Fund](#) with the key objective to ensure that resources needed for peacebuilding activities could be released immediately ([A/60/984](#)). The Fund may invest with UN entities, governments, regional organizations, multilateral banks, national multi-donor trust funds or civil society organizations to respond quickly and flexibly to peacebuilding opportunities.



Since its creation, the [Peacebuilding Commission](#) has reinforced United Nations efforts in many countries emerging from conflict. It has provided support to Member States at risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict and advised the Security Council on mandates, reconfigurations, drawdowns and transitions.

Secretary-General visits refugee camps in Chad / UN Photo #14784 Eskinder Debebe



VIII.



2006–2015: WORLD LEADERS ADDRESS GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS, UN WOMEN IS ESTABLISHED

2006 – Human Rights Council replaces the Commission on Human Rights

The Charter, the founding document of the United Nations, signed in San Francisco in 1945, uses the term “human rights” seven times, enshrining the promotion and protection of human rights as a key purpose and guiding principle of the Organization.

The Commission on Human Rights was established in 1946 as the main UN body working to promote and protect human rights. At its first session in 1947, it was tasked with drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In 2005, – as part of his agenda to reform the UN – [Secretary-General Kofi Annan](#) proposed the replacement of the Commission on Human Rights:

“If the United Nations is to meet the expectations of men and women everywhere – and indeed, if the Organization is to take the cause of human rights as seriously as those of security and development – then Member States should agree to replace the Commission on Human Rights with a smaller standing Human Rights Council ...

The creation of the Council would accord human rights a more authoritative position, corresponding to the primacy of human rights in the Charter of the United Nations. Member States should determine the composition of the Council and the term of office of its members. Those elected to the Council should undertake to abide by the highest human rights standards.”

PHOTO ON PREVIOUS PAGE:
Santa Cruz Massacre Anniversary March /
UN Photo #205351 Martine Perret

VIII.

On 15 March 2006, the General Assembly adopted resolution [60/251](#) and created the [Human Rights Council](#). The Council addresses human rights violations and provides corresponding recommendations, responds to human rights emergencies and assists States in fulfilling their human rights obligations. It also provides an international forum where States can voice their concerns about human rights issues.

One of the more unique mechanisms of the Council is the State-driven [Universal Periodic Review](#), which is designed to ensure equal treatment for every country when their human rights situations are assessed.

2007 – Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon takes office



Portrait of new Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon / UN Photo #136591
Mark Garten

On 1 January 2007, [Ban Ki-moon](#) of the Republic of Korea walked into UN Headquarters no longer his country's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, but as [Secretary-General](#) of the United Nations. In 2011, he was unanimously re-elected by the General Assembly and served until the end of 2016.

Ban's priorities during his two terms included climate change, women's rights, organizational reforms, human rights and prevention of armed conflict. The first major initiative under his leadership was the 2007 Climate Change Summit, followed by other climate-change-related events and continued diplomatic efforts to keep the issue at the top of the world's agenda.

An important initiative he championed was the “[UNiTE to end Violence Against Women](#)” campaign, which aimed at preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls. As an advocate for women’s rights, Ban also promoted the establishment of UN Women.

Within the UN itself, he increased the number of women in senior management by more than 40 per cent, reaching the highest level in the Organization’s history so far. He introduced measures aimed at making the work of the United Nations more transparent, effective and efficient. These included stringent requirements for financial disclosure, compacts with senior managers, harmonization of business practices and conditions of service, as well as continued investments in information technology and staff development.

On his final day in office, the Secretary-General [addressed](#) UN staff, delegates and others who had gathered to help send him off and urged all to “**keep believing [and] working hard**” to achieve the noble goals of the UN, and to be a “**voice for the voiceless**”. During his tenure, both the Paris Accord and the 2030 Agenda were adopted and would guide the UN in the coming years.

2008 – UN works for the equality of persons with disabilities

In December 2001, the General Assembly established an Ad Hoc Committee which was mandated to consider proposals for a comprehensive and integral international convention to promote and protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. During eight sessions from 2002 to 2006 the Committee worked on drafting the convention. [Louise Arbour, then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, pushed for its creation:](#)



International Year for Disabled Persons (IYDP) 1981 /
UN Photo #71324 John Isaac

VIII.

“There is no doubt that the existing human rights system was meant to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities. There is also no doubt that the existing standards and mechanisms have in fact, failed to provide adequate protection in the specific cases of persons with disabilities. It is clearly time for the United Nations to remedy this shortcoming.”

At its eighth session, held from 14 to 25 August 2006, the Ad Hoc Committee adopted the draft text of a Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, including an Optional Protocol, without a vote. After a technical review of the draft, the Committee decided to recommend to the General Assembly for adoption a draft resolution entitled “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”, to which it annexed the draft Convention and the draft Optional Protocol.

The General Assembly adopted [The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol](#) on 13 December 2006. It entered into force on 3 May 2008.

The Convention promotes the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons with disabilities without discrimination of any kind on the basis of disability. It outlines specific steps to be taken by States Parties, including the implementation of laws and administrative measures, to ensure the enjoyment of these rights and to promote awareness of the capabilities of persons with disabilities.

The Optional Protocol recognizes the competence of the [Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) to examine individual complaints with regard to alleged violations of the Convention by States Parties.

2009 – General Assembly addresses the world financial crisis



General Assembly Economic Crisis Panel discussion /
UN Photo #362457 Devra Berkowitz

In 2008 and 2009, the world was experiencing the deepest global economic crisis it had faced since the 1930s. To address the developing financial emergency, the Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development was held at United Nations Headquarters from 24 to 26 June 2009.

The aim of the Conference was to identify emergency and long-term responses to mitigate the impact of the crisis, especially on vulnerable populations, and initiate a dialogue on the transformation of the international financial architecture, taking into account the needs and concerns of all Member States.

[Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon opened the Conference](#) by calling upon attendees to work together:

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"We need international solidarity. We need the United Nations ...

The global economic crisis shows why we need a renewed multilateralism. We know that without adequate regulation a breakdown in one part of the system has profound repercussions elsewhere. Challenges are linked. Our solutions must be, too.

Let us restore hope to the most vulnerable and build a foundation for greater security and peace. Let us ensure more fairness in the governance of the world's institutions. And let us combine the power to get results with the principles of social justice. None of these things can we do alone. All of these things we can do together."

In the outcome document ([A/RES/63/303](#)), Heads of State and Government formulated a set of goals which they pledged to attain in a coordinated and comprehensive response to the crisis:

"The crisis has not only highlighted long-standing systemic fragilities and imbalances but has also led to an intensification of efforts to reform and strengthen the international financial system and architecture."

2010 – A new entity: UN Women is created to promote gender equity worldwide

In July 2010, by adopting resolution [64/289](#) the General Assembly created a single UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: [UN Women](#).



Woman from Mongolian herder community / UN Photo #405021
Eskinder Debebe

Up to this point the Organization had often faced tremendous challenges in its efforts to promote gender equality, in part due to the fact that there was no single recognized leading body to direct all activities on gender equality issues. As part of the UN reform agenda, UN Women was established by combining the assets and mandates of four previously existing gender equality entities: the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

The comprehensive proposal for this composite entity was presented in the Secretary-General's report [A/64/588](#) which set out the mission statement and organizational arrangements, including an organization chart, provisions related to funding, and an Executive Board to oversee operational activities.

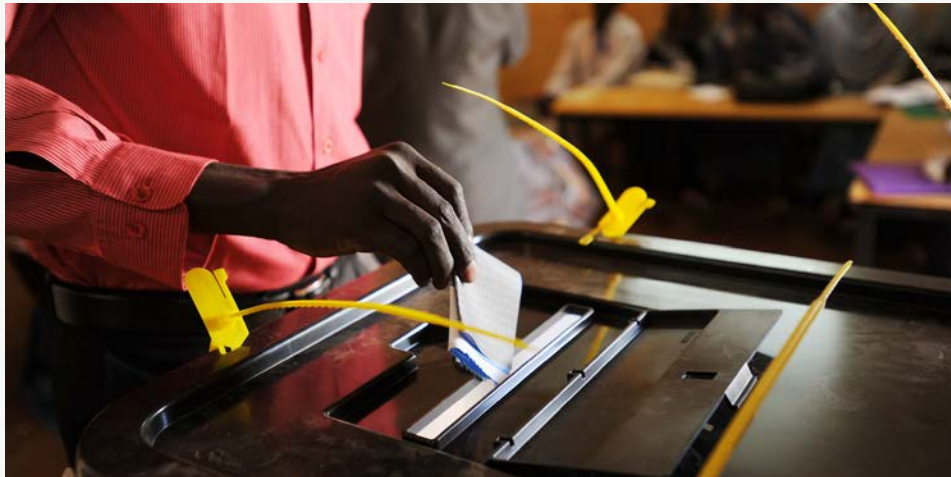
Upon adoption of the resolution, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon [remarked](#):

"This is truly a watershed day. By bringing together four parts of the United Nations system dedicated to women's issues, Member States have created a much stronger voice for women and for gender equality at the global level. It will now be much more difficult for the world to ignore the challenges facing women and girls, or to fail to take the necessary action."

For ten years, UN Women has been a champion for women and girls providing them with a powerful voice at the global, regional and local levels. It supports Member States in setting standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments to design laws and policies needed to ensure that these standards are effectively implemented. UN Women aims at making the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and supports their equal participation in all aspects of life.

VIII.

2011 – South Sudan becomes the 193rd Member State of the UN



Close to capital Khartoum, South Sudanese vote in historic referendum /
UN Photo #460615 Paul Banks

On 14 July 2011, the General Assembly admitted the Republic of South Sudan to the United Nations by adopting resolution [65/308](#) and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the young country as the 193rd UN Member State:

"At this moment, in this place, the world gathers to say in one voice, 'Welcome South Sudan. Welcome to the community of nations'. Just days ago, I was honoured to attend the independence ceremony in Juba. I felt the energy, the potential and the pure joy of the world's newest nation. In my eyes, the rising flag symbolized the rising hopes of the people of South Sudan – all those who endured the long civil war, all those who lost so many loved ones, all those who left their homes and fled their communities, and all those who held fast to hope."
([A/65/PV.108](#))

Only five days earlier, on 9 July, South Sudan had become formally independent. It was the culmination of a peace process that had started on 9 January 2005, when the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement signed the [Comprehensive Peace Agreement](#), which ended more than 20 years of civil war.

The Peace Agreement called for an internationally monitored referendum to take place to determine the status of Southern Sudan. When the referendum was held in January 2011, an overwhelming majority of South Sudanese voted to secede from Sudan.

On 8 July 2011, the eve of South Sudan's independence, the UN Security Council [voted unanimously to set up the UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan \(UNMISS\)](#) to help Africa's newest nation consolidate peace and lay the foundation for long-term State-building, conflict prevention and economic development.

Due to an outbreak of violence and a sharp deterioration in the humanitarian situation, the mandate of [UNMISS](#) was re-prioritized in 2014 towards the protection of civilians, human rights monitoring and support for the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

2012 – World reviews progress in sustainable development: Rio+20



Scene from Rio+20 /
UN Photo #517977 Luiz Roberto Lima

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, known as Rio+20, took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012 – 20 years after the landmark Earth Summit of 1992. The Conference's outcome document "The future we want" contains practical measures for advancing sustainable development. The General Assembly endorsed it on 27 July 2012 in resolution [66/288](#) to which it is annexed.

VIII.

[Rio+20](#) was one of the largest UN conferences ever held. World leaders, along with thousands of participants from the private sector and civil society, came together to shape policy on reducing poverty, advancing social equity and ensuring environmental protection.

Discussions focused on two main themes: building a green economy to achieve sustainable development and lift people out of poverty, and improving international coordination for sustainable development. Deliberations on these topics were organized around seven priority areas: decent jobs, energy, sustainable cities, food security and sustainable agriculture, water, oceans and disaster readiness.

Member States expressed their renewed political commitment to sustainable development and decided to launch a process to develop a new set of goals which were to build on the Millennium Development Goals and converge with the Post-2015 Development Agenda. They agreed to establish an [open working group](#) to develop what would be called the Sustainable Development Goals.

These Sustainable Development Goals were supposed to be ***“action-oriented, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities.”*** (“The future we want”)

2013 – Charting a global development framework beyond 2015



Press conference on launch of report on Post-2015 Development Agenda / UN Photo #552126 Devra Berkowitz

In July 2012, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed a High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons to advise on the global development framework beyond 2015, the target date for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Panel was part of the Secretary-General's post-2015 initiative mandated by the Millennium Development Goals Summit that took place in 2010 with the aim to accelerate progress on ending poverty.

UN Member States had asked for open and inclusive consultations involving civil society, the private sector, academia and research institutions from all regions, in addition to the UN system, to advance the development framework beyond 2015. The Panel, consisting of 27 persons and co-chaired by the Presidents of Indonesia and Liberia, as well as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, would reflect on new development challenges while also drawing on experience gained in implementing the MDGs.

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On 30 May 2013, the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda delivered its report, ["A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development"](#), to the Secretary-General.

The report remarked that ***"new goals and targets need to be grounded in respect for universal human rights, and finish the job that the MDGs started"*** and set out a comprehensive agenda ***"to end extreme poverty in all its forms in the context of sustainable development and to have in place the building blocks of sustained prosperity for all"*** by 2030. It called for a move from vision to action in five big, transformative shifts:

1. Leave no one behind.
2. Put sustainable development at the core.
3. Transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth.
4. Build peace and effective, open and accountable public institutions.
5. Forge new global partnerships.

The focus for action of the first four shifts was seen at the country level, while the fifth shift was planned as an overarching change in international cooperation.

The [United Nations Summit for the Adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#) was held from 25 to 27 September 2015 in New York and convened as a high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly. [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) was adopted on 25 September 2015 and set out the 15-year plan to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

2014 – First-ever UN emergency health mission is created to battle the health crisis in West Africa

In response to the Ebola virus disease worsening and rapidly spreading in West Africa, [Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon addressed a letter](#) to the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council in which he expressed his intention to create the first-ever UN emergency health mission, the [UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response \(UNMEER\)](#).



World Health Organization contact tracing / Martine Perret (UNMEER)

UNMEER was established on 19 September 2014 with the unanimous adoption of General Assembly resolution [69/1](#) and Security Council resolution [2177 \(2014\)](#).

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A temporary measure to meet immediate needs related to the fight against Ebola, the Mission deployed financial, logistical and human resources to the targeted countries to support the push to zero cases. Having achieved its main objective of scaling up the response on the ground and establishing cohesion among responders in support of nationally led efforts, UNMEER closed on 31 July 2015, passing oversight of the UN system's Ebola emergency response to the World Health Organization (WHO).

As of today, Ebola is still posing a grave threat to public health. On 1 June 2020, the 11th [Ebola virus disease outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo](#) was announced. The WHO supports the response to this outbreak which encounters significant logistical and financial challenges, with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic competing for resources and public attention.

2015 – A new course to fight climate change

The [Paris Agreement](#) was adopted on 12 December 2015 at the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\)](#). This groundbreaking document marked the start of a new course in the global climate effort because for the first time all nations joined a common cause to combat climate change by signing this legally binding document.



Closing ceremony of COP21, Paris / UN Photo #656839 Mark Garten

At the closing of COP21, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who had made climate change a priority during his tenure, [addressed the audience](#):

“I have listened to people – the young, the poor and the vulnerable, including indigenous peoples, from every corner of the globe. They have demanded that world leaders act to safeguard their well-being and that of generations to come. Here in Paris, we have heeded their voices – as was our duty ... Today, we can look into the eyes of our children and grandchildren, and we can finally, after so many years of discussion and delay, tell them that we have joined hands to bequeath a more habitable world to them and to future generations.”

The Agreement, which entered into force on 4 November 2016, aims to strengthen the international response to the climate change threat by limiting global warming to below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit it even further to 1.5°C. To ensure transparency, governments agreed to come together every five years to report on mitigation measures being taken to rein in global warming, to assess the collective progress towards the long-term goals and inform Parties in updating and enhancing their nationally determined contributions (NDCs).

With the adoption of the Agreement, the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#) was requested to produce a special report assessing what a 1.5°C warmer world would look like and recommending different pathways by which global temperature rise could be limited to 1.5°C. The IPCC fulfilled the request and prepared the report ***“in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty”***. In the [report](#), that was issued in 2018, the Panel made an urgent call for much stronger climate action.



IX.



2016–2020: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND PERFORMING AMID A PANDEMIC

2016 – António Guterres appointed Secretary-General

In General Assembly resolution [71/4](#) of 13 October 2016, the Member States appointed by acclamation the former Prime Minister of Portugal, António Guterres, as the ninth Secretary-General of the United Nations. Guterres took the Oath of Office on 12 December 2016 and officially entered the office on 1 January 2017. As the new UN leader, he replaced Ban Ki-moon.

This was the first time that the selection process of the Secretary-General was made public. Civil society as well as UN Member States had insisted on more clarity and transparency. Previously, any discussions about the candidates and their selection had happened behind closed doors. Member States continued to push for an open process by presenting several requests to the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Subsequently, the President of the 70th session of the General Assembly, Mogens Lykketoft, worked to improve the transparency of the selection and appointment process. His successor, Peter Thomson, supported this goal by putting up a [public page](#) on the General Assembly President's website with information on the selection process and the candidates' profiles. Member States were encouraged to submit [nominations](#) for the role:

“The position of Secretary-General is one of great importance that requires the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity, and a firm commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. We invite candidates to be presented with proven leadership and managerial abilities, extensive experience in international relations, and strong diplomatic, communication and multilingual skills.”

PHOTO ON PREVIOUS PAGE:
Incoming Secretary-General, António
Guterres, takes Oath of Office /
UN Photo #707563 Eskinder Debebe

At a series of informal dialogues with Member States and the public, including engagement with civil society, the candidates were given the opportunity to present their qualifications and their visions for the role. On 6 October 2016, the Security Council recommended the appointment of António Guterres.

2017 – Making progress towards gender parity within the United Nations

While the United Nations continued to argue the case for gender equality in the international arena, the number of women in senior positions in the Organization itself remained low.

While Secretaries-General over the previous three decades remained committed to the fair and equal treatment of women in the Organization, António Guterres, building upon their efforts, finally brought the number of women in senior positions to an equal level with men.

In his report, [Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system, E/2017/57](#), the Secretary-General provided a comprehensive analysis of the discussions on gender parity within the United Nations system.

Conclusions were drawn from 65 UN entities reporting under the [System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women](#), in the context of the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The document laid a foundation for accountability of the Secretary-General, as well as heads of United Nations agencies and programmes, and it presented a coordinated approach for consistently monitoring gender balance.



Secretary-General with gender-balanced Senior Management Group /
UN Photo #751806 Mark Garten

Based on discussions and commitments in this document, the UN has made significant system-wide progress towards the achievement of gender balance, especially in top positions. On 13 September 2017, the Secretary-General launched the [System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity](#), providing a strong institutional framework and road map to advance gender participation and inclusion within the 2030 Agenda.

By January 2020, gender parity was attained within the Secretary-General's Senior Management Group and among the resident coordinators, top officials who lead UN teams in 129 countries – a remarkable first-time achievement in the history of the Organization.

However, in his [address](#) to the High-Level Meeting on the 25th anniversary of the landmark Beijing Conference, Secretary-General António Guterres looked at the unfulfilled promise of the Beijing Platform of Action:

“This is fundamentally a question of power, so it starts with the equal representation of women in leadership positions, in governments, boardrooms, in climate negotiations and at the peace table – everywhere decisions are taken that affect people’s lives.”

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2018 – A global response to migration

The [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#) is the first intergovernmental agreement prepared under the auspices of the United Nations on a common approach to international migration in all its dimensions, including humanitarian, developmental and human-rights-related aspects. It not only provides the historical opportunity to improve international cooperation on migration, but also strengthens the contribution of migrants to sustainable development.

Migration can create significant risks for individuals and communities in countries of origin, transit and destination. To address the challenges of large movements of refugees and migrants, the General Assembly decided in September 2016 to work towards a global instrument by adopting the [New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, A/RES/71/1](#). In this political Declaration, world leaders expressed their will to save lives, protect rights and share responsibility on a global scale.



Repatriation of internally displaced persons in North Darfur /
UN Photo #480078 Albert González Farran

The process to develop the Compact started in April 2017. The draft text was finalized on 13 July 2018 and adopted during the [Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#) that took place in Marrakech, Morocco, on 10–11 December 2018.

The Compact was endorsed by the General Assembly on 19 December 2018 with a recorded vote of 152 votes in favour, 5 against and 12 abstentions. In [her remarks](#) prior to adoption, General Assembly President María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés pointed out the fact that the instrument did not undermine but rather strengthened States' sovereignty. More than 50 delegations explained their positions.

The non-legally binding Compact is grounded in values of State sovereignty, responsibility-sharing, non-discrimination and human rights. It comprises 23 objectives that aim at improving migration management at local, national, regional and global levels. It is consistent with target 10.7 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which States committed to facilitate migration through planned and well-managed policies.

2019 – Sustainable Development Goals report tracks progress

The Charter of the United Nations underlines in its Preamble the commitment ***“to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom”***.

In the early years, the UN recognized the need to support under-developed nations. On 4 December 1948, the General Assembly approved resolution [200 \(III\)](#), calling for technical assistance for economic development. As UN membership grew, Member States brought the agenda for development to the discussion table.



Closing of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development / UN Photo #815644 Mark Garten

IX.

Development remained on the UN agenda and in 1965 the General Assembly in resolution [2029 \(XX\)](#) established the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to coordinate all development activities. To assess development progress, the UN declared three Development Decades: 1960–1970, 1971–1980, 1981–1990. In 2000, the Assembly approved the [Millennium Declaration](#) that set targets on various aspects of development until 2015.

To sustain their commitment to development progress, Member States held a summit in 2015 to discuss the Post-2015 Development Agenda. In resolution [70/1](#) of 25 September 2015, they approved [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#) as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2019 marked the end of the first five-year cycle of the implementation phase. The [2019 SDG Report](#) highlights the [progress](#) made and areas in need of urgent collective attention. The report calls for increased action in several areas, including reducing poverty (SDG 1), addressing hunger (SDG 2), closing illiteracy gaps (SDG 4), reducing inequalities (SDG 10) and addressing climate change (SDG 13). The UN continues to monitor progress against [169 SDG Targets](#) as achievement indicators. The [2020 Report](#) provides a [summary](#) of the progress made from 2015 to 2020.

The General Assembly, in resolution [74/4](#), declared 2020–2030 as the [Decade of Action](#) to accelerate common efforts to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

2020 – UN calls for global unity to fight COVID-19

On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) learned about a cluster of pneumonia cases of unknown cause in the Hubei Province of China. On 9 January 2020, WHO reported that Chinese authorities had determined that the outbreak was caused by a novel (new) coronavirus (nCoV), and on 11 March 2020, WHO [declared](#) the coronavirus outbreak a global pandemic.



Secretary-General records video message on effect of COVID-19 pandemic on children / UN Photo #841121 Eskinder Debebe

It was on 2 April 2020 that the General Assembly adopted the first resolution ([A/RES/74/270](#)) related to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in which it recognized the unprecedented effects of this pandemic, including the severe disruption to societies and economies, as well as the devastating impact on the livelihoods of people around the world. It emphasized that a global response based on unity, solidarity and multilateral cooperation was required.

This pandemic not only had a profound impact on peoples' lives, it also changed the working procedures of the United Nations. To contain the spread of COVID-19, in-person plenary meetings were suspended, and the above-mentioned resolution was one of many adopted through the silence procedure. On 27 March 2020, the General Assembly adopted decision 74/544 that established a ***"Procedure for taking decisions of the General Assembly during the COVID-19 pandemic"***. It authorized the President of the General Assembly to circulate, after consultation with the General Committee, draft resolutions and decisions to all Member States under a silence procedure of at least 72 hours. If Member States did not raise any objections during this time, the draft text was considered adopted.

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The General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council and all bodies across the UN system had to update their working methods to adapt to a remote work environment while continuing to deliver on the UN mandates and support Member States in their response to the pandemic.

In September 2020, for the first time, the opening of the General Assembly and the [General Debate](#) were held in a virtual format. Because of the [pandemic](#), world leaders were invited to send in pre-recorded videos of their speeches on the theme: ***“The Future we want, the United Nations we need: reaffirming our collective commitment to multilateralism – confronting COVID-19 through effective multilateral action.”***



SOURCES CONSULTED

This publication would not be possible without the below resources:

Yearbook of the United Nations: <https://unyearbook.un.org/>

Dag Hammarskjöld Library Research Guides: research.un.org

Dag Hammarskjöld Library Ask Dag: ask.un.org

Sustainable Development Knowledge Portal:
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.html>

United Nations Website: www.un.org

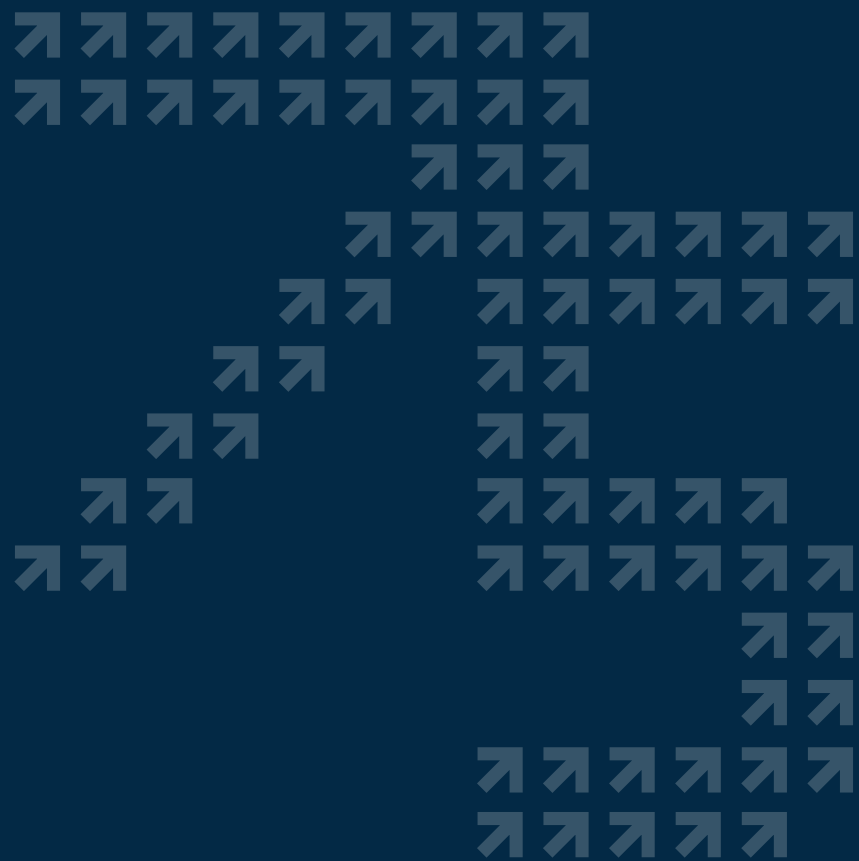
History of the UN Charter:
<https://www.un.org/en/sections/history-united-nations-charter/>

United Nations Peacekeeping: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en>

Audiovisual Library of International Law:
https://legal.un.org/avl/intro/welcome_avl.html

United Nations Archives: <https://archives.un.org/>

UN Treaty Collection: <https://treaties.un.org/>



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