

# INTERCONNECTIONS 21

P.O. Box 960 • 3705 West Canyon Road • Wilson, Wyoming USA 83014  
307 733-0549 • fax 307 733-4178  
info@ic21.org • www.ic21.org

## **Activity 3: How the UN works**

**Purpose:** to familiarize students with main bodies within the UN.

### **Standards:**

Social Studies: NCSS standards

V: Individuals, Groups and Institutions

VI: Power, Authority and Governance

IX: Global Connections

English Language Arts: NCTE standards

1: Reading for understanding

4: Communication skills

8: Developing research skills

12: Applying language skills

### **Materials:**

UN Organizational Chart: available online at

<http://www.un.org/aboutun/chartlg.html>

<http://www.un.org/aboutun/unchart.pdf>

Activity 3 Student Materials: An Introduction to the structure of the UN

### **Description:**

1. Explain to the class that the United Nations is made up of six main bodies, and a number of programs, funds, and agencies. If appropriate, print the UN organizational chart from one of the websites listed above.

2. Have students break into groups and research one of the main bodies of the UN:

The General Assembly

The Security Council

The Economic and Social Council

The Trusteeship Council

The International Court of Justice

The Secretariat

As the Trusteeship Council has a relatively minor role in the current working of the UN, students may research only the other five bodies.

Students can use “An Introduction to the structure of the UN” as a starting point for their research. Additional websites are suggested for further research.

3. When students have completed their research, they can present their findings to the class.

Alternatively, students can be asked to form new groups, each consisting of at least one representative of each of the main bodies of the UN. These new small groups can be used for peer teaching on each of the UN bodies.

4. Once all presentations have been made, hold a “quiz show” by reading out the scenarios below, one at a time. After hearing each scenario, students must decide (in consultation with their working group) which body in the UN would have primary responsibility for addressing that issue, and explain why. The first group that is able to give a correct answer gets one point.

Possible scenarios (teachers can add additional scenarios; or they can be created by students):

A number of poor countries have expressed concern about the “digital divide”: the fact that their limited access to computer technology is causing them to fall farther behind rich countries in development. They want the UN to provide guidance on dealing with this issue. (Economic and Social Council)

A country invades another country; the UN must decide whether or not to impose economic sanctions. (Security Council)

Two countries are disputing an island that both claim is part of their territory. They request help from the UN in resolving the dispute. (International Court of Justice)

A major international conference on children’s rights will be held in New York, and the UN wants to get information into the media on this topic. (Secretariat)

The UN wants to study how it can strengthen protection for the rights of people with disabilities. (Economic and Social Council)

A country that experienced civil conflict has had a UN peacekeeping mission for two years. The UN must decide whether to continue funding the mission. (General Assembly)

The UN wants to publish a report on whether AIDS education programs are reducing the rate of new infections. It must collect findings from the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children’s Fund, UNESCO, and other UN agencies working on AIDS prevention to produce the report. (Secretariat)

Two ethnic groups within the same country are involved in armed struggle, and the government has asked the UN for help; the UN must consider whether or not to send a mediator to negotiate a ceasefire. (Security Council)

A province of an existing Member State has declared its independence and requested membership in the UN; the UN must vote on whether or not to allow this province to join as a new country. (General Assembly)

A country destroys another country's off-shore oil platforms during military operations. The country whose platforms were destroyed wants financial compensation.  
(International Court of Justice)

**Follow up activity:**

Have students research proposals to reform the membership and voting procedures of the Security Council. (Note: Students should be familiar with the role of the Security Council prior to this activity.)

Many countries have complained that representation on the Security Council is limited, and that the five permanent members – all industrialized countries – have excessive power because one veto can block Security Council action.

Some of the various proposals for Security Council reform can be found in “Report of the Open-Ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Security Council” (UN document A/57/47), pages 9-15. This document can be found at:

<http://ods-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/408/24/PDF/N0340824.pdf?OpenElement>

Some of the reforms proposed include:

Veto power: Some countries believe it is unfair that one permanent member of the Security Council can use the veto to override all other countries' opinions. Suggestions for change include:

- eliminating the veto
- making all decisions by consensus
- requiring more than one negative vote for the veto to be used

Changing rules about permanent members: Some countries believe that having five permanent members who represent the victors in the Second World War does not represent the realities of the world today. Suggestions for change include:

- adding more permanent seats
- designating permanent seats for countries from particular regions (Africa, Arab States, developing countries)
- giving permanent seats to Germany and Japan
- not allowing new permanent members to have the veto power

Changing rules about non-permanent members: Some countries believe that greater representation could be achieved if there were more non-permanent seats. Suggestions for change include:

- Adding non-permanent members from both industrialized and developing countries
- Designating a set number of seats for non-permanent members from specific regions
- Giving some non-permanent seat a longer term (6 years)

Have students consider these proposals. Which seem fair, practical, and effective? Which do not?

Have students create their own proposal for Security Council reform and write a justification for why they think this proposal would work.

## Activity 3 Student Materials

### An Introduction to the structure of the UN

The United Nations is a “family” of organizations. It has six main organs:

- The General Assembly
- The Security Council
- The Economic and Social Council
- The Trusteeship Council
- The International Court of Justice
- The Secretariat

All are based at UN Headquarters in New York, except for the Court, which is at The Hague, the Netherlands.

The UN has a number of programs and funds that work for development, humanitarian assistance and human rights. These include The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), The UN Development Programme (UNDP), The World Food Programme (WFP), and others. The UN also has specialized agencies that work in such diverse areas as health (WHO), agriculture (FAO), and education (UNESCO). The specialized agencies coordinate their work with the UN but are separate, autonomous organizations with their own governing bodies, budgets, constitutions or charters.

#### The General Assembly

All UN Member States are represented in the General Assembly, which meets to consider the world's most pressing problems: AIDS, globalization, conflict in Member States, environmental protections, etc. Each Member State has one vote. Decisions on such key issues as international peace and security, admitting new members and the UN budget are decided by a two-thirds majority. Other matters are decided by a simple majority. In recent years, a special effort has been made to reach decisions through consensus, rather than by taking a formal vote. The Assembly cannot force action by any State, but its recommendations are an important indication of world opinion. The Assembly holds its annual regular session from September to December. When necessary, it may resume its session or hold a special or emergency session on subjects of particular concern. When the Assembly is not meeting, its work is carried out by its six main committees, other subsidiary bodies and the UN Secretariat.

For more information, see:

[www.un.org/Overview/brief.html](http://www.un.org/Overview/brief.html)

<http://www.un.org/ga/58/>

#### The Security Council

The Security Council has responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. The Council may meet at any time, whenever peace is threatened. Under the Charter, all Member States are obligated to carry out the Council's decisions.

There are 15 Council members. When the Council was created after the Second World War, five victorious countries – China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States – were chosen as permanent members. The other 10 are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms.

Decisions of the Council require nine yes votes. Except in votes on procedural questions, a decision cannot be taken if there is a no vote, or veto, by a permanent member. Member States are discussing making changes in Council membership and voting procedures to reflect today's political and economic realities.

When the Council considers a threat to international peace, it first explores ways to settle the dispute peacefully. It may suggest principles for a settlement or undertake mediation. In the event of fighting, the Council tries to secure a ceasefire. It may send a peacekeeping mission to help the parties maintain the truce and to keep opposing forces apart. The Council can take measures to enforce its decisions. It can impose economic sanctions or order an arms embargo. On rare occasions, the Council has authorized Member States to use "all necessary means," including collective military action, to see that its decisions are carried out.

For more information, see:

<http://www.un.org/Overview/brief.html>

<http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/>

<http://www.un.org/Depts/dhl/resguide/scfaq.htm>

### The Economic and Social Council

The Economic and Social Council coordinates the economic and social work of the UN and its family of organizations. The Council plays a key role in promoting international cooperation for development. It also consults with non-governmental organizations (NGOs); this is an important way in which the UN maintains a link with citizens around the world.

The Council has 54 members, elected by the General Assembly for three-year terms. It meets throughout the year and holds a major session in July.

A number of other bodies report to the Council on matters as diverse as human rights, the status of women, crime prevention, drugs and environmental protection. Five regional commissions promote economic development and cooperation in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, Western Asia, and Africa.

For more information, see:

<http://www.un.org/Overview/brief.html>

<http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ecosoc/>

### The Trusteeship Council

The Trusteeship Council was established to provide international supervision for 11 Trust Territories administered by seven Member States and ensure that adequate steps were taken to prepare the Territories for self-government or independence. By 1994, all Trust Territories had attained self-government or independence. The Trusteeship Council now consists of the five

permanent members of the Security Council. It has amended its rules of procedure to allow it to meet if required.

For more information, see:

<http://www.un.org/Overview/brief.html>

<http://www.un.org/documents/tc.htm>

### The International Court of Justice

The International Court of Justice, also known as the World Court, decides disputes between countries. It consists of 15 judges elected jointly by the General Assembly and the Security Council. Participation by States in a court proceeding is voluntary, but if a State agrees to participate, it is required to comply with the Court's decision.

For more information, see:

<http://www.un.org/Overview/brief.html>

<http://www.icj-cij.org/>

### The Secretariat

The Secretariat carries out the day-to-day work of the United Nations. This includes administering peacekeeping operations, surveying economic and social trends, preparing studies on human rights, informing the media about the work of the United Nations, organizing international conferences, and interpreting speeches and translating documents into the UN's official languages.

For more information, see:

<http://www.un.org/Overview/brief.html>

<http://www.un.org/documents/st.htm>