

# Chapter IV. The United Nations

Representatives participating in UNIMUN should be familiar with the history of the United Nations, as well as the rapidly changing role that the organization plays in international affairs. This section is intended to provide a brief background on the U.N system and on some of the issues it faces today.

## ORIGINS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations came into existence on October 24, 1945. On that day, the United Nations Charter became operative, having been ratified by the five permanent members of the Security Council and a majority of the other signatories.

The concept of all nations uniting together in one organization designed to settle disputes peacefully was borne of the desire of civilized nations to avoid the horrors produced by the First and Second World Wars. The United Nations developed as a successor to the League of Nations, which represented the first attempts by nations to achieve this unity.

In 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt first coined the term "United Nations", when the Declaration of the United Nations was signed by forty-seven nations in support of the Atlantic Charter. In 1944, the United States, United Kingdom, U.S.S.R. and China met in Washington, D.C. at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference, where the first blueprint of the United Nations was prepared. In 1945, the final details for the United Nations were worked out at the Yalta Conference. Signatory nations gathered from April 24th through June 26th in San Francisco to draft the Charter of the United Nations, which was signed on June 26th, 1945.

## PURPOSE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The primary purposes for which the United Nations was founded are detailed in Chapter I, Article 1 of the Charter. These are:

1. To maintain international peace and security;
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 cooperation in solving international problems of economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinctions as to race, sex, language and religion;
4. To be a center for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends.

## HOW THE UNITED NATIONS SEEKS TO ACHIEVE ITS PURPOSE

Since 1945, the United Nations has established itself as a forum for the discussion of international disputes. Also, member states recognize that the United Nations has an established machinery which can be utilized as the means of solving international problems.

The United Nations seeks, both through its principal organs and various subsidiary bodies, to settle disputes through peaceful means, without resort to the threat or use of force. It should be recognized that the United Nations is not a world government, nor does it "legislate". Rather, the actions of the United Nations, as evidenced by resolutions passed by its bodies, have a strong moral persuasive effect. The member states frequently find it within their own best interests to follow UN recommendations.



## STRUCTURE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations has six primary bodies:

**The General Assembly (GA):** The GA is the central organ of the United Nations. The GA has been described as the nearest thing to a "parliament of mankind", as all member states are members of the GA, and each member has one vote. The GA makes recommendations on international issues, oversees all other UN bodies which must report to the GA annually, approves the UN budget and apportions UN expenses. On the recommendation of the Security Council, the GA elects the Secretary-General, and holds the authority to admit and expel member states. Voting in the GA is ordinarily by simple majority, although on "important questions" a two-thirds majority is required.

**The Security Council (SC):** The Security Council is charged with the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. It has the power to employ United Nations forces and direct action against threats to the peace. Fifteen members sit on the Security Council, including the five Permanent Members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) along with ten "at-large" members who are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms.

A majority in the Security Council consists of nine members voting "yes". However, a "no" vote by any of the Permanent Members has the effect of vetoing or blocking motions for action.

**Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC):** ECOSOC is the primary body dealing with the economic, social, humanitarian and cultural work of the United Nations system. ECOSOC oversees five regional economic commissions and six "subject-matter" commissions, along with a sizeable system of committees and expert bodies. ECOSOC is composed of 54 member states, elected by the GA for three-year terms.

**Trusteeship Council (TC):** In 1945 there were 11 Trust Territories, which were regions without their own governments. These 11 regions were placed under the TC, which helped them prepare for and achieve independence. With the admittance of Palau as a member state in 1994, the TC has now completed its original mandate. The TC today is inactive, but is formally composed of the permanent Security Council members.

**The International Court of Justice (ICJ):** The International Court of Justice, or World Court, is the primary judicial organ of the UN, and decides international legal disputes. All UN members are automatically able to bring matters before the ICJ; however, states must agree to accept the jurisdiction of the ICJ before it can decide a dispute involving that state. Fifteen judges elected by the GA serve 9-year terms on the Court.

**Secretariat:** The Secretariat is composed of the Secretary-General and the United Nations Staff. Approximately 16,000 persons are employed as the staff of the UN, one-third of whom work at the UN headquarters in New York City. The other two-thirds work for various subsidiary bodies of the United Nations. The Secretary-General serves a five-year renewable term.

In addition to the six main bodies, the United Nations includes a large "family" of specialized agencies and programs which the UN administers. Examples include the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

## BLOC POLITICS

The system of "bloc politics" in the UN is one in which nations have organized themselves into groups based on areas of mutual interest. These blocs tend to be made up of nations with similar political, historical or cultural backgrounds. They are often formed on a geographic basis, but this is not exclusively the case. By organizing themselves with other nations that hold similar interests, bloc members hope to increase their influence above the level that they would have as a single nation in the General Assembly.

Bloc politics in the UN today is a misunderstood and rapidly changing phenomena. The necessity of blocs in the UN was formally established in 1957, when four regional groups were endorsed by the General Assembly: the Latin American, the Asian and African, the Eastern European and the Western European and Others. Since that time, the bloc system has grown to encompass many of the political, economic and military organizations of the world. Examples of the major blocs include the Non-Aligned Movement, the Group of 77, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Organization of American States (OAS), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and the European Union (EU).

Major changes in the utilization of blocs at the UN have occurred within the past five years, as explained below. Please note, however, that these groups do not have "official" standing as caucus groups at the UN, but are rather groups that meet, depending on the circumstances, to attempt to reach a consensus on various issues. Also, it is not uncommon for one nation to be elected the leader of a bloc, and to formally speak for that bloc in the various UN bodies. This does not mean that other nations within the bloc will not raise dissenting or different opinions; just that the spokesperson raises the central issues which the bloc can agree upon on a topic.

Blocs are often thought of as "Voting Blocs", but this is a definite misnomer. They can be more realistically seen as "Caucusing Blocs"; groups which discuss issues together based on areas of mutual interest, but that often do not reach full agreement on all issues. A key consideration is that every country in a bloc will have different priorities **based on their own national interests**. Countries will often discount bloc considerations and vote in their own best interest in these priority areas.

Blocs usually attempt to form a consensus among their members which will allow them to act as a cohesive group. The effectiveness of any given bloc in exerting its positions in the General Assembly will often depend upon its ability to form a consensus among its own members. These acts of compromise form the basis of UN politics, and often must occur within the various caucusing groups before they can begin to apply to the UN as a whole.

Bloc politics have changed considerably in the last few years. Their viability as a political tool is diminishing; blocs are falling out of use. The most historically cohesive bloc, the Warsaw Pact, has ceased to exist as a military and political unit. Several other blocs, including the Western, are undergoing structural changes that will have a profound effect on the future of UN politics. The more organized blocs at present are the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of American States, and the European Community.

One often misinterpreted area of bloc politics is that of the "Third World", or developing bloc. A "Third World Bloc" has never existed. In actuality, several blocs of developing countries have existed. The Group of 77 (now consisting of 125+ nations) is the largest and is still sometimes thought of as the Third World Bloc. There are, however, developing nations which are not members of this organization, and many members also belong to several other organizations, particularly the Non-Aligned Movement.

Representatives should be aware that the state they represent may no longer actively participate in bloc politics, or may vote outside of their traditional bloc based on circumstances. For example, at the June, 1992 Environmental Summit in Rio de Janeiro, several Group of 77 countries including India, a previous "leader" of the bloc, ignored bloc positions on environmental issues and followed their own national interests when participating at the Summit. The most accurate thing which can be said about bloc politics today is that they are in a state of flux. Many states are increasingly neutral on issues that they once held strong views on and that were shared with other members of their respective bloc. Other states are becoming increasingly independent on issues, or are concerned only with regional issues.

Representatives are encouraged to caucus in their bloc groups **only when appropriate**. Please remember there are many issues which cross bloc lines and many opportunities to invite an "involved nation" to another bloc caucus in an effort to achieve a consensus. Representatives should note, however, that UNIMUN does recognize the official regional blocs for speaking



purposes, and these blocs will be utilized to assist in determining speakers lists for resolutions during the formal debate period on each topic.

