

Institutions Developing in a Globalized World

We have actively sought and are actively seeking to make the United Nations an effective instrument of international cooperation.

—Dean Acheson, U.S. diplomat, (1893–1971)

Essential Question: How did globalization change international interactions between states after 1900?

In an era of increasing globalization, people formed international organizations to promote useful working relationships among nations. Dean Acheson, a U.S. secretary of state, described how the mission of the United Nations (UN) fit with this goal of maintaining world peace and making international cooperation easier. Working through agencies such as the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank, the UN provides technical advice and loans to developing nations. Other international organizations and treaties, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), promote free trade worldwide. However, the United Nations was born of the devastation of world wars and preventing conflict was its primary goal.

The United Nations: A Structure for Peace

Despite ideological differences, the Allies shared a commitment to preventing conflicts from escalating into war. In 1943, representatives of the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China discussed the idea of the United Nations. The UN was born on October 24, 1945, a day still honored as United Nations Day. At its founding, there were 51 member states. By 2019, that number had grown to 193.

League of Nations vs. United Nations Countries had tried to create a similar international organization previously. In 1920, at the end of World War I, the Allied powers created the League of Nations. (See Topic 7.3.) Its purpose was to resolve international disputes and prevent another world war. However, the United States never joined the League. Some Americans believed that doing so would undercut U.S. authority. The League disbanded after it failed to prevent World War II. Countries hoped that a new, more powerful organization would

help keep the peace. This time around, all the major powers realized they would need to belong for the organization to have any chance of success.

Assemblies of the United Nations

Within the UN, six main bodies implement its work.

- The **General Assembly** is the only UN body in which all members have representation. It decides important questions on peace and security, admission of new members, and budget. To make a decision, a two-thirds majority of those present and voting must agree. Each member nation has one vote.
- The **Security Council** acts on issues the General Assembly debates. It may even use military force against a country accused of violating UN principles. The Security Council has five permanent members, the leading Allies of World War II: the United States, France, Great Britain, Russia, and China. It elects 10 other members on a rotating basis. Each permanent member has veto power in the Security Council. Granting veto power to these five nations was controversial in 1945. Other nations resented giving them so much power. Conflicts among these five often prevented the UN from taking action to confront problems.
- The **Secretariat** is the UN's administrative arm. The secretary general leads and influences the entire organization. He or she usually comes from a small, neutral nation so one of the more powerful countries cannot have an outside influence on what the UN does. All five permanent members of the Security Council must approve the secretary general's selection. Staffers of the Secretariat must take an oath of loyalty to the UN and are not allowed to receive instructions from their home countries.
- The International Court of Justice settles disputes countries bring to it about international law. The court has no power to enforce its decisions, but the Security Council may make recommendations or take action in response to a judgment. Most countries obey the court's decisions.
- The Economic and Social Council is the largest and most complex part of the UN. It directs economic, social, humanitarian, and cultural activities. In the early 21st century, the council promoted green energy and looked for ways to raise people's wages in poorer countries.
- The Trusteeship Council supervised the governments of trust territories, including land that is now Israel, Papua New Guinea, and Nauru. The council's mission was to help those areas become self-governing and independent. The last trust territory, Palau, became independent in 1994. Since then, the council has suspended its operations. Some people have suggested that the council should become trustees of the seafloor or of outer space.

The UN and Human Rights

One of the goals of the United Nations was the promotion of human rights. The UN adopted the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** in 1948. It included several basic rights and freedoms:

- freedom from slavery, torture, and degrading punishment
- equality before the law
- the right to a nationality
- the right to own property, either individually or with others
- freedom of thought, conscience, religion, opinion, and expression
- equal pay for equal work
- the right to rest and to enjoy paid holidays
- equal rights for children born within and outside of marriage
- the right to adequate food, clothing, shelter, health care, and education

The declaration was a milestone achievement. Individuals from different countries, cultures, and legal traditions came together to draft a document that set standards for all governments and all people. People have translated the declaration into more than 500 languages. Since 1948, the UN has investigated abuses of human rights, such as genocide, war crimes, government oppression, and crimes against women.

Keeping the Peace

Since the end of World War II, the United Nations has been well known for its **peacekeeping** actions. Of primary importance is prevention through diplomacy. The UN sends special envoys to help resolve problems peacefully, mindful that it was formed to prevent “the scourge of war.”

The organization has also frequently sent peacekeeping forces, consisting of civilians, police, and troops from member countries, to try to ease tensions in trouble spots. The first peacekeeping mission was related to the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict in Palestine. After that, UN peacekeepers served in the Congo, Lebanon, East Timor, and the Balkans.

Expansion in the 1990s In 1988, the UN had only five active peacekeeping operations. By 1993, it had 28. Individual countries supplied soldiers to form UN peacekeeping forces. They came from dozens of countries—including Canada, Venezuela, Ukraine, Egypt, and Bangladesh. The soldiers were usually lightly armed and instructed to return fire only if attacked.

In the 1990s, the United Nations sent peacekeeping missions to hotspots in Africa, Central America, the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia. In Africa, UN troops kept peace while Namibia changed from a South African colony to an independent state. Peacekeeping troops helped end devastating civil wars in



Mozambique, El Salvador, and Cambodia. In Haiti, they maintained peace while a democratic government replaced a military dictatorship.

Some efforts failed. In 1994, UN peacekeepers could not prevent massacres in Rwanda. In 1995, UN forces withdrew from Somalia while a civil war raged there. The struggle to bring order to Bosnia in the former Yugoslavia took years and had mixed results. As a UN officer in Bosnia observed, “It’s much easier to come in and keep peace when there’s some peace around.”



Source: Wikimedia Commons

UN peacekeepers at their headquarters in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, where violent conflicts continue to break out following a civil war (1997–2003) that killed 5 million.

Challenges for Peacekeeping Missions One problem faced by UN peacekeepers has been their slow response. By the time countries agree on the UN mission and send forces, the war might have grown and become hard to control. A second problem happens when people expect the peacekeeping troops to stop the fighting instead of simply monitoring a truce, running free elections, and providing supplies to civilian populations. By 2019, the United Nations was involved in fewer but larger peacekeeping missions. The number of missions had dropped to 15, but the number of troops involved had increased.

Number of UN Peacekeepers Deployed	
Year	Number
2000	30,000
2007	80,000
2014	95,000
2019	102,000

Source: Global Peace Operations Review.

Other UN Priorities

In addition to assemblies and peacekeeping, the UN has other missions.

Protecting Refugees The UN also protects refugees. In times of war, famine, and natural disasters, people often flee their country and seek refuge in a safer location. Working through partners such as NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and the agency of UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), the UN provides food, medicine, and temporary shelter. Among the earliest refugees the UN helped were Palestinians who fled the disorder following the UN partition of Palestine to create the state of Israel in 1948. In 2019, the UN helped refugees who fled Venezuela and Myanmar.

Feeding the Hungry In 1961, the UN established its **World Food Program (WFP)** to provide food aid. Its first missions were in Iran, Thailand, and Algeria in 1962. Since its founding, the WFP has fed more than 1.4 billion people, many of whom were affected by natural disasters or political unrest.

Supporting Education, Science, and Culture Fighting in World War II destroyed schools, libraries, and museums in many European countries. In 1945, the UN created the **United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**. After repairing war damage, UNESCO began to focus on developing literacy, extending free education, and protecting cultural and environmental sites by designating them World Heritage Sites. The United Kingdom, Singapore, Israel, and the United States have all left UNESCO in disputes over politics and priorities. Although the UK and Singapore rejoined the organization, as of 2019 the United States had not.

Other UN Missions The UN also created the World Health Organization, which improves human health by controlling epidemics and providing vaccines. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was created to help children after World War II. After that, the fund provided aid to children in the developing world and at disaster sites. The UN program **Human Rights Watch (HRW)** has monitored human rights abuses in 100 countries. HRW uses the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as its guide and advocates for policies that prevent abuses.

The Global Goals In 2015, the UN General Assembly set 17 goals to accomplish by 2030. These included wiping out hunger and poverty, achieving gender equality, ensuring clean water and sanitation for all, and fighting climate change. On this project, the UN worked with NGOs, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. (Connect: Evaluate the success of the United Nations in handling political crises compared to its success in dealing with other priorities. See Topic 8.5.)

International Financial NGOs

Several NGOs have worked closely with the United Nations on economic issues. Each NGO was independent and caused controversy.

The World Bank Created in 1944, the **World Bank** fought poverty by providing loans to countries. It first focused on dams and roads. Later it expanded its mission to social projects, such as education and disease prevention. Critics charged that the World Bank often ignored how its projects damaged the environment and local culture. For example, a dam might permanently flood many farms. A highway might promote growth, but the resulting profits might all go to investors overseas rather than people living in the region.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) Created in 1945, the **IMF** was designed to help a country's economy by promoting stable currency exchange rates. It focused on making short-term loans and providing economic advice to countries. Some economists argued that conditions on IMF loans failed to take into account each country's individual needs. Large, wealthy nations influenced the IMF. It acted on their behalf, critics insisted, even while it claimed to help developing nations.

The IMF and the World Bank worked together to create Pathways for Peace in 2018. This report described how countries could work together to prevent violent conflicts.

NGOs Separate from the UN

Although the UN is well funded and powerful, other NGOs also help maintain world peace and improve communication among countries during a time of globalization. For example, the **International Peace Bureau** was founded in 1891 and won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1910. It began working for nuclear disarmament in the 1980s. It also lobbied governments to reduce military spending. By 2019, it had 300 member organizations in 70 countries. The chart on the next page lists other international organizations committed to peace and cooperation.



Source: Guinea Red Cross Volunteers

Red Cross volunteers in Guinea go door to door with information about Ebola.



International Organizations for Peace and Cooperation	
Organization	Mission
Center for International Humanitarian Cooperation (established 1992)	Promotes healing and peace in countries affected by natural disasters, armed conflicts, and ethnic violence
International Committee of the Red Cross (established 1863)	Responds quickly and efficiently to help people affected by armed conflict and disasters in conflict zones
Institute of International Humanitarian Affairs (Fordham University) (established 2001)	Trains and educates current and future aid workers at local, regional, national, and international levels
International Development Association (part of World Bank) (established 1960)	Supports a range of development activities, such as primary education, basic health services, clean water and sanitation, agriculture, business climate improvements, infrastructure, and institutional reforms.
International Organization for Migration (established 1951 and became a UN-related organization in 2018)	Mandated to help European governments identify resettlement countries for the estimated 11 million people uprooted by World War II, when it arranged transport for nearly a million migrants during the 1950s. Provides service and advice to governments and migrants.
The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (established 1961)	Shapes policies that foster prosperity, equality, opportunity and well-being

KEY TERMS BY THEME		
<p>GOVERNMENT: Parts of the United Nations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> General Assembly Security Council Secretariat secretary-general Economic and Social Council Trusteeship Council 	<p>ECONOMICS: International Organizations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> World Bank International Monetary Foundation (IMF) 	<p>SOCIETY: International Cooperation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universal Declaration of Human Rights peacekeeping action World Food Program (WFP) United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Human Rights Watch International Peace Bureau