Chapter

9 The United Nations Organization

SUMMARY OF EVENTS

The United Nations Organization (UNO) officially came into existence in October 1945 after the Second World War. It was formed to replace the League of Nations, which had proved incapable of restraining aggressive dictators like Hitler and Mussolini. In setting up the UNO, the great powers tried to eliminate some of the weaknesses which had handicapped the League. The UN Charter was drawn up in San Francisco in 1945, and was based on proposals made at an earlier meeting between the USSR, the USA, China and Britain, held at Dumbarton Oaks (USA) in 1944. *The aims of the UN are*:

- to preserve peace and eliminate war;
- to remove the causes of conflict by encouraging economic, social, educational, scientific and cultural progress throughout the world, especially in under-developed countries;
- to safeguard the rights of all individual human beings, and the rights of peoples and nations.

In spite of the careful framing of the Charter, the UN was unable to solve many of the problems of international relations, particularly those caused by the Cold War. On the other hand it played an important role in a number of international crises by arranging ceasefires and negotiations, and by providing peacekeeping forces. Its successes in non-political work – care of refugees, protection of human rights, economic planning and attempts to deal with problems of world health, population and famine – have been enormous.

9.1 THE STRUCTURE OF THE UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION

There are now seven main organs of the UN:

- the General Assembly
- the Security Council
- the Secretariat
- the International Court of Justice
- the Trusteeship Council
- the Economic and Social Council
- the International Criminal Court (inaugurated in March 2003).

(a) The General Assembly

This is the meeting together of the representatives from all the member nations; each member can send up to five representatives, though there is only one vote per nation. It meets once a year, starting in September and remaining in session for about three months, but special sessions can be called in times of crisis by the members themselves or by the Security Council. Its function is to discuss and make decisions about international problems, to consider the UN budget and what amount each member should pay, to elect the Security Council members and to supervise the work of the many other UN bodies. *Decisions do not need a unanimous vote as they did in the League Assembly.* Sometimes a simple majority is enough, though on issues which the Assembly thinks are very important, a two-thirds majority is needed. These include decisions about admitting new members or expelling existing members, and about actions to be taken to maintain peace. All speeches and debates are translated into six official UN languages – English, French, Russian, Chinese, Spanish and Arabic.

(b) The Security Council

This sits in permanent session and its function is to deal with crises as they arise, by whatever action seems appropriate, and if necessary by calling on members to take economic or military action against an aggressor. The Council must also approve applications for UN membership, which then require a two-thirds majority in a vote of acceptance by the General Assembly. The Council began with eleven members, *five of them permanent* (*China*, *France*, *USA*, *USSR and Britain*), and the other six elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms. In 1965 the number of non-permanent members was increased to ten. Decisions need at least nine of the 15 members to vote in favour, but these must include all five permanent members; this means that *any one of the permanent members can veto a decision and prevent any action being taken.* In practice it has gradually been accepted that abstention by a permanent member does not count as a veto, but this has not been written into the Charter.

In order to secure some action in case of a veto by one of the permanent members, the General Assembly (at the time of the Korean War in 1950) introduced *the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution*; this stated that if the Security Council's proposals were vetoed, the Assembly could meet within 24 hours and decide what action to take, even military intervention if necessary. In cases like this, a decision by the Assembly would only need a two-thirds majority. Again this new rule was not added to the Charter, and the USSR, which used the veto more often than any other member, always maintained that a Security Council veto should take precedence over a General Assembly decision. Nevertheless, the Assembly acted in this way many times, ignoring Russian protests.

In 1950 a problem arose when the new communist People's Republic of China applied for UN membership. The USA vetoed the application, so that the Republic of China (Taiwan) retained its membership and its permanent seat on the Security Council. The USA blocked communist China's application every year for the next 20 years. In 1971, in an effort to improve relations with communist China, the USA at last refrained from vetoing the application; consequently the General Assembly voted that the People's Republic of China should take over Taiwan's membership and permanent Security Council seat.

(c) The Secretariat

This is the 'office staff' of the UN and it consists of over 50 000 employees. They look after the administrative work, preparing minutes of meetings, translations and information.

It is headed by the Secretary-General, who is appointed for a five-year term by the Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council. In order to ensure some degree of impartiality, he is not from one of the major powers. He acts as the main spokesperson for the UN and is always at the forefront of international affairs, trying to sort out the world's problems. So far the post has been held by:

Trygve Lie of Norway (1946–52)
Dag Hammarskjöld of Sweden (1952–61)
U Thant of Burma (1961–71)
Kurt Waldheim of Austria (1971–81)
Javier Pérez de Cuellar of Peru (1981–91)
Boutros Boutros-Ghali of Egypt (1991–6)
Kofi Annan of Ghana (1996–2006)
Ban Ki-moon of South Korea (since 2006)

(d) The International Court of Justice

The International Court of Justice at The Hague (in the Netherlands) has 15 judges, all of different nationalities, elected for nine-year terms (five retiring every third year) by the Assembly and the Security Council jointly. It adjudicates in disputes between states; a number of cases have been successfully dealt with, including a frontier dispute between Holland and Belgium and a disagreement between Britain and Norway over fishing limits. In other cases, however, it was not so successful. In 1984 for example, Nicaragua sued the USA for mining its harbours; the Court judged in favour of Nicaragua and ordered the USA to pay compensation. The USA refused to accept the verdict, and no further action was taken. Although in theory the Security Council has the power to take 'appropriate measures' to enforce the Court's decisions, it has never done so. The Court can only operate successfully when both parties to a dispute agree to accept the verdict, whichever way it should happen to go.

(e) The Trusteeship Council

This replaced the League of Nations Mandates Commission, which had originally come into existence in 1919 to keep an eye on the territories taken away from Germany and Turkey at the end of the First World War. Some of these areas (known as *mandated territories* or *mandates*) had been handed over to the victorious powers, and their job was to govern the territories and prepare them for independence (see Sections 2.8 and 2.10). The Trusteeship Council did its job well and by 1970 most of the mandates had gained their independence (see Sections 11.1(b) and Chapter 24).

However, *Namibia remained a problem, since South Africa refused to give the area independence*. South Africa, ruled by a government representing the white minority of the population, was unwilling to give independence to a state right on its own frontier that would be ruled by a government representing its black African majority. The UN repeatedly condemned South Africa for its attitude; in 1971 the International Court of Justice ruled that South Africa's occupation of Namibia was a breach of international law and that South Africa must withdraw immediately. South Africa ignored the UN, but as the other states of Africa gradually gained independence under black governments, it became more difficult for South Africa to maintain both its position in Namibia and its own white minority rule (see Section 25.6(b–c) and 25.8(e)). At last in 1990 the pressure of black African nationalism and world opinion forced South Africa to release its grip on Namibia.

(f) The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

This has 27 members, elected by the General Assembly, with one-third retiring each year. It organizes projects concerned with health, education and other social and economic matters. Its task is so enormous that *it has appointed four regional commissions (Europe, Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Far East)*, as well as commissions on population problems, drugs problems, human rights and the status of women. ECOSOC also co-ordinates the work of an astonishing array of other commissions and specialized agencies, around 30 in all. Among the best known are the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). The scope of ECOSOC expanded in such a remarkable way that by 1980 more than 90 per cent of the UN's annual expenditure was devoted to ECOSOC activities (see Section 9.5).

(g) The International Criminal Court (ICC)

The idea of an International Criminal Court to try individuals accused of crimes against humanity was first discussed by a League of Nations convention in 1937, but nothing came of it. The Cold War prevented any further progress until, in 1989, it was suggested again as a possible way of dealing with drug-traffickers and terrorists. Progress towards the creation of a permanent court was again slow, and it was left to the Security Council to set up two special war crimes tribunals to try individuals accused of committing atrocities in 1994 in Rwanda and in 1995 in Bosnia. The most high-profile case was that of Slobodan Milošević, the former Yugoslav president (see Section 10.7), who was extradited from Belgrade and handed over to UN officials in the Netherlands. His trial opened in July 2001 in The Hague; he faced charges of committing crimes against humanity in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo. He was the first former head of state ever to be brought before an international court of justice. The trial dragged on for five for almost five years until he died of a heart attack before a verdict was reached.

Meanwhile, in July 1998 an agreement known as the Rome Statute was signed by 120 member states of the UN to create a permanent court to deal with war crimes, genocide and other crimes against humanity. The new court, consisting of 18 elected judges, was formally inaugurated in March 2003, and was based in The Hague. However, the US government did not like the idea that some of its citizens might be tried in the court – particularly Americans acting as peacekeepers who might find themselves open to 'politicized prosecutions'. Although the Clinton administration had signed the 1998 agreement, President Bush insisted that the signature should be withdrawn (May 2002). Consequently the USA did not recognize the ICC and by June 2003 had signed separate agreements with 37 states promising that no US personnel would be handed over to the ICC for trial. In some cases the USA threatened to withdraw economic or military aid if the state refused to comply with its wishes.

9.2 HOW DIFFERENT IS THE UNITED NATIONS FROM THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS?

(a) The UN has been more successful

There are some important differences which have tended to make the UN a more successful body than the League.

- The UN spends much more time and resources on economic and social matters and its scope is much wider than that of the League. All the specialized agencies, with the exception of the International Labour Organization (founded in 1919), were set up in 1945 or later.
- The UN is committed to safeguarding individual human rights, which the League did not get involved in.
- Changes in the procedures of the General Assembly and the Security Council (especially the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution), and the increased power and prestige of the Secretary-General, have enabled the UN, on occasion, to take more decisive action than the League ever achieved.
- The UN has a much wider membership and is therefore more of a genuine world organization than the League, with all the extra prestige that this entails. Both the USA and the USSR were founder-members of the UN, whereas the USA never joined the League. Between 1963 and 1968 no fewer than 43 new members joined the UN, mainly the emerging states of Africa and Asia, and by 1985 membership had reached 159; the League never had more than 50 members. Later, many of the former member states of the USSR joined, and by 1993 the total had reached 183. In 2002, East Timor, which had at last gained its independence from Indonesia with UN help, became the 191st member. Montenegro joined in 2006 and in July 2011 the newly independent Republic of South Sudan became the 193rd member.

(b) Some of the weaknesses of the League remain

Any one of the five permanent members of the Security Council can use its power of veto to prevent decisive action being taken. Like the League, the UN has no permanent army of its own and has to use forces belonging to its member states (see Section 9.6).

9.3 HOW SUCCESSFUL HAS THE UN BEEN AS A PEACEKEEPING ORGANIZATION?

Although it has had mixed success, it is probably fair to say that *the UN has been more successful than the League in its peacekeeping efforts*, especially in crises which did not directly involve the interests of the great powers, such as the civil war in the Congo (1960–4) and the dispute between the Netherlands and Indonesia over West New Guinea. On the other hand, it has often been just as ineffective as the League in situations – such as the Hungarian rising of 1956 and the 1968 Czech crisis – where the interests of one of the great powers – in this case the USSR – seemed to be threatened, and where the great power decided to ignore or defy the UN. The best way to illustrate the UN's varying degrees of success is to examine some of the major disputes in which it has been involved.

(a) West New Guinea (1946)

In 1946 the UN helped to arrange independence from Holland for the Dutch East Indies, which became Indonesia (see Map 24.3). However, no agreement was reached about the future of West New Guinea (West Irian), which was claimed by both countries. In 1961 fighting broke out; after U Thant had appealed to both sides to reopen negotiations, it was agreed (1962) that the territory should become part of Indonesia. The transfer was organized and policed by a UN force. In this case the UN played a vital role in getting negotiations off the ground, though it did not itself make the decision about West Irian's future.

(b) Palestine (1947)

The dispute between Jews and Arabs in Palestine was brought before the UN in 1947. After an investigation, the UN decided to divide Palestine, setting up the Jewish state of Israel (see Section 11.2). This was one of the UN's most controversial decisions, and it was not accepted by the majority of Arabs. The UN was unable to prevent a series of wars between Israel and various Arab states (1948–9, 1967 and 1973), though it did useful work arranging ceasefires and providing supervisory forces, while the UN Relief and Works Agency cared for the Arab refugees.

(c) The Korean War (1950–3)

This was the only occasion on which the UN was able to take decisive action in a crisis directly involving the interests of one of the superpowers. When South Korea was invaded by communist North Korea in June 1950, the Security Council immediately passed a resolution condemning North Korea, and called on member states to send help to the South. However, this was possible only because of the temporary absence of the Russian delegates, who would have vetoed the resolution if they had not been boycotting Security Council meetings (since January of that year) in protest at the failure to allow communist China to join the UN. Although the Russian delegates returned smartly, it was too late for them to prevent action going ahead. Troops of 16 countries were able to repel the invasion and preserve the frontier between the two Koreas along the 38th parallel (see Section 8.1).

Though this was claimed by the West as a great UN success, it was in fact very much an American operation – the vast majority of troops and the Commander-in-Chief, General MacArthur, were American, and the US government had already decided to intervene with force the day before the Security Council decision was taken. Only the absence of the Russians enabled the USA to turn it into a UN operation. This was a situation not likely to be repeated, since the USSR would take good care to be present at all future Council sessions.

The Korean War had important results for the future of the UN: one was the passing of *the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution*, which would permit a Security Council veto to be bypassed by a General Assembly vote. Another was the launching of *a bitter attack by the Russians on Secretary-General Trygve Lie* for what they considered to be his biased role in the crisis. His position soon became impossible and he eventually agreed to retire early, to be replaced by Dag Hammarskjöld.

(d) The Suez Crisis (1956)

This arguably showed the UN at its best. When President Nasser of Egypt suddenly nationalized the Suez Canal, many of whose shares were owned by the British and French, both these powers protested strongly and sent troops 'to protect their interests' (see Section 11.3). At the same time the Israelis invaded Egypt from the east; the real aim of all three states was to bring down President Nasser. A Security Council resolution condemning force was vetoed by Britain and France, whereupon the General Assembly, by a majority of 64 votes to 5, condemned the invasions and called for a withdrawal of troops. In view of the weight of opinion against them, the aggressors agreed to withdraw, provided the UN ensured a reasonable settlement over the canal and kept the Arabs and Israelis from slaughtering each other. A UN force of 5000, made up of troops from ten different countries, moved in, while the British, French and Israelis went home. The prestige of the UN and of Dag Hammarskjöld, who handled the operation with considerable skill, was greatly

enhanced, though American and Russian pressure was also important in bringing about a ceasefire. However, the UN was not so successful in the 1967 Arab–Israeli conflict (see Section 11.4).

(e) The Hungarian Rising (1956)

This took place at the same time as the Suez Crisis, and showed the UN at its most ineffective. When the Hungarians tried to exert their independence from Russian control, Soviet troops entered Hungary to crush the revolt. The Hungarian government appealed to the UN, but the Russians vetoed a Security Council resolution calling for a withdrawal of their forces. The General Assembly passed the same resolution and set up a committee to investigate the problem; but the Russians refused to co-operate with the committee and no progress could be made. The contrast with Suez was striking: there, Britain and France were willing to bow to international pressure; the Russians simply ignored the UN, and nothing could be done.

(f) Civil war in the Congo (1960–4)

Here the UN mounted its most complex operation to date (see Section 25.5), except for Korea. When the Congo (known as Zaire since 1971) dissolved into chaos immediately after gaining independence, a UN force numbering over 20 000 at its largest managed to restore some sort of precarious order. A special UN Congo Fund was set up to help with the recovery and development of the ravaged country. *But the financial cost was so high that the UN was brought close to bankruptcy*, especially when the USSR, France and Belgium refused to pay their contributions towards the cost of the operations, because they disapproved of the way the UN had handled the situation. The war also cost the life of Dag Hammarskjöld, who was killed in a plane crash in the Congo.

(g) Cyprus

Cyprus has kept the UN busy since 1964. A British colony since 1878, the island was granted independence in 1960. In 1963 civil war broke out between the Greeks, who made up about 80 per cent of the population, and the Turks. A UN peacekeeping force arrived in March 1964; an uneasy peace was restored, but it needed 3000 UN troops permanently stationed in Cyprus to prevent Greeks and Turks tearing each other apart. That was not the end of the trouble, though: in 1974 the Greek Cypriots tried to unite the island with Greece. This prompted the Turkish Cypriots, helped by invading Turkish army troops, to seize the north of the island for their own territory. They went on to expel all Greeks who were unfortunate enough to be living in that area. The UN condemned the invasion but was unable to remove the Turks. UN forces did at least achieve a ceasefire and are still policing the frontier between Greeks and Turks. However, the UN has still not been successful in finding an acceptable constitution or any other compromise. The most recent attempt – the Annan Plan of 2004 – was accepted by the Turks but rejected by the Greeks.

(h) Kashmir

In Kashmir the UN found itself in a similar situation to the one in Cyprus. After 1947, this large province, lying between India and Pakistan (see Map 24.1) was claimed by both

states. Already in 1948 the UN had negotiated a ceasefire after fighting broke out. At this point the Indians were occupying the southern part of Kashmir, the Pakistanis the northern part, and for the next 16 years the UN policed the ceasefire line between the two zones. When Pakistani troops invaded the Indian zone in 1965, a short war developed, but once again the UN successfully intervened and hostilities ceased. The original dispute still remained, however, and in 1999 there were violent clashes as Pakistanis again unsuccessfully invaded the Indian zone. There seemed little prospect of the UN or any other agency finding a permanent solution.

(i) The Czechoslovak crisis (1968)

This was almost a repeat performance of the Hungarian rising 12 years earlier. When the Czechs showed what Moscow considered to be too much independence, Russian and other Warsaw Pact troops were sent in to enforce obedience to the USSR. The Security Council tried to pass a motion condemning this action, but the Russians vetoed it, claiming that the Czech government had asked for their intervention. Although the Czechs denied this, there was nothing the UN could do in view of the USSR's refusal to co-operate.

(j) The Lebanon

While civil war was raging in the Lebanon (1975–87) matters were further complicated by a frontier dispute in the south of the country between Lebanese Christians (aided by the Israelis) and Palestinians. In March 1978 the Israelis invaded South Lebanon in order to destroy Palestinian guerrilla bases from which attacks were being made on northern Israel. In June 1978 the Israelis agreed to withdraw, provided the UN assumed responsibility for policing the frontier area. *The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)*, consisting of about 7000 troops, was sent to South Lebanon. It supervised the Israeli withdrawal and had some success in maintaining relative peace in the area; but it was a constant struggle against frontier violations, assassinations, terrorism and the seizing of hostages (see Section 11.8(b)).

During the early 1990s a new enemy began to harass Israel from bases in South Lebanon: this was the Muslim Shi'ite group known as Hezbollah, which, according to the Israeli government, was backed by Iran and Syria. In retaliation the Israelis launched a major attack on South Lebanon (April 1996) and occupied most of the region until 1999. Once again UNIFIL helped to supervise an Israeli withdrawal and the force was increased to around 8000. In 2002, as the region seemed calmer than for many years, UNIFIL was reduced to some 3000. UNIFIL worked hard to strengthen the Lebanese army, providing training and equipment. Eventually the two forces were able to work together to maintain stability, though a permanent solution still seemed far off. In July 2006 Hezbollah ambushed an Israeli patrol; eight Israeli soldiers were killed and two taken prisoner. The Israelis responded immediately: demanding the return of the captured soldiers, they blockaded Lebanon from the sea, bombed Beirut and destroyed Hezbollah's headquarters. Hezbollah retaliated by firing rockets into Israel at a rate of over a hundred a day. It was mid-August before the UN succeeded in arranging a ceasefire. UNIFIL was increased to 12 000 and there was relative calm for the next four years. Early in 2011 violent incidents began again. The Israelis were still refusing to move out of a small area around the village of Gharjah, north of the withdrawal line agreed in 2006.

There were several exchanges of fire between the Lebanese army and the Israeli Defence Force, terrorist attacks on UNIFIL itself and the firing of rockets into Israel.

(k) The Iran–Iraq War (1980–8)

The UN was successful in bringing an end to the long-drawn-out war between Iran and Iraq. After years of attempting to mediate, the UN at last negotiated a ceasefire, though admittedly they were helped by the fact that both sides were close to exhaustion (see Section 11.9).

9.4 UN PEACEKEEPING SINCE THE END OF THE COLD WAR

The end of the Cold War unfortunately did not mean the end of potential conflict: there were a number of disputes still rolling on, which had originated many years earlier; the Middle East continued to be volatile, and there were more problems in south-east Asia and Africa. Between 1990 and 2003 the UN undertook well over 30 peacekeeping operations; at the peak of their involvement, in the mid-1990s, there were over 80 000 troops on active service, from 77 countries. A few examples illustrate the growing complexity of the problems facing the UN and the increasing obstacles making success more difficult.

(a) The 1991 Gulf War

UN action during the Gulf War of 1991 was impressive. When Saddam Hussein of Iraq sent his troops to invade and capture the tiny, but extremely rich, neighbouring state of Kuwait (August 1990), the UN Security Council warned him to withdraw or face the consequences. When he refused, a large UN force was sent to Saudi Arabia. In a short and decisive campaign, Iraqi troops were driven out, suffering heavy losses, and Kuwait was liberated (see Section 11.10). However, critics of the UN complained that Kuwait had received help only because the West needed her oil supplies; other small nations, which had no value to the West, had received no help when they were invaded by larger neighbours (for example East Timor, taken over by Indonesia in 1975).

(b) Cambodia/Kampuchea

Problems in Cambodia (Kampuchea) dragged on for nearly 20 years, but eventually the UN was able to arrange a solution. In 1975 the Khmer Rouge, a communist guerrilla force led by Pol Pot, seized power from the right-wing government of Prince Sihanouk (see Section 21.3). Over the next three years Pol Pot's brutal regime slaughtered about a third of the population, until in 1978 a Vietnamese army invaded the country. They drove out the Khmer Rouge and set up a new government. At first the UN, prompted by the USA, condemned this action, although many people thought Vietnam had done the people of Cambodia a great service by getting rid of the cruel Pol Pot regime. But it was all part of the Cold War, which meant that any action by Vietnam, an ally of the USSR, would be condemned by the USA. The end of the Cold War enabled the UN to organize and police a solution. Vietnamese forces were withdrawn (September 1989), and after a long period of negotiations and persuasion, elections were held (June 1993), won by Prince Sihanouk's party. The result was widely accepted (though not by what was left of the Khmer Rouge, which refused to take part in the elections), and the country gradually began to settle down.

(c) Mozambique

Mozambique, which gained independence from Portugal in 1975, was torn by civil war for many years (see Section 24.6(d)). By 1990 the country was in ruins and both sides were exhausted. Although a ceasefire agreement had been signed in Rome (October 1992) at a conference organized by the Roman Catholic Church and the Italian government, it was not holding. There were many violations of the ceasefire and there was no way that elections could be held in such an atmosphere. The UN now became fully involved, operating a programme of demobilizing and disarming the various armies, distributing humanitarian relief and preparing for elections, which took place successfully in October 1994. Joachim Chissano of FRELIMO was elected president and re-elected for a further term in 1999.

(d) Somalia

Somalia disintegrated into civil war in 1991 when the dictator Siad Barré was overthrown. A power struggle developed between rival supporters of Generals Aidid and Ali Mohammed; the situation was chaotic as food supplies and communications broke down and thousands of refugees were fleeing into Kenya. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) asked for UN help, and 37 000 UN troops, mainly American, arrived (December 1992) to safeguard the aid and to restore law and order by disarming the 'warlords'. However, the warlords, especially Aidid, were not prepared to be disarmed, and UN troops began to suffer casualties. The Americans withdrew their troops (March 1994), and the remaining UN troops were withdrawn in March 1995, leaving the warlords to fight it out. It was a humiliating backdown; but in fact the UN had set itself an impossible task from the beginning – to forcibly disarm two extremely powerful armies which were determined to carry on fighting each other, and to combine this with a humanitarian relief programme. At the same time the UN took no action in the civil war and genocide taking place in Rwanda in 1994 (see Section 25.7). UN military interventions had most chance of success when, as in Korea in 1950–3 and the 1991 Gulf War, UN troops actively supported one side against the other.

(e) Bosnia

A similar situation developed in Bosnia (see Section 10.7(c)). In the civil war between Bosnian Muslims and Serbs, the UN failed to send enough troops to impose law and order. This was partly because both the European Community and the USA were reluctant to get involved. There was further humiliation for the UN in July 1995 when they were unable to prevent Serb forces from capturing two towns – Srebrenica and Zepa – which the Security Council had designated as safe areas for Muslims. UN helplessness was underlined when the Serbs went on to murder around 8000 Muslim men in Srebrenica.

(f) Iraq – the overthrow of Saddam Hussein

In March 2003 the USA and Britain launched an invasion of Iraq, on the grounds that they intended to get rid of its weapons of mass destruction and to free the Iraqi people from the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein (see Section 12.4). UN weapons inspectors had already spent months in Iraq searching for weapons of mass destruction, but had found nothing of any significance. The attack went ahead even though the UN Security Council had not given its authorization. The USA and Britain had tried to push a resolution through the

Council approving military action, but France, Russia, China and Germany wanted to allow Saddam more time to co-operate with the weapons inspectors. When it became clear that France and Russia were prepared to veto any such resolution, the USA and Britain resolved to go ahead unilaterally, without putting the resolution to a Security Council vote. They claimed that Saddam's violations of earlier UN resolutions were a justification for war.

The US and British action was a serious blow to the prestige of the UN. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, speaking at the opening of the annual session of the General Assembly in September 2003, said that their action had brought the UN to 'a fork in the road'. Until then, all states needed the authorization of the Security Council if they intended to use force beyond the normal right of self-defence, as prescribed by Article 51 of the UN Charter. However, if states continued to act unilaterally and pre-emptively against a perceived threat, that would present a fundamental challenge to the entire principles of world peace and stability on which the UN was based, and which it had been striving to achieve, however imperfectly, for the last 58 years. This, he said, could only set precedents resulting in 'a proliferation of the unilateral and lawless use of force'.

9.5 WHAT OTHER WORK IS THE UN RESPONSIBLE FOR?

Although it is the UN's role as peacekeeper and international mediator which most often gets into the headlines, the majority of its work is concerned with its less spectacular aims of safeguarding human rights and encouraging economic, social, educational and cultural progress throughout the world. There is only enough space in this book to look at a few examples.

(a) The Human Rights Commission

This works under the supervision of ECOSOC and tries to ensure that all governments treat their people in a civilized way. *A 30-point Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was adopted by the General Assembly in 1948; this means that every person, no matter what country he or she lives in, should have certain basic rights, *the most important of which are the rights to*:

- a standard of living high enough to keep him (or her) and his family in good health;
- be free from slavery, racial discrimination, arrest and imprisonment without trial, and torture;
- have a fair trial in public and to be presumed innocent until proved guilty;
- move about freely in his/her country and be able to leave the country;
- get married, have children, work, own property and vote in elections;
- have opinions and express them freely.

Later the Commission, concerned about the plight of children in many countries, produced *a Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959). Foremost among the rights every child should be able to expect are*:

- adequate food and medical care;
- free education;
- adequate opportunity for relaxation and play (to guard against excessive child labour);
- protection from racial, religious and any other type of discrimination.

All member governments are expected to produce a report every three years on the state of human rights in their country. However, the problem for the UN is that many states do not produce the reports and they ignore the terms of the Declarations. When this happens, all the UN can do is publicize countries where the most flagrant violations of human rights take place, and hope that pressure of world opinion will influence the governments concerned. For example, the UN campaigned against *apartheid* in South Africa (see Section 25.8) and against General Pinochet's brutal treatment of political prisoners in Chile (see Section 8.4(c)). Mary Robinson (a former president of the Irish Republic), who was UN Commissioner for Human Rights from 1997 until 2002, worked hard to raise world awareness of the problems by naming and shaming guilty states. Unfortunately she made some powerful enemies by her outspoken criticism of their human rights records – among them Russia, China and the USA (all permanent members of the Security Council). Secretary-General Annan was pleased with her work and wanted her to serve another term as Commissioner. However, she was replaced by Sergio Vieira de Mello, and it was widely reported that her second term had been blocked by the USA.

(b) The International Labour Organization (ILO)

The ILO operates from its headquarters in Geneva. *It works on the principles that*:

- every person is entitled to a job;
- there should be equal opportunities for everybody to get jobs, irrespective of race, sex or religion;
- there should be minimum standards of decent working conditions;
- workers should have the right to organize themselves into unions and other associations in order to negotiate for better conditions and pay (this is known as collective bargaining);
- there should be full social security provision for all workers (such as unemployment, health and maternity benefits).

The ILO does excellent work providing help for countries trying to improve working conditions, and it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1969. It sends experts out to demonstrate new equipment and techniques, sets up training centres in developing countries and runs the International Centre for Advanced Technology and Vocational Training in Turin (Italy), which provides vital high-level training for people from all over the Third World. Again though, the ILO, like the Human Rights Commission, is always faced with the problem of what to do when governments ignore the rules. For example, many governments, including those of communist countries, and of Latin American countries such as Chile, Argentina and Mexico, would not allow workers to organize trade unions.

(c) The World Health Organization (WHO)

The WHO is one of the UN's most successful agencies. It aims to bring the world to a point where all its peoples are not just free of disease, but are 'at a high level of health'. One of its first jobs was to tackle a cholera epidemic in Egypt in 1947 which threatened to spread through Africa and the Middle East. Quick action by a UN team soon brought the epidemic under control and it was eliminated in a few weeks. The WHO now keeps a permanent cholera vaccine bank in case of further outbreaks, and wages a continual battle against other diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and leprosy. The Organization provides money to train doctors, nurses and other health workers for developing countries,

keeps governments informed about new drugs and provides free contraceptive pills for women in Third World countries.

One of its most striking achievements was to eliminate smallpox in the 1980s. At the same time it seemed well on the way towards eliminating malaria, but during the 1970s a new strain of malaria appeared which had developed a resistance to anti-malaria drugs. Research into new anti-malaria drugs became a WHO priority. In March 2000 it was reported that the problem of tuberculosis was growing worse – killing two million people every year.

The most serious world health problem in recent years has been the AIDS epidemic. The WHO has done excellent work collecting evidence and statistics, producing reports and putting pressure on pharmaceutical companies to reduce prices of drugs to treat the condition. In June 2001 the UN global AIDS fund was set up, which aimed to raise $10 billion a year to fight the disease (see Section 28.5 for more details about AIDS).

(d) The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

The FAO aims to raise living standards by encouraging improvements in agricultural production. It was responsible for introducing new varieties of maize and rice which have a higher yield and are less susceptible to disease. FAO experts show people in poor countries how to increase food production by the use of fertilizers, new techniques and new machinery, and cash is provided to fund new projects. Its main problem is having to deal with emergencies caused by drought, floods, civil war and other disasters, when food supplies need to be rushed into a country as quickly as possible. The Organization has done an excellent job, and there is no doubt that many more people would have died from starvation and malnutrition without its work.

(e) The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Operating from its headquarters in Paris, UNESCO does its best to encourage the spread of literacy; it also fosters international co-operation between scientists, scholars and artists in all fields, working on the theory that *the best way to avoid war is by educating people's minds in the pursuit of peace*. Much of its time and resources are spent setting up schools and teacher-training colleges in under-developed countries. Sometimes it becomes involved in one-off cultural and scientific projects. For example, it organized an International Hydrological Decade (1965–75), during which it helped to finance research into the problem of world water resources. After the 1968 floods in Florence, UNESCO played an important part in repairing and restoring damaged art treasures and historic buildings. During the 1980s UNESCO came under criticism from western powers which claimed that it was becoming too politically motivated (see Section 9.6(c)).

(f) The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF was founded originally in 1946 to help children left homeless by the Second World War. It dealt with this problem so efficiently that it was decided to make it a permanent agency and the word 'emergency' was dropped from its title (1953). Its new function was *to help improve the health and living standards of children all over the world, especially in poorer countries*. It works closely with the WHO, setting up health centres, training health workers and running health education and sanitation schemes. In spite of these

efforts it was still a horrifying fact that in 1983, 15 million children died under the age of 5, a figure equivalent to the combined under-5 population of Britain, France, Italy, Spain and West Germany. In that year UNICEF launched its 'child health revolution' campaign, which was designed to reduce the child death rate by simple methods such as encouraging breastfeeding (which is more hygienic than bottle-feeding) and immunizing babies against common diseases such as measles, diphtheria, polio and tetanus.

(g) The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)

This agency was set up in 1950 to deal with the problem of Arab refugees from Palestine who were forced to leave their homes when Palestine was divided up to form the new state of Israel (see Section 11.2). UNRWA did a remarkable job providing basic food, clothing, shelter and medical supplies. Later, as it became clear that the refugee camps were going to be permanent, it began to build schools, hospitals, houses and training centres to enable refugees to get jobs and make the camps self-supporting.

(h) Financial and economic agencies

1 The International Monetary Fund (IMF)
The IMF is designed to foster co-operation between nations in order to encourage the growth of trade and the full development of nations' economic potential. It allows short-term loans to countries in financial difficulties, provided that their economic policies meet with the IMF's approval and that they are prepared to change policies if the IMF thinks it necessary. By the mid-1970s many Third World nations were heavily in debt (see Section 27.2), and in 1977 the IMF set up an emergency fund. However, there was a great deal of resentment among the poorer nations when the IMF Board of Governors (dominated by the rich western countries, especially the USA, which provide most of the cash) began to attach conditions to the loans. Jamaica and Tanzania, for example, were required to change their socialist policies before loans were allowed. This was seen by many as unacceptable interference in the internal affairs of member states.

2 The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the World Bank)
This provides loans for specific development projects, such as building dams to generate electricity, and introducing new agricultural techniques and family planning campaigns. Again though, the USA, which provides the largest share of the cash for the bank, controls its decisions. When Poland and Czechoslovakia applied for loans, they were both refused because they were communist states. Both of them resigned from the Bank and from the IMF in disgust, Poland in 1950 and Czechoslovakia in 1954.

3 The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)
This agreement was first signed in 1947 when member states of the UN agreed to reduce some of their tariffs (taxes on imports) in order to encourage international trade. Members continue to meet, under the supervision of ECOSOC, to try and keep tariffs as low as possible throughout the world. In January 1995 the GATT became the World Trade Organization (WTO). Its aim was to liberalize and monitor world trade and to resolve trade disputes.

4 The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
The conference first met in 1964 and soon became a permanent body. Its role is to encourage the development of industry in the Third World and to pressurize rich countries into buying Third World products.

(i) The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

This began life originally as the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, set up in 1991 to enable the UN to respond more effectively to natural disasters and 'complex emergencies' (the UN phrase for human disasters caused by wars and other political events). Its functions were expanded in 1998 to include the co-ordination of responses to all humanitarian disasters and projects for human development; at the same time it assumed its present title OCHA. It had a staff of some 860 members, some based in New York, some in Geneva and some working in the field.

Much valuable relief work was done in a whole series of crisis situations caused by earthquakes, hurricanes and floods; help was mainly needed in poor countries with less developed infrastructures and high population densities. UN statistics suggested that in 2003 alone, some 200 million victims of natural disasters and 45 million victims of 'complex emergencies' received aid, either supplied directly or organized by the UN. However, a recurring criticism of the UN's role was that it lacked the power and the resources to operate as effectively as it might.

The greatest challenge to OCHA came at the beginning of 2005 in what became known as the tsunami disaster. On Boxing Day 2004, two huge earthquakes occurred in the Indian Ocean, triggering off a series of massive tidal waves known as *tsunami*. No effective warning system existed, and within hours the tsunami were battering the shores of many countries around the Indian Ocean, including Indonesia, India, the Maldive Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia and even Somalia on the east coast of Africa. It soon became apparent that this was a catastrophe of the highest magnitude; at least 150 000 people were killed and thousands more were missing. Worst affected were Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand, where, in some coastal areas, entire towns and villages had been destroyed. A massive and complex relief operation was needed immediately, but the problems to be faced were overwhelming.

The response from around the world was heartening: ordinary people gave unstintingly to the appeals for money; foreign governments promised enormous amounts of cash; 11 states sent troops, ships and aircraft; over 400 non-government agencies and charities such as Christian Aid, the Red Cross, Red Crescent, the Salvation Army, Oxfam and Médecins sans Frontières got involved within a few days. An Oxfam spokesman said that the UN was doing as good a job as anybody could reasonably expect in the horrific circumstances, and that they were grateful for the plain-speaking leadership of Mr Jan Egeland, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, and of Secretary-General Kofi Annan. But there was a long-term operation ahead: after saving tens of thousands of people from death by starvation and disease, the next step was to rebuild communities and restore infrastructures.

9.6 VERDICT ON THE UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION

The UN has been in existence for well over half a century, but it is still nowhere near achieving its basic aims. The world is still full of economic and social problems; acts of aggression and wars continue. *The UN's failures were caused to some extent by weaknesses in its system.*

(a) The lack of a permanent UN army

This means that it is difficult to prevail upon powerful states to accept its decisions if they choose to put self-interest first. If persuasion and the pressure of world opinion fail, the UN has to rely on member nations to provide troops to enable it to enforce decisions. For

example, the USSR was able to ignore UN demands for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Hungary (1956) and Afghanistan (1980). UN involvement in Somalia (1992–5) and Bosnia (1992–5) showed the impossibility of the UN being able to stop a war when the warring parties were not ready to stop fighting. The USA and Britain were determined to attack Iraq in 2003 without UN authorization, and the UN could do nothing about it, especially now that the USA was the world's only superpower – by far the most powerful state in the world.

(b) When should the UN become involved?

There is a problem about exactly when the UN should become involved during the course of a dispute. Sometimes it hangs back too long, so that the problem becomes more difficult to solve; sometimes it hesitates so long that it scarcely becomes involved at all; this happened with the war in Vietnam (see Section 8.3) and the war in Angola (see Section 25.6). This left the UN open to accusations of indecision and lack of firmness. It caused some states to put more faith in their own regional organizations such as NATO for keeping the peace, and many agreements were worked out without involving the UN; for example, the end of the Vietnam War, the Camp David peace between Israel and Egypt in 1979 (see Section 11.6) and the settlement of the Rhodesia/Zimbabwe problem in the same year (see Section 24.4(c)).

At this time, critics were claiming that the UN was becoming irrelevant and was no more than an arena for propaganda speeches. Part of the problem was that the Security Council was hampered by the veto which its permanent members could use. Although the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution could offset this to some extent, the veto could still cause long delays before decisive action was taken. If a potential aggressor knew that his forces would be met by a UN armed force, equipped and mandated to fight, this would be a powerful disincentive; for example if a UN force had been deployed on the Kuwait side of the Iraqi–Kuwait frontier in 1990, or on the Croatian side of the Serbia–Croatia border in 1991, hostilities might well have been prevented from breaking out.

(c) The increasing membership of the UN from the 1970s

The increasing membership of the UN during the 1970s brought new problems. By 1970 members from the Third World (Africa and Asia) were in a clear majority. As these nations began to work more and more together, it meant that only they could be certain of having their resolutions passed, and it became increasingly difficult for both Western and Communist blocs to get their resolutions through the General Assembly. The western nations could no longer have things all their own way and they began to criticize the Third World bloc for being too 'political'; by this, they meant acting in a way the West disapproved of. For example, in 1974 UNESCO passed resolutions condemning 'colonialism' and 'imperialism'. In 1979 when the Western bloc introduced a General Assembly motion condemning terrorism, it was defeated by the Arab states and their supporters.

Friction reached crisis point in 1983 at the UNESCO General Congress. Many western nations, including the USA, accused UNESCO of being inefficient and wasteful and of having unacceptable political aims. What brought matters to a head was a proposal by some communist states for the internal licensing of foreign journalists. According to the USA, this would lead to a situation in which member states could exercise an effective censorship of each other's media organizations. Consequently the Americans announced that they would withdraw from UNESCO on 1 January 1985, since it had become 'hostile to the basic institutions of a free society, especially a free market and a free press'. Britain

and Singapore withdrew in 1986 for similar reasons. Britain rejoined in 1997 and the USA followed in 2002.

(d) There is a waste of effort and resources among the agencies

Some of the agencies sometimes seem to duplicate each other's work. Critics claim that the WHO and the FAO overlap too much. The FAO was criticized in 1984 for spending too much on administration and not enough on improving agricultural systems. GATT and UNCTAD even seem to be working against each other: GATT tries to eliminate tariffs and anything else that restricts trade, whereas UNCTAD tries to get preferential treatment for the products of Third World countries.

(e) Shortage of funds

Throughout its history the UN has always been short of funds. The vast scope of its work means that it needs incredibly large sums of money to finance its operations. It is entirely dependent on contributions from member states. Each state pays a regular annual contribution based on its general wealth and ability to pay. In addition, members pay a proportion of the cost of each peacekeeping operation, and they are also expected to contribute towards the expenses of the special agencies. *Many member states refused to pay* from time to time, either because of financial difficulties of their own, or as a mark of disapproval of UN policies; 1986 was a bad year financially: no fewer than 98 of its members owed money, chief among them being the USA, which withheld more than $100 million until the UN reformed its budgeting system and curbed its extravagance. The Americans wanted the countries that gave most to have more say in how the money was spent, but most smaller members rejected this as undemocratic. As one of Sri Lanka's delegates put it: 'in our political processes at home, the wealthy do not have more votes than the poor. We should like this to be the practice in the UN as well.'

In 1987 changes were introduced giving the main financial contributors more control over spending, and the financial situation soon improved. However, expenses soared alarmingly in the early 1990s as the UN became involved in a series of new crises, in the Middle East (Gulf War), Yugoslavia and Somalia. In August 1993 the Secretary-General, Dr Boutros-Ghali, revealed that many states were well in arrears with their payments. He warned that unless there was an immediate injection of cash from the world's rich states, all the UN's peacekeeping operations would be in jeopardy. Yet the Americans and Europeans felt that they already paid too much – the USA (with about 30 per cent), the European Community (about 35 per cent) and Japan (11 per cent) paid three-quarters of the expenses, and there was a feeling that there were many other wealthy states which could afford to contribute much more than they were doing.

In spite of all these criticisms, it would be wrong to write the UN off as a failure, and there can be no doubt that the world would be a far worse place without it.

- It provides a world assembly where representatives of around 190 nations can come together and talk to each other. Even the smallest nation has a chance to make itself heard in a world forum.
- Although it has not prevented wars, it has been successful in bringing some wars to an end more quickly, and has prevented further conflict. A great deal of human suffering and bloodshed have been prevented by the actions of the UN peacekeeping forces and refugee agencies. At the present time (2012) there are around 85 000 UN peacekeepers in action across the world.

- The UN has done valuable work investigating and publicizing human rights violations under repressive regimes like the military governments of Chile and Zaire. In this way it has slowly been able to influence governments by bringing international pressure to bear on them.
- Perhaps its most important achievement has been to stimulate international co-operation on economic, social and technical matters. Millions of people, especially in poorer countries, are better off thanks to the work of the UN agencies. It continues to involve itself in current problems: UNESCO, the ILO and the WHO are running a joint project to help drug addicts and there has been a series of 15 conferences on AIDS in an attempt to co-ordinate the struggle against this terrible scourge, particularly in Africa (see Section 28.4).

9.7 WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE UN?

Many people thought that with the end of the Cold War, most of the world's problems would disappear. In fact, this did not happen; during the 1990s there seemed to be more conflicts than ever before, and the world seemed to be less and less stable. Obviously there was still a vitally important role for the UN to play as international peacekeeper, and many people were anxious for the UN to reform and strengthen itself.

Kofi Annan, who became Secretary-General in December 1996, had gained an excellent reputation over the previous few years as head of UN peacekeeping operations. He was well aware of the organization's weaknesses and was determined to do something about them. He ordered a thorough review of all UN peace operations; the resulting report, published in 2000, recommended, among other things, that the UN should maintain permanent brigade-size forces of 5000 troops, which would be ready for immediate deployment, commanded by military professionals. The spread of terrorism, especially with the September 2001 attacks on New York, prompted Annan, now in his second term as Secretary-General, to produce his *Agenda for Further Change* (September 2002). This was a plan for reforms to strengthen the UN's role in fighting terrorism, and it included a much-needed streamlining of the cumbersome budget system. These things take time, but none of the suggested reforms is beyond the bounds of possibility.

The really serious problem, which had been brewing ever since the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the USA as sole superpower, was about the future relationship between the UN and the USA. Tensions began to mount as soon as the Bush administration took office in 2001: within its first year the new government rejected the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol (which aimed to limit the emission of greenhouse gases) and the Rome Statute of the new UN International Criminal Court, as well as Security Council offers of a resolution authorizing a war against terrorism (this was because it prefers to conduct its own self-defence in whatever way it chooses). Tensions reached a climax in March 2003, when the US government, aided and abetted by the UK, decided to attack Iraq, *without UN authorization and against the wishes of the majority of UN members*. The USA was so disproportionately powerful that it could ignore the UN and act as it pleased unless the UN delivered the outcome it wanted.

An important American technique in its quest to control the UN was to secure the appointment of a sympathetic Secretary-General. A prime example was Kofi Annan, Secretary-General from 1996 until 2006, who whole heartedly supported the American line on every major UN involvement except one – Iraq. In a book published in November 2006 to mark the end of Annan's two terms as Secretary-General, James Traub chronicles his rise to the top. Since 1993 Annan had been in charge of all UN peacekeeping operations under Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali. However, Dr Boutros-Ghali had displeased Washington by refusing to send a UN mission into Somalia and delaying the NATO

bombing of Serbia. In both cases Annan had supported the American line. In 1996 all the signs were that Boutros-Ghali would have his mandate extended for another five years. But President Clinton was determined to get rid of him; it was relentless pressure from the Clinton administration that got Kofi Annan chosen instead of Boutros-Ghali. Consequently when NATO launched its bombing attack on Yugoslavia early in 1999, instead of condemning it as a blatant violation of the UN Charter – which it most certainly was – Annan announced that it was a legitimate action.

However, the attack on Iraq in 2003 (see Section 12.4) was more difficult for Annan. When the joint US and British operation against Iraq was launched without a second Security Council Resolution authorizing the attack, Annan was eventually forced to admit that the invasion had been illegal. When he was asked in a BBC interview, 'Are you bothered that the US is becoming an unrestrainable, unilateral superpower?' he replied: 'I think in the end everybody is concluding that it is best to work together with our allies.' That innocent remark sums up the whole situation: the challenge for the UN over the coming years is to find a way to harness and make use of the power and influence of the USA instead of being impeded or stampeded by it.

FURTHER READING

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QUESTIONS

1 'There can be little doubt that the social, economic and humanitarian work of the UN has been far more successful and valuable than its peacekeeping role.' Assess the validity of this verdict on the work of the United Nations Organization.

2 'The UN has only been successful in resolving conflict when one of the superpowers has intervened to support it.' How far would you agree with this view?

3 To what extent would it be true to say that the UN has been more successful in dealing with conflicts since 1990 than it was during the Cold War?


There is a document question about the UN and the 1956 crisis in Hungary on the website.