United Nations

The UN was formed following the devastating World War II, with the aim of preventing future global-scale conflicts. It was a successor to the ineffective League of Nations. The representatives of 50 governments met in San Francisco on 25 April 1945, to draft what would become the **UN Charter**. The Charter was adopted on 25 June 1945 and came into effect on 24 October 1945.

For more on UN evolution, check This Day in History dated October 24.

United Nations Functions

In accordance with the Charter, the organization's objectives include maintaining international peace and security, protecting human rights, delivering humanitarian aid, promoting sustainable development, and upholding international law. At its founding, the UN had 51 member states; this number grew to 193 in 2011, representing the vast majority of the world's sovereign states.

United Nations Structure

The UN is structured around five principal organs:

1. General Assembly
2. United Nations Security Council (UNSC)
3. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
4. International Court of Justice
5. UN Secretariat.

A sixth principal organ, the Trusteeship Council, suspended operations on 1 November 1994, upon the independence of Palau, the last remaining UN trustee territory.

A brief table about their primary function is given in the table below:

Principal Organs of the United Nations

Name of the Organ	Primary Function	Primary Tasks of the Organ
UN General Assembly	Deliberative assembly of all the UN member states	• May resolve non-compulsory recommendations to states or suggestions to the Security Council (UNSC); • Decides on the admission of new members, following a proposal by the UNSC; • Adopts the budget; • Elects the non-permanent members of the UNSC; all members of ECOSOC; the UN Secretary-General (following his/her proposal by the UNSC); and the fifteen

		judges of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Each country has one vote.
UN Secretariat	Administrative organ of the UN	• Supports the other UN bodies administratively (for example, in the organization of conferences, the writing of reports and studies and the preparation of the budget); • Its chairperson – the **UN Secretary-General** – is elected by the General Assembly for a five-year mandate and is the UN's foremost representative.
International Court of Justice	Universal court of international law	• Decides disputes between states that recognize its jurisdiction; • Issues legal opinions; • Renders judgment by relative majority. Its fifteen judges are elected by the UN General Assembly for nine-year terms.
UN Security Council	Arbiterates international security issues	• Responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security; • May adopt compulsory resolutions; • Has fifteen members: five permanent members with veto power and ten elected non-permanent members.
UN Economic and Social Council	For global economic and social affairs	• Responsible for cooperation between states as regards economic and social matters; • Coordinates cooperation between the UN's numerous specialized agencies; • Has 54 members, elected by the General Assembly to serve staggered three-year mandates.
UN Trusteeship Council	For administering trust territory (now disbanded)	• Was originally designed to manage former colonial possessions. • Has been inactive since 1994, when Palau, the last trust territory, attained independence.

To know more about the UN and its principal organs, visit the linked article.

What are the Specialized Agencies of the UN?

The UN Charter stipulates that each primary organ of the United Nations can establish various specialized agencies to fulfil its duties. There are 17 specialized agencies of the UN. They are mentioned in the table below:

United Nations Specialized Agencies			
Agency	Acronym	Headquarters	Founding Year
Food and Agriculture Organization	FAO	Rome, Italy	1945
International Telecommunication Union	ITU	Geneva, Switzerland	1865 (Joined UN in 1947)
International Fund for Agricultural Development	IFAD	Rome, Italy	1977

[International Labour Organization](#)	ILO	Geneva, Switzerland	1946
[International Maritime Organization](#)	IMO	London, United Kingdom	1948
[International Monetary Fund](#)	IMF	Washington, United States	1945
[United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization](#)	UNESCO	Paris, France	1946
[World Health Organization](#)	WHO	Geneva, Switzerland	1948
[United Nations Industrial Development Organization](#)	UNIDO	Vienna, Austria	1966
[International Civil Aviation Organization](#)	ICAO	Montreal, Canada	1944
[World Intellectual Property Organisation](#)	WIPO	Geneva, Switzerland	1967
[International Fund for Agricultural Development](#)	IFAD	Rome, Italy	1977
[Universal Postal Union](#)	UPU	Bern, Switzerland	1874
[International Telecommunication Union](#)	ITU	Geneva, Switzerland	1865
[United Nations World Tourism Organization](#)	UNWTO	Madrid, Spain	1974
[World Meteorological Organisation](#)	WMO	Geneva, Switzerland	1950
[World Bank Group](#)	WBG	Washington, D.C, USA	1944

UN Agencies and Organisations

There are several agencies, bodies, institutes and organisations that work under the UN system. Some of them predate the UN's establishment and were incorporated into the UN later on, while others were founded afterwards. They perform important functions across domains, regions and sectors. The table below mentions a few significant such organisations.

Important Agencies under the UN System			
Agency	Acronym	HQ	Founding Year
[United Nations Environment Programme](#)	UNEP	Nairobi, Kenya	1972
[United Nations Children's Fund](#)	UNICEF	New York, USA	1946
[United Nations Population Fund](#)	UNFPA	New York, USA	1967
[United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#)	UNHCR	Geneva, Switzerland	1950
[United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#)	UNODC	Vienna, Austria	1997
[United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute](#)	UNICRI	Turin, Italy	1968
[United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction](#)	UNDRR	Geneva, Switzerland	1999
[United Nations Development Programme](#)	UNDP	New York, USA	1965
[United Nations University](#)	UNU	Tokyo, Japan	1972
[United Nations Conference on Trade and Development](#)	UNCTAD	Geneva, Switzerland	1964

International Atomic Energy Agency	IAEA	Vienna, Austria	1957
United Nations Human Settlement Programme	UN-Habitat	Nairobi, Kenya	1978

India and UN

India was among the founding members of the United Nations. Even before achieving independence, India had signed the Declaration by the United Nations at Washington, D.C. in 1944, and also participated in the United Nations Conference on International Organization at San Francisco from 25 April to 26 June 1945. As one of the original members of the United Nations, India enthusiastically supports the purposes and principles of the UN and has made significant contributions in implementing the goals of the organisation. The UN field networks in India are the largest anywhere in the world through the many offices, programmes and funds currently at work in the country.

Today, there are 26 UN agencies in India. Some of the milestones that the UN has made in India through its agencies are elaborated upon below:

1. **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO):**
    1. When FAO began its India operations in 1948, its priority was to transform India's food and farm sectors through technical inputs and support for policy development.
    2. Over the years, FAO has made major inroads in resolving issues such as access to food, nutrition, livelihoods, rural development and sustainable agriculture. With the Sustainable Development Goals in full swing, the FAO's primary focus will be on improving India's sustainable agricultural practices.
2. **International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD):**
    1. IFAD and the Government of India have achieved significant results in investing in the **commercialization** of **smallholding-agriculture** and building small farmers' capacity to increase incomes from market opportunities.
    2. IFAD-supported projects have also provided women with access to financial services, such as by linking women's self-help groups with commercial banks.
3. **UNAIDS:**
    1. India has worked with the UN on the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS **(UNAIDS).** The main aim of the programme is to help prevent new HIV infections, care for people living with HIV and mitigate the impact of the epidemic.
    2. Between 2001 and 2012 the total number of cases of the disease in India fell down by 50%, one of the highest in the world at that time. So far, India has managed to continue the trend.
4. **Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology (APCTT):**
    1. This is a UNESCAP regional institute established in 1977. It works in the fields of technology transfer, information and innovation management.
5. **International Monetary Fund:** India has been working closely with the IMF. For more on this, please check the linked article on IMF in the table above.
6. **UNESCO:**
    1. India has been closely associated with the UNESCO. India has been continuously re-elected to the Executive Board of UNESCO since 1946.
    2. A UNESCO Category I Institute dedicated to education for peace and sustainable development was established in 2012 and is called the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP). It is located in New Delhi.
    3. There are also several UNESCO World Heritage Sites in India. For more on this, click the linked article.
7. **World Health Organisation (WHO):** WHO has been working closely with the Indian government to improve health outcomes. It has played a stellar part in eradicating several diseases such as cholera,

controlling others like malaria, TB, etc. For more on WHO and India, you can check the WHO linked article from the table above.

Similarly, other organisations have also played a great role in India and helped in its progress towards development, health and economic improvement. For details of each organisation's role in India, you can go through the respective articles from the table above.

India's Contribution towards the UN

India has been an active member of the UN since its inception. In 1946, India became the first country to raise the issues of racism and apartheid in South Africa in the UN forum.

- India played an important part in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Read more about the contribution of Hansa Mehta in this regard.
- The first woman president of the UNGA was an Indian, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, in 1953.
- India's contribution to the UNSC can be read at the UNSC article from the first table on this page.
- India has contributed immensely to **UN Peacekeeping Missions** in various parts of the world.
  - India has sent her peacekeeping troops to Korea, Egypt, Congo, Haiti, Angola, Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda, Lebanon, South Sudan, etc.
  - India has been regularly one among the largest contributor of troops to the missions.
- Mahatma Gandhi's ideals of non-violence resonate deeply with the UN's principles. In 2007, the UN declared Gandhi's birth anniversary of October 2 as the 'International Day of Non-violence'.
- In 2014, the UNGA declared that 21st June would be observed as International Yoga Day. Read more on this in the linked article.

UN Reforms/What are the challenges faced by the UN?

The UN has had its fair share of challenges in the years of its existence. Now there is no one single factor to those challenges but rather multi-faceted factors that make the UN's task of fostering world peace a difficult one. Some of the challenges to the UN's efforts for global peace are as follows:

- **Geopolitical aggression and intransigence**: Conflicts are becoming commonplace and gradually being magnified by rival global powers as they lend support to proxy groups to wage war overseas. The UNSC, being dominated by a few nations, is unable to take a neutral stand on issues, thus endangering world peace and security. Apart from issuing declarations, the UN has been unable to stop certain many conflicts from taking place.
- **Legacies of military intervention and regime change**: Framed as interventions to counter terror, save civilians or remove rogue regimes, in case after case, military intervention and regime change have failed to bring lasting stability or to defeat fundamentalist groups. This has brought an atmosphere of distrust regarding any intervention done by the UN.
- **Panic over forced displacement**: As desperate people flee war zones, the impact of forced displacement is hitting neighbouring countries hardest and they are trying to manage as best as they can. Meanwhile, Western governments are making hasty deals to support border and security forces in transit countries to close their borders and shut the problem out. But such short-term measures will only further antagonize the nations who are overburdened by the inflow of refugees.
- **Struggling humanitarianism**: Undoubtedly humanitarians have a tough job. The UN and others are making enormous efforts, with inadequate resources, to assist the victims of conflict. But they are not yet good enough at defending humanitarian values, working for prevention during a crisis or empowering those affected by humanitarian crises to take the initiative.
- Western interventions in countries like Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc. have not brought about lasting

  peace or stability to those regions. The UN has largely been like a mute spectator to the horrible events (humanitarian crises, woes of migrants who flee these zones) that unfolded in these conflict-ridden

zones of the world. Although, it must be acknowledged that many humanitarian efforts such as by the WHO, UNICEF, WFP, etc. have helped these zones immensely at least in their respective domains. However, political resolutions to conflicts are more tricky and the UN does face enormous challenges in this regard.

- **UNSC Reforms:** There have been great demands for reforms within the Security Council. The **G4 Nations** comprising India, Germany, Brazil and Japan are championing each other's bid for permanent seats in the Security Council. You can read more on the United Nations Security Council Reforms in the linked article. Not only in the UNSC, world leaders are also demanding a change in the manner in which the UN system functions, calling for more localisation, lesser bureaucracy and more decision-making powers to those nations where most of the UN's humanitarian work is concentrated, like the African countries.

Like all challenges, there are solutions to face them as well. Here are a few solutions on how the UN works for conflict resolution and peaceful change in an era of mistrust and division.

- In an era when a consensus, political or otherwise, is hard to arrive at, it will be crucial to use the vision and the mandate of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This consensus was developed through a uniquely consultative process.
- 'Sustaining peace' should also be a moment to reclaim the policy space. **A panic regarding policy is setting in – framing conflicts as 'terror' threats and as a 'migration' crisis is only enlarging the problem.** Prevention and peacemaking tools are the answer to these problems.
- The UN must not settle for an inert and technocratic approach focused only on building the capacity of state institutions, no matter how strong or weak the political pressure. At the heart of the SDGs is a drive for transformative change with more peaceful, just and inclusive societies helping to shape stronger and more inclusive institutions. If sustaining peace merely means reinforcing the very institutions that are at the heart of the problem – such as blood-thirsty military regimes or corrupt bureaucracies – then, such an endeavour is an exercise in futility.
- **Remaining true to an agenda that will transform people's lives requires supporting those who work for peaceful change** – in and out of government, including women and youth. This requires a willingness to step out of national capitals, to talk to a wider range of people, to build up an understanding of conflicts rooted in people's priorities, and to work in solidarity with people to help them.
- These reforms are of utmost importance as the world faces newer challenges in the form of climate change, environmental degradation, population growth, refugee and stateless peoples, etc.