

United Nations and 20th Century Global Issues Activity

The **United Nations** has “Five Principal Organs” within the overall organization. The General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, International Court of Justice, Security Council, and Secretariat. Each of those “organs” seek to help the United Nations achieve its ultimate goal - peace and security. (There used to be a sixth, but the “Trusteeship” organ only meets sporadically now that much of the world is decolonized.)

Today, you will be a member of one of the organs of the United Nations (except for the Secretariat, because that is simply the bureaucracy at work internationally). Each has a definition of what its primary purpose is to help you in this activity. Those are taken directly from the [UN website](#):

- 1. General Assembly:** “The main deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the UN. All 193 member states of the UN are represented... making it the only UN body with universal representation... Decisions on important questions, such as those on peace and security, admission of new members, and budgetary matters, require a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority of the General Assembly. Decisions on other questions are made by a simple majority.”
- 2. Security Council:** “Primary responsibility, under the UN Charter, is the maintenance of international peace and security. It has 15 members (5 permanent and 10 non-permanent members). Each member has one vote. Under the Charter, all Member states are obligated to comply with Council decisions.... takes the lead in determining the existence of a threat to the peace or act of aggression. It calls upon the parties to a dispute to settle it by peaceful means and recommends methods of adjustment or terms of settlement. In some cases, the Security Council can resort to imposing sanctions or even authorize the use of force to maintain or restore international peace and security.”
- 3. International Court of Justice:** “principal judicial organ of the United Nations. Its seat is at the Peace Palace in the Hague (Netherlands). It is the only one of the... principal organs of the United Nations not located in New York (United States of America). The Court’s role is to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States and to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies.”
- 4. Economic and Social Council:** “Principal body for coordination, policy review, policy dialogue and recommendations on economic, social and environmental issues, as well as implementation of internationally agreed development goals. ...central mechanism for activities of the UN system and its specialized agencies in the economic, social and environmental fields, supervising subsidiary and expert bodies. It has 54 Members, elected by the General Assembly for overlapping three-year terms. It is the United Nations’ central platform for reflection, debate, and innovative thinking on sustainable development.



What to Do:

Part 1: Your group will need to rank the global issues as they pertain to your “Organ” of the United Nations. What are the most important issues among those listed to your group and why? Why should they be considered important for your section of the UN above others? Which committees will disagree with your priorities?

Global Issues:

- _____ Revolutions (i.e. Iranian Revolution, Arab Spring)
- _____ Civil wars (i.e. Nicaragua and the Contras/Sandinistas, Somalia, Sudan)
- _____ Rights and treatment of children
- _____ Nuclear disarmament
- _____ Rights and treatment of women (i.e. FGM, Young Brides, Suffrage, Slavery)
- _____ Humanitarian aid
- _____ Rights of indigenous populations
- _____ Civilian contractors or peacekeepers (i.e. doctors without borders, civilian military contracts)
- _____ Cloning
- _____ Refugees
- _____ Economic development in developing nations
- _____ Counter-terrorism
- _____ New forms of warfare
- _____ Communication technology/digital divide
- _____ Political Instability (i.e. Argentina’s “Dirty War” or Corruption, Rise of dictators in certain nations)
- _____ Destabilizing War (i.e. Iran-Iraq War, Gulf War)
- _____ Genocide (i.e. Serbian “ethnic cleansing” of Bosnians, Darfur, Rwanda)
- _____ Is there another issue not represented that should be for your committee?

Part 2: Present your order to the other “organs.” Do you have any in common with others?

Part 3: Debate! What humanitarian, political, security, or other issues need to be addressed by the UN first?

Part 4: Discuss: why is the United Nations unable to solve the world’s problems? What are the issues with its structure that prevent it from solving the problems? What problems CAN it solve?