

independently of governments. **Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)** receiving funds included the Red Cross, CARE, and Oxfam.

On March 11, 2011, another powerful earthquake struck halfway around the world. This time a magnitude 9.0 undersea earthquake shook Tohoku, Japan. The earthquake set off a series of massive tsunamis. Waves over 100 feet tall rolled inland, washed away buildings and vehicles, and caused one of the greatest nuclear disasters in history. One of the waves flooded the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant and disabled the power supply, leading nuclear reactors in the power plant to melt down. In the aftermath of an earthquake, tsunamis, and a nuclear disaster, Japan was in dire need of aid. Once again, IGOs and NGOs stepped in to provide relief.

When faced with the consequences of these disasters, the world has shown its willingness to assist countries during times of emergency. But what about long-term problems like poverty, disease, and climate change? This chapter explores how international organizations are attempting to deal with these and other difficult global issues.



Groups around the world offered their assistance to Japan after the 2011 catastrophe. Here, U.S. Navy crews inspect and load relief supplies following the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster.

■ 18.2 The United Nations

With a membership of 193 nations, the United Nations represents almost every nation in the world. Since it was founded in 1945, it has become the forum for debating every major issue facing humankind. UN agencies like UNICEF coordinate efforts to deal with short-term crises, like the 2010 Haiti earthquake. The UN also focuses attention on tougher, longer-term issues ranging from peacekeeping to poverty.

The Founding of the United Nations

Much of world history can be boiled down to a seemingly endless series of bloody conflicts. By the 20th century, it was clear that the world would never be at peace so long as countries chose to resolve their disputes on the battlefield. The League of Nations was formed after World War I to serve as an international peacekeeper. But the League dissolved when it failed to prevent World War II. As that conflict came to a close, 50 countries joined together to form a more robust intergovernmental organization, the United Nations.

The founding countries adopted a constitution for the new IGO known as the United Nations Charter. The Preamble to the UN Charter identifies four main goals for the UN:

- *to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and*
- *to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and*
- *to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and*
- *to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.*

The UN Charter established several organs, or bodies, to accomplish its goals. The General Assembly is the most democratic UN organ. It is made up of representatives from all member states, each of which has one vote. Problems that arise anywhere in the world can be brought to this body. The General



A meeting of the UN General Assembly brings together representatives from almost every country on Earth. The assembly meets in regular session from September to December each year. Representatives wear headphones that allow them to hear simultaneous translations of the speaker's words into their own language.

Assembly responds by passing resolutions that are taken seriously by member states.

The Security Council is the most powerful UN organ. The council is made up of five permanent members—the United States, Russia, Great Britain, China, and France—and ten members elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms. This body is responsible for maintaining international peace.

The UN's Main Activity: Keeping the World at Peace

The most important activity of the UN is peacekeeping. In 2012, some 115,000 UN peacekeepers were carrying out missions in about 15 countries.

The UN has no permanent peacekeeping force—no standing army of its own. It depends on member states to provide troops if called upon. This system is based on the principle of **collective security**. This principle calls for the uniting of individual countries against an aggressor in order to, as the UN Charter says, “maintain international peace and security.”

Typically, peacekeeping involves sending lightly armed soldiers to the site of a conflict—but only after the two sides have formally agreed to stop fighting. UN peacekeepers, easily identified by their blue helmets, often position themselves between hostile forces. By providing a buffer zone, or neutral

area, the peacekeepers help the two sides maintain their peace agreement. UN peacekeepers work under orders not to fire their weapons except in self-defense. On missions to dangerous hotspots, however, they may use their weapons to defend civilians and UN personnel.

On rare occasions, the Security Council has authorized the use of armed force against a country that has broken the peace. In 1950, for example, a UN force made up of troops from 16 nations helped South Korea push back an invading army from North Korea. The UN took a similar action in 1991 after Iraq invaded its neighbor Kuwait.

The United Nations is also a key player in efforts to halt the spread of nuclear weapons. Nearly all UN members are party to the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Only four member states are not: India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea.

The UN's International Atomic Energy Agency conducts inspections to verify that countries are complying with the nonproliferation treaty. In July 2006, the UN Security Council took steps to discourage Iran from producing nuclear weapons and thus violating the treaty. The council imposed sanctions on Iran that banned the shipment of nuclear materials or technology to that country.

United Nations Organs and Special Agencies

The United Nations consists of various organs and special agencies. Some of the most important are described below, with the UN emblem in the middle. The emblem is a world map centered on the North Pole and surrounded by olive branches, a symbol of peace.

Security Council

The Security Council is responsible for maintaining international peace and security. It has 15 members. Five are permanent, including the United States, while ten fill two-year terms. Permanent members can veto any council resolution.

General Assembly

All 193 members of the UN sit in the General Assembly, the chief policymaking body of the UN. Here member states, each with one vote, debate issues and recommend action on matters covered by the UN Charter.

Secretariat

The Secretariat carries out the day-to-day operations of the UN. It has nearly 9,000 staff members located around the world. The head of the Secretariat, the secretary general, serves a five-year, renewable term.

Economic and Social Council

The Economic and Social Council is a forum for discussing international economic and social issues. It seeks to promote higher standards of living, cultural cooperation, and respect for human rights.

International Court of Justice

The International Court of Justice (ICJ), also known as the World Court, settles legal disputes brought by one nation against another. It also advises the UN's other organs on legal issues. The United States takes part in ICJ proceedings but has been unwilling to accept its authority.

International Monetary Fund and World Bank

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank are special agencies of the UN. The IMF offers nations economic advice and serves as a "lender of last resort." The World Bank's mission is to reduce global poverty. It funds projects that build schools and health centers, provide water and electricity, and create jobs.



Other UN Activities: Improving People's Lives

Besides peacekeeping, the UN works to improve the lives of people around the world. UN agencies and programs have, for many years, devoted their resources toward issues of poverty, education, health, and human rights. The UN has also been a champion of **sustainable development**. This approach to economic development focuses on ways to meet the needs of the world's people today without exhausting the resources that will be needed to sustain future generations. Even so, as the 20th century drew to an end, more than a billion people worldwide were living on less than \$1 a day.

In 2000, the UN hosted the largest gathering of world leaders in history to discuss the role of the United Nations in the 21st century. At that summit, the leaders of 150 countries ratified an agreement known as the Millennium Declaration. This document committed members of the UN to "free our fellow men, women, and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty." To reach this objective, the Millennium Declaration laid out a list of goals to be reached by the year 2015, including the following:

- *Eradicate extreme hunger and poverty.* Reduce by half the number of people living on less than \$1 per day.
- *Achieve universal primary school education.*
- *Promote gender equality and empower women.* Eliminate barriers that keep women from receiving an education.
- *Reduce child mortality.* Cut the death rate among children under five by two-thirds.
- *Improve maternal health.* Reduce the death rate of mothers by three-fourths.
- *Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.*
- *Ensure environmental sustainability.* Reverse the loss of environmental resources, and cut by half the number of people without safe drinking water.
- *Develop a global partnership for development.* Address poor countries' need for good government, debt relief, economic growth, and jobs for young people.

Since 2000, the UN has launched a number of projects to achieve these ambitious goals. Projects in places such as India and Ethiopia contributed to

the 2015 target of halving hunger and poverty rates. The Ethiopian Commodity Exchange, for example, arranged ways for farmers and exporters to trade. By 2005, the poverty rate in developing regions was 27 percent, a decline from 46 percent in 1990.

There has also been progress made toward gender equality in classrooms. For instance, more girls in Bangladesh enrolled in schools with the Female Secondary School Stipend, which helps families pay for tuition. In secondary schools where this program was available, females made up 56 percent of the student body in 2005. Still, few females were able to attend college in developing regions worldwide.

Although HIV/AIDS and malaria are still serious threats around the globe, there have been significant efforts to stop them from spreading. Those infected with HIV in Botswana, for example, have free universal access to antiretroviral treatment. In Botswana, from 1999 to 2007, the number of children contracting HIV in Botswana decreased by about 80 percent.

The global community made great progress toward its target of cutting the number of people without safe drinking water in half as 2015 approached. Programs, such as the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, helped monitor water supply and sanitation in developing regions. North Africa, East Asia, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean had already met the goal by 2010.

The Millennium Development Goals have not been fully reached. However, efforts by organizations around the world helped developing countries make great strides toward meeting the 2015 targets. The UN continues to pursue its goals to create "a more peaceful, prosperous, and just world."

The Limitations of the UN

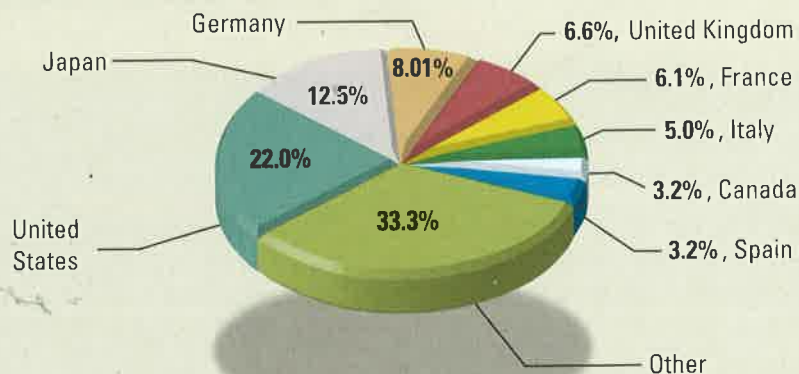
The United Nations has helped to make the world a safer, more livable place. Yet critics often point out that the UN has not fully resolved many of the issues that it has tackled. Poverty, human rights abuses, war, and environmental destruction still persist, they say, in spite of decades of attention from the UN. One reason for this is the sheer size and complexity of these problems. They are the most difficult issues facing the global community. However, there are other factors that limit what the UN can accomplish.

Paying Dues

All members of the UN are assessed dues based on their ability to pay. In 2012, the 39 poorest countries were assessed the minimum dues: \$25,842 each. The United States paid the most: \$568 million. The U.S. amount funded 22 percent of the total UN budget, the maximum any one country can be assessed.

Source: United Nations.

UN Membership Dues, 2012



One is the reluctance of the world's nations to cede any of their national sovereignty to the UN. Most resolutions approved by the General Assembly or Security Council lack enforcement. In general, only decisions related to collective security are legally binding on all members. Moreover, the UN's lack of a standing army means it must rely on member states to carry out peacekeeping missions.

Another factor is the structure of the Security Council. The five permanent members have the power to veto any action by the council. As these nations often have different foreign policy agendas, it is sometimes difficult for the UN to react effectively to problems.

In recent years, the UN has been rocked with corruption scandals and charges of mismanagement and waste. This has led many to question whether the UN can be trusted to deal with important global issues. Reform efforts are underway, but change is slow.

Despite these limitations, the UN has made progress in many areas. Because of the UN's world health programs, diseases that once plagued the world, such as smallpox and polio, have been eliminated or greatly reduced. Every year, the UN World Food Programme helps feed tens of millions of people in countries around the world. As Kofi Annan, who served as secretary general of the United Nations from 1997 to 2007, has observed, "More than ever before in human history, we share a

common destiny. We can master it only if we face it together. And that, my friends, is why we have the United Nations."

18.3 Intergovernmental Organizations

You have probably heard it said that there is strength in numbers. What an individual country cannot do alone, it might be able to do with the help of other countries. The United States understood this well when it joined the Allies in their struggle to defeat the Axis powers in World War II. An intergovernmental organization (IGO) is a type of alliance, though it need not be military in nature.

Promoting International Cooperation Through IGOs

Through IGOs, groups of nations cooperate to achieve common objectives. Those objectives vary from one organization to another, ranging from mutual defense to free trade.

Some IGOs share economic interests. For example, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is made up of 12 oil-producing countries. They have joined together to create a stable market for oil at the best possible price for OPEC members. Trade promotion is the objective of other economic IGOs. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), for instance, has