

Members sit in alphabetical order and each nation has one vote. The General Assembly operates in six languages — Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. Simultaneous translation of all speeches into any of these languages is available.

Each of the five permanent members of the Council can block actions recommended by all the other members. This "power of veto" has been used by all the permanent members of the Security Council at one time or another.

Canada sat on the Security Council in:

1948-49
1958-59
1967-68
1977-78
1989-90

The Council is in permanent session, and members are on call 24 hours a day in case an international crisis occurs. Because of this, a representative of each member must be present at UN headquarters in New York at all times. Any UN member or the Secretary-General may call a Security Council meeting. Even a non-member state may request a meeting if a threat to peace exists. When a meeting is called, those countries involved in the issue are invited to take part. However, nations involved in a dispute may not vote on Security Council resolutions.

If there is a threat to peace, the Council can order economic sanctions against an aggressor, which all other members of the UN are obliged to follow. If the sanctions fail to stop the actions of an aggressor, the Security Council can take military action. It has done this only twice: in Korea in 1950, and in the Persian Gulf in 1990.

More often, the Council tries to negotiate a ceasefire. Once the fighting stops, UN peacekeeping forces may be sent to keep the two sides apart.

The Security Council recommends the admission of new members to the UN. It also recommends who should be elected Secretary-General by the General Assembly and who should become judges on the International Court of Justice.

The Trusteeship Council

This is the only UN body that has seen its workload decline over the years. The Trusteeship Council was set up to look after the interests of 11 Trust Territories which were under foreign administration. Ten of these territories have now been given full independence. Only Palau, an island group in the Pacific Ocean about 160 km southwest of Hawaii, remains under the trusteeship of the United States.

There are five members of the Trusteeship Council — China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. Each member has one vote, and a majority is needed to take action.

The International Court of Justice

The Court sits in The Hague in the Netherlands, and is the only main UN body not located in New York. There are 15 judges, who are elected by the General Assembly and the Security Council. In selecting judges, care is taken that the principal legal systems of the world are represented. The Court gives decisions on issues brought to it by member states; individuals may not bring cases before the Court.

The Secretariat

More than 25 000 people work for the Secretariat at 163 offices around the world. About one third of these employees are at UN headquarters in New York. They provide the services that keep the UN and its programs running. Staff is drawn from most of the member states of the UN (150 countries have people working in the Secretariat), and each person takes an oath not to receive instructions from an outside government.