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DEPENDENT TERRITORIES

Introduction

The United Nations has certain responsibilities under its Charter for dependent territories. The nature of these responsibilities varies according to the particular type of dependent territory. For United Nations purposes, a broad distinction is drawn between the trust territories—for which the Organization has direct responsibilities—and other types of non-self-governing territories, for which the responsibilities of the Organization are limited and indirect. The nature of these responsibilities is set forth in the Charter. Chapter XI of the Charter deals with the non-self-governing territories and Chapters XII and XIII deal with the trust territories. In addition to these Charter responsibilities, the United Nations has inherited certain responsibilities for one remaining mandated territory of the former League of Nations, South West Africa. The nature of these responsibilities has been defined by the International Court in an advisory opinion.

The United Nations has created appropriate machinery to help it to discharge its responsibilities for each of these three categories of dependent territory. For the trust territories there is the Trusteeship Council. For the non-self-governing territories there is the Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories. This Committee's powers and functions are naturally quite different from those of the Trusteeship Council, since they reflect an indirect and limited, rather than a direct responsibility. While the Trusteeship Council is a permanent organ of the United Nations provided for in the Charter itself, the Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories is a temporary body originally established by resolution of the General Assembly in 1949 for a three-year term, which has been renewed at three-year intervals since that time. Another important point of contrast is in the powers of these two bodies. The Trusteeship Council is obliged under the Charter to perform certain positive functions, which include fostering the political development of the trust territories. The role of the Committee on Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories on the other hand is passive, in that the Committee can only study information submitted by the administering states on those territories which they decide are not fully self-governing and on which they are therefore prepared to report. Furthermore, these reports are limited by the Charter to statistical and other information of a technical nature relating to economic, social and educational