

THE PRINCIPAL ORGANS

All of the principal organs of the United Nations are centred in New York, with the exception of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) which is seated in the Hague, The Netherlands.

1. General Assembly (GA)

This is the only body in which all of the United Nations member states are represented. Each member has one vote. The current membership stands at 158. The principal countries which are not members are Switzerland and North and South Korea. Decisions of the General Assembly on important questions (as defined in article 18 of the Charter) are made by a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting. Voting on other questions is by a simple majority. In a great many cases resolutions are adopted by consensus, without a recorded vote.

The General Assembly may discuss any questions or matters that fall within the scope of the United Nations Charter or that relate to the powers or functions of any organ provided for in the Charter. It may make recommendations to member states or to the Security Council or to both on any questions or matters with the exception of those on which the Security Council is currently exercising its functions. Decisions of the Assembly have no binding legal force on governments, but they do carry the weight of opinion as expressed by representatives of the governments of the world.

The Assembly occupies a central position in the United Nations system by virtue of its supervisory functions over most of the institutions within the system. It receives annual reports from the other principal organs and can make recommendations to them. Both the Economic and Social Council and the Trusteeship Council operate under the authority of the Assembly. Financial power is exercised through control over the budget of the UN and the scale of assessments levied on members. The Assembly elects all members of the Economic and Social Council and all elective members of the Security Council and the Trusteeship Council. Along with the Security Council it participates in the election of judges of the International Court of Justice and the appointment of the Secretary-General.

The General Assembly meets once a year in regular session beginning on the third Tuesday in September. The regular session normally continues until mid-December, but it may be resumed at a later date if necessary. Special sessions may be called at the request of the Security Council, a majority of Member States, or one Member State with the concurrence of a majority. An emergency special session may be called within 24 hours of a request by the Security Council, or by a majority of Member States.

A new president, 21 vice presidents and the chairmen of the seven Main Committees are elected at the start of each regular session. The presidency rotates each year among five groups of states (in order: Western Europe and other states, Asia,

Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa). Canada is included among Western European and other states. The current president is Jorge Illueca of Panama. The 39th president, to be elected next September, will come from among the African states.

Most questions placed on the Assembly's agenda are discussed first in one of the 7 Main Committees: First Committee (disarmament and related international security matters); Special Political Committee (political matters other than disarmament); Second Committee (economic and financial matters); Third Committee (social, humanitarian, and cultural matters); Fourth Committee (decolonization); Fifth Committee (administrative and budgetary matters); and Sixth Committee (legal). Each Member State may be represented by one person on each main Committee. Voting in committees is by a simple majority.

In addition to the main committees there are a number of *ad hoc* committees and other bodies established over the years to deal with more specific issues. These include such diverse bodies as the United Nations Council for Namibia, The Special Committee Against Apartheid, both the Disarmament Commission which meets in New York and the Conference on Disarmament which meets in Geneva, advisory committees struck prior to major United Nations conferences, etc.

The Human Rights Committee which dates from 1976, has a particular interest for people in that it is the one UN body with which an individual from a country which has ratified the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights may lodge a communication with regard to alleged violations of his/her human rights. In every other instance it is only the Member State which may make representations to any part of the United Nations system. The Committee is distinct from the Human Rights Commission which considers all matters relating to human rights, and reports as part of the Economic and Social Council.

2. Security Council (SC)

The Security Council has the primary responsibility, under the Charter, for the maintenance of international peace and security. In general it is concerned with the pacific settlement of actual disputes or with action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace and acts of aggression. After investigating any dispute, the Council can only make recommendations for a peaceful settlement. Further UN involvement as a result of such recommendations may proceed if all parties involved are agreeable. The Council may, however, require Member States to apply various sanctions against any state found guilty either of aggression or a threat to peace or of failing to perform an obligation incumbent upon it as a result of a judgement of the International Court of Justice.

Under the Charter, all members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions