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Main Spheres of Activity of the United Nations

International peace and security

Along with economic and social development and the protection of human rights, international peace and security—whether their achievement or their preservation—have always been and still remain the central concern of the United Nations and the international community.

Through the Security Council, whose main responsibility this is, the UN has helped settle disputes between nations, prevent conflicts and put an end to fighting. It has conducted complex peacemaking and humanitarian operations, and has played a crucial role in resolving some of the longest-running conflicts of recent years.

To carry out this mission, the UN uses various means ranging from unobtrusive diplomatic initiatives undertaken during unofficial meetings to the deployment of military contingents, often called Blue Berets, made available by member states.

Maintaining international peace and security is a collective effort that requires the active involvement of individuals, countries and organizations. The UN Secretary-General plays a major role in peacekeeping and in restoring peace in

the event of armed conflict. He acts both personally and through his special representatives. He can call the Security Council's attention to any situation that might jeopardize international peace and security, can lend his good offices in mediation or can take discreet diplomatic initiatives. He also practises preventive diplomacy to avert the outbreak of hostilities.

International peace and security are also a priority for an increasing number of countries working together to create innovative coalitions and partnerships in order to further global action on human security issues. For example, with Norway's support, Canada has established a flexible framework for promoting co-operation between countries with common views from all continents, with the aim of achieving progress on issues that affect human security, such as children in armed conflicts and small arms proliferation.

In addition, broad coalitions of non-governmental organizations and states co-operate with the United Nations to promote peace in the world, along with protection of human rights. The very rapid passage of the Convention on Anti-Personnel Mines (the Ottawa Convention) may be the finest example of this new collective approach in favour of international peace and security.