



UN photo 165054: Lois Connor

Overview of the United Nations

Introduction

The United Nations officially came into being on October 24, 1945. By that date a majority of the 50 countries that had signed the UN Charter in San Francisco on June 26, 1945, had ratified it in their national parliaments. The UN replaced the League of Nations, which had been created by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. Canada, a participant at the San Francisco Conference (April 25 to June 26, 1945), is one of the founding members of the United Nations.

The actions of the UN are guided by its Charter, which defines the United Nations' purposes as follows:

- to maintain international peace and security;
- to develop friendly relations among nations; and
- to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights.

The actions of the United Nations are based on certain principles:

- all of its members are equal;
- all members must fulfil their Charter obligations;
- international disputes are to be settled by peaceful means;
- members may not use force or the threat of force against other members;
- members must help the United Nations in any action it might take in accordance with the Charter; and
- the United Nations may not interfere in the domestic affairs of any state.

Currently, there are 188 member states. For a complete list of member states, along with the year each was admitted to the UN, see Section 10 of this Guide.

The UN resembles a world parliament, although it does not legislate in the manner of a national parliament. But through their actions and their votes, its members help set international policy.