

The United Nations System

The United Nations System:

A Synopsis

By

Graeme Baber

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To my Mum for her support, and my Dad for his company,
in the endeavour to research and write this monograph.

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PREFACE

The *Essays on International Law* – in particular Chapter Eight – inspired an enthusiasm in me to write further on partnerships between the United Nations and regional organizations. Thus, it would only be a matter of time before I returned to Cambridge Scholars Publishing to present a sequel to the *Essays* for publication. Preliminary research revealed how extensive the United Nations System was. Although I intended to write about global-regional co-operation, this could not effectively be presented with only cursory knowledge concerning the United Nations. Looking into the matter further, there seemed to be few books that provided an effective summary of this essential international conglomerate. Accordingly, I presented a proposal for this monograph to Cambridge Scholars Publishing when contacted by the then newly-appointed Commissioning Editor, Mr. Adam Rummens. Adam still works for the publisher. I hope that he treasures this book – as he was integral to its initiation. I am also grateful to the former Assistant Publisher at Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Mr. Anthony Wright, who kindly smoothed the path to the finalization of the arrangements leading to the creation of this monograph.

The United Nations System: A Synopsis introduces the United Nations by considering its purposes, as stated in Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations. It provides a concise history of this institution. The book describes the structure of the United Nations System, concentrating on its Funds and Programmes, Specialized Agencies, and Regional Commissions. This monograph details the work of the United Nations by topic, focusing on development, education, environment, food and agriculture, and peace and security. Then, it presents the activities of the United Nations from a regional perspective, addressing the contribution of the Regional Commissions, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme. There follows a reflective comment and concluding remarks.

Graeme Baber,
July 2019.

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The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015 (New York, 2015), 14-15.

United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General – In larger freedom towards development, security and human rights for all, 21 March 2005 (New York, 2005), paras.181-183.

United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General – An Agenda for Peace: Preventative diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping, 17 June 1992 (New York, 1992), paras.61-63.

United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, “Investing in the Caribbean Future”, *Focus*, 3 (2018), 1, 4, 8, 10 and 12.

United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú, 2018), Preface.

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific (Bangkok, 2012), 13 and 19.

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific and Beijing Declaration including the Action Plan to Accelerate the Implementation of the Incheon Strategy (Bangkok, 2018), 44 and 49.

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, ICPD Beyond 2014: The UNECE Region’s Perspective (Geneva, 2013), ix and x.

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PART A:

**INTRODUCTION TO THE
UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM**

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

Introduction

‘United Nations’ is a reassuring name. ‘United’ means “joined together politically, for a common purpose, or by common feelings”.¹ What is the ‘common purpose’ of nations? The UN Charter may help to determine this.

The Purposes of the United Nations are: To maintain international peace and security ... ;² To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples ... ;³ To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems ... and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction ... ;⁴ To be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends.⁵

The phrases ‘develop friendly relations among nations’, ‘achieve international co-operation’ and ‘centre for harmonizing the actions of nations’ indicate that the Members of the UN work together under the umbrella of the latter. But what are they working towards? The UN’s ‘What We Do’ webpage contains the categories “Maintain International Peace and Security”, “Protect Human Rights”, “Deliver Humanitarian Aid”, “Promote Sustainable Development” and “Uphold International Law”.⁶ In essence, therefore, the UN is working together with its Members to achieve on a continuing basis these worthy goals.

¹ Oxford University Press, *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 2023.

² Charter of the United Nations (San Francisco, 1945), art.1.1.

³ Charter of the United Nations, art.1.2.

⁴ Charter of the United Nations, art.1.3.

⁵ Charter of the United Nations, art.1.4.

⁶ “What We Do”, United Nations, accessed September 22, 2018,

History

The establishment of the UN

On 12th June 1941, the Governments of Australia, Canada, South Africa and the UK, the exiled Governments of Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Yugoslavia, and the Representatives of General de Gaulle – the leader of Free Frenchmen, made a Resolution at St. James Palace in London.⁷ This comprised a commitment to winning the Second World War,⁸ a declaration of “no settled peace and prosperity” with Axis domination,⁹ and a statement “[t]hat the only true basis of enduring peace is the willing co-operation of free peoples in a world in which ... all may enjoy economic and social security”,¹⁰ towards which these governments agreed “to work together, and with other free peoples”.¹¹

On 14th August 1941, Messrs. Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt – the Prime Minister of the UK and the President of the USA, respectively – stated eight principles “in the national policies of their respective countries on which they base their hopes for a better future for the world”.¹² These embody the essence of the future UN System in its broadest sense, i.e., including international organizations such as the IMF and the WTO. The UK and the USA “seek no aggrandizement”,¹³ aspire only to see territorial alterations that concur with the relevant peoples’ freely-expressed wishes,¹⁴ respect the right of self-determination,¹⁵ endeavour to promote all countries’ equal access to those global resources that are necessary for them to prosper,¹⁶ “desire to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field” in order to

<http://www.un.org/en/sections/what-we-do/>. Part B of this book departs from this point (text to note 1 of ch 3).

⁷ “1941: The Declaration of St. James’ Palace”, United Nations, accessed September 23, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/history-united-nations-charter/1941-declaration-st-james-palace/index.html>; Inter-Allied Meeting: Resolution (London, 1941), Preamble.

⁸ Inter-Allied Meeting: Resolution, art.1.

⁹ Inter-Allied Meeting: Resolution, art.2.

¹⁰ Inter-Allied Meeting: Resolution, art.3.

¹¹ Inter-Allied Meeting: Resolution, art.3.

¹² The Atlantic Charter (Ship Harbour, 1941), Preamble.

¹³ The Atlantic Charter, Principle 1.

¹⁴ The Atlantic Charter, Principle 2.

¹⁵ The Atlantic Charter, Principle 3.

¹⁶ The Atlantic Charter, Principle 4.

universally obtain “improved labour standards, economic advancement, and social security”,¹⁷ wish for “a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries, and ... assurance that [everyone] may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want”¹⁸ and enable them to voyage without impediment,¹⁹ and “believe all of the nations of the world ... must come to the abandonment of the use of force”.²⁰

On 1st January 1942, representatives of 26 countries signed the Declaration of United Nations – the first official use of the term ‘United Nations’.²¹ Endorsing the principles stated in the immediately-preceding paragraph,²² each government of those states undertook “to employ its full resources” against the Axis Powers and²³ “to co-operate with the Governments signatory hereto”.²⁴

On 30th October 1943, the Foreign Ministers of the UK, the USA and the USSR, and the Chinese Ambassador to Moscow, jointly issued the Declaration of Four Nations on General Security,²⁵ which mentioned ‘United Nations’ thrice.²⁶ Therein, the governments of these countries “recognize[d] the necessity of establishing at the earliest practicable date a general international organization, based on the principle of sovereign equality of all peace-loving States, and open to membership by all such States ... for the maintenance of international peace and security”.²⁷ Messrs Churchill, Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin – the Premier of the USSR – reaffirmed this objective at their meeting in Tehran on 1st December 1943.²⁸

Other developments include: (i) the convening of the United Conference on Food and Agriculture in May/June 1943 which established

¹⁷ The Atlantic Charter, Principle 5.

¹⁸ The Atlantic Charter, Principle 6.

¹⁹ The Atlantic Charter, Principle 7.

²⁰ The Atlantic Charter, Principle 8.

²¹ United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations 1946-47* (New York: United Nations, 1947), 1.

²² The Declaration by United Nations (Washington, D.C., 1942), Preamble.

²³ The Declaration by United Nations, art.1.

²⁴ The Declaration by United Nations, art.2.

²⁵ *Yearbook of the United Nations 1946-47*, 3.

²⁶ The Declaration by Four Nations on General Security (Moscow, 1943), Preamble and arts.5 and 7.

²⁷ The Declaration by Four Nations on General Security, art.4.

²⁸ “1943: Moscow and Teheran Conferences”, United Nations, accessed September 24, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/history-united-nations-charter/1943-moscow-and-teheran-conferences/index.html>.

an Interim Commission on Food and Agriculture to draft a Constitution of the FAO, (ii) the convoking of the Conference of Allied Ministers of Education from October 1942, which constructed initial plans for the establishment of the UNESCO, and (iii) the convening of the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference in July 1944, which drafted the Articles of Agreement of the IMF and the IBRD.²⁹ These were followed by the Dumbarton Oaks Conversations between the UK, the USA and the USSR (August/September 1944) and the UK, the USA and China (September/October 1944), resulting in the Proposals for the Establishment of a General International Organization³⁰ – that envisaged by the Declaration of Four Nations on General Security.³¹ These Proposals form the basis of the ensuing UN Charter, as the following extracts illustrate.

There should be established an international organization under the title of The United Nations, the Charter of which should contain provisions necessary to give effect to the proposals which follow.³²

[O]ur respective Governments, through representatives assembled in the city of San Francisco ... have agreed to the present Charter of the United Nations and do hereby establish an international organization to be known as the United Nations.³³

The Organization should have as its principal organs: a. A General Assembly; b. A Security Council; c. An International Court of Justice; and d. A Secretariat.³⁴ The Organization should have such subsidiary agencies as may be found necessary.³⁵

There are established as principal organs of the United Nations: a General Assembly, a Security Council, an Economic and Social Council, a Trusteeship Council, and International Court of Justice and a Secretariat.³⁶

²⁹ *Yearbook of the United Nations 1946-47*, 3-4.

³⁰ *Yearbook of the United Nations 1946-47*, 4.

³¹ “1944-1945: Dumbarton Oaks and Yalta”, United Nations, accessed October 3, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/history-united-nations-charter/1944-1945-dumbarton-oaks-and-yalta/index.html>.

³² Proposals for the Establishment of a General International Organization (Washington, D.C., 1944), Preamble.

³³ Charter of the United Nations, Preamble.

³⁴ Proposals for the Establishment of a General International Organization, ch.6 art.1.

³⁵ Proposals for the Establishment of a General International Organization, ch.6 art.2.

³⁶ Charter of the United Nations, art.7.1.

Such subsidiary organs as may be found necessary may be found established in accordance with the present Charter.³⁷

The United Nations Conference on International Organization took place at San Francisco from April to June 1945.³⁸ The proposed UN Charter was segmented into four sections each of which a ‘Commission’ considered: Commissions one, two, three and four worked on the UN’s general purposes and Secretariat, the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Statute of the ICJ, respectively.³⁹ On 25th June 1945, the delegates unanimously approved the UN Charter. It was signed the next day, and came into effect on 24th October 1945.⁴⁰ Thence, the UN was established.

The UN in the twentieth century

Whilst the UN Charter was signed by 51 countries – including Poland which did not touch the original document,⁴¹ by 31st December 1999 most of the countries of the world had joined the UN – the most surprising absentee being Switzerland⁴². Major inputs to this rise in the number of UN Member States were the decolonization of African and Asian

³⁷ Charter of the United Nations, art.7.2.

³⁸ *Yearbook of the United Nations 1946-47*, 12; “1945: The San Francisco Conference”, United Nations, accessed October 4, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/history-united-nations-charter/1945-san-francisco-conference/index.html>.

³⁹ “1945: The San Francisco Conference”, United Nations, accessed October 5, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/history-united-nations-charter/1945-san-francisco-conference/index.html>.

⁴⁰ “1945: The San Francisco Conference”, United Nations, accessed October 5, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/history-united-nations-charter/1945-san-francisco-conference/index.html>.

⁴¹ Charter of the United Nations. The UN website explains: “... Poland – did not send a representative [to the United Nations Conference on International Organization] because the composition of its new government was not announced until too late for the conference. Therefore, a space was left for the signature of Poland At the time of the conference there was no generally recognized Polish Government, but on June 28[, 1945], such a government was announced and on October 15, 1945 Poland signed the Charter, thus becoming one of the original Members.” (“1945: The San Francisco Conference”, United Nations, accessed October 5, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/history-united-nations-charter/1945-san-francisco-conference/index.html>).

⁴² Switzerland joined the UN on 10th September 2002; the most recent accession to membership of the UN was South Sudan on 14th July 2011 (“Member States”, United Nations, accessed October 5, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/member-states/>).

territories and, later, the dissolution of the USSR and (to a lesser extent) the break-up of Yugoslavia – although both the USSR and Yugoslavia were Member States of the UN and original signatories to the UN Charter.⁴³

Whilst there has been much disputation on the continuing status of the ‘Permanent Five’ Members of the UN’s Security Council, i.e., China, France, Russia (which succeeded the USSR), the UK and the USA, one significant issue of the UN’s early period was who should represent China there. Although the signature placed on the UN Charter on 26th June 1945 is under the heading “For China” in five languages,⁴⁴ it was placed there by representatives of the Republic of China – the state formed by the then rulers of China, the Kuomintang. In 1949, this party was ousted by the Chinese Communist Party – which established the People’s Republic of China, and retreated to Taiwan over which it continued in government. With the support of the USA, the Kuomintang retained the Chinese ‘Permanent Five’ seat at the UN, until the General Assembly passed the following Resolution in 1971.

2758 (XXVI). Restoration of the lawful rights of the People’s Republic of China in the United Nations

The General Assembly,

Recalling the principles of the Charter of the United Nations,

Considering that the restoration of the lawful rights of the People’s Republic of China is essential both for the protection of the Charter of the United Nations and for the cause that the United Nations must serve under the Charter,

Recognizing that the representatives of the Government of the People’s Republic of China are the only lawful representatives of China to the United Nations and that the People’s Republic of China is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council,

Decides to restore all its rights to the People’s Republic of China and to recognize the representatives of its Government as the only legitimate representatives of China to the United Nations, and to expel forthwith the representatives of Chiang Kai-shek⁴⁵ from the place which they unlawfully occupy at the United Nations and in all the organizations related to it.

1976th plenary meeting,

25 October 1971.⁴⁶

⁴³ Charter of the United Nations.

⁴⁴ Charter of the United Nations.

⁴⁵ Mr. Chiang Kai-shek was the leader of the Kuomintang from 1925 to 1975 “History: Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975)”, British Broadcasting Corporation, accessed October 6, 2018,

https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/chiang_kaishek.shtml.

⁴⁶ United Nations, Resolution 2758 adopted by the General Assembly on 25 October 1971; emphasis original.

Thus, the situation changed from the ridiculous scenario in the 1950s and 1960s of the rulers of Taiwan representing China at the UN – with the accompanying right to veto proposed Resolutions of the Security Council – to the illogical situation of the government of mainland China representing Taiwan there. Whilst there is a need to address this imbalance, China’s right of veto at the Security Council is likely to lead to no change in the immediate future.

In December 1948, the General Assembly passed Resolution 217 (III), which introduced the UDHR.⁴⁷ This landmark document contains thirty articles specifying basic entitlements of the person that have gained widespread, although not yet universal, acceptance worldwide. They include, for instance, “the right to life, liberty and security of person”,⁴⁸ “the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law”,⁴⁹ “the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State”,⁵⁰ “the right to a nationality”,⁵¹ and “the right to own property alone as well as in association with others”.⁵² In December 1966, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 2200 (XXI), which opened for signature the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the First Optional Protocol to the ICESCR.⁵³ These three international instruments entered into force in 1976. Together, the UDHR, the ICCPR and the ICESCR constitute the International Bill of Human Rights.

All six of the UN’s Funds and Programmes⁵⁴ were established between 1946 and 1978 – the UNICEF, the WFP, the UNDP, the UNFPA, the UNEP and the UN-Habitat were founded in 1946,⁵⁵ 1961,⁵⁶ 1965,⁵⁷

⁴⁷ United Nations, Resolution 217 adopted by the General Assembly on 10 December 1948.

⁴⁸ United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Paris, 1948), art.3.

⁴⁹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art.6.

⁵⁰ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art.13.1.

⁵¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art.15.1.

⁵² Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art.17.1.

⁵³ United Nations, Resolution 2200 adopted by the General Assembly on 16 December 1966.

⁵⁴ “Funds, Programmes, Specialized Agencies and Others”, United Nations, accessed October 7, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/about-un/funds-programmes-specialized-agencies-and-others/>.

⁵⁵ “Learning from experience: 1946-1979”, United Nations Children’s Fund, accessed October 7, 2018,

<https://wcmprod.unicef.org/stories/learning-experience-1946-1979>.

⁵⁶ “History”, World Food Programme, accessed October 7, 2018,

<http://www1.wfp.org/history>.

1969,⁵⁸ 1972⁵⁹ and 1978,⁶⁰ respectively. The UN Specialized Agencies were established over a longer period. The ITU, the UPU and the ILO were founded before the UN existed – in 1865,⁶¹ 1874⁶² and 1919,⁶³ respectively, becoming Specialized Agencies in 1947,⁶⁴ 1948⁶⁵ and 1946,⁶⁶ respectively. The IBRD, the IMF, the FAO, the UNESCO, the ICAO, the WHO, the WMO, the IMO, the UNIDO, the WIPO, the UNWTO and the IFAD were established in 1945,⁶⁷ 1945,⁶⁸ 1945,⁶⁹ 1946,⁷⁰ 1947,⁷¹ 1948,⁷²

⁵⁷ United Nations, Resolution 2029 adopted by the General Assembly on 22 November 1965, arts.1 and 8. Note 13 of ch 4 and accompanying text provide information concerning the establishment of the UNDP.

⁵⁸ “About us”, United Nations Population Fund, accessed October 7, 2018, <https://www.unfpa.org/about-us>.

⁵⁹ United Nations, Resolution 2997 adopted by the General Assembly on 15 December 1972.

⁶⁰ “UN-Habitat Nepal: Mandate & History”, United Nations Human Settlements Programme, accessed October 7, 2018, <http://unhabitat.org.np/about/mandate-history/>.

⁶¹ “About International Telecommunication Union”, International Telecommunication Union, accessed October 8, 2018, <https://www.itu.int/en/about/Pages/default.aspx>.

⁶² “The UPU”, Universal Postal Union, accessed October 8, 2018, <http://www.upu.int/en/the-upu/the-upu.html>.

⁶³ “Origins and History”, International Labour Organization, accessed October 8, 2018, <https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/history/lang--en/index.htm>.

⁶⁴ “About International Telecommunication Union”, International Telecommunication Union, accessed October 8, 2018, <https://www.itu.int/en/about/Pages/default.aspx>.

⁶⁵ “Universal Postal Union”, United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, accessed October 8, 2018, <http://www.unsceb.org/content/upu>.

⁶⁶ “Origins and History”, International Labour Organization, accessed October 8, 2018, <https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/history/lang--en/index.htm>.

⁶⁷ United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference, Articles of Agreement: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (Bretton Woods, 1944), art.XI.1.

⁶⁸ United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference, Articles of Agreement: International Monetary Fund (Bretton Woods, 1944), art.XX.1; “About the IMF: The IMF at a Glance”, International Monetary Fund, accessed October 8, 2018, <https://www.imf.org/en/About>.

⁶⁹ “About FAO”, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, accessed October 8, 2018, <http://www.fao.org/about/en/>.

⁷⁰ UNESCO Constitution (London, 1945), art.XV.3; “UNESCO: The Organization’s History”, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, accessed October 8, 2018, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/about-us/who-we-are/history>.

1950,⁷³ 1958,⁷⁴ 1966,⁷⁵ 1967⁷⁶, 1975⁷⁷ and 1977,⁷⁸ respectively. Like the UN's Funds and Programmes, these Specialized Agencies all existed by 1980. There was one later addition – the MIGA, which, together with the IBRD, the ICSID, the IDA and the IFA, constitute the World Bank Group.⁷⁹ The IFC, the IDA, the ICSID and the MIGA were founded in 1956,⁸⁰ 1960,⁸¹ 1966⁸² and 1988,⁸³ respectively.

⁷¹ Whilst the ICAO's website states that the ICAO was "established in 1944 by States to manage the administration and governance of the Convention on International Civil Aviation" ("About ICAO", International Civil Aviation Organization, accessed October 9, 2018, <https://www.icao.int/about-icao/Pages/default.aspx>), the ICAO was created on 4th April 1947 – following the ratification of the Convention by 26 states (International Civil Aviation Organization", United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, accessed October 9, 2018, <http://www.unsceb.org/content/icao>).

⁷² "About WHO: History of WHO", World Health Organization, accessed October 8, 2018, <http://www.who.int/about/history/en/>.

⁷³ The WMO became a UN Specialized Agency in 1951 ("Who we are", World Meteorological Organization, accessed October 8, 2018, <https://public.wmo.int/en/about-us/who-we-are>).

⁷⁴ "Brief History of IMO", International Maritime Organization, accessed October 8, 2018, <http://www.imo.org/en/About/HistoryOfIMO/Pages/Default.aspx>.

⁷⁵ United Nations, Resolution 2152 adopted by the General Assembly on 17 November 1966, s.I. The UNIDO became a UN Specialized Agency in 1985 ("A brief history", United Nations Industrial Development Organization, accessed October 8, 2018, <https://www.unido.org/who-we-are/brief-history>).

⁷⁶ Convention Establishing the World Intellectual Property Organization (Stockholm, 1967), art.1. The WIPO became a UN Specialized Agency in 1974 ("World Intellectual Property Organization", United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, accessed October 8, 2018, <http://www.unsceb.org/content/wipo>).

⁷⁷ The UNWTO became a UN Specialized Agency in 2003 ("World Tourism Organization", United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, accessed October 8, 2018, <http://www.unsceb.org/content/unwto>).

⁷⁸ "History: An international response to global food shortages", International Fund for Agricultural Development, accessed October 8, 2018, <https://www.ifad.org/web/guest/history>.

⁷⁹ "About the World Bank", World Bank, accessed October 9, 2018, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/about>. However, the ICSID and the MIGA are not Specialized Agencies in concurrence with Articles 57 and 63 of the UN Charter (United Nations, The United Nations System: Revision 5, DPI 2470, March 2017 (New York, 2017).

⁸⁰ "Decade 1: 1950s and 1960s – Up and Running", International Finance Corporation, accessed October 8, 2018,

The UN from 2000 to 2018

In 2000, the UN published eight MDGs: “Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger”, “Achieve universal primary education”, “Promote gender equality and empower women”, “Reduce child mortality”, “Improve maternal health”, “Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases”, “Ensure environmental sustainability” and “Global partnership for development”.⁸⁴ The UN assigned targets for the goals – for the first MDG, these included halving the percentage of people receiving less than one USD each day, accomplishing “full and productive employment and decent work for all”, and halving the percentage of individuals that experience hunger.⁸⁵ It aimed to achieve all the MDGs by 2015.⁸⁶ To what extent did the UN accomplish this?

The 2015 Report and Progress Chart for the MDGs show that good progress has been made with regard to achievement of the MDGs since 1990, and especially, since 2000. For example, with regard to the first MDG, the number of individuals living in extreme poverty – less than 1.25 USD per day⁸⁷ – has reduced by more than half from 1990 to 2015.⁸⁸ The smallest regional decrease in this variable is in Sub-Saharan Africa (28%), whereas Northern Africa shows a large diminution in this statistic (81%).⁸⁹ In 2015, poverty levels were very high in Sub-Saharan Africa, high in

https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/corp_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/about+ifc_new/ifc+history/50s+and+60s.

⁸¹ “History”, International Development Association, accessed October 8, 2018, <http://ida.worldbank.org/about/history>.

⁸² “About ICSID”, International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes, accessed October 8, 2018, <https://icsid.worldbank.org/en/Pages/about/default.aspx>.

⁸³ “About: History”, Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency, accessed October 8, 2018, <https://www.miga.org/history>.

⁸⁴ “We can end poverty: Millennium Development Goals and beyond 2015 – Home”, United Nations, accessed October 9, 2018, <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>.

⁸⁵ United Nations, MDG Fact Sheet – Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (New York, 2013). The MDGs Report for 2015 uses 1.25 USD per day (rather than one USD per day) for the extreme poverty threshold (United Nations, The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015 (New York, 2015), 14-15).

⁸⁶ We can end poverty: Millennium Development Goals and beyond 2015 – Background”, United Nations, accessed October 9, 2018, <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml>.

⁸⁷ Note 85.

⁸⁸ The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015, 15.

⁸⁹ The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015, 14.

Southern Asia, moderate in South-Eastern Asia, and low in Central Asia and the Caucasus, Eastern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern Africa, and Western Asia.⁹⁰

Given the success of the MDGs, some at the UN considered that this approach could be pursued on a larger scale – hence, the creation of the SDGs.

**Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015
70/1 Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable
Development**

The General Assembly

Adopts the following outcome document of the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda:

**Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable
Development**

Preamble

... We recognize that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. ...

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets which we are announcing today demonstrate the scale and ambition of this new universal Agenda. They seek to build on the Millennium Development Goals and complete what they did not achieve. ...⁹¹

This Resolution lists the SDGs.

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Goal 7[.] Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

⁹⁰ United Nations, Millennium Development Goals: 2015 Progress Chart (New York, 2015).

⁹¹ United Nations, Resolution 70/1 adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, 1; emphasis original.

- Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
- Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
- Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
- Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
- Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development⁹²

The targets for these SDGs are rigorous. For Goal 1, they are as follows.

- 1.1 By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than [1.25 USD] a day
- 1.2 By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions
- 1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable
- 1.4 By 2030, ensure that all men and women ... have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over ... property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance
- 1.5 By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to ... economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters⁹³

Whilst these objectives are eminently laudable, they, together with the other targets for the SDGs, may be too expensive to realize by 2030. On 4th April 2018, the President of the 72nd Session of the UN General

⁹² Resolution 70/1 adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 14.

⁹³ Resolution 70/1 adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 15.

Assembly, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, wrote a letter to the Secretary-General to inform the latter that the former was to convene a conference on 11th June 2018 concerning the financing of the SDGs.⁹⁴ The Concept Note appended to this letter, included the following information.

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 will require a rough estimate of [5-7 trillion USD] of annual investment across sectors and industries. ... [O]nly [1.4 trillion USD] are invested annually, from both the public and private sector, in developing countries. The annual investment gap in major SDG sectors in developing countries alone has been estimated at around [2.5 trillion USD] per year.

At the current level of private sector participation, there will be a funding shortfall of [1.6 trillion USD] to be covered by the public sector If business as usual continues ... , the public sector will not be able to finance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Therefore, a step-change in private investment in SDG sectors is required. ...⁹⁵

The Summary Report of the conference included the following statements.

There is no shortage of capital to finance the SDGs. However, mobilizing it requires a systematic change in the way equity markets are organized.

... What is needed is to resolve regulatory issues that prevent SDG impact ... , educate the broader public about responsible investment ... and build-on and strengthen various existing initiatives ...⁹⁶

Bridging the financing gap requires developing an SDG financing architecture and creating an SDG bond market, initially through green bonds, but extending it to blue or social bonds (e.g. to support affordable housing). Mainstreaming sustainability into the finance sector requires risk mitigation frameworks, and adequate and appropriate transparency and disclosure rules. ...⁹⁷

⁹⁴ United Nations, Letter of the President of the General Assembly to the Secretary-General, 4 April 2018. The symposium was entitled 'Financing for SDGs – Breaking the Bottlenecks of Investment, from Policy to Impact'.

⁹⁵ Letter of the President of the General Assembly to the Secretary-General, 4 April 2018, Appended Concept Note, 1. The Concept Note takes these figures from the following document: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, World Investment Report 2014 – Investing in the SDGs: An Action Plan (Geneva, 2014).

⁹⁶ United Nations, Letter of the President of the General Assembly to the Secretary-General, 19 July 2018, Appended Summary Report, 1; emphasis original.

⁹⁷ Letter of the President of the General Assembly to the Secretary-General, 19 July 2018, Appended Summary Report, 1; emphasis original.

A key requirement is **developing basic principles, guidelines and standards** for establishing due diligence backstopping of sustainability action plans. These need to be monitored and evaluated, to allow for scalability and replicability. Equally important is the identification of the sectors with greatest needs, developing investable projects on the ground and ensuring that these are attractive to investors. ...⁹⁸

The challenges towards channelling investment towards SDG sectors, especially in developing countries, include a continued high perception of risks and institutional weaknesses, their scarce domestic resource base, coupled with export-price volatility and external shocks, and persistent market failures. Key to overcoming these challenges is building trust and contributing to de-risking investments. **MDBs** can engage in this by combining traditional funding instruments with innovative forms of finance (e.g. blended finance instruments), thereby playing a catalytic role in overcoming private sector risk perceptions. ...⁹⁹

It is submitted that whilst the international community is engaging with the need to finance widespread nutritional, educational, economic, social and environmental improvements, the funding base is too rudimentary to be able to support the achievement of all the SDGs by 2030. Furthermore, the projected system does not appear to build in to the financing requirements the possibility of substantial external shocks which, if realized, would each adversely affect progress towards achievement of one or more of these goals. Rather than face imminent defeat, the UN and its partners should re-think the priority and timing of implementation of the SDGs and their targets. This reassessment may necessitate that some of the targets are modified to more modest, but achievable, levels.

On 15th March 2006, the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly voted to replace the Commission on Human Rights¹⁰⁰ with the HRC.¹⁰¹ A year earlier, a report prepared by the then current Secretary-General of the UN, Mr. Kofi Annan, had recommended this course of action.

⁹⁸ Letter of the President of the General Assembly to the Secretary-General, 19 July 2018, Appended Summary Report, 4; emphasis original.

⁹⁹ Letter of the President of the General Assembly to the Secretary-General, 19 July 2018, Appended Summary Report, 5; emphasis original.

¹⁰⁰ The Commission on Human Rights was established in 1946 (“HR Commission Archives: Introduction”, United Nations, accessed October 12, 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/chr/pages/commissiononhumanrights.aspx>).

¹⁰¹ United Nations, Resolution 60/251 adopted by the General Assembly on 15 March 2006, art.1; “Press Release 15 March 2006: General Assembly Establishes New Human Rights Council by Vote of 170 in favour to 4 Against, with 3 Abstentions”, United Nations, accessed October 12, 2018, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2006/ga10449.doc.htm>.

The Commission on Human Rights has given the international community a universal human rights framework, comprising the Universal Declaration on Human Rights,¹⁰² the two International Covenants¹⁰³ and other core human rights treaties. During its annual session, the Commission draws public attention to human rights issues and debates, provides a forum for the development of United Nations human rights policy and establishes a unique system of independent and expert special procedures to observe and analyse human rights compliance by theme and by country. ...¹⁰⁴

Yet the Commission's capacity to perform its tasks has been increasingly undermined by its declining credibility and professionalism. In particular, States have sought membership of the Commission not to strengthen human rights but to protect themselves against criticism or to criticize others. As a result, a credibility deficit has developed, which casts a shadow on the reputation of the United Nations system as a whole.¹⁰⁵

If the United Nations is to meet the expectations of men and women everywhere ... then Member States should agree to replace the Commission on Human Rights with a smaller standing Human Rights Council. ...¹⁰⁶

Notwithstanding this recommendation, the General Assembly made the HRC marginally smaller than the Commission on Human Rights had been – a reduction from 53¹⁰⁷ to 47¹⁰⁸ Member States. Thus, it was unsurprising when the HRC, too, was criticized. In June 2018, the USA withdrew from the HRC. The United States Secretary of State, Mr. Mike Pompeo, and the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Ms. Nikki Haley, made a joint statement – which included frank comments.

[Mr. Pompeo:] ... [T]he Human Rights Council has become an exercise in shameless hypocrisy – with many of the world's worst human rights abuses going ignored, and some of the world's most serious offenders sitting on the council itself. ... There is no fair or competitive election process, and countries have colluded with one another to undermine the current method of selecting members. ... Since its creation, the council has

¹⁰² Text to notes 47-52.

¹⁰³ Text to note 53.

¹⁰⁴ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General – In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all, 21 March 2005 (New York, 2005), para.181.

¹⁰⁵ Report of the Secretary-General, 21 March 2005, para.182.

¹⁰⁶ Report of the Secretary-General, 21 March 2005, para.183; emphasis original.

¹⁰⁷ "HR Commission Archives: Introduction", United Nations, accessed October 12, 2018,

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/chr/pages/commissiononhumanrights.aspx>.

¹⁰⁸ Resolution 60/251 adopted by the General Assembly on 15 March 2006, art.7.

adopted more resolutions condemning Israel than against the rest of the world combined. ...

[Ms. Haley:] ... Human rights abusers continue to serve on and be elected to the council. The world's most inhumane regimes continue to escape scrutiny, and the council continues politicizing and scapegoating of countries with positive human rights records in an attempt to distract from the abusers in their ranks. ...¹⁰⁹

In October 2018, Ms. Haley resigned from this post – citing “great successes at the UN” and “st[anding] strong for American values and interests, always placing America first”, but without referring to the HRC.¹¹⁰ It is submitted that this situation concerning the HRC revisits the concerns of the Secretary-General in 2005 regarding the Commission on Human Rights.¹¹¹

Conclusion

The UN pursues upright objectives. It has a noble foundation and a chequered history – the latter being unsurprising given the size of its membership and the complexity of the issues that it is required to address. Some of these matters are of ongoing, crucial and widespread importance, which continues to provide the UN with a unique position in the world order. The next chapter describes the structure of the UN System.

¹⁰⁹ “Remarks on the Human Rights Council”, United States Department of State, accessed October 12, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/06/283341.htm>.

¹¹⁰ Letter of the United States Ambassador to the United Nations to the President of the United States, 3 October 2018.

¹¹¹ Text to note 105.