United Nations Essay, Research Paper

The United Nations is an organization of sovereign nations not a world government. It provides the machinery to help find solutions to disputes or problems, and to deal with virtually any matter of concern to humanity.It does not legislate like a national parliament. But in the meeting rooms and corridors of the UN, representatives of almost all countries of the world large and small, rich and poor, with varying political views and social systems have a voice and vote in shaping the policies of the international community. The year 1995 marks the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Organization.The UN has six main organs, listed below. All are based at UN Headquarters in New York, except the International Court of Justice, which is located at The Hague, Netherlands.The General AssemblyThe General Assembly, sometimes called the nearest thing to a world parliament, is the main deliberative body. All Member States are represented in it, and each has one vote. Decisions on ordinary matters are taken by simple majority. Important questions require a two-thirds majority.The Assembly holds its regular sessions from mid-September to mid-December; special or emergency sessions are held when necessary. Even when the Assembly is not in session, its work goes on in special committees and bodies.The Assembly has the right to discuss and make recommendations on all matters within the scope of the UN Charter. It has no power to compel action by any Government, but its recommendations carry the weight of world opinion. The Assembly also sets policies and determines programmes for the UN Secretariat. It sets goals and directs activities for development, approves the budget of peace-keeping operations and calls for world conferences on major issues. Occupying a central position in the UN, the Assembly receives reports from other organs, admits new Members, approves the budget and appoints the Secretary-General.The Security CouncilThe UN Charter, an international treaty, obligates States to settle their international disputes by peaceful means. They are to refrain from the threat or use of force against other States, and may bring any dispute before the Security Council. The Security Council is the organ to which the Charter gives primary responsibility for maintaining peace and security. It can be convened at any time, whenever peace is threatened. Member States are obligated to carry out its decisions. The Council has 15 members. Five of these China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States are permanent members. The other 10 are elected by the Assembly for two-year terms. Decisions require nine votes; except in votes on procedural questions, a decision cannot be taken if there is a negative vote by a permanent member (known as the “veto”).When a threat to international peace is brought before the Council, it usually first asks the parties to reach agreement by peaceful means. The Council may undertake mediation or set forth principles for a settlement. It may request the Secretary-General to investigate and report on a situation. If fighting breaks out, the Council tries to secure a cease-fire. It may send peace-keeping missions to troubled areas, with the consent of the parties involved, to reduce tension and keep opposing forces apart. It may deploy peace-keepers to prevent the outbreak of conflict. It has the power to enforce its decisions by imposing economic sanctions and by ordering collective military action. The Council also makes recommendations to the Assembly on a candidate for Secretary-General and on the admission of new Members to the UN.The Economic and Social CouncilWorking under the authority of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council coordinates the economic and social work of the UN and related specialized agencies and institutions. The Council has 54 members. It usually holds two organizational and one substantive session each year; the substantive session includes a high-level special meeting, attended by Ministers and other high officials, to discuss major economic and social issues.The Council recommends and directs activities aimed, for instance, at promoting economic growth of developing countries, administering development projects, promoting the observance of human rights, ending discrimination against minorities, spreading the benefits of science and technology, and fostering world cooperation in areas such as better housing, family planning and crime prevention.The Trusteeship CouncilThe Trusteeship Council was established to ensure that Governments responsible for administering Trust Territories take adequate steps to prepare them for self-government or independence. In 1994, the Security Council terminated the UN Trusteeship Agreement for the last of the original 11 Trusteeships the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (Palau), administered by the United States. The task of the Trusteeship System was thus completed, with all Trust Territories attaining self-government or independence, either as separate States or by joining neighbouring independent countries. The Trusteeship Council, by amending its rules of procedure, will now meet as and where occasion may require.The International Court of JusticeThe International Court of Justice (also known as the World Court) is the main judicial organ of the UN. It consists of 15 judges elected by the General Assembly and the Security Council. Only countries may be parties in cases brought before the Court. If a country does not wish to take part in a proceeding it does not have to do so (unless required by special treaty provisions), but if it accepts, it is obligated to comply with the Court’s decision.The SecretariatThe Secretariat works for all the other organs of the UN and administers their programmes. Made up of a staff working at Headquarters and all over the world, it carries out the day-to-day work of the UN. At its head is the Secretary-General. Staff members are drawn from some 170 countries.——————————————————————————–WHAT THE UN DOES FOR PEACE . . .Throughout its 50 years of existence, a central purpose of the UN has been to preserve world peace. The UN has helped resolve disputes between nations, reduce tensions, prevent conflicts and put an end to fighting. It has carried out complex operations involving peacemaking, peace-keeping and humanitarian assistance. It has thus played a major role in resolving some of the most protracted conflicts of recent years. The means at its disposal to bring about peace are varied: a Security Council decision ordering a cease-fire and laying down guidelines for settling a dispute . . . good offices of the Secretary-General . . . a compromise worked out by a mediator . . . unpublicized diplomatic approaches during informal encounters . . . dispatch of a fact-finding team . . . observer missions or peace-keeping forces made up of contingents from Member States under the command of the UN.The demand for UN peace-keeping has increased dramatically, with 21 new operations in 1988-1994, compared with 13 over the previous 40 years.In early 1995, about 69,000 UN troops, military observers and civilian police, provided by 77 countries, were deployed in various areas of the world. More than 720,000 military personnel have served with the UN forces since 1948, and more than 1,100 peace-keepers have lost their lives. Many thousands of civilians have also served.. . . in SomaliaThe civil war that broke out in 1991 resulted in more than 300,000 people dead and five million threatened by hunger. The UN helped eliminate mass starvation, stop the large-scale killings and bring a bitter conflict to an end. It established in April 1992 the UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM), followed in December by the Unified Task Force, led by the United States. As a result, the level of killings, starvation and malnutrition fell dramatically. In 1993, a new UN Operation (UNOSOM II) replaced the Unified Task Force. UNOSOM II sought to restore order, promote reconciliation and help rebuild Somalia’s civil society and economy; its mandate ended in March 1995. Various UN agencies are at work, under difficult conditions, to provide humanitarian assistance.. . . in MozambiqueThe UN has helped secure peace in Mozambique. In 1992, to facilitate implementation of the peace agreement between the Government and the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO), the Security Council set up the UN Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ). ONUMOZ monitored the cease-fire, verified the demobilization of combatants, coordinated humanitarian aid and monitored in 1994 the country’s first multi-party elections, which led to the peaceful installation of a new Government. ONUMOZ successfully completed its mission in January 1995.. . . in CambodiaThe UN helped end the 12-year conflict in Cambodia. The Secretary-General over the years exercised his good offices in the search for peace, and in 1988 presented proposals for a political settlement. High-level meetings of the five permanent members of the Security Council led to the signing in 1991 of the Agreements on Cambodia a peace treaty to end the conflict and prepare the country for elections. The Agreements assigned the UN an unprecedented role. A large operation, the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), was set up to supervise the cease-fire, disarm combatants, repatriate refugees, and organize and conduct free and fair elections. The May 1993 elections led to the peaceful installation of a new Government in September 1993, thus successfully fulfilling UNTAC’s task.. . . in Iran and IraqThe UN was instrumental in ending the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq. Intensive mediation efforts by the Security Council and the Secretary-General led in August 1988 to a cease-fire and to the acceptance by both countries of a 1987 UN peace plan. After the cease-fire, the UN military observers of the UN Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG) were deployed between the two opposing armies to supervise the end of the hostilities and troop withdrawal. UNIIMOG completed its task in 1991.. . . in AfghanistanThe UN played a similar peacemaking role in Afghanistan. As a result of six years of negotiations conducted by a personal envoy of the Secretary-General, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Soviet Union and the United States signed in April 1988 agreements aiming at a settlement of the conflict. To verify compliance with the agreements, the UN deployed the observers of the UN Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Soviet troop withdrawal was completed on schedule in 1989, thus fulfilling the Mission’s task. The Secretary-General and his personal envoy have continued to work for a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan.. . . in Central AmericaThe UN has helped resolve the conflicts in Central America. The UN Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA), in place between 1989 and 1992, monitored security commitments undertaken by five Central American countries. It also helped demobilize some 22,000 members of the Nicaraguan resistance (also known as “contras”), who in March-June 1990 turned in their weapons to ONUCA. Another UN mission monitored the February 1990 elections in Nicaragua the first UN-monitored elections in an independent country.In El Salvador, the Secretary-General assisted in talks between the Government and the Farabundo Mart? National Liberation Front (FMLN) aimed at ending the 12-year conflict. The Secretary-General’s mediation led to the 1992 peace agreement between the Government and FMLN, which ended the conflict and opened the way to national reconciliation. The UN Observer Mission in El Salvador monitored all agreements concluded between the Government and FMLN, and observed the 1994 elections. In Guatemala, the UN supervised talks between the Government and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), which led in 1994 to two agreements opening the way to a settlement of the 30-year conflict. In November 1994, the UN set up a Mission for the Verification of Human Rights in Guatemala.. . . in HaitiIn 1990, the UN monitored the first democratic elections in Haiti, which led to the installation of a Government headed by President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. After a military coup in 1991 forced Mr. Aristide into exile, the UN mediated an agreement for the return to democracy. In the absence of further progress, the Security Council authorized in 1994 the formation of a multinational force and the use of all necessary means to facilitate the departure of the military leaders. After the landing of the United States led multinational force, President Aristide returned to Haiti in October 1994. A UN peace-keeping force, the UN Mission in Haiti, is in place to sustain the secure and stable environment established by the multinational force.. . . in the former YugoslaviaThe UN has strenuously sought to resolve the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. To help restore peace, the UN imposed in 1991 an arms embargo, while the Secretary-General and his envoy assisted in seeking a solution to the crisis. A peace-keeping force, the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR), deployed in 1992, sought to create conditions of peace and security in Croatia, facilitated the delivery of humanitarian relief in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and helped ensure that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was not drawn into the conflict. In 1995, UNPROFOR was split into three operations covering the three countries. As UN-sponsored negotiations continued, the UN peace-keeping forces and UN agencies sought to maintain cease-fires, protect the population and provide humanitarian assistance.. . . in the Middle EastThe Middle East has long been a major concern to the UN. In 1948 a military observer group, the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), was set up to monitor the truce called for by the Security Council during the first Arab-Israeli war. UNTSO’s functions have evolved, but its military observers have remained in the area, helping to defuse tension. A peace-keeping force, the UN Emergency Force, was created in 1956 at the time of the Suez crisis. It oversaw the withdrawal of British, French and Israeli troops and contributed to peace and stability in the region. After the 1973 war, two peace-keeping forces were dispatched to the Middle East. The second UN Emergency Force remained in the Sinai until 1979, when an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty was signed. The UN Disengagement Observer Force, deployed on the Golan Heights in 1974, maintains an area of separation there between Israeli and Syrian troops. The UN Interim Force in Lebanon, created in 1978, contributes to stability in southern Lebanon and provides protection to the population of the area. Hand in hand with its peace-keeping activities, the UN has made continuous efforts to find a peaceful settlement in the Middle East. Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) set forth the principles for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace and remain the basis for an overall settlement. The UN Secretary-General warmly welcomed, in September 1993, the exchange of letters of mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the signing by both sides of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements. A UN Special Coordinator oversees the development assistance provided by the UN system to the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank.Other operationsIn early 1995, UN “blue helmets” were also present in many other troubled areas. UN missions were seeking to contribute to security and help achieve reconciliation in Rwanda (UNAMIR, established 1993), bring peace to Angola (UNAVEM, 1989), supervise a referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO, 1991) and promote a return to normal conditions in Cyprus (UNFICYP, 1964). Military observers were in place in Tajikistan (UNMOT, established 1994), in Liberia (UNOMIL, 1993), in Georgia (UNOMIG, 1993), at the Iraq-Kuwait border (UNIKOM, 1991), and in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, at the cease-fire line between India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP, 1949).The Secretary-General’s roleThe Secretary-General plays a central role in peacemaking, both personally and by appointing Special Representatives or teams for specific goals, such as negotiation or fact- finding. He may also bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which appears to threaten international peace and security. The Secretary- General wasinstrumental in averting a threat to peace during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, in securing through his Special Representative the 1965 cease-fire in the Dominican Republic and in proposing, with the Chairman of the Organization of African Unity, the 1988 peace plan for Western Sahara, which led to a cease-fire there in 1991.DisarmamentHalting the arms race and reducing and eventually eliminating all weapons of war are major concerns of the UN. The UN has been a permanent forum for holding disarmament negotiations, making recommendations and initiating studies. Negotiations have been held bilaterally and through international bodies such as the Conference on Disarmament, which meets regularly in Geneva. Under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), ratified by over 170 countries, nuclear-weapon States agree not to provide nuclear weapons to other countries and to pursue nuclear disarmament; non-nuclear weapon States agree not to develop or obtain nuclear weapons. Concluded under UN auspices, the Treaty came into force in 1970. A major step in advancing non-proliferation was taken in 1995, when a Review Conference extended the Treaty indefinitely. Other treaties have been concluded to ban nuclear-weapon tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water (1963); ban nuclear weapons from outer space (1967), the sea-bed and ocean floor (1971); prohibit the development, production and stockpiling of bacteriological weapons (1972) and of chemical weapons (1992); reduce conventional armed forces in Europe (1990); and ban or restrict other classes of weapons.——————————————————————————–WHAT THE UN DOES FOR JUSTICE . . .The Charter goals of justice and equal rights, for individuals and for peoples, have been pursued by the UN from its early days. As one of its first tasks, the UN formulated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a historic proclamation of the basic rights and freedoms to which all men and women are entitled the right to life, liberty and nationality, to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, to work, to be educated, to take part in government, and many other rights.The Declaration was adopted by the General Assembly on 10 December 1948, a date commemorated every year as Human Rights Day. Two International Covenants one on economic, social and cultural rights and the other on civil and political rights which expand and make legally binding the rights set forth in the Declaration came into force in 1976. These three documents constitute the International Bill of Human Rights, a standard and a goal for all countries and peoples. Many other international conventions have been concluded under UN auspices on women’s rights, racial discrimination, the rights of children and many other human rights.The UN Commission on Human Rights is the only intergovernmental body that conducts public meetings on violations of human rights wherever they occur in the world. It reviews the human rights performance of countries and receives complaints about violations. Special Rapporteurs of the Commission monitor the human rights situation in specific countries.The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, first appointed in 1994, coordinates the human rights activities of the UN system, dispatches fact-finding missions and investigates violations.UN operations are currently monitoring the human rights situation in Haiti and Guatemala. A similar operation was in place in El Salvador from 1991 to 1995.Self-determination and independenceOne of the most important rights self-determination, or the right of peoples to govern themselves was a goal when the Charter was signed. Today it has become a reality in most of the lands formerly under colonial rule. In 1960, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, in which it proclaimed the necessity of bringing colonialism to a speedy end. Since then, some 60 former colonial Territories, inhabited by more than 80 million people, have attained independence and joined the UN as sovereign Members. Now, as the UN celebrates its Fiftieth Anniversary, only 17 Non-Self- Governing Territories remain. The Assembly has set the goal of ending colonialism by the year 2000, declaring the period 1990-2000 as the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism.Namibia’s independenceThe UN helped bring about the independence of Namibia. It assumed direct responsibility for Namibia in 1966, when the General Assembly revoked South Africa’s Mandate to administer the Territory a decision South Africa rejected. Complex negotiations led in 1989 to the implementation of the 1978 UN plan for the independence of Namibia. The UN Transition Assistance Group was deployed throughout Namibia to monitor the withdrawal of South African troops and the registration of some 700,000 voters, as well as the elections, held in November 1989. The elections led to the installation of the first independent Government, and to Namibia’s independence in 1990.Election monitoringAt Government request, the UN also dispatched electoral observers to monitor elections in Nicaragua (1990), Haiti (1990), Angola (1992), El Salvador, South Africa and Mozambique (1994). The observers monitored the preparation and holding of the elections. On election day, they visited polling stations throughout the country and monitored vote counting, and could thus certify that the elections had been free and fair. UN observers also monitored the 1993 referendum in Eritrea. In addition, since 1992 the UN has provided technical assistance in the preparation and holding of elections to more than 40 countries.ApartheidFor more than three decades, the UN carried out a sustained campaign against South Africa’s apartheid (racial segregation) system, denounced by the General Assembly as “a crime against humanity”. The campaign, which ranged from an arms embargo to a convention against segregated sports events, was an important factor in bringing about a democratically elected Government, realized in April 1994 with elections in which, for the first time, all South Africans could vote. The UN Observer Mission in South Africa assisted in the transition and observed the election. With the installation of a non-racial and democratic Government in May 1994, the apartheid system came to an end.International lawThe UN has made major contributions towards expanding the rule of law among nations through its codification and development of international law. The International Court of Justice assists countries in solving legal disputes, and has issued important advisory opinions on UN activities. The International Law Commission works to further the development of international law. The UN has initiated hundreds of international conventions and treaties, ranging from agreements governing diplomatic relations and international trade to those to protect the environment. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is the main legal instrument to further women’s equality. The Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances is the key international treaty against drug trafficking. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea seeks to ensure equitable access by all countries to the riches of the oceans, protect them from pollution and facilitate freedom of navigation and research.——————————————————————————–WHAT THE UN DOES FOR DEVELOPMENTLasting world peace requires social and economic development for all. This link is recognized by the Charter, which assigns to the UN, as one of its main functions, the promotion of higher standards of living, full employment and economic and social progress. Thus a major part of UN work measured in terms of budget and personnel involved goes into numerous programmes aimed at achieving a better life for all people of the world. Three fourths of the world’s people live in developing countries, and 1.3 billion are living in abject poverty. While the world’s 23 richest countries taken together have a per capita income of $22,160, the 40 poorest countries have a per capita income of $390 a ratio of 56 to 1.The General Assembly has stressed the need to reshape international economic relations so developing countries can take their just place in the world economy. In a series of ten-year International Development Strategies adopted since 1961, the Assembly has recommended measures to coordinate the efforts of Governments and international organizations to reduce the gap between rich and poor countries. The Assembly is now elaborating a blueprint for action to promote international cooperation for development, on the basis of the 1994 report of the Secretary-General, An Agenda for Development.A round of world conferences seeks to promote practical ways of solving global problems, by focusing on Environment and Development (1992), Population and Development (1994), Social Development (1995), the Advancement of Women (1995), and Human Settlements (1996).Assistance to developmentIn the forefront of efforts to bring about social and economic progress is the UN Development Programme (UNDP). The UN’s largest provider of grants for technical assistance, and the chief coordinator of UN development cooperation, UNDP focuses its programmes on eliminating poverty, creating employment, advancing women’s status and protecting the environment. With an annual budget of about $1 billion, it works in 175 developing countries and territories. In addition, UNDP-financed activities stimulate some $9 billion a year in follow-up investment from public and private sources. UNDP receives voluntary contributions from nearly every Government in the world. Recipient Governments pay over half the costs involved in the projects. The poorest countries receive 87 per cent of UNDP resources.Among the many other programmes working for development is the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), currently carrying out assistance projects in 138 countries. Major areas of activity are immunization, primary health care, nutrition and basic education. Total expenditures in 1994 amounted to an estimated $972 million. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) works to encourage and coordinate sound environmental practices everywhere. It supports environmental projects, raises environmental awareness and promotes major environmental treaties. Many other UN bodies are at work to foster development: among them are the World Food Programme, the UN Population Fund, the UN Centre for Human Settlements and the UN Conference on Trade and Development.Humanitarian assistanceWhen countries are stricken by war, famine or natural disaster, the UN helps provide humanitarian aid. Part of this aid is in the form of direct assistance from the UN and its agencies, such as the World Food Programme and UNICEF. In 1994, the UN raised $1.9 billion for humanitarian assistance operations. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provides international protection and material assistance (food, shelter, medical aid, education) to the world’s 23 million refugees, at the same time seeking durable solutions to their plight. All UN emergency assistance is coordinated by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, who heads the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs.The specialized agenciesFourteen specialized agencies work for development and international cooperation in their areas of expertise:International Labour Organization (ILO) Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Health Organization (WHO) World Bank International Monetary Fund (IMF) International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Universal Postal Union (UPU) International Telecommunication Union (ITU) World Meteorological Organization (WMO) International Maritime Organization (IMO) World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). Although not a specialized agency, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is an autonomous intergovernmental organization under the aegis of the UN.The UN and its specialized agencies make up the UN system of organizations. For further information about the UN, please contact: Public Inquiries UN Secretariat Room GA-58 New York, NY 10017 USAor the Information Centre in your country.——————————————————————————–