

Lesson 30

The United Nations

Summary -

United Nations (UN) is an important international institution of our times. It was set up in 1945 with 51 countries as member nations and its current membership is 192. Most of the countries in the world today are members of the United Nations. The activities of the United Nations reflect the needs and hopes of not just the governments but the people of the world at large.

Origins of the United Nations

The US president Roosevelt and the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill signed the Atlantic Charter in August 1941 indicating their desire for a post-war peace institution

Finally, the United States hosted the San Francisco Conference in early 1945 to finalise and sign the Charter of the new organisation, the 'United Nations'

A series of conferences followed at Moscow, Teheran, Dumbarton Oaks, and Yalta to discuss various ideas and proposals

The United Nations was established on 24th October 1945

Purposes and Principles -

- (iii) to maintain international peace & security through collective measures for suppression of aggression & through peaceful settlement of disputes.
- (iv) to develop friendly relations among countries based on full respect for the principle of equality and self-determination.

Purposes and Principles -

- (i) to achieve international cooperation in the economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian fields.
- (ii) to encourage respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Principal Organs: Composition & Functions -

The General Assembly -

- ✚ Among the principal organs, the General Assembly is the central body
- ✚ The principles of sovereign equality and universality are embodied in its composition
- ✚ All members of the United Nations are members of the General Assembly
- ✚ The General Assembly is sometimes called as the world parliament
- ✚ The Assembly has adopted several laws like the covenant on civil, political, economic rights of individuals
- ✚ The laws of exploitation of seas, laws prohibiting or controlling chemical & biological weapons.

The Security Council -

- ✚ Security Council is the most powerful decision-making body of the United Nations.
- ✚ It has the main responsibility to maintain international peace and security.
- ✚ The Council is a contrast from the General Assembly, in respect of both its composition and the decision-making procedure.
- ✚ The power and functions of the Security Council are limited to the task of maintenance of international peace & security.

Economic & Social Council -

- ✚ Works to promote international cooperation in economic & social fields
- ✚ It comprises 54 members all of whom are elected for a term of three years by the General Assembly giving representation to various geographical regions
- ✚ Decisions are taken by a simple majority of members present and voting
- ✚ It considers international economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian problems
- ✚ The Council has set up commissions to study and advise on the status of women, population, human rights, etc.

It has the power to coordinate the activities of various specialized agencies like the International

International Court of Justice

The International Court of Justice, known as the World Court, located at The Hague (The Netherlands), is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations.

The Court consists of 15 judges, who are elected jointly by the General Assembly and the Security Council for a term of nine years

The Secretariat -

- ✚ Secretariat General comprises the international staff posted at the UN headquarters, New York, & other locations throughout the world.
- ✚ They are expected to be impartial and independent in the discharge of their responsibilities.

Fight against Colonialism & Racism -

- ✚ India was a British colony for nearly 200 years before Independence in 1947 India was not alone to come under colonial rule
- ✚ Freeing millions of people from foreign colonial rule is a historic achievement of the UN
- ✚ The UN has built up the campaign against colonialism was the adoption of the Declaration of Decolonisation by the General Assembly in 1960, demanding immediate independence of all colonial territories and populations
- ✚ The UN opposition to racism in South Africa known as apartheid is remarkable. The organizations interest in the matter dates to early 1946
- ✚ The widely respected black leader, Nelson Mandela was released after 27 years of imprisonment, The apartheid laws were revoked.

- ✚ The UN revoked all previous punishments and restored to the new South Africa its rightful place in the world body.

Promotion of Human Rights

Promotion of human rights culture through worldwide human rights standards has been another major contribution of the United Nations

So many declarations and conventions touching upon various facets of human rights have been adopted by the UN in the past many decades

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was the first among the UN declarations. The day of its adoption-10 December 1948

The UN has adopted other declarations and covenants with the aim of stopping the practice of torture & racial discrimination or protecting vulnerable section like children, women, and migrant workers

The activities of the UN include the convening of periodical conferences on human rights.

Need for Re-Structuring United Nation

The United Nations has done a responsible job there are some obstacles which limit its performance. For example, a few organs of the United Nations have not changed, though the changes in the world around require it.

There is a strong case to add a few countries like India as permanent members. The number of non-permanent members should also be increased so that different countries can get a feeling that the Council works for their future.

The Third World countries are of the opinion that United Nations is an agent of Western countries, especially the United States. To correct this image the number of Permanent members must be increased.

Evaluate yourself –

1. List down the principles of the UN charter.
2. United Nations has a very important position in the current scenario, write your opinion in light to the given statement.
3. Mention the reasons for the need of re-structuring the United Nations.