

## Celebrate the United Nations

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The presidential election was *finally* held on Tuesday. However, since I'm writing this before the election and it will be published afterward, I don't know yet how it ended. So today we'll take a break from politics. I'll write about the election and the future next week.

October 24 was the 63<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. In June 1945, representatives of 50 countries met in San Francisco to create an organization to support international communications, address common problems, and promote world peace. The United Nations was officially launched on October 24, 1945. That's quite an accomplishment, considering that the world was mired in the last stages of World War II and faced incredible disruption and destruction.

Today, the UN headquarters in New York City is home to its 192 member nations. Ban Ki-moon, of the Republic of (South) Korea, is the eighth Secretary-General. Only three countries in the world are not represented: Vatican City, Taiwan, and Kosovo. All business is conducted in six languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish.

The six divisions are the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, Secretariat, and the International Court of Justice. All members belong to the General Assembly, in which each nation has one vote. The Security Council is composed of fifteen members. China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States are permanent members. The remaining ten seats rotate among the other nations. The terms of Belgium, Indonesia, Italy, Panama, and South Africa will expire at the end of 2008. Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Croatia, Libyan Arab Jahahiriya, and Vietnam will be replaced at the end of 2009.

There have always been disputes about the UN's value and effectiveness. Some consider it a failure because the world still endures war, terrorism, poverty, and other evils. Actually, there are so many UN success stories that I can't list them all here.

In 1967, the UN World Health Organization (WHO) launched a global effort to eradicate smallpox, a horrible disease that killed one-fourth of its victims and scarred and blinded most survivors. Smallpox threatened sixty percent of the world's population. Due to the UN's education and immunization program, there has not been a documented case of smallpox anywhere in the world since 1977. Most of you remember receiving your smallpox vaccine, and still have the scar on your arm. Because of the immunization success, your children or grandchildren probably never needed the vaccine. That's what the UN did for you. WHO is now working to eliminate polio and AIDS/HIV.

Whether from wars, oppression, or natural disasters, the UN has always faced the problem of refugees. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, established in 1950, coordinates international action for the worldwide protection of refugees and the resolution of refugee problems. Its staff of more than 6,000 people helps 32.9 million refugees in more than 110 countries.

Other humanitarian efforts have addressed hunger, poverty, and disease. While those problems remain, UN programs have helped tens of millions of people.

Peacekeeping is a major focus of UN activities. Yes, there is still war. It's impossible to eliminate all human conflict, and that conflict often results in violence. However, UN peacekeepers have responded to 63 conflicts in its history. While it's difficult to measure "success" in this area, several international studies have documented the end of or decrease in armed conflicts due to UN peacekeeping efforts. We can't know how many other conflicts were avoided. The UN, its agencies, and its staff have won the Nobel Peace Prize ten times.

There are currently 50 topics on the 2008 UN agenda. In addition to those mentioned above, UN programs address terrorism, human rights, climate change, education, and other issues.

The United Nations was not designed to solve all of the world's problems. Its founders envisioned a platform for discussion and debate, a place to share information and ideas, and a fellowship of world citizens with common goals. In that, it has succeeded.

**For more information, go to:**

United Nations

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