

United Nations Research Guide

I. Introduction

This research guide provides you with information and strategies for conducting research on the United Nations and its related organizations. The guide will lead you to information on the purpose, history, organization and function of the U.N. and provide you with information on sources of U.N. documents. The United Nations Treaty Series is covered in the research guide entitled *Public International Law Research*, therefore treaties will not be considered in this guide. Documents issued by the International Court of Justice will not be covered in depth in this research guide.

The United Nations succeeded the League of Nations in 1945. Its founding Charter entered into force in October of that year. Membership has grown from 51 countries in 1945 to 192 today.¹ As stated in its Charter the goals of the U.N. are the promotion of social and economic progress, peace and security, human rights and the rule of law.² The U.N. consists of six principal organs: the General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, Security Council, Secretariat, Trusteeship Council and International Court of Justice.³

The General Assembly is the main deliberative and policymaking organ of the U.N. and consists of a representative from each member state. The General Assembly initiates studies and makes recommendations in the areas of security, peace, human rights, economics, health, culture and education.

The Economic and Social Council coordinates the economic and social work of 14 U.N. specialized agencies, nine functional commissions and five regional commissions. The Council receives reports from 11 U.N. funds and programs and issues studies and reports. The Council's 54 member Governments are elected by the General Assembly.

The Security Council maintains international peace and security. It may conduct investigations and make recommendations, call on Members to apply economic sanctions or take military action. In addition, the Council recommends to the General Assembly the appointment of the Secretary-General and, together with the Assembly, elects the Judges of the International Court of Justice.

The Secretariat carries out the day-to-day work of the U.N. It services the other principal organs of the U.N. and administers the programs and policies laid down by them. At its head is the Secretary-General. The duties carried out by the Secretariat range from administering

¹ A list of member states can be found at <http://www.un.org/en/members>.

² U.N. Charter pmbl. The Charter is available at <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter>.

³ U.N. Charter art. VII § 1.

peacekeeping operations to mediating international disputes, from surveying economic and social trends and problems to preparing studies on human rights and sustainable development. Secretariat staff also informs the world's communications media about the work of the U.N., organizes international conferences on issues of worldwide concern, and interprets speeches and translates documents into the Organization's official languages.

The Trusteeship Council had the task of supervising the administration of Trust Territories placed under the Trusteeship System. These territories consisted of former colonies that had been set free after the First and Second World Wars. The Trusteeship Council suspended operation on 1 November 1994, with the independence of Palau, the last remaining United Nations trust territory. The Council amended its rules to drop the obligation to meet annually and agreed to meet as occasion required.

The International Court of Justice has two functions: settling disputes between states based on international law⁴ and delivering advisory opinions on legal questions at the request of the organs of the U.N. or its specialized agencies.⁵ The Court's website (<http://www.icj-cij.org>) contains information about the Court, press releases, and case decisions and related documents.

The U.N. Charter authorizes the formation of subsidiary organs necessary to pursue the organization's goals.⁶ There are fifteen specialized agencies affiliated with the U.N. Agencies such as the International Monetary Fund, World Health Organization and World Intellectual Property Organization are autonomous organizations that collaborate with the U.N. through cooperative agreements. A number of semi-autonomous U.N. programs report to either the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council. They have their own governing bodies and budgets. Among these are the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF), U.N. Environment Program (UNEP) and the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). An organizational chart depicting the principal and subsidiary bodies of the U.N. is available at <http://www.un.org/en/aboutun/structure/index.shtml>

II. Research Strategy

The strategy you choose will depend on your research problem. If you are looking for information about the U.N. organization, its structure, function, history and activities, you should consult the secondary sources found in section III of this guide. If you are looking for U.N. documents, turn to sections IV through VI of this guide. The U.N. website (<http://www.un.org>) offers a brief overview of the organization and its mission.

III. Secondary Materials

A. Research Guides

Research guides on the U.N. provide basic information on the organization and its documentation. While research guides in print format do exist, most of the newer guides are

⁴ Statute of the International Court of Justice, arts. 34-38.

⁵ U.N. Charter art. XIV § 96.

⁶ U.N. Charter art. VII § 2.

found on the Internet. Research guides for related organizations and specialized agencies are rare. When conducting research on the work of these organizations and agencies look to the more general topic. For example, the work of the World Intellectual Property Organization may be covered in a research guide on international intellectual property.

Germain's Transnational Law Research: A Guide for Attorneys. Claire M. Germain.
There are chapters on the International Court of Justice and the U.N.
Location: Reference K85 .G47 1991

International and Foreign Legal Research: a Coursebook. Marci Hoffman & Mary Rumsey.
The chapter on international organizations contains a section on the United Nations.
Location: Ref & Reserve K85 .H64 2008

International Legal Research in a Nutshell. Marci B. Hoffman & Robert C. Berring.
Chapter eight deals with the U.N.
Location: Reserve KZ1234 .H64 2008

Researching the United Nations: Finding the Organization's Internal Resource Trails. Globalex.
Site: http://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/United_Nations_Research1.htm

Selected U.N. Resources and Research Tools: Overview and Search Tips for Legal Research.
Wiltrud Harms.
This guide provides a description of the important finding tools for U.N. documents.
Site: http://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/UN_Resources_Research_Tools.pdf

United Nations. American Society of International Law Guide to Electronic Resources for International Law.
Site: <http://www.asil.org/un1.cfm>

United Nations. Columbia University Arthur W. Diamond Law Library Research Guides.
Site: http://library.law.columbia.edu/guides/United_Nations

United Nations. Duke University School of Law Research Guides.
Site: <http://www.law.duke.edu/lib/researchguides/un.html>

United Nations Documentation: Research Guide. Dag Hammarakjold Library.
This guide presents an overview of the types of documents and publications issued by the U.N. and provides guidance on how to work with them.
Site: <http://www.un.org/Depts/dhl/resguide/>

United Nations Research Guide. Georgetown Law Library.
Site: <http://www.ll.georgetown.edu/guides/unitednations.cfm>

B. Treatises, Yearbooks and Encyclopedias

This highly selective list is limited to more general titles about the U.N. The library online catalog can be used to locate treatises, yearbooks and encyclopedias. You can search for information about a topic by either subject or keyword. The subject heading “United Nations” will retrieve materials of a general nature about the U.N. The principal organs of the U.N. have also been assigned subjects headings. For example, the International Court of Justice and United Nations Security Council may be searched as subjects. Subsidiary bodies such as the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, may also have their own subject headings. If you are uncertain of the exact subject heading, perform a keyword search using the organization’s name.

1. General Treatises

Global Governance and the United Nations System. Volker Rittberger (ed.).

Location: Stack-1 JZ1318 .G58 2001

The Law and Practice of the United Nations. Benedetto Conforti.

Location: Stack-1 JZ4984.5 .C65 2005

Law and Practice of the United Nations: Documents and Commentary. Simon Chesterman, Thomas M. Franck & David M. Malone.

Location: Treatise KZ4986 .C54 2008

The Charter of the United Nations: A Commentary. Bruno Simma (ed.).

Location: Stack-1 JX1977 .C48 2002

The United Nations: Law and Practice. Franz Cede & Lilly Sucharipa-Behrmann (eds.).

Location: Stack-1 JZ4984.5 .U53 2001

The United Nations and a New World Order for a New Millennium: Self-Determination, State Succession, and Humanitarian Intervention. Edward McWhinney.

Location: Stack-1 JZ1242 .M389 2000

2. Yearbooks

Yearbooks, as the name implies, are annual publications. Yearbooks may cover a great variety of subject matter. They may contain collections of scholarly articles, book reviews, texts of resolutions, treaties and case law, and reports of an organization’s activities.

Annual Review of United Nations Affairs.

Location: Stack-1 JX1977.A1 A5

Commission on International Trade Law Yearbook (UNCITRAL Yearbook).

Location: Stack-1 JX1977 .A2 A/CN.9/SER.A & HeinOnline

Site: <http://www.uncitral.org/uncitral/en/publications/yearbook.html>

International Court of Justice Yearbook.

Location: Stack-1 JX1971.6 .A25 & HeinOnline

Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law.

Location: Stack-1 JZ4945 .M39 & HeinOnline

Yearbook of the United Nations.

Location: Stack-1 JX1977.A37 Y437

Site: <http://unyearbook.un.org>

United Nations Juridical Yearbook.

This title includes treaty texts, decisions of administrative tribunals, and a review of the legal activities of the U.N. and related organizations.

Location: Stack-1 JX1977.A1 U54 & HeinOnline

Site: <http://www.un.org/law/UNJuridicalYearbook/index.htm>

Yearbook of the International Law Commission.

Location: Stack-1 JX1977.A2 U558ILC & HeinOnline

Site: <http://untreaty.un.org/ilc/publications/yearbooks/yearbooks.htm>

3. Encyclopedias

Encyclopedias are collections of articles arranged in an alphabetical order.

A Concise Encyclopedia of the United Nations. Helmut Volger (ed.).

Location: Treatise KZ4968 .L49 2002

Encyclopedia of Public International Law. Published under the auspices of the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law.

This work contains entries for the U.N. and its principal organs, programs, commissions, specialized agencies and related organizations. The web version of this encyclopedia contains additional entries and updates that are not available in the print version.

Location: Reserve JX1226 .E5 1992 & web access through the library catalog

Encyclopedia of the United Nations and International Agreements. Edmund Jan Osmánczyk.

Location: Reference JX1977 .O86 2003

International Encyclopaedia of Laws. Intergovernmental Organizations. Jan Wouters (ed.).

Location: Treatise KZ4850 .I57 1996

United Nations: Law, Policies, and Practice. Rüdiger Wolfrum (ed.).

This is a collection of 162 articles on the U.N. and its practices.

Location: Stack-1 JX1977 .A38 1995

IV. UN Documents and Publications

There are two broad categories of texts generated by the U.N.: documents and publications. It is important to understand something about the nature of these texts in order to conduct research on the U.N.

A document is a text submitted to a principal organ or a subsidiary organ of the United Nations for consideration by it, usually in connection with items on its agenda.⁷ Documents include official records and masthead or mimeographed documents.

Official records include meeting records, resolutions, agendas, documents presented to attendees of meetings and reports on the activities of subsidiary organs or agencies. These are indexed in *Index to the Proceedings* publications and in AccessUN.

Masthead or mimeographed documents are working documents that are used at meetings. They include studies, reports meeting records, agendas, draft and final resolutions and decisions. Some masthead documents appear as part of the official records, sometimes in a revised form. In that case they will appear in two versions and have two different document numbers: one version and number for the masthead document and the other the official record. The phrase “Official Records” will appear on the title page of an official record to distinguish it from a masthead document. Masthead documents and official records are assigned document numbers according to the U.N. Documents Symbols System.

The term “publication” refers to any written material which is issued by or for the United Nations to the general public, normally under the authorization of the Publications Board. These publications, usually offered for sale by the Sales Section, include studies, reports, statistical compilations, proceedings of conferences, seminars and symposia, yearbooks, official records of principal organs, the U.N. Treaty Series, journals and bulletins”⁸

Sales publications include yearbooks, serial publications, monographs and studies that are available for sale through the U.N. These publications have their own numbering system and do not use the U.N. Documents Symbols System. Sales publications owned by the McGeorge Law Library can be located using the online catalog GoCat. A list of U.N. publications currently available for purchase can be found at <https://unp.un.org>.

Press releases are not considered U.N. documents; however they may be useful in conducting U.N. research. They are available from 1995 to date on the U.N. News Centre website, <http://www.un.org/News>. Older press releases may be difficult to find.

Sales publications and key masthead documents of the specialized bodies are indexed in the major UN indexes. Often these bodies issue their own indexes and publications catalogs, including masthead and non-sales publications.

⁷ Regulations for the Control and Limitation of Documentation. Addendum, Distribution of Documents, Meeting Records, Official Records and Publications, U.N. Doc. ST/AI/189/Add.3/Rev.2, para. 2 (Dec. 17, 1985).

⁸*Id.* at para. 4.

U.N. Document Symbols

A U.N. document is assigned a unique document symbol consisting of numbers and letters. Document symbols can be used to retrieve documents in one of the online U.N. databases: ODS and AccessUN. Both are discussed in Section V of this research guide. A brief introduction to these symbols is provided here. For in depth treatment see *United Nations: Law Policy and Practice*, edited by Rüdiger Wolfrum, and *United Nations Documentation: Research Guide* (<http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/resguide/symbol.htm>).

Symbols begin with a designation of the issuing authority. The first element of the symbol designates one of five principal U.N. organs: A/ for General Assembly, E/ for Economic and Social Council, S/ for Security Council, T/ for Trusteeship Council, and ST/ for Secretariat. Publications issued by the International Court of Justice are not assigned a U.N. document symbol.

A second element may indicate a subsidiary organ of a parent body. AC. indicates an ad hoc committee, C. a standing committee, CN. a commission, CONF. a conference, GC. a governing council, PC. a preparatory committee and SC a subcommittee. For example, a symbol that begins S/AC is from an ad hoc committee of the Security Council. A subsidiary organ may be numbered to distinguish it from other subsidiary organs. For example, in the symbol S/AC.17 the 17 indicates that this is a document of the ad hoc committee established in pursuance of Security Council Resolution 276. The second element may also indicate the nature of the document. RES stands for resolution, PV for verbatim records of a meeting and SR for summary records of a meeting. For example, A/RES/31/168 is the 168th resolution of the 31st session of the General Assembly.

Following the identification of a principal organ and subsidiary body there may appear a document number, a session number followed by a document number, or a year followed by a document number. The final element of a document symbol may indicate modifications to the original text. Add. indicates an addendum, Rev. a revision, Corr. a correction and Amend. an alteration of part of a text.

U.N. document citation formats are addressed in *The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation* rule 21.7 and the *ALWD Citation Manual* rules 21.4(a)–(d).

V. Locating U.N. Documents

Print Indexes

Index to Proceedings of

This set of annual indexes provides information about documents, speeches, resolutions, and agenda items. Indexes exist for four of the principal U.N. organs; however the McGeorge Law Library has only two of these indexes.

Index to Proceedings of the Security Council. (1964-).
Location: Stack-1 JZ5006.5 .I64

Index to Proceedings of the General Assembly. (1964-).
Location: Stack-1 JX1977 .A2 ST/LIB/ SER.B

Online Databases

ODS (Official Document System)

Site: <http://documents.un.org>

ODS is the official repository of U.N. documents. It offers full text access to all types of official U.N. documentation, beginning in 1993. Older U.N. documents are being added to the database. ODS also provides access to resolutions of the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council and the Trusteeship Council from 1946 onwards. The database does not contain press releases, U.N. sales publications, International Court of Justice decisions or the U.N. Treaty Series. Documents and official records appear in the official languages of the U.N.: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

AccessUN

Location: Library database collection (1946-)

AccessUN indexes most documents from the principal organs of the U.N., official records, masthead documents, periodicals, sales publications and treaties. It also indexes documents from committees and subsidiary bodies, but not from specialized agencies. AccessUN does not index cases heard before the International Court of Justice. You will generally use AccessUN to find information about a document and then use another source to retrieve the full text. Documents can be searched by author, title, country and subject.

Selected UN documents, including resolutions from the General Assembly (1981-), the Security Council (1974-), and the Economic and Social Council (1982-) can be viewed in full-text. In addition, selected Provisional Verbatim documents, which contain voting records of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, are added to the database in reverse chronological order (1990-).

For those documents that do not appear in full text, the researcher will have to use the information provided in the document record – U.N. sales number, document symbol, publication title, author or treaty number – to locate the full text document.

UNBISNET (United Nations Bibliographic Information System)

Site: <http://unbisnet.un.org>

UNBISNET consists of three components: an online catalog of publications, voting records on resolutions and an index of speeches. The online catalog is an index of publications and documents from the U.N. libraries in New York and Geneva. The catalog also contains records of non-U.N. materials available in the New York library. The coverage of UNBISNET is from

1979 onward, however, older documents are being added to the catalog on a regular basis. Some full text documents are available.

Voting records for all resolutions which were adopted by the General Assembly and the Security Council beginning from 1946 to the present are available on UNBISNET. UNBISNET contains an index of speeches made in the General Assembly, Security Council and Economic and Social Council from 1983 and the Trusteeship Council from 1982. Links to the full text of speeches are provided.

UN-I-QUE (United Nations Info Quest)

Site: <http://lib-unique.un.org/lib/unique.nsf>

UN-I-QUE is a database created by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library at the U.N. in New York to respond to requests for document symbols or sales numbers of U.N. materials from 1946 to date. It does not give full bibliographic details. A search using this database will look for words in the document title. UN-I-QUE focuses upon documents and publications of a recurrent nature: annual/sessional reports of committees and commissions, annual publications, reports periodically and irregularly issued, reports of major conferences and speeches made in the General Debate of the General Assembly. Open the "Search Tips" link on the webpage for a more detailed list of the materials indexed in UN-I-QUE.

VI. Collections of U.N. Publications and Documents

United Nations Law Collection (HeinOnline)

Location: Library database collection

This collection contains a vast number of U.N. publications, including treaties, International Court of Justice decisions, yearbooks, periodicals and the U.N. Legislative Series. A complete list of the contents of this collection can be found on the homepage of the database. Titles of publications that are available in this database also appear in the library's online catalog. One advantage of accessing these publications through the HeinOnline database is that full text searching is available.

United Nations Documents in Microform Format

The library owns a collection of U.N. documents in microcard and microfiche format. This collection contains virtually every document from the six main U.N. bodies. AccessUN is the index associated with this microform collection. The collection begins with the year 1946. Documents are arranged by year and document symbol.

The documents from between 1946 and 1981 are on microcards and are kept in the Library Annex. Please ask a librarian for assistance retrieving these documents. The library also has documents for the years 1956-1960, 1969 and 1982 to date on microfiche. They are located in Fiche Cabinet A under the call number JX1977 .A395.

United Nations Websites

The U.N. (<http://www.un.org>), its main and subsidiary bodies, programs, funds and specialized agencies have websites that may provide access to publications and documents related to the body's work. Many of the sites have search engines as well as links to texts such as speeches, press releases, journals and documents. Occasionally a document will appear on a U.N. website before it appears in the Official Document System (ODS) database and it may be easier to locate a document on a website than in a more general U.N. database. Sales publications such as yearbooks, that are unavailable in a database, may be available on an organization's website.

The U.N. International Law Commission, a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, and the Security Council will be used to illustrate the types of materials that may be found on a U.N. organization's website. The International Law Commission (<http://www.un.org/law/ilc>) is charged with the development and codification of international law. The Commission's work has led to the creation of a number of treaties and other documents on international law. These treaties and documents as well as committee reports, yearbooks, and the Commission's annual reports are available on its website. The Security Council's website (<http://www.un.org/Docs/sc>) provides access to the text of resolutions, mission reports, reports of the Secretary-General, annual reports, meeting records, presidential statements and press releases.

The Official Website Locator for the United Nations System of Organizations (<http://www.unsystem.org/Default.htm>) lists the names of U.N. bodies organized by subject and name. It provides links to the websites of these organizations.