



United Nations
Association in Canada

Celebrate with UNA-Canada

United Nations Day

♦♦ 24 October ♦♦

On October 24, the United Nations celebrates its birthday. On that day in 1945, in San Francisco, with the dreams of foresighted leaders, the UN emerged out of the chaos and destruction of the Second World War to “*save succeeding generations from the scourge of war; to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights; and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedoms.*” (UN Charter) Ever since, this historic, and indeed heroic, organization has been an overachiever.

Originally established to foster peace, prosperity and justice, the UN has not only succeeded in its fundamental mission of preventing a third world war and improving the quality of life worldwide, but over the decades, the UN’s mission and membership have broadened dramatically (see box).

In today’s interconnected world, individual governments can’t resolve challenges alone. The support of a community of states is essential to enduring success. The UN is a place where all countries are welcome and encouraged to convene to seek results to global challenges; to draw upon collective economic and human resources; and to work towards ever stronger norms and standards that enhance the lives of all people around the world. It is a place where the world brings its experience and aspirations, and develops friendly relations among nations. Indeed, the UN is the *only* place where all member states, big and small, democracies and dictatorships, have full participation and ability to be part of global solutions. The world has learned, then relearned through blood and loss, that without the aggrieved and aggressors together at the UN table, sustainable solutions to global challenges cannot be effectively solved.

Growth in the UN’s Mission Since 1945

In addition to its original mission to safeguard peace, protect human rights and promote social progress, the United Nations is now asked to also tackle global challenges that transcend borders and affect us all. Its mission now encompasses the environment, climate change, health, hunger, human rights and justice, terrorism, population, energy and more.

Growth in UN Membership Since 1945

UN membership has grown from its 51 founding member states in 1945 (including Canada) to 193. As of 2012, only 3 countries are not members: Kosovo and Taiwan (don’t have complete international recognition as sovereign countries); and the Vatican City (for ecclesiastical reasons).



UN Photos: by Patrick Gruban (UN General Assembly); Joao Araujo (Flags outside UN Headquarters, NY); Eskinder Debebe (UN Headquarters, NY)

All actions of the UN are based on the following principles:

- All of its members are equal;
- All members must fulfil their Charter obligations;
- International disputes are to be settled by peaceful means;
- Members may not use force, or the threat of force, against other members;
- Members must help the UN in any action it might take in accordance with the Charter; and
- The UN may not interfere in the domestic affairs of any state.

The UN system consists of over 50 organizations, specialized agencies, funds and programmes acting in concert to develop increasingly coordinated but diversified actions in the areas of peace and security, humanitarian aid, human rights, and economic and social development. For example,

- The second largest deployed military force in the world – UN peacekeepers – are responsible for restoring stability where terror once lived; for ensuring that ceasefires are honoured; for rebuilding societies wracked by violence or natural disasters; for ensuring that women and girls are part of the peace process; and for overseeing elections that build democracy and help people become more than just residents but also voters and empowered citizens.
- Worldwide, 130 million children are denied primary school education; and 790 million adults are illiterate. Efforts to ensure that everyone has access to education and the opportunities that come with basic literacy skills are a priority of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
- Almost 1.5 billion children and their families around the world live on less than a dollar a day, without any social services, health care plans or insurance to help them survive. They count on food, water, medicine and support from the UN Children’s Fund (Unicef).
- The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) works in 123 countries assisting 34 million souls, including refugees fleeing torture, war and environmental devastation; stateless people; and asylum seekers. It works to find them new countries to be their homes, and jobs to return their dignity.
- When natural disaster strikes, the largest humanitarian agency fighting hunger, the World Food Programme (WFP), rushes people, food, water, shelter and medical supplies to those affected.
- The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) provides global leadership in caring for our planet’s fragile ecosystem and biological diversity. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) has allocated \$9.5 billion to more than 2700 environmental projects in 165 countries.



This UN Day, please take the time to look beyond your communities and daily experiences to recognize how closely we all are knit together in a true global family, and to reflect on how the UN system is at the centre of many of the international connections we so often take for granted.

Join our movement of “*We the Peoples*” and help us to transform lives and build hopeful futures.
A better world starts with YOU.

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