

WHAT is **SC?**



THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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The “What is...” leaflets have been developed to support the learning and education of children and adolescents. We gratefully acknowledge the existing resources that supported the development of this material. Some of the content found in the “What is...” leaflets was adapted or taken directly from a variety of sources, including: www.ohchr.org; www.un.org; <http://treaties.un.org>; www.cyberschoolbus.un.org; Child Rights Information Network, Guide to Mechanisms for Children’s Rights. England; Child Rights Information Network, 2008. http://www.crin.org/law/mechanisms_index.asp

WHAT is ?

The UN General Assembly

Dear Reader,

Every year, the United Nations (UN) makes important decisions that affect and impact the lives of children and young people around the world. In 2009, there was a special focus on a child's right: 'to express his or her views freely in all matters affecting him or her' – or, in other words, children's participation.

We saw this as an opportunity to support children's understanding of not only the UN but also other important processes where children's rights are discussed at international, regional and local levels. We hope that this will encourage and support children and young people to get involved in these processes.

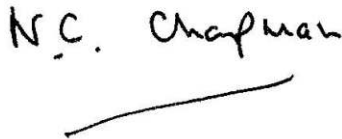
The 'WHAT IS?' leaflets are only one way for you to learn and build a greater understanding and awareness about some of the things that happen at the global/international level. You have a very important role to play in the decisions and processes that affect your life.

This information may be most useful to adults that work with children, teachers, older children, adolescents, youth and young people that are considering ways to get involved in and to influence international or UN related processes.

As needed or requested – we hope to add more leaflets and build on the information that is available to you. As a starting point, we have developed the following leaflets:

- Children's Participation
- The United Nations
- The UN General Assembly
- A Convention and a Treaty
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Special Representative
- The Omnibus Resolution
- The Security Council
- The Complaints Procedure for the CRC

Your voice, your experiences and your opinions matter and count! Our hope is that the information found in the 'WHAT IS?' series will support you to learn, create positive change, speak out, take action and have your voice heard.

Handwritten signature of Nigel Chapman in black ink, consisting of the initials 'N.C.' followed by the name 'Chapman' and a long horizontal stroke underneath.

Nigel Chapman
CEO, Plan International

Handwritten signature of Mark Vogt in black ink, appearing as a stylized, cursive 'M. Vogt'.

Mark Vogt
Director of War Child Holland

Handwritten signature of Elisabeth Dahlin in black ink, written in a cursive style.

Elisabeth Dahlin, Secretary General
Save the Children Sweden

The UN General Assembly

First, we need to look at the United Nations (UN) and how it is structured...

The UN is a huge international body made up of many different organs, programs, agencies and committees. We cannot go into the details of every group, but we can look at a general overview.

There are six main organs of the United Nations:

1. **The General Assembly**
2. The Security Council
3. The International Court of Justice
4. The Trusteeship Council
5. The Economic and Social Council
6. The Secretariat

Each organ has its own structure, membership, goals and ways of working.

(For more information: Please see the websites and additional resources listed at the end of this leaflet)

More about the United Nations General Assembly (GA)...

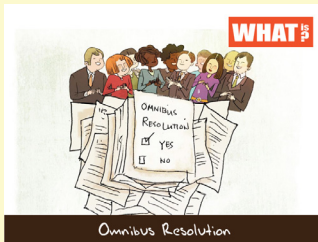
The General Assembly – or GA for short – is where all the members/countries of the UN come together - all 192 members/countries sit on the General Assembly. It is one of the main or central organs of the UN.

Some of the General Assembly's roles and responsibilities include:

- Looking at issues related to international peace and security
- Passing Resolutions and talking about almost any issue related to other UN bodies and organs
- Asking for studies and making recommendations related to international law as well as ones that support human rights
- Making recommendations to peacefully resolve disputes among nations
- Reviewing and approving the budget for the UN
- Reviewing reports from other UN bodies, organs, programmes, committees and agencies such as the Security Council
- Electing the members/representatives for some UN organs
- Appointing the Secretary-General

The General Assembly is a place where countries share their views on many different issues and discuss global issues like international peace, ending poverty and human rights. Sometimes not all countries can agree on an issue or an action and the General Assembly provides a place for discussion and negotiation.

The General Assembly creates 'Resolutions' or recommendations that all member states then vote on. A Resolution is not a global law but if a member state votes in favour of a Resolution, they then have a moral duty/responsibility to see it implemented.



For example:

Each year the General Assembly passes the 'General Assembly Resolution on the Rights of the Child' also known as an Omnibus Resolution.

For more information, please see the leaflet: [What is an Omnibus Resolution?](#)

The General Assembly is the largest of the UN organs and meets once a year in New York from September through December. However, the General Assembly may also meet for special or emergency situations.



In 2002, there was a Special Session of the General Assembly on Children. More than 7,000 people, including children and young people, participated in the Special Session. It was an opportunity for countries to make promises that would improve the lives of children and young people around the world.

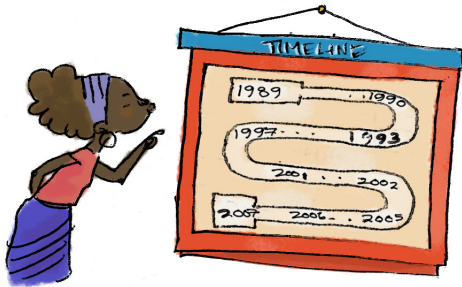
The General Assembly has many different issues to consider – as a result, there are six main Committees that meet from October/November/December each year. These Committees will start the process of drafting and negotiating Resolutions/recommendations. These Resolutions are then brought to the General Assembly (usually in December) for final discussion and final agreement.

The six main Committees of the General Assembly are:

- The First Committee – Disarmament and International Security
- The Second Committee – Economic and Financial
- **The Third Committee – Social, Humanitarian and Cultural**
- The Fourth Committee – Special Political and Decolonization
- The Fifth Committee – Administrative and Budgetary
- The Sixth Committee – Legal

Many of the key discussions relating to human rights, including children's rights, take place in the Third Committee.

Children's Rights and the General Assembly



The General Assembly is responsible for many important decisions, discussions, studies and agreements relating to children's rights.

Here are just a few examples:

1989

The General Assembly adopts the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

1990 The World Summit for Children – world leaders set goals that would improve children's lives

1993 The General Assembly asks for an in-depth study on the impact of armed conflict on children

1997 Olara Otunnu is appointed the Special Representative to study the impact of armed conflict on children.

2001 The General Assembly asks for an in-depth study on all forms of violence against children.

2002 UN Special Session on Children – an opportunity to look at progress made since the 1990 World Summit and to make new commitments for children.

2005 Security Council adopts Resolution 1612 to protect the rights of children affected by armed conflict.

This also created the Security Council Working Group which is a group of experts (from the 15 member states in the Security Council) focusing on children in conflict.

Marta Santos Pais is appointed the Special Representative on violence against children.

2009

2007 The General Assembly agrees on creating the new post of Special Representative on violence against children.

The UN Study on violence against children is presented to the General Assembly

The General Assembly adopts the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

2006 Radhika Coomaraswamy is appointed the new Special Representative on children affected by armed conflict.

Looking for more information?

Overview of the UN and how it works: <http://www.un.org/Overview/uninbrief/index.shtml>

United Nations Cyber School Bus <http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/>

A list of all GA Resolutions: <http://www.un.org/documents/resga.htm>

UN Convention on the Rights of Children: <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: <http://www.crin.org/Law/instrument.asp?InstID=1048>

UN Study on Violence against Children: <http://www.violencestudy.org>

Children and Armed Conflict: <http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/index.html>



WHAT NOW?

What did I learn from this leaflet?

What questions do I have and where might I find the answers?

How can I use this information and are there any actions I want to take after reading this leaflet?

Who do I know that might be interested in learning more about the UN General Assembly and what can I do to help them?



