

WHAT is **SC?**



THE UNITED NATIONS

Published by: Save the Children and Plan International with War Child Holland

ISBN: 978-91-7321-411-7

© 2010 Save the Children and Plan International

Project Manager: Monica Lindvall

Author: Alana Kapell

Designer/Art Director: Jason Robinson, PlanetYou

Illustrator: Qin Cheng

Contributors: Cristina Barbaglia, Bill Bell, Ines Biemmi, Gorel Bogarde, Roberta Cecchetti, Stefanie Conrad, Santiago Davila, Clare Feinstein, Anita Goh, Hannah Lyford Jones, Lena Karlsson, Claire O’Kane, Monica Lindvall, Anne-Sophie Lois, Carmen Madrinan, Sara Philipson, Linda Raftree, Gina Solari, Lene Steffen, Samia Kassid, Annabel Trapp, Ann-Kristin Vervik, Silje Vold

A special thank you to all the partners and staff who supported the project and especially the children and young people who provided feedback on the draft materials, including: War Child Holland in Uganda; Child Rights Information Centre Moldova; Save the Children in Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan; Generacion de Innovaciones para el Desarrollo, Peru.; Plan Norway’s Youth Advisory Board, URO.

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

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.

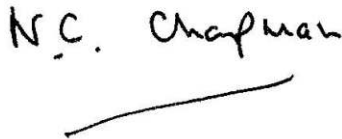
The 'WHAT IS?' leaflets are only one way for you to learn and build a greater understanding and awareness about some of the things that happen at the global/international level. You have a very important role to play in the decisions and processes that affect your life.

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

What is the United Nations?

The United Nations (UN) is a way for all the countries of the world to discuss problems and deal with issues that affect them all. It has a key role in trying to maintain international peace and security but also addresses issues related to disaster relief, human rights, the environment, health, poverty and more.

There are six main organs of the United Nations:

1. The General Assembly

One of the central organs of the UN - Please see the leaflet, What is the General Assembly, for more information.

2. The Security Council

Primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security - Please see the leaflet, What is the Security Council, for more information.

3. The International Court of Justice

Also known as the 'World Court' it decides disagreements between countries.

4. The Trusteeship Council

When needed, the Council provides supervision and support to prepare countries for independence.

5. The Economic and Social Council

Focuses on international economic (financial) and social issues.

6. The Secretariat

Takes care of the administration and other work of the United Nations as directed by the General Assembly, the Security Council and other UN organs – the Secretariat has many different departments and offices and over 8,000 staff.

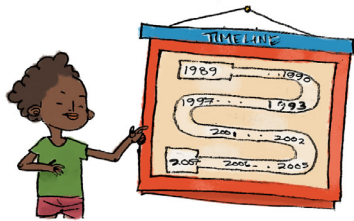


In addition to the 'organs' we have just listed, there are many different and specialized Programs and Committees that support the efforts and work of the UN goals. These usually report to one of the 'organs' we have listed above. A few examples include:

- UNICEF – the UN Children's Fund
- UNDP – UN Development Program
- UNHCR – UN High Commissioner for Refugees
- OHCHR – UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

There are also special Agencies that are part of the UN system. Many of these agencies report to the General Assembly and/or the Economic and Social Council. A few examples include:

- WHO – the World Health Organization
- ILO – the International Labour Organization
- UNESCO – the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



A Brief History of the United Nations

1919

The League of Nations was created after the First World War. The goal was to resolve conflict between nations and reduce war.

One of the main reasons it is believed to have failed was because important countries, such as the United States, Germany and Russia were not part of the original membership.

During the Second World War discussions and planning for the United Nations began to develop.

1945

The United Nations Charter was created and the UN officially came into existence.

The United Nations Charter

The UN Charter outlines the purpose of the UN, its goals and its ways of working. It consists of 19 chapters and over 100 articles/sections.

According to the Charter, the UN has four key purposes:

1. To maintain international peace and security
2. To develop friendly relations between nations
3. To work together to solve international problems and to protect human rights
4. To help countries work together to achieve the above goals

When States/countries become members of the United Nations, they agree to the principles and commitments found in the Charter.

The UN Charter can be downloaded at:

<http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/index.shtml>

For more general information about the UN, please visit: <http://www.un.org/en/index.shtml>



In 1945 there were 51 countries/members that formed the United Nations. Today there are 192 members and nearly every country in the world is part of the UN.



A list of member States/countries can be found at:

<http://www.un.org/en/members/index.shtml#s>

The United Nations is not a world government or parliament and it does not make decisions by itself for the world. It is however, a place to resolve conflict, to solve problems and to talk about things that affect us all.

For example: The UN and its related organizations help to promote human rights, protect the environment, fight disease and reduce poverty.

In September 2000, world leaders came together at United Nations Headquarters in New York to adopt the United Nations Millennium Declaration. The Declaration, which in turn led to the Millennium Development Goals (or MDGs) outlines the promises governments are making to reduce poverty by 2015.



UN agencies also support efforts against drug trafficking, terrorism and exploitation. UN agencies help refugees, clear landmines, help expand food production and support the fight against AIDS – to name just a few.

The UN also creates 'Treaties' and 'Conventions' that are meant to protect girls, boys, women, men and also our planet. Treaties and conventions are legal agreements made by governments. These become the promises governments have made on an issue (for example: trafficking, child labour or child rights) and are part of international law. There are many different treaties and conventions, dealing with many different issues.

For example:



The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the human rights that all children have.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) defines, 'what is discrimination against women?' and what actions are needed to stop it.

Please see the leaflet, What is a Convention and a Treaty, for more information.

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 United Nations and what can I do to help them?



