**The General Assembly**

All UN Member States are represented in the General Assembly –a “parliament of nations”– which meets regularly and in special sessions to consider the world’s most pressing problems. Each Member State has one vote. Decisions on key issues such as international peace and security, admitting new members and the UN budget are decided by two-thirds majority. Other matters are decided by simple majority. In recent years, a special effort has been made to reach decisions through consensus, rather than by taking a formal vote. The assembly cannot force action by any State, but its recommendations are an important indication of world opinion and represent the moral authority of the community of nations.

The General Assembly can discuss any topic that its members wish to speak on. For example, in 2000 the General Assembly produced its Millennium Declaration, a set of goals and recommendations related to reducing poverty, addressing security, maintaining human rights, and improving the functioning of the United Nations. In another example, during the main part of its 2004 session, the Assembly took up more than 150 different topics, including United Nations reform, restoring respect for the rule of law, the needs of small island-developing States, climate change and related humanitarian dangers, and the war in Iraq.

The Assembly holds its annual regular session from the third week in September to December at the UN Headquarters in New York City. When necessary, it may resume its session or hold a special or emergency session on subjects of particular concern. Its work is also carried out by its six Main Committees, other subsidiary bodies, and the UN Secretariat.

**The Security Council**

The UN charter gives the Security Council primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. The Council may convene at any time, whenever peace is threatened. It meets at the UN Headquarters in New York City. Under the UN Charter, all Member States are obligated to carry out the Council’s decisions. In addition to keeping peace, the Council makes recommendations to the General Assembly on the appointment of a new Secretary-General and on the admission of new Members to the UN.

There are 15 Council members. Five of these –China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States– are permanent members. The other 10 are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms. Decisions of the Council require nine yes votes (a simple majority). Except in votes on procedural questions, a decision cannot stand if there is a no vote, or a veto, by a permanent member.

When the Council considers a threat to international peace, it first explores ways to settle the dispute peacefully. It may suggest principles for a settlement or undertake mediation. In the event of fighting, the Council tries to secure a ceasefire. It may send a peacekeeping mission to help the parties maintain a truce and to keep opposing forces apart.

The decisions of the Council are legally binding, and the Council can take measures to enforce its decisions.

It can impose economic sanctions on a country or order an arms embargo. On rare occasions, the Council has authorized Member States to use “all necessary means”, including collective military action, to see that its decisions are carried out.

**The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**

The Economic and Social Council, under the overall authority of the General Assembly, coordinates the economic and social work of the United Nations and the UN family of organizations. The Council plays a key role in fostering international cooperation for economic and social development. It also consults with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), thereby maintaining a vital link between the United Nations and civil society.

The Council is composed of 54 Member States, elected by the General Assembly for three-year terms. It meets throughout the year at the UN headquarters in New York City and holds major session in July, during which a high-level meeting of Ministers discusses major economic, social and humanitarian issues. Each member country has one vote and decisions are made by simple majority among the voting countries.

The Council’s subsidiary bodies (or sub-commissions) meet regularly and report back to it. The Commission of Human Rights, for example, monitors the observance of human rights throughout the world. Other bodies focus on such issues as social development, the status of women, crime prevention, narcotic drugs, and sustainable development.

**The International Court of Justice**

The International Court of Justice, also known as the World Court, is the main judicial organ of the UN. It consists of 15 judges, who are elected by the General Assembly and the Security Council. The judges are chosen for their expertise, and they do not represent countries. In fact, no two judges on the International Court of Justice can be from the same country.

The Court decides disputes between countries (not individuals), based on the voluntary participation of the States concerned. If a State agrees to participate in a proceeding, it is obligated to comply with the Court’s decision. The Court also gives advisory opinions to the United Nations and its specialized agencies. The Court meets in The Hague, Netherlands, and its term runs from August 1 through July 31.

**The Secretariat**

The Secretariat –an international staff working in duty stations around the world– carries out the diverse day-to-day work of the UN. It services the other principal organs of the United Nations and administers the programs and policies laid down by them. At its head is the Secretary-General, who is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council for a five year, renewable term. The current Secretary- General is António Guterres of Portugal.

The duties carried out by the Secretariat are as varied as the problems dealt with by the United Nations. These range from administering 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 United Nations, organize international conferences on issues of worldwide concern, and interpret speeches and translate documents into the Organization’s official languages.

The Secretariat has a staff of about 8,900 people from some 170 countries. As international civil servants, staff members and the Secretary-General answer to the United Nations alone for their activities and take anoath not to seek or receive instructions from any Government or outside authority. The Secretariat does not vote because it is not made up of member states. Headquartered in New York, the Secretariat has offices all over the world in places such as Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Beirut, Geneva, Nairobi, Santiago and Vienna.