



# 63rd UNITED NATIONS DAY

## 60 ways the United Nations makes a difference



*The United Nations was created more than 60 years ago to save succeeding generations from war, protect human rights, establish conditions for justice, and promote social*

*progress and better standards of life.*

*Over these six decades, new challenges have emerged—from international terrorism to climate change, to the spread of infectious diseases to other*

*threats that transcend national borders.*

*These global problems can never be resolved by any one country acting alone. As the world's only truly universal institution, the United Nations offers the best—if not the only—forum to galvanize global action to meet the challenges ahead.*

*Through brief and specific examples, this illustrates some of the achievements of the United Nations so far, and how it can continue its valuable work in the future, for the sake of generations to come.*

*Ban Ki-moon  
Secretary-General of the United Nations*

### **1 Maintaining peace and security**

By sending 63 peacekeeping and observer missions to the world's trouble spots over the past 60 years, the UN has been able to restore calm, allowing many countries to recover from conflict.

### **2 Making peace**

Since the 1990s, many conflicts have ended either through UN mediation or the action of third parties acting with UN support. Research credits UN peacemaking, peacekeeping and conflict prevention activities as a major factor behind a 40-per cent decline in conflict around the world since the 1990s.

### **3 Preventing nuclear proliferation**

For over five decades, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has served as the world's nuclear inspector. IAEA experts work to verify that safeguarded nuclear material is used only for peaceful purposes. To date, the Agency has safeguards agreements with 163 States.

### **4 Promoting development**

The UN has devoted its attention and resources to promoting living standards and human skills and potential throughout the world, now guided by the Millennium Development Goals.

### **5 Focusing on African development**

The continent receives 38 per cent of UN system expenditures for development, the largest share among the world's regions. All UN agencies have special programmes to benefit Africa.

### **6 Seeking a global solution to climate change**

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which brings together 2,000 leading scientists, issues comprehensive scientific assessments every five or six years. The 192 members of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change are negotiating a long-term agreement that will reduce emissions that contribute to climate change and help countries adapt to its effects.

### **7 Helping countries to cope with climate change**

Twenty-seven UN agencies have formed a partnership to deal comprehensively with climate change. For instance, the Global Environment Facility allocates about \$250 million per year in projects on energy efficiency, renewable energies and sustainable transportation.

### **8 Protecting the environment**

As an international forum for building consensus

and negotiating agreements, the UN is tackling global problems like climate change, ozone layer depletion, toxic waste, loss of forests and species, and air and water pollution.

### **9 Promoting human rights**

Since the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the UN has helped to enact dozens of comprehensive agreements on political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights, and has generated international pressure on Governments to improve their human rights records.

### **10 Fostering democracy**

The UN promotes and strengthens democratic institutions and practices around the world, by helping people in many countries to participate in free and fair elections. The UN has provided electoral advice and assistance, and in some cases election monitors, **to more than 100** countries.

### **11 Promoting women's rights**

The 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, ratified by 185 countries, has helped to promote the rights of women worldwide.

### **12 Prosecuting war criminals**

By prosecuting and convicting war criminals, the UN tribunals established for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda have helped to expand international humanitarian and international criminal law dealing with genocide and other violations of international law.

### **13 Ending apartheid in South Africa**

By imposing measures ranging from an arms embargo to a convention against segregated sporting events, the United Nations was a major factor in bringing about the downfall of the apartheid system.

### **14 Promoting self-determination and independence**

When the United Nations was established in 1945, 750 million people—almost a third of the world population—lived in non-self-governing territories dependent on colonial powers. The UN played a role in bringing about the independence of more than 80 countries that are now sovereign nations.

### **15 Strengthening international law**

Over 510 multilateral treaties—on human rights, terrorism, global crime, refugees, disarmament, trade, commodities, the oceans and many other matters—have been negotiated and concluded

through the efforts of the United Nations.

### **16 Providing humanitarian aid to refugees**

More than 50 million refugees fleeing persecution, violence and war have received aid from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) since 1951, an effort that continues today.

### **17 Aiding Palestine refugees**

As the global community strives for a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians, the UN has assisted four generations of Palestinian refugees.

### **18 Alleviating rural poverty in developing countries**

Since 1978, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has invested more than \$10 billion, *helping more than 300 million rural poor increase their incomes and provide for their families.*

### **19 Promoting women's well-being**

The UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) supports programmes in more than 100 countries to eliminate violence against women, reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, and support women's political participation and economic security.

### **20 Promoting reproductive and maternal health**

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has helped women make informed choices and has given families greater control over their lives, through voluntary family planning programmes.

### **21 Providing safe drinking water**

During the first UN decade on water (1981-1990), more than a billion people gained access to safe drinking water for the first time in their lives. By 2002, another 1.1 billion people had clean water.

### **22 Responding to HIV/AIDS**

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) coordinates global action against an epidemic that affects some 33 million people.

### **23 Eradicating smallpox**

A 13-year effort by the World Health Organization (WHO) resulted in smallpox being declared officially eradicated from the planet in 1980. The eradication has saved an estimated \$1 billion a year in vaccination and monitoring, almost three times the cost of eliminating the scourge itself.

### **24 Wiping out polio**

Poliomyelitis has been eliminated from all but four

countries—Afghanistan, India, Nigeria and Pakistan - thanks to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, spearheaded by the WHO, UNICEF, Rotary and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Nearly 5 million children are walking who would otherwise have been paralyzed by polio.

### **25 Fighting neglected tropical diseases**

UN programmes eliminated river blindness in 10 West African countries while opening up 25 million hectares of fertile land to farming, and led to the elimination of the dreaded screw worm in North Africa. Guinea-worm disease is on the verge of being eradicated, while other neglected diseases, such as leprosy, lymphatic filariasis, schistosomiasis and sleeping sickness are now under control.

### **26 Halting the spread of epidemics**

The World Health Organization helped to stop the spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), which had the potential to become a worldwide epidemic. WHO investigates over 200 disease outbreaks each year, 15 to 20 of which require an international response.

### **27 Pressing for universal immunization**

Immunization now saves more than 2 million lives every year. As a result of efforts by the WHO, UNICEF, other organizations and governments, an estimated 79 per cent of the world's children are now vaccinated with the diphtheria-pertussis-tetanus vaccine, up from 20 per cent in 1980. Between 2000 and 2006, measles deaths in Africa declined by 91 per cent, with a two-thirds reduction globally.

### **28 Reducing child mortality**

In 1990, 1 out of 10 children died before they were five years old. Through oral rehydration therapy, water and sanitation programmes, and other health and nutrition measures undertaken by UN agencies, child mortality rates in developing countries had dropped to less than 1 in 12 by 2006. The goal is now to reduce the 1990 under-five mortality rate by two thirds by 2015.

### **29 Laying the groundwork for business**

The United Nations is good for business. It has provided the “soft infrastructure” for the global economy by negotiating universally accepted technical standards in such diverse areas as statistics, trade law, customs procedures, intellectual property, aviation, shipping and telecommunications. It has laid the groundwork for investment in developing economies by promoting stability and good governance.

### **30 Supporting industry in developing countries**

The UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has served as a “matchmaker” for North-South and South-South industrial cooperation, promoting entrepreneurship, investment, technology transfer and cost-effective and sustainable industrial development.

### **31 Helping disaster victims**

When natural disasters and emergencies arise, the UN coordinates and mobilizes assistance to the victims by working together with governments, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, and major aid organizations and donors. UN appeals raise several billion dollars a year for emergency assistance.

### **32 Reducing the effects of natural disasters**

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has helped to spare millions of people from the calamitous effects of both natural and man-made disasters. Its early warning system has made it possible to predict with greater accuracy weather-related disasters.

### **33 Providing tsunami relief**

Within 24 hours of the Indian Ocean tsunami of 26 December 2004, UN disaster assessment and coordination experts were dispatched. The United Nations assisted the survivors, distributing food to more than 1.7 million individuals, providing shelter for more than 1.1 million made homeless, providing drinking water to more than 1 million and vaccinating more than 1.2 million children against measles.

### **34 Protecting the ozone layer**

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) have been instrumental in highlighting the damage caused to Earth's ozone layer. As a result of a treaty known as the Montreal Protocol, governments are phasing out chemicals that have caused the depletion of the ozone layer and replacing them with safer alternatives.

### **35 Clearing landmines**

The United Nations clears landmines in 42 countries or territories. The UN also teaches people how to stay safe, helps victims to become self-sufficient, assists countries in destroying stockpiled landmines and advocates for full international participation in treaties related to landmines.

### **36 Providing food to the neediest**

The World Food Programme (WFP), the world's largest humanitarian agency, reaches an average of 90 million hungry people in 80 countries every year, including most of the world's refugees and internally displaced people.

### 37 Fighting hunger

*The Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) leads global efforts to defeat hunger. FAO also helps developing countries to modernize and improve agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices in ways that conserve natural resources and improve nutrition.*

### 38 Tackling fish stock depletion

Seventy per cent of the world's major commercial fish stocks are exploited to their sustainable limits or beyond. FAO monitors global fisheries production and the status of wild fish stocks and works with countries to improve the management of fisheries, stamp out illegal fishing, promote responsible international fish trade and protect fragile species and environments.

### 39 Banning toxic chemicals

The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants lists some of the most dangerous chemicals ever created. Ratified by 150 countries, the Convention targets 12 hazardous pesticides and industrial chemicals that can kill people, cause disease, and interfere with child development.

### 40 Protecting consumers' health

To ensure the safety of food sold in the marketplace, FAO and the World Health Organization, working with Member States, have established standards for over 230 food commodities, safety limits for more than 3,000 food contaminants, and regulations on food processing, transport, storage, and labeling.

### 41 Combating terrorism

In 2006, the UN adopted a global strategy to counter terrorism—the first time that all countries agreed to a common approach to fighting terrorism. **Sixteen** global legal instruments have been negotiated under UN auspices, including treaties against hostage-taking, aircraft hijacking, terrorist bombings, terrorism financing and, most recently, nuclear terrorism.

### 42 Handing down judgments in major international disputes

By delivering judgments and advisory opinions, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has helped to settle international disputes involving territorial questions, maritime boundaries, diplomatic relations, State responsibility, the treatment of aliens and the use of force, among others.

### 43 Improving global trade relations

The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has helped developing countries to negotiate trade agreements and to win

preferential treatment for their exports, and to integrate into the global economy.

### 44 Promoting economic reform

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have helped many countries to improve their economic management, provided temporary financial assistance to countries to help ease balance-of-payment difficulties and offered training for government finance officials.

### 45 Promoting stability and order in the world's oceans

The United Nations has spearheaded international efforts to regulate the use of the oceans under a single treaty. The 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which has gained nearly universal acceptance, provides the legal framework for all activities in the oceans and seas.

### 46 Improving aviation and shipping

UN agencies have been responsible for setting safety standards for aviation and shipping. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has contributed to making air travel the safest mode of transportation. Likewise, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has helped to make the seas cleaner and shipping safer and more secure.

### 47 Combating international crime

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) works with countries and organizations to counter transnational organized crime including corruption, money-laundering, drug trafficking and smuggling of migrants, as well as by strengthening criminal justice systems.

### 48 Containing the world drug problem

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) works to reduce the supply of and demand for illicit drugs under the three main UN conventions on drug control.

### 49 Promoting decent work

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has established standards and fundamental principles and rights for work, including freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of forced labour, the abolition of child labour and the elimination of workplace discrimination.

### 50 Improving literacy and education in developing countries

Today 83 per cent of adults in developing countries can read and write and 84 per cent of children attend primary school. Programmes aimed at promoting education and advancement

for women helped to raise the female literacy rate in developing countries from 36 per cent in 1970 to 79 per cent in 2007.

### **51 Generating worldwide commitment in support of children**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child has become law in 193 countries, and 190 Governments have committed themselves to a time-bound set of goals in the areas of health, education, protection against abuse, exploitation and violence and the struggle against HIV/AIDS.

### **52 Preserving historic, cultural, architectural and natural sites**

The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has helped 137 countries to protect ancient monuments and historic, cultural and natural sites. More than 850 such sites have been designated as having exceptional universal value.

### **53 Facilitating academic and cultural exchanges**

The United Nations, through UNESCO and the United Nations University, has encouraged scholarly and scientific cooperation, networking of higher education institutions and promotion of cultural expression, including for minorities and indigenous people.

### **54 Encouraging creativity and innovation**

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) promotes the protection of intellectual property rights and ensures that all countries are in a position to harness the benefits of an effective intellectual property system.

### **55 Promoting press freedom and freedom of expression**

UNESCO has helped to develop and strengthen the media and supported independent newspapers and broadcasters. UNESCO also serves as a watchdog for press freedom, and

publicly denounces serious violations like the assassination and detention of journalists.

### **56 Improving housing and city management**

Cities are now home to half of humankind. The UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), with over 150 technical programmes and projects in some 50 countries, works with governments, local authorities and non-governmental organizations to seek innovative solutions for towns and cities.

### **57 Providing local access to a global network**

The Universal Postal Union (UPU) facilitates the exchange of international mail and some 660,000 post offices form one of the most extensive networks in the world, facilitating the transfer of information, goods and money.

### **58 Promoting the rights of persons with disabilities**

The United Nations has been at the forefront of the fight for full equality for persons with disabilities, promoting their participation in social, economic and political life, and has negotiated the first-ever treaty to advance their rights and dignity worldwide: the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which entered into force in 2008.

### **59 Improving global telecommunications**

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) brings together Governments and industry to develop and coordinate the operation of global telecommunication networks and services.

### **60 Improving the plight of indigenous people**

The UN's 16-member Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, established in 2000, works to improve the situation of the 370 million to 500 million indigenous peoples who live in some 90 countries worldwide in development, culture, human rights, the environment, education and health.

(Go to [www.un.lk](http://www.un.lk) to see what the UN is doing for Sri Lanka.)