# UNITED NATIONS – in a nutshell (Part I)

*I work for the United Nations Headquarters at the Department for Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat. Within this Department, I work for the Office of ECOSOC support and coordination.*

We knew the UN is not an easy enterprise to get into, but I did a lot about it in my studies and still admit that it probably took me still 2 months of my 6-months internship to get comfortable with the diverse abbreviations, responsibilities and regulations.

So here a quick overview of the UN – in a nutshell. Behind that bureaucratic monster lies one of the most glamourous and idealistic undertakings and one of the most politicized institutions of the world.

Where to start? In 1945, the second world war was over (at least in some parts of the world) and the “leaders of the peace” came together with the honorable aim of preventing a third World War. This noble undertaking cumulated into the establishment of the United Nations (even though there had already existed an organization called the League of Nations, which was established after WWI to prevent a Second World War and obviously – failed!). However, the United Nations with its initial 51 member-states has since grown into an organization with 193 members and has just recently celebrated its 70th birthday (I was there to eat the “bluest” cake of my life).

The UN Headquarters were built in 1952 in New York (the US was at that time very pro-UN and the only country which was willing and stable enough to host the newly established organization). Now, there are also additional headquarters in Geneva (WHO, UNHCR, UNOCHA and a lot of disarmament stuff), Vienna (Industry, Drugs, IAEA etc.) and Nairobi (UNEP, UN Habitat). Once on UN grounds you are not in officially in the US anymore, which explains that the UN has some special visa requirements/allowances and of course a separate security system (which is a pain in the ass every early morning to get into). The UN is sort of headed by the Secretary General, currently His High Excellency António Guterres from Portugal.

Okay, so far so good. What does the UN do? The UN consists of 6 major parts, which are very nicely called the*‘principle organs’*.

Everyone knows the General Assembly, the biggest *organ* of the UN. The GA is, where all 193 member states (plus two observer states Palestine and the Holy See (Vatican)) meet every September for the GA sessions.

The beginnings of such sessions are called ‘General Debates’, this is the time when all the heads of states come to the UN to meet and greet and have some backdoor talks in the delegates lounge. After that, the GA debates a looot of issues. The heads of states obviously have other stuff to do, so the missions to the UN (all the member-states have some sort of mini-embassy with a team for the UN) send delegates to the different commissions of the GA to work on Resolutions.