# UNITED NATIONS – in a nutshell (Part II)

Then there’s of course the Security Council, theprobably best known of the organs, with its permanent members (France, UK, US, Russia, China) and its current non-permanent members Belgium, Côte d’Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Germany, Indonesia, Kuwait, Peru, Poland, South Africa. The non-permanent members are elected by the GA for a two-year term.

The UNSC is responsible for international peace and security (really a simple task one would think for 15 member states representatives) and can to this end issue peacekeeping operations, sanctions and if necessary the use of force (military interventions). However, the infamous veto rights of the permanent members make this even more difficult than it could be.

*“We the peoples of the United Nations determined […] to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and […] to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom […] have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims”*

These are the parts of the beginning of the UN Charter, which allude to the responsibilities of the UN that go beyond security and to a more encompassing peace. There are three organs, responsible for these aims, which are the International Court of Justice inthe Hague, where disputes between states can be settled peacefully. It is the main court for international law. There is also one organ which is currently inactive – a good sign if you think about it. The Trusteeship Council was responsible for questions of colonized territories up until in 1994 the last nation, Palau, finally became decolonized. Today its chambers are used by the other organs of the system for their sessions and meetings.

The organ I was mostly involved with during my time at the UN is the Economic and Social Council of the UN. The ECOSOC is responsible for the coordination of the work of the specialised agencies of the UN and also gives policy recommendations related to social and economic questions and working towards sustainable development. It has 54 members. Together with the secretariat and the agencies, ECOSOC hosts a bunch of conferences, high-level meetings and fora, such as the Youth Forum, the Conference on Financing for Development and the Development Cooperation Forum – just to name a few. Also, the ECOSOC is the only of the organs, which, according to the Charter has to interact with civil society. Even though, compared to the Security Council, ECOSOC has less power to provide binding decisions, in my opinion it is just as interesting – maybe more so, because, referencing one of the many speechmakers I listened to on ECOSOCs anniversary: *The Security Council tries to fix what’s already broken and deals with conflicts which have erupted, whereas ECOSOC is the organ responsible to avoid these conflicts in the first place and fix the root causes of poverty, war and disaster.*

In the end, people from within my field usually have a very strong opinion of the UN, either they adore and hail it as the one and only institution in the world where all nations come together to talk instead of fight – or they reject it as one more corrupted and hypocritical institution where world leaders close their backdoor deals and where little is achieved for the common good. I agree with both of these assessments.

In the end, as always, it’s not clear cut. I really like this quote by the former UN Secretary General, even though it is already very used: UN was not created to take the world to heaven, but to save humanity from hell.