

# IS THE UNITED NATIONS STILL RELEVANT?

## Introduction

The United Nations is unusual in that it consists of 191 nations with 191 differing histories and 191 perspectives that are all bound by the terms of the same Charter. How can this work? According to John Negroponte the answer is, "Promoting policies that support the freedom and well-being of people in their own nation-state, not by pursuing the illusions of world government." The United Nation's mission statement states that its purpose is to keep peace throughout the world, to develop friendly relations between nations and to work together to help people live better lives by eliminating poverty, disease and to stop environmental destruction. In spite of these lofty goals, many people feel that the United Nations has not accomplished what they set out to do. They point to the failure of the UN in dealing with the genocide in Rwanda, failure to deliver food to starving people in Somalia, and the recent Oil-for-Food scandal. In spite of these problems, I feel that the United Nations is still a vital organization that gives countries facing difficult situations a world stage to deal with their problems.

## The Children of the Middle East

Who will stand up for the children of the world? How will their voices be heard? Thanks to the United Nations, an official concluded a two-week mission to Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the UN Special Representative for children and armed conflict, found the children to be plagued by fear, anxiety, anger, and feeling of hopelessness. The objective of the visit was to see first hand the situation of the children and ensure greater protection for them. The UN addressed their concerns with the countries involved and helped plan a course of action. Some feel that the UN should not be involved in the internal problems of countries, but the UN has the ability to bring the problem back to all the members and challenge them to make a difference. In doing this, the children will have the International community involved, and the problems will be addressed. If not for the UN, the world may not know of the plight of the children in these war-torn areas.

## Machu Picchu and the Environment

Machu Picchu, Peru might not seem important to us, but, in 1983, it was added to the World Heritage list. It is an outstanding Andean archaeological center. The UN met with government officials to monitor implementation of a master plan for the area. They will try to protect the natural environment of flora and fauna and try to halt mudslides and fires which have had a disastrous effect on Machu Picchu. The world belongs to all of us. It is the responsibility of all of us to make sure that we leave it as we found it, if not better. The UN has been challenged by some of its members to spend less time worrying about environmental issues and more time addressing world peace. However, the UN is able to bring these issues and many others

to the attention of the world. It is likely we would not know about the problems facing the environment in different parts of the world without the UN highlighting them and bringing them back to the member nations. It is very easy to think locally, but the UN forces us to think and act globally.

## **Darfur, Sudan Conflict**

Darfur, Sudan may be half way around the world for many of us, so it would be unlikely that we would know what is happening there. The National Security and Intelligence Service of the UN again brought the conflict to the attention of the world. The commission found that more than 70,000 people died as a result of violence and malnutrition. They found that more than 1.6 million people have been displaced because of the violence. The UN is responsible for bringing it to the attention of the world and monitoring the policies set down by the members of the United Nations. Without the help of the UN, this might have been an atrocity half way around the world that went unnoticed.

## **Conclusion**

In the United Nations, even the smallest and least powerful nations are given a voice. Despite the problems that arise when nations attempt to reach decisions on world affairs the UN is still a significant force in world affairs. In a report published in the Oxford University press (2006), it is believed that International activism, mostly spearheaded by the UN, has been the main cause of the Cold War decline in armed conflict. The report singles out these particular achievements: A fourfold increase in the number of UN Peacekeeping operations, an 80% drop in genocide, and an elevenfold increase in the number of economic sanctions against problem nations. These are impressive numbers and should speak for themselves. In 1945, President Franklin Roosevelt declared: "The structure of world peace cannot be the work of one man, or one party, or one nation." Peace is the responsibility of every nation and every generation. The UN is not perfect, but they have been a force in helping nations and people who can not help themselves. It is also an important stage for all peoples who need to be heard by the International community.