***The United Nations***

**Glossary**

**Forum**: a place where people can meet and discuss questions or problems.

**Unanimous**: agreement by everyone involved.

**Sovereignty:** when you are independent. Usually refers to a country or geographical area. United States is sovereign. Alaska is not.

**Veto**: forbidding of something by a person in authority.

**Charter**: an official document that outlines the organization and purpose of an organization.

**Basic Facts of the United Nations**

The United Nations was founded in 1945 with the mission to maintain world peace, develop good relations between countries, promote cooperation in solving the world’s problems, and encourage a respect for human rights. It provides the nations of the world a **forum** to balance their national interests with the interests of the global whole. It operates on the voluntary cooperation and participation of its member nations.

Currently, there are 193 member countries. These countries agree to peacefully settle disputes, refrain from threatening or using force against each other, and refuse to help other nations that oppose the U.N.’s mission.

**Organization of the UN**

The United Nations is made up of five main sections or organs.

1) The General Assembly, which is made up of representatives from each of the UN Member States. Each Member State has one vote.

2) The Security Council, which is made up of 5 permanent members and 10 non-permanent members. The five permanent Member States, are the victors of WWII: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These five have extraordinary power; any of them can **veto** any Security Council measure. The Security Council’s main goal is to maintain international peace and security. It is the only UN body that may authorize military action and create legally binding resolutions on international peace and security.

3) The Economic and Social Council is made up of 54 members elected by the General Assembly for three-year terms. It coordinates economic, social, and other related work of the UN.

4) The International Court of Justice has 15 members who are judges from different countries elected by the General Assembly and Security Council. The Court settles legal disputes between nations.

5) The Secretariat is made up of people from each of the Member States who implement the day-to-day UN programs around the world. The head of the Secretariat is the Secretary-General (currently Ban Ki-Moon of South Korea).

**Creation of the United Nations**

The idea of an international peace keeping organization became a reality after World War I with the creation of the League of Nations. During its operation from 1920 and 1946 the League enjoyed a few successes but ultimately failed when it couldn’t prevent World War II.

While fighting the Axis powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan during World War II, United States President, Franklin Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin met several times between 1941 and 1945 to develop an international peacekeeping organization with the goal of preventing future wars on the scale of World War II. In April of 1945, even before the war was officially over, representatives from 50 countries met in San Francisco to create the **charter** for the United Nations. Similar to the League of Nations, the U.N. was created to promote international peace and prevent another world war.

**Accomplishments of the United Nations:**

During its 60-year history, the U.N. has achieved many remarkable accomplishments in fulfilling it goals. The U.N. has peacefully negotiated 172 peace settlements that have ended regional conflicts and is credited with participation in over 300 international treaties on topics as varied as human rights conventions to agreements on the use of outer space and the oceans. The U.N. has also made great strides in raising the consciousness of human rights beginning with the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” adopted by the General Assembly in 1948.

**Limitations of the United Nations**

Without the unanimous approval and support of the five permanent members of the Security Council the U.N. can only report on and make recommendations about international conflicts. This has lead to the failure of the U.N. from becoming involved in a number of international conflicts and even genocides in Rwanda, Darfur and other countries. Even if these members do come to an agreement the U.N. can only send peacekeepers, which are volunteers from the member states since the U.N. does not have an army. These peacekeepers must follow very specific guidelines about what they can and cannot do. They can only go to keep peace in a country if they are invited and they are usually only allowed to shoot in self defense. Because of this they have often been unable to stop conflicts.