INTRODUCTION
Since its establishment in 1945, the United Nations has played a prominent role in the development of international law. This role has two major components: first, the development and implementation of international law through the promulgation and administration of international agreements and second, through the decisions and opinions of the International Court of Justice. The peacekeeping mission of the United Nations, exercised through the Security Council, has also reinforced and promoted the established principles of international law.

The United Nations and the International Court of Justice are not the only sources of international law, however. A researcher should not limit any work in the area of international law to the efforts of the United Nations and the International Court of Justice. This guide is designed to provide a researcher with an introduction to United Nations materials and their finding aids, and it should not be seen as an overview of the entire body of international law.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE UNITED NATIONS
There are six principal organs of the United Nations established under the Charter of 1945. These principal organs are the General Assembly, the Security Council, the International Court of Justice, the Trusteeship Council, the Secretariat and the Economic and Social Council.

The General Assembly is the major deliberative body of the United Nations. Its wide-ranging agenda includes political, security, economic, financial, social, humanitarian, cultural and legal issues. The General Assembly also oversees procedural and budgetary matters. This agenda is administered by two general committees and seven substantive or main committees.

Under Article 24 of the United Nations Charter, the Security Council has the “primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.” It may act with regard to peaceful settlement of disputes, and it also may act with respect to threats to and breaches of the peace. The Council has 15 members, including five permanent members: China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and the United States. Each of the five permanent members has veto power on substantive decisions. The affirmative vote of nine members is needed for procedural and substantive decisions.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. Member nations are by their status parties to the Statute of the ICJ, which governs its operation. The ICJ consists of 15 judges, elected by the General Assembly and the Security Council. Judges serve a nine-year term and may be reelected. The ICJ’s jurisdiction extends to cases brought by state parties. The General Assembly, the Security Council and other United Nations organs and agencies may request an advisory opinion from the Court.

The Trusteeship Council is empowered by the Charter to oversee the economic, political, educational and social development in territories placed under trusteeship by the United Nations.

The Secretariat is the chief administrative office for the United Nations. The Secretary General performs the many duties entrusted to the office by the General Assembly and the other principal organs. The Secretary General reports annually to the General Assembly on the work of the United Nations.

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) operates under the authority of the General Assembly. It has 54 members, elected by the General Assembly for three-year terms. The ECOSOC is principally responsible for the economic and social activities of the United Nations. Article 62 of the Charter empowers it to “make or initiate studies and reports with respect to international economic, social, cultural, educational, health, and related matters” and to make recommendations regarding these issues to the General Assembly, member nations and specialized agencies. In addition to reports and recommendations, the ECOSOC may prepare draft conventions for submission to the General Assembly. The ECOSOC also includes a number of subsidiary bodies, such as the Commission on Human Rights, the Commission on the Status of Women, and various regional commissions, as well as standing committees such as the Committee on Natural Resources and the Committee on Science and Technology for Development.
Specialized Agencies

Types of United Nations Publications
Every year the United Nations produces thousands of publications relating to its work. United Nations publications, other than opinions of the International Court of Justice, fall into one of three categories:

Official Records
These are published by the General Assembly, the ECOSOC, the Security Council, the Trusteeship Council and many specialized agencies. These publications contain speeches, documents, reports and actions for each organ’s or agency’s session. Speeches and voting records are included in the meeting records; documents relating to the work of the session are included in the annexes; and the major reports, resolutions and decisions are included in the supplements. Rule 20.7.1 of The Blue Book: A Uniform System of Citation provides a detailed description of each part of the Official Records.

Sales Publication
Many important reports, studies, documents and proceedings are also published outside the Official Records series and are offered for sale to the general public. These publications are included as part of the United Nations Depository Library program.

Mimeographed Publications
The United Nations produces many of its documents in mimeograph form; these publications are not offered for sale to the general public. Mimeograph publications are frequently draft versions of reports, studies, or international agreements. Occasionally these publications are intended for limited distribution and are not included in the United Nations Depository program.

Where to Find United Nations Publications
The Boston College Law Library has on microfiche the Readex Corporation’s United Nations Documents and Publications, from 1946 to the present. The library’s microfiche collection includes as complete a range as possible of sales and mimeographed publications, as well as the Official Records of the General Assembly, the ECOSOC, the Security Council and the Trusteeship Council. The library also holds the Human Rights segment of the Readex microfiche collection, which includes publications of the Commission on Human Rights. Please consult library staff for assistance with the Readex United Nations Documents and Publications microfiche service.
The O’Neill Library on the main campus of Boston College also has an extensive collection of United Nations publications and reference materials.

Unless a publication is designated as limited, it should be included in the collection of a United Nations Depository Library. The Widener Library at Harvard University is a United Nations Depository Library. Please contact a member of the Boston College Law Library staff for more information about using the United Nations collection at Harvard University.

The United Nations has established a significant presence on the Internet. Visit the United Nations Home Page at http://www.un.org for information about the structure of the United Nations and general as well as topical research guides. There are also links to other related web sites and links to the full text of United Nations documents.

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**CITATION FORM FOR UNITED NATIONS PUBLICATIONS**

To access United Nations publications, a researcher must understand the document series symbols developed by the United Nations. The document series is made up of distinct alphanumeric elements which identify the authority under which the document is produced. The alphanumeric elements are separated by oblique slashes (/) and are composed of capital letters and figures, usually Arabic numerals. Roman numerals are used to designate a session number or a subsidiary organ. Each element of the document series symbols provides a specific piece of information about the document which, taken together, provide the researcher with an understanding of which agency published the document and when.

Set out below are examples of the citation form for United Nations publications, including the U.N. Document Symbol:


Citations to Official Records should also include a reference to the session, organ or agency, and the type of Official Record, as in the following example:
UN General Assembly Resolutions are published as supplements in the General Assembly Official Records series.

The symbols for the principal organs of the United Nations are:

- **A/-** General Assembly
- **E/-** Economic and Social Council
- **ICJ** International Court of Justice
- **S/-** Security Council
- **ST/-** Secretariat
- **T/-** Trusteeship Council

Symbols for some subsidiary organs of the United Nations include:

- **AT/-** Administrative Tribunal
- **CAT/-** Convention Against Torture
- **CCPR/-** Int'l Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- **CEDAW/-** Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- **CERD/-** Int'l Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- **CRC/-** Convention on the Rights of the Child

The following symbols are used with numbers in identifying specific subsidiary bodies:

- **/-AC.#** Ad Hoc Committee
- **/-C.#** Standing, Permanent, or Main Committee
- **/-CN.#** Commission
- **/-CONF.#** Conference
- **/-Sub.#** Sub-commission

A more detailed list of many of the alphanumeric elements of the United Nations Document Series is available in the front of each issue of UNDOC: *Current Index: United Nation Document Index*, discussed in the next section of the guide.

**WHERE TO FIND ICJ OPINIONS**

The decisions, orders and opinions of the ICJ are available at the Boston College Law Library in three sources:


- Westlaw, INT-ICJ database, 1947—.


**HOW TO FIND UNITED NATIONS PUBLICATIONS**

To use any collection of United Nations documents effectively, a researcher must locate the relevant United Nations citation for a document. The following research tools provide the citations to documents. They also may provide analysis of the document or the text of the document itself, particularly if it is a United Nations Resolution or International Agreement.
Considering the enormous amount of United Nations material available, a researcher would be well advised to begin work with one of the general or subject guides discussed below. If a researcher wants to review material chronologically then use of the various United Nations Document Indices or annual publications might be a helpful starting point.

**General Guides**


**Yearbooks**


- United Nations Juridical Yearbook. New York: United Nations, 1964 —. Law General Collection KZ 4949 .U55. This annual publication gives a broader overview of legal activities of the United Nations. Its major drawback is the delay in its publication, which is now up to five years.

- Yearbook of the United Nations. New York: United Nations, 1947 —. Law General Collection JZ 4947 .U55. The annual survey of United Nations activity. It is one of the most useful tools available to the United Nations researcher. The Yearbook provides detailed analysis of the activities of the principal organs and related agencies for a particular year. The footnotes include extensive references to publications and their relevant citations. The full text of General Assembly and Security Council Resolutions are also reprinted. The major problem with the Yearbook is its delay in publication, which is now up to five years behind the current session.

**“Travaux Preparatoires” (Preparatory Works)**

The following compilations of documents and citations to United Nations publications are extremely useful for organizing a research project based upon one of these international agreements.


Subject Guides

  A publication of the United Nations Centre for Human Rights in Geneva, it provides a researcher with comprehensive coverage of the activities of all United Nations organs and agencies, from 1945. It arranges the topic by broad subject headings, with references to all the major international agreements and United Nations publications. This source is one of the best starting points for research in the area of human rights.

Indexes

The indexes to UN publications are designed to provide subject access to the material and a checklist of publications issued by a particular organ or agency. They are good starting points if a researcher wants a chronological approach to a topic or needs to find recent publications. Otherwise a researcher would do well to begin with a general or subject guide, which provides a more organized and comprehensive approach.

  This index covers the formative years of the United Nations as well as documents involved in the drafting of many major international agreements, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It provides subject access and an annual cumulative list of documents issued by United Nations organs and agencies.

- *UNDEX.* Series C. Cumulative Edition, 1974-1978. 4 volumes
  This set provides publication information on documents issued by the United Nations and the International Court of Justice. The arrangement is by United Nations Document Number, thus allowing a researcher to find all the documents issued by a particular United Nations organ or agency for this time period. This set contains neither a subject index nor a country index.

  The official United Nations Documents Index was formed by the merger of the three parts of its predecessor, UNINDEX. The index provides subject, personal/corporate author and title access, as well as a list of publications arranged by United Nations Document number. UNDOC ceased publication in September, 1996. Please note that the law library's collection of UNDOC begins with volume 9 in 1987. The O'Neill Government Documents collection is complete.

  A part of the United Nations web site, UN-I-QUE is a ready reference file designed to provide quick access to United Nations document symbols/sales number for United Nations materials. UN-I-QUE focuses on documents of a recurring nature, e.g., annual/sessional reports of committees and commissions, annual publications and reports of major conferences. It does not provide full bibliographic details, and it is not intended to replace the other available United Nations indices. Coverage for documents included in the database is 1946 onwards.

- *AccessUN,* 1966-present. This Readex United Nations Index provides access to current and retrospective United Nations documents and publications. The index can be reached through the Boston College Law Library's web site at http://www.bc.edu/schools/law/library/research/international and following the links to AccessUN. Access to this database is restricted to those with a connection to the Boston College network.

Treaties and International Agreements

  This one-volume index provides access to multilateral treaties from 1856. Arranged chronologically, it includes information on the parties to the treaty or agreement, the date concluded, current status, the location of the text in various treaty collections and a general description of the treaty or agreement. It also features subject and keyword indexing. The supplement contains the same information for treaties and agreement from 1983-1994 and updated status information for the earlier treaties and agreements.

- *Status of Multilateral Treaties Deposited with the Secretary General.* http://untreaty.un.org
  A very valuable resource for anyone undertaking United Nations research, this database provides a subject arrangement of the major UN multilateral treaties. It provides information on the status of the treaties, date of
entry into force and the cite to the text in the *United Nations Treaty Series*. The text of any state party’s reservation or declaration on the treaty is also set out.

**Document Collections**


- **International Legal Materials, v. 1—, 1962—. LAW LIBRARY RESERVE and LAW GENERAL COLLECTION KZ 64 .I58.**

  Published by the American Society of International Law on a bimonthly basis, this journal provides researchers with current documents of international law, including General Assembly and Security Council Resolutions and the text of current United Nations drafted international instruments. It has annual and cumulative subject indices and jurisdictional entries, including a general United Nations entry.


  Article 102 of the United Nations Charter requires every member state to register any treaty or agreement entered into with the Secretariat, for publication by the United Nations. This series is the result of that mandate. Despite the requirement, not every treaty or agreement is registered, and the delay in publication of the series also lessens its effectiveness. It is, nevertheless, one of the most comprehensive collections of treaties and agreements available to a researcher. The law library has volumes 1-500 on microfiche, and volumes 500 forward in paper. An electronic version of this set can be found at [http://untreaty.un.org](http://untreaty.un.org).

**Current Awareness**

These sources provide a researcher with up-to-date information about the activities and publications of the UN.

- **LexisNexis and Westlaw**

  Both of these online services have databases that provide current information on the United Nations, through newspapers, periodicals, newsletters and wire services. They also include the full text of important sources such as *International Legal Materials*. Consult the online database directories or ask a legal information librarian for help.

- **United Nations Chronicle. v. 1—, 1963—. LAW PERIODICALS U v. 27, 1990-.**

  A quarterly publication of the United Nations Office of Public Information, this journal is designed to provide highlights of recent United Nations activity and a schedule of upcoming meetings and events. Please note that our holdings begin with volume 27 in 1990.

- **Internet**

  Internet resources, such as the United Nations’ web site, provide current information on UN activities and publications. The United Nations web site is at [http://www.un.org](http://www.un.org). The United Nations Drug Control Program, based in Vienna, has a very useful web site, with many links to other UN-related sites. These links are at [http://www.undcp.org/unlinks.html](http://www.undcp.org/unlinks.html). The United Nations Scholars’ Workstation at Yale University, [http://www.library.yale.edu/un](http://www.library.yale.edu/un), is a collection of texts, finding aids, data sets, maps and pointers to print and electronic information about the UN and its affiliated organizations.
SOURCES OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

United Nations

  A well-written, concise overview of the United Nations, its publications, and the UN document system.
  A very useful overview of the UN’s structure, as well as a detailed look at UN publications and electronic resources.

Research Guides for International Law


Basic International Law Treatises


An electronic version of this guide can be found at [http://www.bc.edu/schools/law/library/research/researchguides/](http://www.bc.edu/schools/law/library/research/researchguides/)

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