

UNIT 1



United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)

Security | Solidarity | Sustainability



Quick Knowledge

As of August 2024

Chinese Name:	联合国大会
English Name:	United Nations General Assembly
Abbreviation:	UNGA
Headquarters:	New York, USA
Formation:	24 October 1945
Membership:	193 Member States
China's Membership:	1945, membership reconfirmed 1971
President:	Philémon Yang (elected 2024 for a one-year term)

Introduction

What is UNGA?

Established in 1945 under the *Charter of the United Nations*, the General Assembly (GA) occupies a central position as the chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the UN. All 193 Member States of the UN are represented in the GA, making it the only UN body with universal representation, and a unique forum for multilateral discussion of the full spectrum of international issues covered by the Charter. It also plays a central role in the process of standard-setting and the codification of international law.

The Assembly meets in regular annual sessions from September to December each year, and in special sessions as occasion may require. The Assembly discusses specific issues through dedicated agenda items or sub-items, which lead to the adoption of resolutions.

What does UNGA do?

The Assembly makes key decisions for the UN, including:

- appointing the Secretary-General on the recommendation of the Security Council;
- electing the non-permanent members of the Security Council;
- considering and approving the UN budget.

Each of the 193 Member States in the Assembly has one vote. Votes taken on designated important issues—such as recommendations on peace and security, the election of Security Council and Economic and Social Council members, and budgetary questions—require a two-thirds majority of Member States, but other questions are decided by a simple majority.

At the 26th session of the GA in 1971, Resolution 2758 entitled *Restoration of the Lawful Rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations* was adopted, which recognizes that the representatives of the Government of the People's Republic of China are the only lawful representatives of China to the UN and

that the People's Republic of China is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council.

How is UNGA structured?

The GA is headed by its President who is elected each year to serve a one-year term of office. The President is elected in accordance with the established regional rotation. Five of the 21 Vice-Presidents are from the five permanent members of the Security Council, and the other 16 are elected at the plenary meeting in line with the seats distributed to the regional groups—six for the Group of African States, five for Asia-Pacific States, three for Latin American and Caribbean States, two for Western European and other States, and one for Eastern European States. One seat of the region where the President is from will be cut down.

The GA establishes six Main Committees, including Disarmament and International Security Committee (First Committee), Economic and Financial Committee (Second Committee), Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues Committee (Third Committee), Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), Administrative and

Budgetary Committee (Fifth Committee), and Legal Committee (Sixth Committee). Each Member may be represented by one person on each Main Committee and on any other committee that may be established upon which all Members have the right to be represented.

How is UNGA funded?

The main source of the GA's funds is the contributions of Member States, determined by considering their relative shares of total gross national product, plus a number of factors, including their per capita incomes. China's contribution to UN's funds has increased substantially over the past 20 years, from 0.995% in 2000 to 15.254% in 2023.

President

Philémon Yang from Cameroon was elected the president of the 79th session of the UNGA on 6 June 2024. Yang is the former Prime Minister of Cameroon and a seasoned diplomat with a track record of experience. His vision and commitment are based on the ideals, objectives and principles enshrined in the UN Charter concerning peace, security, economic and social development, and respect for human rights.



KEY CONCEPTS

- ① **baseline data:** Statistical information researchers collected at the beginning of a scientific study. The information serves as the starting point for the research project and it can help the researchers to develop hypotheses founded on results obtained previously by other investigators.
- ② **Least Developed Countries (LDCs):** Countries that are highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks and have low levels of human assets. According to the statistics released by the Committee for Development Policy (CDP) in 2024, there are 45 countries on the list of LDCs which is reviewed every three years by the CDP.
- ③ **Middle Income Countries (MICs):** MICs are divided by the World Bank Group as lower middle-income economies—those with a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita around \$1,136–\$4,465; and upper middle-income economies—those with a GNI per capita around \$4,466–\$13,845. MICs represent about one third of global GDP.
- ④ **planet degradation:** The long-term trends towards increasing environmental degradation and scarcity of natural resources owing to the fact that the nature on earth has been irreversibly changed by human actions. The trends will pose significant challenges to the world, requiring international action to avoid the worst-case scenario.
- ⑤ **productive employment:** Employment that yields sufficient returns to labor to permit the worker and her/his dependents a level of consumption above the poverty line. Its synonym is decent employment, and its antonym is the deficit of productive employment.

KEY POINTS

- three dimensions of sustainable development
- actions for five Ps (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, Partnership)
- sustainable development targets and goals

Main Text

Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹

- [1] *The General Assembly*
Adopts the following outcome document of the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda:

¹ The Resolution (A/RES/70/1) was adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, at the fourth plenary meeting, 70th session. It is the agenda of the UN from 2015 to 2030. It is composed of five parts, including “Preamble”, “Declaration”, “Sustainable Development Goals and targets”, “Means of implementation and the Global Partnership”, “Follow-up and review”. The selection here is the “Preamble” and the beginning part of “Sustainable Development Goals and targets”.

Preamble

[5] This Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom. We recognize that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.

[10] All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan. We are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet. We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind.

[15] The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets which we are announcing today demonstrate the scale and ambition of this new universal Agenda. They seek to build on the Millennium Development Goals² and complete what they did not achieve. They seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.

[20] The Goals and targets will stimulate action over the next 15 years in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet.

People

[25] We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.

Planet

[30] We are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations.

Prosperity

We are determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.

Peace

[35] We are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear

² The Resolution was adopted at the 55th session of UNGA, in September 2000, as the UN agenda in the 21st century, often shortened as MDGs.

and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.

Partnership

[40] We are determined to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.

[45] The interlinkages and integrated nature of the Sustainable Development Goals are of crucial importance in ensuring that the purpose of the new Agenda is realized. If we realize our ambitions across the full extent of the Agenda, the lives of all will be profoundly improved and our world will be transformed for the better.

...

Sustainable Development Goals and targets

...

[50] 55. The Sustainable Development Goals and targets are integrated and indivisible, global in nature and universally applicable, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities. Targets are defined as aspirational and global, with each Government setting its own national targets guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances.

[55] Each Government will also decide how these aspirational and global targets should be incorporated into national planning processes, policies and strategies. It is important to recognize the link between sustainable development and other relevant ongoing processes in the economic, social and environmental fields.

[60] 56. In deciding upon these Goals and targets, we recognize that each country faces specific challenges to achieve sustainable development, and we underscore the special challenges facing the most vulnerable countries and, in particular, African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, as well as the specific challenges facing the middle-income countries. Countries in situations of conflict also need special attention.

[65] 57. We recognize that baseline data for several of the targets remains unavailable, and we call for increased support for strengthening data collection and capacity-building in Member States, to develop national and global baselines where they do not yet exist. We commit to addressing this gap in data collection so as to better inform the measurement of progress, in particular for those targets below which do not have clear numerical targets.

[70] 58. We encourage ongoing efforts by States in other forums to address key issues which pose potential challenges to the implementation of our Agenda, and we respect the independent mandates of those processes. We intend that the Agenda and its implementation would support, and be without prejudice to, those other processes and the decisions taken therein.

[75] 59. We recognize that there are different approaches, visions, models and tools available to each country, in accordance with its national circumstances and priorities, to achieve sustainable development; and we reaffirm that planet Earth and its ecosystems are our common home and that “Mother Earth” is a common expression in a number of countries and regions.

Sustainable Development Goals

[80] Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

[85] Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

[90] Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

[95] Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

- [100] Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
- Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- [105] Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

Post-class Tasks

I Read to Know

1. The following sentences are definitions or explanations of some of the words or expressions that are frequently adopted in the document of UNGA. Please match the definition or the explanation with the word, varying the form when necessary.

agenda	eradicate	resilient	fulfil	aspirational
landlocked	mandate	inclusive	terrestrial	vulnerable

- 1) While sustainability looks at how current generations can meet their needs without compromising that ability for future generations, _____ considers a system's ability to prepare for threats, to absorb impacts, and to recover and adapt after disruptive events.
- 2) An _____ refers to a plan or list of matters to be acted upon. For instance, sustainable development is placed firmly on the political _____ of the UN.
- 3) To _____ means to get rid of something completely or destroy something bad. For instance, to _____ poverty/diseases/corruption/misdemeanors.
- 4) A _____ is the authority given to an elected group of people, such as a government, to perform an action or govern a country.
- 5) The visions of an _____ society are that it is stable, safe, just and tolerant, and respect diversity, equality of opportunity, and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons.
- 6) A _____ country is an independent sovereign state that does not have direct access to an ocean, such as the Atlantic, or to a sea, such as the Mediterranean.
- 7) A _____ index is a measure of the exposure of a population to some hazard. Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative Index measures the overall _____ by

considering six life-supporting sectors—food, water, health, ecosystem service, human habitat and infrastructure.

- 8) A _____ ecosystem is a land-based community of organisms and the interactions of biotic and abiotic components in a given area. Examples of them include the tundra, taigas, temperate deciduous forests, tropical rainforests, grasslands, and deserts.
- 9) _____ goals refer to extremely lofty goals that push you or your business out of its comfort zone with the challenge and expectation to accomplish more than ever before.
- 10) A _____ life refers to the positive appraisal of the person one has become, how one has led one's life, and the impact one has made.

2. What are the 17 goals of UN's sustainable development from 2015 to 2030?

II Read to Do

1. Suppose you are going to deliver a report, as the representative of China at a session of the UNGA, about what China has done in eradicating poverty from 2012 to 2020. Write a report about 1,000 words, covering the information concerning the policies made by Chinese government, the actions taken, the achievements and suggestions for further improvement.
2. Translate the following English passages into Chinese and Chinese passages into English.
 - 1) We are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet. We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path.
 - 2) We are determined to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.
 - 3) 中国人民始终维护联合国权威和地位，践行多边主义，中国同联合国合作日益深化。……中国率先实现联合国千年发展目标，带头落实 2030 年可持续发展议程，对世界减贫贡献超过 70%。
 - 4) 我们认识到，每一国家可根据本国国情和优先事项，采用不同的方式、愿景、模式和手段来实现可持续发展；我们重申，地球及其生态系统是我们共同的家园，“地球母亲”是许多国家和地区共同使用的表述。

III Read to Think

1. What roles do science and technology play in promoting sustainable development?
2. Do you think there are conflicts between sustainable development and consumption stimulus? If so, what are they? And what are the effective ways to reduce the conflicts?

IV Read to Compare

1. Understanding China's position.

In *The People's Republic of China National Report on Sustainable Development* issued by China's National Development and Reform Commission in preparation for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro, 2012, China proposed 13 key issues concerning sustainable development, including capital and technology transfer, poverty elimination, rural and agricultural development, urbanization, energy, water, oceans, climate change, disaster prevention and mitigation, biological diversity, desertification, forest, and wetlands³. Wen Jiabao, Premier of China back then, insisted in his speech delivered at the Conference that "we must face up to the common responsibility of protecting the Earth while recognizing that countries are at different state and levels of development". He emphasized that "the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities" should be followed to promote global sustainable development. China, while participating actively in promoting sustainable development, makes it clear that great attention should be paid to the developing rights of the developing countries.

2. Compare the 13 key areas concerning sustainable development proposed by China in *The People's Republic of China National Report on Sustainable Development* and the 17 development goals issued by the UNGA at its 70th session, and think about why China takes these 13 areas as the key areas.

³ See Chapter VIII, *The People's Republic of China National Report on Sustainable Development*.

Further Reading

The Charter of the United Nations⁴

[1] Preamble

WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED

to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and

[5] 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 establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and

to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

[10] AND FOR THESE ENDS

to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and

to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and

to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and

[15] to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples,

HAVE RESOLVED TO COMBINE OUR EFFORTS TO ACCOMPLISH THESE AIMS.

Accordingly, our respective Governments, through representatives assembled in the city of

⁴ *The Charter of the United Nations* (DPI/511, 1945) is the founding document of the UN. It was signed on 26 June 1945, in San Francisco, at the conclusion of the United Nations Conference on International Organization, and came into force on 24 October 1945. The UN Charter is an instrument of international law, and UN Member States are bound by it. It codifies the major principles of international relations, from sovereign equality of States to the prohibition of the use of force in international relations. Since the UN's founding in 1945, the mission and work of the Organization have been guided by the purposes and principles contained in its founding Charter, which has been amended three times in 1963, 1965, and 1973. The Charter is composed of the Preamble and 19 Chapters, 111 articles. The selection here is the Preamble and Chapter I.

[20] San Francisco, who have exhibited their full powers found to be in good and due form, have agreed to the present Charter of the United Nations and do hereby establish an international organization to be known as the United Nations.

Chapter I: Purposes and Principles

Article 1

The Purposes of the United Nations are:

- [25] 1. To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the
[30] peace;
- 2. To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace;
- [35] 3. To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion; and
- 4. To be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends.

[40] Article 2

The Organization and its Members, in pursuit of the Purposes stated in Article 1, shall act in accordance with the following Principles.

- 1. The Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members.
- [45] 2. All Members, in order to ensure to all of them the rights and benefits resulting from membership, shall fulfill in good faith the obligations assumed by them in accordance with the present Charter.
- 3. All Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered.
- 4. All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force

- [50] against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.
5. All Members shall give the United Nations every assistance in any action it takes in accordance with the present Charter, and shall refrain from giving assistance to any state against which the United Nations is taking preventive or enforcement action.
- [55] 6. The Organization shall ensure that states which are not Members of the United Nations act in accordance with these Principles so far as may be necessary for the maintenance of international peace and security.
7. Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall
- [60] require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII.

Questions and tasks based on the Further Reading

1. “The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” is a resolution under the framework of *The Charter of the UN*. Please identify the specific items in the resolution that echo and support *The Charter*.
2. Please summarize the purposes of the UN in no more than 150 words.
3. What, according to *The Charter of the UN*, is the role of the UN concerning matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of a sovereign state?

