

#VisitUN: A short tour of the United Nations Headquarters

Intro

Welcome to the United Nations Headquarters. The headquarters in New York City occupies 18 acres of land and overlooks the East River. 75 years ago, in 1945, 51 countries signed the United Nations Charter in San Francisco. By doing so, the Member States agreed to work together to save future generations from experiencing the horrors of another world war.

With a substantial donation by John D. Rockefeller Jr, New York was decided to be the city to provide the home for the nations of the world. The site by the river between 42nd Street and 48th Street was previously occupied by slaughterhouses and surrounded by a continuous foul odor, which had to be demolished to make way for the Headquarters of the Organization. A team of 11 renowned architects, also known as the ‘Workshop for Peace’ and led by Wallace K. Harrison of the United States, designed what came to be known as the Headquarters of the United Nations.

The Security Council

Here in the Security Council Chamber, delegates work tirelessly to uphold the goals of the United Nations Charter to maintain international peace and security. Seated around the horseshoe-shaped table, 15 members of the Council meet almost on a daily basis to discuss conflict situations around the world.

The Chamber was gifted by the Norwegian government and designed by the Norwegian architect Arnstein Arneberg. The blue and gold silk wall coverings and drapes were designed by Else Poulson and depict the anchor of faith, the growing wheat of hope and the heart of charity. The mural was designed by the Norwegian artist Per Krohg.

The Trusteeship Council

Here, I am in the Trusteeship Council Chamber. The role of this Council is to promote self-determination of non-self-governing territories. When the UN was created in 1945, there were 11 such territories under the supervision of this Council. The last of those territories, Palau, gained independence in 1994. Since

then, the work of this Council was suspended. Nowadays, this Chamber is mainly used for a variety of conferences.

The Trusteeship Council Chamber was designed by Danish architect and furniture designer Finn Juhl. After 2011, the Chamber was restored and equipped with new furniture designed by Kasper Salto and Thomas Sigsgaard. Another iconic aspect of this Chamber is this statue titled ‘Mankind and Hope’, a girl with arms upraised, reaching towards a bird which hovers with outspread wings above her head as a symbol of countries achieving independence. Carved out of a single piece of teak wood, it was made by Danish sculptor Henrik Starcke.

The Economic and Social Council

The Economic and Social Council Chamber, also called ‘ECOSOC’, is a gift from Sweden. It was originally designed by Swedish architect Sven Markelius, who was also part of the team of eleven architects who designed the Headquarters. Covering the tall glass windows hangs a curtain by Ann Edholm, ‘Dialogos’, reminding us of the mutual exchange of views on equal terms, embodied in the deliberations taking place in this Chamber. The architect left the ceiling above the public gallery exposed, intentionally leaving the pipes and ducts for everyone to see, which became a symbolic reminder of the ongoing struggle of economic and social development for all.

The General Assembly

The General Assembly is considered the heart of the Organization. All 193 Member States meet in the General Assembly Hall to address universal challenges that demand global solutions for a better and more sustainable future for all. Every September, Heads of State and Government are invited to the General Debate to speak about issues that concern Member States, addressing the world from the black marble rostrum.

The General Assembly works on the basis of equality and consensus. Each Member State has one vote, the same number of seats, and delegations sit in English alphabetical order. Simultaneous interpretation into the six UN official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Spanish and Russian, facilitates the exchange of ideas on how to solve world problems.

Artworks

The United Nations Headquarters is filled with artworks donated by Member States. One example of such an artwork is the Norman Rockwell Mosaic that eloquently expresses our aspirations for fundamental human rights and freedoms for all, without distinction as to sex, race, religion or language. On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the United Nations in 1985, the mosaic was presented as a gift by former First Lady Nancy Reagan, on behalf of the United States of America. The mosaic was executed by Venetian artists specializing in mosaic works and contains more than 22,000 glass tiles.

The Mosaic based on Norman Rockwell's painting 'The Golden Rule' shows a very diverse group of people standing together and displays the words: "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Rockwell wanted to illustrate how Golden Rule was a common theme of all major religions of the world and depicted the people of every race, creed and colour with dignity and respect.

Human Rights

After the creation of the United Nations, human rights was a major focus. Members worked hard to find a universal standard for human rights which previously was considered a domestic concern. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted. Eleanor Roosevelt was instrumental in coordinating this effort. One of the hidden treasures of the Garden is the Monument in Memory of Eleanor Roosevelt. A granite bench is facing a bas-relief of a flame that bears the inscription: "she would rather light a candle than curse the darkness, and her glow has warmed the world."

We look forward to welcoming you at the United Nations Headquarters in person in the near future. Or you may choose to take a virtual tour and online briefing. For more information on our virtual events, please go to *visit.un.org*. (9:03)