

# **9. International Organizations (II)**

## **9.1 THE UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION (UNO)**

### **Origin**

#### *1. The League of Nations*

The League of Nations was a creation of the post-First World War era, a period committed to the avoidance of the factors leading to the traumatic experiences of the First World War (1914–1919). The League of Nations was a product of the Paris Conference of 1919. The League sought to replace the so-called theory of balance of power of the pre-First World War era with a collective security system. This means that all member-states should join to apply economic, political or military sanctions against any state that attacks another state or threatens world peace and security. Its primary objective was to maintain international peace and security through collective security. The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 resulted in the collapse of the League which was formally terminated in 1945 when it was replaced by the UNO.

#### *(ii) Conferences That Led To The Formation*

Several Conferences resulting in several Declarations, were held before a formula for the charter of the UNO was finally drawn up. These included

- â€¢ A conference of representatives of fourteen nations seeking ways of working together in war or peace and ensuring lasting peace. They signed an inter-allied declaration thereafter. The conference was held in London in 1941.
- â€¢ At the initiative of the USA and Britain, the Atlantic Charter was drawn up on 14 August 1941. The two countries envisaged this as an interim arrangement for the disarming of belligerent states. It was to cease as soon as a more permanent international forum was constituted.
- â€¢ A Conference in Moscow in October, 1943 and the Dumbarton Oaks Conference in August — October, 1944 in Washington attended by representatives of the UK, USA, the Soviet Union and China drew up a preliminary draft of the UN Charter.
- â€¢ The Yalta Conference of February 1945 featured the leaders of Britain, USA and Soviet Union, prepared the grounds for the San-Francisco Conference from April to June, 1945. The UNO was formally established on 24 October, 1945 when the major powers and other nations numbering 51 states that attended the San-Francisco Conference ratified the UN Charter of 111 articles. However, the First Assembly of the

UN did not meet until January, 1946. The Headquarters of the UNO is in New York, USA.

Three main defects of the League of Nations were remedied by the founders of the UNO.

First, the UN Charter provided for the use of force by the UNO to stop aggression and thus avert war. The Security Council is charged with the responsibility of ensuring world peace and expects member-states to supply armed forces for this purpose. Second, the Charter of the UNO liberalized the membership of the UNO by making it universal so that all independent nations including all major powers are allowed to be members. Third, The Charter of the UNO provided for an Economic and Social Council which is designed to organize economic relations among member-states. This has the potency of reducing tendencies towards war.

### Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of the UNO are spelt out in the first two articles of its Charter, viz:

- (i) **Maintenance of international peace and security:** This is to be achieved, according to the Charter, by all members taking collective measures to remove threats, suppress acts of aggression and other breaches of peace; pursue peaceful means to settle disputes.
- (ii) **Development of friendly relations:** The UNO also aims at fostering friendly relations among states on the basis of principles of equal rights and self-determination of peoples.
- (iii) **Achievement of international co-operation:** The Charter of the UN states that the world body is interested in achieving international co-operation in solving economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems.
- (iv) **Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms:** It is also the objective of the UNO to encourage the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.

### Basic Principles

The UNO Charter provides basic principles under which it functions:

- (i) **The principle of universality:** This implies that the United Nations Organization shall be open for membership to all sovereign states the world over including all super-powers and small nations. The activities of the organization shall also cover all parts of the world.
- (ii) **The principles of sovereign equality:** The Charter recognizes the equality of all sovereign states in the world system irrespective of the differences in their sizes (population and geographical area), economic or military strength. The UN therefore operates on the basis of one sovereign nation, one vote.
- (iii) **Conformity with international law:** This implies that member-states shall respect international law and act within its provisions.
- (iv) **Peaceful behaviour on the part of member-states:** Member- states should make policies and carry out actions that would not encroach on other States' rights.

Member-states should adopt the policy of peaceful co-existence in all their actions and policies.

- (v) **Collective action on collective security:** The primary purpose of the UNO is collective security. This principle means that all member-states should stand together to use their collective forces to maintain international peace and security. It involves the participation of all member-states in the establishment of efficient security machinery and the employment of collective sanctions and force against threats to world peace and security and acts of aggression against any member-state or acts of war within the world community.
- (vi) **Peaceful settlement of international disputes:** Member-states should seek and adopt peaceful means in the settlement of their disputes with other sovereign states.

## **Membership**

Membership is open to all peace-loving states. Such States should accept the obligations of the Charter. The UN started with fifty members in 1945 and has now grown to over one hundred and forty-two members. Application for membership requires a recommendation by a majority vote of the Security Council. This is however subject to veto by any of the five permanent members (big powers) of the Council. Where an application is recommended by the Council, the admission is then made by a majority vote of the General Assembly. Very few states have chosen not to join the UN. For instance, Switzerland considers the UNO's Charter obligations to be in direct conflict with her policy of absolute neutrality.

## **Organs and their Functions**

The Charter of the UN (Article 7) provides for six principal organs and specialized agencies. These organs are:

- (i) The General Assembly
- (ii) The Security Council
- (iii) Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
- (iv) The International Court of Justice
- (v) The Secretariat
- (vi) Specialized agencies
- (vii) Minor organs.

### **(i) The General Assembly**

The Assembly is made up of representatives of all member-nations. Each member-state is represented in the Assembly by a permanent representative (the ambassadors) of that state to UN's Parliament. The Assembly meets once a year but it can hold emergency meetings at the request of the Security Council or of majority of member-states. Each member-state has only one vote in the Assembly. All decisions on important issues in the General Assembly requires a two-thirds majority vote of member-states present and voting. The functions of the General Assembly are as follows:

- (a) It is vested with the power of discussion and recommendations of any policy or action capable of fulfilling the major objectives of the international body as spelt out in its charter. However, its recommendations on issues relating to international peace and security must carry ~~2/3~~ vote of membership.
- (b) It receives and considers annual and specific reports from the Secretary-General and other organs of the UN.
- (c) It considers and approves the budget.
- (d) It considers any financial and budgetary arrangements with specialized agencies.
- (e) Suspends or expels any member on the recommendation of the Security Council.
- (f) It elects people to serve on other organs of the UNO.
- (g) It receives the visiting Heads of State and leaders of delegations and arranges for them to address the Assembly.

The General Assembly operates with seven main Committees on which any member states may be represented. These are

- â€¢ Political and Security Committee
- â€¢ Economic and Financial Committee
- â€¢ Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee
- â€¢ Trusteeship Committee
- â€¢ Administration and Budgetary Committee
- â€¢ Legal Committee
- â€¢ Special Political Committee.

## **(ii) The Security Council**

This Council has as its primary responsibility the maintenance of international peace and security. The Council is currently made up of 15 members (as against 11 initially). Out of this number, five are permanent members, namely, UK, USA, USSR, China and France while ten are elected by the General Assembly for a two-year term each. The five permanent members (Big powers) enjoy an important and very powerful privilege which is provided by the UN Charter. This is the privilege of special voting powers. That is, each of the five permanent members possesses the power to *veto* the decision of the Council. This implies that before the Council takes a decision on any major issue within its functions and powers, *all* the five permanent members must agree on the course of action to take. This veto power is perhaps in recognition of the fact that the Great Powersâ€™ agreement is essential for the success of the UN in controlling aggression on the international scene.

The functions of the Council are

- (a) The maintenance of international peace and security.
- (b) Determination and imposition of sanctions, either military or economic (or both), necessary to enforce its decisions. To do this, it is empowered to call upon members to provide it with necessary military where-withal. It can also freely draw from its Military Staff Committee and the Disarmament Commission. It is also the function of the

Council to investigate disputes or conflicts among nations, effect negotiations towards peaceful settlement. It mediates where appropriate and desirable and reconciles the conflicting member-states. The Security Council can be regarded as the most effective controlling machinery of the UN. The success and failure of the UN rest with the Security Council.

### ***The issue of veto in the Security Council***

The UN Charter gives the veto power to five permanent members of the council, namely, the USSR, USA, France, China and Britain. The veto power applies to all substantive decisions except where any of them is a party to a dispute involved in the decision. In such a situation, the member must abstain.

*Arguments in favour of veto:* The veto power is justified by a number of arguments viz:

- â€¢ It protects the interests of the great powers which possesses the overwhelming military powers in the world that they, in practice, determine the course of peace and war in the world. They possess the military might and technological potentials that can cause war and prevent war. They speak, decide and back their decisions with appropriate action.
- â€¢ The veto serves as a check on the radicalism of developing nations. Such radicalism could in reality endanger world peace.
- â€¢ The veto checks possible irrational decision of the powerless majority which could plunge the world into devastating war.
- â€¢ In the Council with members that are ideologically polarized, each of the two blocs being led by a super power, world peace can only be realized by peaceful negotiations and compromise rather than on basis of majority decisions.

The veto can be seen as a compensation to those nations who bear the greatest burden of the UN for the maintenance of peace and security.

*Arguments against the veto:* The veto power of the five permanent members in the Security Council is criticized for the following reasons:

- â€¢ The veto power is considered undemocratic as it does not conform with the democratic principle of "One nation one vote".
- â€¢ It contradicts one of the principles of the UNO Charter, which is the principle of sovereign equality of member-states. Under the practice of veto, one of the permanent members can use its veto power to nullify the decision of the Council and the wish of entire General Assembly. When this happens, the Council is rendered helpless and the General Assembly powerless.
- â€¢ Although the real intention of the veto power is to ensure international peace, it is observed that in practice it has been employed to oppress smaller states. The veto power has been used frequently to prevent the UN from applying peaceful interventions in settling cases of international disputes.
- â€¢ The veto has been used to perpetuate social and economic injustice. The Big Powers have applied it to support apartheid policies and practices. For instance, Britain and USA have regularly vetoed any serious sanction against South Africa.

- â€¢ The veto power is regularly used by the world powers to preserve and promote their ideological and economic interests.
- â€¢ It is utilized as a powerful instrument for the Big Powers to ensure that they continue to dominate world politics and thus marginalize the small nations.

### **(iii) Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**

The Economic and Social Council is the organ responsible for the consideration of development problems. The Council is composed of twenty-six member-states. These are broadly representative of UN membership. The members are elected by the General Assembly, which controls and directs its operations. Members are elected for a three year term. The Big Powers are always members of the Council as they finance most of the UN aid programmes.

The functions of the Council include

- (a) initiating studies on economic and social matters. It studies reports and recommendations to the General Assembly and relevant specialized agencies.
- (b) promoting voluntary co-operation of member-states of the UN in areas as diverse as health, education and others.
- (c) preparing draft conventions, and organizing international conferences for the purpose of examining social and economic problems and strategies for development.
- (d) correlating the programmes of many agencies and co-ordinating the activities of the specialized agencies of the UN.
- (e) promoting human rights by establishing commissions which suggest means for their preservation and promotion throughout the world.

The Council is assisted by many regional functional Commissions such as Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), Economic Commission for Europe (ECE).

### **(iv) The Trusteeship Council**

The United Nations Charter provides for the International Trusteeship System. Under these provisions, the responsibility to lead the people in non-self-governing territories towards self-government by means of â€˜progressive development of free political institutionsâ€™ is placed on administering states. The system operates as a means of helping the trust territories from dependence to statehood. The Trusteeship Council is established to supervise on behalf of the UN the processes from trusteeship to independence. The council is composed of countries that administer trust territories, permanent members of the Security Council, and elected members of the General Assembly who serve for a term of three years.

The functions of the Council include

- (a) supervising the processes from non-self-governing status to independent status. It monitors all stages of political development and the action of the administering state.
- (b) receiving reports from the peoples of the Trust territories on any matter affecting their political development and welfare.

- (c) receiving progress reports from the administering states which are carefully considered and necessary action taken to facilitate political development of the areas.

The number of trust territories has rapidly declined since 1960. Today the mission of the Trusteeship Council is almost completed as there remain only a few trust territories in the world.

#### **(v) The International Court of Justice (ICJ)**

The ICJ is a continuation of the Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ) which was an organ of the League of Nations. It is made up of 15 judges elected for a nine-year term by both the General Assembly and the Security Council. Membership of the court is open to all member-States of the UN. Its headquarters, as for its predecessor, is at The Hague, The Netherlands. Its major functions are

- (a) to advise the General Assembly and the Security Council on vital legal issues.
- (b) to serve as a tribunal for the final settlement of international disputes submitted to it by parties to a dispute. This means that it cannot investigate into or pronounce on any dispute which is not referred to it.
- (c) to handle breaches on international obligations, and determine compensations or reparations for such breaches. Member-states are obliged to comply with the decision of the court. The UN is empowered to impose sanctions on any member that fails to obey the decision of the ICJ.

The ICJ hears cases from only states. Disputing states having cases in the International Court possess the right to nominate a judge of their choice to sit at the court. Such a judge remains in the court until the case is terminated.

#### **(vi) The Secretariat**

The UN Secretariat is patterned on the same operational structure contained in the Leagueâ€™s Covenant. It is the UNâ€™s Administration (regular international civil service). Its staff are recruited from nationals of all member-states. The Secretariat staff work under the supervision of the Secretary-General who heads the Secretariat.

The Secretariat which is located in New York has almost about 90% of its staff engaged in economic and social activities of the organization in field locations in various parts of the world.

The Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendations of the Security Council. The recommendation of the Council requires a majority of at least nine members which should include all the permanent members. Moreover, a veto by a permanent member can nullify the recommendation and block the candidateâ€™s chance. On the other hand, the approval of the General Assembly requires a two-thirds majority vote.

The Secretary-General and his staff are required to be impartial and neutral in the discharge of their duties. They should neither seek nor receive instructions from any government or external authority in the performance of their duties. Member-States are expected to respect the international character of the secretariat and thus should not influence the staff.

The functions of the Secretary-General are as follows:

- (a) He recruits his staff as the organization requires. This he does on a wide range of geographical basis to give the staff real international character.
- (b) He controls, directs the staff of the Secretariat and co-ordinates the activities of various departments of the Organization.
- (c) He ensures that decisions of the Organization are implemented.
- (d) He alerts the Security Council about any issue which, in his estimation, threatens or is capable of threatening, international peace and security.
- (e) The-Secretary-General reports to the General Assembly annually on the activities of all the agencies of the UN. He can sit in any meeting of any organ or agency of the UN.
- (f) He makes proposals to the various organs of the UN. The first Secretary-General of the UNO was Trygve Lie of Norway. The second was Dag Hammarskjold of Sweden. The third was U Thant of Burma while the fourth was Kurt Waldheim of Austria. The fifty Secretary-General is Perez de Cuellar of Peru.

#### **(vii) Specialized Agencies**

The term "specialized agencies" is used in the UN Charter to describe inter-governmental organizations whose activities are world-wide. These are

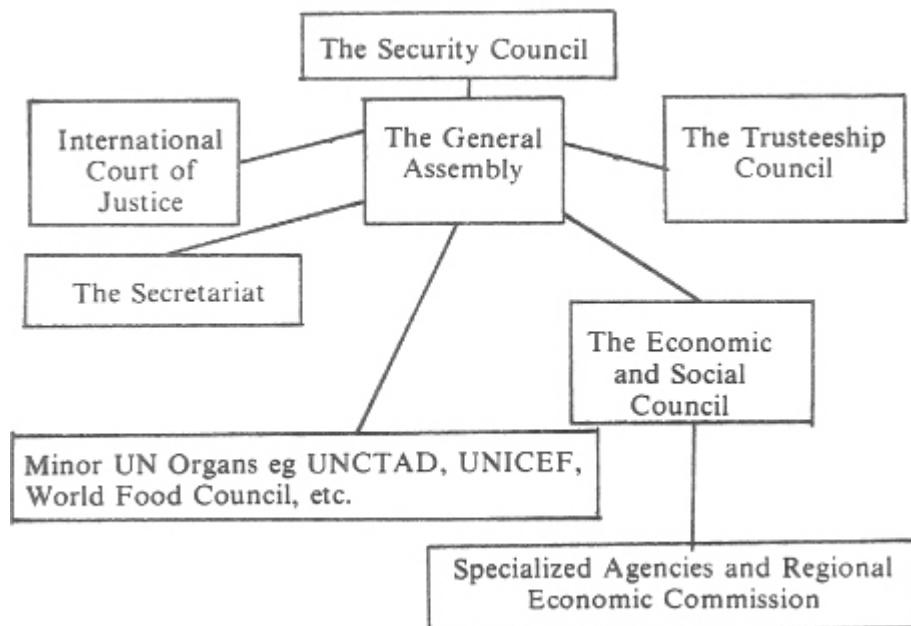
- (a) The World Health Organization (WHO) which furnishes member-countries with technical expertise on how to stop epidemics, improve sanitation and raise the standard of health generally.
- (b) The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) concerns itself with improving the conditions of nutrition and living, improving farming methods, providing improved marketing conditions etc.
- (c) The International Monetary Fund (IMF), well-known in Africa, which has as its primary function the stabilization of currencies and stimulation of world trade.
- (d) The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This Agency has as its major aim the promotion of international understanding in all its ramifications.
- (e) The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) otherwise known as the World Bank is equipped with capital to restore devastated areas as well as help states develop their resources.
- (f) The International Labour Organization (ILO) strives to improve on a global basis, the conditions of service of the working class and the labourers.

Other specialized agencies are International Telecommunications Union (ITU), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), Universal Postal Union (UPU), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), International Development Association (IDA), International Finance Corporation (IFC), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Inter-Governmental Marine Consultative Organization (IMCO) and World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

#### **(viii) Minor Organs of the UN**

Apart from the six principal organs of the UNO, namely, the General Assembly, Security Council, Secretariat, International Court of Justice, Trusteeship Council and the Economic and Social Council, the UNO Charter also provided for 19 minor organs and Regional and Functional Commissions. The minor organs include United Nations' Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations' International Children's Educational Fund (UNICEF), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Joint UN/FAO World Food Programme, United Nations' Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), United Nations' Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations' Environmental Programme (UNEP), United Nations' University (UNU), United Nations' Special Fund, World Food Council, United Nations' Development Programme (UNDP), Disarmament Commission, and others.

## THE ORGANS OF THE UNO



### Achievements

The UNO has recorded some important successes. These include:

- (i) **Maintenance of world peace and security:** It is a tribute to the UN that there has been no outbreak of a world war since 1945. Similarly, it has helped the cause of peace in Korea (1950), Congo (Zaire) 1960–1964, Lebanon etc.
- (ii) **Warding off local conflicts:** By the use of various peace-keeping operations eg UN Peace Keeping Force in Cyprus; its observer Group in India and Pakistan, etc, the UN has succeeded in warding off localized conflicts capable of degenerating into international conflagrations. Its role in avoiding a thermonuclear war in the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 should also not be under-estimated.
- (iii) **Good human rights record:** The, UN's Universal Declaration of Rights of 1948 as well as the Covenant of Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966 and 1976 respectively) have become standard references for almost all countries all over the world. Similarly, the UN has provided

the much-needed umbrella for the conclusion of certain conventions in which member-states commit themselves to guarantee particular rights. Such conventions include those on slavery and forced labour, genocide, refugees, racial discrimination etc.

- (iv) **Economic and social progress:** The UN's specialized agencies have achieved quite a lot in the areas of health, education, social work particularly in the developing countries. The activities of WHO, UNESCO and UNICEF are, in this respect, extremely significant.

## Problems

The problems and weaknesses of the UN include:

- (i) **Difficulty in enforcing decisions:** Over the years, it has become increasingly difficult for the UN to enforce its decisions arrived at either in the General Assembly or in the Security Council. The UN can only appeal; it cannot enforce. The Permanent members who use veto power indiscriminately to pursue their own political, economic, cultural and ideological interests compound this problem. Moreover, these big powers often neither carry out the decisions of the organization nor observe the principles of its Charter. The UN cannot control the behaviour of the big powers. They invade small states with impunity.
- (ii) **Ideological conflicts:** The UN is faced with serious ideological conflicts — the USA bloc vs USSR bloc. These conflicts make it difficult for members to work together in harmony. Prejudices, biases and distrust are rife. These create social distance, gap in communication and lack of co-operation.
- (iii) **Lack of a standing army:** This is partly responsible for the UN's inability to enforce decisions. It explains, in part, why South Africa continues to defy UN resolutions.
- (iv) **Workability of the collective security principle:** This principle is not working adequately or satisfactorily, essentially because it is often difficult to determine who is an aggressor in conflict situations. In the Iran-Iraq strife, for instance, the UN experienced difficulty in identifying the aggressor at any point in time.
- (v) **Abuse of veto power:** The veto power exercised by the big powers in the Security Council is undemocratic and contradicts the principle of sovereign equality of member-states as provided by the UN Charter. Moreover, it is often abused by the big powers. It is sometimes employed to achieve the narrow economic and political interests of the big powers at the expense of the small nations. It is also often used to block popular and desirable measures designed for the realization of the UN objectives.
- (vi) **No solution yet to underdevelopment and poverty:** The UN has failed almost woefully to provide solutions to the problems of poverty of the Third World. The latter is poorer, more wretched, more indebted today than when the UN set out to develop it. The UN cannot develop Africa because the major powers who control the UN pay only lip-service to Africa's development. In fact, the UN's major economic development agencies, the IMF and the World Bank, are more concerned with protecting the economic interests of the Western Powers all over the

world. These interests are diametrically opposed to the economic interests, growth and development of Africa and the "Third World".

## 9.2 THE ORGANIZATION OF PETROLEUM EXPORTING COUNTRIES (OPEC)

### Origin

Unlike the UNO, which serves all countries in the world, OPEC is a specialized international organization set up to pursue the interests of only its members. Its formation in 1960 was precipitated by cuts in oil export prices effected unilaterally by the major (foreign) oil companies without any approval of or consultation with host governments. Founding member-states sensed a danger then, namely, that if those whose sole or main source of national livelihood is petrol did not form an organization, producing countries might face the danger of the West regarding petroleum as an ordinary raw material rather than as a strategic commodity.

There were five founding fathers in 1960. These were Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and Kuwait. Eight other members joined later at various dates: Qatar, Indonesia, United Arab Emirate, Gabon, Algeria, Libya, Ecuador and Nigeria (1971). The qualification for membership was production of oil in substantial quantity. It is noteworthy that the three superpowers USA, UK and China which meet these requirements are not members of OPEC.

OPEC is not a political bloc. Neither is it a supernational organization. It is an economic interest group. The Headquarters of OPEC is Vienna in Austria. OPEC controls at least 96% of world oil exports, 90% oil reserves and 60% of oil production.

### Aims and Objectives

OPEC clearly sets out its objectives. These are:

- (i) **Formulation and execution of oil policies:** OPEC is broadly concerned with formulating and executing policies relating to the production (in terms of ceiling and allocation of quota to members) and exportation of oil. Policy in this context also extends to the issue of price control.
- (ii) **Control of oil production by producer states:** Given the background to the formation of OPEC, this is an important objective. Formally, oil-producing States have taken their proper destiny into their own hands. The powers exercised by foreign oil companies in respect to oil exploitation, pricing, exportation, royalty are now in the hands of member-states. They have, in a sense, recovered their sovereignty.
- (iii) **Equalization of unequal exchange:** Perhaps, due to the dynamics of the international economic order than to any well-spelt out objective, OPEC now seeks to play a dynamic political and economic role in terms of equalizing the unequal exchange between the developed, industrialized North and the developing, non-industrialized South.

### Achievements

- (i) **Oil as political weapon:** Perhaps the most important and visible achievement of OPEC was in 1973 when the Arab oil producers used oil as a political instrument in the Middle East crisis. The real target, which was effectively hit, was the US

economy. This singular action demonstrated to the world the potentialities and powers of the OPEC as a bloc.

- (ii) **Control of oil market:** To some extent, OPEC has shown its capacity to control production levels, sales as well as increase, when the need arises, in oil prices. Higher prices and more sales naturally mean more revenue for member-states.
- (iii) **Unity and solidarity:** Partly because most of the member-states are monocultural (high dependence on oil), OPEC has been able to achieve some form of solidarity, unity and internal cohesion in the bloc. Members can resist being used to protect the economic and political interests of the West. Moreover, unity of purpose, whenever it is exhibited, increases the bargaining power of the Organization.

### Problems

The OPEC, like all international bodies, is plagued with some problems and bogged down by some weaknesses.

- (i) **High increase of fragmentation:** OPEC suffers from ideological polarization. While some members are fervently pro-West (eg Saudi Arabia), others are pro-East (eg Libya). Meeting points are difficult to come by.
- (ii) **Indiscipline (non-adherence to production quota):** A very serious problem is the high level of indiscipline in the organization. It is generally believed that OPEC does not always know how much oil it puts in the market. It is also unable to make members adhere to production quota.
- (iii) **Leadership crisis:** Due to lack of a sense of purpose, dishonesty of most members, lack of good faith, etc OPEC experiences leadership crisis. Perhaps Nigeria's Rilwan Lukman, president of OPEC (1987–1990) has reduced this crisis. Yet, the point is that leadership crisis creates instability. This results in a fragile oil market. This is precisely the situation in OPEC.
- (iv) **Poverty of member states and their citizens:** Since most of these states, as already pointed out, are monocultural, there is often pressure on them to supply oil to the West in order to obtain critical foreign earnings. It is not unusual for them to sell oil at almost any terms in exchange for those goods and services direly needed by their elites. Even when this is not the case, ordinary citizens in several OPEC States suffer a lot of deprivations. They have not benefitted from oil earnings. Rather, the wealth from oil is used to import luxurious goods for a tiny percentage of the population. At a corporate level, in spite of its efforts, OPEC has not achieved much in re-ordering international economic relations.

## 9.3 THE COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS

### Origin

The Commonwealth is a by-product of the evolution of the British colonial policy during the colonial era. It marked a decisive point in the transition of some dependencies within the British Empire from colonies to Dominions and then to independent territories.

When the Commonwealth officially came into existence is still a matter for debate. What is not debatable is the fact that after the North American Colonies broke away from Great

Britain in 1783, the British Government was forced to recognize that the other colonies of settlement, peopled by British men and women would, by and by, violently resist being denied the right to manage their own affairs. So, in order to avert a possible repeat of her ugly experience in North America. Britain transferred to her colonies of settlement responsibility for their internal government. Thus a Dominion status was accorded to Canada in 1867 and later to Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Newfoundland which became a province of Canada in 1949.

This gesture laid the foundation of the British Commonwealth of Nations, for the Dominions enjoyed a special relationship with Great Britain and were referred to as Commonwealth of States within the British Empire. The other British colonies which were not colonies of settlement were not granted dominion status. In other words, both the British Empire and the Commonwealth of Nations co-existed, the Empire being the larger whole of which the Commonwealth was an integral but distinguishable entity.

Although the Dominions took charge of their internal government, their relationship with Great Britain was not clear-cut. Obviously, they did not play any active part in the making of political decisions concerning the British Empire and they were not *formally* given charge of their foreign policy. This situation had to change after the first World War to which the Dominions, fighting on the side of Great Britain, made valuable contributions.

In order to avoid any rupture of the links of solidarity in the Empire, the British Government decided to abrogate all the colonial laws which were incompatible with the idea of equality of status between Great Britain and the dominions. At the Imperial Conference of 1926. Lord Balfour drafted a declaration which defined the British Commonwealth of Nations as autonomous committee within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by common allegiance to the crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations. This definition was accepted by all. It then became necessary, to make changes in certain colonial administrative, legislative and judicial dispositions affecting the Dominions. That was the object of the statute of Westminster of 11 December, 1931, which legally recognized the status of the dominions as defined in 1926.

#### *Emergence of the new Commonwealth*

Members of the British Commonwealth were, up till 1948, territories where the populations were of English or European origin. They had the same type of political and cultural background. This picture changed when most of the former British colonies in Asia and Africa started to gain their independence and chose to be associated with the Commonwealth. It was then that the Commonwealth assumed a multiracial character. It was then also that a new spirit was introduced into the association — a new spirit that lacked the affective elements which had bound the dominions and Great Britain together. This new spirit was produced by the independence of India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in 1947. After India's independence, she declared herself a Republic and at the same time decided to be in the Commonwealth as a Republic not a Dominion. This implies that India did not accept to owe allegiance to the Queen as her Head of State. However, India agreed to recognize the Queen as the Head of the Commonwealth. This innovation was a unique and radical development in the Commonwealth. Consequently, in 1948, the British Commonwealth of Nations™ was changed to "Commonwealth of Nations". The Queen of England is then regarded as mere Head of the Commonwealth. When Bangladesh, Cyprus, Ghana, Nigeria and other

African states attained independence, they followed the Indian example and became Republics within the Commonwealth.

Members of the Commonwealth of Nations, unlike those of the British Commonwealth of Nations are sovereign states which have supreme right to exercise freedom of action in all aspects of their internal and external affairs. The Commonwealth of Nations has developed into a great and virile international club. It occupies about one quarter of the land space and possesses approximately a quarter of the worldâ€™s population and its members are found in all the continents and sub-regions of the world. It is this universal factor that earned the old British Empire the popular statement the Empire on which the sun never setsâ€™.

### **Membership**

Membership of the Commonwealth is voluntary. Members of the Commonwealth are former members of the British Empire. Membership of the Commonwealth requires attainment of independence from Britain. However, the attainment of independence does not automatically confer membership of the Commonwealth on a former British Colony. The newly independent State should first decide to be a member and then apply for membership. The new State is admitted after all members of the Commonwealth have given their consent. A British colony on becoming an independent sovereign nation can decide not to belong to the Commonwealth as did Burma in 1948. Also a member-state can withdraw her membership whenever it likes as did Pakistan in 1972, and the Republic of Ireland in 1949. A member-state can be forced to withdraw her membership if her policies and actions do not conform to tolerable international standards eg South Africa was forced to withdraw her membership in 1961 because of her apartheid policies. Today, the Commonwealth cuts across all races and is expected to foster racial unity. The total membership has now risen to forty-nine which are as follows:

*in Europe* — Britain, Cyprus, Malta,

*in Asia/Pacific* — Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, India, Kiribati, Malaysia, Maldives, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Western Samoa;

*in Africa* — Botswana, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe;

*in Canada/Caribbean* — Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Canada, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Christopher Nevis, St. Lucia, Vincent & the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.

### **Objectives**

Originally, the British Commonwealth aimed, among other things, at maintaining the political, economic, cultural and military links between Great Britain and her erstwhile colonies. It also aimed at promoting certain aspects of the British political system such as parliamentarism, the rule of law, etc. The new Commonwealth of Nations does not and cannot pursue such objectives; rather, it is concerned with

- (i) bringing together former British colonies and providing for them a forum for regular consultation and discussing matters of common interest to them and promoting the sense of belonging to one family;

- (ii) encouraging mutual assistance and co-operation among them in various fields such as, education, finance, trade, culture, legal, scientific, medicine, agriculture etc; and
- (iii) developing close economic and social ties.

### **Organs of the Commonwealth**

The Commonwealth has two major organs — the Conference of Heads of Governments or Prime Ministersâ€™ Conference, and the Commonwealth Secretariat. This simple organic structure is complemented with para-official channels of communication.

- (i) **The Conference of Heads of Governments (or Prime Ministersâ€™ Conference ).** It is an organ of consultation which replaced the former Imperial Conference in 1945. It meets at yearly intervals either in London or in any Commonwealth country to discuss matters affecting members of the Commonwealth or concerning their relations with other members of the international community. The outcome of their deliberations is usually made public in a communique but it does not have any binding force.
- (ii) **The Commonwealth Secretariat:** It was established in London in 1965. It is headed by a Secretary-General. The Secretariat has no political attributes. It serves only as an organ of information.
- (iii) **Subsidiary organs:** In addition to the major organs, consultations among member-states of the Commonwealth take place through the medium of Conferences of Commonwealth Law Ministers, Commonwealth Education Ministers, Commonwealth Finance Ministers, Committee etc.

### **Achievements**

The Commonwealth has recorded a number of achievements.

- (i) It successfully prevailed on Great Britain to take effective measures against the Ian Smith government in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) which unilaterally declared its independence in 1961. The Rhodesian Prime Minister, Mr Ian Smith, would have got away with his illegal declaration of independence but for the pressure mounted on Great Britain by other members of the Commonwealth.
- (ii) South Africa was forced out of the Commonwealth in 1961 as a result of the severe criticisms of its apartheid policy by majority of the members of the Commonwealth.
- (iii) The Commonwealth mediated in the Nigerian civil war in 1968. In fact, it arranged the peace talks between the two sides which took place in Kampala, Uganda.
- (iv) The Commonwealth Games which attract sportsmen from Commonwealth countries contribute, in no small measure, to creating and cementing friendly relations among member-states, and promoting racial co-operation.
- (v) Members of the Commonwealth are engaged in bilateral and multilateral co-operation in various fields. Member-states co-operate in technical, scientific and educational fields. There is a Commonwealth Technical Co-operation Scheme from which funds are made available to members for development. There is free exchange of experts and information in various specialized areas to the benefit of members. Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme had been established from which scholarships are floated to

qualified citizens of member-states annually to study in their qualified areas outside their own States. Most developing nations within the Commonwealth have benefited immensely from this scheme.

- (vi) As an international club, members benefit from aid and loans from other members when they are in need. Members also benefit from elaborate trade agreements and common tariffs. Moreover, Britain has been the largest trading partner with her former territories. However, since Britain became a member of the European Economic Community, and other member-states have joined other sub-regional organizations, most of these economic and trade benefits do not now accrue to members as they did in the past.
- (vii) The Commonwealth is a world-wide organization. It is composed of members from all the races of the world, diffuse world tension and serve as an instrument for promoting international peace.

### **Problems**

The problems confronting the Commonwealth stem from the fact that it has become a "concert of convenience", for the following reasons:

- (i) Most of the links that bind the members together have become extremely weak or even disappeared completely. By way of illustration, some Commonwealth member-states like Nigeria and Sierra Leone, have changed their political system from Parliamentarism to Presidentialism. Furthermore, English is no longer the official language of some member-states, e.g., India. The currency of some of member-states is no longer tied to the British pound sterling. Moreover, many members have adopted Republican status.
- (ii) Great Britain has turned its attention and interest towards the European Community of which she is now a member. She has tightened her immigration laws against Commonwealth immigrants. She no longer gives preferential treatment to Commonwealth countries by way of free movement of goods, economic aid, and so on.
- (iii) Like Great Britain, other members of the Commonwealth have joined regional organizations, political or economic, to which they attach greater importance in the pursuit of their national interest. For instance, members of the Commonwealth in Africa are members of the Organization of African Unity. Those of them in West Africa are also in ECOWAS. This tends to weaken the Commonwealth as loyalty is more to OAU and ECOWAS.
- (iv) Great Britain pursues a foreign policy which is diametrically opposed to that of majority of members of the Commonwealth. For instance, the British Government does not agree with the Commonwealth on how to resolve the problem of apartheid in South Africa. It is opposed to the imposition of stiff economic sanctions on South Africa which is the wish of majority of the members of the Commonwealth. This destroys the very essence of the association. Britain does not protect the interest of African members in the Security Council.

- (v) Some scholars argue that the Commonwealth is a form of neo-imperialism. It is a modern technique with which Britain retains the control of her former colonies in a civilized and modern style of colonialism.

## Conclusion

The future of the Commonwealth does not appear to be bright. As far as Great Britain is concerned, the Commonwealth is no longer what it used to be. She was interested in it when it was the symbol of her greatness and power in the international community. As far as the other members of the Commonwealth are concerned, it has lost its attraction because Great Britain now denies them preferential treatment.

The more Great Britain turns towards Europe, the more the Commonwealth will become a docile and inconsequential memory of her past greatness.

## KEY POINTS

### 1. UNO

#### *Origin*

The UNO grew up on the ashes of the League of Nations. It was preceded by several Conferences e.g., London (1941); Atlantic (1941); Moscow (1943); Dumbarton, Washington (1944) and Yalta (1945). The UN was finally established on 24 October, 1945. Its first Assembly met in January, 1946.

#### *Aims and objectives*

- (i) Maintenance of international peace and security;
- (ii) Development of friendly relations;
- (iii) Achievement of international co-operation and fundamental freedom etc.

#### *Organs*

- (i) General Assembly discusses and recommends any actions capable of fulfilling the major objectives of the UN.
- (ii) Security Council is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security.
- (iii) The ECOSO is charged with the improvement of social and economic life of the whole world.
- (iv) The Trusteeship Council: has the responsibility of overseeing non-self-governing territories.
- (v) The ICJ is an international tribunal for the final settlement of dispute submitted to it by parties to a dispute.
- (vi) The Secretariat is headed by the Secretary General.

#### *Achievements*

- (i) Maintenance of world peace and security
- (ii) Warding off of local conflicts

- (iii) Good human rights proposals
- (iv) Economic and social progress

#### *Problems*

- (i) Difficulty in enforcing decisions
- (ii) Ideological conflicts between East and West
- (iii) Lack of a standing army
- (iv) Inadequate working of the collective security principle
- (v) The world still largely underdeveloped and poor.

## **2 OPEC**

#### *Origin*

Formed in 1960 to protect the interests of oil-producing and exporting states. Immediate cause of formation was the cuts in oil export prices unilaterally imposed on producer states by foreign oil companies. There is now a total of thirteen member-states (five foundation in 1960, 8 others joined later, Nigeria in 1971).

#### *Objectives*

- (i) Formulation and execution of oil prices.
- (ii) Control of oil production by producer states
- (iii) Equalization of unequal exchange

#### *Achievements*

- (i) Has used oil as a political weapon
- (ii) Controls the oil market to some extent
- (iii) Possesses some form of solidarity, unity and internal cohesion.

#### *Problems*

- (i) High-level of fragmentation
- (ii) Indiscipline among members for non-adherence to production quota
- (iii) Leadership crisis
- (iv) Poverty of member-states and their citizens,

## **3. The Commonwealth of Nations**

#### *Origin*

- (i) It originated from the old British Empire

#### *Membership*

- (i) Members are former British colonies plus Britain.
- (ii) It is a voluntary organization
- (iii) It has a total of 49 members from all races.

### *Objective*

The objective is to promote mutual assistance and co-operation in various fields.

### *Structure*

The two main structures are

- (i) Conference of Heads of Governments or Prime Ministers' Conference, and
- (ii) The Commonwealth Secretariat.

### *Achievement*

- (i) It mounted pressure on Britain on her policy towards Ian Smith's government which facilitated the quick liberation of Zimbabwe.
- (ii) South Africa was forced out of the Commonwealth as a result of her apartheid policies.
- (iii) The Commonwealth mounts pressure on Britain towards initiating actions which could dismantle apartheid in South Africa
- (iv) It is engaged in technical, scientific, educational and economic co-operation.
- (v) Members benefit from aid and loans
- (vi) It promotes better understanding among races and helps to diffuse world tensions.

### *Problems*

- (i) Britain's membership of the EEC weakens the Commonwealth.
- (ii) Other members have joined regional organizations to which they are more attached.
- (iii) Commonwealth is a symbol of neo-imperialism.

## **SAMPLE EXAMINATION QUESTIONS**

### **Essay Questions**

1. Discuss the main achievements of the United Nations Organization.
2. Argue the case for and against the 'veto power' in the Security Council of the UNO.
3. Examine the functions and powers of the General Assembly and compare them with those of the Security Council.
4. Discuss the achievements and problems of the OPEC.
5. What are the justifications for the existence of the Commonwealth of Nations?

### **Objective Questions**

1. The UNO was established at the Conference held at
  - A. A New York
  - B. London

- C. Washington
  - D. San Francisco
  - E. Geneva.
2. Which of the following is NOT a principal organ of the UNO?
- A. ESOSOC
  - B. UNICEF
  - C. Security Council
  - D. Secretariat
  - E. General Assembly.
3. Which of the following sets of nations are all members of the OPEC?
- A. Iran and Britain
  - B. USA and Nigeria
  - C. Libya and Gabon
  - D. Indonesia and France
  - E. China and Japan.
4. The first nation to become a Republic within the Commonwealth of Nations is
- A. Nigeria
  - B. Cyprus
  - C. Ghana
  - D. Malta
  - E. India.
5. Which of the following sets of nations are all members of the Commonwealth of Nations.
- A. Nigeria and Burma
  - B. Canada and Togo
  - C. Britain and Libya
  - D. Kenya and Sri Lanka
  - E. Ethiopia and Fiji.

#### **Answers**

- 1. D
- 2. B
- 3. C
- 4. E
- 5. D