

The System of the United Nations



A presentation by the United Nations Association of Germany

The System of the United Nations

The United Nations were founded in 1945. In the course of the following decades, the organization has developed a complex internal structure. The **six principal organs** that are established by the UN Charter still represent the organization's core.

They are the:

- General Assembly
- Security Council
- Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
- The Trusteeship Council
- Secretariat
- International Court of Justice (ICJ)

The System of the United Nations

Principal Organs

Security Council

The **Security Council** consists of 15 Member States that are represented by a permanent representative:

- The **five permanent members** are the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Republic of France, the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China; they have a veto power in all substantial decisions.
- The **ten non-permanent members** are elected by the General Assembly for a term of two years. The non-permanent members do not hold the right of veto.

The Security Council has the **primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security**. It is the most powerful of the six principal organs. If the Council determines a breach of the peace or a threat to international peace and security, it can take measures such as mandating peacekeeping missions or imposing sanctions. The Security Council's **decisions are legally binding on all states**.



United Nations Security Council

The System of the United Nations

Principal Organs

Security
Council

General
Assembly

The **General Assembly** is the UN's plenary assembly. All 193 UN Member States are represented in this organ and each state has one vote. Being a "parliament of states", the General Assembly is also the **principal forum for international debates**.

The General Assembly may take decisions that are binding on subsidiary bodies within the UN system. It may also make **non-binding recommendations** to member states and to the Security Council and initiate investigations.

Furthermore, the General Assembly elects the non-permanent members of the Security Council and, upon Security Council recommendation, the UN Secretary-General. Another main function is to set and to control the UN's budget.



United Nations General Assembly

The System of the United Nations

Principal Organs

Security Council

General Assembly

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

The **Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** consists of 54 Member States which are elected by the General Assembly. Regarding the creation of stability and prosperity, its function is to promote:

- higher standards of living,
- economic and social progress,
- solutions to economic, social and health problems,
- international cultural and educational cooperation, and
- respect for human rights.

The ECOSOC is the **principal coordinating organ** for these issues by closely cooperating with the subsidiary bodies and the specialized agencies. It can initiate investigations, submit reports and hold conferences. Yet, it is subordinate to the General Assembly, as it is not permitted to adopt mandatory decisions autonomously.



Meeting of the Economic and Social Council

The System of the United Nations

Principal Organs

Security Council

General Assembly

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Secretariat



UN Headquarters in New York

The **Secretariat** is the UN's **administrative centre**. It represents the bureaucratic foundation of the organization, providing documentation, information and other services. Head of the Secretariat is the **Secretary-General**. The Secretariat counts approximately 44,000 **international staff** who are stationed at

- the UN headquarters in New York,
- UN offices in Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi and
- further UN sites world wide, e.g. in Bonn.

The Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly upon recommendation of the Security Council for a five year term.



Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General since 2007

The System of the United Nations

Principal Organs

Security Council

General Assembly

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Secretariat

Special Representatives

Given their growing importance as international mediators, Secretaries-General have increasingly appointed **Special Representatives (SRSG)**. Their mandates comprise the investigation of situations which pose a threat to international peace and security. Today, SRSGs are responsible for the **diverse range of tasks of multidimensional UN peacekeeping operations**. They are the **chief negotiators** in peace processes, **heads of UN peacekeeping missions** and **heads of administration** in places where the UN has temporarily taken over administrative functions. Some Special Representatives are not assigned to a specific region but to a **broader subject of global concern** to which they are trying to find international political solutions. There are currently more than 60 SRSGs.

The System of the United Nations

Principal Organs

Security Council

General Assembly

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Secretariat

International Court of Justice (ICJ)

Special Representatives

The **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. Its tasks and competences are laid down in the [UN Charter](#) and the [Statute of the International Court of Justice](#). The ICJ is composed of 15 independent judges who are elected by the General Assembly and by the Security Council.

Only states may be parties to a case before the ICJ. Although every UN member state automatically becomes a state party to the ICJ, it depends on the optional decision of individual states to accept the ICJ's jurisdiction either in general or in particular cases. Until now, only a minority of states has made this decision. Germany does not belong to this minority. Thus, as there is no principle of compulsory international jurisdiction in international law, the ICJ's role can not be compared to the role of an ordinary national Court. In the past, however, the ICJ **has contributed significantly to the development of international law**. Moreover, it is the only international judicial organ which is able to freely interpret international law without any treaty-based restrictions.

The System of the United Nations

Principal Organs

Security Council

General Assembly

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Secretariat

International Court of Justice (ICJ)

Trusteeship Council

Special Representatives

The **Trusteeship Council** has suspended its work in November 1994. It was established in 1945 to oversee the decolonization of those dependent territories that were to be placed under the international trusteeship system created by the UN Charter as a successor to the League of Nations mandate system. With the independence of the last remaining UN trust territory (Palau) in 1994, the Council has ceased its operations. It is set to reconvene prospectively only when circumstances require it.

The System of the United Nations

Principal Organs

Security Council

General Assembly

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Secretariat

International Court of Justice (ICJ)

Trusteeship Council

Special Representatives

Specialized Agencies

FAO	UNESCO	WHO	UNIDO
ICAO	IMO	ITU	UNWTO
WMO	WIPO	IFAD	World Bank Group
	IWF	ILO	UPU

When the UN was founded in 1945, it was obvious that it will rely on the work of other independent international organizations. The more than 15 **Specialized Agencies** have an **autonomous legal and administrative status**. Thus by entering into relationship agreements with the ECOSOC, they became part of the “UN family”. The Specialized Agencies mostly focus on one specific issue. They are obligated to report regularly to the ECOSOC, which coordinates the relations between the UN and the Agencies.

Examples of Specialized Agencies are:

- International Labour Organization (ILO),
- World Health Organization (WHO),
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).



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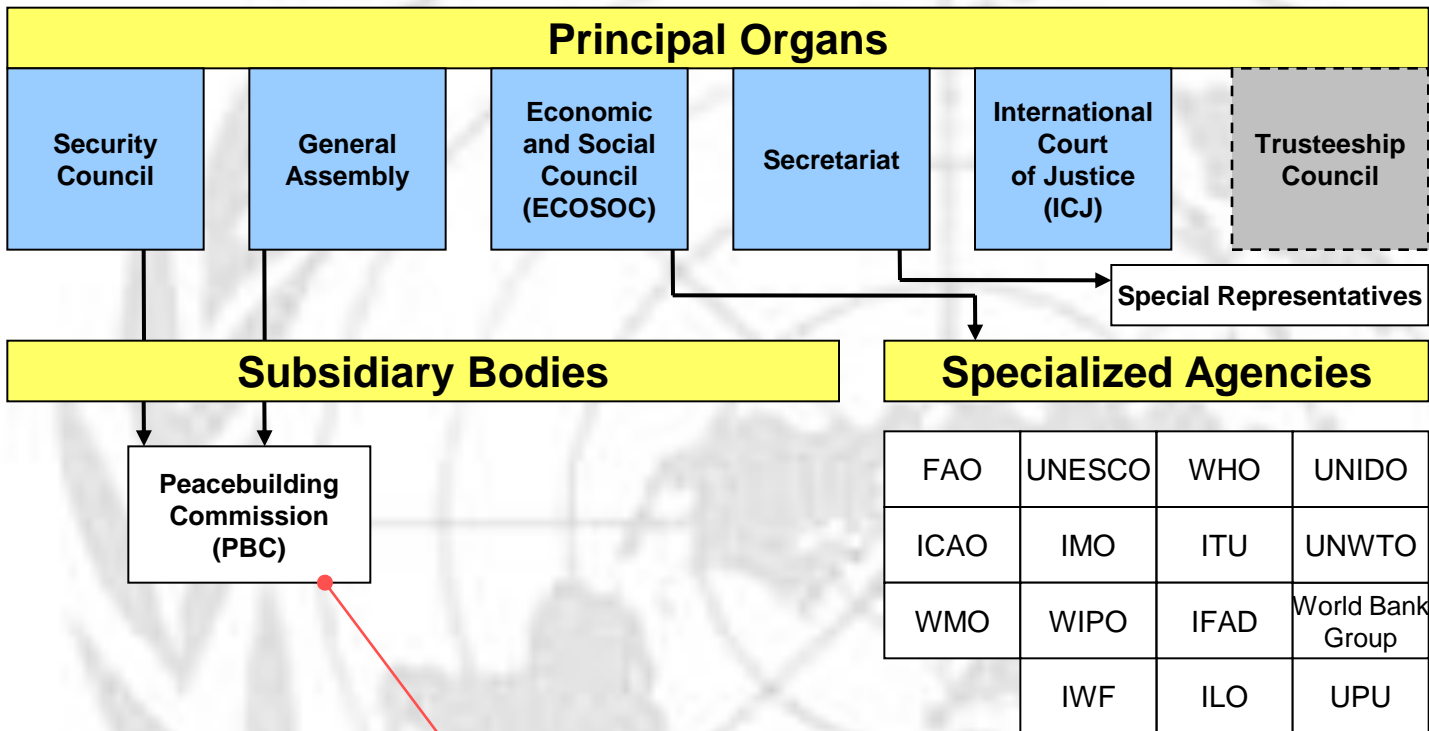
Subsidiary Bodies

Specialized Agencies

FAO	UNESCO	WHO	UNIDO
ICAO	IMO	ITU	UNWTO
WMO	WIPO	IFAD	World Bank Group
IWF	ILO	UPU	

The **General Assembly** focuses on a wide range of issues. In order to cope with this scale, the General Assembly enjoys the explicit right, which is laid down in the [UN Charter](#), to establish Subsidiary Bodies that either temporarily or sometimes permanently take over some of its tasks. Subsequently, a complex system of Subsidiary Bodies derives within the UN system and is subject to constant change and alteration throughout the years. Peacekeeping missions and the two International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and for the Former Yugoslavia, led by the SC, can also be considered Subsidiary Bodies.

The System of the United Nations



The **Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)** is one of the new UN bodies which have been established since 2005. The PBC is an intergovernmental Subsidiary Body performing an advisory function towards the Security Council and towards the General Assembly. Its task is to coordinate the international community's peace efforts in countries emerging from conflict, especially during their transitional phase. It coordinates the Security Council's crisis management in the immediate aftermath and long-term reconstruction efforts, in order to prevent the renewed outbreak of violence. The commission is composed of 31 members, 21 of which are selected in equal numbers by the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. They are joined by five top donor countries to the UN and five top troop-contributing countries to UN missions.



The System of the United Nations

Principal Organs

Security Council

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Special Representatives

Subsidiary Bodies

Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)

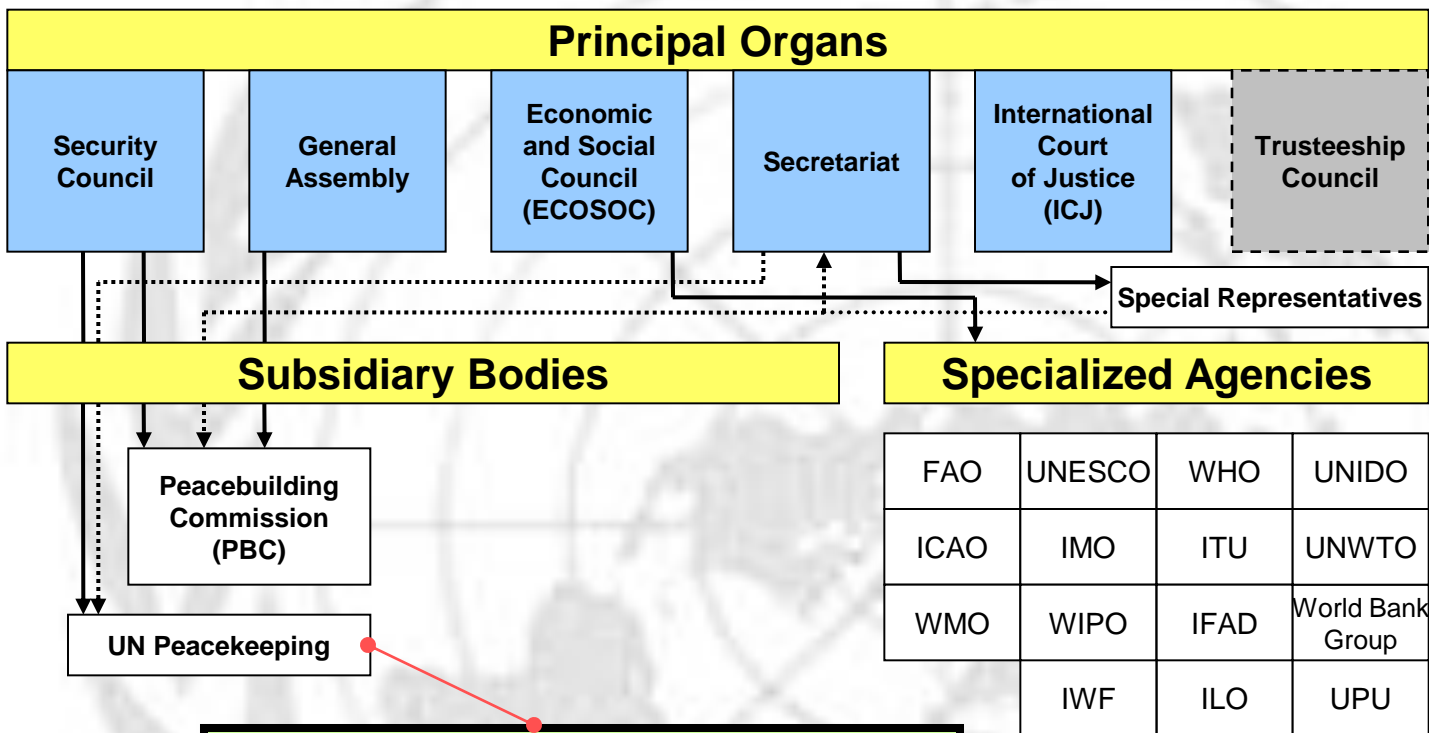
Specialized Agencies

FAO	UNESCO	WHO	UNIDO
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The **Peacebuilding Commission** performs an advisory function towards the Secretariat to maintain a close cooperation with the Special Representatives. The Secretariat, in turn, fulfills an advisory function towards the Peacebuilding Commission.



The System of the United Nations



Under the label of **UN Peacekeeping**, the Security Council establishes and mandates UN missions that fulfill a variety of tasks, deploying unarmed military observers, police and civilian capacity-building personnel as well as heavily armed and equipped soldiers.

As of May 2012, there are **16 peacekeeping operations on the ground, involving a total of 119,446 personnel**: 82,549 regular soldiers, 14,335 police forces, 2,033 military observers and 17,758 civilian personnel.



UN Peacekeeping Mission in Haiti



The System of the United Nations

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Subsidiary Bodies

Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)

UN Peacekeeping

International Tribunals

Specialized Agencies

FAO	UNESCO	WHO	UNIDO
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The two **International Criminal Tribunals** for Rwanda and for the Former Yugoslavia are ad-hoc tribunals that have been established by the Security Council on the basis of Chapter VII of the UN Charter. They are mandated to prosecute individuals charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity and thus to contribute to the “restoration and maintenance of peace” in both regions.



The System of the United Nations

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Subsidiary Bodies

Specialized Agencies

Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)

Committees, Commissions

Functional Commissions

UN Peacekeeping

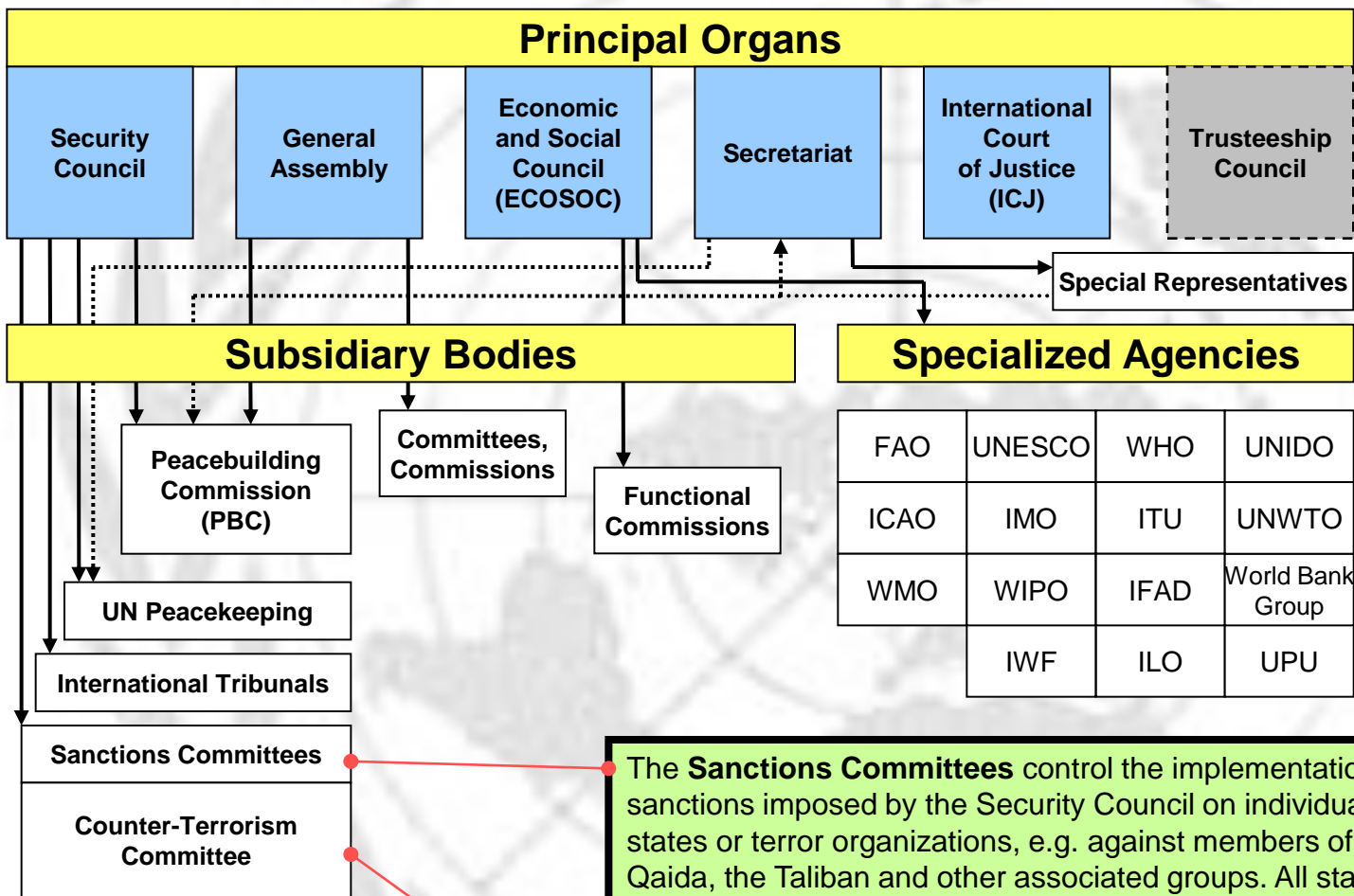
International Tribunals

FAO	UNESCO	WHO	UNIDO
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The **committees and commissions** established by the General Assembly and the ECOSOC fulfill a variety of tasks. They include, among others, functional commissions, ad-hoc commissions, standing committees and expert bodies.



The System of the United Nations

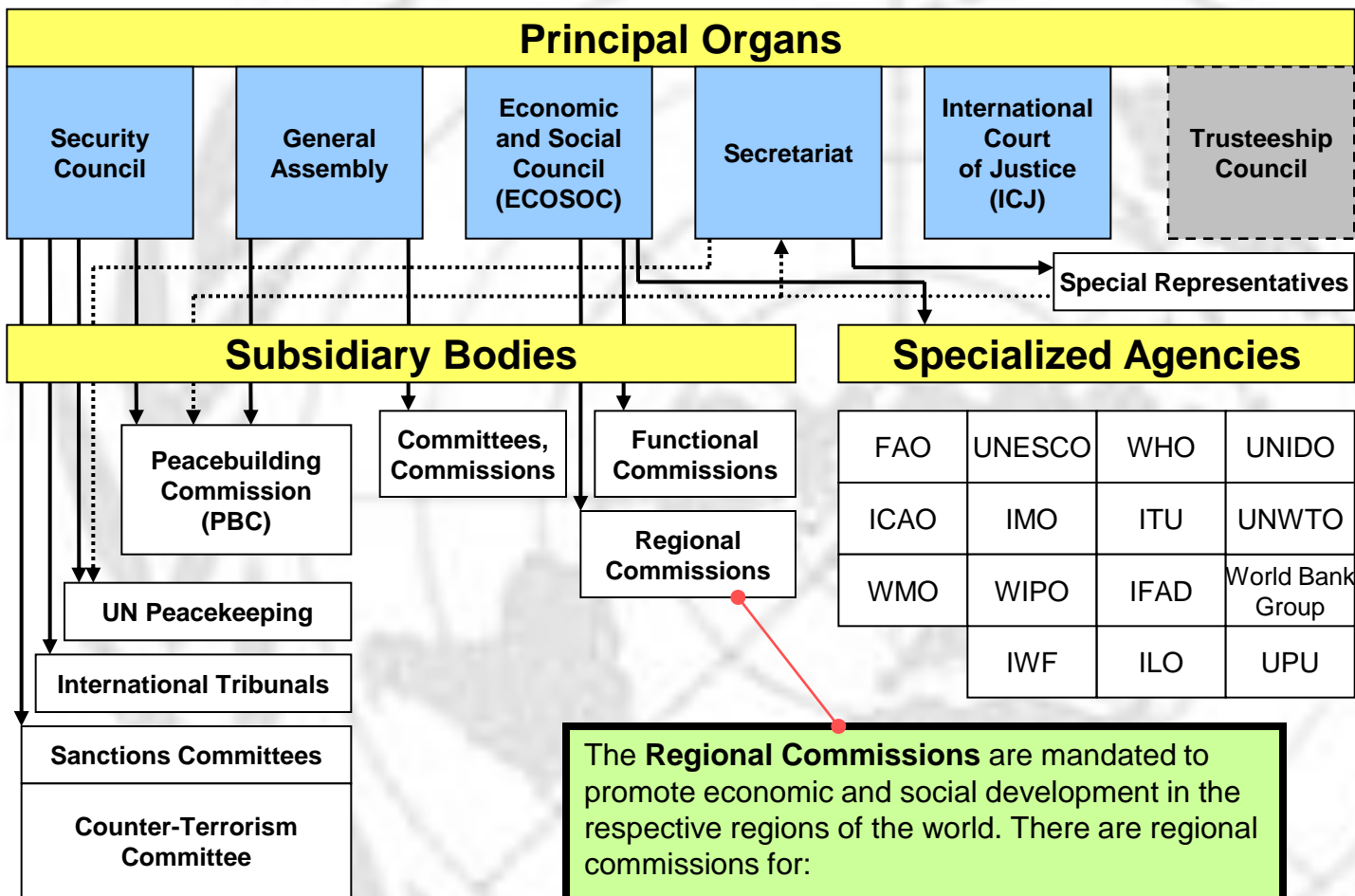


The **Sanctions Committees** control the implementation of sanctions imposed by the Security Council on individual states or terror organizations, e.g. against members of Al-Qaida, the Taliban and other associated groups. All states are expected to cease the sale and transfer of arms to these entities as well as supporting them in any other way.

The **Counter-Terrorism Committee** promotes international cooperation to prevent acts of terror. This is accomplished by passing laws and regulations and by building administrative capacities.



The System of the United Nations

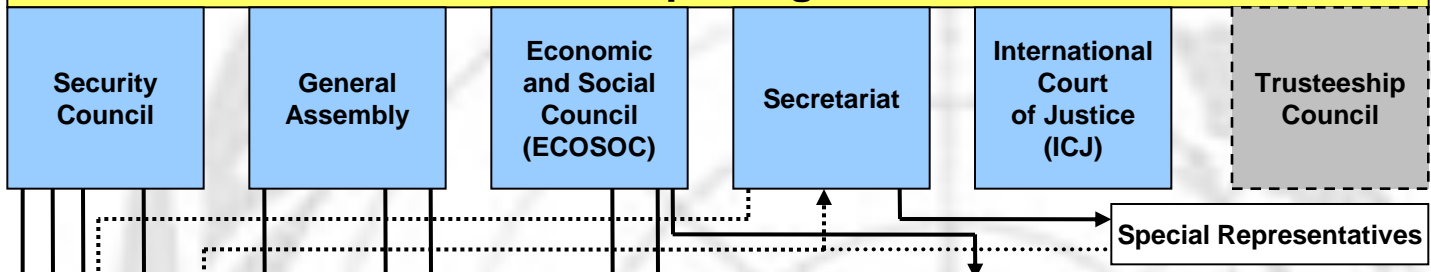


The **Regional Commissions** are mandated to promote economic and social development in the respective regions of the world. There are regional commissions for:

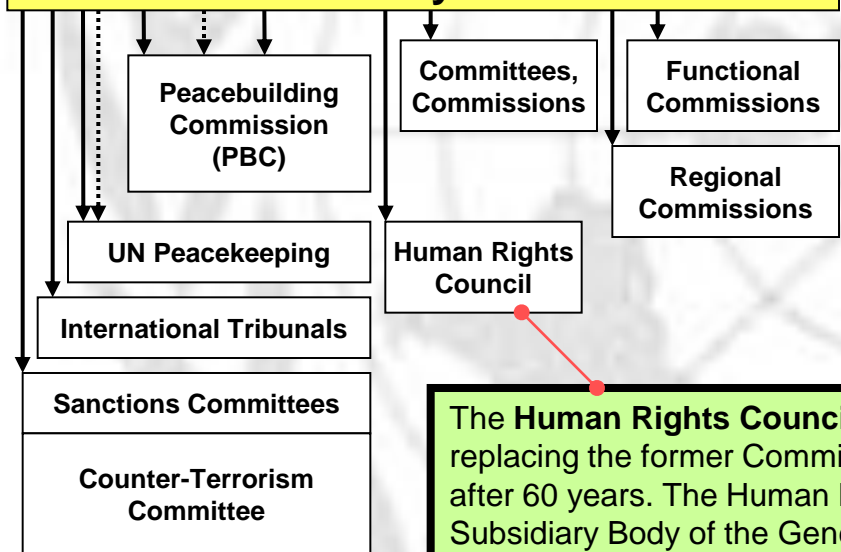
- Europa (**ECE**),
- Asia and the Pacific (**ESCAP**),
- Western Asia, (**ESCWA**),
- Latin America and the Caribbean (**ECLAC**) und
- Africa (**ECA**).

The System of the United Nations

Principal Organs



Subsidiary Bodies



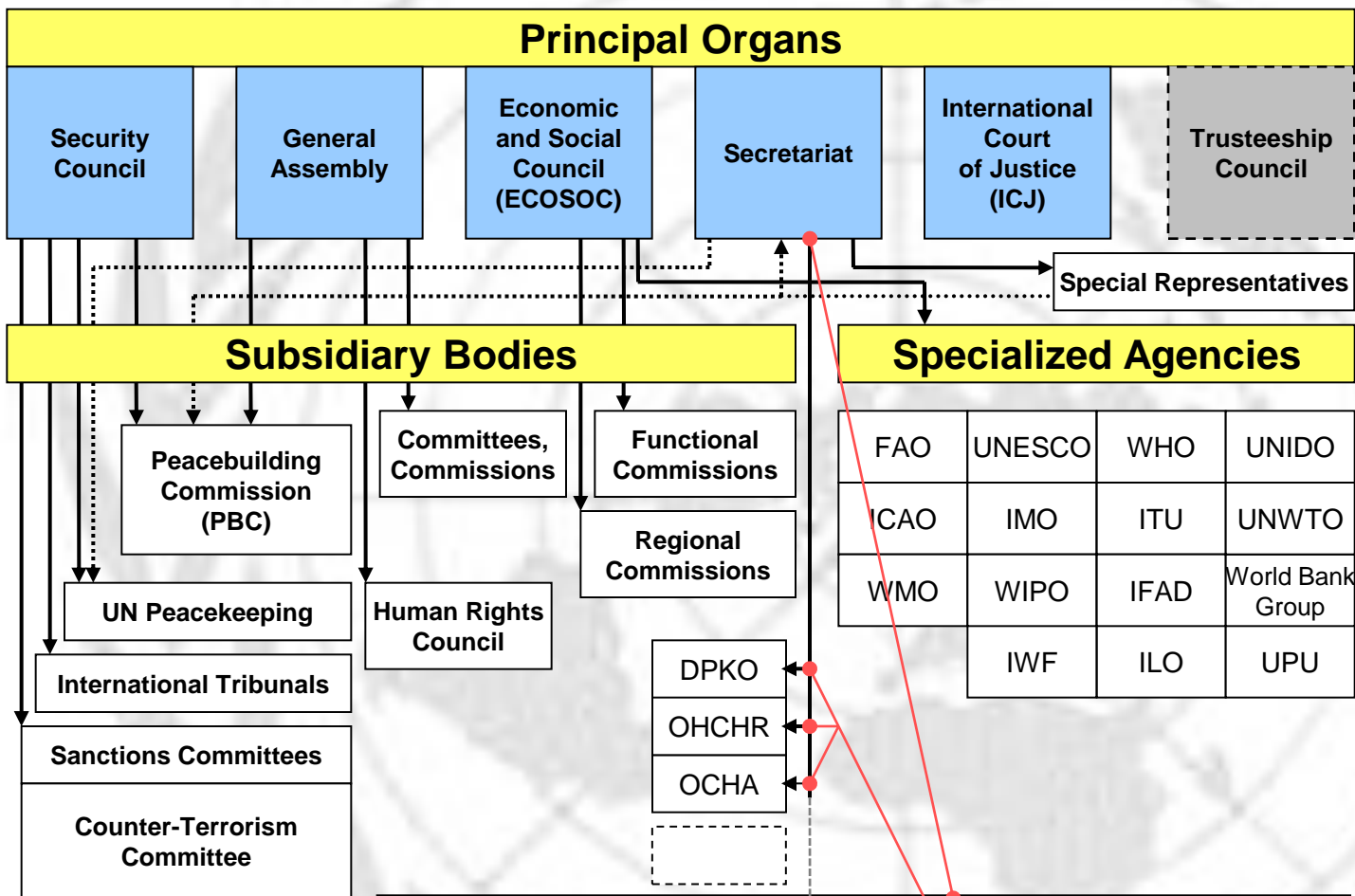
Specialized Agencies

FAO	UNESCO	WHO	UNIDO
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The **Human Rights Council** was established in 2006, replacing the former Commission for Human Rights after 60 years. The Human Rights Council is a Subsidiary Body of the General Assembly. It holds three sessions each year. Although it has not lived up to the high expectations placed on it in the international struggle for human rights, it has taken some positive steps such as the establishment of the compulsory **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)** of all UN Member States.



The System of the United Nations

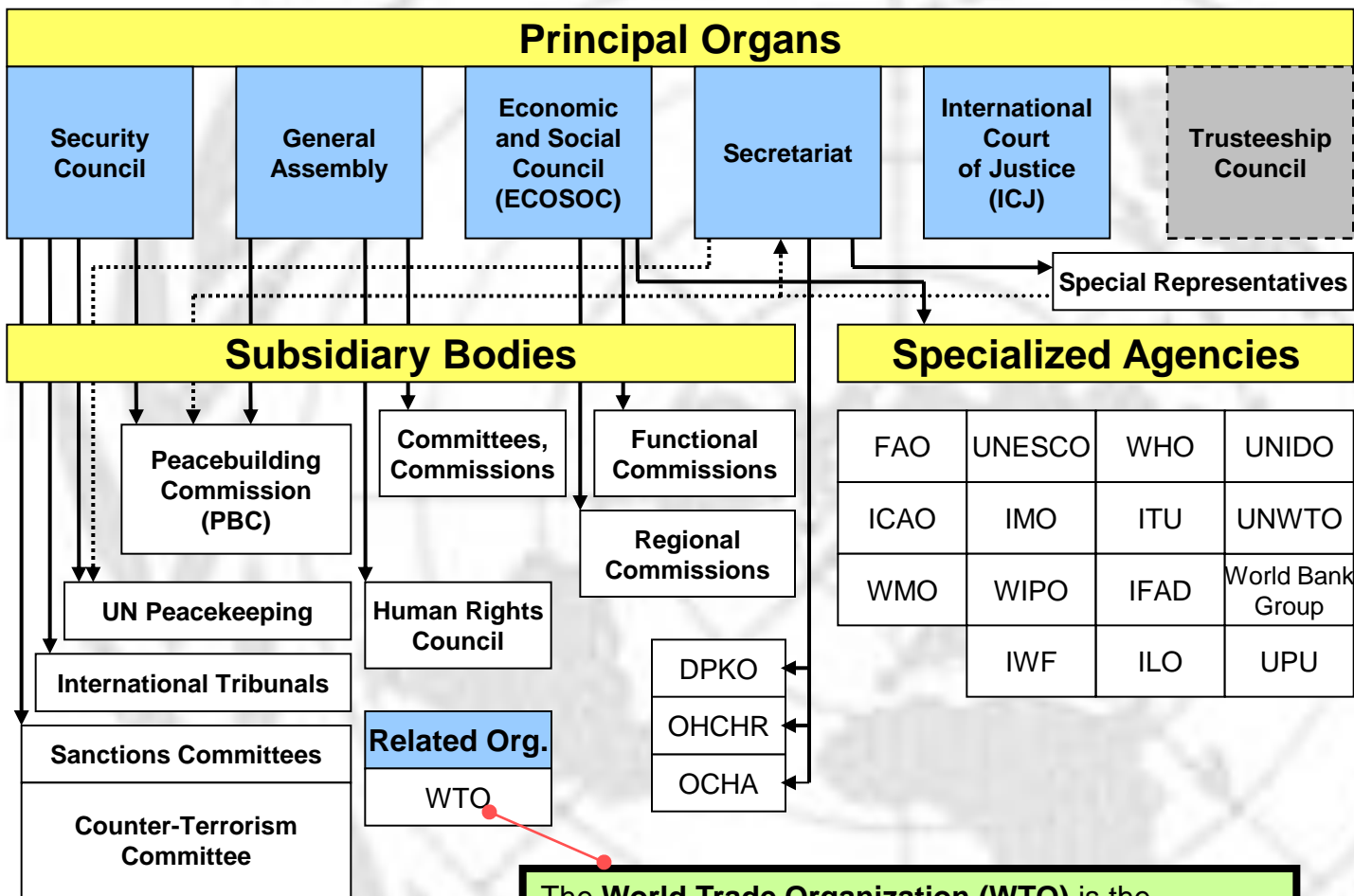


The Secretariat, being the administrative center of the United Nations, combines more than 15 **Departments** that **focus on every important issue** within the organization. Some of the most significant departments are the:

- Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO)
- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)



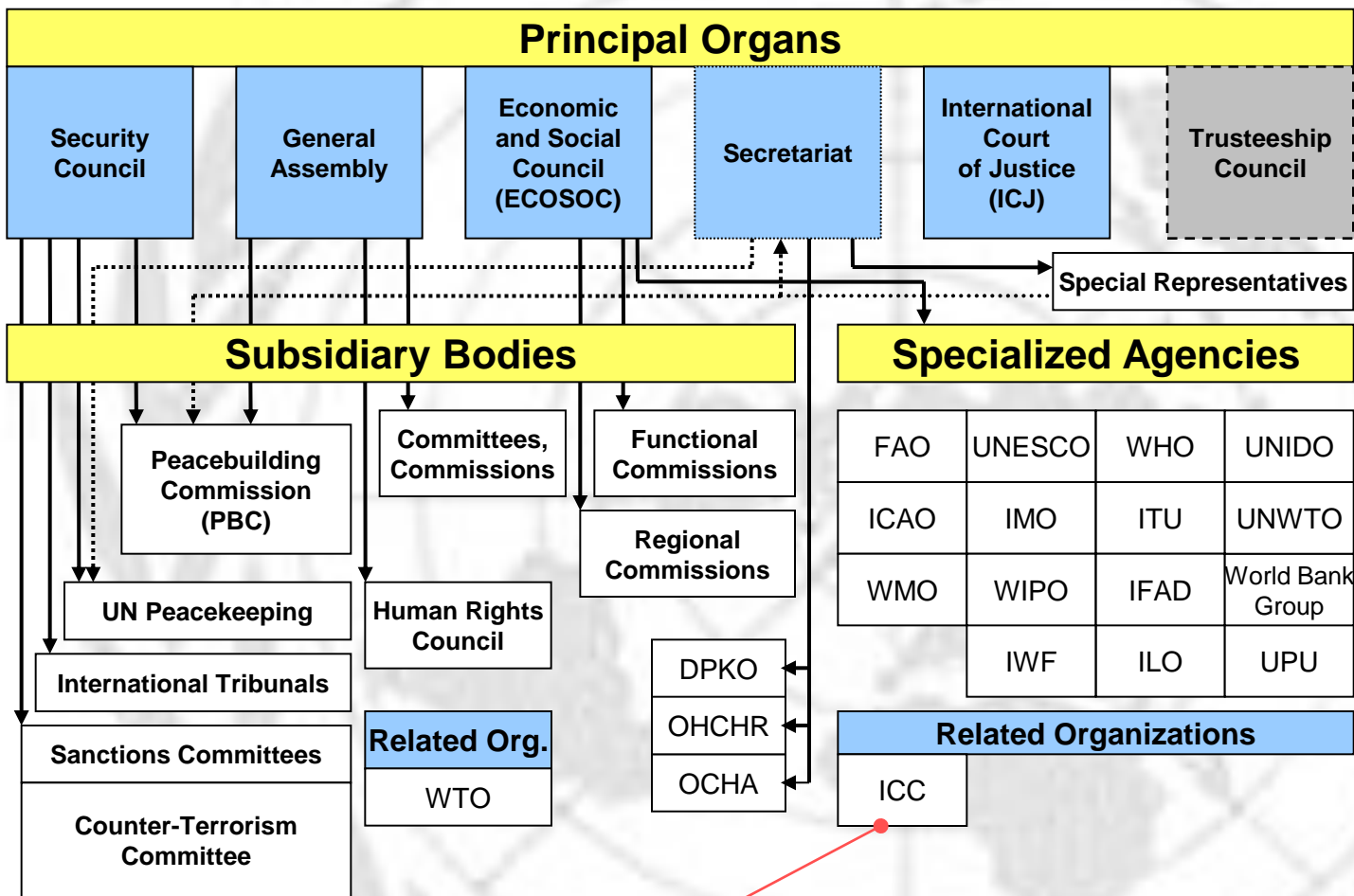
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The **World Trade Organization (WTO)** is the successor organization of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). It provides the legal framework for international trade and thus has a strong influence on the world economy. The WTO is often thought of as part of the UN family, sharing common fields of work with other UN institutions. However, although there is a dense structure of cooperation, it is a legally **autonomous organization outside of the UN system.**



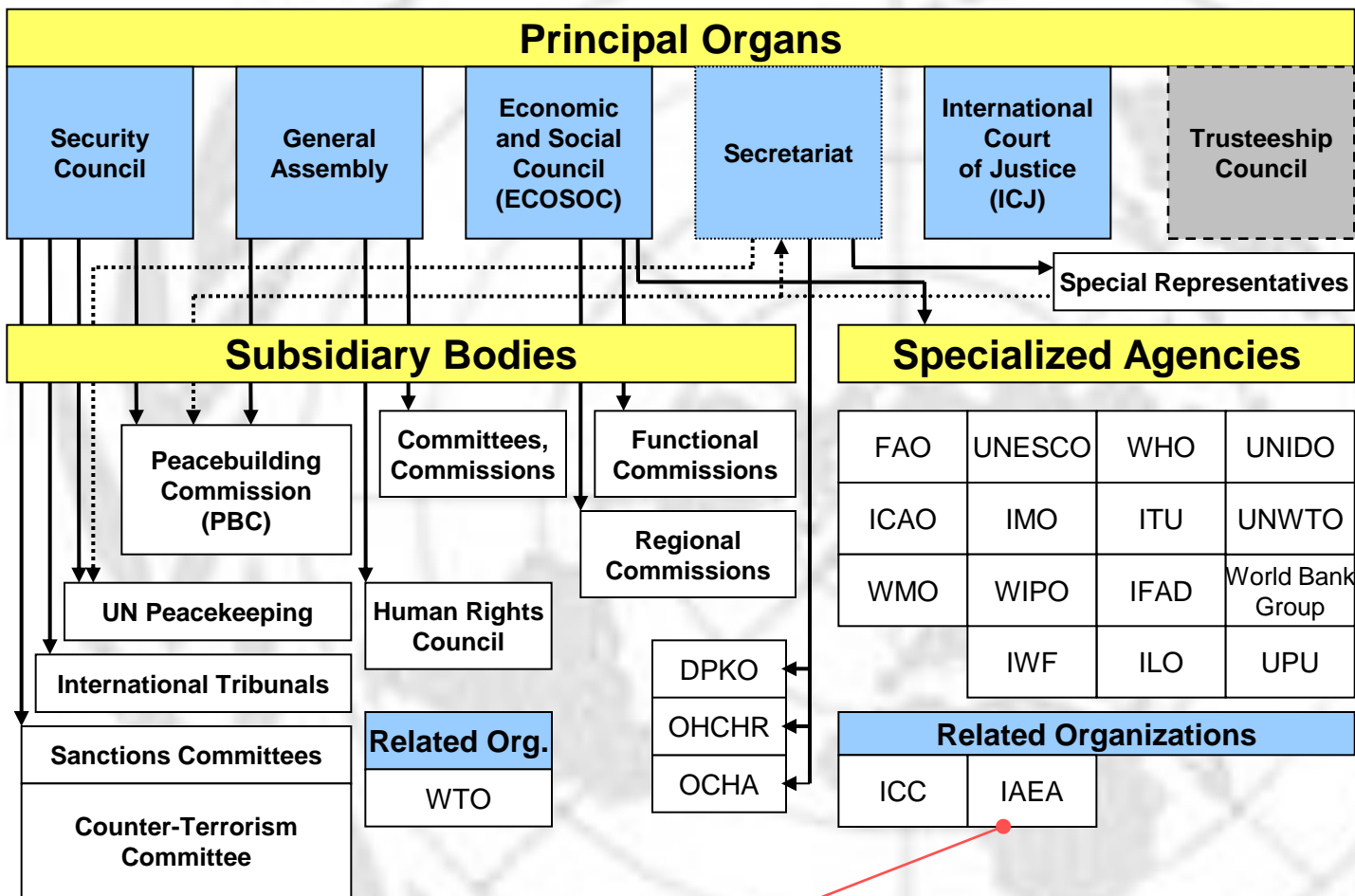
The System of the United Nations



The **International Criminal Court (ICC)** was established as an autonomous international institution in 2002, after the Rome Statute entered into force on 1 July 2002. It is therefore not a UN organ but its cooperation with the UN is regulated by a relationship agreement. The ICC can prosecute individuals (especially those in key positions in the state apparatus or the military) for **grave violations of human rights** such as genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. The lack of recognition of the Court by states like the USA or China, among others, remain a hindrance to its effective functioning. Still, the ICC, whose Statute has already been ratified by over 120 states, carries the hopes of those worldwide who are promoting international respect for human rights.



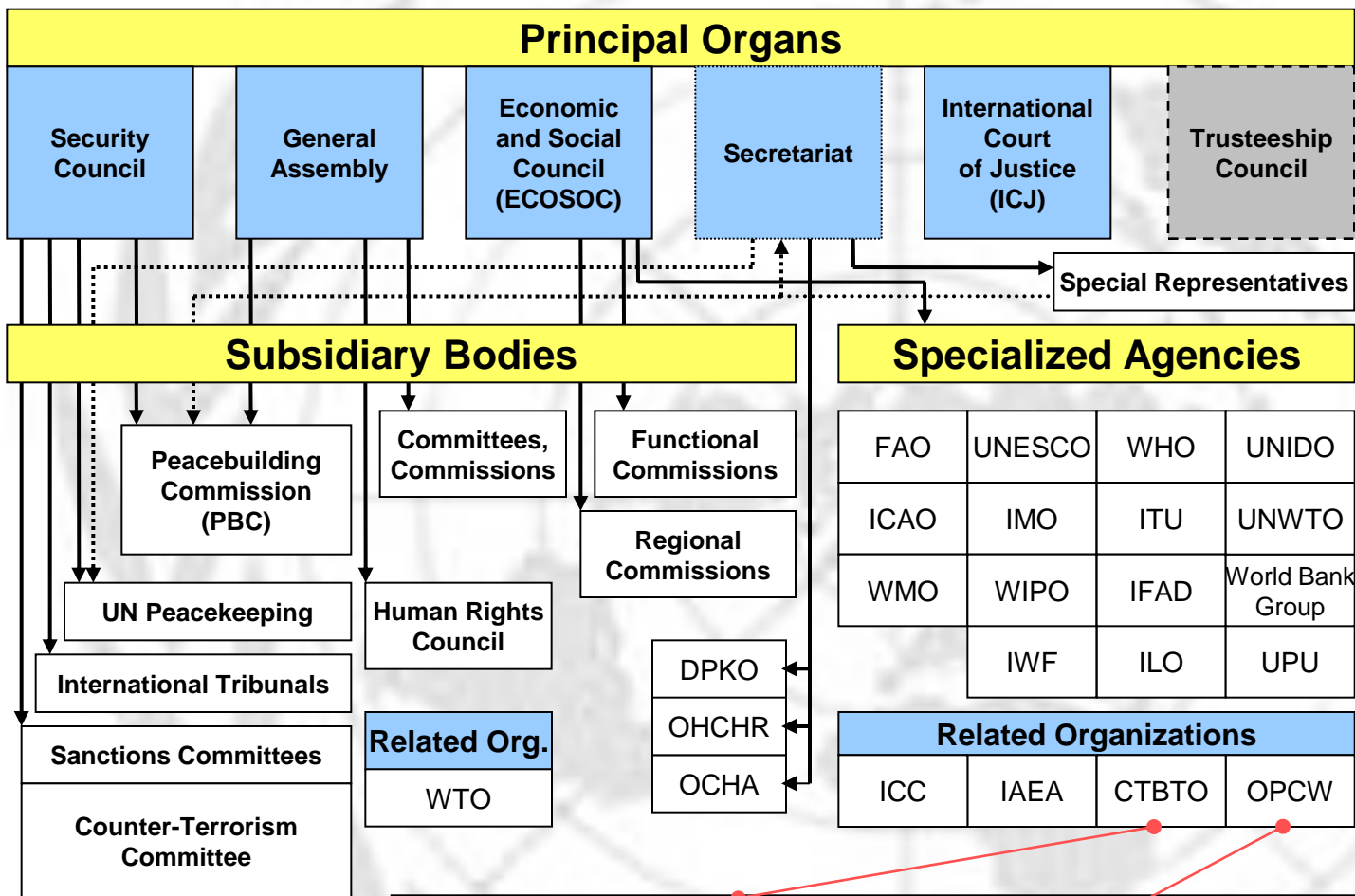
The System of the United Nations



The **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** is also a legally autonomous organization whose close cooperation with the UN is regulated by a relationship agreement. It regularly reports to the General Assembly. The IAEA serves as the center of global cooperation for the peaceful use of nuclear energy and it supervises state compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The Agency has the right to bring items to the attention of the Security Council via the Secretary-General.



The System of the United Nations

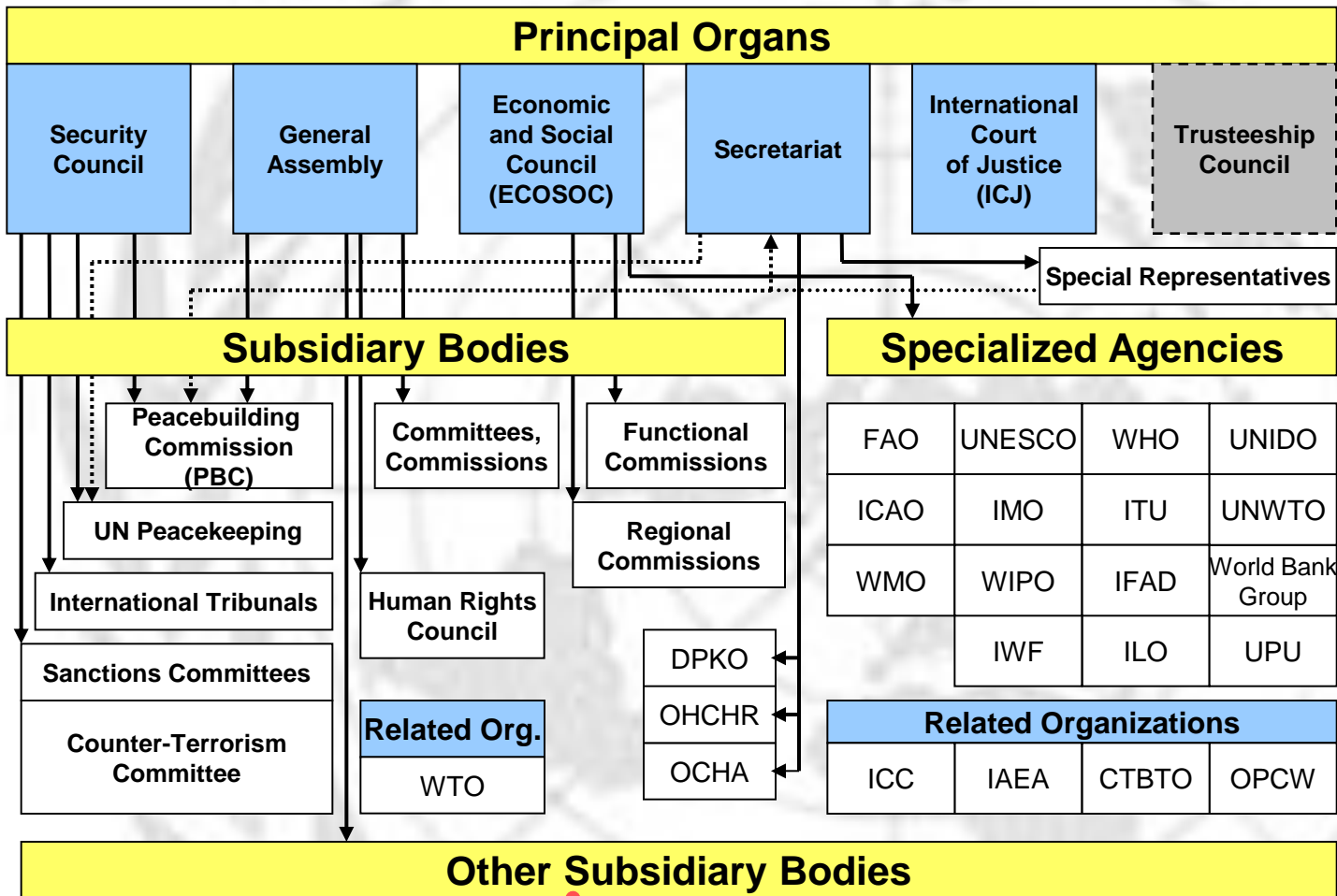


The **Preparatory Commission for the Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)** is an autonomous organization tasked to supervise state compliance with the Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

The **Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)** is an autonomous organization with a relationship agreement with the United Nations. It supervises state compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.



The System of the United Nations

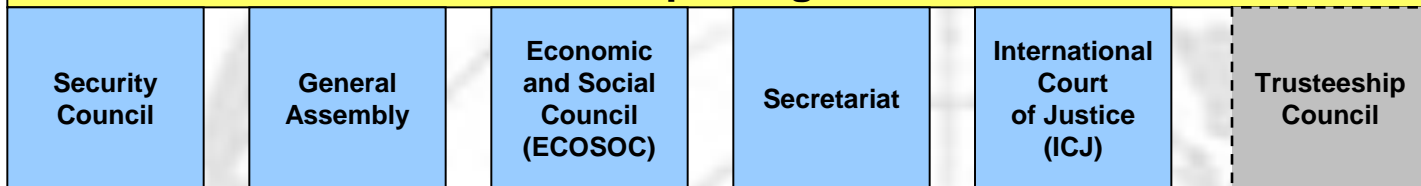


Many **other subsidiary bodies** have been established by the General Assembly. These include:



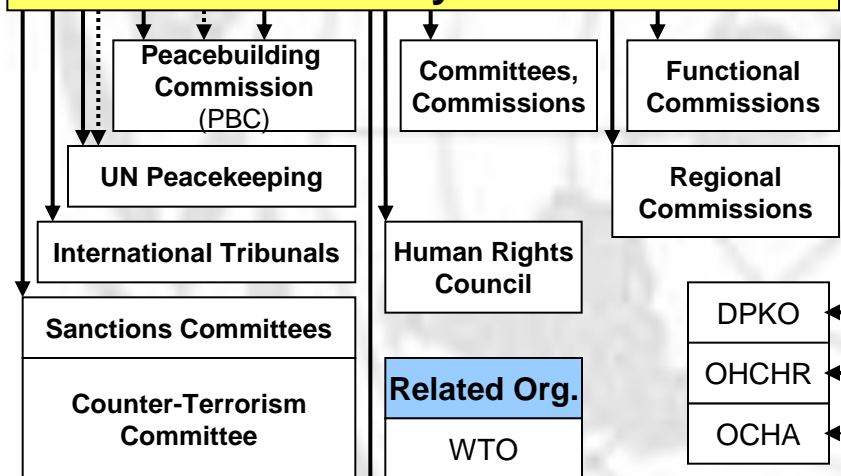
The System of the United Nations

Principal Organs



Special Representatives

Subsidiary Bodies

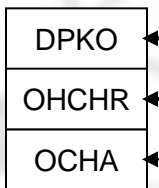


Specialized Agencies

FAO	UNESCO	WHO	UNIDO
ICAO	IMO	ITU	UNWTO
WMO	WIPO	IFAD	World Bank Group
	IWF	ILO	UPU

Related Organizations

ICC	IAEA	CTBTO	OPCW
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Other Subsidiary Bodies

Programmes and Funds

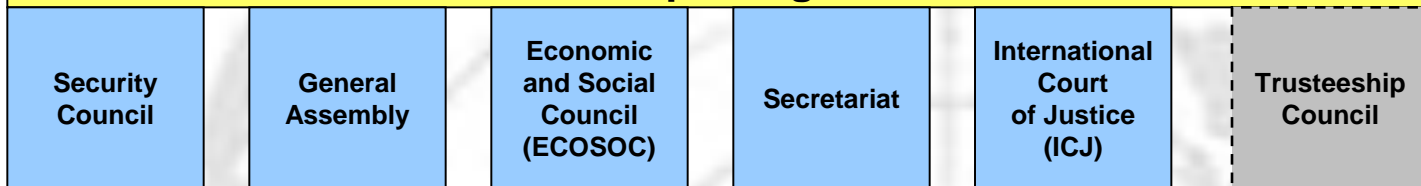
UNCTAD	UNEP	UNDP	UNV
UNDCP	UNCDF	UNICEF	HABITAT
UNFPA	UNRWA	WFP	UNHCR

Programmes and Funds. These bodies were established in the 1960's on demand of the developing countries as Subsidiary Bodies to the General Assembly. Despite this, they have a certain degree of independence as they are allowed to fulfill their mandate in a largely autonomous way. Examples include the **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)**, the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**, the **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** or the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**.

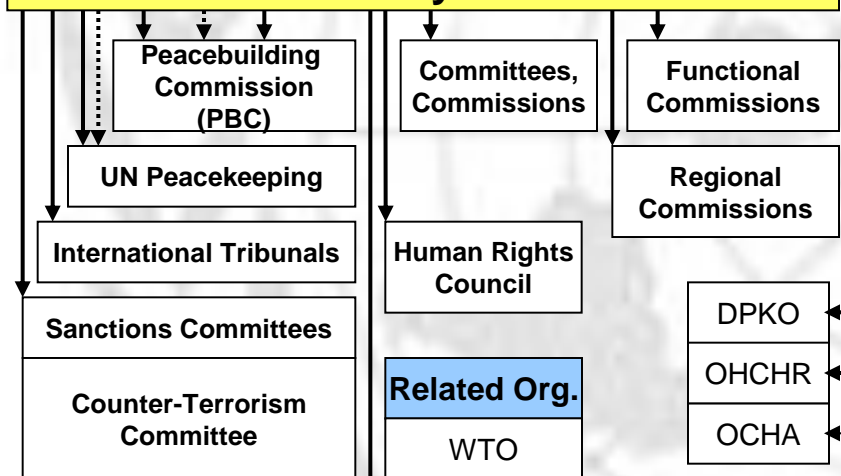


The System of the United Nations

Principal Organs



Subsidiary Bodies



Specialized Agencies

FAO	UNESCO	WHO	UNIDO
ICAO	IMO	ITU	UNWTO
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Related Organizations

ICC	IAEA	CTBTO	OPCW
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Other Subsidiary Bodies

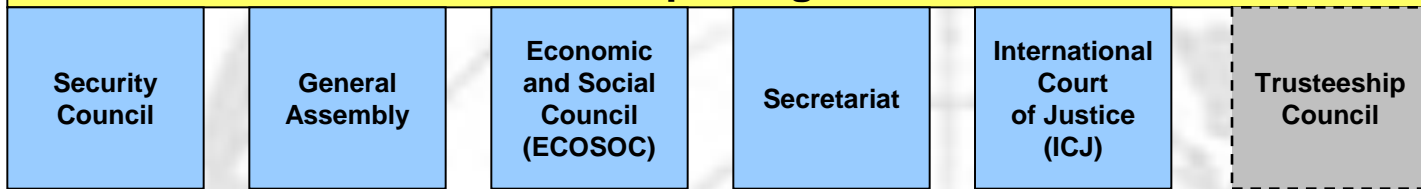
Programmes and Funds				Research and Training Institutes		
UNCTAD	UNEP	UNDP	UNV	UNICRI	UNITAR	UNRISD
UNDCP	UNCDF	UNICEF	HABITAT	UNIDIR		
UNFPA	UNRWA	WFP	UNHCR			

The **Research and Training Institutes** of the United Nations, such as the **United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)**, are mainly financed through donations and other voluntary contributions.



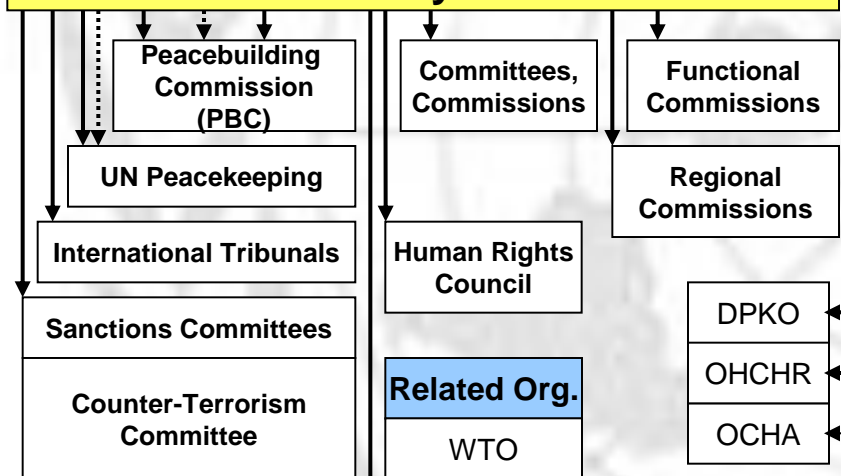
The System of the United Nations

Principal Organs



Special Representatives

Subsidiary Bodies



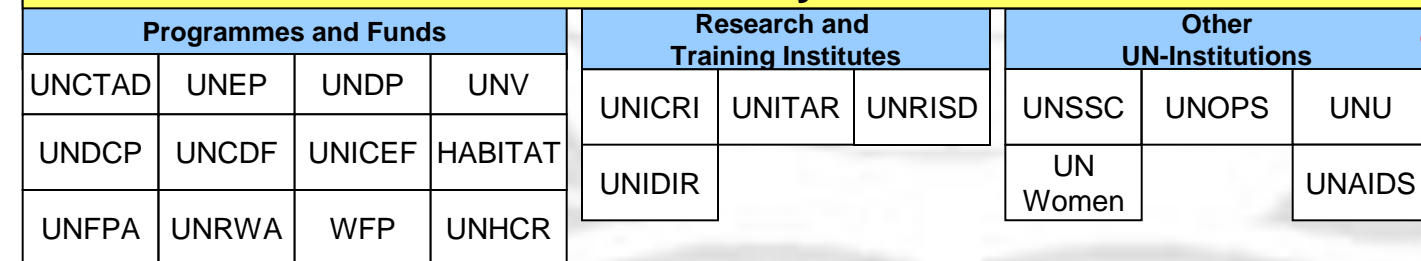
Specialized Agencies

FAO	UNESCO	WHO	UNIDO
ICAO	IMO	ITU	UNWTO
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Related Organizations

ICC	IAEA	CTBTO	OPCW
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Other Subsidiary Bodies

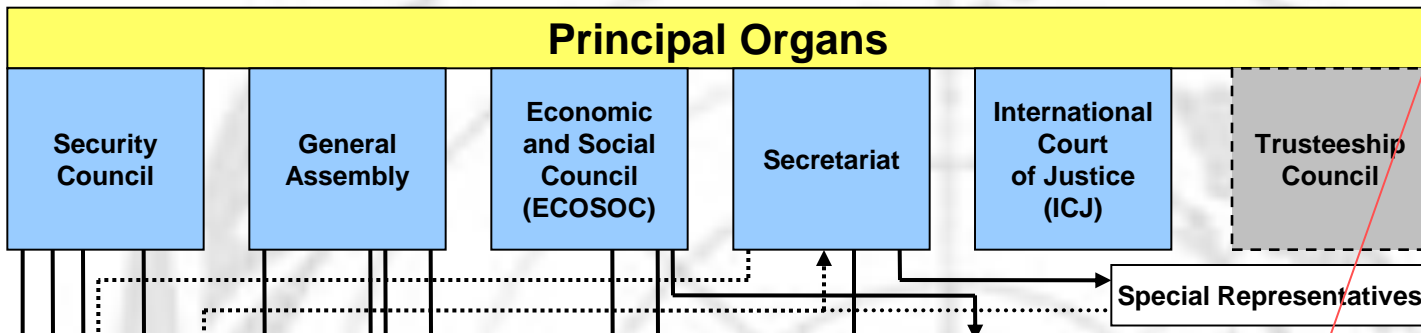


Other UN Institutions include the **United Nations University (UNU)**. UNU is a community of scholars that has a different legal status than the other Research and Training Institutes, yet it also belongs to the UN's subsidiary bodies.



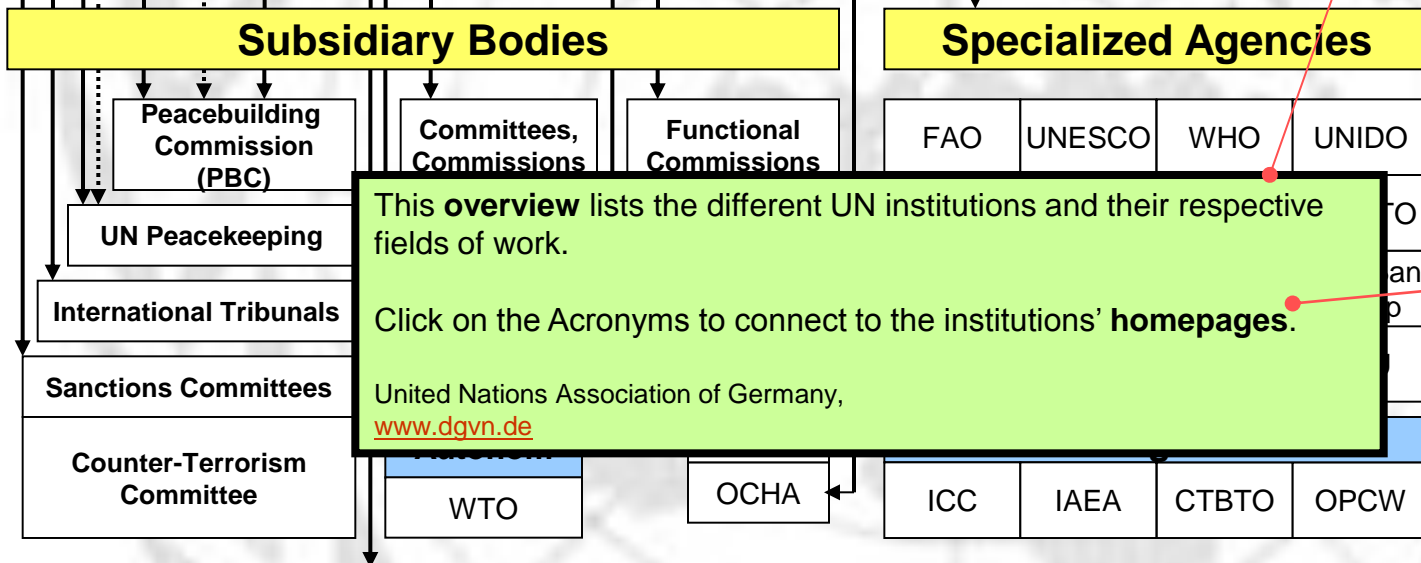
The System of the United Nations

Principal Organs



Subsidiary Bodies

Specialized Agencies



This overview lists the different UN institutions and their respective fields of work.
 Click on the Acronyms to connect to the institutions' **homepages**.
 United Nations Association of Germany,
www.dgvn.de

Other Subsidiary Bodies

Programmes and Funds				Research and Training Institutes			Other UN-Institutions		
UNCTAD	UNEP	UNDP	UNV	UNICRI	UNITAR	UNRISD	UNSSC	UNOPS	UNU
UNDCP	UNCDF	UNICEF	HABITAT	UNIDIR			UN Women		UNAIDS
UNFPA	UNRWA	WFP	UNHCR						

- Specialized Agencies**
- [FAO](#) Food and Agriculture
- [ICAO](#) Civil Aviation
- [IFAD](#) Agricultural Development
- [ILO](#) Labour
- [IMF](#) Currency
- [IMO](#) Maritime Navigation
- [ITU](#) Telecommunication
- [WHO](#) Health
- [WIPO](#) Intellectual Property
- [WMO](#) Meteorology
- [UNESCO](#) Education, Science and Culture
- [UNIDO](#) Industrial Development
- [UNWTO](#) Tourism
- [UPU](#) Postal Service

- Programmes and Funds**
- [HABITAT](#) Human Settlements
- [UNCDF](#) Capital Development Fund
- [UNCTAD](#) Trade and Development
- [UNDCP](#) Drugs
- [UNDP](#) Development
- [UNEP](#) Environment
- [UNFPA](#) Population
- [UNHCR](#) Refugees
- [UNICEF](#) Children
- [UNRWA](#) Palestinian Refugees
- [UNV](#) Volunteers
- [UN Women](#) Women
- [WFP](#) Food Aid

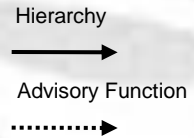
- Departments of the Secretariat**
- [DPKO](#) Peacekeeping
- [OCHA](#) Humanitarian Aid
- [OHCHR](#) Human Rights

- Research and Training Institutes**
- [UNICRI](#) Crime and Justice
- [UNITAR](#) Training and Research
- [UNRISD](#) Social Development
- [UNIDIR](#) Disarmament

- Other UN-Institutions**
- [UNAIDS](#) HIV/Aids
- [UNOPS](#) Project Services
- [UNSSC](#) System Staff College
- [UNU](#) UN University

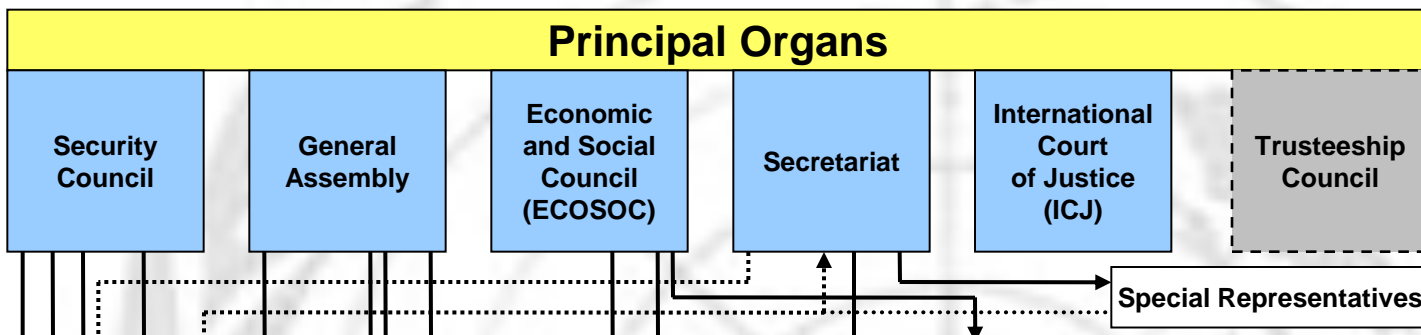
- Related Organizations**
- [CTBTO](#) Nuclear-Test-Ban
- [IAEA](#) Nuclear Energy
- [ICC](#) International Criminal Court
- [OPCW](#) Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

- Autonomous Organisations**
- [WTO](#) World Trade

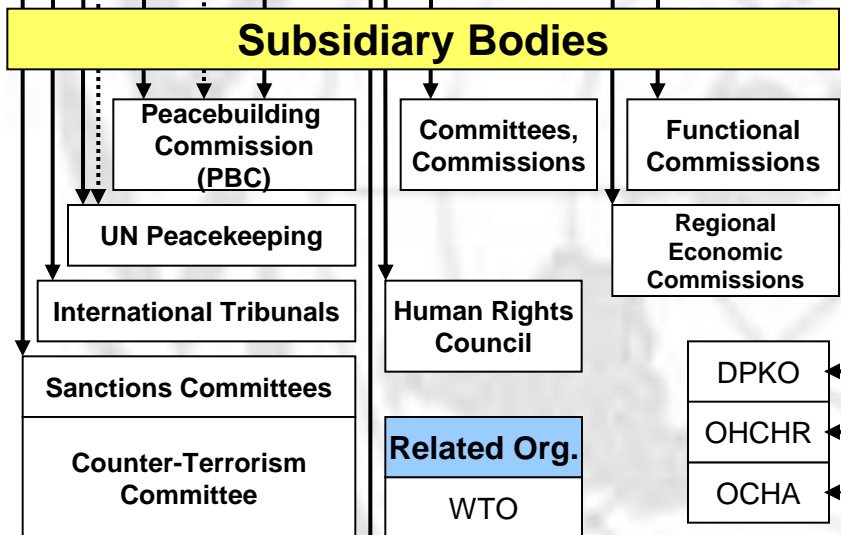


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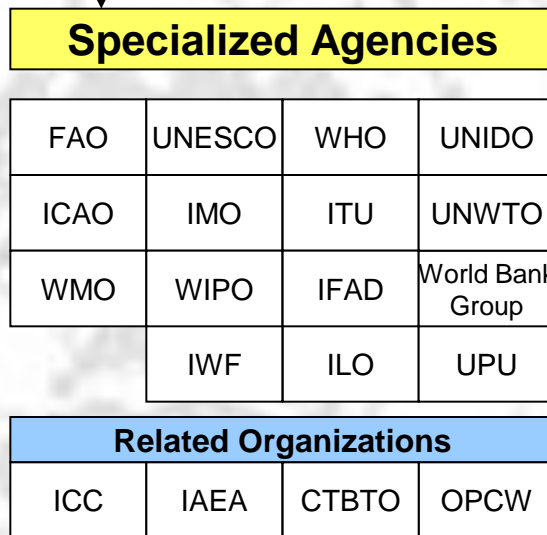
Principal Organs



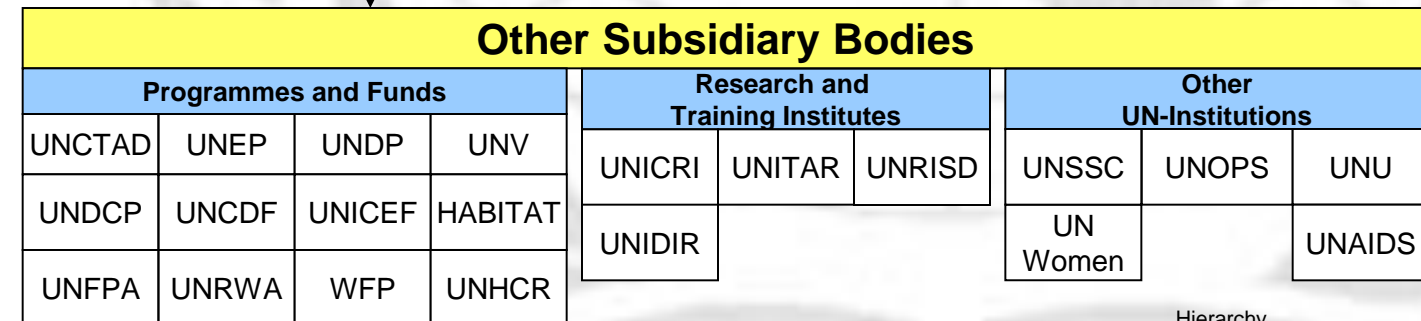
Subsidiary Bodies



Specialized Agencies



Other Subsidiary Bodies



Specialized Agencies

- [FAO](#) Food and Agriculture
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- [UNESCO](#) Education, Science and Culture
- [UNIDO](#) Industrial Development
- [UNWTO](#) Tourism
- [UPU](#) Postal Service

Programmes and Funds

- [HABITAT](#) Human Settlements
- [UNCDF](#) Capital Development Fund
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- [UNDCP](#) Drugs
- [UNDP](#) Development
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- [UNRWA](#) Palestinian Refugees
- [UNV](#) Volunteers
- [UN Women](#) Women
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Departments of the Secretariat

- [DPKO](#) Peacekeeping
- [OCHA](#) Humanitarian Aid
- [OHCHR](#) Human Rights

Research and Training Institutes

- [UNICRI](#) Crime and Justice
- [UNITAR](#) Training and Research
- [UNRISD](#) Social Development
- [UNIDIR](#) Disarmament

Other UN-Institutions

- [UNAIDS](#) HIV/Aids
- [UNOPS](#) Project Services
- [UNSSC](#) System Staff College
- [UNU](#) UN University

Related Organizations

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- [OPCW](#) Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

Autonomous Organisations

- [WTO](#) World Trade

Hierarchy



Advisory Function

