

The United Nations

1. What do you think the three main weaknesses of the League of Nations were?

- a.
- b.
- c.

A. Background and Aims of the United Nations

Background

- **August 1944:** Dumbarton Oaks Conference: first talks about replacing the League of Nations.
- **June 1945:** San Francisco Conference: 50 countries finalise the United Nations Charter.
- **October 1945:** UN Charter accepted by the governments of the member states (including USA).
- **January 1946:** General Assembly of the UN first met in London.
- **April 1946:** League of Nations was formally dissolved.

Aims

- The UN aims to "maintain international peace and security" and "to ensure...that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest". However, the Cold War made agreement on peacekeeping matters impossible.
- In the social arena, the UN was more successful. It adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and since then it has done a great deal of work in terms of education, refugees, decolonisation and racial equality.

B. Membership and Structure

General Assembly:	All members of the UN meet here on a regular basis to discuss major issues. It will recommend and comment on actions of the Security Council. It needs a 2/3 majority vote for its statements to be official.
Security Council:	This is where the real power lies. The Security Council has 11 members. There are five permanent members (USA, USSR, UK, France and China) and six non-permanent members who are rotated every two years. The Council does not need a unanimous vote to act – a majority vote is enough. Also, member states are expected to provide troops when the Security Council thinks that this is necessary. However, each permanent member of the Council has a veto, which weakens it (by 1955 the veto had been used 78 times, 75 times by the USSR). As well as voting for military action, it can recommend economic sanctions, set up tribunals to investigate issues (e.g. the genocide in Rwanda, war crimes in the former Yugoslavia) and send out weapons inspection teams.
Economic and Social Council:	Deals with working and living conditions around the world. Includes agencies like the WHO (World Health Organisation), ILO (International Labour Organisation) and the IMF (International monetary fund).
Trusteeship Council:	Looked after the mandates which still hadn't achieved full independence by 1946. The final mandate (Palau) was made independent in 1994, after which this council was closed down.
International Court of Justice:	Passes judgements in issues referred to it by the Assembly and / or the Security Council. All members of the UN have to carry out its judgements.
Secretariat:	Is responsible for the day-to-day running of the UN and organising its activities. It is headed by the Secretary-General, who is appointed by the General Assembly, which in turn makes its choice based on the recommendations of the Security Council. The Secretary General is the main spokesperson for the United Nations.

2. In what ways is the UN stronger than the League of Nations?

3. What are the main weaknesses of the United Nations?

4. This diagram summarises the main points of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted by the UN in 1948). Highlight / circle off what you consider to be the three most fundamental rights listed here. Be prepared to explain your choice by demonstrating how the other rights would not be possible without the ones you have chosen.



5. [Extension / Homework Task]

- Produce an illustrated diagram of how the United Nations is structured.
- Produce a second diagram showing how the League of Nations was structured.
- Aim to demonstrate the strengths, weaknesses, similarities and differences of the two organisations.