The United Nations touches our lives in a myriad of ways, from peacekeeping and development to rules for telecommunications and standards for health and environment.

How does the UN touch your life and mine?

"United Nations for a Better Future" is a fast-paced look at the work of the world organization now in its fifth decade. Going to the field, talking to individuals and showing the impact of the Organization on their daily lives, the programme describes the wide spectrum of UN activities all over the globe.

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UNITED NATIONS FOR A BETTER FUTURE

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| 00:00 | FAMILY IN FIELD; FACTORY WORKER, CHINESE CHILDREN; ARAB WOMEN IN LAB; MANDELA ADDRESSING CROWD; PROCESSING FISH; AFRICAN MAN | NARRATION
A family in Cyprus; a worker in Texas; children in Asia. Many places, many people, many lives. They don't know each other. They will probably never meet. But they share so much in common with all of us. (28") |
| 00:31 | STING PERFORMING | |
| 00:37 | AFRICANS AT SOCCER MATCH | At work, at play, we cherish a hope for prosperity and happiness, and above all for peace. (8") |
There is a place on our planet, by the East River in New York City, where the pieces of all our destinies fit into place. (7")

Even if we know little of what goes on here, it has a direct impact on the daily lives of all of us. (5")

Take a simple thing like sending a letter to a foreign country. It's only possible because people sat down and agreed to rules. In this, as in so many other aspects of human affairs, nation must talk to nation. (8")
This was the spirit that lay behind the founding of the United Nations at the end of the Second World War.

(5")

The founding nations sought to build a new and better world, where disputes could be settled by peaceful means. A place where nations could agree on how to share the bounty of our Earth more fairly. (10")

To this end, the founders wrote a charter setting out the aims of the United Nations. They gave it a structure made up of six principal organs: the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Secretariat, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice and the Economic and Social Council, which co-ordinates the activities of a whole family of independent UN agencies. (30")
Today, almost all nations on earth meet in the General Assembly. They do so on the basis of sovereign equality, with each country, large or small, rich or poor, having one vote. The Assembly is not a world parliament. It does not have the power to make countries abide by its decisions. But, backed by the weight of world opinion, it's a place where countries with similar interests on a wide range of issues can group together to make their views heard.

In this hall, thousands of resolutions, treaties and conventions have been agreed upon. The debates here -- the town meeting of the world -- have broadened all our horizons and set new standards to be fought for.
-- That no country should remain a colony or be occupied by force;
-- That apartheid is a crime;
-- That human rights are for all, including women and children;
-- And that everyone has a right to development, especially in the poorer parts of the world. (14")

This right to economic and social development is linked to all other rights. For development can only be achieved in a climate of justice and equality -- and most importantly, peace. Leading the world towards disarmament therefore, has been one of the major tasks of the Assembly. (15")
A single nuclear submarine can carry more explosive power than all the munitions used in history. We devote more than one thousand billion dollars a year to armaments. In just six hours we spend on weapons the same amount as it took to eradicate smallpox from the face of the Earth.

It's a matter of choice. For it is becoming more and more difficult to afford both the current arms race and development. It is a message that increasingly is being understood.

(28")

This factory in the Soviet Union used to make only missiles, now the same machinery and workers are converting to the manufacture of children's bicycles. If we're to afford our future, the arms industry everywhere must turn toward peaceful products.

(15")
These technicians in Texas are de-commissioning missiles banned by super-power agreements. The UN's role has been to keep the world focussed on the madness of the arms race. (10")

The General Assembly has done this in a number of ways. (3")

Most Member States have signed treaties to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. And to allow a United Nations Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, to inspect nuclear plants all over the world, to verify that they are used only for peaceful purposes. (16")

There are agreements to ban nuclear tests on the sea bed -- and to ensure the peaceful uses of outer space. (6")
The UN system touches our lives in a myriad of ways. Information from spacecraft, for example, can be transmitted back to Earth undisturbed because of international rules allocating radio and television wavelengths and even some satellite orbits.

The Assembly, moreover, has declared that peace is a basic human right. But it's a right that's all too often lost for the innocent victims of conflict and upheaval. Standards of how we should treat each other are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Declaration has inspired the struggle for human rights in many parts of the world. In South Africa where the UN has steadfastly opposed Apartheid.
In the lives of ordinary people everywhere, where the ideals agreed upon have provided goals for men -- and especially women -- in nations rich and poor. (10")

There is a special declaration for the rights of children. A global set of rules that says children should be raised in a spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom and equality. (10")

Egypt, as part of its fight against drugs, has ratified a UN convention to prevent trafficking in narcotics. (7")

"My name is Mamdoh Farid Ahwad. I'm 38 years old and a ship's captain. I was accused of drug smuggling and sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labour." (12")
AHWAD AND OTHER PRISONERS

Human rights apply to Mamdoh Farid Ahwad too. Along with other prisoners in this Cairo jail, he was entitled to a fair trial, and to be presumed innocent until proven guilty. The minimum standards for the treatment of prisoners are laid down by United Nations agreements.

(16")

BOAT REFUGEES

Ensuring that these people get their human rights is a more challenging task. Many basic rights are still denied to millions of people drifting around the world.

(8")

WOMAN IN CAMP

The UN works for the right of political refugees to have asylum. And the Refugee Agency, UNHCR, makes life in the camps bearable and helps refugees leave the camps and settle in host countries.

(13")
In the Middle East, Palestinians are provided with some of their essential needs by a special UN relief agency. It helps young Palestinians, like Dina Kamal Sabah, have a future.

"The certificate I get here will help me serve my people. There is a great need for the specializations we are studying."

There are refugees on all continents. Tens of millions of them. One of the main reasons for this global tide of refugees is the effect of wars.

Keeping the peace is therefore a major responsibility of the UN -- and the main job of the Security Council.
It has 15 members. Five of these -- China, France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States -- have permanent seats -- and the right of veto. If even one of them votes "No", the resolution is defeated. The other 10 members -- from the principal regions of the world -- are elected by the Assembly for two-year terms. (21")

The Charter gives the Security Council the power to make binding decisions if peace is at stake. And it may even order sanctions -- such as blockades, or even armed intervention -- to halt acts of aggression. (11")

In most cases it has acted -- with the consent of the parties involved. The aim is to help nations end military conflicts -- by providing the tools needed to make a ceasefire possible. (11")
Most important of these tools -- the peacekeeping forces. Soldiers under UN command, they can supervise a truce, help prevent the renewal of fighting and encourage the return to normal conditions. (11")

The blue helmets may be armed with light weapons which can only be used in self-defence. They have served in Africa, in the Middle East, in Central America, in Asia. More than a hundred countries have contributed soldiers and civilians to peacekeeping forces. (15")

A farm in Cyprus. Austrians from the UN Force there stop to chat with a farmer during one of their regular patrols. The peacekeepers are a stabilizing factor. It's reassuring for Loucas Hadjianacou to have them around when he goes to his fields in the UN controlled buffer zone that divides the Turkish and Greek communities on the island. (22")
VOICE-OVER - TRANSLATION FROM GREEK

"When I go to work in the Buffer Zone knowing the U.N. soldiers are there I do so with a light heart. I feel secure."  (8")

NARRATION

Peacekeeping is a highly visible job. Less publicized is peacemaking, the painstaking, behind the scenes work of quiet diplomacy that seldom makes headlines. The UN seeks to prevent fighting before it breaks out -- or to see whether contending parties are ready to end hostilities.  (17")

The Security Council may call for negotiations to resolve differences. Or the Secretary-General may use his "good offices" to settle disputes.  (8")
11:30  SG IN SECURITY COUNCIL

The Secretary-General. The main diplomatic figure of the UN, with almost unlimited responsibilities -- but very little practical power. It has been called the most impossible job in the world. (12")

11:43  COLLAGE

Scarcely a day passes without appeals for assistance from all parts of the world. Often a quiet approach in the right quarter can be of help. (7")

12:11  UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

JAVIER PEREZ DE CUÉLLAR

"The two leaders expressed their willingness to meet without any preconditions and to attempt ..."

(8")
NARRATION

Whether it's for the Secretary-General travelling on a mission of peace -- or tourists going on holiday -- it is worth remembering that aircraft fly safely because of international co-operation on safety and navigation. Even the place names on the world's maps are standardized by a United Nations body. (23")

There are many responsibilities of the UN system that never get the limelight. The Secretariat of the United Nations carries out much of this anonymous work. (8")

Another major responsibility of the Secretary-General. It's an army of international civil servants -- men and women -- drawn from all countries who keep the wheels of international co-operation turning. (11")
The Campero family are Namibians. Almost the whole United Nations system had a part in making it possible for their country to make a peaceful transition to independence, and to become a sovereign state.

In recognition of this historic event, Jose Campero and his wife decided to name their infant son Nalimanguluke which means "Namibia must be free".

"So it means that when he grows up the name will remind him that he was born when Namibia was still under the colonial regime of South Africa."

When the UN was founded, a quarter of mankind was still under colonial rule.
The Trusteeship Council is the centrepiece of United Nations efforts that have guided colonial territories to independence. Along with other UN bodies dealing with decolonization, it has virtually put itself out of business. The fact that more than 100 new nations have joined the UN since its founding, is testimony to a remarkable page in recent history.

In Namibia's case, South Africa had refused to place the territory under the Trusteeship Council. After years of diplomatic efforts, it accepted the UN plan by which Namibia would become independent. An international group made up of more than 120 nationalities successfully monitored free and fair elections.
UN military observers, monitored the withdrawal of South African troops, an effective end to a decades-long war. UN police and civilians watched over the registration of voters, and the polling itself. This unique international effort made possible a peaceful transition from war to independence.

And the Namibian flag could fly outside the UN Headquarters as the new country celebrated. (24")

Another major UN body involved in Namibia's independence was the International Court of Justice, which had ruled that South Africa's presence in Namibia was illegal. The Court, of 15 judges from different countries, sits in the Hague in the Netherlands. The judges are elected by the General Assembly and the Security Council for nine-year terms. (20")
Countries may agree in advance to accept the Court's jurisdiction and bring legal disputes before it. The Court embodies the hope of the founders that conflicts can be settled on the basis of international law.

The Court ruled, for example, that the potentially violent dispute that threatened the livelihood of North Sea fishermen should be settled peacefully. Known as the Cod War it had brought Iceland on a collision course with countries wanting to fish off its coast.

At stake was the life of a community as Gudrun Sigurdsdottir explains.
International attention was absolutely vital to us in Iceland. Here, most of the population is solely dependent on fishing."

The seas and oceans themselves are another area where the reach of law is being extended through the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

There are few human activities that are not reflected in the work of the United Nations.

The task of dealing with pressing economic and social problems, particularly in the Third World, accounts for 80 percent of U.N. resources. This work is co-ordinated by the Economic and Social Council.
The Council supervises the specialized agencies and other programmes, which taken together are known as the UN family. Many, like UNICEF, the UN Children's Fund, and WHO, the World Health Organization, are household names. Others are less well known, but are equally important in their own spheres. (18")

Their common aim is to fight poverty, hunger, disease and ignorance by encouraging international co-operation and to assist poor countries by helping them to stand on their own feet. (11")

In Costa Rica, UN agencies have encouraged the use of fast-growing bamboo to build houses. It means less logging of the precious tropical rain forest. When it's plastered and painted this will be an affordable new house for Margarita Lazaro. (18")
18:26  MARGARITA LAZARO

VOICE-OVER - TRANSLATION FROM SPANISH

"Now I am looking forward to winter and we are very happy because we know we won't get wet."  (6")

18:38  MINING

NARRATION

The UN family includes institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund which play a central role in the global financial system. It includes the UN Development Programme, a major provider of technical assistance to developing countries. (15")

18:53  FACTORY

From telecommunications to health standards, from shipping regulations to trade agreements, the UN system is a vital part of what keeps the modern world working. (9")

19:13  COFFEE FARMER IN KENYA

Take what happens when trade agreements break down. This affects countries burdened by foreign debt and the lives of individuals like Elijah Mutonga. (9")
19:22 ELIJAH MUTONGA

VOICE-OVER - TRANSLATION FROM SWAHILI

"Because coffee prices collapsed, I've had to start over again with another crop to support my family."

(6")

19:35 INDUSTRY

19:40 POLISH FACTORIES

NARRATION

Or what about the choice between jobs and a clean environment. Poland is just one nation facing this dilemma.

(7")

19:45 POLISH FACTORY WORKER

Factory worker Marek Janowsky is worried.

(2")

19:47 MAREK JANOWSKY

VOICE-OVER - TRANSLATION FROM POLISH

"Ecologists and specialists must find an answer to these problems right away."

(5")
NARRATION

Nowhere is the need for common action more urgent than on environmental issues. Increasingly, we are all becoming aware that development, be it in rich or poor communities, must not be at the expense of the water, air and biological resources that we all depend upon. (15")

ON CAMERA

"An Indian chief once told me when the rivers die, when the forests die, so does the earth. And when the earth dies, we all die." (10")

The UN Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organization are monitoring the impact of human activity on the global climate system. To help us find a sustainable path to the future. (11")
NARRATION

It's no wonder that international stars like Sting have taken up the environmental cause. (4")

And it's worth nothing that when this song or any other music is played on television or on the radio, the copyright is protected by a UN convention guarding intellectual properties. (12")

The United Nations: The Economic and Social Council, the International Court of Justice, the Trusteeship Council, the Secretariat, the Security Council and the General Assembly .... Six pieces in the work of solving the puzzle of our shared future. But it's a puzzle that will never be solved unless we all, young and old, play our part. (25")
So we can agree on a whole lot more than just how to send a letter. Our need to work together, to imagine our future together, is a practical response to the accelerating interdependence of the world. (12")

If the U.N. was not already here, working around the clock, somebody would have to invent it. (5")

END CREDITS OVER PICTURE

LAST FRAME