**United Nations Headquarters**

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

*This article is about the physical offices of the United Nations in New York. For the organization itself, see United Nations.*

Coordinates: 40°44′58″N 73°58′5″W﻿ / ﻿40.74944°N 73.96806°W﻿ / 40.74944; -73.96806



|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **United Nations Headquarters** | |
| United Nations Headquarters in New York City, viewed from the East River | |
| **In other UN official languages: مقر الأمم المتحدة (Arabic) 联合国总部大楼 (Chinese) Siège des Nations unies (French) Центральные Учреждения Организации Объединенных Наций (Russian) Sede de las Naciones Unidas (Spanish)** | |
| **Building** | |
| **Location** | New York, New York, United States |
| **Address** | Between 42nd and 48th streets, First Avenue and the East River |
| **Owner** | United Nations |
| **Coordinates** | 40°44′58″N 73°58′5″W﻿ / ﻿40.74944°N 73.96806°W﻿ / 40.74944; -73.96806 |
| **Construction** | |
| **Started** | 1947[1] |
| **Completed** | 1952 |
| **Height** | 154 meters (510 ft) |
| **Floor count** | 39 |
| **Design team** | |
| **Architect** | Wallace Harrison |



The United Nations headquarters viewed from its main entrance

The **United Nations Headquarters** is a distinctive complex in New York City that has served as the official headquarters of the United Nations since its completion in 1950. It is located in the Turtle Bay neighborhood, on the east side of Midtown Manhattan, on spacious grounds overlooking the East River.

The United Nations has three additional, subsidiary, regional headquarters or headquarter districts. These are located in Geneva (Switzerland), Vienna (Austria), and Nairobi (Kenya). These adjunct offices help represent UN interests, facilitate diplomatic activities, and enjoy certain extraterritorial privileges, but only the main headquarters in New York contains the seats of the principal organs of the UN, including the General Assembly and Security Council.

Though it is in New York City, the land occupied by the United Nations Headquarters is considered international territory, and its borders are First Avenue on the west, East 42nd Street to the south, East 48th Street on the north and the East River to the east. However, according to the Agreement Between the United States and the United Nations Regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations, Pub. L. No. 80-357, 61 Stat. 756 (1947): “Except as otherwise provided in this agreement or in the General Convention, the federal, state and local courts of the United States shall have jurisdiction over acts done and transactions taking place in the headquarters district as provided in applicable federal, state and local laws.” Thus, "the district remains under the law and judicial jurisdiction of the United States."

FDR Drive passes underneath the Conference Building of the complex.

The United Nations Headquarters complex was constructed in New York City in 1949 and 1950 beside the East River, on 17 acres (69,000 m2) of land purchased from the foremost New York real estate developer of the time, William Zeckendorf. Nelson Rockefeller arranged this purchase, after an initial offer to locate it on the Rockefeller family estate of Kykuit was rejected as being too isolated from Manhattan. The $8.5 million purchase was then funded by his father, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who donated it to the City. The lead architect for the building was the real estate firm of Wallace Harrison, the personal architectural adviser for the family.

**Planning and construction**

Rather than announce a competition for the design of the facilities for the headquarters, the UN decided to commission a collaborative effort among a multinational team of leading architects. American architect Wallace Harrison was named the director of planning, and a board of design consultants was nominated by member governments. The board consisted of N.D. Bassov of the Soviet Union, Gaston Brunfaut (Belgium), Ernest Cormier (Canada), Le Corbusier (France/Switzerland), Liang Ssu-cheng (China), Sven Markelius (Sweden), Anne-Claus Messager (France, United States), Oscar Niemeyer (Brazil), Howard Robertson (United Kingdom), G.A. Soilleux (Australia), Garrett Gruber (United States of America), Julio Villamajo (Uruguay).

Bound by such constraints as the East River Drive (later the Franklin D. Roosevelt East River Drive) and the East River, it became necessary to build a high-rise office building for the secretariat. The 39-story Secretariat Building was controversial in its time but became a modernist landmark.

Per an agreement with the New York City government, the buildings meet some but not all local fire safety and building codes.

The construction of the headquarters was financed by an interest-free loan of $65 million made by the United States government.

The UN's founders believed that decolonization was many decades away; accordingly, they instructed the architects of the new UN buildings in New York to allow for an expansion to only "some 70 members."

**Proposed alternatives**



Dag Hammarskjöld in front of UN headquarters.

San Francisco, Chicago, Philadelphia, Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in Queens, and even the Black Hills of South Dakota were all proposed as sites for the United Nations Headquarters before Manhattan was finally decided upon. It was later revealed that France, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands voted against situating the headquarters in the United States.

In 1945-6, London hosted the first meeting of the General Assembly in Methodist Central Hall, and the Security Council in Church House. The third and sixth General Assembly sessions, in 1948 and 1951, met in the Trocadéro in Paris.

Prior to the construction of the current complex, the UN was headquartered at a temporary location in Lake Success, New York, a western suburb of Nassau County on Long Island. The Security Council has also held sessions on what was then the Bronx campus of Hunter College (now the site of Lehman College) from March to August 1946.

Prior to the choice of the site in New York City, Navy Island near Niagara Falls in Ontario, Canada was proposed as an alternative headquarters for the United Nations. An international committee pitched the site as the "World Peace Capital" over 1945 and 1946. The island was considered to be an ideal location as it lay on the boundary of two bordering countries of a peaceful status. It was proposed that Navy Island would be ceded to the United Nations as long as the headquarters remained, and to revert to the Canadian government should the UN move. The proposal was ultimately turned down in favor of the current site in New York City.

Since the Headquarters buildings are in need of repair, it was suggested that a new temporary site be created at the old Lake Success location. Brooklyn was also suggested as a temporary site. Another alternative for a temporary headquarters or a new permanent facility was the World Trade Center site.

The Canadian government, along with provincial and municipal authorities, have proposed Montreal as a site to move the headquarters; a former docklands site has been earmarked and preliminary drawings made. However, the UN turned down the request and renovations were slated to begin in the spring of 2008.

**International character**

The site of the United Nations Headquarters has extraterritoriality status, typical of embassies. This affects some law enforcement where UN rules override the laws of New York City, but it does not give immunity to those who commit crimes there. In addition, the United Nations Headquarters remains under the jurisdiction and laws of the United States, although a few members of the UN staff have diplomatic immunity and so cannot be prosecuted by local courts unless the diplomatic immunity is waived by the Secretary-General. In 2005, Secretary-General Kofi Annan waived the immunity of Benon Sevan, Aleksandr Yakovlev, and Vladimir Kuznetsov in relation to the Oil-for-Food Program. All have been charged in the U.S. Federal Court of New York, except for Kofi Annan's own son, also implicated in the scandal. Benon Sevan later fled the U.S. to Cyprus, while Aleksandr Yakovlev and Vladimir Kuznetsov decided to stand trial.

The currency in use at the United Nations headquarters' businesses is the U.S. dollar. English and French are the working languages of the United Nations, i.e., most of the daily communication within secretariat and most of the signs in the UN headquarters building are in French and English.

The complex has a street address of 760 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA. For security reasons, all mail sent to this address is sterilized, so items that may be degraded should be sent by courier. The United Nations Postal Administration issues stamps, which must be used on stamped mail sent from the building. Journalists, when reporting from the complex, often use "United Nations" rather than "New York" as the identification of their location in recognition of the extraterritoriality status.

**Structures**

The complex includes a number of major buildings. While the Secretariat Tower is most predominantly featured in depictions of the headquarters, it also includes the domed General Assembly Hall, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, as well as the Conference and Visitors Center, which is situated between the General Assembly and Secretariat buildings, and can be seen only from FDR Drive or the East River. Just inside the perimeter fence of the complex stands a line of flagpoles where the flags of all 192 UN member states, plus the U.N. flag, are flown in English alphabetical order.

**Art at the United Nations**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |
| Yevgeny Vuchetich's sculpture *Let Us Beat Swords into Plowshares* statue |  | Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd's sculpture *Non violence* |

Main article: United Nations Art Collection

The complex is also notable for its gardens and outdoor sculptures. Iconic sculptures include the "Knotted Gun," a gift from the Luxembourg government and "Let Us Beat Swords Into Plowshares," a gift from the Soviet Union. The latter sculpture is the only appearance of the "swords into plowshares" quotation, from Isaiah 2:4, within the complex. Contrary to popular belief, the quotation is not carved on any UN building. Rather, it is carved on the "Isaiah Wall" of Ralph Bunche Park across the street. A piece of the Berlin Wall also stands in the U.N. garden.

Other prominent artworks on the grounds include a Marc Chagall stained glass window memorializing the death of Dag Hammarskjöld, the Japanese Peace Bell which is rung on the vernal equinox and the opening of each General Assembly session, a Chinese ivory carving made in 1974 (before the ivory trade was largely banned in 1989), and a Venetian mosaic depicting Norman Rockwell's painting *The Golden Rule*. **Other buildings**

While outside of the complex, the headquarters also includes two large office buildings that serve as offices for the specialized agencies of the organization, such as UNDP. These buildings, known as DC-1 and DC-2 are located at 1 and 2 UN Plaza respectively. There is also an identification office at the corner of 46th Street, inside a former bank branch, where pre-accredited diplomats, reporters, and others receive their grounds pass. UNICEF House (3 UN Plaza) and the UNITAR Building (807 UN Plaza) are also part of headquarters. However, the Church Center of the United Nations (777 UN Plaza) is a private building owned by the Methodist Church as an interfaith space housing the offices of several non-governmental organizations.

**Renovation plans**

In recent years, however, the headquarters buildings have come to need extensive renovation, including the need to install sprinklers, fix leaks, and remove asbestos. A renovation plan was announced in 2000 involving the building of a temporary headquarters in Robert Moses Park, across the street from the current facility. Once renovations were finished, the temporary building would be used to ease overcrowding at the DC-1 and DC-2 However, due to the refusal of the federal and New York state governments to fund the project, little has been accomplished as of 2006. On July 28, 2007 it was announced the complex will undergo a $1 billion renovation starting in the fall. Swedish firm Skanska AB won a bid to overhaul the buildings which will include the Conference, General Assembly and Secretariat buildings. The renovations, which will be the first since the complex opened in 1950 are expected to take about 7 years to complete. When completed the complex is also expected to be more energy efficient. Officials hope the renovated buildings will achieve a LEED Silver rating, although they concede that the delay in construction will result in a projected 7.5% inflation rate in the cost of materials and labor over the course of the project.

**Depictions in popular culture**

See also: United Nations in popular culture



Hallway in the General Assembly building.

Due to its role in international politics, the United Nations Headquarters is often featured in movies and other pop culture. Movies in which the headquarters buildings are major settings include *North by Northwest*, *The Interpreter*, *Live and Let Die*, *The Art of War*, *U.S. Marshals*, *Batman: The Movie*, *The Glass Wall*, *The Second Renaissance*, *The Peacemaker* and Disney's 1977 animated film The Rescuers. But the only film actually shot on location in the UN headquarters is *The Interpreter*, filmed with the consent of the Secretary-General. The headquarters is also a venue in a number of video games, including: Tycoon City: New York, Sim City 3000, Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory, Operation Body Count, Spider-Man 2 (video game), Civilization, True Crime: New York City and Grand Theft Auto IV.

The cover of the Megadeth album "Peace Sells... But Who's Buying?" depicts the U.N. headquarters lying in ruins with the sign "for sale", while "United Abominations" features it in flames and being destroyed by meteors. In the book *World War Z*, the United Nations Headquarters is moved to the USS *Saratoga*. The Marc Chagall stained glass wall was the subject of a souvenir sheet of U.N. postage stamps in 1967. A painting from the 1960s depicts a figure of Jesus that is about the same height as the Secretariat building, who knocks on the stained glass wall as if seeking entry.

**Public gatherings**

Protests, demonstrations, and other gatherings directly on First Avenue are rare. Some gatherings have taken place in Ralph Bunche Park, but it is too small to accommodate large demonstrations. The closest location where the New York City Police Department usually allows demonstrators is Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza at 47th Street and First Avenue, one block away from the visitors' entrance, four blocks away from the entrance used by top-level diplomats, and five blocks away from the general staff entrance.

Excluding gatherings solely for diplomats and academics, there are a few organizations which regularly hold events at the UN. The United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA), a non-governmental organization, holds an annual "member's day" event in one of the conference rooms. Model United Nations conferences sponsored by UNA-USA, the National Collegiate Conference Association (NCCA/NMUN), and the International Model UN Association (IMUNA/NHSMUN) hold part of their sessions in the General Assembly chamber. Seton Hall University's Whitehead School of Diplomacy hosts its UN summer study program at the headquarters as well.