Creation of United Nations

The earliest concrete plan for a new world organization to replace the ineffective “League of Nations” began under the aegis of the US State Department in 1939. On 12 June 1941, representatives of the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, and of the exiled governments of Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, and Yugoslavia, as well as General de Gaulle of France, met in London and signed the Declaration of St. James’s Palace. This was the first of six conferences that led up to the founding of the United Nations and the Charter of the United Nations.

U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt first suggested using the name United Nations, to refer to the Allies of World War II, to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill during the latter’s three-week visit to the White House in December 1941.

Declaration

U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Roosevelt aide Harry Hopkins, while meeting at the White House on 29 December 1941, drafted the text of the “Declaration by United Nations”. It incorporated Soviet suggestions, but left no role for France. The first official use of the term “United Nations” was on 1 January 1942, when 26 Governments signed the Declaration. One major change from the Atlantic Charter was the addition of a provision for religious freedom, which Stalin approved after Roosevelt insisted. By early 1945, it had been signed by 21 more states:

A JOINT DECLARATION BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND, THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS, CHINA, AUSTRALIA, BELGIUM, CANADA, COSTA RICA, CUBA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, EL SALVADOR, GREECE, GUATEMALA, HAITI, HONDURAS, INDIA, LUXEMBOURG, NETHERLANDS, NEW ZEALAND, NICARAGUA, NORWAY, PANAMA, POLAND, SOUTH AFRICA, YUGOSLAVIA.

The Governments signatory hereto,  
Having subscribed to a common program of purposes and principles embodied in the Joint Declaration of the President of the United States of America and the Prime Minister of Great Britain dated August 14, 1941, known as the Atlantic Charter,

Being convinced that complete victory over their enemies is essential to defend life, liberty, independence and religious freedom, and to preserve human rights and justice in their own lands as well as in other lands, and that they are now engaged in a common struggle against savage and brutal forces seeking to subjugate the world,

DECLARE:

Each Government pledges itself to employ its full resources, military or economic, against those members of the Tripartite Pact and its adherents with which such government is at war.

Each Government pledges itself to cooperate with the Governments signatory hereto and not to make a separate armistice or peace with the enemies.

The foregoing declaration may be adhered to by other nations which are, or which may be, rendering material assistance and contributions in the struggle for victory over Hitlerism.

During the war, the United Nations became the official term for the Allies. To join countries had to sign the Declaration and declare war on the Axis.

Planning

The idea for the future United Nations as an international organization emerged in declarations signed at the wartime Allied conferences: the Moscow Conference and the Tehran Conference in 1943.

From August to October 1944, representatives of the Republic of China, Britain, the US and the USSR met to elaborate plans at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference in Washington, D.C. Those and later talks produced proposals outlining the purposes of the United Nations organization, its membership and organs, as well as arrangements to maintain international peace and security and international economic and social cooperation. Winston Churchill urged Roosevelt to restore France to its status of a major Power after the liberation of Paris in August 1944.

At the Yalta Conference it was agreed that membership would be open to nations that had joined the Allies by 1 March 1945. Brazil, Syria and a number of other countries qualified for membership by declarations of war on either Germany or Japan in the first three months of 1945 – in some cases retroactively.

Establishment

On April 25, 1945, the United Nations Conference on International Organization began in San Francisco. In addition to Governments, a number of non-government organizations, including Rotary International and Lions Clubs International received invitations to assist in the drafting of a charter. After working for two months, the fifty nations represented at the conference signed the Charter of the United Nations on 26 June.

The charter stated that before it would come into effect, it must be ratified by the Governments of the Republic of China, France, the USSR, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and by a majority of the other 46 signatories. This occurred on 24 October 1945, and the United Nations officially formed.