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## **The Search for United Nations Documents**

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On January 1, 2007, Ban Ki-moon, the South Korean Foreign Minister, will succeed Kofi Annan as the eighth United Nations Secretary General. His primary focus as Chief Administrative Officer of the United Nations will be conflict resolution and "matters which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security."<sup>1</sup> Other responsibilities entrusted to him include the work of human rights, international development, and humanitarian assistance.

The United Nations has six principal organs:

1. General Assembly – the main deliberative body of the United Nations.
2. Security Council – responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security.
3. Economic and Social Council – the council for discussing international economic and social issues.
4. International Court of Justice – the judicial organ of the United Nations, also known as the World Court, which decides disputes between participating countries or provides advisory opinions to the United Nations.
5. Secretariat – the administrative arm of the United Nations.
6. Trusteeship Council – in the past, supervised the administration of Trust Territories until the inception of self-governance or independence. The Trusteeship Council suspended operation in 1994, but could begin again if the need arises.

These six constituent bodies are responsible for multiple entities such as: programs and funds, subsidiary bodies, research and training institutes, regional commissions, departments and offices. With the exception of the Trusteeship Council, which only meets occasionally, all of these groups regularly churn out paperwork in the form of documents, reports, decisions, resolutions, press releases, notes, sales publications, statements, and meeting records, on such issues as poverty, peace, AIDS, global warming, clean water, literacy programs, and endangered species.

If you had to take care of following problem in the course of your job, where would you start your research?

Your client was a sixteen-year old juvenile at the time of a first-degree murder. There is a possibility the accused will be sentenced to life without parole. Will this sentence violate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child? Is the country of which your client is a citizen a party to this Convention?<sup>2</sup> If the accused is considered immune due to diplomatic status, is this situation even debatable?

Never fear. United Nations research is much easier than it used to be.

A quick way to begin your search is at the Hastings Law Library Legal Research webpage. From there click on WEB LINKS and then UN to see a list of the more popular sites for finding

United Nations resources. (The direct URL is <http://library.uchastings.edu/library/Legal%20Research/Web%20Links/un.htm>.) With this list, it's very easy to access some of the major websites for UN documentation.

If you're really at a loss, but you do know a particular phrase, you might want to start with a full text search. The only site with full-text searching capability of UN documents is the ODS, the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org/welcome.asp?language=E>). All documents on ODS are stored as .pdf files, and although coverage began in 1993, older documents are constantly being added.

If full-text is not useful, or for access to older UN related resources, try UNBISnet, the United Nations Bibliography Information System at the UN Dag Hammarskjöld Library, at <http://unbisnet.un.org/>. This library's catalogue is a gateway to UN documents from 1979 onward, and includes sales publications, voting records, and an index to speeches. A benefit of this search engine is the ability to limit by type of document or material.

If you already have an idea that the document you want was a major publication from one of the six principal organs, and especially if you want sessional information, start with the UN Documentation Centre at <http://www.un.org/documents/>. It's organized by group and then by type of document.

Thanks to Google's™ system of ranking by number of links to items, many UN documents are easily accessed with a well-defined search and a click on the "I'm Feeling Lucky"™ button. If you enter "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes Against Internationally Protected Persons" as a search phrase and limit the results to the portable document format (filetype:pdf), a click on the "I'm Feeling Lucky"™ button will open the convention right up for you.

Many specialized agencies within the UN family produce and maintain their documents at their own websites. These include the World Health Organization, the World Intellectual Property Organization, and UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).

Human rights researchers will find the most useful information and documentation using the UN Human Rights Treaty Body Database at <http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf>. This site is very rich with information and includes documents unavailable at some of the other UN research websites. It is, however, difficult to navigate so ask a librarian for assistance.

For current information, the ever-popular "blawg" format is also available for UN documents. It's called the *UN Pulse* (<http://unhq-appspub-01.un.org/lib/dhlrefweblog.nsf>) and whenever there's a new publication or a major report, the reference librarians at the UN Library in New York will create a link to it, or mention it in the *UN Pulse*.

Questions that raise the issue of international law are more and more common in law practices. International issues can affect cases at both federal and state levels. Primary sources of international law are international agreements, conventions and treaties, many of which are hosted by the United Nations. Although the UN is an enormous entity, finding basic UN documents is less complicated than you might think.

1. UN Charter (<http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/>)

2. The United States has not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (<http://www.unhcr.ch/pdf/report.pdf>)

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