



United Nations Headquarters, 1960 © UN Photo

History of United Nations Headquarters

Address	United Nations (UN), New York, NY 10017, USA
Layout	The UN Headquarters consists of the Secretariat building, the General Assembly building, the Conference building and the Library building.
Designers	Wallace K. Harrison (United States), chief architect; team members: Nikolai G. Bassov (Soviet Union), Gaston Brunfaut (Belgium), Ernest Cormier (Canada), Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, known as Le Corbusier (France), Liang Seu-Cheng (China), Sven Markelius (Sweden), Oscar Niemeyer (Brazil), Sir Howard Robertson (United Kingdom), G. A. Soilleux (Australia) and Julio Vilamajo (Uruguay).
Construction started	24 October 1949



Location

Standing on the eastern shore of Manhattan Island, on the banks of New York City's East River, the 18-acre UN Headquarters remains both a symbol of peace and a beacon of hope.

UN Territory

The site of UN Headquarters is owned by the UN and has a special status within the US. No federal, state or local officer or official of the US, whether administrative, judicial, military or police, may enter UN Headquarters, except with the consent of and under conditions agreed to by the Secretary-General of the Organization.

However, the UN is bound by an agreement with the US, its host country, to prevent its Headquarters from being used as a refuge for persons attempting to avoid arrest under the Federal, State or local laws of the US. People being extradited by the US Government are also denied use of UN Headquarters in attempts to avoid arrest.

Selecting New York

On 10 December 1945, the Congress of the US unanimously resolved to invite the UN to establish its permanent home in that country. Thereafter, the decision to locate the UN near New York City was made by the General Assembly at its first session, held in London on 14 February 1946.

During the latter half of 1946, following selection of the US as host country, a special UN site committee studied possible locations in such places as Philadelphia, Boston and San Francisco. While consideration was given at first to areas north of New York City, crowded Manhattan had not been seriously investigated.

A last-minute offer of \$8.5 million by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. for the purchase of the present site was accepted by a large majority of the General Assembly on 14 December 1946. New York City completed the site parcel by additional gifts of property.

The site chosen by the UN was a run-down area of slaughterhouses, light industry and a railroad barge landing.



SECRETARIAT



GENERAL ASSEMBLY



LIBRARY BUILDING



ECONOMIC & SOCIAL COUNCIL



TRUSTEESHIP COUNCIL



SECURITY COUNCIL

Layout

UN Headquarters consists of four main buildings: The Secretariat, the General Assembly, Conference Area (including Council Chambers) and the Library.

General Assembly Building

The General Assembly is one of the six main organs of the UN, the only one in which all Member States have equal representation: one nation, one vote. All 193 Member States of the UN are represented in this unique forum to discuss and work together on a wide array of international issues covered by the UN Charter. The General Assembly first met in this Hall at the opening of its seventh regular annual session in 1952.

The circular shape of the Hall's rotunda is echoed by the UN seal over the podium and below it, the speakers' rostrum. Striated walls angling upward from the second story are punctuated by both an electronic vote tabulation board flanking the seal and by two tiers of glass windows enclosing television, photo and interpreters' booths.

The blue, green and gold General Assembly Hall - 165 feet long by 115 feet wide, with a 75-foot ceiling - has four floors. The Assembly Hall accommodates 193

delegations. Each delegation has six seats, three for full delegates and three behind for their alternates.

The General Assembly Hall is flanked by two large murals designed by French artist Fernand Léger (1881–1955). The mural on the west wall is a free-form creation in blue, white and orange on a dark grey base. The mural on the east wall consists of red, white and dark blue organic shapes on a dark grey background.

Conference Building

The Conference building, which connects the General Assembly and Secretariat buildings, extends along the East River. On the second and third floors are the three Council Chambers.

Security Council

The Security Council has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. It has five permanent members with veto power (China, France, Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the US) and ten non-permanent members elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly. Under the Charter, all Member States are obligated to comply with Council decisions.

The Security Council Chamber was furnished by Norway and designed by Norwegian architect, Arnstein Rynning Arneberg, in 1952. It is easily identified by its central horseshoe-shaped table.

Trusteeship Council

The Trusteeship Council was established to supervise the administration of trust territories as they transitioned from colonies to sovereign nations. The Council suspended its activities in 1994, when Palau, the last of the original 11 trust territories, gained its independence.

The Chamber, designed by Danish architect Finn Juhl in 1952, was revamped by Denmark, with new furniture by Danish designers Kasper Salto and Thomas Sigsgaard.

Among the iconic aspects of the room is a statue of a girl with arms upraised, reaching towards a bird which hovers with outspread wings above her head. Carved out of teak wood by Henri Starcke, a Danish sculptor, it symbolizes Mankind and Hope.

Economic and Social Council

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is the UN's central platform for reflection, debate, and innovative thinking on sustainable development. A gift from Sweden, originally designed by the Swedish architect Sven Markelius, the Chamber was renovated by Sweden in 2013 and features the new curtain 'Diaologos' by Swedish artist Ann Edholm.

The ceiling over the public gallery has been deliberately left 'unfinished' to symbolize that the work of the UN will never be finished. The architect intentionally chose to leave the pipes and ducts exposed as a symbolic reminder of the importance of the structure and foundation behind the UN's never ending work.

Library Building

At the southwest corner of the UN grounds, linked to the Secretariat Building, is the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, dedicated on 16 November 1961 in honor of the late Secretary-General. The building was erected to meet the Organization's growing demands for library services, and its construction was made possible by a gift from the Ford Foundation.

The Reading Room is on the second floor of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. Its Idaho white pine ceiling curves from a height of 22 feet at the windows to a height of 12 feet at the opposite wall. The glass north wall overlooks the secretariat entrance with a view of the UN Member States' flags.

Secretariat Building

The exterior facings of the 550-foot tall Secretariat building are made exclusively of aluminum, glass and marble. Wide areas of green-tinted glass are unbroken by conventional setbacks. In contrast, the windowless north and south facades of the building are faced with 2,000 tons of Vermont marble. The building is 39 stories tall.





Grounds

The flags of the 193 UN Member States provide a colorful, 500-foot wide curved approach to the Headquarters. The circular pool in front of the Secretariat building, with a fountain at the center, features a wavy pattern on its floor formed by alternating bands of crushed white marble and black pebbles. The black stones were gathered from the beaches of Rhodes by the women and children of that Greek island and donated to the UN. A bronze sculpture in memory of Dag Hammarskjöld was set at the edge of the pool in 1964. The abstract sculpture, entitled "Single Form", is the work of the English modernist sculptor and artist, Barbara Hepworth, and was donated by Jacob Blaustein, a former US delegate to the UN.

A bronze statue by English abstract sculptor and artist, Henry Moore, "Reclining Figure: Hand", is set north of the Secretariat building.

A monumental staircase presented by the State of New York in memory of Dag Hammarskjöld leads from the plaza in front of the public entrance of the General Assembly building to the UN gardens. The garden features a diverse array of gifts from Member States.



Top: Detail of "Titans" mural at NY Headquarters © UN Photo/R Grunbaum

Bottom: Cherry blossoms on the campus of UN Headquarters. In the background is the Secretariat building. © UN Photo/ E Debebe



Design and Construction of the Headquarters Building

Architects and Planning

Once the site was agreed upon, the next task was to design the Headquarters for the world Organization. Rather than hold an international competition, delegates decided that the UN home should be the joint project of leading architects from many countries. Wallace K. Harrison of the US was appointed chief architect with the title of Director of Planning. A ten-member Board of Design Consultants was selected to assist him, composed of architects nominated by Governments.

The members of the Board were Nikolai G. Bassov (Soviet Union); Gaston Brunfaut (Belgium); Ernest Cormier (Canada); Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, known as Le Corbusier (France); Liang Seu-Cheng (China); Sven Markelius (Sweden); Oscar Niemeyer (Brazil); Sir Howard Robertson (United Kingdom); G.A. Soilleux (Australia); and Julio Vilamajo (Uruguay).

They began their work in 1947. The planners took into account the structure of the UN with its General Assembly, three main Councils and permanent Secretariat. They had to integrate the needs of Delegation and Secretariat personnel. Because the chosen site was relatively small, a tall building would be required to house offices. The planners determined that the presence of firm bedrock near the surface—the Manhattan schist on which most skyscrapers rest—would facilitate construction. (The bedrock dips to 60 or more feet below sea level between 46th and 47th Streets.)

It was decided to locate the Secretariat building at the south end of the site to facilitate access to public transportation along 42nd Street, the primary artery of midtown Manhattan. The structure's north-south orientation was selected for reasons of appearance and also because a tall building on an east-west axis would have thrown its shadow over much of the site.

The buildings as originally planned were estimated to cost nearly \$85 million. Under the direction of Secretary-General Trygve Lie, however, the designers cut the cost by \$20 million, largely by reducing the height of the Secretariat building from 45 to 39 stories. They did this by reducing the size of the conference areas and by utilizing an existing building on the site for the Library. The plan was approved by the General Assembly on 20 November 1947.

Construction

With the plans approved, action to carry them out moved ahead quickly. Residential tenants were relocated at the Organization's expense, the meat packers and bargemen departed, and the existing buildings were demolished. The construction contract was awarded in January 1949 to a combination of four large NY building firms. In August 1950, the Secretariat staff moved into their new offices.

Secretary-General Trygve Lie laid the cornerstone at a dedication ceremony on 24 October 1949 (UN Day) in the presence of US President Harry Truman. The inscription on the cornerstone is "United Nations" in the five official languages used in 1949 (Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish) with the date in Roman numerals.

Consultant architects look over a model of the UN site, 1947. Left to right are members of Board of Design Consultants: G.A. Soilleux, Australia; Gaston Brunfaut, Belgium; John Antoniadis, Greece; Wallace K. Harrison, USA; Ernest Cormier, Canada; Julio Vilamajo, Uruguay; Oscar Niemeyer, Brazil; Josef Havlicek, Czechoslovakia. @ UN Photo

The cornerstone was prepared with a metal box containing a copy of the Charter and the Declaration of Human Rights, as well as a schedule of meetings and other documents. The box was sealed by Trygve Lie and Wallace Harrison. The cornerstone is underground east of the Library building on the southern boundary of the UN site.

Expansion

The interiors of the buildings were altered to accommodate the many States that joined the Organization. In 1947 when construction plans were drawn up, there were 57 Member States, and provision was made for an increase in membership to 70. This anticipated increase had been exceeded by 1955. An expansion programme was completed in 1964 providing space for a membership of 126.

To accommodate the greatly expanded membership of the UN, the General Assembly in 1976 approved a set of major alterations to refurbish and enlarge the seating capacity of the General Assembly Hall and all the large conference rooms. Alterations were completed in 1980.

Renovation

The largest renovation to date was the Capital Master Plan, launched in 2008. A complete overhaul of the UN landmark complex, it was completed in 2014.

Steelworkers cheer as the UN flag is unfurled atop the completed steel framework for the 39-story Secretariat Building, 1949 © UN Photo



The General Assembly Building

www.un.org/en/ga

Dag Hammarskjöld Library

www.un.org/library

The Security Council Chamber

www.un.org/securitycouncil

The Trusteeship Council Chamber

www.un.org/en/about-us/trusteeship-council

The Economic and Social Council Chamber

www.un.org/ecosoc/en