We the people of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, and for these ends to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples, have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims. Accordingly, our respective Governments, through representatives assembled in the city of San Francisco, who have exhibited their full powers found to be in good and due form, have agreed to the present Charter of the United Nations and do hereby establish an organization to be known as the United Nations.

The United Nations is an organization of sovereign States, which voluntarily join the UN to work for world peace. It formally came into being on 24 October 1945. At that time, it had 51 countries as Members. Currently, 193 countries are UN members; the most recent to join was South Sudan in July 2011.

The UN is a forum, a meeting-place, for virtually all nations of the world. It provides them with the mechanism to help find solutions to disputes or problems, and to act on virtually any matter of concern to humanity.

Though sometimes described as a “parliament of nations”, the United Nations is neither a supra-State nor a government of governments. It does not have an army nor does it impose taxes. It depends on the political will of its Members to have its decisions implemented and relies on contributions of its Members to carry out its activities.

The United Nations plays a central role in reducing international tensions, preventing conflicts and putting an end to fighting already under way. It deals with our environment, outer space, and the sea-bed. It has helped wipe out many diseases and expand food production. It cares for and protects refugees, expands literacy and responds quickly to natural disasters. It also protects and promotes rights of individuals by setting a global standard for human rights.

Learn more about the United Nations: www.un.org
Learn more about UN Member States: www.un.org/en/members/index.shtml
Learn more about UN Women: www.unwomen.org