



**United Nations
University**

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REGIONALISM AND THE UNITED NATIONS

Dear Seminar Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I. Introduction

The fourth session of the Kanazawa Global Seminar is being held on a very exciting topic: The linkages between two seemingly conflicting trends, namely globalization and regionalism.

When thinking about globalization in the context of international relations, many people are led to imagine an evolving world government. Such a world government would be an organization that rules over the entire world in response to the growing pressures on national political and economic systems to act in coordination. Some see the United Nations as a forerunner of such a world government.

It is a fact that the United Nations remains the only general-purpose, universal international organization that exists today: Other international organizations either serve a limited purpose, such as the World Health Organization or the International Labor Organization, or have limited their membership to a specific group of countries, such as some of the regional organizations I will speak more about this in a minute. Nevertheless, considering the strains under which the UN continues to operate and the doubts that have been cast on the viability of multilateralism in general lately, it is difficult to imagine the organization evolving into any kind of globally accepted world government any time soon.

Regionalism, on the other hand, stands for a different reaction to the same trends: The integration of economies and political systems on a smaller, regional scale, encompassing a few states that are located near each other, with many such regional cooperation or integration processes taking place simultaneously.

In fact, it is this development of increasing regional cooperation in economic, political and security issues, that has gathered momentum in recent years – or rather, over the past decades. The European Union is forging ever closer ties among its members states, while at the same time expanding membership; free trade areas such as NAFTA or MERCOSUR are intensifying their internal cooperation, as is the case with APEC and ASEAN; there are largely political organizations such as the African Union or the Organization of American States; or security organizations such as NATO. In fact, a database of regional organizations that is being maintained by the UNU's Programme on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) lists almost 60 such organizations world-wide. Gradually, we also see sustained relations between some of these regional organizations developing, such as the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) that was established by ASEAN and the EU.

Now how should we interpret this proliferation of regional organizations? After all, when states within regions cooperate closer, be it in political, security or economic terms, there will always be those who are left outside, those for which the preferential treatment that members accord to each other translates into disadvantages when dealing with the group. Often, it seems that the “walls” between the regional organizations and the surrounding world tend to rise ever higher while at the same time, the (tariff) barriers between the countries within each regional entity go down.

Thus, do we need to fear that competition and conflicts about resources and power simply shift from the inter-state to the inter-regional level, without any gains in peace, security and prosperity for humankind as a whole? Will regionalism replace globalism, laying to rest the idea of a peaceful world ruled by a world government accepted by all?

In fact, I will argue that globalism and regionalism will proceed in tandem, and that they will do so for the benefit of world peace and prosperity. I will show that

a) The natural answer to globalization is not the creation of a “world government” that uniformly rules to the benefit of all. Rather, we need to establish a system of “world governance” which defines the ways in which decisions are taken and problems are dealt with among and between all states of our common world.

I will also argue that:

b) Regional organizations will be important components of this system of world governance, facilitating discussion and cooperation between individual states.

I will start with a few reflections on what we mean by the terms “region” and “regional integration.” I will then move on to outline some salient issues associated with integration processes, particularly the position of the state vis-a-vis the regional or international organization. On this basis, I will discuss the relevance of regions for the United Nations, to finally conclude with a more detailed discussion of aforementioned vision of a world governance system.

II. Regions and regionalism

Micro- and macro-regions

Until the time of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, “regions” were understood largely as being based on what we could call “landscapes,” that is on geographically closely linked areas where the bonds between people were rooted primarily in a common history and culture, such as, for example, the Kinki and Tohoku regions in Japan. Often, such regions could clearly be seen in the landscape because of their geomorphology and occupation patterns. In the literature, such regions are called *formal* regions.

With the rise of industrial production, improved systems of transport and communication, rapidly increasing volumes and frequency of trade, and the mobility of people, money and ideas, however, we approach regions from a more *functional* perspective, denoting geographically spread entities that are linked by economic, political and social relations. Examples of such functional regions are the Ruhr area in Germany, the Randstad (or “Delta Metropolis”) in the Netherlands, or the Tokaido Megalopolis along the Pacific coast of Japan. In practice, formal regions can also become functional ones, as is the case with the Kanto region: Today, the Kanto region

is largely synonymous with the Tokyo metropolitan area. The latter, however, could easily grow beyond the traditional borders of the Kanto region.

In common language regions are parts of countries, such as Flanders in Belgium, Cornwall in England, the Provence in France (*formal regions*) or the Tokyo metropolitan region in Japan (*functional region*). Let me call this type of regions “*micro-regions*.”

Increasingly, however, the word “*region*” is used in international politics to denote a group of neighboring countries working together, such as the European Union or ASEAN. As opposed to the micro-regions mentioned before, such regions are commonly referred to as “*macro-regions*.” Interestingly enough, micro-regions straddling the borders of countries can easily become the hinges which link two different counties of a macro-region together. In the EU, these so-called “Euregions” are often chosen for pilot projects on concrete cooperation between the EU member states, for example in environmental policies or urban development.

For purposes of simplicity, whenever using the term “region” during the remainder of my presentation, I will be referring to such macro-regions.

Macro-regions can be seen to form a layer between individual states on the one hand, and the international economic and political system on the other hand. As such, we could define “macro-regions” as territorially based subsystems of the international system. What this general definition does not tell us is that the realities of regionalism today show that we are dealing with many varieties of these regional subsystems. They are characterized by different degrees of cooperation within the region and with countries and regions outside of the region. In other words, the degree to which a particular region in various respects constitutes a coherent unit can vary greatly across regions, depending on the areas and the extent of cooperation and integration.

Regional integration

What, then, is “regional integration”?

Firstly, let us look at what the term “integration” means. Generally speaking, one can identify different types of integration, different levels of integration and thus ultimately arrive at different definitions of “integration.” Some scholars, for example,

define integration as an outcome, whereby a situation of integration is achieved only when certain predefined criteria are fulfilled. Others see integration as a process, whereby a system develops from a state of isolation to a condition of integration. I will propose here, however, that we look at integration both as an outcome and as a process: This way, we can define integration as any level of association between actors, on one dimension or another. This way of defining integration allows us to speak of various *types* of integration (economic, social, political etc.), and of various levels (or degrees) of integration. This approach will also help us to compare different integration initiatives (see also Annex 1).

Based on this holistic understanding of integration that combines both static and dynamic perspectives, “*regional integration*” then refers to the process by which states within a particular region increase their level of interaction with regard to economic, security, political, and also social and cultural issues. In short, regional integration is the joining of individual states within a region into a larger whole. And regional integration also refers to the degree of coherence of this larger whole. The degree of integration, of course, is very much related to the willingness and commitment of independent sovereign states to share their sovereignty.

But more on that later. At this moment it is important to note that long existing formal regions at the lower level of geographical scale – the micro-regions that I mentioned earlier – , which were peripheral in the nation states, at present often play an important role in bringing countries together. One example would be Tirol, a region spreading across both Austria and Italy. An excellent example is also the region around Liège, Maastricht and Aachen, which links Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. Connecting “old” and “new” Europe are, for instance, the regions around Vienna/Bratislava (Austria and Slovakia) and Frankfurt/Oder and Slubice (Germany and Poland). These trans-border regions have, as mentioned earlier, come to be known in Europe as “Euregions” and play an important pioneering role in cross-border cooperation.

Old and new regionalism

Many of the regional organizations that exist today were established with the rather straightforward – but certainly not simple – aims to improve prosperity and security within the region. The means to achieve this were the establishment of free trade

regimes or security alliances. Over time, however, as some regional integration processes moved along (the EU is a particularly good example), these regional organizations have set their aims even higher and now aspire to a multidimensional form of integration which includes not only economic and political, but also social and cultural aspects.

This trend which, although I have given the EU as an example, is not limited to Europe, has come to be termed the “New Regionalism,” as opposed to the “old” regionalism, which was seen as linked to the promotion of the interests of micro-regions such as Flandres, the Pays Basques or Wales. In the context of New Regionalism, “... the political ambition of establishing regional coherence and identity seems to be of primary importance,” as Bjorn Hettne, a leading expert on regional integration and the director of a major UNU research project on this topic, has said (Hettne 1999). To put it differently: New Regionalism stands for the attempts of members of a (macro-) region to elaborate their common cultural and social heritage and achievements in order to establish themselves as a coherent force on the world stage. Regions aim to define themselves in cultural terms to assert their distinctiveness in the context of global competition. An illustration of this trend is the important role that was assigned to the definition of a “European identity” during the recent drafting of a European constitution.

Building communities

Now, before a region can integrate in any formal manner (by establishing common institutions, for example in the economic or security areas), let alone develop a common identity as proponents of New Regionalism aim to do, a certain level of trust has to be reached among members of this region. Such trust is necessary not only among the political actors in the states concerned, those who will sign the relevant treaties. It is also needed among the peoples of the countries concerned, who, after all, are the ones who bring the political actors into power and keep them there. Thus, a certain sense of “*community*,” of shared purposes and goals (if not of shared values), is necessary as a basis for formal cooperation between states on a regional level – as it is on the national level as well.

This process of community-building cannot be shouldered by official actors alone. Luckily, they need not: We see that in today’s processes of regional community-

building and regional integration, actors are no longer limited to states, but also include a large number of different types of institutions, organizations and movements, including many initiatives for regional cooperation taken by civil society organizations. I understand that later in this seminar, you will meet a representative of an NGO in Japan which is doing just that – cooperating across borders to improve the state of the environment in the (macro-) region. These non-state activities are important, as they create the necessary momentum ”on the ground” to bring states within regions closer to each other. To “integrate,” a certain level of both commonality and complementarity are necessary.

The state within the region: Issues of sovereignty and legitimacy

Among the issues that dominate the discussion of regional integration today are, in particular, sovereignty and legitimacy. These actually are also the major issues in the discussion of a reform of the United Nations, and particularly of the United Nations Security Council.

Sovereignty is an attribute of a state and refers to its right to exercise absolute jurisdiction over the affairs of its own territory. In short, no one has the right to tell a state how to conduct its domestic or foreign affairs. States differ in power, but as sovereign entities they are legal equals.

In this context, however, it is important to realize that the state cannot exist without the people. One has to ask, “*who is the state?*” This approach helps to understand that the state is not just an abstract, monolithic entity, but a *living, changeable reality*, because in a democratic state, state sovereignty is *based in people’s sovereignty*. And in our present world, continuous change and development, heterogeneity and multiple identities are important characteristics of “the people.”

When states enter into cooperation with other states, be it on a regional or on an international level, this cooperation may entail that they delegate some of their powers to supra-national entities, that is, the new institutions created by the regionally or internationally integrated body. In the European Union, for example, member states no longer decide on their own about permissible contents of pollutants in consumer products, but rather do so collectively in the relevant bodies of the EU’s institutions. This helps to bring about consistency in approaches and policies over the larger region,

which is an absolute necessity at present because of the scale and pace of mobility. There are many other areas in which the member states of the EU have entrusted their powers to the larger whole. In free trade areas, to give another example, a state is no longer able to set a specific tariff without consulting the other member states of the free trade area. And when states enter into a regional security arrangement, too, they will give up some of their discretion in decision-making in case they become involved in a conflict and put their confidence in the capability of the regional entity to find a fair solution in a peaceful manner. The aim, ultimately, is to be *stronger together* in economic, political and military terms, or to make life more easy, as is the case with the common currency, the Euro, in Europe.

For some states and their citizens, this voluntary delegation of sovereign rights – which is part and parcel of regional and international cooperation and integration – looks like surrender and raises fears of losing control over their own destinies. What if a regional institution, for whatever reason, decides to lower tariffs on the import of oranges, rendering a country's own orange growers in a dilemma as they will not be able to compete with the low prices of the imported fruits? What if a regional institution decides that a legal sheet of paper from now on has to be of a specific size that does not correspond to what we are used to in our country? Why should we comply? And what means do we have to complain?

This is why in the context of inter-state cooperation and integration, the issue of sovereignty cannot be separated from the discussion of the legitimacy of regional or international organizations. In order to be able to make decisions that are acceptable to all of their members, the same checks and balances that have been created to ensure that a state acts in the best interest of its citizens must be put in place for regional and international institutions. This is, of course, a matter of degree: If a regional organization primarily serves as a forum for the exchange of information and opinions, but leaves any action on the issues discussed on the regional level to the discretion of the individual member states, there will be no need to establish a parliament to oversee the actions of the executive (that is, the state representatives who meet for their discussions in the regional forum). Also, no court will be needed to make sure that all actions taken are in compliance with the regional organization's basic laws. However, the more sovereign rights are being entrusted to the regional organization, the stronger the call will be to create institutional arrangements to ensure the

legitimacy of the decisions made and actions taken by the regional body. This is the reason why the EU is now working to give itself a constitution, along with major reforms to its existing structures: to bridge the so-called democracy deficit. This is also why there is so much pressure for UN Security Council reform. How do we ensure that democracy and the rule of law not only exist within countries, but also on the macro-regional and global levels? The focus on UN Security Council reform is – in this context – in itself surprising. After all: The UN is a membership organization and in such an organization, the General Assembly is the highest authority.

III. Regions, governance and the United Nations

With regard to the United Nations, “regionalism” has two meanings: On the one hand, there are the many regional organizations that were created independently of the United Nations and their relations to the United Nations and its organs and specialized agencies. On the other hand, there are the regional groupings and commissions within the United Nations itself, which in themselves are a reflection of the general trend to come together and collaborate on a geographical basis. I would like to start my discussion of the UN and its relations with regions with the latter.

Regional electoral groupings

The member states of the UN are divided into five formal regional groupings. The purpose of these groupings is to allocate seats on UN bodies which have only a limited number of members. For example, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, better known by its acronym, ECOSOC, has 54 member states. These are elected by the UN General Assembly for three-year terms according to geographic representation: Fourteen seats are allocated each time to African States, eleven to Asian States, six to Eastern European States, ten to Latin American and Caribbean States, and thirteen to Western European and other States. The number of seats allocated to each group more or less reflects the difference in size of their respective membership. The African group, for examples, has 53 member states, while the Eastern European group only has 21 members.

These differences in size, along with some particularities of group membership – Australia, New Zealand and the United States, for example, are part of the “Western Europe and Other States” group – are at the basis of some criticism of the system of

regional groupings. However, such criticism is usually directed at the nature of membership rather than at the system of regional groupings itself. Proposals for reform of this system tend to advocate a larger number of smaller groups with stronger internal cohesiveness. The UNU was part of an international discussion of this issue, the results of which are published by the UNU Press (Thakur 1999).

Regional commissions

Another expression of regionalism within the UN system are the five regional bodies that were established under the ECOSOC: The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

The role of the regional commissions is to advise member states with regard to economic and social development and to facilitate joint action of their member states for this purpose. In addition, as subsidiary bodies of ECOSOC, the commissions also work to implement ECOSOC activities in the region. For example, they play a major role in preparing world conferences by organizing regional preparatory meetings.

Again, as with the regional electoral groupings, membership in these commissions is based only partially on geography, with history and geopolitics of equal importance in determining states' interest to participate in specific commissions. For example, in the case of these regional commissions, unlike above mentioned regional electoral groupings, Australia and New Zealand have duly become members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, reflective of their geographical position. However, the United States and the UK, for example, are members of the Asian-Pacific, the European as well as the Latin American/Caribbean Commissions. Egypt is in both the Economic Commission for Africa and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. Most of the CIS states are members both of the commissions for Europe and for Asia/Pacific.

These are some examples that demonstrate how "region" is a rather ambiguous term in the UN system. However, consider the following points: The US has historically strong ties to Europe, while bordering on the Pacific and having Latin America as an

immediate neighbor. Thus, their participation in all three relevant regional commissions makes a lot of sense. Or take the case of Egypt, which is located in Northern Africa but also has strong links with the Arab countries that are represented in the commission for Western Asia. Therefore, it is obvious from Egypt's point of view to participate in both the commissions for Africa and for Western Asia. To exclude countries from the cooperation with their natural partners simply on the basis of geography would be meaningless. Thus, the ambiguity of states' representation on the regional commissions reflects the multiple links between states and thus, rather than necessarily being an indicator of chaos and inefficiency, as some people may be led to judge, this ambiguity could just as well be interpreted as a mirror of the multi-layered realities of regional cooperation and decision-making today.

(Macro-) Regional organizations and the United Nations

The United Nations works with macro-regional organizations in a variety of ways. In fact, each year the Secretary-General of the UN summarizes the different aspects of the collaboration with each major regional organization in a separate report to the UN General Assembly. The cooperation covers all areas of activity of the UN, including peacekeeping, humanitarian affairs, economic and social development, human rights, etc. The regional organizations often support UN activities by providing information or collaborating in the design and implementation of programmes and projects. The UN and regional organizations often come together to jointly organize conferences and to develop policies for their – overlapping – member states.

Most prominently, in the area of peacekeeping, the cooperation between the UN and regional organizations is based on the UN Charter: There, it is stated that the Security Council should encourage associations or agencies that promote peace at the regional level. The Security Council actually can and does make use of such regional organizations to enforce its peacekeeping goals: The NATO engagement in Kosovo and Afghanistan is such an example, as are the deployment of troops by the African Union to the Darfur region of Sudan or the engagement of troops of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in various conflicts in Western Africa in recent years. It is no exaggeration to say that without the cooperation of regional organizations, the UN would be hard-pressed to fulfill its peacekeeping mandate. Here,

it is important to note, however, that regional organizations of course should not take any military action without UN authorization except against an aggressor state.

Regionalism, globalism, peace and development

Thus, the relationship between the UN and macro-regional organizations appears close and productive. So how about the fears that I mentioned at the start of my presentation that the growth of regional organizations – growth with reference both to their number and to the breadth of their activities – actually might come to undermine international efforts at peace and equitable development?

Certainly, ever closer cooperation within (macro-) regions may lead to strong competition between regions for shares of the world market and for influence in international politics. In addition, tightly knit intra-regional links may result in protectionist, exclusionary policies towards those who are not members of the regional “club.” Sometimes, policy decisions taken by regional organizations greatly impact the economic, social or political situation in countries outside of the region, while these countries have no means to make their voices heard in the decision-making processes of the regional organization. These threats to open world markets and to access to decision-making structures are not hypothetical, but have already materialized, as in particular some of the disputes show that have been brought before the World Trade Organization.

So are we moving towards a world that is split into regional blocks, each having varying degrees of economic and political power but basically competing with each other for resources, access to markets and political influence?

Actually, I do not believe so. We may see frictions between regional blocks here and there, just as doubts have been cast on the functioning of the United Nations, or even the validity of multilateralism in general, in recent years. But at the same time, we see many conflicts between states resolved peacefully, through dialogue, by applying the consultation and decision-making mechanisms of regional organizations or of the United Nations. And it is precisely the co-existence of states, regions within states (the micro-regions I mentioned earlier), macro-regional cooperation, and international cooperation at the United Nations and other institutions of global reach, that will over time bring us closer to our common aspiration of peace, security and prosperity.

IV. Conclusion: Towards a world governance system

What I am advocating here is a system of world governance, rather than a world government. The difference between the two is fundamental: While a world government would make decisions on all aspects of all people's lives, world governance in essence refers to a system of rules, procedures and institutions that define the basic framework within which actors on various levels – including states as well as micro- and macro-regions – and in different sectors (development, finances, environment, security etc.) take the decisions that affect the people within their areas of responsibility.

Such a system of world governance would be multi-layered and reflect the kaleidoscopic reality of global society. After all, we all share basic values such as our desire to live a secure, healthy and fulfilled life. Nevertheless, the world is characterized by a diversity of cultures, religions, social structures, political and economic preferences that guide the way in which each individual or group goes about attaining this aim of a secure, healthy and fulfilled life. This diversity is the basis of the creativity of humankind, and any system of global governance will only be accepted by all as long as it duly reflects such diversity. This is why world government will not be possible – people would not accept uniform policies that disregard their cultural preferences.

The European Union has experienced opposition by people against overly uniform policies, and this is why in Europe, the “Principle of subsidiarity” is applied in political decision making. The principle of subsidiarity, in essence, means that a decision shall be taken on a higher level of governance – a regional institution, for example – only if the objectives of such a decision cannot be reached were it taken on a lower level of government, for example the state, a micro-region within that state, or even a local community. To give an example: The location of a specific traffic light is best decided on the community level, while the route that a new-to-be-built major highway will follow is better determined on the micro-regional or even state level, as it will cross many community boundaries. The corridors that airplanes follow when flying across continents, however, cannot well be decided by national governments, as they need to be coordinated across borders – here, a regional or international

organization is better placed to make a meaningful decision. This is what subsidiarity is about.

In a system of world governance, states, regional organizations and international institutions work together to develop rules on what to decide and implement on which level and in which sector of governance, with the aim to allow for as much diversity as possible, and to standardize where necessary. In such a system, the state will set the rules of procedure for decision-making on the lower levels of governance within its boundaries, for example prefectures or local governments. At the same time, this state will cooperate with other states to take decisions that are of common concern. At the same time, however, could an actor within a state – a micro-region, for example – engage in cooperative decision-making with similar micro-regions in other states. Such cross-border cooperation in the micro-regional context is already a reality, in Europe and in other parts of the world.

In the end, it will become increasingly difficult to attribute a particular policy position to a specific state, as different entities within that state may be taking different approaches to problems and may choose to collaborate internationally in solving these problems. However, such multilayered political decision-making in a kaleidoscopic array of organizations and institutions is our future, I believe. Both the United Nations and regional organizations will be parts of such a global governance system, along with states, micro-regions and local communities. Globalism, regionalism and, in fact, localism will develop hand in hand.

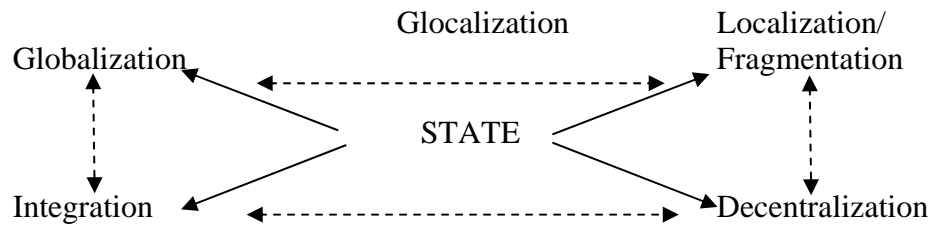
Thank you very much.

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Trends in World Organization



1. **Globalization:** **“Upscaling”**
 “Upsizing”
 - + (*Positive*)
 - Freedom of Movement/Mobility/Communication
 - Overall Increase of Efficiency/Creation of Wealth
 - (*Negative*)
 - Loss of Cultural Diversity
→ Homogenization
 - Unequal Distribution of the Wealth Created

2. **Decentralization:** **“Downscaling”**
 “Downsizing”
 - + (*Positive*)
 - Closer to the People (“rooted”)
 - Allows for More Diversity
 - Less Bureaucracy/Tailor Made Solutions
 - (*Negative*)
 - Possible loss of Synergy/Coherence/Efficiency
 - Risk of Fragmentation

3. **Integration:** **“New Regionalism”**
 a Creative Process (Multidimensional)
 - + (*Positive*)
 - “World Regions”contributing to Global Transformation
 - (*Negative*)
 - Groups of Countries Focusing on their Own Economic Interests

4. Fragmentation: Outcome of Ongoing Secessionism

+ (*Positive*)

- Increase of Internal Coherence and Clear Identity (?)

- (*Negative*)

- Weak Sustainability
 - Weak Contribution to Global Systems
-

WORLD ORDER

Geographical Scales

1. GLOBAL SYSTEM
2. WORLD REGIONS
3. STATES (SOVEREIGNTY?)
4. SUBNATIONAL REGIONS
5. LOCAL AUTHORITIES / MUNICIPALITIES

Principal Organs of the United Nations

- General Assembly (UNGA)
- Security Council (UNSC)
- Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
- Trusteeship Council
- International Court of Justice
- Secretariat

Funds, Programme and other UN Entities

- UNCTAD
- UNDP
- UNEP
- UNHCR
- OHCHR
- UNFPA
- UNICEF
- UNRWA
- UN-HABITAT
- UNOPS
- UNU

Specialized Agencies

- ILO
- FAO
- UNESCO
- WHO
- WORLD BANKGROUP
- IMF
- WTO
- ICAO
- IMO
- ITU
- UPU
- WMO
- WIPO
- IFAD
- UNIDO
- IAEA
- CTBTO
- World Tourism Organization