

# UFOs, NGOs, or IGOs:

## *Using International Documents for General Reference*

by Catherine Shreve

A patron comes to your library, having read that NATO issued a classified report in the 1960s about finding extraterrestrials on Earth<sup>1</sup> or having heard of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs, and wants to know what they're up to.

Whether yours is an academic, high school, or public library, you probably have some basic resources for tracking down international documents. While you may get relatively few questions about unidentified flying objects (UFOs), the publications and documents of international intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) can be very useful for addressing queries about current events, business, the environment, women's issues, agriculture, and Model UN simulations.

For the purposes of this article, "international documents" refer to the documents and sales publications of intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations. Materials from individual countries and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), while valuable sources, are not included. United States government publications that relate to international research cannot be covered comprehensively in this space. Keep in mind, however, the excellent sources from the U.S. Department of State and the CIA, such as two basic series, the Area Handbook Series, which comprises individual country studies, and the Background Notes, both of which are available in print and on the Web.<sup>2</sup>

### **United Nations**

The United Nations and its associated

agencies publish records of their work as well as monographs and periodicals relating to current issues. They are a good source of trade and demographic statistics as well as reports on the status of women, children, the environment, and developing countries. The documents emanate from the six principal organs of the United Nations: the General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, Security Council, Secretariat, Trusteeship Council, and the International Court of Justice, also known as the World Court. If your patron is seeking the official records or working papers of any of these, you can refer her to two North Carolina libraries. The Walter Davis Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is a United Nations depository, receiving printed and "masthead" documents in English.<sup>3</sup> Duke University's Perkins Library collects comprehensively on the United Nations, including the Readex microfiche collection of masthead documents. The fiche collection is accompanied by a CD-ROM index which makes searching by keywords in many fields easy. The United Nations also uploads its bibliographic records into the RLIN database<sup>4</sup> so you can search for references by subject, author, and title. If your library provides Internet access and a Web browser, you can access an increasing number of United Nations documents in full-text through UN Web pages.

The United Nations encompasses 185 member countries.<sup>5</sup> With such wide representation, there are numerous world issues and countries covered in its publications. The *Yearbook of the*

*United Nations* and *A Global Agenda: Issues Before the General Assembly of the United Nations* give a good overview of the hot topics of recent years. Consult the UN's demographic and statistical yearbooks for detailed information on many countries. Some of these publications are by region so that you can focus on Africa or Latin America and the Caribbean. The *UN Chronicle* is a quarterly publication of news and analysis on specific countries and topics such as human rights and women's issues.

The United Nations umbrella covers a number of programs, specialized agencies, and other autonomous agencies. Many of these issue their own publications (some are free)<sup>6</sup> and maintain Web sites. For information on international business, finance, and trade, look for publications from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, also known as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development or IBRD. There are also regional Economic or Economic and Social Commissions for Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, and Western Asia.

Social issues play a major role in United Nations programs. There are Commissions on Human Rights and on the Status of Women. Perhaps most familiar to the American public is UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund. (This is not the only agency that distributes children's books; a quick search of the local public library turned up juvenile books on human rights, refugee children, and folk tales from various UN bodies.) The United Nations Environ-

ment Programme (UNEP) and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) publish many reports that are of general interest. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) have been quite active lately, as evidenced by their Web sites *Refworld*<sup>7</sup> and *Reliefweb*,<sup>8</sup> where you can find the latest news on emergency situations.

Developing countries are in the news and are the subjects of much research recently. The economic and social indicators of these countries, from Albania to Zimbabwe, can be found in UN statistical and demographic yearbooks. The UN Development Programme (UNDP) also publishes reports on its ongoing projects in individual countries and regions. These reports are included in the Readex microfiche collection. UNDP's annual *Human Development Report* addresses poverty worldwide and the challenge of sustainable human development. The World Bank is another excellent source of information on developing countries, with *Trends in Developing Economies* and *Social Indicators of Development*.

### European Union

The European Union (EU) was founded to promote economic development and cooperation among its member countries. It is governed by four institutions with complex interactions, "blending a parliamentary system of government with a permanent intergovernmental negotiating conference."<sup>9</sup> For general reference, it is sufficient to note that the important bodies are: the Commission, which proposes legislation and issues "COM" documents; the Council of Ministers, which enacts legislation, sometimes after consulting with the Economic and Social Committee; the European Parliament, whose advisory powers recently have been supplemented with increased decision-making authority; and the Court of Justice, which simply does as its name implies — interprets EU law. Each of these bodies issues documents, which are distributed to depository libraries in the United States and Europe. In North Carolina, the EU depository is maintained by the Public Documents and Maps Department, Perkins Library, Duke University. There one can find the *Official Journal* and COM documents on microfiche, the *Directory of Community Legislation in Force*, and librarians to provide guidance through the complicated maze of accessing EU documents. EU documents also are published in the

CELEX database, available through a subscription to *Eurobases* or *Lexis/Nexis*. Some documents are available or at least listed with their Official Journal references on the EU Web sites.

Most importantly for general reference questions, the European Union publishes monographs and periodicals about the economic and related social issues of the fifteen member countries. *Eurobarometer* reports the results of public opinion surveys. *Social Europe* has covered a variety of social, health, and employment issues; it will be replaced this year by a series of seven themes under the title "Employment and Social Affairs."<sup>10</sup> The *Bulletin of the European Communities* is good for current awareness and citations to legislation. Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Communities, compiles useful statistics on demographics, living standards, the environment, and economic indicators; two of its main publications are *Europe in Figures* and the *Eurostat Yearbook*. The European Union, like the United Nations and many IGOs, is putting increasing amounts of information on the Web. It also sends free brochures and newsletters for the public, such as *InfEuro*, about the upcoming move to an integrated currency for Europe.

### Other Intergovernmental Organizations

There are so many IGOs that it is difficult to narrow the list. Your use of their publications will ultimately depend on your users' interests. The organizations that were established by treaty for a specific purpose or region may be your first resource for research on those topics — the World Trade Organization, successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT); North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); and North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA). If the United States is a member of the organization, you may find some of their reports included in U.S. government documents.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is known for its detailed economic surveys of individual countries, both its members and others. The Organization of American States (OAS, or OEA in Spanish) covers North, Central, and South America as well as the Caribbean. Several UN-associated agencies are well-known on their own for their work on specific issues, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and

the International Labor Organization (ILO).

Every library can't acquire and maintain a comprehensive collection of IGO publications. Internet access and a Web browser, however, can open up an expanding world of resources. Many of these organizations and agencies have official Web pages, with background information, current news, references to publications with ordering information, and sometimes full-text documents. Before you tell a patron that your library doesn't have that information, consider the Web.

### The Librarian as Web Detective

It is still wise to consider the source when using information from the Internet. You also will want to consider the currency of the information. One great advantage of the Internet is that it is so much quicker than print; yet some international organizations still lag behind in getting the information out. On the other hand, if you are looking for documents more than a couple of years old, you may or may not find them. There is some movement towards publishing backfiles on the Web, and librarians are urging both the United States government and major IGOs to archive electronically published documents.<sup>11</sup> Most reliable Web sites will have the issuing agency's name and the date last updated at the bottom of the first page. Look for the IGO's official home page or a compilation put together by a reputable university or institution.

Those caveats aside, how does one locate a specific document or answer on the Web? Many of us have become proficient at "surfing" without being able to zero in on the one piece of information we need. A librarian needs to hone his or her skills as a Finder — the person who can locate the crucial ingredient on the back of the kitchen shelf, the missing sock under the bed, or that green book that you remember seeing somewhere. Flexible thinking is key. These sites are created by different people all over the world, each with his own approach to organization and categorization. The pages may appeal to visual learners, with waving flags and

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colorful icons, or they may consist of a textual list with a tree structure. The effective Web user can navigate many ways without becoming distracted by all the interesting choices.

The World Wide Web is aptly named. It is useful to visualize each site as its own spider web, with the home page at the center. From there, you can follow one linear strand straight through or take tangents to the side. You might reach the same point in the web in several different ways, taking one strand or the other and then following the tangents. Remember that some links will take you to other sites outside your little web. If you get lost or disoriented, use the Back button or Go to retrace your steps to the home page. From there you can pursue other strands.

To locate specific documents or information from intergovernmental organizations, ask yourself a variation of the reporter's questions:

**Who?** Which IGO and which agency within it would have authored the document? Is there a publications office that would have issued it? For example, European Union publications can come from EurOp (the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities), the statistical office Eurostat, or one of about 24 Directorate Generals, besides the legislative bodies.

**When?** Sometimes the best way to distinguish which link to follow is by the date of the document. The UN's International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia lists its press releases by month and year.<sup>12</sup> To get a hint of the topic, you must first choose the date.

**Where?** Where did the meeting or legislative action take place? The United Nations International Conference on Population and Development is known and linked to as the Cairo Conference.

**What form?** Was the information you're seeking issued as an official record, a technical report, a sales publication, or a press release? There may be separate links for each type of information.

**How is the subject expressed?** As with searches of catalog records, you must be aware that your keywords may not be the same as those used in the subject thesaurus or in any of the fields. Look for synonyms in English and translations to other languages. Familiarity with the

terminology of the particular IGO is a bonus. The European Union has a helpful site, Eurodicautom,<sup>13</sup> which defines and translates thousands of scientific and technical terms, as well as acronyms and abbreviations.

Here is a guided tour of some examples to demonstrate navigation of IGO sites on the Web.

**Question:** What has been the international response to the recent earthquake in Iran?

**Answer:** From the United Nations home page (which agency is likely to have authored the information?), you have a choice of five major categories—Peace and Security, Economic and Social Development, International Law, Humanitarian Affairs, and Human Rights. Click on Humanitarian Affairs (how is the subject expressed?). There you have a choice of, among others, Refugees, Land Mines, and Relief Web. Choose Relief Web. On this page, choose Emergencies. Here you must not be distracted by the flashing headline about Kabila declaring himself President of Zaire; remember which question you are answering. Scroll down the list of countries with ongoing crises to get to the recently dated list of current emergencies (when did it happen?). Choose Iran, and you have found the treasure—maps and international news reports as recent as two days ago. In writing, this sounds like a long process, but in real time it takes just a few clicks of the mouse accompanied by some critical thinking.

**Question:** Where can I find current information from CEPAL? It is a UN agency dealing with Latin America.

**Answer:** This is one of those agencies from which your library may not collect, but you can find news, information, and referrals for your patron if you find CEPAL's home page. Start at the Official Website Locator for the UN. If you look in the alphabetic list under C, you find nothing. However, serendipitously, the same page lists the Es, under which is the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Take a leap of faith and choose it. Perhaps your patron recognizes that CEPAL is an economic commission, or perhaps you guess that CEPAL might be the Spanish acronym. At the top of ECLAC's home page is a choice for "versión en español." When you choose it, you find you are indeed at CEPAL's (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe) home page, from which you can retrieve news, biblio-

graphic references to publications, full text samples of the *CEPAL Review*, and links to related organizations. You might have found the same site by searching (from the Official Web Site Locator) the Catalogue of UN System Web Sites under Economics or the World Map of UN System Web Sites, where ECLAC is shown to emanate from Santiago, Chile. In any case, that leap is necessary, where you synthesize the clues and explore likely links.

Finally, how would you answer that first question about official documents relating to aliens on Earth? You could urge your patron to search the NATO site. She will not find documents going back to the sixties, but may find contact information and links to related organizations. Remember also that the U.S. government publishes some NATO documents. To find the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs, you might try the UN Web Site Locator first. A search by "outer space affairs" retrieved some related documents, but not this particular agency. Going back to the Home Page and poking around, Economic and Social Development turns out to be the hot link—"outer space" is listed in the alphabetic index. Basic print reference sources such as the *Encyclopedia of the United Nations* and the *Yearbooks* will provide background and historical information on the agency, and more clues to pursue.

## Core Sources By and About IGOs

Following are some basic tools for making the most of IGO documents and publications in answering reference questions. This is by no means comprehensive, but is meant as a start for your own explorations.

*Bulletin of the European Communities.* (Brussels: Secretariat General of the Commission, 1968).

*Europa.* (<http://europa.eu.int/>) May 20, 1997.

*European Union Encyclopedia and Directory.* (London: Europa Publications, c1995-).

*European Union in the US.* (<http://www.eurunion.org/>) May 20, 1997.

*Eurostat Yearbook.* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1995-).

*A Global Agenda: Issues Before the General Assembly of the United Nations.* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1991-).

GODORT International Documents Task Force. *International Organizations.* (<http://www.library.nwu.edu/govpub/itdf/igo.html>) May 20, 1997.

*Human Development Report*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990- ).  
*Index to International Statistics*. (Bethesda, Md.: Congressional Information Service, 1983- ).  
*Official Website Locator for the United Nations System of Organizations*. (<http://www.unsystem.org/>) May 20, 1997.  
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*Social Indicators of Development*. (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1987- ), or <http://www.ciesin.org/IC/wbank/sid-home.html>.  
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*UN Chronicle*. (New York: United Nations Dept. of Public Information, 1975- ).  
*UN Demographic Yearbook*. (New York: Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistical Office, United Nations, 1948- ).  
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*United Nations Handbook*. (Wellington, N.Z.: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1993).  
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*Yearbook of the United Nations*. (New York: Dept. of Public Information, United Nations, 1947- ).

#### References

- <sup>1</sup> Col. Steve Wilson, "Inside the US Government Underground," *Skywatch International*, (<http://www.wic.net/colonel/nato.txt>) May 2, 1997.
- <sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Background Notes*, ([http://www.state.gov/www/background\\_notes/index.html](http://www.state.gov/www/background_notes/index.html)) May 20, 1997, and Library of Congress, *Country Studies*, (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html>) May 20, 1997.
- <sup>3</sup> *List of Depository Libraries Receiving United Nations Material*, 19 February 1997, (<http://www.un.org/MoreInfo/Deplib/usa.htm#ncarolina>) May 14, 1997.
- <sup>4</sup> Wiltrud Harms, "UN Bibliographic and Background Tools in Hardcopy and Online: How to Use the Best Tools for Current Legal Research," in *Introduction to International Organizations*, ed. Lyonette Louis-Jacques and Jeanne S. Korman (New York: Oceana Publica-

tions, Inc., 1996), 311.

<sup>5</sup> *United Nations Handbook 1996*, 34th ed. (Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1996), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Marilyn Gahm, "How To Do More With Nothing," in *Introduction to International Organizations*, ed. Lyonette Louis-Jacques and Jeanne S. Korman (New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1996), 157-182.

<sup>7</sup> *Refworld*, (<http://www.unhcr.ch/refworld/refworld.htm>) May 15, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> *Reliefweb*, 15 May 1997 (<http://www.reliefweb.int/>) May 15, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Commission of the European Communities. *EC 1992 and Beyond: Access to Information* (Washington, DC: Public Inquiries Division, Office of Press and Public Affairs, Delegation of the Commission, 1992), 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Office des Publications Officielles des Communautés Européennes, "Note to the Subscribers of Social Europe," Business letter (Jan. 14, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Andrea Sevetson, "letter to EU re: long term access to e-information," *intl-doc@listserv.acns.nwu.edu* (Jan. 8, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> "Press Releases and Press Statements," *International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia*, (<http://www.un.org/icty/press.htm>) May 19, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> *Eurodicautom*, (<http://www2.echo.lu/edic/>) May 17, 1997.



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