

Opinion | From peacekeeping to progress: India's multifaceted contributions to the United Nations

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(File) A "#UNGA" sign is on display at United Nations headquarters. AP

The Israel and Gaza conflict has put a serious question on the effectiveness of the United Nations in the present world. The ineffectiveness of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has allowed killing of the civilians in different parts of the world. However, the other stories of the UN are not as painful as the Security Council.

The ineffectiveness of the United Nations is mostly visible in the case of prohibition of war but other specialised organs or principal organs are doing significant work in the progress of international law and relations. India is one of the initial members of the UN and has always contributed significantly to the promotion of the United Nations' cause for the development of peace and security. In recent times, India has been elected to several key bodies at the UN.

India was also elected by acclamation to the Commission on the Status of Women for the term 2025-2029; the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund for the term 2025-2027; the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services for 2025-2027. In this context, it is important to understand the functioning of such bodies and the relevance they hold for India.

Before delving into the functioning of these bodies, the role of the UN ECOSOC i.e. the Economic and Social Council is important to understand as all these bodies report to it. The ECOSOC is the principal body to promote cooperation, policy review and debate on economic, social, environmental and humanitarian issues, and on the implementation of internationally agreed sustainable development objectives. The Council coordinates, at the intergovernmental level, the activities of the UN's specialised agencies. The General Assembly elects 54 members of the Council (18 each year) for three-year terms and the membership of ECOSOC is allotted by regions i.e. Africa has 14 members, Western Europe and other developed countries have 13 members, Asia has 11 members, Latin America has 10 members and Eastern Europe has six members.

Coming to specific bodies, starting with the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW or UNCSW) which is a functional commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. CSW has been described as the UN organ promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. It was established in 1946 as a mechanism to promote, report on and monitor issues relating to the political, economic, civil, social and educational rights of women.

Another such body is the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), formerly the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, which is a UN agency aimed at improving reproductive and maternal health worldwide. Its work includes developing national healthcare strategies and protocols, increasing access to birth control, and leading campaigns against child marriage, gender-based violence, and female genital mutilation. Similarly, the United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) is a body that reports on its activities to UN member states meeting in the General Assembly through its Executive Board, which is accountable to the UN ECOSOC. UNICEF is dedicated to the well-being of children, adolescents, and women and works for the realisation and protection of their rights within the frameworks of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, and monitored by the 18-member UN Committee on the Rights of the Child).

Another significant UN body is the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) which is a United Nations agency dedicated to implementing infrastructure and procurement projects for the United Nations System, international financial institutions, governments, and other partners around the world. UNOPS concentrates its support in the areas of infrastructure, procurement, project management, human resources, and financial management services. UNOPS often works in post-disaster and peace and security settings, developing countries and economies in transition.

Going forward, the significance of India's active participation in various UN bodies underscores its commitment to the organisation's principles and objectives. By leveraging its position within these bodies, India contributes to shaping global agendas and advancing international cooperation in critical areas such as gender equality, reproductive health, and child welfare. As the world faces complex challenges, India's continued engagement with the UN reaffirms its role as a responsible global actor committed to promoting peace, security, and sustainable development.

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