

GENEVA, AN INTERNATIONAL ROLE

Understanding Geneva's leading role in international cooperation

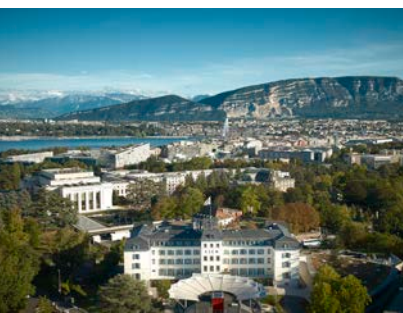




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INTRODUCTION

Welcoming the Reformation's refugees from Europe, the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the first Geneva Convention, the Alabama Arbitration, the League of Nations and the United Nations — all of these have given our country a true international vocation. From trade to peace, from humanitarian action to science, from health to intellectual property, through the environment, human rights and telecommunications, Geneva brings together centres of expertise addressing all the world's challenges. Sunscreen safety standards, internet access, card transactions, weather alerts — what is decided every day in Geneva affects the daily lives of every person on the planet.

This so-called international Geneva — made up of international organisations, NGOs, permanent missions, and research institutions — is a precious tool for Switzerland's foreign policy and positions the country as a key interlocutor on international issues.

This dossier accompanies the comic book *Code critique* published by Helvetiq and provides additional information on Geneva's international role. Where does it come from? What does it actually do? Why does it matter for us as individuals, for Switzerland, and above all for the world? Without claiming to be exhaustive, this dossier defines what is meant by international Geneva, offers an overview of its historical origins, the work of the main international organisations that comprise it, and its capacity to evolve. Far from being static, international Geneva constantly renews itself to respond to the challenges the world faces.

This dossier is aimed at secondary I and II teachers who wish to explore themes addressed in the comic book. Each chapter can be treated independently and includes a classroom activity in the form of a quiz, creative exercise, or debate. International Geneva is a theme that can be approached in a cross-curricular way: it touches on law, economics, citizenship, philosophy, geography and history.

Workshops run by the Fondation pour Genève and the Eduki Foundation can be organised in class or at their premises at the heart of international Geneva. They focus on the following themes:

1. AI, the World and Me
2. Geneva, Centre of International Cooperation

More information available here:

www.fondationpourgeneve.ch/en/educational-resources-comic-strip/

GENERAL INFORMATION

GENEVA'S INTERNATIONAL ECOSYSTEM



186

permanent diplomatic missions
to the United Nations in 2026



42

international organisations in
Geneva in 2026



> 490

non-governmental organi-
sations (NGOs) in Geneva
in 2026



6,570

international meetings
held from Geneva in
2023

DEFINITIONS

International Organisation

An international organisation is an association of states established by an international treaty for the purpose of cooperating in one or more fields (political, economic, social, humanitarian, etc.). It has its own governing bodies (such as an assembly, a secretariat, a council, etc.) to carry out its operations, and its own international legal personality. This means that it has the capacity to act in its own name (to conclude agreements, bring legal proceedings, etc.), independently of its member states.

Examples: the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organization (WHO)

Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)

A non-governmental organisation (NGO) is a private association, independent of governments, that acts on a non-profit basis to assist populations or advocate for causes. NGOs are created by citizens (not States) and can operate in several countries. Some collaborate with large organisations. More than 6,400 NGOs hold consultative status with the UN (ECOSOC).

Examples: Doctors Without Borders, Greenpeace, Amnesty International

Permanent Mission

A permanent mission is the official representation of a country to an international organisation, such as the UN. These missions were formally established by the Vienna Convention of 1961. Their role is to represent the country, participate in the organisation's meetings and negotiations, and defend their government's positions. Some non-member countries or intergovernmental organisations may also have observer status, allowing them to follow the UN's work without being able to vote.

Example: Switzerland's Permanent Mission to the UN and other international organisations in Geneva was opened in 1966 and represents the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

Treaty / Convention

In international law, the words *treaty* and *convention* refer to written agreements concluded between States (or sometimes international organisations) that create rights and obligations between the parties. They constitute a primary source of international law. In common usage, the word *treaty* is often used for the most solemn agreements (peace, border, friendship treaties...), while *convention* is more commonly used for important multilateral agreements, often negotiated within international organisations.

Examples: 1949 Geneva Convention, Treaty of Versailles

Host State

The term *host state* refers to the country whose territory hosts either the headquarters of an international organisation (or one of its offices), or an official meeting or conference of an international organisation.

Example: Switzerland is the host state of the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG)

Multilateralism

Multilateralism refers to coordinated collective action among at least three States, who are aware that it is in their interest to work together to solve problems they could not solve alone.

THE SPIRIT OF GENEVA

The Spirit of Geneva is a set of values – humanism, social justice and independence – championed by various historical figures, authors and international organisations with links to Geneva, as highlighted in a book by the Genevan Robert de Traz in 1929.

Geneva, a leading centre of global governance, embodies values of openness to the world that have their roots as far back as the 16th century, when many Protestant communities sought refuge there. The founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the signing of the First Geneva Convention in 1864 laid the foundations of humanitarian law and gave Geneva a truly international role. This ‘Spirit of Geneva’ continues to be expressed through the city’s hosting of international organisations, the holding of high-level diplomatic meetings and a commitment to promoting dialogue and peace.

“In many respects, Geneva embodies the values upheld by the United Nations: a crossroads of tolerance, peace and democracy; a meeting place for languages, religions and cultures, for civil society, and for the private and public sectors – in short, for humanity in all its diversity.”

Kofi Annan
former Secretary-General
of the United Nations

SWISS NEUTRALITY

Switzerland chose to remain neutral in the aftermath of the Battle of Marignano in 1515, but it was in 1815, at the Congress of Vienna, that Swiss neutrality was formally recognised under public international law. Swiss neutrality is:



freely chosen

It may therefore be waived if this proves necessary to safeguard national interests



permanent

It has no predefined time limit



armed

The neutral state must be able to defend its territory in the event of external invasion

A state’s neutrality is based on the **law of neutrality** and on the **policy of neutrality**.

Switzerland has been a member of the UN since 2002. The UN Security Council can adopt measures that are binding on all members. However, this is not contrary to Swiss neutrality, as the Security Council acts under a mandate from the community of States to restore international peace and security. It is this notion that allows Switzerland to weigh its interests and adapt its neutrality policy in order to follow international sanctions against a State that has violated international law.

→ The **law of neutrality** is the set of rules of public international law that neutral States and belligerent States are required to observe in the event of an international armed conflict. The law of neutrality has been codified in the Hague Conventions of 1907, which Switzerland ratified in 1910. These are the only international agreements governing the law of neutrality, which evolves according to customary law. They require the neutral State to refrain from participating in any international armed conflict and from placing troops or its territory at the disposal of the belligerent parties. The latter are in turn required to respect the inviolability of the neutral State’s territory. The law of neutrality therefore excludes membership in military alliances involving a duty of mutual assistance, such as NATO.

CONCRETE EXAMPLE

During the US attack on Iraq in 2003 without a UN Security Council mandate, Switzerland applied the law of neutrality. It prohibited belligerent parties from overflying its territory except for humanitarian flights. It prohibited the export of war materiel to the States involved in the conflict. Under the law of neutrality, Swiss private companies may technically trade with parties to a conflict, but exports of war materiel are subject to a state authorisation regime. This allows the State to prevent war materiel manufactured in Switzerland from being used in the conflict.

→ The **policy of neutrality** is the set of measures that a neutral State takes to ensure the credibility and effectiveness of its neutrality. Switzerland is therefore free to adapt it, taking into account its international and security policy interests. In addition to the rights and duties prescribed by international law, the neutrality policy takes into account national interests, the international situation and the history and traditions of the country. Neutrality is therefore not a rigid status. Switzerland applies it flexibly according to the international context and the country's domestic situation, in order to preserve its independence, security and prosperity.

CONCRETE EXAMPLE

In late February 2022, Russia launched a military attack on Ukraine. In doing so, Russia violated fundamental norms of international law. The Federal Council adopted the European Union's sanctions against Russia. In making this decision, it took into account the law of neutrality and the policy of neutrality, as well as foreign policy and external economic considerations.

Thanks to its neutrality, its humanitarian tradition, its experience and its diplomatic expertise, Switzerland enjoys a high level of credibility in the promotion of peace. This image has helped to position our country as an ideal location for hosting international organisations.

But the world in which we live is changing. Crises and conflicts have changed radically in nature over recent decades and no longer occur solely between States. This development raises questions about the law of neutrality, which is not suited to new types of conflict, such as internal conflicts or cyber-attacks, which do not follow a territorial logic.

More information on neutrality

Switzerland's neutrality
Swiss Confederation, FDFA



Neutrality: what does Switzerland do in the
event of war?
Article published on 20 May 2025 by Swissinfo



Swiss neutrality
Video resources, news and quizzes from RTS



SWISS DIPLOMATIC EXPERTISE

As a neutral nation, Switzerland has a long tradition of diplomatic expertise and discreet mediation. Switzerland offers its support to countries in conflict through what are known as 'good offices', in which it acts as a mediator between two opposing States. For example, Switzerland has represented US interests in dealings with Iran and Cuba, and mediated discussions between Turkey and Armenia, which led to the Zurich Protocols in 2009. It also hosts high-level meetings between leaders, providing a safe and neutral forum for dialogue, sometimes in secret away from media scrutiny. For example, it hosted a summit between US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985 at the end of the Cold War, and more recently, in 2021, a summit between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"Diplomacy is multifaceted; it does not take place exclusively on the red carpet, at conferences or during receptions. Diplomacy is conducted before, during and after negotiations. Diplomacy builds relationships and connections; it can prevent conflicts and act as a mediator when the parties are no longer on speaking terms. Diplomacy is never static."

Ignazio Cassis
Federal Councillor, Head of the FDFA

The diplomatic processes in which Switzerland is involved are led by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). As early as 1848, when the federal state was established, a Federal Political Department (FPD, now the FDFA) responsible for foreign policy was set up, initially with limited resources. Switzerland's accession to the League of Nations in 1920 helped to expand its activities.

IN-CLASS DEBATE

For or against Swiss neutrality?

Duration: approximately 1 hour

Audience: Secondary I and II classes

Recommended subjects: citizenship, law, geography, philosophy

Educational objectives

- Develop argumentation skills (formulate a thesis, justify it, respond to objections)
- Practise active listening and regulated turn-taking
- Introduce critical thinking on a civic theme
- Encourage cooperation and respect in a debate
- Help students distinguish personal opinion from argumentation

I. Presentation of the theme

The teacher introduces the concept of Swiss neutrality and the question to be debated.

II. A reminder of the rules

What is a debate?

A debate is a structured discussion in which participants present and compare their arguments on a specific issue. Each person presents their point of view, listens actively to others and responds with well-reasoned arguments. The aim is to examine different perspectives, clarify the issues at stake and develop a collective understanding.

A debate is not a confrontational exchange, nor is it a discussion dominated by interruptions, personal attacks or unsubstantiated emotional outbursts. Nor is it a struggle to impose one's opinion, but rather an exercise in analysis, listening and rational justification.

The following rules are set out for students:

- Listen without interrupting
- Respect everyone, even when you disagree
- Criticise ideas, not individuals
- Use a calm tone and appropriate language
- Wait for someone to finish speaking before you speak

III. Role distribution and organisation

Group A: 'In favour of neutrality'

Group B: 'Against neutrality'

Group C (3–4 people): the 'observer-moderators', who:

- observe the course of the debate (quality of arguments, adherence to the rules, dynamics of the discussion)
- strictly manage speaking time (2–3 minutes per contribution)
- allocate the floor and ensure the rounds run smoothly
- ensure contributions remain on topic (no personal attacks, no digressions, no unnecessary repetition)

IV. Preparing arguments

Each group has 20 minutes to prepare a strong case.

- Draw up a list of arguments
- Provide an example, justification or illustration for each argument
- Anticipate the opposing group's arguments and prepare responses
- Appoint the following for phase 2 of the debate, which is dedicated to the exchange of arguments (see below):
 - 2 cross-examiners (who will ask questions) and 2 rebutters (who will reaffirm the positions)



How to construct an argument: The 'why' chain

The 'why' chain is a simple method for strengthening an argument by identifying, step by step, the reasons that support it.

EXAMPLE

Idea

It is important to protect the oceans.

Why?

Because they are home to a large proportion of the world's biodiversity.

Why is this important?

Because biodiversity maintains the balance of ecosystems.

Why does this matter to us?

Because these ecosystems provide oxygen and food, and regulate the climate.

V. Conduct of the debate

PHASE 1: INITIAL PRESENTATIONS (approx. 10 mins)

Each group takes it in turns to present its main points and arguments. Each group is allocated 5 minutes. During this phase, the group not speaking listens without intervening and notes down key ideas.

The observer-moderators ensure that the framework is adhered to and may remind participants of the rules if necessary.

PHASE 2: EXCHANGE (approx. 10 mins)

During this phase, the groups engage in a structured exchange. Each exchange consists of a 2-minute reply (objection) followed by a 2-minute rejoinder (response). The number of exchanges depends on the time available to the teacher.

The group making the reply must:

- Formulate a clear objection or a request for clarification regarding the opposing group's argument
- Highlight a weakness, an omission, a contradiction or a point requiring clarification
- Raise a targeted, well-founded and respectful question or criticism

The group making the reply must:

- Respond directly to the objection raised
- Clarify, elaborate on or strengthen their argument with further justification
- Correct any misinterpretation where necessary
- Accept a nuance whilst demonstrating why the central argument remains valid

PHASE 3: GROUP CONCLUSION (10 to 15 mins)

1. The observers/facilitators:

- Provide feedback on the dynamics of the debate
- Identify the strongest arguments
- Select the most convincing team

2. Discussion led by the teacher, focusing on questions such as:

- Which arguments were the most convincing?
- Did any pupils change their views?
- Which aspects still need clarifying?
- Should neutrality evolve in the current international context?



GENEVA, A WELCOMING PLACE

PROTESTANT GENEVA

Geneva embodies a long-standing openness to the world which, coupled with that of Switzerland, 'predestined' it to become the centre of multilateralism that it represents today.

Since the Middle Ages, thanks to its central geographical location, it has hosted international fairs where traders from all over Europe came to sell their goods. This openness to the outside world was further cemented at the time of the **Reformation**. The city became Protestant in May 1536 and welcomed Jean Calvin, a Protestant who had fled France because of his defence of reformist ideas. He was tasked with establishing the new Church in Geneva and laid down very strict rules, including a ban on wearing jewellery and ornaments, and extended his influence across all political, economic, social and administrative spheres. Under his authority, Geneva was then elevated to the status of the 'Protestant Rome'.

Geneva's theological foundations were further strengthened in 1559, when the Geneva Academy was founded on the initiative of Jean Calvin and Théodore de Bèze, another French Reformer. This institution, initially devoted entirely to theology (the study of religion), would later broaden its fields of research and become the University of Geneva in 1873.

From the late 1540s onwards, persecution intensified across Europe against those who had embraced the new Protestant faith. Geneva, with its reputation as the 'Protestant Rome', was to become a city of refuge for thousands of those persecuted for their religious beliefs. This first wave of refugees transformed the social and economic landscape of the city, whose population grew from 13,000 to over 20,000. Between 1549 and 1587, Geneva granted residence to nearly 8,000 refugees. Among them was Mère Royaume, to whom Geneva owes the famous act of throwing a cauldron at the Savoyard soldiers during the Night of the Escalade in 1602. The Huguenots – the term used to refer to French Protestants – brought with them experts, intellectual elites and craftsmen who would breathe new life into Geneva's economic dynamism. Printing, the silk trade and watchmaking subsequently spurred the development of other sectors, such as banking and enamel painting.

In 1598, King Henry IV of France granted freedom of worship, within certain limits, through the Edict of Nantes. This was subsequently revoked in 1685 by Louis XIV, leading once again to widespread persecution of Protestants in France and forcing them into exile. 12,000 were welcomed into Geneva between August and September 1687 alone.

DID YOU KNOW?

Following Calvin's ban on wearing jewellery, Geneva's goldsmiths turned their attention to watchmaking. This craft was not prohibited, as Calvin regarded it as a scientific instrument. With the arrival of the Huguenots and their expertise, watchmaking went on to become even more significant. Thus, in 1601, the world's very first watchmakers' association was established in Geneva.



The **Reformation** is the name given to a religious movement that challenged the Roman Catholic Church and gave rise to a new understanding of the Christian faith. The Reformation is generally dated to 31 October 1517, when Martin Luther posted 95 theses criticising the excesses of the Catholic Church on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, Saxony. Luther accused the Roman Catholic Church of having strayed from the Gospels and the original message of the Bible. He therefore decided to return to a practice of the faith more in keeping with the Scriptures.



GENEVA, A GREAT PLACE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LAW

HENRY DUNANT AND THE RED CROSS MOVEMENT

In 1859, the Genevan businessman Henry Dunant, whilst passing through Solferino in northern Italy, witnessed a major battle between the Franco-Piedmontese army and the Austrian army. The battlefield was littered with wounded soldiers, left to fend for themselves. Deeply moved, Henry Dunant joined the local people in helping the wounded. In 1862, he published *A Memory of Solferino*, in which he proposed the creation, in peacetime, of 'volunteer relief corps ready to aid the wounded in the event of conflict and to enable them, by some international, conventional and sacred principle, to intervene on both sides, without being hindered by the stark division between enemies'. He published the book at his own expense and sent copies to his friends, his international contacts and governments. The lawyer Gustave Moynier offered him the support of the Geneva Society for Public Welfare, which he chaired and which included influential members such as General Dufour and the doctor Louis Appia. On 9 February 1863, the Geneva Society for Public Welfare established the 'Permanent International Committee' to examine the ideas set out in *A Memory of Solferino*. This committee would become the 'International Committee of the Red Cross' in 1875.



Henry Dunant, founder of the Red Cross © Wikicommons

The First Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field was adopted on 22 August 1864 and enshrined the principle of neutrality for doctors and nurses working on the battlefield, who were to wear a distinctive emblem: the red cross on a white background. The aim of this symbol was to be simple, recognisable from a distance and identical for both sides. However, it was perceived by some countries as a reference to the Christian religion, which is why the red crescent was formally added in 1929 and the red crystal adopted in 2005.

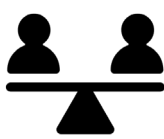
The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement comprises 191 National Societies (the Swiss Red Cross, the French Red Cross, etc.), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The ICRC is primarily active during armed conflicts and acts as the guardian of international humanitarian law. The International Federation coordinates relief efforts during natural disasters and supports the development of the 191 National Societies.

All components of the Movement are guided by seven fundamental principles:



Humanity

to prevent and alleviate human suffering in all circumstances



Impartiality

to make no distinction on the grounds of nationality, race, religion, social status or political affiliation



Neutrality

Taking no part in political, racial, religious or ideological hostilities or disputes, in order to maintain the trust of all



Independence

to retain a degree of autonomy, while complying with the laws specific to each country



Volunteering

The Movement is a voluntary and altruistic relief organisation



Unity

not to have just one National Society and to extend its humanitarian work to the whole of the country



Universality

to be concerned about suffering around the world and to support one another amongst National Societies, which have equal rights

GENEVA CONVENTIONS

On 26 October 1863, an international conference was held in Geneva, attended by 31 delegates from 16 states, on the initiative of Henry Dunant, Gustave Moynier, Louis Appia, General Dufour and Théodore Maunoir. Ten resolutions laid the foundations for the Red Cross's work: the establishment of local committees in each state; the neutrality of medical personnel, hospitals and ambulances bearing an identical distinctive emblem; and the desire to see the mandate of the International and Permanent Committee (now the ICRC) enshrined in a legal instrument. This was achieved in 1864 with the signing of the Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field. This moment marked the foundation of international humanitarian law, which continues to evolve in line with changing conflicts around the world.

1906

A conference to revise the 1864 Convention was held in Geneva, attended by 35 States. The Convention would then comprise 33 articles (compared with 10 in the 1864 version).

1929

Following the First World War, a new Convention was adopted to protect prisoners of war. The red crescent was formally added as a distinctive symbol.

1949

The Second World War had highlighted shortcomings in humanitarian law. Consequently, the two Conventions were revised, giving rise to four texts which were officially named the Geneva Conventions in honour of the Red Cross headquarters:

1. *Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field*
2. *Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea*
3. *Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War*
4. *Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War*

1977

Two Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions were adopted. Protocol I protects victims of international armed conflicts. Protocol II protects victims of non-international armed conflicts. In 2005, a third Protocol introduced a new distinctive emblem, the 'red crystal'. In 2026, the ICRC proposed a digital humanitarian emblem to protect against cyber-attacks by signalling to hackers that they are targeting protected infrastructure.

Today, all States are bound by the 1949 Geneva Conventions. The Geneva Conventions, their Protocols and the Hague Conventions form the core of international humanitarian law, which governs the conduct of armed conflicts and aims to limit their consequences. Whilst the Hague Conventions restrict the conduct of warfare, the Geneva Conventions protect people who are not, or are no longer, taking part in a conflict:



health and humanitarian workers



wounded, sick and shipwrecked soldiers



prisoners of war



civilians

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS



Headquarters of the ICRC
© Genève Tourisme, Loris von Siebenthal

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is a neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian organisation whose mission is to provide protection and assistance to people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence, and to promote respect for international humanitarian law and its incorporation into national legislation.

The ICRC's work is based on the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and the resolutions of the International Conferences of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.



Prisoner exchange in Marseille in 1943
© ICRC, Wikicommons



The French section of the AIPG in 1914
© ICRC, Wikicommons



Signing of the 1949 Geneva Conventions
© British Red Cross, Wikicommons

Humanitarian assistance

The ICRC is currently active in more than 90 countries affected by conflict. As a neutral and impartial organisation, the ICRC carries out humanitarian activities on the ground aimed at assisting and protecting people who are not, or are no longer, taking part in hostilities. This includes, for example, food aid, access to medical care, the identification and clearance of areas contaminated by weapons during and after hostilities, and the organisation of prisoner-of-war exchanges between the parties to the conflict.

Protection of prisoners

In 1914, the International Prisoners of War Agency (AIPG) was established. Its aim was to re-establish links between people separated by the war, whether they were prisoners of war or civilian internees. Between 1914 and 1918, the AIPG handled 2 million cases. At the same time, the ICRC began visiting prisoner-of-war camps. Today, the ICRC continues to visit places of detention to ensure that detainees are treated humanely. It conducts private interviews and submits reports to the authorities. It ensures that detainees are able to maintain contact with their families.

Guardian of the Geneva Conventions

The ICRC works to ensure respect for the rights of persons protected by the Geneva Conventions by reminding the parties to a conflict of their obligations and responsibilities under international humanitarian law (IHL) through confidential bilateral dialogue. It is the ICRC's status as a neutral and impartial organisation that enables it to engage directly with governments. The ICRC also documents violations of the law on the battlefield and helps to develop IHL by adapting it to new challenges.

ALABAMA ARBITRATION



Alabama Room
© Bibliothèque de Genève

The ship Alabama was at the centre of a conflict lasting more than 10 years between Great Britain and the United States, stemming from the American Civil War (a civil war in the United States between the Northern and Southern states). The British had indeed declared themselves neutral, but they had handed over a vessel, the Alabama, to the Southerners, which was immediately fitted out as a warship. This contravened the law of neutrality. The ship sank 150 vessels before being itself destroyed at Cherbourg in 1864. To resolve this dispute, **international arbitration** was the legal means chosen by the Treaty of Washington. Five judges, including former Federal Councillor Jacob Stämpfli, met in Geneva in 1872 in a room at the Town Hall, now known as the 'Alabama Room'. This same room had hosted the signing of the First Geneva Convention in 1864. But

why were this legal proceedings held in Geneva? Swiss neutrality and the city's accessibility, particularly by rail, in a Europe gripped by the Franco-Prussian War, were the main arguments. Following highly publicised proceedings, the judges ruled that Britain owed the United States 15.5 million dollars. This decision was accepted by both parties. This was, therefore, an early historical example of the peaceful settlement of disputes between two major world powers, which helped to shape Geneva's international reputation and gave fresh impulse to the development of international law. It is believed that the success of this legal case gave new momentum to arbitration as a means of settling international disputes.



International arbitration is a procedure whereby, by agreement between the parties, a dispute is referred to one or more arbitrators who issue a legally binding (compulsory) verdict.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Hugo Pratt's journey as a Prisoner of War

Duration: approximately 1 hour

Target audience: Upper secondary school classes

Recommended subjects: law, history

Educational objectives

- Present a real-life example of the ICRC's work
- Demonstrate that the law is constantly evolving
- Encourage students to reflect on the legal framework of the Geneva Conventions and the need to adapt them following the Second World War
- Examine a key historical period through a true story

I. Explain who Hugo Pratt is, the cartoonist behind the Corto Maltese comics

Hugo Pratt (1927–1995) was an Italian cartoonist regarded as one of the world's greatest. He is particularly well known for his adventure comic series featuring the protagonist Corto Maltese, an adventurous sailor. He lived in Italy, Ethiopia, Argentina, England, France and Switzerland, and travelled to virtually every other part of the world.

Hugo Pratt was born on 15 June 1927 in Italy. In 1937, he set off with his mother to join his father, a career soldier, in Abyssinia (now Ethiopia). Abyssinia had been occupied by Italy since 1935. After the outbreak of the Second World War, his father enlisted in the colonial police, taking his thirteen-year-old son with him. Hugo Pratt befriended young Abyssinians of his own age and learnt the local language. It was during this period that he discovered his first American adventure comics. In 1941, his father was captured by British troops and died in captivity in July 1942. Hugo Pratt and his mother were then interned at the Diredaia camp, awaiting repatriation to Italy. Hugo Pratt began buying comics from the guards and drawing. He and his mother were repatriated to Italy in May 1942 by the ICRC. Hugo Pratt had always been opposed to fascism. After returning to Italy, he soon became an interpreter for the Allied forces in 1944, a role he held until the end of the war. In 1945, in Venice, Hugo Pratt worked with a group of friends on the production of *Asso di picche*, a comic strip magazine. It was at this point that he officially made his debut as a cartoonist. He began the adventures of Corto Maltese in 1967. The character of Corto Maltese embodies a desire for freedom and adventure, as well as a certain rejection of cultural hierarchies.

II. Overview of the historical and legal context

1. The Geneva Conventions: an evolving legal framework (see page 12)
2. The Second World War: a catastrophe in terms of civilian casualties

The Second World War broke out in 1939 and was to transform international relations entirely. It remains to this day the deadliest conflict in history, with nearly 60 million deaths. Unlike in previous wars, civilians were fully targeted in these conflicts: aerial bombardments of cities using new weapons (incendiary bombs, atomic bombs, napalm), and concentration and extermination camps. In total, around 40 million civilians died between 1939 and 1945.

III. Initial discussion with students

Do international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions apply to Hugo Pratt's case?

Feedback and discussion: Outline the legal context of the Geneva Conventions (see pages 11-12)

In 1942, when Hugo Pratt and his mother were evacuated by the ICRC, there were only two Geneva Conventions in place: the Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field (1864, revised in 1906) and the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War (1929). At this stage, therefore, international humanitarian law protected only wounded and sick soldiers on battlefields on land and prisoners of war, who were soldiers captured on the battlefield. The situation of Hugo Pratt and his mother did not, therefore, strictly meet the criteria of the Geneva Conventions in force at that time, as they were civilians.

IV. Second discussion point for student, involving online research

If the Geneva Conventions in force in 1942 did not apply to Hugo Pratt's case, why did the ICRC organise his evacuation?

Feedback and discussion: The ICRC and civilians – the reality on the ground before 1949

In 1914, the ICRC founded the International Agency for Prisoners of War (AIPG), which was originally intended exclusively for captured soldiers whose families wished to receive news of them. However, faced with the number of enquiries concerning civilians received by the Agency, Dr Frédéric Ferrière, one of the Agency's founders, felt that these could not be left unanswered. He therefore set up a civilian section of his own. With the help of a few close associates, he eventually brought together hundreds of volunteers from all walks of life. Despite the legal vacuum regarding civilians, this section was eventually incorporated into the AIPG.

Six months after the outbreak of the First World War, the ICRC launched a new initiative: visiting detention camps. There was no legal provision formally authorising such visits, as the Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War had not yet been drawn up (1929). However, it was a win-win situation for all: the belligerents wished to quell rumours circulating in the enemy camp about the ill-treatment of prisoners, whilst the ICRC hoped that by providing objective and neutral information, it could break the cycle of reprisals. From the beginning, these visits included detention centres for civilians.

After the First World War, the Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War was signed, formalising visits to military detention camps. The idea of a convention relating to civilians emerged, but it did not succeed before the outbreak of the Second World War.

Between 1939 and 1945, there was therefore still no legal text on which the ICRC could base its work on behalf of civilians. However, as many civilians found themselves interned in detention camps, the ICRC broadened its remit and incorporated them into its activities in support of prisoners of war. In particular, it attempted, with great difficulty, to visit concentration camps in Nazi Germany. It was against this backdrop that Hugo Pratt and his mother were repatriated to Italy through the ICRC in 1942, even though they were not formally protected as civilians under the international humanitarian law in force at the time, which legitimised the ICRC's actions.

V. Third discussion with students

*Would Hugo Pratt be formally protected under international humanitarian law today?
If so, under which convention?*

Feedback and discussion : A look back at the Geneva Conventions signed in 1949

In 1949, in the wake of the atrocities committed against civilians during the Second World War, a convention specifically concerning civilians was signed.

VI. Conclusion and discussion with the students: the law, a constantly evolving field

What does this period in history bring to mind for you? Which area of law has recently evolved (at Swiss or international level)? Which rights do you think should be better recognised globally?

Useful resources for this activity

Hugo Pratt, the ICRC and Ethiopia
ICRC Blog



In 1914, the ICRC learnt how to protect civilians
Le Temps



Hugo Pratt's biography
Cong SA official website



1949 Geneva Conventions
ICRC's website



Video on the Geneva Conventions
ICRC YouTube channel (3 mins 35 secs)





GENEVA, CAPITAL OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Background

From 1914 to 1918, the First World War raged. It led the US President, Woodrow Wilson, to include in his peace programme the establishment of a League of Nations, in which each nation would undertake to guarantee the territorial integrity and political independence of all the others. This idea was incorporated into the Treaty of Versailles of 28 June 1919, which brought the conflict to an end and established the League of Nations (LoN). Whilst the horrors of the First World War were a major factor in the creation of an international organisation with a universal remit, the League of Nations emerged in a context of growing multilateral negotiations since the 17th century and an increasing political and philosophical interest in peace.

Why Geneva?

The LoN was established in Geneva thanks to the diplomatic efforts of Genevans such as **William Rappard** and Gustave Ador, and with the support of Woodrow Wilson. The city's international standing as the headquarters of the Red Cross and the birthplace of Rousseau and Calvin, combined with Swiss neutrality, worked in its favour. However, when pitted against its rival, Brussels, Switzerland's non-participation in the First World War proved to be a decisive factor. Geneva was thus able to host an organisation with an international remit in a completely impartial manner. The LoN settled in the Palais Wilson in 1920.

"It is our shared desire to rid the world of the suffering caused by war. We will not succeed in this if we choose a city where the memory of that war would make any impartial discussion impossible."

Woodrow Wilson,
President of the United States
Session of 10 April 1919 regarding the
headquarters of the League of Nations

Mission

The Covenant of the LoN, incorporated into the Treaty of Versailles, sets out its main objectives: to ensure collective security, to promote cooperation and to carry out the mandates of the peace treaties. The LoN consists of an Assembly, a Council and a permanent secretariat. Arbitration is defined as a means of settling disputes.

Key actions



Peace and collective security

As the first attempt at collective security, the LoN stipulated that an attack on any member State was to be regarded as an attack on all. The Covenant provided for a system of economic and military sanctions. However, this did not prevent Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. In order to promote the peaceful settlement of disputes, the LoN established the first Permanent Court of International Justice (now the International Court of Justice), which adjudicates any dispute between States referred to it by mutual agreement. The LoN also established the Disarmament Commission and urged States to sign the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which banned asphyxiating gases.

Implementation of the peace treaties

The Covenant stipulated that German or Ottoman territories were to be administered by the victorious powers (e.g. Syria was under a French mandate) or by the LoN (the city of Danzig and the Saar) before they could become independent. The Treaty of Versailles also entrusted the LoN with the task of guaranteeing the rights of minorities in a completely reshaped Europe. The new borders, with their stricter controls, affected millions of undocumented refugees who found themselves unable to move freely. The LoN therefore tasked Fridtjof Nansen with coordinating aid to refugees. He created the Nansen passport, which enabled stateless persons to cross borders between 1922 and 1945.

Technical cooperation

Article 23 of the Covenant provides that Member States shall cooperate in addressing various social challenges. This includes ensuring fair working conditions, combating the trafficking of women and children, and preventing and combating disease. With this in mind, the League of Nations established the Health Organisation in 1923, which would conduct studies, organise international exchanges of health personnel and promote information sharing on epidemics. Furthermore, in 1926 the LoN drafted a Convention aimed at abolishing slavery. 99 States are now parties to this treaty, which was taken over and expanded upon by the UN in 1953.

The structure of the LoN, however, was problematic right from the start. Although the United States was the League's primary driving force, it ultimately did not join, thereby undermining its universal remit. Its sanctions regime, which was too vague, proved unable to stand up to the will of the great powers, whose violations of the Covenant went unpunished on numerous occasions. Having failed to prevent the Second World War, its credibility was therefore profoundly undermined.

Whilst the LoN failed in its mission to maintain peace, it did, however, provide a major impetus to Geneva's international role, elevating it to the status of a global governance hub. Indeed, the LoN gave rise to specialised international organisations such as the International Labour Organisation and the Health Organisation (the forerunner of the World Health Organisation). The activities of the LoN and its specialised organisations attracted diplomatic missions, delegates and experts in law, disarmament, trafficking in women, child protection and other fields to Geneva. In turn, these actors would bring with them representatives of civil society (committees, associations and various leagues), who saw the city as fertile ground for collaboration. The LoN thus laid the foundations for the unique ecosystem we know today.

→ **William Rappard** was an influential diplomat during the interwar period, born in the United States. A professor and later rector of the University of Geneva, he founded the Geneva Graduate Institute in 1927. Drawing on his connections with the United States, he was strongly committed to ensuring that the League of Nations was established in Geneva and that Switzerland joined the organisation.

More information on the League of Nations

Thematic dossier
'Peace and the United Nations system'
Eduki Foundation



Covenant of the League of Nations
26 articles, 1919



THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION



International Labour Organisation
© Jérémy Toma, Wikicommons

Background

The 1919 Treaty of Versailles also provided for the creation of the International Labour Organization (ILO). It was recognised that there can be no lasting peace without social justice. The ILO builds on the mission of the International Association for the Legal Protection of Workers, founded in Basel in 1901. It emerged against a backdrop of growing labour movements and in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The Treaty of Versailles stipulated that the ILO would report directly to the League of Nations and would therefore have to be based in the same city. It established its headquarters in Geneva in 1920, occupying the first building specifically constructed for the 'International Geneva' complex: the William Rappard Centre, which today houses the World Trade Organization.

Indeed, the ILO's activities expanded rapidly. In particular, its membership grew from 52 in 1948 to 120 in 1970. Its premises were no longer sufficient. The ILO therefore commissioned the construction of Switzerland's largest administrative building in the Quartier des Nations and moved there in 1974.

Mission

The ILO's mission is to promote social justice, human rights and internationally recognised labour rights, which are essential for lasting and universal peace.

The ILO's work is based on a unique model: tripartism. The ILO comprises a General Conference, a Governing Body and an International Labour Office (permanent General Secretariat). Governments, employers and workers are represented in all three bodies. The ILO is thus the only global organisation whose policies and programmes are shaped by employers and workers alongside governments on an equal footing. This ensures that the voices of workers and employers are fully heard and that the organisation's actions reflect the realities on the ground.

Key actions

Development of standards

The first ILO Conference adopted six Conventions in 1919, covering working hours in industry, unemployment, maternity protection, night work for women, the minimum age for employment, and night work for children. The first ILO Convention thus established the well-known 8-hour working day and the 48-hour working week, and ensured that workers had sufficient time for rest and leisure to lead a balanced life. Since its creation, the ILO has developed more than 190 Conventions.

Global research and statistics

The ILO provides studies and key statistics on labour worldwide. These statistics are essential for policy-making and for assessing progress towards decent work. They also serve as a tool for information and analysis, helping to foster a better understanding of shared challenges, guiding Member States in developing responses tailored to their specific circumstances, and enabling specialised centres in the field to target their actions effectively.

Field support

The ILO sets up offices in countries hosting refugees to help them find work. It works in partnership with UNHCR in this regard. This is the case, for example, in the Zaatari camp in Jordan, which hosts Syrian refugees. Since the change of government in Syria in 2024, the offices have also been supporting refugees preparing for voluntary return to their home country, by directing them towards vocational training programmes that meet the needs of their country's labour market.

THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF GENEVA



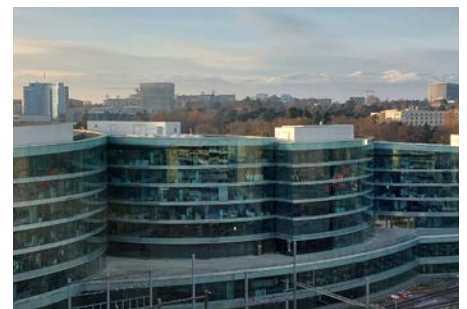
International School of Geneva (Grande Boissière) in 1929 © Bibliothèque de Genève

Founded in 1924, the International School of Geneva (Ecolint) is recognised as the world's first international school. It was established at a time when the League of Nations and the International Labour Organisation were setting up their headquarters in Geneva, with the aim of meeting the educational needs of the children of international civil servants from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Its founding ambition was to provide an education that would foster intercultural understanding, peace and openness to the world. The International School was founded by officials from the first international organisations, with the support of the Genevan sociologist Adolphe Ferrière and Elisabeth Rotten, both of whom were associated with the Rousseau Institute. From the outset, teaching was bilingual. Adolphe Ferrière championed the principle of language immersion in order to foster in pupils an openness to cultural differences and an international outlook.

Today, the school welcomes around 3,900 pupils aged between 3 and 18, representing over 140 nationalities. It is spread across three campuses in the Geneva region and offers English, French and bilingual programmes. Through its educational model and international focus, Ecolint fully embodies Geneva's international vocation.

GENEVA GRADUATE INSTITUTE

Founded in 1927, the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID) plays a central role in the ecosystem of International Geneva. As the successor to the Institute of Higher International Studies founded by William Rappard and Paul Mantoux during the era of the League of Nations, the Institute established itself as a pioneering institution from the very outset. Its interdisciplinary approach combines international relations, economics, law and development. Now based at the Maison de la Paix, in the heart of the international quarter, IHEID benefits from unique proximity to multilateral organisations, diplomatic missions, NGOs and actors in the field of international cooperation. Its mission is to generate and disseminate high-level knowledge on major global challenges: peace and security, economic governance, sustainable development, inequalities and international cooperation. The Institute trains students from all over the world who are set to take on roles of responsibility within international institutions, governments and civil society. Through its role as a bridge between academic knowledge and international action, IHEID plays a key part in establishing Geneva's position as a centre of global governance.



Maison de la Paix © Wikicommons

THE GENEVA DECLARATION

The Geneva **Declaration** on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1924, was the first international text specifically devoted to the protection of children. It contains five articles and was adopted within the framework of the League of Nations, on the initiative of Eglantyne Jebb, founder of Save the Children, at a time when the consequences of the First World War were affecting many children. The Declaration is based on a central principle: children cannot be treated in the same way as adults and must be afforded rights appropriate to their age and vulnerability. It affirms that every child must be able to develop normally, both physically and morally, and that they must receive appropriate assistance when in need. This protection must be guaranteed without discrimination, regardless of origin, nationality or political context. In crisis situations, children must be given priority access to assistance. The text emphasises protection against economic exploitation, violence and abuse, and highlights the importance of education, not only for the child's individual development but also for their future integration into society.

The Geneva Declaration represents a landmark in international law relating to children. It has inspired other instruments, such as the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child.



A **declaration** is an instrument of international law that is generally not legally binding. It is more in the nature of guidelines that may lead to the creation of legally binding texts. This is the case, for example, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Check out the Geneva Declaration



INTERNATIONAL BUREAU OF EDUCATION

Background and mission

In the post-war period, the education system came under scrutiny, as it was alleged to have encouraged pupils to become patriotic soldiers. Education therefore needed to be overhauled in order to build lasting peace. As the LoN didn't take up the issue, committed educators Adolphe Ferrière, Edouard Claparède and Pierre Bovet founded the International Bureau of Education (IBE) in Geneva in 1925, with the support of Albert Einstein. Its aim was to bring together all the world's educational associations. In 1929, the organisation opened its membership to States. The IBE thus became the first intergovernmental organisation dedicated to education. Jean Piaget, a renowned psychologist, led it for 40 years. He turned it into a leading research centre, bringing together 68 States by 1968 and fostering international collaboration in the field of education. From 1946 onwards, the IBE worked closely with UNESCO, before being fully integrated into the organisation in 1969. The IBE champions the right to education and draws on its technical expertise and intellectual knowledge to support education stakeholders worldwide, as well as governments, in realising this universal right.

"Only education can save our societies from potential collapse, whether violent or gradual."

Jean Piaget,
Director of the International Bureau of
Education

Key actions

Field technical assistance

The IBE is implementing measures to help countries develop their education systems in the face of challenges such as conflict or the preservation of indigenous knowledge. For example, it has developed a digital platform in Chad that can operate both online and offline, thereby facilitating access to learning materials in the most remote areas.

Documentation Centre

Its Documentation Centre houses 600,000 documents (textbooks, historical archives, comparative studies, etc.). It has been safeguarding the legacy of global education for 100 years. These archives are freely accessible and can be digitised on request.

Educational Development

The IBE develops innovative educational tools to support national education policies. It offers training programmes for public officials to strengthen countries' capacity to manage, rethink and modernise educational programmes. In particular, specialised Master's degree programmes have been established at universities around the world.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

What would your Geneva Declaration be?

Duration: approximately 45 minutes

Target audience: Lower and Upper Secondary classes

Recommended subjects: law, history, philosophy, geography, citizenship

Educational objectives

- Present a defining moment in the history of children's rights
- Summarise an overarching idea in terms of key principles
- Encourage pupils to reflect on current global issues and how they affect their daily lives
- Enable young people to express their vision for the world of tomorrow

1. Introduction

Remind the students of :

- The historical context of the text (see page 20)
- Its purpose (to set out general, non-binding principles)
- Its style (short, universal, impersonal phrasing)

The students will, in turn, draft a declaration inspired by this model, addressing a major issue facing the world today.

2. Choice of topic

Ask students to choose a single topic that they consider to be a priority today. The topic must:

- Be current and easy to identify with
- Relate to a collective issue (rights, protection, responsibilities)
- Be suitable for addressing in terms of general principles

Examples of topics:

- *The right of future generations to a healthy environment*
- *Combating cyberbullying*
- *The responsible use of artificial intelligence*
- *International solidarity in the face of humanitarian crises*
- *The right to access healthcare for all*
- *Pandemic prevention*
- *Mental health for everyone*

3. Drafting guidelines

The declaration must include:

- A title: 'Geneva Declaration on ...'
- A short introduction (2–3 sentences) explaining the issue at stake and the purpose of the text
- 5 to 7 principles, set out as articles or numbered points, using short, clear and general sentences in a neutral, institutional tone

Possible phrasing to be encouraged:

- 'Everyone has the right to...'
- 'Children must be protected from...'
- 'States and institutions have a responsibility to...'

4. Conclusion (optional)

Students may add a short concluding paragraph explaining the purpose of their statement and what it aims to protect or improve.

5. Optional sharing with the Fondation pour Genève

Teachers are invited, if they wish, to share their students' Declarations with the Fondation pour Genève (secretariat@fondationpourgeneve.ch). The Fondation will compile an overview of the issues that young people consider to be priorities and publish them on its website. The aim is to provide a platform for young people to share their vision of the world.



UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

GENEVA, A GLOBAL CENTRE OF TECHNICAL EXPERTISE

UNITED NATIONS EUROPEAN HEADQUARTERS

Background

The Second World War highlighted the League of Nations' failure to prevent another global conflict. As early as 1941, whilst the war was still raging, the Allies were already considering the creation of a new international organisation tasked with maintaining peace. Between 1941 and 1945, a number of international declarations were issued and conferences held, leading to the signing of the United Nations Charter, which established the United Nations (UN) on 26 June 1945 in San Francisco, thereby replacing the League of Nations.

Why is there a UN headquarters in Geneva?

Unlike the League of Nations, the United Nations is not based in a single location. Whilst its main headquarters are in New York, where the principal political bodies meet, the UN has, since its inception, adopted a decentralised structure in order to operate on a global scale. In this context, Geneva naturally emerged as one of the UN's headquarters due to its diplomatic tradition, Switzerland's neutrality and the presence of the Palais des Nations, the former headquarters of the League of Nations. Today, Geneva is one of the UN's four global headquarters and the organisation's main conference centre outside New York, playing a central role in multilateral diplomacy.

Mission and structure

The UN aims to maintain international peace and security, foster peaceful relations between nations, promote respect for human rights, and encourage international cooperation in tackling economic, social, humanitarian and environmental issues. The UN comprises several bodies, including the Security Council, which is responsible for peacekeeping, and the General Assembly, which serves as a forum for discussion for all Member States. A Secretariat oversees the day-to-day running of the organisation.

Key actions



Peace and collective security

The Security Council comprises five permanent members (China, the USA, Russia, France and the United Kingdom) and ten States elected for two-year terms. It works to maintain peace and is based in New York. It may adopt resolutions, impose sanctions or authorise operations on the ground. These operations, carried out with the consent of the countries concerned, aim to protect civilians, monitor ceasefires and support peace processes. The Geneva headquarters contributes to collective security by hosting the Conference on Disarmament. Established in 1979, it has, in particular, drawn up four conventions restricting the use of weapons, such as anti-personnel mines and biological weapons.



Diplomatic and technical expertise

The UN has established a whole system of specialised agencies, funds and specific programmes, such as the World Health Organisation, the World Food Programme and UN Women. Many of these specialised agencies are based in Geneva. UN Geneva is therefore a key player in facilitating connections between these institutions. In particular, it provides them with administrative support and promotes joint initiatives. Furthermore, with more than 185 States represented by permanent missions, UN Geneva is a major centre for dialogue, hosting nearly 8,000 meetings each year. It provides the essential services required to hold large-scale discussions.



Cornerstone of international law

The UN promotes compliance with international standards and the peaceful settlement of disputes. This role is carried out in particular by the International Court of Justice, which issues binding judgments in disputes between States that have conferred jurisdiction upon it, and clarifies matters relating to the application of international law at the request of the UN. For example, in 2022, the Court recognised Uganda's responsibility for violations committed during its military intervention in the Democratic Republic of the Congo between 1998 and 2003. It ordered Uganda to pay \$325 million in compensation for damage caused to persons, property and natural resources.

THE GATT AND THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION



World Trade Organization
© Genève Tourisme

Background

In 1944, the United States organised a conference at Bretton Woods to establish an international monetary policy and support the reconstruction of countries affected by the Second World War. The aim was to avoid a repeat of the economic problems that followed the First World War and to create a stable economy. It was in this context that the idea of an international organisation regulating trade, under the auspices of the United Nations, emerged. Although this organisation never came into being, 23 countries established the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). It was believed at the time that trade liberalisation would foster peaceful relations between States. GATT remained the sole trade agreement until 1995. Its main shortcoming – the lack of a dispute settlement system – led to its replacement in 1995 by the World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO is not part of the United Nations system.

Mission

The WTO establishes rules governing trade between countries, with a view to promoting the smooth functioning, predictability and freedom of trade. The organisation comprises a Secretariat, a General Council and a Ministerial Conference, the WTO's supreme body, which meets every two years. The most-favoured-nation clause is one of the founding principles of the WTO's trading system. Any advantage granted by one WTO member to another must be extended to all members without discrimination.

Key actions



Development of agreements

The WTO establishes agreements that are binding on its member States. Trade rules cannot be amended without their agreement, which is reached by consensus following negotiations. Among the recent agreements is the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, adopted by WTO members in June 2022. It aims to ban harmful fisheries subsidies, a factor contributing to the widespread depletion of fish stocks worldwide.



Dispute settlement

States may file a request for dispute settlement if they consider that a member has breached WTO agreements. The arbitration procedure lasts approximately one year. If the breach is confirmed, the offending State has 20 days to bring its actions into compliance. If it doesn't, the complaining State may be authorised by the WTO to take retaliatory measures, intended to be temporary. Between 1995 and 2025, more than 630 disputes were brought before the WTO.



Technical assistance

The WTO's mission is to ensure that all countries have the necessary capacity to participate in global trade. With this in mind, it organises training programmes for developing countries to help civil servants, experts and businesspeople better understand WTO rules. The aim is to facilitate the implementation of WTO agreements in their countries and to enable them to negotiate more effectively with their trading partners.

CASE STUDY

In 2019, the European Union lodged a dispute settlement request concerning the anti-dumping duties (an additional customs tax imposed on foreign products whose price is lower than that of products produced domestically) imposed by the USA on ripe olives from Spain. In 2021 and 2024, the WTO confirmed that the duties imposed by the United States were contrary to the WTO Agreements. The United States then agreed with the EU to withdraw these duties. However, as the deadline granted to them had passed, the EU referred the matter to the WTO in order to be able to take retaliatory measures, which were authorised in October 2025.

THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR STANDARDIZATION

Background

The need for international standardisation grew with the increased use of electricity in the early 20th century (trams, street lighting, refrigerators, etc.). The units and terminology used varied from country to country. The International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) was therefore established in London in 1906 and was one of the first international institutions to set common standards amongst nations. It still exists today and has been based in Geneva since 1948. After the First World War, more general national standardisation associations emerged in many countries, such as the Swiss Standards Association, founded in 1919. However, it was in 1947 that an international standardisation body was established in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations: the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), which works closely with national standardisation associations and the IEC.



International Organization for standardization
© ISO

Mission

ISO brings together experts from around the world to define best practices, ranging from goods manufacturing to management processes. Standardization aims to ensure reliability, build trust, and simplify choices. Standards serve as a benchmark for both businesses and consumers.

Key actions



Development of standards

Standards are developed by technical committees composed of experts from the relevant industries, as well as consumer associations, academia, NGOs, and governments. Each committee is responsible for a specific area. A total of 26,133 ISO standards were created between 1947 and 2026. Although technical in nature, they have a very tangible impact on our daily lives. For example, standard 24444 establishes methods for determining the level of protection provided by sunscreens. Companies can obtain certification from a third-party body to demonstrate that they meet the requirements of an ISO standard; ISO itself never issues certifications.



Research and statistics

ISO conducts research to determine the impact of standards on trade and the economy. Notably, a study on the impact of standards on the economies of ISO members found that an increase in the number of standards contributes to economic growth. ISO also provides a database on the work of its technical committees and analyses new opportunities for international standardisation. It should be noted that ISO does not develop new standards on its own initiative; it always responds to requests from industry or consumer associations, with the aim of meeting a genuine need.



Representation and training

ISO helps build capacity in developing countries through training designed to facilitate the integration of international standards into their economies. However, ISO also aims to increase the participation of developing countries in the standard-development process. Although developing countries make up three-quarters of ISO's membership, their participation in creating standards remains low. It is important that the standards ISO publishes reflect the reality of the world in its entirety.

CASE STUDY

Every time a credit card payment is made, whether in a store or online, the ISO 8583 standard ensures that the correct information is transmitted to our bank so that the funds are successfully transferred from our bank account to that of the store or website in question.

THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION



World Health Organization
© Yann Forget, Wikicommons

Background

Before the Second World War, international cooperation in the field of health was poorly coordinated. The first genuine intergovernmental health organisation was a regional body: the Pan American Sanitary Bureau, established in 1902. With the expansion of global transport (railways, maritime shipping, etc.), diseases spread more widely across the world, making international coordination necessary. Consequently, the 'Office international d'hygiène publique' was founded in Paris in 1907, and the League of Nations established its Health Organisation in 1923. These two institutions coexisted during the interwar period, laying the groundwork for a universal health organisation. As part of the creation of the United Nations in 1945, states decided to establish a single organisation tasked

with coordinating global health efforts. They merged the League of Nations Health Organisation and the 'Office international d'hygiène publique' to create the World Health Organization (WHO), which was established in Geneva in 1948. The WHO subsequently attracted an entire ecosystem of health institutions, positioning Geneva as a hub of global health expertise.

Mission

The WHO aims to bring all peoples to the highest possible level of health. It defines health as a state of physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The WHO has six regional offices in order to remain close to local realities.

Key actions



Development of common frameworks

The WHO develops international health standards. It is responsible, for instance, for the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which entered into force in 2005. Signed by 168 States, the convention notably prohibits the sale of tobacco to minors and mandates warning labels on all tobacco products. In May 2025, WHO Member States adopted the first global pandemic agreement following more than three years of negotiations. The goal is to make the world safer in the face of future pandemics and to ensure a more equitable response.



Research and training

The WHO compiles global baseline health data. It also invests in research and training. Notably, it established the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in Lyon. The IARC houses 6 million samples from around the world, facilitating laboratory research. In 2024, the WHO also inaugurated an Academy aimed at addressing gaps in health workforce training; it features a state-of-the-art simulation center and hosts researchers and academics from across the globe.



Combating epidemics

WHO helps governments strengthen their health systems and provides technical assistance. The eradication of smallpox stands as WHO's greatest operational success. In 1967, 2 million people were still dying from smallpox each year. WHO launched a mass vaccination campaign and implemented measures to contain outbreaks. In 1980, thirteen years later, smallpox was officially declared eradicated. To this day, it remains the only human disease to have been eradicated globally.

CASE STUDY

In 2020, the WHO launched the COVAX initiative together with the Gavi Alliance and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations. COVAX aimed to accelerate the development and production of COVID-19 diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines, as well as to ensure equitable access to them. It concluded in December 2023, having delivered nearly 2 billion vaccine doses to 146 countries.

THE INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION

Background

The link between Geneva and telecommunications dates back to 1774, when a Genevan named Georges Le Sage operated one of the first electric telegraphs, even before Samuel Morse patented his telegraph and the famous Morse code in 1843. Telegraphs made it possible to transmit messages over long distances using a system of codes. This means of communication grew rapidly; in 1851, the first submarine cable enabled communication between France and England, and the first transatlantic cable was laid in 1858. However, messages were transmitted using the code of the country of origin. Efficient transmission across the services of different countries required international technical cooperation. Thus, the Telegraph Union was established in 1865. It is the oldest international organisation. It was originally based in Bern, changed its name in 1932, and relocated to Geneva in 1948 under the auspices of the United Nations. Its mission subsequently expanded alongside the evolution of communication technologies: the telephone, the radio, satellites, the Internet, and AI.

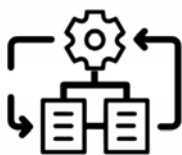


International Telecommunication Union
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Mission

The ITU aims to foster international cooperation among governments, private sector companies, and other stakeholders in order to develop the best practical solutions for integrating new technologies globally and ensuring their optimal interoperability across nations.

Key actions



Developing common frameworks

The ITU establishes standards to facilitate global connectivity, ensuring that infrastructures can interoperate across national borders. For instance, the ITU established country calling codes (such as +41 for Switzerland and +33 for France). The ITU also advocates for AI development that serves the common good; it organises the annual “AI for Good” summit in Geneva, which brings together experts from around the world and drives the creation of standards to regulate AI development. Notably, the ITU has established a group dedicated to developing safety standards for AI.



Internet access

99% of internet connectivity relies on undersea cables, making them vulnerable during geopolitical crises. As these cables are frequently damaged, the ITU launched an international group in 2024 in order to protect them. The ITU also promotes internet access. To this end, it launched the Giga initiative in 2019 in partnership with UNICEF and the private sector. Giga aims to connect every school in the world to the internet. The ITU and its partners identify needs and act as a bridge between the private sector and governments to supply the necessary equipment. Between 2019 and 2023, 5,800 schools were connected.



Radio and satellite coordination

Radio frequencies and the orbital space around Earth are not unlimited resources. To prevent uncontrolled use and interference, the ITU centralises and processes requests to bring new satellites into service and coordinates the allocation of radio frequencies. Once a satellite system is officially recorded in the ITU’s Master International Frequency Register, it gains international recognition and usage rights. The ITU then notifies other space actors so they can assess whether the new system impacts their own infrastructure.

CASE STUDY

In 2019, SpaceX submitted a request to the ITU for authorisation to operate 30,000 Starlink satellites in low Earth orbit. The ITU, which allocates frequencies and orbital slots on a first-come, first-served basis, approved the request.

UNITED NATIONS REFUGEE AGENCY



UNHCR
© Mike Peel, Wikicommons

Background

World War I and the peace treaties led to a redrawing of borders. Empires were dissolved, and eight new states were created between 1914 and 1918. These upheavals resulted in significant population displacements. Approximately 10 million people were displaced, creating chaos on the roads and at the newly established borders; minorities found themselves stateless, and large-scale population exchanges took place. This situation prompted the League of Nations to establish the High Commission for Refugees, led by Fridtjof Nansen. Originally intended to be temporary, the Commission was meant to resolve the refugee issue during the interwar period. However, the Second World War triggered further mass displacements of people across Europe and beyond. The institution evolved in

response to successive crises, eventually becoming a stable, permanent structure in 1952 with the creation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Its work is grounded in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which defines refugee status and outlines the rights of the individuals concerned as well as the obligations of States. Its fundamental principle is “non-refoulement”, which prohibits returning a person to a country where their life or freedom would be seriously threatened.

“A refugee is any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, finds themselves outside the country of their nationality.”

Article 1A Convention relating to the Status of Refugees

Mission

UNHCR protects people forced to flee their homes across international borders, internally displaced persons, and stateless persons (a stateless person is someone whom no state recognizes as its national, thus depriving them of a nationality). It accompanies them at every stage of their journey, from the beginning of a crisis, during their flight, and during the months or even years they are separated from their homes.

Key actions



Emergency Assistance

In times of conflict or natural disaster, people often have to flee overnight, leaving everything behind. UNHCR mobilises quickly to ensure their safety and provide them with shelter, access to clean water, food, healthcare, and assistance in reuniting families. Within 72 hours, UNHCR can mobilise supplies for one million people. It also conducts on-the-ground monitoring to verify whether governments and armed groups are preventing refugees from entering safe areas. In the event of a violation, UNHCR engages with governments and alerts the media.



Long-term refugee integration

UNHCR helps refugees rebuild their lives through access to education and employment. Nearly half of the world's refugees are under 18. To ensure their future, it is essential that they can continue their education. UNHCR helps refugees find work so they can support themselves and contribute to society. It works with governments to find long-term solutions, the main one being voluntary repatriation to the country of origin when conditions allow. Integration in the host country or resettlement into another country are other alternatives.



Law Enforcement

UNHCR encourages accession to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which will bring together 146 States by 2026. It also assists States in registering displaced persons and works to clarify refugee status determination procedures. Furthermore, it works with governments to amend national laws and practices to better protect displaced persons and end statelessness. For example, in 2022, Kenya announced that the Pemba people, previously unrecognised by the government, were being granted citizenship. In this context, UNHCR assists with registration and the issuance of identity documents.

THE WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION

Background

Samuel Morse's invention of the telegraph in 1843 made it possible to exchange meteorological observations over long distances in real time. National meteorological offices developed, leading to the creation in 1873 of a non-governmental organisation, the International Meteorological Organisation (IMO). From its inception, the organisation facilitated the exchange of observations and the standardisation of meteorological measurement methodologies. After the First World War, technologies, including civil aviation, expanded significantly. Sharing standardised meteorological data became essential for ensuring the safety of air traffic. In 1939, the headquarters moved to Geneva to continue its operations in a neutral zone, as the Second World War broke out in Europe. In 1950, it became a specialised agency of the United Nations, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).



World Meteorological Organization
© Torbjørn Toby Jorgensen, Wikicommons

Mission

The WMO facilitates international cooperation on meteorological services. It is committed to ensuring that data are collected in a similar way worldwide and then made accessible to everyone. This is essential for monitoring climate change and anticipating risks. The WMO works with six regional commissions and two technical commissions (one dedicated to forecasting and observation infrastructure, the other to the interactions between meteorological events and human activities).

Key actions



Early Warning

The WMO equips areas particularly affected by extreme weather with early detection tools so they can anticipate disasters, warn populations at risk, and prevent disastrous consequences. It has also launched the *Early Warning for All Initiative* with the ITU, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the private sector to develop the use of AI to assist vulnerable populations before and after disasters.



Data Access and Standards

The WMO facilitates access to meteorological data through a common platform. Furthermore, its technical committees establish standards so that experts worldwide work in the same way and understand each other. For example, the WMO named the different types of clouds (stratus, cumulonimbus, etc.). Its International Cloud Atlas, initiated in 1896 by the IMO (the WMO's predecessor), established the terminology globally and remains a reference today. The WMO also establishes standards for aviation, maritime transport, and agriculture.



Support for infrastructure in the field

WMO ensures that all Member States have the opportunity to collect and share meteorological observations. This involves a field presence that includes infrastructure support and technical training. For example, in 2023, a fuel depot in Guinea exploded, severely damaging the building of the country's National Meteorological Agency. WMO supported them in continuing their operations and transitioning to a self-sustaining structure. Thanks to local teams and WMO, the Agency's meteorological services never ceased.

DID YOU KNOW?

The link between Geneva and meteorology dates back to 1783. It was a Genevan, Horace-Bénédict de Saussure, who invented an innovative meteorological instrument: the hair hygrometer. It allowed for the measurement of humidity levels in the air by attaching a hair to a needle. Indeed, our hair reacts to humidity; it lengthens when it is humid and shortens when it is dry.

THE EUROPEAN ORGANIZATION FOR NUCLEAR RESEARCH



CERN
© Switzerland Tourism, Colin Frei

Context

In the post-war period, there was a desire to reunify Europe and restore peaceful relations between states by fostering scientific cooperation. Many European scientists had fled the continent during the war. It was therefore essential to make Europe attractive for research again. Thus, in 1953, 12 States founded the European Council for Nuclear Research (CERN). While its official name is now the European Organisation for Nuclear Research, the original French acronym has remained. Straddling Switzerland and France, CERN is the world leader in particle physics research and brings together 25 States by 2026. CERN is not part of the United Nations system.

Mission

CERN seeks to understand the origin of the Universe by fostering international scientific cooperation. It operates the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), the most powerful accelerator ever built.

Key actions



CERN
© Genève Tourisme, Gauvin Lapetoule



CERN
© Switzerland Tourism, Colin Frei



Hôpitaux universitaires de Genève
© UNIGE

Fundamental Research

To understand the origin of the Universe, CERN develops very powerful particle accelerators, including the famous LHC. A particle is an infinitely small, indivisible element. An accelerator allows us to recreate the conditions just after the Big Bang. It creates collisions between particles at very high speeds in order to observe the matter that is created as a result of these collisions. It's as if we threw two strawberries at each other and their collision created other fruits. Something was created that did not exist before. CERN is researching how this could have happened and therefore how our world came into being.

Science Outreach

CERN has been popularising the core of its work among the general public for many years. Unable to accommodate all the requests for visits, the Science Gateway was built thanks to private donations. Inaugurated in October 2023, it aims to demonstrate the importance of fundamental research and stimulate young people's interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Designed by the world-renowned architect Renzo Piano, the Gateway welcomes more than 300,000 visitors from 180 countries each year. Its exhibitions, educational laboratories, and events make it one of the most popular attractions in Geneva.

Contribution to Society

CERN develops highly sophisticated instruments for fundamental research. The technologies developed are then shared with society and used in other fields. For example, collaboration with the medical community led to the development of PET scans and radiotherapy, used in the detection and treatment of cancer. But the best-known example is the invention of the World Wide Web in 1989 at CERN. Its goal was to allow researchers to easily share information around the world. Today, it is an indispensable tool in our societies.

CASE STUDY

CERN cooperates with six UN agencies (ITU, WIPO, WHO, WMO, UNITAR, and UN-Geneva). It is working closely with the WHO to develop, within the framework of the CAiMIRA project, a tool for measuring air quality and virus concentration in enclosed spaces.

THE WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANIZATION

Background

The Industrial Revolution in the 18th century sparked a race for innovation, with the risk of technological imitation. Switzerland, for example, launched its industrial revolution by importing and copying English machines. With the globalisation of trade intensifying from the mid-19th century onward, boosted by the rise of communication and transportation, global protection of intellectual property became essential. Engineers hesitated to present their inventions at world's fairs and exhibitions for fear of imitation. In 1884, the International Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property was signed in Paris by nine States, including Switzerland, launching a movement for international protection. In 1886, the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works was signed.

International offices for the protection of intellectual property were established in Bern in 1893. They moved to Geneva in 1960 and were replaced by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in 1970. WIPO joined the United Nations system in 1974. Today, WIPO administers 28 treaties relating to intellectual property.



World Intellectual Property Organization
© Genève Tourisme

Mission

Intellectual property refers to works of the mind: inventions, literary and artistic works, designs, models, emblems, names, and images used in commerce. WIPO provides services that enable creators, innovators, and entrepreneurs to protect their intellectual property across borders.

Key actions



International Patents

WIPO facilitates the international protection of inventions through the International Patent System (PCT). Launched in 1978, the PCT offers businesses and experts a way to obtain protection for their inventions in multiple countries. Indeed, an international patent application with WIPO avoids the need to file multiple patent applications with each PCT member State. This greatly simplifies the protection of an innovation worldwide. 158 States are part of the PCT by 2026. WIPO collaborates with national patent offices to facilitate the processing of international patents.



Trademark Protection

The Madrid System offers a practical solution for registering and managing trademarks worldwide. Established in 1891, it has evolved to allow companies to seek protection in all 132 countries covered by filing a single international application with WIPO and paying a single set of fees. This eliminates the need to repeat the process in each country where trademark protection is desired. A database provides access to trademarks already registered globally, containing over 50 million entries.



Arbitration and Mediation Center

In 1994, WIPO established an Arbitration and Mediation Center that offers fast and cost-effective dispute resolution methods and expertise. These methods are used by large corporations, SMEs, startups, artists, inventors, universities, and producers to efficiently resolve their national and cross-border intellectual property disputes, whether related to copyright, patents, or trademarks. WIPO is also the world leader in resolving domain name disputes, having resolved nearly 80,000 cases between 1999 and 2025.

CASE STUDY

Patentscope is the WIPO database that lists all patent applications filed via the PCT. Since 1980, the sporting goods company Nike has filed more than 10,000 patent applications.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Quiz

Duration: approximately 15 minutes

Target audience: Secondary I and II classes

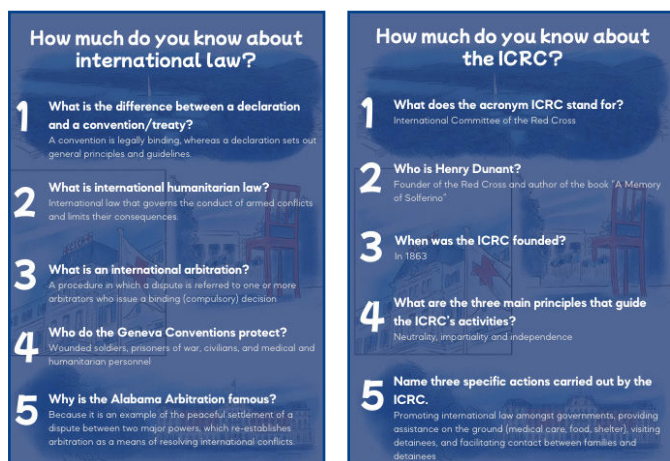
Recommended subjects: law, history, philosophy, geography, citizenship

Educational objectives

- Allow students to self-assess their level of knowledge about International Geneva
- Stimulate the learning of key elements thematically
- Assess the acquired elements in a fun way

OPTION 1: Classroom Card Game Inspired by the TTMC Game

Tu te mets combien (TTMC) is a board game in the form of a quiz. Its unique feature is that each card focuses on a specific theme and contains questions of increasing difficulty. Each question is worth the number of points corresponding to its difficulty level (Question 1 is the easiest and is worth 1 point, etc.). The Fondation pour Genève was inspired by this game and created a set of themed question cards covering all the topics in the dossier (examples below).



The game elements are available on the Fondation pour Genève website via the link below.



www.fondationpourgeneve.ch/en/educational-resources-comic-strip

Gameplay

Each turn, the person asking the question announces the topic as follows: «How much do you know about the World Trade Organization / the Treaty of Versailles / the Reform?» The person answering then rates their own level of knowledge on the subject and gives a number from 1 to 5, with 1 being the easiest and 5 the most difficult. They are then asked the corresponding question. If they answer correctly, they earn the corresponding number of points (question 1 = 1 point, etc.). If they answer incorrectly, they earn no points. The player whose score exceeds 25 wins the game.

Example Round

Player 1 draws a card and announces the question: “How much do you know about the ICRC?”

Player 2 assesses their knowledge and announces: “2”

Player 1 reads question 2: “Who is Henry Dunant?”

Player 2 answers: “He is the founder of the Red Cross.”

Player 1 announces if this is the correct answer: “That’s right, you win 2 points.”

Suggestions for organising the game in the classroom

The game can be played in groups of 2 to 3 people.
It takes approximately 15 minutes.

OPTION 2: Online quiz on the Eduki website

The Eduki Foundation develops themed quizzes about International Geneva. They are available at this link and can be used for individual or group games by students.



<https://eduki.ch/en/quiz-en/>



GENEVA, A DRIVING FORCE FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

Background

In the 1970s, the Cold War divided the world into two blocs (Soviet Union vs. United States), and geopolitics became a battleground of ideological struggle. The UN, with its Security Council paralysed by the veto system, struggled to establish effective dialogue. Furthermore, this was also a complex economic period, marked by the end of the Bretton Woods system (see the WTO section p.23) and the post-war boom. The world was therefore facing major upheavals. It was in this context that the World Economic Forum was created in Geneva, aiming to offer a new response to global challenges by bringing together government, business, and civil society. It was based on what was known as the “Davos spirit” namely the concept of multi-stakeholder participation, collaboration, and cordial exchanges between the economic and diplomatic spheres.

Mission

The WEF aims to bring together political leaders, business executives, intellectuals, and representatives of civil society to discuss key global issues. To this end, it has organised the iconic Davos Forum since 1971, which annually gathers top leaders from the economic and diplomatic spheres and attracts global media attention. The Forum is a true platform where the liberal values that shaped the post-war world are assessed and redefined each year. The WEF also positions itself as a leading authority by publishing renowned reports such as the Global Competitiveness Report, the Global Risks Report, and the Future of Jobs Report. Furthermore, the WEF develops expertise on numerous topics likely to influence the global economy. It has established 11 thematic centres. Each brings together leaders from the business world, government, civil society, academia, and other sectors to exchange ideas and advance joint agendas.

The WEF has therefore initiated a new form of international cooperation, based on a partnership between the public and private sectors, where economic leaders and heads of government are convinced that a stable and sustainable world benefits society and the economy.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL GROUP OF EXPERTS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Background

Global awareness of climate change began in the 1970s. In 1972, the Stockholm Conference was one of the first events to place environmental issues at the heart of international political discussions. Subsequently, the UN created the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), while the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) initiated a World Climate Research Programme. In 1985, the Villach Conference was held, the first international conference on the role of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in climate change. Following this conference, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was established by the WMO and UNEP. The IPCC is an intergovernmental organisation comprising the member governments of the United Nations or the WMO and is headquartered in Geneva.

Mission

The IPCC’s objective is to provide governments with scientific information they can use to develop national climate policies. It brings together scientists from around the world to assess knowledge about climate change. It does not conduct experiments itself and does not fund research. Its role is to gather, analyse, and synthesise published scientific studies to produce a clear and reliable overview. Approximately every six to seven years, the IPCC publishes a comprehensive assessment report, written by hundreds of experts and reviewed by thousands of scientists and government representatives. The summaries for policymakers are approved line by line by member States, giving them international legitimacy.

OFFICE OF THE UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



OHCHR
© Genève Tourisme, Olivier Miche

Background

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948 by almost all members of the UN at the time, with the exception of 10 States. It was the first document in history to define fundamental human rights. From 1948 to 1974, human rights were handled by a UN division in New York. This contributed to the development of declarations and conventions which laid the foundations of the international human rights framework. 45 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a World Conference held in Vienna in 1993 decided to create a UN body specifically dedicated to human rights: the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). This change came in the context of the end of the Cold War when the notion of human rights

no longer opposed the two blocs.

Mission

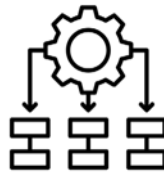
The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) promotes human rights by ensuring that the United Nations integrates them into its programmes, by investigating the most serious violations, and by providing technical assistance. The Commission on Human Rights has been its principal organ since 1946. It was reformed at the initiative of Switzerland and replaced in 2006 by the Human Rights Council in order to increase its effectiveness.

Key actions



Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

One of the great innovations when the Human Rights Council was created was to establish a mandatory review for all member States. Every 4 and a half years, each Member State must report on the human rights situation. It then receives recommendations and undertakes to implement them. Since the first periodic review in 2008, each of the 193 Member States has undergone three reviews. A new cycle began in 2022. The acceptance rate of the recommendations by the States examined was 76% at the end of the third cycle. The UPR is based on the national reports of the State under review, the reports of United Nations human rights experts and information provided by other independent bodies, such as NGOs. However, in the event of non-implementation, the system does not provide for sanctions.



Development of Human Rights

All organs of the United Nations system are required to integrate human rights into their work. The OHCHR is responsible for ensuring this is done. However, the OHCHR is also a driving force in the development of legal standards for human rights. At its first session in 2006, for example, the Human Rights Council adopted the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which was subsequently adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. The OHCHR also has a complaints mechanism through which any individual can report human rights violations they have personally experienced or witnessed. This system aims to promote respect for human rights and provide a tool for victims. Thousands of complaints are received each year.



On-the-ground assistance

States are responsible for implementing human rights standards. However, the OHCHR provides its expertise to assist in their implementation, for example, on issues related to justice, reforms of national laws, and electoral processes. OHCHR operates through 18 field offices, including those in Ukraine and Palestine, as well as 11 regional offices. This presence allows for close analysis of the situation and facilitates collaboration with the government of the country concerned, national authorities, and victims. It also has a rapid response team that establishes commissions of inquiry in humanitarian emergencies. For example, the Human Rights Council held a special session in January 2026 and decided to launch an investigation following the crackdown that took place in Iran.

GAVI – THE VACCINE ALLIANCE

Background

Until the 1970s, barely 10% of children in the poorest countries were vaccinated against pertussis, childhood tuberculosis, tetanus, polio, measles, and diphtheria. Thanks to UNICEF's efforts, a central purchasing body funded by public donations was established to lower prices. Significant sums were raised, and vaccination rates increased sharply. However, these programmes declined in the 1980s and 1990s, once again jeopardising the global vaccination situation for children. In response to this situation, the international organisation Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, was created in 2000. Its creation was based on an initial financial commitment of \$750 million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation over five years, which was later increased to \$1 billion, making this private foundation its primary funder. Gavi thus represents a prime example of a public-private partnership within International Geneva. Its governance model combines the technical expertise of the WHO, the purchasing power of UNICEF, the financial know-how of the World Bank, vaccine manufacturers, low-income countries, and major public and private donors. This hybrid structure illustrates the evolution of global governance towards more inclusive forms, where States, international organisations, and the private sector cooperate.

Mission

Gavi aims to accelerate access to childhood immunisation in low-income countries. Since its inception, it has helped vaccinate more than 822 million children. By covering nearly half the world's children, the Alliance has sufficient leverage to negotiate more affordable prices with manufacturers. In 2022, a child's complete vaccination with the 11 WHO-recommended vaccines cost approximately \$28 in Gavi-supported countries, compared to about \$1,100 in the United States. The number of manufacturers producing Gavi-supported vaccines has grown from 5 in 2001 to 17 in 2017, with the majority located in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Gavi co-organised COVAX, the leading provider of free COVID-19 vaccines to low-income countries.

GLOBAL FUND TO FIGHT AIDS, TUBERCULOSIS AND MALARIA

Background

In the early 2000s, despite the joint efforts of the WHO, UNAIDS, NGOs, and governments, AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria continued to cause millions of infections and deaths, particularly in low-income countries. In response to this situation, a new initiative was launched in 2001 at the G8 Summit in Genoa, spearheaded by then-UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. This led to the creation, in Geneva, of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Mission

Unlike the WHO, the Global Fund is not a United Nations agency, but a foundation governed by Swiss law. Its role is not to directly implement health programmes, but to mobilise and redistribute financial resources to support the fight against these three diseases and strengthen health systems in low- and middle-income countries. Since 2002, it has invested nearly \$50 billion in more than 155 countries, making it one of the leading international donors in the field of global health.

The Global Fund's unique feature lies in its governance model, which combines public and private actors. While 92% of its resources come from governments, it also mobilises philanthropic foundations, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as other private partners.

This public-private structure reflects an evolution in global governance, in which States are no longer the sole funders or decision-makers. It also helps to position Geneva as a centre for global health governance.

GENEVA SCIENCE AND DIPLOMACY ANTICIPATOR

Background

The creation of GESDA was part of a broader reflection on strengthening the Swiss Confederation's host State strategy between 2012 and 2018. Indeed, in 2012, Geneva failed to secure the headquarters of the Green Climate Fund, which relocated to South Korea. This was a resounding defeat, as Geneva was eliminated in the first round. The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs then established a task force to consider the future of International Geneva. This working group, named the International Geneva Task Force (TAFOGI), submitted its first report on the challenges facing International Geneva to the Federal Council in 2013. In the spring of 2015, these discussions continued under the auspices of a new group, named Geneva+, which would then initiate the core of GESDA. In 2018, Geneva+ presented its final report. It proposes to create an independent foundation based on scientific anticipation, aimed at responding to the accelerating pace of technological development.

Mission

The GESDA Foundation, a privately owned organisation, is at the heart of what is known as **science diplomacy**. GESDA practices a form of science diplomacy that aims to be an incubator for concrete solutions. It seeks to anticipate the effects that technological innovations currently being developed in laboratories will have on society in 5, 10, and 25 years, in order to guide them, from their inception, toward the common good. Specifically, GESDA brings together hundreds of scientists from around the world to identify technological advances likely to affect individuals, society, and the planet, in an annual reference document: the GESDA Science Breakthrough Radar.

This information is then shared with the diplomatic community so that these advances can lead to pilot solutions to help states address global challenges. To this end, it launched the Open Quantum Institute, hosted at CERN in Geneva, with the aim of facilitating access to quantum technologies worldwide and developing use cases that could contribute to accelerating the achievement of the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Quantum computing makes it possible to explore a vast number of possibilities in parallel and to solve certain types of problems much more quickly. For example, a quantum computer could rapidly identify the best scenario from thousands of possible combinations, such as optimising a city's public transport flow, whereas a classical computer would have to test each option one after the other.



Science diplomacy is a set of practices at the interface of the scientific and diplomatic communities. An interface implies the need to speak a common language in order to understand the perspectives and stakes of the diplomatic world for scientists, or of the scientific world for diplomats. Science diplomacy can take several forms:

1. Science for diplomacy, which means using scientific cooperation to improve relations between States. Example: CERN.
2. Diplomacy for science, which means using diplomatic relations to support large-scale international scientific projects. Example: the ITER project, which brings together 35 States.
3. Science in diplomacy, which means informing political issues through scientific advice. Example: the IPCC, which provides detailed scientific reports to guide political decisions concerning climate.

THE INTERNATIONAL GENEVA OF TOMORROW

International Geneva has been active for over 100 years; it has evolved over time, through crises, in response to conflicts and new challenges. It has developed its areas of expertise, starting with humanitarian work in 1864 and extending to artificial intelligence today. Its development, centred on so-called 'technical' international cooperation, establishes it as a unique centre of global governance.

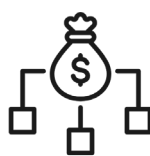
However, international cooperation is currently under strain. It is, and always has been, dependent on the goodwill of member States. Some are withdrawing from certain organisations, leaving them facing a funding crisis and forcing them to rethink how they operate. This re-evaluation is prompting a broader reflection on opportunities for developing international cooperation. Throughout its history, International Geneva has indeed succeeded in developing innovative forms of cooperation. It has successfully brought together a diverse range of

stakeholders to tackle new challenges. The World Economic Forum (WEF), Gavi, the Global Fund and GESDA are proof of this. It is therefore well-placed to be the driving force behind a new form of multilateralism. With this in mind, several avenues are being explored to reimagine international cooperation from Geneva:



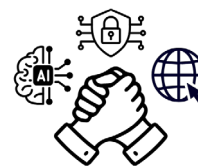
Taking on board new partners

The system of governance established after the Second World War no longer reflects the way the world works today. Indeed, the development of certain countries is reshaping their involvement in world affairs.



Reviewing funding

The funding of international organisations is highly dependent on the goodwill of member States. Diversifying funding sources and promoting public-private partnerships are essential to ensuring the long-term sustainability of programmes.



Building cooperation on emerging challenges

Building international cooperation on emerging challenges such as **AI**, digital technology and cybersecurity is essential, as these issues affect society as a whole.



AI is playing an increasingly important role within the International Geneva community. Indeed, several stakeholders are committed to establishing Geneva as a global hub for discussion on AI governance. Among the many initiatives, we can mention:

1. The ITU's 'AI for Good' Summit, which brings together experts from around the world in Geneva every year and advocates for the development of AI that serves the common good.
2. In early 2026, the United Nations General Assembly established the **Independent International Scientific Panel on AI**, comprising 40 members from all regions, which aims to be for AI what the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is for global warming (see p.35). The General Assembly also launched the **Global Dialogue on AI Governance**, which is being held in Geneva in July 2026.
3. Following events in Paris and New Delhi, Geneva is hosting the **World Summit on AI in 2027**, bringing together governments, leaders and businesses to envisage a global framework for AI.
4. Many international organisations based in Geneva are incorporating AI to carry out their activities more effectively. Notable examples include CERN, which uses AI to analyse data collected by its particle accelerator; the WMO, which employs AI models to analyse climate change and improve natural disaster preparedness; and the ICRC, which in 2024 developed its own guidelines for the responsible use of artificial intelligence within the scope of its mandate.
5. The ICRC carries out advocacy work on the implications of AI in armed conflicts. In particular, it raises concerns about the use of autonomous weapons, the role of AI in cyber-attacks and the use of AI in decision-making regarding military attacks.
6. **Involvement of the local academic community:** The **Swiss AI Centre** was established by the HES-SO to set up a Swiss organisation that develops tools designed to accelerate the adoption of AI components in the digital transition of SMEs. Furthermore, the **AI in Healthcare Cluster at Campus Biotech** brings together doctors, researchers and experts in artificial intelligence to foster the development of new methods of diagnosis, treatment and prevention. The **IHEID** and the **Diplo-Foundation** are also exploring the interactions between AI and diplomacy.
7. **Private sector involvement:** **Trust Valley** is an initiative of the cantons of Vaud and Geneva, which has become a global benchmark bringing together nearly 400 companies and institutions to address the governance of AI, quantum technology, cybersecurity and critical digital infrastructure. **GAIGI** is an independent institute based in Geneva, which designs sector-specific governance frameworks for artificial intelligence based on existing global standards.

But the form that this International Geneva of the future will take, the issues it will address and the values it will uphold are also those of your students. This future International Geneva will help shape the world in which they will live. They can help to shape its contours by sharing their concerns and aspirations. The aim of this booklet is to involve them in this discussion.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Mock press conference on AI regulation

Duration: approximately 1 hour 30 minutes

Target audience: Lower and Upper Secondary school classes

Recommended subjects: law, history, philosophy, geography, citizenship

Educational objectives

- Enable students to practise structured speaking
- Develop the ability to present arguments and answer complex questions
- Understand current issues relating to the regulation of AI
- Explore the ethical, social and political issues surrounding the regulation of artificial intelligence
- Encourage reflection on the impact of this new technology on oneself and on the world

Overview

This activity involves simulating an international press conference on a regulatory project for artificial intelligence. A group of students represents an international organisation (IO) which is presenting a draft treaty on AI regulation.

The rest of the class take on the roles of journalists, divided into two groups:

- Journalists in favour of the project
- Journalists who are either sceptical or opposed to it

Group organisation

For a class of 20 to 25 students:

Group A – The international organisation (3 to 5 students)

They prepare and present a proposal for regulating AI.

Group B – Supportive journalists (6 to 10 students)

They ask questions that support, explore or highlight the proposal.

Group C – Critical journalists (6 to 10 students)

They ask questions that scrutinise, question or challenge the proposal.

Specific role of the moderator (teacher)

- Allocate speaking time fairly.
- Ensure that contributions are concise and respectful.
- Ensure that questions are relevant (no personal attacks, no off-topic comments).
- Maintain the pace of the activity.

Activity outline

I. Introduction to the topic by the teacher (15 mins)

- What is AI?

This term refers to the ability of computer systems to perform tasks that would normally require human reasoning. A well-known example of artificial intelligence is the programme on which ChatGPT is based, but there are many others. An artificial intelligence system works using algorithms. A traditional algorithm is a set of instructions, or rules, that a computer or machine must follow to provide an answer to a question or to solve a problem. Machine learning is a form of artificial intelligence capable of creating its own instructions based on the data used to 'train' it. The system then uses these instructions to find a solution to a given problem. In a sense, the software programmes itself. Once assigned to a particular task, some of these systems continue to 'learn' by utilising data from the environment in which they operate. (explanation taken from the ICRC website,

see sources)

- International cooperation and AI (see the chapter 'The International Geneva of Tomorrow')

II. Preparation (15 mins)

Group A – The international organisation

- Draft a treaty proposal based on two or three concrete measures (e.g. transparency of algorithms, data protection, establishment of an independent authority).
- Identify the reasons why these measures are necessary.
- Prepare a 2- to 3-minute oral presentation, structured around:
 - The problem or risks identified,
 - The proposed solutions,
 - The expected benefits.
- Defence arguments: anticipate questions from journalists and consider how to answer them clearly and convincingly.

Groups B and C – Journalists

- Prepare a few questions to ask during the press conference:
- Supportive journalists: questions that encourage clarification, highlight the benefits or seek positive details.
- Critical journalists: questions that emphasise the risks, limitations, contradictions or potential negative impacts.

Questions must be formulated in a precise, relevant and respectful manner.

III. Press conference session (20 minutes)

1. Presentation of the international organisation (2–3 minutes)

- Group A briefly outlines its proposed regulation:
- Why AI regulation is necessary (risks, challenges),
- What specific measures are proposed (examples: transparency, controls, limits on use, etc.),
- What benefits are expected (safety, protection of rights, balance between innovation and responsibility).

2. Questions from journalists (20 minutes)

The press conference is organised as a series of alternating rounds of questions.

Journalists raise their hands to ask their questions.

The teacher acts as moderator and ensures that time is managed effectively and that a balance of questions is maintained.

The recommended procedure:

A supportive journalist asks a question; the organisation responds.

A critical journalist asks a question; the organisation responds.

This alternates until the allotted time has elapsed.

The organisation's responses must be clear, well-structured and directly relevant to the question asked.

IV. Collective feedback session (5–10 minutes)

A brief discussion allows participants to reflect on:

- the quality of the questions asked,
- the relevance of the answers given,
- their understanding of the issues surrounding AI regulation,
- any difficulties encountered when speaking.

This discussion can also be used to compare the arguments put forward by the two groups of journalists.



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COMMITTED STAKEHOLDERS *(non exhaustive list)*

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA)

The FDFA is the Swiss ministry responsible for foreign policy. It defines Switzerland's international strategy and, within this framework, supports 'International Geneva', in particular by promoting peace, humanitarian aid and multilateralism. It also contributes to the funding and development of international organisations.

Switzerland's Permanent Mission to the UN

The Mission officially represents Switzerland at the UN and other international organisations in Geneva. It takes part in multilateral negotiations, defends Switzerland's positions and ensures coordination between the federal authorities in Bern and the diplomatic discussions in Geneva.

International Affairs Directorate of the Canton of Geneva (DAI)

The DAI is the cantonal body responsible for advising the authorities, coordinating local stakeholders and supporting initiatives related to International Geneva. It promotes Geneva's international role by fostering synergies to make the canton a hub for global governance dedicated to resolving global challenges.

External Relations and Communications Service of the City of Geneva

This service is responsible for the City's relations with International Geneva. It liaises with institutional partners and helps to organise international events. It works closely with the Swiss Mission and the Canton to support Geneva's international role.

Foundation for Buildings for International Organizations (FIPOI)

FIPOI is a non-profit foundation governed by private law. Its aim is to facilitate the establishment and development of international organisations in the canton of Geneva, and occasionally in the canton of Vaud, by providing them with offices and facilities that meet their needs.

International Geneva Welcome Centre (CAGI)

The CAGI supports diplomats, international civil servants and NGOs as they settle in Geneva. It provides practical information (on accommodation, administrative procedures and employment for spouses) and organises integration activities to help them adapt to life in the city.

Foundation for the Adaptation of International Geneva (FAGI)

Established in 2025 by the State of Geneva and the Hans Wilsdorf Foundation, the FAGI provides temporary support to international organisations and NGOs based in Geneva that are facing financial difficulties. Its aim is to preserve and strengthen Geneva's position as a major centre for international cooperation.

Fondation pour Genève

The Fondation pour Genève promotes Geneva's attractiveness, reputation and openness to the world. It works closely with the federal and Geneva authorities to launch initiatives that support Geneva's international development. It helps to build bridges between the private and public sectors and brings together the Eduki Foundation, the Cercle International, the Diplomatic Club of Geneva, the CAGI Newcomers Network and GVA2.

Eduki Foundation

The Eduki Foundation raises awareness of international cooperation amongst young people. It forges links between organisations and young people by organising activities linked to International Geneva, developing teaching materials for teachers, and running a competition for all school classes in Switzerland.

Diplomatic Club of Geneva

The Diplomatic Club of Geneva brings together decision-makers from Geneva's international community and encourages synergies through exclusive events. Conferences, debates, visits and excursions are designed to stimulate discussion on current issues. It fosters relations between the international community and the host country.

International Circle

The Circle welcomes prominent figures from the international community in Geneva, along with their spouses, to ensure they enjoy their stay in Geneva. Through a range of activities organised during the day and in the evening, it helps to foster social ties between the local and international communities in a friendly atmosphere.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AI: Artificial Intelligence

AIPG: International Agency for Prisoners of War

CAGI: Geneva Welcome Centre (Centre d'Accueil de la Genève Internationale)

CERN: European Organization for Nuclear Research

DAI: International Affairs Directorate of the Canton of Geneva

FDFA: Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

ECOSOC: Economic and Social Council

Ecolint: International School of Geneva

FAGI: Foundation for the Adaptation of International Geneva

FIPOI: Foundation for Buildings for International Organizations

GATT: General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

GAVI: Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance

GESDA: Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator

IARC: International Agency for Research on Cancer

ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross

IHEID: Geneva Graduate Institute

IHL: International Humanitarian Law

ILO: International Labour Organization

IMO: International Meteorological Organization

IPCC: Intergovernmental panel on climate change

ISO: International Organization for Standardisation

ITU: International Telecommunication Union

LHC: Large Hadron Collider

LoN: League of Nations

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGO: Non-governmental organisation

OHCHR: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

PCT: Patent Cooperation Treaty

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

SMEs: Small and medium-sized enterprises

TAFOGI: International Geneva Task Force

UN: United Nations

UNAIDS: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

UNEP: United Nations Environment Programme

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNHCR: UN Refugee Agency

UNHRC: United Nations Human Rights Council

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

UNITAR: United Nations Institute for Training and Research

UNOG: United Nations Office at Geneva

UPR: Universal Periodic Review

WEF: World Economic Forum

WHO: World Health Organization

WIPO: World Intellectual Property Organization

WMO: World Meteorological Organization

WTO: World Trade Organization

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