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REFERENCE WORK

A Concise Encyclopedia of the United Nations *Second Revised Edition*

Edited by Helmut Volger

A Concise Encyclopedia of the United Nations

Edited by Helmut Volger

Second Revised Edition

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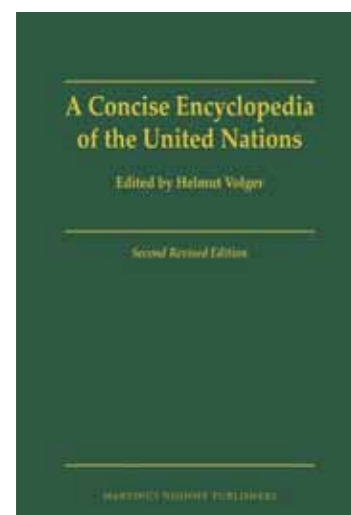


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How can we approach the complex United Nations system, a 'family' of principal organs, subsidiary organs and specialized agencies? Where do we get summarizing information on the large number of reform concepts developed and implemented since the late 1990s, in particular in connection with the UN World Summit 2005?

The present book provides orientation and information: It is the second updated English edition of the German "Lexikon der Vereinten Nationen". The book provides in addition to concise and comprehensive information on the UN system insight into recent UN developments and reform efforts in the face of global opportunities and challenges, such as the Millennium Summit 2000 and World Summit 2005, and the establishment of important new UN organs, the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, in 2006.

The contributing authors are academic scholars of international law, economics and political sciences; active and former diplomats and UN officials; journalists and members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and offer a variety of interesting perspectives.

The entries are provided with bibliographies and with Internet addresses for further information and are supplemented in the annex by an informative text on the UN document numbering system and by a list of information facilities concerning the UN.

Africa as Topic in the UN

Africa as Topic in the UN

From the outset the process of → decolonization was of overall importance with regard to Africa in the organs of the United Nations. After the majority of African countries had gained their independence in the early sixties, Africa played an increasingly important role for the → specialized agencies and other UN bodies dealing with development issues (→ Development Cooperation of the UN), such as UNECA, → UNCTAD, → UNDP, → WHO, → FAO, → ILO, → UNIDO, → UNICEF, → UNESCO, → UNEP. But it was not until the 80s that Africa became a special topic for the UN, as for the first time a whole continent was a subject for the UN.

The development crisis in the eighties

This special commitment was induced by the African development crisis which then became more and more obvious. The "lost development decade" left deep marks in Africa. The collapse of commodity prices during this period hit the continent particularly hard, especially as in most African countries exports are based on just a few commodities (monocultures).

Therefore, most countries became extremely over-indebted, despite comparatively high Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows to Africa as bilateral and multilateral aid. Corrupt elites and conflicts that were escalated by East-West rivalry increased the economic drain. Furthermore, a vicious circle ensued between the overexploitation of resources and natural disasters. The modernization achievements of the 60s and 70s were destroyed. Impoverishment and social decline became rampant. States could no longer fulfill their core obligations for the welfare of their peoples. Some states even collapsed.

The response of the → IMF and the World Bank (→ World Bank, World Bank Group) to this development crisis was to impose Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). However, their impact was as if thirst was being quenched with seawater. The first gen-

eration of SAPs in particular deepened the slump. Devaluations and liberalization of exchange rates as part of SAPs increased the oversupply of commodities on world markets, and accelerated the erosion of commodity prices. At the same time imports became more expensive. As a result, SAP-funding sometimes was not even enough to pay for essential imports. Therefore, debt and debt service could not be reduced as intended by SAPs, but were in fact further increased. The economic austerity measures led to demand compression of public as well as private households. This virtually destroyed the achievements of the first phase of industrialization in the field of import substitution.

The Programme of Action for Africa UNPAAERD

The United Nations tried to reverse this economic and social degradation in Africa with its "United Nations Programme of Action for the Economic Recovery and Development of Africa" (UNPAAERD), adopted by the 13th Special Session of the UN → General Assembly on 1 June 1986 (UN Doc. A/S-13/16).

UNPAAERD was a framework for the development actors in Africa including the international donor community. It was prompted by the famine which ravaged large parts of Africa in 1983/84, which had in turn resulted from the drought caused by the El-NinoPhenomenon. This phenomenon had then occurred for the first time simultaneously north (Sahel and Horn of Africa) and south (Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique) of the equator. All over the world, solidarity actions in support of the African peoples involved pop stars, athletes and the media. In Germany the Public Broadcasting Network ARD organized a special "Africa Day". The 13th Special Assembly of the UN was accompanied by fundraising events, such as a concert and the "world race against the time", produced by Bob Geldof.

UNPAAERD, and its base document prepared by the African governments