The United Nations Flags and Poles

Gustavo Tracchia

UNITED NATIONS MEMBERSHIP

The name United Nations, suggested by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, was first used on 1 January 1942 when representatives of 26 nations pledged to continue fighting together against the Axis Powers.

In April 1945, near the end of the Second World War, representatives of 50 countries met at the San Francisco Opera House to plan an organization to help keep peace in the world. In June 1945, those nations—the first UN members—signed the United Nations Charter. Since then, 128 more countries have joined the United Nations.

According to the UN Charter, membership is “open to all other peace-loving states which accept the obligations” of the Charter and, “in judgment of the Organization, are able and willing to carry out these obligations”.

In the first session of the General Assembly in 1946, delegates took up the issue of locating the permanent headquarters. On December of 1946, the Assembly accepted a gift of $8.5 million from John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to buy 18 acres along the East River in New York City. The city donated additional land in the area. In 1947 the General Assembly approved the plans for a headquarters building.

By the building’s completion in the fall of 1952, the UN had 60 members. But the dream of nations joining to solve their differences presented a nightmare to the office responsible for hoisting their flags and maintaining the flag poles. The growth in UN membership, the changes occurring when nations divided into two or joined together as
one, and the perennial changes in country names and flags all posed ongoing challenges.

The original architectural plans for the UN headquarters failed to foresee the number of nations that would join year after year. The facilities managers have had to rearrange gardens, remove trees, and make other modifications (still in progress today), to accommodate the growing number of flag poles.

The flags at the United Nations headquarters are arranged following the English alphabet and the UN Official Terminology Code, which uses the short form of the full official name of the country. An exception is made when a country asks to be listed differently, as the case of Ivory Coast which requested listing under its official name (under “C” for Côte d’Ivoir), or Tanzania (listed as the United Republic of Tanzania under “U”).

The article used with the name of a country is omitted, as in The Dominican Republic. However El Salvador is listed under “E”, because the Spanish article (written with a capital “E”) forms an integral part of that country’s official name. And in the current dispute over the name of Macedonia, its flag is hoisted under “T” for The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in a clear breach of logic and common sense only possible in the world of diplomacy.

At times, different political ideologies have split countries into two, both using the same name and hoisting similar flags. Many of these countries choose to add the phrase “Democratic Republic of …” before the country name, such as the Democratic Republic of Yemen, or the former Democratic Republic of Germany. Most of these countries request their flags to be hoisted under “D”. This not only keeps the flag distant from the other country with the same name (and, in many cases, with a very similar flag) but also keeps the delegates’ seats far apart, since the seating arrangements in the General Assembly maintain the same alphabetical order as the flags hoisted outside building!

When a new country is admitted into the UN, its flag flown for one day in the place of honor, which is today Row C. After the customary statements following the admission of the new nation, the General As-
South Korea and Moldova are hoisted under the “Rs” for Republic of Korea and Republic of Moldova. Moldova wanted to be next to Romania, and South Korea far from the Democratic Republic of Korea (North Korea) whose flag is hoisted under “D”.

All photos by Gustavo Tracchia.
Gustavo Tracchia

assembly is suspended for few minutes for the flag raising ceremony outside. In most cases, a high-level delegation, often led by the president or the foreign minister, attends from the new member country.

In the first 10 years after the UN’s formation, nine countries joined. Then in 1955, 16 nations became members and in 1956, five more were admitted, bringing total membership to 81.

Another large increase came in 1960, with the independence of many former colonial nations. That year, 17 countries (the largest number of countries in one year) were granted UN membership (all but one from Africa). Later in 1960, the Assembly adopted the “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples”. Within two years, another 11 nations had joined.

Over the next two decades, membership grew steadily, reaching 144 by 1975, when six new members joined. Among them was Mozambique, which had attained independence after a long struggle for national liberation. Angola, another former colony that had fought for its independence, joined in 1976, as did Zimbabwe in 1980. Ten more countries were admitted during the 1980s.

The membership total seesawed in 1990. Namibia became the 160th UN member on 23 April, but on 22 May membership dropped to 159 when Democratic Yemen and Yemen combined into a single member under the name of Yemen. With the admission of Liechtenstein on 18 September, membership again reached 160, but dropped to 159 when the Federal Republic of Germany and the Democratic Republic of Germany united in October 1990 to form one sovereign Germany. In 1992, 13 new countries joined.

UN membership has not always increased. In 1958, for example, Guinea was admitted but total membership remained unchanged at 82 because Syria and Egypt had formed the United Arab Republic. In 1971, the Assembly decided to “restore all its rights to the People’s Republic of China and to expel forthwith the representatives of Chiang Kai-shek from the place which they unlawfully occupy at the United Nations and in all the organizations related to it”. In January 1965 Indonesia withdrew from the UN but rejoined in September 1966.
The Federation of Malaya joined the UN in 1957. In 1963, its name was changed to Malaysia, following the admission of Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak to its federation. Singapore became an independent state and a UN Member in 1965.

Tanganyika had been a UN member since December 1961 and Zanzibar since December 1963. Following their unification in 1964, the United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar continued as a single member, changing its name to the United Republic of Tanzania on 1 November 1964.

Another large increase in UN membership occurred in 1992 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the breakaway of some republics of the Yugoslavian Federation. Nine former USSR republics and three former Yugoslavian republics gained membership together with San Marino, bringing the total to 179 members. However by the end of the year, membership dropped to 178 with the withdrawal from the UN of Czechoslovakia due to the voluntary dissolution of its federation.

In 1993, 6 new countries joined the UN. The former members of the Czechoslovakian Federation, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, joined the UN as separate members. Eritrea, formerly part of Ethiopia, joined the UN as a sovereign country, as did Andorra and Monaco. Finally, Macedonia left the Yugoslavian Federation, following the earlier example of Croatia, Bosnia, and Slovenia, and requested membership as a separate nation.

With the admission of Kiribati, Nauru, and Tonga, and later on 30 September 2000 of Tuvalu, there are now 189 United Nations members.

Countries continue to join the UN, proving that, as former Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar put it, “the effectiveness of the UN is no longer in doubt” and the world body “is being increasingly looked upon as a trusted intermediary”.
Figure 1.
UNITED NATIONS FLAGS AND POLES

Six rows of poles display member nations' flags at the United Nations headquarters in New York City. They are marked as: Row A, B, C, D, E, and F (Figure 1).

Row D, known as the “Semicircle” was the first to be constructed, initially with 60 poles.

When a country’s name has changed since it was originally admitted, the changes are noted to indicate how that country’s flag has changed its pole position. The flags are currently [2000] hoisted in the following order:

Row A. (18 poles) From 48th St. to the Park Gate Entrance at 47th Street.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andorra</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antigua &amp; Barbuda</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahamas</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarus (Formerly Byelorussia.)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Row B. (48 poles) From 47th St. (Park Gate Entrance) to the Visitors Entrance at 45th Street.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benin (Formerly Dahomey.)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia &amp; Herzegovina</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunei Darussalam</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bukina Faso (Formerly Upper Volta.)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia (Entered the UN as State of Cambodia. In 1970 changed to Khmer Republic. In 1975 was renamed Kampuchea until 1991, when it went back to Cambodia.)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Verde</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comoros</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo, Republic of The</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cote d’Ivoire</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
45 Czech Republic (Czechoslovakia was an charter member of the UN. In December 1992 the Secretary was informed that the Federated Czech and Slovak Republics had ceased to exist. In January 1993 the Czech Republic was admitted as a Member State.)

46 Democratic Rep. of Korea (Commonly known as North Korea, but under “D”.)

47 Democratic Rep. of Congo (Joined the UN under the name of Zaire in 1960. In May 1997 the name was changed to the present one.)

48 Denmark

49 Djibouti

50 Dominica

51 Dominican Republic

52 Ecuador

53 Egypt (Egypt and Syria united in 1958 under the name of United Arab Republic. In 1961 Syria resumed its status as an independent State. On 2 September 1971 the United Arab Republic changed its name to the Arab Republic of Egypt.)

54 El Salvador

55 Equatorial Guinea

56 Eritrea

57 Estonia

58 Ethiopia

59 Fiji

60 Finland

61 France

62 Gabon

63 Gambia

64 Georgia

65 Germany (The Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic were admitted to the UN in 1973. Effective 1990 the two German States united to form one sovereign state.)

66 Ghana

Row C. (17 poles) From the Visitors Entrance at 45th St. to Delegates Entrance A.

67 Greece

68 Grenada

69 Guatemala

70 Guinea

71 Guinea-Bissau

72 Guyana

73 Haiti

74 Honduras

75 Hungary

76 Iceland

77 India

78 Indonesia (In 1965 Indonesia withdrew from the UN, resuming membership in September 1966.)

79 Iran

80 Iraq

81 Ireland

82 Israel

83 Italy

Row D. (85 poles) “Semicircle” from Delegates Entrance A, near 45th St., to Delegates Entrance B, at 43rd St.

84 Jamaica

85 Japan

86 Jordan

87 Kazakhstan

88 Kenya

89 Kiribati

90 Kuwait

91 Kyrgyzstan

92 Laos

93 Latvia

94 Lebanon

95 Lesotho
96 Liberia
97 Libya
98 Liechtenstein
99 Lithuania
100 Luxembourg
101 Madagascar
102 Malawi
103 Malaysia (Formerly the Federation of Malaya.)
104 Maldives
105 Mali
106 Malta
107 Marshall Islands
108 Mauritania
109 Mauritius
110 Mexico
111 Micronesia
112 Monaco
113 Mongolia
114 Morocco
115 Mozambique
116 Myanmar (Formerly Burma.)
117 Namibia
118 Nauru
119 Nepal
120 Netherlands
121 New Zealand
122 Nicaragua
123 Niger
124 Nigeria
125 Norway
126 Oman
127 Pakistan
128 Palau
129 Panama
130 Papua New Guinea
131 Paraguay
132 Peru
133 Philippines
134 Poland
135 Portugal
136 Qatar
137 Republic of Korea (Known as South Korea. The flag is hoisted under “R”.)
138 Republic of Moldova
139 Romania
140 Russian Federation (The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was an original member of the UN from 1945. In 1991 the newly formed Russian Federation informed the Secretary General that the membership of the USSR in the Security Council and other UN agencies was being continued by the Federation with the support of the 11 member countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States.)
141 Rwanda
142 St. Kitts & Nevis
143 Saint Lucia
144 Saint Vincent & The Grenadines
145 Samoa
146 San Marino
147 Sao Tome & Principe
148 Saudi Arabia
149 Senegal
150 Seychelles
151 Sierra Leone
152 Singapore
153 Slovakia (In 1993 it was admitted as a UN Member State. For more information, see Czech Republic.)
154 Slovenia
155 Solomon Islands
156 Somalia
157 South Africa
158 Spain
159 Sri Lanka (Formerly Ceylon.)
160 Sudan
161 Suriname
162 Swaziland
163 Sweden
164 Syria (See Egypt.)
165 Tajikistan
166 Thailand
167 Macedonia (The General Assembly admitted Macedonia in April 1993 and is provisionally referred as: “The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” pending settlement of the differences over its name.)
Row E. (15 poles) From Delegates Entrance B, at 43rd St., to Exclusive Entrance near 42nd St., also known as the Dag Hammarskjold Library Entrance.

168 Togo
169 Tonga
170 Trinidad & Tobago
171 Tunisia
172 Turkey
173 Turkmenistan
174 Tuvalu
175 Uganda
176 Ukraine (formerly Ukrainian SSR)
177 United Arab Emirates
178 United Kingdom

Row F. (7 poles) From the Library Entrance to near 42nd Street.

183 Vanuatu
184 Venezuela
185 Viet Nam
186 Yemen (Yemen became a member in 1947, and Democratic Yemen in 1967, under “D”. In May 1990 the two countries merged and are now represented as one.)

179 United Rep. of Tanzania (Admitted in 1961 as Tanganyika. In April 1964 it united with Zanzibar as the United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar and continued as a single member. Zanzibar was a member from December 1963. The name was changed to the United Republic of Tanzania on the 1st of November 1964.)

180 United States
181 Uruguay
182 Uzbekistan
187 Yugoslavia
188 Zambia
189 Zimbabwe
Tanzania is hoisted with the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States, Uruguay, and Uzbekistan. The official name of the country is the United Republic of Tanzania, formerly known as Tanganyika and Zanzibar.
UNITED NATIONS MEMBER COUNTRIES BY YEAR OF ADMISSION

From 1945, when the 50 (then 51, see below) charter members signed the UN Charter, to 1952, when the UN moved into its New York headquarters, the United Nations functioned in several different locations from San Francisco, California to Hunter College in New York. For a time the Assembly met at the Queens Museum Building in Flushing Meadow Parks Fair Grounds (also in New York), while the Secretary General functioned in the Sperry Rand Corporation Building, in Lake Success, New York.

The 51 original countries were:

Argentina, Australia, Byelorussian SSR, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, France, Greece, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, India, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Liberia, Luxembour, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, USSR, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Syria, Turkey, Ukrainian SSR, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, Venezuela, Yugoslavia. (Poland was forming its government when the UN charter was being signed. Space was reserved for Poland to sign, bringing the final total to 51.)

Over the next seven years, nine more countries joined the UN: Afghanistan, Iceland, Sweden, Thailand (1946), Pakistan and Yemen (1947), Myanmar, under the name of Burma (1948), Israel (1949), and Indonesia (1950).

Therefore when in 1952 the UN moved to its permanent headquarters, 60 flags—from Afghanistan to Yugoslavia—were displayed at the Semicircle (Row D), the only place with flag poles.

Beginning in 1955 flags and poles were added to accommodate new members. The following listing shows the original name of the countries when admitted to the UN. See also notes regarding name changes after admission, which change the alphabetical location of the flag.
1955 (16 new poles)
Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Laos, Libya, Nepal, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Ceylon.

1956 (4 poles)
Japan, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia.

1957 (2 poles)
Ghana, Federation of Malaya.

1958 (no poles)
Guinea, United Arab Republic.
*Egypt and Syria united under the name of United Arab Republic, under “U”, and the vacant pole was taken by Guinea.*

1960 (17 poles)
Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Congo (Republic of), Cote d’Ivoir, Cyprus, Dahomey, Gabon, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Togo, Upper Volta.

1961 (5 poles)
Mauritania, Mongolia, Sierra Leone, Syria, Tanganyika.
*Originally admitted in 1945, Syria changed its name to the United Arab Republic (UAR) together with Egypt in 1958. In 1961 Syria withdrew from the UAR, resuming independent membership.*

1962 (6 poles)
Algeria, Burundi, Jamaica, Rwanda, Uganda, Trinidad & Tobago.

1963 (3 poles)
Kenya, Kuwait, Zanzibar.

1964 (2 poles)
Malawi, Malta, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia.
*Upon the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar under the name of Tanzania, the vacant poles were taken by Tanzania and Zambia. Therefore although four new countries were admitted, only two new poles were added. The Tanzanian flag is hoisted under “U”.*
1965 (2 poles)
Gambia, Maldives, Singapore.

*With Indonesia’s withdrawal, only two poles were needed to accommodate the three new member states.*

1966 (5 poles)
Barbados, Botswana, Guyana, Lesotho, Indonesia.

1967 (1 pole)
Democratic Yemen.

1968 (3 poles)
Equatorial Guinea, Mauritius, Swaziland.

1970 (1 pole)
Fiji.

1971 (5 poles)
Bahrain, Bhutan, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates.

_Egypt, as the sole member state of the U.A.R., resumed membership as “Egypt”. The flag was moved from “U” to “E”._

1973 (3 poles)
Bahamas, German Democratic Republic, German Federal Republic.

1974 (3 poles)
Bangladesh, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau.

1975 (6 poles)
Cape Verde, Comoros, Mozambique, Sao Tome & Principe, Papua New Guinea, Suriname.

1976 (3 poles)
Angola, Samoa, Seychelles.

1977 (2 poles)
Djibouti, Viet Nam.

1978 (2 poles)
Dominica, Solomon Islands.
1979 (1 pole)
  Saint Lucia.

1980 (2 poles)
  St. Vincent & The Grenadines, Zimbabwe.

1981 (3 poles)
  Antigua & Barbuda, Belize, Vanuatu.

1983 (1 pole)
  St. Kitts & Nevis.

1984 (1 pole)
  Brunei Darussalam.

1990 (no poles)
  Liechtenstein, Namibia.
  The unions of the Germanies and Yemenite states freed up two poles for the new members.

1991 (7 poles)
  The most outstanding event of the year was the disappearance of one of the charter members of the UN. The USSR ceased to exist and the Russian Federation took over all the duties and status of the former USSR within the UN. The republics once forming the Soviet Union gradually requested individual membership in the UN, with the exception of two which were already UN members (since 1945): Byelorussia, which changed its name to Belarus, and the Ukraine.

1992 (13 poles)
  Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, San Marino, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Georgia.
At the beginning of row "A", four new stands are ready for new poles and flags.
1993 (5 poles)
Andorra, Eritrea, Macedonia, Monaco, Slovak Republic, Czech Republic.
Six new countries were admitted, but only five poles were added since
the Czech Republic used the pole formally used by Czechoslovakia.

1994 (1 pole)
Palau.

1999 (3 poles)
Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga.

2000 (1 pole)
Tuvalu.

The General Assembly is currently debating the status of East Timor as
a sovereign nation and its request for membership; Switzerland votes
on UN membership in March 2002.

United Nations Terminology Bulletin No. 342, which keeps records of
the official names of the countries, is updated on a regular basis to re-
fect the changes of names of the Member States.

This paper was presented at the 34th NAVA Meeting in Lansing, Michigan
in October 2000 and in an earlier form at the 26th NAVA Meeting in San