Selected U.N. Resources and Research Tools: Overview and Search Tips for Legal Research

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Introductory Note: The resources described here are currently the most important finding tools for United Nations documents. Our aim is to help legal researchers select the tool best suited to their needs. The side-by-side column format was thought advantageous for purposes of an overview: a good way to organize the information and see the tools in relation to one another. The last (and longest) section offers search tips for each resource or finding aid.

	Official Document System of the United Nations (ODS)	**United Nations Bibliographic Information System (UNBISnet)**	**AccessUN: Readex United Nations Index**	**Selected UN websites & pages (with official documents and legally relevant information)**	**UN Info Quest (UN-I-QUE)**
Location	http://documents.un.org	http://unbisnet.un.org/	http://www.law.berkeley.edu/library/online/UNResearch.html Click AccessUN (UCB access only)	(A) http://www.un.org/english/ (A.1) http://www.un.org/aboutun/ (A.2) http://www.un.org/law (A.3) http://www.un.org/documents (B) http://www.ohchr.org/english	http://lib-unique.un.org

Purpose Scope Period	The main purpose of the ODS is to function as a multilingual system that searches for and re-trieves United Nations documentation – not, however, UN sales publications, the UN *Treaty Series* or sub-scription periodicals [with one exception, see (iii) below].
	
	    ODS is comprised of seven databases, acces-sible *via* the Advanced Search screen. We con-sider here only those
		The main purpose of UNBISnet is to offer a comprehensive online index/catalog for UN documents and publica-tions from 1979 onward (with older documents being added regularly). It is produced by the UN Dag Hammarskjöld Library (DHL) in coope-ration with the UN library in Geneva.
		
		    UNBISnet is com-prised of 3 databases: (i) Bibliographic Records (ii) Voting Records, and
			AccessUN is a com-mercially produced on-line index covering UN documents and publica-tions issued from 1946 to the present. Ac-cessUN functions pri-marily as finding aid for UN documents scanned onto READEX fiche. It is also valu-able, however, for UN document collections in paper because it is the only online index that covers older UN docu-ments not yet incorpo-rated by UNBISnet.	(A) The HOMEPAGE OF THE UN WEBSITE
				    Launched in July 1996 to serve as gateway to an immense store of infor-mation & documentation on the world body and its activities, the Homepage
				    _ leads to background information on the UN and its membership
				    _ links to essential documentation & information on upcoming and ongoing, as well as past conferences
				    _ leads (*via* its "Main Bodies" link) to *sessional* information and documenta-tion of the principal organs and their subsidiary bodies, with background information for each body
				    _ brings up the UN Documentation Centre (*via* the "Documents, Maps"
					UN-I-QUE is an online ready-reference file created and maintained by the UN Dag Ham-marskjöld Library (DHL) to respond to questions dealing main-ly with UN materials of a *recurrent nature*. It provides comprehen-sive listings (in reverse chronological order) of
					    _ sessional or annual reports of UN bodies;
					    _ periodic or infre-quent reports of spe-cial representatives of the Secretary-General

Purpose Scope Period (cont.)	ODS (continued)	UNBISnet (continued)	AccessUN (continued)	Selected UN websites (continued)	UN-I-QUE (cont'd)

	with substantial content for legal research: (i) UN Documents, (ii) Resolutions 1946-1993, and (iii) Daily journal – New York.
	
	    Most documents included in the ODS were issued after 1992, but selected General Assembly and Security Council documents go back further (to the mid- or late eighties). Older documents are being added daily.
	    NOTE: Resolutions of the main organs (General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, and Trusteeship Council) go back to 1946.
		(iii) Index to Speeches.
		
		    NOTE: The 'Bibliographic Records' database also contains records for *non-UN* materials (such as books and journal articles) published worldwide on topics that are relevant to the UN. These materials are acquired and indexed by the DHL to support the work of the world body and its permanent missions. The resulting bibliographic descriptions, particularly those of journal articles, can be very useful for researchers outside the Organization. UNBISnet alone offers these citations to books and articles coming from all regions of the world.
				link), described further below in (A.3)
				    _ provides access to five broad subject areas reflecting the UN's main mandates; every subject link contains various sublinks covering the many UN bodies and programs active in these areas. Here can be found sessional information and documentation on the activities of each body, as well as selected UN publications. For more about "International Law", the single most important subject link for our purposes, see (A.2) further below.
				    The time period covered by the various UN bodies and activities differ.
				
				(B) The WEBSITE OF THE OFFICE OF THE UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
				    Launched in December 1996 by the Office of the High Commissioner to become the most complete source of information and documentation on UN action for the protection and promotion of human rights.
				    The time period covered by each body working for human rights varies.
					_ periodic or infrequent reports submitted by special rapporteurs in the areas of international law and human rights.
					
					    These listings are not only valuable for research and reference assistance but also useful for bindery preparation and collection development.
					
					    Comprehensive and up-to-date coverage from 1946 to the present.

What they offer / Special Features	(i) The UN DOCUMENTS database:
	    By far the most important and largest database of the ODS system. It contains the *Official Records* of the United Nations and many thousands of masthead documents (also known as "working
		(i) BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORDS database:
		    The most important and largest database of UNBISnet. It contains catalog records for publications issued from 1979 to the present (typically) – and is expanding as older records continue to be added.
			(i) AccessUN offers BIBLIOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTIONS for *Official Records* and masthead documents which were reproduced on Readex fiches. Also included are citations to UN sales publications although their images do not exist on	(A) The UN HOME PAGE includes links to the following pages:
				
				(A.1)ABOUT THE UNITED NATIONS
				    The UN Charter can be found under the heading "Main Documents". Among the items grouped together here is a link to the most up-to-date version of the *Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs* (which also offers full-text searching of the publication).
					(i) UN-I-QUE's REFERENCE RECORDS
					    More than 6,500 reference records were created for this ready-reference file. Every record is identified by a (searchable) title or heading and a (non-searchable) record number consisting

What they offer / Special Features (cont.)	ODS (continued)	UNBISnet (continued)	AccessUN (continued)	Selected UN websites (continued)	UN-I-QUE (cont'd)

	documents" or "mimeos") most of which were issued after 1992.
	
	(ii) The RESOLUTIONS 1946-1993 database:
	    Only accessible from the Advanced Search screen; retrieves resolutions *in the final Official Records version* only. Covers resolutions adopted by the
	_ General Assembly between 1946 and 1996 (not ending 1993, note)
	_ three Councils (Security, Economic and Social, Trusteeship) from 1946 to 1993, incl.
	    NOTE: Resolutions adopted later (in provisional or final version) can be found only in the UN Documents database ([see above](#)).
	
	(iii) The DAILY JOURNAL – NEW YORK database:
	    This database forms an exception to the rule that the ODS does not contain subscription periodicals: we can access here the *Journal of the United Nations* (beginning with the July
		NOTE: UNBISnet became even more valuable when a direct link was created between the catalog record and actual documents in ODS (for materials issued from 1992 onwards). The number of catalog records for older UN documents linked to the ODS continues to increase as the ODS itself adds more and more older documents.
		
		    Resolutions adopted by principal organs of the UN (GA, SC, TC, ECOSOC) got special treatment: all of their bibliographic descriptions - going back to 1946 - are linked to the ODS.
		
		    Catalog records for UN materials are typically very detailed and frequently give useful additional information (relating to treaties, for example). The same cannot be said for records created for non-UN sources held by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library; expect less here.
			Readex microfiche. Beyond that, AccessUN offers citations to multilateral and bilateral treaties - including instruments of subsequent treaty actions such as ratifications – all published in the UN *Treaty Series* (beginning with vol. 925). These citations to UNTS treaties are a unique feature of AccessUN.
			
			    (ii) NOTEWORTHY TREATY CITATION FEATURES
			To search AccessUN efficiently for citations to treaties published in the UNTS, treaty researchers should become familiar with the following special features:
			_ the "Document Number" field is used for the UN treaty registration number, followed by the parenthetical phrase "Treaty Series", for example, 27531 (Treaty Series)
			_ UNTS volume and page number appear in the (searchable)
				Apart from "Main Documents", this page does not offer much for legal research.
				
				(A.2) INTERNATIONAL LAW
				    This is the most important UN web page for international law research, and all of its sublinks are worth exploring, particularly:
				    (i)The Research Guide. Provides an overview of the various legal bodies and courts established by the United Nations and should be visited first;
				    (ii) The page of the Sixth Committee (the "legal arm" of the General Assembly") offers in its "Summaries of work" detailed descriptions of the Assembly's current work on legally relevant agenda items;
				    (iii) The page of the International Law Commission has as a large section entitled "Researching the work of the Commission". However, the single most valuable single research aid is the *Analytical Guide to the Work of the International Law Commission*.
				
				(A.3) UN DOCUMENTATION CENTRE
				    The Centre provides
				    (i) links to the ODS, UNBISnet and UN-I-QUE
				    (ii) access to the UN Documentation Research Guide - an expert's guide to the UN documentation system (with search tips included), and special chapters on the environment, human rights, int'l law, peacekeeping;
				    (iii) Resolutions of the General
					of the letter "R" followed by a 5-digit number: e.g. UN-I-QUE's reference record for the *Report of the Human Rights Council* was given the title, "Human Rights Council. Report" and the record number "R06502". Researchers (and catalogers) interested in creating direct links to reference records of UN-I-QUE should note that the URL of each record begins with: http://lib-unique.un.org/lib/unique.nsf/Link/ and ends with the individual record number as last component. Example: the URL for the record that lists reports of the Human Rights Council, is http://lib-unique.un.org/lib/unique.nsf/Link/R06502
					
					UN-I-QUE presents its search results by listing the found record titles in alphabetical order, with each title/heading serving as link to the individual reference record.
					    Many records include

What they offer / Special Features (cont.)	ODS (continued)	UNBISnet (continued)	AccessUN (continued)	Selected websites (continued)	UN-I-QUE (cont.)
	1996 issue) although it is received by paid sub-scription only. The *Journal* contains _ information about upcoming meetings _ a *Summary of Official Meetings* convened a day or so earlier _ UN document symbols of major documents that served (or will serve) as basis for the discussions _ beginning with July 2004, links to the text of documents cited or listed: retrieve the full text by clicking on the document symbol.	(ii) VOTING RECORDS database: Offered for the General Assembly and the Security Council: for the Assembly voting records are available from 1983 onward, for the Security Council from 1946. *Each record has a link to the full text of the resolution.* (iii) INDEX TO SPEECHES database: Speeches of the _ General Assembly, Security Council and Economic & Social Council: beginning with 1983 _ Trusteeship Council: beginning with 1982. The Index also provides links to the full text of speeches of the _ General Assembly: starting in 1990 _ Security Council: beginning in 1983 _ Trusteeship Council and Economic & Social Council: beginning in 1993	"Series Information" field - thus *a UNTS citation can be used for finding the respective treaty citation in AccessUN*, see the search example below _ Parties to bilateral agreements are inclu-ded in the title field (preceding the actual title) and also treated as subjects; they can be searched *via* title and subject fields _ Multilateral as well bilateral agreements have the word "Text" inserted at the end of the title _ Title fields usually include information about place & date of conclusion/adoption. (iii) AccessUN offers selected FULL-TEXT DOCUMENTS, appended to the res-spective bibliographic citations incl. SC reso-lutions (from 1974 on) and GA and ECOSOC resolutions from 1983.	Assembly and the Security Council (going back to 1946), and of the Econ. & Social Council (back to 1992); (iv) Sessional listings of General Assembly meetings and documents be-ginning with the 57th session (2002/2003) - with links to the full texts; (v) Yearly listings (from 1994 on-ward) of Security Council meetings & documents with links to the full texts (docs. are grouped in categories); (vi) access to UN Pulse, keeping re-searchers abreast of recently issued major UN publications and documents and offering links to their full text. (B) The HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS website offers: (i) an INTERNATIONAL LAW link providing a comprehensive list of UN human rights treaties and declara-tions; for any instrument selected, the full text and status information is brought up; (ii) an ISSUES link that lists hu-man rights topics considered by the UN, in alphabetic order; click a topic and obtain a selection of relevant, important UN documents; (iii) a HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES link with info & documents on *all* UN bodies working for human rights and a sublink "Search the Treaty Body Database" (see *Search Pointers* below)	useful information, e.g. the record for the *Report of the Human Rights Council* pro-vides a reference to the resolution which established the Coun-cil, gives the series symbol for its docu-ments and includes the URL for its website. (ii) UN-I-QUE's INDI-VIDUAL ENTRIES A reference record may have just one en-try or many, numbering at times more than 60. These entries do *not* lead to full-text docu-ments nor detailed bibliographic descrip-tions but offer impor-tant information about the listed items, e.g.: _ document symbol and/or sales number _ publication date _ session specifica-tion (if applicable) _ publication in one of the United Nations *Official Records* series (if applicable).
Timeli-ness	Documents are normally added to the database as soon as they are ready for publication.	Varies. Documents of the main organs are in-dexed with minor delay only (approx. 2-4 weeks)	Varies.	Varies.	Items are usually lis-ted within a few days after receipt by the Dag Hammarskjöld Lib.

User Guides/ Search Instructions	ODS (continued)	UNBISnet (continued)	AccessUN (continued)	Selected websites (continued)	UN-I-QUE (cont.)
User Guides/ Search Instruct ions	**ODS (continued)** An <u>introduction to the ODS</u> is available as a PowerPoint presenta-tion of the DHL at: <u>http://www.un.org/Dept s/dhl/resguide/train.ht m</u> The <u>search instruc-tions</u> contained in the ODS "Help" links (acces-sible from both search screens) are not well or-ganized but do provide detailed information and some useful examples. NOTE: Each search field label links to that part of the Search In-structions which is rele-vant for the field.	**UNBISnet (continued)** An <u>introduction to UNBISnet</u> is available as a PowerPoint presen-tationis of the DHL at <u>http://www.un.org/Dept s/dhl/resguide/train.ht m</u>	**AccessUN (continued)** AccessUN's "<u>Help</u>" link offers well written and clearly organized search instructions with numerous search examples included. Search fields and search options are described in detail with a surprising ex-ception: no details or examples are given for AccessUN's citations to treaties that were published in the UN *Treaty Series*.	**Selected websites (continued)** A PowerPoint presentation entitled <u>UN Web Search</u> was designed by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library to present an overview of the UN website and de-monstrate various search methods. It is available at: <u>http://www.un.org/Depts/dhl/resguid e/train.htm</u> The "Search" link of the UN Home-page allows for BASIC and AD-VANCED searching. Both search screens offer a "<u>Search Tips</u>" link, containing very detailed instructions with numerous examples.	**UN-I-QUE (cont.)** From UN-I-QUE's <u>Homepage</u> link to: "Search Tips". Here we find tips & examples on how to search for UN documents, publica-tions and (rarely) press releases, dealing with selected categories of UN materials or UN related information. UN-I-QUE uses 23 terms to identify 23 types of frequently re-quested materials: e.g. if you need human rights rapporteurs' re-ports (hr) on freedom of religion search for <religion hr>.
Search Tips	(i) "<u>Advanced Search</u>" <u>versus "Simple Search"</u> <u>and "Global Search"</u> Using the "Advanced Search" mode is no more difficult than "Simple Search". It has the ad-vantage of leading us to additional databases and allows a greater choice of search options. "Global Search" was implemented only a few years ago. Using a diffe-rent search engine, its *full-text searches* re-trieve even older docu-ments that are stored in	All three UNBISnet databases offer a "New Keyword Search" as well as a "New Browse List Search" ("new" here dis-tinguishes them from the earlier/original UNBISnet interface). (i) A "<u>New Browse</u> <u>List Search</u>" can be con-venient and efficient if the exact beginning of the document symbol, sales number, title, etc. is known. (ii) For most searches	(i) <u>Treaty citations in</u> <u>AccessUN are valuable</u> for researchers who want to view a treaty in the United Nations Treaty Series data-base of UNTC Online but *are unable to lo-cate it there because they know only the UNTS citation for the treaty (e.g. 1577 UNTS 3)*. Such a refe-rence cannot be used for searching the UN Treaty Series data-base – but it can be used for locating the	(A) <u>The UN HOME PAGE</u> (i) <u>About the "Search" link</u> In 2003, a *GOOGLE* search engine was implemented on the UN website and (*via* the "Search" link) allows re-searchers to conduct powerful full-text searches of all materials posted on the UN website *and any site linked to it*. This makes it possible to search the text of materials posted on the UN website and on the <u>website of the</u> <u>UN High Commissioner on Human</u> <u>Rights</u>, for example, simultaneously. (ii) <u>What the "Search" link can find</u> The UN website has links to the ODS, and most of its documents are con-tained in the ODS database. However,	(i) <u>UN-I-QUE's link to</u> <u>"Search Tips" should</u> <u>be visited by every</u> <u>user</u> because there is more to UN-I-QUE than is apparent from the brief description given on the search screen. The "Search Tips" reflect the broad scope of information contained in this refe-rence file: they men-tion, for example, con-ferences and summits as well as plans or pro-grams of action adop-ted by UN bodies and

Search Tips (cont.)	ODS (continued)	UNBISnet (continued)	AccessUN (continued)	Selected websites (continued)	UN-I-QUE (cont.)
	image format only – something the "Advanced Search" engine is not able to do. For most other searches however, the latter is preferable. (ii) A _symbol entered into the symbol field can be truncated to just *one* letter_ if the first symbol element consists of a single letter: to search *all* General Assembly documents, for example, just enter "A/". (iii) _Full-text Searching_ The "UN Documents" and the "Daily journal – New York" databases allow full-text searching for words and phrases, and also the use of boolean operators such as AND, OR, AND NOT, SENTENCE, and PARAGRAPH. A question mark replaces any letter in a word, and an asterisk any string of characters at the beginning or end of a word. Full-text searches are very effective when	the powerful "New Keyword Search" is preferable. It allows several search criteria to be combined. The "General Keyword" search criterium (for the "Bibliographic Records" database) is especially valuable when looking for information possibly contained in a content note. Note that UNBISnet's catalogers usually include in a content note information about any legal text annexed to the document in hand. (iii) In order to _exclude unwanted materials_, limit your search results to a particular _ database (for separating UN from non-UN materials) _ type of material (e.g. UN resolutions) _ type of record (e.g. journal articles) _ language _ year or years of publication. (iv) The ability to restrict the search using a "Type of Material Code" is particularly valuable	respective treaty citation in AccessUN: in this index, every treaty citation includes the UNTS volume and page number in the (searchable) "Series Information" field. EXAMPLE: When you only have a UNTS citation such as 1577 UNTS 3 and need to view the agreement in the 'UN Treaty Series' database, go through the following steps: _ On the AccessUN search screen, enter <volume 1577 and p. 3> [p. + space + number] and search "in All Fields": it will bring up the wanted treaty citation, covering the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child _ Note the treaty's identification as "Multilateral" and the treaty registration number 27531 (in the "Document Number" field) _ Access the UN Treaty Series database and select the "Advanced Search": _ Select as "Type	there are materials on the UN website (and sites linked to it) that are *not available in the ODS* and may not even be described by UNBISnet. For this reason, whenever we have citations for UN materials but ODS will not retrieve them, it is a good idea to try the "Search" link on the UN website. This may reward us with _ unedited advance versions of selected UN documents (to be issued as official UN documents in due time) _ selected reports on UN seminars and working papers issued mainly for the participants and "in-house" use _ selected publications (even sales publications), particularly those dealing with human rights or trade and development issues _ UN publications which are (presently) only available in electronic version, e.g. the *Legislative History of the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN Doc. HR/PUB/07/1). (iii) _Searching by title_ The "Search" link of the UN Home has a "Basic" and "Advanced Search" option. The latter has several advantages, among them the freedom to search by phrase or keyword, ways to restrict the search, and the ability to rank/sort results by relevance or date. Conduct a search for a UN publication whose title is known, by entering the title as a PHRASE search and sort results by relevance. The desired publication (or webpage that posted	explain which type of documents are listed for these categories and how to search for them. (ii) In most cases, _one should prefer ALL WORD searches to PHRASE searches_ because the record titles (or rather "headings") chosen by UN-I-QUE may differ from the bibliographic title we know: since UN titles and names change frequently, UN-I-QUE may use simplified, slightly modified, or abbreviated titles for certain recurring publications or documents. On the other hand, *searchable information may be added* (in brackets) to the name of a body when the given name does not seem sufficiently descriptive for UN-I-QUE's reference purposes. Example: a phrase search for *Report of the International Law Commission* will find no hits although it is presently the exact title

Search Tips (cont.)	ODS (continued)	UNBISnet (continued)	AccessUN (continued)	Selected websites (continued)	UN-I-QUE (cont.)
	searching for documents dealing with specific topics or concepts that are not used as subject terms by the UN bibliographic system. For example: *significant harm SENTENCE aquifer state* PARAGRAPH (reparation OR compensation)* – and selecting "*Use boolean operators*" as search type. 　　NOTE: When the result of an ODS full-text search seems unsatisfactory, try to complement it with searches using the "Search" link of the UN Homepage and "Global Search". (iii) Using UNBISnet as a portal to the ODS 　　For all searches other than full-text, UNBISnet is the best tool for finding UN documents: once the symbol has been found by UNBISnet, enter it on the ODS search screen to retrieve the item. The last step may be unnecessary since many UNBISnet citations offer direct links to ODS.	for legal research. We recommend using the (B01) code first (resolutions/decisions – UN), followed by the (B16) code (reports/studies). The items retrieved in this manner will often be the most substantive documents issued by the UN on a particular topic - and may be all that the legal researcher needs. 　　(v) For human rights research the following "type of material codes" are particularly useful: (B14) for reports of States parties to various agreements, and (B21) for NGO written statements. 　　(vi) Subject terms assigned by UNBISnet may differ from those of the Library of Congress, e.g "transnational corporations" is used for "international business enterprises". Note that UNBISnet created 2 subject terms for materials containing treaties and declarations: 　_ Treaties (Text) 　_ Declarations (Text).	of Agreement": <Multilateral> and 　_ Enter <27531> in the "UN Treaty Registration Number" field and 　_ Click <Search> to retrieve the wanted ("original") agreement. (ii) Treaty citations in AccessUN are valuable for researchers who *do not* have access to the UNTC Online (or do not desire to use it) but need to know the 　_ location of a treaty in the UNTS and/or 　_ the exact title of a treaty and/or 　_ other treaty data such as its registration number, date of conclusion, etc. SEARCH EXAMPLE: If you need a citation for an original treaty 　_ Enter <treaty series> in the "Document Number" field 　_ Enter <text> in a "Title" field 　_ Add treaty specific data, e.g. enter in a Title field: <child and convention not ratification not accession>.	it) will usually be among the first items listed. 　　(iv) Searching by document symbol To find the document or publication belonging to a known document symbol (say HR/PUB/07/1), enter the symbol as a PHRASE search and sort results by relevance. This works very nicely for UN documentation posted on the UN website. The item sought will usually be listed first and reveals at a glance that it does contain the full text: the trailing elements of the URL will be the document symbol and language identification (thus the last elements of the URL for A/CN.4/525 will read: …A/CN.4/525&Lang=E). (B) The HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS website offers in its "Human Rights Bodies" page a sublink: "Search the Treaty Body Database" (new URL=http://tb.ohchr.org). A user guide is not available and the Keyword search does not function (yet). The new interface enables us to combine various search criteria, including listings from three drop-down menus, one of which offers more than thirty different document types to choose from. (They are briefly described on pages 20-23 of *Fact Sheet* No. 30: http://www.ohchr.org/english/about/publications/docs/fs30.pdf). *As at 12 August 2007, the old treaty body database is still accessible at http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf*	of the ILC's sessional report. Enter instead: international law commission report – and select "Match ALL worlds". The first of four retrieved records contains the wanted listing of ILC reports. (iii) Enter numerous significant keywords if you know exactly what you want in order to keep the retrieved listing as short as possible. (iv) Enter only the main keywords if you are at the beginning of your research: perusing the retrieved list of reference record titles will provide you with a useful overview of past & present UN activities/ publications related to your topic. For example, if you plan to do research in *the social responsibility of transnational corporations*, search only for <transnational corporations> to find an informative mix of reference records listed.