

UNIVERSAL POSTAL UNION

The Universal Postal Union (UPU) is a UN specialized agency dealing with international postal relations. The UPU is located in Bern, Switzerland, and its Director General is Thomas E. Leavey, of the United States.

The Treaty of Bern created the UPU in 1874 to ensure the organization and improvement of postal services throughout the world. The UPU encourages international cooperation in the postal field, and provides technical assistance in all postal sectors as requested by its member countries. It also keeps pace with the development of new technologies and how these could be adapted to the postal industry.

According to the UPU Constitution, the member countries comprise a single postal territory for the reciprocal exchange of letter-post items. Freedom of transit is guaranteed throughout the entire territory of the Union. The postal services of UPU member countries form the largest physical distribution network in the world. More than 5 million postal employees working in close to 700,000 post offices handle an annual total of 430 billion domestic items and 7.4 billion international items.

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The UPU holds a Universal Postal Congress every five years to review conditions governing international postal cooperation as well as ways to improve the postal service and bring it up-to-date. The next Congress will be held in Bucharest, Romania, from September 15 to October 5, 2004.

The World Postal Strategy for 2000-2004, approved at the 1999 Beijing Congress, challenges posts to seize the opportunities offered by new technologies, new customer demands and new institutional options. The strategic plan contains six major objectives, which include improving universal postal service; improving the reliability, the security and the efficiency of postal services; encouraging postal reform and development for the benefit of customers; improving market knowledge and developing new products that meet the needs and expectations of customers; providing affordable postal services; and broadening cooperation and interaction among the stakeholders of the postal industry.

The principle of technical cooperation is at the heart of the UPU's mission. Most of the funds destined to finance technical cooperation activities come from member country contributions to the UPU budget or to the Special Fund. Each Congress defines the direction and framework of the technical assistance programme for the coming five years, taking account of the objectives of the World Postal Strategy set by the supreme body. The 1999 Beijing Congress decided that the direction and action

programme for UPU technical cooperation would be based on the six objectives of the Beijing Postal Strategy.

The UPU maintains close ties with United Nations programs such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in the field of postal development, the United Nations Drug Control Program (UNDCP) to help impede the shipment of drugs in the mail, and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) to increase awareness for the environment among posts. The organization also cooperates with specialized agencies such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Labor Organization (ILO), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The UPU also collaborates with the World Bank Group to promote postal development and reform, as well as a number of other international organizations.

The UPU holds an annual exposition and conference, POST-EXPO, to showcase new postal technologies and discuss challenges faced by postal services around the world.

MEMBERSHIP

The UPU has 189 member countries.

BUDGET

Since 1992, the UPU has followed the practice of zero growth, maintaining its annual budget at or below the level of inflation. The organization has the smallest annual budget in the UN system, amounting to approximately 35 million Swiss francs .

UPU

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