With information comes understanding and support. UNOG aims to promote to the greatest possible extent an informed understanding of the work and purposes of the United Nations and thereby to help the United Nations achieve its substantive goals. It communicates, in particular, on the main issues being dealt with in Geneva: disarmament, human rights, humanitarian action, global health and sustainable development.

Various means are used to spread the message, and UNOG activities are communicated in an impartial and effective manner to Member States, international organizations, civil society, the private sector, the academic world and the wider public.

COVERING THE NEWS

From the depths of the Palais des Nations, UNTV Geneva covers major United Nations events and activities to be broadcast around the world, and can also provide studio and transmission facilities in a range of formats for live interviews on United Nations issues. Meanwhile UN Radio Geneva, tuning into the beats and rhythms of life in Europe’s humanitarian capital, prepares and transmits audio material on major United Nations events and activities for use by UN Radio New York and to be broadcast by radio stations around the world. In 2011, a range of United Nations activities were featured, from the crisis in the Horn of Africa to climate change and economic and social development. Delegates, United Nations officials and accredited journalists gave interviews and reported live from the UN radio and TV studios. Many major United Nations meetings were also recorded, including all press conferences and the biweekly press briefings at the Palais des Nations. Generally, human rights
and humanitarian affairs continued to be the main subjects of radio, television and photo coverage in Geneva during 2011, while other content produced during the year included radio reports on relief for Djibouti’s drought victims and television features on the plight of persons with disabilities in Bulgaria and on organic farming in the United Republic of Tanzania. Debates and press conferences on the changing situation in the Arab world were transmitted live through Eurovision, while the public could watch live webcasts of action in the Human Rights Council.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

A constructive relationship between United Nations bodies and agencies and the print and broadcast media is essential for getting the Organization’s message to the public. In this context, the United Nations Information Service (UNIS) provided accreditation to the 230-strong permanent Geneva press corps, and gave ad-hoc support to the 550 journalists who covered events on a temporary basis over the past 12 months.

Another important channel is the biweekly press briefing for accredited reporters. These sessions are chaired by the UNIS Director and attended by spokespersons from United Nations specialized agencies and programmes. The briefing is a chance for journalists to acquire background and insight into issues developing globally in which Geneva-based agencies have a stake or interest, as well as to address their questions and comments directly to spokespersons.

Timely, accurate reporting and coverage is another key tenet of engaging stakeholders in the work of the United Nations. Press releases, meeting summaries and other materials are produced all year round on the spectrum of work of United Nations bodies. Photographers often attend events and meetings, and a selection of the images taken is freely available, either upon request, or through the Flickr website.
PROMOTING AWARENESS THROUGH INTERNATIONAL DAYS

This year, UNOG commemorated several international days in collaboration with other offices, Member States and civil society organizations to raise awareness of specific issues and promote the work of the United Nations. In 2011, UNOG marked, amongst others, the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, the International Day of la Francophonie, the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda, World Press Freedom Day, the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, Nelson Mandela International Day, the International Day of Peace, Human Rights Day and the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (see Highlights section above for more information on specific outreach through international days). Efforts have intensified to include younger audiences, whether school children or university students, in all the commemorations. Highlights from the commemoration of these days included:

The participation of two artists, Juanes (Colombia) and Miguel Bosé (Spain), both well known for their commitment to the cause of peace, in a meeting held for the International Day of Peace with more than 550 participants on 21 September. The event was organized by UNOG with the Permanent Missions of Costa Rica and Spain, and in association with the non-governmental organization (NGO) Spanish Society for International Human Rights Law. Closing the meeting, the two artists launched a video, created with the involvement of a large number of well-known fellow artists. This was followed by an Internet campaign to encourage people to support human rights and peace.

The participation of diplomatic representatives and observers at an event to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November. The Director-General delivered a message from the Secretary-General, who called for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, and pledged to continue his efforts with all means available. The event served as a reminder of the need to turn solidarity into positive action.

The active role played by the Director-General in events to mark key milestones in United Nations history, including the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development, the 50th anniversary of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the 60th anniversary of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

REACHING OUT TO A WIDE AUDIENCE THROUGH INFORMATION PROGRAMMES

As part of ongoing efforts to reach out to the general public, UNOG organized information programmes which bring small groups of United Nations officials and civil society representatives together to encourage a better understanding of the many activities of the United Nations, its specialized agencies based in Geneva and their role in global issues. Themes covered in 2011 included human rights, peacekeeping operations, humanitarian affairs, development, environment, disarmament, trade and development, and the activities of the many United Nations agencies, funds and programmes.
Groups of visitors were composed of students, diplomats, civil servants, representatives of NGOs and other associations from all parts of the world and a range of backgrounds.

UNOG also hosted the second edition of the United Nations programme of thematic seminars organized to deepen young people’s knowledge of the activities of the United Nations. The first seminar entitled “Migration: which challenges and which opportunities?” and the second, “Humanitarian action in a changing world” consisted of a series of lectures given by experts, followed by an open debate. These mainly targeted university students and representatives from academia and research institutes in France and Switzerland. Both seminars were attended by over 60 participants.

GRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMME

For several decades now UNOG has organized a Graduate Study Programme, which brings a large number of postgraduate students to Geneva from all continents. The Programme takes place during the academic vacation in July and regularly attracts students from across the world, selected on the basis of academic experience, motivation and equitable geographical distribution, as well as gender balance. The Programme consists of lectures given by senior members of United Nations staff and agencies and gives participants the opportunity to consider global issues under the guidance of United Nations experts. In 2011 the forty-ninth Programme looked at the challenges faced in meeting the targets of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 and reviewed relevant issues from a human rights, economic, social and environmental perspective.
Students from Geneva’s international schools gave peace a chance with their entries to the International Peace Day Essay Contest 2011, organized in partnership with the Permanent Mission of Sweden. Based on the themes of peacemakers in their midst or on the ideas of the second Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld, 90 young people age 11 to 16 submitted pieces of creative writing to be judged by an independent panel. The entries were of a high standard, and many touched the hearts of the jury. This year’s competition jointly marked not only the 30th year of the International Day of Peace, but also the 50th anniversary of the untimely death of Mr. Hammarskjöld.

TO THE DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY IN GENEVA

On 29 September 2011, the first-ever “Introductory Session for New Delegates” seminar was held at UNOG as part of its continuing outreach efforts to Member States. The session sought to give new delegates from permanent missions in Geneva information on how exactly UNOG services fit into the larger United Nations picture, and how the delegates could benefit from them. The session was well received by the participants, who represented 22 countries, as well as the European Union and the League of Arab States. UNOG will hold another such session in 2012 for the diplomatic community as part of its efforts to highlight the role of the United Nations in Geneva.