Ambiguous States: Comments and Lists

James A. Paul
August 1997, revised February 2000

Some cases of complex status:

Switzerland is not a member of the UN, but it has observer status and pays dues.

The Vatican (known as the "Holy See") is not a member of the UN, but it has observer status and pays dues.

Taiwan is not a member of the UN, nor does it have observer status. It would like to become a UN member, but China would cast a veto.

Palestine is not a member of the UN, nor is it completely self-governing. It has observer status, not as a state but as an "organization."

The Security Council has recommended that Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga be admitted as members of the UN. All 3 countries are now UN members.

The following independent nation states, all of them small islands, are not members of the United Nations: Cook Islands, Niue and Tuvalu. Tuvalu applied for membership in January 2000.

"Non-Self-Governing Territories" (according to the UN, there were 17 in 1996)

A 1996 report by the Secretary General says that the great majority of these
NSGTs were small island territories which suffered from various handicaps, including limited size, remoteness, vulnerability to natural disasters, and lack of natural resources, as well as migration of skilled personnel.

Matters pending at the UN (dispute over sovereignty) include East Timor (controlled by Indonesia but considered a Portuguese NSGT by the General Assembly), Falkland Islands (Malvinas), Gibraltar, New Caledonia [France], and Western Sahara (a Spanish colony seized by Morocco). Also American Somoa and Puerto Rico.

Other Small Territories which are not in dispute but which are more-or-less self-governing and not UN members include: Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Guam, Montserrat, Pitcairn, St. Helena, Tokelau, Turks and Caicos Islands, and the United States Virgin Islands. Bermuda has one of the world's oldest parliaments.

Kashmir is listed by the UN as an occupied territory whose final fate is yet to be determined.

**Olympics vs. the UN**

There were 197 "countries" participating in the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta. All were invited by the International Olympic Committee and none invited failed to attend. At the same time, there were 185 "member states" of the United Nations. Consider the difference in the two lists (official terminology of each organization used):

*Olympians but not UN members: (16)*
Netherlands Antilles
Aruba
American Samoa
Bermuda
Cook Islands
Guam
Hong Kong
Virgin Islands
British Virgin Islands
Nauru
Palestine
Puerto Rico
Switzerland
Chinese Taipei
UN Members but not Olympians: (4)
Eritrea
Marshall Islands
Micronesia
Palau
This list reflects the position as of August 1999, but by January 2000, the International Olympic Committee had recognized 200 Olympic National Committees.