

# ONLINE ACCESS TO UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM INFORMATION

By Lilia Vázquez

**Abstract:** This overview of the current status of availability of electronic sources of United Nations information presents the role of the United Nations Advisory Committee on the Coordination of Information Systems (ACCIS) in promoting the accessibility of United Nations information systems and highlights several of the databases produced by the United Nations and those of the Specialized Agencies which are presently available or will soon be available, online or on CD-ROM. It also discusses the role of the United Nations Information Centres (UNICs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in providing UN information.

The views expressed and the information presented in this paper are the result of my own research and do not necessarily represent the official views or position of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, the Advisory Committee on the Coordination of Information Systems (ACCIS), or any other component of the United Nations system.<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a paper I presented at the Summer Institute of the American Association of Law Librarians, held at Harvard Law School, Cambridge, Massachusetts, July 6-9, 1993, entitled Electronic Sources of United Nations Information. In it I will highlight online databases and only mention briefly those on CD-ROM. I will use the term "external user" to mean actual and/or potential users of United Nations databases other than those who are affiliated with the UN system, or with permanent missions or foreign ministries of Member States.

## Accis

ACCIS is an interagency body of the United Nations which promoted cooperation among all organizations and specialized agencies of the UN system, in order to enhance effective usage of their information systems and services within the UN

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system and by Member States. Its two main aims are: 1) to facilitate access by Member States to United Nations information and 2) to promote the improvement of the information infrastructure of the United Nations system. ACCIS has itself produced databases, described below, and is making them available on tape, diskette, online and soon on CD-ROM. Similarly, other UN offices and specialized agencies are making their data available to internal and external users.

### **United Nations information on Internet**

While the Electronic Services Division (ESD), of the United Nations Secretariat, has taken steps to join Internet, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been a node on Internet for quite some time and has recently set up a gopher to provide access to the ACCIS-produced UN-EARTH database, and other UN information such as documents from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), as well as a directory of UNDP addresses. It is available through the University of Minnesota gopher service and the University of Kansas gopher service and probably others as well. You can access these gophers by telnetting to:

University of Minnesota	consultant.micro.umn.edu	login: gopher
University of Kansas:	ukanaix.cc.ukans.edu	login: kufacts

To access the UNDP gopher service directly on [nywork1.undp.org](http://nywork1.undp.org), port 70, you need a gopher client. You can obtain a gopher client for your platform by anonymous FTP from [boombox.micro.umn.edu](http://boombox.micro.umn.edu). With it you do not need an ID and password to access the information. If you have a gopher client you can access the United Nations via the gopher by contacting '[nygate.undp.org](http://nygate.undp.org)'. There you can access a file called 'The UN, what it is and what it does'.

The ACCIS UN-EARTH database which was mentioned above as being available on the UNDP gopher, is also available in two diskettes that require 12 Mb of space on the hard disk and 500K of memory when UN-EARTH is in use. Once the program has been installed the user can make use of the accompanying manual. This PC-based information system contains factual information which describes the activities of the UN organizations. Information can be found on the objectives, membership, administrative offices, information services and databases of the organizations and agencies, the location of their field offices, development activities, as well as tabulated data on human resources, development projects and expenditures. Since this type of information gets outdated very quickly, a 1993 updated version is planned. The diskette version of UN-Earth is available from the UN Sales Offices in New York and Geneva. United Nations Publications, Sales Section, Room DC2-853, Dept. 701, New York, N.Y. 10017, tel. (212) 963-8302,

fax: (212) 963-4879 or United Nations Publications, Distribution and Sales Section, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10 Switzerland, tel + 41 22 734 6011 Ext. Bookshop, fax: + 41 22 733 98 79. The UN Sales No. is GV.E. 9304. The price is US\$ 60.

Two of the bibliographic files: the United Nations Documents file (DOCFILE) and the non-UN materials file (CATFILE), which are included in the United Nations Bibliographic Information System (UNBIS), are available on the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN), tel. + 415-691-2207, Internet: [bl.ric@rlg.stanford.edu](mailto:bl.ric@rlg.stanford.edu).

edu. With an RLIN account one can access it via Internet as well.

The United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) provides the full text of UN press releases to Global Education Motivators, a non-governmental organization (NGO) responsible for GEMNET. They were providing the Information Service on the United Nations (UNISER) via DIALCOM on the Telecommunications Cooperative Network (TCN) and will soon be providing this and more UN information via Internet. At present this service can be accessed via an 800 number and negotiations are under way with a university to continue to provide this service via Internet. In the meantime questions can be addressed to GEMNET, Chestnut Hill College, Germantown and Northwestern Avenues, Chestnut Hill, PA 19118-2695, Attn: Mr. Wayne Jacoby, President, tel.: (215) 248-1150, fax: (251) 248-7056, Internet address: [SSY00076@LLPPTN.LINKNET.COM](mailto:ssy00076@LLPPTN.LINKNET.COM).

Another example of close cooperation between NGOs and the UN is NGONET. The secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) has an information system running on TCN and other networks, including Greenet in the United Kingdom. It contains the documents relating to the conference, speeches, press releases, and other material. In addition, the framework has been established for an information system of UNEP to be managed by INFOTERRA. Both systems are accessible on several networks around the world.<sup>2</sup> NGONET UNCED Resource Library provides a complete set of the Alternative Treaties signed by the NGOs present at Rio de Janeiro, Agenda 21 in 4 languages, the NGONET document store which lists background material about the process and NGO-originated critiques. You can access the NGONET document store to request a catalog with the following addresses: [ngonet-lib@chasque.apc.org](mailto:ngonet-lib@chasque.apc.org) or NGONET P.O. Box 1539, Correo Central, Montevideo, Uruguay, tel.: + 598 (2) 496192, fax + 598 (2) 419222.<sup>3</sup>

The UN Information Centres (UNICs) in Sydney and Rome, have been providing UN Press Releases and other UN data via the Pegasus and Agora networks and

these are equally accessible on other networks on Internet, such as EcoNet in the U.S.

The United Nations Criminal Justice Information Network (UNCJIN), also available via DIALCOM on TCN. It is run by the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Branch, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs at Vienna. It contains a wide variety of information such as selections from the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, legislative updates, directories of criminal justice research organizations around the world, directories of criminal justice journals, reports from research institutes, and an extensive collection of Bureau of Justice Statistics reports, many available well before they are actually published in hard copy. There are seven agencies or UN-related networks available on the system. All of these networks have their own user base and messages and documents may be freely passed between them. They are:

- UN International Emergency Network-UNDRO (UNIENET),
- UNICEF Electronic Information Network (UNET),
- UNDP Electronic Mail Service (UNDP),
- UN Criminal Justice Information Network (UNCJIN),
- HIV/AIDS Global Network (HIVNET),
- Pan American Health Network (PAHONET), and
- UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED).

Most of the data bases on UNCJIN are also available if you access UNCJIN via Internet. If you have access to Internet, you can join UNCJIN up until September 1993, by simply sending an e-mail message to [LISTSERV@ALBANYVM1](mailto:LISTSERV@ALBANYVM1) as follows: Subscribe UNCJIN-L YourFirstName YourLastName. After September 1993 you will have to contact the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Branch, United Nations Office at Vienna, directly at P.O.Box 500, A-1400 Vienna, Austria, fax: + 43 1 21 92 599 or + 43 1 23 21 56.

FAO has recently set up a listserv for UN system libraries as part of the work of the ACCIS Technical Panel on Inter-Library Cooperation, Standards and Management (TP/LIB). UNDP also plans to run a listserv on the UN in the near future.

Online access to specialized agency information via the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Commission of the European Communities (CEC) via ECHO<sup>4</sup>.

The IDRC is a corporation which was created by the Parliament of Canada in 1970 to stimulate and support scientific and technical research by developing countries for their own benefit. The Library offers access to eight databases to non-profit organizations: three are in-house, IDRC databases: ACRONYM, BIBLIOL and IDRIS; six are from other international organizations, U.S. AID, FAO, ILO, Unesco, UNIDO, and WHO.

This service is provided free to more than 120 organizations around the world. Users must however obtain permission for access in writing from any one or all of the agencies listed above and pay telecommunications costs.

Prospective institutions interested in obtaining access to the Development Data Bases Service should send their requests to the IDRC Library and meet the following criteria: 1) have an interest in one or more of the data bases; 2) have some on-line experience; 3) have a controlled user group; and 4) be willing to provide the IDRC Library with feedback.

Requests should be addressed to: Mr. Alain Lamirande, Coordinator, Regional Information Services, IDRC Library, P.O.Box 8500, Ottawa, Ontario, K1G 3H9, Canada, tel.: (613) 236-6163 ext. 2417, fax: (613) 238-7230, BITNET: IDRC@UOTTAWA.BITNET.

IDRC produced a CD-ROM database which contains the full text of the documents of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). This is the only complete source for United Nations materials pertaining to the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit. Technical and other questions should be addressed to IDRC Books, P.O. Box 8500, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada E K1G 3H9, tel (613) 236-6163 ext. 2087, fax: (6613) 563-0815. The UNCED documents are also available on Internet via the UNDP gopher, as explained above.

In addition to IDRC, ECHO (the host of the CEC) provides free online access to UNESBIB, the bibliographic database produced by Unesco. Documents on the database include the main documents, working series, conference papers, mission reports, speeches of the Director-General, Executive Board and General Conference documents. Publications include monographs and articles of Unesco since 1946. To access UNESBIB on ECHO contact ECHO, BP 2373, L-1023 Luxembourg GD, fax + 352 488040.

### **Commercial Hosts**

Several of the specialized agency databases have been available on commercial hosts for many years now, such as FAO's AGRIS, IAEA's INIS, and ILO's

LABORDOC. The Unesco Courier and the UN Chronicle are no longer available on the Mead Data Central Lexis/Nexis files. However, the International Court of Justice information is still provided on Westlaw.

### **United Nations information on CD-ROM**

In addition to the forthcoming ACCIS Inter-agency CD-ROM of bibliographic records of the United Nations system, the Readex UN Index on CD-ROM, the upcoming UNBIS Plus on CD-ROM, the CD-ROMs of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the INRES-SOUTH CD-ROM produced by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Popline CD-ROM, funded by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the UNCED CD-ROM, produced by IDRC, and the prototype CD-ROM of the United Nations Statistical Yearbook, the November, 1992 issue of the ACCIS Newsletter lists several CD-ROMs that contain United Nations system information.

### **Future Prospects**

ACCIS will have its annual meeting in September, at which time its work programme and the reports of the Technical Panels will be discussed.

Hopefully the work in progress will receive recognition and needed support from the UN system and its Member States and yield increased awareness of the information resources available at each of the organizations within the United Nations system which will hopefully result in greater access to these resources.

### **Notes**

- 1 The United Nations system includes: the principal organs of the United Nations (the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, Secretariat, International Court of Justice), other United Nations organs and operations, main committees, standing committees, other subsidiary organs, UNRWA, UNCTAD, UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, UNITAR, UNDP, UNEP, UNU, UN Special Fund, World Food Council, HABITAT, UNFPA, the Military Staff Committee, the peace-keeping operations, the regional economic and social commissions, functional commissions and other committees, and the specialized agencies and other autonomous organizations (IAEA, ILO, FAO, Unesco, WHO, IMF, IDA, IBRD, IFC, ICAO, UPU, ITU, WMO, IMO, WIPO, IFAD, UNIDO, and GATT).
- 2 JUNIC/1991/25 Progress report on a common approach to ICC on the establishment of the data bases Note by UN/DPI p.3

3 DTTP June 1993, p. 99

4 Information on online access to specialized agency databases via IDRC is taken from the following sources.

Development Data Bases Service (DDBS) Users' Manual - Query / MINISIS. IDRC Canada. Rev. 91/08

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