

1. Teach Students the purpose of the African Union:

African Union, formerly the Organization of African Unity (OAU), organization of African nations created to promote continental peace, unity, and cooperation. The organization works to resolve conflicts between nations and to coordinate political, economic, cultural, scientific, medical, and defense policies.

2. Have students discover the number of countries that are member states of the African Union:

The African Union has 53 member nations. Its headquarters is in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The organization was founded in Addis Ababa on May 25, 1963, as the Organization of African Unity. It retained that name until 2002 when it formally became the African Union (AU).

At the time of the OAU's founding, African leaders disagreed about what kind of organization it should be. Some leaders pushed for the creation of a central government that would unite all of Africa under one authority. However, many of the nations had just recently gained independence from colonial rule and their leaders opposed the idea. The leaders eventually reached a compromise but in so doing created an organization that is controlled by its member nations, leaving it with little power to act on its own. Nonetheless, the organization has helped strengthen ties among African nations and settle disputes. But it has also faced many problems that have undermined its ability to achieve its goals. In the 1990s new leadership helped the OAU gain increased influence.

3. Teach students the structure:

The AU is divided into 8 commissions and 14 directorates. However, the Assembly of the Heads of States and Governments is the supreme organ. It consists of a representative from each member nation, usually the head of state. The Assembly meets at least once a year. The key organ for the day-to-day functioning of the AU is the AU Commission, which consists of a chairperson, a deputy chairperson, eight commissioners, and a staff.

4. Have students learn the issues and concerns for the African Union:

Throughout much of its history, the OAU was troubled by disputes among its member nations. In 1975 the organization's members became divided over which side to support in the Angolan Civil War. In this conflict, rival factions fought for control of Angola, which had won independence from Portugal in

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1974. One faction, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (officially known as Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola-Partido de Trabalho, or MPLA), was backed by Cuba and the Soviet Union. Two other factions, the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola, or FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola, or UNITA), were supported by the United States, its Western allies, and South Africa. In a December 1975 vote to decide which side to support, half of the nations in the OAU chose one side, and half the other.

The split in the organization continued during a series of wars, including the 1977 and 1978 invasions of the Katanga Province in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) by Angolan-backed forces, Somalia's invasion of Ethiopia in 1978, and the conflict between Uganda and Tanzania in 1978 and 1979. In 1981 the same nations that had supported the MPLA government in Angola also recognized the Western Sahara as an independent state and admitted it into the OAU. Morocco and other states that had supported the UNITA/FNLA side of the Angolan conflict did not approve of this move and Morocco temporarily withdrew from the OAU. The OAU's strength was sapped further by an accelerating economic decline in Africa during the 1970s and 1980s.

5. Learn the successes of the African Union:

Despite these problems, the organization scored a number of successes during its early history. The OAU mediated a border dispute between Algeria and Morocco in 1964 and 1965. It also mediated the border conflicts of Somalia with Ethiopia and Kenya from 1968 to 1970.

The OAU formed the African Liberation Committee in 1963 to channel financial support to movements trying to defeat Portuguese colonial rule in Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique. Those movements were victorious in 1974. It also supported movements against white minority rule in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Namibia. South Africa was excluded from OAU membership until 1994, when white minority rule and apartheid (the policy of racial segregation) ended.

The organization sent an *observer mission* to the United Nations (UN) in 1963. An observer mission refers to the representatives sent by a nation or organization that is not a member of the UN, but wishes to participate in UN discussions. Observer missions cannot vote on UN actions. The OAU also coordinated collective action among African nations at the UN. It promoted decisions that led to South Africa being barred from participating in the UN's General Assembly in 1974, and to the admission of the People's Republic of

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China to the UN in 1971. In 1986 the OAU established the African Commission on Human and People's Rights to monitor human rights practices in member nations.

6. Students will learn about resolution statements:

In the 1990s the OAU experienced a revival, partly due to the election of Salim Ahmed Salim of Tanzania as its secretary general in 1989 for a five-year term. Salim was one of Africa's most respected statesmen and brought increased authority and prestige to the post. Salim was reelected in 1993 and 1997.

Under Salim's leadership, the OAU established a new mechanism for conflict resolution and a peace fund in 1992 to deal with a growing number of conflicts. In 1993 the OAU sent peacekeepers to Liberia to support other peacekeeping missions trying to end a civil war. In 1994 African nations ratified an OAU initiative to establish an African Economic Community intended to promote trade between African nations and remove tariffs and other restrictions that hamper commercial exchange. The African Economic Community also had a goal of establishing a common currency in Africa. Ten years later, these ambitious economic objectives had not been fully achieved, even though the OAU continued to encourage greater economic unity among African nations during the mid- to late-1990s.

The OAU received a boost when South Africa became a member in 1994. South Africa has been a major force for peace, democracy, and economic development in Africa ever since 1994, when apartheid ended in that country.

In 2002 the OAU formally changed its name to the African Union, believing that the new name better captured the organization's goal of establishing a common economic market and political union across the entire continent. In this way it believes Africa can play a more prominent role in the global economy and overcome some of the negative effects of globalization.