

# Proceedings of the United Nations Conference on International Organization (April 25, 1945 – June 26, 1945)

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Essay by Brandon Burke (guest post)\*



*Anthony Eden (United Kingdom), Edward R. Stettinius (United States), Vyacheslav Molotov (USSR), and T.V. Soong (China) at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco, 1945*

In his welcome message to the opening session of the United Nations Conference on International Organization, California Governor Earl Warren set the tone for the work that lie ahead in the coming weeks as well as the nascent organization’s vision of a post-WWII global order, saying:

We recognize that our future is linked with a world future in which the term “good neighbor” has become a global consideration. We have learned that understanding of one another’s problems is the greatest assurance of peace. And that true understanding comes only as a product of free consultation. This conference is proof in itself of the new conception of neighborliness and unity which must be recognized in world affairs.

Alternatively known as the The San Francisco Conference, the gathering of delegates began at the War Memorial Opera House on April 25, 1945 and concluded with the signing of the United Nations Charter on June 26.

Fifty nations participated at the invitation of the United States, the United Kingdom, the USSR, and China: principal signatories of the January 1, 1942 Declaration by United Nations to commit maximum war effort against the Axis powers and abstain from independent negotiation. The sponsors invited only those states which had, by March 1945, signed the agreement and declared war on Germany and Japan.

NBC Radio produced what many consider the official, and only, “gavel-to-gavel” audiovisual record of the event and donated the 146 glass-based instantaneous lacquer

discs that constitute its coverage—the only known copy of these broadcasts—to the then-Hoover War Library (now the Hoover Institution Library & Archives) at Stanford University in 1947. NBC Host, Steve Robertson, identified speakers and offered brief, sporadic commentary but the recordings are largely straight audio documents of conference proceedings interrupted only by the limitations of the medium’s side-length recording capacity.

Recordings include plenary sessions, committee meetings, the signing of the United Nations Charter, and ancillary moments such as President Harry S. Truman arriving at Hamilton Field on June 25<sup>th</sup> in anticipation of closing ceremonies. On their own, these events support the collection’s status as a document of international historical significance; however, a particularly interesting moment occurs during the fourth plenary session on April 28<sup>th</sup> when José Serrato, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, is interrupted by audience applause in response to Julián R. Cáceres, Ambassador to the United States and Chairman of the delegation from Honduras, entering the venue holding a newspaper with the headline, “NAZI’S QUIT.”

Ladies and gentlemen, this program—the entire conference—has been interrupted. One of the delegates whose name I can’t...Sr. Cáceres has just walked in with a newspaper, with headlines fully ten inches high, saying Germany has quit the war. It interrupts this message by the interpreter of José Serrato’s message—Serrato of Uruguay. And now Vyacheslav Molotov is being greeted by newspapermen and cameramen. The entire audience is in an uproar right at this moment—applause, cheering. Cameramen are trying to take pictures of this newspaper. Everybody is trying to get a look at it. It has upset everything.

Indeed, for eight weeks in the spring of 1945, as the book was closing on one era, a team of delegates in San Francisco was literally drafting chapters for the next. The United Nations Conference on International Organization paved the way for a diplomatic shift toward globalization that would define the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

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\* The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Library of Congress.