Principal Actors in the International System

- **States**: considered the most powerful actors in the international system---states have four characteristics: territory, a central government, a loyal population, and the recognition by other states. The operative characteristic that distinguishes states from other actors is **sovereignty**.

- **International governmental organizations (IGO)**: a international organization with states as members such as the United Nations and the European Union. Sovereignty rests in the hands of the member states. These are **multi-lateral** institutions.

- **Non-governmental organizations (NGO)**: an international organization with **individuals** or **private groups** as members, such as the World Council of Churches, Red Cross, Greenpeace, Amnesty International.