WHSMUN 2019
United Nations General Assembly
Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian & Cultural)

Wisconsin Model United Nations
UW Milwaukee International Affairs
March 21-22, 2019
Introduction

1. Topic 3.1: Treatment of Prisoners
2. Topic 3.2: The Right to a Quality Education
3. Topic 3.3: Violence Against Women
4. Topic 3.4: Social Implications of HIV/AIDS

Greetings Delegates!

We’re excited for the return of the General Assembly’s Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural) to WHSMUN 2019. On December 9th of 1948 Eleanor Roosevelt addressed the General Assembly to proclaim the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This document was a milestone for the post-war international community documenting the universal protection of fundamental human rights for the first time. The Declaration was drafted and recommended to the General Assembly by the third committee, tasked with addressing social, humanitarian, and cultural issues. In response to conflict and changing sociological norms of the 21st century, the third committee at WHSMUN 2019 will be responsible for reviewing a broad spectrum of human rights related issues including subcommittee topics: Treatment of Prisoners, The Right to a Quality Education, Violence Against Women, and the Social Implications of HIV/AIDS.

The WHSMUN 2019 staff has been working diligently for the past year to write and gather materials to best prepare delegates for our conference. This background guide should serve as an introduction to individual research, and although it is not required, the best background guides consult external sources. In order to be considered for an outstanding research award, position papers must be submitted to the WHSMUN website by March 1st, 2019 at 11:59 PM. On the WHSMUN website, delegates can also find tips for writing efficient position papers.

Questions unable to be answered by this background guide or the WHSMUN website can be directed at wisconsinhighschoolmun@gmail.com. We wish you luck in preparation and can’t wait to see you in March!

With diplomatic courtesy,

The WHSMUN 2019 Secretariat
Topic 3.1: Treatment of Prisoners

3rd Main Committee

According to a 2016 report by the Institute for Criminal Policy Research, more than 10.35 million people are imprisoned worldwide, a number that has grown by nearly 20% since 2000. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is the organ of the United Nations tasked with supporting the humane treatment of prisoners, assisting states with the implementation of penal reforms, and serving as the go-between for intergovernmental processes relating to the treatment of prisoners and other related issues. In a report titled “Addressing the Global Prison Crisis”, the UNODC laid out several current issues relating to the treatment of prisoners. The first, and arguably most salient of these is “continuing growth of prison populations and prison overcrowding”. Overcrowding can lead to inhumane and inadequate living conditions for prisoners. Other issues include the negative impacts of the overuse of solitary confinement, high rates of infectious diseases among prison populations, and lack of access to legal advice and assistance.

The United Nations has attempted to address this issue in several ways. In 1955, the First UN Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders adopted the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. In 2011, the General Assembly established an intergovernmental Expert Group, chaired by the UNODC, to review and revise the existing rules. In 2015, the Expert Group finished its review and revisions, which were endorsed by the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) and sent back to the General Assembly. The General Assembly adopted these revised rules in resolution A/RES/70/175. Additionally, this resolution renamed the Standard Minimum Rules the “Nelson Mandela Rules”, in honor of the late President of South Africa. In addition to the Nelson Mandela Rules, the UN has set forth a variety of other standards and norms relating to the treatment of prisoners, including the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measure for Women Offenders -- “The Bangkok Rules” (2010), United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty (1990), and United Nations Principles and guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems (2012). However, despite having these rules in place, many prison systems still fail to live up to these internationally recognized standards.

Topics for Consideration:
1. How can the United Nations effectively address the issue of prison overcrowding?
2. How can member states better use alternatives to incarceration to reduce prison overcrowding?
3. How can the United Nations incentivize member states to improve the conditions of their prisons and their treatment of prisoners?
4. How can the United Nations assist member states in implementing penal reforms that promote improved living conditions for prisoners and better prison management?
5. How can the United Nations better address the needs of women and juveniles in prison?

Bibliography:


Topic 3.2: The Right to a Quality Education

3rd Main Committee

Several international documents have secured the natural right to a quality education. The first of these declarations was in 1948 with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guaranteed all people the right to a free primary education. Succeeding this came the 1988 Delors Report under United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which articulated the idea of learning throughout life and the four pillars of learning, which included learning to know, to do, to be, and to live together. This report focused on educating the “whole person”, as opposed to a summation of parts; it was also the first international doctrine that took a non-market driven approach to reform. Furthermore, the Delors Report was renowned for being idealistic and utopian, however it was criticized for its lack of a pragmatic approach.

Similarly, other international resolutions have emphasized the importance of adequately funding education reform. One example is Article 29 of Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights’ (OHCHR) Convention on the Rights of the Child, which calls upon member states to make education funding a top priority. Another step the United Nations took to advance education reform is the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which advocates for education at an elementary, intermediate, and advanced level.

Along with formal international documents, several non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) have also affirmed the right to a quality education. For instance, the Association for Childhood Education International has developed the Right to Education Index (RTEI), which monitors national progress toward fulfillment of the right to education. The index identifies key areas in need of improvement, offers country-to-country comparisons, and tracks progress over time. Noting all prior actions affirming the right to a quality education, this committee is urged to consider specific, comprehensive education reform in order to see these goals materialize.

Topics for Consideration:

1. What makes a teacher qualified? What and how can their qualifications assist them in meeting their in classroom and out of classroom responsibilities?
2. How does gender impact one’s opportunity to a quality education?
3. How can and/or should education reform be financed?
4. What steps have been taken to advance global literacy?
5. How can this body expand upon and use tools created for assessing education such as the RTEI?
Bibliography:


Topic 3.3: Violence Against Women

3rd Main Committee

Violence against women is a grave violation of human rights. Taking place in both public and private settings, women are negatively impacted through the mental, physical, and psychological effects of physical and sexual violence. These instances can come in many forms, including intimate partner violence, sexual abuse and harassment, and gender-based killings, among others. Women are prevented from fully participating in society, inhibiting maximum wellbeing for individuals, local communities, and countries at large. According to UN Women, 1 in 2 women killed worldwide were killed by their partners or family in 2012, whereas only 1 in 20 men were killed under these circumstances. Within the European Union, 45% - 55% of women have experienced at least one form of sexual harassment since the age of 15. Such figures represent the widespread nature of this dire issue. Immense financial costs come at the hand of violence against women too, for health care and legal expenses related to violence perpetrated against women impact countries’ budgets and development.

The United Nations partners with governments, civil society organizations, and various institutions to combat this global issue. In 1994, the UN adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The resolution defines gender-based violence, identifies the pillars of women’s rights, and outlines action on the issue on both national and international levels. Furthermore, the 1996 UN General Assembly created a trust fund to end violence against women, improve access to services, and strengthen the implementation of laws and policies. Since its creation, the UN Trust Fund has awarded $128 million (USD) to 139 countries and territories. Recently, in 2008 the UN Secretary General launched a campaign entitled UNiTE as an ongoing effort to bring together various UN agencies and offices to further strengthen their ability to collectively address this global issue and provide the needed resources. In 2013 – 14, UN Women ran anti-violence against women programs in 85 countries to combat this issue.

Many high-income countries, such as those in North America or the European Union, have laws on gender-based violence, including sexual assault, rape, and various forms of domestic violence. However, issues arise in the full implementation of laws and policies, due to incidents where many women are not believed when they come forward. Some countries with Muslim-majorities, such as Iran, have not outlawed violence against women in cases of adultery and do not have clear laws against such acts of violence. Religion, then, can become a major concern for many member countries. Due to the differences in recognition, evaluation, and justice in regard to violence against women, member countries must work diligently in order to provide reasonable solutions to this pervasive global issue and prominent cases of human rights violations.

Topics for Consideration:

1. How can cultural, social, and religious differences be bridged to reduce violence against women?
2. What kind of support can be provided to victims of this type of violence?
3. How can unequal power relations be combated in order to stop the subordination of women that can lead to various types of violence against women?
4. What can member states do to ensure all those who identify as women, including transgender and intersex, are provided equal health and legal care?
5. What can be done to safeguard women who are unable to leave violent situations?

Bibliography:
“About the UN Trust Fund.” UN Women | UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, UN Women, untf.unwomen.org/en/about-us/about-the-un-trust-fund.


In 1981, American scientists discovered the first clinical evidence of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) in humans. This disease severely reduces one’s cellular immunity and increases the risk of infection. Two years later, its cause, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), was identified. This virus is located in bodily fluids (e.g. blood, breast milk) and can be transmitted among individuals through interpersonal interactions such as pregnancies and unsanitary needle injections. In the three decades since this discovery, nearly 80 million individuals have contracted HIV and approximately 35 million have died due to complications relating to the illness.

Throughout the beginning of the 21st century, the United Nations has recognized the necessity of reducing HIV transmissions. To illustrate, the General Assembly Millennium Summit in 2000, issued the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, which set various national goals to curtail the prevalence of the virus. Fifteen years later, the United Nations reported that for the first time for a global health issue, the international community successfully achieved its goals to reduce the virus. Namely, HIV infections decreased by approximately 40 percent between 2000 and 2013. Additionally, the number of patients with access to HIV antiretroviral medications nearly doubled between 2010 and 2015.

In spite of these advancements, various negative attitudes about AIDS and HIV continue to exist worldwide which may prevent affected individuals from seeking treatment. For instance, a survey conducted among a sample of approximately 800 Hong Kong Chinese in 2000 revealed that over 40 percent of the respondents would avoid contact with AIDS patients and support banning these individuals from entering the Special Autonomous Region. Moreover, because of the intense moral stigmatization in Hong Kong, nearly four in five citizens with AIDS feared that their condition would be disclosed to others. Nevertheless, the survey also demonstrated that the Hong Kongese who had recently been educated on the symptoms of AIDS and HIV exhibited less discriminatory perceptions of the condition. As the United Nations continues to address the AIDS epidemic, member states will need to similarly resolve these societal treatment barriers.

Topics for Consideration:

1. What perceptions do the people of individual member states hold with respect to AIDS and HIV?
2. How can states bridge cultural differences with other United Nations member states and find a common solution to addressing this epidemic and its social implications and impacts?
3. What is the role of state government in assessing the necessity of ameliorating the well-being of AIDS and HIV patients? What have state governments realized to accomplish
this goal?
4. In what ways have countries indicated their perceptions of AIDS and HIV to the United Nations?
5. What is the role of regional organizations in addressing AIDS and HIV? Have AIDS and HIV treatment been a concern or issue that has been acknowledged at any regional summits or conferences?

Bibliography: