

General Assembly Third Committee: Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee

Welcome

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to BUSUN 2009! As the chairs of the SOCHUM committee, we hope to make your conference experience at Brown a memorable one. My name is Jessica Faiz and I am currently a sophomore pre-med student and a prospective human biology and political science concentrator. I am originally from New Jersey and had participated in Model UN throughout my four years in high school, attending various university conferences. I also had the opportunity to be the director of a crisis committee last year at BUSUN. My co-chair, Briana McGeough, is also a sophomore at Brown concentrating in psychology and has participated in Model UN since her second year of high school. She is originally from Iowa and also served as a director at last year's BUSUN conference. We are both very excited to meet and work with you in the fall and hope to have a successful conference and productive committee!

I am sure you are all aware that the world today is faced with numerous conflicts surrounding human rights issues. It is so important, especially for students of our generation, to be aware of these problems and the obstacles that the international community faces while working toward resolutions. The three topics that we are addressing in the SOCHUM committee this year are just a few of these real-world issues: Humanitarian Aid in Somalia, Sexual Assault and Peacekeeping Forces, and the Rights of Indigenous People. We have provided a background guide for each of the topics to aid in your preparation for committee session and ask that you submit a one-page position paper on each of the topics. In addition to background information, we have also given you links to sources that may be useful in your research.

We urge you to step outside of the box, keep up with current events, and do anything you feel necessary to be ready to participate enthusiastically in committee session! SOCHUM, being a General Assembly committee, is typically one of the largest committees of the conference, but we hope to maintain a welcoming, suitable atmosphere for debaters of all skill levels. We hope that over the course of the conference you learn more about the issues, Model UN debate, and of course, enjoy yourselves!

Please feel free to e-mail us at sochum@busun.net with any further questions before the conference about

position papers or the topics themselves. Having just finished our freshman year, Briana and I would be happy to answer any questions you have about college life and life at Brown as well!

We wish you the best of luck in your preparation for the conference!

Sincerely,

Jessica Faiz and Briana McGeough
Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee Co-Chairs
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Committee History

The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM), also referred to as the Third Committee of the General Assembly, is a United Nations body designated to deal with issues regarding the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. All member states of the UN are represented in this committee, providing a forum of diverse viewpoints and positions for the discussion and negotiation of important human rights issues. SOCHUM acts to defend the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and collaborates with other United Nations bodies and organizations to implement the General Assembly's resolutions, such as the United Nations Children's Fund, UN Development Program, UN Environmental Program, World Health Organization, and UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

As its name suggests, SOCHUM strives to promote the social, humanitarian and cultural welfare of the international population. In the past, SOCHUM has dealt with issues in social development, the prevention and combat of human trafficking, international drug control, and elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

Topic 1: Humanitarian Aid in Somalia

Background

Since 1991, when President Siad Barre was overthrown, the nation of Somalia has been without an effective central government. Somalia was created in 1960 with the merging of a former British protectorate and an Italian colony. Since its inception, development of the nation has been very slow – mainly due to years of fighting between rival warlords and an inability to deal with famine and disease that have led to the deaths of over a million people. In addition, Somalia's relations with its neighbors have not been collaborative due to territorial claims on

Somali-inhabited areas of Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti.

After the fall of the Barre regime, the foreign policy of the various entities in Somalia has been based on gaining international recognition, winning international support for national reconciliation, and obtaining international economic assistance. Somaliland and Puntland are the two main states seeking this recognition. Somaliland has been governed independently from Somalia since 1991, yet is a self-declared state not recognized by the international community. The leaders of Puntland declared Puntland an autonomous state in 1998, but unlike Somaliland, they do not seek complete independence from Somalia. UN missions to Somalia failed and ultimately withdrew from 1992-1995, hindering the acquisition of those goals. Since there was no existing power in Somalia to hold sovereign authority over the state, foreign relations on a formal basis were unable to be maintained.

In 2008, Security Council hearings were held to pass a resolution to potentially station UN peacekeeping forces in Somalia. The resolution, which also encourages UN presence in Somalia by relocating its political office from Kenya's capital to Somalia and puts forth the possibility of imposing sanctions on parties that act to undermine stability in the region or attempt to block the political process, was adopted unanimously.

Current Situation

The humanitarian situation in Somalia continues to be dire and has certainly worsened in the past year. From 2007 to 2008, the estimated number of people in need of emergency assistance in Somalia has increased from 1.8 million to 2.6 million. Today, 3.2 million people, approximately 43% of the total population, in Somalia require humanitarian aid. Moreover, Somalia has the world's highest maternal mortality and about 18% of the population is malnourished. Now, it is estimated that 1 in 3 Somalis are in need of emergency assistance. The delivery of this humanitarian aid is hindered by the dangerous security situation due to civil war, uncontrolled violence, and piracy, as well as the increasing drought, difficulty in bringing in food from abroad, and rise in food prices.

In 2008, food supplies had become scarcer because of crop failures and it was near impossible for foreign relief organizations to operate in Somalia due to the escalation of the armed conflicts. From 2007 to 2008 alone, 16,000 people were killed and 1.3 million internally displaced. Therefore, the issue in Somalia is not only a matter of increasing the amount of humanitarian aid, but finding out how to get the provided aid to persons in need. Aid workers have become direct targets, becoming victim to killings, roadside bombs, abductions, or harassment. In Somalia, the humanitarian space is constricted and

humanitarian principles are not respected.

In addition to the increased levels of conflict, the vulnerability of Somali communities is increased by the poorly performing erratic rains and an extremely harsh dry season. This combination of factors has resulted in more than one million internally displaced persons and exhaustion amongst host communities, disruptions to trade and economic activity, and continued high rates of inflation combined with the declining value of the Somali Shilling. Along with food shortages, the nutritional situation is worsening - Somalia has a Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rate of 19.3 % and Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) of 2.3 % in Central and South Somalia.

Negative headlines in the media regarding Somalia skyrocketed last year. 30 humanitarian helpers were killed and at least ten were kidnapped, at least 22 vehicles were taken in carjackings and, in at least 17 cases, aid shipments were ransacked. The UN Security Council adopted several resolutions in 2008 regarding the deployment of naval vessels and military aircraft to combat the increasing piracy off the Somali coast, which was hindering the World Food Programme's emergency shipments to the country. In mid-December 2008, under the European Security and Defence Policy, an EU anti-piracy mission named Operation Atalanta began and has proven to be quite successful, as 18 out of 20 attacks on civilian vessels were prevented in January 2009 alone.

A rise in refugee movements to neighboring countries has also arisen from the humanitarian situation in Somalia. One of the main destinations for Somali refugees is the Dadaab refugee camp in north-east Kenya, which is now home to 244,000 people. In 2008 around 100,000 Somalis fled to Yemen and Kenya and about 1,400 people lost their lives attempting to cross the Gulf of Aden to Yemen. This year, the United Nations has issued an appeal for around 1 billion euro for aid in Somalia, 18% of which has been made available to date.

Bloc Positions

United States and European Union

The United States is currently the leading donor of aid to Somalia, with the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO) being the second. Both are working with relief partners to support the most vulnerable pockets of the population with activities to provide the local, host population and internally displaced people (IDP) with access to water, sanitation, food assistance, shelter and non food items, health, as well as support for livestock and livelihoods.

In order for their aid to be effective and reach those in need, the US and EU would be in support of resolutions combating crimes like piracy as well as efforts to stop the uncontrolled violence.

African Union

The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has been established to conduct a Peace Support Operation in Somalia to stabilize the security situation for humanitarian aid and to create a safe and secure environment in preparation for the transition to the UN.

It is important to take into consideration the various conflicts that Somalia has been engaged in with neighboring nations due to border conflicts, and how those negative interactions may affect the accommodation of refugees and any other support with humanitarian aid.

Arab League

Somalia became the first non-Arab member of the League of Arab States in 1974. Somalis generally identify more closely with the Arab nations than their fellow Africans. As a result, Somalia had become increasingly dependent on conservative, wealthy oil-exporting states for economic aid. Within the past year, the Arab League has opened permanent headquarters in the Somali capital, Mogadishu. The Arab League mission has taken it upon itself to hold direct contacts with the Somali government and all other parties in Somalia. The League wishes to support Somalia's development in two stages, the first addressing its humanitarian needs and the second, studying the educational and cultural needs in the country.

Questions To Consider

1. How can the international community work to effectively bring foreign aid organizations into Somalia?
2. How does the lack of government play a role in Somalia's present situation? Is there anything the UN can do to address this issue?
3. How can neighboring nations work to accommodate the thousands of Somali refugees?
4. How might conflicts with neighboring nations due to border disputes affect Somalia's ability to call upon them for safe havens for refugees?

Helpful Resources

- European Commission Humanitarian Aid in Somalia http://ec.europa.eu/echo/aid/sub_saharian/somalia_en.htm

- African Union Mission in Somalia <http://www.africa-union.org/root/AU/AUC/Departments/PSC/AMISOM/amisom.htm>
- Somalia Country Study, Library of Congress <http://countrystudies.us/somalia/>
- US Humanitarian Aid to Somalia Fact Sheet <http://www.africom.mil/getArticle.asp?art=1691>
- International Relations of Somalia <http://www.somalipress.com/somalia-overview/international-relations-somalia-1040.html>

Topic 2: Sexual Assault and Peacekeeping Forces

Background

Sexual abuse of women and children by Peacekeeping Forces (also known as “Blue Helmets”) has been reported for nearly two decades. The first publicly known allegations of sexual assault, concerning solicitation of prostitution by Peacekeeping Forces, were made during the 1992–93 deployment to Cambodia. Allegations surfaced in 2002 of staff forcing women and children to trade sexual acts for desperately needed food and medicine in UN-administered camps in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. All charges were dropped for these incidents.

In 2005, reports of sexual abuse in the Democratic Republic of Congo further tainted the reputation of Peacekeeping Forces. In 2007, over twenty reports were issued of Peacekeeping staff picking up young children in Sudan in their UN vehicles and forcing them to have sex. Additional accusations of sexual abuse by UN officials have been made in the last five years in Haiti and Burundi. The UN launched investigations into the allegations in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan. The results led to dozens of expulsions and criminal prosecutions by the perpetrators' home governments.

In recent years the United Nations has worked with member nations to reduce the incidence of sexual assault by Peacekeeping Forces. These actions have included strengthening pre-existing regulations, such as the forbiddance of sexual relationships between UN staff and people under the age of 18 and emphasis of the United Nation's “Zero Tolerance” for sexual assault, child abuse, and prostitution. A number of United Nations publications between 1990 and 2000 intended to reduce sexual assault committed against refugees. The issues identified in these publications included poor refugee camp layout that required women to venture into isolated areas for restroom and washing facilities, poor lighting in these facilities, and commonly lacking night patrol in refugee camps. In May of 2000, the UN Department of Public Information

recommended that all staff receive education about sexual violence. Further recommendations were made that an increase in female Peacekeeping Staff may boost the reporting of sexual assault, reducing the overall incidence.

Current Situation

As it currently stands, many of the recommendations have been put into operation. Greater enforcement of the “Zero Tolerance” policy has resulted in what appears to be a reduction, though not a disappearance, of sexual misconduct by Peacekeeping Forces. UN leaders have now imposed a range of new restrictions and regulations that are currently enforced. These restrictions include:

- a. A ban on all unofficial contact by Peacekeeping Forces with local communities
- b. A dusk-to-dawn curfew on military personnel forbidding them to leave the base during the night
- c. The prohibition of civilian dress for UN officials to make them more identifiable
- d. Increased cooperation between Peacekeeping Forces and Congolese police to reduce informal contact between UN personnel and local women
- e. Expanded training in UN codes of conduct and rules regarding sexual abuse and exploitation
- f. Forbidding Peacekeeping Forces from going to certain business establishments, including brothels and some bars
- g. Improved base and camp facilities
- h. The creation of a confidential hotline to report abuses
- i. The creation of a new office to investigate any new allegations.

In addition to prevention of further acts sexual assault, the Congolese government and the UN have established a joint initiative to help victims of sexual abuse rebuild their lives. The initiative focuses on:

- Medical care
- Psychological counseling and treatment
- Relocation and reintegration
- Child welfare and education.

Though these actions are helping to reduce the incidence of sexual assault by Peacekeeping Forces, this issue is far from resolved, and continues to be a concern in areas occupied by Peacekeeping Forces, especially refugee camps.

Bloc Positions

United States

The U.S. supports the UN “Zero Tolerance” policy, and it demands harsher punishments by the governments of the perpetrators.

Arabic Nations

Support the “Zero Tolerance” policy and stricter enforcement of that policy.

African Union

Support the policy of “Zero Tolerance” and asserts that local police officials will be willing to help in any way possible.

European Union

Supports the UN “Zero Tolerance” policy, and strongly encourages the UN to place more women in positions of authority.

Questions To Consider

1. How may cultural diversity make this an exceptionally difficult issue to deal with?
2. How might the nature of these human rights violations make victims less likely to report incidents?
3. How might the military culture increase the likelihood of sexual assault?

Helpful Resources

- UN Staff Accused of Raping Children in Sudan
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1538476/UN-staff-accused-of-raping-children-in-Sudan.html>
- Stop Violence Against Women: Sexual Assault Against Refugees
http://www.stopvaw.org/Sexual_Assault_Against_Refugees.html
- Tough UN Line on Peacekeeper Abuses
<http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/afrec/vol19no1/191peacekeep.htm>

Topic 3: The Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Background

Indigenous People are individuals that have historically belonged to a particular region or nation before

its colonization or transformation into a nation state. Indigenous People may be different culturally, linguistically, or traditionally from the people from the dominant culture of that region or country. There are approximately 370 million Indigenous People living in approximately 70 nations. Indigenous People have historically been highly disadvantaged. Many have faced extreme hardship, including loss of land through colonization, being forced into slavery, displacement by settlers, being required to live by new cultural standards, and death from diseases transmitted by newcomers. Some indigenous groups receive criticism for their treatment of the environment or their reluctance to comply with the laws of the nation or state in which they currently live. Another conflict between indigenous people and the people of the more dominant culture in the area surfaces over land possession; many indigenous people claim ownership to land that is currently possessed by another cultural group.

Current Situation

After 20 years of drafting and debating, on June 29, 2006, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted the U.N. Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This declaration emphasized Indigenous Peoples' rights to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions and to pursue their development.

The draft of the declaration received resistance because of its support for the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples and its approval of indigenous people controlling the natural resources on their traditional land. If the declaration were interpreted to allow indigenous people to reclaim land that they historically owned this could result in a great political controversy. As a result, several countries have made a joint statement that proclaiming that "No government can accept the notion of creating different classes of citizens."

On September 13, 2007, the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. 143 nations voted in favor of the resolution, 11 nations abstained and 4 nations (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States) voted against the resolution. The declaration is not legally binding, however, indigenous communities worldwide advocated for this measure because they believed it would aid them in their fight against racism, discrimination, marginalization, oppression and exploitation.

The resolution is currently in place, but many human rights groups criticize the implementation of the declaration, on the basis that many human rights violations are still occurring and the international community is doing relatively little to remedy many of these violations against indigenous people.

In addition to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the United Nations has the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and Indigenous People are protected by several other international laws.

Bloc Positions

The United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand support many of the rights of Indigenous People, though do not support reclamation of territory and believe Indigenous Peoples should follow the laws of the nations in which they reside.

143 other nations worldwide support the contents of the Declaration to a degree that sufficiently justified supporting the resolution.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways might the United Nations act in order to improve the status and conditions of indigenous people?
2. How might the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People be altered to gain support of nations that currently refuse to sign on while not compromising the commitment to indigenous people?
3. How might the needs of indigenous people vary based on where they are located globally?

Helpful Resources

- UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfi/en/drip.html>
- United Nations adopts Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=23794&Cr=indigenous&Cr1>
- UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfi/>
- Rights of Indigenous People <http://www.globalissues.org/article/693/rights-of-indigenous-people>