



**Florida High Schools Model United Nations**

FHSMUN 45

**UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP)**

Ensuring Global Human Rights for Future Generations

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\*Content warning: one or more sections of this guide includes references to sexual assault and domestic violence. There is a disclaimer before the section to notify readers and offer the opportunity to skip ahead of it.\*

## Introduction

Human rights are central to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals “seeks to realize human rights for all and aims for a world of universal respect and dignity of the human person.”<sup>1</sup> They follow human rights principles and living standards outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which is a milestone document that defines the most basic human rights.<sup>2</sup> It was published on December 10, 1948 by the collective members of the United Nations General Assembly in Paris. The document has thirty articles outlining the rights each individual is afforded; to this day, this document continues to serve as a basis for international law.<sup>3</sup>

One organization that continues to serve the UDHR’s legacy is the UNDP’s Rule of Law and Human Rights Global Programme (ROLHR). In 2022, the ROLHR created the 2022-2025 Report that provides an overview of the UNDP’s broader contribution to fostering the rule of law, justice, security, and human rights. That same year, the Global Programme commenced the implementation of Phase IV, an initiative aimed at prevention and response to crisis and conflict<sup>4</sup>. This initiative is guided by the UNDP’s three directions of change: structural transformation, building resilience, and leaving no one behind. It has increasingly invested in interlinked areas of gender, environmental, and digital justice globally.

Other initiatives like the UNDP Strategic Plan (2022-2025), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), and the Secretary General’s Call to Human Rights (2020) are also aiming for the protection of the rights of everyone, including future generations. However, many social barriers and external factors hinder such development. It is of the utmost importance that the UNDP, the rest of the UN Organization, and international governance cooperate to promote equality. Delegates must assess the obstacles that stand in the way of ensuring human rights for the future and develop a stable consensus to implement new goals.

## Call to Action

In a world where systematic violations of human rights such as rising hate speech, exclusion, polarization, misogyny, and genocide are so widespread, a change is needed to ensure future generations may thrive. In 2020, the Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, launched a Call to Action for human rights. This call to action was a vision to address complex crises' broad causes and impacts. It focuses on seven thematic areas of improvement: rights at the core of sustainable development; rights in times of crisis; gender equality and equal rights for women; public participation and civic space; rights of future generations- climate justice; rights at the heart of collective action; and new frontiers of human rights- digital justice.<sup>5</sup> In the words of the Secretary-General: “Human rights are universal and indivisible. We must see human rights with a vision that speaks to every being and encompasses all rights: economic, social, cultural, civil,

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<sup>1</sup> 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (2015).

<sup>2</sup> “Human Rights.” UNDP, Accessed 12 Dec. 2023. <https://www.undp.org/rolhr/human-rights>

<sup>3</sup> United Nations. (n.d.). *Universal declaration of human rights*.

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

<sup>4</sup> “UNDP Rule of Law and Human Rights Annual Report | 2022.” *UNDP Annual Report*, <https://rolhr.undp.org/annualreport/2022/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> United Nations. “Secretary-General’s Call to Action for Human Rights.” [www.un.org/en/content/action-for-human-rights/index.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/content/action-for-human-rights/index.shtml)

and political.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Sustainable Development at the Heart of Ensuring a Better Future**

Sustainable development is a relatively recent concept. The term was originally coined at the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment but gained momentum following the 1987 Brundtland Report. This report introduced the need for integration of economic development, environmental protection, and social justice and inclusion.<sup>7</sup> The Brundtland Report has since cemented sustainability into the foundation of today’s leading frameworks for international cooperation- the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>8</sup>

Sustainable development, defined by the Brundtland Report, “is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”<sup>9</sup> Sustainable development considers environmental issues, economic concerns, and social problems – all entwined together. There are three pillars of sustainability in development: environmental, social, and economic sustainability:

Environmental sustainability is the ability to protect and preserve the environment over time through appropriate practices that meet the needs of the present without compromising the availability of resources in the future.<sup>10</sup> Some main factors include pollution, climate change caused by human activity, loss of biodiversity, and the overexploitation of natural resources.

Social Sustainability focuses on the well-being of the people- encompassing the promotion of equity, human rights, and access to health and decent work. To achieve social sustainability, the world must overcome poverty and socioeconomic inequality, discrimination and prejudice, insecurity and conflict, and poor governance.

Economic Sustainability is the approach in which economic activities are conducted to preserve and promote long-term economic well-being. Factors that influence economic sustainability are the responsible management of resources, financial stability at a macro level, and international cooperation.

Due to the complexity of sustainable development, obstacles still stand in the way. COVID-19 is one such obstacle that has sent the world reeling from its effects. In 2015, when the SDGs were first published, the UN began writing yearly reports on the actions and effects of reaching their goal. Between the first yearly report in 2016 and the 2019 report, the poverty rate

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<sup>6</sup> Guterres, Antonio. “The Highest Aspiration.” 2020. [https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The\\_Highest\\_Aspiration\\_A\\_Call\\_To\\_Action\\_For\\_Human\\_Right\\_English.pdf](https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Aspiration_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Right_English.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> A.N . “Quick Guide to Sustainable Development: History and Concepts.” March, 2015. <https://senedd.wales/research%20documents/gg15-003%20-%20sustainable%20development%20history%20and%20concepts/gg15-003.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> International Institute for Sustainable Development. “Sustainable Development.” *International Institute for Sustainable Development*, 2022, [www.iisd.org/mission-and-goals/sustainable-development](http://www.iisd.org/mission-and-goals/sustainable-development)

<sup>9</sup> United Nations. *Our Common Future- Brundtland Report*. United Nations, Oct. 1987.

<sup>10</sup> Enel. “The 3 Pillars of Sustainability: Environmental, Social and Economic.” *Enel*, 15 June 2023, [www.enel.com/company/stories/articles/2023/06/three-pillars-sustainability](http://www.enel.com/company/stories/articles/2023/06/three-pillars-sustainability).

decreased by 1.8% and was projected to decrease the poverty percentage to 7.4% by 2021.<sup>11</sup> In the same time frame, global unemployment also decreased. The start of the pandemic, however, changed everything. The global extreme poverty rate rose for the first time since 1998, from 8.4% in 2019 to 9.5% in 2020, reversing years of work.<sup>12</sup> Certain areas of the seventeen SDG goals remained intact and even improved, but some of the more crucial goals, like the eradication of poverty and the environment, experienced declines. The world saw a global recession, healthcare systems collapsing, and layoffs affecting nearly every sector of the economy:

“Now, due to COVID-19, an unprecedented health, economic and social crisis is threatening lives and livelihoods, making the achievement of [the] Goals even more challenging. As of the beginning of June, the death toll had surpassed 400,000 and was continuing to climb, with almost no country spared. Health systems in many countries have been driven to the brink of collapse. The livelihood of half the global workforce has been severely affected. More than 1.6 billion students are out of school, and tens of millions of people are being pushed back into extreme poverty and hunger, erasing the modest progress made in recent years.”<sup>13</sup>

Four years later, the world is still reeling from the pandemic. So much so that it is likely that most of the seventeen SDGs will not be completed by 2030. According to the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Report, only 15% of the targets are on track, with 48% being moderately or severely off track, and an alarming 37% of targets were either stagnated or regressed in their progress. The pandemic triggered the largest increase in global inequality in three decades. It is now projected that by 2030, only one-third of all countries will have halved their poverty levels. In addition, 573 million people will still be living in extreme poverty.<sup>14</sup> So, what is being done to help curb the issue at hand?

### *Environmental Sustainability*

Climate change is a force to be reckoned with, as rising temperatures make the winter months warmer and shorter, in addition to melting glaciers and ice caps. In turn, they raise sea levels, threatening populations in most Pacific and Caribbean island nations. The blame? That would be human activities such as the usage of fossil fuels, overconsumption, and deforestation. There have been actions to stop the issue where it stands, such as the Paris Agreement (2015-16) and the endorsement of clean energy. However, there still is much to be done to defeat it.

Colombia is not a significant carbon emitter but is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Glaciers melt because of the high temperatures, causing extreme rainfall and allowing for ecosystem degradation, water scarcity, floods, and landslides. There is also the matter of deforestation and loss of biodiversity within the pocket of the Amazonian rainforest. In addition, seesaw rainfall and drought patterns have negatively affected Colombia's agricultural sector, a significant source of food security and export revenue. According to the World Bank Group projections, climate change will affect the country's GDP by 14%, corresponding to

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<sup>11</sup> “— SDG Indicators.” *Unstats.un.org*,

[unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/goal-01/#:~:text=Nowcast%20estimates%20put%20the%20global](https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/goal-01/#:~:text=Nowcast%20estimates%20put%20the%20global)

<sup>12</sup> “Amid Disease and Destruction, New UN Assembly President Highlights Hope.” *Africa Renewal*, 15 Sept. 2021, [www.un.org/africarenewal/news/sustainable-development-report-shows-devastating-impact-covid-ahead-](https://www.un.org/africarenewal/news/sustainable-development-report-shows-devastating-impact-covid-ahead-)

<sup>13</sup> United Nations. *The Sustainable Development Goals 2020*. United Nations, 1 Jan. 2021.

<sup>14</sup> “The SDG Report 2023: Special Edition.” Accessed 27 Dec. 2023 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zF361a019zA&t=90>

agriculture.<sup>15</sup> For Colombians, responding to climate change is a matter of survival. In November 2020, the Colombian government announced a commitment to greenhouse gas (GHG) emission cuts and other like-minded policy goals to increase climate resilience. The government implemented a ten-year strategy to invest \$200 million to reach zero net deforestation by 2030 and a clean energy transition plan. As a result, they plan to increase economic incentives for conservation, such as payment for ecosystem services to protect more than 29,000 hectares and commercial agreements for agricultural products, and they provided over 70,450 people with greater economic benefits. As one of the first steps toward achieving these goals, Columbia – with the backing of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) – developed the first free access financed emissions accounting tool in Latin America.

On the other hand, China is the world's largest emitter of GHGs, emitting 12.7 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> in 2019. The emissions are a byproduct of the Chinese economy, one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. Its economic output grew by 244% from 2005-2019, outpacing the growth in GHG emission; as a result, its carbon intensity fell about 46%, but it is still far above the world's average. Because of the decrease in carbon intensity, the nation has been able to implement more environmentally-friendly infrastructure without as much hassle as, say, the United States. China dominates the global market for photovoltaic solar panels and has increased expenditure on clean energy such as hydropower and wind power. Ahead of the Conference of the Parties (COP 27) climate change conference, China proposed a global clean energy partnership with aims to support investment and integrate clean energy supply chains. China officially submitted its mid-century long-term low greenhouse gas development strategy in October 2021, pledging to reach carbon neutrality by 2060 and decrease carbon intensity by 65% by 2030.

Despite the many efforts made by global participation, much remains to be done. Temperatures have continued to rise, with September 2023 being the warmest month in 174 years. The world's global surface temperature was the warmest on record at 1.10 degrees C above average.<sup>16</sup> Warming surface temperatures strongly correlate to ocean temperatures. Such an effect has harmed marine life by damaging coastal ecosystems, coral reefs, and marine life populations. It is crucial for the sake of tomorrow that international governance, along with multinational corporations, collaborate to safeguard the environment and employ cleaner energy sources.

### *Social Sustainability*

Although poverty is a ubiquitous problem, it disproportionately affects the developing world. Some of these places were left behind by the foreign powers that once held them, some are still being influenced or controlled by those foreign powers, and most are still on the path toward sustainable development. In this modern world, technology has pushed the boundaries of innovation to new limits, allowing industrialization to thrive. This has translated to a worldwide rise in urbanization, the developing world included. More people are moving to cities in search of a better quality of life, and as of 2022, about 57% of the global population lives in urban

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<sup>15</sup> Zoysa, Kiyomi de. "Profiles of Adaptation: Colombia." *www.wri.org*, 7 July 2022, [www.wri.org/update/profiles-adaptation-colombia](http://www.wri.org/update/profiles-adaptation-colombia)

<sup>16</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. "Topping the charts: September 2023 was Earth's warmest September in 174-year record." 13 October 2023, [https://www.noaa.gov/news/topping-charts-september-2023-was-earths-warmest-september-in-174-year-record#:~:text=Year%20to%20date%20\(YTD%2C%20January,F%20\(14.1%20degrees%20C\)](https://www.noaa.gov/news/topping-charts-september-2023-was-earths-warmest-september-in-174-year-record#:~:text=Year%20to%20date%20(YTD%2C%20January,F%20(14.1%20degrees%20C)).

areas.<sup>17</sup> Cities are becoming more populous by the influx of people moving there to find jobs, education, better security, better health facilities, etc. With so many people migrating to the cities, overcrowding becomes a problem. Limited places to build and high rent mean those who cannot afford to live in the city are sometimes forced to look towards other housing alternatives. Thus begins the rise of slums or informal settlements. Often, the residents in these areas also lack security of tenure- or ownership of the property they reside on- so they face constant threats of eviction. In addition, these settlements have a need for services like clean water, sewage drainage, paved sidewalks, and adequate security. Such is seen within the community of Khayelitsha in Cape Town, South Africa.

Khayelitsha, located on the outskirts of Cape Town, South Africa, is one of the country's largest and most densely populated townships. Despite being a symbol of post-apartheid development, Khayelitsha continues to grapple with severe urban poverty. The township was initially established in the early 1980s as a result of forced removals during the apartheid era, and it has since grown rapidly due to migration from rural areas and other parts of the country. Khayelitsha has become severely overcrowded; it had an initial planned population of 200,000 at its conception, but as of 2021, the population was estimated to be 2,400,000 inhabitants.<sup>18</sup> The pace of urbanization outstripped the ability of the local authorities to provide adequate housing and infrastructure. Furthermore, there are limited job opportunities in the formal sector, forcing many to settle in informal structures due to affordability issues. Due to limited employment opportunities, it is estimated that 54.1% of the population within the township is unemployed, resulting in a high crime rate. Gang violence and organized crime are rife within Khayelitsha, resulting in many residents claiming never to leave their homes after dusk. Amidst the lockdown in 2020, the Department of Community Safety and several police precincts within the Western Cape enforced a ban on the sale of liquor during the weekends and endorsed awareness campaigns, which was reported to have decreased the number of reported offenses by 11.9%.<sup>19</sup> Local governance has also launched initiatives aimed toward upgrading informal settlements while also engaging the community to better understand their needs.

Khayelitsha, is not alone in doing so. Cities from Sao Paulo, Brazil; Calcutta, India; Neza, Mexico; and Jakarta, Indonesia, organize self-help programs with local organizations to establish tenant rights groups, credit unions, and political movements. They seek to get the residents involved and hope to raise them out of poverty. A commitment to inclusive development, community empowerment, and targeted interventions will be essential in transforming the living conditions of residents in informal settlements and creating a more resilient and equitable urban landscape within large-scale cities.

### *Economic Sustainability*

Economic sustainability is a critical aspect of overall sustainable development, encompassing strategies and practices that aim to balance economic growth with environmental protection and social equity.<sup>20</sup> Achieving economic sustainability requires careful consideration

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<sup>17</sup>Szmigiera, M. "Urbanization, by Continent 2019 | Statista." *Statista*, Statista, 2019, [www.statista.com/statistics/270860/urbanization-by-continent/](https://www.statista.com/statistics/270860/urbanization-by-continent/)

<sup>18</sup> "About Khayelitsha." *Sikhula Sonke Early Childhood Development*, [www.sikhulasonke.org.za/about-khayelitsha.html#:~:text=Today%20Khayelitsha%20is%20home%20to](http://www.sikhulasonke.org.za/about-khayelitsha.html#:~:text=Today%20Khayelitsha%20is%20home%20to)

<sup>19</sup>Western Cape Government, Department of Community Safety Sub-programme: Policy and Research. *Western Cape Crime Trends*. March 2022.

<sup>20</sup> Prysman Group. "Economic Sustainability: What Is It? | Prysman Group." *Www.prysmiangroup.com*, [www.prysmiangroup.com/en/insight/sustainability/economic-sustainability-what-is-it#:~:text=Economic%20sustainability%20refers%20to%20practices](http://www.prysmiangroup.com/en/insight/sustainability/economic-sustainability-what-is-it#:~:text=Economic%20sustainability%20refers%20to%20practices).



of various factors, including resource management, social inclusion, innovation, and long-term planning. It involves the responsible use of resources, the promotion of inclusive economic policies along with the development of strategies to address emerging challenges such as climate change, technological disruptions, and geopolitical shifts.

In the past few years, Germany has proven itself to be one of the most sustainable industrialized nations in the world. The German Sustainable Development Strategy – the guiding principle for German foreign and development policy – aligned itself with the seventeen SDGs in 2016. Its robust export-oriented economy is driven by a strong manufacturing sector, and has contributed to sustained economic growth. Increased investments in research and development, coupled with an emphasis on innovation and technology, has positioned Germany as a leader in several industries. The German economy also emphasizes small to mid-size enterprises (SMEs), essentially forming its heart.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, its social market economy combines free-market capitalism with a strong social safety net, fostering economic prosperity while addressing social inequalities. As of 2022, 42% percent of German start-ups are woman owned, and the push for more women to executive board positions within prestigious companies has also increased.

Economic sustainability is a multifaceted concept that requires a holistic approach, incorporating economic, social, and environmental considerations. The concept of sustainability is complex, consisting of many layers and sublayers. The matter of sustainability should be taken into significant account as it is the stepping stone of ensuring that future generations are guaranteed the same privileges that we have today.

### **Digital Justice and Censorship**

The digital age provides new tools for promoting human rights and new means of control and censorship. As progress is made to ensure future generations' human rights, balance open access to information with protections against harmful content. Companies like Facebook and Twitter have faced criticism that their attempts to remove hate speech, misinformation, and extremism sometimes go too far, silencing marginalized voices. However, regulation is needed to curb unlawful material that can occur on any online platform. The challenge is crafting laws and policies governing online content that uphold free expression and privacy while preventing actual harm. Multi-stakeholder initiatives involving tech companies, governments, civil society, and academia will help develop nuanced digital justice frameworks. Any restrictions on speech should be prescribed by law, necessary for a democratic society, and subject to independent judicial oversight. With human rights as the guiding principle, digital justice can be promoted without compromising freedom. The internet offers an unparalleled ability to expand access to knowledge worldwide. If done justly and with foresight, online spaces can empower future generations.

### **Human Rights Under Fire**

While the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals espouse lofty ideals of promoting dignity, justice, and equality, the harsh reality for countless individuals worldwide is far-removed from this vision. Despite human rights being enshrined in constitutions and

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<sup>21</sup> Orth, Martin. "Why Is the German Economy so Strong?" *Deutschland.de*, 16 Mar. 2023, [www.deutschland.de/en/topic/business/why-is-the-german-economy-so-strong-seven-reasons](https://www.deutschland.de/en/topic/business/why-is-the-german-economy-so-strong-seven-reasons).

legislation globally, egregious violations and infringements persist.

Since 2020, human rights have deteriorated across the world. The COVID-19 pandemic provided justification for authoritarian states and regimes to implement draconian, repressive policies under the pretext of public health, severely curtailing fundamental civil liberties and freedoms. From censorship of criticism and free speech to violent crackdowns on protests and dissent, the most basic of human rights were systematically and brutally suppressed. Simultaneously, multiple wars and armed conflicts have contributed massively to major human rights abuses and violations. From the killing fields of Ukraine, where civilians are bombed indiscriminately, to the ongoing raging war in Israel and Palestine, the disregard for human life is appalling. Even principles of equality that humanity has striven toward for generations appear to be unraveling rapidly worldwide. Racism, xenophobia, homophobia, misogyny, and other forms of bigotry and discrimination are still rife globally, with hate crimes rising in many developed countries.

If the United Nations Development Programme aims to safeguard fundamental human rights for future generations, urgent and decisive action must be taken immediately. Though the challenges are complex and daunting, progress requires genuine political will and principled leadership. Concrete efforts toward advocacy, activism, and grassroots organization are essential to uphold legal frameworks and instruments protecting inherent human freedoms. From local community mobilization to lobbying governments, individuals and civil society groups must persistently hold the powerful accountable for human rights violations and demand real consequences beyond rhetoric. Good governance, transparency, anti-corruption measures, and ending the corporate lobbies of profiteering arms manufacturers also have vital roles to play. Only through vigorous, unwavering struggle can we ensure that the U.N.'s human rights declarations are not mere words but lived experiences uplifting humanity. The solemn mission rests with all people of conscience today for a more just world tomorrow.

**Disclaimer: The following sections (Marked \*) include references to sexual assault and domestic violence. These case studies provide delegates with specific instances of attacks on human rights worldwide. Please skip to the subsection (“The Time is Now”) if the above topics are triggering; you will not be held responsible for any information in the following section.**

### **COVID-19 & Its Impacts\***

The COVID-19 pandemic that began in late 2019 brought about an unprecedented global crisis that affected virtually every aspect of human life. Among its myriad consequences, one particularly concerning issue emerged: the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women's rights and the subsequent global ramifications.

COVID-19's economic fallout exacerbated existing gender inequalities, highlighting the vulnerable position of women in the workforce. Many women concentrated in sectors disproportionately affected by lockdowns and restrictions, such as hospitality, retail, and domestic work.<sup>22</sup> These sectors often lacked job security, benefits, and fair wages, leaving women economically exposed and vulnerable to layoffs.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the closure of schools and childcare facilities placed an additional burden on women, forcing many to take on caregiving responsibilities, often at the expense of their careers. Lockdowns and quarantine

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<sup>22</sup> Dempere and Grassa, “The Impact of COVID-19 on Women’s Empowerment: A Global Perspective.”

<sup>23</sup> Dempere and Grassa, “The Impact of COVID-19 on Women’s Empowerment: A Global Perspective.”



measures led to an alarming surge in cases of gender-based violence. With restricted movement and limited access to support services, many women found themselves trapped in dangerous situations with abusive partners. The pandemic exacerbated the existing gaps in legal frameworks and support systems for survivors of violence, leaving countless women without the help they desperately needed.<sup>24</sup>

The pandemic also revealed disparities in healthcare access and provision, primarily affecting reproductive health services. Lockdowns and overwhelmed healthcare systems hindered women's access to family planning, contraceptives, maternal healthcare, and safe abortions. This not only jeopardized women's physical health but also their ability to make informed choices about their bodies and reproductive futures.<sup>25</sup>

The pandemic catalyzed a significant increase in maternal deaths, according to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). Due to the lack of maternal rights in certain corners of the world, mothers were forced to continue their role of caregiver for their household, which drastically increased the chances that they would be exposed to the disease. Women also make up a large majority of the first-line workforce who were in charge of taking care of patients in their hometowns and their families. This PAHO report states, “Women were on the front line caring for patients and accounted for 72% of all COVID-19 cases among healthcare professionals in the region.”<sup>26</sup> Dr. Etienne said, “If they had been better protected from the start and with reasonable shifts, many infections could have been avoided.” From the start of the pandemic until 2022, 365,000 cases of COVID-19 were reported, and due to a lack of medical assistance in the region, more than 3,000 of them have died.<sup>27</sup>

The reverberations of these gendered consequences extended far beyond individual households and communities, shaping the broader global landscape. The setbacks in women's rights reversed years of progress toward gender equality. The pandemic laid bare the critical importance of prioritizing gender-inclusive policies and support systems, especially in times of crisis. Moreover, the unequal burden of the pandemic on women has implications for economies and societies at large. Research has consistently shown that gender equality is not only a matter of human rights but also a driver of economic growth and social stability.<sup>28</sup> Failing to address the pandemic's impact on women's rights could hamper the global recovery, hinder sustainable development, and perpetuate cycles of poverty and inequality.<sup>29</sup>

### **Feminism and Reproductive Rights Activism\***

Recently, women's rights have come under fire worldwide. Protecting women's reproductive rights—which include the ability to “be in control of their bodies and decide if, when, with whom and how often to bear children,” “safe pregnancy and safe delivery,” “access to family planning counseling [, comprehensive sexuality education,] and a range of modern contraceptive methods,” —is exceptionally vital for achieving gender equality and the sustainable development goals.<sup>30</sup> The United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA) stresses the severity of reproductive rights violations, citing how “complications from pregnancy and

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<sup>24</sup> “The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against Women during COVID-19.”

<sup>25</sup> VanBenschoten et al., “Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Access to and Utilisation of Services for Sexual and Reproductive Health: A Scoping Review.”

<sup>26</sup> “COVID-19 Pandemic Disproportionately Affected Women in the Americas.”

<sup>27</sup> “COVID-19 Pandemic Disproportionately Affected Women in the Americas.”

<sup>28</sup> “Caregiving in Crisis: Gender Inequality in Paid and Unpaid Work during COVID-19.”

<sup>29</sup> “COVID-19 Pandemic Disproportionately Affected Women in the Americas.”

<sup>30</sup> Natalia Kanem, “Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: The Cornerstone of Sustainable Development,” *UN Chronicle*, August 2018,

childbirth are the leading killer of 15- to 19-year-old girls globally,” and policies restricting bodily autonomy generally increase unsafe abortions.

There has been progress towards achieving this goal, as shown by “all 193 countries in the world ... ratif[ying] treaties that protect reproductive rights,” and “50 countries liberaliz[ing] their abortion laws over the last 25 years.”<sup>31</sup> These developments have, in part, been achieved by women rallying together to share their personal stories and experiences to break the silence around this profoundly stigmatized topic as demonstrated by movements like “Ni Una Menos”—originating in Argentina demanding an end to the high rate of gender-based violence—or the following “Marea Verde” in Latin America—advocating for the legalization of abortions.<sup>32</sup> Such efforts have led to Argentina legalizing abortions in 2020 and Colombia’s decriminalization of abortion in 2022, as well as sparked discussions of debates in other nations.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, in Ireland, the “Repeal the 8th” campaign built up to the overwhelming public vote majority of 66.4% to overturn the abortion ban enforced by the country’s 8th Amendment, repealed with the passing of the 36th Amendment.<sup>34</sup>

While these advancements are a step in the right direction, they are just the beginning: “There are 24 countries ... where abortion is completely prohibited,” including Andorra, El Salvador, Honduras, Senegal, Egypt, and the Philippines.<sup>35</sup> This statistic does not include the number of countries that permit abortions only on specific cases like rape or critical health risks for women, adding up to more than 50.<sup>36</sup> Even in countries where it is legal, uneven or difficult access to safe abortions poses a more significant challenge. Furthermore, the ongoing debate about the rights of unborn children or fetuses—pro-life—and the rights of pregnant women—pro-choice—have led to regressions in the legality of abortion in 4 countries — the US, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Poland<sup>37</sup> (with the US recently joining this trend after their Supreme Court overturned the landmark case *Roe v. Wade*) which legalized abortion based on an implied right to privacy—through the decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*.<sup>38</sup> Ergo, recent developments have sparked progress in the international women’s reproductive rights movement, yet complex socio-economic barriers still serve as obstacles to achieving full gender equality.

### **The Situation in The Democratic Republic of The Congo\***

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has experienced persistent conflict and instability for decades, with devastating humanitarian consequences. Since the 1990s, the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu have been at the epicenter of fighting between various armed groups and government forces. The conflict has led to widespread human rights violations against civilians, including killings, sexual violence, child soldier recruitment, and population displacement.<sup>39</sup> According to a 2010 study by the International Rescue Committee,

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<sup>31</sup>Center for Reproductive Rights, “Global Advocacy,” August 30, 2022,

<sup>32</sup> 1. Ximena Casas, “How the ‘green Wave’ Movement Did the Unthinkable in Latin America,” The New York Times, November 1, 2021,

<sup>33</sup>Megan Diamondstein, “Colombia’s Highest Court Rules to Decriminalize Abortion,” Center for Reproductive Rights, March 25, 2022,

<sup>34</sup>BBC News “Eighth Amendment Repealed as Irish President Signs Bill into Law,” September 18, 2018,

<sup>35</sup> Eloise Barry, “Countries Where Abortion Is Illegal or Restricted,” Time, June 24, 2022,

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Center for Reproductive Rights, “The World’s Abortion Laws,” August 25, 2023,

<sup>38</sup>Nina Totenberg and Sarah McCammon, “Supreme Court Overturns *Roe v. Wade*, Ending Right to Abortion Upheld for Decades,” NPR, June 24, 2022,

<sup>39</sup> “Democratic Republic of the Congo - Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.”

conflict-related causes led to the deaths of around 5.4 million people between 1998 and 2007 - making it the world's deadliest conflict since World War II.<sup>40</sup> Much of the violence in eastern Congo stems from the continued presence of dozens of armed groups, including local self-defense militias known as Mai-Mai, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) - composed of ethnic Hutu extremists linked to the 1994 Rwandan genocide, and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) - an Islamist Ugandan rebel group. These groups clash over control of land and natural resources and prey upon civilians.<sup>41</sup> According to Human Rights Watch, armed groups were responsible for 1,093 deaths of civilians in North and South Kivu provinces in 2020. Civilians face looting, illegal taxation, forced labor, sexual violence, arbitrary detention, and killings.<sup>42</sup>

Sexual violence has been used systematically as a weapon of war in eastern Congo. A 2011 study in the *American Journal of Public Health* estimated that 1,152 women were sexually assaulted every day in the Congo, with 48 women sexually assaulted every hour.<sup>43</sup> The vast majority of perpetrators are armed men, including rebels, soldiers, and police. Victims include women, children, and infants. Sexual assault survivors face medical complications, social stigma, unwanted pregnancies, and HIV/AIDS. Very few perpetrators are ever prosecuted. The use of sexual assault as a weapon of war destroys families and communities. The conflict has led to gruesome human rights abuses against children. UNICEF estimated in 2020 that over 3,000 children had been recruited into armed groups in the Kivus.<sup>44</sup> Both girls and boys are forced to undergo military training and participate in combat operations, including laying mines and ambushes. Children are often coerced into joining armed groups through abduction, threats against their families, or promises of financial rewards. Those who try to escape face torture and death.<sup>45</sup>

Population displacement has also reached catastrophic levels due to the conflict. As of September 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported over 5.6 million internally displaced persons in the Congo - Africa's largest internally displaced population.<sup>46</sup> Armed attacks force communities to constantly flee their homes and lands, with little access to food, medical care, or education. Refugees also face a heightened risk of sexual assault, forced recruitment, and further attacks in displacement camps. The Congo's human rights and humanitarian crisis should shock the international community into action. Firstly, the UN peacekeeping mission in the Congo (MONUSCO) needs more personnel and resources to protect civilians from armed groups.<sup>47</sup> Secondly, intensified diplomatic efforts are required to demobilize and disarm militias and reintegrate former fighters into society. Thirdly, perpetrators of human rights violations must be held accountable, including through the International Criminal Court. The Congolese government needs assistance strengthening the national justice system and ensuring fair trials respecting defendants' human rights.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> "Progress and Challenges on Conflict Minerals: Facts on Dodd-Frank 1502 - The EnOUGH Project."

<sup>41</sup> "DR Congo: Atrocities by Rwanda-Backed M23 Rebels."

<sup>42</sup> "Democratic Republic of the Congo - Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect."

<sup>43</sup> Adetunji, "Forty-Eight Women Raped Every Hour in Congo, Study Finds."

<sup>44</sup> "UNICEF Calls for Urgent Action to Respond to Alarming Levels of Increasing Sexual Violence against Girls and Women in Eastern DRC."

<sup>45</sup> "UNICEF Calls for Urgent Action to Respond to Alarming Levels of Increasing Sexual Violence against Girls and Women in Eastern DRC."

<sup>46</sup> UNHCR US -, "DR Congo Emergency | UNHCR US."

<sup>47</sup> UNHCR US -, "DR Congo Emergency | UNHCR US."

<sup>48</sup> "Security Council Must Strengthen, Uphold Responsibility to Ensure Accountability When International Law Is Violated, Speakers Stress in All-Day Debate | UN Press."

The appalling human rights situation and civilian suffering in the Congo require urgent global attention. The people of the Congo deserve peace, justice, and freedom from fear. As part of shared humanity, we all have a responsibility to speak out against these atrocities, support Congolese civil society groups, and press for accountability and political solutions. True peace will only come through protecting human rights, ensuring good governance, and addressing the root causes of conflict. The international community must stand in solidarity with the Congolese people to put an end to this tragic crisis.

### **The Time Is Now**

Human rights violations continue to occur around the world at an alarming rate. Acknowledging these abuses is insufficient - real action is urgently needed to end impunity and uphold justice. As we approach the 2030 deadline for the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including peace and justice, the international community must mobilize to defend human rights worldwide.

Empty condemnation does nothing for victims and enables oppressors. When governments and groups systematically violate rights, they must face consequences - from sanctions to prosecutions. The UNDP should debate requesting the UN Security Council to leverage asset freezes, travel bans, and referrals to the International Criminal Court to hold abusers accountable. Regional bodies like the African Union can censure rights-violating regimes. Concerted diplomacy and conditional aid should pressure offenders to reform. There must be costs for violating rights. An essential step is developing a universal, legally binding definition of human rights to be enforced worldwide. This would end discrepancies on which rights deserve protection. Freedom from slavery, torture, discrimination, and arbitrary killing should be enshrined alongside civil liberties and economic/social rights to food, health, and education. Governments should agree to uphold rights legislation domestically and be monitored through transparent progress reports.

We need stronger global institutions to implement rights protections. The UN Human Rights Council should be less vulnerable to politicization and more resolute against serial abusers through mandatory sanctions. Independent investigations must gather evidence on violations to feed legal action. Regional human rights courts should augment the International Criminal Court in prosecuting war criminals, genocidaires, and torturers when states fail to do so. Impunity must end. With global cooperation, we can build a rights-respecting world. The lives of millions depend on action being taken now to enforce human rights norms consistently worldwide. If world leaders are serious about defending the rights of all people today and generations to come, concrete steps must follow rhetoric. The time is now to move past complacency by standing up for the oppressed, restraining the oppressors, and enacting laws that uphold the inherent human rights of all.

## **RESOURCE REVIEW**

### **United Nations Documents**

#### **UN Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations Towards Future Generations (1997)**

<https://bit.ly/UNESCOFUTURE>

This comprehensive UNESCO-drafted declaration clearly delineates the current generation's responsibilities toward protecting future generations' interests and needs. It provides an aspirational framework centered on intergenerational equity that delegates can reference throughout the debate. Specific principles can be cited to argue for air pollution reductions, sustainable use of natural resources, preservation of cultural diversity, etc. When drafting resolutions, delegates may consider reaffirming and expanding on this declaration by calling for national policies aligned with its principles and annual reporting mechanisms.

#### **UN Resolution A/RES/70/1 Agenda 2030 (2015)**

<https://bit.ly/UNAGENDA2030>

Central to this ambitious agenda unanimously adopted by UN member states is the concept of intergenerational solidarity and human rights for future generations. Delegates can cite aspects like the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, urgent calls for climate action, reduced inequalities, and good governance as essential building blocks when writing resolutions to uphold rights for future generations. The emphasis on collective long-term thinking makes this agenda foundational, and resolutions should align with and expand on its human rights provisions.

#### **UN General Assembly Resolution 44/25 (1989)**

<https://bit.ly/UNGA4425>

Though focused on protecting children's interests, this widely ratified binding human rights convention importantly enshrines children's right to an education that prepares them for an active, engaged role in society. Delegates can argue that extending human rights preparations and capacities to future generations is a natural extension and evolution of this right. Resolutions could include provisions recommending that human rights education be incorporated into school curriculums globally.

#### **UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/66/137 (2011)**

<https://bit.ly/UNGA66137>

This declaration emphasizes the critical importance of human rights education and training for empowering all people to contribute to society and enact change. Delegates can connect this to building future generations capable of protecting their own human rights through standardized education and training programs. Calls for member states to achieve this can build on this declaration's framework.

### **Guiding Questions for Debate**

1. What specific human rights challenges do we anticipate future generations might face that need to be safeguarded today? How might technological advances, climate change, population growth, or other factors threaten human rights for future generations?
2. What responsibilities do current generations have to protect the human rights of future generations? Should we view this primarily as an ethical obligation or legal responsibility?
3. How can we balance protecting future generations' rights with policies needed today? For example, if limiting fossil fuel usage today impacts economic growth, how do we weigh those tradeoffs?
4. What new laws or amendments to existing human rights conventions/frameworks are needed to enshrine the rights of future generations? Should rights like a clean environment, digital privacy, etc. be codified?
5. What role can technology play in either enhancing or threatening human rights for future generations? How can technology be guided positively and its risks mitigated?

### **Guiding Questions for Position Papers**

1. What specific human rights issues are most important for your nation to prioritize for future generations? How are these grounded in your nation's values and history?
2. What binding commitments, laws, or constitutional provisions does your nation already have in place that safeguard the human rights of future generations?
3. What concrete policies and programs has your nation implemented or plans to implement to uphold intergenerational human rights? Cite specific examples.
4. How does your nation weigh impacts on future generations when evaluating policies on issues like economic development, environment, technology, etc? What tradeoffs does your nation see between short-term and long-term interests?
5. Is your nation open to proposals for new legal frameworks or amendments to existing human rights conventions to enshrine the rights of future generations? What specific changes would your nation support or oppose?
6. What role does your nation believe technology companies, civil society groups, and other non-state actors should play in protecting human rights for future generations?