



Florida High Schools Model United Nations

## **FHSMUN GULF COAST 9**

### **UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

#### Child Protection and the Human Rights of Youth

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**“A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline.”**

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan

## **COMMITTEE BRIEF**

### **Introduction**

Since its creation, the United Nations Human Rights Council has been dedicated to “the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations.”<sup>1</sup> Although the UNHRC addresses multiple thematic human rights issues such as freedom of expression, women’s rights, and the rights of racial and ethnic minorities, there has been a recent shift in focus for the council. More specifically, the human rights of youth have come to the forefront of discussion for the UNHRC. Given the distinct role that young men and women play in the social, political, and economic sectors of society, it is evermore important to discuss the rights that accompany them within these parts of civil society. Delegates to the United Nations Human Rights Council are tasked with thoroughly investigating this issue and exploring the difficulties that young people experience in exercising their rights. The council must look beyond the ages of these young people, and delve into the period of life that these men and women are in, and the challenges they face on a day to day basis in areas such as immigration status, disability, and social status.

In the UN System, a “youth” is a person between the ages of 15 to 24.<sup>2</sup> Delegates to the UN Human Rights Council are tasked with assessing the treatment of youth in the workplace, in educational institutions, and in the political environments of their respective societies. These rights are outlined within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and are important topics to consider when discussing the human rights of youth. Delegates to the Human Rights Council may wish to discuss how the SDGs catalyze action in “promoting and coordinating implementation of internationally agreed development goals,”<sup>3</sup> such as reducing inequalities; quality education; and eliminating poverty, amongst others. These goals are an important starting point for evaluating the contributions of young men and women to society; they may also highlight how this demographic is often excluded from important sectors of contemporary society.

### **Background**

Youth rights are of primary importance within the international community. This issue begins with the historical perception of youth, which advocates say has been oppressive and informed by paternalism, adultism and ageism in general, as well as fears that people have of children and youth. Multiple societal perceptions may include assumptions that young people are incapable of making crucial decisions and need protection from their tendencies to act impulsively. Laws such as voting age, child labor laws, emancipation, and corporal punishment may all be affected by society’s perceptions of young men and women. Within the subject of rights of youth, there are marginalized issues such as the rights of youth in schools and civic engagement of the youth population. Young men and women within different school systems may face different obstacles in obtaining their education through a homeschool, private, or public school system. Additionally, there are systems that have been established for adolescents that display antisocial behavior, oftentimes called “gulag schools,” that attempt to alter antisocial

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<sup>1</sup> "United Nations Human Rights Council." Welcome to the Human Rights Council. Accessed January 08, 2017. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/AboutCouncil.aspx#ftn1>.

<sup>2</sup> Secretary-General’s Report to the General Assembly, A/36/215, 1981

<sup>3</sup> "About: Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform." United Nations. Accessed January 08, 2017. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/about>.

conduct of young men and women. The UNHRC may also want to explore the amount of young men and women that are used for forced labor, as well as those within professional detention centers. The United States currently has the world's largest prison population. There are states, like California, that have been ordered by the United States Supreme Court to reduce the capacity rate of the state's prison.<sup>4</sup> This critical population is being held in correctional facilities with poor conditions. The men and women have been reported as sleeping together in prison gyms, and sharing restroom facilities with 50 other people. This desensitized system puts a halt on the growth of these men and women, and how they may contribute to today's society.<sup>5</sup> In response to these poor conditions, California has recently announced plans to rework their prison system, changing the focus of their prisons to rehabilitation and education.<sup>6</sup>

An additional sub-topic within the human rights of youth issue is civic engagement of young people. This topic is significant because of the changing dynamics in contemporary politics. There are hundreds of organizations that have members of all ages engaged in the political sphere of society. Voting rights are an important instance of how youth may be excluded from the political sector of society; there are national campaigns in countries like the United States such as the National Youth Rights Association and Vote16 USA, that have dedicated themselves to lowering the voting age, and the age of candidacy in order to make it easier for young men and women to be engaged in making laws and influencing society. Additionally, some of these organizations have remained steadfast in their goal to get young people elected to prominent positions in local communities, including as members of city councils and as mayors.

Another popular topic within the broader scope of human rights is ageism. The term ageism refers to the stereotyping and discriminating against individuals or groups on the basis of their age. In a definition that was introduced by Iversen, Larsen, and Solem in 2009, ageism is "defined as negative or positive stereotypes, prejudice and/ or discrimination against (or to the advantage of) elderly people on the basis of their chronological age or on the basis of a perception of them as being 'old' or 'elderly'. Ageism can be implicit or explicit and can be expressed on a micro-, meso- or macro- level."<sup>7</sup> Conversations that are related to ageism in the workplace, or society in general, tend to focus on the older generation and the havoc that ageism wreaks on older people. Well-meaning people may even mistake the issue of ageism to apply only to the older generation. However, it is increasingly evident that youths around the world suffer from inequalities sometimes just as much as their counterparts. Dr. Bill Thomas is an author and physician that has conducted research in the terrain of human aging. His global organization, The Eden Alternative, works to improve the care provided to older people. However, he has been cited as saying that, "Of all the "isms" out there, ageism is the one that we can all relate to. We've all been young once, and hopefully, we will all know what it is like to grow old. Yet, despite this fact, ageism is one of the most pervasive and ingrained social patterns

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<sup>4</sup> Biskupic, Joan. "Supreme Court stands firm on prison crowding." USA Today. May 24, 2011. Accessed February 12, 2017.

[http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/washington/judicial/2011-05-24-Supreme-courtprisons\\_n.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/washington/judicial/2011-05-24-Supreme-courtprisons_n.htm).

<sup>5</sup> MacDonald, Morgan (2013) "Reducing California's Overcrowded Prison Population," *emis: Research Journal of Justice Studies and Forensic Science*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 2.

<sup>6</sup> Office of Gavin Neusem. "Governor Newsom Announces Historic Transformation of San Quentin State Prison." March 17, 2023. <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2023/03/17/san-quentin-transformation/>.

<sup>7</sup> Iversen, T.N.; Larsen, L.; Solem, P.E. (2009). "A conceptual analysis of ageism". *Nordic Psychology*. 61: 4–22. doi:10.1027/1901-2276.61.3.4.

in our culture.”<sup>8</sup> At the end of the day, the United Nations Human Rights Council must ensure that men and women of all ages understand their rights and their worth within a given society. When a person is not allowed to share their talents and gifts they may be overcome with loneliness or helplessness. The international community must not turn their backs on individuals because they are “too young,” because it hinders their ability to thrive in civil society and have a voice in the future they will inherit.

### **UN System Actions**

Rarely are issues in the UN System addressed by only one agency, body, or committee and the human rights of youth are no exception. The Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), the United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the UN Entity on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls (UNWOMEN), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and a variety of partner agencies, bodies and committees are all directly involved in monitoring, promoting, and protecting the human rights of youth.

The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), adopted in 1995, specified 15 priority areas for youth<sup>9</sup> and remains one of the guiding principles for the UN System and its international partners. Addressing all 15 priority areas may be a daunting task but delegates to the United Nations Human Rights Council will almost assuredly wish to address issues regarding employment, environment, education, civic engagement, and the status and treatment of girls and young women. In July 2016, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) convened a meeting of experts to analyze the existing human rights framework that applies to young people as well as “to formulate possible ways forward for the human rights of youth at an international level.”<sup>10</sup> More recently, the OHCHR made youth the focus of the fourth phase of their World Programme for Human Rights Education from 2020 through 2024.<sup>11</sup> This report outlines strategies that would support the education of youth in human rights topics with policy meant to be implemented on the national level. The report emphasizes the importance of including youth in the conversation when developing and implementing education policies that would directly effect them. Delegates to the UN Human Rights Council may wish to examine this report to see what steps might be most effective to ensure proper and effective guarantees of the human rights of youth and what policies would be most effective in educating youth on human rights topics.

### **The Role of Youth in Economic Development**

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<sup>8</sup> Laura Beck The Eden Alternative and About Laura Beck, The Eden Alternative, "Ageism . . . Not Just for Grown-ups," Changing Aging, December 23, 2016, <https://changingaging.org/culture-change/ageism-not-just-for-grown-ups/>

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, “World Programme of Action for Youth” 1995. Those 15 priority areas are: 1) Education; 2) Employment; 3) Hunger and poverty; 4) Health; 5) Environment; 6) Drug Abuse; 7) Juvenile Delinquency; 8) Leisure-time activities; 9) Girls and young women; 10) Full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making; 11) Globalization; 12) Information and Communication Technology; 13) HIV/AIDS; 14) Armed Conflict; and 15) Intergenerational Issues.

<sup>10</sup> UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), “Expert meeting on the human rights of youth: Executive summary and outcomes” (HRESIS/RRDD) September 18, 2013 p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> OHCHR. “World Programme for Human Rights Education, Fourth Phase.” 2022. [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/OHCHR-OSGEY-UNESCO-World\\_Programme-for-Human-Rights-Education\\_Fourth-Phase.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/OHCHR-OSGEY-UNESCO-World_Programme-for-Human-Rights-Education_Fourth-Phase.pdf).

In 2019, it was reported to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division that there “are about 1.2 billion youth aged 15-24 years in the world, or 16 percent of the global population.”<sup>12</sup> The sustainable development goals that have been outlined by the United Nations predict that there will be nearly 1.4 billion youths by the year 2065, the estimated peak for youth population.<sup>13</sup> Youthful men and women have the ability to contribute positively to the development, granted that they are provided the knowledge and opportunities they need to succeed in today’s world. “Demographers and economists have heralded the window of opportunity presented by this ‘demographic dividend,’ wherein the relative abundance of working-age people can lead to increased savings, higher productivity, and more rapid economic growth.”<sup>14</sup> A country’s ability to harness the power that a demographic dividend may have relies heavily on the investments in human capital, particularly amongst young people that are poised to enter the labor force. As summarized in the United Nations report on population facts, “if human capital investment falls short of if the labor market is unable to absorb new workers, the opportunity of this demographic dividend may be squandered.”<sup>15</sup>

Delegates to the United Nations Human Rights Council may wish to focus on aspects of civil society that have the ability to support young men and women entering the workforce. The committee may wish to consult the Global Youth Wellbeing Index to track progress, and plan for the future to improve the rights that are guaranteed to every human at every stage of life. The index has been produced by the Center for Strategic International Studies, which gauges 30 countries that represent about 70% of the world’s youth. Within the report, the organization studies six main areas: citizen participation, economic opportunity, education, health, information and communications technology, and safety and security. After the Index was produced, it could be seen that “85% of the youth represented in the 30 countries are experiencing ‘lower levels; of well-being than the average.’”<sup>16</sup> In each country included in the study, young men and women are the strongest in health, yet suffer from low levels of economic opportunity. The results of the study show that Australia and Sweden were the two countries that supported each of the six areas the most. However, it should be noted that a country’s economic activity does not necessarily create a higher well-being for each population. A prominent example of this would be comparing GDP to well-being in nations such as India. While India is considered a growing economy, simply looking at its GDP fails to take into account the environmental degradation that comes with development or the distribution of wealth across population, two areas that India struggles in.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Data are from World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision, UN DESA, [https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2019/08/WYP2019\\_10-Key-Messages\\_GZ\\_8AUG19.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2019/08/WYP2019_10-Key-Messages_GZ_8AUG19.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Mason, A. (2005). Demographic dividends: the past, the present, and the future.

<sup>15</sup> "Population Facts." United Nations. May 2015.

[http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/popfacts/PopFacts\\_2015-1.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/popfacts/PopFacts_2015-1.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Golden, Nicole. "The Global Youth Wellbeing Index."

<https://www.youthindex.org>

<sup>17</sup> Kapoor A., Debroy B. “GDP Is Not a Measure of Human Well-Being.” Harvard Law Review. Oct 4th, 2019. <https://hbr.org/2019/10/gdp-is-not-a-measure-of-human-well-being>.

## Education of Youth

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.”<sup>18</sup> This right has been neglected to children and youths because of international conflict, corrupt governments, and diseases. The United Nations Human Right Council should advance discussions on how more young men and women can attain a certain level of education in times of conflict and stay safe within the process.

Education is a universally important right, but the means by which it is implemented in each nation can differ greatly. The United States, amongst other developed nations, view education as a mandatory requirement for young people to be successful within society. The governments of some countries may still see education as a privilege, not a right, particularly for women and girls. These inequalities must be diminished in order for all young men and women to have a right to education. There is a significant disadvantage that young women suffer in comparison to men in many countries. For example, South and West Asia have the widest gender gaps in its out-of-school population: 81 percent of its out-of-school girls are unlikely to ever start school compared to 42 percent of its out-of-school boys, with conditions in Afghanistan getting worse as girls are refused allowance into secondary education programs.<sup>19</sup> While gender parity has improved in many aspects, there are various barriers that are still in place that discriminate against women, especially at the secondary school level and among the most marginalized children. In some cultures, barriers to girls’ education throughout the world range from supply-side constraints, negative cultural norms, school’s fees, inadequate sanitation facilities in schools such as lack of private and separate latrines, and negative classroom environments where girls may face violence. Increasingly, adolescent girls may also face multiple economic and social demands that have the ability to disrupt their education, spanning from household obligations and child labor to child marriage, gender-based violence and female genital mutilation. Estimates shown by the United Nations Children’s Education Fund estimate that one-third of girls in the developing world are married before age 18, and one-third of women in the developing world give birth before age 20. If there was access to secondary education for girls and young women in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, child marriage would fall by an estimated 64 percent.<sup>20</sup> Examples of discriminatory legislation and policies often inhibit girls’ equal access to quality education. In countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, formal or written threats to shut down and close girls’ schools or end classes have fueled gender motivated attacks on schools.

These aspects, including several others, should be taken into account during the United Nations Human Right Council’s many deliberations. The right to education and the equality of education for both men and women are clear priorities for all participating countries; these goals and rights are crucial to sustainable human development all over the world.

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<sup>18</sup> The United Nations. 1948. Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

<sup>19</sup> UNICEF. "Gender Equality in Primary and Secondary Education." March, 2018. <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/what-we-do/education/gender-equality-primary-and-secondary-education>

<sup>20</sup> “Evaluation of UNICEF Girl’s Education Portfolio (2009-2015).” UNICEF. August 2018. <https://evaluationreports.unicef.org/GetDocument?fileID=10748>

## **Civic Engagement**

Recently, youth have taken a strong stance to become engaged in civic society and issues that relate immediately to their rights. Progress in youth civic engagement within countries, however, varies considerably. Subjects within the overarching issue of civic engagement of youth include: voting age, accessibility to voting, age limits for holding public office, among many others. Each of these aspects must be taken into account to attain the ultimate goal of providing each young person the right to engage in civil society.

United Nations HABITAT organization's book, "Advancing Youth Civic Engagement and Human Rights with Young Women and Men," explains how the lack of engagement of youth in governance at all levels can undermine their rights as citizens. The Under-Secretary-General for UN-Habitat states, "As this report demonstrates, youth citizenship and engagement in governance is about more than political engagement. It is as much about dealing with limited access to economic resources and socio-political assets. It begins with engaging youth as equal partners, recognizing their rights to participate in decision-making processes and to productively use their knowledge, perspectives, and experience."<sup>21</sup> Youth will live to inherit the future world we leave them with and thus possess a unique incentive to protect it. Helping to facilitate youth's participation in decision making works to build a better future for all of society.

## **Conclusion**

The rights of men and women in all parts of the world are increasingly important with the spread of globalization, new technology systems, and communication on a global scale. It is easier now, more than ever, to learn about inequalities, rights of people in developed countries, and how to create change around the world. It is the responsibility of each member state, and the UNHRC, to guarantee rights to young people everywhere. Through the work of the UN and participating nations, it is imperative to develop initiatives, and work together with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to ensure that the voices of young people everywhere are not overlooked or drowned out.

The right to education, civic engagement, and equality in the employment sector of society are just a few of the pressing obstacles that youth face in today's world. However, there are still many issues that are left to explore, such as health and safety from diseases and conflict. Additionally, member states should ultimately focus on creating an environment for youth where they can satisfy their basic needs independent of their parents. In countries where young men and women are forced to take on more responsibilities, they should always know their rights are ensured and protected through the efforts of their government and the international community.

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<sup>21</sup> "Advancing Youth Civic Engagement and Human Rights with Young Women and Young Men." Inhabitant.org. 2013. <http://unhabitat.org/books/advancing-youth-civic-engagement-and-human-rights/>.



## **RESOURCE REVIEW**

### **UN Documents and Resolutions**

United Nations General Assembly resolution 70/127 (A/RES/70/127), “Policies and programmes involving youth” December 15, 2015.

This report “reaffirms the World Programme of Action for Youth...” and urges governments to remember their commitments in working towards the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while not leaving youth behind. This includes emphasizing the need to eradicate poverty and malnutrition, improve education, improve, and provide widespread health-care services, and address high rates of unemployment for youth among other issues. This is an extremely well written and well formatted UN document that outlines many of the issues delegates could discuss in this committee. It is highly recommended delegates read-through it.

United Nations General Assembly resolution 62/126 (A/RES/62/126), “Policies and programmes involving youth: youth in the global economy - promoting youth participation in social and economic development” December 18, 2007.

This document focuses on the role of youth in the global economy. This includes youth’s access to economic education and their ability to enter the work-force or become entrepreneurs. This document would be beneficial for delegates looking to address issues related to youth in the labor market.

United Nations General Assembly resolution 50/81 (A/RES/50/81), “World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond” December 14, 1996.

This document outlines much about the World Programme of Action for Youth and its goals and structure from 1996-2000. The document is rather old and somewhat outdated but is still beneficial when it comes to understanding the goals of the WPAY and how it functions.

### **RESOURCES AND NOTES:**

- The Global Youth Wellbeing Index (<https://www.youthindex.org>)
  - o Provides an interactive country by country analysis of overall youth wellbeing and ranks countries based on their score in seven different categories. The categories evaluate the country on things like youth education, health, gender equality, etc.
- “Ageism... Not Just for Grown Ups,” Laura Beck.  
(<https://changingaging.org/culture-change/ageism-not-just-for-grown-ups/>)
  - o A good article addressing how ageism is not exclusive to grown-ups and elders and can affect youth as well.
- UNDESA: International Youth Day, 12 August 2019 Report  
([https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2019/08/WYP\\_2019\\_10-Key-Messages\\_GZ\\_8AUG19.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2019/08/WYP_2019_10-Key-Messages_GZ_8AUG19.pdf))
  - o The most up to date report on global youth statistics including youth percent of the population, expected changes in youth population and poverty rates. Short and easy read in 10 well summarized key points, delegates should absolutely read through this document.

- UNICEF: Evaluation of UNICEF Girls' Education Portfolio (2009-2015) (<https://evaluationreports.unicef.org/GetDocument?fileID=10748>)
  - o A comprehensive evaluation of global efforts by UNICEF and participating countries to help improve girls' education and equality in the education sector. Includes some important key points and conclusions on the state of education for girls and some suggestions for how UNICEF can rework their program to better advance girls' education.

### **Guiding Questions:**

How are youth treated in your country? At what age(s) do your young people reach adulthood and/or the age of majority? What rights are limited and/or prohibited for youth in your country?

Does your government maintain any agencies or departments whose primary roles are to ensure the effective exercise and protection of the human rights of youth? If not, does your government plan to add any agencies or departments along these lines in the near future?

How might your government and its civil society partners more effectively incorporate youth into decision-making and the economy? How might the UN System and other international entities, including international financial institutions (IFIs) assist youth in enjoying their full complement of rights?