



Florida High Schools Model United Nations

FHSMUN 46

UNSC & ILO CRISIS

SAFEGUARDING HUMAN PROSPERITY IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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Introduction

In the 21st century, technological advancements in automation and artificial intelligence (AI) have reshaped global labor markets. While these innovations promise increased efficiency, they pose significant challenges to labor forces worldwide, particularly in industries reliant on manual work, such as shipping and logistics. The widespread adoption of automation in major ports and supply chains has led to large-scale job displacement, fueling labor unrest and economic instability. As dockworkers and logistical employees face the threat of replacement by AI-operated cranes, self-piloted cargo ships, and automated customs systems, labor movements across the world have organized strikes and protests to demand job security and equitable labor policies. Beyond economic implications, these protests raise questions about enforcing international labor laws, the role of governance in balancing innovation with human rights, and the potential for escalating unrest if no sustainable solutions are implemented. This background guide explores the growing crisis surrounding global labor strikes in response to automation, the role of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in addressing this issue, and the potential consequences of prolonged disruptions in global trade.

The Crisis of Automation in the Labor Market

Automation has been steadily transforming the global labor market for decades, but recent advances in AI have accelerated this shift. In ports and shipping industries, AI-driven automation has replaced traditional dockworker jobs with robotic cranes, AI-assisted inventory management, and self-navigating vessels. The efficiency of AI-driven systems has led corporations and governments to prioritize cost-saving automation over human labor, resulting in widespread layoffs. While automation allows ports to handle larger cargo volumes at unprecedented speeds, streamlining supply chains and reducing human error, it has also fueled growing labor unrest. Workers, unions, and advocacy groups argue that while automation benefits corporate efficiency, it often does so at the expense of workers' livelihoods, sparking protests and strikes in major industrial sectors. Many nations lack enforceable international regulations that define workers' rights in the context of automation, leading to disparities in labor protections across different economies. Many labor movements demand policies that protect workers from automation-related job losses, including retraining programs, phased automation implementation, and stronger regulatory oversight. However, responses have varied widely, leading to global labor protections and enforcement inconsistencies.

Case Studies: Protests and Unrest in Response to Automation

Labor strikes against automation are not a new phenomenon. In past decades, introducing automated port equipment has led to mass protests. Strikes in significant shipping hubs have delayed cargo deliveries, disrupted trade agreements, and strained diplomatic relations between nations. These labor actions demonstrate the direct economic consequences of failing to integrate

automation policies with labor protections. Automation's encroachment into logistics, including self-driving freight trucks and AI-managed warehousing, has led to pushback from transportation unions. Recent nationwide trucking strikes, rail worker protests, and logistics slowdowns have contributed to supply chain shortages and increased consumer prices. One of the most notable examples of labor unrest affecting global trade was the blockade of a major port due to a dockworkers' strike. This event led to massive economic disruptions, causing cargo ships to remain stranded at sea, shortages of essential goods, and delays in manufacturing operations worldwide. This crisis underscored how critical ports are to the stability of international commerce and highlighted the vulnerabilities of supply chains to labor unrest. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has had to intervene in times of labor-related unrest when such crises threaten international stability. One prominent case involved a widespread dockworkers' strike that escalated into diplomatic disputes and economic retaliations between major trade partners. The prolonged labor action resulted in significant supply chain disruptions, prompting the UNSC to mediate between striking workers, port authorities, and national governments. Sanctions and peacekeeping efforts were considered part of conflict resolution strategies, demonstrating how labor unrest, when left unchecked, can escalate into international crises requiring high-level diplomatic intervention.

The Role of the ILO in Addressing Automation and Labor Disruptions

As the leading international body focused on labor rights and workforce policies, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has sought to mitigate the risks of automation while ensuring fair labor practices. The ILO has issued comprehensive guidelines on fair transitions to automation, advocating for worker retraining and social protection programs. It has successfully brokered agreements between governments and unions, securing concessions such as automation limits and phased implementation strategies. The organization has strengthened global recognition of workers' rights in the face of technological change, ensuring that automation does not eliminate human labor from the workforce. The ILO has played a crucial role in shaping policies that prevent exploitation and uphold the dignity of laborers in the face of rapid technological shifts. However, the ILO faces several challenges. It lacks direct enforcement mechanisms, relying on national governments to implement its recommendations. Many businesses have prioritized profitability over labor concerns, undermining ILO-backed agreements. Wealthier nations have been more capable of adapting to automation while ensuring worker protections, whereas lower-income countries have struggled to implement similar policies. Despite its influence, the ILO has yet to create a universally accepted framework for balancing automation with labor rights, leading to growing tensions and industrial actions.

The Role of Ports in Global Trade and the Consequences of Disruptions

Ports serve as the backbone of global trade, facilitating the transport of raw materials, consumer goods, and essential commodities. Any disruption to port operations can have ripple effects

across multiple industries, leading to economic downturns, inflation, and geopolitical instability. Ports link global economies, allowing nations to import and export essential goods. Maritime trade supports millions of jobs worldwide, from dockworkers to logistics specialists. Efficient port operations are crucial for maintaining steady supply chains and preventing food, fuel, and medical supply shortages. Many of the world's largest ports are strategic assets, making them focal points for national security concerns and international disputes. Previous large-scale port strikes have led to massive economic consequences, including increased inflation, factory shutdowns, and even food shortages in some regions. Even temporary port shutdowns have resulted in months-long backlogs, affecting manufacturing and retail industries. Major disruptions have led to strained relations between trade partners, as delays cause financial losses and diplomatic disputes.

Conclusion

The global economy is at a crossroads as automation reshapes the workforce. While AI-driven efficiency brings undeniable benefits, labor unrest and economic disruptions threaten global stability. With significant ports serving as the lifeline of international trade, disruptions caused by strikes and labor protests have the potential to cripple economies and create widespread instability. As delegates consider solutions to these pressing challenges, they must balance technological progress, international law enforcement, and labor protections. Finding a resolution ensuring economic growth and job security will be crucial in preventing future crises.

Guiding Questions for Research

1. How has automation impacted global labor markets, particularly in industries like shipping and logistics?
2. What previous actions have been taken by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to regulate automation, and how effective have they been?
3. How have past labor strikes and protests affected global trade and supply chain stability?
4. Who benefits the most from automation in port operations, and how does it shift economic power between nations?
5. What role does international law play in addressing labor rights and automation, and how enforceable are these regulations?
6. How have major economies responded to labor unrest caused by automation, and what policy measures have been implemented?
7. How have disruptions in major ports historically influenced diplomatic relations and economic agreements between nations?
8. To what extent should governments intervene in labor disputes related to automation, and what challenges arise from such interventions?
9. What are the potential long-term consequences if automation continues to replace human labor without adequate safeguards?