Dartmouth Model United Nations
April 5 - 7, 2019
SPECPOL
December 5, 2019

Dear Delegates:

On behalf of the entire Dartmouth Model United Nations staff, I would like to welcome and thank you for registering for the fourteenth annual Dartmouth Model United Nations conference this April 2019. We have been working relentlessly since the end of last year’s conference to provide a better and more worthwhile Model U.N. experience for this spring’s delegates.

DartMUN is a unique conference. We pair world-class delegations and dais staff members in smaller, more-interactive environments to facilitate an enriching experience for delegates of all skill levels. We believe DartMUN’s active, small committees ensure delegates feel comfortable immersing themselves in a competitive but supportive environment that encourages trial by error and participation. Furthermore, DartMUN’s well-trained staff is excited to work with your delegates this winter in committee to equip the next generation of college students with the skills to tackle complex global problems.

This being said, Model United Nations is only meaningful when delegates are thoroughly prepared. To aid in your research preparation, your committee staff has spent hours researching, writing, and editing this Background Guide. The Background Guide serves as an introduction to your respective committee and an overview of the topics that you will be debating over the course of the conference.

The Background Guide is intended to be a starting point for your research and is not, in itself, an adequate exposure to the complexities of your committee’s topics. To be prepared, each delegate should do further research and focus on processing information through the lens of their respective country or position. If you are having trouble digesting all the information, the Background Guide contains relevant discussion questions that break down the topics. Also, as questions or ideas arise, do not be shy in contacting your committee staff via e-mail. Committee staff are knowledgeable and can help you better understand a particular topic or how your country fits into a larger international debate. More often than not, discussing the problem with another person can open up more paradigms and viewpoints that may guide you throughout the brainstorming process.

As in years past, all delegates are expected to write a brief position paper before the conference to synthesize all of their preparatory research and analysis. Please see the position paper guidelines on the conference website for specific information about content, format, etc. Committee staff will collect position papers at the beginning of the first committee session on Friday evening. Bring a hard copy because delegates who do not submit position papers will not be eligible for awards. I look forward to meeting you this coming spring.

Sincerely,

Lauren Bishop
Secretary-General DartMUN XIV
Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL), the fourth committee of the General Assembly at DartMUN XIV! We are Daniela Kyle and Yan (Mia) Miao, your co-chairs for this committee. We are so excited to meet all of you and see the energy, research, and sophistication you will bring to debate during the conference! We are first-year students at Dartmouth and (consequently) first-time staffers at DartMUN, but we look forward to working the dais and organizing your discussion.

SPECPOL will debate two sensitive and important topics at DartMUN XIV: the Yemeni Civil War and the political rights of indigenous peoples. We expect that delegates will read this background guide attentively and then conduct their own research into literature and current events to understand the position of their assigned countries on these topics and to write a position paper. We look forward to reading your papers and hearing how you have advanced the topic outlines presented here with your own research.

During your preparations for the conference and during the weekend of the conference itself, please remember the nature of the United Nations as a peaceful forum for international dialogue. All nations and all delegates may present their diverse views on these controversial topics while working together to create a safer, more egalitarian world of the future.

All our best,

Daniela Kyle and Yan Miao
Co-chairs, SPECPOL, DartMUN XIV
**Topic A: Yemeni Civil War**

**Historical Context**

For the SPECPOL committee to fully understand its current tumultuous state, Yemen must first be placed in its historical context. The Republic of Yemen was first internationally recognized in 1990; since that time, the country has been in a constant state of turmoil including insurrections, conflicts, riots, terrorist attacks, and wars. These series of events have both weakened and divided the country, paving the way towards the instability of today. The SPECPOL committee must analyze the history of Yemen and the history of the current conflict to understand its origins and devise solutions to bring peace, stability, and prosperity back to this country.

**Reunification**

Yemeni unification occurred in 22 May 1990, after the fall of the USSR led to reunification talks between the communist, southern People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen whose capital was Aden and the Islamic, northern Arab Republic of Yemen whose capital was Sana’a. The former president of the Arab Republic of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was already in power for eleven years, became president of the newly establish Republic of Yemen, while the former president of the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen, al-Beidh, became vice president. Sanaa become the capital of the unified Republic of Yemen, and its population is majority Muslim, with about thirty-five percent Zaidi Shiite and sixty-five percent Sunnis.

**Yemeni Civil War in 1994**

After reunification, the first difficulty Yemen faced was their decision to stand against intervention in Iraq during the Gulf War in 1991, which caused the West and other Arab countries to cut off financial support to the fragile state leading to economic turmoil and strained international relations. The first Yemeni civil war after

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2 Ibid.
reunification was in 1994 after vice-president al-Beidh led an effort for South Yemen independence, concerned with increasing financial turmoil. The conflict quickly resolved itself with the anti-separatist northern Yemen prevailing, and the post of vice-presidency was given to the Minister of Defense Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi.4

Insurrections

Following the first Yemeni civil war since reunification in 1990, a series of insurrections took place. Al Qaeda began a jihadist insurgency in 1997, targeting forces loyal to the Yemeni government and the United States of America; the Yemeni government countered these attacks with their own military activities. In October of 2000, al Qaeda operatives executed a suicide bombing on the United States naval vessel USS Cole, which was refueling at a port in Aden, Yemen.5 Zaidi Shia tribes in northern Yemen rebelled in 2004, following years of incitement against the central government by the Shia cleric Hussein al-Houthi. The Yemeni military responded with force and reported the death of Houthi by September of that year.6 The Houthi movement, ideologically anti-American and anti-Semitic, launched protests due to complaints of being marginalized in the predominantly Sunni state.7

Southern Movement for Succession

In southern Yemen, continued frustration over repression by northern Yemen after Yemen’s reunification in 1990 and the failed separatist attempt in the 1994 Civil War sparked the creation of the Southern Movement in 2007, calling for the separation of southern Yemen into its own country.8 The Southern Movement demanded an end to corruption, a healthier economy, and lower unemployment rates. They later participated in the Yemeni revolution in 2011 during the Arab Spring. The current president, Saleh, was then ousted during these revolts and replaced by his vice-president Hadi, who initiated

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7 Ibid.
discussions exploring a more democratic restructuring of the government.⁹

_Uprising by the Houthis_

By 2014, Hadi’s proposed reforms have proven to be weak and ineffective, and the insurgent Houthi group continue to feel resentful and marginalized, since they did not inherit any political power or autonomy in their region following the Arab Spring. The Houthis took up arms, backed by certain northern regions and forces loyal to the former President Saleh, and begin the current Yemeni Civil War. The Houthis successfully took control of the Yemeni capital Sana’a in 2015, forcing Hadi to flee to Aden and then to Saudi Arabia.¹⁰ After this aggressive move against the internationally recognized Yemeni government, the Gulf Cooperation Council, made up by all Arab states of the Persian Gulf except Iraq, condemned the Houthis and their coup against Hadi’s government.¹¹

Saudi Arabian-led Coalition

Saudi Arabia believed that Iran, a country of predominantly Shia Muslims, was supporting the Houthi rebellion militarily.¹² Another important point of contention to the international community, especially Saudi Arabia, is the threat of having the Bab El Mandeb Strait, the fourth most important sea crossing point for oil, under the control of a rebel group. This concern prompted Saudi Arabia to form an international coalition of nine predominantly Sunni Muslim counties set on reinstating the official Yemeni government and expelling Houthi rebels from power.¹³ The United States, additionally, provides support to the international coalition through logistics and intelligence.¹⁴ The coalition began to strategically bombard installations and the United Nations imposed embargos against the sale of arms to the Houthis and their allies in 2015, setting the course for an

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¹⁰ Ibid.


¹² “Yemen crisis: Why is there a war?” BBC News.

¹³ Ibid.

intense civil war, now fueled by outside players in a kind of proxy war.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{Yemeni Civil War (2015 – Current)}

In August 2015, the military coalition formed by Saudi Arabia and backed by the United States, the UK, and France captured Aden, an important southern city in Yemen in proximity to Bab El Mandeb Strait. Hadi’s government moved back to Aden after finding refuge in Saudi Arabia during the initial rebellion by the Houthis, but Hadi himself remained in exile abroad.\textsuperscript{16} After this success, the coalition focused on the city of Taiz, which is just north of Aden, to secure their control over the Bab El Mandeb Strait. Due to a lack of experience in the field, the military units of the coalition begin to rely on aerial bombardment to combat the Houthi rebels which consequently led to increased civilian causalities as they get caught in the crossfire.\textsuperscript{17}

The indiscriminate nature of the war waged in Yemen may qualify some actions by combatants as war crimes. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the United Nations, “[t]he airstrikes have hit residential areas, markets, funerals, weddings, detention facilities, civilian boats and even medical facilities.”\textsuperscript{18} These vulnerable, noncombatant targets are unacceptable losses in any armed conflict. The United Nations has condemned these airstrikes and mourned the losses, all while calling for talks to negotiate a peace treaty between the Hadi government and the Houthi rebel groups, still comprised of supporters for the deceased Houthi and former president Saleh. These efforts have failed thus far, and the humanitarian crisis has continued, further perpetuated by the embargos on ports and airports controlled by the Houthis and additional embargos.


\textsuperscript{16} “Yemen crisis: Why is there a war?” \textit{BBC News}.


imposed by the Saudi-led coalition.\textsuperscript{19,20} The shipments permitted for humanitarian aid have proven insufficient for the population caught in the crossfires of a devastating civil war.

In November of 2017, Saleh broke his alliance with the Houthis in Sanaa to try a diplomatic approach with the coalition and Saudi Arabia. In retaliation, he was killed a few days later in December by the Houthis, ending hopes that a peace treaty or ceasefire that would allow immediate aid to reach the Yemeni people.\textsuperscript{21} Meanwhile, in Aden, Hadi’s government was unsuccessfully attempting to project authority and unite the locals. The Southern Movement, still protesting the reunification of North and South Yemen, created the Southern Transitional Council in January of 2018. This secessionist organization that quickly took control of the city. The Southern Transitional Council demanded the removal of Prime Minister Ahmed bin Daghar from office.\textsuperscript{22} The Southern Transitional Council, now another major division in the Yemeni Civil War, receives support from the United Arab Emirates, which has removed itself from the Saudi-led coalition supporting Hadi and his government.

As of 2018, the Saudi-led coalition has intensified airstrikes against the Houthi movement in northern Yemen. Forces loyal to Hadi are attempting to retake Hodeida’s strategic port to cut off maritime access for the Houthis.\textsuperscript{23} In Aden, the Southern Transitional Council has strengthened their position with Emirati support. Terrorist groups, including Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic State (ISIL), are also taking advantage of the chaos in the country to capture swathes of territory in southern Yemen, even briefly taking the city of Mukalla in 2015.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{19} “Yemen crisis: Why is there a war?” \textit{BBC News}.
\textsuperscript{20} Dearden, Lizzie. “Yemen civil war: 20 civilians including women and children ‘killed in Saudi-led air strike,’ UN says.”
\textsuperscript{21} “Yemen crisis: Why is there a war?” \textit{BBC News}.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
internationally recognized government headed by Hadi, the Houthi rebels in northern Yemen, the Southern Transitional Council in the south, and groups of Islamic terrorists in the east. No group has a clear political prerogative to control all of Yemen, and representatives of all groups have committed actions likely qualifying as war crimes. The Yemeni Civil War does not seem to be nearing any meaningful resolution.

**Yemeni Humanitarian Crisis**

The Yemeni people are paying the ultimate price for the civil war in their territory. The civil war has exacted severe penalties on the country’s population in terms of civilian casualties, food insecurity, medical emergencies, extreme poverty, and psychological trauma. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, called Yemen “the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.” As the conflict enters its fourth year, more than 22 million people – three-quarters of the population – are in desperate need of humanitarian aid and protection. More than 6800 civilians have been killed and at least 10,700 injured in the civil war since March of 2015. In addition, the war has displaced more than 2 million people from their homes. Military operations continue to disrupt the provision of humanitarian aid to the civilian population. For example, the aforementioned campaign by the Saudi-led coalition to capture the Yemeni port city of Hodeida from the Houthis will disrupt the main entry point for food and other supplies distributed to millions of people in Houthis-controlled northern Yemen. The longer the civil war lasts, the more disruption and destruction it will cause for the Yemeni people.

**Food Insecurity**

Secretary-General Guterres has stated that over 8 million people in Yemen "did not know where they will obtain their next meal," and that "every ten minutes, a child under five dies of preventable..."
causes." The World Food Programme (WFP) has warned the international community that 18 million of Yemen’s 29 million inhabitants classified as food insecure, and 8.4 million of them severely food insecure. Executive Director of the WFP David Beasley has noted that access to the regions of Yemen controlled by the Saudi-led coalition has "substantially improved" in the past year, but denial of access within Yemen remains the major obstacle to fighting hunger and disease. Blockades over air, land, and sea imposed by the Saudi-led coalition were designed to block the exchange of weapons between Iran and the Houthi rebels, but have also impeded the flow of food and medicine to needy civilians. Beasley then proceeded to lambaste the Houthi rebels for their stonewalling of humanitarian relief shipments. He accused Houthi rebels of "breaking every human principle imaginable", which included impeding the delivery of food supplies and using weapons at UN warehouse facilities. The severity of the crisis cannot totally be accounted for, since many organizations do not have access to regions blockaded by military groups or too remote for easy entry, and therefore they cannot monitor nor send aid.

**Cholera Outbreak**

The Yemeni humanitarian crisis also includes one of the worst outbreaks of cholera in world history. Cholera is a gastrointestinal disease caused by the bacteria *Vibrio cholerae*. The World Health Organization reported more than one million cases of the disease in Yemen by the end of 2017, along with several thousand deaths. Airstrikes by the Saudi-led and Emirati-led coalitions have damaged water supply systems in Yemen as well as medical facilities, such as a Doctors Without Borders facility struck in June of 2018.

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30 Nikbakht, Daniel and Sheena McKenzie. “The Yemen war is the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, UN says.”
32 Ibid.
Lake and Margaret Chan, the executive directors of UNICEF and WHO, have condemned the violence and the resulting spread of disease, poor sanitation, and malnutrition.\textsuperscript{35} They also noted that thousands of healthcare workers and sanitation workers around the country have not received salaries for their work in months, which has contributed to the shoddy maintenance of essential public services in this time of conflict. Even besides the cholera epidemic, the Yemeni healthcare system is struggling to meet the basic needs of the population. Only about half of the 3500 medical facilities in Yemen are fully functioning, and at least 16.4 million people lack access to basic healthcare.\textsuperscript{36} The Yemeni civil war has crippled the ability of their medical establishments to provide adequate services to the population.

**Human Trafficking**

The lack of a stable government has made Yemeni civilians vulnerable to smuggling and human trafficking. Reports have indicated that Yemen children, mostly boys, have been taken for forced domestic labor, begging, or working in small shops in Aden or Sana’a, the major cities of Yemen, or other countries in the region such as Saudi Arabia and Oman.\textsuperscript{37} Female civilians, both women and children, have also been taken for sex trafficking and prostitution. Human trafficking of these at-risk groups further jeopardizes the human rights of Yemeni civilians impacted by the civil war.

**International Response**

The United Nations has organized the international response to the Yemeni Civil War and the associated humanitarian crisis. Many agencies, funds, and programs of the United Nations have an active role in aiding the Yemeni people and government as of 2018, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN Women, and other organizations already mentioned in this background guide.\textsuperscript{38} In

\textsuperscript{35} “Statement from UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake and WHO Director-General Margaret Chan on the cholera outbreak in Yemen as suspected cases exceed 200,000.” UNICEF, 24 June 2017, www.unicef.org/yemen/media_12062.html.

\textsuperscript{36} “Yemen crisis: Why is there a war?” BBC News.


2012, a few years before the war began, but when the country was already suffering from instability and lack of development, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) assigned to Yemen developed a United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) with contributions from the government of Yemen and various NGOs. The UNDAF had four primary goals: “(1) Inclusive and diversified economic growth with a social dividend; (2) Sustainable and equitable access to quality basic social services to accelerate progress towards MDGs; (3) Women and youth empowerment; and (4) Good governance and social cohesion.” These goals continue to organize the humanitarian relief missions in Yemen, even during the civil war; the United Nations originally intended to phase out the UNDAF in 2015, but extended its application until the end of 2018.

In the meantime, the United Nations has developed the UN Strategic Framework for Yemen, a more comprehensive document acknowledging the instability caused by the civil war, which will expire in 2019. The goals of the Strategic Framework are “to prevent the complete collapse of national capacity in Yemen, to restrict the humanitarian crisis from growing, and to support the ongoing efforts towards peace and security in Yemen.” Secretary-General Guterres has appointed Martin Griffiths of the United Kingdom as Special Envoy of the Secretary-General (SESG) for Yemen to support the implementation of the Strategic Framework, resolutions of the Security Council, and the goals of the Yemeni government. Despite the length and devastation of this civil war, the United Nations continues to support the peace process and the stability of the region.

Possible Solutions

Potential solutions to the Yemeni Civil War must cover a wide range of economic, political, and humanitarian

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40 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
problems. These solutions could range from a recommendation for a military occupation of Yemen, by the Saudi-led coalition or another group, possibly with assistance from peacekeepers dispatched by the Security Council, to packages of economic aid and associated programs, recruiting the support of NGOs to deliver these supplies and services to the neediest parts of the country. SPECPOL may recommend international coordination and funding for medical services which can include the participation of NGOs such as Doctors Without Borders, in addition to the expansion of medical institutions, sanitary infrastructure, and immediate health services for emergencies. SPECPOL may also provide for the coordination of the availability and distribution of food sources for internally displaced people which can be based from individual state organizations or increased United Nations efforts from different UN agencies.

Conclusions

That devastation may be finally approaching an end. In December of 2018, the United Nations evacuated 50 wounded Houthi rebels into Oman for medical treatment.\(^4^4\) This act of good faith has paved the way for UN-sponsored peace talks between the Houthi rebels and the Hadi-led government backed by the Saudi coalition. Although the United Nations is optimistic about this conference, their last attempt ended in failure when Houthi representatives failed to appear at talks in Geneva.\(^4^5\) The situation will undoubtedly continue to develop into 2019. When this session of SPECPOL convenes, the committee must be prepared to discuss the most up-to-date aspects of the Yemeni Civil War and the associated humanitarian crisis. In the words of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, the war has exacted an “unconscionable toll” on the population of Yemen, and SPECPOL is in the position to make a positive impact on this situation.\(^4^6\)

Questions to Consider

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\(^4^4\) Ibid.

\(^4^5\) Ibid.

1. How can the history of Yemen inform and improve the response of SPECPOL to the current crisis?
2. Does your country have strong sympathies for any of the groups vying for control of Yemen? How will these sympathies translate into your official position in the committee?
3. How can SPECPOL address both the civil war and the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, two major issues requiring different responses, at the same time?

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**Topic B: The Rights of Indigenous Peoples**
Introduction

The indigenous peoples of the world have long struggled for the rights to political recognition, representation, and participation. Advocates and political leaders have made real strides toward this goal of political equality by the early 21st century. In December of 2005, for example, voters elected Evo Morales as the next President of Bolivia. As a member of the Aymara group, Morales was Bolivia’s first elected leader from the indigenous population, and he committed his government to providing services and legal rights for all indigenous citizens residing in the country.47 Morales’ victory, and many similar gains in countries across Latin America and around the world, represented the culmination of indigenous movements for political rights decades in the making. These social movements had gained prominence as more governments, especially in the Americas, converted to democracy in the mid-20th century.48 The nonviolent pursuit of political rights by any group marginalized in their society is a mission hallowed by the United Nations, and the indigenous peoples of the world have regained significant agency since earlier periods of discrimination and repression under colonial and minority-led regimes of government.

Nevertheless, indigenous peoples continue to confront significant challenges in their pursuit of these basic political rights and freedoms. These issues include “reducing persistently high rates of poverty and inequality, implementing national legislation and international accords that recognize indigenous claims to land and natural resources, and achieving autonomy and a greater voice in both local and national decision-making.”49 Political advocates, however, could define these problems instead as action steps toward a more egalitarian world with open participation by indigenous peoples in their systems of government. SPECPOL, as the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly at the

49 Ibid.
United Nations, has a responsibility to address issues relevant to decolonization and the need for appropriate political representation in formerly colonized regions. The deliberations of this committee and the resolutions from this session can improve the rights of indigenous peoples to speak on their own behalf.

**Who are Indigenous Peoples?**

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues recommends the following criteria to understand and help identify indigenous peoples:

- Self-identification as indigenous;
- Acceptance as a member to an indigenous community;
- Traceable lineage to pre-colonization societies;
- Non-dominance as a social group;
- Strong connections to local territory and natural resources;
- Social, political, economic, or cultural distinction;
- Desire to reproduce distinctive aspects of their community.\(^{50}\)

Recognition of an indigenous group does not necessarily require meeting all these characteristics, but they are useful qualifications to distinguish the unique political situation of indigenous peoples worldwide.\(^{51}\)

**History of International Political Participation by Indigenous Peoples**

The movement for indigenous political rights on the international stage has existed for many years and achieved many milestones of representation. In 1923, the Haudenosaunee Chief Deskaheh visited the League of Nations (a global organization preceding the United Nations) in Geneva to defend the political rights of his people against their subjugation under the Canadian government.\(^{52}\) This appeal, and a similar one by the Maori advocate T. W. Ratana two years later, was one of the first attempts by indigenous leaders to engage the

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\(^{52}\) “Indigenous Peoples at the UN.” *UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs*, www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/about-us.html.
international community. Chief Deskaheh was not allowed to speak to the assembly and returned home to Canada in 1925, but his actions inspired future generations of advocates for indigenous rights, and Chief Deskaheh himself was able to speak to large public crowds about the plight of his people.\textsuperscript{53}

Before 1981, the United Nations lacked a detailed study into the identification of indigenous peoples. Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, Jose R. Martinez Cobo, published his groundbreaking “Study on the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations” in that year.\textsuperscript{54} He provided a working definition for indigenous peoples for application around the world, which inspired more research and involvement by the international community into studies of indigenous people. His work clearly inspired the criteria employed by the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in their work to establish and defend the rights of indigenous populations worldwide.

Any survey on the political rights of indigenous peoples must acknowledge the contributions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) to the enshrinement of these rights into legal documents. In 1957, the ILO adopted Convention 107, the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, after 11 years of discussion and negotiation with agencies and member states of the United Nations.\textsuperscript{55} Although Convention 107 adopted a Eurocentric point of view and its language occasionally supported national governments over the self-determination of indigenous peoples under their jurisdiction, it was still the first internationally ratifiable document to support the rights of the indigenous. Convention 107 was later superseded by Convention 169, the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, in 1989. This document, also developed by the ILO, attempts to empower indigenous peoples from a firmer standpoint of social justice.\textsuperscript{56}


\textsuperscript{54} “Indigenous Peoples at the UN.” UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.


\textsuperscript{56} “Indigenous Peoples at the UN.” UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
The work of the ILO has substantially advanced the agenda of recognizing political rights for indigenous peoples and inspired subsequent actions in the 21st century.

The United Nations established the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in July of 2000. The forum would debate and advise the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on “indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health, and human rights.” This broad mandate of discussion and consultation ensures that the perspective of indigenous peoples and issues unique to those groups remain on the agenda of powerful agencies in the United Nations.

A few years later, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on September 13, 2007. UNDRIP expanded upon the work of ILO Conventions 107 and 169 to establish and protect the fundamental human rights of indigenous peoples, including their political rights. Only four countries – Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States – voted against the Declaration, but these nations have since reversed their opposition and now support its provisions.

The publication and approval of this comprehensive document indicates the general support and desire from the international community for more dialogue and more acknowledgement of these political rights for historically marginalized groups of indigenous peoples.

**Modern Challenges**

**Poverty and Inequality**

Many similar challenges face indigenous communities around the world, despite their diversity of situations and backgrounds. Nations around the world have a history of exploiting indigenous peoples – politically, economically, and socially – within their borders. However, Article 1 of

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58 “Indigenous Peoples at the UN.” *UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs*.

59 Ibid.


the UNDRIP guarantees to indigenous peoples “all human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognized in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and international human rights law.” The unequal poverty and exclusion of indigenous peoples continues around the world, despite these rights enshrined by the United Nations.

Extensive research and documentation have described the extent of poverty in indigenous communities, as well as the discrimination and oppression that prevents its amelioration. In a recent study by the World Bank, analysts concluded that poverty is “more widespread, more severe, and harder to overcome for indigenous peoples” than non-indigenous peoples. The causes of this poverty are easily documented. For example, the government of Australia did not accord official recognition of residency to Aboriginal populations for decades. Politicians insensitive to indigenous issues could fill reels of tape with their gaffes. Longstanding racism continues to infect healthcare, employment, housing, criminal justice, and education systems, damaging outcomes for individuals identifying as Aboriginals. Sol Bellear, a former rugby player and activist for Aboriginal rights, described how “Dogs and cats and pigs and sheep were counted in Australia before Aboriginal people” in the country’s official census, a clear violation of their human rights. Australia most recently refused a council of indigenous peoples the right to form an advisory council to inform the Australian Parliament about the opinions of the Aboriginal population and the impact parliamentary actions would have on their communities. Poverty and inequality remain as pressing issues for indigenous

65 Ibid.
communities around the world without the political rights to express their discontent.

Recognition of Claims

Many governments have long not recognized the rights of indigenous peoples to claim their own lands and resources. Article 26 of the UNDRIP protects the “right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories, and resources that they possess” for indigenous peoples. However, the lack of access or ability to use the land they have traditionally possessed makes the survival of indigenous peoples more challenging, endangering their livelihoods and free exercise of political freedoms. For example, the San people of Namibia have found adjusting to the modern labor market more difficult after the loss of the land base necessary to exercise their traditional occupations. In Bangladesh, a 1997 treaty included provisions to resolve land disputes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the easternmost region of the country. However, poor and biased management has removed farmlands from their traditional cultivators, the Jumma people, in favor of Bengali settlers.

Both of these situations demonstrate the failure of national governments to acknowledge the claims of indigenous peoples to their own lands, necessitating additional protection and acknowledgement by the UNDRIP and DISEC to secure their political rights.

Self-Determination

Self-determination is a further political right for indigenous peoples often neglected by their governments. Article 3 of the UNDRIP explicitly protects this right for indigenous peoples and their communities to decide their own actions and determine their own futures. Articles 33 through 37 protect various additional political rights, such as citizenship to the national government claiming jurisdiction over indigenous lands and the right to self-governance within their own communities. The United States of America, for example, has had a tumultuous

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71 Ibid.
and evolving relationship with the Native American tribes within its borders. However, over time, federal policies about Native Americans and their lands have changed from a position of subjugation and assimilation to instead prioritize self-determination.\textsuperscript{72} Admittedly, Native Americans often still clash with federal officials over the nature of their association. The world has not yet achieved the goal of freely-exercised self-determination for all peoples.

**Potential Solutions**

DISEC may take various positions to address the issue, such as incorporating the rights of indigenous people into the domestic legal system and governmental policies, establishing regional human rights systems, increasing coordination and partnership between the international human rights institutions and the indigenous peoples, consolidating the rights of the indigenous people in international laws and policies, and encouraging voluntary funds for indigenous peoples to improve their political and socioeconomic status. For example, the Indian Law Resource Center has proposed the formation of a United Nations body to implement and monitor compliance with the UNDRIP.\textsuperscript{73} DISEC might consider how to fund, organize, and empower such an agency to extend the UNDRIP in a meaningful way.

DISEC should also support national governments to recognize the political rights of the indigenous peoples within their borders. While the Australian Parliament unfortunately rejected an Aboriginal advisory, the government of New Zealand has guaranteed representation by the indigenous Maori in its Parliament since 1867 through a system of reserved electorates.\textsuperscript{74} Modest provisions for indigenous representation in their government can improve relations between indigenous communities and their national government as well as quality of life for indigenous peoples. The United Nations Development Programme has noted that

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\textsuperscript{72} “History of BIA.” *Bureau of Indian Affairs*, www.bia.gov/bia.
\textsuperscript{73} “Creation of an implementing and monitoring body for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.” *Indian Law Resource Center*, 2016, indianlaw.org/implementing-
\textsuperscript{74} O’Sullivan, Dominic. “Australia Denies Political Participation as an Indigenous Human Right.”
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political participation by indigenous peoples, especially by indigenous women, is necessary to advance human rights and make economic development more egalitarian. DISEC should approach this issue with the goal of advancing indigenous peoples’ realization of their own political rights.

Conclusions

Although DISEC usually addresses issues of decolonization and special political situations, the political rights of indigenous peoples are relevant to this committee as the legacy effects of colonization and historical subjugation around the world. This committee should prioritize the human rights of indigenous peoples during debate, but delegates must continue to recognize the relationship of these rights with other issues such as international law, climate, and economic development. With proper consideration, DISEC may provide new protections and provisions for political rights and representation to secure the future flourishing of indigenous peoples around the world.

Questions to Consider

1. Does your country include any populations of indigenous peoples? What does the relationship between these peoples and their government look like?
2. What steps can DISEC take to ensure political representation for indigenous peoples despite centuries of subjugation and repression?
3. How can DISEC encourage the countries of the United Nations to respect the UNDRIP without infringing upon national sovereignty?

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