

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Chairing Style

Hello delegates! My name is Lara McCormick, and I am thrilled to serve as the chair of the UN Human Rights Council and look forward to a great conference. This President's Letter is meant to help guide your research efforts and introduce you to my chairing style.

Within the letter you will find three topics to discuss during the conference: statelessness, religious discrimination, and violence against women and girls. At the end of each section, there will be questions to guide your research. Additionally, there will be links to sources you can use to learn more about the topics.

A firm understanding of the Rules of Procedure is necessary for debate to function. A good delegate will have knowledge of their country's policy and history regarding the issues at hand. Your research should cover old and new articles to fully understand your country's position and role. The goal of the committee is to pass productive documents that address worldwide human rights problems and create logical and feasible solutions.

The role of the chair is to facilitate debates and arguments, not control it. As for being a leader, I believe every delegate has that opportunity to lead the council as a whole or in a smaller group, in forming working papers and resolutions, or even leading a discussion on a certain topic during debate.

I am confident that we will have a weekend full of productive and lively debate. The more preparation you do, the more in depth we can discuss the topics and consequently debates will be more productive and focused.

Religious Discrimination

Many members of various religious communities suffer discrimination and are denied access to public health, education, and other public services; they are also sometimes arrested and even killed. Generally speaking, members of certain religious communities are persecuted. In the decade between 2007 and 2017, government restrictions on religion that promote discrimination and restrict religious beliefs and practices have risen considerably. In such countries, people also experience "social hostilities", which have also been on the rise. According to a study done by the Pew Research Center, tension and violence between sects or religious communities have "declined markedly", but as a whole, religious restrictions have been rising globally, but not evenly across geographic regions.

Many governments also practice favoritism of religious groups, and thus infringe on people's rights to choose what religion they practice. In extreme cases, religious discrimination can lead to the rise of organized groups that target certain sects or communities of believers. Examples include neo-Nazi groups such as the Nordic Resistance Movement, or groups like Boko Haram, an Islamist group. In other cases, it can also even lead to war.

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Some of the most repressed religious minorities include the Christian Coptic minority in Egypt; the Baha'i in Iran; Ahmidis in Pakistan; and Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Shiite Muslims in Saudi Arabia; Muslims in Myanmar; and Muslims in India (especially in Kashmir). Religious discrimination can also be seen in western democracies, although more subtly, through certain governmental actions, such as the "Imam Law" in Denmark 2004, or Israel's "nation-state law" which states that "the right to exercise national self-determination" in Israel is "unique to the Jewish people," thus excluding other religious communities such as Christians or Muslims...

The Human Rights Committee, among other duties, is active in overseeing implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (which includes Article 2 on non-discrimination and Article 18 on freedom of thought, conscience and religion). It also works in countries where citizens face the most risk of having their human rights taken away due to religious discrimination. The UN Human Rights Committee also supports Member States with their human rights issues, as well as provide rapid response to emerging human rights crises by providing personnel to the area that needs it most.

Questions to consider:

- How is your country affected by religious discrimination? Is there any?
- What is your country's policy on religious discrimination?
- Are there short-term and/or long-term solutions? What are they?
- What could the international community do to lessen or eliminate religious discrimination?
- Do you think international organizations are effective in reducing religious discrimination?

Useful links:

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in the World: making human rights a reality on the ground. Link:

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/Pages/WorkInField.aspx>

Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on "Faith for Rights". Link:

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/FaithForRights.aspx>

Equal Opportunity Oppression Religious Persecution Is a Global Problem. Link:

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-08-31/equal-opportunity-oppression>

A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen Around the World. Link:

<https://www.pewforum.org/2019/07/15/a-closer-look-at-how-religious-restrictions-have-risen-around-the-world/>

Religious discrimination. Link:

<http://encyclopedia.uia.org/en/problem/141143>

Ending Statelessness

What is statelessness? What causes it? What is your country doing to help the stateless people? Statelessness has been with us for a long time. Statelessness can be caused by many different issues, and many countries have different understanding of what it means to be stateless. The UN Human Rights Council has taken steps to aid stateless people around the world.

Millions of people around the world are denied a nationality due to laws, discrimination, religion, and a multitude of other factors. As a result, they often aren't allowed to go to school, see a doctor, get a job, open a bank account, buy a house, or even get married, they can't do things most people can do and should be able to do. Stateless people don't have access to basic rights.

Here is an example: One geographic area currently dealing with the difficulties of statelessness is West Africa, especially in the area of Côte d'Ivoire where the stateless population is 700,000. This population is largely people of Burkinabé descent who were not able to gain Ivorian citizenship after independence from France in the 1960's.

An additional population of concern for the UN Human Rights Council are the Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, who have experienced extreme violence and ethnic cleansing. By the end of 2017, the UNHCR reported over 1.5 million Rohingya people were considered stateless.

The UNHCR has made attempts to remedy the increasing numbers of stateless people such as the #IBelong campaign. The campaign works in addition to 1954 UN Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness to encourage a legal solution to international statelessness.

The UN Human Rights Council is particularly interested in ending statelessness due to the human rights violations it can cause. Stateless people lose their right to a basic existence.

Questions to consider:

- How is your country affected by statelessness? Are there stateless people in your country? If not, is your country affected at all by this issue?
- What is your country's policy on statelessness?
- Are there short-term and long-term solutions?
- Do you think we need international agreements to deal with this issue?
- Do you think international organizations could play a constructive role in resolving this issue? How?

Useful Links:

What is Statelessness? Link:

<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/statelessness.html>

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Ending Statelessness. Link:

<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/ending-statelessness.html>

Statelessness. Link:

<https://www.refworld.org/statelessness.html>

What Would it Mean to End Statelessness by 2024? Link:

<https://unu.edu/publications/articles/what-would-it-mean-to-end-statelessness-by-2024.html>

Refugees International. Link:

<https://www.refugeesinternational.org>

Violence Against Women and Girls

A historic and consistent problem that affects the worldwide population is violence against women and girls. This violence could take place anywhere and in various forms. It can take place in the public sphere or the private sphere. Out of the 87,000 women killed in 2017, more than half were intentionally killed by a partner or a family member. Whether it takes place during times of conflict or times of peace, violence is a human rights violation. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women has named five different categories of violence women and girls face all around the world.

Intimate partner violence refers to physical or psychological violence perpetrated by a partner or spouse. About 75 percent of countries have outlawed domestic violence, but partner violence is still an issue in all countries. Sexual violence and harassment ranges from unwanted sexual advances to acts forced marriage or rape. This issue arises in various forms in countries and can happen in any place by any person.

Human trafficking is the taking and exploitation of people through force, coercion or deception. Seventy one percent of human trafficking victims are female and the issue often involves crossing international borders.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) occurs when female genital organs are harmed or altered for a non-medical reason. Most of this violence happens to girls under the age of five.

Finally, child marriage can affect the future opportunities and freedom of young girls. Worldwide, there are 650 million women and girls who are married before age 18.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has recently spoken about the importance of addressing violence against women and girls. He has specifically mentioned the atrocities against females that can take place during times of conflict: "Let me be clear. Sexual and gender-based violence in conflict is not only a horrendous and life-changing crime, most often perpetrated against women and girls. It is also used as a tactic of war, to terrorize families, dehumanize communities and

destabilize societies, so that they struggle to recover for years or even decades after the guns fall silent.”

UNiTE is a campaign created to raise awareness of violence against women and girls and bring organizations together to work on solutions and advocacy. There have been other efforts as well such as November 25th is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and the 16 days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence held this year. This event, like the UNiTE by 2030 to End Violence Campaign, focuses on solutions and awareness.

Questions to consider:

- How is your country affected by violence against women and girls? Is this a common phenomenon in your country?
- What is your country’s policy on violence against women and girls? Are your laws sufficient? Do they need updating?
- Are there short-term and long-term solutions?
- What should the UN do?
- Do we need international agreements to handle this issue?

Useful Links:

Conflict Related Sexual Violence—report of the United Nations Secretary-general. Link: <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/report/s-2019-280/Annual-report-2018.pdf>

Violence against Women: Facts. Link: <https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/infographic/violenceagainstwomen/en/index.html#home>

Women’s human rights and gender-related concerns in situations of conflict and instability. Link: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/PeaceAndSecurity.aspx>

Remarks at Event on Conflict-Related and Gender-Based Violence. Link: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2019-02-25/remarks-conflict-related-and-gender-based-violence>

Facts and figures: Ending violence against women. Link: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>