



MODEL UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly:
I. International Labor Laws
II. The Influence of Big Oil

Chair: Isadora Goldman Leviton

Rapporteur: Sarah Collier

Hello delegates!

Welcome to the UN General Assembly at CAMUN 2021! My name is Isadora Goldman Leviton and I will be chairing this committee. I am a senior here at Concord Academy and it is my first year as a chair, so I am super excited about this committee and its topics. Other than doing MUN, I also enjoy dancing, singing in my a capella group, and being head of the Jewish Student Organization.

My name is Sarah Collier and I will be the rapporteur in the General Assembly. I am a junior at Concord Academy and I have been doing model UN since I was a freshman. In my free time I enjoy being a member of the cross country team, skiing, and hanging out with friends. I look forward to serving as a rapporteur for the first time this April!

The General Assembly was established in 1945 under the Charter of the United Nations, and is the only branch of the UN to contain all 192 members, each of which have an equal vote. Any resolutions that delegates make in the GA can only be recommendations and no actual mandates are enforceable. However, the General Assembly remains a powerful international body that has effected change since its inception.

This committee will follow the basic form of parliamentary procedure; we will start with a Speakers List and then move into moderated and unmoderated caucuses, with the goal of producing working papers and eventually draft resolutions delegates will vote upon. Our goal is to produce resolutions that offer comprehensive solutions to the issues presented below.

After reading this background guide, examine the discussion questions and find information about your own country, consider how these problems affect your constituents, and what you might suggest for the future. Feel free to email us anytime with questions as you go about your research, and you may send us position papers, but they are not required.

We're excited to meet you all soon!

With gratitude,

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Topic I: International Labor Laws

More and more in recent news the issue of international labor laws has been prevalent. With media and activists criticizing well-known companies such as Nike for using cheap labor and exploitative practices, there is great pressure for the UN to enact more restrictive international labor laws. In many wealthy nations, people have formed social activism organizations focused on fair labor in the global south to examine practices such as child labor, women's rights, 40-hour work weeks, livable wages, and others. The debate about fair labor standards typically centers upon two main lines: moral and economic.¹ Many countries in the global south also have few environmental laws, allowing large companies to operate pollution-heavy factories. With many social and environmental activist groups increasing pressure for new international labor laws to be enacted, the United Nations needs solutions that will not infringe on countries' national sovereignty.

The UN has a specialized committee focused on labor laws: the International Labour Organization (ILO). The ILO was created in 1919 as part of the Treaty of Versailles. The first conference focused on six aspects of labor law:

1. hours of work,
2. unemployment,
3. maternity protection,
4. night work for women,
5. minimum age, and
6. night work for young persons in industry.²

In 1946 the ILO joined the United Nations as a specialized agency and in the next few decades it proceeded to grow, with its budget increasing by 500%³. The ILO went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1969 for fighting for human rights and social justice.⁴ The ILO currently has four objectives:

1. Promote and realize standards and fundamental principles and rights at work,
2. Create greater opportunities for women and men to decent employment and income,
3. Enhance the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all, and
4. Strengthen tri-partism and social dialogue.⁵

¹ Golub, Stephen S. "Are International Labor Standards Needed to Prevent Social Dumping?" 12 Jan. 2014. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/1997/12/pdf/golub.pdf>

² "International Labor Organization - Origins and History." 12 Jan. 2014. <http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/history>

³ "International Labour Organization - Facts." 12 Jan. 2014. http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1969/labour-facts.html

⁴ "International Labor Organization - Mission and Objectives." 12 Jan. 2014. <http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/mission-and-objectives>

⁵ Ibid.

The common moral arguments concerning labor laws are that many practices in developing nations regarding labor are unacceptable and that the current laws infringe upon basic human rights. In 2008, 22% of the world's population lived on less than \$1.25 a day,⁶ whereas in the United States, the average income is \$51,017 a year, or \$139.77 a day.⁷ Oftentimes this huge wealth divide can be blamed on extremely low wages in the global south that do not yet have the resources to legally require and enforce higher wages and better working conditions. As mentioned previously, Nike was scrutinized for using cheap labor in many countries. In Cambodia, approximately 500,000 workers make garments for Nike as well as other large companies, with the majority of these workers getting paid at minimum wage, \$160 a month— despite large protests.⁸

Another issue is that many countries are being flooded with immigrant workers who do not receive the same protections as citizens. For example, 94% of workers in Qatar are migrants and are forced into labor in many cases because the national laws there simply do not have the power to protect them.⁹ Women's rights, specifically with regards to maternity leave, are also a pressing issue in many countries in the global south. Despite a general growth in the amount of time women are given in many nations in the global north, countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Tunisia only allow, at most, 45 days.¹⁰ Child labor is yet another issue that affects 220 million children between five and fourteen years old; 120 million of these children work full time and 73 million in what is considered by the UN as a dangerous environment.¹¹ Despite these seemingly clear moral arguments for international labor laws, some countries in the global south protest that it is their right to decide what is reasonable, often concerning issues such as equal rights for women. Others also argue that these jobs are necessary and the work conditions are acceptable since these jobs are often the only ones available.

Economically speaking, some argue that enforcing higher pay for workers will cost much-needed jobs and negatively impact companies hiring in the global south. Others argue that low wages in the global south are taking jobs from the global north to lower manufacturing costs. For example, Indonesia was recently named the 15th largest exporter of textiles but still has approximately half the citizens living on less than two dollars per day.¹² Despite the low wages, Indonesia has been one of the top 20 emerging economies in the world and continues to grow despite increasing

⁶ Alexander, Ruth. "Dollar Benchmark: The Rise of the \$1-a-day Statistic." 13 Jan. 2014. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-17312819>

⁷ Hargreaves, Steve. "Poverty Rate 15%, Median Income \$51,017." 12 Jan. 2014. <http://money.cnn.com/2013/09/17/news/economy/poverty-income>

⁸ Sochua, Mu. "Crackdown in Cambodia." 18 Jan. 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/09/opinion/crackdown-in-cambodia.html>

⁹ "Migrant Workers in the Middle East Often Exploited, UN Reports at Human Trafficking Conference." 18 Jan. 2014. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=44604>

¹⁰ Killian, Erin. "Parental Leave: The Swedes Are The Most Generous." 18 Jan. 2013. <http://www.npr.org/blogs/babyproject/2011/08/09/139121410/parental-leave-the-swedes-are-the-most-generous>

¹¹ "UN: Child Labour" 2021. <https://www.un.org/en/observances/world-day-against-child-labour/background>

¹² "World Bank and Poverty in Indonesia." 18 Jan. 2014. <http://www.worldbank.org/id/poverty>

stratification.¹³ It is arguable that the lower price of labor in poorer nations impedes the development within those nations by encouraging workers to leave for large international companies rather than staying and building their own national economy.¹⁴

There is much debate about what standards are unreasonable. For example, for many people living in the global north, child labor is seen as unacceptable and people advocate against it and push for the ILO to abolish it. In many countries in the global south, however, people oppose this—for many families, having their children work is a desperate attempt to survive in extreme poverty when they would otherwise be unable to support themselves.

In July 2019 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution to declare 2021 the *International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour*.¹⁵ Considering the complications with human rights, economics, and national sovereignty, this UN body must establish its position with regards to international labor laws, both by reviewing laws already in place, and considering the ratification of new laws.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How effective has the United Nations been in addressing these issues, and how might it become more so?
2. What is the United Nations' purview to act on this matter? How and why is the UN obligated to intervene?
3. Are current international labor laws in countries affected by colonization and imperialism comprehensive enough? Is the UN involved enough in these affairs?
4. How should the UN enforce labor laws in the global south?

¹³ Schonhardt, Sara. "As Indonesia Grows, Discontent Sets in Among Workers." 16 Dec. 2011.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/17/business/global/as-indonesia-grows-discontent-sets-in-among-workers.html>

¹⁴ Marshall, Andrew G. "Meet the Next Country That Might Explode into Protests Against Corporate Plunder and Slave Labor Working Conditions." 13 Jan. 2014.

<http://dissidentvoice.org/2013/07/meet-the-next-country-that-might-explode-into-protests-against-corporate-plunder-and-slave-labor-working-conditions>

¹⁵ International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, 2021. Adopted 25 July 2019.

<https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=A/RES/73/327&Lang=E>

Topic 2: The Global Influence of Big Oil Companies

For decades, oil has been a hotbed for violence and greed. It has been a catalyzing force in many international disputes including the Iraq war,¹⁶ during which Big Oil companies benefited from big profits.¹⁷ Oil has also been responsible for about a third of the world's civil wars.¹⁸ Countries which were once resource-poor have grown their economies after discovering themselves to be oil rich, but this has often led to political conflicts. This committee will be discussing:

1. Measures on how to prevent transnational companies from exploiting natural resources in poorer countries;
2. Means to prevent corruption in countries rich in oil;
3. Preventing the funding of insurgencies and terrorist organizations with oil money; and
4. Preventing economic difficulties that plague nearly half of the members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

The first major issue we will be discussing is protecting the global south from exploitation by transnational companies and nations in the global north. An example of this was the Iraq war, during which Big Oil invested large amounts of money in the 2000 United States election.

In 2000, Big Oil, including Exxon, Chevron, BP and Shell, spent more money to get fellow oilmen George W. Bush and Dick Cheney into office than they had spent on any previous election. Just over a week into Bush's first term, their efforts paid off when the National Energy Policy Development Group, chaired by Cheney, was formed, bringing the administration and the oil companies together to plot our collective energy future. In March, the task force reviewed lists and maps outlining Iraq's oil productive capacity.¹⁹

This investment paid off enormously for investors, who earned billions from the painstaking war. "Before the 2003 invasion, Iraq's domestic oil industry was fully nationalized and closed to Western oil companies. A decade of war later, it is largely privatized and utterly dominated by foreign firms."²⁰ Some argue that countries in the global north and transnational companies should stay out of oil-rich countries in the global south. However, these countries often have struggling economies and rely on these oil investments.

The oil booms of the 1970s brought great wealth—and later great anguish—to many petroleum-rich countries in the developing world. In the 1970s, oil-producing states

¹⁶ Antonia Juhasz, *Why the war in Iraq was fought for Big Oil*, 7:42 AM ET, Mon April 15, 2013 <http://www.cnn.com/2013/03/19/opinion/iraq-war-oil-juhasz>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Blood Barrels: Why Oil Wealth Fuels Conflict*, Michael L. Ross Foreign Affairs, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2008-05-03/blood-barrels>

¹⁹ Juhasz, 2013.

²⁰ Ibid.

enjoyed fast economic growth. But in the following three decades, many suffered crushing debt, high unemployment, and sluggish or declining economies. At least half of the members of OPEC were poorer in 2005 than they had been 30 years earlier. Oil-rich countries that once held great promise, such as Algeria and Nigeria, have unraveled as a result of decades of internal conflict.²¹

Depending on your country's perspective on this, it's worth considering whether a foreign presence is helpful or hurtful to the economies of the global south with newly discovered oil. We'll also discuss how to protect oil-rich countries in the global south from corrupting and mishandling their economy in order to keep them stable and productive. Many of these countries suffer from "Dutch Disease":

Dutch Disease hits when a country becomes a significant producer and exporter of natural resources. Rising resource exports push up the value of the country's currency, which makes its other exports, such as manufactured and agricultural goods, less competitive abroad. Export figures for those products then decline, depriving the country of the benefits of dynamic manufacturing and agricultural bases and leaving it dependent on its resource sector and so at the mercy of often volatile international markets.²²

Another issue currently affecting these countries is their lack of understanding regarding how to spend their revenues from oil, most of it being used for objectively unimportant projects.²³ And there are frequently issues with accountability for the revenues they collect. Oil revenues tend to increase corruption, strengthen the hands of dictators, and weaken new democracies. The more money the governments of Iran, Russia, and Venezuela have received from oil and gas exports, the less accountable they have become to their own citizens—and the easier it has been for them to shut up or buy off their opponents.²⁴ The less accountability these countries have the worse they tend to fare. A country in the global south affected by colonization with oil is twice as likely to have a civil war.²⁵

Another issue to discuss is how to prevent insurgents from using oil to fund their work. Groups like ISIS use their conquered oil fields to generate revenue of 3 million dollars a day.²⁶ Rebellions in many countries fail when their instigators run out of funds. But raising money in petroleum-rich countries is relatively easy: insurgents can steal oil and sell it.²⁷ This makes having a stable government in one of these countries all the more difficult.

²¹ Blood Barrels, Michael L. Ross

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Luay al-Khatteeb How Iraq's black market in Oil Funds ISIS August 22, 2014
<http://edition.cnn.com/2014/08/18/business/al-khatteeb-isis-oil-iraq/>

²⁷ Blood Barrels, Michael L. Ross

There are many controversial decisions that need to be made regarding oil policies. Countries like the USA will continue to need oil, and Big Oil companies will continue to fund and influence politicians. Many oil-rich countries are still working out their oil policy—some will want to create resolutions to prevent superpowers from exploiting natural resources, while others will try to invite those investments. Nations might also want to create resolutions to prevent corruption and create transparency in governments with oil. In any case, action must be taken before more conflicts arise.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What is the role of the UN in monitoring or intervening in corruption resulting from oil?
2. What, if any, protective measures should be taken to prevent profit-driven invasions into oil-rich nations in the global south?
3. How should countries that find themselves rich in oil deal with this? What are the consequences they should be aware of?
4. How does the power of Big Oil corporations affect the decisions of nations? What should be done to prevent it?
5. How can oil-rich nations learn to be independent from oil as this natural resource inevitably runs out?