**The Union of South Africa**

Positions for the United Nations General Assembly First Committee: Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC)

1. **The Weaponization of Artificial Intelligence**

Artificial Intelligence (AI), while still a vastly under-researched technology, has infiltrated battlefields internationally at a threatening pace and will inevitably continue to revolutionize the world, regardless of UN interference or otherwise. Artificial intelligence has great potential to improve the quality of living globally, but if used unethically creates the potential for human rights violations and unnecessary hostility. The United Nations should instead turn its attention to properly regulating its uses and promoting AI technology implementation in fields such as infrastructure and healthcare.

The Union of South Africa has been one of the leading forces in innovating artificial intelligence globally. In 2021, South Africa granted a groundbreaking patent to what is known as the Device for Autonomous Bootstrapping of Unified Sentience, or DABUS, which is an artificial intelligence machine capable of mimicking human brainstorming and developing inventions. This patent was rejected by several other nations, but South Africa intends to lead in innovation within the Fourth Industrial Revolution. South Africa also established The Centre for Artificial Intelligence Research (CAIR) in 2011, which researches and develops artificial intelligence programs to implement throughout the African Union.

Throughout the continent of Africa, AI surveillance programs and other systems have been utilized by military and law enforcement officials to combat civil unrest and de-escalate war zones. African Union representatives have marked AI development as an economic accelerator for the continent. In 2018, The African Union Commission presented topics during the Seventh Internet Governance Forum that expressed the need to protect human rights in digital settings while still establishing digital technology as an area of economic growth, and in 2019 they adopted the Sharm El Sheikh Declaration, part of which established the goals of creating a common stance throughout Africa on AI development and building infrastructure to support its ethical use.

International law is currently behind the development of AI programs. As mentioned prior, artificial intelligence can be utilized in other ways than as a weapon. Internationally, the UN paired with organizations in Denmark to create an AI algorithm known as the Universal Human Rights Index (UHRI), which is the most comprehensive database of information relating to human rights compiled thus far. Unfortunately, the unprecedented amount of data that AI programs can identify and sort through presents a potential threat to privacy. In 2019, UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet was quoted as saying that artificial intelligence technology threatens the "rights to privacy, to a fair trial, to freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention and the right to life." This presents a dangerous precedent that could pave the way for the weaponization of artificial intelligence through unlawful monitoring of a nation’s citizens.

The Union of Africa advocates for an increase in regulation and infrastructure development for artificial intelligence worldwide to both combat its unethical use as a weapon of mass destruction and promote its existence in human rights problem-solving and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as SDGs 10 and 16. However, South Africa acknowledges the impending danger of unregulated AI technology and its potential to be used for violation of international laws and treaties, and to incite violence worldwide. A balance must be struck between innovation and regulation, and South Africa proposes a revision to the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence that outlines what usages of AI should be considered unethical. There must be established accountability between member states that artificial intelligence technology is to be used for economic development and the improvement of quality of living, not for unlawful surveillance of their citizens or warfare technology that damages positive international relations.

**II. Combatting the Global Illicit Arms Trade**

         The increase in trade of illicit arms is a threat to global peace and security. The Union of South Africa is in favor of combatting the practice of buying and selling illegal arms. According to Sustainable Development Goal 16, a goal of the United Nations is to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development [...]”. South Africa’s compliance with SDG 16 shows its support for the cultivation of a peaceful and just world, which is impossible to achieve while illicit arms dealing exists.

         Domestically, South Africa has created the South African Arms Deal, resulting in a procurement program that has been set in place to reequip the South African armed forces for the post-Apartheid Era. With this program, the imports, exports, transit, and brokering of arms are nationally controlled. This program is to strategize where weapons are coming from and who they are going to in order to protect South African citizens and keep the arms from ending up in the illicit market.

Regionally, South Africa is the largest source of arms production and is an integral part of the global small arms market. Weapons are mainly distributed from South Africa and pass through transit countries, this being when most of the arms are stolen and resold illegally. Illicit trade of small arms is an issue for South Africa domestically, regionally, and globally.

Globally, South Africa has worked with the United Nations to address and resolve the issue of illegal arms dealing. Having served as Vice Chair on the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty, South Africa has made moves towards stopping illicit arms trade and creating a safer world. One point in this the Arms Trade Treaty of 2021 is “underlining the need to prevent, combat, and eradicate the illicit trade of unconventional arms and to prevent their diversion to the illicit market for unauthorized end use.” South Africa supports the idea of responsible arms control and regulation, while also being aware and supportive of the sovereignty of each Member State.

Illicit weapons are known to be coming from military safehouses. Knowing that this is a global threat as well as domestic, the Union of South Africa proposes the Small Arms Safeguard (SASG) in order to protect procured weapons from reaching illegal markets. The implementation of SASG would include the creation of an international registry for every firearm procured and the creation of multiple fully protected and guarded safehouses where the arms are stored until further notice. This registry would include a listing of the direct source of each weapon and each transit country it passes through as a means of keeping track of where weapons are going. The Union of South Africa believes in the importance of peace, and how detrimental illegal arms dealing is to this peace.