

VOLUME I: OUR VOICES

Opinion Articles Collection on Global Issues
Summer 2022



YCISCQ UN Committee

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Editor's word



Dear readers,

We would like to welcome you to United Nations Committee (UNC)'s first article collection: *Our Voices*.

The UNC is a student-led committee based in the Yew Chung International School of Chongqing (YCISCQ) community, composed of students from different year levels ranging from Year 7 to 13, and different countries, including China, South Korea, Philippines, Singapore, and Canada. Known as the "United Nations Committee," we have been aiming to raise students' awareness of global issues and develop their critical thinking skills as global citizens. Throughout the 2021-2022 academic year, we have been working towards this goal through organizing several SDG-themed events within our school community, making some successful donations to rural areas of Chongqing, while bringing the knowledge of global issues into sight for both primary and secondary students.

This Summer, we have decided to voice out our beliefs and perspectives on global issues through writing. Therefore, we created this article collection, consisting of opinion articles written by our members on global issues that are of our personal interest, ones that we believe require a saying, require more attention, require more understanding. While you may not fully agree with our opinions, we believe that it is exactly the purpose of our writings: to inspire, to stimulate thinking, to enhance knowledge and understanding of differences in perspectives on the subjects of discussion.

In our first collection, *Our Voices*, our members have focused on issues such as poverty, climate change, women, children, and international conflicts. Ryan Chen identified poverty issues in Somalia, analyzing its impacts on the country's future development; Olivia Choi discussed the Australian Bushfire, specifically on its impacts, and responsibilities that should be taken by different stakeholders; while Cherry Pan focused on sexual harassment awareness, Eunseo focused on the harmful, cultural religious practices imposed on women; Ye Eun Kim evaluated the impacts and purposes of South Korean government approaches towards resolving low birth rates; Hyein Kim delves into the research of the war crimes committed during the Russo-Ukrainian War. Although we cannot fully tackle and address all the prevalent worldwide concerns, we hope that our thoughts and discoveries on these specific topics are effectively delivered, and we will continuously examine other areas of exploration in our potential future collections.

We would like to thank our members who have contributed their writings with high dedication. We would also like to show gratitude to our designing team, who have worked hard in putting those writings together into this visually engaging and aesthetic collection.

Kind regards,

YCIS CQ United Nations Committee
July 2022

Disclaimer:

Articles in this collection demonstrate the opinions of the individual author, and do not, in any form, represent UNC, or YCIS CQ's opinions and political stances towards the areas of discussion.

Poverty in Somalia: The Causes, Effects, and Solutions

By Chingshu (Ryan) Chen

Age 13, from China

Introduction

"No Poverty" is the first UN sustainable development goal (SDG), aiming to "end poverty in all its forms, everywhere". As we entered the 21st century, countries are committed to eliminate poverty. This essay will discuss the definition, causes, and effects of poverty, specifically focusing on Somalia's recent progress towards achieving "No poverty".

Definition of Poverty

The word "poverty" originated from the French word "poverty", which meant "poor". Today, poverty is defined as "the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions". Countries may have different poverty line, varying base on the development, average income, and GDP. As of 2022, most countries set the poverty line to half of the average income.

Background Information

Somalia, or officially the Federal republic of Somalia, is a country in the Horn of Africa. Most of its land is located in savanna and desert, with averaging 200-300ml of precipitation per year, and temperature of 28-30 degrees Celsius. In the 19th century, Somalia was colonized by Italy, Britain, and Ethiopia, before Somalia declared independence in 1960, July 1st. From then on, Somalia has been through multiple ruling parties. In 1991, the government collapsed, leaving the country in fragments. Afterwards, constant civil war has resulted in disorder and underdevelopment within the country. In this respect, Somalia is classified by UN as an underdeveloped country, with most of their citizens living in absolute poverty.

Statistics

Currently, the poverty rate in Somalia is approximately 73%. In other words, every seven out of ten people in Somalia is living in poverty. Somalia has the sixth highest poverty rate in Africa, and this have directly led to an extremely high mortality rate of around 10% in Somalia. In addition, about 70% of the Somali population is 30-years old or younger, with an expected lifetime of 57 years. In contrast, the global life expectancy rate as of 2020 is around 70, and the children mortality rate is significantly lower (at 3.9%). Meanwhile, over 2.8 million Somalis are unable to meet their daily food requirements because of natural disasters, such as droughts, floods, and locust infestations that are affecting the harvest. Furthermore, the literary rate in the country is 27.8%, which is significantly lower compared to the world average of 86.66%. In addition, the literacy rate has an uneven distribution between men and women. Men have a literary rate of 47.8, whereas women have a literary rate of 25.8. This suggests gender equality is also a problem in Somalia.

Cause

When we examine the causes of poverty in Somalia, two major contributing factors are identified: natural disasters, and the lack of a central government. Firstly, the country has been caught in civil war since the Siad government (named after former president Mohamed Said Barre) fell in 1991. According to statistics, over 500,000 Somalis lost their lives during the civil war. The war had influenced the Somali society in a couple of ways, two of which includes the increase in unemployment rate, and an increase in pirate attacks. Secondly, with limited resources, over three-fifth of Somalia's GDP is composed of agriculture: crop farming and raising stocks. However, only 1.6% of the total land in Somalia is cultivated, and 69% of the land is permanently pasture, and natural disasters, such as floods, droughts, and locust plagues, can have a huge negative impact on the harvest. Even worse, unlike developed countries, Somalia is unable to afford aerial spraying of pesticides, building dams, or irrigating water.

For example, in 2020, there happened the largest locust plague in Somalia. The plague was so severe that the people had to eat locusts to save themselves from starving. Research shows that out of the 12.3 million people living in Somalia, around 3 million are in starvation and 6.2 million are in food insecurity. Few months ago, Somalia had the most severe drought crisis in the past century.

Effects

Poverty has shaped the Somalia society in various aspects. Firstly, poverty increased the number of criminal activities. For instance, piracy began to emerge in 1991, at the beginning of the civil war; and reached its peak in 2011. From 2010 to 2015, there were a total of 358 attacks. Secondly, poverty has led to the lack of education. Whilst elementary school-aged children make up 1.8 million of Somalia's population, only 48% of children attend school. In addition, only 26% of children will receive secondary education. This is because the families in poverty are not able to fund their children's education. Finally, poverty caused half of the Somalian population to remain in food insecurity. In 2011, it was estimated that a quarter of a million people died because of famine.

Work towards “No Poverty”

The UN has been closely working with Somalia since its independence in 1960. They have provided food and sanitation shelter to the citizens, meanwhile helped Somalia government to punish criminals. When the civil war broke out in 1991, 37,000 well-equipped UN soldiers were sent to Somalia to restore peace and to protect the Somali citizens. Other than that, the UN has been supporting the development of Somalia, actively helping the government to construct and re-open schools and create new job opportunities. In the recent years, Somalia had far less pirate attacks, and saw increase in the percentage of children attending elementary school and secondary school.

Conclusion

It is emphasized by the UN that, “Is only through collective and coordinated efforts across the UN, and with the Somali government and people, can progress towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) be realized.” (UN, The United Nations in Somalia). To conclude, as a country that has went through tremendous turmoil in the past 30 year, Somalia is eventually seeing progress towards “No poverty”. Nevertheless, for Somalia to fulfil its goal to eliminate poverty, further efforts must be made by the UN and the local government. It is hoped that in the future, Somalia will continue its development towards safety, health, and happiness.

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Australian Bushfires: It isn't about them, but us

By Dain (Olivia) Choi

Age 17, from South Korea

One of the most striking headlines that hit the top in the news articles for a couple of months was the Australian bushfires.

Bushfires can be started by natural causes, majorly by lightning strikes. Weather and fuel conditions, such as leaf litter, bark, small branches and twigs, grasses, and shrubs, can play a part as a factor of bushfires happening. That said, Australia is no stranger to bushfires. They even typically have an annual fire season, lasting from September to March. However, the 2019-2020 season was an unprecedented event in many ways.

The first major bushfires began before the official arrival of spring in June and then new out-of-control fires sprung up at the beginning of September 2019. The situation worsened significantly at the beginning of November 2019 with increasing temperatures and a prolonged drought. Although heavy rain in mid-January 2020 did bring some relief to certain areas hit by bushfires, it was nowhere near sufficient to extinguish the fires. The major cause of this unexpected event was predicted that it is due to the exceptionally dry, hot, and windy weather that led Australia to experience its hottest day and driest spring on record.

The aftermath of the Australian bushfire was disastrous. Millions of hectares of vegetation were destroyed and three billion animals were killed or displaced in the bushfires. The toll of the bushfires that ravaged New South Wales and Victoria in 2019 and 2020 was even more horrific than earlier estimated. Experts say the regeneration of Australia's lost biodiversity will take many years, and will require human intervention – especially if weather conditions remain unfavorable.

Although bushfires may be a natural cause, there are some ways to prevent them from happening, as well as measures that must be taken for recovery (although it is impossible to completely restore it with only human intervention). For the Australian bushfire, it was not just the Australian government that acted. As this was big news that spread globally, people worldwide stood up for help.

Natural disasters strongly relate to global warming, and each and one of us are far more responsible for it than we can imagine. Unfortunately, though, not all people understand this, and some even underrate their effects. Therefore, more people need to get educated about global warming and climate change. As we should be responsible for global warming, we should also be responsible for its effects. It should not just be a country's government's responsibility to restore the damage from natural disasters. It is ours. For example, while all of us have contributed to Australia's dry and hot weather in spring that led to bushfires, why should only the Australian government be responsible to act?

On social media which anyone can have access to, we can see many opinions from different people, including criticisms of the Australian government for "not being responsible to the event and taking stunt actions". But can we be sure that those people who commented on the Australian government have zero contributions to the cause of this Australian bushfire? What did they do to support them?

It is also extremely important for us to notice that with the current levels of global warming, natural disasters can happen anywhere, anytime. We need to stay focused on the word "anywhere".

They can happen anywhere. In this scenario, we were rather lucky. Australia is a developed, wealthy country, the bushfire that could have led to worse effects was stopped in millions of hectares of vegetation getting destroyed with three billion animals getting killed and displaced (although this is already significant). Imagine the same scale of events that happened in Afghanistan, Niger, or Cambodia. The effects could have been far-reaching, beyond our imagination. It is also not just the natural environment that gets affected by this. There are millions and billions of refugees still out there who suffered from natural disasters like earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons, and more.

They can happen anywhere. This means that the natural disasters that you see that are happening from the other side of the country can happen to you tomorrow (although oftentimes natural disasters do not happen so abruptly without any warning from the broadcast). This means that the news that we see every day is not "their" story, but rather "ours".

As global citizens who all live on this earth, we need to understand the earth, love the earth, and take action to make a better planet for all of us.

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Sexual Harassment and Gender Equality: why it is everyone's responsibility to combat sexual assaults

By Kaiyi (Cherry) Pan

Age 17, from China

Imagine: you are a young woman at a restaurant with your three other female friends. A stranger, a male, approaches you, accosts you, and touches you without consent. Annoyed, you shake his hand off, question his actions, and tell him to get lost. He ignores your frustration and attempts to touch you again. You push him away. He slaps your face, tries to beat you, and your friends try to protect you; but his group arrives and attacks all of you: throwing chairs at you, dragging you by the hair down the stairs, stomping your head, kicking your stomach, and threatening you with dirty expletives.

This was an actual incident, an assault consisting of violence and harassment, that occurred in a restaurant in Tangshan, Hebei, China on June 10th, 2022, at 2:40 a.m. A man sexually assaulted one of the four female diners and turned hostile after being rejected and pushed away. Eventually, all four women were beaten up by the man and the rest of his group. This horrifying event was recorded and spread virally across the internet.

While the majority of the Chinese netizens remain shocked, some questioned:

"Why are these girls outdoors at 2 a.m.?"

"The man was drunk. Why can't the girls chill and be more understanding?"

"Why was the girl so hostile?"

"One of the girls smashed a glass bottle onto his head. Wouldn't she also be blamed for aggressing him, worsening her and her friends' circumstances?"

Am I truly living in 2022? Advocacies for the victim-blaming theory have never come to an end. In sexual-harassment incidents, female victims are always told to blame themselves for being assaulted, implying as if following the "correct" procedures, they wouldn't be experiencing such treatments: people say girls should wear less exposing clothes – the girls were wearing t-shirts and long jeans; people say girls should avoid going to remotes areas, and avoid being alone – there were four of them, at a restaurant, with more than ten witnesses.

Watching the video for the first time, tears of fear and irritation uncontrollably ran across my face. The second time, a mixture of rationality, frustration, and helplessness. All the girls did was protect themselves and defend their friends. Are women not even entitled to fight back for their rights, for themselves? Soft rejections are considered weak, not strong enough to deter the attacker; powerful rejections are considered hostile, "not tolerant," and "not considerate" enough, consequently infuriating the attacker. Then tell me, tell us, tell women, what is the correct thing to do? Are we expected to keep our mouths shut and silently accept behaviours that are against our will? How can we even protect ourselves and be fully safe when men cannot learn to understand the most fundamental idea that "no means no"?

Please don't get me wrong by thinking "men" is a generalization of the male population. I am referring to the ones that have traditional gender biases ingrained in their minds and are reluctant to respect women.

35% of women worldwide have experienced physical or sexual harassment in their lifetime, and the severity varies, from unwanted sexual touching to rape. But this doesn't mean we should be diminishing or dismissing any incident. Harm, either physical, sexual, or psychological, has ultimately been made and is not negligible. The girls in Tangshan were only attempting to prevent what could have happened to become their darkest, deepest nightmares which would have kept them sleepless at night. However, those endeavors were futile after all. Now, they would still need to suffer from those endless nights of fear and anxiety in another way.

Meanwhile, statistics have shown that at least 1 in 6 men, whether a child or adult, have been sexually abused or assaulted. Males who have been sexually assaulted are likely to suffer from high levels of mental illness, such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, as well as alcohol abuse. This is not only about women.

Therefore, no matter the gender, it is ultimately each and every person - you and me - our common goal and responsibility to combat sexual harassment by supporting and understanding the victims. Sexual assaults would never come to an end until people start to pay serious attention to their impacts and learn to respect both genders. Today, it might be only about the four girls in Tangshan; tomorrow, it could be us: you, me, him, her, them.

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Harmful Cultural, Religious Practices on Women

By Eunseo Kang

Age 17, from South Korea

The world has been continuously endeavoring to resolve gender equality; however, a number of cultural and religious practices are still harming women. In a society that obeys the practices, it is regarded as a natural custom that everyone needs to follow. However, due to these harmful beliefs, many girls and women are suffering all over the world.

The most commonly known harmful cultural practice is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). FGM involves all procedures of, partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injuries to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It is usually conducted to increase the marriageability of girls, which is motivated by cultural beliefs about what is considered acceptable sexual behavior. However, FGM has led to several health risks such as severe hemorrhage, sepsis (an infection of the bloodstream), acute and chronic pain, and infertility. FGM is practiced in the Western, Eastern, and North-Eastern regions of Africa, and some countries in the Middle East and Asia. According to the WHO, more than 200 million girls and women alive today have been subjected to this practice, and more than 3 million girls are estimated to be at risk of FGM annually.

Another example of harmful cultural practices is caused by the "son preference", which is a belief that boys have more value than girls. This belief is a product of patriarchy, a system in which the father or eldest son is the head of the family, and descendants are connected through the male lineage. In families where sons are preferred, the birth of a boy is highly regarded, while the birth of a girl is less pleasant. Consequently, the gender of the baby will also determine the value of a mother. In some societies, particularly in Asia, severe son preference leads to selective abortions, feticide, infanticide, and malnutrition of the girls with deprivation in treatment. In an attempt in preventing such issues, clinics in India and China, for example, are implementing early sex detection laws to avoid families from knowing the baby's gender before giving birth.

There are not only cultural practices but also religious practices which exacerbate gender inequality. One of them is Islam. In Islam society, every year approximately 1.2 million women are raped and approximately 17 percent of pregnant women report having been battered. Based on Islamists and conservatives in the name of Islam, "Men their (that is to say, the women) are superior to a degree "That is because the Qur'an says, "Men have authority over women, according to the preference that God has given them over them, and because of the expenses that they are doing to maintain them (4:34)" Furthermore, because of these doctrines, women in Islam have to wear hijab to maintain male supremacy. They believe that God has taught women to wear it to satisfy his directive for modesty. Living under such belief, it is almost impossible for women to be treated equally to men, as their opportunities and rights are diminished. Such beliefs are not right, as women should not be treated differently simply due to their gender.

There are far more examples of harmful cultural, and religious practices. In India and Nepal among other countries, Devadasi, Deuki, and Devaki are practiced: girls are forced to go to temples to provide services including forced prostitution. In Nigeria, Ghana, and Benin, a ritual in their traditional religions named Trokosi is practiced: children (Mostly, they are girls. Boys are given rarely), aged between 5 and 10 years are given to the priests to "pay for" sins of the family or to ask for clemency from the gods. These children have to serve the priests, do unpaid hard work for them, and will also be exploited for sex. If a Trokosi girl dies or manages to flee, the family must provide for another girl.

Like all other violence imposed on women, harmful religious, and cultural practices are caused by gender inequality, including unequal power relationships between women and men, and rigid gender hierarchy in society. People who implement these practices claim that it is right to do so based on the belief of their culture or religious belief, and those beliefs are the exact reasons why such practices are difficult to change within the same community. Nonetheless, no culture or religion can reasonably justify the violence and discrimination that encourage gender inequality. However, the beliefs that are the reason for this practice are difficult to change within the same community. Thus, we should pay more attention to these cultural and religious practice issues so that the suffering of women does not continue any longer.

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Growing awareness of gender equality for our future generation

By Yeun Kim

Age 18, from South Korea

A lot of High-Income Countries (HICs) are encountering population issues, especially the rapid decrease in the birth rate. The low birth rate is a serious issue as there will be a lesser working-age population, leading to a decrease in the competition for employment and may negatively affect the overall economy of the country. Furthermore, the old-age population will soon exceed the birth rate which causes greater pressure on the government and the younger generation to support the elderly with more taxes.

Over the past few years, Korea has had the lowest birth rate in the world. According to recent statistics, the "total fertility rate" (the total number of children a woman has had in a lifetime) has rapidly decreased to 0.81 in 2021 since its fall to less than 1 in 2018. This is only half of the OECD average of 1.61.

The government has established a basic plan for a low birth rate and aging society since 2005 and is currently implementing the fourth basic plan. In addition, the central government and local governments have implemented various policies such as marriage, pregnancy, and childbirth support, child-rearing support, work-family balance support, youth support, and housing support to increase the birth rate. To this end, a cumulative budget of \$287 billion was invested, nevertheless, the birth rate is continuously decreasing without any policy effect.

Besides, HICs like Sweden, France, and the UK also have confronted the low birth rate issue, but introducing a new policy went successfully and led the birth rate to increase again for a while.

Thus, the Korean case of low fertility rate is the result of not considering the "gender relationship" established within the existing policy, focusing on the logic of "economic growth and national development" by encouraging marriage and childbirth. Unlike the first to second basic plans, the third to fourth basic plans are aimed at a policy paradigm that considers "gender relations," but when entering detailed projects, the actual policy contents are not much different from before.

The British Financial Times (FT) has also pointed out that it is more effective to establish gender equality than cash-based support such as birth incentive subsidies to solve Korea's low birth rate problem. For example, the fact that Norway, Sweden, Iceland, and France, which have high levels of gender equality in Europe, have relatively high birth rates supports this. Therefore, to solve the low birth rate problem, it is necessary to start by predicting future changes based on population policy within the framework of the perception that women and men are gender-equal subjects in the areas of 'labor' and 'care'. Through this, careful policies concerning the quality of life of each citizen will be prepared, while all structures, including the economy, education, employment, housing, and social security, will be transformed into a society that can sustain growth in line with the new population structure. What we need first in this process is to come up with inclusive governance to reflect the characteristics and policy needs of the new generation and resolve gender-generational conflicts and alleviate regional gaps.



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International community or related governments should be responsible in managing war crime

War crime in Russia Ukraine war

By Hyein Kim

Age 18, from South Korea

Russia invaded Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022. This invasion rapidly worsened the diplomatic relationship between the two countries. Many nations and news agencies ought to predict and analyze how this war will affect their economies. Although it is important, many countries were reluctant to help civilians in this war and suffering from the war, directly. It is time to acknowledge what we are ignoring and what we must face. Therefore, in this writing, I want to focus on methods of managing war crimes.

According to the UN & UNHR report published on April 2022, Russian armed forces violated International Humanitarian Laws (IHL), by attacking population areas, civilians, schools, hospitals, and local infrastructures. But these are just parts of a big issue. More than 11,544 civilian casualties were reported in OHCHR July Ukraine: civilian casualty update – another huge violation of UN goals and international laws. However, this is still not regulated strictly.

Moreover, several news articles were reporting sexual violence of the Russian soldiers against Ukrainian women. However, it is unlikely to punish assaulters of war crimes, especially ones committing to sexual violence in war. Evidence is less likely to exist when they all are in a war. Although Human Rights Watch pointed out the issue of sexual crime in the war, mentioning “Seven Ukrainian civilians executed by Russian soldiers in two separate incidents. A case of repeated rape. ... These are just two of the many ...”, Russian armed forces have denied those accusations.

In this war, from the perspective of Ukraine, when an individual becomes a victim of an unjust, unpleasant, and terrible crime, there is no place to be protected from it. Having Russia being suspended from the UN human rights council is not a good sign for civilians. It also means that the safe zone where the individual can avoid the perpetrator has disappeared. In addition, this war is not what all Russian civilians want. They are suffering from this war in different ways. In other words, now the human rights of civilians in both countries are not guaranteed in the 21st century when we all believe we are doing our best to raise awareness of human rights, and humanity is developing. This war makes citizens of both Russia and Ukraine feel even more helpless.

If the international community or related governments ignore or deny having a responsibility in the situation where the war has disturbed the human rights of civilians, it means the international community doesn't prioritize the value of human rights and they are even justifying war crimes.

Protecting human rights has been considered a part of moral standard in this world and it is accepted in many international communities. Thus, not being responsible for the war crime can indicate that human rights are not rules of conduct, which can lead to the destruction of humanitarian rules in the world.

Half of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, announced by the UN, have been disregarded in this war: No. 1, No. 3, No. 5, No. 8, No. 10, No. 11, No. 16, No.17, etc. Regardless of which country committed war crimes, the repetition of these actions is an act that destroys the social achievements of the 21st century that UN calls "promoting equality." Therefore, we must actively pay attention to this issue and take action to support victims and raise awareness of weak management of war crimes.

To be responsible, the world community is showing its voice through anti-war protests. International communities – including almost all individuals and myself – understand that this war is sophisticated, because Russia and Ukraine have deeply intertwined historical, linguistic, and cultural contexts, but we also know that we need to make a move for our rights and peace.

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