

MITMUNC 2014 – ECOSOC Background Guide 2

To the delegates attending MITMUNC-

Hello! We are your chairs for ECOSOC 2014, Antonio Moreno and Sarah Wharton.

Antonio: My name is Antonio, and we're glad to have you along for the ride! First, a little bit about myself, I'm a junior at MIT, (Class of 2015, MIT students like to think in numbers) majoring in Computer Science and Electrical Engineering with a Political Science concentration (Course 6-2 with a Course 17 concentration, more numbers!). I was raised in Mexico, and my family immigrated to the United States when I turned 9, and because of this I grew up to be interested in a lot of international and political issues. So why go to MIT, you may ask? Well, other than being really interested in science and technology, the thing I like about most is that engineering is about solving problems, and who better to put to solving an international issue other than an engineer! This is my second year doing MITMUNC, and anything related to Model United Nations, so I apologize in advance for any procedural mistakes I make!

Sarah: I am a freshman at MIT planning to study Brain and Cognitive Sciences. I am possibly one of the most excited people you will ever meet; I love talking to people, hearing their stories, and baking them cookies! I try to keep a very positive outlook on life, and infuse everything I do with my passion for living.

This is my first year doing anything related to MUN, so I am very excited to see how everything unfolds. By the end of the conference, I hope that all of you will have learned how to at least begin to resolve worldwide issues that are often very complicated and difficult to solve.

Both of us: ECOSOC met for the first time on January 23, 1946; if you do the math, you'll see that we will be meeting just after the 67th anniversary of the inaugural meeting, which we think is absolutely fantastic! We hope that you will allow us to create in you with the desire and the energy to look at global issues from many perspectives, and to apply the thinking of an engineer in order to solve a problem, and perhaps, come to some resolutions.

We are looking forward to meeting you all! We're sure you all are going to do amazingly well.
Sincerely,
Both of us!

ECOSOC Topic II: Rights of Migrant Workers in Asia

Ever since the industrial revolution, there has been exponentially increasing demand for quick, cheap manufactured goods. In order to keep up with demand, factory workers had to work longer hours, in hazardous conditions, with fewer breaks, under abusive employers, and some even with lower pay. Along with the industrial revolution came many concerns about workers' health and safety, from politicians, labour unions, and the workers themselves. These efforts succeeded in the first world countries, but in a global economy, the free market allowed companies to find abundant labour in developing countries. In addition, the economic boom of the 20th century that came about due to a technological revolution propelled the world's economy to a new high, further increasing demand for cheap labour under even more hazardous conditions, as factories had to adapt to more advanced processes due to new electronic technologies, a PC in every home, a cellphone in every hand. Much of this work has been outsourced to Asia. The claims of economic success for these countries comes largely from their export focused economies, filling the hungry demand for manufactured goods and consumer electronics. The same concerns for worker's health and safety have been brought up, but to a lesser extent. Laws have been passed to protect the workers, but in order to circumvent that, many corporations have gone onto a 'guaranteed' source of cheap labour, and that is Migrant workers. They are less likely to report hazards and abuse, while more likely to work for wages below non-migrant workers. And, in the case of illegal workers, they are less likely to go to the authorities to report criminal activities. UNESCO is charged with tackling social and economic challenges, and the challenge of migrant workers in SE Asia is both a social and an economic challenge. UNESCO needs to approach this issue both as a human rights issue, as there have been many instances and reports of injuries and unreasonable abuse, and as an economic development issue, as this employment allows many families to rise out of poverty, and allows the standard of living in the country to increase due to an increase in chances more stable employment.

Background

First, let's look at what it takes to define a migrant worker. The UN officially declares a migrant worker to be "a person who is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national." We will use this definition. We are dealing with the rights of the people who cross national borders to seek employment. Therefore, this divides each country into two blocks, whether they are the receivers of migrant labour, or their citizens are immigrating to other countries for labour. We are looking to define how the receiver nation's governments should act, what steps (if any) should they take in order to improve the conditions of migrant workers.

In order to look at what we can do, we can look at what the UN has done in the past. The major resolution that came about of conversations about migrant workers comes from the "International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families", which you can find the whole of the text [here](#). [A convenient summary of it is here. The resolution outlines what rights a migrant worker should have, with a focus on setting standards for basic human rights to be given to migrant workers and their families. I encourage you to read the summary in depth, as these are the rights we will be discussing. They include freedom of thought, freedom of religion, freedom from torture and slavery, rights to privacy and property, among with basic legal rights such as right to a fair trial and legal representation. In](#)

addition, the resolution includes clauses about equal treatment by their employers, when it comes to unionizing, over time pay, hours of work, and minimum age of work.

This resolution was adopted by the General Assembly in 1990, and has been slowly ratified ever since by many countries. You can peruse the list [here](#) The problem arises when you look at the countries that have not ratified the Convention, here. Among them are China, India, Vietnam, Thailand, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and the United States, all of which are main hubs, attractors for migrant workers. There is a clear divide in the countries that have ratified it (Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Philippines) and the countries who have not become acting Parties. THE trend to spot is that the majority of the countries that have ratified the resolution are countries from which migrants originate, while the countries that have not ratified the resolution are countries that employ the migrant workers. Therefore we cannot ensure that this past resolution has been optimally beneficial to the rights of migrant workers, specifically in Asia.

A few questions we must ask in the exploration of this topic relate to the numbers of migrant workers, legal and illegal, estimated are for each participant country. The numbers will usually point to where the country feels on the issue. For example, Singapore's population is divided among citizens, who make up 63.6% of the 5 million residents, with 10.7% being permanent residents, and 25.7% being nonresidents, or “individuals who hold passes for short-term stay in Singapore; these include the employment pass, work permit, dependent's pass, and long-term social visit pass”. This points to a large migrant population in Singapore, one that hails mostly from China, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka, and is employed in low-skilled jobs. Therefore it is in Singapore's vested interest to maintain peace between its migrant population, and the native population, while maintaining the legal divide to a lawful migration and legalization process. Singapore and other countries benefit from migrant workers, as they prop up the workforce by doing the low-skill, dangerous jobs that the citizens avoid.

Other countries might have a different opinion about migrant workers, as some governments might incline towards maintaining a low unemployment rate among their citizens, so they adjust quotas for foreign workers. These quotas allow the local workers to find employment and assure a job, as companies might not be able to find, or even be allowed to hire more migrant workers. This helps to maintain the citizens happy and employed. Another reason for limiting foreign workers are remittances, which is money sent back to the country of origin of the migrant worker. This might be interpreted as money leaking away from the host country, and might be a significant impact on the local economies. For example, 12% of the Philippines GDP is sent to other countries as remittances. Other reasons can be used to limit migrant workers, such as preservation of culture, ethnic conflict, war, a desire to control economic output, limited resources, among others.

Textiles, construction, and manufacturing are the main source of employment for immigrants, because of this, the migrant workers do not work in the safest conditions. The textile industry has dangers that involve fast machinery, and the construction industry has a high risk of injury due to machinery and falling from heights. The manufacturing industry, especially electronics manufacturing, includes a lot of work around toxic materials and heavy machinery, which can be extremely dangerous with improper use. These factors are involved in the decision to allow migrant workers. Some of the local populace might strive for less dangerous jobs, making

room for jobs to be filled in by foreign workers. Because these jobs are taken by migrant workers, there are less regulations covering them. There are no minimum wage laws, no contracts by which they can ensure safe wages, and little to no regulation that assures a safe working environment. In Singapore, there is little to no protection of wage assurance, and compensation for injury is an arduous process that might not be feasible for many migrant workers.

Consumer demand for manufactured goods is skyrocketing, as stated before, goods like electronics and textiles, are commodities taken for granted in many countries. Developing countries take advantage of this by supplying the demand, and in Asia, the migrant worker force is a huge factor in the economic growth of these industries. The GDP's of countries' industries that take advantage of these industries has grown exponentially since the 1980's, and there is a correlation with the amount of migrant workers, who traditionally work for lower wages and in more hazardous conditions, and increase of GDP in the last 2 decades.

One last question to ask, is if the model of rapid growth sustainable for a country, and what this means to the migrant population. Will there ever be a point where a country decides that migrant workers are not profitable? In that case, what happens to the migrant worker, who might still need the job. The rights afforded to them, if any, might not offer protection in this case, and they will be left to other means to sustain themselves.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the rights of migrant workers hinge on a lot of factors. Right now we have a resolution on the rights of migrant workers, but it has not been adopted by many countries. Among these countries that have not adopted the resolution, there are many that are the host of migrant workers, therefore the UN cannot be sure that the basic human rights of the migrant workers are being met. Many problems encountered today are problems with the source of the employment, as there is a lot of abuse by the employers that take advantage of migrant labour, and do not provide access to rights, such as a right to unionize, right to contractual wages, right to protection against unreasonable dismissal, or right to benefits. These problems arise and prevent migrant workers from a fulfilling way of life. We must work to ensure that these workers are getting protection from any abuse from their employers. This might include making steps towards a new resolution that fulfills the requirements for basic human rights, while allowing for clauses that would encourage countries that are host to migrant workers to pass and enact this new resolution. We could also take steps to encourage countries that have not chosen to pass the 1990 resolution, to do so, and join the countries that protect these basic human rights.

Questions to consider:

- Are the rights of migrant workers relevant to your country?
- Is your country a host of migrant workers? Does your country benefit from the presence of the migrant workers?
- Are members, or citizens, of your country, migrant workers elsewhere? Does your country benefit economically from having workers outside of your boundaries?
- Does your country consider that basic human rights should be considered in all cases, especially when a person is not in their country of origin?
- Does your country benefit at all from migrant workers, depending on global trade?

In order to establish country blocs, the questions that arise include whether a country desires migrant workers, and whether this reflects how the country treats the migrant workers. We look to the list and map of countries that have ratified and adopted the 1990 resolution to establish blocs. The United States, Canada, and major European countries that have not adopted this resolution, are mostly hosts to migrant workers, and are not as invested in protecting the rights of migrant workers as much as other countries. Countries in Latin America, excluding Brasil, consider the rights of migrant workers important, perhaps because they have a large population of workers outside of their boundaries. North Africa and Turkey have also ratified the resolution, along with Indonesia and the Philippines. In Asia, countries like China, India, Thailand, and more, are developed and developing countries that are large sources of manufacturing, thus jobs from migrant workers, and they have not ratified the resolution.

Here are sources that are good to take a gander at, along with those footnoted, they provide a good base for a lot of the conversations that would happen. The news snippets especially, they provide snapshots of a continuing conversation

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