



STUDY GUIDE FOR



UNITED NATIONS WOMEN

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UNITED NATIONS WOMEN

1. Mandate of the United Nations Women

United Nations Women was established in July 2010 through United Nations General Assembly Resolution 64/289, bringing together four previously separate entities to strengthen the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Its mandate is centered on advancing women's rights, eliminating discrimination, and protecting women from exploitation in all spheres of life, including matters related to health, reproduction, and bodily autonomy.

The organization supports intergovernmental bodies in setting global standards, assists member states in implementing policies, and ensures accountability across the United Nations system regarding gender equality commitments. While commercial surrogacy is not directly regulated at the international level, it falls under the broader mandate of United Nations Women because it directly involves questions of reproductive autonomy, women's health, and potential exploitation.

Frameworks such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), and the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action (1994) affirm women's right to make decisions regarding their reproductive lives free of coercion or abuse.



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Within this context, United Nations Women's mandate extends to monitoring how practices like global commercial surrogacy impact women, ensuring that reproductive autonomy is protected while also preventing the commodification and exploitation of women's bodies.

Through its work with the General Assembly, the Commission on the Status of Women, and other United Nations entities, United Nations Women promotes international cooperation and guides states in addressing the ethical and legal challenges posed by surrogacy. Its mandate therefore provides the foundation for examining global commercial surrogacy both as a matter of reproductive rights and as a potential site of exploitation requiring careful international attention.

2. Funding of the United Nations Women

United Nations Women is financed through a combination of assessed contributions, voluntary donations, and inter-agency support within the United Nations system. Unlike certain United Nations bodies that operate primarily on assessed contributions from member states, United Nations Women relies heavily on voluntary contributions provided by governments, intergovernmental organizations, private sector partners, and individuals.

The United Nations regular budget, which is made up of assessed contributions from all member states, provides a limited allocation to United Nations Women, mainly to cover its core functions and staff. However, the vast majority of the organization's operational and programmatic activities are funded through voluntary contributions, making sustained donor support critical for its work.

To ensure predictability and accountability, United Nations Women administers a multi-year funding framework, aligning contributions with the priorities outlined in its Strategic Plans. These resources are distributed across its global initiatives, including the advancement of women's rights, support for national legislation and policies, and the implementation of gender equality commitments at country and regional levels.

A key funding instrument is the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, managed by United Nations Women since 1996, which provides grants to initiatives worldwide aimed at preventing and responding to gender-based violence. Other earmarked funds are dedicated to areas such as women's political participation, economic empowerment, and humanitarian response.



The financial reports of United Nations Women consistently highlight the imbalance between the organization's expanding mandate and the level of resources available, underscoring the need for broader and more consistent financial support from member states and donors. Adequate and sustainable funding is therefore essential for United Nations Women to effectively address global issues such as commercial surrogacy, ensuring that women's reproductive rights are upheld while protecting against potential exploitation.



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TOPIC A

GLOBAL COMMERCIAL SURROGACY: REPRODUCTIVE AUTONOMY OR MODERN-DAY EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN?

1.1. Introduction to the Agenda

Global commercial surrogacy refers to arrangements in which a woman carries and delivers a child for another individual or couple in return for financial compensation. While surrogacy itself has existed for centuries in various cultural contexts, the rise of transnational commercial surrogacy in recent decades has raised significant human rights concerns. These arrangements frequently involve intended parents from wealthier states entering into contracts with women in economically disadvantaged regions, where limited legal protections and financial need create conditions of vulnerability.

This agenda lies at the intersection of reproductive autonomy and the prevention of exploitation. On one hand, surrogacy may be understood as an expression of women's reproductive choice. On the other, the commercialization of such arrangements risks commodifying women's bodies, particularly where social and economic inequalities dictate the terms of participation.

For United Nations Women, this issue falls within its mandate to uphold gender equality and safeguard women from discrimination and exploitation. International instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and broader human rights treaties including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) affirm that reproductive rights must be exercised free from coercion and abuse.



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The rapid globalization of fertility markets and advances in reproductive technologies have intensified the urgency of this issue. The absence of a unified international framework has allowed cross-border surrogacy to expand in legal grey areas, creating challenges of accountability and enforcement. As a result, the question of whether global commercial surrogacy represents reproductive autonomy or modern-day exploitation remains a critical concern for the Executive Board of United Nations Women and the international community at large.

1.2. Key Terminologies Related to the Agenda

- **Commercial Surrogacy:** A surrogacy arrangement in which a woman agrees to carry and deliver a child for intended parents in exchange for financial compensation beyond medical or pregnancy-related expenses.
- **Altruistic Surrogacy:** A form of surrogacy where the surrogate mother receives no financial compensation apart from reimbursement of medical and pregnancy-related costs.
- **Transnational Surrogacy:** Also called cross-border surrogacy, this refers to arrangements where intended parents contract surrogates in another country, often due to differences in legal restrictions, costs, or availability.
- **Reproductive Autonomy:** The principle that individuals have the right to make decisions about their reproductive health and choices, including whether to conceive, carry a pregnancy, or use assisted reproductive technologies, free from coercion or discrimination.
- **Exploitation:** In the context of commercial surrogacy, exploitation refers to situations where surrogates may be coerced, inadequately compensated, or subjected to unequal bargaining power due to economic vulnerability, lack of legal protection, or social inequality.
- **Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART):** Medical procedures that aid in achieving pregnancy, including in vitro fertilization (IVF), embryo transfer, and other techniques often used in surrogacy arrangements.



- **Informed Consent:** A fundamental medical and ethical principle requiring that the surrogate mother fully understands and voluntarily agrees to the terms, risks, and implications of surrogacy, without external pressure or manipulation.
- **Child's Legal Status:** Refers to the recognition of the legal parentage and nationality of children born through surrogacy arrangements. In transnational cases, children may face challenges of statelessness or unrecognized parentage if laws between countries conflict.
- **Gender Equality in Reproduction:** A human rights principle recognizing that women must have equal access to reproductive choices, protections, and freedoms, without being subjected to practices that commodify their reproductive capacities.

1.3. Historical Context

The practice of surrogacy has roots in early human history, with references to surrogate arrangements appearing in religious and cultural texts. In ancient societies, surrogacy was often framed as a means of ensuring lineage where infertility threatened family continuity. For example, historical records in Mesopotamia and references in the Hebrew Bible describe situations in which a woman bore children on behalf of another. These arrangements were typically non-commercial and closely tied to family or community structures.

In the twentieth century, advances in medical science, particularly the development of in vitro fertilization (IVF) in 1978, transformed surrogacy from a traditional or informal practice into a medically facilitated arrangement. The first recorded commercial surrogacy contract was established in the United States in 1980, marking a shift toward organized surrogacy services. By the late twentieth century, clinics and agencies began to operate in multiple countries, linking intended parents with surrogate mothers through contractual and financial arrangements.

The globalization of the fertility industry in the early twenty-first century significantly expanded the scope of surrogacy. Lower costs in developing countries and differing national laws led to the rise of transnational commercial surrogacy markets, particularly in countries such as India, Thailand, Nepal, and Ukraine.



In these contexts, economic disparities and limited legal protections made surrogacy accessible to foreign couples while raising concerns about the protection of women acting as surrogates.

These developments prompted international debate. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) drew attention to the need to protect the legal status and rights of children born through surrogacy. Meanwhile, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, established under the 1979 Convention, began to highlight the risk of exploitation in reproductive contexts. In 2015, the Hague Conference on Private International Law initiated discussions on international regulation of surrogacy, particularly in relation to the cross-border recognition of parentage and protection of children.

The evolution of surrogacy therefore reflects a broader tension in the history of reproductive rights: while scientific advances expanded reproductive autonomy, they also created new risks of inequality and exploitation. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, surrogacy had become a subject of concern for multiple United Nations bodies, positioning it within the mandate of United Nations Women as an issue directly connected to gender equality, bodily autonomy, and protection from exploitation.

1.4. Relevant International and Regional Frameworks

Although no binding international treaty explicitly regulates global commercial surrogacy, a number of existing instruments, conventions, and judicial decisions provide guidance on the protection of women's rights, children's rights, and reproductive autonomy.

International Frameworks

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): Recognizes in Article 1 the inherent dignity and equality of all people, and in Article 16 the right of men and women to marry and to found a family, which is frequently cited in reproductive rights debates.
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979): Articles 11 and 12 obligate States to protect women in matters of health and employment. While surrogacy is not explicitly mentioned, its provisions on preventing exploitation are relevant to commercial arrangements.



- **The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989):** Article 7 affirms every child's right to birth registration, a name, and nationality, which are often contested in cases of transnational surrogacy.
- **The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966):** Article 12 enshrines the right to the highest attainable standard of health, applicable to surrogate mothers' reproductive health and the well-being of children.
- **The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966):** Protects recognition before the law and family life, both of which are central to determining parentage and legal identity in surrogacy cases.
- **Hague Conference on Private International Law:** Currently advancing discussions on international cooperation in parentage and surrogacy, acknowledging the need for harmonized solutions to conflicts of law, nationality, and recognition of children.
- **Reports of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children (2018, 2019):** Express concern that unregulated commercial surrogacy can amount to the sale of children, highlighting the need for international safeguards.

Regional Frameworks:

- **European Court of Human Rights:** In *Mennesson v. France* (2014) and similar cases, the Court required States to respect the legal identity and family life of children born abroad through surrogacy.
- **African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981):** Guarantees the protection of family and prohibits exploitation, principles that may be applied to safeguard against abuses in surrogacy arrangements.
- **Inter-American Court of Human Rights (Advisory Opinion OC-24/17):** Affirmed that reproductive rights are integral to human dignity and autonomy, providing a basis for evaluating surrogacy practices in Latin America.

1.5. Core Principles

The discussion of global commercial surrogacy is guided by core principles that underpin international human rights law and the mandate of United Nations Women. These principles provide the foundation for evaluating whether surrogacy arrangements uphold reproductive autonomy or contribute to exploitation.

- **Reproductive Autonomy:** Women have the right to make decisions concerning their reproductive lives, including the use of assisted reproductive technologies, free from coercion, discrimination, or violence.
- **Prevention of Exploitation:** States have a duty to ensure that women are not subjected to economic or social pressures that reduce their reproductive functions to commodities in commercial markets.
- **Best Interests of the Child:** Every child has the right to a legal identity, nationality, and recognition of parentage. Surrogacy arrangements must prioritize the welfare and legal protection of children born through such contracts.
- **Equality and Non-Discrimination:** International instruments affirm that women must enjoy equal rights and opportunities in health, employment, and family life. Surrogacy practices that disproportionately exploit women in vulnerable situations conflict with this principle.
- **Informed Consent:** Any surrogacy arrangement must ensure that the surrogate mother is fully informed of the medical, legal, and social implications, and that her participation is genuinely voluntary.
- **State Responsibility:** Governments are responsible for enacting legislation and regulatory frameworks that safeguard women's rights and prevent human rights violations in both domestic and cross-border surrogacy.
- **International Cooperation:** Because surrogacy often involves cross-border arrangements, cooperation among states is essential to resolve conflicts of law, prevent statelessness, and uphold international human rights standards.



1.6. Contemporary Case Studies and Violations

Case Study 1: India's Ban on Foreign Commercial Surrogacy (2015).

India became a major hub for commercial surrogacy in the early 2000s, attracting thousands of intended parents due to comparatively lower costs. By 2012, the industry was valued at approximately \$2.3 billion annually. Concerns arose regarding the exploitation of economically vulnerable women, lack of informed consent, and inadequate medical safeguards. In 2015, the Government of India prohibited foreign nationals from engaging in commercial surrogacy, citing the need to protect women from exploitative practices.

Case Study 2: Baby Gammy Case, Thailand (2014).

In 2014, an Australian couple commissioned a Thai surrogate who gave birth to twins. The intended parents took only the healthy child back to Australia, leaving behind the twin, Gammy, who was born with Down syndrome. The case drew global attention to the absence of regulation, exploitation of surrogate mothers, and the risk of children being treated as commodities. In response, Thailand introduced legislation in 2015 banning commercial surrogacy for foreigners.

Case Study 3: Ukraine's Surrogacy Industry During Conflict (2022–Present).

Ukraine has been one of the few European countries permitting commercial surrogacy for foreign couples, with hundreds of children born annually through such arrangements. The outbreak of armed conflict in 2022 highlighted the vulnerability of surrogate mothers and newborns. Reports indicated that many infants were left in temporary facilities due to border closures, raising concerns about the best interests of the child and the protection of women in conflict zones.



Case Study 4: United States Legal Patchwork

In the United States, regulation of surrogacy is determined by individual states rather than federal law. States such as California permit and enforce commercial surrogacy contracts, while others, such as Michigan, criminalize them. This fragmented system has led to legal disputes, including cases where children born through surrogacy abroad were denied U.S. citizenship due to unclear parentage recognition. The lack of uniformity underscores the need for international standards.

Case Study 5: Nepal's Surrogacy Ban Following Earthquake (2015).

Prior to 2015, Nepal permitted international commercial surrogacy, with many surrogate mothers recruited from marginalized communities. Following the 2015 earthquake, international attention was drawn to foreign couples evacuating surrogate-born children while surrogate mothers were left behind in precarious conditions. This event intensified criticism of surrogacy as exploitative and led the Supreme Court of Nepal to impose a complete ban on commercial surrogacy later that year.

Case Study 6: European Court of Human Rights – Mennesson v. France (2014).

In this landmark case, French intended parents used surrogacy services in the United States, but French authorities refused to recognize the legal parentage of the children. The European Court of Human Rights ruled that denying recognition violated the children's right to identity and family life under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. This case illustrates the tension between national prohibitions and international human rights obligations.



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1.7. Challenges in the Implementation and Enforcement

- **Lack of International Regulation:** There is no binding international treaty specifically addressing global commercial surrogacy. This absence results in a fragmented legal framework where national practices diverge significantly, allowing inconsistencies that can foster exploitation and create risks for both women and children.
- **Cross-Border Legal Conflicts:** Because surrogacy often involves intended parents, surrogate mothers, and children across multiple jurisdictions, conflicting national laws on parentage, citizenship, and recognition of contracts frequently lead to complex disputes. These conflicts can delay or deny legal recognition of children, leaving them in precarious situations, including statelessness.
- **Exploitation of Economically Vulnerable Women:** Surrogate mothers frequently come from low-income backgrounds, particularly in states where commercial surrogacy has expanded as an industry. Without access to independent legal, financial, or medical support, many women are at risk of entering agreements under coercive economic circumstances.
- **Commodification and Ethical Concerns:** Commercial surrogacy raises questions about the commodification of women's reproductive capacities. Reports of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children (2018, 2019) warned that in certain circumstances, surrogacy arrangements resemble practices of child sale when financial considerations override the protection of family and identity.
- **Health and Safety of Surrogate Mothers:** Women acting as surrogates often face medical risks, such as complications from multiple embryo transfers, high-risk pregnancies, or insufficient medical oversight. Some contracts limit their autonomy by mandating medical procedures or restricting personal decision-making during pregnancy, undermining health rights.

- **Inconsistent Recognition of Children's Rights:** Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) affirms every child's right to nationality and legal identity, many children born through cross-border surrogacy encounter difficulties in securing citizenship or inheritance rights. The absence of harmonized standards continues to jeopardize their best interests.
- **Cultural and Religious Opposition:** In many countries, surrogacy faces moral, cultural, or religious objections. These perspectives often lead to outright prohibitions but also complicate the development of regional or international consensus on regulation.

1.8. The Way Forward: Proposed Measures and Recommendations

The challenges associated with global commercial surrogacy highlight the urgent need for coordinated international responses. United Nations Women, together with other United Nations bodies, emphasizes the following measures to safeguard women's rights, reproductive autonomy, and the protection of children.

- **Development of International Standards:** States, under the guidance of the Hague Conference on Private International Law and in consultation with United Nations bodies, should work toward an international framework that harmonizes laws on parentage, citizenship, and surrogacy arrangements.
- **Strengthening Domestic Legislation:** National laws should ensure that surrogacy contracts uphold women's reproductive rights, guarantee informed consent, and prohibit practices that exploit economically vulnerable women.
- **Protection of Children's Rights:** States should align surrogacy-related policies with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ensuring every child's right to nationality, legal identity, and family life.

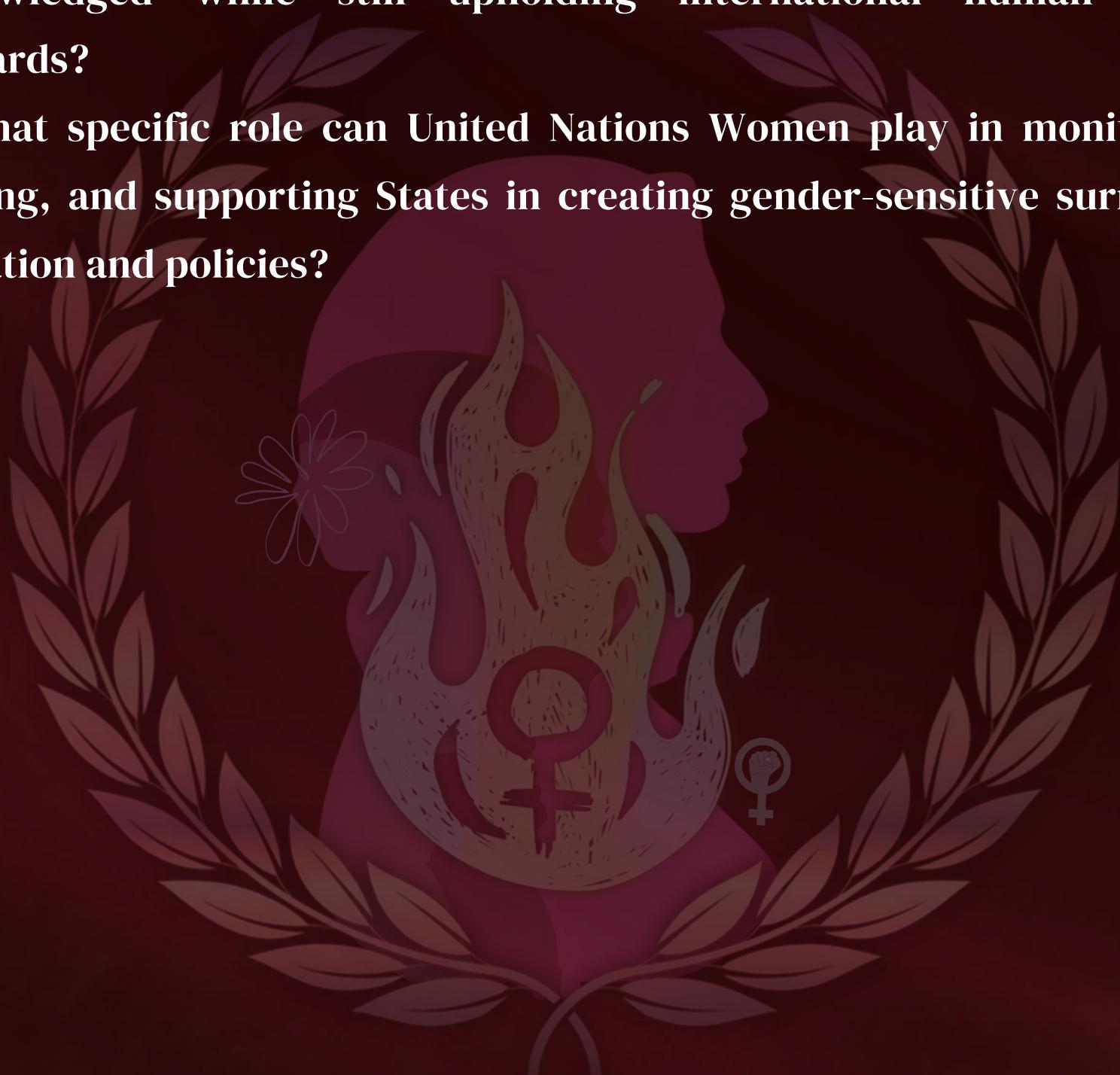


- **Safeguards for Surrogate Mothers:** Legal frameworks must require independent medical and legal counseling for surrogates, along with health and social protections, to prevent coercion and unsafe medical practices.
- **Enhanced Monitoring and Accountability:** United Nations Women, working alongside the Commission on the Status of Women and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, should strengthen monitoring mechanisms to track violations and promote accountability in cross-border surrogacy.
- **Awareness and Capacity-Building:** Governments should invest in public awareness campaigns, training for healthcare providers, and support for women at risk of exploitation in the fertility industry.
- **International Cooperation:** States should engage in cross-border collaboration to prevent statelessness, address trafficking concerns, and ensure consistent recognition of children born through surrogacy.

1.9. QARMA – Questions a Resolution Must Answer

1. How can States cooperate to establish an international framework that regulates commercial surrogacy while respecting national sovereignty?
2. What measures can ensure that women entering surrogacy arrangements provide informed consent free from economic or social coercion?
3. How can the rights of children born through cross-border surrogacy be safeguarded, particularly concerning nationality, identity, and parentage?
4. What role should the Hague Conference on Private International Law play in harmonizing international laws on surrogacy and parentage recognition?
5. How can States guarantee that commercial surrogacy does not amount to trafficking or the sale of children, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and related protocols?
6. What protections must be implemented to safeguard surrogate mothers' health, autonomy, and reproductive rights throughout the process?

7. How should accountability be ensured for clinics, agencies, and intermediaries involved in exploitative or unlawful surrogacy practices?
8. What mechanisms can strengthen international cooperation to prevent statelessness and ensure legal recognition of children across borders?
9. How can cultural, moral, and religious perspectives on surrogacy be acknowledged while still upholding international human rights standards?
10. What specific role can United Nations Women play in monitoring, advising, and supporting States in creating gender-sensitive surrogacy legislation and policies?



1.10. Bibliography and References

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TOPIC B

WEAPONIZING FEMINISM: THE USE OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS A JUSTIFICATION FOR FOREIGN INTERVENTION AND POLITICAL CONTROL

2.1. Introduction to the Agenda

The promotion of women's rights has long been recognized as an essential pillar of human rights and international development. However, in recent decades, feminist rhetoric has increasingly been used in political and security contexts not primarily to advance gender equality, but as a justification for interventionist policies. This phenomenon, often referred to as the "weaponization of feminism," involves the instrumentalization of women's rights discourse by states or external actors to legitimize foreign intervention, political control, or coercive agendas.

A prominent example includes the framing of military interventions in Afghanistan in the early 2000s as campaigns for the liberation of women, despite the primary strategic objectives being geopolitical and security-related. Similar patterns have been observed in other contexts where narratives of protecting or advancing women's rights have been selectively invoked to garner international support or to delegitimize rival governments, often without delivering meaningful or sustainable improvements for women on the ground.

United Nations Women, as the principal entity responsible for the promotion of gender equality within the United Nations system, has a direct role in addressing this agenda. Its mandate underscores that women's rights must be pursued as universal human rights, grounded in treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), rather than as tools to advance political or military interests. This agenda highlights the need to critically assess the gap between rhetoric and reality: while feminist language may be used to justify intervention, actual conditions for women in conflict and post-conflict societies often remain unchanged or are even worsened.



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This agenda highlights the need to critically assess the gap between rhetoric and reality: while feminist language may be used to justify intervention, actual conditions for women in conflict and post-conflict societies often remain unchanged or are even worsened. Addressing this issue requires reaffirming that women's empowerment cannot be subordinated to foreign policy strategies, but must instead remain a global commitment rooted in equality, autonomy, and human dignity.

2.2. Key Terminologies Related to the Agenda

- **Weaponizing Feminism**: The strategic use of feminist rhetoric and the language of women's rights by states, political actors, or international institutions to justify foreign intervention, regime change, or political control, often without genuine commitment to advancing gender equality.
- **Instrumentalization of Human Rights**: The practice of invoking human rights principles selectively to achieve political, military, or diplomatic goals, rather than as part of a consistent and universal rights-based approach.
- **Humanitarian Intervention**: The use of military force or coercive measures by one or more states in another state, purportedly to prevent widespread human rights abuses. In certain cases, the protection of women's rights has been highlighted as a justification for such interventions.
- **Gender Equality**: A core principle of the United Nations, enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), referring to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women and men in all spheres of life.
- **Feminist Foreign Policy**: A framework adopted by some states that incorporates gender equality and women's rights into foreign policy priorities. While it aims to center women in diplomacy and development, critics highlight risks of selective application when aligned with strategic interests.



- **Soft Power:** The ability of a state to influence others through cultural, ideological, and diplomatic means rather than direct force. Narratives of women's empowerment can function as a form of soft power when used to shape global perception and legitimize foreign actions.
- **Human Security:** A concept promoted by the United Nations that shifts focus from traditional state security to the protection of individuals, emphasizing freedom from fear, freedom from want, and dignity. Women's rights are integral to this framework, but selective use can distort its application.
- **Orientalism:** A term popularized by Edward Said, referring to the depiction of non-Western societies as backward or uncivilized. In the context of weaponized feminism, this concept is relevant when women in non-Western states are portrayed as uniformly oppressed to justify external intervention.
- **Post-Conflict Reconstruction:** Efforts undertaken in societies emerging from conflict to rebuild institutions, infrastructure, and governance. Gender-sensitive reconstruction is a priority of United Nations Women, though in practice, women's rights are often sidelined despite being used rhetorically during intervention.

2.3. Historical Context

The use of women's rights narratives to justify political or military action has roots in both colonial and modern international relations. Throughout history, claims of "rescuing" or "liberating" women have been deployed to frame interventions as morally legitimate, even when underlying objectives were strategic, economic, or geopolitical.

In the colonial era, European powers frequently portrayed non-Western societies as inherently oppressive to women, using this depiction to justify imperial expansion under the guise of civilizing missions.



Practices such as the banning of sati in colonial India or the regulation of veiling in North Africa were often cited as examples of colonial states positioning themselves as protectors of women, while simultaneously consolidating political control.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, similar patterns re-emerged in modern forms of intervention. A significant example was the framing of the 2001 intervention in Afghanistan as a mission to liberate Afghan women from Taliban restrictions, despite the primary strategic motivations being linked to security and counterterrorism. Feminist discourse was prominently used in speeches, international campaigns, and diplomatic messaging to secure public support for military action. However, the lived realities of Afghan women after years of conflict and instability revealed that rhetorical commitments often outpaced tangible progress.

Beyond Afghanistan, the narrative of protecting women has appeared in contexts such as Iraq, Libya, and parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, where women's rights were highlighted in international rhetoric while broader geopolitical aims remained dominant. These examples reflect a recurring trend in which feminist language is selectively invoked to justify actions that do not necessarily result in long-term improvements for women.

The historical context therefore demonstrates that while women's rights are universally recognized as essential human rights, their use as instruments of political strategy undermines both the legitimacy of intervention and the authenticity of feminist advocacy. This dual history—of genuine struggles for empowerment alongside their manipulation for power—provides the foundation for analyzing the agenda of weaponized feminism in contemporary global politics.

2.4. Relevant International and Regional Frameworks

Although no binding treaty explicitly regulates the instrumentalization of women's rights for foreign intervention, several existing international and regional instruments provide guidance on the protection of women's rights and the prevention of their misuse for political purposes.



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International Frameworks

- **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):** Affirms the equality and dignity of all individuals, establishing that human rights must be protected universally, not selectively invoked for political gain.
- **The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979):** Serves as the core international treaty on women's rights, obligating States to promote gender equality across political, social, and economic spheres. Its provisions emphasize that women's rights must be advanced as an intrinsic goal, not instrumentalized for external agendas.
- **The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995):** Calls for the elimination of systemic discrimination against women, and highlights the role of governments in promoting authentic empowerment rather than rhetorical commitments.
- **United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace, and Security:** Recognizes the importance of women's participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It establishes that women must not be reduced to symbols in conflict narratives but be active agents in shaping peace processes.
- **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966):** Establishes protections for individuals against coercion, reinforcing that women's rights cannot be subordinated to political or military strategies.
- **Reports of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women:** Stress that women's rights are human rights and highlight the dangers of co-opting feminist language for state-centric or interventionist purposes.

Regional Frameworks

- **African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981):** Protects against exploitation and discrimination, affirming that women's rights must be secured through domestic empowerment, not external political intervention.
- **Maputo Protocol (2003):** Strengthens the African Charter by explicitly focusing on women's rights and autonomy, reinforcing the principle that gender equality is inseparable from human dignity and cannot be politicized.



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- European Convention on Human Rights (1950): Guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms; relevant when evaluating the selective application of women's rights discourse in international relations.
- Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará, 1994): Establishes state obligations to protect women's rights in the Americas, highlighting that these rights must not be subordinated to political agendas.

2.5.Core Principles

- **Universality of Women's Rights:** Women's rights are fundamental human rights recognized in international law, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979). They cannot be selectively invoked to advance foreign policy agendas.
- **Non-Instrumentalization:** Feminist rhetoric must not be used as a tool for legitimizing intervention, regime change, or political control. Genuine empowerment requires policies rooted in equality and dignity, not strategic manipulation.
- **Self-Determination:** Women in conflict and post-conflict societies must be central actors in shaping their futures. External narratives that portray them solely as victims undermine their agency and contradict principles of autonomy.
- **Accountability:** States and international actors that invoke women's rights as justification for intervention must be held accountable for ensuring real and measurable improvements in the lives of women affected.
- **Transparency in International Action:** Humanitarian and development initiatives must be transparent in intent and outcomes to avoid conflating strategic objectives with the advancement of rights.
- **Respect for Cultural and Social Contexts:** While universal standards must be upheld, approaches to gender equality should be implemented in ways that engage local contexts and women themselves, avoiding imposed narratives that can serve external interests.



- **Peace and Security Integration:** In line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), women must be meaningfully included in peace processes and not reduced to symbolic figures in international discourse.

2.6. Contemporary Case Studies and Violations

Case Study 1: Afghanistan (2001–2021).

Following the 2001 intervention, international actors consistently highlighted the suppression of women under Taliban rule as justification for military presence. While some gains were made in education and employment for Afghan women, the prolonged conflict and eventual withdrawal in 2021 revealed that improvements were fragile. Reports by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) confirmed that women's rights deteriorated rapidly once foreign troops left, raising questions about the instrumental use of feminist rhetoric to sustain intervention.

Case Study 2: Iraq (2003).

The invasion of Iraq was partly framed in terms of liberating women from authoritarian rule. U.S. and coalition leaders emphasized opportunities for Iraqi women in a new democratic order. However, subsequent instability, sectarian conflict, and weakened institutions led to rising gender-based violence and reduced access to services. Reports by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) documented that many women faced harsher conditions post-intervention than before.

Case Study 3: Libya (2011).

The 2011 intervention in Libya, authorized under Security Council Resolution 1973, included references to protecting civilians, with women's rights invoked as part of the broader humanitarian justification. However, the collapse of state structures led to increased trafficking, sexual violence, and loss of legal protections for women. United Nations reports on Libya (2016–2022) noted persistent violations, illustrating the gap between rhetoric and outcomes.



Case Study 4: Bosnia and Herzegovina (1990s).

During the Balkan conflicts, reports of mass sexual violence against women were widely publicized to galvanize international action. While intervention led to the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), which recognized sexual violence as a crime against humanity, critics argue that political actors selectively emphasized women's suffering to justify military responses while broader structural protections for women lagged behind.

Case Study 5: Syria (2011–Present).

The Syrian conflict has seen repeated references to the plight of women as part of international debates on intervention. Both state and non-state actors have highlighted sexual violence, forced displacement, and suppression of women's rights. However, selective focus on gender issues has often been linked to strategic objectives, while humanitarian access and women's long-term protection have remained inconsistent.

Case Study 6: Colonial Algeria (1830–1962).

French colonial authorities framed the unveiling of Algerian women as a symbol of liberation during the colonial period. Historians have documented how colonial rhetoric portrayed the emancipation of Muslim women as justification for domination, while in practice women's rights remained restricted and instrumentalized for political ends. This case illustrates the historical roots of weaponizing feminism within colonial frameworks.



2.7. Challenges in the Implementation and Enforcement

- **Absence of Binding International Regulation:** There is no specific international treaty that prohibits the instrumentalization of women's rights for political or military purposes. This creates a legal vacuum where states and external actors can selectively employ feminist narratives without accountability.
- **Selective Application of Human Rights Norms:** Women's rights are often invoked selectively to support interventionist agendas in certain states, while similar violations elsewhere are overlooked. This inconsistency undermines the universality of international human rights standards.
- **Marginalization of Women's Agency:** In many cases, women are framed as victims in need of rescue rather than as active participants in shaping their societies. This approach sidelines their voices in policymaking and reinforces dependency on external actors.
- **Geopolitical Interests Overshadowing Rights:** Strategic and security objectives often dominate interventionist policies, while commitments to women's empowerment remain rhetorical. Reports from the United Nations Human Rights Council highlight that such practices fail to produce sustainable improvements for women.
- **Risk of Backlash and Cultural Resistance:** When women's rights are presented as externally imposed, they may be rejected as foreign or imperialist agendas. This can provoke societal resistance, sometimes worsening conditions for women on the ground.
- **Weak Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms:** Current monitoring frameworks within the United Nations system are insufficient to track and prevent the misuse of feminist discourse. Without clear indicators, it is difficult to hold states accountable when rhetoric does not translate into concrete progress.

- **Fragmentation Between Humanitarian and Security Approaches:** In intervention contexts, women's rights are often addressed within humanitarian aid frameworks, while security policies operate separately. This fragmentation limits coherence and reduces the effectiveness of efforts to advance gender equality.
- **Undermining of Genuine Feminist Movements:** The co-option of feminist language by political actors risks delegitimizing authentic grassroots women's rights movements. When feminism is seen as a tool of foreign powers, it can weaken local advocacy efforts and create mistrust.

2.8. The Way Forward: Proposed Measures and Recommendations

- **Development of Binding International Standards:** The United Nations system, led by United Nations Women and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, should advance discussions toward a framework that explicitly addresses the misuse of women's rights in political or military agendas. This could take the form of a General Assembly resolution or a dedicated convention.
- **Strengthening Monitoring Mechanisms:** Independent monitoring mechanisms should be reinforced to evaluate whether international interventions justified through women's rights rhetoric result in measurable improvements in the lives of women. Transparent indicators and reporting systems are essential.
- **Promotion of Women's Agency:** Policies and interventions must prioritize women's participation at all levels of decision-making. This aligns with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), which emphasizes the central role of women in peace and security.
- **Separation of Humanitarian and Strategic Agendas:** Humanitarian programs advancing women's rights should be clearly distinguished from political or military strategies. This separation prevents the dilution of rights-based objectives and builds trust with affected populations.



- **Context-Sensitive Approaches:** International action must engage with cultural, social, and political contexts through consultation with local women's organizations. This reduces perceptions of external imposition and ensures that empowerment efforts are sustainable.
- **Accountability for States and Institutions:** Member States and international organizations invoking women's rights in justifying interventions should be held accountable by the Human Rights Council and General Assembly for delivering concrete progress. Failure to do so should be documented and addressed.
- **Capacity-Building for Grassroots Movements:** Support should be directed to local and grassroots feminist organizations, ensuring that resources empower women within their own contexts rather than being mediated through external political agendas.
- **Awareness and Education:** Educational campaigns within the United Nations and among Member States should highlight the dangers of weaponizing feminism, reinforcing that women's rights are universal human rights, not instruments of foreign policy.

2.9. QARMA – Questions a Resolution Must Answer

1. How can the United Nations establish mechanisms to prevent the instrumentalization of women's rights as justification for foreign intervention?
2. What measures should be taken to ensure that references to women's rights in international policy are linked to genuine, measurable improvements on the ground?
3. How can United Nations Women and other relevant bodies strengthen monitoring and accountability for states invoking women's rights in intervention narratives?
4. In what ways can local women's organizations be empowered to lead their own advocacy without dependence on external political agendas?

- 5. How can the United Nations Security Council integrate safeguards against the misuse of Resolution 1325 (2000) and the Women, Peace, and Security agenda for political or military objectives?**
- 6. What strategies can be developed to separate humanitarian initiatives on gender equality from military or security-driven interventions?**
- 7. How can international frameworks, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), be better enforced to ensure universality rather than selective application?**
- 8. What accountability mechanisms can be introduced for states or organizations that invoke women's rights rhetorically but fail to deliver substantive progress?**
- 9. How can educational and awareness programs within the United Nations system highlight the risks of weaponizing feminism and promote a rights-based approach instead?**
- 10. What role should regional organizations (such as the African Union, the European Union, and the Organization of American States) play in safeguarding against the political misuse of women's rights?**

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