



# HoMMUNC

United Nations Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

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Moderator: Adam Shaw

Hi Delegates!

My name is Noa Meerscham, and I'll be chairing UNESCO at HOMMUNC XXIX. I'm so happy all of you are here and hope everyone is ready to discuss and debate solutions that are so crucial for today's global social climate.

Currently a senior, I've been on Horace Mann's Model UN team since freshman year and have worked on the HOMMUNC staff for the past two years. However, my extracurriculars do not start and end with Model UN (though it sometimes feels that way!). Outside of Model UN, I'm the captain of the girl's varsity swim team, the editor-in-chief of the Horace Mann *Mannuscript*, our creative writing publication, and the President of Teach for America. In my spare time I love to travel and ski.

Both Beatrice and I hope you will all come into committee with new and innovative ideas, great diplomacy, and above all, excitement to work together and leave with new experiences, friends, and knowledge. Enclosed is a background guide that I hope will be the corner stone of an in-depth research experience that will make this a great Model UN experience.

Sincerely,

Noa Meerscham

## History of UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was created in 1945.<sup>i</sup> UNESCO, guided by the motto, “Building peace in the minds of men and women,” is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN).<sup>ii</sup> It was formed in response to World War II, with its Constitution going into effect in 1946 after ratification by twenty UN Member States.<sup>iii</sup> UNESCO follows the belief that political and economic agreements are not enough for a lasting peace between countries. Peace must be founded on “the basis of humanity’s moral and intellectual solidarity.”<sup>iv</sup>

UNESCO attempts to build networks among nations. Network building encourages solidarity between nations and thus ensures a more peaceful world.<sup>v</sup> It strives for every child, despite gender, to have access to a quality education, which is a basic human right. Furthermore, it builds intercultural understanding and pursues scientific cooperation, in order to strengthen the relationship between nations and societies.

UNESCO’s purpose is to promote peace in the world through education, science, culture, and communication. It does this by providing information and expertise on these topics.<sup>vi</sup> UNESCO also supports international security in order to create a culture of “respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental

freedoms” for all people.<sup>vii</sup>

UNESCO also has three main objectives, which are more specifically addressed in Article 1 of the Constitution.<sup>viii</sup> Firstly, UNESCO promotes understanding between different peoples. Secondly, it enhances education and cultural exchange. Lastly, it “maintains, increase and diffuse knowledge.”<sup>ix</sup> While its specific priorities have changed and developed over time, the importance of promoting collaboration and working with UN entities as well as outside partners has remained critical in achieving its mandate.<sup>x</sup>

## **Topic 1: Rights of Indigenous People**

### *Topic Background*

Throughout history, civilizations have continually worked to colonize and expand their boundaries. However, as these countries dominate the area, the indigenous people are losing their rights and power. According to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, there are more than 370 million indigenous people in about 70 countries worldwide.<sup>xi</sup> Some examples of the indigenous population include the Aborigine of Australia, the Mayas in Guatemala, and the Saami of northern Europe.<sup>xii</sup>

By the conclusion of World War II, international organizations began to promote decolonization efforts; however, independent governments began to assimilate the indigenous population to their own. Despite the indigenous groups resisting to give up their power, many have lost their lands and resources, and as a result, have often lost

control over their own way of life.<sup>xiii</sup>

The 21st century has presented many problems for indigenous people and their lifestyles. Increasing industrialization has threatened the communities and homes of indigenous peoples. In addition, the climate change has affected many indigenous groups who rely on the climate for food production and survival.

Indigenous peoples are often socially discriminated against or are dehumanized by the rest of the populace because of their unique cultural traditions. Indigenous groups are often denied job opportunities and medical care, as a result of racism and the language barrier.<sup>xiv</sup>

Finally, many of these indigenous groups are often raided for minerals, timber, farmland, oil and other natural resources. Many national governments allow industries to develop an area without the consent of the indigenous groups that live the region.<sup>xv</sup> There is a lack of political representation of indigenous people, so they are not able to voice their concerns. Governments also refuse to recognize the laws or codes of conduct of an indigenous group.

### *Past Actions*

The rights of the ingenious people has been an international problem ever since the members of the League of Nations accepted the duty of promoting the well being and development of the indigenous population. The League used the term “indigenous” to distinguish between colonial powers and people living under colonial domination.<sup>xvi</sup>

After the League of Nations dissolved, the United Nations continued to address the rights of indigenous people. When the United Nations was founded in 1945, the United Nations Charter included a “Declaration Regarding Non-Self-Governing Territories.” It called upon member states to protect the culture of people living in these territories, which included indigenous people, and help them develop self-governance.

In 1981, the United Nations created the Working Group on Indigenous Populations of the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. Representatives of indigenous peoples were allowed to participate in drafting the declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.<sup>xvii</sup>

In 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration emphasizes the “rights of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions and to pursue their development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations.”<sup>xviii</sup> Despite the fact that the Declaration is not binding, it encourages countries to cooperate with indigenous peoples in order to solve issues.

In 2000, The Permanent Forum on the Indigenous Issues was created to advise the United Nations and to raise awareness of the issues of indigenous peoples.<sup>xix</sup> A year later, the Commission on Human Rights appointed a Special Rapporteur who defends the rights of indigenous peoples. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people has a mandate to gather, request, receive, and

exchange information on alleged violations of their human rights.<sup>xx</sup>

In addition to the United Nations, various non-government organizations work for the rights of the indigenous people. These NGO's include Native Planet and Cultural Survival. They both aim to self-empower indigenous peoples and preserve world ethnic cultures.<sup>xxi</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Indigenous people are deprived of their basic human rights. They face poverty, malnutrition, unemployment and illiteracy. The United Nations passed the Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples and developed a handful of programs within the UN, which help indigenous people as well, however, these people still face persecution and threats on their ways of life that must be protected. Countries must work together to improve indigenous peoples' lives, while still respecting their customs.

*Delegates should consider the following questions when researching this topic:*

1. How can national governments protect the rights of indigenous peoples?
2. How does your country view indigenous people?
3. What laws are already in your country?
4. How do indigenous people affect your economy?

5. What have been your past actions regarding Indigenous people?
6. What new strategies need to be introduced?
7. How does this problem affect your country?

## **Topic 2: Promoting Women and Girls' Access to Education**

### *Introduction*

Education is a fundamental human right that is currently being denied to millions of women and girls. Economic stability of countries can be improved through the creation of an educated workforce. The education of women is a catalyst for change and development that can bolster economies and communities.<sup>xxii</sup> Women and girls are not given access to education particularly in the areas science, and technology.<sup>xxiii</sup> Over the course of the last thirty years, there has been a rapid growth of technology, which is expected to continue throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>xxiv</sup> This presents an immediate need to develop and implement successful strategies enabling women and girls to acquire the



education and training required to meet the changing needs of a modern economy.<sup>xxv</sup> The United Nations actively promotes equal access for women and girls to education and demonstrates the importance education for improving the status of women and boosting the global economy.<sup>xxvi</sup>

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is founded upon the idea that education is a fundamental human right, which “promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important development benefits.”<sup>xxvii</sup> While there have been advancements to women’s right to education, progress has primarily been made in higher education, leaving countless young women and girls without an education.<sup>xxviii</sup> Many women still face negative stereotypes, in higher education, which only exacerbates obstacles for women all over the world.<sup>xxix</sup>

### *International Framework*

In 1979, the United Nations adopted The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It has often been described as the international bill of rights for women.<sup>xxx</sup> CEDAW defines discrimination against women, establishes a road map to find situations where there is discrimination, and puts in place steps to eliminate discrimination through a variety of national and international action.<sup>xxxi</sup>

CEDAW states that women have “equal rights with men in the field of education.”<sup>xxxii</sup> It also establishes an obligation for all State Parties to provide better incentives for women to pursue education. This is to ensure that women and girls have equal access to the same educational standards, teaching staff, examinations, qualities of curriculum, and

equipment.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

### *Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*

Women only hold forty out of every hundred wage-earning jobs in the non-agricultural sector around the globe.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Even though this is an improvement since 1990, it is far from perfect. Women who have been educated have a greater chance of success in life. There are fewer child marriages and the chance of abuse decreases. In many places, women are unable to have their voices heard in governments. Severe poverty lingers among older girls, which hinders completion of a secondary education for many.<sup>xxxv</sup> Due to many different unfortunate circumstances, women are left with few options, which results in extreme vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

### *Beijing Platform for Action*

The Beijing Platform for Action was adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, which was held in Beijing in 1995.<sup>xxxvii</sup> The empowerment of women was central to the Platform for Action.<sup>xxxviii</sup> The Action recognized that equal relationships between men and women prosper when non-discriminatory education is provided, resulting in mutual benefits.<sup>xxxix</sup> For women to become agents of change, a focus on the equality of education is necessary.<sup>xl</sup> Some of the objectives include: “eradicating illiteracy

in women; improving access for women to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education; developing gender-neutral education and training; allocating sufficient resources for and monitor the implementation of educational reforms; and promoting life-long education and training for girls and women.”<sup>xli</sup>

### *Role of the United Nations System Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)*

The Commission on the Status of Women (CWS) is policymaking body in the UN, which is meant to address issues dealing with gender equality and the advancement of women.<sup>xlii</sup> Member States annually convene to assess the progress of gender equality, to identify challenges, and to establish or refine policies promoting women’s empowerment.<sup>xliii</sup> During the 55th session of CSW, considerable time was spent on the priority theme of “the access and participation of women and girls in education, training and science and technology.”<sup>xliv</sup>

### *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)*

In 2010, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) was established.<sup>xlv</sup> UN-Women’s goals focus on gender equality and the empowerment of women. It encourages Member States to implement and to

support existing policies.<sup>xlvi</sup> UN-Women was created as an umbrella entity. It took over the work previously done by four separate parts of the United Nations. Each part focuses on gender equality. The first is the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW). The second is the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW). The third is the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI). And the last is the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).<sup>xlvi</sup> UN-Women became fully operational in 2011, when CSW's priority theme was the importance of education for women.<sup>xlvi</sup> The entity has taken an active role in increasing access to education and training for women and girls.<sup>xlix</sup>

### *Access to Education; Education as a Basic Human Right*

Education is instrumental in the promotion of individual freedom and empowerment. It can highlight the importance of gender equality as a core value. Millions of children and adults are deprived of educational opportunities due to poverty and social marginalization.<sup>i</sup> There has been a lot of improvement of access to education over the course of the past few years. African countries have made progress in accessibility of secondary education.<sup>li</sup> Access for women and girls has increased considerably in higher education.<sup>lii</sup> Private schools have improved more than public schools in female attendance at all educational levels in many countries.<sup>liii</sup> However, at

least 60 million girls still do not have access to primary schooling. Additionally, over two-thirds of the world's 960 million illiterate adults are women. The advancement and development of women remains at a standstill as high rates of illiteracy stretch across developing countries, including most of Sub-Saharan Africa and some Arab States.<sup>liv</sup>

There are many factors contributing to discrimination against the education of girls and women, including cultural traditions and attitudes encouraging early marriage and pregnancy, lack of adequately equipped school facilities or outright denial of education, inadequate and gender biased teaching, sexual abuse, and the lack of access to health care and reproductive health services.<sup>lv</sup> Sometimes very young girls are forced to take on a great amount of domestic work, which does not allow them to have time for an education.<sup>lvi</sup> Sexist attitudes lead to early withdrawals from what schooling exists and results in long-term ramifications of social and emotional insecurity throughout the lives of women.<sup>lvii</sup>

## Conclusion

The examples cited above demonstrate the UN's unwavering support for the full promotion of equal educational and training opportunities for women and girls, particularly in the areas of science and technology.<sup>lviii</sup> Benefits of increased access to education, training, science, and technology for women and girls will be seen and experienced by the global community. It is critical to identify and define real-world

strategies to break down any existing financial and cultural barriers preventing access to education for women and girls, and delineating practical, simple, and effective steps to promote science, technology, training, and educational opportunities for women all over the world.

*Delegates should consider the following questions when researching this topic:*

1. How does your country view the education of women?
2. What has your country already done to promote the education of girls and women?
3. What are successful strategies to get traditional communities to give women and girls educational opportunities?
4. If there is resistance in communities to educating girls and women, what are strategies for overcoming this resistance?
5. How does one overcome financial barriers for creating educational facilities?
6. In what other ways can the United Nations promote the empowerment of women?
7. How can civil society and private institutions contribute to achieving these goals?

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"Introducing UNESCO." *UNESCO*.

vi UNESCO, UNESCO Constitution, 1946.

vii UNESCO, UNESCO Constitution, 1946, art. 1.

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<sup>x</sup>Holmström, Task Force of UNESCO in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, 2000; UNESCO, UNESCO Constitution, 1946. Web. 18 July 2014.

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