GREENWOOD HIGH
JUNIOR MODEL UNITED NATIONS

BACKGROUND GUIDE

UNHRC

AGENDA

ADDRESSING HUMAN RIGHTS
VIOLATIONS AMID THE GLOBAL
EXPANSION OF AUTONOMOUS
SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS

Letter from the Executive Board

It brings us immense pleasure to welcome you to GWHJMUN 26. We are truly honoured to serve as your Executive Board and hope to see truly fruitful debates in committee.

We would also like to take this opportunity to remind every delegate that this is merely a background to the agenda and should not serve as your main source for research. This guide only covers small portions of the extensive scope of this agenda and helps in creating a framework of the topic to help kickstart the research of delegates.

As delegates to the UNHRC, you are expected to debate, deliberate, and reach solutions in line with the agenda at hand. You are expected to collaborate with other delegates, discuss matters diplomatically, and come up with solutions to address the problem. Delegates, in this committee, we urge you to delve into the topic at hand meticulously, try to understand the surveillance, and how it violates human rights

As your Executive Board members, we understand the pressure and anxiety in attending a Model United Nations conference, whether you are a first-timer or not. We strongly hope that you all will come prepared and, most importantly, motivated to discuss the situation at hand and brainstorm together to find solutions that we can be proud of. We look forward to the engaging debate that you all have in store.

Warm Regards,

Suhani Singh (Head Chair)
Daksh A. (Vice Chair)
Yash Dak (Vice Chair)

Introduction to Committee

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) was established in 2006 with the purpose of protecting and preserving human rights throughout the world, giving issues involving it the center stage, and enabling important discussions that come up as a result. Hence, it intends to act as an international medium via which pressing discourse regarding human rights issues can be had.

It has 47 elected Member States, and the seats are equally shared among the five UN regional groups (African, Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, GRULAC, and WEOG). Members are elected every three years, and at each election, about one-third of the members are replaced. A country can serve no more than two years in a row. If a Member State commits a serious human rights violation, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) can vote to suspend the country from the council. The council is led by a bureau, which includes one president and four vice presidents. Each vice president represents one of the regional groups.

The UNHRC has a minimum of three regular sessions— February-March, June-July, September-October—coming up to a total of 10 weeks annually. These sessions usually range from three to five weeks, depending on the program at work. In addition, a special session may be held anytime if one-third of the Council Member States ask for it. This type of meeting is usually held to deal with urgent human rights violations or emergencies.

The UNHRC's main bodies include:
- The Universal Periodic Review (UPR)
  - A process where countries regularly check and review each other's human rights records.
- The Special Procedures
  - Independent experts or groups who report on human rights issues or situations in specific areas.
- The Advisory Committee
  - A group of experts that gives advice and expert knowledge to help the council on important human rights topics
- Complaint Procedure
  - A system that allows individuals and organisations to report serious human rights violations to the council.

In addition, the UNHRC has investigation teams that look into specific cases of Human rights violations. One exception is the Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in law enforcement, which works more broadly. The council also receives important support from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). This support involves sending expert groups to study and report on human rights situations, using expert groups, setting up working groups made up of different countries, and creating forums for discussions.

Mandate of the UNHRC:

The United Nations Human Rights Council is one of the main bodies of the United Nations. It was developed by the United Nations General Assembly to protect Human Rights around the world. These rights are established by bodies such as the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and International Human Rights Laws and Treaties. Established by the UNGA resolution 60/251, the council's mandate encompasses key responsibilities:

- <u>Promotion of Human Rights:</u> The Council is mandated to promote universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for everyone, without distinction of any kind.

- <u>Addressing Violations:</u> It is responsible for addressing situations of human rights violations, particularly gross and systematic violations, and making recommendations to improve these conditions

- <u>Forum for Dialogue:</u> The UNHRC provides a platform for dialogue among member states on various human rights issues, facilitating discussions that can lead to resolutions aimed at upholding human rights standards.

- <u>Special Procedures:</u> The Council has established mechanisms known as "special procedures," which include independent experts and working groups that monitor specific human rights issues or country situations. These experts report on their findings and make recommendations to the Council.

- <u>Universal Periodic Review (UPR):</u> The UNHRC conducts the UPR process, reviewing the human rights records of all UN member states. This mechanism promotes accountability and encourages states to improve their human rights practices

- <u>Recommendations for Improvement:</u> Through its sessions, the UNHRC adopts resolutions that call upon states to take specific actions to uphold human rights and protect vulnerable populations.

Introduction to the Agenda

Autonomous Surveillance systems are advanced AI-driven technologies that can monitor people and spaces simultaneously with minimal human intervention. The combined tools, such as facial recognition, biometric technology, and large-scale data analytics, are used to track individuals both online and offline. Such systems are rapidly expanding into policing, border control, urban management, and welfare screening, reshaping how power and control operate in society. UN experts and human rights bodies warn that this expansion creates systematic risks to the rights to privacy, non-discrimination, and freedom of expression, movement, and assembly.

Invasive AI-enabled monitoring can chill protests and enable the silencing of journalists, activists, and political opponents under the guise of security and public order. As many systems are trained on opaque algorithms on biased data, they can entrench and automate discrimination against racial, ethnic, and other marginalized groups. Real incidents include Americans of the black race being detained due to misidentification and bias in facial recognition.

International reports now describe some forms of mass automated surveillance as incompatible with core human rights standards, calling for bans or strict limits on high-risk uses such as remote identification in public spaces. There is growing pressure for strong regulation, impact assessments, and accountability mechanisms across the entire life cycle of these technologies.

Addressing these violations involves a global governance approach that aligns innovations in autonomous surveillance with dignity, equality, and the rule of law, rather than control and repression. Considering the latest breakthroughs in technology, it is vital to bring out these discussions to prevent the increase in human rights violations and misuse of technology by the government.

Rules of Procedure

Rules of procedure are an essential aspect of any MUN as they help maintain decorum and order. They ensure that delegates maintain formality during the conference. Following these rules is pivotal to ensuring the smooth functioning and flow of the committee. For this conference, we will be adhering to the UNA-USA format of rules of procedure. The main points are listed below:

Roll call: The chairperson announces each country's name. When a delegate's country is called, they should answer either "present" or "present and voting". However, please note: If a delegate says, "present and voting", they must vote on the resolution at the end of the committee. This can be raised by a delegate of an allotted country by simply raising a motion to begin a roll call.

Formal Session: In this session, the Chairperson will steer the flow of the conversation. They will ensure only one delegate speaks at a time, and they can choose to debate, introduce resolutions, or answer questions. You can raise a formal session as a delegate of your country by putting forward a motion to begin the formal session.

General Speaker's List: The committee usually begins formal debate by starting the 'GSL' (General Speaker's list). It allows all delegates to express their stance on the given agenda, and a GSL is non-exhaustive.

Moderated Caucus: When the committee wants to debate on specific topics under the agenda, this motion can be raised. You must also decide a specified total time period, with a specific amount of time per speaker.

In case a delegate does not speak, they can voice their point through a chit.
The format of the substantive chit must be as listed:
Substantive Chit To: Executive Board
From: Delegate of your allocated country
List your points here.

Unmoderated Caucus: This motion is proposed when delegates wish to discuss drafting resolutions or the status of the committee. The rules of the moderated caucus are suspended. You can raise it as the delegate of your allotted country by raising a motion to suspend formal debate and move into an unmoderated caucus for a specified period.

Points:

1._Point of Parliamentary Enquiry:_ Delegates can raise this point to clarify the status of the committee or further understand the rules of procedure. (For example: to know if the EB is accepting more speakers, or which delegate is speaking next.)

2._Point of Personal Privilege:_ Delegates can raise this point to address personal issues. (For example: to ask another delegate to repeat a point they made in their speech, or to be excused from the committee)

3._Point of Order:_ Delegates can raise this point to point out logical or factual inaccuracies in other delegates' speeches. This can either be a factual inaccuracy or a logical fallacy.

4._Point of Information:_ Delegates can raise this when they want to ask questions about another delegate's speech. Raise it by speaking as the delegate of your allocated country and raising a point of information. If you do not receive a satisfactory answer to your initial question, you can raise a follow-up question right after the delegate answers.

If a delegate wants to ask a question through a chit, you can use the following format:
Point of information:
To: Delegate of the country you want to question
VIA: Executive Board
From: Delegate of your allotted country. State your question here.

Press Conference: This aspect of the conference is to test the knowledge and depth of research conducted by the delegates. As such, the questions in this conference could range from matters of foreign policy, the agenda itself, or any controversial actions or speeches by the respective nations of the delegates.

Background on Surveillance

A. Definition and Purpose of Surveillance
Surveillance refers to the systematic monitoring, collection, and analysis of information about individuals or groups by state authorities. Governments employ surveillance for purposes including law enforcement, national security, public health, and the maintenance of public order. Traditional surveillance methods include physical observation, targeted interception of communications, border monitoring, and closed-circuit television (CCTV) systems operated by human personnel.

Surveillance itself is not prohibited under international law. Instead, it is regulated to prevent abuse and protect fundamental rights.

B. Surveillance Under International Human Rights Law
The right to privacy is protected under Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). These provisions prohibit arbitrary or unlawful interference with an individual's privacy, family life, home, or correspondence. While international law does not ban surveillance outright, it strictly limits the circumstances under which states may lawfully interfere with this right.

International human rights bodies have clarified that surveillance measures are permissible only when they comply with the following cumulative principles:

- Legality- Surveillance must be authorised by clear, accessible, and publicly established law.
- Necessity- Surveillance must pursue a legitimate and clearly defined aim, such as public safety or national security.
- Proportionality- Surveillance must be the least intrusive means available to achieve the intended objective.

Surveillance conducted without an adequate legal basis, effective oversight, or sufficient safeguards is considered arbitrary and constitutes a violation of international human rights law.

C. Benefits and Drawbacks of Government Surveillance

Benefits

- Enhances public safety and crime prevention by supporting investigations, deterring criminal activity, and improving emergency response.

- Assists in border management and national security, including monitoring cross-border movement, trafficking, and threats to critical infrastructure.

- Supports public health responses, such as tracking disease outbreaks, identifying high-risk areas, and enabling timely public advisories.

- Can strengthen state capacity and governance when implemented with clear legal authority, judicial oversight, and data protection safeguards.

Drawbacks

- Risks arbitrary interference with privacy when surveillance is excessive, indiscriminate, or lacks a clear legal basis.

- Large-scale data collection increases the likelihood of misuse, function creep, and data breaches, exposing sensitive personal information.

- Has been used for unlawful monitoring of journalists, activists, political opponents, and minority groups, undermining equality before the law.

- Weak or outdated legal frameworks often fail to ensure transparency, accountability, or effective remedies for individuals affected by surveillance.

- Erodes public trust when surveillance practices are opaque or perceived as tools of control rather than protection.

Autonomous Surveillance

A. Definition and Scope of Autonomous Surveillance

Autonomous surveillance systems are advanced forms of surveillance that utilise artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to collect, process, and analyse data with minimal human intervention. These systems integrate technologies such as facial recognition, biometric identification, behavioural analytics, and large-scale data aggregation to monitor individuals across physical and digital environments. Unlike traditional surveillance, autonomous systems are capable of generating automated assessments or alerts without direct human judgment at every stage.

B. Key Features of Autonomous Surveillance Systems

- *Automation -* Surveillance processes such as identification, classification, and risk assessment are performed algorithmically rather than manually.

- *Scalability -* Monitoring can extend from specific individuals to entire populations, enabling mass and real-time surveillance.

- *Continuity -* Systems operate continuously and often invisibly, with little awareness on the part of those being monitored.

- *Reduced Human Oversight -* Decisions are increasingly shaped by algorithmic outputs, limiting direct accountability.

C. Benefits and Drawbacks of Autonomous Surveillance Systems

Benefits

- Enhances law enforcement efficiency by rapidly analysing large datasets and identifying patterns or potential threats.

- Supports border control and identity verification through biometric screening and automated monitoring systems.

- Enables predictive analysis, allowing authorities to anticipate risks and allocate resources proactively.

- Reduces reliance on constant human monitoring, lowering long-term operational demands.

<u>Drawbacks</u>

- Enables large-scale intrusion into privacy through continuous biometric identification and data aggregation.

- Automated systems may produce biased or inaccurate outcomes due to flawed or unrepresentative training data.

- Facilitates profiling and disproportionate targeting of minorities, activists, and political opponents.

- Lack of transparency makes it difficult to challenge or appeal automated decisions.

<u>D. Human Rights Concerns</u>

Autonomous surveillance systems raise serious human rights concerns due to their scale, persistence, and reliance on automated decision-making. These technologies enable continuous monitoring and biometric identification in public spaces, often without individuals' knowledge or consent, increasing the risk of arbitrary interference with the right to privacy and incompatibility with international human rights standards.

The deployment of autonomous surveillance also affects freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and movement. The presence of automated monitoring in public spaces can discourage participation in protests, political activity, and journalism, creating a chilling effect on civic engagement and democratic participation.

Additionally, autonomous surveillance systems raise concerns regarding equality before the law, as algorithmic decision-making may reflect biased or incomplete datasets. This can result in misidentification, profiling, and disproportionate targeting of certain groups. The opacity of many AI systems further limits transparency and makes it difficult for individuals to challenge or seek remedies for automated surveillance decisions.

Case Studies

1. Uyghur Mass Surveillance via IJOP (China, 2017-ongoing)

The Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP), developed by Chinese authorities, aggregates data from facial recognition, phone scans, and behavioral analytics to assign risk scores to Uyghurs and other minorities in Xinjiang.

Behaviors like praying, storing large amounts of food, or traveling abroad trigger alerts, funneling individuals into "re-education" camps without due process, where torture and forced indoctrination occur. Hikvision's AI cameras, deployed across checkpoints and streets, feed real-time biometrics into IJOP, enabling mass arbitrary detentions estimated at 1-3 million since 2017, as documented by UN and HRW reports.

This system exemplifies "pre-crime" policing, eroding privacy and enabling genocide through automated repression, with no judicial oversight or appeals.

2. Dwreck Ingram Harassment (USA, 2020)

Dwreck Ingram, a Black Lives Matter organizer in New York, faced intense police harassment in July 2020 after the NYPD deployed post-event facial recognition software on protest footage from a George Floyd demonstration.

The AI tool, provided by Clearview AI, falsely or retroactively matched his face from social media and videos, prompting a massive no-knock raid at 5:30 AM with helicopters overhead, multiple drones circling his block, and over 30 officers surrounding his home without a warrant or probable cause. Ingram and his family were detained briefly, questioned aggressively, and intimidated, chilling his right to peaceful assembly and free speech under the First Amendment, as no charges followed, and the identification was later deemed unreliable.

This case exemplifies how autonomous surveillance enables disproportionate targeting of activists of color, amplifying racial biases in AI algorithms and eroding privacy protections against warrantless digital tracking

3. Cambodia's Smart Cities (Phnom Penh, 2020s)

Cambodia's "Smart Cities" initiative in Phnom Penh, launched in the early 2020s with heavy funding from Chinese firms like Huawei and Tiandy, deploys over 10,000 AI-powered cameras, achieving near-99% facial recognition coverage across public spaces, streets, and borders.

Post-2018 elections, which saw opposition leader Kem Sokha imprisoned and the CNRP dissolved, the system integrates real-time tracking with mobile data and social media scans to monitor dissidents, journalists, and activists, flagging "suspicious" movements like gatherings or travel. This has enabled extrajudicial harassment, including arbitrary arrests, home raids, and forced disappearances of figures like journalist Ouk Sophy and union leaders, without warrants or transparency, as reported by OHCHR and Amnesty International.

The opaque AI algorithms lack oversight, perpetuate one-party rule under Hun Manet, and violate privacy, freedom of expression, and assembly rights, turning urban surveillance into a tool for political repression.

4. Trento Street Surveillance Fine (Italy, 2024)

In 2024, the northern Italian city of Trento was fined €100,000 by the Italian Data Protection Authority (Garante) for GDPR violations in its AI-powered street surveillance project launched in 2022.

The system used over 100 cameras with facial recognition and behavioral analysis to monitor public spaces for "anomalies" like loitering or crowds, but failed to properly anonymize pedestrian data or conduct required Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs), allowing identifiable footage to be stored and shared with police without legal basis or consent. Authorities criticized the lack of transparency in AI algorithms, which processed sensitive biometrics without proportionality tests, enabling unchecked tracking of citizens' movements and enabling potential mass profiling of protesters and minorities.

This case underscores GDPR's enforcement against autonomous surveillance overreach, mandating deletion of unlawfully collected data and halting the project, while highlighting broader EU risks of privacy erosion from opaque AI deployments.

5. Glukhin v. Russia (Russia, recent)

In July 2021, Russian activist Maksim Glukhin participated in a solo peaceful protest in Moscow against internet censorship, holding a cardboard sign reading "You can't assemble a Kalashnikov quickly." Police used live facial recognition technology (FRT) to identify him almost instantly from CCTV footage and social media screenshots, despite no public safety threat, leading to his swift arrest, 8-day administrative detention, and fine for "disorderly conduct." The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled unanimously in 2023 (Glukhin v. Russia, Application no. 11519/20) that this violated Article 8 (privacy) and Article 10 (freedom of expression) of the European Convention on Human Rights, deeming FRT "highly intrusive" and disproportionate without clear legal safeguards, records, or justification.

The Court noted the technology's chilling effect on dissent, ordered Russia to pay Glukhin €6,000 in damages and costs, and emphasized the need for strict rules on biometric surveillance in democratic societies.

Legalities

1.<u>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966):</u> Prohibits arbitrary interference with privacy (Article 17), extending to state surveillance, including AI-driven methods; ratified by over 170 countries.

2.<u>Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence (Council of Europe, 2024):</u> First binding AI treaty requiring privacy safeguards, risk assessments, and transparency for surveillance systems; signed by the US, the EU, and others.

3.<u>Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948):</u> Foundational non-binding text affirming privacy rights (Article 12) against unlawful attacks, influencing AI surveillance debates.

4.<u>European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR, 1950):</u> Article 8 protects privacy from disproportionate surveillance; applied to emerging tech via European Court rulings.

5.<u>Budapest Convention on Cybercrime (2001):</u> Addresses data protection in cross-border surveillance; updated protocols cover automated systems

6.<u>UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI (2021):</u> Non-binding global standard promoting privacy-by-design in AI surveillance to uphold human rights.

QARMAs

- How can states guarantee that the implementation of Autonomous surveillance systems fully respects international human rights standards, particularly the requirements of legality, necessity, and a fair balance?

- What clear restrictions and prohibitions should be imposed on especially high situations, such as indiscriminate mass surveillance and real-time remote biometric identifications in public spaces-to prevent systematic violations of fundamental rights?

- In what ways do algorithmic biases embedded in surveillance systems reinforce systemic discrimination?

- To what extent can national security concerns justify the deployment of autonomous surveillance systems?

- How can developing countries be protected from becoming testing grounds for unregulated surveillance technologies?

- How can the private sector be held liable for exporting surveillance technologies that are later used for repression abroad?