

**Houston Area
Model United Nations
Standard Committee**



SOCHUM

**Chair | Nini Dang
Topic A Background Guide
Houston Area Model United Nations 48
February 2-3 , 2023**

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Note to Delegates

Howdy Delegates,

My name is Nini Dang and I'm super excited to be your chair for this year's committee. I am currently a junior attending the University of Houston double majoring in Political Science and Kinesiology! I've been doing Model UN since my freshman year and I've loved it ever since. HAMUN has been one of my favorite experiences so I hope I can make it as great as I can for all of you. HAMUN has given me the opportunity to meet a lot of the colleagues I work with/for today such as candidates like Mike Collier and Beto O'Rourke. This will be my third HAMUN as a chair so I hope that this experience will help you learn new skills, make new friends, or interest you further in national issues and finding solutions to our world's current issues. I'm very happy to be able to meet everyone in person as well as share the beautiful UH campus with you. This conference is what you make of it so do your research, get out of your comfort zones and more importantly; have fun! If you have any questions before the conference or need advice, don't hesitate to contact me. I'm looking forward to it!

Nini Dang

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Background Information

History of Committee

The Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM) is the third committee of the United Nations General Assembly. Formed in 1945 in response to the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, SOCHUM's purpose is to uphold the basic rights of human beings internationally. Specifically, the committee addresses issues of children's safety, elimination of racial discrimination, treatment of refugees, and rights to self determination, family, people with disabilities, and crime prevention. The goal of the committee is to settle these social, humanitarian, and cultural issues in a peaceful manner, while upholding the values of the U.N. SOCHUM encourages diplomacy and basic human freedoms for all people.

Topic Overview

Topic A will discuss the issues of indigenous rights around the world along with discussing the issues of human trafficking within Thailand. It is our responsibility to provide aid to those who are oppressed and to ensure that the humanity of every person is accounted for. SOCHUM has the opportunity to mediate discussions between states, provide humanitarian support, and mobilize member states to act. However, no action can be taken in a country without the consent of the state, and so it is up to you to find solutions within the limits of SOCHUM.



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Background

The term of Indigenous people can be perceived as too broad because there are more than 5,000 different groups of Indigenous people, each group having distinct cultures and ways of life. Although it may seem like a risk to put all these groups under one title, often the reason for doing so is because each group often experiences similar discrimination. This results in many organizations such as the United Nations and International Amnesty to consider this discrimination as part of the definition for indigeneity. The United Nations has not adopted a universal definition because the organization believes it can take away the right of Indigenous People to self-determination. However, the United Nations has a common understanding of some terms that correlate with Indigenous people:

- I. Distinct language, culture, and beliefs
- II. Are considered to be apart of non-dominant groups; part of the minority
- III. Have a strong connection to their ancestral environment and natural resources with that environment
- IV. Struggled to protect their rights as a distinct group
- V. The preservation of Indigenous culture is not only beneficial to Indigenous people,

But to society as a whole. Due to their unique ways of living, Indigenous groups offer different types of technology, food, culture, and medicine not seen before. Unfortunately, their potential has not been explored yet due to the world's history of determination to push away natives' cultures and their ability to work in professional fields.

In previous years, nations have come together to implement laws that have improved the treatment of Indigenous people. One instance is the 2007 with the non-binding commitment to the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which outlined the rights of Indigenous peoples as a collective and as individuals, including the right to language, education, health, culture, identity, and more. Although it is a great leap forward taken to protect Indigenous people globally, there is still so much more that countries can do to ensure that Indigenous people attain their rights and recognition.

History:

According to the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs, there are over 370 million Indigenous people living in 90 countries across the world. To be considered “indigenous”, a group must fulfill three key requirements. First, a group of people is considered to be indigenous if its members are descendants of people who lived in a particular place before colonization or the arrival of a different ethnic group. Second, the group is socially, politically, and economically distinct from other groups. Third, people in the group think of themselves as part of the group. In addition, they may be ancestral and/or share a common language, religion, or belief structure. Despite many attempts to aid in the preservation of Indigenous people and highlight their advocacy, there are three main reasons as to why Indigenous groups continue to suffer from human rights abuses. The first consists of a disagreement on whether to regard Indigenous people as a group or as individuals. While many Indigenous people view themselves as members of groups, human rights laws have previously only applied to individuals. The second reason is an uncertainty about whether to regard Indigenous groups as members of the UN member state they live in or as their own separate nation determining if a human rights abuse has occurred. While the systems that prevent Indigenous groups from gaining the rights and representation they need have only been recognized recently, these issues have been prevalent since European colonization. When great powers such as Great Britain, France, and Spain invaded, they saw the Indigenous groups living there as inferior and uncivilized as well as the land they lived on to be newly discovered, completely ignoring the fact that it belonged to Indigenous groups that had been living there for years before.

Since then, Indigenous groups have suffered as a result of European colonization and it wasn't till after WWII when the Indigenous rights movement gained traction. While decolonization benefitted those who had once been ruled by foreign nations, those benefits often did not extend to Indigenous groups.

Current Situation:

As of present day, Indigenous people continuously face discrimination and threats to their identity. A common feeling of hopelessness overcomes each Indigenous community, as nations make empty promises. However, the United Nations is still focused on encouraging nations to preserve the culture and identity of Indigenous people with a focus on honoring the land of Indigenous people, right to self-determination, and giving access to resources that will allow Indigenous people to thrive in their environment

Land and Its Importance to Culture and the Environment

Erica Irene Daes, a United Nations Special Reporter voiced, "The gradual deterioration of indigenous societies can be traced to the non-recognition of the profound relation that indigenous peoples have to their lands, territories, and resources." As Daes reported, land is of the utmost importance to Indigenous people for a couple of reasons. First, land is where Indigenous people gain economic stability. For generations, Indigenous people have learned how to grow food and create medicine off of their land. Indigenous peoples' understanding of the land has allowed them to sustain their ways of life. Secondly, their culture is embedded in the land, as their language is connected to parts of their land and historical rituals practiced in a certain location.

Sadly, Indigenous people have had land taken away from them to be used for their natural resources and been pushed out of their own territory. For example, in Canada, recent issues have arisen with the Coastal GasLink pipeline, which runs through multiple Indigenous communities. Groups of Indigenous people, such as the Unist'ot'en tribe, are protesting against the pipeline not only because it runs through the land they live on, but because the pipeline will pollute the local environment. Conflicts like these continue to happen across the world, and Indigenous groups typically have little say in the matter because many groups, like the aboriginals, have no national or international law giving them full claim to the land they live on. To emphasize again, land is crucial to the culture and religion/spiritual rituals of Indigenous people and for their economy.

Self-Determination

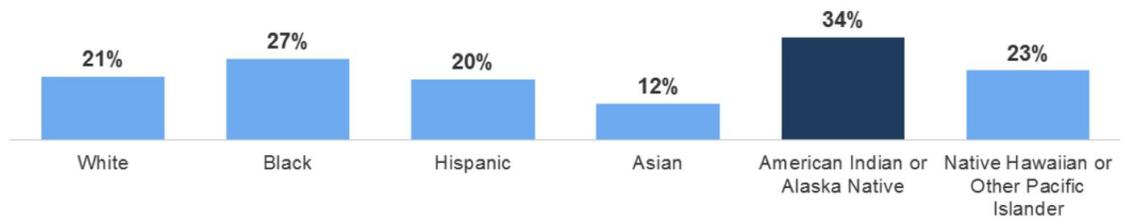
Right to self-determination is another crucial factor in preserving the culture of Indigenous people. The right to self-determination is defined as the freedom to take control over one's way of life without someone impeding. Indigenous persons have had little opportunity for self-determination throughout history. Much of the reason for inability to self-determination is because they are barred from participating in their nation's government, economy, and so on. A root problem to this lack of participation is because Indigenous people often do not have access to higher education. A little over 16% of persons identifying as indigenous have a bachelor's degree or higher in the United States. A reason for the small number, as identified by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, is the lack of respect for Indigenous peoples' diverse cultures and discrimination in school.

Physical and Mental Health

Indigenous communities have little access to resources for their physical and mental health compared to the rest of the world because many nations consider Indigenous people as less than human. Negative health effects include high mortality rates, especially in children, due to less access to healthcare. Additionally, Indigenous people are often greatly affected by illnesses compared to the rest of the population. This has been seen with COVID-19, with Alaskan Natives or the American Indigenous population being at the greatest risk for serious illness if infected by COVID-19.

Figure 2

Share of Adults Ages 18-64 at Higher Risk of Serious Illness if Infected with Coronavirus by Race/Ethnicity



NOTE: Data includes adults ages 18-64; excludes adults living in nursing homes or other institutional settings. Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race, but are categorized as Hispanic for this analysis; other groups are non-Hispanic. SOURCE: KFF analysis of 2018 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.



Figure 2: Share of Adults Ages 18-64 at Higher Risk of Serious Illness if Infected with Coronavirus by Race/Ethnicity

Returning back to the issue of land, since much of the land Indigenous people live on is being polluted Indigenous communities are highly susceptible to diseases such as asthma and heart disease. Furthermore, the health of Indigenous people is dependent on their coexistence with the environment they live in. When forced out of the land where they live off

there are tremendous effects on their health.tremendous effects on their health.

In a report from “Mental Health America,” Indigenous people in the United States report having 2.5 times more psychological stress than the rest of the American population over the span of a month.¹⁵ Mental health in the Indigenous community is greatly related to their diverse cultures not being accepted by the rest of the world, as Indigenous people experience constant discrimination and harrassment. Past policies in nations that aimed to strip Indigenous people of their culture and heritage has created trauma within many Indigenous people. Naturally, the preservation of their culture and opportunity for self-determination is crucial to their mental health.

Past UN Actions:

The UN has established multiple committees dedicated to protecting and furthering indigenous rights. In 1982, the Economic and Social Council established the Working Group on Indigenous Populations to develop a set of minimum standards that would protect indigenous peoples. This group drafted the first declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, which was approved by the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in 1994 and submitted to the UN Commission on Human Rights.

Many states expressed concerns over several provisions within the declaration. Most of these involve the right to self-determination of indigenous peoples, and the control over natural resources on indigenous lands. In response, the UN created an intersessional working group to consider and elaborate on declaration.

This all culminated in the passing of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on 29 June 2006 by the UN Human Rights Council, and the adoption of the Declaration by a majority of 144 states in favor, and 4 votes against (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States).

The UN has been vocal on a wide range of indigenous issues since the passage of the declaration. For example, the UN Human Rights Council has repeatedly called out the Canadian government for its work on the Coastal GasLink pipeline without consent from indigenous groups, which fails to comply with international human rights law. And in 2016, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages, with an action plan that worked to support access to indigenous languages and strengthen indigenous organizations.

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