



THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY THIRD COMMITTEE: SOCIAL, HUMANITARIAN, AND CULTURAL

Purview of the Simulation: While the Committee's areas of concern and its work often overlap with other United Nations organs, the Third Committee focuses its discussions on social, humanitarian and cultural concerns that arise in the General Assembly. The Third Committee discusses with, recognizes reports of, and submits recommendations to the General Assembly in coordination with

other United Nations organs, such as the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). For more information concerning the purview of the UN's General Assembly as a whole, see page 17.

Website: <http://www.un.org/ga/third/index.shtml>

RIGHTS OF PEOPLE TO SELF-DETERMINATION

Self-determination is the right of a people to have freedom from external rule, to have the independence to choose their own form of government, and the liberties necessary to be an autonomous political entity. The principle of the right of peoples to self-determination was first recognized as a fundamental human right by the Atlantic Charter in 1941. Moreover, the Charter of the United Nations declares self-determination to be one of its most integral ideals. However, the UN's steadfast recognition of self-determination as a fundamental right has not translated into state actions in which such claims are universally recognized. Despite the principle's significance, no proper mechanism has ever been agreed upon for enforcement. The concept of self-determination frequently challenges the fundamental international norm of state sovereignty, making international consensus difficult to reach.

In addition to the Charter's declaration, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was one of the first international human rights documents to acknowledge the rights of all humans to political and social freedom. In 1966, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights more thoroughly elaborated the rights of citizens to amnesty, self-determination of liberty and rule of law, and freedom from arbitrary imprisonment and slavery. In the same year, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights affirmed the right of all peoples to self-determination while requiring Member States to promote respect for and realization of that right. Subsequently, Security Council resolutions addressing various regional and intra-state conflicts also repeatedly underscored the right to self-determination.

In recent years, discussions have focused largely on violations of the right to self-determination and other human rights abuses resulting from the role played by mercenaries and private military contractors in foreign military intervention, aggression, and occupation. The General Assembly at its sixtieth session requested the Commission on Human Rights to prepare a report on the violation of human rights, with particular attention paid to violations of the right to self-determination resulting from foreign military action. A Working Group was established on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the rights of peoples to self-determination. In March 2008, the Human Rights Council (HRC) extended the mandate of the Working Group, requesting them to elaborate on and present proposals on how to further protect human rights, in particular the right to self-determination, when they are under threat by mercenaries or mercenary-related activities. To accomplish this goal, the Working Group was instructed to seek input from governments, intergovernmental organizations

and non-governmental organizations. The Working Group was asked to study the traits of mercenaries and mercenary-related activities and monitor the effects of those groups on the enjoyment of human rights, with emphasis on the right to self-determination.

While the Working Group is engaged in creating newly proposed legal instruments to regulate private militaries and security companies, it has urged Member States that have not yet acceded to the International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries to do so, noting that although the instrument has a number of loopholes, it is presently the only tool available at the international level that may be able to impact the outsourcing of functions involving the use of violence, which have been considered the monopoly of the state for centuries.

Rather than addressing only one region or area, the Sixth Committee typically takes a comprehensive approach in discussing the subject of self-determination. Although resolutions in recent years have centered around the impact of modern-day mercenaries, past resolutions on this subject have also acknowledged and discussed the claims of self-determination made by peoples living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, as well as self-determination claims made in the course of recent conflicts in Chile and Sudan. Special attention has increasingly been paid to the abilities of indigenous peoples to exercise their right to self-determination. The Declaration on the Rights to Indigenous Peoples, adopted in 2007, called upon Member States to recognize that communities of indigenous peoples have the right to express their unique origins and identity.

In December 2008, the General Assembly reaffirmed the fundamental condition of self-determination as a necessity for the observation, preservation, and promotion of human rights. The resolution further identified the primary opponent of the right to self-determination as foreign military intervention, as these acts of aggression have frequently led to repression, discrimination, exploitation and maltreatment. The General Assembly renewed its call for attention to the obstacles faced by refugees and displaced persons and asked that they be given the right to return to their homes. Though the resolution's adoption reaffirmed Member States' commitment to the right of peoples to self-determination, achieving universal realization of that right will require further concrete actions by the international community.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include:

- How has the increased role played by private military and security firms impacted the exercise of self-determination?

- Are current resolutions and committees effective in increasing the rights of all people to self-determination? What further actions could be taken by the international community to strengthen the ability of peoples to exercise their right to self-determination?
- How can Member States strike a balance between principles of sovereignty and self-determination?

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 A/63/325
 A/62/438
 A/62/301
 A/62/184
 A/61/341
 A/HRC/7/7
 E/CN.4/2006/11
 Charter of the United Nations, Chapter 1, Article 1
 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Additional Web Resources:

- www.amnesty.org - Amnesty International
www.hrw.com - Human Rights Watch
www.ohchr.org - Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

Gender equality has always been a major area of concern for the UN. Of particular concern is the situation of rural women, who comprise the majority of the more than one billion people living in abject poverty and who also encounter some of the most egregious and entrenched inequality. The plight of women in rural areas also merits special consideration in light of the widespread effects of the global economic recession. Adverse economic conditions in many developing countries have had a disproportionately negative impact on rural women who often suffer the greatest burden of poverty.

A history of discrimination and unequal access to health care, education, technology, capital and land remain prime causes of the feminization of poverty. To provide for their families, women often must choose either dangerous, exploitative working conditions or unemployment and worsening hardship. Land is the primary form of wealth and collateral in many areas, which can make it more difficult for women to obtain loans and take advantage of other economic growth opportunities. Additional social barriers prevent many girls from attending school or women from obtaining health care, both which compound and perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

In 1975, the UN established the International Women's Year to highlight issues of gender inequality. The subsequent Decade for Women (1976-1985) sought to remedy past shortcomings in development philosophies that had economically marginalized women and increased their dependence on men. It also emphasized the need to bring women into decision-making at all levels. Accordingly, several funds and organizations including the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) were created to improve the situation of women. At the conclusion of the Decade, the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women were adopted, which concretized measures to achieve goals and objectives for the advancement of women.

The situation of rural women has been recognized and addressed in several UN conventions and conferences. Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women specifically calls for the elimination of discrimination against rural women. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action drafted in 1995 specifically emphasized the need to improve the situation of women in rural areas by increasing their incomes and providing food security. In 2000, the Beijing +5 conference titled Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century called for equal access to economic, educational, and health care resources. The conference also advocated for the continuation of microcredit ventures to help alleviate poverty for women in rural areas.

In recent years, specific efforts to address and to improve the situation of rural women have often worked in concert with Member States' efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). For instance, the goal of achieving gender equality focuses on expanding access to education by addressing circumstances preventing women and girls from attending school. School access for girls can be hindered by a lack of school sanitation facilities or a lack of access to water, which can necessitate girls' household labor. Simi-

larly, efforts to eliminate poverty and hunger include reducing the number of people earning less than \$1 per day and working toward full and productive employment for all, which includes rural women.

The UN has also taken steps to raise awareness and establish the situation of rural women as a more specific priority. The first International Day of Rural Women, established by the General Assembly in 2007, was observed in October 2008 and celebrates the role and contributions of rural women in promoting development, ensuring food security, eradicating rural poverty, and sustaining their families and communities. In support of the 2008 International Day of Rural Women, which coincided with the food production-focused World Rural Women's Day, the Secretary-General urged countries to make rural women's needs a top priority at the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus. During the December 2008 conference the body touched on the fact that the global economic crisis has had a grave effect on rural women. It called for increased attention to basic economic and social infrastructure and inclusive social services. The conference also identified economic empowerment of women as essential to a sustainable vibrant economy.

Despite these efforts to increase awareness regarding the situation of rural women, discrimination in access to education, health care, and economic means persists in many rural areas. Addressing these issues will require increased consultation with rural women in implementing future programs, as well as improved access to transportation and information and communication technology. It is possible that Member States with existing programs to further the cause of women's equality will be scaled back in the face of the continuing global economic crisis. Yet financial resources and support for governments striving to meet the MDG targets will need to be increased if efforts to improve the situation of rural women will be successful. At the same time, increased support will also be needed from Member States to provide microcredit and other direct financial assistance services to more women in rural areas in order to promote their economic empowerment.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include:

- How do cultural considerations affect programs aimed at the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas?
- In what ways can developed countries help developing countries ensure equal access to education and health care for women in rural areas?
- How can countries with large rural populations be encouraged to better integrate women into mainstream society and include the concerns and issues of rural women in state development programs?
- What actions or mechanisms could the General Assembly recommend to ensure that increased development financing is applied in ways that best address the needs of rural women?

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A/CONF.212/L.1/Rev.1

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women

Additional Web Resources:

www.gender-budgets.org – Gender Responsive Budgeting

www.rural-womens-day.org - World Rural Women's Day

www.unifem.org - UN Development Fund for Women

www.un.org/womenwatch - UN Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality

www.un.org/millenniumgoals/gender - Millennium Development Goals Related to Gender www.ifad.org/gender - International Fund for Agricultural Development

www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/beijing+5.htm - Five-year Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing +5)

www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/ - Ten-year Review of the Beijing Declaration (Beijing +10)