



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 issues 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 24.

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

THE RIGHT TO FOOD

For some countries, food shortages are an agricultural and development issue. For all, however, hunger is a basic affront to human dignity that should be addressed as a human rights issue. The United Nations defines the right to food as "the right to have regular, permanent and free access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensures a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free of fear." This definition defines the right to food as both an individual right and a collective responsibility and has galvanized the world to address hunger. International efforts to protect the right to food have generated a long and complex debate over how the international community can solve the problem. This debate has touched on climate change, intellectual property rights, free trade and international obligations to provide development assistance.

The United Nations has a long history in addressing the right to food. In 1976, at the World Food Conference, governments pledged to end hunger within a decade. Over twenty years later, the international community came together once again at the 1996 World Food Summit. The outcome of the summit, the Rome Declaration, which was adopted by 112 heads of state, pledged to halve the number of persons in the world who suffer from hunger by 2015. With the adoption of the Millennium Declaration in 2000, the international community again committed to reducing the number of people who suffer from hunger by 2015. In 2000, the Commission on Human Rights created a Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, who monitors and reports on situations detrimental to food security. All of these issues have helped to elevate the concept of food security on the global agenda. Despite this ongoing commitment, there are major issues that still need to be addressed, as global food prices continue to climb. Major spikes in global food prices occurred in 2008 and 2011, contributing to dramatically increasing hunger around the world.

This problem has prompted more recent action from the United Nations. In response to soaring food prices in 2008, the Secretary-General convened a High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis. In partnership with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the World Trade Organization, the Task Force aims to support a comprehensive and unified response to the global food crisis. The Task Force produced the Comprehensive Framework

for Action (CFA). The CFA outlines a plan of action that includes activities to meet immediate needs and longer term actions to address structural factors, such as investment in agriculture in developing countries, access to land and water, post-harvest technologies, and sustainability, that all contribute to food insecurity.

Following the formation of the High-Level Task Force, the General Assembly hosted a thematic dialogue in 2009 on the global food crisis and the right to food which was a high-level meeting of human rights specialists, economists, and agroecologists. The GA re-affirmed that a rights-based approach should guide efforts to promote food security. Under this type of framework, the GA acknowledged that strategies that only focus only on lowering food prices to eliminate hunger would not be sufficient. Rather, social support schemes to ensure vulnerable populations were adequately protected would need to be developed along with reforming global agricultural policy. At the Dialogue, the General Assembly acknowledged the complexity of the current crisis and that factors such as the volatility of oil prices, climate change and inequities in the trading system have all contributed to the current food crisis. These factors, along with improvements in accountability and the need for good governance, should be taken into consideration when designing agricultural reform.

Recently, two new issues have entered discussions on the right to food: the effects of climate change and the concept on food sovereignty. Discussion on the effects of climate change on food security and the right to food has been limited in the GA to date, however the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has begun to examine the topic. In March 2011, the FAO submitted a brief to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat on the effects of climate change on food security. The brief outlined potential steps that the UN and its Member States can take, including promoting the development of new, change-resilient staple crops.

On the issue of food sovereignty, there is support for the democratic control of agricultural policy and food production networks, particularly for farmers themselves. The idea has gained significant support from developing countries, as well as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. The costs of transforming agricultural systems are high, the potential returns include greater sustainability and healthier ecosystems.

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

- How does promotion of the right to food as a basic human right influence policies to address hunger and undernourishment?
- How can Member States promote the development of climate-change-resistant crops without severely damaging biodiversity?
- What can Member States do to emphasize the importance of local and national economics as a way to support food sovereignty?

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A/RES/56/155

A/RES/55/2

A/HRC/16/49

A/HRC/RES/16/27

A/HRC/RES/13/4

E/C.12/1999/5 – General Comment 12, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Rome Declaration on World Food Security

Additional Web Resources

www.foodsovereignty.org/ - International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty

<http://www.un.org/issues/food/taskforce/index.shtml> – High Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis

<http://www.fao.org/righttofood/> - FAO on the Right to Food

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/food/index.htm> - Special Rapporteur on the right to food

PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS WHILE COUNTERING TERRORISM

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon. Protecting human life and security within the context of terrorism presents a two-fold, and potentially contradictory, challenge: first, States have an obligation to ensure the security and well-being of their citizens by providing protection from terrorist threats, and second, they must enact counter-terrorism measures that do not violate human rights or the rule of law.

One of the first and most concrete endorsements from Member States of the significance on protecting human rights while countering terrorism came in 2005 with the creation of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism. The Special Rapporteur, who operates under the Human Rights Council, is charged with promoting best practices and investigating allegations of human rights violations that occur during the course of counter-terrorism actions.

In 2006, the General Assembly adopted the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The Strategy was the first international agreement on a common approach and plan of action to prevent and respond to global terrorism threats. The Fourth Pillar of the Global Strategy addresses measures intended to ensure that respect for human rights and the rule of law remain the cornerstone of global counter-terrorism strategies. Specifically, it calls upon member states to Member States to implement strategies that are not in conflict with their obligations to international human rights law, refugee law, or international humanitarian law. By committing to the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, Member States recognized that “effective counter-terrorism measures and the protection of human rights were not conflicting goals but complementary and mutually reinforcing aims.”

The Fourth Pillar of Action of the Global Strategy also calls upon Member States to develop criminal justice systems guided by the rule of law, so the fundamental freedoms and human rights of persons being extradited or prosecuted for terrorist acts are protected. Finally, the Fourth Pillar commits to providing technical assistance to Member states through the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime.

The Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force created a Working Group on Protecting Human Rights While Countering Terrorism. The Working Group supports Member States' efforts to promote and protect human rights in the context of counter-terrorism. To that end, the Working Group hosted an expert seminar on the effects of terrorism and counter-terrorism measures on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. The Working Group is

developing a series of ten Basic Human Rights Reference Guides, that have guidelines for Member States on how to protect human rights in the context of counter-terrorism activities.

While there is broad general agreement on the need for protecting human rights while countering terrorism, there is still debate over specific standards Member States should be expected to uphold. For example, some rights, such as the protection against torture, are non-derogable, while others like freedom of expression, can be suspended by states for fixed periods of time to deal with unrest and potentially destabilizing events. Some states have claimed that combating terrorism is such a circumstance and have sought to restrict speech and other rights.

Despite these challenges, the General Assembly and the United Nations remain engaged in the topic and committed to supporting Member States in their efforts to ensure human rights are protected as they implement counter-terrorism measures. The General Assembly continues the work on the draft comprehensive convention on international terrorism. The convention will aid in reducing the credibility gap in the field of human rights. However, the lack of a coherent human rights strategy remains one of the top challenges of Member States.

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

- What restrictions of rights may be justifiable to combat terrorism and under what circumstances?
- What can Member States do to ensure that counter terrorism is more compatible with fundamental human rights?
- How can the reinforcement of human rights support the aims of countering terrorism?

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A/HRC/13/37 and Add.1
International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action
Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Additional Web Resources

- <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/IOR40/008/2011/en/9b5494ce-e049-45d0-8c91-788f7c24b89a/ior400082011en.pdf>
- <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2005/04/17/protecting-human-rights-while-countering-terrorism>
- www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/rights.html - Protecting Human Rights While Countering Terrorism, UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee
- <http://legalift.wordpress.com/> - Legal Issues in the Fight Against Terrorism
- <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/terrorism/rapporteur/reports.htm> - Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism