



THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY THIRD COMMITTEE

SOCIAL, HUMANITARIAN & CULTURAL

PURVIEW OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY THIRD COMMITTEE

While the Third Committee's work often overlaps with other United Nations organs, the Third Committee focuses its discussions on social, humanitarian and cultural concerns that arise in the General Assembly. Human rights, education and cultural preservation are typical issues for the Third Committee. The Third Committee would not discuss the legal implications of human rights matters as those are discussed by the Sixth Committee. The Committee also does not call for special studies or deploy monitors; those tasks are handled by the Human Rights Council. For more information concerning the purview of the United Nations General Assembly as a whole, see page 29.

Website: www.un.org/ga/third/index.shtml

IMPROVING THE COORDINATION OF EFFORTS AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Human trafficking is present in every country and poses a vital threat to human rights and dignity. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports that, at any given point in time, 21,000 victims have reported cases across 111 countries. This does not include the vast number of victims whose cases go unreported. Estimates place the value of human trafficking at \$32 billion. Forced labor and sex trafficking are the two largest reasons for human trafficking; however, the United Nations also reports on trafficking for organ harvesting, illegal adoption and child marriage. Victims of human trafficking are often malnourished, deprived of personal space and privacy, prostituted or otherwise abused and refused any payment for their work. Human trafficking disproportionately affects women—over two-thirds of reported victims are women. The vast majority of traffickers are men. Criminal impunity is a major challenge: when apprehended, traffickers are rarely prosecuted. Trafficked persons, particularly those trafficked in the sex industry and those trafficked across borders, are often imprisoned and prosecuted rather than given care and services to return home safely and recover from trauma.

While human trafficking is a long-standing problem that exploits the economically and socially vulnerable, response efforts remain largely uncoordinated. The Third Committee has pursued both horizontal coordination—coordination among similar groups—and vertical coordination—coordination among groups with differing levels of authority. Many issues related to trafficking result from this lack of coordination. In particular, the inability to accurately report its prevalence, inconsistency in punishment and the inability of organizations to work together on cases are fundamental issues preventing the international community's effectiveness. As a result, human trafficking not only remains, it has the opportunity to thrive.

In 1999, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, in conjunction with the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, launched the Global Programme Against Trafficking in Human Beings (GPAT). GPAT emphasized the importance of "technical cooperation" between Member States, highlighting the importance of developing the legal and operational resources necessary for identifying and prosecuting trafficking offenders. Though it has largely

focused on fixing information and data collection issues, those efforts have revealed how disparate the different issues in human trafficking are between regions, countries and population demographics. The GPAT led directly to the increase of reporting, but didn't fix one of the most fundamental problems contributing to human trafficking and impunity: countries did not agree to universal definitions of human trafficking. This is a persistent problem. In many countries, indentured servitude, child marriage and other forms of trafficking are not considered to be trafficking, and national legislation is weak or nonexistent. The request for increased technical cooperation, and the capacity-building assistance that accompanied the request, helped to increase effective prosecution. However, cultural mores still prevent the effective reporting and enforcement of the issue, particularly in transnational crimes in which Member States have differing opinions.

The next decade saw incremental changes to coordinating efforts, but the UNODC called attention back to the lack of coordination in the human trafficking crisis in 2006, leading to the creation of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT). Prior to ICAT and still today, many criminal systems prosecuted trafficking victims for the acts they were forced to commit. Within ICAT, associated organizations stressed the importance for a "holistic" approach to fighting the hidden movement of people at a local and regional level. This meant increasing legislative action, prosecuting traffickers, and creating medical and judicial systems that supported rather than punished trafficking victims. Through this work, the approach of anti-trafficking actions began to develop a broader scope that encompasses the role of law enforcement officers and medical care workers in identifying and protecting victims of trafficking. ICAT was further strengthened in 2010 with the creation of a Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons.

The General Assembly has focused on improving the conditions under which United Nations committees and other international organizations can better communicate and share information while emphasizing the importance of recognizing human trafficking as an affront to international human rights. This requires all Member States cooperate and conform to some level of legislative consistency and effective enforcement. In addition to cultural differences, some Member States resist sharing criminal information, either because they fear interference or because information sharing is a politically fraught action to begin with. The United Nations has also pushed for public awareness campaigns. These are meant to help victims speak out, to give citizens the tools necessary to help victims and to increase awareness of new victim protections. This key part of the issue had been scarce in previous, less holistic approaches.

The most recent of several High-Level Meetings of the United Nations General Assembly on the Appraisal of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons was held in 2013. The United Nations' most recent work has focused on strategy and policy development, legislative assistance, capacity building, regional and transregional cooperation, protection and assistance to victims of trafficking and smuggled migrants, and assistance and support to children. The basis for this work is the Global Action to Prevent and Address Trafficking in Persons and



the Smuggling of Migrants (GloACT), a four-year cooperative initiative that started in 2015. There have already been several events aimed at better coordinating international efforts to address this crisis, including a Special High-Level Event in February. One of the most significant events is the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, which increases global awareness of this problem.

Human trafficking remains one of the most difficult issues facing the international community. While the United Nations has adopted a more holistic approach that provides services rather than punishment for the victims of human trafficking and that incorporates law enforcement, medical professionals and the broader community, Member States still struggle with a lack of information. Recent efforts to view and treat trafficking victims as victims rather than perpetrators of crimes they do not choose to commit is at best indicative of shifts in mindset and at worst a moral victory for the United Nations. Intergovernmental cooperation and information sharing is still scarce and often Member States lack the resources or political will to comply with the numerous action plans and protocols put forward. The Third Committee must find ways to reinforce their holistic approach and to help Member States adopt congruent ideas of what human trafficking is, how to treat victims and when and how to best report and cooperate on human trafficking cases. Without these changes, millions of men, women and children annually will continue to be abused and exploited.

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

- What communication barriers exist preventing information exchanges, particularly on known and suspected traffickers and trafficking cases? How can the United Nations encourage the exchange of this information?
- What steps can the international community take to ensure that traffickers are prosecuted?
- What legal and other resources do States need to better combat trafficking?

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THE HUMAN RIGHTS TO SAFE DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION

Water is one of the most fundamental human needs, yet 884 million people lack access to safe drinking water. This poses a serious threat to human health and human dignity, as well as presenting a barrier to economic and social development. Industrial contamination, climate change and infrastructure neglect create increasingly urgent problems for millions of people. Lack of proper sanitation is one of the largest causes for drinking water contamination. Forty percent of the population worldwide lives with insufficient sanitation procedures, primarily in the form of living without bathrooms or latrines. This population is one of the poorest and most vulnerable and risks disease and death due to drinking water contamination.

As a health issue, lack of infrastructure is one of the key contributors to insufficient access to clean water and sanitation. Waste and garbage leach toxins and spread dangerous bacteria like cholera, dysentery and E. coli. They can also cause parasitic infection in populations. Existing infrastructure is often worn down, made with potentially hazardous materials like lead and often vulnerable to natural disaster. Increasing the number of sanitation facilities and the quality of infrastructure has been a long-standing goal of the United Nations. However, the costs of replacing, installing and updating infrastructure is extremely expensive and without much return on investment. This leads to prolonged use of worn systems and can place a disproportionate amount of the costs on low-income users who are at the highest risk, including cost per use or increased service costs and taxes that low-income users simply cannot afford to pay. As a result, even when facilities for clean water and sanitation are in place, many are forced to still use old systems or to make hours-long trips to wells or springs, or to use insufficient sanitation facilities. Once in place, getting people to use the infrastructure and facilities is difficult as well. Public awareness about how waste can spread illness to drinking water and how to access potable water is a key to effectively increasing access to both.



The first actionable plan to address clean water and sanitation was developed at the United Nations Water Conference in 1977. The Conference aimed to assess the status of water access and water usage, avoid a global water crisis, and monitor water use with regard to natural hazards, health and pollution control. The Conference laid the base framework for global water policy and water management, and is still used as a starting point for State policies. The Conference resolutions and final report committed Members to improving water quality and sanitation standards by 1990. This led directly to the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade of 1981-1990. The decade focused international attention on ensuring reasonable access to safe water supplies and focused on areas without adequate sanitation facilities. These policies still allowed for Member States to charge users for access to clean water and for infrastructure development.

The 1992 Dublin Statement laid out four guidelines for Member States at the local, national and international levels. These guidelines include: States should use a holistic approach to water management; development should be participatory and include members of relevant communities from the bottom up; women are integral to the safeguarding of water; and though water is a human right, it should also be recognized as an economic good. The Dublin Statement contributed to the move toward sustainable usage of water and the related actions that helped to reverse trends of over consumption, pollution, and rising threats from drought and floods. Sustainable water and sanitation systems were also included in the Agenda 21, the outcome document of the 1992 Earth Summit.

In 2003, the United Nations declared the International Year of Freshwater, increasing awareness and changing individual behaviors in water use, sanitation and hygiene; mobilized participation of communities; set national targets and plans to generate investment; and increased regulatory framework enforcement for water management that take into account both public health and ecosystem needs. In 2005, the United Nations began the International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005-2015. Its goal was to promote efforts to fulfill international commitments in policies on water. The campaign helped to bridge co-operation between governments over international water disputes and for commitments made between diverse internal groups, but has only begun the steps to bridge economic interests and public need. The co-operation balanced economic interests, the needs of the ecosystem and the needs of people in poverty.

In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly declared access to safe drinking water and sanitation a human right. This was a direct result of a 2008 United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights initiative that examined safe drinking water and sanitation as a human right and that called for a Special Rapporteur on the issue. Declaring access to safe drinking water and sanitation a human right ensures that States are obligated to provide clean drinking water and sanitation to their citizens. Legally, this should include providing equal access to both and preventing unreasonable barriers to access. The legal precedent for this set forth in the Dublin Statement, however, does not define affordability; the United Nations has a suggested limitation of less than three percent of household income going towards water and sanitation. Because utility companies have significantly more political power than citizens, particularly among low-income persons, policies have not caught up to this standard. While some areas have found community-led sanitation projects effective, they are not universally available or practical.

Currently there is more than enough fresh water on the planet to adequately provide for water needs but, due to unproductive economies and poor infrastructure, millions of people die from inadequate water supply, sanitation and hygiene each year. Since 1990, 2.1 billion people have gained access to improved sanitation facilities, but many are still under threat from drought and water shortages, inadequate infrastructure, environmental contamination and natural disaster. While the United Nations has focused on public awareness, the infrastructure investments, public education campaigns and open access to water all require vast amounts of money and urgently need to be completed. Some Member States, however, are reluctant to spend that money, are unable to complete these projects independently or are simply unable to focus on the issue due to geopolitical conflict. Eighty percent of human water waste is discharged into rivers or the sea without any pollution removal. This contamination and climate change create increasingly expensive projects to which many cannot afford access. Without legal systems to fix these barriers, both physical and financial, people worldwide will be denied the water they need to live.

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

- What policies and programs can States implement to ensure the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation?
- With safe drinking water and sanitation as a human right, what responsibility do States and the private sector have to protect the natural environment and their natural water supplies?
- How can States best address issues of natural water scarcity?
- How does the privatization of water supplies and infrastructure impact the human right to safe drinking water?

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