

# RAMMUNC II

March 28th-29th, 2025



# Delegate Handbook SOCHUM

# History of SOCHUM

The Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM) is the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly. The General Assembly is made up of representatives from all member nations and each has a vote. The decisions the GA concludes are not legally binding for governments, but they do carry a heavy weight: the world opinion.

Most know that every national or international conflict that arises has a social aspect to it such as overpopulation, discrimination, etc. This Third Committee addresses the protection of human rights and freedoms in the social and cultural frameworks all over the world. SOCHUM was first convened in 1948 and has since then become one of the more important subsidiaries of the United Nations. Since gaining importance and attention, SOCHUM has begun to promote and enforce many freedoms and ideals such as the right to life, the expression of cultures, children's rights, social development, and political participation, etc. SOCHUM strives to operate on the sole goal of peaceful settlements within the international community. The platform that has been developed within SOCHUM allows for member states to share ideas, express best practices, and strategize while also playing an important role in raising public awareness and advocating for change.

Although the 21st century has been filled with progress and advancement for a more equitable world for all people, many across the globe have resisted this change. The rise of populism, religious orthodoxy, anti-LGBTQ sentiment, xenophobia and the general idea of "culture wars" places all the world's social growth in jeopardy. The goal of this committee is to determine how to navigate these social issues in an increasingly hostile political climate. Consider how this committee can include the voices and protect the rights of Indigenous nations that aren't represented with their own membership status in the United Nations, and how the international transportation of waste impacts economies, environments, and livelihoods.



# Topic 1: Rights of Indigenous Peoples

## Who are Indigenous Peoples?

The official definition of “indigenous” has not been adopted by any UN- system body. Instead, the system has developed a modern understanding of the term based on certain characteristics. Indigenous peoples can be identified through certain characteristics:

- They self-identify as indigenous peoples.
- There is a historical link between those who inhabited a region at a time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived.
- They have distinct social, economic, and or political systems.
- There is a strong link between them and surrounding natural resources.
- Presence of a distinct language, culture, and beliefs.
- They maintain and develop their ancestral environments and systems as distinct peoples.
- They are a part of non-dominant groups of society.
- Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environment.

Is it estimated that there are more than 370 million indigenous people across 70 countries. Through unique traditions, indigenous people combine social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics in the society they reside in. They are descendants- those who inhabited a country or region at a time when people of different cultures or origins arrived across the Arctic to the South Pacific. Indigenous people speak more than 4,000 of the world’s 7,000 languages and make up 6% of the global population. Some examples of indigenous peoples are those of- the Lakota in the USA, the Mayas in Guatemala, the Aymaras in Bolivia, the Māori of New Zealand.

Indigenous peoples reside all over the world from the Arctic to the Pacific, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. There is no singular definition of what an indigenous person is under any law or policy. This was done on purpose under the rationale that identification of an indigenous people was the right of the people itself. This was also considered under the notion that indigenous peoples’ obstacles and situations are circumstantial and cannot be categorized. Many indigenous peoples populated areas before any other inhabitants which lead them to creating unique political and legal structures. Although the legal status of indigenous peoples is different from minority groups, they do tend to fall in the minority of the States where they live.

Throughout history, indigenous peoples faced countless threats to their land and resources from land rights, urbanization, large scale agriculture, and resource extraction. These transgressions have resulted in the displacement of millions of indigenous peoples, created conflicts, increased attacks on indigenous peoples, killing and framing of indigenous peoples, threats, assassinations, harassment, targeting, profiling, etc. These obstacles have lowered the life expectancy of Indigenous peoples by 20 years when compared to non-Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples encounter discrimination everyday which impacts their daily lives from obtaining education, healthcare, and even safe housing. On a global scale, they suffer from landlessness, poverty, unemployment, imprisonment, displacement, malnutrition, and illiteracy.

Indigenous peoples are majority of the time misrepresented or underrepresented in decision making processes on matters involving their land or legal measures that impact them. Due to this poor representation, they are often displaced from their land due to the exploitation for natural resources. Indigenous women and youth are specifically targeted by disproportionality by the lack of access to education, employment opportunities, and decision making. It can be argued that the lack of social inclusion of indigenous peoples in communities has created mechanisms that don't address gender-based violence. This history of inequality and social exclusion has made indigenous peoples more susceptible to impacts of climate change and natural hazards- one of the biggest and most notable is the impacts of the outbreak of COVID-19 on indigenous peoples.

Indigenous people occupy a quarter of the world's surface area and conserve 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity through their deep knowledge on how to adapt, migrate, and reduce climate risks and damage. A good portion of the land occupied by Indigenous peoples is under customary ownership. However, many governments only recognize that a fraction of this land legally belongs to that of indigenous peoples. Despite having some land and territories recognized, protection of the exploitation of natural resources is weak. This creates environmental degradation, conflict, and poor social and economic development. It also creates a threat to the survival of cultural and knowledge systems which we need for biodiversity-which we all depend on.

Over the last 30 years, we have seen an increase in the recognition of Indigenous peoples when it comes to their rights on an international scale. For example, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007 in which the Third Committee of the General Assembly (SOCHUM) adopted a draft resolution to defer consideration and action, the American Declaration of on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2016, the Regional Agreement

on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement) in 2021, and the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention from 1991. Many have called on governments and the United Nations to implement laws and policies that bring the UNDRIP to reality by:

- Creating effective consultation for Indigenous Peoples about decisions that impact them
- The maintaining of unique cultural identities
- Education on a local and national level
- Freedom from discrimination and the threat of violence
- Secured access to their lands and resources
- Increased representation of Indigenous People's rights to relevant United Nations bodies

### **Questions to consider:**

- What steps can be taken to create representation for Indigenous people with their own membership status in the UN?
- What system can be implemented to better educate those on a local, national, global, and even in our own assembly?
- Consider past occurrences of discrimination on an international scale, are they relatable to any seen today? Aka, has anything changed?
- A system to implement to sustain the diverse and unique cultural, social, and economic ways of Indigenous peoples
- How effective are the resolutions that are effective today?
- Differences and similarities between the resolutions then and now.
- How can indigenous women and youth be better represented in terms of opportunities?
- What are the implications on our biodiversity if we do not take the steps to repair the history of discrimination that continues to challenge Indigenous Peoples?

# Topic 2: The Global Waste Trade

## What is the Global Waste Trade?

Waste trade is the international trade of waste between countries for further treatment, disposal, or recycling. The World Bank estimated that 2.01 billion tons of waste were generated globally in 2016. The production of waste and trash is part of human life whether we like it or not. Waste is an inevitable consequence of human existence.

Due to the increase of unsustainable production and consumption of plastics combined with the decreasing waste management capacity, developed countries look to export their waste to developing countries that have lower labor costs. The global waste trade was worth approximately \$98.3 billion from 1988 to 2016 for importing countries. China was the primary location for most of the world's plastic waste and the impacts on the citizens, the climate, and waste workers were threatening and harmful. Developing countries were willing to take on waste from wealthier countries as it provided new economic advantages and regulation freedoms. These developing countries became overwhelmed with the management of the imported waste, as well as their own waste. In 2018, China banned the imports of plastic waste which tremendously changed the course of trade of waste. It is estimated that 37 million tons of plastic waste was displaced due to this event. Despite China's effort to reduce the amount of plastic flowing from Europe to Asia, other countries are now picking up the waste from China's ban.

The global waste trade has severe implications on marine life and biodiversity. The waste that countries import contains high levels of contaminants, plastics, and mixed materials. The ineffectiveness of waste management systems accounts for 25% of the plastic that ends up in our oceans. From oceanic freight dumping to illegal dumping, the incorrect disposal of plastic waste is what is harming our oceans.

Plastic waste has proven to be dangerous and harmful to marine life such as mammals, fish, and seabirds. The implications of harming marine life have an economic and cultural impact on coastal countries that depend on marine life. Citizens living there rely on the seafood market for economic growth and stability as well as a major food group. Plastic waste that is mismanaged harms the soil and land that it impacts. The incorrect dumping of plastic waste can lead to high amounts of liquid and gas contamination in the soil which can degrade ecosystems. These implications can be seen at the lower-standard waste management entities mainly found in tropical and subtropical countries. An example of these practices can be seen at a solid waste

landfill in India which resulted in high amounts of iron, zinc, and heavy metals in surrounding water bodies which resulted in the groundwater being unsuitable for consumption.

Adding to marine and soil pollution, air pollution. High levels of volatile organic compounds are emitted into the air by recycling workshops which poses adverse health threats to the workers and surrounding people. High amounts of air pollution have been found to be more prevalent in developing countries than in developed nations from the collection of plastic waste. Asthma and lung cancer are more prevalent in these developing countries; these countries usually lack the grade of healthcare facilities required to take care of these health concerns.

There is also a social impact of the global waste trade in developing nations. The workers in developing countries who are affected by the contaminated air and water suffer the negative impact of being disproportionately disadvantaged and marginalized within their communities. In China, the main workers who suffer from this are senior citizens who are forced to bend over and sort through waste. In Southeast Asia, children are the ones who receive this burden as they leave school to earn money which in turn decreases their lifespan and social and economic status. Culture and tradition of communities are severely negatively impacted by the improper and excessive amount of waste and plastic waste that plagues their land. The global waste trade has created socio-political environmental injustices.

In February 2022, at the UNEA 5.2 In Nairobi, Kenya, member states of the United Nations committed to a legally binding treaty that addressed the plastic problem from start to finish (e.g. production to disposal). Many have argued that little progress has been made toward the global waste management problem as environmental groups started to criticize oil and gas producers for blocking final decision making.

Many members of the United Nations want to have a finalized treaty by the end of 2024 as plastic production is expected to increase in the next coming years. The Challenge is coming up with a solution that is effective in reducing plastic waste while also obtaining the yes from all countries involved. China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia who are all big oil and gas producers will be a big part of the decision-making process as well as the United States which will be the world's biggest oil and gas producer in 2022. The United States has said that plastic pollution and waste management needs to be dealt with every stage of the plastic lifecycle. Many industry advocacy groups feel that the goals of the treaty can be reached if waste is recyclable and managed properly.

## Questions to consider:

- Are there any real time solutions to the plastic waste problem? Are the solutions these fossil fuel reliant companies offering viable?
- What are the implications of not combating the global waste trade on our future?
- What nations need to work together as key players to come to a formal agreement?
- How will this treaty remain sustainable? What system of checks and balances can be introduced to hold all parties involved accountable?
- What nations are the biggest contributors to the problem?
- What scientific evidence can play a role in determining which route the treaty should take?



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