

RAMMUNC II

March 28th-29th, 2025



Delegate Handbook SPECPOL

History of SPECPOL

The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL) is the fourth of the United Nations General Assemblies. SPECPOL consists of all members of the United Nations, each with voting powers. Like other United Nations General Assemblies, the decisions made within SPECPOL have no legal binding on governments. However, the discussion and ideas formed in the committee hold an important role in forming the framework of legislation for nations through soft power.

When the UN was formed in 1945, one-third of the world's population, around 750 million people, were living under colonial rule. A major milestone in global decolonization efforts was the United Nation's adoption of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, where the importance of colonial territories gaining independence was recognized, as well as declaring an effort to assist in the speedy end to colonization. Later in 1990, the UN declared 1990-2000 as the "International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism." SPECPOL was established in 1993, born from the merging of the Decolonization Committee (originally the Fourth Committee) and the Special Political Committee. Since then, SPECPOL has worked to guarantee the right to self-determination for all, monitoring decolonization processes all over the world. As of today, over 80 former colonies have gained their independence since 1945, in part due to the efforts of SPECPOL. SPECPOL covers five main decolonization items, including atomic radiation, peacekeeping and UN political missions, working with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), colonization and settler activities regarding Palestine, and issues of outer space. While SPECPOL encompasses all previously mentioned topics, their main goal is to tackle the long-lasting impact of colonization and how countries can rebuild successfully and peacefully. The Committee also works closely with indigenous communities, addressing land rights, territorial disputes, and legal recognition of Indigenous groups' sovereignty over their lands.

With the rise of neo-colonialist tactics, SPECPOL must combat a new form of colonial issues in the 21st century. Neocolonialism is described as a way for larger, more powerful countries to control less-developed nations, usually who have recently gotten out of a colonial regime, through economic, cultural, and global exploitation and pressure. Economically, this is often done using Multinational Corporations (MNCs), the use of the developing nation's land and labor, and exports. This impacts the stability and kinds of infrastructure being implemented in developing countries, including the building of pipelines and other environmentally damaging infrastructure. Despite the progress made over the decades, colonial remnants from the past remain in the present, sustaining the conflict between indigenous communities and governments. Consider how the Fourth Committee can protect the sovereignty of indigenous people when their interests clash with the interests of government policy and action.

Topic 1: The Role of Multinational Corporations in Developing Countries

What is a Multinational Corporation?

Multinational corporations (MNCs) under the United Nations definition are corporations that have businesses outside of the country they are founded in or based around. It is important to distinguish that MNCs are corporations rather than small businesses or companies, and they are often so large that they have large economic influence beyond the country they initially operated out of. They operate globally, with their main branch typically being in their home country, with several subsidiaries around the world bringing in further profit. MNCs stimulate growth for the home country by expanding their scope to more people willing to buy products. Many MNCs retain the political ideology and regulations of their home country, often leading to conflicts of interests. However, since MNCs operate in other nations under other laws, they must abide by the laws of the country they reside in, whether their home country would necessarily agree. MNCs are political tools and ways to exert soft power over nations and are products of globalization. While globalization does connect nations economically, socially, and politically, it often erodes cultural practices, emphasizes further individualism, and leads MNCs to exploit vulnerable populations.

MNCs have become incredibly well known across the world, even in places that do not disagree politically. For example, the popular food-chain McDonalds has over 38,000 locations in approximately 119 countries, meaning over two-thirds of the world has a McDonalds operating. McDonalds is an American company and has locations in nations such as China, two countries that do not always align politically. However, countries such as Russia have closed their McDonalds due to its ties with America. Other influential MNCs include, but are not limited to:

- Apple, Inc.
- Microsoft Corporation
- Amazon.com, Inc.
- Alphabet, Inc.¹
- Saudi Arabian Oil Company²
- Meta Platforms, Inc.
- Walmart, Inc.
- Exxon Mobil Corporation
- British Petroleum Company, p.l.c.
- International Business Machines Corp.³
- Intel Corporation
- Samsung Electronics Co., Ltd.

¹ Alphabet is the parent company of Google

² More commonly known as Saudi Aramco

³ More commonly known as IBM

How do MNCs Impact Development?

Since MNCs operate on a global scale and are economic powerhouses, they play large roles in the economies of developing countries. While MNCs can operate without having an establishment directly in developing countries, they often rely on the countries for extracting resources for their products, use labor from individuals in developing countries, and take over small businesses to maintain economic power over developing nations. Furthermore, the prospect of economic growth brought by MNCs can be incredibly appealing for developing nations, leading developing nations to have an unhealthy reliance on MNCs. However, MNCs often become more powerful than the countries themselves, becoming a facet of neocolonialism and control rather than a business stimulating growth, especially with the issue of abuse of labor.

One case study of MNCs impacting developing nations is the issue of cobalt mining in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The DRC is rich in natural resources, most notably, their cobalt. Cobalt is desirable for its use in electronic devices, including phones and vehicles. MNCs such as Apple and Microsoft rely on cobalt to make their products. Since they have billions of dollars in assets and funding, it is incredibly easy for them to buy cobalt for low prices and exploit labor. The workers in cobalt mines work cruel conditions described as “modern day slavery”. They are exposed to hazardous toxins when working with cobalt, leading to health complications further in their lives. Many are families, including children, who work for the equivalent to US pennies. MNCs such as Apple know they can use the DRC as a place to mine cobalt since their labor laws and regulations are much easier to exploit compared to developed countries. Additionally, MNCs know that they can buy the products from the DRC and other developing nations for cheap, opting to buy from them to turn more of a profit, therefore the cycle of MNCs using the labor and resources of less developed countries continues. However, it is important to note that while MNCs directly contribute to the labor exploitation faced by people in the DRC and other nations with similar stories, it is usually the governments themselves that create and enforce labor laws and practices. Consider how multinational corporations and developing governments may work in tangent to gain profit, even if it is under dubious means.

Questions to Consider

- What alternative resources can be used to stop MNCs from taking valuable resources from developing nations?
- How can countries invest in smaller “start-up” businesses to be able to compete with MNCs?
- Consider how developing nations are often economically dependent on MNCs. What measures can be put in place to prevent that from occurring?
- How can MNCs be used for sustainable development? Is that possible?
- How can we break the cycle of exploitation by both governments and MNCs?
- What labor policies and regulations should be put in place to protect workers? Do current regulations need to be changed or updated?
- How can the UN encourage policies regarding MNCs?

Topic 2: Pipelines and Infrastructure in First Nation Territories

First Nations, as defined in Canada's Constitution Act of 1982, are indigenous communities/people in Canada that are neither Inuit nor Métis. Over 600 groups fall into this category, and as of 2021, 37% of First Nations live on reserves. Not to be confused with traditional territories, reserves are plots of land set aside by the Canadian government for use by First Nations. Reserves have many uses for First Nations, including hunting and gathering, schools, residential homes, and hosting Indigenous archaeological sites like burial grounds. However, while reserves are designated for use by First Nations communities, the lands are ultimately owned by the Canadian government, as outlined in the Indian Act of 1876. This has laid the foundation for clashes between First Nations and the government concerning using the land for infrastructure development.

One key issue is the development of pipelines running near or through First Nation territories and reserves. Although the government and private oil companies argue that pipeline projects are necessary for economic growth and energy production, they often fail to fully consult with First Nation communities before going ahead with the projects. This has caused protests and legal battles, with First Nations arguing that the actions of the government and private companies interfere with their sovereignty over reserve lands. One recent example of this conflict took place with the expansion of the Trans Mountain Pipeline. Following its approval in 2019, protests erupted across Canada, and several First Nations leaders took legal action to stop the pipeline's expansion that would be dismissed in court. In addition to pipeline construction violating First Nation sovereignty, they also leave First Nations vulnerable to health risks when the pipelines leak oil.

The UN has shown support for First Nations regarding the issue. In April 2024, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) called for the United States and Canada to cease operations on Line 5, a Canadian pipeline that transports crude oil. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination echoed this sentiment, concerned that the continued use on Line 5 threatened the human rights of First Nations. In 2023, the General Assembly adopted the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which called for many provisions, including:

- Urges Governments and the UN system, in cooperation with Indigenous Peoples, to continue implementing appropriate national measures to achieve the goals of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

- It urges Member States to implement World Health Assembly resolution 76.16 titled “The health of Indigenous Peoples” and take necessary measures to ensure the rights, protection and safety of Indigenous Peoples.
- The Assembly suggests that the Commission on the Status of Women considers in a future session the issue of gender equality and the empowerment of Indigenous women and girls as a priority theme.

Although the UN has shown an effort to support First Nations, many are calling on the UN to do more to solve the issue of pipelines being built without proper approval from First Nations.

Questions to consider:

- How can we balance national economic interests, like pipeline construction, with the sovereignty and cultural preservation of Indigenous peoples?
- What role does meaningful consultation with First Nations play in legal and government decisions about land use, and how could the process be improved?
- How do colonial mindsets persist in modern Canadian policies, and how can these be addressed to ensure better relationships with Indigenous communities?
- What alternatives to pipelines or other resource-extraction projects could be explored to respect the rights of Indigenous peoples and protect the environment?
- How can the UN continue to support Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination in the modern era, particularly in the face of resource extraction and environmental degradation?

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