



Dear Delegates,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the 2014 Montessori Model United Nations Conference.

The following pages intend to guide you in the research of the topics that will be debated at MMUN 2014 in committee sessions. Please note this guide only provides the basis for your investigation. It is your responsibility to find as much information necessary on the topics and how they relate to the country you represent. Such information should help you write your Position Paper, where you need to cite the references in the text and finally list all references in the Modern Language Association (MLA) format.

The more information and understanding you acquire on the two topics, the more you will be able to influence the Resolution writing process through debates [formal and informal caucuses], and the MMUN experience as a whole. Please feel free to contact us if and when you face challenges in your research or formatting your Position Papers.

We encourage you to learn all you can about your topics first and then study your country with regard to the two selected topics. Please remember that both committee members need to be well versed and ready to debate both topics.

Enjoy researching and writing your Position Papers.

We look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

MMUN Secretariat Team

info@montessori-mun.org



Social, Humanitarian & Cultural

Third Committee

Year after year, the General Assembly allocates to its Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Affairs Committee, commonly referred to as the “Third Committee”, agenda items relating to a range of social, humanitarian affairs and human rights issues that affect peoples all over the world.

An important part of the Committee’s work focuses on the examination of human rights questions, including reports of the special procedures of the newly established Human Rights Council. In October 2006, the Committee will hear and interact with 25 such special rapporteurs, independent experts, and chairpersons of workings groups of the Human Rights Council. The Committee also discusses the advancement of women, the protection of children, indigenous issues, the treatment of refugees, the promotion of fundamental freedoms through the elimination of racism and racial discrimination, and the promotion of the right to self- determination. The Committee also addresses important social development questions such as issues related to youth, ageing, disabled persons, family, crime prevention, criminal justice, and drug control.

Source: <http://www.un.org/ga/61/third/third.shtml>

Right to Self-Determination

Topic Background



In 1945, when the United Nations was founded at the end of World War II, 750 million people lived in non-self-governing territories and colonies. Since then, millions of people have declared independence, founded their own countries, and exercised their right to self-determination.ⁱ

The right to self-determination is a people's ability to “freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.”ⁱⁱ The right to self-determination is also associated with the process of decolonization – enabling former colonies to govern themselves.

In United States history, for example, signing the Declaration of Independence and fighting the Revolutionary War are examples of self-determination. However, the modern day struggles of Native Americans to govern themselves and preserve their cultural identity are also examples of self-determination.

The right to self-determination is a human right universally recognized by the international community; all peoples have the right to self-determination. However, people are not always allowed to exercise this right for various reasons:

- Israel was founded in 1948 after a long struggle for self-determination. However, it also created a refugee situation for the people of Palestine. And today, Palestinians are struggling to exercise their right to self-determination by forming their own state alongside Israel. Additionally, Palestine is trying to become a member of the United Nations, but its bid for membership is being stopped by the United States.ⁱⁱⁱ
- The people of Tibet are trying to exercise their right to self-determination by founding their own country, but they are occupied by the Chinese military. The leader of Tibet, the Dalai Lama, is in exile, and he travels around the world to speak about the self-determination of Tibet and peaceful resistance.^{iv}
- The people of Chechnya are attempting to exercise their right to self-determination by seceding from Russia. However, the government of Russia does not believe that Chechnya has a right to self-determination. This has led to violence in Chechnya, including the formation of rebel groups and accusations of terrorism.^v

Millions of people around the world are trying to exercise their right to self-determination, yet this also threatens the security of other countries and leads to violence.

Past Actions



The international community has recognized the right to self-determination ever since the founding of the United Nations:

- In the Charter of the United Nations, one of the UN's purposes is "to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples."
- In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 15 declares that "everyone has a right to a nationality" and that "no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality."
- Both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) start with the same first article: "All peoples have the right of self-determination." By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."
- The General Assembly recognized the right to self-determination in x with Resolution 1514 (XV), "Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples." Since 1990, the GA has declared three consecutive "international decades" for the "eradication of colonialism."

In addition to recognizing the right to self-determination, the United Nations has taken various actions to help people exercise their right. One of the original organs of the United Nations was the Trusteeship Council, which helped non-self-governing territories achieve independence. In essence, the UN governed former colonies, including present-day Cameroon, Somalia, and Rwanda, until they were able to govern themselves. In 1994, the last territory managed by the Trusteeship Council gained independence -- Palau -- and the council suspended its operations indefinitely.^{vi}

Today, the 4th Main Committee of the General Assembly is the Special Political and Decolonization Committee, which deals with issues related to Palestinian refugees, human rights, and other cases related to decolonization. Separately, the Special Committee on Decolonization, also known as the Committee of 24, assists former colonies and territories achieve and maintain independence, and exercise their right to self-determination.^{vii}

In addition to the UN, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also assist peoples around the world with exercising their right to self-determination. The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) is a membership-based NGO comprised of indigenous peoples, minorities, and unrecognized or occupied territories who have joined together to protect and promote their human and cultural rights, to preserve their environments, and to find nonviolent solutions to conflicts which affect them. UNPO offers training seminars and workshops on human rights, democracy, self-determination, non-violence, and international law. UNPO lobbies on behalf of its members at the United Nations, regional organizations, and national governments.^{viii}

Possible Solutions

Although the UN and the international community have taken many actions to recognize the right to self-determination and assist former colonies, problems still persist that affect millions of people and lead to violence.



There are 3 areas regarding the struggle for self-determination in which this committee can take action:

- **Question of Palestine:** The struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination has been a controversial issue as old as the UN itself. In 2012, the General Assembly adopted resolutions 67/19 on the “Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine” and 67/23 on the “Status of Palestine in the United Nations.” How can the international community aid Palestinians in their struggle for self-determination – without threatening Israel and the stability of the Middle East? Can Palestine be admitted to the United Nations as member – even if its membership is opposed by the United States?
- **Minority Groups:** From Tibet to Chechnya to North America, minority groups around the world struggle for self-determination. They struggle to preserve their cultural identity, to govern themselves, or to declare their own independence. Can the international community help minority groups achieve self-determination? Or does this pose a threat to the countries in which these groups reside?
- **Decolonization:** Many former colonies and territories have achieved self-determination and statehood, but they still struggle to govern themselves, oftentimes facing instability and insecurity. Can the international community help these countries realize their dreams of self-determination?

The right to self-determination is an important human right that goes straight to the heart of what it means to be a people and what it means to be a state. At the same time, the struggle for this right must be balanced against the national security of states. If a balance is not found, then millions will continue to struggle and face strife and violence.

Further Research



Guiding Questions

- What is your country's history with self-determination? How was your country founded? Is your country a former colony – or a former colonizer?
- What is your country's position on the Question of Palestine? Does your country support a particular solution? Does your country believe Palestine should become a member state of the UN?
- What minority groups reside in your country? Are they struggling to achieve self-determination? What is your government doing about that?

Research Sources

- The United Nations and Decolonization: <http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/index.shtml>
- General Assembly Resolutions 67/19 (<http://bit.ly/15RhZ4Q>) and 67/23 (<http://bit.ly/19BLT7E>)
- Minority Rights Group – Self-Determination: <http://www.minorityrights.org/2813/themes/>

ⁱ <http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/history.shtml>

ⁱⁱ General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV)

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.cfr.org/palestine/palestinian-statehood-un/p25954>

^{iv} <http://www.cfr.org/china/question-tibet/p15965>

^v <http://www.cfr.org/separatist-terrorism/chechen-terrorism-russia-chechnya-separatist/p9181>

^{vi} <http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/trusteeship.shtml>

^{vii} <http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/specialcommittee.shtml>

^{viii} <http://www.unpo.org/section/2>