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

Background information on the Human Rights Council

The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and make recommendations on them. It has the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year. It meets at the UN Office at Geneva. The Council is made up of 47 United Nations Member States which are elected by the UN General Assembly. The Human Rights Council replaced the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

The Council was created by the United Nations General Assembly on 15 March 2006 by resolution 60/251. Its first session took place from 19 to 30 June 2006. One year later, the Council adopted its "Institution-building package" to guide its work and set up its procedures and mechanisms.
Among them were the Universal Periodic Review mechanism which serves to assess the human rights situations in all United Nations Member States, the Advisory Committee which serves as the Council's "think tank" providing it with expertise and advice on thematic human rights issues and the Complaint Procedure which allows individuals and organizations to bring human rights violations to the attention of the Council.
The Human Rights Council also works with the UN Special Procedures established by the former Commission on Human Rights and now assumed by the Council. These are made up of special rapporteurs, special representatives, independent experts and working groups that monitor, examine, advise and publicly report on thematic issues or human rights situations in specific countries.

Source: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/AboutCouncil.aspx

©Montessori Model United Nations. All rights reserved.

Website: www.montessori-mun.org
Email: info@montessori-mun.org

Freedom of Religion or Belief

Topic Background

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights defines the freedom of religion or belief as a human right. Article 18 declares that "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

Although the freedom of religion is recognized internationally as a human right, governments may not respect that right for various reasons. Governments may not want individual practice a certain religion or set of beliefs for fear that might threaten national security. Or, governments may want individuals to practice a certain religion.

According to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, there are dozens of countries being investigated for alleged violations of the freedom of religion or belief. In 2009, for example, UN officials visited India to investigate concerns regarding "the situation of religious or belief minorities; justice for victims and survivors of communal violence; freedom of religion or belief in Jammu and Kashmir; the negative impact of laws on religious conversion in several states; and implications of religion-based personal laws."[i]

The United States government has also accused other countries of violating the freedom of religion. In its 2012 International Religious Freedom Report, the US said that the government of China "harassed, detained, arrested, or sentenced to prison a number of religious adherents for activities reportedly related to their religious beliefs and practice." The report also stated that in Saudi Arabia, "the public practice of any religion other than Islam is prohibited, and the government enforced restrictions on religious freedom," and that "the government reportedly deported foreigners for worshipping privately."[ii]

The violation of the freedom of religion as a human right can lead to insecurity and violence. Because of this, the UN and the international community have taken various actions to help protect the freedom of religion or belief.

Past Actions

The General Assembly first recognized freedom of religion when it adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Later, in 1981, the General Assembly adopted 36/55 on the "Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief." And most recently, in 2012, the General Assembly adopted resolutions 67/178 on "Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief" and resolution 67/179 on the "Freedom of religion or belief."

©Montessori Model United Nations. All rights reserved.

The Human Rights Council is another UN body that works to protect the freedom of religion worldwide. It receives reports by countries on what they are doing to protect this right. And in 2007, the Council adopted resolution 6/37 on the "Elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief."

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief takes the leading role on protecting the right to freedom of religion or belief at the national, regional, and international levels, the Rapporteur visits countries accused of violating this right and reports findings to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly.[iii] In 2012, Special Rapporteur Heiner Bielefeldt spoke to the General Assembly about religious conversions, saying that "the right of conversion and the right not to be forced to convert or reconvert belong to the internal dimension of a person's religious or belief-related conviction, which is unconditionally protected under international human rights law."

In addition to the United Nations, non-governmental organizations play an important role in protecting the freedom of religion or belief worldwide. Freedom House is "an independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom around the world" that analyzes and reports on the freedoms of people around the world, including their freedom of religion.[iv] Another NGO, the International Religious Liberty Association, is the "oldest association dedicated to freedom of conscience for all people" that advocates for the freedom of religion among governments and at the United Nations.[v]

Possible Solutions

Despite the work of the UN and NGOs, the human right to freedom of religion or belief is still being violated in countries around the world. There are many areas in which this committee can develop possible solutions to protect and promote the freedom of religion or belief. But there are several issues in particular that the UN has focused on in recent years:

- **Eliminating Intolerance:** Dozens of countries are being investigated for allegations of violating the rights of their citizens to practice the freedom of religion or belief.[vi] In 2010, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief released a report on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief as a human right, describing what violations were taking place.[vii] But how can the international community better protect those whose rights are being violated? Can the international community work with governments that are accused of these human rights violations?

- **School Education:** In 2011, the Special Rapporteur on freedom or religion or belief released a report about school education, including how religion and belief is being taught in schools, and how schools can promote the freedom of religion or belief. But the report cautioned that "Freedom of religion or belief and school education require very careful handling…The main reason is that the school, besides providing a place of learning and social development, is also a place in which authority is exercised."[viii] Should the international community approach schools as a platform for promoting the freedom of education or belief, especially among the youth? Will governments agree with this approach?

©Montessori Model United Nations. All rights reserved.

- **Right of Conversions:** In 2012, the Special Rapporteur on freedom or religion or belief released a report on the right of conversion as part of the freedom of religion or belief. He identified four main subcategories: "the right to conversion, in the sense of changing one's own religion or belief; the right not to be forced to convert; the right to try to convert others by means of non-coercive persuasion; and the rights of the child and of his or her parents in this regard."[ix] This is a potentially sensitive and controversial issue, as one person's right of conversion might infringe on another person's right to freedom of religion or belief – and potentially create situations of insecurity or violence.

The freedom of religion or belief is an important human rights issue that affects nearly every life on the planet. Different perspectives on religion and belief have led to tensions, conflict, violence, and war. It is an issue that the UN and the international community must continue to address.

Further Research

Guiding Questions

- What religions or beliefs are practiced in your country? How do people of different religions or beliefs interact with one another? Is there any tension or fighting because of differences in religion or belief?
- Does your government protect its people's right to the freedom of religion or belief? Does the government have any programs in place to promote this freedom?
- How do schools in your country teach religion and belief? Does your government believe that schools are a good place to teach the freedom of religion or belief?

Research Sources

- UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief: http://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/freedomreligion/pages/freedomreligionindex.aspx
- US International Religious Freedom Report: http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/
- Freedom House – Religious Freedom: http://www.freedomhouse.org/issues/religious-freedom

---

[i] http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G09/104/62/PDF/G0910462.pdf?OpenElement

[ii] http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom

[iii] http://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/freedomreligion/pages/freedomreligionindex.aspx

[iv] http://www.freedomhouse.org

[v] http://www.irla.org/

[vi] http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/Visits.aspx

[vii] http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N10/470/47/PDF/N1047047.pdf?OpenElement

[viii] http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G10/177/93/PDF/G1017793.pdf?OpenElement

[ix] http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N12/461/30/PDF/N1246130.pdf?OpenElement

©Montessori Model United Nations. All rights reserved.