



General Assembly Third
Social, Humanitarian, and
Cultural Committee

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Letter from the Secretariat

Delegates,

Welcome to the background guides for MiniMUN 2018! Whether it is your first or third Model United Nations conference, it is our hope at MiniMUN that you will continue to further expand your knowledge of MUN, world issues, and the UN itself.

The purpose of this background guide is to introduce the committee and the topic, as well as help you write your position paper. Details on position paper and submission are available under the Position Paper tab on our website:

<http://chsminimum.weebly.com/position-papers.html>

The topics and committees were chosen to reflect the problems that our world leaders face. As a delegate, you will be stepping into the role of world leaders. You will take on perspectives different from your own, and you will push for what your country believes to be right.

We have diligently worked to make this year's topics even more captivating and advanced than previous years. If at any time, you are having trouble understanding the background guide, finding information on the topic, or writing your position paper, please contact your chairs for help. They are more than willing to assist you to make MiniMUN a productive and engaging conference!

We are very excited to see you at MiniMUN 2018!

Christine Pang and Curran Myers

Secretary-General and Director-General, MiniMUN 2018



Description of Committee

General Assembly (GA) is the main deliberative organ of United Nations (UN) and it has six main committees. Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Committee (SOCHUM) is 3rd Committee of the General Assembly. SOCHUM is an United Nations body designated to focus on preserving human rights and implementing fundamental freedoms all around the world. SOCHUM works in cooperation with the United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) and Economical and Social Committee (ECOSOC).

The agenda of the Third Committee of the General Assembly relates to an array of social, humanitarian affairs, and human rights issues that impact people around the world. This committee's work will focus on examining and discussing human rights, including reports of the special procedures of the UNHRC which was established in 2006. The committee will discuss questions relating to the advancement of women, protection of children, indigenous issues, the treatment of refugees, the promotion of fundamental freedoms through the elimination of racism and racial discrimination, and the right to self-determination. In addition, the Committee addresses important social development questions such as issues related to youth, family, ageing, persons with disabilities, crime prevention, criminal justice, and international drug control.

SOCHUM: <http://www.un.org/en/ga/third/>

The Advancement of Gender Equality in the Middle East

Introduction

Gender equality is a modern global issue that affects both men and women of all races, nationalities, and religions. It is commonly defined as “women and men enjoying the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, including economic participation and decision-making”. Gender equality has become an important component of international institutions through decades of legislation and advocacy. In 2015, the United Nations featured gender equality as one of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals to accomplish by the year 2030. This goal was added as a continuation of the third Millennium Developmental Goal which sought to promote gender equality and empower women and girls.

Although the United Nations has promoted the advancement of gender equality, many governments have not made laws for women’s rights. The goal of women’s rights is to increase women’s participation in government, access to education, and economic status. This may be difficult in countries that have large social and cultural barriers for women. Before 2009, Saudi Arabia’s traditional culture required women to have a male guardian who monitors their actions. These male guardians may choose to restrict a woman’s access to money, work, and education. Under this law, women will be considered “permanent legal minors”. Women’s rights activists in Saudi Arabia protested against the government to get rid of the male guardianship system, but it

still remains largely in place today. This, among many other oppressive systems, have caused global condemnation. Specifically, Western countries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have called these systems counterproductive and socially backwards.

Government officials in the Middle East have begun to make an effort to address gender inequality. Recently, five member states of the European Union voted to include Saudi Arabia on the UN Commission on the Status of Women. Saudi Arabia will serve four years on the commission and will be expected to follow standards of gender equality and promote women's empowerment. Many countries have expressed doubt that the Saudi Arabian government will take the necessary steps to create a gender-fair society, however, this decision was a big stepping stone towards progress on women's rights. In addition, the United States Agency for International Development has partnered with the government of Jordan to start programs to increase female participation in government, expanding gender-specific social services, and "[empowering] civil society institutions". As more countries collaborate with intergovernmental bodies and humanitarian organizations, the advancement of gender equality will grow exponentially in the Middle East and foster a freer global society.

Brief Culture of the Middle East

The Middle East is one of the most religiously diverse regions in the world. The three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, were founded in the

Middle East, specifically the Mesopotamia region. Nine out of ten Middle Easterners identify with the Islamic faith (approximately 93%) or over 552 million people.

Christianity is the second most popular religion with 12 million followers, and the Jewish population rests at nearly 6 million. The large Muslim population has produced theocratic governments that operate under traditional Islamic fundamentalism.

Current Islamic theocracies include Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Yemen.

Gender Segregation: Education and the Labor Market

One of the most significant obstacles to gender equality in the Middle East is gender segregation. Gender segregation divides interactions between men and women in the education system and the labor market. Theocratic governments, particularly those that are Islamic, enforce gender segregation because of long-standing, conservative standards.

Segregation between men and women is a large issue in the Middle Eastern labor market. For instance, Saudi Arabian labor regulations stop women from working in mostly male sectors. If men and women do work in the same industry, women are required to work in separate offices with separate entrances and separate security guards. These regulations cause employers to view hiring women as a financial burden, and many choose to hire men instead. Because of this, women suffer extremely high unemployment rates. In 2013, women made up nearly 75% of the

unemployment rate (~1.2 million) in Saudi Arabia and 40% of those women held advanced degrees.

Public education systems in the Middle East are also segregated by gender though women have grown to be one of the most educated groups in the region. For instance, Saudi women make up 47% of undergraduate graduates and 58% of higher education graduates respectively. In 2009, Saudi Arabian officials appointed the nation's first female deputy education minister, Noura al-Fayez, to further increase the literacy rate among women and girls.

The Problem with Gender Inequality

The oppression of women and girls created by both the government and society has created many social, political, and economic issues in the Middle East. These issues could result in the loss of millions of dollars and isolation from the international community. The United Nations Security Council has repeatedly sanctioned (economically punished) countries that are known to abuse women's rights or enforce rules that foster hostile environments for women. According to the Arab Human Development Report, deep-rooted gender inequalities have continued to prevent women from "using their capabilities to the fullest". Women are not able to contribute to the economy, because they are subjected to gender discrimination on the labor market. This ultimately reduces the overall GDP of a given country and increases the unemployment rate tremendously. Gender discrimination has also prevented women from participating in decision-making bodies. This means that women are being

denied representation in government which could lead to more gender biased policy making. It was not until 2015 that Saudi Arabian women were allowed to vote in municipal elections. The United Arab Emirates allowed women to vote and participate in government only nine years earlier. These political developments are important gains for women in the region, however, it could take decades for these legislations to become normal in Middle Eastern society. Social and cultural barriers have prevented these government regulations from reaching its full potential.

Terrorist organizations have heavily contributed to the cultural discord with women's rights and Islamic society. Many Middle Eastern terrorist organizations practice Islamic fundamentalism which capitalizes on the oppression of women and girls. For instance, the principles of Sharia law require that women defer to men in all sectors of society. This could potentially harm the gains made by women's rights activists.

The UN Response

Since the creation of the Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations has listed equal access to education and economic prosperity as fundamental human rights which all human beings are given regardless of race, nationality, religion, and gender. SOCHUM has increased its ability to address the issues of women in the Middle East by working alongside humanitarian organizations for human rights. Moving forward, cooperation is the most important factor in improving the state of women and girls and advancing gender equality in Middle Eastern countries.

Questions to Consider

1. For what reasons should Middle Eastern countries advance women's rights and how can these reasons be used to benefit the country?
2. What cultural aspects prevent the implementation of women's rights in the Middle East, and is it the responsibility of the UN to change or remove these aspects?
3. How has the UN Declaration of Human Rights influenced modern day feminism?
4. What political consequences could Middle Eastern countries experience by not advancing gender equality?