

Background Guide



United Nations Human Rights Council

Topic A: Death Penalties

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Chairs: Abigail Tzeggai & Laiba Ali

TAEMUN IX

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United Nations Human Rights Council

Hello Delegates!

I am Abigail Tzeggai, one of your Co-Chairs for the United Nations Human Rights Council. I am currently a senior at Thomas A. Edison High School. I am the co-founder of *Project Read*, a director/treasurer of the non-profit and Edison chapter *Period101*, Fairfax Global Youth Leader, Student Ambassador, and Edison's book club president. In my free time, I find it fun to come up with quirky words with my friends, try to places, and read. I have been in Model UN for two years now! After high school, I hope to study International Relations and pursue a career in diplomacy. I am ecstatic to Chair at TAEMUN this year! You can email me anytime.

Sincerely,

Abigail Tzeggai

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TAEMUN IX
United Nations Human Rights Council

Greetings Delegates!

My name is Laiba Ali, and I am one of your Chairs for the United Nations Human Rights Council this session. Currently a senior at Thomas A. Edison High School, I am a member of the Student Ambassador Program, Co-President of Period101, and the Edison Choir Librarian. This is my 4th year of Model UN. I am from Pakistan, and in my free time I enjoy reading, making and scrolling through tiktok, and watching whatever Netflix show is popular! I have attended many MUN conferences over the past couple of years in-person and online included. Personally, Model UN has helped me to improve my writing and research skills, overall, helping me in my classes. After high school, I see myself somewhere in the medical field. I can't wait to meet everyone and I am incredibly excited to Chair UNHRC this year! Feel free to email me if you have any questions.

Warm Regards,

Laiba Ali

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Topic A: Death Penalties

Background:

In many countries around the world, capital punishment, or the death penalty, is a contentious and highly debated practice. The death penalty is a state-sanctioned punishment that entails the deliberate taking of a life for various serious crimes. Numerous countries use the death penalty, and its application varies greatly from one to another. As the death penalty continues to be a global concern, it raises important questions about human rights, justice, and the role of the government. In some countries, the death penalty has been abolished, while in others, it is still applied to crimes such as murder, terrorism, espionage, and drug trafficking. Death penalty ethics encompass a wide range of issues. There are arguments both in favor and against its use, based on issues such as the possibility of executing innocent individuals, the fairness of legal systems, and the effectiveness of deterrence. International human rights organizations and advocates have consistently campaigned against the death penalty, citing concerns about its cruelty and the potential for errors of justice. Furthermore, the methods of execution, which include hanging, firing squad, electrocution, lethal injection, and beheading, vary from one country to another, and their humanity and reliability are also subjects of debate.

International bodies such as the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and others have played a critical role in shaping global norms and standards related to death penalty issues. The topic of the death penalty is a deeply controversial and significant matter that challenges countries to reevaluate their legal systems, values, and commitments to human rights. It remains a subject of continued scrutiny on the international level.

Current Situation:

In many countries, there are varying practices and policies regarding the death penalty, which remains a contentious issue. Death penalty bans and moratoriums are in place in some nations, while executions for various crimes remain active in others. China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the USA are among the nations with the highest number of known executions. As China, in particular, labels execution data as a state secret, it is difficult to determine the extent to which it uses the death penalty. Excluding China, a significant majority of reported executions occur in Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. The death penalty has been a topic of debate in the United States and is enforced differently in each state. Executions are still conducted in some states, but others have banned them. It remains a concern that wrongful convictions, racial disparities in sentencing, and capital punishment's ethics are being ignored. There is the death penalty in Iran for a wide range of offenses, including drug-related crimes. Human rights organizations have criticized execution methods, including hanging and stoning. Several crimes, including drug offenses and political opposition, continue to be punished by death in Saudi Arabia. This kingdom also continues to execute people by beheadings in public. Executions are still carried out in Belarus, the only country in Europe that does so. Executions in Japan are conducted without much public information or notice, leading to criticism over its lack of transparency and its application of international standards.

Capital punishment remains a complex and multifaceted issue, with varying practices and views worldwide. While progress has been made, with over half the world's countries abolishing the death penalty, challenges persist. The global community grapples with balancing national sovereignty, legal traditions, and human rights considerations. Delegates in the UNHRC must

collaboratively address the complex issues surrounding the death penalty, seeking viable solutions to move closer to the ultimate goal of its universal abolition.

Past UN Actions:

The United Nations has consistently addressed the death penalty issue through a series of resolutions, with Resolution A/RES/77/222 adopted on December 15, 2022, representing the latest effort in this ongoing endeavor. Throughout the years, the UN has underscored the irreversible and irreparable nature of any miscarriage or failure of justice associated with the death penalty. Previous resolutions, including 62/149, 63/168, 65/206, 67/176, 69/186, 71/187, 73/175, and 75/183, consistently called upon Member States to establish a moratorium on executions, with the ultimate objective of abolishing the death penalty.

As a crucial step toward global abolition, the UN recognizes the importance of the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In addition, the UN's past actions have stressed the importance of fair trials, access to legal counsel, and adherence to international human rights standards in applying the death penalty. Additionally, the resolutions advocate for progressive restrictions on the death penalty, particularly for vulnerable groups such as minors, pregnant women, and people with disabilities. The UN recognizes the vital role of human rights institutions and civil society in fostering regional, national, and local debates on the death penalty. In continuing to address the complexities surrounding the death penalty under the agenda item "Promotion and protection of human rights," the UN shows its commitment to addressing these issues.

Questions to Consider:

1. How can UNHRC ensure that the death penalty is applied fairly and without the risk of wrongful convictions?
2. What alternatives to the death penalty exist for addressing heinous crimes while respecting human rights?
3. What role does public opinion play in shaping a country's stance on the death penalty?

Useful Links:

- <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/02/1133977>
- <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/death-penalty/>
- [Death penalty | OHCHR](#)



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Topic B: Religious Persecution

Background:

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes religious freedom and the right to practice one's beliefs free from violence or judgment, including the ability to practice and worship individually or in a community. Religious persecution refers to acts of ill-treatment directed at individuals who are not accepted due to a particular religion. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism are among the most persecuted religions, with almost 90% of countries in the world holding some kind of persecution towards certain religious groups. In the most extreme instances, religious persecution can be described as mass genocide, concentration camps, and mass killings. The Holocaust serves as one of the most notable examples of widespread religious persecution in history. On a smaller yet still significant scale, the wrongful arrest or threats made against someone based on their religion is a clear violation of their rights. Sexual assault and torture can also be classified as religious persecution, depending on the motive.

The issue at hand largely stems from conflicts arising from differences in ethnicities, faiths, and beliefs. Often, nationalism becomes intertwined with religious convictions, leading some to fear that individuals practicing a different faith might pose a threat to their country or religious beliefs. This fear can result in hate crimes and acts of violence. Additionally, the role of governments is significant in this matter, as many authoritarian governments align themselves with a specific religion and may resort to persecuting individuals or groups who oppose their beliefs, resulting in oppression. More often than not, governments try to spread one religion, shutting out those whose views do not align. They may take control of religious practice communities, such as churches, mosques, temples, etc. Persecution can also take place at a

smaller familial or village scale as well. Many instances can be seen when someone of a younger generation decides to marry outside their faith or convert their religion to another, and they may get persecuted by their family.

Current Situation:

As previously said, religious persecution is extremely frequent in the vast majority of the world today. Eritrea, Iran, and China are among the most well-known and actively persecuted countries.

Sunni Islam, Eritrean Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Evangelical (Lutheran) churches are all recognized by the Eritrean government. Eritrean orthodox are the most common, accounting for more than half of the population, with Muslims accounting for roughly 30%. The government considers any religion other than these four to be illegal. Due to their religious beliefs, the Eritrean government stormed a prayer meeting in 2022 and detained seventeen ladies and twelve men. During the same year, it was also revealed that certain priests were placed under house arrest in order to avoid prosecution. Aside from 2022 reports, many citizens believe that the Eritrean government has a lack of transparency with their citizens and uses these tactics as a way to keep religious freedom out of their country.

Shia Islam is recognized as Iran's official religion. In Iran, everything, human, economic, and political, must revolve around the nation's religion. Punishment for any non-Muslims who attempt to convert to another faith includes amputation, flogging, and stoning. It has been observed that several minority groups within Iran have become imbalanced as a result of the disappearances of their members. Members of the Baha'i faith, in particular, are heavily targeted,

with enormous numbers of mass destruction to their houses and property. Many "non-believers" in Iran have also been sentenced to death.

Chinese legislation claims religious freedom but restricts it to "normal religious activities" without defining the term. Having said that, China has persecuted over a million Uyghur Muslims in "reeducation" camps since 2017. Uyghur Muslims are a Turkic-speaking minority in China's Xinjiang province. These "reeducation" camps are essentially concentration camps that torment and divide minorities. Furthermore, it was discovered that many of those prosecuted for terrorism in China are members of the Uyghur Muslim minority.

Past UN Actions:

Since 1981, international law has recognized the right to religious freedom and the absence of discrimination in its practice. It is explicitly stated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Rights that "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion." Having said that, ever since this law was passed, the UNHRC has fought to advance this. Following incidents of the Quran being burned, it was discovered in recent years that religious intolerance was growing in Sweden. The UNHRC made the decision to publish a resolution calling on nations to prosecute acts of violence motivated by religion. This was viewed as a negative concept by many westernized nations since it would restrict people's freedom of speech. In July, the resolution was approved by a vote.

Questions to Consider:

1. How can the UNHRC effectively help those being persecuted, without getting too involved in a nation's government?
2. What current situations today involve religious persecution along with other conflicts, and how can you combat that?
3. What type of aid will you use to help those who are actively in need of help from violent acts of religious persecution?

Useful Links:

- <https://jp.it.uk/issues/religious-persecution>
- <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-elimination-all-forms-intolerance-and-discrimination>
- <https://www.un.org/en/observances/religious-based-violence-victims-day>

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