Human Rights Committee
Background Guide
Hello Delegates!

My name is Simon Popkin and I am your chair. I am a senior majoring in History and Economics. My first model UN conference, in my first semester, inspired me to study history and economics. I have three years of collegiate Model UN experience and this is my second time as chair. Next semester I will be attending Georgetown Law School, concentrating in litigation.

My name is Danielle Sockin and I am so excited to be your co-chair for the Human Rights Committee. I am a sophomore double-majoring in Economics and Applied Mathematics and Statistics; I am also pursuing a double-minor in Political Science and Sustainability Studies. I am honored to be a part of Model UN as I continue to be challenged to not only learn about global issues, but to also think of solutions collaboratively.

We would like to welcome you to the Stony Brook University Model United Nations Human Rights Committee! The United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC) is composed of a body of independent experts that monitors the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by its State parties. All parties submit regular reports to the Committee on how the rights are being implemented; after receiving such reports, the Committee examines each, addresses its concerns, and forms recommendations for the State party. Additionally, the Human Rights Committee also publishes its interpretation of the content of human rights provisions, known as general comments on thematic issues or its methods of work. Essentially, the HRC is responsible for promoting as well as protecting human rights all over the world. In our version of this committee, we will be focusing on human rights issues specifically looking at the rights to family planning and a sustainable environment, two issues surrounding global population growth. There are a lot of human rights issues that have yet to be resolved and so, we
are seeking resolutions that can ease the situation, especially in the most negatively affected areas.

We look forward to the conference this Spring and are very eager to hear all of your opinions on the heating international human rights issues we have chosen. As global citizens, we all are responsible to respect and accept different cultures and races. If you have any concerns, please email us! We look forward to the conference and meeting all of you soon!

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Topic A: Protecting the Right to Autonomous Family Planning

Introduction:

Is it a human right to have as many kids as you want? The Human Rights Council is dedicated to defending the civil liberties of all of the world’s population. That being said, we must be assessed whether or not limiting population growth infringes upon human rights to reproduce and it must be determined whether or not the UN can intervene on issues of population growth. The trade-off to a relaxed family planning policy is that environmental sustainability is jeopardized. The underlying question is: Can a government limit the number of children a family can have? What about in countries where large families coincide with cultural values? Without preventative measures, populations grow out of control. With family planning, many countries have created an unequal sex ratio.

Topic B: Protecting the Right to Environmental Sustainability

Introduction:

The concept of sustainability centers around satisfying basic economic, social, and security needs now and in the future without undermining the natural resource base and environmental quality on which life depends. Based on research, the scientific community has warned political leaders about a myriad of issues that we could face either globally or in specific countries: without a change in CO2 emissions the climate will irreversibly change, global temperatures rising means worse weather conditions, resource depletion means less for future generations to produce with, population growth potentially increases pollution, and more
pollution results in low ambient quality as well as health issues. These are just some of the issues but they, as many others, bring up the question of whether or not we have the right to have a clean environment? Do things like fresh air and clean water, which will inevitably degrade as populations increase, constitute innate human rights? Do future generations have the right to a stable environment? If they do, does allowing unhindered population growth, in essence, impinge on some rights while not restricting others? We must work to address these sustainability aspects of human rights when it comes to population growth.

Case Study: China’s One-Child Policy

Background/History:

The Chinese government’s perceived need to limit China’s population growth can be traced back to 1949 after the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was established. Mao Zedong encouraged the population to multiply and create manpower, looking at children as a sign of prosperity and economic growth as they would largely supplement the workforce. In support of Mao Zedong’s views, the Chinese government released propaganda at the time condemning the use of contraceptives and even banned importing some. Soon, China’s population doubled. However, success was short-lived as more and more issues arose, with a major one being a strained food supply because resources could not keep up with capacity. And so, the government reversed its campaign against contraceptives with the hope that people would have fewer children and that the population growth rate would slow.

Forward to 1979 with a government, that under Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, introduced a one-child policy, or a collection of rules governing how many children married
couples could have. A famine had occurred before Xiaoping took power, wiping out millions of people and after realizing the benefits of a smaller population, Xiaoping has a desire to limit communist China’s population growth. However, he intended it to be a temporary measure of sorts, but it outlasted his plans, continuing on into the 21st century with its effects having a much further reach. Under the one-child policy which predominantly restricted those living in urban areas, most couples in China were only allowed to have one child. If a couple tried to have more than one child, they could face fines, possibly be forced into sterilizations, and females could be pressured to get abortions; in what could be seen as a major violation of human rights, people were threatened by enforcers with these threats as well as some monetary ones, such as losing their jobs in the civil service sector or having valuable things taken away.

Among one of the many effects of this policy was the strong distrust that came out of the Chinese government with people questioning their right to intrude on family planning matters. Another major impact that unfolded was due to the overwhelming desire to have male children over female ones because they would be better workers and carry on a family name; with this came a strong disdain for and a drastic rise in abortion, neglect, and abandonment when it came to female infants. In the aftermath, there has been a disparate ratio of males to females among babies and children, creating a very large gender imbalance.

**Current Situation:**

With these aforementioned issues among others, there was a relaxing of the one-child policy of 2013 and an eventual abandonment of it, in favor of allowing most couples to have two children. However, after several decades of the one-child policy, coupled with societal and
economic pressures to succeed, many couples decided to stop at one child or to have none at all. And with a national birth rate well below replacement level, the population has the ability to increase but this might not be able to outweigh the negative impacts that came about because of the one-child policy. For example, with such an older population since less and less people are being born, decreasing the amount of young people, it might be harder and harder for Africa to figure out ways to provide for its people. A significant portion of residents will be aging out of the labor force but that will not replenish either because even if people start having two children now, it will be well into the 2030s that they enter the workforce; there is a shortage of workers who can support China’s aging population and so, time will tell if this relaxed population control policy will be able to resolve this labor deficit. All in all, the Chinese government’s attempt to temporarily limit population growth manifested in a
multi-decade-spanning restriction on couples having more than one child and the effects will continue to be seen and need to be dealt with in the future.

Case Study: India

Current Situation:

India did not enforce a strict family planning policy. Their population has doubled in the last 30 years. Currently, 16% of the world’s population lives in India, a country with only 2.4% of the world’s total land area.

India’s population is projected to surpass China within the next 10 years. One-third of the population is under the age of 14. Since the population is young, the ratio of dependents: laborers is unusually high. More and more Indians are living in poverty. 70% of Indians live in the countryside. The average Indian family has three children. Overpopulation is depleting India’s limited resources and expediting the spread of contagious diseases. With more mouths to feed, India’s land is under more pressure than ever before. Some rural Indians move to cities in the hopes of a better life. They are met with the harsh reality that social mobility is generally...
unavailable to the poor. Large slums of unemployed and homeless have developed outside major cities. The conditions in the slums are unhygienic, leading to the spread of disease.

Case Study: Africa

Current Situation:

Africa is currently facing a population boom as it is expected to nearly quadruple its population by the end of the century, growing from about 1.1 to 4.2 billion. Currently, Africa is only home to one of the world’s ten most populous countries, Nigeria. However, in 2100, the UN believes Africa will be home to give: Nigeria, Congo, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Niger.

Moreover, economic growth and prosperity during the past decade have not cut fertility as much as they have done elsewhere, leading many to question the Africa’s sustainability. Currently, the way African countries utilize resources is not sustainable and as their populations increase, the problems may worsen: lack of access to clean water, loss of biodiversity as people disperse over the continent, as well as public health issues that continue to be compounded. These issues coupled with the large birth rates of many African countries have led many to question if steps need to be taken so that women begin having fewer children.
An example of an African country that has taken steps to decrease the birth rate is Ethiopia. In Ethiopia’s case the growth rate has been steadily declining and is projected to slow further in the future; whereas in the early 1990s, the average Ethiopian woman was having seven children and the country’s population was growing by 3.5% a year, currently, those two statistics have dropped to 4.1 children and 2.5% respectively. The fertility rate, furthermore, has fallen about 0.15 a year for the past decade, probably thanks in part due to a nationwide network of 38,000 “health-extension workers,” which is about one for every 2,500 people; these workers pay regular visits to each household within their locality and provide coaching on public health, specifically looking at topics from immunizations to hygiene as well as family planning. The UN further states that the share of Ethiopian women aged 15-49 who use some form of contraception has risen from 6% in 2000 to 40% last year. And so, Ethiopia is one of the African countries that has been able to somewhat counteract its high growth rate by putting in systems of health and family-planning education.

Issues to Discuss:

From a more global perspective, birth rates are of major issue to multiple countries and regions. In developing countries especially, such as those in Africa and a large portion of Asia, we see high birth rates which stand in contrast to the low birth rates of developed countries such as the United States. Overall, world population growth rates are declining, whereas overall population is increasing and trying to support this many people, and possibly more in the future, will undoubtedly bring about environmental disaster from increased pollution, manifesting in
climate change, rising sea levels, stronger storms, droughts, overfishing, species extinction, and overcrowding of cities. With developing countries, such as India and China, that already have a relatively high population, increasing it more and more leads us to questions about sustainability and environmental degradation. The larger populations become, the more and more resources that will be necessary to sustain people’s lifestyles; with this increased use of resources, countries’ carbon footprints will increase, negatively impacting the environment, and we will negatively be impacting the future as less and less resources will be available to them, so with current technology, people in the future will not be able to produce all necessary to provide for themselves either. And so, we might be disadvantaging ourselves if we continue to grow populations exponentially, especially in developing countries.

Taking this all, from the human rights aspects to the negative impacts, into consideration, we must find a better solution to population control, preventing countries from imposing such negative and detrimental control measures while also ensuring that they are able to curb the population so that we do not reach unsustainable levels and exceed the carrying capacity of our planet. Especially in a global society where overpopulation is rampant among poor populations typical of developing countries, we must find a solution to this pervasive issue before irreparable damage is done on the global stage or on a micro-level, within individual countries.

Focus Questions:
Is a government infringing on human rights by legislating family planning?
Does population growth affect environmental sustainability?
What policies should governments implement to combat pollution with respect to population growth?
Useful Sources:
An Introduction to Sustainable Development - Peter Rogers and Moana (book)


   http://www.english-online.at/geography/india/india-population-problems.htm


http://www.bordbia.ie/industry/manufacturers/insight/alerts/Pages/FormulamakersstocksriseasChinaabandonsonechildpolicy.aspx?year=2015&wk=36


http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1912861,00.html