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CHAIRS' LETTER

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to SOCHUM! We, Barak, Ariella, and Ori, are thrilled to be your chairs for this AtidMUN and are eager to see the passion and ideas you bring to our committee. The Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM) of the United Nations General Assembly addresses a wide range of global human rights and social issues. This committee has historically dealt with topics ranging from human rights abuses to public health crises. Your voice in the committee has the power to inspire real change.

As you prepare, remember that Model UN is about more than representing your country—it's about collaboration, empathy, and finding solutions that uplift all people. We're here to support you in every step of the process, and we can't wait to see the meaningful debates that will emerge during this conference.

If you ever need help or guidance, don't hesitate to reach out -

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Warm regards, Barak, Ariella, and Ori





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INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

The United Nations General Assembly Third Committee, also known as C3 or Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM), resides in New York City and usually consists of all 193 UN member states if they wish to attend. Its work focuses on human rights, humanitarian affairs, and social issues. Some of the critical points of the committee's research focus on the protection and empowerment of women and children, the preservation of Indigenous people's dignity and heritage, the rights of refugees, and the ultimate pursuit, the elimination of racism and discrimination.

Chapter IV of the United Nations Charter regarding the General Assembly outlines its powers and functions. The power of all UN General Assembly committees is limited to giving recommendations to States on international issues to attain peace, security, disarmament, development, safeguard human rights, and protect the environment. (SOCHUM, n.d.)



TOPIC A: DISCUSSING WOMEN'S RIGHTS FOR ABORTIONS

BACKGROUND TO THE ISSUE

Abortion - the deliberate termination of pregnancy.

The history of abortion is a complex and multifaceted narrative that spans centuries and cultures. It is a topic shaped by medical practices, legal frameworks, and societal or religious attitudes, reflecting the ever-evolving discourse around reproductive rights.

Historical Overview

Early History of Abortion Practices

The practice of abortion is not a modern phenomenon; it dates to ancient civilizations. In ancient Greece and Rome, abortion was not universally condemned, and various herbal remedies and medical procedures were used to terminate pregnancies. These methods, however, were risky and unregulated, often leading to severe complications for the women involved. Across many ancient societies, women's reproductive rights were tightly controlled by religious and social norms. Abortions were practiced discreetly, primarily shaped by the necessity of controlling population sizes and managing inheritance rights.

In contrast, early Christian and Islamic teachings began to regulate the practice more strongly. By the medieval period, many societies imposed restrictions on abortion, influenced by religious doctrine. The Catholic Church's stance, codified over centuries, has remained one of staunch opposition to abortion. Similarly, in many Islamic societies, although interpretations vary, abortion is generally permitted only under certain strict conditions (e.g., to save the life of the mother).

The 19th Century and Early Modern Era

In the 19th century, abortion became increasingly criminalized across Europe and the United States. The spread of professional medical standards and the rise of modern nation-states coincided with greater state control over health practices, including reproductive health. The



United States, for example, passed the Comstock Law in 1873, which criminalized the distribution of materials related to abortion and contraception.

In Europe, similar restrictions emerged, with many countries adopting punitive legal frameworks regarding abortion. These laws often reflected moral beliefs about the sanctity of life and the role of women in society, limiting reproductive autonomy. The rise of professional obstetrics and gynecology also shifted abortion practices from midwives and herbalists to regulated, often male-dominated, medical professions.

The 20th Century: A Turning Point

The 20th century has marked significant changes in abortion laws worldwide. The Soviet Union was the first modern country to legalize elective abortion care under Vladimir Lenin in 1920. This decision was part of a broader effort to grant women more control over their reproductive lives and to challenge patriarchal norms. However, the law was reversed under Stalin in the 1930s, only to be reinstated after his death. This early legalization reflected the growing recognition of women's rights as central to social policy.

In the West, abortion began to be seen not just as a moral or religious issue but as one related to public health and women's rights. The feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in the United States and Europe, challenged restrictive abortion laws, arguing that women had the right to control their bodies. This led to landmark legal cases and legislative changes. In the United States, the Supreme Court's decision in **Roe v. Wade (1973)** was a watershed moment, recognizing a woman's constitutional right to an abortion under the right to privacy. This ruling triggered similar legal movements worldwide, although the level of access and restrictions varied widely by country.

CURRENT SITUATION

In 2024, the landscape of abortion rights presents a patchwork of progress and challenges. Over 60 countries have liberalized their abortion laws in the past three decades, with Ireland, Nepal, and several Latin American nations leading the charge.

Countries with Liberal Abortion Laws

Many countries in Europe and the Americas now have relatively liberal abortion laws. In



countries like **France, Germany, Canada, and the United Kingdom**, abortion is legal under various conditions, often based on gestational limits (usually between 12 and 24 weeks). These laws typically allow for abortion on request in the early stages of pregnancy, with certain conditions or restrictions applying after specific time limits. Many countries with liberal abortion laws have integrated abortion services into their public health systems, making them free or heavily subsidized.

Restrictive Abortion Laws

In countries with restrictive abortion laws, abortion is only permitted under minimal circumstances, often with no government support or funding, leading women to seek illegal or unsafe procedures. **Poland**, for instance, has some of the strictest abortion laws in Europe. In 2020, the Polish Constitutional Tribunal ruled to ban nearly all abortions, sparking widespread protests. The law now only allows abortion in cases of rape, incest, or when the mother's life is at risk.

In **Sub-Saharan Africa**, restrictive abortion laws remain widespread, and access to safe abortion is limited. According to the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, approximately **20 million unsafe abortions** occur every year, predominantly in countries with restrictive laws. These unsafe abortions are responsible for **13% of global maternal deaths**.

Abortion in the Middle East and South Asia

In the **Middle East** and **South Asia**, abortion laws are also generally restrictive, often influenced by religious teachings. In **Iran** and **Saudi Arabia**, abortion is only allowed under minimal circumstances, such as to save the mother's life. Similarly, in **India**, although abortion is legal under a range of circumstances, access to safe procedures is often limited by socio-economic factors and regional healthcare disparities.

Post-Roe v. Wade in the United States

The **United States** has been a focal point in the global abortion debate.

Roe v. Wade was a landmark decision by the United States Supreme Court in 1973, which effectively legalized abortion nationwide. The case recognized a woman's constitutional right to choose whether to continue a pregnancy, setting a precedent for abortion rights in the U.S. and influencing legal frameworks around the world. The Court held that a woman's right to choose to have an abortion was part of the broader constitutional right to privacy, which is implied in the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. This clause guarantees that



no state shall “deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.” The Court concluded that the “liberty” protected by this clause includes a woman’s right to make decisions about her own body, including the decision to have an abortion.

However, the Court also recognized that this right was not absolute and had to be balanced against the state's interests in protecting both the health of the mother and the potential life of the fetus. This resulted in the court’s three-trimester framework, which defines the woman's rights and the state’s interest and responsibilities at each trimester of the pregnancy. The decision had a global impact on the women’s rights movement. Feminist activists hailed it as a victory for reproductive autonomy, arguing that the ability to control one's reproductive health was fundamental to women’s equality and freedom.

Opposers to the decisions claimed that the ruling allowed for the destruction of innocent lives. The “Pro-life” movement gained considerable traction, especially amongst religious groups.

In 2022, the Supreme Court overturned the case, stating that the Constitution does not confer a right to abortion and that the issue should be left to individual states to decide. This led to a dramatic divergence in abortion access across the country, with states like **California** and **New York** maintaining liberal access. In contrast, states like **Texas** and **Alabama** implemented near-total bans. This decision also affected abortion law debates worldwide. Many countries look up to the United States as a model for liberty and justice.

Latin America and The Green Wave

Abortion laws in Latin America have historically been among the most restrictive in the world, primarily influenced by the **Catholic Church** and **conservative political structures**. In many countries, abortion was only permitted in minimal circumstances, such as cases of **rape, incest**, or when the **mother's life was in danger**. In others, like **El Salvador** and **Honduras**, abortion was utterly banned, even when the woman’s life was at risk. Women who sought abortions under these circumstances faced not only health risks but also severe criminal penalties, including lengthy prison sentences.



The Green Wave

(Marea Verde in Spanish) is a powerful feminist movement that has emerged across Latin America in the past two decades, advocating for the legalization and decriminalization of abortion. The movement has had profound political, social, and legal impacts, particularly in countries where abortion laws have historically been restrictive. The symbol of the Green Wave—the green bandana—has become synonymous with the fight for reproductive justice and women's rights across the region.

The Green Wave has transformed the landscape of reproductive rights in Latin America and inspired similar movements worldwide. Activists in countries such as **Italy**, **Ireland**, and **Poland** have adopted the green bandana to symbolize solidarity in their fights for reproductive rights. In many ways, the Green Wave has become a global movement for women's bodily autonomy and reproductive freedom.

The Green Wave has become one of the most significant feminist movements of the 21st century, challenging deeply entrenched patriarchal structures and transforming the legal landscape for reproductive rights across Latin America. Its victories in countries like Argentina, Mexico, and Colombia have inspired women across the world to fight for their right to safe, legal, and accessible abortion services. However, the movement continues to face strong opposition, and its work is far from complete. As the Green Wave continues to spread, its impact on the global conversation surrounding abortion rights will likely only grow stronger.

KEY ISSUES FOR DEBATE

Reproductive Autonomy vs. Foetal Rights

One of the most contentious issues in the abortion debate is the conflict between a woman's right to bodily autonomy and the rights of the foetus.

Pro-choice advocates argue that women should have complete control over their reproductive decisions, including the right to terminate a pregnancy. A leading reason for abortions could be financial concerns, with many feeling they cannot support a child economically. Timing is another factor; some may feel they are not ready for parenthood or that it's not the right time in their life for a child. Others consider the quality of life they can provide for a child or the



impact on their existing family. Health concerns for the mother or potential anomalies in the fetus can also be reasons for choosing abortion. Ultimately, the decision is deeply personal and varies widely among individuals.

On the other hand, pro-life cites the belief that life begins at conception, making abortion equivalent to taking a human life, which they view as morally wrong. They may also argue that abortion undermines the sanctity of human life and that society should not permit one individual to harm another without consequences. Personal, religious, and cultural beliefs deeply influence these views. Delegates must consider how these competing rights are balanced in their respective countries and how international human rights frameworks address the issue.

Body vs. State: The Ethics of Choice

In some cultures, the preference for male children leads to sex-selective abortion, raising ethical questions about gender discrimination and the value of female lives. Women may be pressured into having abortions by partners, families, or social systems; how can we guarantee that abortion is a genuine choice?

Another factor that should be considered is the ethics of abortion in cases of rape, incest, or when the mother's life is at risk presents complex moral considerations. In cases of sexual violence, abortion is often viewed as a way to alleviate further trauma.

Public Health and Unsafe Abortions

Race, class, and inequality intersect with abortion access. Wealthier women often have better access to abortion services than those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Such factors may lead to self-abortion due to illegality or lack of funds. Attempting to terminate a pregnancy without medical assistance carries significant risks that can have severe health consequences.

One of the most immediate dangers is infection, potentially leading to life-threatening sepsis. Excessive bleeding can result in shock or death if untreated. Incomplete abortions, where not all fetal tissue is removed, can cause prolonged bleeding and infection. Additionally, using unsafe objects or substances can cause damage to internal organs, which may require surgery and could lead to infertility.



Beyond the physical dangers, self-abortion can also lead to emotional trauma, with women often experiencing guilt, isolation, or fear. In many regions, legal consequences, such as imprisonment or fines, further complicate the situation, preventing women from seeking medical help when complications arise. All these risks highlight the critical need for access to safe and legal abortion services to protect women's health and well-being.

Delegates should consider how public health arguments intersect with moral and legal frameworks.

The Role of International Organizations

International organizations, including the **United Nations** and **WHO**, have played a significant role in advocating for reproductive rights, including access to safe abortion services. However, not all countries agree with these positions, leading to tension in international forums. For example, some **Catholic-majority** and **Muslim-majority** countries have resisted calls to liberalize abortion laws, citing religious and cultural values. How should international organizations balance their advocacy for women's rights with respect for national sovereignty and cultural differences?

Socioeconomic Factors and Access to Abortion

In many parts of the world, access to abortion is not just a legal issue but also an economic one. In countries where abortion is technically legal, women may still face significant barriers to accessing services, such as high costs, lack of healthcare infrastructure, and social stigma. Delegates should consider how socio-economic factors affect abortion access in their own countries and whether international aid or development programs could play a role in improving access to reproductive healthcare.

CONCLUSION

The issue of abortion rights continues to be one of the most divisive and complex topics in global politics. While significant progress has been made in many countries to liberalize abortion laws and improve access to reproductive healthcare, challenges remain, particularly in regions where restrictive laws and cultural opposition persist.

The conversation around abortion rights is far from over. Still, the current trajectory suggests a growing recognition of the need for safe, legal, and accessible abortion services as a



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cornerstone of women's rights and public health. As the world continues to grapple with this complex issue, the voices of women and activists remain crucial in shaping a future where reproductive rights are upheld and respected globally.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How do religious, cultural, and ethical beliefs influence abortion laws and policies in your country?
2. What role should international organizations like the United Nations play in promoting or regulating abortion rights globally?
3. Where should the line be drawn between a woman's right to choose and societal or state interests?
4. How does the legal status of abortion in your country align with international human rights standards?
5. How do socio-economic factors affect access to safe and legal abortion in your country?
6. What public health implications arise from unsafe abortions, and how can countries address these issues?
7. Should abortion be considered a fundamental human right, or is it subject to national sovereignty and cultural relativism?
8. How does your country balance women's rights with the protection of fetal life?

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TOPIC B: RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS IN CLASSROOMS: INDOCTRINATION OR A MUST?

BACKGROUND

Religion has been a cornerstone of human civilization for millennia, shaping cultures, moral values, laws, and social norms. As societies developed, the question of how religious teachings intersect with education became more relevant.

In many historical contexts, **religion was integral to education**. Ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Greece, and Mesopotamia incorporated religious practices into schooling, believing religious knowledge was essential for moral development. In medieval Europe, **church-run schools** were the primary learning institutions, blending religious instruction with basic literacy.

However, with the rise of the **Enlightenment** in the 18th century, the role of religion in education began to be questioned, leading to a shift towards **secular education**. This process continued into the modern era as countries worldwide began to separate religious instruction from state education systems. Today, the role of spiritual teachings in classrooms is one of the most controversial topics in global education, with views differing significantly between countries, cultures, and legal systems.

DEFINING THE DEBATE – THE LINE BETWEEN EDUCATION AND INDOCTRINATION

Before divulging information regarding different religious education practices or key arguments in this debate, it's important to understand what we define as “education” and “indoctrination.”

Education and indoctrination are quite similar in their execution and aim—both are made to pass on ideas and thought processes to younger generations with the hopes that they will grow up with the same morals and ideals as us. It would be all the better if their ideals were stronger and their morals “more just.” However, their differences lie in intent.

For this committee, education is a teaching method that fosters critical thinking, encourages students to question, analyze, and form independent opinions, and presents diverse perspectives. It is carried out to allow children to engage with different ideas without being coerced into a particular belief system. The main idea at the center of education is skepticism, which it wishes to promote.

Indoctrination is contrary to education in that it discourages skepticism and encourages obedience in action and thought. It involves the imposition of a particular viewpoint picked by a



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governing body, with little to no critical engagement or dissent. Indoctrination mocks those who subscribe to different beliefs or certain “out-groups,” often depicting them as lesser both in body and mind. History is not short of examples; we encourage you to think back to race theory in 1940s Germany or the many religious wars throughout humanity.

The line between religious education and indoctrination has been an integral part of the debate around education ever since the mid-nineteenth century with the emergence of public schooling. You, the delegates, must come to a resolution on what indoctrination looks like and if religious education fits the bill or not. You must determine which kind of religious education is acceptable, and which is not. But first, a quick overview of different religious education practices around the world:

APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS

STRICT SECULARISM

In countries that embrace strict secularism, there is a clear separation between religion and state, which extends to the education system. The goal is to ensure that schools remain neutral spaces, free from religious influence. Public schools in these countries do not provide religious instruction; spiritual symbols and practices are sometimes banned in school settings.

France is a leading country in this approach, where the principle of *laïcité* ensures the freedom of public institutions from the influence of the church. Religion is wholly separated from all state institutions, including public schools. Religious education is not part of the curriculum, and wearing religious symbols such as crosses or headscarves is prohibited in public schools. This policy aims to promote equality and maintain neutrality in a multicultural society. However, it is essential to mention that it has been controversial among religious communities.

Another significant country with this approach is the United States, where the First Amendment ensures the separation of church and state, prohibiting public schools from endorsing or teaching any religion. Religious instruction is not allowed, although academic courses about world religions or the historical impact of religion may be taught. The legal principle of neutrality means that schools cannot hold religious ceremonies, and students cannot be required to participate in religious activities.

MORAL AND ETHICAL EDUCATION (NON-RELIGIOUS ALTERNATIVES)

Secular moral and ethical education has become an essential alternative to religious instruction in countries like France, Australia, and Singapore. This method teaches students ethical principles,



civic responsibilities, and human rights without grounding lessons in any particular religion. Such programs include discussions of real-world ethics, debates on moral issues, community service projects, and analyses of literature and media. The goal is to engage students actively in moral reasoning rather than lecturing on ethical principles.

Proponents of this method argue that it fosters social cohesion in diverse societies and develops critical thinking. It prepares students for ethical challenges and encourages mutual understanding among different backgrounds. However, implementation faces challenges such as balancing neutrality with core values, addressing objections from religious groups, training teachers on sensitive topics, and assessing moral development outcomes.

Examples of moral and ethical education include France's "Moral and Civic Education," Australia's "Ethical Understanding," and Singapore's "Character and Citizenship Education." All approaches aim to provide ethical education through non-religious means.

OPT-IN OR OPT-OUT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Certain countries adopt a flexible approach where students (or their parents) can choose whether to participate in religious education. This opt-in or opt-out model balances religious instruction and individual freedom, often based on parental choice or student preference.

Ireland is an example of such a system. In Ireland, the Education Act of 1998 prioritizes parents' right to determine their children's religious education by providing public school students the right to opt out of religious instruction and ceremonies contrary to their or their parent's conscience. As such, schools are required to provide alternatives for students who opt out of religious instruction. Furthermore, as students get older, they have more say in whether to participate in religious activities and in which kind.

Moreover, New Zealand has recently shifted from an opt-out to an opt-in system for religious instruction in state primary and intermediate schools. The Education and Training Act of 2020 requires schools that offer religious instruction to have signed consent from a parent before placing a child in such classes.

While opt-in/opt-out systems aim to provide flexibility, they can still face challenges. These may include logistical issues in providing alternative activities, potential social pressures on students who opt out, and debates over the role of religion in public education.



PLURALISTIC AND MULTIFAITH EDUCATION (TEACHING ABOUT RELIGION)

Countries with a pluralistic approach to religious education aim to teach students about different world religions. Rather than promoting a single faith, these countries include academic instruction on various religious traditions in the curriculum. Exposing students to multiple beliefs fosters mutual respect, cultural literacy, and tolerance.

In the United Kingdom, religious education is compulsory in state schools, but it is designed to cover multiple faiths, including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and others. Schools must teach a broad and balanced curriculum that reflects the country's religious diversity. Collective worship, typically of a broadly Christian nature, is also required in most schools, though parents can withdraw their children from these activities. The case in Germany is similar, and students can receive instructions in their faith. The teachers for these classes are provided by the state and are aimed to encourage religious freedom and pluralism.

STATE-ENDORSED RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

Public schools often include state-endorsed religious instruction in countries where a specific religion is closely tied to national identity or governance. In these systems, religious education is a formal part of the curriculum. It is typically mandatory for students (although in a few countries, there may be exceptions for religious minorities or opt-out provisions).

In these countries, religious education is seen as central to moral development and the preservation of values. Often, religious education is tied to maintaining the country's spiritual values. There is little to no room for religious pluralism in the classroom, and the state directly supervises religious instruction to ensure it aligns with the nation's religion (for example, Saudi Arabia and Iran).

KEY ISSUES FOR DEBATE

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE VS. CULTURAL IDENTITY

The tension between the separation of church and state and the role of religion in shaping national and cultural identity is a complex and contentious issue in many countries, particularly regarding education.

On one side, proponents of strict separation argue that public education should remain secular to ensure all students' equality and freedom of belief. Their stance states that the state is interested in neutrality as it protects religious minorities from discrimination, allows students to develop critical thinking skills, and respects the diversity of beliefs among multicultural societies.



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On the other hand, many religious communities and nations view education as a crucial means of transmitting cultural values and heritage, including religious beliefs. They argue that religious education provides societies with longstanding moral and ethical foundations with culture and tradition – thus preserving an integral part of a nation's identity and history.

Some nations have attempted to find a middle ground, such as Germany, the UK, and the US, with varying degrees of state intervention in religious education—such as opt-in and opt-out programs and multifaith religious education. Such compromises wish to respect both neutrality and religion. However, they often face criticism from secular and religious groups, highlighting the ongoing challenge of balancing these competing interests.

INDOCTRINATION VS. MORAL EDUCATION

Critics of religious instruction in public schools often argue that it can become a form of indoctrination, where children are exposed to only one set of beliefs without room for questioning or alternative viewpoints. This is particularly problematic in countries with dominant state religions, where religious teachings are intertwined with national identity and patriotism. On the other hand, supporters of religious education argue that teaching students about their faith helps them develop a moral and ethical framework essential for navigating the complexities of life. Of course, others could claim that moral values and ethics can be taught in different ways, such as secular philosophy. Furthermore, many argue that studying religion enables students to make reasoned and informed judgments on religion and moral and social issues.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN EDUCATION

In increasingly multicultural societies, public schools are challenged to respect their students' diverse religious backgrounds. Some countries offer religious instruction in multiple faiths to foster mutual respect and understanding. However, this can lead to logistical and legal challenges, especially in countries with smaller religious minorities. To what extent is a government responsible for introducing a variety of religions? How can minority religions be addressed without marginalizing their beliefs?

CONCLUSION

The issue of religious education is far from consensus, as different countries hold different positions, and opinions often vary even within countries. It involves core values and ideology, beliefs, morals, ethics, and philosophical ideas regarding the country's role in educating its



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people. While most countries agree that teaching morals and ethics is essential, the debate lies on how it should be done and what distinguishes education from indoctrination.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is the role of religion in my country? Consider cultural, constitutional, and religious aspects.
2. Is there a wide variety of religions in my country? Is my country interested in religious pluralism?
3. Should the state be responsible for regulating the content of religious instruction to ensure neutrality?
4. How can countries balance the freedom of religion and freedom from religion?
5. How should states handle the teaching of religious beliefs that contradict modern scientific understanding?
6. How can schools promote understanding and respect between students of different backgrounds?
7. Even in secular societies, is there a place for religious education to teach ideas of ethics and philosophy?
8. What is the target of religious education in your country?
9. Where does the line pass between education and indoctrination?

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