



GeMUN
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DISEC Topic 1

The term “child soldiers” refers to children who, even though they have not yet legal age, are employed in either official or non-official armies. Despite the term being commonly associated with the use of young people in actual battles, child soldiers are just as often assigned to other types of tasks such as mine laying, scouting, surveillance and deliverance of resources. UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) considers as “child soldiers” those who are less than eighteen years old.

This phenomenon, although widespread in many parts of the world, is mostly present in Africa, especially in countries such as Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and Sudan, where they are used in armed conflicts. In Uganda, the Lord’s Resistance Army was composed mainly of kidnapped children.

Child soldiers commit atrocities without realizing it while under the effect of harmful drugs given by adults, or they have been forced to do so.



DISEC topic 2

Reducing the illicit production and trade of arms among youngsters.

The arms industry, which produces and sells military equipment, is by far the largest producer of small arms. Most arms trade from the industry takes place legally, to a country's armed forces or private individuals (appropriately regulated). However, illegal arms traffic is a major problem worldwide: countries which experience political instability often have high rates of illegal arms traffic.

Small arms* are readily available in many countries. It is estimated that there are 500 million small arms worldwide (or roughly one for every 14 people). Young people can easily acquire and carry them because they are small, easy to hide and relatively cheap.

The illicit trade of weapons has contributed to create more than 300.000 child soldiers worldwide, even though it is just a factor in the problem of child soldiers. The increased availability of small arms has caused an alarming increase in deaths since the 1990s. 2 million children have been killed, 5 million have become disabled and 12 million homeless.

There is high demand for armaments in the Middle East, while the illegal trade starts mainly in Asian countries such as China or Iran. Countries which produce weapons often sell illegal arms with the tacit approval of their governments.

Criminal gangs and mafias also play a significant role in the illegal trade of small arms. In Guatemala and other Central American states, drug guerrillas are even armed with illegally acquired tanks and attack helicopters.

*small arms: weapons which an individual soldier can carry



DISEC topic 3

Combating terrorism in Latin America.

Terrorism has existed in Latin America since 1962 in Venezuela, when a violent terror campaign was launched by the Leftist Revolutionary movement against President Rómulo Betancourt.

In the mid-1960s (a couple of years after the Venezuelan incident), the “trend” of terrorism spread in Brazil, Peru, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. Moreover, a large terrorist group (FARC) was created in Colombia in the early 1970s. After this, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala experienced extremely violent terror acts.

At present, the situation is more complicated - the countries have changed; there are more democratically elected governments and debt is significantly lower. With those improvements in democracy and economy, one expects the situation to be better for the people, therefore reducing terrorism. To the contrary, poverty in Latin America is much more than in the '80s and '90s. The spread of democracy did not create more opportunities for most people as was originally presumed and to aggravate this fact, economic inequality (measured by the Gini index) in Latin America remains the highest in the world. These are the main sources of political upheaval and terror acts in Latin America.

Moreover, guerrillas and terrorist groups which initially started as Communist revolutionary groups (such as FARC in Colombia or Shining Path in Peru) are increasingly becoming large, well-armed gangs based on the illegal drug traffic. Peru is the world's largest illegal exporter of cocaine, followed closely by Colombia.

Creating better living conditions and increasing government reliability are a crucial part in eradicating terrorism in Latin America.



SOCHUM topic 1

Ensuring children's rights to a family.

The family, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares, is the fundamental and natural group of every society. The family is an important vehicle for the transmission of knowledge, values, attitudes and practices which are essential for the survival of a culture; that's why children have the right to grow up in a family.

The estimated number of orphans in the world is 150.000.000, most of them in Africa. Today there are also children living in institutions, children in prisons, children living in households headed by children (over 100.000), children living on the streets (approximately 7.000). The more widespread causes are: inability to feed the entire family and so children have been turned out onto the streets, natural disasters, armed conflicts, diseases. Possible consequences are: discrimination, inadequate care, abuse, exploitation and trafficking.

Inadequate care environments can impair children's emotional and social development and leave them more vulnerable.

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/family/documents/rc_pc_family_doc_20001115_family-human-rights_en.html

<http://www.unicef.org/>

http://www.hrea.org/index.php?doc_id=425



SOCHUM topic 2

Devising measures to protect cultural, ethnic and religious minorities with special focus to youth problems.

A minority (or subordinate group) is a group (ethnic, culture, religion and/or language) which is distinct from the dominant group in a society and which has less power. Although the word 'minority' suggests that they represent a small percentage of the population, this is not necessarily true: in South Africa under apartheid, for example, the whites were the dominant group and the blacks the minority, even though there were more blacks than whites. A minority has these defining characteristics, according to sociologist Joe Feagin:

- Discrimination and subordination
- Physical and/or cultural traits that set them apart from the dominant group
- A collective identity
- Rules about who belongs and who does not to the minority
- A tendency to marry within the group

Minorities exist in most of the world's countries, although the treatment varies depending on the country and the culture. Minorities may suffer discrimination at the hands of the state or of the people. In many countries, they are not even allowed to follow their traditional customs. In about one third of the world's countries, for example, there are serious limitations on freedom of religion, according to Minority Rights Group International.

Young people may be subject to forced conversion in some societies in an attempt to eliminate religious differences, or they may not have access to higher education and administrative posts because of their minority status. They may be forced to assimilate the culture of the dominant group or are denied education in their minority group's language.

Useful link for further research: <http://minorityvoices.org>



SOCHUM Topic 3

Enforcing the right to a primary education

The right to a primary education is enshrined by Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stating that *“Everyone has the right to education.”* In 2000, the Millennium Summit of the United Nations declared ensuring such right at a global level and without any form of discrimination part of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

It is widely accepted that education is the main tool through which cultural, social, moral and ethical values are transmitted from one generation to the next. As such, education is a fundamental tool in developing one person’s character and allowing them to reach their full potential. As a whole, the prosperity and success of a society depend on the qualities of its members, and such qualities can be developed through proper forms of training.

As of today, despite the fact that illiteracy rates have diminished in recent decades, there remains much work to do. Children living in rural areas and developing countries still do not have access to basic primary education, whereas there still exist families who, despite living in economically developed countries, cannot afford to pay for higher education.



SPECON Topic 1

Assisting the development of health systems worldwide

In recent years, health care and public health have improved dramatically worldwide, with the extermination of some diseases such as smallpox and polio and the increase of average life expectancy worldwide by 35% in the last 50 years. However, it varies widely, from 83 in Japan to 32 in Swaziland. This is mainly (but not exclusively) due to varying health conditions of the environment and the availability of health care. Some of the main problems that remain to be solved include:

- Open sewage and contaminated drinking water
- The scarcity of doctors and of medicine
- Malnutrition and unhealthy eating habits
- A high degree of infant and maternal mortality
- The spread of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa
- Dangerous and unhealthy working conditions
- iodine deficiency (in many countries this has been easily solved by adopting iodized salt universally)
- Sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS
- Malaria and related diseases
- The relative unavailability or cost of health insurance
- Epidemics
- Lack of vaccination for common diseases
- Famines and wars (see Somalia)

Many measures simply require higher public awareness, others need state funding. The UN is trying to take serious action with regard to these problems: 3 of the 8 Millennium Development Goals deal with health (reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases) and several UN bodies (notably FAO and UNICEF) have undertaken aid and assistance programs to the countries which need them most.



SPECON Topic 2

Combating youth abuse

Childhood abuse is a complex phenomenon that consists of actions that harm children or put them at risk. It is the product of many different causes such as unwanted pregnancies, social and financial problems and unemployment. They are the most common causes for the increasing rate of child abuse. The American surgeon C. Everett Koop stated that “the starting point for the effective child abuse programming is pregnancy planning”.

There are four forms of youth abuse: physical, sexual, and psychological and neglect. Physical maltreatment involves beating, biting, shaking or burning children. This can happen to children who are used as slave laborers (or underage laborers anyway) or children who do not have a formal family. Sexual abuse includes any forced sexual activity and sexual stimulation that is not appropriate to a child’s age. While psychological violence consists in yelling at children, putting them down or blaming them for everything, neglect is equal to ignoring a child’s needs, both physical (e.g. food, shelter, clothes and medical care) and emotional.

The majority of abused children suffer emotionally rather than physically: they may become depressed, think of committing (or even commit) suicide, become addicted to drugs or alcohol, run away or abuse others (contributing to bullying).



SPECON Topic 3

Fighting youth malnutrition.

Malnutrition is defined as the result of a prolonged unbalanced or insufficient diet. This condition can be divided into two subsets:

- Quantitative malnutrition: Resulting from protracted scarce or absent intake of essential nutrients;
- Qualitative malnutrition: Occurring when there is a deficit in one particular type of nutrient, despite the overall amount of food being substantial in quantity.

The roots of malnutrition are commonly found in poverty, where economic conditions do not allow regular or sufficient access to food supplies. According to the World Health Organization, a total of six million children die each year for malnutrition; of these, under-weight births cause 2.2 million deaths, scarce breastfeeding 1.4 million whereas other deficiencies (Eg: vitamins or zinc) a further one million.

Effects of malnutrition, although not to be underestimated in adults, are even harsher on developing children and, if not properly treated, can lead to permanent damage. Among these, we include cardiovascular diseases, starvation, impaired physical and mental development, blindness and osteoporosis.

Solutions which have been implemented include modernizing agriculture techniques in developing countries, implementation of fortified nutrients (Eg: Golden Rice) and distribution of essential nutrients (Eg: vitamins and minerals) through sachet powders.



EnvCom Topic 1

Implementing measures to prevent climatic and environmental changes caused by pollution

Pollution affects the environment and the climate in which we live. One component of pollution is the disposal of everyday materials, such as plastic, which are not biodegradable. Another component is the burning of fossil fuels and other substances that give off harmful gases – such as carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and others, which cause the greenhouse effect. The combustion of fossil fuels (in factories, power plants and vehicles) is the prevalent cause of pollution in the atmosphere. There are other forms of pollution, such as the dumping of toxic or radioactive waste, open sewage, leakage of fertilizers (which causes algal bloom in rivers and lakes, seriously affecting the ecosystem) or misuse of fertilizers, which causes desertification and the ‘dust bowl’ effect. Oil spills at sea are also a source of pollution, affecting wildlife in the radius of hundreds of kilometers.

The burning of fossil fuels and other substances releases gases which prevent the Earth from dissipating its heat to space, thus raising the global average temperature. This has far-reaching effects on the environment such as the melting of the polar ice caps (leading to a rise in sea levels) and changes in the atmospheric wind patterns (which cause some areas to record different temperatures and different amounts of rainfall).

This has an effect on plant and animal life worldwide. Many species in Africa and South America are driven from their habitat because of desertification. Algal bloom caused by leakage of fertilizers severely affects fish and other animal life in rivers and lakes. Global warming and climate change caused by greenhouse gases means that plants and animals are exposed to different conditions to those they are evolved for, and some go extinct as a result.



EnvCom Topic 2

The question of nuclear contamination in Eastern Asia

Nuclear contamination, as a source of ionizing radiation, can be severely harmful to an environment or its inhabitants. Although very large doses of radiation (such as those resulting from prolonged close contact with a radioactive material) can lead to death by radiation sickness, there is no minimum 'safe' amount of radiation – any amount of it is potentially harmful, just like smoking cigarettes. Effects of nuclear contamination on humans include: headaches and nausea, increased risk of cancer, and a higher rate of birth defects.

Nuclear contamination in Eastern Asia may arise from: natural sources, such as radon gas, the unsafe dumping of nuclear waste from power plants, and radiation from nuclear accidents (such as Fukushima Dai-ichi) or nuclear bomb tests and attacks (such as Hiroshima or Nagasaki).

In the region of Tibet in China, several uranium deposits have been located and mines have been opened. In addition, nuclear waste has been dumped there, and there are unconfirmed reports that this has led to contamination among the local population.

In Japan, the recent Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear disaster has contaminated the areas near it, and an exclusion zone with a radius of 20km around the plant has been placed. Large amounts of radioactive material have been dumped into the sea: in June 2011 levels of radioactive iodine greater than 200,000 times the background level were found in the sea near Fukushima.



EnvCom Topic 3

Youth education aimed at environmental sustainability

Environmental Education is an educational strategy which works by connecting people with the environment in order to develop positive attitudes for the conservation of our environmental heritage.

The concept of environmental education stems from the early 20th century when it was understood that human activities were affecting the environment. The concept became popular in the 1960s and 1970s and, in 1970, Earth Day was established by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) to promote environmental awareness. The T'bilisi Declaration of 1977 firmly laid the foundation for environmental education.

Many scientists see profound changes in living conditions on Earth, brought about by global warming and the greenhouse effect. They predict changes in climate worldwide, the melting of glaciers and of polar ice caps, with serious consequences for the ecosystem. Changes have already been observed in sea levels, leading to the disappearance of small islands and the flooding of coastal areas, as in Bangladesh.

The participation of youth in environmental protection is essential to safeguard the ecology of our planet because they are the future and if they learn from an early age with the right precautions, we can improve their future quality of life.

Useful links for further research:

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/ch05.pdf>

<http://www.unep.org/>



ECOSOC Topic 1

Combating child labour and underage work

Underage labor is the employment of young people, usually interpreted as those who have not yet reached legal working age, in regular and perpetuating labor activities. Such practice, while having in fact declined over the past decades, is still widespread today and cases of underage work are constantly being reported.

The reasons behind this form of child exploitation are numerous. It should firstly be noted that cases of underage labor are most common in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs), or other areas where families cannot achieve economic sustainability. Children are therefore employed as soon as possible, and forced into providing financial aid to their family or elders.

Such activities pose severe risks to the child. Children are most often employed in hazardous jobs without sufficient precautions and with a lack of training. Mining, working with pesticides, chemicals and other dangerous substances as well as machinery are among the most common jobs children are assigned to. Often, they are also assigned to families as household servants. UNICEF estimates that one out of six children in the world is exploited for financial gain.

Moreover, underage labor interferes with a child's education and schooling, preventing him or her from acquiring basic fundamental skills and developing his or her own person. At work, children are often victims of harassment and other forms of abuse, the effects such condition can have on the psychological and emotional development of a child are not to be underestimated.



ECOSOC Topic 2

Preventing age-based discrimination

Nowadays, getting old signifies an entry into a phase of life which is full of negative aspects. The term “ageism” was coined in 1969 by Robert Butler who compared age discrimination to discrimination based on gender, creed and ethnic identity. He hoped that by creating this term, the discussion would come out into the open and people would be aware of this issue.

This phenomenon is not criticized because it is still considered socially acceptable. Studies show that the more developed a country, the worse elder people are treated. Ageism is spread world wide, but the USA and the UK are the most affected.

Other cultures, instead, treat elders with respect and admiration: in South African tribes, for instance, getting older is considered a step toward “the real world of the spirits”. In China and Japan older people are treated with great respect. Australia is developing negative attitudes towards the elderly as well.

Everybody experiences ageism unless they die at an early age.

In some countries of the world campaigns against ageism have been initiated. Even though ageism is a problem which is present in all countries, some of them are far more problematic than others.



ECOSOC topic 3

Devising measures to combat the illegal trade and consumption of drugs and alcohol.

Until the end of the 19th Century, the narcotics trade was legitimate business, especially since drugs have played an important medicinal role in the human society. In the early 20th century, positions on drug and alcohol use started to change: since then, drugs trade has become a frustrating feature of the international scene.

During recent decades the international drugs trade began to take on the key features recognized today. Moreover, nowadays, according to a United Nations survey, the amount spent on illegal drugs is growing exponentially. Drugs are produced and consumed domestically, but much of the drugs trade takes place between states, and this is the reason why the international control system is based on cooperation. In 1991, in order to coordinate UN drug control activities, the UN International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) was established.

In order to prevent alcohol abuse, one of the most serious problems among young people have been different policy interventions, such as alcohol taxes and raising the minimum legal drinking age, but, apparently, efficient measures have not yet been devised.



MedCon Topic 1

The question of stability in Northern Africa

Starting in Tunisia in December 2010 and spreading quickly, a wave of unrest has hit the Middle East and North Africa. All the countries on the Mediterranean coast of Africa – Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco – have been affected by this (in one way or another).

Tunisia was the first to experience unrest – in January 2011, President Ben Ali left the country and power was transferred to a provisional government. In Egypt, street demonstrations starting January 25 led to the ousting of President Mubarak and the passage of power to a provisional government. However, pending elections (scheduled for November 2011) demonstrations against the ruling military council have continued. In Libya, an armed insurrection in mid-February quickly led to rebels seizing control of most of the country and retaliation by the regime. On March 17, United Nations Security Council resolution 1973 authorized military action against Libya. NATO then aided the rebels, who took control of the capital Tripoli in August and the whole country in October. In Algeria, street demonstrations in January led to the lifting of emergency law but not to a revolution. In Morocco, prolonged demonstrations from March to June led to constitutional reforms which shifted power towards the elected government and away from the king.

The character of these demonstrations and revolutions seems to be headed towards democratic reform. However, the toppling of the establishment will probably lead to instability in those countries which have experienced revolutions, as all groups see it as a chance to increase their power. Tensions between seculars and Islamists in these countries are also a concern. In countries that have not experienced revolutions, concerns remain about the regimes' stability and the possibility of revolt.



MedCon Topic 2

Deploying measures to combat the kidnapping of children

Child kidnapping, or abduction, is the unauthorized removal of a minor from his or her parent's/guardian's custody. Such practice usually develops into one of the following:

- Child Trafficking – Illegal selling of children on the black market.
- Slavery – Forcing the child into serving as a workforce, either in a household or domestic environment, or in other forms of activity.
- Extortion – Demanding money or goods in exchange for the child.
- Illegal Adoption – The child will be delivered to a family that will raise it as if it were their own.

The previous are all cases of abduction which are carried out primarily to earn money from the kidnapping. However, two other forms exist which are not linked to money:

- Parental abduction, when one of the parents undergoing divorce fears the loss of his or her child.
- Children may also be kidnapped (especially in Less Economically Developed Countries/ LEDCs) for them to serve as soldiers in civil wars. One example of this is the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda, which uses primarily kidnapped children in its ranks. It is estimated that in the past 30 years 30000 children have been kidnapped in Uganda alone. In all cases, separation of an infant from its parents causes an emotional trauma in the child which, especially in worst-case scenarios, can scar him or her forever, resulting in extended psychological strains.



MedCon 3

Encouraging the use of renewable and non-polluting energy

The development of non-polluting energy facilities which take advantage of the potential offered by renewable energies is part of the “United Nations Millennium Development Goals”. The importance of switching from using fossil fuels to renewable sources as our main provision of energy is undeniable. Negative aspects of the former are clear from the environmental perspective, including phenomena as acid rain, the formation of toxic sediments and ecosystem destabilization. Furthermore, fossil fuels are available only in limited amounts, and supplies are diminishing.

From an environmental point of view, Mediterranean states are privileged as to that which concerns the presence of natural supplies. Countries belonging to such region can profit from abundant exposure to sun light, as well as other major resources. Mediterranean countries are among the top-ranked in the list of top-countries for investments on renewable energies. Spain is a world leader for solar panel installation and is ranked third world-wide for installed wind-energy capability.

For these reasons, the development of environmental-friendly power plants in the Mediterranean region is fundamental; therefore, efforts aimed at developing such technology should be promoted and encouraged.