

# UNITED NATIONS COVID-19 CRISIS COMMITTEE

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## *Study Guide*

### Inside

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Committee and Chair  
introduction

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Study Guides for both  
Topic Areas

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Disclaimer



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## Introduction to the Committee & its Chairs

The coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic is the defining global health crisis of our time and the greatest challenge we as a species, have faced since World War Two. Since its emergence in Asia late last year, the virus has spread to every continent, except Antarctica; with cases rising daily. Countries are racing to slow the spread of the virus by testing and treating patients, limiting travel, quarantining citizens, cancelling large gatherings, etc. The pandemic is moving like a wave—one that may yet crash on those least able to cope.

But COVID-19 is much more than just a health crisis. By stressing every one of the countries it touches, it has the potential to create devastating social, economic, and political crises that will leave deep scars. We are in uncharted territory. Many of our communities are now unrecognizable. Dozens of the world's greatest cities are deserted as people stay indoors, either by choice or by government order. Every day, people are losing jobs and income, with no way of knowing when normality will return; the International Labour Organization estimates that 195 million jobs could be lost.

In this committee, delegates will be presented with constant crisis updates that they will be expected to resolve within the three days of the conference. As representatives of countries from all over the world, delegates are required to be quick thinking and capable of providing practical and innovative solutions to the several problems at hand; ultimately paving the way to flattening the curve. Approach with care and caution, however. When so much has already been lost to the crisis, would you really want to be responsible for it getting worse?

### Chairs:



**Qimra Hameed**



**Arsam Shaikh**

### **Note from the Committee Directors:**

We need you to understand that this might be the easiest and the hardest committee of your entire MUN career owing to the following reasons respectively:

1. Each one of you is going through the events of this crisis firsthand. When you research this topic, you are not cramming facts and incidences that have been laid down in books, newspapers, and digital media platforms. Each individual present in the committee feels for the topic and has either condemned or supported several decisions taken by governments around the world; it is time for you to formulate your sensible choices into speeches, discussions, and documents in a manner that you believe best will accomplish the greater good.
2. The crisis at hand is not something anyone is wholly detached from. While being directly exposed to the crisis may make it familiar to deal with and easier to understand, it also means that each delegate will have active sentiments attached to the crisis. You might have lost someone dear in the crisis and might have come across a friend losing someone dear or may have been through a form or state of mind where you were scared for a loved one's life. It is hard to argue about things from a neutral perspective under this scenario.

Keeping the aforementioned situation in mind, we want to make sure that every delegate is aware that their mental health is our priority. The committee sessions will be designed to keep you under pressure, be nerve-wracking, and simulate an experience as close to the real intensity of stress that a diplomat may be facing in the actual United Nations. However, we acknowledge that you are high-schoolers, and the pressure may be too much for you. Therefore, if you feel that your mental health is at stake at any point during the three-day conference, you must approach either one of the committee directors directly.

On a separate note, we need you to understand that we are looking forward to seeing the diplomats who will alter the course of history. You will have the benefit of having the wisdom of hindsight for a significant portion of the committee. It is up to you to either repeat the same mistakes that your countries made in the first place or save the millions of lives that we have currently lost. However, whatever decisions you make should be coherent with your country's local and foreign policies. Delegates strictly follow your country's stance and do not cross the fragile line between diplomacy and bowing down to the international community's pressure.



## **Timeline of the committee**

The committee will commence from the time; 31st December 2019, when the first case of COVID-19 was discovered in China, and the country alerted the WHO of a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, leading to the eventual identification of the novel virus. Updates to the crisis will be given, with each crisis update having a date and time associated with it. The crisis will be affected by the series of unfortunate incidents brought by the year 2020 and their implications on the crisis under consideration. Therefore, we would recommend you all to have a sound understanding of global issues surrounding the COVID-19 crisis at any point in time. Remember, we are trying to simulate a real-world situation, and in doing so, you need to understand that all global events affect each other. These updates will eventually lead you to the situation on the very day of the committee. Potential future crises will also be dealt with accordingly.

## **What is COVID-19?**

COVID-19 is a newly identified illness caused by coronavirus. SARS-CoV-2 has caused a worldwide pandemic of respiratory illness. Coronaviruses are a type of virus with many different kinds; some of which cause disease. CoVs are positive-stranded RNA viruses with a crown-like appearance under an electron microscope (coronam is the Latin term for crown) due to the presence of spike glycoproteins on the envelope.

## **Social Implications of the Crisis**

The COVID-19 outbreak affects all segments of the population, particularly detrimental to members of the most vulnerable social groups; and continues to affect populations, including people living in poverty, the elderly, individuals with disabilities, the youth, and indigenous peoples. Early evidence indicates that the health and economic impacts of the virus are borne disproportionately by poor people. For example, homeless people; because they might not be able to shelter in place safely and are highly exposed to the dangers of the virus. People without access to running water, refugees, migrants, and displaced persons also suffer disproportionately from both the pandemic and its aftermath – whether due to limited movement, fewer employment opportunities, increased xenophobia, etc.

If not addressed efficiently through policy, the social crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic may also increase inequality, exclusion, discrimination, and global unemployment in the medium and long term. Comprehensive, universal social protection systems, when in

place; play a much permanent role in protecting workers and in reducing the prevalence of poverty, as they act as automatic stabilizers. That is to say, they provide underlying income security at all times, thereby enhancing people's capacity to manage and overcome shocks. Old-aged individuals are particularly susceptible to the risk of infection from COVID-19, especially those with chronic conditions such as hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. Older persons are struggling with higher health risks but are also likely to be less capable of supporting themselves in isolation. Although social distancing is necessary to reduce the spread of the disease, such measures if not implemented correctly can also lead to the increased social isolation of older persons when they may be at their highest need of support.

The risks of infection from COVID-19 for persons with disabilities are compounded by other issues, which warrant specific action: disruption of services and support, pre-existing health conditions in some cases which leave them at a higher risk of developing severe illness or dying, being excluded from health information and mainstream health provision, living in a world where accessibility is often limited and where barriers to goods and services are a challenge, and being disproportionately more likely to live in institutional settings.

Many governments have called on the youth to embrace the effort to protect themselves and the overall population. The youth are also in a position to help those who are most vulnerable and to aid in increasing public health social awareness campaigns among their communities. Thus, the youth are critical to limiting the virus's spread and its impact on public health, society, and the economy. More than one billion youths are no longer physically in school after school closings and universities across many jurisdictions. The disruption in education and learning could have medium and long-term consequences on the quality of education. However, the efforts made by teachers, school administrations, local and national governments to cope with the unprecedented circumstances to the best of their ability should be recognized. Many vulnerable youths, such as migrants or homeless youth, are caught in precarious situations. They are the ones who can easily be overlooked if governments do not pay specific attention, as they tend to already be in a situation without minimum requirements being met on health, education, employment, and well-being.

Indigenous peoples are particularly vulnerable at this time due to significantly higher rates of communicable and non-communicable diseases, lack of access to essential services, absence of culturally appropriate healthcare, and if any, under-equipped and under-staffed local medical facilities. A large number of indigenous peoples outside the social protection system further contributes to vulnerability, mainly if they are dependent on income from the broader economy – produce, tourism, handicrafts, and employment in urban areas. In this regard, Governments should ensure that interim financial support measures include indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups.

## **A study done at MIT**

“When ‘social distancing’ measures hit MIT, we tried to process how the implementation of these policies would impact the landscape of our social lives,” explains graduate student Heather Kosakowski, who conceived the study late one evening with undergraduate Michelle Hung. This landscape is broad, examining the effects of being uprooted and physically relocated from a place, but also changes in social connections, including friendships and even dating life.

“I started speculating about how my life and the lives of other MIT students would change,” says Hung. “I was overwhelmed, sad, and scared. But then we realized that we were actually equipped to find the answers to our questions by conducting a study.”

Together, Kosakowski and Hung developed a survey to measure how the social behavior of MIT students, postdocs, and staff is changing over the course of the pandemic. Survey questions were designed to measure loneliness and other aspects of mental health. The survey was sent to members of the MIT community and shared on social media in mid-March when the pandemic hit the United States; and MIT made the unprecedented decision to send students home, shift to online instruction, and dramatically ramp down operations on campus. More than 500 people responded to the initial survey, ranging in age from 18 to 60, living in cities and countries around the world; many but not all of the respondents were affiliated with MIT. Kosakowski and Hung are sending follow-up surveys to participants every two weeks and the team plans to collect data for the duration of the pandemic.

“Throwing myself into creating the survey was a way to cope with feeling sad about leaving a community I love,” explains Hung, who flew home to California in March and admits that she struggles with feelings of loneliness now that she’s off-campus.

Although it is too soon to form any conclusions about their research, Hung predicts that feelings of loneliness may actually diminish over the course of the pandemic.

“Humans have an impressive ability to adapt to change,” she says. “And I think in this virtual world, people will find novel ways to stay connected that we couldn’t have predicted.”

Whether we find ourselves feeling more or less lonely as this COVID-19 crisis comes to an end, both Kosakowski and Hung agree that it will fundamentally change life as we know it.

## **Economic Implications of the Crisis**

Businesses are coping with lost revenue and disrupted supply chains as factory shutdowns and quarantine measures spread across the globe, restricting movement and commerce. Unemployment is skyrocketing, while policymakers across countries race to implement fiscal and monetary measures to alleviate the financial burden on citizens and shore up economies under severe strain. In the US, the unemployment rate in April climbed to 14.7% - a post-war record - as more than 20 million Americans lost their jobs. GDP dropped by 4.8% in the first quarter of 2020 - the sharpest contraction since the global financial crisis of 2007-2009 - bringing an end to the longest economic expansion in US history. The US Treasury Department has said it plans to borrow nearly \$3 trillion in the second quarter of 2020 as it tries to mitigate the impacts of coronavirus. That it is five times as much as it has ever borrowed previously over a three-month period.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said the coronavirus pandemic had instigated a global economic downturn, the likes of which the world has not been experienced since the Great Depression. That view is supported by the latest figures from the European Commission, which has forecast that the GDP of EU countries will contract by 7.5% in 2020. “Despite the swift and comprehensive policy response at both EU and national level, the EU economy will experience a recession of historic proportions this year; the Commission said in its spring economic forecast released on 6 May.

On 15 April, the IMF warned economies in Asia would see no growth this year; for the first time in 60 years, with the service sector particularly under pressure. National lockdowns across the region have meant airlines, factories, shops, and restaurants have suffered the greatest economic shocks. Just a day after the IMF warning, official data showed the Chinese economy had contracted in the first quarter - the first time since quarterly records began in 1992. Gross domestic product (GDP) in the world’s second-largest economy fell 6.8% in January-March year-on-year - more than the 6.5% forecast by analysts and the opposite of the 6% expansion in the fourth quarter of 2019. The Chinese economy is likely to be hit further by reduced global demand for its products due to the effect of the outbreak on economies around the world. Data released on 16 March showed China’s factory production plunged at the sharpest pace in three decades in the first two months of the year. For 2020, the country’s economic growth is expected to fall to 2.5%, according to a Reuters poll - its slowest in almost 50 years.

On 5 March - before the US travel ban was announced - the International Air Transport Association (IATA) predicted the COVID-19 outbreak could cost airlines \$113 billion in lost



revenue as fewer people take flights. “The industry remains very fragile,” Brian Pearce, the IATA’s chief economist told the Associated Press. “There are lots of airlines that have got relatively narrow profit margins and lots of debt and this could send some into a very difficult situation.” On March 16, British Airways said it would cut flying capacity by at least 75% in April and May. Other UK airlines, including Virgin Atlantic and easyJet; also announced drastic cuts. The travel and tourism industries were hit early on by economic disruption from the outbreak. Besides the impact on airlines, the UN’s International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) forecast that Japan could lose \$1.29 billion of tourism revenue in the first quarter due to the drop in Chinese travelers, while Thailand could lose \$1.15 billion. The initial shortage of products and parts from China affected companies around the world, as factories delayed opening after the Lunar New Year and workers stayed home to help reduce the spread of the virus. Apple’s manufacturing partner in China, Foxconn; faced production delays. Some carmakers including Nissan and Hyundai temporarily closed factories outside China because they couldn’t get parts. By March, countries such as Italy had closed all but the most essential factories. The pharmaceutical industry, bracing for disruption to global production since February, reported fears of drug shortages as India faced lockdowns from the 24th of March. India supplies nearly half of the generic drugs for countries such as the U.S. Most trade shows, cultural and sporting events across the world have been cancelled or postponed.

### **Political implications of the Crisis**

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the political systems of multiple countries causing suspensions of legislative activities, isolation or deaths of multiple politicians, and rescheduling of elections due to fears of spreading the virus. There are at least four areas of governance that are likely to be affected by the way governments around the globe are handling the Covid-19 crisis. They are:

- economic management
- authoritarianism
- federalism
- multilateralism

The concept of federalism that a national government could govern in ways that don’t always agree to the interests of the established elites in all federating states is being tested in the way governments are managing COVID-19. Two conflicting approaches have emerged, one that factors in state rights and the other that has the federating units step aside and let the federal government take charge. Donald Trump, relying on the support of smaller and less-populated states, is not prepared to adopt a strong national policy. There is a clamor in New York and California for the federal government to step in and craft a national policy to distribute desperately needed items for dealing with the ill in the hospitals. India, by adopting a national lockdown, has gone in the other direction. The debate remains unresolved in the US but has been

settled — at least for the moment — in India, the other large federal system in the world. India was able to move in the direction of a strong federal government since it is led by a person with a pronounced authoritarian trend. This brings us to the second important possible development growing out of the COVID-19 crisis: the rising trend towards authoritarianism. History has many examples of how authoritarians took advantage of emergencies such as wars, terrorist attacks, natural disasters to consolidate their powers and increase their hold on the societies they governed. The most obvious example, of course, is Adolf Hitler but the most recent one is Vladimir Putin who used the war in Chechnya to grab greater power in Russia. The coronavirus has provided the Russian strongman another opportunity to expand his control of the system as well as lengthen the period of his rule. Several other strong leaders have moved in the same direction. The consolidation of power by Hungary's Viktor Orban is an interesting development.

Hungary is a member of the European Union but the Prime Minister disregarded the Union's strong preference for democracy by moving along several non-democratic routes.

Narendra Modi, the Indian Prime Minister; also took advantage of the COVID-19 crisis to acquire more powers for himself, including placing serious constraints on the freedom of the press and the country's vast Indian television system. He drew inspiration from the philosophy of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), as it is generally referred to and has opted for authoritarian rule over the nation of 1.3 billion people.

As Joshua Kurlantzick of the Council on Foreign Relations notes in a recent newspaper article, "Autocratic leaders in many nations are using the coronavirus to enhance their powers — to put in place new rules that will be hard to overturn even if the coronavirus is defeated. Many of the new powers have no clear end date. The pandemic will have entrenched these strongmen indefinitely."

## **Environmental Impacts of the Crisis**

With entire populations ordered to stay home; schools, offices, and factories have limited their activities, road traffic dwindled to a minimum and airlines reduced scheduled flights by 60% to 95%. These developments have been associated with significant reductions in air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Air quality levels in the world's major cities have improved dramatically in March and April. Air quality improved largely because of a reduction in factory and road traffic emissions of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) and related ozone (O<sub>3</sub>) formation, and particulate matter (PM). During the same period, global air traffic dropped

by 60%. Taken together, these emissions reductions have led to a temporary dip in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from their pre-crisis levels, encouraging some to hope that our global society may indeed be able to reduce greenhouse gas emissions substantially over the long term to mitigate impending climate change. So long as the coronavirus crisis keeps economic activities reduced,

emissions will remain relatively low. However, it would be shortsighted to conclude this is a durable environmental improvement as emissions will most likely rise to previous levels when economic activity picks up as the crisis resolves. Also, not all the environmental consequences of the crisis have been positive. Volumes of non-recyclable waste have risen; severe cuts in agricultural and fishery export levels have led to the generation of large quantities of organic waste; maintenance and monitoring of natural ecosystems have been temporarily halted, and tourism activity to natural areas has ceased. Local waste problems have emerged as many municipalities have suspended their recycling activities over fears of virus propagation in recycling centers. Food retailers have resumed using plastic bags at checkout points citing health concerns over consumers' reuse of paper bags. In addition, due to stay-at-home policies, many consumers have increased their consumption of take-away food delivered with single-use packaging. All these developments have created acute challenges for the waste management industry at a time when they are operating with limited capacity due to the coronavirus crisis.

With the emergence of import restrictions in export markets and sharp declines in the availability of cargo transportation services, the coronavirus crisis has led to increased volumes of un-shippable agricultural and fishery commodities. Many export-oriented producers produce volumes far too large for output to be absorbed in local markets, and thus organic waste levels have mounted substantially. Because this waste is left to decay, levels of methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) emissions, a greenhouse gas, from decaying produce are expected to rise sharply in the crisis and immediate post-crisis months.

Natural ecosystems and protected species are also at risk during the coronavirus crisis. In many countries, environmental protection workers at national parks and land and marine conservation zones are required to stay at home in lockdown, leaving these areas unmonitored. Their absence has resulted in a rise of illegal deforestation, fishing, and wildlife hunting. The stoppage of ecotourism activity has also left natural ecosystems at risk of illegal harvesting and encroachment.

In addition, as ecotourism is often a major economic mainstay in many destinations, rising unemployment caused by the crisis may lead to many households harvesting resources from fragile ecosystems unsustainably as they seek alternative means to provide their households with food and income.

### **Disclaimer:**

This study guide will provide you an outline of the research that you need to do.

It is in no way exhaustive, and you should research from external sources, extensively, to have a comprehensive understanding of the topic at hand.