



MADMUN XVI
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SOCHUM

Background Guide
MADMUN 2025



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Letter from the Dais

To the Delegates of the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee,

Welcome to MADMUN XVI - Madison Area's 16th Annual Model United Nations Conference! As delegates, you will represent various countries and collaborate on pressing global issues. This background guide will provide an overview of the two main topics you will discuss: Cultural Preservation and Child Labor. The Dais includes Chairs Adra Lange and Maggie Parchem. We are honored to have you participate in one of MADMUN's beginner (and best) committees!

About Us:

My name is Adra Lange (she/her), and I am a freshman at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. This is my fourth year participating in Model United Nations, and I am thrilled to be involved in collegiate MUN. Aside from being involved with the Student Council in college, I enjoy volunteering and working out. I love fashion, yoga, going out with friends, and traveling!

My name is Maggie Parchem, and I am currently a sophomore at Baraboo High School. This is my second year partaking in Model UN. I am so excited to be one of your chairs! When I'm not worrying about school or MUN-related matters, I can be found hanging out with my friends, shopping, working, or spending time with my family. I love going shopping with my friends, finding cute clothes, and getting breakfast or lunch together is my favorite way to spend a Saturday morning!

The committee decided on two substantial topics fitting our theme of *Dismantling Veils of Deception*: Cultural Preservation and Child Labor. As you prepare for the conference, consider the many children around the world who must work instead of attending school, which can impact their future opportunities. At the same time, many communities face challenges in preserving their cultures and traditions, especially when they struggle to earn a living wage. Delegates should consider ways to protect children's rights to education and a safe childhood, while also supporting communities in preserving their unique cultural heritage. Finding balanced solutions that help both children and cultures is essential.

In this committee, we hope to develop practical solutions to address cultural preservation and child labor issues through intensive research on your country's perspectives and extensive collaboration with other delegates in each bloc. We also hope that everyone stays civil throughout the conference.

If there is one piece of advice we would give you, let it be this: take comfort in being uncomfortable. Speak up and advocate for your nation during the debate. Also, please ensure that you thoroughly answer the guiding questions in each of your papers. As the conference approaches, we look forward to a civil discussion and inspiring resolutions that will shape an excellent conference. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out.

We look forward to seeing you debating soon!

All the best,
Adra Lange and Maggie Parchem



Topic One - Cultural Preservation

Introduction

Cultural preservation refers to the protection of traditions, languages, landmarks, and practices that make each group of people unique. Culture helps shape who we are, and it connects people to their history, values, and community (UNESCO, *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*). In an ever-changing world influenced by technology, urbanization, and differing forms of media, indigenous and minority groups are seeing their cultures fade away and/or come under threat.

SOCHUM (Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee) is a part of the United Nations General Assembly, focusing on human rights and humanitarian issues worldwide. One of this committee's roles is to discuss how to protect cultural heritage and promote cultural diversity. While SOCHUM does not directly carry out preservation projects like UNESCO, this committee plays a vital role in raising awareness, creating resolutions, and encouraging international cooperation (UNESCO, *Convention Concerning the Protection*). Culture plays a key role in sustainable development, human rights, and peacebuilding in the modern world. As delegates in this committee, you will explore how nations and organizations can collaborate to support cultural preservation in meaningful, respectful, and effective ways.

Historical Background

The global effort to protect culture began after World War II, when many culturally significant sites and works were destroyed or damaged. This led to the creation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1945 (UNESCO, *Convention Concerning the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict*). In 1954, the Hague Convention, a series of international treaties and declarations, was adopted to protect cultural property during armed conflicts. This was a crucial step forward in furthering the cause of international cultural protection laws.

Colonialism also plays a significant role in cultural preservation. Colonizers often took cultural artifacts back to their home countries and replaced local traditions with their own. Today, many former colonies are working to reclaim their cultural identities and recover artifacts that were stolen from them. Debates surrounding cultural ownership and the return of artifacts are ongoing and can be extremely controversial (Bevan). One example includes the British Museum housing one of the six Caryatids, statues which were initially part of the Erechtheion temple on the Acropolis in Athens. These female figures served as columns, supporting the porch of the temple. Lord Elgin, a Scottish nobleman and diplomat, acquired the British Museum's Caryatid in the early 19th century, and it is now a notable exhibit in the Greek and Roman galleries of the museum. The other five Caryatids are located at the Acropolis



Museum in Athens. Greece is actively campaigning for the return of the sixth Caryatid, viewing it as an integral part of its cultural heritage.

Timeline of Key International Agreements on Cultural Preservation

- **1945** – UNESCO was founded
- **1954** – Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property
- **1972** – World Heritage Convention
- **2003** – Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention

Influential Factors + Current Situation

Cultural preservation today faces many challenges. From war to climate change to globalization, many factors threaten the survival of artistic traditions and landmarks. However, efforts to protect them are also growing, with help from local communities, international organizations, and emerging technology.

Armed Conflict and Cultural Destruction

War often leads to the destruction of cultural heritage. Sometimes, these acts are deliberate, meant to erase the identity of a group of people. A tragic example of cultural destruction occurred in 2001 when the Taliban demolished the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan. These ancient statues were carved into the cliffs of the Bamiyan Valley and were over 1,500 years old and represented an essential part of both Afghan heritage and Buddhist history (UNESCO; Middle East Institute). Their destruction was a loss for local and global communities, as it erased a unique and irreplaceable piece of world heritage (Smithsonian; UNESCO). This event highlights the devastating impact that extremist ideologies and conflicts can have on cultural preservation.





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A more recent example of cultural destruction took place in the ancient city of Palmyra, Syria, which suffered extensive damage at the hands of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), an extremist armed terrorist group. Once a thriving center of art, architecture, and trade in the ancient world, Palmyra held immense historical and archaeological significance (Smarthistory; Wikipedia). When ISIS took control of the site, they destroyed temples, monuments, and other cultural artifacts, including the Temple of Bel, the Arch of Triumph, the Temple of Baalshamin, and statues like the Lion of Al-lāt (Smarthistory). These actions were attempts to erase history and also served as methods of domination and control, aiming to intimidate and undermine cultural identity on both a local and global scale (Khan Academy).



Climate Change and Environmental Degradation

Climate change poses a significant and growing threat to cultural heritage worldwide. As global temperatures rise, the impacts are felt in locations around the world that hold deep historical, spiritual, and cultural significance for many communities.

Extreme weather events, such as hurricanes, heat waves, and heavy rainfall, are becoming more frequent and intense. These conditions damage historic buildings, monuments, and other physical structures that reflect the art, architecture, and history, key components of the culture of past generations.



In the Arctic region, this issue takes on a different form. As temperatures warm more rapidly, the environment is changing at an alarming rate. Ice melts earlier in the year, and as a result, animal migration patterns shift. For Indigenous peoples who have depended on stable seasonal cycles to guide their traditional hunting and fishing activities, these changes are incredibly disruptive. Their cultural practices, passed down for generations, are becoming difficult to maintain.

Small island nations, such as Tuvalu and the Maldives, are among the most vulnerable. These countries face the possibility of losing communities and cultural landmarks to the rising seas. Without intervention, some cultural sites could be submerged permanently. Even popular tourist destinations, such as Venice, Italy, famous for its unique canals and historic buildings, are struggling to manage water damage, which in turn threatens their culture and architecture.

While there is an understanding that efforts to alleviate climate change must include the protection of culture, efforts have been inconsistent. Some countries and regions are making progress; however, many others lack the resources, knowledge, or political ability to act swiftly. As a result, valuable pieces of human history and identity are at risk.

Technology and Cultural Preservation

While there are many threats to cultural preservation, technology is opening up new possibilities for protecting and revitalizing cultural heritage. Digital tools enable the collection, storage, and sharing of artistic materials in innovative ways. For instance, digital archives can safeguard traditional music, oral histories, photographs, and language resources, ensuring they remain accessible to future generations. Advanced technologies, such as 3D scanning, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality, have also become crucial tools for cultural preservation. These techniques can be utilized to document and digitally reconstruct damaged heritage sites in painstaking detail. (UNESCO).

Beyond preservation, technology can also help individuals, especially younger generations, engage more dynamically with their culture. Virtual reality experiences, language learning apps, and online cultural games and exhibits can make heritage more accessible and relevant in the digital age. By combining traditional knowledge with modern innovation, these tools offer new hope for preserving cultural identities, even in the face of global change.

China: Urbanization and Minority Cultures

China has many ethnic groups with their own cultures, but the government has tried to create a more unified national identity. In regions like Xinjiang and Tibet, local traditions, languages, and religious



practices have been limited. For example, some mosques have been closed, and children are taught in Mandarin instead of their native language. Critics argue that this is cultural suppression, while the government claims it facilitates modernization (Sautman). Urban development has also impacted cultural heritage. In cities like Beijing, traditional neighborhoods called "Hutongs" have been demolished to make space for modern buildings, often without input from residents (Bevan).

France: Secularism and Religious Expression

In France, the idea of secularism (*Laïcité*) means religion is kept out of public life. This has led to laws banning religious clothing, such as headscarves, in public schools. Supporters say it helps everyone be equal, but critics argue it targets minority groups, especially Muslims, and limits their cultural expression (Bowen). This raises important questions about whether people should have the right to express their culture and religion publicly, and how far the state should go in regulating this expression.

New Zealand and Ireland: Language Revival

Not all stories about cultural heritage are about loss. In New Zealand, efforts to preserve and revitalize the Māori language (*Te Reo Māori*) have become a model of successful language revival. After years of decline due to colonization and the dominance of English, Māori communities, along with the government, took action to bring the language back to life. One of the most important steps was the establishment of *Kura Kaupapa Māori*, Māori-language immersion schools, which teach children entirely in *Te Reo Māori*. This is helping raise a new generation of fluent speakers (May). In addition to education, Māori have gained a stronger presence in media, with TV shows, radio stations, and online platforms broadcasting in the language (Spolsky and Nicoletti). Government initiatives, such as making Māori an official language and supporting language weeks and public signage in *Te Reo*, have also played a big role (New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage). Today, more young people are choosing to learn and speak Māori, not only as a way to connect to their heritage but also to keep their culture alive. This success shows that with long-term commitment, strong community leadership, and supportive policies, language revival is possible.

In Ireland, the Irish language (*Gaeilge*), often referred to as Gaelic, has faced challenges over the years due to colonization, emigration, and the rise of the English language. However, there has been a strong and ongoing movement to revive the language. One of the key efforts has been in education, with *Gaelscoileanna*, an Irish-language immersion school, growing in popularity. These schools teach all subjects through *Gaeilge* and have helped many young people become fluent speakers from an early age (*Ó hIfeárnáin*). Media have also played an important role, with Irish-language TV and radio stations like TG4 and RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta broadcasting news, entertainment, and cultural content entirely in *Gaeilge* (Watson). The government supports the language through official recognition, funding for Irish-speaking regions known as the Gaeltacht, and the inclusion of *Gaeilge* as a compulsory subject in



schools (Government of Ireland). In recent years, a cultural shift has occurred, with younger generations embracing the Irish as a meaningful way to connect with their roots. From social media accounts in Gaeilge to bilingual signage and public campaigns, the language is becoming more visible and accessible (Nic Pháidín and Ó Cearnaigh). This shows that language revival is not easy, but with education, media, policy, and community engagement working together, it is possible to revive an ancient tongue.

Bloc Positions

Western Bloc

Countries like the United States of America, France, and Canada support cultural preservation through UNESCO and other partnerships. However, these countries also face pressure to return cultural items taken during colonial times and to address cultural tensions within their respective nations related to immigration and minority rights (Bevan).

Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and Developing Nations

Many countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America view cultural preservation as a crucial step in recovering from colonialism. They often advocate for stronger international support, increased funding, and the return of cultural artifacts. They also value cultural traditions as a key component to economic development and tourism (UNESCO, *Convention for the Safeguarding*).

Authoritarian or Single-Party States

These governments may support culture, but only certain kinds. They often promote a single national identity and limit minority cultures they see as “risky.” While they invest in heritage sites and museums, they may also suppress cultural expressions that do not align with state goals (Sautman).

Questions to Consider in Position Papers

1. How can countries work together to protect cultural traditions without interfering in each other’s internal affairs?
2. What should be done when governments or armed groups intentionally destroy cultural heritage?



3. How can local communities and indigenous peoples have a greater say in preserving their culture?
4. In what ways can technology (digital archives, 3D scanning, and virtual reality) help preserve languages and traditions?
5. Should artifacts taken during colonial times be returned, and how can this be done fairly?
6. How can cultural preservation be part of climate and development plans?

If struggling, consider what bloc position your country may fall under

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Topic Two - Child Labor

Introduction

Child labor refers to the exploitation of children through work, often by businesses, in ways that are harmful, exploitative, and illegal under international law. These children are frequently subjected to harsh working conditions, including long hours, exposure to dangerous machinery or chemicals, and environments that risk their physical safety and emotional well-being. The impact on their mental and moral development can be long-lasting, affecting their ability to access education and live healthy lives. A major cause of child labor is poverty; families facing severe financial hardship, unemployment, illness, or



the death of a wage earner may feel they have no choice but to send their children to work (UNICEF). In its worst forms, child labor can resemble modern slavery. Some children are trafficked or sold, forced into illegal activities such as drug production, prostitution, or even recruited as child soldiers in armed conflicts (International Labour Organization). These violations of children's rights are major concerns highlighted by organizations like UNICEF and the ILO, who continue to advocate for stronger protections and support systems for vulnerable children around the world.

Historical Background

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the growth of manufacturing and farm mechanization during the Industrial Revolution in Europe and the United States led to children working in dangerous environments in factories and on farms. As we entered the Victorian era (1837-1901), child labor became more and more common and fatal. Children working in factories were expected to do things that the adults found were too difficult for them to do themselves. Work hours were between 52-80 hours per week while earning low wages.

Mid-nineteenth century is when educational reformers tried to convince the public that primary education was a necessity if the nation wanted to grow and advance as a whole. Multiple states decided on a minimum wage for labor and certain requirements for school attendance, although a majority of these laws led to loopholes that were exploited by employers wanting cheap labor. Many laws that restricted child labor were passed as part of the Progressive Era reform movement. This movement has ten reform movements: civil rights, conservation, government reform, health and medicine, labor reform, racial trade unionism, socialism, temperance, trust-busting, and women's rights. Even with this, many Southern states resisted it, which led to the decision to work for a federal child labor law. The Supreme Court ruled them unconstitutional.

As the Great Depression swept through the United States, thousands of Americans were left without jobs. The New Deal programs that were made by Franklin D. Roosevelt, the programs touched on increasing the federal oversight of workplaces. This gave work to adults, giving a motive to remove children from working. States began to increase the number of years of required schooling to obtain certain jobs, lengthening the school years, and started to strictly enforce truancy laws.

In the United States, child labor numbers have significantly decreased. However, in certain economies, like agriculture, it still lingers because migrant workers have a more difficult time regulating. Garment industry employers have moved to the children of illegal immigrants to compete with imports from other low-wage nations. As the laws now limit the number of hours a child and teen can work and teens are still attending school, the cost of education continues to rise, and many are still working longer hours to balance both out. It is up to the state's enforcement of these laws to determine what will happen next.

***Brief Timeline:***

Between 1938 and 2025, laws and regulations were put into place to help children have safer working conditions.

1938: Restrictions on hours and job fields for children under the age of 16 were established by the Fair Labor Standards Act in the United States.

1973: A minimum age for employment is settled, but there are some exceptions. This was put in place by the Minimum Age Convention. 172 countries ratified this.

1989: The United Nations enacts the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a guaranteed protection of children's rights so they can grow.

1992: The International Program on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) is founded, promoting the global elimination of child labor, and it supports countries in their efforts.

1999: A requirement of ending practices such as slavery, debt bondage, prostitution, drug trafficking, child trafficking, forced labor in armed conflict, pornography, and other illegal activities. The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention was set in place as 186 countries ratified it.

2021: The United Nations Assembly declares that this is the Year for the Elimination of Child Labour.

2025: International commitment is set to end all forms of child labor this year. Under Target 8.7 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Current Situation + Influential Factors

Child labor remains one of the most pressing human rights issues in the world today. As of 2021, more than 160 million children, nearly 1 in 10 worldwide, are engaged in child labor. Approximately 79 million children are involved in hazardous work that endangers their health, safety, or moral development (Child Labour). This global issue is due to several interconnected factors, including poverty, lack of access to education, inadequate labor protections, and social inequalities. In many regions, families rely on their children's working income to survive. Additionally, weak enforcement of child labor laws makes it difficult to monitor and address this problem on a national scale (UNICEF).

India

Despite the existence of legal protections such as the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986, millions of children are still employed in labor-intensive sectors. Agriculture is the most common area of employment, but children are also found working in mining, brick kilns, garment factories, and domestic services. Often, these children are exposed to harmful chemicals, long hours, and abusive working environments. Social structures like the caste system and gender-based discrimination further disadvantage children from marginalized backgrounds, especially Dalit, tribal, and Muslim



communities (UNICEF). In rural areas, families may also lack access to affordable education, forcing children into labor as a necessity rather than a choice.

Ghana

As a leading cocoa exporter, child labor is especially prevalent in the cocoa sector. Children are often required to perform physically dangerous tasks such as clearing land with machetes, spraying pesticides, or carrying heavy sacks of cocoa pods. Although Ghana has partnered with international actors under the Harkin-Engel Protocol and received assistance from NGOs like the International Cocoa Initiative, progress has been uneven. Ghana's reliance on cocoa for its economy makes child labor difficult to address, especially when farmers struggle with poverty themselves. Enforcement of labor standards remains weak, and many children continue to work in conditions that violate both national law and international conventions (International Cocoa Initiative; "Child Labour").

Afghanistan

Afghanistan presents an especially severe case due to its prolonged humanitarian crisis. Years of war, economic collapse, and internal displacement have left children vulnerable. Many are forced to take up hazardous jobs in brick-making, construction, street vending, or begging. Others are drawn into illegal or exploitative activities, including drug smuggling and even military recruitment by armed groups. Access to schooling has sharply declined in recent years, especially for girls, as the Taliban's restrictions on female education have been reintroduced. With limited government oversight and reduced international aid following regime changes, child labor has become even more difficult to monitor and prevent (UNICEF; Human Rights Watch). The collapse of public services and growing food insecurity are forcing more families to send children to work to survive.

Bloc Positions

African Bloc

Many African nations, including Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Ghana, are deeply affected by child labor, especially in the agricultural sector. While these countries may support global anti-child labor efforts, they often argue that solutions must consider poverty reduction and development goals. Nations tend to support capacity-building programs and international aid rather than punitive measures.

Western Bloc

Countries such as the United States, Germany, and Canada strongly advocate for international



labor standards and transparency in global supply chains. These nations often support economic sanctions or trade restrictions for countries that fail to address child labor. Nations also fund programs through institutions like the ILO and UNICEF while pushing for corporate accountability and ethical sourcing.

Asia-Pacific Bloc

Nations like India, Bangladesh, and Indonesia are in a complex position. While they formally oppose child labor and have passed legal protections, enforcement varies, and child labor persists due to economic necessity. These countries often stress the importance of balancing labor reforms with national development goals and call for support in education, job training, and poverty alleviation.

Questions to Consider in Position Papers

1. How does child labor manifest in your nation, and what are the root causes?
2. What national laws and or programs does your nation have to prevent or regulate child labor?
3. What role should international organizations play in ending child labor? Should they focus more on aid or accountability?
4. How can global supply chains be made more ethical without causing harm to vulnerable economies?
5. How can education be used as a tool to combat child labor in both the short and long term?
6. What measures can be taken to address the worst forms of child labor, such as trafficking, forced labor, and child soldier recruitment?

If struggling, consider what bloc position your country may fall under

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