



جامعة جورجتاون  
كلية الشؤون الدولية في قطر  
Model United Nations

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## **I. ABOUT THE SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND HUMANITARIAN COMMITTEE (SOCHUM):**

With the signing of the Charter of the United Nations at the conclusion of the United Nations (UN) Conference on International Organization in 1945, the United Nations came into existence. It was not until 1947, however, that the General Assembly (GA) was created and together with it, the Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Committee, also known as the GA Third Committee, was also created. With the purpose of overseeing and finding solutions relating to human rights issues and to social and cultural affairs, the SOCHUM agenda consists of, every year, issues that include, but are not limited to:

- The advancement of women
- The protection of children
- Indigenous issues
- The treatment of refugees
- The elimination of racism
- The promotion of human rights<sup>1</sup>

Among the works of the GA Third Committee, it is the groundbreaking Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was partially drafted and debated by SOCHUM. Adopted in 1948, the UDHR emphasizes freedom, justice, and peace in the world as well as promotes even the most basic rights to all human beings. The aforementioned document was drafted as a result of the atrocities and conflict experienced in World War II. Moreover, it was later (1966) reinforced in the

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<sup>1</sup> “General Assembly of the United Nations – Social, Humanitarian & Cultural – Third Committee” - <http://www.un.org/en/ga/third/index.shtml>

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which have been signed and/or ratified by the majority of States worldwide.

The SOCHUM Committee works closely with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Human Rights Committee (HRC), and other UN bodies to discuss “any questions or matters within the scope of the present Charter or relating to the powers and functions of any organs.”<sup>2</sup> Together with other UN bodies, the GA Third Committee drafts working papers that only turn into resolutions once adopted by the GA Plenary. These resolutions become recommendations to all UN Member States and are often supported by treaties and conventions.

Members of SOCHUM are all 193 UN Member States. The current chair of the committee is H.E. Mr. Stephan Tafrov of Bulgaria. He chairs the sixty-eighth session (2013), in which roughly 60 draft resolutions are set to be approved and will be presented to the GA Plenary during this year’s session (68th). The GA session runs from September to November each year and is it during this time that SOCHUM drafts working papers to be put forward for adoption by the GA Plenary in the following year’s session

As a GA committee, SOCHUM is limited in power and any of its produced resolutions are non-binding, but serve as recommendations only. These recommendations are not only a valuable part of providing solutions, but are a representation of cooperation at its highest level. All 192 countries are member to the five GA committees and each resolution produced by those committees are a conglomeration of contributions from the international community as a whole.

## **II. BRIEF BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON WOMEN IN POLITICS**

In 1910 at the Socialist International meeting in Copenhagen, International Women’s day was first established in honor of the International Women’s Right Movement and to encourage achievement of universal suffrage for women in other parts of the world. The most recent country to grant women’s suffrage was the United Arab Emirates in 2006,

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<sup>2</sup> The Charter of the United Nations

joining the rest of the world excluding Saudi Arabia. In 1945 the Charter of the United Nations became the first international agreement to proclaim gender equality as a fundamental human right. In 1979 the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women, often described as the bill of rights for women, was put into force and has been ratified by 160 countries.

### **III. CURRENT STATUS**

The political representation and participation of women is still significantly lower than that of their male counterparts in many countries throughout the globe. While in recent years there have been many substantive improvements in both the political rights and positions of power being held, but statistics still reveal that women have not yet reached parity with men. Currently women have equal voting rights to men in every country except in Saudi Arabia who has just announced that women will gain the right to vote starting in 2015. As of October 2013 only 21.5% of legislators in the world were women and there were only 18 Heads of State who were women. This represents a severe lack of representation for women's issues such as reproductive rights and, property rights, as well as the lack of the important perspective of women on such issues like HIV/AIDS and development. Because gender inequalities in health, education, and income are some of the most pressing issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it will be necessary for women to be more actively involved in the policy making process. Some of the most recent victories in the political representation of women have been the joint award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sifleaf, Liberian Leymah Gobwee and Tawakul Karman of Yemen. This award proves the importance of women in the issues of peacekeeping and democratization. Women now make up the majority of Rwanda's legislature with 56% of the governing body.

### **IV. CURRENT WOMEN HEADS OF GOVERNMENT**

There currently exist 19 different women heads of government

### **V. KEY PLAYERS**

#### **COUNCIL OF WOMEN WORLD LEADERS**

This council is a network comprised of women heads of state and/or government (i.e. Presidents and Prime Ministers) which began in 1996 under the guidance of Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, former President of Iceland. Ms. Finnbogadóttir was the first woman to

ever be democratically elected president. The group seeks to mobilize the highest-level women leaders globally for collective action on issues of critical importance to women.<sup>3</sup>

### **NORDIC COUNTRIES**

Nordic Countries far and away are the closest to reaching parity in representation with women. An average of 42.1% of legislators in Nordic Countries are women. The only Non-Nordic country that is at or above that level is Rwanda whose parliament is 56% women. American, Asian, European and Sub-Saharan African countries all have average rates between 20-17%. The only areas that have a lower percentage than this are the Oceanic and Pacific states, and the Middle East and North African states. These states have average representation levels of 13% and 10% respectfully. It is also worth noting that women have very limited civil rights in regions with the lowest participation.

## **VI. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

One of the possible solutions to solving the gender gap in political representation is by enacting a quota system. A quota system entails that women constitute a certain percentage of members of a body, generally a critical minority of about 30 or 40 percent; that body may either be a candidate list, a parliamentary assembly, a

Country	Name
Germany	Angela Merkel
Liberia	Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf
Argentina	Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner
Bangladesh	Sheikh Hasina Wajed
Brazil	Dilma Rouseff
South Korea	Park Geun-Hye

committee, or a government as a whole. The burden of insuring that the quota is met is placed on those who control the recruitment process of the political parties. The idea behind this system is that women will be recruited into political positions and are not isolated from the political culture. Quota Systems have been used effectively in Rwanda who has as a result reached above parity in terms of women representation in their legislature. With this said however it is important to note that quotas aren't the sole solution to solving the gender gap in political participation. As Birgitta Dahl, Speaker of Parliament in Sweden said "[one] cannot deal with the problem of female representation by a quota system alone... [political] parties the educational system, NGO's trade unions, churches-all must take responsibility within their own organizations

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.lauraliswood.com/councilofwomenworldleaders.html>

to promote women's participation."<sup>4</sup> It is important for Member States to not only look at quota systems when solving this issue but to also try and tackle some of the underlying causes of this gender gap.

Some of the factors behind this gender gap include the ideological constraints of patriarchal societies that put women into gender roles that restrict them to "domestic" positions in society where they are less influential. There are also numerous political factors that act as a barrier to women's entry into politics, part of this is because most political parties have male-orientated platforms. This in turn makes it harder for women to fit into these parties. There is also a strong economic factors that act as a barrier to women. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the cost of political campaigns have gone up significantly especially in the developed world. Because women typically have less access to capital than men, this can be one of the most important factors to women not entering into politics.

Proposed solutions to help solve these underlying gender inequalities include promoting networking for women politicians. This is important in strengthening the solidarity for female politicians who often times face prejudice when entering the political scene.

## **VII. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS**

1. What are some good measures of progress in promoting women's political participation?
2. What role should Partisanship play in promoting women's presence in politics?
3. What National Policies should the United Nations General Assembly advocate member states to enact?
4. What can existing bodies within the United Nations do in order to promote women politicians?
5. How should the United Nations itself Promote Women with in its own ranks?
6. Is the lack of female participation in government the result of sexism?
7. In cultures that are traditionally patriarchal what can be done to encourage the participation of women in government?

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<sup>4</sup>[http://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1314/ElectoralQuotas](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1314/ElectoralQuotas)

