

ECOSOC

DELEGATE BACKGROUND GUIDE



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A Letter From Your Director...

Dear delegates,

Welcome to UTMUN! Whether this is your first committee, or your tenth, I hope that you get everything you're looking for out of a MUN experience.

My name is Angela and I'll be your director. I'm currently in my 2nd year of study at university, pursuing a double major in International Relations and Ethics, Society and Law. I am a passionate member of the MUN community here at the University of Toronto and hope to create a dynamic and engaging committee for all of you.

Of course, I can't run a committee on my own. A dedicated team is behind every committee and we've been working hard to create an inclusive environment for you to improve your debate skills. However, you MUN experience is ultimately what you make of it. Bring your ideas to the table, research your position and speak to your fellow delegates. If you have any questions, please get in touch and I'd be happy to help.

It's going to be a fantastic conference and my team and I look forward to meeting you all this February!

Best Regards,

Angela Hou

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Photo: PBS

INCOME INEQUALITY

Human history has been characterized by a need to overcome scarcity – scarcity of resources, scarcity of people, and scarcity of time. Economics is a field that attempts to resolve such scarcities. It is the role of this committee to properly delegate monetary resources, human capital, and time into creating a more equitable and egalitarian world in terms of economic distribution and the availability of opportunities for individual and collective advancement. Over the course of the past decade, the international community has witnessed significant progress in alleviating poverty. However, despite these strides, inequality still remains to be a fundamental problem in most developing nations. The existence of large disparities remain to be a cause of concern, namely that of access to health, education and social services, as a result of income inequality. Income inequality, as defined by the United Nations (UN) refers to the extent to which income is distributed in an uneven manner among a population. One must also note that even though income inequality between countries is nonetheless a consistent problem, the inequality present within the borders of member states remains to be on the rise.

Though the world continues to witness significant economic progress, one thing is

clear. Economic growth, or rather development, is no longer a viable solution in alleviating poverty. Rather, it is a question of building an inclusive economy composed of the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental- as outlined by the Millennium Development Goal Indicators Database. In order to reduce inequality, policies and solutions should focus on demands as they address the needs of those that are disadvantaged, minorities and marginalized.

Thus far, economic inequality continues to affect many people around the world. With the rise of a drastic income inequality, successful development is dependent on a country's national and foreign policy. Countries with weak economic structures and institutions, and low infrastructural and human development have less capacity to gain from integrating into global markets. Consequently, such conditions present barriers for developing countries to grow out of poverty and reduce their vulnerability to global economic shocks. Hence, the greater the likelihood of growth collapses and conflict, the easier it is for global inequality to raise. Therein lies the crux of the problem. Development is not a sustainable solution to income inequality.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: REDUCE INEQUALITY WITHIN AND AMONG COUNTRIES

On the January 1st, 2016, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) formed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These goals were adopted by world leaders in September 2015. The underlying crux of these goals are to end all forms of poverty. Unlike the previous Millennium Development Goals, these goals demand action plans from all countries, regardless of their socio-economic status. It is important to note that part of addressing income inequality includes the following (United Nations Development Programme, 2014):

- 1.0 Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality.
- 2.0 Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard.
- 3.0 Improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions and strengthen the implementation of such regulations.
- 4.0 Ensure enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions in order to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions.

5.0 Encourage official development assistance and financial flows, including foreign direct investment, to States where the need is greatest, and in particular to the least developed countries, such as African countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries, in accordance with their national plans and programmes.

These Sustainable Development Goals are crucial as it makes provisions on how countries such as China can effectively use globalization, or other policies, to extend prosperity and human development to the poorest of their regions, while maintaining both economic health and environmental security at the same time. This ECOSOC committee also needs to guide countries stricken with corruption, poverty, and low levels of development into reaching a level of political stability, economic affluence, and political accountability. In other words, the committee must attempt to level the playing field for economic opportunities, not only in the most poverty stricken countries of the developing world, but also in developing and developed countries. There are many avenues for the discussion to flow, yet perhaps the most pertinent issue is whether or not globalization still remains a relevant and desirable option for the world of 2017, and whether or not any viable alternatives exist.

Delegates have the ability to help influence change and development at a local level. It can also extend oversight into areas of development, such as environmental issues, corruption, and wealth distribution that are usually neglected by free market models of globalization and development. The situation at hand is not a dire one, but may manifest itself into a pressing threat to global security and stability if inequalities and perceived issues of cultural imperialism antagonize those not involved with the process of globalization.

CASE STUDY ON THE 'REPORT ON THE WORLD SITUATION 2013'

In addressing income inequality in the years to come, the Report on the World Situation 2013 remains to play an important role. Perhaps the importance of the report lies in its acknowledgment that policies enacted by governments and international organizations alike are necessary if not fundamental for growing, or, conversely declining inequality. The report remains relevant today as it has taken the liberty of predicting the trajectory of income inequality. Not to forget, its statistical data is all encompassing, and provides an overarching perspective of a nation's economy.

The problem with adopting a global perspective on the question of income inequality is the variant in its statistical numbers. Whilst the report concedes that the magnitude of income disparities across countries is large, it is adamant in its belief that disparities across individuals within the borders of the nation state also remain relatively high. For example, the

average income of an individual in the bottom decile in South Africa is higher than that of an individual in the richest decile in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This is to mean that though internal distribution also has a strong impact on the relative economic situation of individuals in different countries. Poor people in more unequal countries can have lower living standards than poor people in countries with lower average incomes but less unequal distribution.

In today's economy, regional centres of wealth and power still highlight vast disparities between affluent urban concentrations of wealth and poverty-stricken remote, rural regions. Globalization, a force that has freed so many from poverty and spread so many benefits of technology and modern industry to the developing world, has also resulted in ghastly environmental issues, exploitation of locals by elites, and economic vulnerabilities for local markets. Cultural imperialism, a sense of exclusion, and frustration mark those who have not been involved with the process of globalization. Increasing debt and credit crises as a result of economic integration, especially the recent 2015 Greek debt crisis, have instilled fear in those supporters of globalization and bodies such as the European Union. This has translated into terrorism, domestic political instability, and increasingly protectionist mind-sets. The world today is troubled by such evils, and unless policy makers can resolve these issues, fear and instability will continue to dominate the political environment of both the domestic and the international arena.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Considering the repercussions of environmental negligence, cultural imperialism, and economic marginalization, is globalization the most desirable model for development in both developing countries and disparate regions of developed countries?
2. How can environmental issues and the other consequences of globalization be mitigated while at the same time preventing the hindrance of economic development?
3. What role have the world's wealthiest nations played in increasing the developmental disparity between nations, and what responsibility do they have to use their economic resources to aid other states?
4. How can private and public interests be reconciled in development?
5. How can governments work with international organizations such as the UN, World Trade Organization (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), NGO's, and corporations to address income inequality?
6. How can the ECOSOC Committee persuade the developing world to adopt development plans that are most in touch with traditional industries than imitate Western macroeconomic situations?

HELPFUL SOURCES:

1. United Nations Development of Economic & Social Affairs: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/>
2. An article explaining the relationship between environmental destruction and economic development, highlighting the case of the Indian economy: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/23/opinion/cutting-through-indias-smog.html?_r=1&mtrref=undefined&gwh=2E3070FC4E333E60051259AAC772C9D3&gwt=pay&assetType=opinion
3. The website offers insight into commonly used terms in international politics & finance: <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/r/resource-curse.asp>
4. United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UNOHRLLS): <http://unohrlls.org/>

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Photo: Sunday Leader

INTERNET ACCESS

Within a world becoming increasingly connected through the internet, it has become a quintessential component of communication, information storage and access, and even a platform for speech and opinion. With the development of the internet, it has become such an integral part of our lives that it has been declared a human right by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights in May of 2011. This was done with the primary intent of preventing the “digital divide”, in which internet access would become elitist in nature and only be accessible by those living in first world regions, and possibly monopolizing access in itself.¹

However, projects such as Facebook’s internet.org initiative are boasting “free basics” for everyone in impoverished countries across the world, granting access to select websites for free without any charges whatsoever.² This guide will cover the background of internet access and private ownership in our rapidly adapting world.

INTERNET.ORG

Internet.org is a project launched by Mark Zuckerberg, CEO and founder of Facebook, in 2013 to establish universal internet access. This mission is currently based primarily in

¹ United Nations Human Rights Council. “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Frank La Rue”. 16 May 2011.

² N.a. “Free Basics by Facebook”. Internet.org. n.d.

Latin America, East Asia and Africa, focusing on nations that have statistically impoverished citizens incapable of obtaining internet access due to financial difficulty. Partnered with Samsung, Ericsson, MediaTek, Opera Software, Nokia and Qualcomm, the goals of the alliance are to make access affordable, use data more efficiently to minimize costs, as well as helping local businesses become a fellow driving force in providing access.³

It is estimated that extending internet access in these regions will deliver many benefits. Internet access brings a projected increase in long term productivity by 25%, an additional \$2.2 trillion collective GDP across all nations, and personal income increases by up to \$600 per person per year, which would in turn lift 160 million across the globe out of poverty. There is also strong evidence on the link between internet access and health, showing that the 2.5 million current HIV and AIDS patients could benefit from access to better monitoring and adherence to treatments. Approximately 640 million children across the world would have greater access to information, allowing for higher education, and greater literacy rate.⁴

However, the “Free Basics” base of Internet.org has flaws – first you must have permission from your wireless carrier to access it, and once you do, Facebook itself has direct control over what sites are included, and which are rejected. Once signed up for the Free Basics package, the carrier unplugs the individual from their current internet access, and transfers them entirely to Facebook’s server, on which websites do not truly exist, but are instead mimicked in the form of low-bandwidth, stripped-down copies. This means people can access sites such as a news article, but may not be able to see user comments, pictures, or video media posted. For these reasons, there are concerns about the freedom of information and speech with those who choose these options. Additionally, considering that an individual must get approved through their carrier provides that they must have existing internet service in the first place; effectively, they are willingly cutting themselves off the ‘real’ internet to opt for the more limited and controlled Free Basics version. Current approximations on the total number of websites is approximately 2 billion, whereas the Free Basics package is projected to reach approximately 100 websites in the foreseeable future.⁵

The goal of Internet.org is removing geographic barriers and integrating everyone into the global community. It is estimated currently that 80-90% of the world population lives in areas that is covered by some type of cellular network, and Facebook is attempting to reach out to the remaining 10-20% using aerial vehicles or drones in remote areas.⁶ On September 1st, 2016, a SpaceX rocket exploded on its launchpad, and was carrying Face-

3 Josh Constantine. “Facebook and 6 Phone Companies Launch Internet.org to Bring Affordable Access To Everyone.” Techcrunch. 20 August 2013.

4 Chris Williams and Davide Strusani. “Value of Connectivity: Benefits of Expanding Internet Access”. Deloitte. N.d.

5 Mike Elgan. “The surprising truth about Facebook’s Internet.org”. PCWorld. 15 Feb 2016.

6 Trevir Nath. “Internet.org: What It Is and How It Works”. Investopedia. 13 Feb 2015. [a](#)

book's \$200 million AMOS-6 satellite designed to deliver internet access to remote regions around the world; this was to be paired with a network of drones over these regions to establish one large network over poorer regions.⁷

INTERNET FREEDOM, PRIVACY, CENSORSHIP AND OWNERSHIP

Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "no one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy" – this, alongside protection of the freedom of speech, are core elements of the UN and democratically recognized nations across the world. There are approximately 2 billion internet users and five billion mobile phone users, most of whom are actively publishing photos, blogs, or other forms of either private information or personal opinions. Social media sites such as Facebook are a monetarily free service, but their users agree to allowing for the use of their data and private information to be sold to advertisers in using it. With such large following and support, the consumers of social media are vulnerable to unilateral changes made to privacy policies and practices. Additionally, these sites actively enforce their community guidelines, which is seen by some as an active method of control of expression.⁸

Online censorship exists within the current People's Republic of China, blocking access of websites such as Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter to all citizens and visitors. Information on specific topics has also been removed, such as the Tiananmen Square protests, specific episodes of the Chinese political leadership, or content related to human rights and political reform.⁹ This has been vocalized as a 'barrier to trade' by the United States, and is considered a force acting against the ultimate globalizing goal of universal internet access.¹⁰ Other forms of such censorship exist outside controlled environments, such as the admittance by a former Facebook editor to suppressing Conservative news from being shown as "trending."¹¹ There is currently much debate about the use of censorship as a form of retention of power, such as in the cases of China and North Korea, but also in the form of limiting freedom of speech by selective acts.

INTERNET NEUTRALITY

⁷ Brian Fung. "Mark Zuckerberg 'deeply disappointed' after SpaceX blows up US\$200 million Facebook Satellite". National Post. 2 Sept 2016.

⁸ Mendel, T., Puddephatt, A., Wagner, B., Hawtin, D. & Torres, N. "Global Survey on Internet Privacy and Freedom of Expression". UNESCO. 2012.

⁹ Schmidt, Eric & Jared Cohen. "Web censorship: the net is closing in". The Guardian. 23 April 2013.

¹⁰ Simon Denyer. "China's scary lesson to the world: Censoring the Internet works". The Washington Post. 23 May 2016.

¹¹ Nellie Bowles & Sam Thielman. "Facebook accused of censoring conservatives, report says". The Guardian. 9 May 2016.

Within developed countries with 'universal' internet access, another question arises – how to ensure the internet, and the consumers, are treated fairly by corporations that provide internet services. Network neutrality is loosely considered as the idea that cellular, cable and phone connection should treat all websites and services the same – many corporations currently force greater payment for different websites, depending on what the customer uses. The FCC (Federal Communications Commission) of America is currently debating legislation to limit this practice of 'website discrimination' and allow for open internet usage.¹²

While this issue is mostly localized to America currently, it is a legitimate threat that exists once internet providing corporations exist within any region. It poses an even greater threat to nations that do not have existing networks, or have a very limited number of corporations, as it can open the door to monopolization.

CONCLUSION

With the inclusion of internet access as a basic human right in 2011, our usage and dependence of the internet has only increased and spread across the globe. Governments and lawmakers worldwide are still actively working to implement new rules and regulations to the internet, attempting to offer the same rights and rules as the 'real' world. With the introduction of Internet.org, it must be considered that the small group of companies offering this initiative will have unparalleled control over the regions they service.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Is it admirable that Facebook and other corporations are filling a gap in the world's telecommunications infrastructure, or is it an indicator that national governments are abdicating their own responsibility to develop public infrastructure?
- What actions can be taken to prevent the control of the internet by corporations?
- How important is a free and open internet, and to what lengths should the international community go to defend it?
- What specific rights do individuals have on the internet?
- How worried should individuals be about the capability of Facebook and other sites to monitor their internet activity, and store vast amounts of private information? How should international organizations and national governments regulate this behaviour?

12 N.a. "A Guide to the Open Internet". The Open Internet. N.d.

- How should the opposing interests between businesses and individuals surrounding internet regulation be resolved?
- Should there be greater attention put on states who restrict citizen access to the internet, and should they face punishment for suppressing information from the public?
- How can nations with highly developed telecommunications infrastructure aid those whose capacities are underdeveloped?



ABC

OFFSHORE ACCOUNTS

Offshore accounts are defined as bank accounts for the storage of wealth in other states, usually in locations with low-tax jurisdictions. Usually, placing money in offshore accounts is incentivized by financial and legal advantages, such as relatively less or no taxation and more privacy. For example, foreign accounts can provide safe havens for politicians who wish to hide their wealth, or allow business owners to evade local tax compliance. With the increased convenience of owning bank accounts globally, many rich individuals have also been equipped with more possibilities to avoid economic and legal obligations.

The leak of the Panama Papers brought the issue of offshore accounts to the forefront. The Panama Papers are a series of leaked documents revealing offshore entities, listing individuals and their stored amounts. This leak involved several state leaders, economic elites, and celebrities. The Panama Papers named relatives of many senior political leaders, most which hold high status in authoritarian governments. Another more recent example of leaked offshore account information is the Bahamas tax-haven data, released a few months ago in 2016.¹ These two leakages have both been publicized initially through European news outlets, and later through the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ: <https://www.icij.org>).²

Offshore accounts are not only problematic for individuals and their public reputation. They are also policy concerns for governments and international organizations. In response to the Bahamas leak, UN experts responded by calling upon governments to collaborate in “liquidating offshore tax avoidance and establishing tougher financial regulations”.³ This issue has gained international attention both on the political and economic front, and this

- 1 Zach Dubinsky. “Canadian Ties Exposed in Leaked Bahamas Tax-Haven Data.” CBCnews Business. September 21, 2016.
- 2 Juliette Garside. “Bahamas Files Leaks Expose Politicians’ Offshore Links.” The Guardian. September 21, 2016.
- 3 “After disclosure on Bahamas tax havens, UN experts urge governments to take action.” UN News Center. October 06, 2016.

committee encourages delegates to understand the causes and nuances behind the issue.

The phenomenon of illegal offshore accounts is widespread for numerous reasons. Firstly, one reason to utilize offshore accounts is that public figures may want to hide their true amount of wealth, sometimes accumulated through corrupt practices. Some argue that the existence of offshore banking services perpetuates corrupt practices in governments that lack transparency, and sustain authoritarian states by allowing the leader to accumulate wealth at the expense of its people.

The emerging consciousness of a global responsibility to (at least) discourage non-democratic rule brings the issue of offshore accounts into controversial territory. For instance, the case of Switzerland reflects the repercussions for bankers worldwide. The Swiss government's policy of non-intervention and neutrality apply both to its military and economic stance, the latter of which is often intertwined with fiscal policy designed for price stability.⁴ As a result, the government of Switzerland has been under considerable pressure to reform its domestic banking regulations, which it has recently begun to consider. In the context of the international community, the central political issue here is the sovereign legislation of any state to determine domestic tax policies. However, as offshore accounts have increasing global implications, policies within state borders (like that of Switzerland's) have attracted controversy and criticism.

Offshore banking disproportionately affects the developing world. In fact, the understanding that offshore banking is the flow of capital from developed to developing countries is a limited one. In fact, a large portion of money in offshore entities originates from developing countries, totaling more than one third of the world's offshore wealth.⁵ This money becomes especially critical when it is diverted from pressing needed welfare or infrastructure programs, instead being moved from public coffers to private accounts. While it is undeniable that many beneficiaries of offshore accounts are based in developed countries, where the taxation infrastructure is more robust, offshore accounts is a truly global problem in its reach.

It is crucial to understand that the legal issue at hand is not the mere existence of offshore accounts. In fact, it is acceptable to store one's private possessions in another country under set legal guidelines. Businessmen often choose to bank elsewhere due to a lack of certain financial services in their home country, or for simple convenience in the case of transnational corporations. The availability of offshore bank accounts helps multinational corporations who often simultaneously operate in multiple currencies. This issue only hits a gray area insofar as it is manipulated by some as a tool for avoiding the civil duty to pay taxes. What is illegal is the absence of accurate report to institutions responsible for taxation. In other words, offshore assets must be duly reported in tax files to institutions such as the Canadian Revenue Agency and its equivalents worldwide.⁶ The murky area of offshore accounts lies in the lack of incentive for account-holders to self-report, as well as the insufficient capability of state governments to reach beyond state borders for investigation and thus accountability.

4 Owen F Humpage. "The Limitations of Foreign-Exchange Intervention: Lessons from Switzerland." Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland. October 18, 2013.

5 Christopher Matthews. "The Real Problem With Offshore Tax Havens." Time. July 26, 2012.

6 Andrew Allentuck. "Foreign Bank Accounts – They're Not Just For the Furtive." Financial Post. April 4, 2013.

Offshore accounts also have public implications. Leaks such as the Panama papers attract public frustration from the people, especially in countries with wide gaps of inequality, because the individuals evading tax payments are almost always those who are better off. For instance, when the Panama Papers were publicized, domestic backlash and dissatisfaction flooded the social media and other means of expression. Not only are offshore accounts vivid reminders of the scope of inequitable wealth distribution, but also of the dishonesty of the 'one percent'. Moreover, tax evasion leaves the burden of government funding unfairly on the relatively worse off. States like Canada, for example, implement graduated tax systems under which individuals with higher income are subject to a higher percentage of taxation. This system is enforced in the spirit of easing structural barriers of the relatively less wealthy through taxation, which some see as a mechanism of economic redistribution. The proliferation of dishonest offshore account storage undermines and weakens current government efforts worldwide to shrink the inequality gap, thus triggering public distrust and discontent.⁷

The media exposure of the Panama Papers has provided public momentum for further investigations regarding offshore accounts. The often deeply engrained criminality in the practice of offshore world is a problem that spills over state boundaries.⁸ The issue of offshore accounts is also deeply entrenched in broader issues of corruption, banking and corporate interests, and economic structure.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the role of the UN and ECOSOC in the issue of offshore accounts?
2. How can member states achieve effective political collaboration despite the regulatory differences between different countries and governments?
3. How can national and international policies allow for the convenience of multi-national banking while ensuring the accountability of taxation?
4. What are the crucial factors contributing to the issue of tax evasions through offshore banking? Do businesses and civil society organizations have a role to play in this issue?

7 Dale Eisler. "The Panama Papers and Public Trust: The Challenge for Governments." Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Social Policy. May 2, 2016.

8 International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. "Giant Leak of Offshore Financial Records Exposes Global Array of Crime and Corruption." ICIJ Panama Papers. April 03, 2016.

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