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THE SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND HUMANITARIAN COMMITTEE

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DURABLE PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Distinguished Delegates,

It is in these times that the importance of sustainable peace becomes very pertinent. When crops fail, conflict broadens, and the social, humanitarian, and very cultural fabric of entire nations become shaken. Through this, the role of international organisations such as the United Nations becomes both simultaneously forgotten, and more necessary than ever. It is through the dialogue of nations, and those within them, that great things can be done, and real change can be made. And within this, development is essential, as the Secretary General noted:

It's widely recognized that there is no peace without development and no development without peace; it is also true that there is no peace and sustainable development without respect for human rights. – Antonio Guterres

And so with this context in mind, it is our greatest pleasure to welcome you to the Future We Want Model United Nations Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee! The third Institutions of the United Nations General Assembly, and one that brings a wide range of influence and influences to the international community. At this conference, we hope to broaden your understanding of sustainable peace, and how it can be strengthened in one of the most diverse continents in the world, Africa.

As Chairs, we will be here at all times to help you, teach you, coach you, and watch you grow during this conference. Model United Nations is about building the skill, ideas, and network to become a global citizen and effectuate change across the world, and we sincerely hope to impart these skills onto you.

With this, we are always within reach, and hope that we meet you in wonderful circumstances come July

Yours sincerely,
Hidde van Luenen and Philippe A. Lefevre

I. Introduction to the committee

The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM) is the third committee of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). It was founded in 1946 during the first meeting of the UNGA together with five other committees. All 193 members of the United Nations (UN) can attend the meetings of SOCHUM, which usually take place from early October to late November.

In SOCHUM, all members are equal, and have one vote. Unlike the United Nations Security Council, no vetoes exist in the committee. As such, no sole nation can block a SOCHUM resolution. However, resolutions by SOCHUM are not legally binding on the members of the UN, and as such, states cannot be punished for neglecting to uphold decisions made in SOCHUM resolutions. Instead, SOCHUM resolutions are advisory in their nature. They make recommendations to international actors which they are then free to act upon these recommendations. This absolutely does not mean that resolutions by SOCHUM are void of meaning or purpose, however. States are unlikely to sign resolutions they disagree with, or do not plan to implement, and resolutions can act as a clear signal of intent towards the rest of the world.

As is also in the name of the committee, SOCHUM concerns itself with social, humanitarian, and cultural issues (Aeschlimann, & Regan, 2017). This includes predominantly the protection of human rights, but also includes topics such as the advancement of women's rights, fundamental freedoms and the right to self-determination, and criminal justice (Aeschlimann, & Regan, 2017). As such, any solutions that SOCHUM introduces in their resolutions must be in nature with this mandate.

Unlike some of the other six committees, it has no subsidiary bodies. Instead, special rapporteurs and working groups often report to the committee. The Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR) is the main affiliated committee. Furthermore, the Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC), the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and other organisations within the UN that have social themes often refer to the third committee.

II. Introduction to the topic and definition

In the upcoming meeting of SOCHUM, the topic that will be discussed is *Durable Peace through Sustainable Development in Africa*. This touches upon many different issues and will require comprehensive solutions that need to be widely supported by the member states. The two main themes in our debate are durable peace and sustainable development.

A. Durable Peace

Thousands, if not millions of books have been written on war, conflict, and peace, and there are about as many definitions for those

concepts as there are books on them. To make it easier for you, consider the following definitions:

“it [war] is an intense form of political relations that impacts upon virtually every dimension of human life.” (Williams, 2013, p. 187).

Peace is not just the absence of war, but also the absence of conflict.

Literature distinguishes between two types of peace:

(1) “Negative peace” = a state of being where war is not being fought or war is not imminent.

(2) “Positive peace” implies a social and political ordering of society that is generally accepted as just (Howard, 2000, p.2).

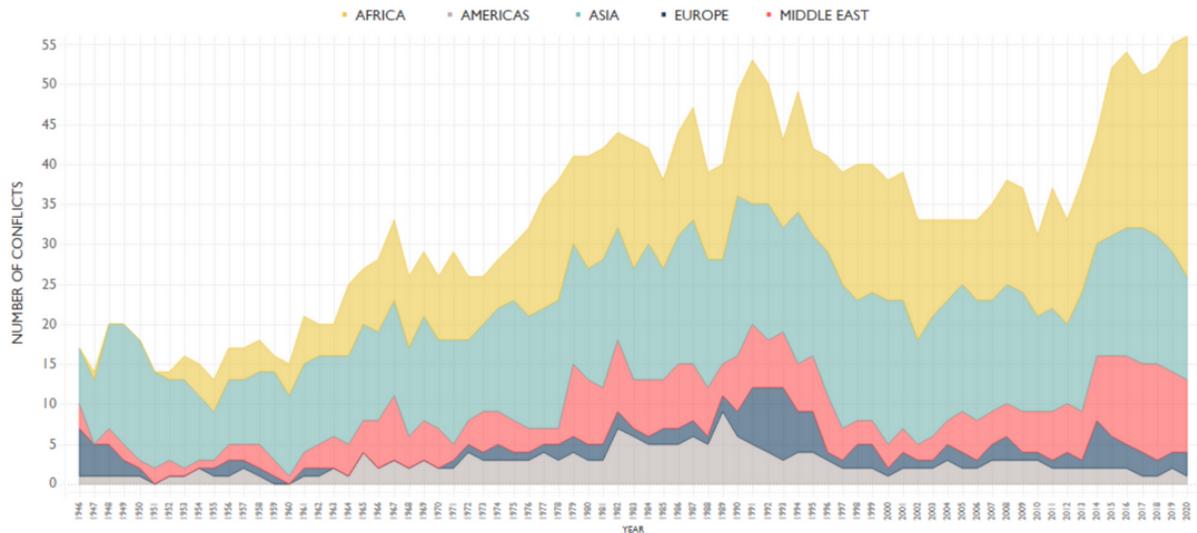
Tragically, such a positive peace can take a long time to build up, and much less time to break off.

(3) Peace according to the Enlightenment thinkers: “an international order in which war plays no part” (Howard, 2000, p. 2).

According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (n.d.), the number of conflicts is on the rise in the world, especially in Africa. Please see Figure 1 for data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program on the number of state-based armed conflicts in the world. Note that these statistics exclude non-state violence and one-sided violence.

Figure 1

Number of state-based armed conflicts sorted by region, from 1946-2020



Based on UCDP 21.I data

Note. Adopted from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program at <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/charts/>

B. Sustainable development

In 2015, in resolution A/RES/70/1 the world announced the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as a follow-up to the Millennium Development goals. This is one of the largest and most ambitious projects the United Nations has embarked upon (The United Nations [UN], n.d.a). These 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), pictured below in Figure 2, will require intensive global engagement and bringing together large parts of society to realise them.

As a major milestone in the international pursuit for sustainable development, these SDGs will act as a guide in your debate and will surely be mentioned in our resolutions. Since they form such a central part of our debate, and you will likely use them for your solutions, it is perhaps enlightening to consider what the SDGs

themselves identify as means of implementation, as found in A/70/L.1 paragraph 39 – 46 (UN, n.d.a)

First and foremost, nation states are primarily responsible for ensuring that the targets laid out for the separate goals are met. In addition to this, there is a wide variety of other actors and programs that are already established and aim to assist the nation states. These then form a great opportunity for our committee and should be included in any resolution passed.

Figure 2

The Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development



Note. Adopted from the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development

<https://unosd.un.org/content/sustainable-development-goals-sdgs>

III. Literature Review

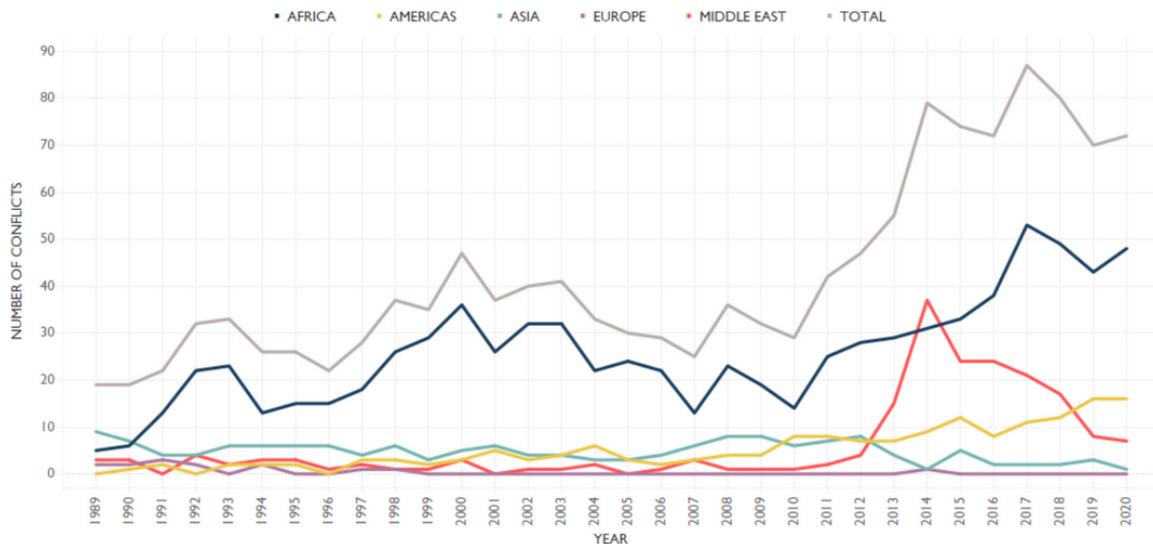
As shown above, the number of conflicts in Africa is at an all-time high, with instability as a result. As such one might wonder why one would engage in conflict. According to Williams (2013) there are three reasons beyond victory why one would engage in conflict:

1. To limit violence, especially one's own exposure of that of a key political constituency, for instance by bringing the fight to a geographical location far away from the group you are trying to protect.
2. For immediate gain, for instance economic gain through the accumulation of commodities, or through increased security. But it could also be psychological, for instance by giving people a purpose (protecting the homeland, being a 'freedom fighter'). Other options are to establish a hierarchy, or to take revenge for past humiliations.
3. Lastly, war can be used to weaken political opposition. This not only concerns the foreign party that you are fighting but can also concern domestic opposition. A war can be used to frame critics of one's own regime as appeasers, weak, or even traitors.

And as the world develops, conflict does as well. Interstate conflict has been on the decline since the mid-1970s, yet non-state actor wars have been on the rise as is also seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Number of non-state conflicts by region, 1989-2020



Note. Adopted from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program at <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/charts/>

Important to note is the link between society and conflict. First of all, conflict has the potential to affect all of society, and in some cases, society is the target. Africa is an enormous, and hugely diverse continent, and as such there will be no one-size fits all solution for all conflict taking place within its borders.

Then what is the role of sustainable development in conflict? First it is important to realise that sustainable development is necessary all over the world. As a developing continent, this means that Africa has the opportunity to immediately develop in a more sustainable manner.

Second, consider that the African continent is one of the most vulnerable continents due to its high exposure and low adaptive capacity (Bruckner, 2012). Climate change already affects the biodiversity, food security, water availability, and productivity levels in Africa (Hope, 2009).

Lastly, consider the relationship between climate change and conflict. As will also be expanded upon below, climate change has the potential to create new, and exacerbate existing conflicts.

IV. Basic human rights and freedoms and conflict

The relationship between human rights and conflict has been scrutinised before in the academic realm. A few central conclusions have been drawn: First, **human rights abuses are both the cause of conflict, and a symptom of conflict.** The Rwandan genocide, but also the protracted conflicts in Angola and Sudan have shown that human rights abuses can become a tool or strategy in the waging of a war or conflict. Two examples of human rights abuses as a cause of conflict are South Africa and Ireland. In South Africa, the Apartheid regime caused a high-intensity conflict, and in Northern-Ireland, the systematic abuse of the civil and political rights of catholic nationalists led first to non-violent protest groups, which later transformed into violent protests.

Second, **institutionalised respect for human rights is a form of conflict prevention.** The satisfaction of basic human rights and needs prevents the need for people to resort to violence and conflict to achieve those things. When the respect for human rights is institutionalised and becomes part of state policy, high-intensity conflict may be prevented.

Lastly, **fundamental rights and freedoms are non-negotiable, though their application is.** This relates to the way in which fundamental rights and freedoms are implemented. Though rights

such as education and healthcare, and freedoms such as political participation and freedom of speech are non-negotiable, the way in which a state implements them may differ and need to be suitable for the society it governs.

As such, when considering the effects of human rights on durable peace, it is important to know the relationship between the two. As such, processes aimed at resolving conflict, and the solutions that you will present in SOCHUM must address the human rights of all parties involved in the conflict.

V. Climate change, resource scarcity, and conflict

By now it should no longer come as a surprise that climate change affects every facet of life, and every facet of politics. It has been a crucial topic in sustainable development since the beginning of its movement, and it is increasingly becoming more of an issue in international security. Perhaps the best example of how climate change may create, or exacerbate resource scarcity, which in turn may intensify conflicts, is the case of water.

Water is a vital resource, not just for drinking water, but also for sanitation, farming, industry, and electricity generation. Climate change creates a higher risk of droughts, thus leading to a higher demand for water. The need for clean and cheap energy has prompted nations to build dams, with tensions as a result. A great example here is Ethiopia's Great Renaissance Dam, which may cause a loss of flow downstream. In this example, the use of water by

Ethiopia might cause shortages further downstream in countries such as Sudan and Egypt.

As such, it is of interest of the world, and thus of SOCHUM to consider how the world can prevent climate change and resource scarcity from becoming a source of conflict.

VI. Land-leasing and conflict

Global food scarcity is on the rise. This is the result of international crises such as the war in Ukraine, which reduced food exports, and climate change, which is influencing crop yields more and more. As a result of this, food prices have risen to an all-time high, and food insecurity has become rampant in developing nations. In addition to this, countries such as China and India see a reduction of their own arable land, for instance due to high-intensity farming which depletes the resources of their soil. This may lead to an increase of the controversial practice of land-leasing. Land-leasing in this case refers to when countries, or private actors, invest or buy arable land abroad to ensure their own food security.

Countries such as South-Korea, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and the People's Republic of China have all engaged in land-leasing contracts in order to continue feeding their population. Such contracts often see financial and technological investments in return for food, and at times even wholesale purchases of swaths of land.

Though the advantages to host countries may be clear, repercussions are numerous. For example, domestic food production may be reduced in the short and long term, there is often a lack of regard for the environment in such deals, and oversight, transparency, and regulation are insufficient (UN, 2009).

In addition to this, the sheer scale of the deals that are being made has caused concern. An example is a deal made by the South Korean Daewoo Corporation, which leased 1.3 million hectares of land in Madagascar, a deal which also played a part in the ousting of their president in March 2009 (UN, 2009).

Since land-leasing can lead to resource scarcity in the host country, and as it may lead to domestic tension, SOCHUM should consider whether it wants to work towards regulation of land-leasing contracts.

VII. Digitalisation and sustainable development

Digitalisation is an essential part of sustainable development. Technologies can help our world become more fair, peaceful, and just (UN, n.d.b). They can help with reaching each of the 17 SDGs, from ending extreme poverty to reducing maternal and infant mortality, promoting sustainable farming and decent work, and achieving universal literacy, but they can also be a detriment to society. Technological advancements create privacy concerns, fuel inequality, and erode security (UN, n.d.b). As SOCHUM it is relevant to consider how technology may affect human rights, both in a positive and in a negative light.

An example is data collection. Currently there is no legal framework on the ownership of private data. This means that corporations and governments have a lot of power over the data they collect on their users and population, to the detriment of the ownership of that individual. Private data can be used for good. For instance, responsible use of data on the personal health of individuals may enable healthcare providers to deliver better care. Yet private data can also be used to abuse the human rights of individuals, for instance when it is used for political repression.

With this in mind, it is perhaps useful for SOCHUM to consider international guidelines and standards on the use of personal data, especially for developing countries which have a weaker rule of law and may be more vulnerable to exploitation by large corporations.

VIII. Discussion and conclusion

We live in a time of unprecedented crises. COVID is still lingering, with long COVID looming as a large threat. The war in Ukraine shows no sign of stopping anytime soon, with rising food prices as a result. The nations of the world are not on route to reach the agreements made in the Paris climate accords, and all the while we seem to be at the start of a large financial crisis, with rampant inflation throughout the world.

And while all these crises are happening, it is important to remember that sustainable development is a central pillar of durable peace, whose importance will only increase. Africa is predominantly a developing continent, and one with huge potential. This potential can only be realised, however, when conflict is stifled, and stability

prevails. This year, SOCHUM has a broad topic, with loads to discuss. The appropriate time to act was yesterday, so we better find solutions today than tomorrow.

IX. Bloc Positions

X. Recommended Sources and Further Research

The Uppsala University Conflict Data Program (n.d.)

[https://ucdp.uu.se/encyclopedia?
resourceVersion220613_1512=1](https://ucdp.uu.se/encyclopedia?resourceVersion220613_1512=1)

A letter by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on conflict and durable peace in Africa (2004)

https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/EJC10050?casa_token=FDzNxNXqShYAAAAA:pQOahJ7RDcfXR9s2kYWpJjIGlamu8Z-hD9XPpiz36zu_eUOWGEk4sOiRIK_skFzUCWDOYWFefozX5kl

Information on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

Africa and Climate Change.

<https://academicjournals.org/journal/JENE/article-full-text/117F36455610>

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted by SOCHUM)

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

Resource scarcity in Africa:

<https://www.cfr.org/event/scarcity-and-security-africa-0>

Scale of land leasing in Africa:

https://www.africanbusinesslife.com/countries-in-rush-for-leasing-land-in-africa,IDE_272.html

XI. Questions A Resolution Must Answer

The following are questions that the chairs will expect to see answered in a final Draft Resolution.

- What should SOCHUM's role be in making basic human rights such as food, education, and healthcare, more accessible, and how can the committee help guarantee basic freedoms such as the freedom from torture?
- How can SOCHUM help prevent climate change and resource scarcity from becoming a source of conflict and instability?
- Is land-leasing a desirable practice, and should SOCHUM involve itself in the regulation of it? If so, what should this look like?
- What role does digitalisation have in achieving sustainable development in Africa?

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