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LATIN AMERICAN MODEL
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LAMUN XXXVI**

UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S EMERGENCY FUND

Topic A Handbook

"Child marriage in underdeveloped countries."

Chairwomen: María Carmina López Tajonar
maria.lopeztr@udlap.mx

Vice Chair: Luis Samuel Uriza Ricano
luis.urizaro@udlap.mx

Conference Official: Jaqueline Silva Martínez
jaqueline.silvamz@udlap.mx



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Dear delegates,

The Bureau wants to officially welcome you to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. We feel really honored to lead the delegations participating in this committee at the Thirty-Sixth edition of the Latin American Model United Nations. As members of the Chair, our main role is to provide corresponding guidance in the development of the exchange of proposals and ideas, so that a meaningful discussion on our topics of interest can be achieved.

The mission of UNICEF is to advocate for the protection of children's rights, for them to fulfill their basic needs, and to amplify their opportunities so they can flourish in their potential. Care, respect, integrity, trust, accountability, and sustainability are the core values that guide communication and interaction within this agency. The Bureau encourages delegates to consider the mission and use the core values, helping maintain a professional and courteous environment that allows us all to develop our capacities.

Finally, the Bureau would like to thank you all for your participation; the presence, sharing, and cooperation of each of the delegations is fundamental for the correct development of the UNICEF committee. Do not be afraid to share and express your ideas; remember that each contribution can help diversify and enrich the debate. It will be a significant learning experience for all of us. Once more, the Bureau is pleased and excited to form part of this meaningful experience for your academic, professional, and personal development. We will meet you at LAMUN XXXVI!

Sincerely,

María Carmina López Tajonar
Chairwomen of the UNICEF Committee



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UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S EMERGENCY FUND (UNICEF)

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund was established on December 11, 1946, after the end of the Second World War, by the United Nations General Assembly (UNICEF, n.d.). With this global scenario, there was a huge need to help youths and children whose lives and futures were exposed, without taking into consideration the role their country had taken in the war. From the ashes of the war till today's globalized world, the main objective has been to protect children's rights, so they survive, prosper, and flourish in all their capacities (UNICEF, n.d.).

Since 1996, UNICEF programs and actions have been guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, seeking children's rights to become the basis for the national and international standards of behavior towards them. This document presents who children are, their rights, and the responsibility of governments to protect them. All the rights of infants are interconnected and have equal importance (UNICEF, n.d.-a).

Throughout its history, this agency has had various achievements. They have developed diverse historical documents that promote policy discussion and guidance for decision-making for countries where infants' safety and dignity are at risk. This United Nations agency won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1965 (UNICEF, n.d.-b). Today, UNICEF is working in over 190 countries to defend and promote children's rights, emphasizing at 1) child protection and inclusion, 2) child survival, 3) education, 4) social policy, 5) emergencies, 6) gender, 7) innovation for children, 8) supply and logistics and 9) research, evidence, and analysis (UNICEF, n.d.-c).

UNICEF has considered it fundamental to pay specific attention to the disadvantaged children living in underdeveloped countries, urging the international community to continue working together to create appropriate policies that help deliver qualified and specialized services for infants and their families (UNICEF, n.d.). At this committee, delegates will discuss two problems experienced by children living in disadvantaged societies: A) Child marriage in underdeveloped countries and B) Renovating protective policies to prevent the recruitment of children in armed conflicts from Africa and the Middle East.



TOPIC A

Child marriage in underdeveloped countries.

Child marriage is “any formal or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child” (UNICEF, 2023), violating several of their rights. Although the international community has developed multiple global laws to mitigate child marriage, this practice continues to transpire in different countries, especially in underdeveloped ones. One in five girls around the globe continues to marry during their childhood (World Bank, 2017).

This committee will focus on child marriage in underdeveloped countries, since there are several factors in these nations that contribute to keeping this practice alive. Poor economic condition is considered the main cause. There are a lot of families around the globe that struggle each day to feed and support their children, so they consider marrying their daughters as the most viable alternative. Doing this will reduce the number of people that they have to feed. Also, in most cases, they will also get a payment for their daughter. In many cultures, minor age represents a higher price, incentivizing parents to marry their daughters at an early age (Population Media Center, 2023).

Another factor is cultural norms since, in some regions, daughters are considered less valuable than sons; believing their only role in society is to get married and form a family. Parents consider investing in their education a waste of time and financial resources, deciding that is better to arrange their marriage. They also believe that this practice will help reduce premarital sex, which in many cultures and their societies it is considered a lack of respect. A third factor are the dangerous environments, viewing marriage as a form to protect girls from violence or being raped (Population Media Center, 2023).

As mentioned before, this practice continues to happen regularly in underdeveloped countries. It is fundamental that the international community develops strategies to combat and prevent it, since many girls' rights are being violated. Child marriage also has a lot of negative implications for society as a whole. This practice does not allow girls to fulfill their potential and decide about their future, but it also puts at risk



children's health, increases rates of fertility, and contributes to generate a cycle of poverty for girls (Population Media Center, 2023).

One of the children right violated by child marriage is the right to receive education, since when girls get married, they are forced to drop out from school (Population Media Center, 2023). In many cultures, they still believe that as a wife their only job is to do housework and to raise children. Another negative implication is the continuation of the cycle of poverty, not having a complete and a quality education has negative consequences on their adult life. This affects the whole country, since they lose a huge amount of money in earnings and productivity costs (Population Media Center, 2023).

Child marriage leads to an increase of health risks for children, especially because of childhood pregnancy, where both the mother and the baby are put in danger. Different studies have confirmed that teen mothers have a higher mortality rate giving birth, especially when they experience a vulnerable lifestyle (Population Media Center, 2023). Another risk is the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases, since many girls are forced to marry older men. Another consequence that impacts on society is the spike in the fertility rate, because girls marry young, they are likely to have more children. The increase in fertility rates contributes to overpopulation, which affects not only a country, but the whole international system. The growth of the global population directly impacts on poverty, migration, environmental degradation, among others (Population Media Center, 2023).

In 2016, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund together with the United Nations Population Fund developed the Global Programme to End Child Marriage. The main objective is "to tackle child marriage in 12 of the most high-prevalence or high-burden countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen, and Zambia." (UNICEF, 2023-a). The global programme has been supported by various resolutions made by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council; encouraging countries to increase their investment in the prevention and mitigation of this practice. It has also been supported by Belgium, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. In 2022, the Programme presents a report with various



outstanding results in education, child protection, social protection, social and behavioral change, gender, and health. The Programme is trying to engage governments and non-governmental organizations with the communities and partners, so that efficient and reasonable preventive measures and solutions may be created (UNICEF, 2023-a).

Other actors are trying to accelerate coordinated action across education, health, protection, and other sectors, to end child marriage. An example is the Population Media Center (PMC), that throughout entertainment are contributing to create a positive behavior change. Their radio and television programs have the main goal to enforce women and girls around the world, and to propose alternative options for them to flourish their potential and have a future with more and better opportunities (Population Media Center, 2023).

Guiding questions

1. How is child marriage affecting my delegation?
2. What actions is the government taking to solve and prevent this problem (both nationally and internationally)?
3. What global agreements has my delegation signed to protect children's rights?
4. What national measures have been implemented to protect the rights of children?
5. How does child marriage impact the international system?
6. What is the relationship of my delegation with the underdeveloped countries most affected by this problem?



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