

President's Letter



Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the African Union of the Model United Nations Conference!

My name is Nicole Aleksandra Gruszka. I am a second year peace and global studies major with a minor in politics. This is my second year being involved with Model United Nations at Earlham College, but I also have seven years of experience with debating. I am deeply interested in international politics and the structural factors at play within them, and MUN allows me to explore those topics and apply them to a real-world setting. My other interests include playing and listening to music, astrology, and social justice. I am very excited to be your chair for the African Union at ECMUN 2017!

My name is Tienin Olivia and I will be one of your chairs this year. I am a freshman at Earlham College, majoring in politics. I am from Burkina Faso, where I was born and raised. I have a real passion for social entrepreneurship, traveling and politics in the African continent. I have participated in MUN before in my previous school. However, I do not have experience as a chair and I am really excited to live this experience with you. Taking the class "Introduction to Diplomacy" has helped me to acquire more knowledge about the UN. I look forward to engaging in fruitful debate with all of you!

We all are very excited to meet you all in January and lead you through this amazing experience. The topics we will be discussing in the committee are all highly significant and relevant in our globalized world, and we hope you will all come prepared, with carefully done research, an open-minded spirit, and the willingness to learn. Please familiarize yourself with parliamentary procedures and do not hesitate to get in touch with any of us if you have questions. We are all looking forward to working with you. Best of luck!

Kind regards,

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Committee Background

The African Union (AU) is an organization of African countries who came together in order to protect their mutual interest. The Africa union was created on May 26, 2001 in Addis Ababa. It succeeded the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Its purpose was to project the organization at a higher level with more economic, social and political power. Overall, 54 countries are members of the AU (excluding Morocco). The AU also promotes democratic procedures and policies amongst its member countries and is made of many bodies such as the Assembly of the AU, the Pan-African Parliament, the African Court of Justice and Human Rights, the AU Commission (its secretariat), the African Central Bank, African Monetary Fund, and other organs and agencies. Other aims of the AU are to repair damages from colonization, promote unity among African countries, coordinate economic development with African nations, protect the independence and border rights of its member countries and lastly, increase security within its member nations.

Topic I: Environmental Degradation in Africa

Overview:

Global warming has become a serious issue for the world. In the past decade, the African continent has been suffering the most from this phenomenon. Desertification and soil degradation have been the worst effects of global warming on the continent. Sub-Saharan Africa is mainly affected by these issues, with the horn of Africa (Uganda, Somalia, Kenya and Djibouti), subjected to severe droughts over the past 60 years. From lack of water supplies to cracking soils, environment degradation is increasing among African nations and has become a more pressing issue with every day that passes.

Historical Background:

Since the 1940s, Sub-Saharan Africa has been confronted with extreme environmental issues. This situation can partly be explained by the fact that Africa has been occupied by the human species for much longer than other continents. Therefore, as human activity has been prevalent there for much longer, we have observed a decrease in the fertility and quality of soil and the availability of resources. Archeologists have discovered that the arid areas in Africa have been getting drier and drier within the last 5000 years. Since 1980, 42 severe droughts have affected the horn of Africa and 109 million people have suffered from this situation, with more than 12 million of them now depending on food aid. In the past, environmental degradation has been resolved through the rainy season, which usually lasts for half of the year. However, partly due to environmental changes, rainy seasons have become shorter and shorter. In addition to that, the exploitation of minerals in the past by foreign companies has resulted in a lot of damage to the environment. East Africa was also subject to civil wars (Somalia) and terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida, and there human conflicts have contributed to rising levels of greenhouse gases and the degradation of the soil.

Current situation:

Erosion, deforestation, desertification, poor agricultural practices and mineral extraction are the main current causes of the current environmental degradation in Africa. Currently, around 40% of Africa's soils have degraded and most of its water sources are depleted. Roughly 83% of the African population depends on the land, because of agriculture being the main activities in most of the countries. In fact, the growing population of the continent is one of the causes of the current pressure on its land, which has resulted in further degradation of soil.

In addition, agricultural practices, mainly seen in West Africa, are not convenient to the soil: monoculture, irrigation methods and the heavy use of fertilizers affect the quality and the quantity of the soil negatively. If the actual trend continues, many countries will be on the edge of survival, no matter the amount of international aid. We have also seen an increase in desertification. In West Africa, where most of the Sahel countries like Mali and Niger are located, the desert is moving at about 5 km per year, which has rendered a lot of the soil there useless. Each year, around 37 million hectares of forest disappear in Africa and the desert keeps expanding.

Questions to consider:

1. What actions should be taken to reduce environmental degradation in Africa?
2. Did Western nations play an important role in the current situation of soil degradation in Africa? What are their responsibilities and should they intervene?
3. With more than 80% of its population relying on land, should there be a shift to other activities than agriculture? What are other activities that are more sustainable for the environment in Africa?
4. Which kind of actions should be taken by African governments to tackle the issue and is education a potential and effective solution?

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Topic II: China in Africa: Chinese Business and Intervention in African Nations

Overview:

China's active interest in Africa started in 1955, after the Bandung Conference (the first large-scale Asian-African Conference). It is undeniable that since then, China has become one of Africa's favorite business partners at almost every level. Approximately \$160 billion goods per year are traded between these two partners. In addition, the Chinese population in African countries is growing significantly; around 1 million Chinese have moved to African nations within the last 10 years. From mines to roads, to mobile networks, to clothing and to restauration, Chinese companies have become the monopoly of building businesses in the continent.

Historical Background:

China has become a dependable friend for Africa. In fact, China is known by African governments for providing timely and effective assistance whenever African countries are in need. In 2011, China provided millions of dollars for emergency aid for disasters in Africa. China's investment in Africa increased from \$7 billion in 2008 to \$26 billion in 2013. In December 2015, Xi Jinping, the Chinese president, offered a \$60 billion loan and aid package to the continent in order to build infrastructures, develop agriculture and reduce poverty on the continent.

Current situation:

Today, China's ambitions for the African continent are getting bigger and bigger. The China-Africa relationship is growing stronger, causing American firms to claim that Chinese firms are "going around bribing everyone." The reality is that Chinese companies are taking over the African market, leaving Western companies behind.

In 2015, the percentage of imports from France into the African continent dropped considerably. China affirms that they want a country to country relationship and a two-way beneficial relationship. Compared to Western countries and organizations, China is treating Africa with far more dignity. China has been praised by African leaders for not imposing political conditions and interfering in political affairs of African nations. In addition, China is helping to protect the environment, send children to school, dig wells, and build roads and hospitals. China also helps to create jobs: it created 35 000 jobs in Nairobi for building the railways, with 78% of the workers being Kenyans. Recently in 2015, under El Nino, Africa suffered from severe droughts with 35 million people affected.

The Chinese president announced that they would give emergency food aid and money to the affected countries. Furthermore, the headquarters of the African Union (which cost \$200 million) was entirely funded by the Chinese government.

Questions to consider:

1. Does China have any ulterior motives?
2. What could happen to the continent if China's economy slows down?
3. Is China a better partner for the continent compared to Western countries?
4. How can African nations fulfill their needs independent of external characters?

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Topic III: Resource Use

Overview:

The continent of Africa has large quantities of natural resources; some examples are diamonds, salt, gold, iron, cobalt, uranium, copper, bauxite, silver, petroleum and cocoa beans, woods, and tropical fruits. These resources are commonly sold as commodities to many highly industrialized nations, including the United States, France, Canada, the United Kingdom, and China, where their use is central to many economically viable industries. Often, however, the sale of these resources fails to economically stimulate the nation from which they are extracted. Additionally, nations profiting from their natural resources have been shown to have greater economic inequality.

Furthermore, the extraction of many of these resources has led to questions of environmental consequences, with particular concern surrounding environmentally unstable mining practices, deforestation, and general issues of fueling overconsumption.

Historical Background:

European intrusion into Africa began as post-medieval trade posts, settlements, and ports along the coasts of the continent. These ports dealt in the trade of European manufactured goods, resources from the Americas, and resources from Africa, including slaves, gold, ivory, hardwoods, and spices.

Thus, the European partition and colonization of Africa from the 1870s until independence struggles commonly referred to as the “Scramble for Africa” was largely motivated by the competition for the control of access to natural resources unavailable in Europe, such as cotton, cocoa, copper, tin, rubber, diamonds, tea, and palm oil. Large quantities of African resources were extracted by these colonial forces and used to economically advance their own nations, while offering minimal support to the economic development of the continent. Even in comparison to other Western colonial territories, Africa received particularly little foreign investment. This lack of foreign investment was rooted in the need to procure and retain both African labor and natural resources at the lowest possible price, resulting in poor working conditions, forced labor, and environmentally unsound extraction practices.

Current Issues

As Africa currently has the highest rate of population growth in the world, the region requires further access to its own resources, as well as the economic benefits of selling these resources. However, as so much of Africa's resources are extracted by foreign-owned corporations – which have a tendency to pay little in tax money and provide few jobs for local residents – neither seem to be in the imminent future. Furthermore, Africans that are employed by foreign-owned corporations in the business of resource extraction complain of human rights abuses, particularly those involved in mining.

Additionally, in areas with very high population densities (greater than 500 per square kilometer), areas that are themselves physically or biologically vulnerable, or areas where economic conditions prevent conservation measures, severe environmental degradation has occurred due to environmentally damaging resource extraction techniques.

Questions to Consider

1. How can Africa's vast natural resources be used to improve quality of life for all Africans?
2. What can be done to insure more ethical resource extraction?

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Topic IV: Democratization and Secularization

Overview

The movement towards democratization has been accompanied by an enthusiasm for secularization, with the underlying considerations of this being that democracy requires the role of religion to be reduced to the private sphere in order to allow for public opinion – a central component of democracy – to flourish. In this sense, the push for democratization in Africa has resulted in a concurrent push for secularization; however, the motivations behind this encouragement of state secularism have been called into question.

Historical Context

Pre-colonial Africa was not inherently theocratic; there are examples of states in which religious and political life were to some degree separate, in the sense that political leaders were not simultaneously religious leaders, although religious leaders did still enjoy a level of political influence due to their social status, found in communities within Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi and Zambia. Though the divine right of kings was still utilized as justification for their ruler's position, the duties of political figures were separate from those of religious ones. However, this was not always the case, as shown by the role of the Gambarana in the Mamprusi region of Ghana; the Gambarana is both head political leader and head priest.

The presence of Islam in Africa can be traced to the 7th century, during which Muslim refugees arrived in modern-day Somalia. By 709 C.E., the majority of North Africa and the Horn of Africa, including Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Djibouti, and Somalia, had been converted to Islam.

European colonialism introduced political systems that were secular on a de jure level; however, as colonial powers aligned themselves with Christianity and Christian missionaries were introduced as a part of colonizing forces, a strong Christian bias was ingrained into colonial governments. This resulted in conflict between theocratic Islamic nations, as many Muslim leaders viewed this Christian colonization as a front for Christian expansionism and domination. Though many post-colonial states and political structures were largely secularist in message, many states have, in practice, become more deeply affiliated with religion. Additionally, many Muslim-majority states adopted Islam as their state religion after the fall of colonial rulers.

Current Situation

Since the fall of colonial rule, many African states have encountered problems with corruption, suppression of popular opposition, and contested elections, such as in Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, and Chad. Many nations, despite experiencing dramatic strides towards democratization in what is known as Africa's second wave of democratization, have regressed, many times because of incumbent leaders using corrupt tactics to retain power, such as in Angola.

While some states have embraced secularization – particularly the West African states, including Senegal and Mali, but also the state of South Africa. Many states theoretically embrace secularism in their constitutions, but in practice resemble religiously affiliated states, as evidenced by the Islamic family codes of Chad and Niger and implementation of sharia law in Nigeria. Many states in the northern part of the continent continue to be openly Islamic states, including Egypt. The presence of strong political ties to Islam has aided the justification of human rights abuses, such as the mistreatment of LBGTQIA+ citizens.

Questions to be considered:

1. Should the UN enforce democratic policies and procedures in African Nations?
2. Should the UN send in external forces to investigate corruption concerns in aforementioned nations? Do we have the right to do that?

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