

# COMMITTEE GUIDE

HRC



**HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

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# Contents

## 1. Presidents' Letter

## 2. **Simulation:** *Human Rights Violation in Myanmar*

- I. History/Context
- II. Current Situation
- III. Key Points of the Debate
- IV. Guiding Questions
- V. Bibliography

## 3. **Topic 1:** *Exploitation of workers in cobalt mines in the DRC*

- I. History/Context
- II. Current Situation
- III. Key Points of the Debate
- IV. Guiding Questions
- V. Bibliography

## 4. **Topic 2:** *Tackling Institutional Racism in Schools*

- I. History/Context
- II. Current Situation
- III. Key Points of the Debate
- IV. Guiding Questions
- V. Bibliography

## Presidents' Letter

Dear Delegates,

Greetings and welcome to the HRC committee, we are Jacobo Serrano and Andrés Bernal. We are both students from the Colegio Colombo Británico, Cali and have each participated in 9 to 10 UN models. We are very excited that you have decided to join the HRC committee.

The United Nations Human Rights Council is a body within the United Nations system which is responsible for strengthening and protecting human rights around the globe, as well as addressing situations based on the violations of these rights and trying to find solutions for these issues. This council is made up from 47 members which are elected by the UN general assembly. This council meets in the UN office at Geneva.

In this committee, we are going to address worldwide situations which affect many people around the globe. Everyone should have the same basic rights, but unfortunately these rights are not respected in many parts of the world.

We know that for many of you, this is your first model, and that you may have worries about how to participate in a committee. We are here to help you with any questions that you may have before or during the model. We invite you to bring out your inner delegate, and to debate without fear! We look forward to seeing you at CCBMUN XX. In the meantime, please write to us with any questions you may have at [hrc@ccbcali.edu.co](mailto:hrc@ccbcali.edu.co)

Yours sincerely,

Jacobo Serrano & Andrés Bernal  
HRC Chair

## **Simulation Topic:** *Human Rights Violation in Myanmar*

### **I. History/Context**

Myanmar is a Southern Asian country located between Thailand, Bangladesh, Laos, China, and India with a population of about 54 million inhabitants. It gained its independence from Britain in 1948. The country has a long history of problems caused by military juntas that have ruled since 1962. The generals who ran the country at that time were accused of many human rights abuses, and the country (originally called Burma until 1989) was regarded badly by many other countries who would not have diplomatic relations with it.



(BBC, 2021)

In 2010, the country started to become more open, and a new president was voted in called Aung San Suu Kyi in 2015. However, in 2017, the army started to drive out all the Muslim Rohingya people in what was considered to be ethnic cleansing by the rest of the world. The president did not do anything to stop this, and her reputation fell in global politics.

In February 2021, Myanmar's military made the decision to detain its top political leaders and government officials. The leaders of the military were not happy with the results of the presidential elections, so they declared the results to be fraudulent and arrested the elected politicians, among them Aung San Suu Kyi, saying they were corrupt. This action led to the military declaring a state of emergency, an act which was condemned by most other countries.

There were mass protests on the streets, which gradually became more violent as the military cracked down on peaceful protesters using heavy-handed methods. Due to this devastating situation, many members of the international community such as Malaysia, India, and the United States of America have supported the Myanmar citizens during their crisis by helping with the sale and transfer of weapons, technicians and humanitarian aid.



(HRW, 2022)

The human rights situation has deteriorated dramatically in the country; thousands of people were killed or detained because they opposed the military takeover. There have also been many reports of detainees being tortured.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has proposed a 5-point census which mainly commits to giving more aid and help from the international community in order that Myanmar citizens' rights and quality of life are protected. The census seeks to find a resolution so that the nation can start afresh in a better way with a proper democracy.

## **II. Current Situation**

During the past 16 months, Myanmar's army has killed at least 142 children, displaced over 250.000 and detained over 1.400 arbitrarily. Citizens refer to the humanitarian situation as "dire" as, due to the military coup, Myanmar's economy has been "crippled"; millions of people have lost their income, the national economy has crashed, and prices have surged because of this.





(Reuters. 2021)

With each passing day, the violence has increased with the military providing little or even negative protection for the citizens. Residents in the south-eastern states of Kiyan and Kayah, the north-western state of Chin, and the central regions of Sagaing and Magway have been detained, and some have been forcibly disappeared or used as human shields. Added to this, the Myanmar military has violated international human rights by burning villages, residences, and schools, and by destroying food stocks and many other basic supplies.

Despite this difficult situation, the citizens continue to protest against the military and demand their freedoms.



(Al Jazeera, 2022)

As well as the general problems for citizens, the military continues using derogatory language

to marginalize minority groups. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims were forced to flee to Bangladesh and strict discriminatory restrictions were imposed on their movement. Lately, more than half a million Muslims have been arrested for what is described as traveling illegally out of Muslim territory.



(Al Jazeera, 2022)

The politicians who were ousted by the military coup, and who are now living in exile, have formed the Government of National Unity (GNU), which the United Nations has recognised as the legitimate government.

Militias have been forming across the country since the coup with the aim of opposing the government and attacking security forces. Many militias have adopted the title “People's Self-Defence Force”, the same name used for the national force that the National Unity Government (GNU) created. However, not all of the newly formed People's Self-Defence Forces are subordinate to the GNU or take orders from its command structure.



(Reuters, 2022)

To date, over one million people have become refugees from Myanmar, whilst more than 900.000 people have been internally displaced by the conflict. Over 14 million people are seeking humanitarian aid for survival as the problems continue to grow in the country.

### III. Key points of the debate

- Effects of the military coup on citizens in Myanmar.
- Human rights violations in Myanmar.
- Rise of militia groups in Myanmar.
- Strategies to bring peace and stability to Myanmar.
- Humanitarian aid for the citizens of Myanmar.

### IV. Guiding questions

1. What is your country's diplomatic relationship with Myanmar?
2. How has your country been affected by the situation in Myanmar?
3. What has your country's government said or done about the situation in Myanmar?
4. Has your country been involved in a similar situation and, if so, what was done to resolve the problem?
5. What proposals does your delegation have to resolve the situation?



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## **Topic 1:** *Exploitation of workers in cobalt mines in the DRC*

### **I. History/Context**

#### **Brief facts about cobalt**

Cobalt compounds have been used for centuries to apply a rich blue colour to glass, ceramics, and other craftwork. Traces of the material have been found in Egyptian sculptures, Persian jewellery, in the ruins of Pompeii, and at many other sites across the world. However, the discovery of cobalt didn't happen until the 1700s when Swedish chemist, Georg Brandt, discovered the metal. This was the first metal to be discovered since prehistory.

#### **History of cobalt mining**

Mining of cobalt first started during the 16th century in Norway, Hungary, and Sweden. With the discovery of cobalt deposits in the French colony of New Caledonia, in 1864, the production of cobalt in European countries decreased. Later, deposits were discovered in Ontario, Canada, in 1904. The largest deposit was found in the province of Katanga in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 1914. In 1978, there was an internal conflict, the Shaba conflict, which almost stopped the production of cobalt in the Katanga province, but the impact was smaller than expected due to new cobalt recycling techniques that were being used in the industry.

#### **Cobalt mining in the DRC**

Cobalt is an essential mineral in the technology industry for the production of ion batteries. These are the batteries that are used in the construction of smartphones, laptops, and many other technological gadgets. Most of the mining operations for this mineral can be found in Katanga province, south of the capital, Kinshasa. 63% of the world's cobalt is extracted from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), of which 65-85% is mined by large multinational corporations from copper mines, which are strictly controlled by local governments and

organizations. The remaining 35-15% of cobalt comes from artisanal mining, which is often done under terrible working conditions. Women and children can often be found among the workers in these small mining operations.



(Marketplus, 2018)

Although this practice is illegal in the DRC, many large-scale technology companies buy cobalt without investigating the working conditions of the people who mined the ore. Often these companies buy the cobalt without any precise knowledge of how it was extracted, due to the fact that it is often too difficult to trace it back to the source.

## **II. Current Situation**

Currently, the situation in the DRC is far from perfect. To date, there are no estimates on how many Congolese workers have died in accidents related to unregulated mining. Sub-contractors have also posed a big threat in recent years; according to one study, over 63% of the workforce contracted to work in cobalt extraction earn extremely low wages - far less than the local living wage. Subcontracting has also been used by corporations to save costs. However, the corporations do not monitor the conditions under which these sub-contracted employees are working.

One corporation which has been at the centre of many accusations is Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt, which is a Chinese mining corporation accused of human rights violations. The revelation of

several of these abuses prompted Apple to stop buying cobalt from this corporation. Reports have also surfaced of racism and verbal violence in the Chinese-owned mines, where workers describe it as labouring in a “colonial era”.



(Wilson Center, 2021)

Many other corporations have been found to be profiting from child labour according to a report made by Amnesty International. One plant manager was quoted as saying “... the government doesn’t provide money for schools, so parents send their children to the mines instead”. There have also been reports of corruption by government officials, which has had a negative effect on the current situation in the DRC. This lack of enforcement by the local government has also posed a problem for the big technology companies, since they have great trouble tracking the source and production of the cobalt they are buying for their own industry.

Mining cobalt has also had a toll on the environment, with locals reporting poisoning of water and food supplies that have led to birth defects and respiratory diseases.



(Northwestern University, 2021)



On the positive side, cobalt mining has allowed the DRC economy to boom in recent years, allowing for economic and social growth. Cobalt has quickly become an essential mineral in our daily lives, and it is critical for green energy policies all around the world.

Steps are being taken by big companies to ensure their supply of cobalt is socially and environmentally responsible. For example, companies like Tesla, Volkswagen and BMW have started initiatives to ensure their cobalt supply comes from sustainable sources. Although in recent years there has been a great push for sustainable cobalt production, there are still many cases in which human rights are being violated at sites in the DRC.

So why not ban the exports of cobalt from the DRC if there are so many negative effects? Well, mining and mineral exports account for 90% of the DRC's economy and are, therefore, essential for its survival. Artisanal mining employs 100,000 to 200,000 people and many others also benefit from the income that cobalt brings. Cobalt mining also provides a great opportunity for development if responsible practices can be established.

### **III. Key points of the debate**

- Working conditions in artisanal cobalt mines
- Lack of accountability when subcontracting in cobalt mines
- Abuses at mining sites of large corporations
- Profiting from child labour by large international corporations
- Ensuring that cobalt is produced sustainably in the DRC

### **IV. Guiding questions**

1. Does your country export cobalt? If so, is it an important part of your country's economy?
2. Does your country import cobalt? If so, what is it used for, and is it an important part of your country's economy?

3. If your country exports cobalt, does it have any regulations to ensure that it is ethically produced?
4. If your country imports cobalt, does it have any regulations to ensure that it is ethically sourced?
5. Does your country import cobalt from, or have any connections with the mining of cobalt in the DRC?
6. How can your delegation help regulate the mining of cobalt in the DRC?

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## Topic 2: Tackling Institutional Racism in Schools

### I. History/Context

To understand how to tackle institutional racism in schools, we first need to understand what racism is. Racism is the belief that humankind can be separated into different biological entities called races, and inherently some are superior to others. This way of thinking flourished during the 18th century when western European empires used people of African descent as slave workers. By characterizing African people as “lesser” human beings, the proponents of slavery attempted to justify the means used. Although the 18th century seems far away from our current era, racism is still present in society through the cultural heritage that was left to us. Cultural racism also affects indigenous peoples, who are often badly treated in their own countries.

Far more alarming is the fact that racism has been ever present in the educational system of most western countries either through direct or indirect means. In Canada after 1850 there were “common schools” for all students, but black students were expected to sit separately and were often not allowed to enter at all, and up until 1996 there were residential schools for indigenous children where the idea was to bring them up without their indigenous languages and customs.



(The Guardian, 2015)

In South Africa, there was a system of “apartheid” where black students had to go to separate schools which were given much less funding than the schools for white students. The United States had a similar system, where black students were expected to go to separate schools from white students up until 1954. They also had separate schools for indigenous people.



(Thoughtco, 2020)

In the United Kingdom in the 1960s and 1970s, many black children were sent to special schools for subnormal students even though there was nothing wrong with them. In Argentina and Chile, it was not even acknowledged for many years that there was a considerable number of citizens of African American descent in the countries.

All around the world, there have been similar examples of students of different colour or race being treated in a discriminatory way by educational establishments.



## II. Current Situation

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, many of these beliefs about the inferiority of certain races can still be found around the world. Currently, inside educational institutions, cases of racism are still much in evidence.

For example, in the UK disciplinary sanctions affect black children more. Stereotypes also vastly affect black children in the educational system, where they are perceived to be more problematic than other students from other ethnicities. They often get into trouble for minor things, such as their hairstyles. Black Caribbean students are three times more likely to be excluded from school than white pupils, and 46% of school have no teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds to act as role models.

In South Africa, where once there were whites-only schools, black children are still discriminated against in many schools. Although there are no segregated schools now, black students are still discriminated against by their teachers. This may be in the form of derogatory comments about their culture or background, not allowing them to speak their native language in an English-speaking school whilst letting white students speak their native language, and generally having low expectations of their academic ability.

The USA has long been known for racism in the educational system, with black students often underachieving due to the low expectations that teachers have of them. Sometimes this is because they have to go to schools which have less experienced and lower paid staff who do not know how to get the best out of them. Black students are more likely to get into trouble in school; although they make up about 15% of the school population, 31% were referred to police or arrested in schools in 2015.

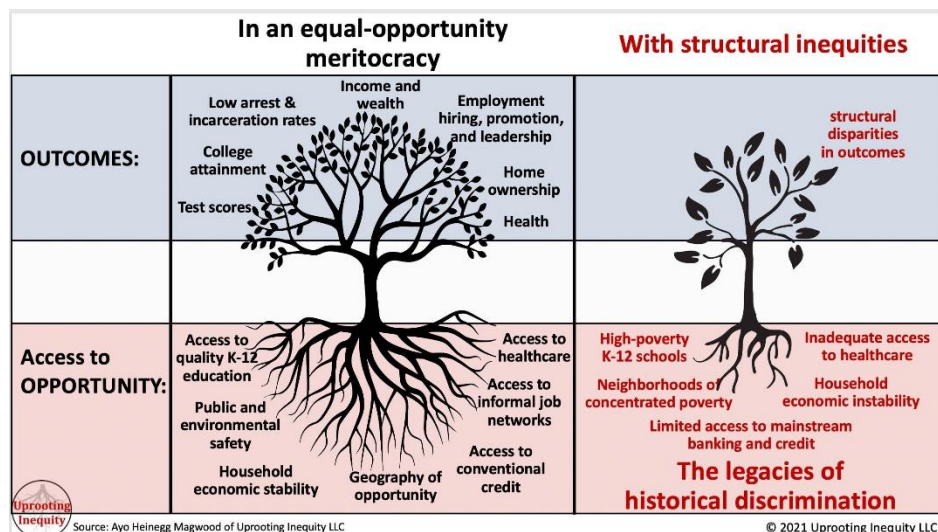
In Germany it was found that teachers consistently gave lower grades to students with names from ethnic minorities. However, many countries in Europe do not track how students from ethnic minorities are doing because they say everyone has equal opportunities in the education system, although in reality this is not true.

In Colombia, students from an African American background only make up 0.001% of all the university students. The reasons for this are often because of the poor quality of education that these students have received in school, meaning that there are low expectations for them to achieve academically.



(The Conversation, 2019)

Institutional racism can lead to mental health problems in children from ethnic minorities. This is often because the students feel that there is no hope for them and no way out of the situation that they are in; as well as having to confront everyday racism in their lives, they also have to deal with the pressures that educational institutions put on them because of the colour of their skin.



(Weil, 2022)

Racism can be found in many different schools across the world, and it is a problem that needs to be addressed urgently so that students from ethnic minorities are given the same opportunities as others in life.

### III. Key points of the debate

- Racism in society in general
- Low expectations for students of ethnic minorities in educational institutes
- High level of black students who get into trouble in schools
- Effects of institutional racism on mental health of students
- Lack of teachers from ethnic minorities in schools

### IV. Guiding questions

1. What percentage of the population of your country is of different races?
2. What sort of problems are there in your country because of racism?
3. How do school students of minority races compare with others academically and socially?
4. What sort of problems do students of minority races face in your schools?
5. What has your government done to tackle institutional racism in schools, if anything?
6. What ideas does your government have for helping minority groups to be more successful in school?

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