



# **WrightMUN**

## **High School Model UN Background Guide**

### **General Assembly**

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**Wright State University**

**White Hall**

## **General Assembly Background Guide**

Staff:

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### **Topic: Human Rights and Climate Change**

#### **Message from the Director of the General Assembly Third Committee**

Delegates,

Welcome to the WrightMUN! My name is Chase Harness and I am the Director of United Nations General Assembly Third Committee (GA3).

GA3, also known as the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM), is one of the six primary organs of the United Nations (UN), responsible for addressing matters related to social, humanitarian affairs, and human rights.<sup>1</sup> Delegates will represent one of the 193 Member States part of the assembly. Each Member State has one vote that requires either simple majority or two-thirds majority support.<sup>2</sup> The committee seeks to achieve its goals through the adoption of resolutions following a series of committee and caucusing sessions.<sup>3</sup>

This background guide is intended to offer delegates a starting point for research on Human Rights and Climate Change; however, it is not intended to limit research to the content provided within it. Delegates are advised to ensure they can address all of the questions posed by the Director at the end of this topic.

Please remember, this is a learning conference and all delegates are encouraged to please participate! That means raising your placard, making policy speeches, and creating working papers. Should you have any questions, please approach the Dais and we would be happy to assist.

Sincerely,

Chase Harness

Director, General Assembly Third Committee

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/ga/third/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/ga/about/background.shtml>

## Topic: Human Rights and Climate Change

### ***Introduction***

Building upon the work on the Millennium Development Goals, the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals acknowledge the relationship between climate change and human rights. The UN defines climate change as, “long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. These shifts may be natural, such as through variations in the solar cycle”.<sup>3</sup> This relationship between climate change and human rights is complicated. Humans are both impacted negatively by climate change and also contribute by burning fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and gas. The continued rising global temperatures, CO2 emissions, and large-scale disasters increase levels of risk of human rights abuses, impacting livelihoods, displacement of persons, and threatening the lives of persons.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Background***

In 1972, at the UN Conference in Stockholm, Member States acknowledged that environmental issues must be addressed for the well-being of all people.<sup>5</sup> This sentiment commitment is outlined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976). Even with these commitments, it is not enough. Since the 1980s, each decade’s temperature has increased, affecting the water supply and increasing sea levels.<sup>6</sup>

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Human Rights Council (HRC) acknowledge the relationship between climate change and human rights and advocate for a rights-based approach to direct climate change policies.<sup>7</sup> The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change decision 1/CP.16 (2010) referenced HRC resolution 10/4, recognizes the effects of climate change on human rights and encourages states to uphold human rights in their climate initiatives.<sup>8</sup> HRC Resolution 10/4, notes the climate change related impacts harming human rights such as the right to life, the right to adequate food, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, the right to adequate housing, the right to self-determination, the right to access safe drinking water and sanitation, and that persons may not be deprived of such rights.<sup>9</sup>

As part of the rights-based approach, it does negate the role that humans also hold in contributing to climate change. Humans contribute through the manner in which power sources

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/ClimateChange/COP21.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/stockholm1972>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/climate-change/integrating-human-rights-unfccc>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/climate-change/integrating-human-rights-unfccc>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/climate-change/integrating-human-rights-unfccc>

are generated (e.g. burning fossil fuels), manufacturing goods, manner in which food is produced, fossil fuel-based transportation, and deforestation.<sup>10</sup>

Climate change has a severe impact on the water supply available, making it a scarcer commodity. Resulting in agricultural impacts such as crop failures and dwelling ecosystems and the loss of species on both land and sea. Areas already vulnerable to water scarcity are even more heavily impacted.<sup>11</sup> In addition to water being a scarce commodity, the increase in extreme weather has contributed to the rise in global hunger and poor nutrition. Food sources are destroyed or become less productive and viable as a result of the environmental conditions.

The impacts of climate change are party to no treaties or international conventions and respect territorial boundaries. The need for the international community to act is dire as it is estimated that drought will displace more than 700 million people in the next 7 years according to the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Existing Frameworks and Initiatives***

The Paris Agreement (2015) is a foundational legally binding treaty on climate change. The Paris Agreement is a multilateral Agreement legally binding Member States to combat climate change and its associated effects.<sup>13</sup> This Agreement was adopted by 196 States at the UN Climate Change Conference in December 2015 and almost a year later entered into force.<sup>14</sup> The Paris Agreement focuses on the mitigation of climate change damage, climate-oriented monetary aid, and harm avoidance through the reduction of greenhouse gasses.<sup>15</sup> The goal of the agreement is focused on keeping the global temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius.<sup>16</sup>

In order to achieve this, the agreement utilizes economic and social strategies. States party to the agreement are to implement strategies to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. Each State party to the agreement is required to create strategies to cut emissions and adapt to climate impacts, these strategies are nationally determined contributions (NDCs). NDCs are to be updated every five years and assessed at that mark.<sup>17</sup> The Paris Agreement also provides a framework for technical, financial, and capacity building for States in need of assistance.<sup>18</sup>

The 2023 Agenda for Sustainable Development is also a foundational framework for a response to climate change. Adopted in 2015 by all UN Member States, it builds upon the Millennium Development Goals by creating 17 Sustainment Development Goals (SDGs), calling for action

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change>

<sup>12</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal13>

<sup>13</sup> <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>

<sup>14</sup> <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>

<sup>15</sup> [https://unfccc.int/kyoto\\_protocol](https://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol)

<sup>16</sup> <https://unfccc.int/most-requested/key-aspects-of-the-paris-agreement>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/all-about-ndcs>

<sup>18</sup> <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>

from developed and developing states. The SDGs are interconnected and have overlap between the goals; however, dedicated to the impact of climate change and human rights are Goals 7 and 13.

Goal 7, Affordable and Clean Energy. Goal 7 ensures access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. Though progress has been made to provide electricity, in 2020, less than 70% of the world's population had access to clean cooking fuels and technologies.<sup>19</sup> Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) it outlined the right to food as a human right, and committed to it in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1996). This is one example of how climate change and human rights are interconnected. Furthermore, access to energy is critical for the development of a variety of sectors such as agriculture, business, communications, education, healthcare and transportation, all impacting the economic and social development of a person's life.<sup>20</sup> It is also important to note the disparity between developed and developing nations, as well as areas impacted by conflict.

Goal 13, Climate Action, focuses on combating climate change and its impacts. The world is experiencing an increase in heatwaves, droughts, and floods caused by climate change.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, even with the commitments made by States to reduce CO2 emissions in 2020, energy-related CO2 emissions rose as COVID-related restrictions were removed.<sup>22</sup> It is estimated that by 2023, 700 million people are at risk of being displaced by drought and ecosystems will suffer from the rising temperatures.<sup>23</sup> The lack of adequate shelter leaves populations vulnerable and increases the chance of fighting over resources. The need to act and act fast has been recognized. At the 2019 Climate Action Summit, the UN established multiple international programs, Cool Coalition, the Energy Efficiency Alliance, the Getting to Zero Coalition, Business Ambition for 1.5°C, the Coalition for Disaster-Resilient Infrastructure, to halt rising temperatures and reduce carbon emissions. Programs and partnerships akin to these continue to prove as effective mechanisms for combating climate change.<sup>24</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Climate change cannot be combated nor mitigated by a single Member State as the consequences are transnational. Member States are faced with challenges that are interconnected. Environmental sustainability is linked with economic capability, disaster risk reduction, and air quality, which are all core elements of human rights.<sup>25</sup> The international

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<sup>19</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal7>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainable>

<sup>21</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal13>

<sup>22</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal13>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climate-change/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/2019-climate-action-summit>

<sup>25</sup> <http://sdg.iisd.org/news/unga-third-committee-highlights-impacts-of-climate-change-on-social-development/>

community must collaborate together for a cohesive response as the impact of climate change threatens access to clean water, food, shelter, and other human rights.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Questions to Consider***

Below are suggestions for research and cooperation in committee. Consider what effective action GA3 can accomplish to protect human rights while developing effective sustainable energy solutions.

1. What climate change issues most considerably impact your Member State and/or its geographical region?
2. What initiatives does your Member State have to combat climate change and contribute to SDG 13?
3. What are the social, cultural, and humanitarian impacts climate change has on your Member State and the international community?
4. What sources and actions for sustainable energy development does your Member State utilize, and what does your Member State consider to be the most effective means of achieving SDG 7?

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<sup>26</sup><https://wedocs.unep.org>