



Overview of the Committee

The General Assembly was one of the first bodies to be established by the UN Charter. It remains the largest of the UN's six principal organs, and is the main deliberative organ of the United Nations. While the General Assembly does not have any legal bindings on any of the world governments, it acts as a sort of "parliament of nations," and its decisions are recognized as representative of the world opinion on important global issues. The Assembly is also a strong moral voice. Therefore the decisions made by the General Assembly are greatly respected and valued.

Each of the 189 member states of the UN have at least one, but no more than five, representatives in the General Assembly, and each member state is given one vote. Important decisions require a two-thirds majority vote to be passed, while other smaller matters only require a simple majority—though there is a movement to consider voting on matters by negotiated consensus, rather than by using formal voting methods.

The Assembly's regular session meets every year, starting in September, continuing until December. Special and Emergency Special Sessions may also convene at other times during the year if needed. While not in session, the work of the General Assembly is carried out by its six internal committees and other such subsidiary bodies.

The General Assembly is concerned with such things as international peace and security issues, admittance of new members into the United Nations, and the UN budget. The Assembly has jurisdiction to discuss any matters that are within the scope of the current UN Charter. See Chapter IV of the UN Charter for more, general information about the General Assembly.



Topic 1: Innovative Strategies to Combat Ethnic Conflict

An ethnic group is the label given to a unit of people who are grouped by certain commonalities, such as race, religion, language, and/or nationality. People find comfort and security in identifying with and belonging to a certain group of people who share similarities. Culture, heritage and community are some of the positive aspects that ethnic groups possess, and these are the features that the United Nations endeavors to preserve.

Despite the positive features of ethnic groups, some negative mentalities have been known to develop within groups of people, such as the dangerous “us against them” mentality. Conflict between opposing ethnic groups has thus far been the same as our history of war. Because it is the central tenet of the United Nations to eradicate war, we must spend time combating ethnic conflict, as it will greatly aid us in evading future wars.

In order to best combat ethnic conflict, we must spend some amount of time examining the nature of ethnic conflict. We must understand the motivations and desires that frustrate people and lead them to express their frustration in the form of violent conflict. Then we must find innovative ways to assuage people’s frustrations, and thus effectively combat ethnic conflict.

Conflict among various ethnic groups is not a new phenomenon, yet the nature of ethnic conflict is taking new shape at a rapid pace, a pace that is making our world a new and different world everyday. New technology, new economic interests, new political alliances, new weapons, and new values and ideas, are creating new institutions and situations that must be met with a new sort of peacekeeping. The UN peacekeeping troops are good at what they do; unfortunately, these days, some of the UN’s peacekeeping tactics are out-dated. Thus, again, we must think, be flexible and discover new, innovative ways to combat ethnic conflict that will help us face today’s world.

Despite the fact that ethnic conflict is surfacing in new ways in this modern world of ours, the things that people are fighting about today are, on a basic level, the same things that people have always fought about. Food, shelter, the family, the tribe—these are the important things to people. Consider this: in an attempt to establish a post-colonial boundary, Winston Churchill once drew a line down on a map, which became the Saudi/Jordanian border. Legend has it that, although he intended to draw a straight line, he hiccupped mid-drawing and left a little squiggle in his line that had no strategic or economic purpose.

Now consider that you happened to take residence somewhere right along the line that was mistakenly made into a squiggle, and now you happened to find yourself across the border from your brother’s house, now requiring you to have a passport to go visit him. (Not that I’m claiming that this is the case along the Saudi/Jordanian border.) Churchill’s “solution,” and indeed peacekeeping tactics in general, seem to be forgetting the basic human wants that need to



be met in order for people to be satisfied and uninterested in conflict. Once again, it is important to re-define the UN's peacekeeping role, by seeking out *innovative* strategies to combat ethnic conflict.

While researching this topic, look into the situations in the Sudan, Kashmir, Tibet, Rwanda, Yugoslavia, Burundi, Kenya, Moldova, Nigeria, Quebec, Ireland, Korea, the Palestinian-Israeli situation, and any others that you come across. Look for themes in the origin of the conflicts that these places are experiencing, and take note of certain conflict resolution tactics that were successful in alleviating struggle. Then, narrow your focus and explore one of these situations in more depth, especially if you are representing one of the countries at the conference in March that is involved with a conflict of this nature.

Lastly, a side avenue that can be explored here is the impact and influence that the arts, the media, and celebrities have had on ethnic conflicts. Then try to determine if these or other possible mediums could be used in innovative ways to combat ethnic conflict.

Past UN Action

The UN has been instrumental in the past in combating ethnic conflict in a number of ways. The first way has been with policy writing that countries dealing with conflict have been able to refer to in order to determine how to handle ethnic conflict. The second way the UN has helped is by sending the "blue soldiers," or the UN peacekeeping troops, into areas to protect certain "hot spots," in order to prevent blood-shed and the dangerous escalation of conflicts that can lead to world-wide concern. The third way has been a sort of economic "punishment" in the form of sanctions against perpetrating countries. And finally, the UN has helped to open lines of communication and has furnished peace talks.

One area of the world that has seen a good deal of conflict is Yugoslavia. Both World War I and II were initiated in this region. The impact of these two world wars is what actually led to the establishment of the United Nations in 1945. Now, there continues to be work to be done; today we are witnessing devastating ethnic conflict in Yugoslavia once again, which again has the potential to lead to another world war. In this situation, the UN has stepped in and is now running Kosovo, even though according to international law, this territory still belongs to Yugoslavia. This action has helped to defuse some of the tension in this region.

The UN also intervened in a region once known as Ruanda-Urundi. In 1962, the UN stepped in and divided this region into two independent states, Rwanda and Burundi. This was done in an attempt to calm the ethnic conflict that this region was experiencing, yet in retrospect, many agree that the division of this region could have been a mistake. Many people died in this region despite the UN's peacekeeping efforts.



A last example of an area that is experiencing ethnic conflict today, and what the UN has done to try to combat that conflict, is Palestine and Israel. Palestinian refugees who wish to return to Israel are being held at bay. The Israelis do not want to let any of the Palestinian refugees return to Israel because they fear that that action would lead to the end of the state of Israel. However, the UN General Assembly created the “principle of return,” in Resolution 194, which was passed in December of 1948, which may help some Palestinians to be able to return to Israel. The Israelis may some day be willing to endorse the principle of return too, because it is the Israelis who would determine where, how, over what period, and in what numbers the right of return would be exercised.

Proposed Solutions

There are no miracle cures to be used to combat ethnic conflict. Yet there are some things that can be done to avert violence. And once again, peacekeepers must be innovative, flexible, compassionate, mature, and up to date with their peacekeeping methods in order to be successful at achieving peace.

One proposed solution to combat ethnic conflict is to increase ethnic consciousness in order to some day decrease it. This means that we would start to recognize different ethnic groups for who they are and what they want. Then, rather than denying the differences among groups, peacekeepers could begin to address the real issues that concern people, and perhaps some real solutions could be reached.

Another important tool to be used in combating ethnic conflict is education. If children are raised to believe that people who have a different color skin, speak a different language, or believe in a different god are “bad,” then this sets the stage for ethnic conflict. Children must be taught tolerance.

When researching for solutions to the problem of ethnic conflict, look for proposals that are honest and attack the root of the problem. Remember what the current president of this 55th Session of the General Assembly, President H.E. Harri Holkeri of Finland said, “You cannot make easy decisions unless you first commit yourself to hard solutions.”

Bloc Positions

Countries of a feather tend to flock together. However, sometimes countries that might seem to be similar resent being grouped together by outside “authorities” when they do not actually share the same views. Blocs should be determined by shared views, not some arbitrary factor like geography or economic status, though often times those two factors do tend to lend themselves to the creation of a bloc. When researching bloc positions, pay attention to what sorts of proposals are offered by which countries, and look for congruencies.



Remember that the “Western” countries tend to be wealthier and will tend to be the countries grappling with whether or not they should intervene in international conflicts. Usually these countries will take into account such factors as economic interests, political strategy (i.e. anti-communist interests for the United States), and also international security, which affects everyone these days, due to nuclear weaponry. These countries too, however, can have their own problems with ethnic conflict.

Less wealthy and smaller countries will tend to be reaching out for aid. In dealing with ethnic conflict, many times the governments of small states will ask for help with internal conflicts. At times, these countries will also require help with recovery from the impact of ethnic conflict.

It is very important to know where the country that you will be representing at the conference stands, and which countries it considers itself to be allied with. Spend some time researching your country’s status and position regarding ethnic conflict, and also the alliances that your country has. If you do this, it will be easier for you to take a stance at the conference because you will clearly know where you are coming from, and you will know what sorts of resolutions you would like to see passed.



Topic 2: International Military Law in International Conflicts

A major question that needs to be answered regarding this topic is when it is appropriate to use military force while dealing with international conflicts. While trying to end conflict, we must ask ourselves when international peacekeeping bodies can justify the dropping of bombs on a region in order to get a point across, or when we can use guns to counter an aggressor's attack. We must determine if the use of military force is ever permissible as a tool of conflict resolution, and if so, how to properly manage the use of that power—what laws to write that will grant that power to international peacekeepers.

Another central issue that must be addressed regarding this topic is the international standardization of military combat procedure. Militaries handle themselves differently regarding issues such as protocol, women's roles, the treatment of prisoners of war, the chain of command, and other aspects of combat, which can create conflict in combat situations. Consider having been sent into combat to find yourself faced with a twelve-year-old child who had been sent to fight you. The United Nations seeks to create cohesion among military forces so that things like that—being faced with a fighting force composed of children—will not be tolerated.

International military lawmakers also strive to achieve more cohesion and cooperation in peacekeeping matters in which military forces are deployed in order to end conflict. Peacekeeping forces have come into conflict even when they have had the same motivation and have subscribed to the same overall goal. An example of this is when both the French and the U.S. armies were sent into Vietnam. Both armies went in, intending to achieve peace in Vietnam. Yet there was no cohesion in the manner in which the two armies conducted themselves, which ended up escalating the conflict in Vietnam, rather than achieving the common goal of peace.

International military law in international conflict also has to do with creating laws concerning neutral spaces of international interest, like the oceans and outer space, where militaries can potentially get involved, and conflicts could potentially arise. Because no one lives in these areas, conflicts are not common, yet conflicts could occur in these regions, in which case, it would be wise to be prepared and to know how to deal with conflict in these places, should conflict arise.

Finally, international military law is also concerned with terrorism. Military forces need to know how to approach international terrorist situations. Civilians must be protected, hostages retrieved, and the integrity and security of nations maintained.



Past UN Action

In the UN Charter, the codification of international law has been made one of the UN's tasks. Conventions, treaties, and standards developed by the UN promote international peace and security, and promote economic and social development. Once states ratify these UN codes, the states are legally bound to them.

An important international law-making body is the International Law Commission. The work of this commission is important to research because it prepares drafts that are allowed into UN conventions and opened to states for ratification; and again, once ratified, these codes become international law. Many international laws have come from the International Law Commission.

One success in creating cohesion among militaries is that militaries have in the past come to an agreement on how prisoners of war should be treated. There have also been violations of agreements such as these too, however. Such was the case in the Vietnam War, when prisoners of war were badly mistreated.

The UN has special agencies that deal with terrorism. And if matters become extremely explosive, generally the Security Council handles those international conflicts, rather than the General Assembly. But it is written in the UN Charter that the General Assembly should address security issues involving international military conflicts.

Proposed Solutions

When researching proposed solutions regarding international military law in international conflict, you will need to research your country's military situation. Then you will need to research, mostly using the web, specific laws that have become ratified into international law. You will need to know what laws exist and which ones do not yet, so that you will know what laws to propose as an effort to ameliorate the struggle that exists among militaries these days as they deal with international conflict.

The main goal of international military law is to avoid war, and to quickly squelch conflicts that could escalate to war. Find proposed solutions that recognize when force is necessary, and when other means can be used in order to achieve compromise in international conflicts. Do not forget to be realistic about human wartime behavior.

Bloc Positions

International military blocs are largely determined along ideological lines. This was illustrated in World War II when the Allies allied against the Axis, and again during the Cold War when



communist countries allied against non-communist countries. There are other kinds of bloc alliances too, however.

Many times geography combined with shared (possibly economic) interests can serve to unite international military forces. Land ownership may be disputed in certain regions, and various countries will take sides for various reasons in international conflicts such as these. It is important to be aware of your country's political and economic interests.

Lastly, remember that the wealthier, larger countries tend to have more sway in militaristic issues. The United States of America, Britain, France, Germany, and Japan along with a handful of other countries will have a large say in how international conflict will be solved, and when force will be used. Remember that if you are representing a small country, it would be wise for you to seek alliance with a stronger country. Your main interest is to promote the well being of your own country while maintaining internal and international peace, especially among militaries, in order to avoid the ghastly devastation of war.