

SPECPOL

Special Political and Decolonization Committee

High School General Assembly



Background Guide

Virginia Invitational

V I M  N C

Model United Nations Conference

12th Session

February 28th - March 1st, 2025

VIMUNC XII



Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the twelfth annual Virginia Invitational Model United Nations Conference. As the MUN year winds down, we hope to provide the best experience yet, with paramount service and attention to detail that creates the greatest conference. From ancient civilizations and mythological conflict to broad UN organizations and regional bodies, this year's VIMUNC features committees that truly serve every interest. With experienced chairs, czars and staff, we will ensure that every delegate truly has a positive experience, and we simply hope that you can enjoy your experience with us.

VIMUNC's 22 committees and over 1100 delegates is the largest edition of our conference ever, and we look forward to expanding our outreach across Virginia to continue to provide a wonderful experience for all delegates. With a large MUN team that has years of experience and accolades, we hope that every ounce of effort we put in this year's conference is met with every single minute of the committee being filled with substantive and invigorating debate that will create learning experiences that last for years to come.

It has been the absolute dream of my time in high school to lead my club to this very day, and so much hard work has been put into every single crisis update, background guide and dossier. We sincerely hope that the work and care placed in every single aspect of this conference is displayed in its highest quality. If at any time you feel something about the conference is unsatisfactory, please don't hesitate to talk to your chairs, a staffer, or a member of the Secretariat. So whether it be solving 'unsolvable' letters from the Zodiac killer themselves, casting spells to make your presence known in one of our 3 Harry Potter JCCs, or handling the tricky maneuvers of Space Pirates, I know deep in my heart that we're ready for VIMUNC XII. Now, the question becomes: Are you?

Thank you so much for your commitment to VIMUNC XII, and best of luck in your committee, future conferences, and ambitions.

Sincerely,

Matt Tam

Secretary-General, VIMUNC XII

MATT TAM

SECRETARY-GENERAL

ZARA GHATTAS

DIRECTOR-GENERAL

EVAN LEE

CHIEF OF STAFF

KARIM TEJANI

*UNDERSECRETARY-
GENERAL OF SPECIALIZED
AGENCIES AND CRISIS*

JIBRAN SALAM

*UNDERSECRETARY-
GENERAL OF GENERAL
ASSEMBLY*

SPECPOL

Special Political and Decolonization Committee

TOPIC A: *Economic Inequalities Stemming from Colonialism in Sub Saharan Africa*

TOPIC B: *Safeguarding Cultural Heritage Sites in Middle Eastern Conflict Zones*

Overview of the Body

The Special Political and Decolonization Committee, otherwise known as SPECPOL, is the Fourth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly. Originally called the C-24, or the Decolonization Committee in 1962, this committee's original purpose was to ensure that decolonization efforts across the world were realized.¹ However, in 1993 as the rate of decolonization decreased, the C-24 merged with the Special Political Committee (formerly the Seventh Committee of the General Assembly) to create what is now known as SPECPOL.² SPECPOL's main focuses include certain decolonization events, atomic radiation, the reviewal of peacekeepers across the world, questions concerning the Israel-Hamas war, and international cooperation in the peaceful use of outer space.³ However, as is true for numerous UN agencies, SPECPOL's resolutions are non binding. Regardless, SPECPOL's decisions represent the attitude of

the UN and its member nations, and the committee's non-binding nature should encourage delegates to look for comprehensive solutions amicable to all.

TOPIC A: Economic Inequalities Stemming from Colonialism in Sub Saharan Africa

Topic Background

Colonialism has impacted the world since the time of the Romans. However, more recent examples of imperialism in history have resulted in continued impacts upon countries in Sub Saharan Africa. During a time of heightened imperialism following the Industrial Revolution, wealthy nations in Europe, East Asia, and the Western Hemisphere pursued colonialism to obtain natural resources, increase trade access, expand their landholdings, spread religious beliefs, and ensure a stronger military presence. Many of these endeavors resulted in large empires, including the British and French empires, which spanned all the way from North America to Asia. Both the British and French empires, among others, relied upon enslaved labor in their landholdings, specifically in Africa, to obtain valuable resources, including rubber and sugar. Such exploitation resulted in subjugation of native people's, who often lived in impoverished conditions within colonial empires. Additionally, to extract and transport natural resources, colonial powers would build railroads and transportation routes, distributing local habits and communities.

Following the end of imperialism, though many colonial powers ended their direct rule over differing countries, nations globally, including Sub Saharan Africa, were left in a cycle of

economic inequality and poverty due to decades of socio-economic neglect and exploitation. The abrupt withdrawal of colonial powers often left new nations with poorly defined borders, fragmented infrastructures, and weakened political systems. The economic systems established during colonial rule were not designed to foster self-sufficiency but to extract resources for the benefit of colonial powers. As a result, newly independent African countries inherited economies that were heavily dependent on the export of raw materials and vulnerable to fluctuations in global markets. Furthermore, the lack of investment in education, healthcare, and industrial development during colonial times stunted human capital growth, leaving many nations with limited capacity to drive internal development and innovation. These enduring legacies of exploitation and neglect created barriers to progress that have persisted for generations, entrenching poverty and inequality across the region.

Current Situation

The profound economic legacy of colonialism has left Sub Saharan Africa to face economic inequality, ethnic tensions, and poverty. Economic exploitation, specifically through the extraction of natural resources, disrupted millions of livelihoods and hindered industrial development in African nations. Additionally, the colonial system led to unequal land distribution, which perpetuates poverty and inequality. Furthermore, colonial administrations neglected education and healthcare, leading to a lack of human capital development; thus, hindering economic development. Furthermore, the drawing of borders by colonial powers heightened ethnic tensions and conflicts, furthering economic instability.

Possible/Past Solutions

The colonial era's economic exploitation of Sub Saharan Africa created deep and lasting inequalities that continue to impact the region today. Colonial powers extracted vast amounts of resources, including rubber, gold, and diamonds, but left little investment in infrastructure or sustainable development. Railroads and roads were built primarily to facilitate the transportation of resources to colonial ports, not to foster long-term economic growth in the regions they passed through. This extraction model drained African nations of their wealth while leaving local communities with few opportunities to build their own industries or economies. Furthermore, the unequal land distribution policies enacted by colonial governments have had long-term consequences, contributing to ongoing poverty and land conflicts. The focus on extraction rather than development stunted the growth of local economies, leading to continued reliance on foreign trade and aid. To address these legacies, several solutions can be pursued. First, investing in education and healthcare is crucial to building human capital, which can then drive economic innovation and growth. By prioritizing these sectors, African nations can develop a skilled workforce capable of advancing local industries and reducing dependency on external actors. To add on, land reform programs are necessary to rectify the historical injustices of land dispossession, ensuring that land is more equitably distributed and accessible for local farmers and businesses. Moreover, nations in Sub Saharan Africa could strengthen regional cooperation through organizations like the African Union to foster greater economic integration and reduce reliance on foreign powers. Finally, the international community must support efforts to undo the economic damage of colonialism by providing fair trade deals and investment in sustainable development projects, instead of perpetuating extractive relationships that prioritize profit over progress.

Questions to Consider

- *How can the global community ensure that trade deals and foreign aid no longer perpetuate the economic inequalities created during the colonial era, and instead promote sustainable development in Sub Saharan Africa?*
- *In what ways can education systems in Sub Saharan Africa be restructured to effectively address the gaps left by colonial neglect and equip future generations for economic development?*
- *How can land reform initiatives be implemented in a way that promotes equitable distribution and minimizes ethnic tensions in regions with complex historical land ownership issues?*
- *What role should international organizations, such as the United Nations and the African Union, play in addressing the long-term economic inequalities caused by colonialism?*
- *How can African nations balance the need for foreign investment with the goal of fostering self-sustaining economies that do not rely on external exploitation?*

TOPIC B: Safeguarding Cultural Heritage Sites in Middle Eastern Conflict Zones

Topic Background

Over the course of history, an immense amount of destruction has been done to cultural heritage sites, specifically in the Middle East. Considering that the overall goal of SPECPOL is to ensure that diverse political issues and peacekeeping are maintained, the concern of the destruction of cultural heritage sites falls under the category of significant issues. The Middle East is the region in which civilization sprouted, currently obtaining a melting pot of cultures, religions, and identities. But unfortunately, in many cases of cultural heritage destruction, it is done to erase these valued identities. This horrific action is known as “cultural cleansing”, and goes entirely against the values of SPECPOL. These significant sites not only illustrate history, but provide senses of belonging and identity to many.

In the Rome Statute, destruction of cultural heritage is considered a war crime, and falls under the category of a crime of aggression or even against humanity when a specific group of people are targeted. When focusing on sympathy towards the suffering of people, the destruction of historically important cultural heritage sites gets washed out entirely. Sadly, there is a considerable amount of effects that originate from this destruction that don't necessarily first meet the eye. The foundation of a cultural identity in a land and its peoples is not just crucial when it comes to their unification, but when broken, can shake the region's security and hinder its development. The rapid demolition of churches, temples, mosques, and historical gems alike call for immediate intervention, not just from a certain denomination, but from the entire human race.

Current Situation

Situated at the crossroad of countless formidable civilizations, the Levant region is no stranger to war. Following the Arab Spring in 2010, however, this conflict has been incessant and merciless. A major overlooked casualty of this series of hostilities lies in the erasure and deletion of this region's rich history.

In 2015 alone, ISIS along with other extremist groups devastated countless historical sites in Iraq, Yemen, and Syria. Amongst these tragedies are 3 of Iraq (and the world)'s oldest cities: Hatra, Ashur, and Samsara. Some dating back to Assyrian times, the loss of these ancient memorials pose a threat to the preservation of global history. Also demolished during the year 2015, include over 75 archeological sites in Yemen. These monuments, reflecting the rich diversity of cultures and religions that were entangled through this land's past, were a point of unity and connection for the Yemeni people, and their destruction can only lead to more chaos and disorder. According to the French National Center for Scientific Research, three UNESCO sites have been damaged here along with the Temple of Nakrah from 400 BC. Under repeated bombardment is the Marib dam (mentioned in both the Old Testament and the Quran). Moreover, the ravaging of sites such as Palmyra in Syria further the urgency to solve this crisis before it is too late.

In the past year, 195 historical and religious sites have been completely leveled in Gaza. The Anhedon harbour from 800 BC, Byzantine Church of Jabalia from 444, and the Othman bin Qashqar mosque from 1220 (Muhammad's great grandfather said to be buried there) are just a few of the shrines that have been ravaged. In addition to the physical sites, one-of-a-kind collections at the Al Qarara Museum and the Great Omar Mosque have been shattered, erasing

stories and lessons from 1550-1200 BC. Not only can these relics never be replaced, but the knowledge and insight they possess have been lost forever.

It is important to note that the loss of these ancient treasures have greater implications than just social unrest. The funding for the restoration of these sites often comes from private donors who can then use their influence to make alterations at these monuments at their own discretion. Moreover, these cities have been used to accommodate local people, and their demolition could displace over 250,000 people. Lastly, along with the discontent and disorganization that come with the upset of these locations comes a lack of security that can lead to the trafficking of priceless artifacts.

Possible/Past Solutions

The Middle Eastern culture heritage, and the conflict zones, are so sensitive that the UN has taken significant actions to protect the sites. The dismantling of heritage sites was troubling and in direct response to that, the United Nations security council passed a plan called “Resolution 2347”. It was the first comprehensive solution that pinpointed cultural heritage protection in armed conflicts. Today the UN maintains that the only way to stop the dismantling of heritage sites is through collaboration and pledging that the UN itself will focus on cooperation between governments, UNESCO, Interpol, and all international organizations. The UN has also instructed implementing cultural protection strategies in peacekeeping missions to curb the trafficking of cultural heritage artifacts as well as stopping destruction to these sites from happening.

Among these is the project *Endangered Archeology in the Middle East and North Africa*, established in 2015 and part-funded by the Cultural Protection Fund, which applies satellite

imagery and digital documentation to provide rapid condition assessment and monitoring of archeological sites. Funded with £1,615, 025 (pounds sterling) or \$2,006,660 in USD, the project covers capacity building through training heritage professionals across Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt. This work will ensure that local authorities will have the skills needed to protect cultural heritage through the latest methods of site documentation and risk assessment. The integration of new technologies with traditional expertise plays an increasingly vital role in this project to reduce the destruction of cultural sites irreplaceable both in value and cultural significance in conflict zones.

Cultural heritage is the soul of civilization, a thread woven through time that connects the past, present, and the future. When war and conflict unravel this thread, entire histories risk being lost, leaving only echoes of what once was. The destruction of cultural sites in the Middle East are not just an attack against crumbling towers, and once hallowed walls, they are nothing less than an assault on identity, memory, and the stories that define humanity. While the United Nations and other international organizations have gone a long way in safeguarding these treasures, the struggle to save the milestone of history is relentless. It calls for persistent commitment, harmony at the global level, and innovative ways to combat wars, terrorism, and ecological disasters. Cultural heritage are testaments to the resilient and enduring nature of human civilization. If it is not protected, more than just monuments are lost; fragments of humanity's defining features will perish. The past will not speak for itself, delegates, and we urge you to create a creative and multifaceted solution that addresses not only these problems but their collateral effects.

Questions to Consider

- *How can the international community effectively respond to non-state actors who deliberately target cultural sites as part of their military strategy?*
- *What role should regional organizations play in protecting cultural heritage sites, and how can their efforts be coordinated with UN initiatives?*
- *What funding mechanisms could be established to support the immediate protection and subsequent restoration of damaged cultural sites?*
- *What role should private sector actors and international cultural institutions play in protecting and preserving threatened heritage sites?*
- *What measures can be taken to ensure the documentation and digital preservation of cultural heritage sites that are at risk of destruction?*

Works Cited

- Al Hosani, Rashed. "Preserving Cultural Heritage in War-Torn Iraq: Challenges and Imperatives." *Trends Research and Advisory*, 10 Nov. 2024, trendsresearch.org/insight/preserving-cultural-heritage-in-war-torn-iraq-challenges-and-imperatives/?srsltid=AfmBOorCmUs2rHdwNMVn5buC7EEqRne13cEAJMbHhue4Bzeb6M_mlagG. Accessed 30 Jan. 2025.
- Corti, Margherita. "Cultural Heritage Protection in Armed Conflicts." *The CoESPU Magazine*. *CoESPU*, <https://doi.org/10.32048/Coespumagazine4.22.1>. Accessed 31 Jan. 2025.
- EAMENA. "The Cultural Protection Fund." *EAMENA*, edited by Oxford University et al., Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa, eamena.org/cultural-protection-fund. Accessed 30 Jan. 2025.
- The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, editor. "Palmyra." *Britannica*, 24 Jan. 2025, www.britannica.com/place/Palmyra-Syria. Accessed 30 Jan. 2025.
- Khalidi, Lamya. "The Destruction of Yemen and Its Cultural Heritage." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2017, pp. 735–38. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26852598>. Accessed 31 Jan. 2025.
- Millender, Michaela, and Nicolette Lyubarsky. "When Protectors Become Perpetrators: The Complexity of State Destruction of Cultural Heritage." *IPI Global Observatory*, IPI International Peace Institute, 24 Apr. 2024, theglobalobservatory.org/2024/04/when-protectors-become-perpetrators-the-complexity-of-state-destruction-of-cultural-heritage/. Accessed 31 Jan. 2025.
- Saber, Indlieb Farazi. "A 'Cultural Genocide': Which of Gaza's Heritage Sites Have Been Destroyed?" *Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera Media Network, 24 Jan. 2025,

www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/14/a-cultural-genocide-which-of-gazas-heritage-sites-have-been-destroyed. Accessed 30 Jan. 2025.

United Nations. "Security Council Condemns Destruction, Smuggling of Cultural Heritage by Terrorist Groups, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2347 (2017)." *United Nations*, 24 Mar. 2017, press.un.org/en/2017/sc12764.doc.htm. Accessed 30 Jan. 2025.

Winchester, Nichole. "Targeting Culture: The Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Conflict." *UK Parliament*, House of Lords, 14 Dec. 2022, lordslibrary.parliament.uk/targeting-culture-the-destruction-of-cultural-heritage-in-conflict/. Accessed 31 Jan. 2025.