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Land Acknowledgement

The staff at HCMUN XII acknowledges that we are situated on the traditional territories of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples, and are now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. Toronto is covered by Treaty 13, signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties, signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

As we prepare to attend and direct conferences such as HCMUN, we would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the continuous injustice that affects Indigenous and Inuit peoples. As we gather together, it is important to reflect on the discrimination and the lasting impact our government has had on Indigenous communities across Canada. We take this time to recognize those who continue to share their culture and push back against discrimination, for the good of future generations.

Equity Disclaimers

Dear delegates,

Throughout this committee, delegates may be challenged to engage in complex and heavy discussion on a broad range of important world issues. At Havergal College Model UN, our top priority is to ensure that every delegate feels respected, included, and able to participate fully. In the meantime, they also feel comfortable in the committee they are in. We would like to ask participating delegates to approach all discussions on sensitive topics with a great deal of professionalism, empathy and respect.

The staff here at HCMUN are here to support you, so if you experience or observe behaviour that makes you uncomfortable, or have concerns related to diversity, equity, or inclusion involving a delegate, chair, or staff member, please contact the equity team. You may submit an anonymous report or reach out to a team member directly, whichever you prefer. All reports are taken seriously and will be reviewed promptly. Delegates who engage in inappropriate behaviour may become ineligible for awards and may face further action if necessary. We hope you feel supported throughout the conference and wish you a positive experience!

Sincerely,
Belle Guo and Mia Liu

Tech Policy

At HCMUNXII, we are committed to creating a fair, focused, and academically honest environment for all delegates. To uphold these standards, delegates are expected to follow the conference's technology guidelines throughout their committee experience.

During committee sessions, technology may only be used during unmoderated caucuses. At these times, delegates are not permitted to access online research, external sources, or any materials beyond what they prepared before the conference. Technology is allowed strictly for the purpose of drafting resolutions and collaborating on written documents. To maintain transparency, all draft resolutions, working papers, and collaborative files must be shared in real time with the Dais. Any document not shared with the Dais may be considered invalid for committee use.

Outside of formal committee time, delegates are free to access technology and conduct research during lunch and scheduled breaks. However, the conference maintains a firm commitment to academic integrity. The use of any AI tools — including generative AI, automated writing tools, or AI-based research systems — is strictly prohibited throughout any point before or during the conference. Plagiarism of any kind is not tolerated, and all work presented in committee must be original and reflect the delegate's own preparation and analysis. Any violations of these expectations will be handled in accordance with HCMUNXII's academic policies.

These guidelines are designed to ensure that committee work remains equitable, that debate is grounded in authentic understanding, and that HCMUNXII upholds the highest standards of integrity and professionalism. Let this policy help guide delegates toward productive collaboration, meaningful diplomacy, and an enriching Model UN experience.

SOCHUM as a TOC Qualifier

The SOCHUM committee is thrilled to announce that we are a **Tournament of Championships (TOC) qualifier** at HCMUNXII this year! The first Tournament of Champions in Toronto will be taking place from May 28th - May 30th, 2026. This is a competition hosted by HarvardMUN where delegates will engage in extremely competitive debate to earn the 2026 Canadian Championship Titles. As a TOC qualifier, the Best Delegate from our committee will automatically qualify to participate in the TOC! We highly encourage all delegates who are interested in this opportunity to learn more information about the TOC by referring to the following link: <https://www.hmuncanada.org/tournament-of-champions>. This is an extremely exciting chance for delegates to prove their skills in debating, innovation, and international policy. The WHO committee could not be more honoured to host this opportunity.

Letter From the Secretary General

Dear Delegates and Advisors,

It is our honour and privilege to invite you to the twelfth annual Havergal College Model United Nations Conference. Each year, HCMUN brings together passionate, curious, and globally minded students from across the region, delegates who are eager to question, collaborate, and imagine solutions to the world's most pressing challenges.

At its core, HCMUN is more than a one-day event. It is a space where young people can test ideas, challenge assumptions, and discover the power of diplomacy. Whether you are stepping into your very first committee or returning as an experienced delegate, we hope this conference offers you a chance to push your thinking, embrace unfamiliar perspectives, and develop the confidence to advocate for meaningful change.

Our team has worked hard to create engaging, dynamic committees that encourage creative problem-solving and meaningful dialogue. We invite you to participate with curiosity, empathy, and confidence — your voice will shape the experience of everyone in the room.

Thank you for joining us. We can't wait to see the diplomacy and passion you bring to HCMUN XII!

Sincerely,

Aurelia He and Marlowe Herman
Secretary Generals, HCMUNXII

Letter from the Dais

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to HCMUN XII! We are delighted to invite you all to the SOCHUM committee! Model UN is a phenomenal opportunity to work together alongside other people, not as students, but as world leaders, famous politicians, or even well-known historical figures, to solve complex dilemmas requiring crucial skills such as collaboration and critical thinking, ultimately broadening one's perspective and knowledge on pressing global topics.

In this SOCHUM committee, delegates are expected to dive deep into modern but prevalent issues of navigating the privacy concerns in an ever-progressing digital world, as well as addressing the severe alienation created by government persecution targeted at minorities in a country, and ultimately coming up with innovative and effective solutions to tackle these pressing topics to ensure that society will remain balanced. The dais is looking favourably upon delegates who adhere to their foreign policy and country policies when engaging in fruitful debates during moderated caucuses.

As your dais, we are so excited to see what you will come up with! We're looking forward to reading position papers, hearing everyone's thoughts, and witnessing the collaboration, innovation, and diplomacy that Model UN itself is built upon. If you have any questions at all, please feel free to contact either of us: clin@havergal.on.ca, alexsong.2028@gmail.com or any other member of the dais.

Sincerely,
Cinya Lin, Alex Song
Chair, Co-chair

Topic A: Protection of Privacy in the Digital Age

Introduction:

This SOCHUM committee will address the concerns currently threatening privacy in our digitally expanding world. From information trading to data breaches, from state surveillance to artificial intelligence, society's greatest technological advances also lead to great ethical concerns. Recognizing that privacy is a fundamental right, now under a new form of threat, delegates will need to collaborate to devise innovative solutions to one of the world's most pressing issues. Individuals are immediately placed at risk of exploitation, discrimination, and psychological and mental harm, particularly for journalists, activists, minorities, and politicians, because of weak protection and encryption, as well as unethical access to personal data and information.¹ It is a direct violation of human rights and personal autonomy regarding the unauthorized collection, surveillance, or misuse of personal information and data within the mandate of SOCHUM. As technology expands state and corporate power, safeguarding digital spaces becomes not only a technical necessity but a moral obligation. Delegates must therefore confront how failures in digital security enable abuses of power and consider how ethical standards can be reinforced to protect individuals in an increasingly data-driven world.¹

Terminology and Key Ideas:

Right to Privacy (Digital Privacy)

The principle that individuals have control over how their personal data is collected, stored, shared, and used online. In SOCHUM, this is framed as a fundamental human right, linked to dignity, autonomy, and freedom from arbitrary interference.¹

Mass Surveillance

The large-scale monitoring of populations by states or corporations is often through digital tools such as metadata collection, facial recognition, or online tracking. This term is crucial when discussing state power, national security, and human rights trade-offs.

Data Exploitation / Information Trading

The practice of collecting personal data and monetizing or sharing it without meaningful consent. This is especially relevant when discussing corporate responsibility, consent, and discrimination risks.²

¹ United Nations. "UN General Assembly - Third Committee - Social, Humanitarian & Cultural." *United Nations*, 2019, www.un.org/en/ga/third/. Accessed 15 Jan. 2026.

Encryption and Data Security

Encryption refers to methods that protect data from unauthorized access. Weak or restricted encryption increases the risk of data breaches, surveillance abuses, and targeting of vulnerable groups like journalists and activists.

Algorithmic Bias (in Artificial Intelligence)

When AI systems produce discriminatory outcomes due to biased data or design. This term connects privacy violations with systemic discrimination, particularly against minorities and marginalized communities.

Context of the Issue:

In recent decades, digital technology has rapidly changed how people communicate, work, and participate in society.² While these advancements have made life more efficient and connected, they have also created serious risks to personal privacy. The collection and use of personal data has become a routine part of daily life, often happening without individuals fully understanding how their information is stored, shared, or used. Both governments and private companies now have unprecedented access to personal data. Many states justify increased digital surveillance in the name of national security or public safety, yet these practices can easily become intrusive and excessive when proper safeguards are not in place.³ Journalists, political activists, minorities, and opposition figures are especially vulnerable to monitoring and misuse of their data, which can lead to intimidation, discrimination, or silencing. At the same time, corporations profit from gathering and trading personal information. Weak data protection laws, poor encryption standards, and frequent data breaches leave individuals exposed to identity theft, manipulation, and psychological harm. As technology continues to advance, legal and ethical frameworks often struggle to keep pace, allowing harmful practices to persist unchecked. The rise of AI has further intensified privacy concerns. Automated systems increasingly influence decisions in areas such as employment, law enforcement, and access to services. When these systems rely on biased data or lack transparency, they can reinforce existing inequalities and violate individual rights.

Case Study: China's Mass Surveillance and the Uyghur Population in Xinjiang

A case study that illustrates how governments justify privacy violations against specific groups in the digital age can be seen in China's surveillance of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang.³ As

² United Nations, "The Impact of Digital Technologies | United Nations," n.d., <https://www.un.org/en/un75/impact-digital-technologiesbehaviour> .

³ "China's Algorithms of Repression," *Human Rights Watch*, March 28, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/01/chinas-algorithms-repression/reverse-engineering-xinjiang-police-mass>.
³"Mass Surveillance Is a Violation of Human Right to Privacy." *Civil Liberties Union for Europe*, 24 Oct. 2023, <https://www.liberties.eu/en/stories/un-mass-surveillance-is-a-violation-of-human-right-to-privacy-sn-892/19916>.

digital technology expanded in the early 21st century, the Chinese state increasingly framed mass data collection as a tool for counterterrorism and social stability. Under this justification, authorities implemented large-scale biometric data collection, facial recognition systems, DNA sampling, and mobile phone monitoring across Xinjiang. While the government claimed these measures targeted extremism, they were applied broadly to the entire Uyghur population rather than to individuals suspected of wrongdoing. Uyghurs became defined as a security risk based on ethnicity and religion rather than behaviour. This collective surveillance allowed the state to track movement, communication, and daily life without consent. Internationally, this practice raised alarm because it normalized the use of invasive surveillance technologies against minorities and encouraged other states to adopt similar systems.

Case Study: India's use of Pegasus spyware against journalists and opposition figures

In the late 2010s, the Indian government increasingly emphasized national security, counterterrorism, and internal stability to justify expanded digital surveillance powers. Pegasus spyware, developed by NSO Group, was marketed as a precision tool to track criminals and terrorists.⁴ However, investigative reporting revealed that the spyware was deployed against journalists investigating government corruption, opposition politicians, lawyers, and civil society activists. Pegasus allows full access to a device, including messages, photos, microphones, and cameras, without any user interaction or consent.

This created a chilling effect, as individuals could no longer communicate privately or safely organize political activity. The lack of transparency and judicial oversight made it impossible for victims to challenge the surveillance. Internationally, the case damaged India's democratic credibility and intensified global concern over the unregulated trade in spyware. Similar to historical collective punishments, the Pegasus case demonstrates how governments can weaponize privacy violations to control dissent by treating political affiliation and occupation as grounds for suspicion.

Case Study: Iran's internet shutdowns and digital surveillance during nationwide protests

Beginning in 2017 and intensifying during protests in 2019 and 2022, the Iranian government repeatedly shut down mobile networks and restricted internet access while expanding online surveillance capabilities. Authorities justified these measures by claiming they were necessary to prevent violence, foreign interference, and misinformation. In practice, internet shutdowns were used to disrupt protest coordination, prevent the sharing of evidence of

⁴ Parliament, "THE DIGITAL PERSONAL DATA PROTECTION ACT, 2023," *THE GAZETTE OF INDIA EXTRAORDINARY*, August 11, 2023, https://prsindia.org/files/bills_acts/bills_parliament/2023/Digital_Personal_Data_Protection_Act,_2023.pdf.

state violence, and isolate citizens from international media.⁵ Social media monitoring and digital data tracking were used to identify protesters after demonstrations ended. Rather than responding to individual criminal acts, the state imposed collective digital punishment on entire cities and regions. Protesters, journalists, and ordinary civilians lost access to communication and information regardless of their involvement. This policy treated public expression itself as a threat to national security. Internationally, Iran's actions violated established UN human rights standards and contributed to growing concern over the normalization of internet shutdowns as a governance tool. This case shows how modern governments adapt traditional repression techniques into the digital sphere by removing privacy and access to information from entire populations to maintain political control.

Past Actions/Limitations:

Actions:

States and international bodies have attempted to address digital privacy primarily through legal frameworks, soft law, and regional regulations. At the international level, the United Nations has affirmed privacy as a human right under Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The UN Human Rights Council has passed multiple resolutions recognizing that the right to privacy applies in the digital age, including resolutions condemning unlawful surveillance and data collection. Regionally, the most significant step has been the General Data Protection Regulation, which set strict rules on consent, data minimization, and cross-border data transfers. Some countries have also introduced domestic data protection laws and oversight bodies, while courts in states such as Germany, India, and Canada have ruled against unlawful surveillance practices.

In response to spyware and AI risks, some governments have launched investigations, imposed fines, or placed temporary restrictions on certain technologies. However, these actions remain fragmented and largely reactive.

Limitations:

A key flaw is that most protections are non-binding or unevenly enforced. UN resolutions lack enforcement mechanisms, allowing states to publicly support privacy while continuing intrusive surveillance domestically.

Another major weakness is the absence of global standards. Strong regulations like the GDPR are regional, while many states lack comparable laws, creating loopholes that companies and governments exploit through cross-border data flows.

⁵ "Digital Personal Data Protection Rules 2025 | Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology," n.d., <https://www.meity.gov.in/documents/act-and-policies/digital-personal-data-protection-rules-2025-gDOxUjMtQWa?pageTitle=Digital-Personal-Data-Protection-Rules-2025> .

National security exemptions are also overly broad. Governments often justify mass surveillance without transparency or judicial oversight, making abuse difficult to challenge. Additionally, corporate accountability remains weak. Technology companies operate transnationally, but regulation is primarily national, limiting states' ability to control data harvesting, AI training practices, and biometric surveillance.

Finally, existing frameworks struggle to keep pace with rapid technological change, especially in artificial intelligence, facial recognition, and commercial spyware, allowing harmful practices to spread faster than regulation.

Current Actions:

EU Implementation of the EU AI Act and Ongoing GDPR Enforcement

The European Union is currently implementing the EU Artificial Intelligence Act, the first binding international framework regulating artificial intelligence systems that process personal data.⁶ The law classifies AI systems by risk level and places strict limits on high-risk uses such as facial recognition, biometric surveillance, and automated decision-making in policing and migration. At the same time, EU regulators continue to actively enforce the General Data Protection Regulation, issuing fines and orders against companies that misuse personal data.

This action directly addresses AI-driven privacy violations and has global influence, as multinational companies must comply or exit the EU market. It sets a regulatory model that other regions are beginning to copy.

UNHCR on the right to privacy in the digital age

The United Nations Human Rights Council continues to pass resolutions affirming that the right to privacy applies fully online and condemning unlawful surveillance, biometric data collection, and misuse of personal data.⁷ These resolutions mandate reports by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on digital surveillance practices and their impact on journalists, activists, minorities, and political opponents.

This is the main global forum addressing digital privacy as a human rights issue. While not legally binding, these actions shape international norms, influence state behaviour, and provide legitimacy for future regulation and accountability.

India's Enforcement Rollout of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act

⁶ Müge Fazlioglu, "EU Digital Laws Report 2025," IAPP.org, December 15, 2025, <https://iapp.org/resources/article/eu-digital-laws-report>

⁷ OHCHR, "Special Rapporteur on the Right to Privacy," n.d., <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-privacy>.

India is currently rolling out enforcement of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, which establishes nationwide rules for consent, data storage, and processing by both governments and private companies. The law introduces penalties for misuse of personal data and creates a central data protection authority. As the world's largest democracy and a major technology market, India's approach has significant international implications. The law represents a shift from minimal regulation toward formal privacy protections, while also revealing ongoing tensions between privacy rights and national security exemptions.

Guiding Questions:

1. How should the right to privacy be understood and protected in a world where digital technologies continuously collect and analyze personal data?
2. To what extent should states be permitted to intrude on individual privacy in pursuit of national security, public order, or technological development?
3. How have private corporations reshaped the meaning of privacy through large-scale data collection, and what obligations, if any, should they bear under international human rights norms?
4. Does the expansion of digital surveillance technologies pose a structural risk to democracy and human dignity, or can these tools be reconciled with human rights through regulation and oversight?
5. How can international cooperation address privacy violations that occur across borders without undermining state sovereignty or economic innovation?
6. What legal, ethical, and institutional mechanisms are necessary to ensure that privacy protections remain effective as technology continues to evolve?

Topic B: Cultural Protection from Government Persecution

Introduction:

Furthermore, this committee will also delve deep into the persecution exalted by certain governments of minorities, and what the United Nations can do in response. Whether it be the Uyghurs in China,⁸ the Kurds in Turkey,⁹ or other victimized groups, international human rights must be upheld. Delegates will be tasked with constructing elaborate yet feasible plans to narrow the scope of this issue while respecting the sovereignty of member states. Furthermore, this committee will also push delegates to dive deep into the persecution carried out by certain governments against minority populations and the role that the international community can play in mitigating the abuse endured by these populations. Cases around the globe can offer prime examples of violations and pose a direct threat to international human rights norms. Overall, such situations demand careful attention, as they often occur within complex political and cultural contexts. Delegates will be tasked with crafting comprehensive yet realistic strategies that address these injustices, narrow the scope of the issue, and enable the United Nations to take meaningful action while respecting the sovereignty of member states.

Terminology and Key Ideas:

Cultural Cleansing

Defined by UNESCO, “Intentional strategy that seeks to destroy **cultural diversity** through the deliberate targeting of individuals identified based on their cultural, ethnic or religious background, combined with deliberate attacks on the places of worship, memory and learning.”

Ethnic Cleansing

Removing people for homogeneity by using violence or coercion for depopulation

Homogeneity

The quality or state of being all the same or all of the same kind

⁸ Minority Rights Group, “Uyghurs in China - Minority Rights Group,” April 12, 2024, of <https://minorityrights.org/communities/uyghurs/>.

⁹ Hussein Tahiri, “Cultural and Physical Genocide: The Kurdish Case in Turkey,” The Insight International, February 7, 2018, <https://theinsightinternational.com/genocide-kurdish-case-turkey-2018-02-06>.

Context of the Issue

Culture has a fundamental role in shaping an individual's identity. On a larger scale, it holds core beliefs, practices and languages that a community can connect with.¹⁰ When that essential aspect of life is stripped from a group of people by a country's government, the community doesn't just lose their traditions or peers; they lose their selfhood. Critically, youth minority communities that face discrimination, economic hardship, and community violence need their racial, cultural and social identities to serve as active coping methods.¹¹ The importance of cultures is why cultural protection from government persecution has been a core component of international human rights law. Many international and domestic legal frameworks offer mechanisms to protect individuals and groups from targeted harm based on their cultural, ethnic, or religious identity.¹² Therefore, it is vital to understand that these kinds of attacks don't just harm the individual and their rights, but rather target entire populations and their history, which ultimately causes maximum destructive impact.¹³

Case Study: Medieval Expulsions in England

A case study that depicts the range of why governments persecute culture in the first place can be the medieval expulsions that occurred in England. Before the 12th century, European governments rarely expelled entire groups; punishments usually targeted individuals, not communities.⁶ However, in the High Middle Ages, rulers and city governments began to expel whole communities at once as an official policy.¹⁴ For example, Jewish communities in England were heavily associated with money lending, because Christians were forbidden from charging interest.⁷ Although individual Jews would be honest in their work, the government targeted the entire community by taxing them heavily, restricting their rights, and ultimately

¹⁰ Avom Kamtoh Kevin and Avom Kamtoh Kevin, "The Importance of Culture in Modern Society - Right for Education," Right for Education, March 25, 2025, <https://rightforeducation.org/2025/03/25/the-importance-of-culture-in-modern-society/>.

¹¹ Adithi Rajagopalan et al., "Utilizing Sociocultural Identity to Cope With Poverty-related Stress: Methodological Insights From Developing a Coping Intervention," *Identity* 25, no. 2 (August 17, 2024): 216–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2024.2383750>.

¹² Patty Gerstenblith, "Protecting Cultural Heritage: The Ties Between People and Places," Cultural Heritage and Mass Atrocities, September 20, 2022, <https://www.getty.edu/publications/cultural-heritage-mass-atrocities/part-4/21-gerstenblith/>.

¹³ Elizabeth Rushing, "Cultural Property Protection: A Humanitarian Concern," Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog, February 6, 2025, <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2020/02/13/cultural-property-protection-humanitarian/>.

¹⁴ "Stanford Historian Explores How Expulsions Became Widespread in Medieval Europe," Stanford Humanities and Sciences, n.d., <https://humsci.stanford.edu/feature/stanford-historian-explores-how-expulsions-became-widespread-medieval-europe>

expelling them in 1290.¹⁵ This is a key example of why governments in medieval England would justify the expulsions by claiming that these groups caused moral, economic or social harm. Money lenders were defined by their shared occupation of culture and identity, not individually.⁶ Over time, these expulsions would become normalized as a government tool to deal with cultural or social groups because other governments would simply copy the practice and spread it across medieval Europe.⁶ Additionally, governments in medieval England exemplify methods of polarization that were implemented in the 12th century, such as church teachings and canon law to help legitimize expulsion as an acceptable response to "undesirable groups".⁶ Overall, the medieval expulsions in England illustrates how governments would act against entire groups regardless if they did anything wrong to enforce social, economic and religious norms.

Case Study: The Kurdish Population in Turkey

However, government persecution of culture and identity can also take place in other ways. A key case study that illustrates the atrocities of what governments can do to culturally cleanse a culture or group of people is the Kurdish Case in Turkey. The Kurds are an indigenous, stateless ethnic group. Being the fourth largest population in the Middle East and inhabiting a region known as Kurdistan, they are known for seeking independence and autonomy amidst regional powers, and are also defined by their tribal structures. Historically, the Turkish state used both cultural and physical means to destroy Kurdish identity and society. For example, Kurds would be denied basic human rights, language, and identity. They would be called mountain Turks as a way to assimilate them into Turkish society. Moreover, the Turkish state created boarding schools and education policies used to inculcate Turkish national norms and destroy Kurdish cultural practices.¹⁶ This cultural persecution has been a clear defining moment for many Kurdish peoples, as they now feel the need to protect their culture, families and homeland from this kind of government persecution. For example, many Kurdish women have joined the Women's Protection Units (YPJ) to get revenge against the government for their families and friends.¹⁷ Learning about the Kurdish population in Turkey illustrates how government actions can break a minority community's connection to culture. By destroying the foundations of a group's cultural existence through suppressing their language, undermining practices, controlling education, and replacing cultural institutions with those of a dominant

¹⁵ "Edward I (Longshanks) Expells the Jews From England : History of Information," n.d., <https://www.historyofinformation.com/detail.php?id=1901>.

¹⁶ "Learn About Kurdish History | the Kurdish Project," The Kurdish Project, September 9, 2019, <https://thekurdishproject.org/history-and-culture/kurdish-history/>.

¹⁷ Kurdish Project, "What It's Like to Stand Alongside the Kurdish Women Fighting ISIS | the Kurdish Project," The Kurdish Project, May 24, 2017, <https://thekurdishproject.org/likdominante-stand-alongside-kurdlanguagesuppressingcommunity'sish-women-fighting-isis/>.

group, cultural genocide goes far beyond physical destruction and ultimately requires time to make a culture unable to survive.

Case Study: Uyghurs in China

Finally, a case study that highlights the feeble excuses of government persecution of cultures, as well as the scope of necessity for cultural protection against government oppression, is the Uyghurs in China. The Uyghurs are a Turkic, predominantly Muslim group of individuals whose population totals around 11.5 million within China in 2020.¹⁸ Since 2014, Chinese authorities have begun implementing “re-education” programs in 2017 for Muslims in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), where an estimated 500,000 people are still currently held in prison or detention, most of them identifying as Uyghur.¹⁹ In these “re-education camps”, the Uyghurs are subjected to forced indoctrination, torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, sexual violence and rape, forced sterilizations, abortions, and removal from their families.²⁰ China has explicitly denied the fact that they are violating the rights of the Uyghurs or any minority communities by saying, “The lawful rights and interests of workers of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang are protected, and there is no such thing as ‘forced labour’”¹³, but are also excusing these programs for anti-terrorism and state safety.²¹ They try to defer the attention by also mentioning that the UN and other international organizations should investigate, “the human rights disasters caused, and numerous crimes committed, by the US and some other Western countries, both at home and abroad”.¹³ Overall, the case study in China regarding the Uyghurs is a prime example of how even though UN organizations such as the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights(OHCHR) present reports that explain how Ughur and others are being deprived of their fundamental rights, governments will still hide it from the public, making it even more necessary for minority communities to get together and stand against government oppression.

Past Actions and Flaws:

The UN has made many attempts to get this issue under control, such as the 1954 Hague Convention, which states that cultures must be respected equally during peacetime, and parties must avoid using cultural sites for military purposes or targeting them during conflict.¹⁴ With 138

¹⁸Minority Rights Group, “Uyghurs in China - Minority Rights Group,” April 12, 2024, <https://minorityrights.org/communities/uyghurs/>.

¹⁹ Lindsay Maizland, “China’s Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, October 3, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights#chapter-title-0-2in>.

²⁰ Ewelina U. Ochab, “The Genocide Convention and the Failed Promise of Never Again,” *Forbes*, June 3, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2023/12/08/the-genocide-convention-and-the-failed-promise-of-never-a-gain/>.

²¹ “China Responsible for ‘Serious Human Rights Violations’ in Xinjiang Province: UN Human Rights Report,” UN News, September 6, 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/08/1125932>.

states being parties to this convention, the convention also mentions how cultural property is to be marked with the distinctive Blue Shield emblem, which is a symbol that is under international law.²² Although this action was the first international legal framework of its time to protect cultural heritage as a response to the damage and looting of cultural property during World War II,²³ has major flaws in the convention. For example, it has legal ambiguities such as the vague definition of “military necessity”. The convention allows for attacks on cultural property if “imperative military necessity” requires it, but it does not clearly define the term. This kind of ambiguity has allowed parties in various conflicts to misinterpret or abuse the exception as a pretext for destruction.²⁴ The 199 Second Protocol attempted to clarify this, but the issue remains a point of contention.²⁵

Moreover, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), created in 1998, gives the ICC jurisdiction over the following four crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of aggression.²⁶ Essentially, the ICC can potentially hear cases where a government or government-supported group systematically attacks or discriminates against people because of their cultural identity.²⁷ This attack on their fundamental rights being deprived must be widespread or systematic, not isolated. For example, a government who bans a cultural language or forbids traditional practices could be prosecutable as persecution before the ICC if all other legal requirements are met, including the ICC’s jurisdiction conditions; however, the challenges with the ICC are that it does not provide preventative or enforcement powers inside a country, the way a domestic court or human-rights treaty body might, it only prosecutes crimes after they occur.²⁸

Finally, another example of a past action that the United Nations has taken is the UN Genocide Convention, created in 1948.²⁹ This convention was the first human rights treaty ever adopted by the United Nations that addresses humanitarian issues.¹⁸ By defining genocide and

²² “1954 Convention,” UNESCO, November 19, 2025, <https://www.unesco.org/en/heritage-armed-conflicts/1954-convention>.

²³ Archaeological Institute of America, “The 1954 Hague Convention and Preserving Cultural Heritage,” October 19, 2010, <https://www.archaeological.org/the-1954-hague-convention-and-preserving-cultural-heritage/>.

²⁴ “Former Yugoslavia, Special Agreements Between the Parties to the Conflicts | How Does Law Protect in War? - Online Casebook,” n.d., <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/former-yugoslavia-special-agreements-between-parties-conflicts>.

²⁵ “20 Years of the Second Protocol to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in Armed Conflict: Have All the Gaps Been Filled?,” EJIL: Talk!, May 29, 2019, <https://www.ejiltalk.org/20-years-of-the-second-protocol-to-the-1954-hague-convention-for-the-protection-of-cultural-property-in-armed-conflict-have-all-the-gaps-been-filled/>.

²⁶ “Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court,” European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, November 26, 2021, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/law-reference/rome-statute-international-criminal-court>

²⁷ “Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.”

²⁸ “How The Court Works,” International Criminal Court, n.d., <https://www.icc-cpi.int/about/how-the-court-works>.

²⁹ “IHL Treaties - Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, 1948,” n.d., <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/genocide-conv-1948>.

criminalizing it in both war and peace, the convention has been widely accepted by the international community and ratified by the overwhelming majority of States.¹⁸ Additionally, it declares that everyone is subject to trial, even the most powerful leaders, and as of 2025, 139 countries are parties to this convention.¹⁸ Regarding challenges, articles have mentioned that although countries ratify the convention, the implementation of the convention and solving the actual solution only occurs when governments follow through with their commitments.³⁰ When looking at the number of genocides that have occurred in the past 75 years, it is vital to recognize that only ratifying conventions and not explicitly implementing them is not able to protect whole communities from attacks that target their identity.³¹

Current Actions:

As of 2025, there are 44+ mandates regarding cultural protection and 10 communities, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization(UNESCO), the UN Human Rights Council(HRC), and the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee(SOCHUM), are set to implement the mandates. Moreover, there are also active mechanisms that are put in place to enforce these mandates, such as a mandatory peer review of each of the 193 member states of the United Nations' activities every 4-5 years.³² Another example of what the UN has done to solve the issue of government persecution of cultures is appointing a special rapporteur to specialize in finding diplomatic solutions to the world's most pressing cultural dilemmas. The current special rapporteur in the field of cultural rights is Alexandra Xanthaki.³³

Future Actions:

On future actions, as of 2024, the United Nations adopted the Pact for the Future as its main strategy for both current and future global challenges.³⁴ Some key items it entails include: updating policies to encompass digital forms of oppression and harassment, sustainable long-term plans regarding the protection of minority groups, and encouraging member states to implement their own human rights acts in parallel to the pact.²⁵

³⁰Ewelina U. Ochab, "The Genocide Convention and the Failed Promise of Never Again," *Forbes*, June 3, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2023/12/08/the-genocide-convention-and-the-failed-promise-of-never-a-gain/>.

³¹ Ewelina U. Ochab, "The Genocide Convention and the Failed Promise of Never Again," *Forbes*, June 3, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2023/12/08/the-genocide-convention-and-the-failed-promise-of-never-a-gain/>.

³² OHCHR, "Instruments & Mechanisms," n.d., <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-and-mechanisms>.

³³ OHCHR, "Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights," n.d., <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-cultural-rights>.

³⁴ Cae Team, "Integrating Culture in the UN's Pact for the Future," Culture Action Europe, June 17, 2024, <https://cultureactioneurope.org/news/integrating-culture-in-the-uns-pact-for-the-future/>.

Furthermore, another relevant strategy for the future of cultural protection is the Culture2030Goal Campaign, which entails: embedding cultural rights in global governance reforms, strengthening heritage protection in crisis conflicts, ensuring cultural actors participate in policy-making, and defining access to culture as a human right – not a luxury.³⁵

Key Challenges and Limitations:

Cultural protection from government persecution has been a significantly important issue spanning from the present to medieval times; however, the fact remains that it is an increasingly difficult problem to solve, considering the weak enforcement of international law and the strategic weaponization of culture and identity by state actors. However, besides these ideas, it is often simply a challenge of a country's pride and logistics. As international law is largely based on consent, governments can simply resist the external pressures by claiming non-interference in domestic affairs; thus, enforcement becomes a challenge of political will rather than legal obligation. This kind of situation is already illustrated with the Uyghurs in China.

Moreover, another huge issue is power politics. Developed countries may simply avoid consequences due to their economic, military, or strategic importance.³⁶ Additionally, other international actors may hesitate to act on enforcement if it risks their strategic alliances or economic relationships.³⁰

Overall, cultural protection for minority communities from government persecution is vital to ensure that these minority cultures are represented, global leaders are held accountable for their crimes, and the international community respects the diversity of identities, traditions, and beliefs to contribute to a more inclusive, just, and peaceful global society.

Guiding Questions:

1. How do we represent these minority languages and traditions to ensure they are protected without political repression?
2. How can governments protect cultural diversity while maintaining national unity?
3. Is cultural suppression justified by the government as “security”, “unity,” or “counter-extremism”
4. Are state actors directly enforcing cultural restrictions, or enabling others to do so?
5. How should education play a role in cultural protection?

³⁵ “Home | #Culture2030goal,” n.d., <https://culture2030goal.net/>.

³⁶ RevisionDojo, “Why Is Enforcing Human Rights Globally so Difficult?,” RevisionDojo, December 30, 2025, <https://www.revisiondojo.com/blog/why-is-enforcing-human-rights-globally-so-difficult>.

6. How do we ensure all, or most, minority cultures are protected, considering the vast diversity of them?
7. How can technology play a role in the protection of cultures from government persecution?
8. What voices from affected communities should be included/excluded in policymaking?
9. In what ways can we include local communities to further protect cultures?
10. What lessons can we learn from past UN or non-UN actions to ensure we properly ratify conventions or treaties that are necessary to protect culture?

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