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GENERAL ASSEMBLY THIRD COMMITTEE BACKGROUND GUIDE 2018

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NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS



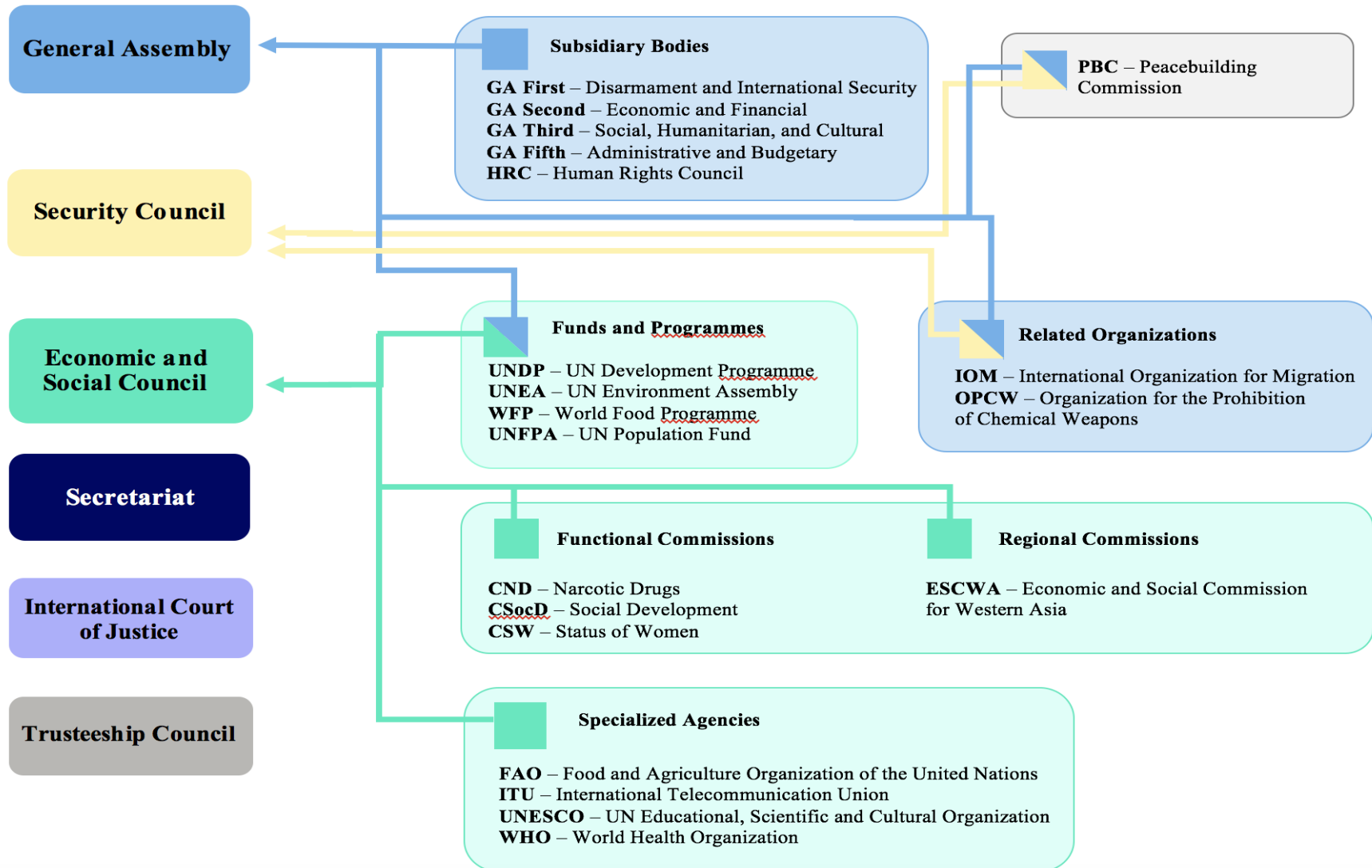
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United Nations System at NMUN•NY

This diagram illustrates the UN system simulated at NMUN•NY and demonstrates the reportage and relationships between entities. Examine the diagram alongside the Committee Overview to gain a clear picture of the committee's position, purpose, and powers within the UN system.





Abbreviations

ACRWC	<i>African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child</i>
AU	African Union
CAR	Central African Republic
CSO	Civil society organization
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DPI	Department of Public Information
EAC	Educate a Child
F4R	Faith for Rights
FBO	Faith-based organization
HRC	Human Rights Council
ICCPR	<i>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights</i>
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
IT	Information Technology
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NSGT	Non-self-governing territory
OAS	Organization of American States
OHCHR	Office for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PaRD	International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development
PGA	President of the General Assembly
PRC	People's Republic of China
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
UDHR	<i>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</i>
UN	United Nations
UN-Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNAOC	United Nations Alliance of Civilizations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization

Committee Overview

Introduction

Following the Second World War, the United Nations (UN) was formed to act as a deliberative and cooperational forum for Member States to better prevent the outbreak of future hostilities.¹ The General Assembly, one of the six principal organs of the UN established under the *Charter of the United Nations* (1945), was created to act as the wholly representative and deliberative arm of the organization.² The large variance in the scope of its mandate led the General Assembly to allocate its work among six committees that would allow each to focus on a specific theme.³ The stated mandate of the Third Committee is the discussion of all matters related to social, humanitarian, and cultural affairs.⁴ Since its foundation, this mandate has naturally developed to also include a particular specialism as the primary forum for issues around human rights.⁵ More than 50 % of the resolutions adopted by the committee in recent years were submitted under the human rights agenda addressing a variety of subtopics, thereby making it the world's largest and most prominent forum for international human rights norm creation.⁶ This overview will introduce the Third Committee through a contextualization of it within the wider General Assembly structure, an overview of its governance and membership, and an analysis of its mandate and associated powers before examining its current priorities.

Governance, Structure, and Membership

In accordance with the Charter, the General Assembly is comprised of all 193 UN Member States, as well as the Holy See and the State of Palestine as Observer States.⁷ Furthermore the work of the committee is supported by non-governmental and intergovernmental observers like the European Union or the International Criminal Court.⁸ All main General Assembly committees begin their annual session in mid-September, following the drafting and allocation of agenda items by the General Committee to each specific committee, according to theme and content.⁹ Relevant reports of the Secretary-General are issued just before each corresponding agenda item, followed by an allotted time for questions for clarification or analysis.¹⁰ As is the case for all General Assembly committees, the Third Committee adopts draft resolutions on each agenda item and a report to the General Assembly Plenary.¹¹ All documents require a simple majority to be adopted, unless the agenda item is considered an important question, like for example those on peace and security which require a two-thirds majority.¹² Based on this, the Plenary then adopts, either through a vote or by consensus, the draft resolutions as recommended in the committee report.¹³

The President of the General Assembly (PGA) is the largely ceremonial head of the General Assembly, elected each year by a simple majority to a one-year nonrenewable term.¹⁴ The PGA's duties are to facilitate Plenary sessions by directing discussion, managing the administration of meetings, and enforcing the General Assembly Rules of Procedure.¹⁵ The PGA does not preside over all six General Assembly committees separately; rather, Chairs and

¹ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, Art. 55-60.

² Ibid.; UN General Assembly, *About the General Assembly*, 2017.

³ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945; UN General Assembly, *Main Committees*, 2017.

⁴ UN General Assembly, *Social, Humanitarian & Cultural*, 2017.

⁵ Ibid.; UN DESA, *The UN General Assembly's Third Committee – social, humanitarian and cultural issues*, 2013; UN General Assembly, *Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues – Draft proposals per agenda item*, 2017.

⁶ UN HRC, *Institution-building of the United Nations Human Rights Council (A/HRC/RES/5/1)*, 2007; UN HRC, *Review of the work and functioning of the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/RES/16/21)*, 2011; UN DESA, *The UN General Assembly's Third Committee – social, humanitarian and cultural issues*, 2013.

⁷ UN General Assembly, *Member States*, 2017.

⁸ UN General Assembly, *List of non-Member States, entities and organizations having received a standing invitation to participate as observers in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly (A/INF/71/5)*, 2017.

⁹ Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, pp. 37-38, 62.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 37-38, 65.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 37-38, 62; UN General Assembly, *Reports to the Plenary*, 2017.

¹² UN General Assembly, *About the General Assembly*, 2017.

¹³ Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, p. 62.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Vice Chairs are the facilitators of individual committees.¹⁶ The PGA also performs executive duties such as meeting regularly with the Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council, and the President of the Economic and Social Council; communicating with the press and the public; and organizing high-level meetings for certain thematic issues.¹⁷

All General Assembly committees are supported by secretariats, which provide substantive and logistical support to the committees. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) serves as the primary substantive support wing of the Third Committee's secretariat, acting as a natural focal point for human rights bodies, reports, and other publications.¹⁸ Given the varied nature of its work, various other UN entities may serve as substantive secretariats for the Third Committee, such as the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Volunteers program, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).¹⁹ Furthermore, as a subsidiary body of the General Assembly, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) provides an annual report to the Third Committee on its own recent sessions and discussions.²⁰ Independent Experts, Special Rapporteurs, and Working Groups that compile reports and advise the HRC will also engage in interactive dialogues with the Third Committee on a variety of subjects.²¹

Mandate, Functions, and Powers

The Third Committee derives its direction from a variety of UN documents.²² Articles 10-17 of the Charter are the principal guidelines for the substance and scope of all General Assembly committees.²³ These articles state that the General Assembly has the authority to "initiate studies and make recommendations", as well as "receive and consider reports" from other organs of the UN, including the Security Council.²⁴ Article 1 also speaks of "promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all", which has been said to be the foundation of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948) and the mandate of much of the Third Committee's work.²⁵ Nearly every international human rights instrument since the UDHR has built upon its core principles, thereby enlarging the Third Committee's mandate by extension.²⁶ The Third Committee used the UDHR as the groundwork to adopt additional and more specific international human rights instruments, chief among them the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966) and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (1966).²⁷ These documents, along with the two optional protocols to the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, make up what is known as the *International Bill of Human Rights*.²⁸ Both covenants differ from the UDHR in that they are legally binding multilateral treaties to those Member States that have either ratified or acceded to them.²⁹

Under its overall mandate as the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee, the Third Committee spends a large portion of its time discussing matters relating to human rights and setting rights norms, demonstrated by the fact that around half of its work is based on the single agenda item "Promotion and protection of human rights".³⁰ However,

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 15, 18.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

¹⁸ UN OHCHR, *Human Rights – New York: Mainstreaming human rights*, 2017.

¹⁹ UN General Assembly, *Organization of work of the Third Committee: Note by the Secretariat (A/C.3/71/L.1/Rev. 1)*, 2016.

²⁰ UN General Assembly, *Report of the Human Rights Council (A/71/53)*, 2016.

²¹ Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, p. 65; UN DESA, *The UN General Assembly's Third Committee – social, humanitarian and cultural issues*, 2013.

²² Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011; *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, Art. 10-17.

²³ *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945, Art. 10-17.

²⁴ Ibid., Art. 13, 15.

²⁵ UN OHCHR, *Fact Sheet No.2 (Rev.1), The International Bill of Human Rights*, 1996; UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*, 1948.

²⁶ UN OHCHR, *Fact Sheet No.2 (Rev.1), The International Bill of Human Rights*, 1996.

²⁷ Ibid.; UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*, 1966; UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A/RES/2200 (XXI))*, 1966.

²⁸ UN OHCHR, *Fact Sheet No.2 (Rev.1), The International Bill of Human Rights*, 1996.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, p. 65.

the Third Committee's work can encompass a broad variety of issues, including those beyond human rights, demonstrated during its 71st session wherein topics including crime prevention and criminal justice, international drug control, young people's social development, and the advancement of women were discussed.³¹

As part of the General Assembly, the work of the Third Committee is of a normative nature, in that it does not actually carry out the operations or tasks called for in its resolutions.³² The Third Committee primarily works through the initiation of studies and the creation of nonbinding recommendations.³³ The task of operationalizing the Third Committee's recommendations is primarily delegated to the various agencies and offices of the UN Secretariat.³⁴ The Third Committee can request studies to be undertaken by relevant UN bodies such as OHCHR, UNHCR, UN-Women, and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).³⁵ UN-Women, for example, delivered the "Report of the Secretary-General on trafficking in women and girls" (A/71/223) to the Third Committee, and UNODC similarly issued the "Report of the Secretary-General on international cooperation against the world drug problem" (A/71/316) prepared pursuant to resolutions 69/149 (2015) and 69/194 (2015), respectively.³⁶ The Third Committee can also call for conferences to highlight certain issues, with a notable recurring example being the World Conference on Women, originating from the Third Committee resolution 3276 (XXIX) (1974), and monitored regularly through follow up reviews every five years.³⁷

Recent Sessions and Current Priorities

During its 71st session, beginning in September 2016, the Third Committee addressed a variety of issues and topics, culminating in 50 final texts being adopted by the Plenary.³⁸ With the Third Committee meeting for the second time since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the importance of the goals as a guidance for the work of the committee was stressed.³⁹ The work on draft resolution concerning country-specific human rights questions led to heated discussions, due to the draft resolutions being considered "arbitrary and politicized" by some Member States.⁴⁰ The reasons for increasing discussion on issues under the human rights agenda vary, but differing opinions on human rights questions as well as various ways to address the issue are part of it.⁴¹ A big question under debate that will need to be discussed further is whether resolutions on the human rights situation within single Member States are the suitable way to address the issue.⁴² Nevertheless, the Committee adopted four draft resolutions on the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.⁴³ While the General Assembly mostly works on a consensus basis, the committee requested recorded votes for three of the four draft resolutions.⁴⁴ Overall the General Assembly adopted 35 out of the 50 Third Committee draft resolutions

³¹ UN General Assembly, *Allocation of agenda items to the Third Committee (A/C.3/71/1)*, 2016.

³² UN General Assembly, *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly*, 2017.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ OHCHR, *Human Rights – New York: Mainstreaming human rights*, 2017; Switzerland, *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*, 2011, p. 65.

³⁵ UN General Assembly, *Organization of work of the Third Committee: Note by the Secretariat (A/C.3/71/L.1/Rev. 1)*, 2016.

³⁶ Ibid.; UN General Assembly, *International cooperation against the world drug problem: Report of the Secretary-General (A/71/316)*, 2016; UN General Assembly, *Trafficking in women and girls: Report of the Secretary-General (A/71/223)*, 2016.

³⁷ UN General Assembly, *Conference of the International Women's Year (XXIX) (A/RES/3726 (XXIX))*, 1974; UN-Women, *World Conferences on Women*, 2017.

³⁸ UN DPI, *General Assembly Adopts 50 Third Committee Resolutions, as Diverging Views on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity Animate Voting (GA/11879)*, 2016.

³⁹ UN DPI, *Speakers Focus on Greater Solidarity with World's Most Vulnerable People, Unequal Economic Progress, Need to Empower Youth, as Third Committee Opens Session (GA/SHC/4163)*, 2016; UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

⁴⁰ UN DPI, *Third Committee Approves 5 Draft Resolutions on Situations in Syria, Iran, Crimea, Introduces 5 Others Concerning Self-Determination, Enhanced Cooperation (GA/SHC/4188)*, 2016.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

without a vote.⁴⁵ This means that 30 % of the resolutions were adopted by recorded votes, showing the diverging views on many of the issues discussed within the agenda of the committee.⁴⁶ The Third Committee also considered the question of the right of peoples to self-determination, continuing the work of the previous years.⁴⁷ While the General Assembly adopted a resolution on the issue in general it also considered the question of mercenaries and the Palestinian people in two more resolutions.⁴⁸ The committee considered the annual report of the HRC and, taking it into account, approved draft resolutions on a variety of human rights questions.⁴⁹ This included human rights in relation with extreme poverty, right to peace, right to food, right to development, right to privacy in the digital age, as well as the freedom of religion and belief.⁵⁰

The 72nd session of the General Assembly opened on 12 September 2017 and continues the initial work of implementing the SDGs.⁵¹ Secretary-General António Guterres began the General Debate by emphasizing that “we are a world in pieces” and stressed the need for more collaboration to face today’s challenges.⁵² The Third Committee opened its discussions on 2 October 2017 and, across its 72nd 1st session, will discuss a variety of issues on the human rights agenda, including the promotion and protection of children’s rights, the empowerment of women and indigenous peoples, as well as receiving its annual reports from other UN bodies.⁵³ The committee will furthermore discuss questions like the right of peoples to self-determination, eliminating various forms of discrimination, and international drug control.⁵⁴

Conclusion

The Third Committee continues to perform a central role within the UN system, providing an overarching forum of discussion for a wide variety of social, humanitarian, and cultural issues and as the largest representative body for setting human rights norms.⁵⁵ Particularly within the context of the adoption of the SDGs, and the foundational underpinning its mandate has across many of them, the Third Committee’s work continues to be of the utmost importance.⁵⁶ Delegates should aim to understand the historical precedents the Committee has set through its work on human rights and humanitarian issues, as well as how these achievements continue to contextualize and influence the work it does today across a broad spectrum of topics and situations.⁵⁷

Annotated Bibliography

Charter of the United Nations. (1945). Retrieved 17 July 2017 from: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/>

The Charter is the fundamental document that underpins and informs all of the subsequent work of the United Nations. Delegates should understand the document as the foundational blueprint of the UN, both in terms of its structure and powers, but also its guiding ideals and objectives. Although much subsequent work has expanded upon the core principles of the Charter, it is essential that delegates understand the primary document and its context. Of particular interest is Article 17, which outlines the primary functions and powers of the General Assembly.

⁴⁵ UN DPI, *General Assembly Adopts 50 Third Committee Resolutions, as Diverging Views on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity Animate Voting* (GA/11879), 2016.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ UN General Assembly, *Universal realization of the right of peoples to self-determination* (A/RES/71/183), 2017.

⁴⁸ UN General Assembly, *Right of peoples to self-determination: Report of the Third Committee* (A/71/483), 2016.

⁴⁹ UN General Assembly, *Report of the Human Rights Council* (A/71/53), 2016.

⁵⁰ UN General Assembly, *Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues – Draft proposals per agenda item*, 2017.

⁵¹ UN DPI, *General Assembly Adopts Resolution on Follow-up to, Review of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in Consensus Action* (GA/11809), 2016.

⁵² UN DPI, *Secretary-General Stresses Political Solutions in Addressing Nuclear, Terrorism Migration Issues as United States President Warns Pyongyang* (GA/11947), 2017.

⁵³ UN General Assembly, *Allocation of agenda items to the Third Committee* (A/C.3/72/1), 2017.

⁵⁴ Ibid.; UN General Assembly, *Universal realization of the right of peoples of self-determination* (A/RES/71/183), 2017.

⁵⁵ UN DESA, *The UN General Assembly’s Third Committee – social, humanitarian and cultural issues*, 2013.

⁵⁶ UN DPI, *Speakers Focus on Greater Solidarity with World’s Most Vulnerable People, Unequal Economic Progress, Need to Empower Youth, as Third Committee Opens Session* (GA/SHC/4163), 2016.

⁵⁷ UN General Assembly, *Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues – Draft proposals per agenda item*, 2017.

Switzerland, Permanent Mission to the United Nations. (2011). *The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly*. Retrieved 17 July 2017 from: http://www.unitar.org/ny/sites/unitar.org/ny/files/UN_PGA_Handbook.pdf

The PGA Handbook is an essential read for delegates who will be a part of a General Assembly committee. The entirety of the Handbook is relevant and delegates are encouraged to study it carefully; however, of particular interest is page 65, which offers a comprehensive breakdown of the basic information of the Third Committee, including details of proceedings and voting information. This handbook is an essential 'first-step' for delegates to understand the structures, processes and traditions of the General Assembly Committees.

United Nations, Department of Public Information. (2016, December 19). *General Assembly Adopts 50 Third Committee Resolutions, as Diverging Views on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity Affect Voting (GA/11879)* [Meetings Coverage]. Retrieved 17 July 2017 from: <http://www.un.org/press/en/2016/ga11879.doc.htm>

This coverage of the work of the 71st session provides delegates with useful insight into the recent priorities of the committee. It provides a concise overview of resolutions adopted by the Plenary on the report of the Third Committee, and also a summary of statements made with actions undertaken on draft resolutions. Not only does this give delegates an understanding of the breadth of subject matter under consideration at the Third Committee, but it also serves as a useful starting point in their research that shapes and focuses lines of inquiry.

United Nations, General Assembly. (2017). *Functions and Powers of the General Assembly* [Website]. Retrieved 17 July 2017 from: <http://www.un.org/en/ga/about/background.shtml>

This is a basic overview of the work of the General Assembly, and how it is permitted to do such work under the Charter. The page is very easy to understand and has links on the side that can take delegates to other pages with valuable information on the General Assembly, such as the subsidiary organs, rules of procedure, and observers. All the functions of the General Assembly are clearly laid out in bullet points, and delegates should study these points carefully.

United Nations, General Assembly, Third session. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217 A (III))*. Retrieved 17 July 2017 from: <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>

The UDHR is the cornerstone of international human rights, and, along with the Charter of the United Nations, is one of the most important documents delegates should study during their preparation. Delegates should seek to fully understand these principles, given their foundational role as the fabric of how human rights are viewed today. Special attention should be paid to the principles of equality and inalienability of these rights, as well as the strong desire that Member States express for the UDHR to be enshrined as the global standard for human rights.

United Nations, General Assembly, Seventieth session. (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. Retrieved 17 July 2017 from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/70/1>

Although the overall reach of the SDGs extends beyond the remit of the Third Committee, there is significant overlap between the mandates of the two. A rights-based approach is highlighted in nearly all of the goals, and many touch upon topics that the Third Committee regularly discusses. The SDGs represent the primary development agenda of the UN and it is therefore important that delegates understand the organization's overarching objectives and how these interplay with and influence the work of the Committee.

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<https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/gashc4188.doc.htm>

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<http://www.un.org/press/en/2017/ga11947.doc.htm>

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