

## **Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee**

### **Topic 1: Female Infanticide**

*New York Times* contributor Nicholas D. Kristof wrote in August 2009 that as slavery was the defining issue of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the treatment and plight of women will be the defining moral challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this session, the Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian committee will be facing a very important component of this issue: female infanticide.

Throughout history the issue of female infanticide has plagued society. As women were unable to head households, hold property, or take part in familial lines of succession, the desire to have a boy rather than a girl was commonplace. Even today, a girl may not be able to gain as lucrative of employment opportunities as a boy may, and their ability to look after their parents in old age is immediately questioned. Poverty, lack of education, and low access to healthcare facilities are all still factors in creating environments for infanticide to flourish. In these situations, the girl will become a greater financial burden than a boy as she must be married off and a dowry must be given. Technology has added a new dimension within our lifetime that has made the accessibility to knowing the sex of your child that much easier. These individual deaths have now accumulated into what many are calling “gendercide”.

Gender imbalance has been growing steadily since the 1980s, nowhere more staggeringly than China. According to the Chinese Academy for Social Science, China will have 30-40 million more men age 19 and below than women. The ramifications of this skewed gender ratio are far reaching – imagine a country where an entire generation has little chance of marrying, starting a family, or having a traditional home. The potential for truancy is a threat to currently stable societies as individuals lose stake in the conventional organization of their world. It is important to note that China is not the only country facing this problem. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, South Korea, Serbia, Cyprus, Belarus, and India are just a few nations that also had a higher than natural ratio of male per 100 females at birth from 2000-2005.

Female infanticide is not only limited to poor segments of society, it will still occur even amongst the educated and rich. Cultural mores - that a boy will carry on the family name and will be there to look after the parents – are still a reality. General Electric recently took steps to regulate the use of ultrasound machines in India after evidence of their use for explicit sex-determination tests. A disturbing UNICEF statistic on Indian infanticide reported by *Frontline* states that if not for “extraneous circumstances, including gender-specific abortion” 43 million of an estimated 100 million women across the globe would have been Indian.

Infanticide takes more guises than just choosing to terminate a pregnancy upon discovery of the sex of the child. Placing a child in a dangerous situation, abandonment, excessive physical punishment, lowered biological support, and even deliberate killing are all examples of infanticide, and are not common to just one society or culture.

This issue should be treated with the upmost care and respect in the committee.

## Questions:

1. How does your country view the role of women in society?
2. How can countries raise the cultural value associated with girls?
3. What role does education play in reversing the trend of skewed male/female birth ratios?
4. Can the mass media affect the issue of female infanticide?

## Resources:

1. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/>  
United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality website that is devoted to gender disparities with a focus on women
2. <http://www.webster.edu/~woolflm/femaleinfanticide.html>  
Webster.edu puts an in depth explanation of why the gendercide has continued, how it's executed, how the laws put in place to stop it.
3. [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/23/magazine/23Women-t.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/23/magazine/23Women-t.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1)  
*The New York Times* article, "Saving the World's Women: The Women's Crusade" 17 August 2009 is an excerpt from Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn's book *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*
4. <http://www.rediff.com/news/1999/mar/08woman.htm>  
This article starts by telling the story of one girl, then continues to discuss why infanticide begins, which countries it targets, and look at the shifting numbers of deaths.
5. [http://www.gendercide.org/case\\_infanticide.html](http://www.gendercide.org/case_infanticide.html)  
Gendercide.Org focuses on the development of gendercide in the two largest offenders, India and China from the reasons for gendercide, to the few statistics that are available for the number of children killed today.
6. *Infanticide and the Value of Life* by Marvin Kohl  
Kohl looks at infanticide from a religious standpoint, comparing it to euthanasia and suicide constantly questioning what is moral, legal, and finally what the value of life truly is.
7. [http://www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=15606229](http://www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story_id=15606229)  
Article from *The Economist* on the growing trend of gendercide, especially the practice of abortion
8. <http://www.google.com/books?id=QKfpoiLReqUC&printsec=frontcover&dq=infanticide&ei=BEXeS-y1L5niyQSArzbCQ&cd=1#v=onepage&q&f=false>  
*Infanticide: Comparative and Evolutionary Perspectives* by Glenn Hausfater and Sarah Hrdy is a Google Books digitized copy of their book, and includes selected pages of their anthropological studies on infanticide in animals as well as humans

9. [http://www.ge.com/citizenship/performance\\_areas/human\\_rights\\_ultrasound.jsp](http://www.ge.com/citizenship/performance_areas/human_rights_ultrasound.jsp)  
“GE Business Dilemma: Ultrasound Technology and Feticide” is an interesting case study of the intersection between the moral and economic obligations of an international business.
10. [http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/rough/2007/04/the\\_missing\\_girls.html](http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/rough/2007/04/the_missing_girls.html)  
PBS *Frontline* article on female feticide with great links to other articles on the subject

## **Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee**

### **Topic 2: Literacy Promotion**

Stipulated as a human right, literacy is one of the great equalizers of our civilization. The promises of universal access to education are improvements in almost every other facet of life. The peril of failure is equally as high - countries with persistently low literacy rates are more likely to fall behind in terms of health, democracy, and sustainable development.

The United Nations has marked literacy as a high priority for the body. The second of ten Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is to achieve universal primary education. There are severe geographic disparities with world literacy rates, with the highest being in North America and Europe, and the lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Gender equality is also an issue when speaking of education. Rates of gender parity are one of the best indicators of development. While in Latin America primary school completion is higher for girls, the same cannot be said for Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia, where girls trail boys in performance and completion at the primary education level. However, this issue goes deeper than just statistics of enrollment or matriculation. Research exists on the lack of gender sensitivity in curricula as well as classroom, making learning environments hostile to females. While tracking these types of behaviors are not easy, these gaps must be confronted if we are to truly achieve gender equality in education.

Discrepancies in literacy cross-cut multiple breakdowns in society. There are differentials between rural versus urban populations, ethno-linguistic groups, and even conflict versus post conflict societies. There is no one way to look at how to tackle literacy, and only programs that take into consideration the conditions on the ground in a particular country will have any hope for success.

The United Nations has sought to promote advocacy for literacy on a broader scale than the MDGs. In 2003, the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) inaugurated the Literacy Decade to bring awareness to this international problem, especially to marginalized populations. According to a UNESCO study, there are more than 774 million adults and 72 million out-of-school children who are illiterate and lack access to programs to improve literacy rates. As we enter the last years of the Literacy Decade, it is up to member nations to rise to the challenges and complexities of this issue and increasing international support.

As an issue, literacy promotion does not stop at school-aged children; it affects all ages, genders, ethnicities, societies, and economies. Illiteracy induces a cycle of poverty that can pass from generation to generation without an upturn in socio-economic conditions. The Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee must build on the efforts already in place and explore new ways for the UN and individual nations to promote literacy. It is integral to develop sustainable programs designed to improve literacy rates while addressing the questions of national and cultural sovereignty that lie at the heart of the debates on literacy.

## Questions:

1. What measures can be taken to deal with middle-income countries that have the most significant drop out rates among the poor?
2. How can countries provide equal access to education with serious barriers such as ethnic, linguistic, and geographic disparities?
3. How do countries incentivize initial literacy campaigns?

## Resources:

1. [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F63%2F172&Submit=Search&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F63%2F172&Submit=Search&Lang=E)  
UN Literacy Decade's Mid-Decade Review: PDF File
2. <http://www.unesco.org/en/education>  
United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) provides a vast selection of articles, statistics, reports, and more for research on the state of literacy throughout the world
3. <http://www.uis.unesco.org/template/pdf/Literacy/LiteracyReport2008.pdf>  
UNESCO report on literacy statistics and monitoring data
4. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001866/186606E.pdf>  
UNESCO report on the effect of the economic downturn on the education and literacy efforts around the world, and what can be done to further improve literacy efforts
5. [http://www.unesco.org/ui/en/UIPDF/unesco/life/lifereview\\_singlepages.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/ui/en/UIPDF/unesco/life/lifereview_singlepages.pdf)  
2006-2009 Review of LIFE (Literacy Initiative for Empowerment), a major initiative enacted under the Literacy Decade
6. <http://www.undp.org/mdg/goal2.shtml>  
UN Development Programme: Millennium Development Goals: Goal 2 overview and program breakdowns
7. <http://www.ungei.org/index.php>  
The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative: Great resource on the work of the UN for female literacy and education promotion.
8. <http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/GMIS/gdmis.do?siteId=2&goalId=6&menuId=LNAV01GOAL2>  
The World Bank Group: Millennium Development Goals: Goal 2
9. <http://www.cls.utk.edu/>  
Center for Literacy Studies at the University of Tennessee statistics on literacy

10. <http://www.accu.or.jp/litdbase/index.htm>  
Asia-Pacific Literacy Database: Statistics and programs dealing with literacy in Asia and the Pacific Rim

## **Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee**

### **Topic 3: Freedom of Information**

With rapid globalization and the advent of Internet technology, the issue of freedom of information has become an international concern. Governments have become increasingly occupied with the issues of access to information, whether through the Internet or more traditional routes such as the written press or the ability to petition a government for official records.

The United Nations has confirmed its commitment to the issue as early as 1946. During its very first session, the body passed Resolution 59(I) of the General Assembly of the United Nations, which called for an international conference on freedom of information. The resolution states, "Freedom of information is a fundamental human right and is the touchstone of all the freedoms to which the United Nations is consecrated." Furthermore, Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

The Internet is certainly the vehicle through which most of the contentious debates over freedom of information play out. Through the web, movies can be watched, songs downloaded, and even revolutions tweeted. The right of governments to limit, or filter, the information that citizens can access through complicated firewall technology has caused much international tension, especially within the last year. Google's decision to relocate their search engine route from mainland China to Hong Kong comes with the country's "Great Firewall," which censors searches for sensitive subjects such as "Tiananmen" or "Tibet."

The existence of a free press corps is also a facet. While much attention is paid to formal press outlets being threatened or shut down, the informal press has come under attack as well. Bloggers all over the world, from Vietnam to Venezuela, have been censored and sometimes even jailed for espousing policies that contradicted or questioned the government.

There are legitimate concerns about the use of the Internet. In her remarks on Internet Freedom, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated, "The same networks that help organize movements for freedom also enable al-Qaida to spew hatred and incite violence against the innocent. And technologies with the potential to open up access to government and promote transparency can also be hijacked by governments to crush dissent and deny human rights.

Access to public records is another integral, albeit less spoken about, component of this issue. The ability for citizens to petition their governments for public records is a sign of an open society. In the United States, for example, there is the U.S. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Under this law, there is a recognized fundamental principle that the records of the executive branch of the federal government should be accessible to citizens of the country, and that the burden of responsibility to produce those records belongs to the government, not the individual.

It is the duty of the Social Humanitarian Committee to address issues of freedom of information, as it is an issue that links directly to the openness and democratic tendencies of a society.

## Questions:

1. Do governments have the right to filter content because of potentially libelous or slanderous accusations?
2. What is the role of the international community in promoting freedom of information?
3. What is the relationship between freedom of information and terrorism? How can states uphold views against censorship and still address the use of the Internet to promote or encourage violence?

## Resources:

1. <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>  
The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948
2. <http://en.rsf.org/-Anglais-.html>  
Reporters Without Borders: Organization that works with the UN to promote freedom of the press and press safety
3. [http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/freedom\\_of\\_press.htm](http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/freedom_of_press.htm)  
Nations Online "Press Freedom:" Overview of the issue
4. <http://www.article19.org/index.html>  
Article 19: Current news articles about information access in countries
5. <http://right2info.org>  
Right 2 Info: Database of freedom of information rights granted by the constitution, laws and court cases in over 80 countries
6. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2009>  
Freedom House: Map of freedom rankings and explanations for each country, as well as information from past years
7. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/01/135519.htm>  
Hillary Clinton's Remarks on Internet Freedom, 21 January 2010 in the wake of Google's dispute with China over internet censorship
8. [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/23/magazine/23google.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/23/magazine/23google.html?_r=2)  
*New York Times* article, *Google's China Problem (and China's Google Problem)* 23 April 2006
9. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/08/world/asia/08censor.html?fta=y>  
*New York Times* article, *China's Censors Tackle and Trip Over the Internet* 7 April 2010
10. <http://www.un.org/en/events/pressfreedomday/>

World Press Freedom Day: UN site dedicated to providing awareness to press freedom