



ISMUN VI

Background Guide

Committee: UNHRC

**Topic: Combating Child Labor in the Global Supply Chains:
Ensuring Corporate Accountability and Labor Rights
Enforcement**



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Letter from our Chairs

Dear Delegates!

Welcome to AISMUN VI! My name is Sebastian Esparza-Forero, I am an 11th grader at Atlanta International School, and I will be serving as your chair for the **United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)**. I am thrilled to see so many of you here, ready to engage in a meaningful debate on an issue that has profound implications for human rights, international law, and global development.

I joined MUN in the 6th grade because it offers a unique opportunity to explore how international cooperation and diplomacy can address pressing global issues. I've come to be close friends with many delegates within the team at AIS and with delegates across conferences. I hope MUN has that same effect for you. Besides that, it is also extremely fun!

Hi all, my name is Sai Abhiram (Abhi) Pathaneni. I am a 10th grader at Webster Thomas High School, and I am from Upstate NY. I will be serving as your co-chair for UNHRC. I am excited to guide you through engaging discussions on important issues that shape international relations, policy, and global cooperation. I look forward to seeing your ideas, debates, and solutions in action!

As chairs, our goal is to guide you through rigorous debate while also ensuring this experience is enjoyable and engaging. We want to ensure that you have as much fun as you do learn something new. Please use this background guide as a foundation for your research, but also dive deeper into your assigned country's perspective, as that will help bring depth and authenticity to your arguments.

The topic for this session, named **Combating Child Labor in the Global Supply Chains: Ensuring Corporate Accountability and Labor Rights Enforcement**, is both urgent and complex. Millions of children worldwide are still forced into exploitative labor, often hidden deep within the supply chains of major industries such as agriculture, textiles, and mining. This not only denies children their basic right to education and safety but also continues a painful and unfathomable cycle of poverty around the world.

We look forward to the creative and passionate solutions you will bring forward. Let's make this a productive and impactful committee!

Sincerely,

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Chair, UNHRC

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Co-Chair, UNHRC

Introduction to UNHRC

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is an intergovernmental body within the UN system, created in 2006, tasked with promoting and protecting human rights worldwide. It consists of 47 member states, elected by the UN General Assembly, and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. The Council addresses violations of human rights and pressing country situations, issues recommendations, and works closely with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Several entities and subsection mechanisms fall under the UNHRC, and they can convene urgent sessions to address crises. One example is the Universal Periodic Review, where every member state's human rights record is examined. The Special Procedures consist of independent experts and working groups who monitor and report on specific human rights issues such as education, health, freedom of expression, and human trafficking, as well as country-specific situations including those in Ukraine, the DPRK, Eritrea, and Iran. The Advisory Committee functions as the Council's "think tank," providing expert analysis and recommendations on thematic human rights concerns. Finally, the Complaint Procedure allows individuals and organizations to bring allegations of human rights violations directly before the Council, giving a voice to those who might otherwise go unheard.

When it comes to child labor in supply chains, UNHRC plays a role in monitoring state compliance with international treaties, promoting labor rights, pressuring corporations to uphold human rights standards, and recommending frameworks for accountability.

Key Terms

- **Child Labor:** Child Labor is the work that deprives children of their childhood, potential, and dignity, and is harmful to their physical and mental development. (ILO)
- **ILO:** Otherwise known as the International Labour Organization, it is a UN agency that specializes in promoting employment, people's rights at work, social protection, and social dialogue, with the ultimate goal of achieving sustainable and inclusive economic growth for all.
- **Supply Chain:** The entire network of entities involved in producing and delivering a product, from its raw materials to the final consumers.
- **Corporate Accountability:** The responsibility of companies to adhere to laws, ethical standards, and human rights obligations, including labor rights.
- **Due Diligence:** The process through which companies identify, prevent, mitigate, and account for their impacts on human rights throughout their operations and supply chains.
- **Labor Rights:** Fundamental rights related to work, including freedom from forced labor, the right to fair wages, safe conditions, and the right to organize.
- **ILO Convention No. 138:** Establishes the minimum age for admission to employment.

- **ILO Convention No. 182:** Prohibits the worst forms of child labor, including slavery, trafficking, and hazardous work.
- **Forced Labor:** Work performed involuntarily and under the threat of penalty.
- **Transparency:** The disclosure of supply chain practices and sourcing by corporations to allow scrutiny and accountability.
- **Hazardous Work:** Any work that is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** A business model where companies integrate social and environmental concerns into their operations, including labor rights protections, overall ethical practices, and economic responsibility.
- **Fair Trade Certification:** A Labeling system that verifies products are made under ethical labor practices, often free from exploitative child labor.
- **Modern Slavery:** A term that encompasses forced labor, debt bondage, forced marriage, and human trafficking, often linked with exploitative child labor practices.

- **Consumer nations:** Nations that import goods, with occasions being made with child labor.
- **Producer nations:** Countries leading in manufacturing, many times with the impact of child labor behind the products.

Introduction to Combating Child Labor in the Global Supply Chains: Ensuring Corporate Accountability and Labor Rights Enforcement

This topic addresses the urgent need to combat the persistence of child labor within global supply chains, an issue that undermines fundamental human rights and sustainable development efforts worldwide. The United Nations, through its agencies such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Human Rights Council (UNHRC), has repeatedly stressed that the elimination of child labor is essential to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG 8.7, which calls for the eradication of child labor in all its forms by 2025. Yet despite international commitments, child labor remains a systemic problem deeply embedded in the global economy.

According to the ILO, an estimated 160 million children are engaged in child labor worldwide as of 2020, with nearly 79 million performing hazardous work that directly threatens their health, safety, and moral development (UNICEF). A large share of this labor is hidden within global supply chains—the interconnected systems of production and trade that connect, link raw material extraction, manufacturing, and final consumption across borders in order for the everyday use of products in our lives. Products such as cocoa, coffee, textiles, electronics, and minerals have all been tied to exploitative child labor practices (Bureau of International Labor Affairs). For example, over 70% of the world's cocoa beans originate in the Ivory Coast and Ghana, where over 2 million West African children are intricately part of child labor in hazardous conditions, and it's been extensively documented (Humanium). Similarly, cobalt mining in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, essential for rechargeable batteries used in

smartphones and electric cars, has been linked to children working in unsafe mines without protective equipment (Humanium).

The complexity of supply chains makes their accountability difficult. A single multinational company may rely on thousands of suppliers across multiple continents, often subcontracting to smaller producers who operate under weaker labor oversight. This lack of transparency allows child labor to persist largely unchecked, despite international standards such as the ILO Conventions No. 138 (Minimum Age of Employment) and No. 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labour), both of which have near-universal approval. Ratification, however, does not always translate into effective enforcement, as many states lack the resources, infrastructure, or political will to ensure compliance, particularly in regions where poverty forces families to rely on child labor as a survival strategy.

International efforts have largely been tuned in response to corporate accountability. While some companies have voluntarily adopted Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, these are often limited in scope and rely on self-reporting, making them vulnerable to loopholes and greenwashing. Recent legislative trends, such as Germany's Supply Chain Due Diligence Act (2021) and the EU's proposed Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), seek to impose mandatory due diligence obligations, requiring companies to identify, prevent, and remedy child labor in their supply chains (IBM). However, it can be argued that such measures risk uneven enforcement, leaving many corporations able to bypass responsibility and continue processing of material with child labor.

As a committee, delegates must take on this challenge of protecting children's rights while considering economic realities. In many developing countries, child labor is closely tied to poverty, limited access to education, and reliance on informal economies (National Library of

Medicine). Solutions, therefore, must not only emphasize enforcement and corporate responsibility but also address root causes such as lack of schooling opportunities, inadequate social protection, and economic inequality. At the same time, international plans must balance the responsibilities of both consumer nations (which import goods made with child labor) and producer nations (where child labor occurs).

Understanding of Different Parties

UNHRC: Leads international monitoring, investigates abuses, and issues recommendations on child labor and corporate accountability with the ultimate goal to strengthen the protection of human rights around the globe.

Member States:

- **Developed nations:** Often, consumer markets have the power to enforce due diligence requirements on imported goods.
- **Developing nations:** Frequently sites of child labor, they struggle with enforcement due to economic dependence on industries linked to child labor.

Corporations: A business entity. Multinational companies (companies with a headquarters in one place but have divisions internationally) play a central role in ensuring transparent and ethical supply chains, but many resist regulation due to profit motives.

International Labour Organization (ILO): Sets global labor standards, monitors compliance, and provides technical support to states.

NGOs and Civil Society: Expose child labor practices, advocate for victims, and pressure both governments and corporations.

Local Communities: Families and children directly affected by child labor, often caught between poverty and exploitation.

Key Country Involvement:

1. Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

- Largest supplier of cobalt and minerals for electronics. Children work in hazardous conditions in artisanal mines. UNHRC attention focuses on human rights abuses and corporate accountability in mining.

2. Ghana

- Cocoa production hotspot; over 1 million children are involved in cocoa farming. International scrutiny has led to UN and NGO monitoring programs

3. Côte d'Ivoire

- World's top cocoa exporter. Persistent child labor challenges have pushed multinational companies to commit to due diligence and reporting.

4. India

- Children work in textiles, brick kilns, agriculture, and fireworks. Largest absolute number of child laborers; policies and enforcement vary across states, making UNHRC engagement crucial.

5. Bangladesh

- Garment industry hub. Post-Rana Plaza reforms, legally binding agreements (like the Bangladesh Accord) provide a model for corporate accountability. UNHRC monitors ongoing human rights compliance.

6. Pakistan

- Children are employed in carpet weaving, agriculture, and sports goods manufacturing. Legal frameworks exist, but enforcement is inconsistent. International supply chains often rely on Pakistani exports.

7. United States

- Large importer of goods linked to child labor (cocoa, textiles, electronics).
Enforces the Tariff Act and import bans, and influences global corporate accountability standards.

8. Germany

- Adopted Mandatory Human Rights Due Diligence Law (2021), requiring companies to identify and mitigate child labor risks in global supply chains.
Model for EU-wide legislation.

9. France

- Passed Corporate Duty of Vigilance Law, compelling large companies to implement child-labor risk assessments in supply chains. Strong influence in UNHRC corporate accountability discussions.

10. Norway / Netherlands

- Norway's Transparency Act (2022) mandates supply chain reporting on human rights risks, including child labor. The Netherlands' Child Labor Due Diligence Law (2019) sets a model for accountability in multinational supply chains.

Timeline of Key Events

1993 – Vienna World Conference on Human Rights creates the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

1998 – The **Global March Against Child Labor** begins in Manila and spans over 140 participating countries, culminating in Geneva to influence ILO's Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labor.

2001 – In response to revelations about child labor in West African cocoa production, the **Harkin–Engel Protocol** is signed. This agreement involves chocolate companies pledging to reduce the worst forms of child labor in cocoa farming by 70% by 2020 on farms in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.

2006 – The Human Rights Council (HRC) replaces the Commission on Human Rights, with 47 elected Member States.

2007 – First session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) begins.

2007 – The UNHRC creates the **Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery**, which includes and indicates the worst forms of child labor.

2011 – UNHRC passes a landmark resolution on human rights, sexual orientation, and gender identity — the first UN resolution affirming LGBTQ+ rights.

2014 – The UNHRC establishes an intergovernmental working group (OEIGWG) to develop a legally binding treaty on transnational corporations and human rights, directly relevant to corporate accountability in child labor.

2015 – The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are adopted, with SDG 8.7 aiming to eliminate child labor in all its forms by 2025, and SDG 16.2 targeting the end of child exploitation and trafficking.

2021 – Declared the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, with UNHRC side events on supply chains and enforcement gaps.

2021 – Lawsuits are filed in the U.S. seeking to block cocoa imports produced with child labor, arguing enforcement of a decades-old prohibition on child labor-derived goods. ([Advocates sue federal government for failing to ban imports of cocoa harvested by children | AP News](#))

Key UN Suggestions and Actions

Since child labor is quite harmful to children and leaves a lasting negative impact on their developing brains, working children shall not be less than 14 years, according to the Minimum Age Convention No. 138.

In 2015, as part of target 8.7, global leaders agreed to take immediate measures to eliminate the worst forms of child labor by 2025, as part of one of their United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Again in November 2017, at the IV Global Conference on the Sustained Eradication of Child Labour in Buenos Aires, over 100 governments with employer/worker representatives in attendance, the ILO released a report with detailed plans of action to further encourage the completion of the goal to end child labor by 2025.

In 2021, the United Nations Global Compact launched the 2021 Action Pledge to Help End Child Labour to expand its efforts to completely eliminate child labour and forced labour to promote the most human rights and responsible business practices across global supply chains.

A report done by the Fair Labor Association in January 2025 emphasized the urgent need for companies in agriculture and manufacturing to eradicate child labor, as it poses severe risks and includes many dangers associated with the tasks, which are not suitable for children.

The US Labor Department stated that there has been an 87% increase in fines on employers in recent months, and companies across the nation have faced \$6.6 million in child labor penalties and violations, showing a clear shift towards stricter enforcement in the fight to protect children's human rights.

On an international level, the All-Party Parliamentary group in the United Kingdom and the House of Commons in Canada have passed laws to completely outlaw child labor and forced labor.

In 2021, the European Union (EU) set up a standardized set of guidelines on fair rights of children regarding employment and safety, which hopes to secure access to basic services for all children and ensure protection for all.

Evaluation of Past Attempts

Goal 8.7 - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, crafted by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Sustainable Development was a program created in 2015, which attempted to eradicate all forms of child labor by 2025, agreed on by several global leaders. However, in 2025, 138 million children across the world have to work hard, long hours working dangerous jobs with less or no safety measures.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) pledged to take action to forbid children under 14 years of age in any region of the world by launching Convention No. 138 in the 1970s. However, 50 years later, there are over 50 million kids who are under 14 years old.

While the United Nations Global Impact launched an initiative in 2021 to end child labor in supply chains due to its many safety risks, 204 goods from 82 different countries were identified to be made with child labor in September 2024.

Despite the FLA's efforts, approximately 60% of child workers are in agriculture and 13% in manufacturing.

However, since 2024, there have been multiple breakthroughs identifying 4,032 children employed in violation of child labor laws, resulting in over \$15.1 million in penalties, with investigations run by the US Department of Labor.

Guiding Questions/Sources to Use

- How can the UNHRC hold corporations accountable for child labor violations in global supply chains?
- What role should consumer nations play in enforcing labor rights abroad?
- How can poverty alleviation and access to education reduce reliance on child labor?
- What are the most effective mechanisms for monitoring and verifying supply chain transparency?
- Should there be an international treaty on corporate due diligence, and how would it be enforced?
- How can developing countries balance economic growth with the elimination of child labor?

Resources:

- [ILO official website](#)
- [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights \(2011\)](#)
- [UNICEF “Children’s Rights and Business Principles”](#)
- [Global Slavery Index](#)
- [Reports by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International](#)

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