

Vancouver Youth Model United Nations 2019



United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Background Guide

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Salutations! My name is Justin Jia and I am elated to be your director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for VYMUN 2019. This year, I hope to stimulate an educational and rousing experience that leads to self-discovery at VYMUN 2019. During the conference, we will tackle two exciting topics: the Panama Papers and Reforming the UNODC.

Our first topic, the Panama Papers, remains as a controversial topic on the ethics of offshore companies. The leaking of the Panama Papers in 2016, resulted in a worldwide purge of the rich and elite who were involved in illicit activities ranging from tax evasion to funding war schemes. It has also shone light on a deeper level of corruption and raised questions about the division between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in politics. For many countries around the world, offshore companies are still legal; users can still use them in a legal manner, but unfortunately, these users have been reduced to a minority. In today’s economic world, money can control millions of people’s lives, and these shell corporations are making it possible. Whether or not this immense power should be contained in a few select people’s hands is for your country to decide. It is up to delegates to pursue this topic with vigilance and diligence, and bring forth intriguing debate during session.

Our second topic, Reforming the UNODC, is a broad one. It explores the historical mistakes made by the office and discusses potential changes and evolutions that the UNODC may undergo. An interesting topic that helps delegates understand the rich history of the UNODC and the many campaigns and commissions of the past and present. A backgrounder inside of a backgrounder, this topic is sure to fortify knowledge and test the creative and critical thinking abilities of delegates as they pursue to build an ideal committee.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don’t hesitate to contact me at unodc@vymun.com. I look forward to seeing everyone in October!

Sincerely,
Justin Jia
Director of UNODC | VYMUN 2019

Table of Contents:

Panama Papers

Questions to Consider	4
Overview	
Timeline	5
Historical Analysis	6
Past UN Action	9
Current Situation	9
Possible Solutions	10
Bloc Positions	11
Sources Cited	13

Reforming the UNODC

Questions to Consider	15
Overview	
Timeline	16
Historical Analysis	18
Past UN Action	20
Current Situation	21
Possible Solutions	22
Bloc Positions	23
Sources Cited	25

Topic 1: Panama Papers

Questions to Consider

1. What were the effects of these papers in your country? Which laws and rights were violated through the use of offshore companies and tax havens?
2. Were any specific individuals from your country involved in the Panama Papers? Who were they? What did your country do or not do to persecute those individuals?
3. Think about the financial implications that the Panama Papers include. How does it affect your country's stance?
4. Many politicians and affluent individuals were involved in the Panama Papers. What kind of issues does this bring up in today's society? How does this reflect your country's outlook and perspective on corruption?

Overview

In 2015, 11.5 million¹ documents detailing financial and attorney-client information from the Panamanian law firm and corporate service provider Mossack Fonseca were leaked by an anonymous source to the German newspaper, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. An astounding amount of private and confidential information was made widely accessible and exposed to the public. Mossack Fonseca was among one of countless offshore companies in the world, providing and creating companies for clients that have no physical office or headquarters, in other words, shell corporations, which allows clients to deposit and withdraw money without bank intervention. Mossack Fonseca happened to have a multitude of influential and controversial clients. For example, the Swedish head of state and several of Vladimir Putin's associates² were all tied to the Panama Papers. Within the financial and attorney-client information that the papers documented, malicious cases such as tax evasion, transactions supporting prostitution rings, and arms deals were revealed. Illicit activities are often funded through these shell corporations and have affected many lives around the world; the Syrian Civil War, and even corruption in the FIFA have all been involved with the Panama Papers. The leak was only brought to light by one whistle-blower under the pseudonym "John Doe". After releasing a myriad of data to *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the information was then passed onto the ICIJ, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, and for more than a year, journalists from 107 media organizations in 80 countries analyzed the documents and published the first articles on April 3rd, 2016.³ Immediately afterwards, multiple politicians and dignitaries were called upon; specifically, 18 former or current country leaders, such as the king of Saudi Arabia, the president of the United Arab Emirates, the prime minister of

¹ <https://panamapapers.sueddeutsche.de/articles/56febf0a1bb8d3c3495adf4/>

² Ibid

³ Ibid

Australia, and the president of the Ukraine.⁴ An abundance of these leaders were punished, ultimately ending in resignations or convictions. Despite the international attention and action the articles garnered, many mafia leaders and other undercover criminals managed to avoid punitive measures and disappear unscathed.

In line with the policies laid out by the UNODC, the illicit activities that the Panama Papers shone a light on are now a topic of discussion for delegations to focus on and combat.

Timeline

1977: Mossack Fonseca & Co. is founded by German lawyer Jürgen Mossack in 1977. The law firm is based in Panama.⁵

1986: Mossack is later joined by Panamanian novelist/lawyer Ramón Fonseca in 1986, hence the name Mossack Fonseca.

March 2011: The Syrian civil war commences, which will eventually lead to Bashar Al-Assad's cousins and relatives to fuel the war, by providing militias with fuel and ammunition, using their money and power as the most powerful family in Syria.⁶

May 2011: The United States and European Union impose sanctions on three of Raki Makhlof's companies and multiple other companies linked to Bashar Al-Assad's family.⁷

May 2015: The US Department of Justice indicts a number of companies and individuals for conspiracy, corruption and racketeering in connection with bribes and kickbacks paid to obtain media and marketing rights for FIFA tournaments.⁸

February 2015: An anonymous source under the pseudonym "John Doe" leaks the Panama Papers from the Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca to the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

April 2016: The first articles are released on the Panama Papers on April 3rd, along with 150 of the actual documents.⁹

April 2016: Amid protests and denouncements from past Icelandic leaders, Prime Minister of Iceland, Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson, resigns after it is revealed that Davíð was involved

⁴ <https://www.icij.org/investigations/panama-papers/the-power-players/>

⁵ <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/04/panama-papers-mossack-fonseca/476727/>

⁶ <https://panamapapers.sueddeutsche.de/articles/570fc0c6a1bb8d3c3495bb47/>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/nine-fifa-officials-and-five-corporate-executives-indicted-racketeering-conspiracy-and>

⁹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20170319113221/http://www.documentcloud.org/public/search/>

in tax evasion, and using shell corporations to invest in companies anonymously: companies that the prime minister wouldn't have been able to invest in had it been public.^{10 11}

May 2016: John Doe, the anonymous source who leaked the Panama Papers, cites "income inequality" and "simply...the scale of the injustices" as reasons for his actions.¹²

February 2017: Panamanian police raid Mossack Fonseca's headquarters, and Jürgen Mossack and Ramón Fonseca, both co-founders of Mossack Fonseca & Co., are detained.¹³

March 2018: Mossack Fonseca & Co. is dissolved on the 14th due to the "reputational deterioration, the media campaign, the financial circus and the unusual actions by certain Panamanian authorities, [that] have occasioned an irreversible damage that necessitates the obligatory ceasing of public operations at the end of the current month", as reported by The Guardian.¹⁴

June 2018: A second leak of Mossack Fonseca documents show the "frantic" attempts to keep the business afloat.¹⁵

July 2018: Following lengthy trials regarding his involvement in the Panama Papers, the Federal Judicial Complex of Pakistan sentences Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to ten years in prison.¹⁶

Historical Analysis

The Panama Papers were the first of its kind: a technological revolution that would change the future of investigative journalism and crime for years to come. The Panama Papers, or Mossack Fonseca Papers, are documents describing financial transactions between the law firm and clients wishing to conceal money in "shell corporations" that the government and bank cannot control or surveil. The explosive controversy around the leaks when it was first exposed to the public in 2016 was due to the shocking illicit activities that these shell corporations allowed clients to with the money hidden inside. After 38 years of business, Mossack Fonseca was hacked by an anonymous source in 2015, and the articles were released a year later after comprehensive analysis by the ICIJ (International Consortium of Investigative Journalists).

¹⁰<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/apr/16/panama-papers-inside-the-guardians-investigation-into-offsho-re-secrets>

¹¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/06/world/europe/panama-papers-iceland.html>

¹² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-36232142>

¹³ <https://panamapapers.sueddeutsche.de/articles/e344090/>

¹⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/14/mossack-fonseca-shut-down-panama-papers>

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1348191>

Prior to the leaks, Mossack Fonseca was a company that only the rich and powerful knew about. A relatively inconspicuous business, the business' headquarters was located in Panama with international branches all over the world. In the leak, big names like Vladimir Putin and Bashar Al-Assad were involved in the papers, and exposed to the public. However, what is more interesting is how these people were involved and what the documents mean.

For example, the indirect involvement of Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, raised serious questions from the international community regarding his financial activities as the leader of a powerful nation. Despite his controversial actions as a politician, his involvement in the Panama Papers actually begins with his relationship with a seemingly civil cellist. Leading multiple music institutions and winning many accolades, it is certainly unexpected to find Sergei Rodulgin, a world renowned cellist, among the malicious crimes depicted in the Panama Papers. Taken in 1985, a picture of Putin holding his newborn daughter next to Rodulgin gives investigators and journalists more context. Mariya Putina, only four years old at the time, is at her christening alongside her parents and new god-father, Sergei Rodulgin. A close friend for 40 years, Rodulgin is a friend of Putin who stayed by his side as he rose to power and presidency.

It comes as no surprise that the controversial president could be using his friends to bring large sums of money in and out of the country without directly involving himself in illicit activities. Putin's multiple and large assets raises questions regarding the true origins of his wealth, and it certainly seems as though inconspicuous middlemen like Rodulgin has a hand in these financial endeavours.

Although Rodulgin's name, passport, and signature are all found in the Panama Papers showing that he has held shares in multiple businesses, he is not the only close friend of Putin that is growing rich. His inner circle comprised of past co-workers, friends and associates has also grown in personal wealth alongside Putin's growth in power. Previously lowly and relatively unknown men have transformed into powerful billionaires of Russia, including Rodulgin. Because of these men, it is reported that USD 2 billion flowed through their shell corporations in just a few short years, and possibly even more money that wasn't documented in the Panama Papers.¹⁷

Although not explicitly said, Putin had some involvement in offshore companies and shell corporations— perhaps a large contributor to his and his inner circle's financial growth could be these documents. Definitely brow-raising, the Panama Papers have a lot to say about the rich and powerful in Russia.

On the other hand, the Panama Papers can have real-life, explicit, and violent implications, compared to the inconspicuous and discreet transactions hidden away from the

¹⁷ <https://panamapapers.sueddeutsche.de/articles/56fec05fa1bb8d3c3495adf8/>

public; specifically, the ongoing 2011 Syrian civil war. As many already know, the Syrian war began strikingly violent, with countless bombings, gas attacks, and killings regularly occurring. The Syrian civil war has persisted for almost a decade now and continues to this day. Amidst the fighting and violence lies the question of how and where these partisans and militias are getting their funding from.

Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad and his army have been fighting not only other Islamic factions, but also his own country, too. Bombs, ammunition, and fuel have all seemed to come from an endless supply despite countless sanctions against these items and companies. Similarly to Putin, Assad has also used those around him to fuel his personal agenda, though Assad's is much more immediately violent compared to Putin's. The documents point to one man: Raki Makhoulf, Assad's very own cousin. Not only is he Assad's cousin, but according to *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, "he is said to be the richest man in Syria, and the regime's biggest financier."¹⁸

Following the release of the Panama Papers, Makhoulf supplied funds to produce poison gas, operate torture facilities, and supply arms and vehicles to the ill-famed Shabiha militia in spite of several arms and ammunition sanctions imposed by the US and European Union. Avoiding these sanctions are possible through investing and owning shares in the very shell corporations that Mossack Fonseca creates. Despite Makhoulf's name being mentioned in sanction lists, Mossack continued to assist Makhoulf in his financial dealings. Mossack Fonseca's malicious intent was proven when the law firm's compliance department, the department in charge of following laws and regulations, alerted management and senior executives of Makhoulf's name on sanction lists and the serious consequences of his involvement being discovered. Yet, despite the warnings, shareholders dismissed the concerns.

Makhoulf's brothers were also named in the Panama Papers, discovered to be running torture facilities and coordinating deadly gas attacks on Ghuta. Moreover, a captain in the Syrian army was suspected of involvement with attacks on Syrian civilians, completely defying the Syrian military motive of fighting against the Islamic State and terrorism. After having sanctions imposed on them, they have fled Syria.

This is white collar crime; the professional and elite class of the world have committed heinous felonies. The Panama Papers have unearthed and exposed a world of corruption, abuse, and crime. A world full of hidden stories, organized crime and notorious criminals, action must be taken to solve and prevent issues like those made possible through the Panama Papers.

¹⁸ <https://panamapapers.sueddeutsche.de/articles/570fc0c6a1bb8d3c3495bb47/>

Past UN Action

The UN nor UNODC have taken any significant action to solve the many consequences of the Panama Papers, but have made declarations. On April 8th, 2016, five days after the initial articles on the Panama Papers were published, the United Nations Independent Expert on foreign debt and human rights, Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky, “called on the international community to urgently put an end to financial secrecy. [Bohoslavsky] warned that tax evasion and the flow of funds of illicit origin undermine justice and deprive governments of resources needed for the realization of economic, social and cultural rights.”¹⁹ The UN has acknowledged the dangerous capabilities of offshore companies and can improve on promoting its actions towards member states on shell corporations.

Current Situation

Currently, in almost every single country that the Panama Papers involved, actions have been taken against the criminals to varying degrees, specifically various ongoing investigations in over 82 countries.²⁰ It can be said, however, that the general public has been educated on the dangers of illegal financial ventures that result in countless deaths and immense losses of money. Citizens continue to learn of the alarming crimes committed by these ambitious offenders and have demanded change. Consequently, countries and groups like the G20 have made gradual progress towards stricter regulation of offshore finances.

Combating tax evasion and illicit financial activities fueled by the Panama Papers has proven to be challenging, as a majority of countries are unable to determine the identities of culpable. Since Mossack Fonseca registers clients with pseudonyms under their files, unless authorities search through all the documents and find both signatures and the corresponding identification, it is extremely difficult to persecute the individuals.

However, this isn't to say that efforts have been completely fruitless. In fact, more than \$1.2 billion has been recouped from 22 countries, numerous other investigations have been launched — even as recent as March 2019, raids are being conducted, and taxpayers are starting to declare hidden money. In fact, in late 2018, Columbia's tax office doubled its revenue collection after the Panama Papers encouraged citizens to report hidden assets.²¹ Furthermore, in countries like Sweden and Pakistan, initiatives started by civilians, including various protests, have resulted in resignation or even indictment of the leaders that have been directly involved with the Panama Papers.

Following both Mossack's and Fonseca's detainment and investigations, the law firm was dissolved in 2018. Despite these seemingly progressive milestones, the company is just one of countless offshore companies that could possibly be hiding even more secrets.

¹⁹ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=19800&LangID=E>

²⁰ <https://www.icij.org/investigations/panama-papers/what-happened-after-the-panama-papers/>

²¹ Ibid

Possible Solutions

Tax evasion, fraud, along with multiple other issues that arise with offshore companies, can be tackled in many different ways, some of which have already been implemented and others which have not. It is strongly urged that solutions mostly pertain to restoring and preventing financial integrity, economic integrity, and security.

Transparency

The lack of transparency was arguably one of the most substantial and detrimental factors that led to the exploitation of offshore companies. For example, The Common Reporting Standard, set up by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, is a standard that allows countries to receive tax and asset information for any finances and income abroad. Through the organization, countries then share this information with other nations, should they request it.²² The standard is an existing example of how the usage of regulation and surveillance can record and help persecute illicit activities internationally. Another example includes the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act: an American law that requires financial firms around the world to declare accounts held by US citizens to the Internal Revenue Service.²³ Implementing regulations and laws can prevent financial crimes, like those depicted in the Panama Papers, before they even happen.

Increased collaboration on sharing information

Without the help of *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the collective collaboration of investigative journalists in the ICIJ (International Consortium of Investigative Journalists), the crimes detailed in the Panama Papers likely would have never been exposed. The papers were the first of its kind to incite collaboration on compiling the tremendous amount of raw data and on releasing the information internationally.. Furthermore, another example of feasible international cooperation would be the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. A group of 36 member states, the organisation is a separate entity from the UN and is dedicated to “stimulat[ing] economic progress & world trade.”²⁴ The OECD has created standards specifically regarding the Panama Papers, which have elicited change in laws and regulations internationally. A key factor in dealing with international finances and affairs is understanding the importance of international cooperation, whether that be between countries, companies, or justice systems.

Increased investigation support

Many of the indictments come from investigations and raids done by local police and detectives, such as the multiple raids done on co-founders Jurgen Mossack and Ramon Fonseca Mora, as well as the searches done in Mossack Fonseca’s headquarters in Panama.

²²<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/04/05/how-the-u-s-became-one-of-the-worlds-biggest-tax-havens/>

²³<https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/tax-policy/treaties/Documents/FATCA-Agreement-UK-9-12-2012.pdf>

²⁴ <http://www.oecd.org/about/members-and-partners/>

The persistence of law enforcement around the world has resulted in numerous charges against political leaders and criminals involved with the papers. The police have acted upon international news and information that have pertained to their jurisdiction, allowing for justice to be brought to the international community. Without investigative support, the Panama Papers would have never been brought to light. However, these investigations haven't been enough to rid all the inequities. Extremely powerful governments such as Russia's have censored journalists heavily and forbid any public criticism of Putin — a clear indicator of the hardships of free journalism and investigative justice in some countries.

Bloc Positions

North America and Europe

Generally, countries that share Western values are Mossack Fonseca's target demographic, seeing as how the majority of the international firms have been based in these North American and Western countries. Because of the prevalent number of economic activities in Europe and North America, it is expected of an international law firm assisting in tax evasion to focus on the North American market. Additionally, co-founder Jorgen Mossack is German, and has established firms in his home country as well. Third co-founder and Swiss lawyer, Christoph Zollinger, who was added to the board of directors later on, also used his personal background to assist in the firm's operations.

In the United States particularly, the nation refused to sign the Common Reporting Standard set up by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, resulting in the allowance for confidentiality about foreign finances inside of the USA without having to share the information to other countries, including the UK, Canada and Mexico. This has made North America and Europe attractive spots for tax havens.

Middle East

The Middle East has had a reputation for having anomalous and unorthodox procedures for many issues and conflicts that arise in this region. The Panama Papers are no exception to this theme, as many leaders and relatives are directly related to offshore companies and financial crime. For example, the UAE president, the king of Saudi Arabia, former emir of Qatar, former president of Qatar, as well as various other prominent figures, are all found to be linked to the papers. The Panama Papers also has ties with the Syrian Civil War and has strong evidence to back up speculations of how Mossack Fonseca helped fund war attacks.

Asia

Russia and many other Eastern Asian countries have failed to deal with the Panama Papers effectively. In fact, the nation has had no media coverage of the leak and if Russian journalists were to cover such a controversial topic in their home country, they would likely face harsh punishment from the government. Moreover, Russia has denied its involvement in the company and Putin has stated that no illicit or corruption has occurred within the

government. The government has also openly dismissed the leaks as “a way to destabilize Russia” and its government. Whether or not this is to undermine the very true and authentic implications of the papers or genuine slander towards the Russian government, remains unclear until further solid evidence points towards blatant corruption. This also applies to countries in the East, like China. China has had a controversial history of covering up significant historic events. Although political ties were not as blatant as some other countries, China and Hong Kong have been heavily involved in financial dealings with the law firm, making up the majority of the clients.

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Topic 2: Reforms to the UNODC

Questions to Consider

1. What are some major issues in the UNODC, and what can we do to improve the status and ability of the office as a whole?
2. What could be done to improve the quality of work and effectiveness towards the goals of the UNODC?
3. What were some controversial campaigns and projects that didn't have a good reception, and why?

Overview

Since its establishment in 1997, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has become a committee with prominent influence and status in modern society. An abundance of campaigns, projects, and conventions have been put into effect by the office which consists of 160 member states.²⁵ However, like all projects, not all of them have been successful. Examples of failed plans range from the Myanmar Opium Report to the 1988 UN Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, with some being significantly more devastating than others. Delegates should work diligently to improve the quality of the UNODC's work and UNODC as a whole through identifying core weaknesses and trying to strengthen such deficiencies.

To specify, the UNODC's commission on drugs has been ongoing for about 50 years, aiming to stop and prevent the distribution and harmful effects of illicit narcotic drugs that they have listed in their treaties. Drugs such as cocaine and opioids are all included in their range of targeted drugs. The considerable growth of the illicit drug market has shaken the UNODC and the committee's failed efforts to extinguish this issue have not accurately reflected their capabilities as a committee.

Using "the drug problem" as an umbrella term, the UNODC describes its "war on drugs" as fighting against the colossal amount of side-effects and misconducts elicited by the production and distribution of "psychotropic drugs" and "narcotic drugs". The UNODC uses the word "psychotropic" to describe the mental altering abilities of certain drugs, and the word "narcotic" to define illegal and harmful substances. For example, a specific controversial issue that is growing in many parts of the world is the opioid crisis. Opioids are a category of psychotropic substances that specifically serve to relieve pain in medicinal environments, but when used recreationally, elicit a euphoric feeling for users. The chief reason why opioids are so destructive is because they are highly addictive and cause physical

²⁵ <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CAC/country-profile/index.html>

debilitation during withdrawal or if the substances are adulterated. Therefore, many ill intentioned people around the world can exploit and take advantage of these drugs and use these substances as a tool for selfish gains.

In this backgrounder, we will further examine the drug-related policies that have not been well received by the public, and why many governments, leaders, officials, and citizens are unsatisfied by some past controversial UNODC operations. Furthermore, the principal feature of this second topic is how the committee can reform its policies and techniques to prevent, improve and fortify the integrity of the UNODC in the future.

A prominent and important theme of this backgrounder is the spread of misinformation and misunderstanding. The UN and its committees are devoted to its member states and the protection of peace and human rights. In no situation should any committee be reduced to bribery, bias, or corruption. Therefore, much of what the media calls “corruption” in the UNODC is merely the result of carelessness and miscommunication. However, although apologies are released, the messages that the UNODC shares with the public can be too ambivalent and easily elicit negative reactions from the media and community.

Timeline

March 1961: The first drug-related treaty by the UN, the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, is signed and released by the United Nations Drug Control Programme. It is an international treaty to prohibit production and supply of specific narcotic drugs—such as cocaine, heroin and opium—and of drugs with similar destructive effects except under licence for specific purposes, such as medical treatment and research.²⁶ The first treaty provided a foundation for member states to begin their policies and laws regarding illicit drugs.

1997: The UNODC is established through a merger between the United Nations Drug Control Programme and the Centre for International Crime Prevention.

1997: First World Drug Report is published, the precedent to a comprehensive yearly drug analysis and report by the UNODC. The World Drug Report provides readers and citizens with comprehensive research and surveys done that year on drug-related areas of science.²⁷

June 1998: The first political declaration made by the UNODC to address the global drug problem is signed. According to the UNODC, “The Political Declaration of 1998, adopted by the General Assembly at its twentieth special session on the world drug problem, requested Member States to report biennially to the Commission on their efforts to meet relevant goals

²⁶ https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Single_Convention_on_Narcotic_Drugs

²⁷ <https://wdr.unodc.org/wdr2019/en/previous-reports.html>

and targets. The Commission was requested to analyze these reports in order to enhance the cooperative effort to combat the world drug problem”.²⁸

October 1998: UNODC holds United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs (UNGASS), aiming to eliminate or significantly reduce illicit drug trafficking. Following the event, sources claim it was “disappointing” and lacked “evaluation of current repressive drug policies”.²⁹ The UNGASS is a recurring special session of the annual general assembly, which can be initiated by the UNSC, a majority of UN members or a single member, if the majority agrees.

December 1988: The United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988 is the second of the three chief treaties enforced by the UNODC. The 1988 Convention “reinforced those provisions, obliging states to eradicate illicit cultivation and to impose criminal sanctions.”³⁰

December 1998: UNODC declares the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, pledging that by 2008, the world will be “drug free.”³¹ The convention primarily requires member states to seize banned drugs listed in the convention, and confiscate any proceeds from these prosecutions.

March 2009: UNODC releases the Political Declaration and Action Plan, targeting to diminish the global narcotics market. During the meeting, “member states evaluated the progress made since 1998 towards meeting the goals and targets established at the twentieth special session of the General Assembly. They identified future priorities and areas requiring further action and established goals and targets for drug control beyond 2009.”³²

2012: Mexico, Colombia and Guatemala call for the special session (UNGASS) to be brought forward two years to 2016, citing an urgent and pressing need for reform from the original 1998 convention.

April 2016: The third UNGASS (United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem) is held. The special session is held to further elaborate on the previous political declarations and conventions. In the UNODC’s own words, “this Special Session will be an important milestone in achieving the goals set in the policy document of 2009 ‘Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem’, which defined action to be taken by Member States as well as goals to be achieved by 2019.”³³ During the special session,

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ <https://www.tni.org/en/article/background-of-ungass-1998>

³⁰ <https://www.tni.org/en/article/alternative-development-and-human-rights>

³¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/02/un-war-on-drugs-failure-prohibition-united-nations>

³² Ibid

³³ <https://www.unodc.org/ungass2016/en/about.html>

members discussed the growing psychotropic drug market, ways to combat the growth, and different rehabilitative methods.

January 2019: UNODC releases the Myanmar Opium Survey 2018 and quickly receives an onslaught of criticism after it was reported to have “blown the truth out of proportion” on the Myanmar opium situation.³⁴

June 2018: The UNODC launches yet another drug-related initiative, the Integrated Strategy on the Global Opioid Crisis, to address the severe opioid situation in numerous countries around the world, including developed countries like the US and Canada. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, “In 2017, more than 47,000 Americans died as a result of an opioid overdose, including prescription opioids, heroin, and illicitly manufactured fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid. That same year, an estimated 1.7 million people in the United States suffered from substance use disorders related to prescription opioid pain relievers, and 652,000 suffered from a heroin use disorder (not mutually exclusive).” This is a rapid increase from the original introduction of opioids in the 1990’s.

September 2018: President Donald Trump declares his Global Call to Action on the World Drug Problem at the 73rd iteration of the General Assembly. Signed by 129 member states, the document urges signatories to “develop national action plans to reduce demand for illicit drugs through education, expand treatment efforts, strengthen international cooperation on justice, law enforcement and health, and cut off the supply by stopping production.”³⁵

Historical Analysis

It is no question that drugs remain a deadly and dark part of today’s society. These substances have had significant effects on our world, eliciting a need for an official UN body to be created to combat this growing problem. The UNODC has been operating as a UN committee since 1997, but a previous UN body, the United Nations Drug Control Programme, has addressed drug-related issues since 1961. To solve, alleviate, and eradicate the destructive consequences of the illicit drug market, the UNODC has made countless campaigns, assemblies, treaties, surveys, and reports. Evidently, the UNODC has yet to be successful and continues to battle the ever-growing drug pandemic, working to combat the plethora of crime that follows along with these banned substances. The list includes, organized crime, illegal financial flows, corruption, terrorism, slavery, and many more horrific transgressions.

For instance, the first UNODC drug treaty, the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961. According to the UNODC, “[The] convention aims to combat drug abuse by

³⁴<https://www.tni.org/en/article/a-distortion-of-reality-drugs-conflict-and-the-unodcs-2018-myanmar-opium-survey>

³⁵<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-un-trump/some-129-countries-sign-up-to-trumps-pledge-at-un-to-fight-drugs-idUSKCN1M41LH>

coordinated international action. There are two forms of intervention and control that work together. First, it seeks to limit the possession, use, trade in, distribution, import, export, manufacture and production of drugs exclusively to medical and scientific purposes. Second, it combats drug trafficking through international cooperation to deter and discourage drug traffickers.”³⁶ However, the 1961 convention provided an unstable foundation for UNODC’s “war on drugs,” with an increasing daily death count following the UNODC 1981 convention. After failing to meet countless pledges to win the war on drugs, the UNODC has disappointed many governments around the world. In fact, rather than eradicating narcotics and disease, the campaigns and conventions have actually seen a shocking growth in the number of HIV and needle-sharing related diseases due to unsafe injecting. Furthermore, the UNODC was criticised for not promoting safe needle practices, contrary to other UN committees like WHO. The UNODC has stated that they promote safer prevention methods “based on scientific evidence and on ethical standards.”³⁷ Moreover, in many parts of the world, people are dying daily due to drug related offenses and incidents. To put this into perspective, 30 people a day die from drug cartel and police forces in Mexico, and in Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia, the number of drug traffickers being executed have skyrocketed.³⁸

These are all reasons as to why many people are advocating for alternative development, “an approach aimed at reducing the vulnerabilities that lead to involvement in illicit crop cultivation and ultimately eliminating such cultivation,” according to the UNODC’s 2015 World Drug Report.³⁹ Alternative development includes methods such as rehabilitative therapy, safe injection and needle sites, and a holistic approach towards addiction and the harmful side effects of narcotic drugs. During the 2016 UNGASS (United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs), countries discussed the topic for the first time in 20 years. According to Wall Street Journal, “some European and South American countries as well as the U.S. favored softer approaches[,] ... countries such as China and Russia and most Muslim nations like Iran, Indonesia and Pakistan remained staunchly opposed”⁴⁰ to any move beyond prohibition. It is important to note how the two stances are separated between the east and the west side of the globe, a clear indicator of the cultural differences and consequently, their policies.

According to *The Guardian*, “even the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) acknowledges its failure. Its own analysis notes: ‘Global drug control efforts have had a dramatic unintended consequence: a criminal black market of staggering proportions. Organised crime is a threat to security. Criminal organisations have the power to destabilise society and governments. The illicit drug business is worth billions of dollars a year, part of

³⁶ <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/single-convention.html>

³⁷ <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-prevention-and-treatment/index.html>

³⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/02/un-war-on-drugs-failure-prohibition-united-nations>

³⁹ https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2015/World_Drug_Report_2015.pdf

⁴⁰ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-n-conference-on-drugs-ends-without-shift-in-policy-1461299583>

which is used to corrupt government officials and to poison economies.”⁴¹ This is a significant acknowledgement made by the UNODC as, they have recognized the noxious and baleful effects of these narcotic drugs. Crippling addiction, homelessness due to financial loss, and the spread of disease are some of the many negative side effects of these substances the UNODC is targeting.

Furthermore, the UNODC has also misinterpreted data and misled readers towards false conclusions by excluding important information. The 2018 Myanmar Opium Survey is a prime example of this. According to TNI (Transnational Institute), “In the light of such accusations and misinformation [by the UNODC], it is therefore no surprise that the UNODC survey has come under strong criticism from ethnic armed organisations... By omitting positions on the maps and linking opium cultivation with armed conflict, the 2018 report appears to deliberately confuse the realities on the ground. In essence, the report makes it look as if only ethnic armed opposition organisations are behind opium cultivation in the country today.”⁴² This has added onto readers’ confusion and when exposed to the public that these deductions made by the UNODC are simply not correct, it damages the credibility of the UNODC and makes readers question if there are ulterior motives for the errors.

A lack of careful consideration damaged the reputation of the international committee and caused global citizens to question the legitimacy and reliability of the UNODC’s work. A globally acclaimed institution should not withhold information from the public nor should they hold any bias, especially as the UN claims to “maintain international peace and security.” The fact that citizens had felt as if the UNODC had “deliberately confused the realities” of the Myanmar report is detrimental to the values and foundation of any UN committee. The original mission of the UN should remain as the primary driving factor of the UNODC’s work.⁴³

Remaining as one of the most controversial campaigns of the UNODC, the Myanmar Opium Survey is among the various UNODC efforts that have been recognized by the office itself as an alarmingly unsuccessful in the eradication of drugs and narcotics. Indeed, it can even be said that these failed endeavors furthered the severity of one of the largest pandemics in the world.

Past UN Involvement

There are currently three drug related treaties that guide UNODC's drug related programs: The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 as amended by the 1972 Protocol; the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971 and the United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988.

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴²<https://www.tni.org/en/article/a-distortion-of-reality-drugs-conflict-and-the-unodcs-2018-myanmar-opium-survey>

⁴³ <https://www.un.org/en/sections/what-we-do/>

Concurrently, there are two crime preventative treaties regarding corruption and organized crime in place: the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and the United Nations Convention against Corruption. However, the drug related treaties were primarily criticized for its unmet claims, pledges, and unforeseen heightened severity of the issue.

As of now, the UNODC releases yearly drug reports to the public to promote awareness, and publishes scientific research, surveys, and data to stay updated on the rapidly changing situations in the world. Evidently, the UNODC recognizes the gravity of the drug crisis, but continues to make commitments that they fail to meet. How effectively the UNODC uses this data to truly implement solutions is questionable, and requires further interpretation and innovation to target the core problems. Moreover, these surveys and reports have been significant weak points for the UNODC, as smaller but more frequent projects lack the same amount of scrutinization that larger and well-invested projects are subjected to. Ironically, the inconsistencies in these reports, such as the Myanmar Opium Survey taken in 2018, had been costly to the reputation of the UNODC because of the misinterpretations made by the researchers commissioned by the UNODC in the survey, creating drama and unnecessary stress. It is essential to maintain equally diligent when conducting both scientific research and widespread awareness campaigns, as scientific interpretations are the basis for future solutions and should be valued just as highly.

It is no wonder that citizens all over the world have been disappointed at the UNODC's claims to "eradicate" the illicit drug market. After making multiple claims that they will completely rid the world of narcotic drugs, the UNODC has failed to meet their lofty objectives and continue to do so. Furthermore, it is completely unrealistic for the UNODC to accomplish these goals, seeing the troubling statistics. It is completely unreasonable for the UNODC to mislead citizens and governments towards the illusion of a world that is entirely free of narcotic drugs when, clearly, that is currently unachievable for the near future.

Current Situation

The controversy around UNODC and its actions regarding alternative development has remained largely unsolved and inadequate. Proposed and implemented solutions have had very little impact on the alleviation of the drug crisis and efforts to improve these solutions are weak. The lack of acknowledgement from the UNODC about the variety of errors and fallacies in the office has been discouraging towards advocates of alternative development and progressive drug practices.

Although the UNODC promised implementation of an alternative development program as a solution its funding for the program drastically decreased after the 1980s. Much criticism of the council revolves around its repressive measures towards actors in drug

manufacturing and the drug trade. This includes imposing criminal sanctions on century old traditions and obliging states to eliminate illicit behaviour. A lack of human rights and cultural respect from the UNODC has also been widely scrutinized. Currently, the UNODC does not acknowledge the absence of human rights in its repressive illegal drug eradication methods and has shown no effort in pushing for alternative development.

The UNODC has also been publicly targeted for their apparent disregard of human rights. Criticism has arisen from international organization Amnesty International, who accused the UNODC of “not promoting the inclusion of adherence to international human rights standards within its project in Iran. Amnesty states that in Iran, there are ‘serious concerns regarding unfair trials and executions of those suspected of drug offences.’”⁴⁴ Additionally, the UNODC signed a partnership with the Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption Center, which was founded by controversial Ali Bin Fetais Al-Marri, the General-Prosecutor of Qatar. The General-Prosecutor of Qatar has been associated with terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda, using his status to free two Al-Qaeda leaders from US prison, and having close relatives who “admitted to being a very important member of Al-Qaeda.”⁴⁵

Possible Solutions

It is imperative for delegates to underscore the multiple weaknesses of the committee and work to reinforce areas that have not received adequate attention. Much of what elicits media criticism are expressions of conflicting arguments and negligence of programs and solutions. As an unbiased committee, the UNODC should strive to clear up misunderstandings and acknowledge and apologize for mistakes the office may make, regardless if the mistakes were committed with malicious intent or not. Below are possible solutions to improve the integrity and strengthen the stature of the UNODC.

Promotion of Human Rights

Human rights is at the core of every single United Nations committee. The protection and restoration of human rights worldwide is an essential part of the UN mission. Therefore, it is important to maintain a strict adherence to the UN core values, avoid bias in resolutions, and ultimately, protect the integrity of human rights. Member states can achieve this through publishing and solidifying a consistent international policy of human rights in all commissions, conventions and declarations. The committee mustn't forget at any moment that the purpose is to protect and restore human rights. Therefore, by centering the actions of the committee around the central goal, such as listing it in the first clauses of resolutions, it will lessen the possibility of projects by the UNODC from going off focus. Furthermore, it is essential for the committee to keep an open mind towards all perspectives and opinions. Undoubtedly, humans from around the world will have different cultures and as a result

⁴⁴ <https://www.amnesty.nl/sites/default/files/public/mde130902011en.pdf>

⁴⁵ <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2018/10/09/Qatar-Attorney-General-s-role-in-Qaeda-operatives-release-returns-to-haunt-him.html>

different beliefs. Evidently, actions by an international committee cannot leave out any nation when it is considering different solutions to an issue. something that can be achieved through general assemblies.

General Assemblies

General assemblies, such as UNGASS (United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs), allow for widespread awareness and consensus across countries and organizations around the world. Promoting transparency and allowing the global community to voice their opinions, thoughts, and concerns is an efficient way to keep perspectives broad and open and to prevent narrow thinking and bias. Public assemblies will also bring forth key points of debate and discussion that would have not been noticed otherwise. Open discussions can further understanding and challenge and utilize previous knowledge to reach the root of a problem. Thus, members will be able to reach a truly comprehensive and thorough solution.

Stricter Guidelines and Higher Standards

As said by the Transnational Institute, “international organisations such as the UNODC need to be aware that inaccurate reporting is a high-risk activity that could have very negative impacts on efforts to promote peace and political reform.”⁴⁶ This not only applies towards research reports, but also towards all projects and campaigns; evidently, higher standards must be set. Moreover, promoting strict adherence to guidelines set by the UNODC would further the progress of committee goals effectively and efficiently. This would also ensure no infeasible and impractical pledges that are bound to fail are set. By settling on agreements that all member states can agree on and holding member states accountable for not fulfilling pledges and keeping consistent in their policies, the UNODC can avoid misleading citizens and strengthen the reliability of the committee.

Bloc Positions

Developing Countries

In nations with high rates of poverty, citizens use the high demand for opium as a way to support their families. Moreover, there is a prevalent reliance on the drug sector to keep unstable economies afloat: a fact that the UNODC fails to acknowledge. In Myanmar particularly, the drug trade allows the country to fund various security efforts and anti-insurgency tasks to help stabilize the government. Military efforts funded by the illegal drug trade protect developing projects such as dams, oil and gas pipelines and secure land for rubber plantains.⁴⁷

In poverty-ridden countries, cooperation with the UNODC is significant and essential towards the government’s efforts to improve the quality of living in their country. Specific country programmes are made by the UNODC that targets individual concerns in the country.

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/207.html>

Clearly, it is impossible for the UNODC to allocate the perfect funding for every country that is in need, but a relatively small amount of initiatives is better than none.

United States and Asia

The United States, along with the Philippines and other Asian countries, are notoriously known for their aggressive policies and intolerance towards drugs, coining the term “war on drugs”. The US in particular implements a high level of drug criminalization policies and has one of the highest mass incarceration rates for drug related crimes.⁴⁸ It has also been reported that the US supports executions of drug dealers and the Philippines president’s extreme drug policies. Furthermore, in nations with extreme drug policies, like the Philippines, police officers have executed suspected drug offenders and planted drugs as false evidence. Moreover, China, Saudi Arabia, Russia and the United States support harsh drug laws through the “Global Call to Action on the World Drug Problem”. In addition, a heavy stigma around drug rehab in Eastern Asia still continues to be prevalent. Traditional values cause issues such as addiction and drug trafficking to be labelled as a cultural taboo and are topics that are largely avoided in political debates.

Europe & Canada

Canada and European countries have generally focused on positive rehabilitation and holistic alternative development methods towards addiction and drug usage. These countries retain predominantly right-wing values, which mainly include capitalistic and democratic views. For instance, between 1991 and 2010, in Switzerland, deaths from drug overdose decreased by fifty percent and HIV infections decreased by 65 percent.⁴⁹ This major decrease in drug use was because the nation prioritized progressive drug policies rather than harsh approaches. Moreover, Switzerland was one of the first countries to introduce safe injection sites for heroin users in order to prevent HIV infection and dangers. The four pillared model — prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and law enforcement — drives Switzerland’s and many other European countries’ success in reducing drug related crimes. Similarly, in Nordic countries, such as Sweden and Norway, there have been improvements of financial ethics to parallel the efforts of Switzerland’s. Instead of proposing an aggressive “war on drugs”, European countries chiefly support harm reduction measures. These countries are also primarily developed, with many being members of international organizations like the G8, UN, or EU. In addition, delegates should note that viewpoints of this bloc generally oppose the aggressive opinions and policies of the UNODC.

⁴⁸ <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2019.html>

⁴⁹ https://ssir.org/articles/entry/inside_switzerlands_radical_drug_policy_innovation

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