

## UCMUN 2019 United Nations Human Rights Council

Hi there delegates! Welcome to the 2019 UConn Model United Nations Conference!

I'm Cayleigh O'Connell, the director of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). This committee focuses on protecting the fundamental rights that each human is guaranteed by locating human right violations and discussing how they can be solved. In order to be able to participate in this year's conference each delegate needs to understand the topics that are going to be debated. This year, we have two important topics. Topic A is workers' rights violations, and Topic B is human rights violations against LGBT people. These two topics have great amounts to be researched outside of the background guide I have provided, as I have not gone into incredible depth for each country attending the conference. Therefore, you are required to be prepared with your countries' stances on the above topics for this conference and how the country can create solutions with others while maintaining and respecting their cultures and customs.

This is my third year in Model UN here at UConn, and my second as a director. Prior to being a part of the UNHRC, I was an assistant director for the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, and then later the director for it. I'm a junior studying political science and French studies. I fill my time with work, reading, and studies during the school year, but I do find time to do other things that I love. Spending time outside is important to me, so hiking, snowboarding, and travelling are among my favorite hobbies. When I want to be more relaxed, I watch movies and television shows.

I'm incredibly excited for this upcoming conference, and can't wait to meet you all! Please do not hesitate to send me an email if you have any questions or concerns.

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**Committee History:**

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) was created in 2006, taking the place of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCRH), which was established in 1946. This was done so the United Nations could put the global conflict of fighting for human rights at the forefront of their attention (ohchr.org). This was done by the UN General Assembly on March 15 after the UNCRH was scrutinized for allowing members that had history of human rights violations (news.bbc.co.uk).

The UNHRC is a subdivision of the UN General Assembly that reports directly to the General Assembly, when previously the UNCRH reported to the Economic and Social Council (ohchr.org). One thing they do is advocate for more effective international laws that are specifically to aid human rights. The Council also reviews Member Nation States to ensure they are continuing to follow the laws in place and their citizens are not having their rights violated. Within the UNHRC are 47 United Nations Member States, each of which must be elected by the General Assembly. This committee meets at the UN office in Geneva, Switzerland.

The UNHRC also works with the United Nations Special Procedures to supervise member states and protect human rights throughout all countries. This is done by representatives, independent experts, elected members, and groups, all of which create their reports after observations (ohchr.org).

The “Institution building-package” was adopted a year after the UNHRC was established. This was done to create procedures, such as the Universal Periodic Review, the Advisory Committee, and the Complaint Procedure. The Universal Periodic Review

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evaluates the nation states and their human rights situations. The Advisory Committee is the “think tank” of the Council, providing expertise and counsel on global issues with human rights. Lastly, the Complaint Procedure is where human rights violations are presented to the Council by either individuals or organizations ([ohchr.org](http://ohchr.org)).

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## **Topic A: Workers' Rights Violations**

### **Introduction**

A common work day for many Americans consists of working for a maximum of eight hours, unless volunteering to work longer for overtime, a short break to eat and relax, and safe working conditions. Among the rights won by labor unions, workers now have reasonable pay for their work, the right to unionize if there is a grievance against their employer, annual leave, no children working with them, and more. These protections are due to the labor rights movements in America that started in the late 18th century (Labor Movement).

In the 18th and 19th century, a common working day did not resemble what it does today. Places of work were unsafe, with employees getting hurt, sometimes dying, by the equipment or becoming severely sick from the sanitary issues and pollution from the machines (Industrial Revolution Working Conditions). Fires were a matter to pay attention to as there were a high number of occurrences and no fire safety protocols for buildings. These mills and factories had few exits and had flammable objects being created, so when a fire broke out many lives were lost due to the severity. Children were employed in these mills and factories performing extremely hazardous tasks, such as crawling underneath the machines to collect debris and unused materials, that put their lives at risk (Industrial Revolution Working Conditions). The shifts that employers would give their employees would last 10 to 16 hours a day, depending on the size of the operation, six days a week without any sick days, vacation time, or paid breaks for food and drink. Wages were incredibly low, barely enough money for male workers to afford their food and housing.

Women and children typically made half the salary that men did (Industrial Revolution Working Conditions). During the Industrial Revolution the unemployment rate was high, thus workers were easily replaced if they were not working at the rate that their employer wanted them to be or if they requested higher pay. There were no rights to unionize to stand up for themselves, so bosses were allowed to fire anyone who asked for better treatment.



**Figure 1.1** Women working in unsafe textile mills in Lowell, Massachusetts. (Source: Khan Academy)

Having these fundamental rights are important to workers because it gives them freedom to stand up for themselves with a sense of job security, to be in a safe environment, and to earn a living. Lives have been saved with these protections, as work environments are now more secure and inspected to ensure that workers' wellbeing will be safe while on duty. It is rare that on the job accidents occur, and when they do workers are given compensation for related injury. Job security is an important right that was won

when the right to unionize was established. As noted previously, employers could terminate a worker for whatever reason they saw necessary, but today that is not allowed. There must be a reason that does not discriminate or go against the right to unionize. Pay increase negotiations are now a common reason for unions to strike, and that is legal due to the tireless efforts of past employees. When more fair wages are given, improving the lives of those receiving the salary.

Not every country has the exact same rights for their workers, but a large majority of states have similar legislation thanks to progress made in the work environment. The International Labor Organization (ILO) was created at the end of WWI “to reflect the belief that universal and lasting peace can be accomplished only if it is based on social justice,” creating a constitution and adopted its first 10 recommendations (History of the ILO) . Hour limitation, unemployment, maternity rights, child labor laws, and working at night for women and young adults were demanded by workers and stressed by the ILO. It was not an easy struggle for workers to gain these rights, and they are still not always properly enforced by some countries and companies, but for centuries workers fought to be where we are today. Corporations and employees continue to deny workers their rights, varying in degree depending on country and company. The UNHRC has an obligation to ensure that all citizens in the world have their rights as laborers upheld by companies, employers, and governments. Ignorance of these hindrances will assist in the decay in workers rights that were fought for for centuries. Recognition and denouncing of these overt violations is compulsory of the UNHRC, and working to expand these rights to countries with grave infringements will benefit generations to come.

## History and Description of the Issue

One of the earliest known fights for workers rights was the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 England, in which a massive group of peasants who rose up in protest against the unfair working conditions and wages that they were receiving (Peasants' Revolt). The taxes that were raised to pay for the wars England was fighting had been the final line for these citizens, as they could not afford to pay them with the wages that they earned. In turn, the rebellion was a failure, but they were told by the King, Richard II, that their demands would be met (Peasants' Revolt). These demands were not accepted once the revolt failed, but this was the beginning of a social revolution to ensure all workers had proper rights.



**Figure 1.2** An illustration of King Richard II talking with the peasants revolting against him. (Source: BBC)

During the industrialization of western countries, the social movement from the Peasants' Revolt emerged again, with greater support this time. Labor revolts occurred throughout Britain, the birthplace of the industrial revolution, during the 1830s and 40s, and began in the coal mines but rapidly moved to the mills and factories. These started as

workers were executed for destroying machines to revenge their employers poor treatment, so they turned their tactics to less violent ways that still greatly impacted the business: strikes (European Strike Wave). Many labor unions in western Europe lost their right to unionize because governments began to make it illegal, however that did not stop them. In some places, such as Lyon, France, the strikes turned into uprisings (European Strike Wave). The continuous battle that the workers put up lasted for decades, eventually wore down the governments and companies. Inspections were required for factories and mills in England while France created child labor laws, Austria following behind the next year, with other western European countries not far behind them (European Strike Wave). After decades of resistance, unions and employers started bargaining with each other, and the unions began to be accepted in their countries. Strikes continued to take place, but the conversation between unions and employers had changed. Decades of small steps in the direction toward social reform in western Europe changed the workforce for the better.

Throughout the twentieth century, Russia and Eastern Europe was greatly affected with worker strikes. In Russia, strikes started during the Russian Revolution in 1905 because the workers were demanding better pay and working conditions, much like those of western Europe. A great amount of these feelings arose in Russia after the publication of the Communist Manifesto by Marx and Engels, as the peasants demanded a new, radical form of government (Organized Labour). At this time, present day Poland, Estonia, and Latvia all established their own form of labor movement. Poland's movement was the closest to Russia's, as at this point Poland was a part of Russia, however they were also demanding political freedom as well in their strikes (Organized Labour). Throughout the

rest of the twentieth century there were continual fights for improvements to past demands. These countries all saw an influx in united laborers following to their western counterparts.

In Japan, after the Second World War, the Allied forces created “reforms [that] spurred a spectacular spread of independent trade unions, which had been eliminated during wartime,” (Organized Labour). Almost half of the countries workforce were engaged in active unions. Though the unions did receive backlash, they were able to achieve many of their demands, such as a constitutional right to unionize, strike, bargain for fairer wages, and improvements in working conditions.

In developing countries, it was mainly employees that worked for railroad companies in Ghana and Argentina, docks in China and most coastal African Countries, and mines in Chile and South Africa. This generated labor unions throughout the industries in those countries (Organized Labour). The unions developed in these areas because of how much it would “disrupt a major economic activity” in the country. This gave the workers leverage to have their requests met. The main problem presented by these employees was the poor wages for the work being done (Organized Labour).



**Figure 1.3** Ghana labor union strike in 2016. (Source: Africa News)

### **Current Status:**

The International Labor Organization (ILO) is the UN specialized agency that focuses on labor rights across the world. Almost all of the UN member states have joined the ILO, 186 of the 193 and the Cook Islands (Mission and impact of the ILO). The UN member states that are not a part of the ILO are Andorra, Bhutan, Liechtenstein, Micronesia, Monaco, Nauru, and North Korea (Alphabetical List of ILO Member Countries). These countries are not a part of the organization because they have not told the director-general they accept all the obligations of the contract of the agency. The remainder of the UN member states have agreed to these obligations already. The UNHRC is concerned about the countries' lack of participation in the ILO as labor rights are human rights. Today the world still has to address the issue of violations in the workplace. It is not limited to one particular area in the world, as it is seen in both the western hemisphere and

the east, in Asia and North America, the global north and the global south. In the modern era, laborer's rights continue to be infringed upon.

In 2016 it was reported by the Human Rights Watch that in Kazakhstan, the 8.9 million workers had their labor rights breached for years (Violations of Workers' Rights in Kazakhstan). In 2011, the oil and gas industry had employee strikes for months. One strike in December turned violent when the police began "opening fire on workers and others, killing at least 12 people," (Violations of Workers Rights in Kazakhstan). This was one of the longer strikes of that year. In 2012, the president called upon employers and employees to have better relations to avoid strikes and situations such as in 2011. The government then created new trade union law in 2014 and adopted a new labor code in 2015, both of which are not in compliance with the ILO and did not listen recommendations and input from trade unions or the ILO (Violations of Workers Rights in Kazakhstan). Due to more unrest in the country because of the economic situation, law enforcement has been quick to shut down any meetings that were not strictly in agreeance with the new laws created. Hundreds of peaceful activists and protestors were arrested with criminal charges in 2016 because of the current fiscal climate. This makes it difficult for workers to have their grievances heard and validated by their employers and bargain for better treatment, pay, and other accommodations that must be changed. The article 'Violations of Workers' Rights in Kazakhstan' by the Human Rights Watch said "Kazakhstan was publicly and firmly admonished in both 2015 and 2016 over restrictions in the Trade Union Law at the International Labour Conference, the highest-level decision-making body of the

International Labour Organization (ILO),” and that no amendments to their new laws have been made since (Violations of Workers Rights in Kazakhstan).

Along with Kazakhstan abusing labor rights, Pakistan has been documented participating in similar practices. This more recent Human Rights Watch report (2019) has shown that those that create garments are not being treated fairly. These issues include, not being paid the minimum wage, forced to work overtime, not being allowed to unionize, unable to take breaks from their work, and failing to give paid maternity and medical leave, which is all embedded in Pakistan law (Pakistan: Garment Workers’ Rights at Risk). The labor inspection system has also failed to meet mandated requirements. In the past few years there have been multiple strikes and protests in Pakistan. In 2018, workers at a training institute protested because, “workers alleged that the training institute actually operated, extracting free labor from ‘trainees’,” and in 2017 over 30 employees were fired for demanding their workers rights be recognized and upheld by their employer (Pakistan: Garment Workers’ Rights at Risk). There was even record of workers being beaten by their managers while the Human Rights Watch was inspecting factories. The Pakistani government is being urged to reevaluate the current labor laws and adopt new laws, policies and inspection requirements, as well as companies that are sourced in Pakistan should ensure that labor laws are being complied with in the factories (Pakistan: Garment Workers’ Rights at Risk).

The FIFA World Cup was hosted in Russia for the 2018 championship. This called for the construction of new stadiums and careful watch of labor conditions. FIFA is known for working toward an equal world for all, with putting human rights at the center of its

efforts. Having the World Cup in Russia meant that the organization needed to keep a close watch on the working conditions and treatment of the workers, however they did not seem to do this. Workers complained of “unpaid wages either in full or part, ... work in temperatures as cold as -25 degrees Celsius without sufficient protections, and employers’ failure to provide work contracts required for legal employment” (Russia/FIFA: Workers Exploited on World Cup 2018 Stadiums). There was a total of 17 workers that died during the construction of these stadiums. Protests and strikes broke out when the workers were not paid. Those workers that spoke out about these issues admitted to being scared about doing so because they feared their employers would give them backlash (Russia/FIFA: Workers Exploited on World Cup 2018 Stadiums). A Human Rights Watch worker was arbitrarily arrested when trying to gather information about these working condition and the treatment of workers. After a large amount of pressure from the international community, Russia and FIFA worked together to create a labor monitoring system. FIFA has not yet released the findings from this system, but it has stated that it will work more in the future to fight labor right violations (Russia/FIFA: Workers Exploited on World Cup 2018 Stadiums).



**Figure 1.4** Workers constructing the FIFA World Cup 2018 stadium. (Source: Human Rights Watch)

Amazon is another company that has had workers rights violation complaints recently. Throughout the United States and Europe there has continuously been demand for better enforcement of labor laws. In the United States and the United Kingdom there has been accusations of “intolerable working conditions” and “insecure jobs” while working for this corporation, as well as unfair wages (The World’s Worst Countries for Workers). In Spain, Germany and Italy strikes by Amazon workers transpired, requesting better pay and working conditions. Some workers were dismissed for these actions (The World’s Worst Countries for Workers).

One major issue with jobs around the world is whether they are dignified or not. This translates into a job where there is no respect given to the worker. Workers must complete tasks that are shameful, wrong, and ultimately violate fundamental human rights. Across the world this is an issue. In Bangladesh, India, Thailand, Colombia, Turkey, China, Vietnam, the United States of America and many more countries all have undignified

centers of work. Much of this is due to the violations including no break periods for recreation or self care.

In America, one widely known violation is in the poultry industry. An Oxfam report showed that workers in the industry have the fundamental basic right to use the bathroom revoked from them (No Relief: Denial of Bathroom Breaks in the Poultry Industry). They are threatened with punishment or termination by their employers, who routinely mock them in their condition. They have had to resort to wearing diapers while they work on the line, having to relieve themselves around their coworkers. Not only is this happening, but they are also having to restrict their liquid and food intake to ensure that they have to relieve themselves a limited amount of time (No Relief: Denial of Bathroom Breaks in the Poultry Industry). Women face worse consequences as compared to men due to the fact that they menstruate and work while pregnant. This act of restriction is severely unhealthy for workers and is causing health issues.

In many of the other countries that are known for having undignified work there are sweatshops. These jobs are undignified because they as well not receiving an adequate amount of restroom breaks, they also do not receive a fair wage and work excessive amounts of hours. If these workers demand their rights to be recognized by their employers, the multinational corporations then just relocate their business centers to another country that has citizens that are willing to work for low wages, take few breaks, and work obscene amounts of hours (Brown 37). These workers receive no respect from their employers and must suffer through severe working conditions for minimal pay (Brown 37). Nike is guilty of owning sweatshops in developing countries. Nike originally

owned sweatshops in South Korea and Taiwan, but then moved to post-war Vietnam and China due to their lack of labor laws and protections. The company exploited the poverty stricken workers by paying them incredibly low wages and violated their labor rights that the ILO had declared they had decades before (Facts About Nike Sweatshops).

**Bloc Positions:**

There is a general world wide agreement that workers rights are necessary and must be met. This is enforced by the ILO, specifically the International Labor Convention. This is where the labor standards and policies are established. Questions about labor and social issues are open for inquiry, while countries are open to discuss grievances with other countries and the violations they allow to be imposed on their citizens (How the ILO Works). However, not every UN member state is a part of the ILO, which means that they do not agree with the obligations in the ILO constitution.

The UN has created the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights which all business entities must adhere to. These principles involve reporting any abuse, respecting human rights, working towards fixing any abuses as quickly as possible, and avoiding carrying out any of these abuses (UN Guiding Principles). Countries must also abide by these principles. If there is a company that is violating human rights, the government must intervene directly or indirectly. If there are human rights violations, then the state must create legislation to change this. Addressing the issue within a corporation is the first step for a country to complete, then for the country to encourage the corporation to respect the rights of their workers and prevent human rights abuses (Guiding Principles on Business

and Human Rights). Whether these issues must be solved through judicial matters or the creation of legislation, countries must correct violations (Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights). The UNHRC endorsed these principles in 2011 (UN Guiding Principles).

Today the Middle East and North African regions are considered to be an area with the highest level of labor rights violations in the world including poor working conditions along with the treatment of employees is in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) (Workers' Rights: The worst - and best - countries). The conditions and treatment are considered the worst because of the ongoing conflicts within the countries that cause the laws to be changed or dismantled. These countries consistently have their right to unionize, strike, receive fair pay and work breaks abused by their employers. One employee in Saudi Arabia claimed that she "had no leave, no day off, and was always working apart from when [she] got to sleep for a few hours. [She] worked for at least 20 hours a day," (The World's Worst Countries for Workers). The indicated anecdote is a clear violation of this person's workers rights. Such a case is not uncommon throughout the MENA region. Instances of workers being beaten and lashed for demanding to be paid for their work has occurred in countries along the Persian Gulf (The World's Worst Countries for Workers).

Throughout South America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East many countries governments allow workers to be imprisoned, detained and physically harmed for trying to exercise their rights. In India, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Colombia, Brazil, and Guatemala there has been an increase in violence against employees and their families while both at work

and in protests (The World's Worst Countries for Workers). In Colombia there was 19 trade unionists that were murdered during a protest. Guatemala has totaled 87 trade unionist assassinations since 2004 (The World's Worst Countries for Workers). Nigeria banned trade unions, and in response to that there was protests that turned violent, killing one unionist and injuring others (The World's Worst Countries for Workers). Korea, China, Niger, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Egypt all have records of arresting activists that protest the workers rights violations. Some of these arrests are for conspiring to unionize, actively protesting, or being related to known trade unionists (The World's Worst Countries for Workers).



**Figure 1.5** Women working in a garment sweatshop in Bangladesh. (Source: War on Want)

Europe and North America are more likely to have less workers rights violations than anywhere else in the world. However, this does not exclude them from being mentioned in the article "The World's Worst Countries for Workers". This is because there continues to be areas for improvement in these continents. Workers still have their rights to unionize and collectively bargain suppressed throughout these countries. While their

countries are a part of the ILO and work toward giving their laborers these rights, there are still cases of strikes. Some of the reasons for these strikes is because of the government changing the labor laws without consultation with trade unions or being pushed through legislation without being properly debated, such as in France and Poland (The World's Worst Countries for Workers).

**Committee Mission:**

The United Nations Human Rights Council is committed to ensuring that every person is being treated with dignity, respect and are receiving their rights as a human. This clearly extends to the treatment of workers and their working conditions. The UNHRC must stay committed to raising awareness and enforcing the rights set by the ILO. All individuals, no matter where they live, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or what they do for work deserve their rights to be recognized and upheld by their government and their employers. Individuals have the right to negotiate and bargain with their employers and these rights must be protected by their government. Countries must revisit their labor laws and policies and be certain that the workers in their country are receiving these rights. If not, the laws and policies must be revised to secure these rights. The UNHRC must keep a closer eye on the treatment and conditions of laborers and protect the rights of all workers.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Has your country had any recent protests or strikes?
2. If so, were any of the demands met, or was there a compromise?

3. Has your country had any workers rights violations, to any degree, in the past few decades?
4. If so, how did your country address these violations?
5. Does your country's labor laws comply with the ILO constitution?
6. What efforts has your country made to ensure their citizens workers rights are respected and upheld?

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## **Topic B: Human Rights Violations Against the LGBT Community**

### **Introduction**

Human rights are guaranteed to all citizens of the world with no exceptions. This does not change whether you follow a certain religion, age, sex, profession, or sexual orientation. However, throughout history the LGBT community has had to fight for their human rights to be given to them. Not until 2015 were the United States LGBT citizens lawfully able to obtain marriage license without discrimination in other institutional jurisdictions. The United Kingdom passed similar legislation regarding marital rights in 2013. Rights were fought for by the members of the LGBT community because they were not guaranteed the same freedoms as other members of society.

Violating the rights of members of the LGBT community is illegal under international law set by the United Nations. Multiple resolutions since 2011 have been passed relating to sexual orientation or gender identity by the UNHRC to draw attention to the issues going on throughout the world (LGBT UN Resolutions). While in Asia, Africa, and South America there are more severe consequences for being a part of the LGBT community than in Europe and North America. However, this does not mean that European and North American LGBT community members are immune to discrimination. Homophobia, transphobia, and any other phobia directed at a group in the LGBT community is considered discrimination. These views make life harder for members of the LGBT community because of prejudices. People can lose their employment status or face termination because of their sexual orientation. Individuals have been rejected from adoption agencies because they are in a same-sex relationship. Couples have had their

marriages refused to be recognized by their country just on the basis of their sexual orientation. Before the United Nations, there were no rights protecting citizens within the LGBT community, but luckily today there are.

Today, while in the Western world LGBT human rights are upheld more than in the Eastern world, there is still a way to go to until every person within the LGBT community is guaranteed their human rights. Many countries do not condemn sexual acts with same-sex couples, yet they are barred from legally participating in adoption, the army, or a lawful marriage recognized by the state. With human rights violations directed specifically at members of the LGBT community in many countries – such as the majority of African countries, Central American countries, Asian countries, European countries, South American countries, and more – the United Nations Human Rights Council must address these countries and demand that they ensure no citizens are being deprived of their human rights.

Laws change drastically from different regions of the world. Many countries in the Americas and Europe allow same-sex relationships and marriages, yet in Asia and Africa there are very few that accept that. The majority of Asian and African countries do not allow same-sex marriage, adoption, partaking in the military, or have laws banning discrimination against members of the LGBT community (Brunei Stoning: Which Places Have the Death Penalty for gay sex? 2019).

### Countries where there are laws against homosexuality



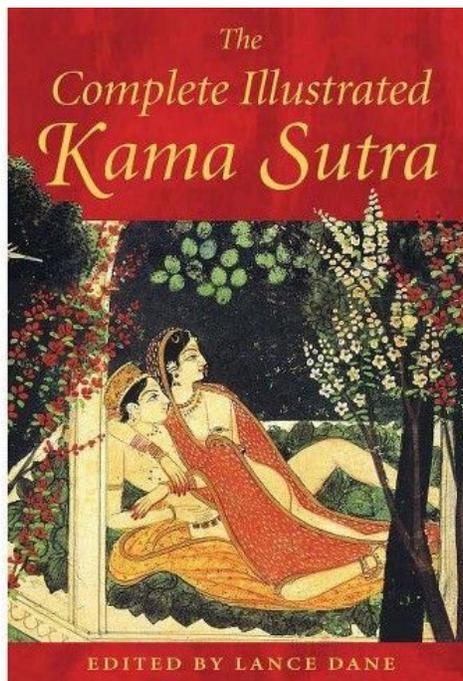
**Source 2.1** World map that gives a visual representation of where in the world there are laws against homosexuality, teal, and where homosexuality is punishable by death, yellow. (Source: BBC)

Punishing individuals for their sexual orientation is depriving them of their human rights. The world must not discriminate against the LGBT community and the UNHRC must confront countries that violate the rights of those of the community, demanding fair and equal treatment for everyone. These rights were laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. There has not always been such great violations of LGBT rights, as many ancient societies accepted homosexuality, but there were also those that did not accept it.

### History and Description of the Issue

There are many historical accounts of same-sex love in different societies. The Ancient Greeks were known for relations between two men, many times with a large age gap between the two, a practice known as 'Pederasty' (Greek Homosexuality). This

normalized the idea of homosexual relations within the Greek society. There were limits to these relations being acceptable, such as between two older men, a homosexual relationship was considered shameful (Greek Homosexuality). In Ancient India there were tales of Gods and Goddesses having homosexual relations and changing genders (Homosexuality in ancient India: 10 instances). This was widely accepted, and included in texts mentioning the tales. The Kamasutra – an ancient Indian Sanskrit text that discusses sexuality and how to be fulfilled emotionally – is where much of this is discussed. Japan during its feudal days neither praised nor condemned homosexual relations. In fact, there are many images from this time period of Japanese history that involved same-sex relations (The Gay of the Samurai).



**Source 2.1** The Kamasutra, a book that describes sexual acts and how to have an emotionally fulfilled life, from Ancient India. (Source: The Kamasutra)

The approval of same-sex relations did not last, as it soon became dangerous for individuals to involve themselves romantically and sexually with the same sex. Centuries later during the zenith of Ancient Rome, acts of homosexuality between men were accepted up until the dawn of Christianity in the early 4th century AD (Roman Law and the Banning of 'Passive' Homosexuality). When the Christian emperors after Constantine the Great ruled the empire same-sex relationships were outlawed and punishable by death (Roman Law and the Banning of 'Passive' Homosexuality). This influence spread throughout Europe, shaping laws for centuries to come. Ancient Israel did not allow the acts of homosexuality, as in the Torah it is said that "thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is an abomination" (*King James Version, Leviticus 18:22*). Citizens were given the death sentence if they were found guilty of homosexual relations, as in the Old Testament it also said "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood *shall be* upon them," (*King James Version, Leviticus 20:13*).

The impact of these prior feelings towards the LGBT community maintained its influence on future generations generations. Laws condemning their feelings and actions resulting in physical punishment, refusing to recognize marriages, and lies created negative feelings towards the LGBT community. This is seen clearly in WWII, with homosexuals being one of the many groups that the Holocaust affected (Persecution of Homosexuals in the Third Reich). The members of the LGBT community were stripped of their rights as humans, sent to concentration camps, and experimented on. While there is no exact

number, it is estimated that thousands of LGBT members were murdered in the Holocaust (Persecution of Homosexuals in the Third Reich).

The LGBT community is now more accepted in the West than it was a few decades before, but there is still progress to be made. Most countries allow same-sex marriage and ban discrimination of sexual orientation, but this does not mean that there are not still prejudices today. There is still homophobia and transphobia prevalent in Western society, at times causing concern for welfare due to hate crimes. In Orlando, Florida there was a mass shooting in the Pulse nightclub, a well known location for members of the LGBT community (Orlando shooting of 2016). This tragedy claimed the lives of 49 people, and injured 53 (Orlando shooting of 2016). This was a direct attack on members of the LGBT community. On the East side of the world there are many places that homosexual actions are punishable by imprisonment or death (Brunei stoning: which places have death penalty for gay sex?). In the beginning of 2019, the country of Brunei made it legal for an individual to be stoned to death for have same-sex relations (Brunei stoning: which places have death penalty for gat sex?). The country joins Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Sudan, Mauritania and parts of Nigeria and Somalia, which all also allow the death penalty for same-sex relations. This direct attack on the wellbeing and livelihood of LGBT community members must stop, as it is a violation of their human rights to be treated equally to all other humans, and their inalienable right to freedom.



**Source 2.3** Memorial for the victims that lost their lives at the Pulse nightclub mass shooting. (Source: BBC)

## **Current Status**

The UNHRC passed a resolution in 2011 that recognizes the rights of LGBT people, and defining what is considered a violation of their rights. Since then, there have been two other resolutions passed on the top of how to combat LGBT discrimination world wide. The resolution passed in 2011 (17/19) was the starting point for the resolutions following. With stress put on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the committee expressed its concerns with the treatment and discrimination of the LGBT community throughout the world (A/HRC/RES/17/19). The resolution requested a study to research the violence, bigotry, intolerance, and the discriminatory laws against members of the LGBT community (A/HRC/RES/17/19). This therefore would assist the committee in combating these practices and laws, working towards ending violations and discrimination against the members of the LGBT community (A/HRC/RES/17/19).

In 2014 the UNHRC passed a second resolution on the topic of LGBT rights, referencing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the previous resolution (resolution 17/19), and multiple other anti-discriminatory resolutions in the General Assembly (A/HRC/RES/27/32). This again reiterated the fact UNHRC is concerned about the grave human rights violations to the members of the LGBT community across the world. The committee thanked the High Commissioner for the study previously demanded, and requested that the High Commissioner update the study so that the committee could find ways to combat the issues discovered (A/HRC/RES/27/32).

The 2016 resolution passed by the UNHRC was similar to resolution 17/19 and 27/32, however it had amendments added to it. This resolution also reiterated the previous resolutions that stand against discriminatory laws, practices, and violence against the members of the LGBT community. This resolution has a main focus on addressing and combating the violence and treatment of the LGBT community across the globe (A/HRC/RES/32/2). One section of the resolution says the committee “Deplor[es] the use of external pressure and coercive measures against States, particularly developing countries, including through the use and threat of use of economic sanctions and/or the application of conditionality to official development assistance, with the aim of influencing the relevant domestic debates and decision-making processes at the national level” to ensure that progress is made without greatly affecting the country (A/HRC/RES/32/2).

The President of the United States, Donald Trump, has been advocating for rules to roll back nondiscriminatory protections for transgender people that are insured by the Affordable Care Act (Trump Administration Takes Aim at Transgender Healthcare).

Because many states do not have laws against discrimination based on gender identity, this poses a massive threat to transgender peoples rights. The Department of Health and Human Services interpreted the Affordable Care Acts anti-discrimination policy to include prohibiting the discrimination based on gender identity, which could now be reversed with the proposed change by the Trump administration (Trump Administration Takes Aim at Transgender Healthcare). This discrimination on the basis of gender identity goes against the current resolutions that the UNHRC has passed, therefore if this proposal develops into law the international community would need to address it.

In May of 2019 the Human Rights Watch continued their investigation into the current situation of gay and bisexual men in Chechnya, Russia. Multiple men were interviewed after being imprisoned, revealing that they had been tortured by being beaten, and some even electroshocked (Russia: New Anti-Gay Crackdown in Chechnya). One man admitted he had been sodomized by a police officer with a foreign object (Russia: New Anti-Gay Crackdown in Chechnya). The men were degraded by the police officers, as they shared their sexual orientation with other inmates, people working in the building, and even their families so that they too would harm or humiliate them. In two cases the torture resulted in the death of the individuals involved (Russia: New Anti-Gay Crackdown in Chechnya). This treatment is cruel and unacceptable, as it causes harm to the men involved and violates their rights as humans. The Human Rights Watch has called out these atrocities, and demands that the Russian government looks into the investigation that was reported to them (Russia: New Anti-Gay Crackdown in Chechnya). The UNHRC gave a joint address in March, with 30 member states in support, expressing grave concern about the

findings of the investigations into the treatment of members of the LGBT community in Chechnya, Russia (Russia: New Anti-Gay Crackdown in Chechnya). This address demanded critical action against the investigation findings, including but not limiting to releasing all individuals that are being held in prison because of their sexual orientation (Human Rights Council 40: Joint Statement Item 8 General Debate on LGBTI Persons in Chechnya).



**Source 2.4** A political drawing of an account with the Chechnian police told by a victim. This depicts the victims treatment after having his sexual orientation assumed.

(Source: John Holmes for Human Rights Watch)

In Egypt, the LGBT community was under attack by the media and the government in January 2019. A news anchor was imprisoned for inviting an anonymous gay sex worker on a broadcast (Egypt’s LGBT Crackdown Expands to Stifle Journalists). This imprisonment was considered justified by a minor court of Egypt for “contempt of religion, incitement to debauchery, and immorality,” solidifying the anti-LGBT stances that the government holds (Egypt’s LGBT Crackdown Expands to Stifle Journalists). This news anchor was sentenced to one year in jail, and the television network has been suspended for “promoting

homosexuality”, although he was quoted as referring to homosexuality as “a deviance” and a “disease’ (Egypt’s LGBT Crackdown Expands to Stifle Journalists). In the Egyptian Constitution this type of discrimination is illegal, as it violates the citizen’s freedom to expression.

The ruling that occurred in Kenya in May 2019 breached the rights of those that are a part of the LGBT community. Multiple LGBT support organization created a petition stated there were laws that discriminated against the community. The High Court of Kenya ruled the articles in question did not violate the rights of members of the LGBT community, as they claimed the laws do not single out the individuals in the community, the organizations that filed the petition did not provide how the laws violated the rights, and “the constitutional rights to privacy and dignity are not absolute and should be read in the context of article 45 of the constitution, which states ‘Every adult has the right to marry a person of the opposite sex.’” (Kenya: Court Upholds Archaic Anti-Homosexuality Laws). The punishment for homosexual relations in Kenya is imprisonment. With being a member state of the UNHRC, Kenya is violating its commitments to end anti-LGBT laws, as they discriminate against their rights.

The government of Japan upholds discriminatory laws that are directed at individuals that seek to change their gender. For the government to recognize a transgender person’s gender change, they must undergo a psychological evaluation, apply to a family court under the Gender Identity Disorder Special Cases (GID) Act, and requires them to be sterilized (Japan: Compelled Sterilization of Transgender People). This is discriminatory, as there are many transgender citizens that do not want to undergo

surgery to be recognized by the government. This process violates human rights, as these members of the transgender community should not have to be forced to be operated on just to be recognized as who they are. An 84 page report was conducted by the Human Rights Watch that involved interviews with many transgender citizens that gave anecdotes about their experiences with being transgender in Japan. Human Rights Watch says that in 2013 the UN special rapporteur on torture “called on governments to prohibit the practice” of requiring surgery for recognizing gender change, and medical experts “urged governments to remove medical requirements from legal gender recognition,” (Japan: Compelled Sterilization of Transgender People). In January of this year the Japan Supreme Court ruled that it was not unconstitutional for the Japanese government to require sterilization surgery, while that does clearly infringe on a person’s right to bodily autonomy (Japan: Compelled Sterilization of Transgender People).



**Source 2.5** A Japanese citizen outside of a courthouse where they were filing a lawsuit against the Japanese government for forcing them to be sterilized to change their gender. (Source: The Japan Times)

Today, the LGBT community is an incredibly accepting group of people. All around the world people are a part of this community, and they accept anyone that feels as though they identify them, as well as those that don't. The community is empowering all of those that associate themselves with the group, as well as promotes living healthy, happy, positive lives. Outspoken members of the community are advocates for those that are not comfortable and that do not have a voice to speak out against injustices committed against the LGBT community.

### **Bloc Positions**

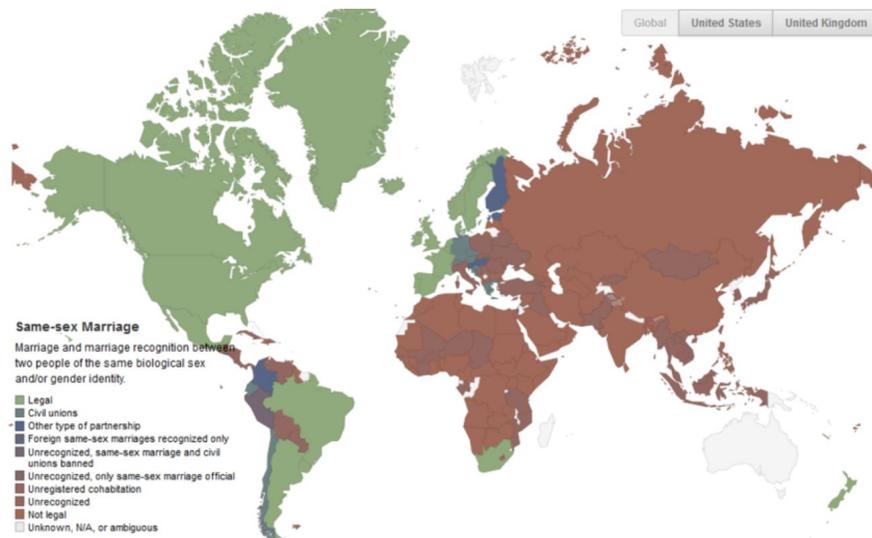
With the UNHRC 2011, 2014, and 2016 resolutions recognizing the rights of LGBT people, there is a general agreement among the member states that their rights as humans must be upheld. If they are not, then the violations must be addressed and resolved. While this is a general agreement, there are still countries that are members of the UN that have voted against the resolutions, and that have in the past and continue to violate these human rights and discriminate against individuals in the LGBT community. Many of the countries that voted against the resolutions are those that do not allow homosexual relations, same sex marriage, gender identity change. While not all countries that voted in favor of the resolutions have legalized same sex marriage, adoption by same sex couples, gender identity change, and other issues revolving LGBT rights, this is still a step in the right direction for social change concerning the LGBT community. There are more developed countries that have legalized these rights than developing countries.

In North America and the majority of Western and Northern Europe have legalized same sex sexual relations, same sex marriage, have anti-discrimination laws, laws concerning gender identity, and same sex couples adoption (Same-Sex Marriage: Global Comparisons). These countries have more liberal social policies regarding the rights of members of the LGBT community. This does not mean members of the LGBT community are immune to discrimination. In the United States, an institution is allowed to deny service to a member of the LGBT community if it goes against their religion or beliefs. One recent example of this is the case of a bakery in Colorado, USA denying service to same sex couples that wanted a wedding cake (Same-Sex Marriage: Global Comparisons).

The Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) region are very strict with their laws concerning LGBT rights (Same-Sex Marriage: Global Comparisons). Within the MENA region same sex relations, marriage, adoption, and civil unions are illegal, the only country that these are not banned is Israel. This area has some of the more extreme punishments for same sex relations. In Iran, Qatar, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E., and Yemen it is punishable by death if you are found involved in a same sex relationship (Same-Sex Marriage: Global Comparisons). The majority of the states do not have any anti-discrimination laws that prohibit bigotry against individuals in the LGBT community. This is a clear violation of the rights of members of the LGBT community, as this is a direct attack on their well-being and livelihood.

Throughout Africa there is low tolerance for same sex relations. A poll was conducted by Afrobarometer in 2016 that concluded "78 percent of Africans across thirty-three countries were intolerant of homosexuality," (Same-Sex Marriage: Global

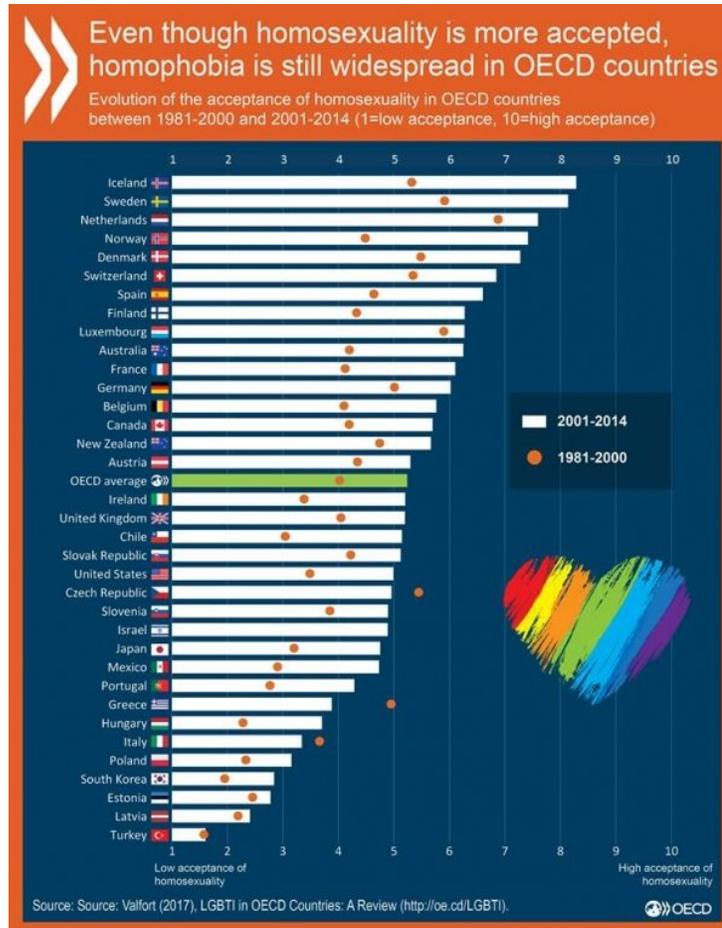
Comparisons). Just like the Middle East and Northern Africa region, only one country allows same sex relations and marriage; South Africa (Same-Sex Marriage: Global Comparisons). There are four countries in which it is punishable by death to be a part of a same sex relationship; Somolia, Sudan, Nigeria, and Mauritania (Same-Sex Marriage: Global Comparisons).



**Figure 2.6** Photo that shows where same-sex marriage is legal or illegal. (Source: World Economic Forum)

While there are areas of the world that are unsafe for members of the LGBT community, there are also countries that are incredibly accepting. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found in a study that Iceland is the most accepting of LGBT members than any other country a part of the OECD (Iceland Least Homophobic Country in the OECD). Following behind Iceland is Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, and Switzerland (Iceland Least Homophobic Country in the OECD). The

study also found that the more legal recognition the LGBT community receives, the less homophobic a country is (Iceland Least Homophobic Country in the OECD).



**Figure 2.7** Least to most homophobic countries in the OECD. (Source: Iceland Magazine)

**Committee Mission**

The United Nations Human Rights Council has pledged to protect the rights of all citizens of the world. In doing so, they therefore have made the commitment to defend the rights of those that are a part of the LGBT community. There are acts across the world

being committed that do not give these rights to members of the community, blatantly disregarding what the UNHRC stands for. It is absolutely necessary for the UNHRC to stand up to these laws and practices to protect individuals human rights. The treatment of these humans must be surveillanced and addressed by the committee, or else it risks scrutiny from the international community for not consistently following its morals. The committee must continue to discuss ways to end archaic, violent laws that harm the individuals of the LGBT community, as well as laws and practices that infringe on the livelihood of the members of the community. These violations are not exclusive to certain areas of the world, though there is a disparity of rights between developed and developing countries. The UNHRC should make an effort to assist individuals in these countries, and crack down on the human rights violations that are occurring in these countries.

### **Questions to consider**

1. What are the current laws in your country regarding the LGBT community?
2. Has there been any recent changes in these laws?
3. What has your country done to protect the rights of those in the LGBT community?
4. Has there been any violations to the rights of LGBT community members in your country's past?
5. If so, how did they fix them? Or have they fixed the violations yet?
6. How can your country ensure that these citizens do not have their human rights violated?

7. Is there any way that your country can assist individuals in countries that violate their rights?

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[www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/24/trump-administration-takes-aim-transgender-healthcare](http://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/24/trump-administration-takes-aim-transgender-healthcare).

Human Rights Watch is an organization that operates on behalf of human rights. The main focus of the organization is to conduct studies about violations of rights, as well as advocates for change. This article discussed the new proposed rule by President Trump’s administration that would rollback nondiscrimination protections for members of the LGBT community under the Affordable Care Act.

