United Nations Social and Economic Council (SOCHUM)
Chair Letter

DEAR DELEGATES,

Welcome to the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM) at CNYMUN 2026! We are super excited to have you here and hope that we see some healthy and productive debate. Your chairs this year will be Sanaa Goyal and Amelia Whipps.

ABOUT THE CHAIRS:

Sanaa is a senior at Fayetteville-Manlius High School. She enjoys traveling, going to the movies, hanging with friends, and reading in her spare time. This is her fourth year of doing MUN and fifth time chairing a committee, and she is very excited to chair at CNYMUN 2026. She looks forward to an amazing conference and meeting everyone!

Amelia is a junior at Fayetteville-Manlius High School. She enjoys dancing ballet, playing the violin, and doing fun crafts like crocheting blankets. This is her third year doing Model UN but her first chairing, and she is very excited to be chairing for SOCHUM particularly. She is looking forward to her third CNYMUN and knows it is going to be a great conference this year!

INTRODUCTION TO COMMITTEE:

The Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM), also known as the Third Committee, is one of the six vital organs of the United Nations General Assembly.[1] It addresses responsibilities and issues related to the advancement of women in society, the protection of children, the elimination of racism and discrimination, international drug control, and the right to self-determination. The mission of SOCHUM is to design peaceful settlements around issues that have social, cultural, and humanitarian complications. All 193 member countries are represented in this committee, and all nations work together to address the most pressing social, cultural, and humanitarian issues. Through advocacy and the development of technology, SOCHUM aims to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

[1] "UN General Assembly - Third Committee - Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee." *United Nations*, www.un.org/en/ga/third/#:~:text=UN%20General%20Assembly%20%2D%20Third%20Committee%20%2D%20Social%2C%20Humanitarian%20&%20Cultural.&text=The%20Committee%20discusses%20questions%20relating%20to%20the,discrimination%2C%20and%20the%20right%20to%20self%2D%20determination. Accessed 21 June 2025.

Your topics for the Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee at CNYMUN 2026 are:

1. Addressing the Protection of Indigenous Cultural Heritage Sites and Upholding Tribal Sovereignty
2. Combating the Issues of Child Labor Practices in Underdeveloped Nations

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE:

Keeping in line with CNYMUN tradition, all committees will follow Harvard style debate, meaning delegates are prohibited from using pre-written clauses and/or resolutions during committee. Doing so will make a delegate ineligible for awards. To be eligible for awards, delegates must submit a Georgetown style position paper per each topic, meaning that each topic should be one page, single spaced, with a font size of 12 in Times New Roman. Position papers should outline the stance of your delegation and demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of your topics. The use of AI is prohibited and will result in disqualification from awards. When deciding on awards, chairs will look favorably upon delegates who have put significant effort into preparation prior to the conference, collaborate with other delegates without being overbearing, remain within the bounds of their nation's policies, and encourage other's voices to be heard. CNYMUN committees are structured using a tiered structure, designating each committee as open, intermediate, or advanced. SOCHUM is designated as an **open** committee. In turn, the Best New Delegate award will be offered to a first-time delegate in this committee.

Please share position papers prior to the start of the conference. The chairs' emails are listed below for you to contact about any research, position paper, or committee inquiries. It is recommended that all delegates share their position papers to both chair's emails, although chairs will ask for any hard copies of position papers at the start of committee session one if necessary.

We encourage you to scan our delegate preparation resources and award structure on www.cnymun.org. We wish you the best of luck and can't wait to see what you bring to CNYMUN 2026!

Sanaa Goyal
26sgoyal@fmschools.org

Amelia Whipps
27awhipps@fmschools.org

TOPIC 1: ADDRESSING THE PROTECTION OF INDIGENOUS CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES AND UPHOLDING TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY

For thousands of years, the environment has determined the settlement patterns, the culture, and the development of a civilization. Access to water, geographic features such as mountains, and soil fertility are some key features that have forged and shaped civilizations and empires. This holds especially true for indigenous societies who originally settled on the lands and developed their own unique set of customs and traditions that have lasted for centuries. Often, indigenous lands overlap with world heritage sites, unsurprising due to the complex relationship between the two. According to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), a heritage site is defined as a natural or cultural landmark that is deemed to have significant historical, cultural, or scientific significance. At the same time, indigenous groups are considered to be major stakeholders in the designation and participation as world heritage sites. When communities are not involved in governance and decision making, a conflict of interest occurs where a threat is posed to cultural identity and traditional practices.

Common issues around indigenous groups include land disputes, cultural identity, and governance. For example, in the United States, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 were passed to promote cultural assimilation and give more territory to white settlers.[2] Similarly, In New Zealand, the Maori people were granted civil rights in 1867 through the Treaty of Waitangi, and although interracial marriages were accepted between whites and Maori people, much discrimination occurred, with Maori women receiving less than 25% of the rate for old-age and widow's pensions compared to counterparts.[3]

In 1948, the UN established the United Nations Universal Declaration for Human Rights, which set

[2] "The Dawes Act." *National Park Service*, www.nps.gov/articles/000/dawes-act.htm. Accessed 21 June 2025.
[3] "Intolerance towards Maori." *Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, teara.govt.nz/en/ethnic-and-religious-intolerance/page-1. Accessed 21 June 2025.

the minimum standards for human rights to be held by all individuals "without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or status." However, this framework was not enough to clarify the rights of indigenous peoples. In 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN DRIP), which contains a clear right to self-determination as distinct peoples within existing countries. It freely determines their political, social, and cultural development as well as autonomy in local affairs,[4] but the document fails to provide a concrete definition for indigenous peoples, creating a gap between the doctrine and the legal enforcement in reality. As a result, the UN DRIP has not always been upheld around the world.

These issues around the protection of cultural heritage sites and tribal sovereignty spread into the modern day and affect all countries globally. All of the modern-day issues around land rights, cultural assimilation, and self-determination are contentious and have affected the settlement patterns of indigenous societies as well as indigenous sovereignty.

Currently, there are more than 5,000 different Indigenous peoples around the world, and they comprise 476 million people, which is about 6.2% of the population worldwide. Each indigenous group or tribe has a diverse array of customs, cultures, and traditions that are unique in their own way.[5] However, these communities are subject to extreme marginalization and discrimination and are constantly threatened by eviction from their ancestral lands. These groups are also known to have higher rates of poverty and restricted access to education, healthcare, and housing. For example, in the Philippines, 46% of indigenous households rely on unimproved sanitation facilities. Additionally, in Bolivia, the primary school completion rate for indigenous women in rural areas is half of the rate for non-indigenous men (25.6% vs. 52.5%).[6] Globally, only 57% of all indigenous peoples around the world have access to lighting in households.

As has been previously mentioned, the protection of cultural heritage sites has been discussed frequently in recent decades. This is because these heritage sites are constantly at risk of being destroyed or harmed due to threats such as armed conflict, climate change, and tourist development. For example, the Iranian city of Bam was labeled as a UNESCO World Heritage site after 26,000 people lost their lives in the earthquake of December 2003. Bam was a symbol of cultural community, as well as complex building techniques and a sophisticated water management system called qanats. In addition, the historic town of Zabid in Yemen has deteriorated in the past couple of decades, where 40% of the original historic houses have been replaced by concrete buildings, showing gradual decay due to modernization and a loss of Islamic scholarly heritage.[7] There are many issues around the protection of cultural heritage sites that need to be considered.

Tribal sovereignty is threatened especially by debates around the right to self-determination. Lately, around the world, \tribal governments in countries such as the United States have begun to demand again for equal rights. Tribal rights are recognized; however, rights are not being upheld everywhere around the world. For example, in the United States, the Standing Rock tribe has been protesting against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline because the pipeline's construction goes through tribal lands.[8] Additionally, the pipeline is supposed to transport crude oil, which can be toxic for the Standing Rock

[4] "Native Sovereignty and Self Governance." *Indian Law*, indianlaw.org/issues/native-sovereignty-self-governance?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=22011722877&gbraid=0AAAAA-hE9vvQwnauX4AD78_pY1_Wq2BK6&gclid=EAIaIQobChMIqriWvMOAjgMVIFhHAR2aAzCYEAAYASAAEgIg0PD_BwE&utm_source=google_cpc&utm_medium=ad_grant&utm_campaign=cbc_ggrant_issues. Accessed 21 June 2025.

[5] "Indigenous Peoples." *Amnesty International*, www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/indigenous-peoples/. Accessed 21 June 2025.

[6] "Indigenous Peoples Overview." *World Bank*, 7 Apr. 2025, www.worldbank.org/en/topic/indigenouspeoples. Accessed 21 June 2025.

[7] "UNESCO World Heritage Centre - World Heritage in Danger." *UNESCO*, whc.unesco.org/en/danger/. Accessed 21 June 2025.

[8] Hu, Sheila. "The Dakota Access Pipeline: What You Need to Know." *NRDC*, 12 June 2024, www.nrdc.org/stories/dakota-access-pipeline-what-you-need-know. Accessed 21 June 2025.

tribe. There have been many petitions and forms of youth activism against the construction of the pipeline. For example, a letter was written from middle school student Anna YellowHammer about the devastation that her family and grandparents would face if the pipeline was built. In addition, the Oceti Sakowin Youth & Allies group ran a relay run that was about 2,000 miles long to deliver a petition of 140,000 signatures to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. But concerns have been largely ignored, with President Trump issuing a 2017 memorandum that allowed the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline to proceed.

In many South American countries, there have been many efforts to gain legal rights for the different ethnic tribes that live in these countries, but they have had very little impact on their current status. For example, in Ecuador, the Quichua people struggle to preserve their cultural and linguistic identity within the national court system of Ecuador. Also, many Colombian tribes have found that in the face of development projects and armed conflict for natural resources, they are the ones found to be suffering and, in some cases, disappearing completely from the world.

Many multinational corporations have infringed upon the rights of tribes, uprooted communities, polluted and contaminated surrounding areas that cause serious health effects.[9] For example, in Brazil, the mining giant Vale is responsible for the contamination of lead, mercury, and nickel in springs near the Xikrin indigenous territory. Reports from the area indicated that a 19-year-old had nickel levels that were above 2,000% the safe limits.[10] The corporate abuse of companies can set dangerous precedents of indigenous rights violations as well as promote further environmental injustice.

Delegates should consider ways to clarify existing legislation, such as the UN DRIP, and look for initiatives that can provide not only economic relief to indigenous communities but also ways to improve tribal representation in governments around the world. In addition, delegates should consider ways to regulate development projects and areas of armed conflict to help protect indigenous communities.

Another key issue related to the protection of indigenous peoples is the protection of cultural heritage sites. Over the course of the development of different civilizations and empires, architectural feats have lasted until the modern day. Examples include the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Turkey and Chichen Itza in Mexico. Some cultural heritage sites are currently protected, while others are threatened due to a variety of factors such as armed conflict, climate change, and commercial development projects.

For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 5 world heritage sites are threatened, including Virunga, Kahuzi-Biega, Garamba, Salonga National Park, and Okapi Wildlife Reserve due to the impacts of war and civil conflicts in Africa. Currently, 25% of sites are threatened, an increase from 16% in 2009. Additionally, world heritage sites in places such as the Cote d'Ivoire, Tanzania, Niger, Zimbabwe, and the Central African Republic are also at threat from mining and commercial activities. [11]

Due to the ongoing war in Ukraine, UNESCO has verified damage to 342 sites, including sites of religious, historic and artistic significance. More than 480,000 artwork pieces are said to have been removed from Ukrainian heritage sites by Russian troops, with the Kherson Museum specifically losing about 28,000 artwork pieces. In Aleppo, Syria, the Great Mosque was destroyed in 2013 due to the Syrian civil war. This great mosque had stood since 1090 and was a place of prayer and worship and of architectural significance.[12] In

[9] Ruge, Dan. "Indigenous Rights in Latin America: The Gap between Doctrine and Reality." *Digital Commons*, digitalcommons.du.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1462&context=hrhw. Accessed 21 June 2025.

[10] Fabiano Maisonnave. "In Brazil, Mining Giant Vale Is Sued over Metal Contamination Found in Indigenous Peoples." *AP News*, 25 Feb. 2025, apnews.com/article/brazil-indigenous-amazon-mining-cop30-vale-xikrin-9f8643135fad5fbcfe6092b1dec00304.

[11] "Mining Threats Are on the Rise in World Heritage Sites." *International Union for Conservation of Nature*, 27 June 2011, iucn.org/content/mining-threats-rise-world-heritage-sites#:~:text=African%20natural%20World%20Heritage%20sites,in%20four%20sites%20is%20threatened. Accessed 21 June 2025.

[12] Banjo, Fadeke. "7 Heritage Sites We Are Losing to Conflict and Climate Change." *Global Citizen*, 15 Mar. 2024,

addition, cultural heritage sites are known to provide invaluable resources to native groups around the world. World Heritage forests absorb about 190 million CO_2 annually and 15% of the world's blue carbon assets. One-third of glaciers by 2050 are expected to disappear, especially in regions such as Mount Kilimanjaro.[13]

Delegates should consider ways to protect these cultural heritage sites by keeping in mind ways to protect the rights of tribal and indigenous groups, but also showcase cultural traditions, performing arts, oral histories, and other forms of heritage that are celebrated by nations.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1) What are the main indigenous groups and where are they located? What legislation or policies are in place to protect their rights?
2) Are there any cultural heritage sites that the UN does not recognize? If so, what are they, and what measures could be implemented to protect them?
3) How can the UN improve issues related to tribal sovereignty? Consider ways to educate the public about the value that indigenous peoples have for the environment around them.
4) Are there any ways the UN can provide economic relief to indigenous communities of color?

HELPFUL SOURCES:

Overview of what tribal sovereignty is and what it means for Native Americans.
https://journalistsresource.org/politics-and-government/tribal-sovereignty-native-americans/

UNESCO page on indigenous peoples and Cultural Heritage sites.
https://www.unesco.org/en/indigenous-peoples

Importance of Protecting Cultural Heritage Sites.
https://www.getty.edu/publications/cultural-heritage-mass-atrocities/part-4/21-gerstenblith

www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/hertiage-sites-conflict-climate-change/.

[13] World, UNESCO. "Climate Change and World Heritage." *Unesco.org*, 2018, whc.unesco.org/en/climatechange/#sources.

TOPIC 2: COMBATTING THE ISSUES OF CHILD LABOR PRACTICES IN UNDERDEVELOPED NATIONS

Child labor is the use of children in industry or business, especially when illegal or considered inhumane. Child labor has been around for centuries and is a practice integrated into many cultures and customs around the world. Although child labor is mostly seen as a problem in developing countries, it is a problem that affects almost every country in the world. This practice, especially done unethically or underground, can disrupt children's lives, stunt education, and lead to higher mortality rates in children who participate in child labor.

Child labor is an enduring issue in many underdeveloped and developing nations. These practices can be extremely unethical, unsafe, and include illegal practices like human trafficking and sex trafficking. In the Victorian era, child labour notably became a fatal and hazardous practice, with children as young as four years working in industrial factories. Children were expected to crawl through tunnels that were too narrow for adults in coal mines, endangering many children's lives, with extremely low wages and working for up to 80 hours a week. Additionally, in many times in history, including the Victorian era, several children were exploited as prostitutes.[14] In 2016, across the globe, an estimated 152 million children were in child labor, and almost half of them in the worst form of child labor.[15] These issues are caused by systemic issues of poverty, weak enforcement of laws and poverty. This issue is embedded in many cultures; it is a significant contribution to many countries' economies, keeping lower wage sectors afloat and supporting these children's families. The continued prevalence of child labor has enforced the idea of children in the workforce, making it not just an ethical question, but a question of the economies held together by both legal and illegal labor done by children.

In developing nations, child labor is not perceived as an exploitative practice, but rather a mode of economic support for struggling families. In most developing countries with a high rate of child labor, many people believe that this work has a constructive effect on character building and increases skill development in children as well as helping families make a little extra money. Traditionally, in families, children choose or are expected to follow the parents' footsteps and learn the job from an early age. Often perceived cultural beliefs may contribute to the concept that a girl's education as opposed to boy's education, so often in these lesser devolved nations girls are pushed into child labor as providers of domestic services, including being sold into marriage, which is not usually seen as a child labor practice, but can affect girls in the same way as forced work, or working in incorporate domestic skills that girls can start young and stay until adulthood as a way of stopping women and girls from succeeding and moving up in the workforce.[16]

In Ethiopia, child labor is a persistent problem, as children spend all day working to create cheap products for meager wages. Children there have been taken away from their parents to work in sweatshops and don't have access to education and necessary healthcare.[17] In the past, the government approved an Education and Training Policy, which provides for free education throughout Ethiopia from preschool through 12th grade, although currently, education is still lacking in Ethiopia. Ethiopia's laws did not meet international standards because they did not criminalize the use of a child for commercial sexual exploitation, allowing children ages 15 and 16 to engage in hazardous work. Ethiopian law also does not include free basic education or a compulsory age for the completion of education.[18]

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[14] Vision, World. "Facts, History, FAQs, What You Need to Know about Child Labour." *Www.wvi.org*, 17 Aug. 2022, www.wvi.org/stories/facts-history-faqs-what-you-need-know-about-child-labour.

[15] Thévenon, Olivier, and Eric Edmonds. "Child Labour: Causes, Consequences and Policies to Tackle It." *Child Labour: Causes, Consequences and Policies to Tackle It*, vol. 235, 2019, www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/f6883e26-en.pdf?expires=1599037901&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=0DC6FA9102D084FF9A8BAB7B83364282, https://doi.org/10.1787/f6883e26-en.

[16] Radfar, Amir. "Challenges and Perspectives of Child Labor." *Industrial Psychiatry Journal*, vol. 27, no. 1, Jan. 2018, pp. 17–20, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6198592/, https://doi.org/10.4103/ipj.ipj_105_14.

[17] Birhanu Mengist Zewdie, Arega Bazezew Berlie and Linger Ayele Mersha (2024) 'Causes of child labor and working conditions in Ethiopia: evidence from temporary inter-rural child labor migrants from Sekela district', *Comparative Migration Studies*, 12(1). Available at: https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-024-00384-1.

[18] Bureau of International Labor Affairs. "Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor - Ethiopia | U.S. Department of Labor."

Another area with a big child labor problem is Nigeria. The environment of child labor has made Nigeria an area very likely for the exploitation of young workers. Unfortunately, unlike Ethiopia, Nigeria has yet to try and combat the issue of child labor in its country. Their government's minimum working age does not meet the international standards, as it does not apply to children who are self-employed or working in "underground affairs," also called an informal economy. Additionally, the state of Kano in Nigeria does not prohibit the use of children in illicit activities, causing problems for reformers, as it is difficult for the Nigerian government to change state laws.

Globally, these issues don't just affect one country, the effects of child labor and unethicalness of this type of work causes international problems between nations that have opposing views on the legality of children in the workforce. While child labor's unethical standing is held by many nations, others argue that the economic benefits outweigh the overall problems. It is important for delegates to keep in mind the possible economic struggles in their country as well as the problems banning child labor in the local and global economies may cause.

In 2005, the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated that 980,000 to 1,225,000 boys and girls are in a forced labour situation as a result of human trafficking.[19] It was also found that almost 20% of all trafficking victims around the globe are children. However, in some parts of Africa and Southeast Asia, children are the majority. Specifically, in West Africa, children constitute 100% of the trafficked people.[20] These statistics demonstrate that massive amounts of human trafficking are occurring illegally, predominantly in underdeveloped nations. These statistics indicate a problem within nations of wealth disparity and a cycle of poverty that is deeper than the trafficking itself. The exploitation of children for labor shows systemic issues spanning across the globe.

In some cases, child labor can benefit local economies and help poor families. But, hazardous conditions, abuse, exhaustion, malnutrition, or exposure to toxic materials threaten children's health. With the many combined problems listed here it is likely that they could lead to the inability to work as an adult, develop higher-skilled professions, and a lack of education affecting many people living in these areas, stunting the potential growth for these underdeveloped nations because of a lack of advanced laborers.[21] With less education, these countries are also lacking in healthcare for most of their population, causing higher infant mortality and a shrinking workforce.[22]

It is also important to note that the removal of children from the workforce could cause problems with the use of illegal human trafficking, which has the potential to increase in growth. Delegates should understand the problems surrounding child labor around the world as well as the risks associated with attempting to eliminate it in developing countries.

Dol.gov, 2018, www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/ethiopia.

[19] "Trafficking in Children | International Labour Organization." *Www.ilo.org*, 28 Jan. 2024, www.ilo.org/international-programme-elimination-child-labour-ipec/sectors-and-topics/trafficking-children.

[20] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2019) *Global report on trafficking in persons*, *Unodc.org*. United Nations. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/global-report-on-trafficking-in-persons.html.

[21] Radfar, Amir. "Challenges and Perspectives of Child Labor." *Industrial Psychiatry Journal*, vol. 27, no. 1, Jan. 2018, pp. 17–20, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6198592/, https://doi.org/10.4103/ipj.ipj_105_14.

[22] European Commission. "Child Labour Has a Profound Impact on the Health and Wellbeing of Children." *International-Partnerships.ec.europa.eu*, 2021, international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/stories/child-labour-has-profound-impact-health-and-wellbeing-children_en.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1) What are the problematic rates of child labor? Is it mostly legal labor, illegal labor, or trafficking? A mixture of all three?
2) How do countries economically benefit from child labor practices around the world?
3) What problems could come with getting rid of child labor in developing nations
4) What direct challenges would there be for governments to enforce laws against child labor in different types of nations?

HELPFUL SOURCES:

Child Labor Policies.
www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/f6883e26-en.pdf?expires=1599037901&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=0DC6FA9102D084FF9A8BAB7B83364282.
https://doi.org/10.1787/f6883e26-en.

Challenges and Perspectives of Child Labor.
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6198592/.
https://doi.org/10.4103/ipj.ipj_105_14.

Forms of Child Labor.
www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/ethiopia.

Current Weakening of Child Labor Laws
https://www.epi.org/publication/child-labor-laws-under-attack/