

Committee: Social, Cultural and Humanitarian Committee (GA3)

Issue: Racism in the face of the expanding viruses

Student Officer: Chrysa Pierakea and Valentina El Kadi

Position: President and Deputy President

Dear delegates,

This study guide aims to facilitate your preparation towards the conference. We do hope that it gives you a good overall representation of the issue, but nevertheless, we encourage you to use it as a stepping stone to further research on the topic and not be limited by it. For any questions regarding the content of the guide or the procedure, feel free to contact your chairpersons at the following email addresses:

Chrysa Pierakea (President): chrysa.pierakea@gmail.com

Valentina El Kadi (Deputy President): valentina.elkadi@gmail.com

We wish you the best for your preparation and can't wait to virtually meet you at the conference!

Sincerely,

The GA3 Student Officers.

INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, humanity has faced various public health crises. A few of the most significant ones that have ever struck the world's society, while severely destabilizing the global population in various aspects are HIV, Ebola, Zika, Chikungunya, Malaria, Sars, and H1N1. Currently, the world is battling one of the most widespread and threatening viruses, namely Covid-19. These outbreaks always had, and still to this day, have severe negative impacts on people's psychological / mental health, emotional well-being and medical state. However, due to these outbreaks, many economies and even individual citizens' financial states have been left in disarray. In many cases, the social gap between communities broadens even more, increasing the already existing social differences. Another thing these pandemics all share is they have highlighted racist beliefs that are still deep-rooted in our modern society. The viruses have been stigmatized by the media and politicians. For

example, Covid-19 is referred to as the “China Virus” and the “Chung Flu” by US President Donald Trump. This stigmatization has tremendous effects on the communities it has been appointed to. The reason for this is that it gives the majority of people an excuse to turn their fear and uncertainty, caused by the ongoing pandemic, into anger and violence towards a specific demographic of people. One major issue is that most of the time, that demographic of people already endure prejudice and racist behaviour due to being a minority.

Our current health crisis is no exception to this phenomenon. All over the world, violent racist attacks against Asian people are taking place and will not stop in the foreseeable future. In addition to that minorities in plenty of countries have fallen ill and died due to the coronavirus at an alarmingly higher rate than the rest of the population. This fact highlights another issue. The inability of minorities to receive adequate healthcare and the lurking inequalities in the public health sector. In conclusion, it is evident that the current crisis that we as a global society are undergoing has brought light to the issue of racism and racial inequalities. It is urgent, especially in times like these, to be able to have fruitful debates that will lead to policies that will change the current status quo. We hope that this type of respectful and beneficial debate will also take place in our committee!

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Racism

1. Prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized.

1a. The belief that different races possess distinct characteristics, abilities, or qualities, especially so as to distinguish them as inferior or superior to one another. (definition by Oxford Dictionary)

Virus

1a. any of a large group of submicroscopic infectious agents that are usually regarded as non living extremely complex molecules, that typically contain a protein coat surrounding an RNA or DNA core of genetic material but no semipermeable membrane, that are capable of growth and multiplication only in living cells, and that cause various important diseases in humans, animals, and plants.

1b. a disease or illness caused by a virus

1c. the causative agent of an infectious disease (definition by Merriam Webster Dictionary)

Pandemic

1. an outbreak of a disease that occurs over a wide geographic area and affects an exceptionally high proportion of the population (definition by Merriam Webster dictionary)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The racist provocations which happen during the Coronavirus crisis are no stranger to us – in fact, we might even have witnessed them on the bus or laughed at jokes about them. However, as this section aims to demonstrate, racist opinions are really posing a threat to people in this pandemic environment.

Coronavirus Hate Crimes

According to the United Nations office of the high commissioner in many locations minority groups are used as scapegoats in accordance with the virus outbreak. Hatred and stigmatization is directed towards every group that is marginalized in that specific region. Roma people. It is reported that Jews, Muslims, Christians, people of Asian origin and also refugees and migrants had to endure racist attacks, both verbal and physical in nature, due to the outbreak. However, it is not only the coronavirus that has sparked a social barrier between communities and ethnicities, other global pandemics in the past have also created this kind of tension, which proves that this phenomenon is recurring and requires a solution.

In order to be able to understand how vicious and unfounded the racist attacks that minorities had to endure are, one must read some real-life examples. The two following are extremely telling: In the United Kingdom, a young Asian man was in a public bathroom in London, when suddenly the rest of the men there started attacking and beating him up, while yelling racial slurs. On another occasion, on a train in the US a man was yelling to a foreigner “I don't want him next to me, tell him to move” and then took a potentially harmful cleaning spray and sprayed him.

Effects of Racism in regard to Healthcare

Most of the time minorities have a harder time accessing healthcare than the rest of the population. During the coronavirus crisis this gap widened. Many countries report that ethnic and racial minorities have been disproportionately affected by covid 19. This means that these people are not only more likely to contract the virus, but also to die from it. In order to be able to examine the situation on a deeper level ,one must search for the factors that put minorities to increased risk.

The first factor is discrimination. In spite of the fact that most of the medical health professionals have fought bravely during the time of the pandemic, some cases of racial discrimination have been documented in the form of unreasonable denial of services. This means that for example a practitioner denied help to a person, because he/or she originated from an Asian country, even if they displayed no symptoms and had not travelled back to their home country recently. Also many people from minority groups are likely to not trust the healthcare system of their country due to historical events, which highlight the deep rooted inequalities in the healthcare systems of many countries, such as the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the African American Male and sterilization without people's permission, .

Another factor is the living situation of these people. They disproportionately work in high risk job fields such as factories, public transportation, cleaning and farms. Jobs that do not only require contact with other workers, but also with the public. They often are not paid sick days and therefore cannot miss work, even if they are sick. Additionally, their living spaces can be more crowded, which makes it more difficult to follow prevention strategies, such as self-isolating. They also are less likely to have health insurance. This means that getting tested and treated for covid-19 in countries that do not offer free healthcare is practically impossible.

In many countries or regions minorities live in places with communal bathrooms and access to water. So if one person gets sick the entire community is at risk. Additionally, people with lower socio-economic status most of the time do not have access to information from digital and non-digital sources, so they also do not possess or they are not even aware of the available means to protect themselves. Even if information is available, it can only be found in the native language or English, so minority groups are less likely to be able to benefit from it.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the government has been sending away plenty of Rohingya refugees who have remained stranded for several weeks at sea. On another occasion, an incident occurred between the Bangladeshi and Malaysian borders, where hundreds more refugees remained stranded between them. Due to these inconsiderate actions, they have received a lot of backlash for using the coronavirus pandemic as a pretext to send refugees away.

Cameroon

Recently in Cameroon, the United States embassy warned all US travelers amidst reports of online, physical and verbal harassment, and vandalization of personal property. Such cases prove that racist views can be detrimental to a country's overall standing and also harm its tourism industry, but also showcase that during a pandemic even tourists might seem as a threat.

People's Republic of China

In the place where the coronavirus originated, Wuhan, the natives have been regularly oppressed with acts of xenophobia and racism, such as rejection from hotels, leaked private information (home addresses and phone numbers, ID numbers) followed by harassing phone calls from unknown people. On a plane flight on January 27th, a flight from Nagoya to Shanghai claimed to have had trouble due to the fact that some travelers refused to board with travelers from Wuhan.

Germany / Central and Western Europe

Many racist attacks have been reported since the beginning of the outbreak. Also, the magazine 'Der Spiegel' had a quite controversial cover that was considered to indirectly pin the blame on China for the coronavirus outbreak and therefore encouraging the marginalization of Asian people. Furthermore, several Chinese people living in Germany have had trouble with doctors since the start of this pandemic, due to doctors denying their visits. For example, in early February, a Chinese woman in Berlin who had not even traveled to China during that period was directly rejected to receive medical treatment by her gynecologist. The gynecologist later claimed that it was because the coronavirus may have bad effects on pregnant women. On another occasion around the same time period, a

Chinese student in a town in Germany was denied an appointment by a general practitioner due to fears of the coronavirus.

Congo (DRC) and Several African Countries

The Ebola virus originated in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and has since then been spread throughout the world, but mostly in other African countries. It has since been labelled as an African virus and even if a vaccine is available, due to previous discrimination in the field of healthcare, a great percentage of the citizen is refusing to get vaccinated. Since the beginning of the Ebola outburst and up to now, people of African origin and the countries themselves have faced discrimination. In general, the African community has faced plenty of discrimination. Black Africans who still live in Africa have also had a lack of people visiting their nations, or people avoiding them in public, fueled by the irrational fear of Ebola. On several occasions, tourists have even avoided going to Africa because they are “afraid of catching Ebola” even if a vaccine is available. This, in turn, has affected the cash flow of the nations, and the lack of incomes.

United States of America

Since the beginning of this pandemic, several attacks against defenseless people of Asian origin have ensued. Either it occurred on the train, the road, the bus, a store or any other public place, it had been happening at staggering rates. Also, people of colour have been reported to die from the virus at a disproportionately higher rate. This is an issue which apart from racism also pinpoints the fact that lower income people tend to receive subpar healthcare, something which has been noted many times before in the US according to studies.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
1965	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)
December 2019	COVID first outbreak in Wuhan, China
January 2020	First racist crimes because of COVID19 are reported
February 2020	COVID reaches Europe
March 2020	On the 11 th , WHO recognizes COVID19 as a pandemic

May 29 th , 2020	GA votes: PRST 43/1 Human rights implications of the COVID-19 pandemic
-----------------------------	--

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

- The General Assembly has recently voted unanimously adopted through silence a resolution with the title PRST 43/1 Human rights implications of the COVID-19 pandemic 1 A/HRC/43/L.42, on 29 May 2020
- The next resolution is about the topic of racism in general, but is really important in order to be able to find solutions for the specific manifestation of racism that we are studying about. This one is the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), adopted in 1965, which delegates will need to keep in mind, as it is the first big international agreement on the topic
- Racial inequalities within and among countries is also a UN sustainable goal, about which one can find many information and statistics on the topic in the UN website.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

While this issue has taken a relatively new turn during Corona times, there are steps taken in order to solve it. Apart from adopting the aforementioned resolutions, the United Nations have been an accurate and verified source of news during the pandemic, something that was of such high importance during this difficult time, where fear helps spread misinformation at an alarmingly higher rate than usual. In addition, the UN has taken local and international action through many of its organisations like WHO (World Health Organisation), ILO (International Labour Organisation) and has managed to help minority groups to some extent. One can also find through the UN webpage reliable statistics on the topic of racial discrimination during the pandemic and successful ways that some member states or groups and organisations within them have dealt with the issue, but also suggestions about the future.

Some of the most successful measures include emergency aid and provision services, data collection and informing minorities about available services and ways to

prevent the spread of covid-19 in their language and in sign language, measures to prevent racial attacks and ways to address socio-economic differences. For example, in Norway, it was reported that minority groups were 10 times more affected by the virus than the rest of the population. This is why Somali doctors created YouTube videos in their language in order to raise awareness on the issue and share guidance on the hygienic measures that must be taken, the symptoms of COVID19 and what one must do if one has them. In Greece the measures taken in order to stop the spread of the virus included providing potable drinking water to Roma communities and informing them in an adequate way about the topic. In Lebanon a minority group supports 700 families with food and hygiene products in order to protect them during the pandemic. A hotline that provides information on the issue has also been created. And these are only some examples of the excellent work that not only governments, but also groups of everyday people and organisations, have done to help the ones that are more at risk.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

No matter how volunteering and personal contributions have helped alleviate the problem, it is apparent that the issue cannot be solved without a political response on a national and international level. It is evident that each Member State should implement a response against racism in the face of the pandemic, that is tailored to the needs of its minority groups that are in danger. This doesn't change the fact that some policies could and should be implemented on an international level, as this pandemic crisis knows no limitation regarding countries.

First of all, a system of gathering and publishing data about covid-19 cases and deaths that includes statistics like age, sex, race, ethnic origin etc. should be established. Then it will become easier to create policies that cover the needs of each community and are evidence based. Of course, any such intervention should comply with the privacy standards many Member States abide by (e.g. GDPR in Europe), remain statistical in purpose and not violate privacy and personal data.

Member States should also make sure that marginalized and thus vulnerable members of the society are reached as far as both information and access to healthcare is concerned. This could happen through distribution of information in each minorities native language and in regions where internet access is limited the local or religious leaders of each community should be contacted and informed on preventative measures against the spread of the pandemic, in order for them to be able to pass that knowledge to the rest of the

community. Emergency financial aid for minority groups that work informal jobs and the ability to receive healthcare even without insurance or social security number are also vital measures.

A very important step is that governments should also ensure that no one is denied healthcare or stigmatized on racist grounds and provide transparent justice mechanisms and legal and social assistance to victims of discrimination. Additionally, the international community should make sure that emergency declarations due to the virus are not used to target minority groups. Last but not least the promotion of inclusive dialogue and the respect of human dignity by the media, by politicians, by religious leaders, by NGOs and generally by the international community, especially via the educational system, will be very fruitful in the long run.

However, the delegates reading this study guide should not be discouraged from researching more or coming up with their own solutions to these issues! These are only some of the measures that could be taken, but we are certain that the creativity and the preparation of our delegates will help them come up with many more, therefore we cannot wait for this conference to commence!

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND FURTHER READINGS

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Health Equity Considerations and Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups, 2020, available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html>.

“COVID-19 and Minority Rights.” OHCHR, www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Minorities/Pages/COVID19-and-minority-rights.aspx. (The

resources on this website (most in pdf form) are highly recommended for further preparation!)

Economic Policy Institute, Black workers face two of the most lethal preexisting conditions for coronavirus—racism and economic inequality [online]. 2020. Available from URL: <https://www.epi.org/publication/black-workers-covid>.

Institute of Medicine, *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2003, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17226/10260>.

Leonard, E. et al., Structural Racism, Social Risk Factors, and Covid-19 — A Dangerous Convergence for Black Americans, *N Engl J Med* 2020; 383:e77, 2020, available at: <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2023616>.

‘Pandemic’, Merriam Webster Online Dictionary, available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/virus>.

‘Racism’, Oxford Online Dictionary, available at: <https://www.lexico.com/definition/racism>.

Roberta K. Timothy Assistant Professor. “Coronavirus Is Not the Great Equalizer - Race Matters.” *The Conversation*, 12 Aug. 2020, www.theconversation.com/coronavirus-is-not-the-great-equalizer-race-matters-133867.

“UN Adopts Resolution of Global Solidarity on COVID-19.” Anadolu Ajansi, available at: www.aa.com.tr/en/latest-on-coronavirus-outbreak/un-adopts-resolution-of-global-solidarity-on-covid-19/1790464#.

‘Virus’, Merriam Webster Online Dictionary, available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/virus>.

Wallis, C., Why Racism, Not Race, Is a Risk Factor for Dying of COVID-19, 2020, available at: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-racism-not-race-is-a-risk-factor-for-dying-of-covid-19/>.

“What Is the UN Doing to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination? - Ask DAG!” United Nations, *United Nations*, available at: ask.un.org/faq/306811.