SciMUNC XVII

Protection of Cultural Property & Natural Resources

BACKGROUND GUIDE

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the African Union Committee at SCIMUNC XVII! My name is Aniqa Amran, I'm a senior here at Bronx Science and I'm excited to serve as your chair this year! I'm so glad that you're all attending this year, and I wish you the best of luck in your delegation positions. I'm looking forward to hearing all of your ideas and solutions as we work together to address the challenges facing the African Continent. In my free time, I love music, reading, and psychology. I'm a person who loves to meet new people and learn new things so feel comfortable reaching out to me for any reason. I'm confident that we can have a productive and successful conference together and I look forward to getting to know you better on the day of the conference. Thank you!

I am Adrita Risha, a junior here at Bronx Science and I will be your vice chair! This is my first time chairing, so please bear with me! We have made sure to prepare an engaging conference for all of you. Model UN is all about creating and sharing new ideas so remember that you are not limited to just one approach on any problem. I cannot wait to hear what you guys will bring to the conference and I hope it will lead to a very productive discussion! Thanks!

If you have any additional questions or are sending in your position papers, please email us at amrana@bxscience.edu for Aniqa your chair and/or rishaa@bxscience.edu for Adrita your vice chair!

Sincerely,
Aniqa Amran and Adrita Risha

Committee Description

African Union

The African Union (AU) holds significant importance, embodying the continent's unity commitment with a history rooted in the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, ultimately evolving into the AU in 2001. This transformation has empowered the AU as a formidable influence that fosters cooperation, peace, and solidarity among Africa's nations, transcending borders. At its highest level, the African Union's main body, the Assembly, brings together heads of state and government from member countries. This annual meeting shows the commitment to discuss and shape transformative policies, aiming for a prosperous and harmonious Africa.

The Executive Council plays a crucial role in implementing the AU's vision. Consisting of foreign affairs ministers from member states, it carries out the decisions made by the Assembly and leads the implementation of important strategies. Technical committees, focused on areas like peace and security, trade and industry, and education, work together to promote a comprehensive approach to progress. These committees, composed of experts and representatives from member states, collaborate cohesively to champion a holistic approach to advancement. A significant achievement within the African Union is the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. This organization promotes and protects human rights and fundamental freedoms. Upholding the principles of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Commission advances justice and inclusivity in the continent. For instance, it has played a pivotal role in advocating for fair legal proceedings in cases involving marginalized communities and has facilitated educational campaigns to raise awareness about fundamental rights among vulnerable populations.

Today's African Union Model UN Committee will focus on safeguarding Africa's cultural heritage and valuable resources. They will address challenges in protecting cultural artifacts, historical sites, and natural resources from armed conflicts, looting, and illicit trade. Delegates will explore the interplay between preserving cultural property and safeguarding vital

resources like minerals, biodiversity, and ecosystems, crucial for Africa's identity and sustainable development. Discussions on policies and cooperation frameworks will aim to prevent exploitation and ensure equitable access to Africa's resources. Attention will be given to countries with a history of outsourcing resources from Africa, and mechanisms to address resource exploitation and promote fair trade practices will be explored.

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Background Information

The African continent, with its rich and diverse civilizations and traditions spanning millennia, holds a profound cultural heritage and valuable resources deserving of protection and preservation. Yet, this invaluable heritage and the continent's natural wealth have faced formidable challenges throughout history, confronting armed conflicts, looting, and the illicit trade of cultural artifacts and natural resources.

In response to these challenges, the African Union (AU) has taken on a significant role in safeguarding and promoting the protection of both cultural property and valuable resources across the continent. From its inception, the AU recognized the significance of preserving not only the continent's diverse cultural heritage but also its abundant natural resources as pillars of identity, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

The history of resource exploitation and outsourcing in Africa has been intertwined with the looting and plundering of cultural artifacts during the colonial era, spanning the late 19th to mid-20th centuries.

European powers systematically exploited and pillaged not only cultural treasures but also valuable natural resources, leading to significant economic disparities that persist to this day. The extraction and export of Africa's minerals, biodiversity, and other resources have been a contentious issue, with concerns about fair trade practices, equitable access, and sustainable utilization.

The existing struggles of safeguarding cultural property and natural resources on the continent have been intensified by armed conflicts. These conflicts have yielded profound consequences, wherein cultural sites and artifacts have suffered destruction and looting, while natural resources have been exploited to fund and prolong the conflicts. This unfortunate situation has given rise to thriving illicit trade in both cultural property and natural resources, propelled by international demand and economic motivations. Consequently, this has dealt a dual blow to Africa's heritage and economic growth. For instance, the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which started in the late 1990s and continued for years, stands as a stark example. The war resulted in the widespread looting of

valuable minerals such as coltan, gold, and diamonds. These resources were exploited to finance the various armed groups involved in the conflict. As a consequence, not only were the cultural heritage and natural resources of the country devastated, but the conflict's aftermath also perpetuated instability and hindered the country's development prospects. This demonstrates the interconnectedness of armed conflict, resource exploitation, and their detrimental impact on Africa's heritage and growth.

Causes of Destruction of Cultural Property

The escalation of cultural property destruction in African nations is a multifaceted challenge driven by a complex interplay of factors, as supported by various statistics and examples. These factors have had a profound impact on the socio-economic landscape of the continent, and their implications for sustainable development are significant. A comprehensive understanding of these underlying causes is imperative for formulating effective strategies to mitigate cultural property loss and preserve historical heritage.

The COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on economies globally, including those in Africa. Travel restrictions and business closures resulted in a dramatic decline in tourism. A report from the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) revealed that international tourist arrivals in Africa dropped by 75% in 2020 compared to the previous year, leading to a loss of over $60 billion in revenue. As a result, cultural heritage sites suffered a 70% reduction in on-site visits, exacerbating economic challenges.

This economic strain heightened the vulnerability of African nations to cultural artifact looting and the destruction of heritage sites. An illustrative example is the Konso Cultural Landscape in South Ethiopia. Due to pandemic-induced lockdowns, vital maintenance rituals responsible for water management were interrupted. Reduced security created an opportunity for locals to remove stones from the site for building, disrupting its historical and agricultural significance.

Moreover, economic pressures drove the illegal looting of cultural artifacts.

Djenné-Djenno, a World Heritage Site in Mali, experienced rampant illicit looting during the pandemic, with the artifacts often ending up on the dark web. This phenomenon reflects the desperation for income among affected communities.

Beyond the pandemic, Africa's history of conflicts has also significantly contributed to cultural property destruction. The Tigray War serves as a stark example. Lasting from 2020 to 2022, this conflict resulted in extensive damage to infrastructure, including cultural sites. The war cost Ethiopia nearly 23 million dollars, as reported by the World Bank.

Human rights violations and cultural destruction were intertwined in this conflict. The Al-Nejashi mosque, a symbol of Tigrayan faith, was bombed and destroyed, with holy manuscripts and artifacts looted. The destruction extended to over 30 churches and monasteries. These events underscore how conflicts continue to perpetrate human rights violations through the destruction of cultural property.

The complexities of these challenges necessitate nuanced solutions. Delegates must craft strategies that consider the varying economic circumstances of African Union member states and the far-reaching effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the need for international frameworks to address repatriation and cultural preservation is evident. These frameworks should emphasize not only economic incentives but also the ethical and historical imperatives of safeguarding cultural heritage for present and future generations.

In conclusion, the destruction of cultural property in Africa has been exacerbated by a confluence of factors, as evident from the intricate interplay between historical conflicts, economic pressures, and global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These issues demand proactive strategies that prioritize preservation, ethical responsibility, and international collaboration to ensure the protection of Africa's rich cultural heritage.

Photos of Al-Nejashi Mosque in Tigray after destruction by Ethiopian and Eritrean troops.

At the crux of the heightened depletion and exploitation of Africa's resources lies a historical narrative of exploitation intertwined with colonialism. The colonial era witnessed European powers systematically extracting the continent's valuable resources, such as minerals, timber, and agricultural products, to fuel their own economic advancement. This exploitative undertone, often at the expense of long-term resource sustainability and the equitable sharing of benefits, has left a legacy of resource inequality that continues to reverberate in Africa's developmental journey.

Furthermore, the resounding global demand for Africa's copious resources has emerged as a pivotal driving force behind their overexploitation. Commodities like minerals, timber, and agricultural products have ascended to coveted positions within the international market, prompting African nations to prioritize resource extraction as a conduit for generating revenue and propelling economic growth. However, this demand-centric pursuit has at times overlooked the critical principle of sustainable resource management, resulting in the depletion of resources and environmental degradation.

Concurrently, the presence of feeble governance structures and the pervasive specter of corruption in specific African nations, including countries like Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Guinea, compound the challenge of resource depletion. Insufficient regulatory frameworks and opacity in transactions foster an environment conducive to unchecked extraction and unsustainable practices. This scenario often disproportionately benefits a select group, leaving the broader population exposed to the adverse consequences of resource exploitation.

An often-overlooked facet is the absence of meaningful engagement and

equitable benefit-sharing with local communities, further contributing to resource depletion. Decisions regarding resource extraction frequently unfold without comprehensive involvement from the communities reliant on these resources for their livelihoods. This gap, unfortunately, culminates in ecological decline, displacement, and the marginalization of local populations.

The rapid pace of infrastructure development and urbanization magnifies the demand for resources. According to a report by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), Africa's urban population is projected to double by 2035, necessitating substantial resource inputs for construction and development. The expansion of urban centers and industries escalates the requirement for raw materials, energy, and construction components, amplifying the pressure on existing resources. Additionally, the cumulative effects of climate change and environmental degradation heighten these challenges, exposing crucial resources like water, arable land, and biodiversity to threats like drought, desertification, deforestation, and loss of biodiversity.

Foreign investment and land appropriation, often driven by extensive agricultural, mining, or infrastructural ventures, further accentuate resource exploitation. These endeavors often prioritize short-term financial gains at the expense of sustainable, long-term resource management and the needs of local communities. For instance, the large-scale agricultural projects in countries like Ethiopia and Sudan have been associated with land grabbing, leading to the displacement of indigenous populations and exacerbating tensions between communities and outside investors. The outcome frequently encompasses land degradation, resource depletion, and the worsening of conflicts between various stakeholders.

Simultaneously, population growth and rural-to-urban migration exacerbate the predicament. Concentrated urban populations lead to an increase in the demand for housing, energy, and consumer goods, further intensifying resource consumption. Furthermore, limited access to advanced technology and scientific insights for sustainable resource management impede

endeavors to ensure responsible resource extraction and utilization.

Lastly, Africa's positioning within global supply chains and market dynamics perpetuates resource exploitation. Market fluctuations and market demands can influence the rate and extent of resource extraction, occasionally jeopardizing long-term sustainability in favor of immediate economic gains.

Effectively mitigating the surge in resource depletion and exploitation in Africa necessitates comprehensive strategies. These strategies should encompass regulatory reforms advocating transparent and accountable governance, community participation to nurture ownership and sustainability, the adoption of sustainable developmental paradigms that harmonize economic growth with ecological preservation, the transfer of technology and skill development to enhance resource management acumen, and international collaboration to propagate equitable trade practices and conscientious resource consumption.

By delving into the roots of resource depletion, African nations can chart a course towards an equitable and sustainable future. A future envisioned to harness resource wealth for the collective well-being of society, while simultaneously conserving the environment and ensuring the endurance of these invaluable resources for current and forthcoming generations. The variety of resources present in African Union countries encompass a spectrum of minerals such as gold, diamonds, and platinum; agricultural produce like cocoa, coffee, and cotton; and burgeoning renewable resources like solar energy and wind power, all underscoring the importance of responsible resource management for Africa's progress.

Past Actions

While renowned for its diplomatic and political endeavors, the United Nations has extended its purview to encompass the preservation of global culture. This endeavor has been channeled through various agencies and conventions such as UNESCO, the Geneva Conventions, the Hague Convention, and the World Heritage Convention. However, the efficacy of these efforts has varied across regions. Notably,

African countries have encountered challenges in upholding the regulations set by past international agreements, thereby raising concerns over the protection of their cultural property.

UNESCO: Centrality of Cultural Preservation

A cornerstone among specialized UN agencies is UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Established in 1946, UNESCO has fostered cooperation among sovereign states in the realm of social and cultural practices. Initially formed to reconstruct educational and cultural institutions damaged during World War II, UNESCO now boasts 194 member states and 12 associate members, with 54 hailing from Africa. Notable achievements encompass the World Heritage Convention (1972) and the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003). Yet, despite UNESCO's creation of 1,157 World Heritage Sites worldwide, merely 13% of these sites are in Africa, while Europe, a comparably smaller continent, claims 36%. Such disparities engender the perception that African cultural property lacks commensurate recognition and protection.

Geneva Conventions: Artifacts Amidst Conflict

The Geneva Conventions, a suite of agreements delineating international humanitarian laws in times of armed conflict, address the protection of cultural property amid adversity. These agreements, which originated between 1864 and 1949 in Geneva, Switzerland, stipulate that intentional damage to cultural property by invading forces is prohibited. Unfortunately, Africa's landscape is rife with conflict and turmoil, compounded by challenges such as poor governance, debt, corruption, and ethnic divisions. These factors have led to deviations from treaty commitments, resulting in cultural destruction unbridled by the provisions of the Geneva Conventions.

Hague Convention: Preserving Shared Heritage

The Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954), known as the Hague Convention, stands as a series of treaties safeguarding cultural property worldwide, emphasizing its status as a shared human

heritage. Before this convention, cultural property lacked a precise definition. This agreement establishes guidelines for protecting cultural property, encompassing measures against emergencies like natural disasters, fires, theft, and structural collapses. Special Protection designations can be granted to cultural property of exceptional importance. Notably, breaching this convention can be considered a war crime. However, Africa's challenges in governance and conflict mitigation sometimes hinder adherence.

World Heritage Convention: Balancing Nature and Culture

Under UNESCO's purview, the World Heritage Convention (1972) defines criteria for designating World Heritage Sites and manages the allocation of the World Heritage Fund. Though conceived to harmonize nature and cultural preservation, its application in Africa has been limited due to the intricate application process and perceived Eurocentrism. African Union (AU) countries often lack the requisite expertise and resources for the elaborate application, prompting reduced interest in cultural property preservation. Furthermore, concerns arise about the Convention's compatibility with the diverse African cultural landscape.

Other Natural Resource Depletion Solutions and Agreements

Apart from cultural property, natural resources in Africa face depletion due to unsustainable practices. Solutions and agreements are emerging, such as the African Mining Vision (AMV) which seeks to transform mineral wealth into sustainable development. Additionally, the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100) aims to restore 100 million hectares of degraded land. Collaboration through regional frameworks and international partnerships is crucial to addressing natural resource challenges.

Safeguarding Cultural Heritage and Natural Resources in the Mali Crisis

Beginning in 2012, the Mali War consisted of a series of armed conflicts, political instability, and the proliferation of extremism, primarily in the northern region. This crisis inflicted profound damage on Mali's cultural heritage and natural resources, which exacerbated the challenges faced by the country in its pursuit of sustainable development. The northern region of Mali, with its illustrious UNESCO World Heritage sites of Timbuktu and Djenné, boasted rich cultural heritage and historical significance. The turmoil caused during the crisis rendered these sites vulnerable to looting, destruction, and trafficking. Armed groups specifically targeted cultural artifacts and manuscripts as a means to finance their operations through the illicit trade of antiquities. This unscrupulous activity not only jeopardized Mali's unique cultural identity but also posed significant threats to the broader cultural heritage of Africa.

Research conducted by INTERPOL revealed that the looting and trafficking of cultural artifacts during the crisis led to a vast illegal market in Mali's historical treasures, with a significant portion being smuggled across borders. The loss of such invaluable artifacts not only deprived Mali of its historical legacy but also fueled transnational criminal networks.

Mali's extensive endowment of natural resources, encompassing minerals and biodiversity, confronted considerable challenges throughout the crisis. The allure of the region's abundant mineral wealth, particularly gold, drew unregulated extraction, resulting in severe environmental degradation and disputes over resource ownership. The intensification of illicit mineral extraction led to heightened levels of mercury contamination and extensive soil degradation, culminating in long-term ecological repercussions. According to data from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the illegal extraction of gold in Mali contributed significantly to deforestation and land degradation, as well as emitting substantial greenhouse gasses. Moreover, disputes over mining rights and control fueled conflicts, further impeding the nation's stability and potential for sustainable development.

Mali, in collaboration with UNESCO and INTERPOL, launched initiatives to combat the illicit trafficking of cultural artifacts. These efforts included improved documentation and registration of cultural property, as well as increased training for law enforcement personnel to recognize and interdict stolen artifacts. Mali sought international support to develop and implement regulations for responsible resource extraction. By collaborating with organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Mali aimed to ensure that mineral extraction adhered to environmentally sustainable practices and contributed to local economic development. Recognizing the vulnerabilities of local communities to exploitation, Mali implemented programs that aimed to diversify livelihoods and reduce dependency on illicit activities. These programs included vocational training, microfinance initiatives, and support for agricultural development.

The Benin Bronzes and Repatriation of Stolen Artifacts

The Benin Bronzes hold a unique record of the Kingdom of Benin, present-day Nigeria, comprising a remarkable collection of over 5,000 bronze and metal sculptures exemplifying the intricate art of brass casting from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. Regrettably, approximately 4,000 of these sculptures were pilfered, with only a few having been repatriated. This case study delves into the complexities of cultural property theft, the display of cultural artifacts in non-national museums, and their profound implications on cultural heritage protection.

During the late 19th century, British military expeditions, termed the Punitive Expedition or Benin Expedition, resulted in the systematic looting of thousands of artifacts integral to Benin's cultural heritage. This extensive appropriation included the prized Benin Bronzes, which were subsequently sold by British art merchants such as J.C. Stevens and William Downing Webster. Presently, the British Museum holds around 900 Benin Bronzes. While these sculptures may be ornamental exhibits within the British Museum, they possess profound cultural significance to the indigenous people of the Kingdom of Benin. These sculptures were once widespread in Benin City, including busts of the Oba

(king) and Eoba (Oba's mother), many of which were stolen. The Bronzes served diverse purposes, from ritualistic use to honoring ancestors, and offered insights into social hierarchies, dynastic history, and the Kingdom's relationships with other entities. These artworks also offer a window into the specialized guild of artisans who worked for the Oba, contributing to the cultural and historical richness of the Kingdom. They acted as conduits for conveying the Kingdom's identity and social structure, including depictions of court ceremonies, dynastic narratives, and royal regalia. Post-looting, British collectors and looters swiftly initiated trade, facilitating the dispersal of these artifacts to nations like Germany, some of which have subsequently returned certain Benin Bronzes. The "Digital Benin" online database, a repository of information on these sculptures worldwide, has emerged, shedding light on their dispersal and spotlighting the institutions harboring them. Notably, this initiative has catalyzed collaboration, prompting the British Museum to lend Benin Bronzes to the Edo Museum of West African Art.

Restitution negotiations between Nigeria and the British Museum remain intricate, leaving the prospect of recovery uncertain. Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Information and Culture (FMIC) and the Benin Royal Palace have repeatedly urged the return of these artifacts, a plea echoed by Oba Ewuare II. The British Museum, however, counters that by exhibiting these artifacts, they serve as cultural emissaries for the past kingdom, and that returning them to Nigeria – a separate sovereign state – would not necessarily restore them to their original context. Advocates, conversely, underscore the significance of repatriation, both as a means of redressing colonial-era injustice and as a step toward cultural heritage preservation. Notably, Germany has returned 20 Benin Bronzes to Nigeria and has agreed to repatriate an additional thousand.

Questions to Consider

1. How can the African Union foster international cooperation to protect and repatriate cultural/historical artifacts and sites that were looted or taken away during colonial periods and conflicts?

2. What measures can be put in place to ensure the preservation and promotion of Africa's cultural heritage while also supporting

sustainable tourism and economic development?

3. How can the African Union effectively collaborate with UNESCO and other international organizations to create a comprehensive framework for safeguarding Africa's cultural heritage and resources?

4. What steps can be taken to enhance the capacity of African countries to prevent and address illegal trafficking of cultural artifacts and resources?

5. What policies and strategies can be implemented to prevent armed conflicts and civil unrest that may pose a threat to both cultural artifacts and natural resources in Africa?

6. What mechanisms can be established to ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the exploitation of natural resources among local communities, governments, and external investors (companies, organizations, etc)?

7. How can the African Union address the issue of multinational corporations extracting valuable minerals from Africa without

providing adequate benefits to the local communities and economies?

8. How can the African Union promote and incentivize sustainable practices in resource extraction, such as responsible mining and environmentally friendly methods?

9. What legal frameworks and international agreements can be established to ensure the restitution of cultural artifacts and resources taken from Africa to their countries of origin?

Bloc Positions

Algeria

Angola

Burkina Faso

Côte D'Ivoire

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Egypt

Ethiopia

Ghana

Kenya

Morocco

Mali

Nigeria

Rwanda

Senegal

South Africa

Sudan

Tanzania

Uganda

Zimbabwe

Belgium

China

France

Germany

India

Italy

Japan

Netherlands

Russia

Saudi Arabia

South Korea

Spain

United Arab Emirates (UAE)

United Kingdom (UK)

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