UNHRC

STUDY GUIDE

AI and human rights violations

Examine the impact of AI on human rights, including surveillance, privacy, and freedom of expression

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1. Letter from the chairs:

Hello! I am Júlia Cabré, one of the chairs for the United Nations Human Rights Council. I am a second year student of International Relations at Blanquerna University and the vocal of social media of URL's United Nations Youth Association. I started participating in MUNs while I was in school and have never stopped since, since debating is truly a passion of mine and I sincerely hope that you enjoy the debate as much as we enjoyed preparing it. If you have any doubts feel free to contact me at jcabresurroca@gmail.com.

Hey! I am Matilda Herrero, a first-year IB Diploma student at St Peter's. I'm one of the co-chairs for the UNHRC. I have been participating in the CICAE debate league and MUNs for the past few years, which I really enjoy, and I can assure you that you will do, too.

Hello! I am Margherita Ottier, also one of the co-chairs of the United Nations Human Rights Council. I am in my first year of the IB diploma program at St. Peter's School in Barcelona. I started MUN two years ago and I really enjoy debating on real-world problems, I hope you do, too.

It is important to note that a Model United Nations is not like other kinds of debates, it is strictly a simulation of real United Nations committees which is why there are strict protocols and procedures that must be followed. We would strongly recommend you to study them thoroughly, as well as to respect the dress code.

We would also strongly recommend you to do a lot of research not only on the position of the country that you will represent, but also on the position of other delegations in the committee before the debate starts, in order to have a good idea of who your allies are and what their propositions are. For it to be easier during the debate, we strongly suggest having all this information written down either by hand or printed to ensure that it is not lost and always available to you.

We are very excited to meet you, sincerely

2. Introduction to the committee:

The Human Rights Council is an intergovernmental organisation within the United Nations. It comprises a total of 47 states (12 African States, 13 Asia-Pacific States, 8 Latin American and Caribbean States, 7 Western European and other States, and finally 6 Eastern European States), which are elected by a majority of the 193 members of the UN General Assembly. Each member serves a three year term, and there are elections each year to substitute ⅓ of the countries. If a state systematically violates human rights, the General Assembly holds the power to suspend its membership.

The HRC was established in 2006, and it substituted the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. Its main goals are to promote and defend Human Rights all around the globe, and to monitor situations in which there is a possible violation of Human Rights. One of its main tasks is responding to human rights violations; they do this by putting out official statements, recommendations and resolutions (that are not legally binding), backed by investigation, fact-finding missions, commissions of inquiry (which are special bodies established to investigate, inquire and report on certain topics) and other special procedures such as appointing experts to look into the matter at hand and report back to the council.

In order for the council to work correctly, it has different mechanisms and entities, these include:

- Advisory committee: this entity serves as the council's own think tank, researching and putting together articles on different human rights violations that serve to help members come to a decision as well as to inform the public.

- Universal Periodic Review (UPR): this is a mechanism led by the states in which they assess the human rights situations of all United Nations member states.

- Special Procedures: these are groups (which do not work for the United Nations), that speak on human rights violations such as for example, human trafficking, or the war in Ukraine.

- Complaint procedure: it is a mechanism that allows individuals to bring up human rights violations to the Human Rights Council.

The UNHRC is mandated by the UN General Assembly, based on the Charter of the UN, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and International Human Rights Law and Treaties. The UNHRC is mandated with the following responsibilities:

- Promotion and protection of all human rights for all.

- Recommendation for UN bodies to improve the promotion and protection of all human rights.

- Promote and protect the right to development.

- Provide technical assistance to States for human rights activities.

- Coordinate UN human rights education and public information programmes.

- Work actively to remove obstacles to the realisation of human rights and to prevent the continuation of human rights violations.

- Engagement in dialogue with governments in order to secure respect for all human rights.

- Enhancing international cooperation for the promotion and protection of all human rights.

- Coordinate human rights promotion and protection activities throughout the United Nations system.

- Rationalise, adapt, strengthen and streamline the UN human rights machinery.

Therefore, through this debate, the different delegations will have to work together to put out a resolution that addresses the possible Human Rights violations that might take place using AI, keeping in mind the committee's limitations, the polarisation between the member states, and a possible lack of financial and personnel resources.

3. Introduction to the topic:

The topic for this debate is "AI and Human Rights Violations", so the main goal of the committee is to analyse the impact that artificial intelligence has on human rights, and to reach a consensus on how to regulate it.

Artificial intelligence is a term used to refer to capabilities that computers or computer controlled robots have to perform tasks that have been associated with sentient intelligent beings.

Artificial Intelligence has evolved to the point where it could cause an actual threat to human rights and the well being of people, especially in conflict areas. Nowadays, everything can be automated. Through technology, humans have managed to develop fields like medicine or education, which have brought wonderful things to mankind, but we also have used and developed this technology with darker intentions, such as more "conventional" issues like deep fakes, to automated hacking tools, automated artillery, identity theft and discrimination. During this debate, the different delegations will have to take into account how artificial intelligence can be developed to harm and threaten human's safety and human rights, how to apply it properly, and defend their country's position on the topic.

The history and development of AI is clearly marked by dates and inventions. Artificial Intelligence appeared in 1950 when Alan Turing (also known as the man who cracked the nazi code), published his book "Computer machinery and intelligence" out of which came the "Turing test", a tool used by experts in the field to be able to measure the intelligence of

computers. However, the term Artificial Intelligence only came to light in 1955 when IT expert John Mcarthy (who won the Turing prize in 1971) gave a workshop at Dartmouth University on artificial intelligence, with it being the first time recorded in history of the term being used.

The time period between 1957 and 1979 is considered to be the maturation period of artificial intelligence, in which we can see the appearance (between many others) of the first industrial robot in 1961, New Jersey, or the first chatterbot called ELIZA in 1966 which used natural language processing to be able to hold conversations with humans. In 1979, the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AAAI) was founded.

Between 1980 and 1987, the "AI Boom" took place. This period of time was marked by a growing interest in the development of artificial intelligence, which led to more public funds being diverted to the research of AI (it's important to take into account the cold war context). To set a positive start to the period, in 1980 the first AAAI conference was held in Stanford, and XCON, the first expert system, designed to pick components based on the needs of customers came into the market, and other creations such as the first autonomous driving car was created in Munich, 1986.

From 1987 to 1993 the "AI Winter" took place, which was a stage in AI development marked by its decrease in funding and public interest, due to artificial intelligence being very expensive and slow to develop. However, it is important to note that research on the field did not stop, it was merely slowed and reduced.

From 1993 to 2011 there took place what is known as the "AI Agents", in which there was a surge of interest in artificial intelligence, which brought a surge of progress. During this time we saw huge advances such as the NASA landing of the two rovers Spirit and Opportunity on Mars, or the release of Siri, the roomba and the xbox 360 kinect.

Finally, from 2012 to nowadays, we are living the Artificial General Intelligence, in which we are seeing a growing popularity in deep learning and big data. A very important and relevant point that took place during this time is that in 2015, over 3000 signatories from different technological companies around the world (between them Elon Musk and Stephen Hawking) signed an open letter to governments around the world banning the development and use of automated weapons.

4. Current situation:

AI has become a possible threat to human rights (HR) in many ways. When thinking about this, we must take a broader approach to human rights. When it comes to human rights violations we usually think about human rights in war contexts, displacements or natural disasters. But there are many more ways in which human rights have to be protected. Artificial intelligence transcends the previously set boundaries and poses new challenges to preserving human rights. Through the use of AI, some rights are more prone to being violated than others. Under these fall especially:

1. Right to Equality.

2. Freedom from discrimination.

3. Right to life, liberty and personal security.

4. Freedom from slavery.

5. Freedom from torture and degrading treatment.

Furthermore, AI may be abused or become a possible threat especially in the following areas:

- **Privacy:**

    Privacy is being threatened daily. One of the many reasons it does so is through the data collection that many big and small technological companies use. These companies use artificial intelligence to be able to have a clear view of their customers and target audience, as well as for targeted advertisements. However, there have been instances where the database of these companies has been hacked, and the personal information of their clients has been stolen and published, which directly affects the right to privacy. To solve this, strong data legislation must be put in place, ensuring that the correct security measures are implemented in all businesses who possess this kind of information. Some examples of the biggest data breaches recorded to this date are:

    - Linkedin data breach (2021): the private information of 700 million users including full names, email addresses, phone numbers, and other personal information was posted for sale on the dark web.

    - Facebook data breach (2019): where all the information that 533 million users had used to create the facebook account or shared on the platform was available on the dark web.

    - Twitter data breach (2018): in what seemed like a glitch in the system, the passwords of 330 million users were made available to the internal network of the app (making the passwords accessible to any and all twitter employees with access to the app).

- **Discrimination:**

    Some artificial intelligence systems are coded in a way that algorithmic discrimination takes place. Algorithmic discrimination is when AI uses your personal information such as race, gender or sexual orientation, treating users in an unequal manner. We have seen this in cases such as mortgage lending (specially in the United States), where lenders using AI may discriminate towards possible clients, or in employment opportunities, where in some cases AI filters curriculums, specially according to gender, like we saw on the amazon algorithm controversy.

In order for this not to happen, every automated system should be tested to ensure that it is designed to work equitably.

Another example were AI is used to actively discriminate a specific group of peoples is the ongoing Uyghur genocide in China. The Chinese government has been abusing artificial intelligence and facial recognition to surveil and control this muslim ethnic minority in order to detain them and retain them in so called 'reeducation camps'. This treatment of the Uyghur people is fueled by big western tech companies, and it is claimed to be the new mass surveillance system for the world. China however, denies the accusations.

- **Exploitation of workers:**

AI has been presented as a replacement for many workers, and while in many cases that may be true, the truth is that artificial intelligence does not work without human labour behind it. There have even been instances where companies have hired workers to impersonate artificial intelligence chatbots to seem more technologically developed.

To do this work, big silicon valley companies resort to outsourcing to countries such as India, Uganda or Kenya, where laws regulating workers rights generally favour big international enterprises. Through this outsourcing, the workers hired work for salaries of under 2 dollars per hour doing long shifts in small uncared offices. There are mainly two fields of work in this area.

The first and most known one is being a content moderator, which forces people to stare at a screen, reportedly having to go through up to 600 videos every hour and deciding if these videos are apt for public consumption. This job, other than being extremely underpaid in most cases, is known to cause mental issues to the workers, as they are exposed to pure unfiltered internet, and the things they see can be very traumatic.

The second, but more unknown position in this field are data labelers. Data labelers do as their title suggests, they analyse and label data. This data is later on used to train and improve what is called the "learning models" of the algorithm. These workers work under the same conditions or even worse as content moderators. Content moderation is something that people can do from home, and many choose to do it in the west as a part time job, but data labeler positions are in their vast majority outsourced to the countries mentioned before.

The other side of the coin is that because of AI and the automation of different human processes, many workers have lost their jobs. This is a direct threat to the well being of the population and to the poverty index of each country, since due to the use of AI being cheaper than manual labour, workers are being substituted for machines, and whole fields of work are being eradicated, leaving many persons out of work.

However, artificial intelligence can also be a powerful tool to protect and enhance human rights, for instance, AI can be used to offer platforms and lines of communication to activists to spread awareness to certain topics, like for instance, with the Me Too movement or the All Lives Matter movement in the United States.

Artificial Intelligence is also an extremely useful tool in education, as it can help provide more adaptability in the education system to student's special needs, it provides support and help to educators so they can reach their students in a better and more fruitful way. And through AI and technology, the work of spreading education to communities in need is facilitated.

There is the general fear that artificial intelligence will prove to be a damaging tool to democracy, however, we must take into account that AI as a concept is still being developed, and there is still time to modify it in a way where it strengthens democracy and freedom. A way to do this, which we have already seen in countries like Kenya, Egypt or Iceland, where they used artificial intelligence to do mass surveys in their population in order to further include citizen's participation in policy making in a non-traditional way (like voting).

5. Bloc positions:

There are no clear bloc positions on AI, as it is a relatively new topic, and concerns about AI being used to disrespect human rights is a recently new topic of debate.

However, it is clear that the European Union (and therefore its member states) has been the organisation that has worked on AI regulation more extensively. They proposed and implemented the first ever Artificial Intelligence Act in April 2021.

The United Kingdom, although no longer part of the EU, has also implemented new regulatory AI policies.

China has also started implementing AI regulations, the last one being implemented on the 15th of August 2023. It is important to note that artificial intelligence has been a central tool used in the government's new mass surveillance policies.

The United States is the leading country in artificial intelligence research and development (Silicon Valley), however, they still have not implemented any AI regulations. It is important to understand this taking into account the big importance that private companies and capitalism have in the country. Nevertheless, president Biden did state that this would be a central topic in 2024.

Other states have started proposing AI regulations. At the moment, the AI sphere is dominated by the USA, China and the EU, therefore, even though block positions are not clear, a state's opinion will be greatly influenced by their allies and their economic and social situation (global north/global south).

6. Questions that should be answered:

When preparing the debate, it is important to keep in mind how the country you represent stands on the following issues:

- Does artificial intelligence post a real threat to human rights?

- How can artificial intelligence be used to ensure data protection and privacy rights?

- Should this topic be dealt with at national or international level?

- What measures should states take in order to protect human rights?

- What should the approach be towards big AI companies?

- What is the importance of digital rights? Should they be further developed? If so, how?

- How can transparency be promoted in the digital world?

7. Key terms

During the debate, the following vocabulary is of extreme importance:

Artificial intelligence (AI)	Field in computer science that refers to machines being able to do what humans do.
Privacy	A fundamental human right that is often violated through AI.
Surveillance	Tracking and observation of citizens that affects people's right to privacy and freedom (specially of expression).
Data protection	Measures to ensure that personal data is not abused by a third party.

Automation	Performing tasks without human assistance.
Bias and Fairness	Some AI algorithms have been known to discriminate against certain individuals.
Work exploitation; content moderators and data labelers	It is important to keep in mind that AI needs human work in order to function and during the debate it is important to keep these workers in mind.
Ethical AI	AI that is developed to follow ethical principles.
Digital rights	Human rights on the digital sphere.

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