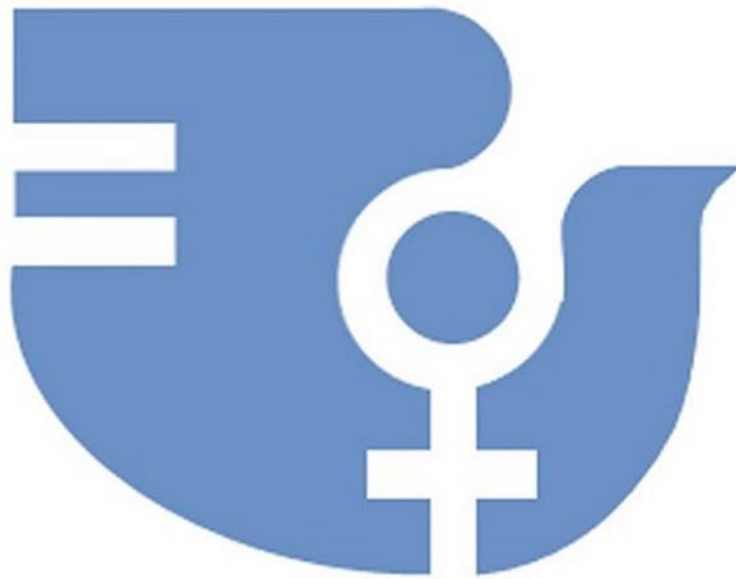


**UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON  
STATUS OF WOMEN (UNCSW)**

**BACKGROUND GUIDE**



**UN** Commission on the  
Status of Women

**COMMITTEE AGENDA - WOMEN'S RIGHT TO  
EXPRESSION WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE  
HIJAB, SECURITY OF WOMEN OF IRAN WITH ITS  
REPERCUSSION WORLDWIDE, AND  
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH OF WOMEN IN  
REFERENCE TO RIGHTS TO ABORTION.**

# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Greetings!

Delegates as you have begun this journey of being an informed individual, and at such an age, debating and discussing issues of national and international importance already makes you a leader within and a torch bearer for others as well. You are taking a leap ahead to ponder upon different agendas and topics in the school environment but this will train you to be the change maker for the entire nation. Some of you might be new to this and some might have already participated in different conferences, but not to worry we, the executive board of this committee are here to guide you on each and every step and furthermore will be discussed in the committee proceedings as well. My goal is to enhance your knowledge and embark you all on a journey to learn professionalism, healthy debates, and many key takeaways from this two-day conference.

Hereby, providing you all a Background Guide, to give you a basic idea of the committee's purpose, agenda, and some sources to refer to for information to further elaborate on the committee discussion.

Please note this background guide is not the only source for reference, it is just to provide you with a brief idea please feel free to use your creativity and thinking to search for other such things, though the provided sources of information below can be treated as the most important ones.

Good Luck!

Warm Regards,  
Cheshta Dabra (Chairperson)  
Evereena (Vice Chairperson)  
Vibhuti Sharma (Rapporteur)

## FIRST OF ALL, SOME KEY POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND WHILE RESEARCHING FOR THE GIVEN AGENDA:

- It is not necessary that your country will be mentioned in the guide with reference to the agenda stated sometimes your country might not be directly related to the issue but there is nothing to worry about as you still have to formulate your stance for the representation of the country portfolio.
- If your country has a poor track record on a topic and you cannot find many detailed country stances, this gives you an amazing opportunity to put yourself in the opposition on many discussions and stimulate discussions and provide a fresh perspective to the debate.
- Questions to consider while researching the topic:
  1. What is the topic about?
  2. Understanding the key terms first that are mentioned in the agenda.
  3. What are the important issues related to this and why is it itself an issue, the back story of it?
  4. What is your country doing, has done in the past, or will do in the future to resolve this issue or any policies introduced in relation to the issue, and what will be your stance on it
  5. Which countries are actively part of the issue, and what actions are being taken by them
  6. Key facts related to the issue.
- Preparing a list of possible solutions and actions the UNCSW can adopt as per your country's stance, and policies.
- Always refer to credible sources and keep the source in hand just in case you are asked to prove your point.
- Characterizing the agenda into sub-topics and preparing a few speeches and statements related to them in order to participate more.

## OTHER BASIC DETAILS TO SEARCH ABOUT YOUR COUNTRY'S PROFILE:

- Economics

- What is the GDP of your allotted country profile?
- What are your most important industries?

## **UNDERSTANDING BASIC FINANCIAL STATISTICS CAN HELP YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR STATE'S PRIORITIES.**

- Blocs
  - What other countries are next to you and what is your relationship with them?
  - What blocs has your state historically been a part of?

## **THIS CAN HELP YOU FIND OTHER STATES TO WORK WITH ON RESOLUTIONS.**

- Strengths
  - What helps the reputation of your state and creates a positive first impression?
- Weaknesses
  - What doesn't help the reputation of your state and creates a negative first impression?
- Geography
  - It's always good to have an understanding of the basic geography of your state – where your largest cities are, and where most of your citizens live.
- History
  - Some basic history can help provide more perspective on current issues. It's not necessary to be an expert but some knowledge can provide helpful context.
- Foreign Policy
  - Keep in mind to check the foreign policy of the country. It can help make efficient research papers and form the correct bloc with the country's allies.

## ADDENDUM: NATURE & PROOF OF EVIDENCE

Documents from the following sources will be considered as credible proof for any allegations made in the committee or statements that require verification:

~ Reuters: Appropriate Documents and articles from the Reuters News agency will be used to corroborate or refute controversial statements made in committee.

~ UN Documents: Documents by all UN agencies will be considered sufficient proof. Reports from all UN bodies including treaty-based bodies will also be accepted.

~ National Government Reports: Government Reports of a given country used to corroborate an allegation on the same aforementioned country will be accepted as proof.

The documents stated above will hold a binding nature of establishment. Other sources like Wikipedia, Amnesty International, or newspapers like the Guardian, so on and so forth will not be accepted as credible proof; but may be used for better understanding of any issue and even be brought up in debate, if the information given in such sources is in line with the beliefs of a government or a delegate.

Some websites and sources to refer to:

1. UN News [Visit](#)
2. The World Factbook - CIA [Visit](#)
3. UN Women [csw](#)
4. The Wire

# UNCSW

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. A functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), it was established by ECOSOC resolution 11(II) of 21 June 1946.

The CSW is instrumental in promoting women's rights, documenting the reality of women's lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women.



## **INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC**

The right to freedom of expression is protected in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), as well as regional human rights treaties.

These treaties require States to guarantee to all people the freedom to seek, receive or impart information or ideas of any kind, regardless of frontiers, through any media of a person's choice, including through the Internet and digital technologies. The scope of the right to freedom of expression is broad and made up of a number of important elements:

- It includes the right to freedom of opinion, which is absolute and can never be restricted.
- It belongs to all people, regardless of their race or ethnicity, nationality, sex, gender identity or sexual orientation, religion, or political opinion.
- It includes the right to seek, receive, and impart information.
- It applies to ideas of all kinds, including political discourse, commentary on one's own and public affairs, discussion of human rights, journalism, cultural and artistic expression, teaching, and religious discourse. It even embraces expressions that some people find deeply offensive or unpopular.
- It applies regardless of geographical, political, or cultural frontiers or borders.
- It can be exercised through any media, including oral, written, or printed communications; artistic expression; and audio-visual, electronic, and internet-based modes of communication. It applies online just as it does offline.

## **SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN**

The situation for women's rights in Afghanistan changed fundamentally in August 2021 as the Taliban took power. In spite of their initial promises to respect women's rights within the framework of Sharia law, the Taliban issued numerous decrees that prevent women and girls from exercising their basic rights to freedom of expression, liberty, work and education. Afghans who do take to the streets to protest for their rights are being threatened, arrested and tortured. Women's rights activists report that there have been detentions, child marriages, forced marriages and rapes. Under the Taliban, women are excluded from public life. Their access to civil rights and liberties was radically cut. For a woman or LGBTQI+ person before 2021 it was not at all easy to openly pursue their own independent life vision, but now it is impossible again.

Women's rights activists are facing serious threats. Nonetheless, Afghan women continue to fight for their rights and against the fundamentalism of the Taliban – even if they face severe reprisals.

## **GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN INTERNATIONAL LAW**

Article 2 of the ICCPR sets out the right of all people to equality and requires States to guarantee human rights to all people, “without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” Under international human rights law, these provisions should be viewed to include sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics. The provision means States have an obligation to protect women's equal enjoyment of the right to free expression, privacy, association, and all other human rights.

Additionally, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 9 creates specific obligations for States to end discrimination against women, defined as “any distinction, exclusion or restriction” based on sex characteristics which have the effect or purpose of restricting or negating women's enjoyment of human rights.

## **IMPORTANT NEWS PUBLISHING**

Repressive enforcement of Iranian Hijab laws symbolizes gender-based persecution: UN experts on **14 April, 2023**. Visit the link to read more:

[Repressive-enforcement-iranian-hijab-laws-symbolises-gender-based](#)

## **SECURITY OF WOMEN IN IRAN**

Study the recent case of women in Iran who have taken to the streets to peacefully protest the death in custody of Mahsa (Jhina) Amini and to demand their bodily rights.

## **CHARTING THE COURSE OF THE WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN IRAN**

Article 638 of the Islamic Penal Code of Iran provides the following: Anyone who explicitly violates any religious taboo in public beside [sic]



being punished for the act should also be imprisoned from ten days to two months, or should be flogged (74 lashes). Note - women who appear in public without a proper hijab should be imprisoned from ten days to two months or pay a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 Ryal [Iranian rials (IRR)] [C\$1.58-16]. (Iran 1996, Art. 638)

Iranian women experience discrimination in law and in practice in ways that deeply impact their lives, particularly with regard to marriage, divorce, and custody issues. Post-1979 compulsory hijab laws affect virtually every aspect of women's public life in Iran. In today's Iran, a woman's access to employment, education, social benefits, and proper health care — and even her mere public presence in society— depends on complying with compulsory hijab laws, which are routinely enforced through a web of rules and arbitrary interpretation by state agents as well as businesses. However, despite its overarching impact on women's rights and freedoms, the choice of dress code as a right was not taken up by Iran's women's movement as a collective issue until recently. Instead, the battle against enforcement of the compulsory wearing of the hijab was largely fought by the individual acts of millions of women, including activists, across the country - rather than via groups or institutions.

Iran has a decades-long history of movements promoting women's rights, both before and after the revolution of 1979. Most of them pursued a vision of equality under the law and sought to redress the gap regarding legal protection by promoting international human rights instruments. The most notable example after the revolution is the coalition of Islamist and secular feminist activists who came together to establish the "One Million Signature Campaign to Demand the Repeal of Discriminatory Laws" in 2006. Focus issues included age discrimination in establishing criminal responsibility and marriageable age, inequality in inheritance and discrimination of mothers as guardians in case of divorce. The issue of the compulsory hijab was notably absent. While the "One Million Signature Campaign" did not achieve its stated goal of fully repealing the set of relevant laws, it created strong bonds among students and labor activists and trained a generation of activists in legal advocacy. Similar to other movements, this group of activists came under significant state pressure and faced large-scale arrests during the Ahmadinejad presidency.

The pressure on the movement combined with the repression that followed the 2009 presidential election protests increasingly foreclosed avenues for legal reforms and led dozens of human rights defenders and

activists to go into exile. It also shifted the focus of women's rights defenders towards promoting women's representation, including the presence of women in public life. During the presidency of Hassan Rouhani, Shahindokht Molaverdy, the then-vice president for women and family affairs and a figure close to the women's rights movement, came under immense pressure from the judiciary to prevent any such change and was only able to take minor steps in advancing women's rights (Tara Sepehri Far, 2023).

## **THE ICPD PROGRAMME OF ACTION**

The Programme of Action adopted at the ICPD is a consensus document, the end product of a process of negotiation and compromise involving over 180 States. Reproductive health is defined in paragraph 7.2 of the Programme of Action as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being ... in all matters related to the reproductive system", which "implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so." The ICPD referred to the term "reproductive rights" as embracing "certain human rights that are already recognized in ... international human rights documents and other consensus documents". The most mentionable "consensus documents" are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, June 1993.

Reproductive rights, according to the ICPD, "rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health." Reproductive rights, according to the ICPD, also include the right "to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence, as expressed in human rights documents." This aspect of reproductive rights can also be derived from the Women's Convention. Before proceeding to examine the Convention more closely, it is worth noting that a subsequent consensus document of the international community, that is, the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW), held in Beijing in 1995, reiterated the paradigm shift of the ICPD. One of the critical areas of concern identified at the Beijing Conference referred to inequalities and inadequacies in access to health care and

related services, adopting a life cycle approach to women's health from infancy to old age. The Beijing Declaration stated that "the explicit recognition and reaffirmation of the right of all women to control all aspects of their health, in particular their own fertility, is basic to their empowerment". The Platform for Action adopted at Beijing included one notable addition to the ICPD in further explicating women's human rights in respect of their sexuality.

## **THE WOMEN'S CONVENTION**

Both the ICPD and the FWCW acknowledged the intrinsic relation of gender equality to women's health, including sexual and reproductive health. Both of these are consensus documents, expressing political will. As opposed to this, international human rights documents - treaties or conventions - are sources of international law, and as such are considered to be legally binding. The Women's Convention is the core human rights treaty to address discrimination against women, and is sometimes referred to as the international bill of women's rights.

## **ROE V. WADE**

Roe v. Wade is a 1973 lawsuit that famously led to the Supreme Court making a ruling on abortion rights. Jane Roe, an unmarried pregnant woman, filed suit on behalf of herself and others to challenge Texas abortion laws. A Texas doctor joined Roe's lawsuit, arguing that the state's abortion laws were too vague for doctors to follow. He had previously been arrested for violating the statute. At the time, abortion was illegal in Texas unless it was done to save the mother's life. It was a crime to get an abortion or to attempt one. In Roe v. Wade, the Supreme Court decided two important things:

- The United States Constitution provides a fundamental "right to privacy" that protects a person's right to choose whether to have an abortion.
- But the abortion right is not absolute. It must be balanced against the government's interests in protecting health and prenatal life.

The state of Texas put forth three main arguments in its case to defend the abortion statute:

- States have an interest in safeguarding health, maintaining medical standards, and protecting prenatal life
- A fetus is a "person" protected by the 14th Amendment
- Protecting prenatal life from the time of conception is a compelling state interest. Roe Claims Absolute Privacy Rights.

Jane Roe and the others involved based their case on the following arguments:

- The Texas law invaded an individual's right to "liberty" under the 14th Amendment
- The Texas law infringed on rights to marital, familial, and sexual privacy guaranteed by the Bill of Rights
- The right to an abortion is absolute - a person is entitled to end a pregnancy at any time, for any reason, in any way they choose.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF ROE V WADE**

Many think of Roe v. Wade as the case that "legalized abortion." However, that isn't exactly true. What it did was change the way states can regulate abortion, and characterized abortion as something that was covered under constitutional rights of privacy. Since the Court's decision in Roe v. Wade, judicial interpretation of the constitution is that abortion is legal. However, after Roe, many abortion opponents have advocated for stricter abortion laws. The opponents haven't been able to ban abortions outright, but have placed limitations on abortions. A number of states have placed restrictions on abortions in certain circumstances, including parental notification requirements, mandatory disclosure of abortion risk information, and restrictions on late-term abortions. The much publicized Roe v. Wade case has given rise to many important arguments related to women's rights and has divided the world into two sections, pro-choice and pro-life. The people who stand pro-life believe that life starts at conception and an unborn baby is also a person whose right to life should be respected. People who stand pro-choice argue that it should be the woman's choice to give birth as it is her body and she should have the right to choose what happens with it. Carrying a child and giving birth can have drastic effects on a woman's body, thus it should be her choice to continue with the pregnancy.