

## GA4

(Decolonization and special political)

### **“Preventing the exploitation of regions in regard to international supply chains to ensure the upholding of human rights and humanitarian infrastructure “**

#### 1. General information:

An international supply chain refers to the processes which raw materials go through in order to be turned into a commodity item that is shipped worldwide. Typically, this implies placing factories and resource collecting facilities in countries where they are most efficient from both a shipping and production point of view (e.g. coffee being harvested from South America). As such, due to the oftentimes weak legal framework of these resource-rich countries, as well as the financial status of the companies putting forward these facilities, international supply chains are extremely likely to violate basic human rights put in place by the UNHRA, and prevent the ability of locals to access basic humanitarian infrastructure. The purpose of this topic in the GA4 committee is to allow delegates to provide solutions preventing such abuse of power.

#### 2. Background:

No country has every resource needed to produce every commodity imaginable. As such, international supply chains are a reality which today's economy needs. However, as mentioned earlier, there's a great number of human rights violations related to these processes, and these mostly come from the many subcontractors that these companies employ overseas. These subcontractors are found in many industries, including agriculture, textiles, mining and constructions. These factories take advantage of the oftentimes poor and underprivileged local communities, by making them work at an extremely low wage, employing children for even lower wages, placing these workers in environments usually deemed unsafe by international labour law, and making them work for an unreasonable number of hours. Furthermore, these operations are oftentimes extremely unsustainable and can compromise basic humanitarian infrastructure such as water supplies, and space otherwise used for housing.

There are many attempted solutions for this problem. Many large companies, especially Germany, France and Switzerland among others have put in place laws which prevent such practices from taking place, to varying success. On an international level, the idea of human rights due diligence has been pushed by the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in recent times, which refers to steps that are necessary to ensure the safety and security of workers in supply chain-related jobs. These include forcing companies to map their supply chain locations, and being assessed by UNGP representatives for human rights risks. However, this does not mean that the issue is solved, as these principles are not legally binding to UN member states, and companies often operate in the informal sector of the economy (activity that is not officially registered and trackable) in order to continue violating labour laws, and therefore are unable to be verified with these due diligence laws.

### 3. Issues that are likely to arise:

The list of human rights violations which these supply chains have been accomplices is nearly endless, and it mostly goes undocumented, so delegates should focus on not only persecuting these companies, but also on preventing these practices from taking place in an enforceable manner. As such, the biggest issue that delegates will face is coming up with a way that businesses can be investigated on their own subcontractors' activity. Most of these businesses greatly benefit from the reduced price and abundance of resources they have available to them due to these practices, and delegates should think of a way to force businesses to disclose their subcontractors and ability legally.

Furthermore, another issue is related to UNGPs. These principles are important to how businesses operate in supply chain operations, but they are not legally binding. As such, delegates must also take into account a method in which these principles might be applied in a resolution

### 4. Main Countries involved:

- Germany: Germany is one of the only countries to have laws directly related to supply chain operations. Their supply chain act (Lieferkettengesetz) of 2021 specifically aims for businesses that operate using international factories to prove to the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs that their work conditions comply with international labour laws.
- People's Republic of China: China is famously one of the largest producers of any commodity in the entire world. However, it is one of the main countries involved in major human rights violations. Certain groups such as the Uyghur Muslim community have garnered international attention for being forced into labour in large factories. Addressing these issues in China would be an extremely important step in reaching a final resolution.
- India: India has one of the highest rates of child labour in the world, particularly in textiles, agriculture, and mining industries. Forced labour is also prevalent, with a lot of activity taking place in the informal sector of the economy. Many workers face extremely poor working conditions, low wages, and a lack of social protections.

### 5. List of questions delegates should ask themselves in regards to the topic:

- How can we prevent international supply chain practices from taking place in future businesses?
- How can we stop businesses already using abusive international supply chain practices?
- How can we continue to maintain, and potentially legally enforce the principles of the UNGP?
- Safe or not, how can we prevent these subcontractor companies from taking away the real estate and culture belonging to those local communities?
- How can we prevent ongoing exploitation networks in countries such as China and India?

### 5. Key-terms and explanations:

- United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: This is a document that was written by the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, which among other elements related to human rights practices within work environments and labour laws, outlines the many human rights violations within supply chain-related jobs, and introduce ideas such as the state responsibility to protect workers in subcontractor factories, the corporate responsibility to respect local workers employed by foreign

businesses, access to remedy for said workers and human rights due diligence. These principles are not legally binding.

- Human Rights Due Diligence: This is a process suggested by the UNGP that involves a business systematically identifying and addressing the impacts its operations and products may have on human rights and local communities. This process extends across the company's entire supply chain and network of subcontractors. It includes evaluating internal policies and systems for risk of human rights violations, and declarations of all subcontractor locations for business-customer transparency.
- Forced Displacement / Land Grabbing: This is a phenomenon when local communities are pushed out of their own land as part of an industrial effort. The subcontractors which take part in international supply chains are often culprits to this phenomenon, which is a violation of the fundamental human right to shelter. As such, this is extremely relevant to the conversation.
- Cultural Erosion: This is a concept that is closely related to the previous point - it refers to indigenous communities having their culture ripped away from them as their terrain is radically industrialised. Considering that most of these indigenous groups reside in areas which are often the targets of supply chain subcontractors, the way in which people's culture is violated should also be discussed.
- Exploitation Networks: This specifically refers to how labour laws are violated through human trafficking rings. Some large organisations tend to employ people who are extremely desperate for financial stability by using extremely exploitative worker contracts, which then are used to commit various labour and human right law violations. Preventing this from happening from both sides of the employment exchange should also be a focal point.

#### 7. Useful sources:

The most useful resources in terms of reporting on human rights are the UNHCR official website and the Human Rights Watch. Another extremely useful resource for inspiration is looking at all of the supply chain-related laws that have been passed by governments such as Germany, France, UK and Canada. These can be accessed on the official websites of all of their governments.