

Letter from the Executive Board

Dear Delegates,

We are delighted to welcome you to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) at Oakridge MUN 2025.

This background guide has been prepared to introduce you to the complexities and critical nuances of our agenda. It outlines the core issues, offers relevant case studies, and provides a foundational understanding to help you initiate your research. However, it is by no means exhaustive. We strongly encourage you to explore beyond the guide, engage with diverse perspectives, and come prepared with an informed, analytical view of the topic.

As a representative of a sovereign state in the international community, we expect you to approach this committee with the respect, responsibility and diplomacy the role demands. We urge all delegates to take the time to understand their country's stance, prepare documentation thoughtfully, and arrive well-versed in both substance and strategy.

Our goal is to foster meaningful, solution-oriented dialogue that reflects the real-world challenges and opportunities within the agenda. A successful session will culminate in a consensus document that encapsulates the committee's collective insights and proposed actions, and your role in steering this outcome is crucial.

Beyond the competition, we hope this committee offers you a space to grow, to sharpen your critical thinking, build confidence in public speaking, and better understand global policymaking. Whether you are a first-time delegate or a seasoned MUNer, we believe there is something here for everyone to learn and take forward.

We look forward to an engaging, informed, and impactful debate.

Wishing you the very best,
Chaarmikha Nagalla & Deeksha Singh

Best Practices to Research before the MUN:

(You can take these best practices into account, for this MUN and for other MUNs too)

- Before the conference, read the agenda and background guide in detail. Highlight areas that require further clarification or deeper understanding. If the committee involves a crisis situation, pay close attention to updates or briefing notes that may be issued a week prior - these often include key insights and narrative shifts.
- Don't stop at the guide. Search for additional information using reliable sources — such as UN documents, international news agencies, scholarly journals, and policy reports. These will help you build a nuanced understanding of the topic.
- Once you grasp the agenda, shift focus to your assigned country. Research its foreign policy, historical actions, public statements at the UN or other forums, and any national laws relevant to the issue at hand.
- Your country's stance will define your foreign policy during the committee. Make sure your arguments, speeches, and proposed solutions are aligned with your nation's real-world perspective, even if they differ from your personal beliefs.
- The background guide often contains subtle hints or suggested lines of thought — take note of these. They can help you craft sharper contentions, identify potential allies, or anticipate opposition during the debate.
- Familiarize yourself with the official scope of your committee. Know what topics are within its jurisdiction and the types of resolutions it can pass. However, don't limit your knowledge only to the mandate - build a broader understanding, but speak only within the bounds of the council's authority.
- Try to predict the possible subthemes or debate blocks that may emerge. For example, under a broad agenda like women's rights, discussions may arise around education, healthcare access, representation, etc. Create a document to list your arguments, supporting facts, and possible counterpoints as this improves clarity and readiness during the debate.
- Keep copies of essential international documents such as: the **UN Charter**, the **Geneva Conventions (1949)** and their **Additional Protocols**, any **relevant treaties or declarations** related to your committee (e.g., CEDAW for UNCSW)

- If you're unsure about MUN procedures, such as how to raise motions, when to use right of reply, or what constitutes a moderated caucus, don't hesitate to ask the Executive Board on the day of the conference. Confidence comes from clarity.

Pro Tip: MUN research is as much about depth as it is about strategy. Think like a diplomat, argue like a policymaker, and research like an academic. The better prepared you are, the more compelling your contributions will be.

About the committee

Work and priorities of UNCSW

United Nations Commission on Status of Women is the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UNCSW supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing strategic priorities:

- Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems
- Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy
- All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence

Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action; UNCSW also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality, and in all deliberations and agreements linked to the 2030 Agenda. The entity works to position gender equality as fundamental to the Sustainable Development Goals, and a more inclusive world.

Status of women

Gender equality is not only a basic human right, but its achievement has enormous socio-economic ramifications. Empowering women fuels thriving economies, spurring productivity and growth. Yet gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in every society. Women lack access to decent work and face occupational segregation and gender wage gaps. They are too often denied access to basic education and health care. Women in all parts of the

world suffer violence and discrimination. They are under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes.

Over many decades, the United Nations has made significant progress in advancing gender equality, including through landmark agreements such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Working for the empowerment and rights of women and girls globally, UNCSW's main roles are:

- To support inter-governmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms.
- To help Member States implement these standards, standing ready to provide suitable technical and financial support to those countries that request it, and to forge effective partnerships with civil society.
- To lead and coordinate the UN system's work on gender equality, as well as promote accountability, including through regular monitoring of system-wide progress.

Historical perspective

The UNCSW was established in 1946 as a mechanism to promote, report on and monitor issues relating to the political, economic, civil, social and educational rights of women. It was a unique official structure for drawing attention to women's concerns and leadership within the UN. UNCSW first met at Lake Success, New York, in February 1947. All 15 government representatives were women, which distinguished UNCSW from other UN movements, and UNCSW has continued to maintain a majority of women delegates. During its first session, the Commission declared as one of its guiding principles:

- To raise the status of women, irrespective of nationality, race, language or religion, to equality with men in all fields of human enterprise, and to eliminate all discrimination against women in the provisions of statutory law, in legal maxims or rules, or in interpretation of customary law.
- One of UNCSW's first tasks was to contribute to the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Commission members inserted gender-sensitive language — arguing against references to “men” as a synonym for humanity and phrases like “men are brothers.” They received resistance from members of the Commission on Human Rights, but succeeded in introducing new, inclusive language.

Methods of work

The Commission adopts multi-year programmes of work to appraise progress and make further

recommendations to accelerate the implementation of the Platform for Action. These recommendations take the form of negotiated agreed conclusions on a priority theme. The Commission also contributes to the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development so as to accelerate the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Under its current methods of work, established by ECOSOC resolution 2015/6, at each session the Commission:

- Convenes a ministerial segment to reaffirm and strengthen political commitment to the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as well as their human rights, and to ensure high-level engagement and the visibility of the deliberations of the Commission, including through ministerial round tables or other high-level interactive dialogues to exchange experiences, lessons learned, and good practices;
- Engages in general discussion on the status of gender equality, identifying goals attained, achievements made, and efforts under way to close gaps and meet challenges;
- Convenes interactive expert panel discussions and other interactive dialogues on steps and initiatives to accelerate implementation and measures to build capacities for mainstreaming gender equality across policies and programmes;
- Considers one priority theme, based on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly and linkages to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- Evaluates progress in implementing agreed conclusions from previous sessions as a review theme;
- Discusses emerging issues, trends, focus areas, and new approaches to questions affecting the situation of women, including equality between women and men, that require timely consideration;
- Considers in closed meeting the report of its Working Group on Communications;
- Agrees on further actions for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women by adopting agreed conclusions and resolutions;
- Contributes gender perspectives to the work of other intergovernmental bodies and processes;
- Reports on the aspects relating to gender equality and the empowerment of women of the agreed main theme of the Economic and Social Council, in order to contribute to its work; and
- Celebrates International Women's Day on 8 March, when it falls within its session.

Mandate of UNCSW

UNCSW stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas:

- Expanding women's voice, leadership and participation;
- Ending violence against women and girls;
- Strengthening women's full participation in conflict resolution and peace processes;
- Enhancing women's economic empowerment; and
- Making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting.

The list of Member states and Observer Nations of the committee can be found here:

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/member-states>

Introduction to the Agenda

Agenda: *Reforms for Protection of Women's Rights and Constitutional Freedoms with Special Emphasis on Conflict and Post-Conflict Areas*

In times of conflict and instability, women and girls often bear a disproportionate burden of suffering, including violence, displacement, loss of livelihoods, and the erosion of rights. Conflict not only exacerbates existing gender inequalities but often leads to the systemic erosion of constitutional freedoms and civil protections, particularly for women.

This agenda calls for critical reform to ensure that women's rights are protected not only during peace but also in the extreme circumstances of conflict and fragile post-conflict recovery. It seeks to examine the role of international law, national constitutions, transitional justice mechanisms, and peacebuilding efforts in promoting gender equity.

Key Issues to Address

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Conflict Zones

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is one of the most pervasive and devastating consequences of armed conflict, disproportionately affecting women and girls. In many conflict zones, sexual violence, including rape, trafficking, forced prostitution, and sexual slavery, is not merely a byproduct of war but a deliberate weapon used to terrorize, dominate, and destabilize communities. Historical examples from Rwanda, Bosnia, and South Sudan reveal how sexual violence has been strategically deployed to inflict long-term psychological, social, and demographic harm.

Despite recognition of such atrocities under international law, justice mechanisms often remain weak or inaccessible. Survivors frequently face stigma, lack of protection, and limited legal recourse, while perpetrators operate with impunity due to the breakdown of institutions and entrenched gender norms. Addressing GBV in conflict settings thus requires not only legal

reform but also survivor-centered justice, robust accountability frameworks, and international cooperation to end the culture of silence and impunity.

Loss of Legal Protection and Representation

The collapse of state institutions during conflict often results in the suspension or erosion of constitutional rights, leaving women particularly vulnerable. As legal systems break down, access to essential services such as courts, education, healthcare, and civil documentation becomes severely restricted or entirely inaccessible for women and girls. This legal vacuum not only exposes them to greater risks of exploitation and marginalization but also undermines their ability to seek redress or assert their rights. In the aftermath of conflict, as nations embark on state-building and constitutional reform, women are frequently excluded from decision-making processes, reinforcing their political disenfranchisement. Without intentional efforts to include women's voices in the reconstruction of legal and governance systems, post-conflict societies risk entrenching gender inequality and missing the opportunity to build more inclusive, equitable institutions.

Access to Humanitarian Aid and Basic Services

In conflict and post-conflict settings, access to humanitarian aid and basic services is often compromised, and gender-blind delivery mechanisms exacerbate the issue for women and girls. Humanitarian responses frequently fail to account for the unique needs of women, leading to unequal distribution of aid and limited access to healthcare, reproductive services, and psychosocial support. In refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, women face heightened vulnerabilities due to overcrowding, poor sanitation, lack of privacy, and inadequate security, all of which increase the risk of gender-based violence. Furthermore, cultural barriers and the absence of female leadership in aid distribution structures can prevent women from voicing their concerns or accessing critical services. Without a gender-sensitive approach to humanitarian assistance, these gaps not only persist but also perpetuate cycles of exclusion and vulnerability.

Women's Role in Peacebuilding

Despite global recognition of their contributions, women remain significantly underrepresented in formal peacebuilding processes. UN Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000, was a landmark affirmation of the need for women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction. However, implementation of this resolution remains uneven and insufficient. Women continue to be marginalized in peace talks, with transitional governance bodies and negotiation teams often lacking proportional female representation. This exclusion not only undermines the legitimacy and inclusivity of peace processes but also neglects critical perspectives on justice, reconciliation, and community rebuilding. Empirical studies show that peace agreements are more durable and effective when

women are actively involved, making their inclusion not only a matter of rights but also of strategic importance for sustainable peace.

Customary Law vs Constitutional Rights

In many post-conflict societies, the coexistence of customary law and formal constitutional frameworks presents a complex challenge to the advancement of women's rights. Informal justice systems and traditional institutions often hold significant influence, particularly in rural or fragile states where state authority is weak or contested. While these customary systems may offer accessible dispute resolution, they frequently reflect patriarchal norms that subordinate women and limit their access to justice. When customary practices override constitutional guarantees, women's legal protections are diluted, and efforts toward gender equality are stymied. This tension between tradition and rights underscores the need for legal harmonization and community engagement to ensure that customary law evolves in alignment with international human rights standards and constitutional mandates.

Relevant International Frameworks & Conventions

- UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and related WPS Resolutions (1820, 1888, 1889, etc.)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Maputo Protocol)

Case Studies to Explore

Across conflict and post-conflict regions, the status of women's rights has varied dramatically, reflecting both progress and persistent challenges. In Afghanistan, women's rights saw significant gains after 2001, with constitutional guarantees supporting access to education and employment; however, the Taliban's return to power in 2021 triggered a severe regression, with girls banned from secondary and higher education and women removed from public roles. In contrast, Rwanda emerged from genocide with one of the world's most gender-inclusive parliaments, where women now hold over 60% of seats, a result of deliberate constitutional reforms and strong female leadership during national reconstruction.

Meanwhile, Bosnia and Herzegovina became the a nation where rape was internationally recognized as a war crime, yet its justice mechanisms for survivors remain slow and fragmented. In Sudan and South Sudan, ongoing conflict and entrenched tribal customs continue to erode legal protections for women, while peacebuilding efforts consistently sideline their voices. In

Ukraine, the Russian invasion has led to mass displacement with heightened risks of gender-based exploitation, though grassroots women's organizations have stepped in as critical agents of humanitarian aid and advocates for inclusive recovery. These case studies collectively highlight the complex interplay between conflict, governance, and gender equity, revealing both the consequences of exclusion and the transformative potential of reform.

Bloc Positions (*Indicative only*)

- Western Bloc (e.g., USA, UK, EU States): Generally strong advocates for gender rights and constitutional protections. Active in funding women-centric development and peacebuilding programs in conflict zones.
- Global South (e.g., India, Nigeria, Brazil): Often support gender equity rhetorically but face domestic implementation challenges. May advocate for sovereignty and non-intervention in internal affairs.
- Conflict-Affected States (e.g., Afghanistan, Ukraine, Syria, Sudan): Often divided between urgent humanitarian needs and limited institutional capacity. Constitutional reform may be underway or recently reversed.
- Religious/Traditional Societies (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Iran): May resist certain “Western” interpretations of women's rights, emphasizing culturally rooted gender norms.

Suggested Readings

- UN Women Report on Women, Peace and Security (2023)
- CEDAW Committee General Recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict, and post-conflict situations
- UNDP: Gender and Recovery Toolkit
- International Crisis Group: Gender in Conflict Zones Reports
- Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance: Gender & Transitional Justice

This committee offers a rich opportunity for delegates to explore the intersection of international law, gender justice, and conflict resolution. Delegates are expected to critically analyze gaps in existing frameworks and propose innovative yet pragmatic reforms. The ideal outcome is a comprehensive, consensus-driven resolution that strengthens constitutional guarantees for women, even in the world's most fragile states.

Questions a Resolution Must Answer (QARMA):

1. How can civil society be empowered to track and report on the implementation of gender-related legal reforms?
2. What role should international organizations (UN, NGOs, regional bodies) play in monitoring women's rights in post-conflict areas?

3. What minimum constitutional guarantees must be safeguarded for women, even during states of emergency or conflict?

