

UC Davis Model United Nations Conference 2013
Committee – LEGAL



Delegates,

Hello, and welcome to the Davis Model UN Conference 2013. We are Shalmali Joshi, Zane Pang, and Jasmine Patel, and we will have the pleasure of guiding chairing the Legal committee. We will be discussing the regulation of designer babies and modernizing the Geneva Conventions.

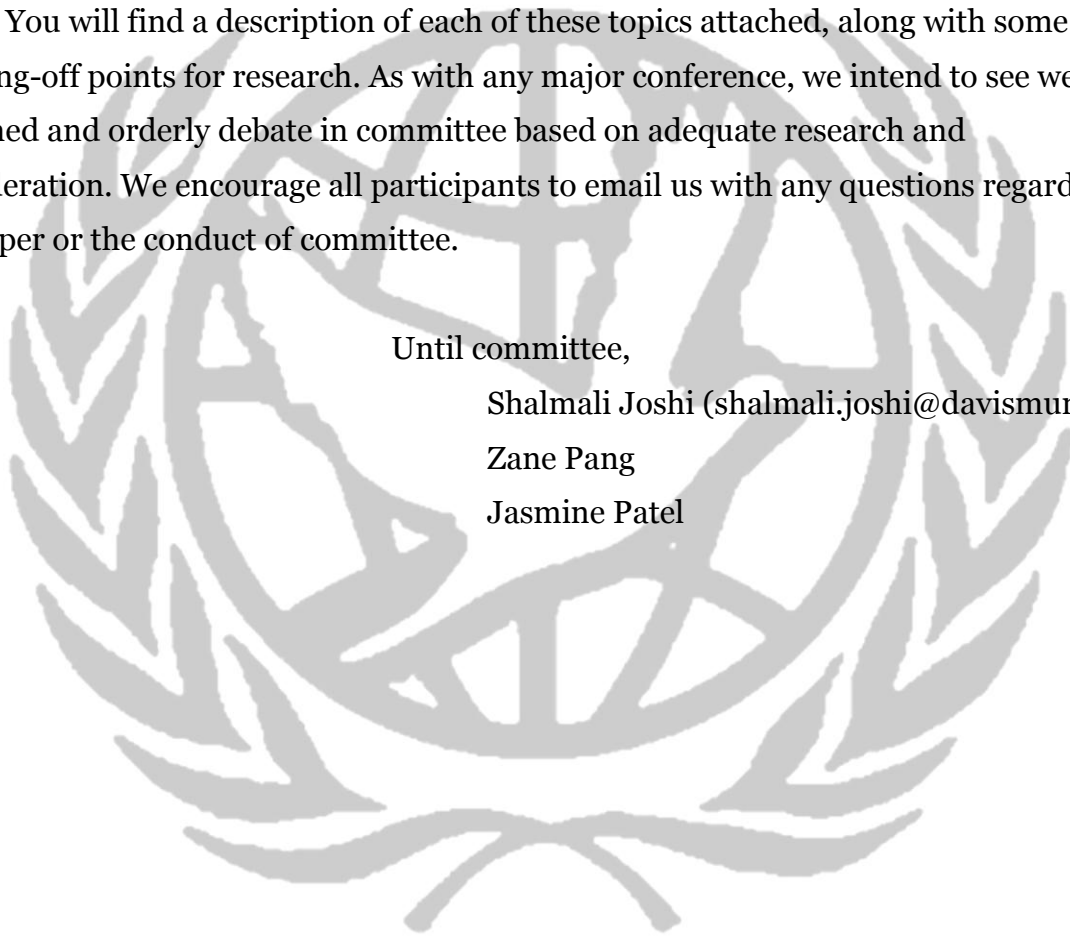
You will find a description of each of these topics attached, along with some jumping-off points for research. As with any major conference, we intend to see well-reasoned and orderly debate in committee based on adequate research and consideration. We encourage all participants to email us with any questions regarding the paper or the conduct of committee.

Until committee,

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Topic A: Designer Babies

Background of the Topic

Science has made many incredible achievements in the past century; it has given us everything from penicillin to nuclear energy to nylon. Within all of these advances, are the advances made within genetics. We now possess the ability to determine the genetic make-up of an embryo before it is born and find out if it has “unfavorable” characteristics.

An increasingly popular method of controlling an embryo is pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, which is also known as PGD or embryo screening; the process involves testing a 3-day old embryo for genetic markers of disease. Only those embryos that do not carry disease markers are implanted into a mother’s womb. This has been popular with people who know that their potential offspring carry the risk of inheriting genetic diseases like cystic fibrosis, Down’s Syndrome, or even deafness. So to prevent certain outcomes, potential parents turn to clinics to help them have children. A benefit to being able to detect diseases at an early stage is being able to produce siblings that will be a match for and provide blood, bone marrow, or organs to help a sick child.

The other side to this issue is the possibility for catastrophe in the ethics issues that are raised with modifying what will become a living being. Many scientists and policy-makers argue that left un-checked genetic engineering of embryos will lead to parents wanting to custom-build their child to have specific traits such as being 5’8” tall with fair skin, green eyes, and blonde hair. They believe that this conflicts with the natural order of things and counters evolution itself.

UN Action

The Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights, which was passed by UNESCO in 1997 is the basis for much of the UN action in regards to genetics and genetic engineering policy. This document outlines the proper use of the human genome and research involving genetics along with setting guidelines for examining the ethics of such research.

Genetic engineering and the ethics of genetic engineering have been discussed in many forums within the UN. The International Bioethics Committee, which is part of UNESCO, is an active environment that discusses the various legal and ethical issues that arise when conducting scientific research in the life sciences.

Some countries, such as the UK, China, and India have bans on using embryo screening techniques to determine the sex of a potential child citing the risk of misuse of the technology such as wanting a son badly enough to abort female embryos. While an outright ban is only in place in some nations, genetic engineering and designer babies is a point of concern in many places around the world. Many schools of thought say that altering an embryo or selectively conceiving a child goes against a higher power or a natural order of things.

Questions to consider:

What impact could this have on people in developing nations?

What about non-human genetic engineering?

What if we “designed” livestock that produced more meat, milk, or other byproducts?

To what extent should we, the UN, be regulating this? Can we regulate this?

Sources Consulted:

<http://science.howstuffworks.com/life/human-biology/future-children1.htm>

[http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/bioethics/international-bioethics-committee/)

[sciences/themes/bioethics/international-bioethics-committee/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/bioethics/international-bioethics-committee/)

<http://www.sciencemag.org/content/283/5410/2023.summary>

<http://www.actionbioscience.org/biotech/agar.html>

Interesting things to check out:

NPR debate on genetically engineered babies:

<http://www.npr.org/2013/02/15/172137776/should-we-prohibit-genetically-engineered-babies?ft=1&f=1007>

Gattaca- Sci-Fi movie that explores the societal effects of Genetic Engineering

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0119177/>

Topic B: Modernizing the Geneva Conventions

Background of the Topic

First drafted in 1864, the Geneva Conventions have been the long-standing guidelines for the treatment of civilians, prisoners of war (POWs) and soldiers who are left incapable of fighting. While initially drafted to protect wounded soldiers from being badly treated and ensuring that they receive medical care, the Geneva Conventions have gone beyond that.

The First and Second Geneva Conventions protect any soldiers found by the opposite side to be injured or dead. Whether on land or on the sea, an injured soldier must be given medical treatment equal to any medical treatment received by enemy soldiers. Soldiers are also protected from being taken hostage, being executed without judgment, and affronts to personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment.

The Third Geneva Convention, written in 1929, expands the scope of the original conventions to include protections for Prisoners of War (POW). Even if not injured, POW may not be subjected to torture for information, deprived of any personal effects, or forced to do harsh labor without payment. This convention also explicitly defines the term Prisoner of War and who can be classified as a prisoner of war.

Finally in 1949, the Fourth Geneva Convention was written to include protection for civilians affected by fighting in times of war. It allowed for protection against discrimination due to religion, race, or personal political opinion. At the time nations met to draft the fourth Geneva Convention, they also updated the previous three conventions to reflect a changing world with different military practices post-World War II.

Since then, Protocols have been added to the original Geneva Conventions that update protections and increase the scope of the Conventions. Mainly, these protocols improve the legal protection for victims of both international and non-international conflicts since the original conventions only accounted for international conflicts.

UN Action

The UN Security Council has the absolute authority to enforce the Geneva Conventions, though it is rarely faced with the need to act. The International Criminal Court has the authority to try cases of serious violations of the Geneva Conventions. International involvement is usually not necessary in cases involving the Geneva Conventions as nations tend to resolve issues themselves. As a whole, the UN frequently references the Geneva Conventions when making resolutions, such as UN Security Council Resolution 446 on the Israel-Palestine Conflict.

Questions to consider:

Are the Geneva Conventions still relevant today?

What issues are there in modern warfare that the Geneva Conventions should ameliorate?

What legal rights need to be modernized, if any?

Sources Consulted:

http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/geneva_conventions

<http://www.icrc.org/IHL.nsf/FULL/365?OpenDocument>

http://www.ppu.org.uk/learn/texts/doc_geneva_con.html

<http://www.icrc.org/eng/index.jsp>