



# GRIFFMUN 2019

Novice: UNHRC

*LGBT Rights*

*Child Marriage*

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## **Committee Description**

The United Nations Human Rights Council was created by the UN General Assembly in 2006. It is made up of representatives from 47 member states (countries) who seek to identify violations of human rights and work towards solutions. They work with non-governmental organizations and other UN groups to eliminate discrimination and provide aid to those who need it. Recent projects include maintaining human rights during the South Sudan conflict, alleviating the effects the Rohingya crisis, making education more accessible, and ensuring that those facing capital punishment are not deprived of their rights.

## **Chair Introductions**

### **Head Chair:**

Hello delegates! I am Justin Kim, and I will be your head chair for GriffMUN 2019 this year. This is my third year in MUN and my second year in chairing. MUN is a real life changer to me. I gained confidence in speaking in front of crowds and improved my ability to speak to others comfortably. Besides MUN, other club activities I participate in are Japan Bowl, Lifehacks Club, and Japanese Club. If you know me personally, I would be finding easier ways to do things, eating an insane amount of food, or listening to music. My greatest advice for this committee is to start preparing early. Feel free to ask me questions about my life and about MUN! See you in committee!

### **Vice Chair:**

Hi, everybody. My name is Leela Fredlund and I am excited to be your vice chair for GRIFFMUN 2019! I am also a junior at LAHS, and this is my third year in MUN. I'm on the JV water polo team and am vice-president of Science Olympiad here at LAHS. One of my

favorite aspects of MUN is learning about a variety of topics which affect our world that I never would have been exposed to otherwise--I think it really helps to make you a more educated and well-rounded person. Hopefully this conference will provide an opportunity for you to practice your MUN skills, learn more about the hotly-debated topics of LGBT rights and child marriage, and, of course, have fun. My number one recommendation is to stay on policy, especially on controversial topics like these where your personal views might not reflect the stance of your country. I look forward to seeing you all in committee!

## **LGBT Rights**

### **Background:**

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) rights have been a controversial issue throughout the past century. Although LGBT people were a part of society for hundreds of years, the issue and terminology emerged in the 20th century. During the 1960s, the LGBT community expressed their ideas and feelings about their personal rights. As the hippie movement began, they introduced a more liberal culture to the United States, which then introduced the idea of protecting members of the LGBT community from their history of discrimination. Many European countries, such as the United Kingdom and Scandinavian countries were greatly influenced and changed their perspective on how they viewed the LGBT community. Due to this revolution, LGBT advocates were able to run for office in California and New York.

Currently, the community has expanded their campaign greatly through the internet and contributed their ideas to politics in the United States. As of January 1, 2019, twenty five countries around the world have legalized gay marriage, and over thirty countries recognize gay marriage couples as citizens of their country. Institutions, such as HRW (Human Rights Watch), ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association), and GLAAD (Global LGBT Rights), continue to advocate LGBT rights in other countries, focusing on countries where the acknowledgement of LGBT communities is low. These institutions hope to empower the LGBT communities to help them fight a battle against prejudice, discrimination, and neglect.

## **UN Involvement:**

The United Nations has been involved in LGBT rights ever since the 4th World Conference for Women in Beijing, but it was mentioned very briefly before the conference moved on to another topic. Despite its brief moment, many started to take LGBT rights more seriously. Countries such as Brazil, United States, and United Kingdom were already actively involved in the movement.

However, LGBT rights are not supported by all branches of the United Nations. Branches, such as the Arab League and Organization of Islamic Cooperation, often neglect and disagree with individuals who identify as LGBT. Many countries that are a part of these organizations have severe punishments and death penalties for those who are LGBT. Despite the opposition of LGBT rights, the UN continuously makes efforts to protect the rights of the LGBT community. In 2011, UNHRC drafted a resolution based on protecting and acknowledging the rights of the LGBT community. Additionally, they implemented the Vienna Declaration, which exposed the horrifying culture that LGBT people are harassed, neglected, and criminalized because of their identity. Many countries, especially Latin American countries, then added additional resolutions to address the issue at a global level in 2015. In 2016, the UN worked to find reasons and to investigate crimes committed against the LGBT community as a response to the Orlando shootings at a nightclub. The UN has reported much success and continues to work to improve the LGBT community in the future.

## **Bloc Positions:**

- Middle East and African Bloc

In African and Middle Eastern countries, the LGBT community face much discrimination and neglect from society. The Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, for example, are groups that strongly oppose the LGBT community. Many want to prioritize other issues, rather than focusing on the LGBT community and their rights.

- Central and Eastern European Bloc

Central and Eastern European countries are following similar trends to the European/ Developed Bloc, but there are some countries which ban same-sex marriage. Countries, such as Montenegro and Georgia, follow religious ideas that are incorporated into their system of law. As a result, same-sex marriage and other rights are not granted to the LGBT community.

- Latin American and Caribbean Bloc

The Latin American and Caribbean Bloc have recently worked hard to achieve LGBT rights. Countries such as Brazil, Chile, and Argentina advocated for further support of the 2003 resolution proposed by Brazil.

- Western European and Developed Bloc

The Western European and Developed Bloc strongly supports LGBT rights. The origin of the movement for LGBT rights started in Chicago, which has been expanding in the United States and United Kingdom.

- Asia-Pacific Bloc

Many Eastern Asian/ Pacific countries struggle to accept LGBT rights. Many countries, such as South Korea, China, and Japan remain persistent on this topic because it breaks traditional values

of their culture. However, due to Western influences on these countries, these countries are beginning to slowly change their view on this topic.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Why do you think social issues make LGBT rights harder to achieve?
2. Why did the LGBT community become a big deal recently when they have existed for hundreds of years in society?
3. How does groups like Arab League and Organization of Islamic Cooperation justify their position on LGBT?
4. To what extent should the government intervene with human expressions? Should they focus on unity of the people (collectivist culture) or focus on the individual (individual culture)?
5. How does LGBT rights infringe on people's cultural and societal values, especially with religious matters?

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## Child Marriage

### Background:

From the dawn of humanity until industrialization, low life expectancies resulted in child marriage, both consensual and non-consensual, of an individual under the age of 18. Its practice was common enough to be acceptable and even expected practice in most societies. Some governments set restrictions on child marriage, such as the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus' marriage laws in 18 BC and 9 AD, which stated that the minimum age of betrothal was 10 years old, while other societies relied on religious laws. As global life expectancies rose in the late 1700s, child marriage became less popular, but it wasn't until the 1900s that official laws to prevent child marriage became widespread; many of which have just been enacted in the past few decades.

Today, the minimum legal age for marriage ranges from 9 years old in Iran to 22 years old in China, as well as multiple countries with no age restrictions. Marriage laws often give females a lower marriage age limit than males; girls are also more likely than boys to be married as children.

Child marriage poses a variety of risks. Girls in particular (especially those with older husbands) often face physical and sexual abuse which along with STDs and pregnancy can cause psychological and physical health issues. Child brides and grooms are far less likely to complete their secondary school education, and as adults, child brides earn 9% less than women who marry later in life. Furthermore, since child marriages are often arranged by family, those who attempt to escape may be met with violence and abuse. However, many cultures and religions promote child marriage, and there are many cases of happy, consensual child marriage as well.

**UN Involvement:**

In December 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declared in Article 16 that “Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses,” sparking debate over whether children can give free and full consent. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has formally condemned marriage of any individual under the age of 18. Sustainable Development Goal 5.3 states that the UN aims to “Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.” UNICEF (United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund) has taken many actions towards ending child marriage, such as in 2012, when they arranged for the International day of the Girl Child, which brought awareness to the issue of child marriage; UNICEF has also worked with many NGOs, including Girls Not Brides.

In 2014, the General Assembly voted to condemn child marriage and consider it a violation of women’s and children’s rights. The GA and UNHRC have also supported the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in funding NGOs and helping governments which are seeking to end child marriage. The UNFPA specifically seeks to teach girls the life skills and family planning they need to succeed independently, outside of a child marriage.

**Bloc Positions:**

- Middle East and African Bloc:

Child marriage is most common in the Middle East and Africa. Of the 20 countries with the highest rates of child marriage, 18 are in Africa; furthermore, all of the countries which have no restrictions on child marriage are found in this bloc. Religion plays a role in child marriage in many of these countries, with women (consensually or not) marrying young because Islam says it is acceptable.

- Central and Eastern European Bloc

Most child marriage laws in central and eastern Europe range from setting 16 to 18 as a minimum age, and child marriage is not the most pressing issue in the area. However, in select groups, especially the Roma people, child marriage rates are as high as 30%, leading to debate between traditional culture and human rights. Bride kidnappings are also a concern in many southeastern European countries.

- Latin American and Caribbean Bloc

Latin American countries have some of the strictest marriage laws in the world, with a few putting the legal age of marriage above 18 years old and the rest at 18 (Bolivia is an exception at 16). There is, however, a 23% child union rate in Latin America, especially among poor populations; this is in part due to the social stigmas surrounding pregnancy, sex, and single motherhood.

- Western European and Developed Bloc

Western Europe and developed nations have the lowest rates of child marriage. However, many developed nations have relatively relaxed marriage laws, which allow marriage at 16 or allow age restrictions to be bypassed with parental or judicial approval. Illegal unions are not unusual, both consensual and nonconsensual.

- Asia-Pacific Bloc

Child marriage rates vary widely in Asia. India has the most child marriages in the world, with Bangladesh and Nepal both having extremely high rates of child marriage; China, meanwhile, doesn't allow men to marry until age 22 and has very few child marriages due to population control.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. At what age does an individual become mentally capable of agreeing to marriage? Should this vary from person to person or is there a set age?
2. What are the root causes of child marriage and how can they be eliminated? If these negative root causes are removed, does child marriage become more acceptable?
3. Are religious or traditional justifications for child marriage valid enough to be respected? When religious freedom comes into conflict with human rights, which one takes precedence?
4. How would ending child marriage change social structures, and will affected countries be content with these changes?
5. What role does national sovereignty play? For countries that support child marriage, how can your country prevent interference from other countries? For countries which do not support child marriage, how can your country bypass national sovereignty?

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