

# WORKING TOWARDS A PLURALISTIC FUTURE

NEWSLETTER BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE SIKH HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP  
NGO WITH SPECIAL CONSULTATIVE STATUS AT THE UNITED NATIONS

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# WELCOME TO OUR FEBRUARY 2022 NEWSLETTER

## DIRECTORS NOTE

BY DR JASDEV SINGH RAI (SHRG DIRECTOR) (LONDON OFFICE)

Neurodiversity is one of those issues that is often missed or hidden. Either due to reluctance to acknowledge or because there is a degree of embarrassment. However, the most common diagnosis within the neurodiversity family is Autism. At the same time, there are many world-renown individuals on the Autistic spectrum who are not only highly successful but who have also contributed immensely to the growth and development of our global society. Elon Musk and Albert Einstein are some of the many examples. However, it is extremely important to remember that there are people with lifelong neurological characteristics such as Autism from all walks of life.

However, society has little understanding of Autism and often even less tolerance of it. This is particularly so in some Asian communities. Traditionally there was acceptance of a diversity of behaviour in human beings but no clear diagnostic approaches to assist. While some people with Autism have done well, the majority suffer a life of marginalisation due to misunderstandings regarding their behaviour and conduct. But with a better understanding of their predicament and personality, most are helped to lead fulfilling lives.

Gurdwaras and other Sikh community institutions can be particularly challenging environments for children with lifelong neurological characteristics such as Autism. Many children do not like the noise nor feel comfortable in a Sangat (congregation), particularly if it is large. They don't always follow rules and practices required within a Gurdwara. However, there is also a lack of understanding among Granthis (priests) and Gurdwara committee members regarding Autism.

Consequently, the Sikh Human Rights Group has embarked upon a project with the help of parents of some children on the Autistic spectrum to make Gurdwaras more welcoming, amenable and enjoyable environments for neurodiverse children and young adults. The project entitled the **Sikh Neurodiversity Network** has started working with Gurdwara management teams, Granthis and other volunteers to set engagement events (family days) for children on the Autistic spectrum. The parents have found this extremely helpful.

The project started at Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Southall. It is now being taken to other Gurdwaras around the country and it is hoped by the SHRG that the Gurdwara will in practice be a welcoming and nurturing environment for all, irrespective of their personality or the daily challenges that they may be facing.

The SHRG has also embarked upon an international campaign to make education on female menstruation easily available, culturally sensitive and fully supported by State Governments. The campaign also wants any taxation on products to manage menstruation hygienically, such as tampons, to be exempt. And further, the products need to be sustainable or disposable without causing environmental harm or issues. In order to achieve this, the SHRG has joined forces with some other NGOs such as BINTI international and is taking this issue to United Nations, hoping to persuade Member State Governments to sign up for this approach.

The SHRG is also coordinating with some other NGOs and countries in order to address the plight of small farmers around the globe. In other words, the SHRG is of the opinion that the World Trade Organisations rules are antagonistic to small farmers and penalise countries that support small farmers with subsidies. The SHRG considers that developing countries, that have a large number of small farms, should not be asked to comply with the same rules and regulations as those that apply to countries where the average farm is 400 hectares upwards. Therefore, the SHRG will be asking the United Nations Human Rights Council to ensure that the WTO's rules and agreements are brought further into compliance with universally accepted human rights standards and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Throughout February, the Sikh Human Rights Group has been preparing for the forthcoming 49th Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council. Positions, oral statements and written statements need careful strategising and lobbying. The UN HRCs 49th Regular Session takes place mostly in March. Therefore, to stay up to date with our progress please visit our [website](#) or our social media accounts at [@shrg\\_ngo](#)

Yours sincerely,

*Dr Jasdev Singh Rai*

# WELCOME TO OUR FEBRUARY 2022 NEWSLETTER

## EDITORS NOTE

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)

(HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER & PROJECT COORDINATOR AT THE SHRG)

Welcome to the February 2022 edition of the Sikh Human Rights Group's monthly newsletter informing you of our ongoing work. Unfortunately, we are not able to cover everything that we do in this brief newsletter. Nevertheless, and as you will see we are engaged in a wide variety of international human rights issues to promote our founding doctrine of Pluralism.

We have also taken on a number of interns and volunteers who take up research, take notes during United Nations conferences and events and write reports. Consequently, we always try to encourage them to contribute to our newsletter.

If you would like to get involved in any of our ongoing projects or for anything else then please contact us via email at [info@shrg.ngo](mailto:info@shrg.ngo)

I very much hope that you enjoy the contents of this month's edition.

Yours sincerely,

*Mr Carlos Arbuthnott*



(Mr Carlos Arbuthnott)



**SIKH  
NEURODIVERSITY  
NETWORK**

## **GURDWARA SRI GURU SINGH SABHA SOUTHALL**

### **SEN ENGAGEMENT EVENT**

This event is an opportunity for those with lifelong neurodiversity characteristics (SEN) of any age and those who care for them to come together to discuss how **Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall** can best support them and their families.

The Sikh Neurodiversity Network is currently establishing a network of children and adults with lifelong neurological characteristics, such as Autism, and listening to their experiences and the experiences of those who care for them. Specifically, regarding the problems they may have encountered whilst accessing Gurdwaras and other Sikh community institutions.

After we have completed this step we will establish a network of experts within Gurdwaras and other Sikh community institutions who will be charged with increasing Sangat understanding, engagement and support for those with lifelong neurological characteristics.

There will be:

- Food and drink
- Music
- Arts and crafts
- Toys

**Date:** 19 March 2022 (Saturday)

**Time:** 14:00 - 16:00 (GMT)

**Address:** Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall (Upstairs Hall), 2-8 Park Avenue, Southall, UB1 3AG



**To book your FREE ticket or for more information about this event and the Sikh Neurodiversity Network please scan the QR code below.**

**N.B. Wheelchair access is available**



# HOW DELHI BECAME THE GANG RAPE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

BY MS BETHAN WALTERS (HUMAN RIGHTS, COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA OFFICER AT THE SHRG) (LONDON OFFICE)

Paris, the love capital of the world. London, the finance capital of the world. Milan, the fashion capital of the world. Delhi, the [gang rape capital of the world](#). How did India get to the point that their capital, Delhi, is so often referred to as the rape capital of the globe, let alone attain the title of the gang rape capital of the world?

Indian newspapers on the 27th of January 2022 should have covered how India celebrated its Independence Day, but instead, Delhi has made the headlines for, yet another incident of [gang rape as a 20-year-old woman](#) was kidnapped from her home and gang-raped as an act of 'revenge' after a boy commits suicide.

A senior police officer reports, *'The boy committed suicide in November last year and his family blamed the victim for it. The family alleged that it was because of her that the boy took the extreme step. To exact revenge on her, the family members allegedly abducted her. They wanted to teach her a lesson.'*

After the young woman/mother/sister/wife, was gang-raped she was paraded by the accused on the streets of Kasturba Nagar with her hair chopped, face blackened, and a shoe garland around her neck.

## Why is this becoming a common occurrence in India?

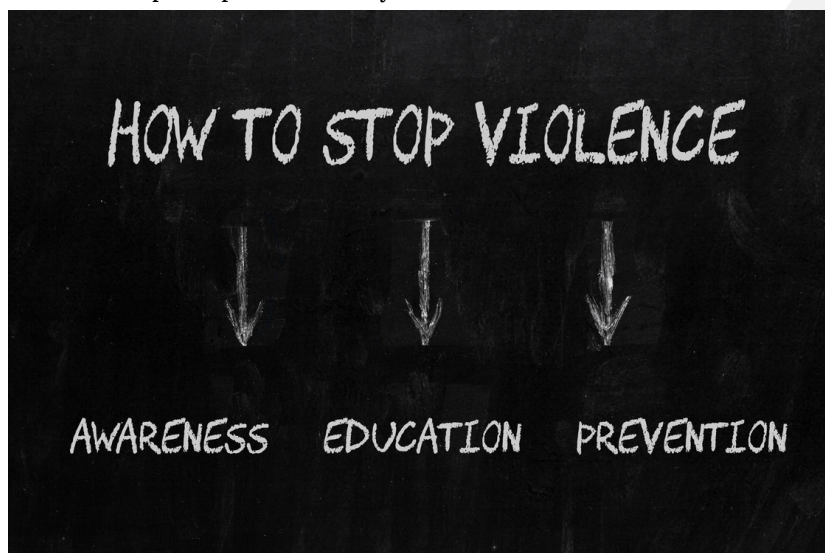
According to the [National Crime Records Bureau](#), in 2015 it was recorded that a woman reported a rape every 15 minutes in India. What makes this statistic even more harrowing, is that it is believed that 90% of rapes and assaults aren't being reported by victims.

With that in mind, it is no surprise that in 2018 India was ranked the most dangerous place in the world to be a woman according to the Thomson Reuters Foundation [survey](#).

In response to this data, experts said India moving to the top position showed not enough was being done to tackle the danger women face, even after the gang rape and murder of a student, Jyoti Singh on a Delhi bus that made [international headlines](#) and made violence against women a national priority.

*'India has shown utter disregard and disrespect for women [...] rape, marital rapes, sexual assault and harassment, female infanticide has gone unabated. The (world's) fastest growing economy and leader in space and technology is shamed for violence committed against women'* - said [Manjunath Gangadhara](#), an official at the Karnataka State Government, to the [Guardian](#).

Government data shows reported cases of crimes against women in India rose by 83% between 2007 and 2016. There were four cases of rape reported every hour.





# HOW DELHI BECAME THE GANG RAPE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

BY MS BETHAN WALTERS (HUMAN RIGHTS, COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA OFFICER AT THE SHRG) (LONDON OFFICE)

## Politicians and Police

In the case of the teenage girl in Uttar (India), in 2017, whose name is ironically protected under Indian law, the same legal system that failed to protect her against her assailant, Former BJP lawmaker [Kuldeep Sengar](#). Sengar who was allegedly known as a 'muscle man' or for using 'gangster politics', was accused of raping the 17-year-old when she approached Sengar for a job in June 2017. The victim alleges she was kidnapped and raped for more than a week by him and others.

Nearly two years later, Sengar was arrested for rape under child protection laws in 2019. However, this long journey to justice is just one example of why 90% of rape victims in India do not come forward. Not only were her allegations not taken seriously by the police but her family was threatened. For instance, it has been said that the victim's father was arrested for possessing an illegal firearm. He died 3 days later in police custody.

In addition, the victim was seriously injured in a suspicious car crash in July. Whilst she survived, both her aunts, who had been travelling with her, died and her lawyer was seriously injured. The crash happened in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, where Sengar was a lawmaker from Unnao district. In protest, the victim tortured herself, by setting herself on fire outside a BJP house. In order to cover up the crime of this child's sexual abuse so many have died. The eventual conviction and imprisonment of Sengar is not justice.

Many British and Indian journalists have investigated these alleged cases and uncovered how many authority figures have tried to cover up their sexual assaults. The verdict against Sengar came in the wake of the gang rape and murder of a 27-year-old vet in the southern city of Hyderabad that made [global headlines](#). It wasn't until the public took to the streets in protest that India's federal investigation agency took over the case and arrested Atul Sengar, Kuldeep Sengar's brother, and 10 others on charges of murder.

## Continuous Corruption

Even in the case of Jyoti Singh, in 2012, where her parents made a Trust in her name, the [Nirbhaya Jyoti Trust](#). Nirbhaya – Hindi for fearless is the name by which Jyoti came to be known because Indian law initially prevented the publication of her identity, similar to the cases above. The reason for this is that the authorities were anxious to avoid the creation of a martyr. They were quick to threaten publications with Section 228A of the Indian Penal Code and the possibility of two years in jail for identifying a rape victim. However, the code also contains a Clause permitting the next of kin to give written consent. Therefore, after Jyoti's family consented to her name being published, it started to be used more often. Her image remains private.

Jyoti's mother explains how she chose to 'disclose the name of my daughter, Jyoti Singh. She was a victim. She did not commit any crime. Why should we suppress her details? They, who gang-raped and murdered her, should hide their names for committing that brutal act'.



# HOW DELHI BECAME THE GANG RAPE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

BY MS BETHAN WALTERS (HUMAN RIGHTS, COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA OFFICER AT THE SHRG) (LONDON OFFICE)

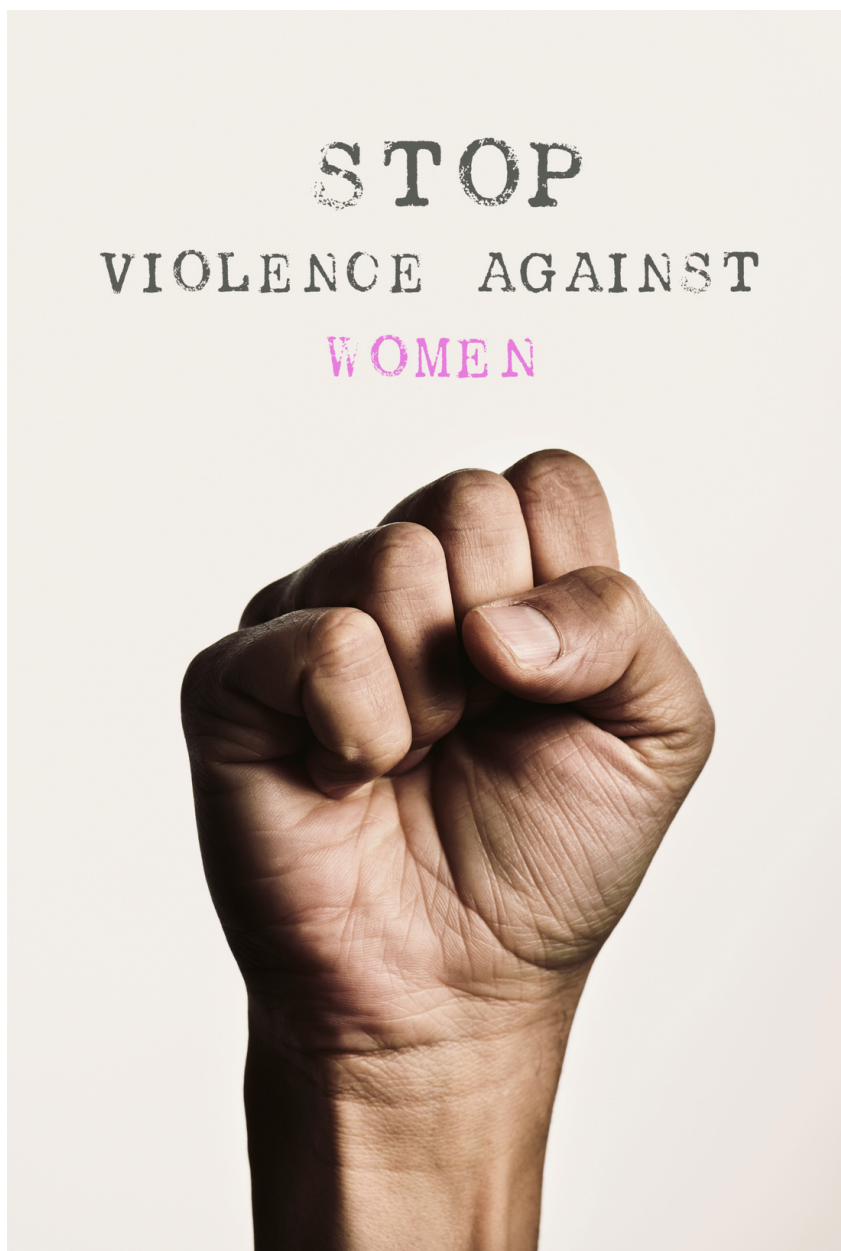
## India's Verdict

Violence against women in India appears to be a systemic issue. It is apparent, the more powerful one is, or if you're in the position of political or institutional power, the whole system seems to be at your disposal.

However, contrary to this case, it is not just the elite. In most cases, women know their attacker, and often it is their husband. Something that worried the globe during the coronavirus pandemic as domestic violence rose by at least [20% globally during lockdowns](#). The public understanding of what rape is and who might be guilty of rape is extremely narrow. Also, the tendency is still to side with the accused and not with the accuser. The victim of Sengar did not receive a medical examination until April 2018, nearly a year after the attack happened.

Whilst the Government has tried to improve matters with fast-track courts, and tougher sentencing, things just aren't getting any better. This may be due to enforcement evidently being non-existent.

As a nation, India prides itself on its democracy, its soaring economic growth, and stature on the world stage. Yet, there is a growing sense of shame in India to be known as the rape capital of the world!



# CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY SERIES

## MR MARK ASTON - COMPLIMENTS OF THE HOUSE

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)



To watch the full video please click [here](#)

Recorded live on the 16th of February 2022 this is the 2nd podcast in Sikh Human Rights Groups Corporate Social Responsibility Series.

### **Topic:**

*'How to address Britain's food wastage crisis'*

### **Panellist:**

Today you will be listening to Mr Mark Aston. Mark is 26 years old and has been working in the food supply chain sector for over 8 years. 4 years were spent studying a logistics degree at the University of Hull. During his studies, he also spent a semester studying in Hong Kong and a year at the Copenhagen Business School.

Since graduating he has taken up multiple jobs across the food industry. For instance, helping to run a start-up based on temperature-controlled logistics. This involved working with some of the biggest suppliers and customers in the UK. Since then he has moved into the retail sector taking up the position of an area manager for one of the UK's largest supermarket chains.

In addition to this, he also sits on the board of trustees for Compliments of the House, a community-led food redistribution charity working to cut food waste in Britain. Compliments of the House aims to change the way that we as a society view food wastage in Britain and turn that into helping as many people as possible along the way.

### **Sikh Human Rights Group Host:**

Mr Carlos Arbuthnott (Human Rights Officer and Project Coordinator)



**MR MARK ASTON - COMPLIMENTS OF THE HOUSE**

**Questions include but are by no means not limited to:**

What should we all be doing in our capacity as consumers to combat the food wastage crisis in Britain?

[www.shrg.net](http://www.shrg.net)



# REPORT ON 2022 ECOSOC FORUM

BY MS MONICA GILL (HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER AT THE SHRG) (NEW YORK OFFICE)

In January 2022, the Sikh Human Rights Group had the privilege of attending the 2022 ECOSOC Partnership Forum which focused on how to implement the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in the post-pandemic world. The Sustainable Development Goals, as defined by the United Nations website are *'a collection of 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all'*. The SDGs were established in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly and are intended to be achieved by the year 2030. These include a *'universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity'*.

The first session attended was entitled, **Achieving the SDGs and Sustainable and Inclusive Recovery from the Covid-19 Pandemic Through Partnerships and Sound Governance: The Vital Role of Local and Regional Governments**. The keynote address was given by Jose Manuel Ribeiro, the Mayor of the Municipality of Volongo. He described himself as a *'simple man with lots of passion'*. The key points that he made were that a great ally for the SDGs is to involve citizens because there is a need to have cooperation from everybody. He also stated that we weren't planning the right way, we have to engage people. He said that citizens are now very well prepared and the world has tools so we should use collective intelligence to plan and implement the SDGs. He finished off by saying that in order to achieve the SDGs we should promote behavioural change because a change in citizens' behaviour will lead to a change in political behaviour.

Another speaker that stood out during this session was Thomas George from UNICEF. He laid out many key points. He said that Covid has exposed many crises in cities, local Governments have to identify these pockets of poverty. He emphasised that local Governments must demystify the SDGs and make them more understandable to people. Another key point he made was that there are many vulnerable people who don't even have access to local Governments. How can we make sure these marginalised groups are also given a seat at the table?

The second session that was attended was entitled, **Financing the SDGs in the Era of Covid-19**. The keynote was given by Naveed Haniff from the office of the SDGs UN DESA. He made five key observations. The first was that economic recovery has slowed down, which has directly led to a decrease in SDG budgets. Second, emerging markets spend most on debt whereas low-income countries are in debt greater than their healthcare and education expenditures. The third was that there needs to be a domestic tax resource. Countries need to build meaningful tax systems and there needs to be global tax cooperation which would help reduce illicit tax flows. Fourth, there needs to be better SDG financing, better project planning and more mobilising. Finally, there needs to be policy analysis on key issues with an emphasis on long term loans on concessional conditions, grants and financing for the SDGs report.

The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals has been impacted heavily by the Covid-19 pandemic. The purpose of forums such as these is to establish a series of action items that would help bridge the delay in progress. Attending these forums helps organisations such as ours to communicate within our own networks as to what needs to be done to help move these goals along.



# INDIA'S VIOLATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS

BY MS SUKHMANI MANDAIR (INTERN AT THE SHRG) (NEW YORK OFFICE)

Over the past few months, several Government-funded educational institutions in Karnataka, India have banned female Muslim students from wearing a hijab. The Hindu-nationalist party (BJP) has backed and supported this discriminatory ban saying, '*clothes which disturb equality, integrity, and public law and order should not be worn*'. This ban has led to public outcry and increasing tensions - protests between Muslim and Hindu students around the hijab ban have caused Karnataka authorities to shut down schools and universities for three days. Viral videos have emerged of Hindu students heckling and bullying a young female Muslim student for wearing a hijab. A few days later, the local news had reported several female Muslim students' home addresses and phone numbers had been leaked online. The female students protested outside schools and were met with right-wing Hindu nationalist counter-protesters.

This ban is a direct manifestation of Indian authorities increasingly attempting to marginalize Muslims, exposing them to increased violence and discrimination. Karnataka - where only 13% of the population is Muslim - is governed by the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party). Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's election to power in 2014, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party has insistently pursued a Hindu-nationalist agenda that explicitly ignores and disenfranchises Muslims in India, instilling discriminatory ideals in everyday culture with ideas such as the creation of Pakistan being the ultimate manifestation of Muslim disloyalty. Modi's administration has allowed for and passed many anti-Muslim laws such as the Citizenship Amendment Act which specifically excluded Muslims and applied a religious criterion to the question of citizenship. Over the years, targeted acts of violence against Muslims have become common occurrences as well as mass violence against Muslim protesters (specifically, the killing of 50 Muslims in New Delhi during protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019). In an unfortunately successful attempt at undermining India's secularism, Modi's administration and the BJP have used their anti-Muslim rhetoric and legislation to escalate the daily discrimination of religious minorities, especially the millions of Muslims in India, leading us to the present violation of religious freedoms in Karnataka state.

Human rights law guarantees religious freedom to all - this includes the right to manifest one's religious beliefs through practice and worship both in public and private. Human rights law requires States to guarantee this right, as well as the right to autonomy - this includes the right to choose what to wear. States must ensure equality and the right to non-discrimination, especially in regard to religion and gender. The United Nations Human Rights Committee has clarified that the concept of worship includes the display of symbols, and that observance and practice can include the wearing of distinctive clothing or head coverings. Because religious freedom or autonomy is not an absolute right and can be limited by Governments, it is important to note that these rights can only be limited when it can be undeniably proven that such restrictions are necessary for the greater good of public safety and social order. The hijab ban does not meet the necessary threshold for limitations to be placed upon those who choose to exercise this right.

India is obligated under international human rights law to uphold these religious freedoms. The State policy banning hijabs directly violates religious freedoms and autonomy rights with no possible benefit to anyone, but rather consequently, the proliferation of anti-Muslim sentiment. The UN human rights office has described India's subversive actions against Muslims as 'fundamentally discriminatory'. Because human rights law requires non-interference by the State in matters of religion and religious beliefs, the State must remain neutral. This applies to an 'aggressive secularism' that attempts to hinder any individual manifestation of religion and/or private beliefs. This hijab ban is the latest showing of the marginalisation of Muslims in India, as well as the human rights violations being ignored and disregarded by Indian and BJP officials.





# INVESTMENT STATE DISPUTE SETTLEMENT

BY MR AHARAN SANDHU (INTERN AT THE SHRG) (LONDON OFFICE)

**What is ISDS?**

**Why is it so important?**

The ISDS is short for Investment State Dispute Settlement and its job is to be the mediating ground between a sovereign nation (such as Singapore) and another party which is usually a transnational corporation (such as Nike). A dispute occurs when a corporation that invests money into a State does not get what they agreed or bargained for. This may seem fair, however, usually, the bargain involves the cost of lowering the standards of human rights and labour in the receiving State. ISDS is meant to mediate between the two to find common ground and peacefully resolve an issue such as copyright infringement. As aforementioned a State may cause an ISDS to occur when it decides to enact its democratic powers. For example in the famous case of **Phillip Morris v Uruguay**, Uruguay in a bid to help the health of its citizens had started to put warnings on cigarette packaging to encourage citizens to stop smoking. Instead, Phillip Morris had argued that it was infringing on its trademark (and as a result causing it to lose money) as there was less space available on the cigarette packaging and something on the same packaging that actively deters its consumers away from its product. With great financial difficulty, Uruguay won the arbitration, helping to enforce basic democracy and exercise its sovereignty.

The case above is a shining example of corporations attempting to bully States (usually that from the global south (developing world) into submission and putting aside basic human rights. When a State wishes to get direct investment from corporations like Phillip Morris the citizens of that State suffer. A State can no longer exercise their sovereignty and what democracy calls for without being challenged. Secondly, the monetary investment usually comes at the cost of reduced protections of labourers, meaning lower pay and lower working conditions which directly infringes on human rights.

ISDS is however meant to be the saving grace in all of this. In other words, the mechanism via which a State can enforce the will of its people. However, it is extremely important to note that ISDS is a private undertaking. What does this mean? This means that when a claimant (usually a corporation) decides to make a claim against a State (what is almost always a legal and democratic action taken for the protection of public policy or public morals) the State would have to externally brunt the cost. So you could potentially have a war-torn State such as Ethiopia going against a giant corporation with billions of dollars to spare in a legal battle. Developing States are usually the ones that are hit the hardest, and usually don't have the funds to go down this route. This then leads to a 'chilling effect', a State would rather continue lowering or not enforcing the human rights of its citizens in favour of a corporation in the fear that they would have to cough up huge sums of litigation funds, therefore, disrupting the evolution of human rights.

Therefore and as you can imagine the global south is constantly facing the threat of litigation and the aforementioned chilling effect. Consequently, some States will not be able to enrich and enforce the basic human rights of their citizens even if democracy calls for it. Owing to the simple fact that they simply cannot afford it. Even if a State does win an ISDS they risk other investors not investing in their country and then having to duly rely on other States who will help them but in return for the same (if not more) infringements on their citizens' human rights. Therefore, I put it to you - How can a developing State ever develop if it is always stagnant?



# United Nations Engagement Opportunities 2022

Want to contribute to a written and oral  
statement at the United Nations  
Human Rights Council?



**We are currently searching for secondary school and undergraduate students to help us prepare our written and oral statements on climate change adaptation and mitigation for the United Nations Human Rights Councils 2022 Regular Sessions:**

We want to empower you to have your say, at a truly international event, on how every member of our global society can overcome the many challenge and issues of climate change

Through online presentations and simple practical projects you will learn more about the United Nations and how you can become involved

Enhance your CV and UCAS applications whilst simultaneously learning more about climate change and how it can be overcome

**To apply please send an expression of interest statement to:**

**[carlos.arbuthnott@shrg.ngo](mailto:carlos.arbuthnott@shrg.ngo)**