

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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NEEDS AND DISABILITY ENGAGEMENT
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WELCOME TO OUR AUGUST & SEPTEMBER 2022 NEWSLETTER

DIRECTORS NOTE

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

September and October have seen the Sikh Human Rights Group (SHRG) engaged at the 51st Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council and the hosting of our first United Nations side event on one of our thematic issues.

The SHRG continues to work on its main thematic lines with the aim of introducing new ideas, grassroots activism and putting a Sikh perspective on the international stage.

Our main themes are Diversity, Biodiversity, Environment, Gender, Transnational Corporations and Human Rights, Minority Issues, Peace Resolution, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Poverty Reduction, New Technologies and Human Rights.

We are excited to participate in the forthcoming COP27 in Egypt and hope to network with like-minded organisations.

Our Sikh Neurodiversity Network project continues to progress with more Gurdwaras requesting for sessions to be held on their premises. There is now a successful project running at Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Slough.

There is a brief report in this newsletter regarding our Sikh Neurodiversity Network project being mentioned in our statements to the United Nations Human Rights Council. Where we are asking the United Nations to set up assistance for States to help integrate neurodiverse children and adults into everyday life.

Our two Human Rights Officers in Geneva have worked hard during the 51st Regular Session of the United Nations Human rights Council. For example, they have delivered numerous statements on behalf of the organisation. The organisation's researchers prepare the background material, write the statements and send them off to our representatives at the United Nations Human Rights Council.

The SHRG also engaged in the Human Rights Advisory Body, which meets before the Human Rights Council and advises the Human Rights Council with research, proposals and ideas. The SHRG raised suggestions about the incorporation of Neurodiversity into the Human Rights Council's main agenda.

The SHRG also attended the conference on the Durban Follow-Up. The Durban Follow-Up is a yearly review of the decisions made at the World Conference Against Racism in Durban in 2001. SHRG was involved in that conference.

During the 2022 Durban follow-Up, the SHRG raised the issue of Para 67 again - a few countries felt that they could introduce the possibility of looking at Para 67 and finding a term to capture the sentence.

We also continue to work on the small farms' issue and push for human rights to be incorporated into the WTO Agriculture Agreement Framework - a statement was made to this effect.

At the 51st Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, we held our first side event. It was focused on pushing our agenda on a Declaration on Diversity. We were honoured to be joined on the platform by the Permanent Representative of Bolivia. The side event was attended by three countries and several NGOs.

The SHRG also hosted a webinar on the strike action that was then being undertaken by Criminal Barristers across England and Wales. It was astonishing to hear that junior Barristers are paid below minimal hourly wage. They face intense hardships. We are glad that there has been some resolution of their demands although the agreement may not have gone far enough.

We have an article on the debt faced by least-developed countries. This is part of our poverty reduction programme. Debt is a serious obstacle to many developing countries whose ability to address even basic issues such as poverty and health is hampered by the fact that a lot of their GDP goes to service debt at high interest. The SHRG will work with other organisations on seeking a change in the debt burden on developing countries.

We hope that you will find this newsletter useful reading and will be encouraged to participate in our work.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jasdev Singh Rai

WELCOME TO OUR AUGUST & SEPTEMBER 2022 NEWSLETTER

EDITORS NOTE

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)

(HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER & PROJECT COORDINATOR AT THE SHRG)

Welcome to the August and September 2022 editions 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 domestic and 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 me via email at carlos.arbuthnott@shrg.ngo

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

Yours sincerely,

Mr Carlos Arbuthnott



(Mr Carlos Arbuthnott)



GURDWARA SRI GURU
SINGH SABHA
SOUTHALL

shrg
Sikh Human
Rights Group

SEND After School Club

Special Educational Needs & Disabilities

Every Wednesday from 4:00pm to 5:30pm

At Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha (Upstairs Hall)

2-8 Park Avenue, Southall, UB1 3AG



LET'S LEARN ABOUT ...

GURDWARA SAHIB

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STORIES - SAKHIES

SIKH RHYMES

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PLAY. LEARN. GROW.

For more information please contact either:

Mr Carlos Arbuthnott (English Speaker) via: carlos.arbuthnott@shrg.ngo

or

Ms Karimul Kaur Dhillon (Punjabi Speaker) via: 07546699115

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL 51ST REGULAR SESSION

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)



General Debate on the Oral Update by the UN High Commissioner

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

On Wednesday the 14th of September 2022, Mr Albert Barseghyan (Human Rights Officer at the SHRG), made the following oral submission at the United Nations Human Rights Council's 51st Regular Session in Geneva. Specifically, at the General Debate on the Oral Update by the UN High Commissioner (Agenda Item 2).

Full Text:

'The Sikh Human Rights Group would like to commend the Acting United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the oral update presented yesterday.

We would like to comment on Sections 46 and 47 and say that to implement the 2030 agenda in a timely manner, civil society participation on a grander scale is pertinent. The SDG office at the United Nations should be made more accessible as the 2030 Agenda will ultimately be delivered by civil society.

We have found that the website is extremely difficult to navigate, lacking any FAQs and emails and calls to the SDG office go unanswered.

For instance, our partner organisation Nishan-E-Sikhi has done immense work of planting 650,000 trees in one region of North West India and has found that the temperature in that area is a few degrees cooler than the surrounding localities. Their focus on organic farming has also resulted in cleaner and higher levels of groundwater. They also have a huge focus on education and women's empowerment.

We would love to send an extensive report on their work to the SDG office but there has been a major issue of guidance and interest from the office.

Similarly, our partner in the Indigenous Knowledge Systems department of Kwazulu Natal University has integrated SDGs but also found it difficult to communicate with the SDG office. We urge the High Commissioner to take this on board and enable the SDG initiative to be more civil society friendly and accessible...'

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL 51ST REGULAR SESSION

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)



The Promotion & Protection of All Human Rights, Civil, Political, Economic, Social & Cultural Rights

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

On Wednesday the 21st of September 2022, Mr Albert Barseghyan (Human Rights Officer at the SHRG), made the following oral submission at the United Nations Human Rights Council's 51st Regular Session in Geneva. Specifically, regarding the Promotion and Protection of All Human Rights, Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, including the Right to Development (Agenda Item 3).

Full Text:

'In reference to report A/HRC/51/22, the Sikh Human Rights Group supports the sentiment and call for action in integrating human rights with development, in policies of financial institutions and further the need to review debt burden of least developed countries to ensure basic human rights for their citizens.

Basic human rights include the right to healthy food and the right to a healthy environment. While much attention is given to IMF, World Bank and Private Financial institutions in recovery from debt, the pandemic and environmental degradation, we must not ignore the impact of the policies of the World Trade Organization, particularly in the Agreement on Agriculture.

This agreement encourages large-scale monoculture farming which is detrimental to environment, food security of least developing countries that have to import basic food commodities and further increases poverty as well as dependence on unhealthy diets.

As the WTO is outside the UN family, its focus remains trade with no obligation to integrate human rights principles in its agreements. As it is not a business, it is not bound to the emerging Binding Instruments for Transnationals.

The WTO model of trade regulation is limited and perhaps outdated. As human rights and importantly the Sustainable Development Goals are becoming increasingly integrated into almost all work of United Nations bodies, agreements and actions, and as Agriculture links into almost all SDGs, it is reasonable to propose that Agriculture should closely involve several agencies of the United Nations, such as UNFCCC, HRC, UNCTAD, UN Women, UN-Habitat, FAO, IFAD, etc... to achieve development with human rights...'

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL 51ST REGULAR SESSION

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)



Interactive Dialogue with the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee

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

On Thursday the 29th of September 2022, Mr Ivan Lorenci De Francisco (Human Rights Officer at the SHRG), made the following oral submission at the United Nations Human Rights Council's 51st Regular Session in Geneva. Specifically, at the Interactive dialogue with the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee (Agenda Item 5).

Full Text:

'Further to our statement at the 28th Advisory Committee, we would respectfully remind the international community that neurodiversity remains a neglected area of disability. It seems that because neurodiversity is not obvious as a physical disability, little attention is paid to those who are disadvantaged or denied opportunities by virtue of being on the neurodiverse spectrum. Autism is a prevalent form of neurodiversity. Ignoring it affects the children and adults who possess it and deprives them of opportunities that they can easily avail to improve their lives.

We raise the issue here as we feel that the HRC should make neurodiversity an important issue and persuade Member States to adopt programmes and make commitments to raise general and specific awareness around this issue, set up support systems, encourage employers to understand neurodiversity and state authorities such as law enforcement agencies to be sensitive to the character of individuals with neurodivergent conditions.

We also recommend that a specialist team could be set up with the help of the WHO to offer assistance to countries under improving technical skills mandate.

This also falls under the HRCs obligation to ensure technical cooperation but also Member States National Development Objectives and the UN SDGs...'

This matter needs fewer resources to address but holds enormous potential for the individual concerned, the community and the State.

SHRG and our affiliate organisations would be delighted to assist this Advisory Committee in developing this further.

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL 51ST REGULAR SESSION

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)



Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia & Related Forms of Intolerance

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

On Tuesday the 4th of October 2022, Mr Albert Barseghyan (Human Rights Officer at the SHRG), made the following oral submission at the United Nations Human Rights Council's 51st Regular Session in Geneva. Specifically, regarding racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance (follow-up to and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action) (Agenda Item 3).

Full Text:

'The Sikh Human Rights Group notes with dismay that racism continues unabated as a scourge of human species. Whether based on colour or ethnicity, racism defies logic as there is neither a scientific basis to it nor a socially beneficial use for it.

Some misguided European ideologies institutionalized racism and it's now Europeans' duty to deal with it.

While States have chosen to deal with it through the law and human rights, we feel that a psychological problem also needs other means to address it.

A social and political feature of racism is discomfort with diversity, minorities and 'the other'.

We have been proposing a United Nations Declaration on Diversity that we think can help society to be comfortable with diversity in all forms.

This will complement the Durban Declaration with positive programmes by States to make diversity inclusive and encourage society to be at ease with racial and other forms of diversity.

A UN Day of Diversity will also be a step forward to make diversity inclusive as States can showcase their best practices.

Twenty-one years after Durban we should not simply be writing reports on the lack of progress, but looking for ways to address the issue.

We hope our proposal for a Declaration on Diversity and a UN Day of Diversity will be taken seriously....'

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL 51ST REGULAR SESSION

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)



General Debate on Technical Assistance and Capacity-Building

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

On Thursday the 6th of October 2022, Mr Ivan Lorenci De Francisco (Human Rights Officer at the SHRG), made the following oral submission at the United Nations Human Rights Council's 51st Regular Session in Geneva. Specifically, at the General Debate on Technical Assistance and Capacity-Building (Agenda Item 10).

Full Text:

'Neurodiversity remains a neglected area of disability. Neurodiversity is a form of hidden disability as it is not a physical disability. Hence it is often neglected or treated as a mental disability issue.

However, neurodiversity is simply a different way of perceiving and dealing with the world.

We believe that with appropriate training, States, Schools and employers can make life meaningful for children and adults with Neurodiversity, particularly those with Autism. They will also find that people on the Neurodiverse spectrum are constructive, hard-working and an asset to whoever engages with them.

The HRC should make neurodiversity an important issue and persuade Member States to adopt programmes and make commitments to raise general and specific awareness around this issue, set up support systems, advisory services, encourage employers to understand neurodiversity and state authorities such as law enforcement agencies to be sensitive to the character of individuals with neurodivergent conditions.

This understanding and training can be promoted through the mandate of Technical Cooperation and capacity building by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights with assistance from experts from the WHO. It will meet UN SDG.

It needs to be part of Member States National Development Objectives.

Our organisation and affiliates run successful programmes to assist community and State institutions understand Neurodiversity and accommodate it. We will be happy to assist...'

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL 51ST REGULAR SESSION

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)



Interactive Dialogue on the Report of the OHCHR on the Right to Privacy in the Digital Age

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

On Friday the 16th of September 2022, Mr Kenny Singh (Human Rights Officer at the SHRG), made the following oral submission at the United Nations Human Rights Council's 51st Regular Session. Specifically, regarding the report of the OHCHR on the Right to Privacy in the Digital Age (Agenda Item 3).



Follow-up To and Implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

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

On Monday the 3rd of October 2022, Mr Ivan Lorenci De Francisco (Human Rights Officer at the SHRG), made the following oral submission at the United Nations Human Rights Council's 51st Regular Session in Geneva. Specifically, regarding the follow-up to and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (Agenda Item 8).

CRIMINAL BARRISTERS STRIKE ACTION

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)

Don't forget to watch the recording of our Criminal Bar Strike Civil Society Engagement Event

THIS EVENT IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CRIMINAL BAR STRIKE THAT WAS TAKING PLACE ACROSS ENGLAND AND WALES

Speakers include:

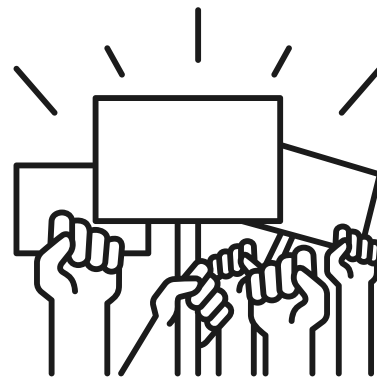
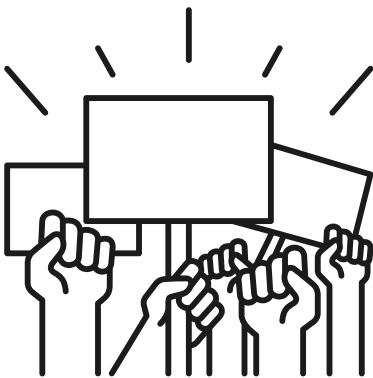


Former Chair of The Criminal Bar Association
Criminal Barrister (25 Bedford Row)

Secretary of The Criminal Bar Association
Criminal Barrister (Garden Court Chambers)



Criminal Barrister (Second Six Pupil)
(Pump Court Chambers)



TO WATCH THE FULL RECORDING PLEASE CLICK [HERE](#)

CRIMINAL BARRISTERS STRIKE ACTION

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)

On Monday the 5th of September 2022 Barristers across England and Wales began their indefinite, uninterrupted strike action, in an escalation of industrial action over legal aid rates which began in April 2022.

The walkout marks an escalation in tensions between criminal Barristers and the UK Government as they fail to agree on what is an acceptable level of pay for legal aid work.

Panellists:

(1) Mr Jo Sidhu QC

Former Chair of The Criminal Bar Association of England and Wales (2021 - 2022)

Criminal Barrister (25 Bedford Row)

(2) Ms Lucie Wibberley

Current Secretary of The Criminal Bar Association of England and Wales

Criminal Barrister (Garden Court Chambers)

(3) Ms Ruba Huleihel

Criminal Barrister (Second Six Pupil) (Pump Court Chambers)

Chair:

(1) Mr Carlos Arbuthnott

Human Rights Officer & Project Coordinator at the SHRG

Agenda:

- Introduction to panellists
- Presentation on the Criminal Bar strikes
- Questions posed to panellists
- Audience Q&A



TO WATCH THE FULL RECORDING PLEASE CLICK [HERE](#)

CRIMINAL BARRISTERS STRIKE ACTION

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)

Questions include but are by no means limited to:

Panellists: For members of the audience who have little understanding of life at the Criminal Bar in your expert opinions what factors, both professional and personal, have led to this indefinite strike action?

Panellists: What are the objectives of this indefinite strike action? In other words, in your expert opinions, how could or should our criminal justice system be reformed to combat the issues that you have previously discussed?

Panellists: It would be remiss of me not to ask your opinions on the impact that this indefinite strike action is having or is going to have on the victims of crime and those currently awaiting trial. In other words, we have heard a lot in the news recently that both victims and those charged with serious criminal offences are now going to have to wait for extended periods of time for their trials to begin. Therefore, do you believe that the intended positive outcomes of this indefinite strike action outweigh the distress and hardship caused to the aforementioned parties?

Panellists: My next question to you is twofold. Firstly, how can members of our audience support you and your colleagues in your ongoing and highly commendable efforts to force through the reforms that are needed within our criminal justice system? Secondly, is there one message that you would like our audience to take away from today's discussions?

Brief Guide Re: Criminal Bar Strike

Who is striking?

Members of the Criminal Bar Association of England and Wales are carrying out indefinite strike action, starting on the 5th of September 2022, escalating the intermittent strikes that have been taking place since June 2022 after the UK Government refused to negotiate with their demands.

Nearly 80% of the roughly 2,000 members of the Criminal Bar Association taking part in the ballot, voted to move to an uninterrupted strike.

Dominic Raab, the Justice Secretary, has refused to negotiate with Barristers at all, although he did briefly break his summer holiday to write a few tendentious paragraphs in the Daily Mail, accusing Barristers of holding 'justice to ransom'.

Why are the strikes happening?

Although issues of underfunding in the legal aid system go back decades, the renewed strike action has been prompted by the recent independent review of criminal legal aid, which recommended that fees be increased by a minimum of 15% without delay.

The pay of junior Barristers is below the national minimum wage - as little as £77 for some hearings but that's before deducting travel, office and other vital costs. In fact, some Barristers in their first three years, who are self-employed, can take home as little as £12,000 a year according to the CBA.

While criminal Barristers still hold a sense of power and tradition, a quarter has decided to leave the profession in the last five years.

TO WATCH THE FULL RECORDING PLEASE CLICK [HERE](#)

SIKH HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS UN SIDE EVENT

UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL 51ST REGULAR SESSION

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)



Making Diversity Inclusive in the State

4 OCTOBER 2022

'A FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM WHY PEOPLE CONTINUE TO BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST ON THE GROUND OF RACE, GENDER, RELIGION, LIFESTYLE, NATIONALITY AND OTHER DIFFERENCES MAY BE THAT SOCIETY IS UNCOMFORTABLE WITH DIVERSITY WHICH HAS DEVELOPED FASTER IN THE LAST DECADES IN THE MODERN STATE THAN CULTURE AND POLITICS WERE READY FOR. WHILE HUMAN RIGHTS REGIME IS NECESSARY TO ENSURE THE PROTECTION AND RIGHTS OF THOSE FACING DISCRIMINATION, MAKING SOCIETY COMFORTABLE WITH DIVERSITY IS EQUALLY ESSENTIAL. A UN DECLARATION ON DIVERSITY TO ENCAPSULATE ALL FORMS OF DIVERSITY, INCLUDING CONSTITUTIONAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, ECO-DIVERSITY AND DISABILITY (NEURO-DIVERSITY) WILL ENCOURAGE STATES TO TAKE PROACTIVE STEPS FOR SOCIETY TO EMBRACE DIVERSITY IN ALL ITS FORMS...' - DR JASDEV SINGH RAI (SHRG DIRECTOR)

TO WATCH THE FULL RECORDING PLEASE [CLICK HERE](#)

SIKH HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS UN SIDE EVENT

UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL 51ST REGULAR SESSION

BY MR CARLOS ARBUTHNOTT (LONDON OFFICE)

PANELLISTS



**MS. MARIA MARIELA
MACDONAL ALVAREZ**

Permanent representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia to the United Nations Office and other international organisations in Geneva



**MR WARWICK
HAWKINS**

Associated with Faith in Society Limited and formerly the UK Department of Communities and Local Government



**DR KANAWALJIT
SINGH**

Nishan-E-Sikhi Charitable Trust



**PROFESSOR
HASSAN KAYA**

DSI- NRF Centre in Indigenous Knowledge Systems (CIKS) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

TO WATCH THE FULL RECORDING PLEASE [CLICK HERE](#)

THE TIME FOR DEBT RELIEF IS NOW

WE MUST UNITE AND SUPPORT DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

BY MR AMRITPAL VIRDEE (HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER AT THE SHRG) (NEW YORK OFFICE)

Imagine the world to be a family of five.

How would you feel about a loved one struggling to eat, heat their home or afford basic needs?

This is the reality of today for developing countries.

According to the latest analysis by the UN Global Crisis Response Group, almost one in five (1.2 billion) of every man, woman and child in the world is severely exposed to crises in food, energy and finance.

Day after day, the situation continues to worsen with projections of vulnerability increasing at ever-alarming rates, fueled by the war in Ukraine, the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change.

At the heart of the dilemmas facing developing countries are crushing debt burdens.

Weakening global solidarity, systemic inequalities in the financial system and the COVID-19 pandemic have brought a wrecking ball to the financial stability of developing countries.

Our brothers and sisters across the developing world are struggling to keep their heads above water and provide a quality standard of living for their people whilst only now, living costs are becoming an issue in richer countries.

Exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, the result is that many developing countries are facing a future with depleted domestic resources and weaker multilateral policy buffers as highlighted by Deputy Secretary-General Ms Amina Mohammed in a recent speech:

'At least 108 developing countries now face new economic shocks with higher debt levels than in 2019. Government debt in developing countries rose from 58 per cent to 65 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) between 2019 and 2021'.

The urgent need for developing countries to respond to global shocks, coupled with the dwindling of their precious financial resources demonstrates the need to reform a flawed international financial system that was not designed to react to multiple systemic and global crises.

Despite this, the international community has failed to unite and deliver support.

Going back to the family analogy. We are watching our loved ones tread water without attempting to throw a lifeline.

This year, developed countries will spend roughly 3.5% of their revenue on debt interest repayments compared to 14% of Government revenue for the least developed countries.

Interest rates in the developed world are on average 1% compared to over 8% in developing countries.

The result is that in 2020, 59 developing countries spent more on external public debt repayments than on public health care. During a once in a century pandemic.

Multilateral efforts to mitigate this problem are inadequate.

The Debt Service Suspension Initiative allowed developing countries to pause debt repayments whilst fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this was only partially effective and expired at the end of 2021.

THE TIME FOR DEBT RELIEF IS NOW

WE MUST UNITE AND SUPPORT DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

BY MR AMRITPAL VIRDEE (HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER AT THE SHRG) (NEW YORK OFFICE)

This leaves the Common Framework for Debt Treatment as the main debt relief mechanism. However, only three countries have signed up and none have seen their debt be successfully restructured.

Without a coordinated global response, the trade-off between debt repayment and public investment will only increase, fueling greater civil unrest and undermining our hopes of an inclusive and equitable world.

Despite the dire situation, it is never too late for the global community to act.

At the multilateral level, we can implement the Resilience and Sustainability Trust, utilize debt for climate swaps and fully align financial flows with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Nationally, we can look beyond the antiquated measure of GDP and holistically assess financing needs, especially given the multidimensional nature of vulnerability for developing countries. National planning and donor coordination, including country platforms and integrated national financing frameworks, play a part here.

Locally, we can petition our lawmakers to strengthen global partnerships and help increase transparency, predictability and accountability of the international financial system.

Without exaggeration, the decisions made today determine whether the world emerges stronger and more resilient from the crises of the past two years, or whether almost half of humanity is left behind. We must act together and throw a desperately needed lifeline to developing countries.



NEW YORK CONDOM AVAILABILITY PROGRAM

BY MS APRIL HAMILTON (HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER AT THE SHRG) (NEW YORK OFFICE)

Officially recognised in 1981, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, or AIDS, the result of human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV, has circulated the world, with more than 70 million people having been infected and 35 million overall mortalities. There are several ways it can be transmitted, the most common being through sexual contact and via needles and syringes. Since the recognition of the disease in 1981, New York City has had the highest incidence rate of the virus of any city in the world: according to the New York Department of Health, there were 3,145 cases reported between 1981 and 1984, with 4,133 reported cases by 31 July 1985. The impact of the disease on society, in a physical sense, as well as its disproportionate impact on specific communities, necessitated organised community efforts and community responses to control its spread and prevention. It was and continues to be a severe public health crisis.

The incidence of AIDS was highest in New York City during the early 1990s, leading to community actions being taken to prevent its further spread. The New York Board of Education took the most significant action by including Title 8 § 135.3 of the New York Codes, Rules, and Regulations. In 1991 the policy was implemented into the state curricula, requiring AIDS education and additional initiatives in public schools. Called the AIDS instruction program, it requires districts to implement the condom availability program, or CAP, at each school campus. A review by the National Institute of Health shows that condoms can reduce the incidence of AIDS by 95%. The shown efficacy of condoms was the primary reason for including CAP as part of the policy. However, this new policy was met with varying degrees of support and disapproval.

The response of parents and students varied. A survey taken in New York City, published in 1995, shows that 69% of parents and students were in favour of the Condom Availability Program. Similarly, the data suggests that parents were equally in favour of the AIDS education program, believing that a sexual education program would promote safe sex practices and AIDS prevention. Politicians within the State of New York had mixed responses to the new policy, with politicians such as Chancellor Ramon C. Cortines disfavoring the implementation of the CAP. The primary beliefs of those who disapproved of the program were that a CAP would lead to increased sexual activity amongst adolescents and that it violated a parent's religious freedom. Before the beginning of the program, the Roman Catholic Church voiced its disapproval of the mandate. In 1991 emissaries of the Roman Catholic Church called the plan '*morally bankrupt*', with Cardinal John O'Connor comparing the legislation to '*giving an alcoholic a bottle of wine so he will not drink whiskey*'. In 1993 there was a case regarding the CAP called **Alfonso v Fernandez**. In this case, petitioner parents brought the proceeding to the lower courts of the State of New York. They asserted that the condom availability portion of the mandate violated their constitutional rights, namely the right to freely practice religion, and requested the inclusion of a condom opt-out program within the legislation. The ultimate ruling included a clause in the legislation requiring the implementation of a condom opt-out program in schools which enables parents to prevent their children from accessing free condoms from school distribution centres. Schools throughout the state responded accordingly.

The impact of the condom availability program on sexual behaviour slightly varied depending on the time a study was conducted, but the results were consistent. In an article published in 1995, researchers observed that condoms as a contraceptive doubled in schools before and after the implementation of the CAPs. It noted a minor change in overall sexual behaviour. In a study published in 1998 researchers found that the incidence of sexual behaviour decreased by 20% in schools with CAPs and a 4% decrease in students having sex over a 3-month period. This slight decrease in sexual behaviour contradicts the claims that implementing CAPs at schools increases sexual behaviour. The consequences are not solely related to sexual behaviour and health but also apply to the policy itself. The surrounding debate on CAP continues to be highly contentious, with Roman Catholic leaders in the city continuing to criticize its mandate long after its passing in 2007. A joint statement was released by several leaders criticizing the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's efforts to deliver 26 million condoms to various organizations throughout the city, with said program costing \$720,000. The CAP and the AIDS education program, amongst other policies, proved effective in reducing the incidence of AIDS and AIDS-related deaths. Since 2001 the number of HIV / AIDS diagnoses has decreased by 76%. While stakeholder perspectives have varied, the state government's justification for the policy was within its authority. The program has proven effective in reducing the incidence of AIDS and can be used as an example for other states considering implementing similar programs.

United Nations Engagement Opportunities 2022

A large, faint watermark of the United Nations logo is centered in the background. It features a world map within a circular frame, surrounded by a laurel wreath.

**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