VMUN 24'

IBC

Confronting the Legacy of Unit 731: Safeguarding Humanity from Biological Weapons (Pre-Biological Weapons Convention Signing)

Freeze Date: April 9, 1972

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Letter From The Executive Board

Welcome to Vaels Model United Nations,

The Executive Board of IBC extends a warm welcome to all delegates participating in this conference. It gives us immense pleasure to serve on the Executive Board of VMUN 2024. While we will follow UNA-USA rules of procedure as a foundation, it's important to remember the flexibility inherent in this field. Bioethics often necessitates open discourse and the exploration of various viewpoints.

This background guide serves as your essential toolkit, equipping you with the knowledge and resources needed to excel in your committee sessions. Whether you are a seasoned MUN veteran or a first-time participant, we encourage you to make use of the provided information and prepare to engage in thought-provoking discussions and collaborative problem-solving. Please do not limit your research to this document, this study guide is to give you a general perspective on the agendas to be discussed upon.

The EB is here to support you throughout this enriching experience. We encourage you to actively participate, ask questions, and contribute your unique perspectives to the committee discussions. Reach out to us via the email given below if you wish for reallotment or are facing issues during the registration process.

With warm regards,

The Executive Board

Signing off,
Chair of IBC:
Hamsika Chakilam

Vice-Chair of IBC:
Sanjana Roy

For any issues such as misspelled names, wishing to be reallotted, etc, feel free to contact us privately, or at:
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An Introduction to Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee

The Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee is a vital body within the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Established in 1998, it serves as a global forum for ethical reflection, debate, and standard-setting in the field of bioethics.

The creation of the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee stemmed from a pivotal moment in history. The latter half of the 20th century witnessed a surge in scientific advancements in biotechnologies, encompassing fields like medicine, genetics, and agriculture. While these advancements promised immense benefits, the potential for misuse and unintended consequences also became apparent. Revelations of unethical biological experimentation programs like Unit 731 during World War II further underscores the urgency for international dialogue and ethical frameworks to safeguard human dignity and well-being.

The specter of biological weapons development also loomed large. While the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) was signed in 1972, predating the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee's establishment, concerns persisted regarding research activities that could blur the lines between peaceful and weaponized applications of biological agents. The International Bioethics Committee and Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee’s creations served as a crucial step towards strengthening the international bioethics architecture and ensuring responsible conduct in the life sciences.

The International Bioethics Committee and the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee* : A Collaborative Approach

The creation of both the International Bioethics Committee and the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee served as a crucial step towards strengthening the international bioethics architecture and ensuring responsible conduct in the life sciences. However, their roles and compositions differ:

- **The International Bioethics Committee:** Composed of independent experts from various disciplines (medicine, law, ethics, etc.), the International Bioethics Committee provides independent advice on ethical issues raised by advancements in the life sciences. It drafts international bioethics instruments and promotes public awareness of bioethical issues.

- **The Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee:** Established under the International Bioethics Committee's Statutes, the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee is an intergovernmental committee composed of representatives from UNESCO member states. It reviews the advice and recommendations of the International Bioethics Committee and informs the International Bioethics Committee of its opinions and proposals. It then submits these combined insights to UNESCO for dissemination to member states.

In essence, the International Bioethics Committee acts as a body of independent experts who provide crucial analysis and ethical guidance, while the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee serves as a platform for member states to engage with these recommendations and translate them into concrete actions at the international level. This collaborative approach ensures that bioethical considerations are addressed from both expert and governmental perspectives, fostering a more robust and comprehensive approach to bioethics on a global scale.

The intergovernmental bioethics committee is also referred to as IGBC, a platform to represent member states under the International bioethics committee. All documents about IBC and IGBC are relevant here. We request the delegates to look further into rules and regulations of the Intergovernmental bioethics committee. Please do not get confused between International Bioethics Committee and Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee as they both are essentially the same, with the only difference being the Intergovernmental bioethics committee has representatives of member states, whereas the International bioethics committee has field specialists. This MUN conference simulates the interGOVERNMENTAL bioethics committee as the delegates represent member states.

Committee Focus and Goals:

- ★ The IBC's primary focus is on the ethical implications of scientific and technological advancements in the life sciences and their applications in various fields, including medicine, biotechnology, and environmental science.
- ★ The committee aims to promote respect for human dignity and fundamental rights in the context of biotechnologies.
- ★ It strives to develop ethical frameworks and guidelines to ensure responsible research and development practices.
- ★ The IBC also fosters international cooperation in bioethics through dialogue and knowledge sharing among member states.

A Detailed Summary of the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee of UNESCO's Mandate

1. Identifying Emerging Issues:

- ★ The committee acts as a global watchdog, actively scanning the horizon for new and evolving bioethical challenges arising from scientific advancements in the life sciences. This includes issues like human cloning, gene editing, the ethical implications of artificial intelligence in the life sciences, and the potential misuse of biotechnologies for non-peaceful purposes.

2. Conducting In-Depth Studies and Preparing Reports:

- ★ The committee undertakes in-depth studies on these issues, consulting with experts, researchers, and member states. They then produce reports outlining the scientific, ethical, and social implications.

3. Developing Frameworks and Guidelines:

- ★ Based on their research, the committee drafts ethical frameworks and guidelines for responsible research and application of biotechnologies. The frameworks may address issues like informed consent in research, equitable access to biotechnologies, fair distribution of benefits and risks, and the protection of human dignity in the face of scientific advancements.

4. Fostering International Cooperation:

- ★ **:** The IGBC promotes international collaboration by facilitating dialogue, knowledge sharing, and exchange of best practices among member states. They aim to cultivate a spirit of collective responsibility towards bioethics.

While the committee's mandate empowers it to perform these crucial functions, it's important to understand the limitations of its authority:

- ★ **Non-Binding Recommendations:** The committee's recommendations and guidelines are not legally binding on member states. However, they carry considerable moral weight due to the committee's global representation and the expertise of its members.

- ★ **Focus on Soft Law:** The committee operates within the realm of "soft law," which influences international behavior through persuasion and moral authority, rather than through legally binding obligations.
- ★ **No Enforcement Power:** The committee lacks the authority to enforce its recommendations or guidelines. It relies on the cooperation and commitment of member states to implement its advice and frameworks.

Despite these limitations, the committee plays a critical role in advancing the field of bioethics:

- ★ By identifying emerging issues and providing ethical frameworks, it helps navigate the complex ethical landscape posed by biotechnologies.
- ★ Through promoting international cooperation and knowledge sharing, it fosters a global conversation on bioethics and encourages concerted efforts towards responsible scientific research and development.
- ★ The committee's work ultimately contributes to safeguarding human dignity, promoting ethical practices in research, and ensuring the safe and responsible use of biotechnologies for the betterment of humankind.

This Model UN committee's agenda is dated back to April 9 1972 (DURING COLD WAR), predating the establishment of the International Bioethics Committee in 1993 and the establishment of the Intergovernmental bioethics committee in 1998. Even though the International Bioethics Committee and Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee are recent, our simulation will explore bioethics in history. This unique approach will challenge us to consider how past events might influence the future of bioethics.

Bioethics Before the BWC Freeze Date (April 9, 1972)

Bioethics, as a formalized field of study and practice, was still in its nascent stages prior to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) freeze date of April 9, 1972. While ethical considerations surrounding medical practice and experimentation existed for centuries, the rapid advancements in science and technology during the 20th century necessitated a more systematic approach.

The Evolving Landscape of Bioethics:

- **Early Ethical Concerns:** Historical accounts document ethical debates surrounding medical practices like bloodletting and dissection dating back centuries.
- **Rise of Modern Bioethics:** The 20th century witnessed a surge in scientific breakthroughs, particularly in genetics, organ transplantation, and artificial life support. These advancements sparked concerns about potential misuse and the need for ethical frameworks to guide research and application.
- **Pre-BWC Focus:** Early bioethics discussions focused on issues like informed consent, patient autonomy, and the ethics of human experimentation. The Nuremberg Code (1947), a response to the atrocities committed by Nazi doctors during World War II, became a landmark document outlining ethical principles for research involving human subjects.

Limited Legal Framework:

- **National Laws:** Prior to the BWC, most bioethical considerations were addressed through national laws or professional codes of conduct for medical practitioners. These regulations primarily focused on patient safety and informed consent in clinical settings.
- **International Focus:** International law remained largely silent on bioethical issues before the BWC. The focus of international treaties was primarily on disarmament and arms control.

Emerging Concerns:

- **Nuclear Threat:** The Cold War and the threat of nuclear weapons overshadowed discussions around biological warfare.

- **Limited Awareness:** The potential for biological weapons development and the ethical implications were not widely understood or addressed at the international level.

The BWC as a Turning Point:

- The signing of the BWC in 1972 marked a significant shift. While primarily focused on prohibiting the development and use of biological weapons, the BWC indirectly acknowledged the ethical concerns surrounding biological research.

The period leading up to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) signing in 1972 witnessed a confluence of scientific advancements and ethical ambiguity, particularly concerning bioweapons. While the field of bioethics was still nascent, the potential for weaponizing biological agents raised a series of complex bioethical dilemmas.

1. The Blurring Lines of Research and Weaponization:

- **Dual-Use Dilemma:** Many scientific discoveries have applications in both medicine and warfare. Research on pathogens like anthrax or plague could be justified for developing vaccines and treatments, yet also carried the potential for offensive biological weapons development.
- **Opaque Research:** Concerns arose regarding the potential for seemingly legitimate biological research to be a covert front for developing bioweapons. The lack of international oversight made it difficult to distinguish between peaceful and weaponized research programs.

2. The Ethics of Defensive Bioweapons Programs:

- **Deterrence vs. Escalation:** Some argued that developing defensive bioweapons programs (researching vaccines and treatments for potential biological weapons) could deter adversaries. However, others contended that such programs could normalize the concept of biological warfare and trigger an arms race.

- **Resource Allocation:** Investing resources in defensive bioweapons programs could divert funding away from more peaceful medical research and public health initiatives.

3. The Nuremberg Code and Bioweapons Research:

- **Silence on Biological Weapons:** The Nuremberg Code (1947), a landmark document outlining ethical principles for research involving human subjects, did not explicitly address biological weapons research. This gap created uncertainty about whether the same ethical principles could be applied to research with potential military applications.

4. Ethical Considerations in Testing Bioweapons:

- **Human Subjects vs. Animal Models:** Testing the effectiveness of defensive measures (vaccines or treatments) for bioweapons raised ethical questions. Using human subjects in such testing was deemed unacceptable, but relying solely on animal models presented limitations in accurately mimicking the effects of biological agents in humans.

5. The International Community's Limited Response:

- **Focus on Traditional Disarmament:** Prior to the BWC, international efforts focused on disarmament treaties for nuclear and chemical weapons. Biological weapons remained a less-addressed threat, with limited focus on the ethical implications of their development and use.
- **Lack of Transparency:** There was no international mechanism for verifying compliance or monitoring bioweapons research programs before the BWC. This lack of transparency fostered suspicion and mistrust between nations.

The BWC's Legacy:

The BWC's signing in 1972 marked a turning point. While it didn't create a comprehensive bioethics framework, it explicitly prohibited the development, production, and stockpiling of biological and toxin weapons. This international consensus helped solidify the ethical stance against biological warfare.

Timeline of Bioethical Problems with Potential Weaponization (Pre-BWC Freeze Date - April 9, 1972)

18th Century:

- **Variolation:** This practice, the precursor to modern vaccination, involved inoculating individuals with weakened or modified smallpox to develop immunity. While a medical advancement, it carried risks and raised ethical concerns about the deliberate exposure to disease.

19th Century:

- **Biological Warfare Precedents:** Historical accounts suggest instances of using biological agents like poisoned arrows or contaminated water sources in warfare during this period. These raise early questions about the ethics of using biological means for military purposes.
- **Pasteurization:** The discovery of pasteurization by Louis Pasteur in 1864 revolutionized food safety and public health. However, the same principles could be weaponized by deliberately introducing pathogens into food or water supplies.

Early 20th Century:

- **World War I (1914-1918):** While not widely documented, some evidence suggests limited attempts to develop and use biological weapons during this war, such as anthrax-laced grain or glanders-infected horses. This highlights the potential for weaponizing biological agents even with limited scientific understanding.
- **The Rise of Chemical Warfare:** The widespread use of chemical weapons during WWI spurred concerns about the potential development and use of biological weapons as an even more devastating weapon.

Mid-20th Century:

- **The Rise of Microbiology:** Advancements in microbiology throughout the first half of the 20th century increased scientific knowledge of pathogens, making them more readily identifiable and potentially weaponizable.

- **Nazi Biological Warfare Programs (1933-1945):** During WWII, Nazi Germany developed biological weapons programs, including research on anthrax and plague. **Unit 731**, a notorious secret biological and chemical warfare unit of the Imperial Japanese Army, also conducted horrific experiments on live human subjects during this period. These programs exposed the horrifying potential biological warfare held and underscored the need for international controls.
- **The Nuremberg Code (1947):** A response to the atrocities committed by Nazi doctors during WWII, the Nuremberg Code established ethical principles for research involving human subjects. However, it did not explicitly address bioweapons research, leaving a gap in the ethical framework.
- **The Cold War (1947-1991):** The intense competition and paranoia of the Cold War fueled concerns about biological weapons development as a potential tool of mass destruction. The focus on nuclear weapons overshadowed bioweapons research to some extent, but suspicions lingered.

Additional Bioethical Incidents:

- **The Tuskegee Syphilis Study (1932-1972):** This infamous study in the US withheld treatment from African American men with syphilis to study the disease's progression. While not directly related to bioweapons, it highlighted the ethical abuses that could occur in medical research and the need for informed consent and patient protection.
- **The Manhattan Project (1939-1945):** While not directly related to bioweapons, the secrecy surrounding the development of atomic bombs and the potential unintended consequences raised concerns about the ethical implications of pursuing powerful weapons of mass destruction.
- **The Plague Epidemic in Manchuria (1910-1911):** The Japanese military response to this outbreak involved quarantines and some argue, testing experimental plague treatments on human subjects without informed consent, blurring ethical lines in public health responses.
- **Spanish Flu Pandemic (1918-1920):** This devastating global pandemic, caused by an influenza virus, fueled anxieties about the potential deliberate use of pathogens as weapons. Conspiracy theories, though not substantiated, arose about the origin of the virus, raising concerns about the ethical boundaries in biological research.
- **The Dachau Hypothermia Experiments (1940-1945):** Nazi doctors conducted cruel experiments on concentration camp inmates, exposing them to freezing

temperatures and other harsh conditions to study methods of survival. Though not directly related to pathogens, these experiments exemplify the ethical disregard for human life in wartime medical research with potential military applications.

- **The Fort Detrick Serratia Marcescens Experiment (1950s):** The US military conducted a biological warfare simulation experiment by spraying a harmless bacteria, Serratia marcescens, over St. Louis, Missouri, without informing the public. This incident raised serious concerns about informed consent, potential ecological risks, and the ethical implications of weaponizing biological agents, even for testing purposes.
- **The Ogata Sha (Ogata Company) Incident (1966-1968):** In Japan, a private company, Ogata Sha, allegedly produced and sold biological weapons to several countries, including North Korea and Egypt. This incident exposed the dangers of bioweapons proliferation beyond state-sanctioned programs and the need for international controls.
- **The Soviet Bioweapons Program:** While details remain shrouded in secrecy, the Soviet Union is believed to have had a large-scale biological weapons program during the Cold War. Concerns arose regarding the development and stockpiling of weaponized pathogens like smallpox and tularemia, highlighting the ethical risks associated with a biological arms race.

Unit 731

Unit 731: Shrouded in secrecy and fueled by unimaginable atrocities, Unit 731 stands as a chilling example of the ethical abyss that can be reached in the pursuit of biological warfare. Established by the Imperial Japanese Army in Manchuria during World War II (1937-1945), this covert biological and chemical warfare research unit conducted horrific experiments on live human subjects.

The Depths of Depravity:

- **Live Dissections:** Prisoners of war (POWs), primarily Chinese civilians but also Koreans and others, were subjected to vivisection, often without anesthesia, to study the effects of plague, anthrax, and other pathogens.
- **Deliberate Infection:** Healthy individuals were deliberately infected with various diseases to observe their progression and potential treatments.
- **Weaponization Experiments:** Methods of dissemination were explored, including dropping plague-infected fleas from airplanes or spraying pathogens in simulated attacks.
- **Weaponized Logs:** Prisoners were referred to as "marutas" (logs) and treated as mere research objects, highlighting the complete disregard for human dignity.

The Stain on Bioethics:

- **Human Experimentation:** Unit 731's practices blatantly violated the most fundamental principles of informed consent and human subject protection, which are cornerstones of bioethics.
- **Ethical Blind Spots:** The urgency of wartime research and the prevailing militaristic ideology of the time allowed for these atrocities to occur, highlighting the need for robust ethical frameworks in times of war.

The Cold War Twist:

- **Post-War Dealings:** In exchange for immunity from prosecution for war crimes, the US granted some Unit 731 personnel access to their research data. This controversial decision, aimed at gaining a biowarfare advantage during the Cold War, raised serious ethical concerns about profiting from such horrific acts.

- **The Ethics of Intelligence Gathering:** The decision to collaborate with Unit 731 personnel, even for intelligence purposes, remains a contentious issue, blurring the lines between seeking knowledge and condoning war crimes.

A Legacy of Unease:

- **Bioweapons Proliferation:** The knowledge gained from Unit 731's research undoubtedly contributed to advances in biological warfare research globally, further fueling anxieties about the potential use of such weapons.
- **The Dual-Use Dilemma:** Unit 731 exemplifies the "dual-use dilemma" where legitimate scientific research can have weaponization potential. This highlights the need for rigorous oversight and international cooperation to prevent research from going down a dark path.
- **Distrust and Secrecy:** The Unit 731 episode fostered a climate of distrust and secrecy surrounding biological research during the Cold War, hindering transparency and collaboration in addressing global health threats.

Unit 731's impact transcended the immediate horrors of World War II:

- It cast a long shadow on the field of bioethics, demanding stricter ethical guidelines and oversight in biological research.
- It fueled the Cold War arms race, contributing to anxieties about biological weapons proliferation.
- It exposed the dangers of sacrificing ethical principles in the pursuit of national security.

Closing Remarks

Delegates,

This background guide has equipped you with a solid foundation for your exploration of bioethical challenges in the upcoming committee sessions.

The field of bioethics is dynamic and thrives on a diversity of perspectives. We encourage you to leverage the knowledge gained here as a springboard for further inquiry and to actively participate in the committee discussions.

The Executive Board wishes you the best in your continued research and preparation. We look forward to hearing your insightful contributions and witnessing the engaging conversations that will undoubtedly unfold.

See you there!

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Additional Resources:

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