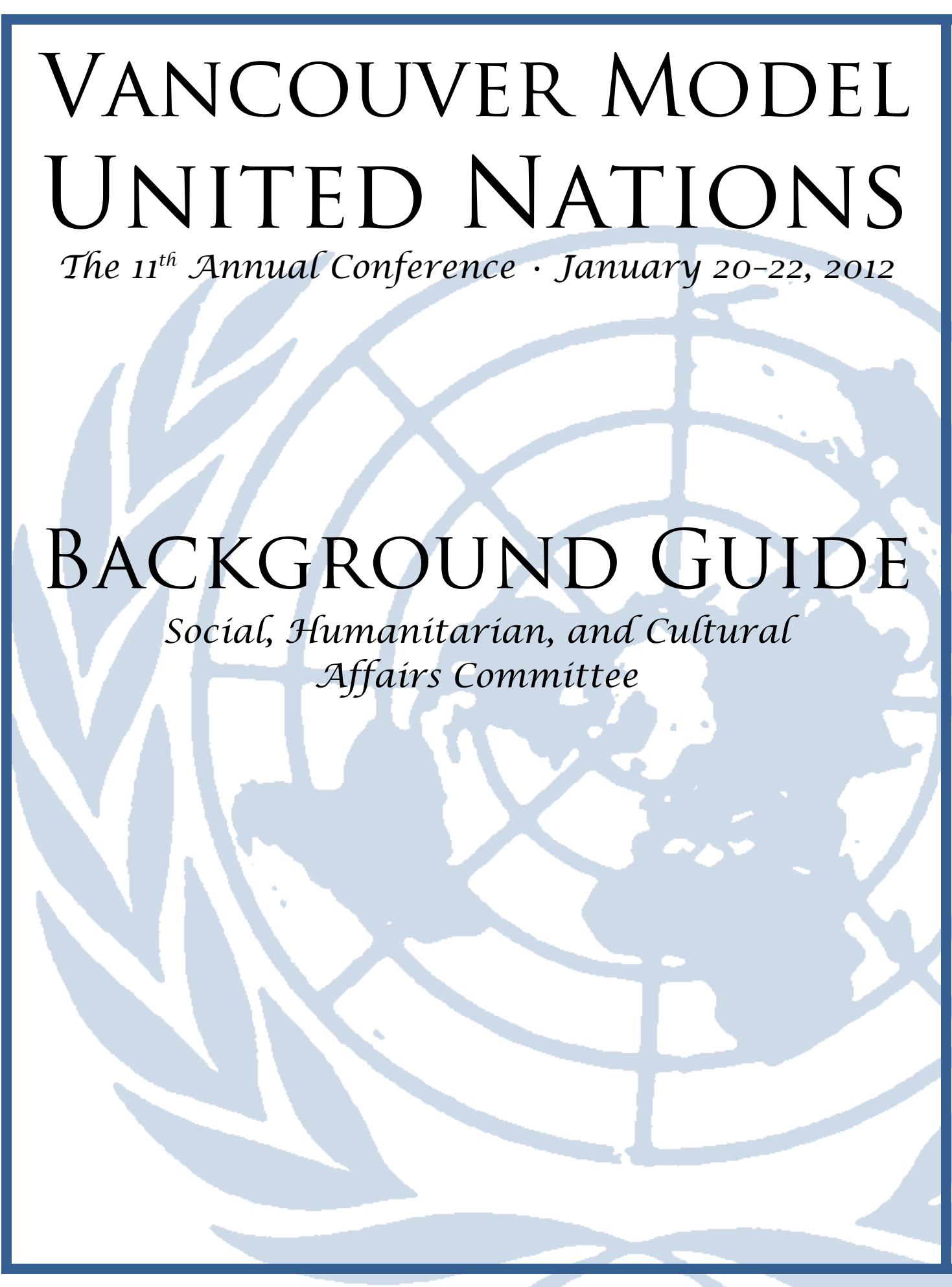


VANCOUVER MODEL UNITED NATIONS

The 11th Annual Conference · January 20-22, 2012

BACKGROUND GUIDE

*Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural
Affairs Committee*





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Dear Delegates,

My name is Cara Jin and I am the director for the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am a grade 12 student at University Hill Secondary and I am excited to be able to work with you during the course of this conference.

I hope you will find the two topics that the staff of SOCHUM have selected engaging and thought-provoking. These topics are very important and relevant to the present time. Womens' rights in many third-world countries have frequently been disregarded and overlooked. Although progress has been made, there is still a long road ahead of us. Child soldiers have been and are still used in quite a few developing countries. It is important not only for the child soldiers who are currently in combat to receive aid but also for the children who have been discharged from service to be rehabilitated.

I wish you all the best of luck in your research and I look forward to seeing everyone at the conference.

Sincerely,

Cara Jin
Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Affairs Committee

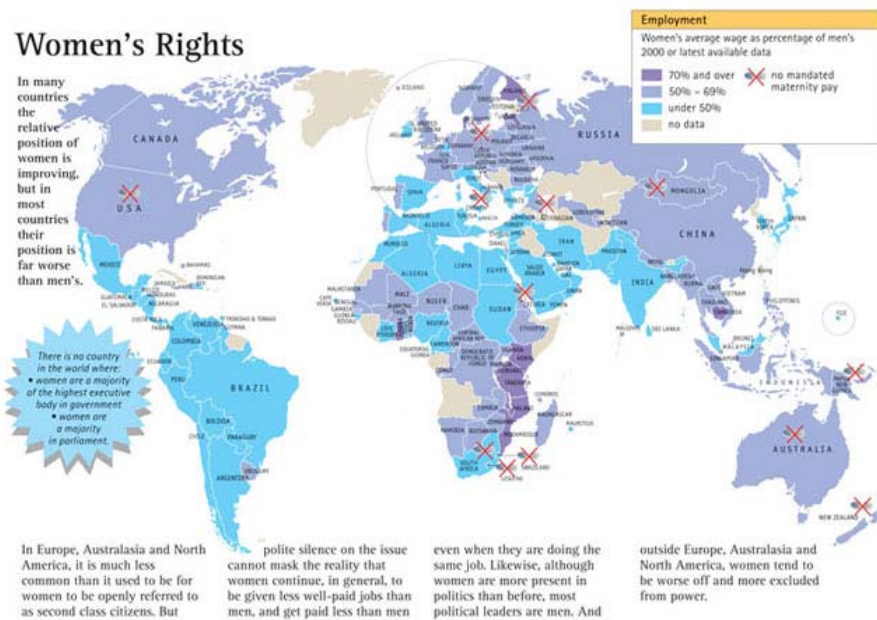
Topic A: The Rights of Women in Developing Nations

Introduction

It can seem almost inconceivable to many North Americans, but the hard truth about women's rights is that many women in developing nations around the world struggle to maintain their basic rights as individuals. Many women can face severe discrimination and inequality on a daily basis. There are fewer job opportunities for women, who are in many places even confined to the home, prevented from taking part in wider society. Where women do find jobs, their jobs are often the hardest tasks, the most menial or even gruesome tasks, and yet usually the least paid tasks. In many developing nations, women are barely educated and oftentimes illiterate as a result. The situation of women's rights can be so abject that women are not even sufficiently empowered to defend themselves, both from further abuse of their human rights and from physical violence.

In contrast, in many countries male children are greatly favoured over female children. Boys provide a sense of security and wealth for families in many developing countries, and so are better-fed and better-educated by many families. In some cases, families who discover that their unborn babies are female even abort these babies and try for a boy. However, without

women who can function as equals to men in all respects, developing nations lose huge opportunities to prosper. It has been shown that when developing countries improve the state of women's rights, women gain access to better healthcare and family planning resources due to awareness of reproductive rights, and are more likely to have well-paying jobs that help the community, to name only a couple of benefits. Fortunately for the world, much attention has been brought to the state of women's rights within the past decade and the current situation has been improving.



Timeline

- 1848 — Seneca Falls Convention takes place in New York and is an early and prominent conference to discuss women's rights
- 1913 — First International Women's Day is held
- 1946 — The Commission on the Status of Women is created to improve the status of women

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- 1948 — Universal Declaration of Human Rights is adopted by the General Assembly
- 1964 — Civil Rights Act passed in the US, which makes discrimination based on gender illegal
- 1975 — First World Conference on Women held in Mexico City to discuss gender equality
- 1976 — United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) created
- 1979 — General Assembly adopts Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- 1993 — Women for Women International is created to support women in war-torn nations
- 1995 — Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China
- 2000 — Millennium Development Goals adopted by world leaders address the promotion of gender equality
- 2000 — Dakar Framework for Action reaffirms participants' commitment to achieving gender parity, including education for all
- 2001 — Taliban are overthrown in Afghanistan and women are allowed to leave the house unaccompanied and to work
- 2011 — UN Women becomes operational



Current Situation

Poor Healthcare and Malnutrition

Poverty-stricken communities are abundant in developing nations. In these districts, such as Chennai, India, males are often favored over females. There isn't much food available in these countries, and males are usually better-nourished from an early age. This can be a huge problem because children who aren't fed properly can face serious health issues. Malnutrition can lead to vulnerability to diseases. Women subject to this sort of discrimination become susceptible to diseases such as tuberculosis, cancer, and dysenteric related illnesses. Without proper nutrition, females find it harder to work and take care of their families.

For women who are pregnant or disease-stricken, lack of nutrients isn't the only health-related problem they face. In developing countries, hospitals are scarce. They can be miles away from people in villages that are in need of medical attention. Transportation is often hard to come by and infrastructure is often so underdeveloped that women cannot travel to hospitals. Therefore, many illnesses go unchecked and many births take place inside the home. In Nigeria, for example, only 13.9% of births took place in a medical facility in 2003.¹ This makes it hard for women to receive treatment when needed and for children to survive past infancy. As well, medical care can be very expensive; many women find healthcare unaffordable. Because insurance is unavailable in many developing nations, aid is often unavailable to those who need it. Even for those women who can afford to pay their medical bills, hospitals are oftentimes unsanitary and unsafe to stay in, especially during pregnancy. These factors cause preventable deaths in poverty-stricken areas.

¹ Chudi, Ibekwe. "Healthcare Problems in Developing Countries." Academic Journals. 8 Feb. 2010. 22 Jul. 2011. <<http://www.academicjournals.org/MPR/PDF/Pdf2010/Apr/Ibekwe.pdf>>.

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Education

Many girls are not given the opportunity to attend school for a variety of reasons, including cultural prejudice and insufficient or low-quality educational facilities. In many countries, girls and women are expected to stay at home and take care of household chores, menial tasks that their families believe do not require much education. Boys are often the only ones that families send to school, since the jobs they get later on in life bring more money to their families than they would if occupied by women. Worse, a lack of education brings with it significant long-term effects. With little education, women and girls are so under-empowered that they cannot hope to improve their living standards and fight for their rights. Education is indeed an extremely significant area that, if improved, can lead to sweeping effects across the board. With good education, women can use the information they learn to feed their families better. As well, educated women are likely to have fewer children, which allows them to invest more time and resources towards the health and education of each child. For example, in 2003, educated Brazilian women had an average of 2.5 children each to illiterate mothers' 6.5.

In many developing nations, there are insufficient schools accessible to girls. Often, the schools that are available are either too far away or too expensive. Additionally, institutes that girls can attend often lack a good curriculum. The quality of education is just as important as being able to receive an education. In order to make significant educational improvement for girls, they must be taught according to comprehensive syllabuses that will empower them later on in life.

In countries with extremely low literacy rates, such as Bangladesh and India, about two-thirds of the female population are illiterate, whereas only about one-third of the men are illiterate. Over two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults reside in just eight countries: Nigeria, China, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Egypt, and India.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a very serious issue that must be addressed immediately for the safe and secure future of women. Women, especially in areas in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America, are subject to physical abuse, verbal attacks, and psychological mistreatment, although their situations are gradually improving. In many countries, wives may be beaten by husbands, fathers, or any other male family members for no legitimate reason. The violent exploitation of women can have long-term serious effects. Wives, as well as their children, may suffer emotional trauma for the rest of their lives.

Domestic violence is a major issue particularly because females often feel that they do not have the right to defend themselves. The police forces in many developing countries often consider domestic abuse acceptable. With no one to turn to for help, women are attacked without recourse. Organisations such as Amnesty International are currently trying to give women a voice to speak out against abuse.

Occupation

In developing nations where jobs are especially scarce, men are much more likely to find work than women are. Cultural biases aside, men are better educated and better fed, which gives them the upper hand in the hiring process. Many jobs in developing countries include construction, mining, and transporting heavy objects. Because women are underfed, they often don't meet the strength requirements

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needed to perform tasks that these jobs ask for. Also, men have a better chance of getting jobs that pay higher wages.

Women who do work get paid less and have to work harder than men do. If they can find jobs, women must often work where conditions are harsh. For example, women now constitute more than 50% of migrant workers in Latin America and Asia.² Female migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation by human traffickers and as sex workers. Increased job opportunities and security will be crucial for the sustainable security of women's rights in developing nations.

Reproductive Rights

These are legal rights that are related to giving birth, family planning, and reproductive health. According to these rights, women are allowed to help determine the number of children they have, as well as the spacing between each child. Many women have no knowledge that these rights exist, and little access to contraceptives. Therefore, large families are inevitable in some parts of the world. If more women knew about their reproductive rights, it would help prevent diseases from spreading and allow for better family planning.

With smaller families, women can spend more time taking care of each individual child. This can allow the children to be better educated and better fed since more resources can be spent on each child. Family sizes in developing countries tend to be very large, due to the requirements of agricultural work and the need for more boys bringing in income. However, larger families mean that less attention is spent on education than on earnings to bring home. Spreading awareness about reproductive rights and increasing the availability of family planning tools is crucial for establishing smaller family sizes and improving the living conditions of communities.

UN Involvement

- UN Women — Established in 2010. This organization was created for UN member states to accelerate the process of empowering women and reaching gender equality. UN Women supports causes trying to eliminate discrimination against females. This UN association is helping women gain roles in government and receive the rights that they are entitled to.
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) — adopted by the General Assembly in 1979. This has been described as a bill of rights for women. This convention provides a foundation for achieving gender equality by ensuring that women have the right to have access to a place in politics and the right to vote.



² "Women Migrant Workers." UN Women. 24 Jul. 2011.

http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_poverty_economics/women_migrant_workers.php.

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- Universal Declaration of Human Rights — Adopted by GA in 1948. This declaration consists of 30 articles that state the rights of humans in general as well as rights of women. It clearly states that discrimination of women should cease to exist and that gender equality should be achieved.
- International Women’s Day — In 1975, the UN declared March 8 as International Women’s Day. The Secretary General makes a speech that marks the day of women every year.
- Commission on the Status of Women — Created during the UN’s first year of existence. This is a body that aims to press women’s situations forward. This commission has worked closely with UNESCO and UNICEF to bring attention to women living in poverty and violence against females.

Possible Solutions and Controversies

There are many separate avenues that must be targeted to close the gender gap and improve women’s rights. A few examples are listed below, but delegates are encouraged to bring other sub-issues to the table.

Infrastructure

In many developing countries, transportation infrastructure is very poor. Road systems can be insufficiently maintained or even non-existent. Deficits in transportation infrastructure affect quality of life across the board, and as the most vulnerable human rights-wise of the sexes women often feel the brunt of the negative effects. Insufficient transportation infrastructure can make it difficult for women who have to travel long distances carrying heavy objects. It can also become a major obstacle when schools and hospitals are not nearby; women are usually the ones who first lose the luxury of learning at schools and being treated at hospitals when they are too difficult to reach. The little transportation that is available, other than walking, is either too expensive or unusable due to bad conditions. For instance, the Tanzania-Zambia Railways is in a horrible state of affairs. There are broken train tracks and frequent breakdowns making the network barely usable.

Poor infrastructure is a major impediment when it comes to advancement in developing nations. More government money must be spent on improving roads, transportation methods, and making schools and hospitals more accessible. If transportation issues are addressed, more women will be able to gain a good education and more medical attention when needed.

Employment

In order for women to be able to find work, stable jobs—not only the low-paid and menial positions that do exist, but also skilled positions—must be created. These jobs must be safe for women and pay well enough for wives to feed their families. Women who have jobs can work to improve living conditions in poverty-stricken areas. When women can obtain secure jobs, they can spend their incomes on educating their children and feeding them properly. As well, an increase in women’s employment makes women’s empowerment soar, with sweeping effects across the board.

Healthcare

Hospitals should be more accessible for women. Not only could more hospitals be built, but also medical care could be made more affordable. Often, women cannot pay for their medicine and treatment when

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needed. Many medical facilities in developing nations do not even meet basic sanitary standards and can be unsafe. Without good health ensured for women, development is held back significantly.

Controversies

Religion has been a big controversy in women's rights. It is the custom of many religions to place women in inferior positions. As well, there are many religious practices that may be detrimental to women's health and basic rights. One example is female genital circumcisions that are excruciatingly painful and very dangerous for women. Particularly in developing countries, women are not often allowed to leave their houses without supervision due to religious traditions. In some parts of the world, if women refuse to take part in these religious customs, they could be shunned from their communities. SOCHUM must ensure a balance is struck between respecting traditional culture and religion and ensuring women's rights.

Bloc Situations

The positions of different governments on different aspects of women's rights vary significantly, as do countries' progresses towards better women's rights. Delegates will need to research their own country's situation and government's position on the various sub-issues involving women's rights.

Latin America

This bloc is trying hard to protect women's property rights and bring equal job opportunities for females. These countries are working to increase access to healthcare for women and to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS.

Africa

These countries are working together to reduce cruelty against women and to increase the number of women in government positions.

Asia

These countries are focusing on the safety of women migrant workers as well as trying to decrease the number of women who are trafficked. They are trying to reduce domestic abuse against women to ensure that they are secure in their homes.

Middle East

These countries are working to increase accessibility to education for women. They are trying to gain women the franchise and help women earn the right to leave the house unsupervised.

Central and Eastern Europe

These countries are trying to gain economic and property rights for females as well as obtain government positions for women.

Discussion Questions

1. How can we reconcile our basic respect for traditional cultures and religions while combating the aspects of these traditions that treat women unequally?
2. What might be an important first step for those countries that are struggling to make a change for equality?

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3. What are some ways for women in developing nations to voice their opinions and be empowered to pursue their own rights?
4. In what ways can women who are victims of domestic violence or sex trafficking be helped?
5. How can gender parity be achieved in the workforce?
6. How can schools and hospitals be more accessible for women?

Additional Resources

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/xx.html>
http://www.un.org/womenwatch/directory/statistics_and_indicators_60.htm
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/Worldswomen/wwVaw2010.htm>
<http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/women/gender.htm>
<http://www.globalissues.org/article/166/womens-rights#LackofProgress>
<http://hatefsvoice.wordpress.com/2011/03/08/timeline-of-women%E2%80%99s-improvement-around-the-world/>
<http://womensstudiesourperspective.blogspot.com/2011/04/news-flash-3-discrimination-against.html>

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