

# **Sixth Committee: Legal Background Guide**

## **Georgia Tech Model United Nations**

the 24th GTMUN  
High School Conference  
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# Topic 1

## Natural Disaster Aid During Periods of Economic Sanctions

### Introduction

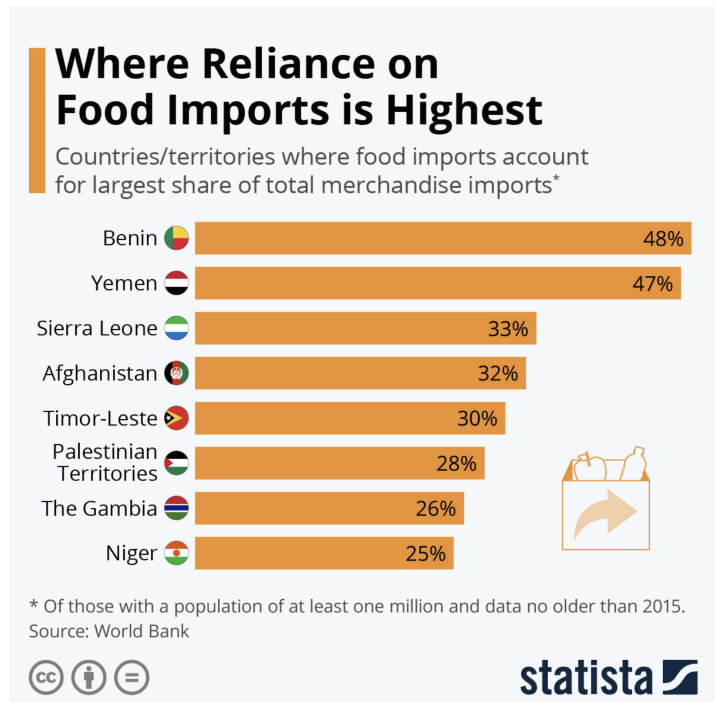
One of the most valuable aspects of international trade is that it allows countries to specialize in the goods that they have a comparative advantage in producing. This means that a country will produce the goods it can make at a lower opportunity cost than its trading partners and rely on imports to procure what would otherwise be impossible or expensive to produce domestically. Both countries benefit from the most efficient allocation of their resources; however, one country may benefit more from the relationship overall. Benin, Yemen, and Sierra Leone all face high reliance on imports of food, while the smaller and much wealthier state of Singapore faces no such issue.<sup>1</sup>

Economic sanctions have the power to decimate the economic security of an entire people for the

<sup>1</sup> Armstrong, "Infographic: Where Reliance on Food Imports Is Highest."

actions of their government. Sanctions can be imposed unilaterally or multilaterally, coordinated through the UN or by member states acting as a bloc. Sanctions generally target industries that generate large amounts of income for disfavored governments, and aid reduction is a common sanction. Sanctions may be targeted at a government but can have real impact on a civilian population. Research has shown that sanctions targeting dual-use technology with military and civilian applications leads to an increase in civilian transportation deaths.

Economic sanctions are commonly used due to the fact that they are seen as both low risk and low cost. The United States in particular has 37 active sanction programs dating back from Cuba in 1962.<sup>2</sup> Sanctions are often met with controversy during their use. One of the main reasons for this is that the citizens of the country that the sanctions are enacted against are often harmed as collateral damage. A country like Afghanistan, in which food imports make up 32% of merchandise imports, economic sanctions intended to target the Taliban have resulted in over 90% of Afghans experiencing food insecurity to some degree within the last two years. The chair invites delegates to consider how a natural disaster would play into this.



## History

Records of economic sanctions date back to ancient Greece, with one particularly well-known measure being the Megarian Decree of 432 B.C, which banned trade between Megara and the Athenian Empire.<sup>3</sup> Another measure enacted later in time, November 21, 1802, was the Continental System, which was enforced by France against Britain during the Napoleonic wars. The League of Nations, formed following World War I to prevent another global conflict, attempted to use sanctions to force foreign compliance with the League's objectives. However, these initiatives are widely regarded as ineffective, and are attributed to one of this international organization's weaknesses.

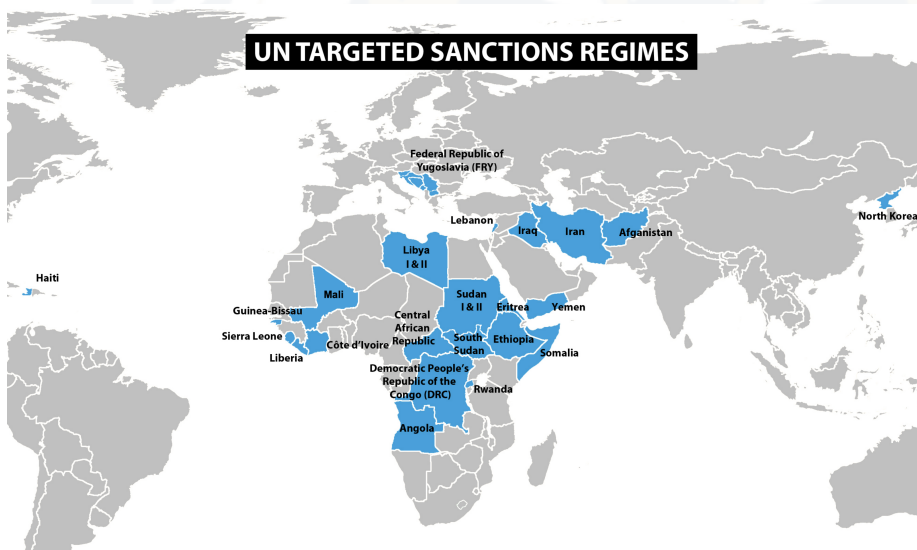
<sup>2</sup> USAFacts, "What Are Sanctions and How Are They Enforced?"

<sup>3</sup> Abughris, Noura. n.d. "A Brief History of Economic Sanctions."

Regarding the 1950s onwards, some countries are feeling the impact of The League of Nations Council in 1936 sanctions that are more comprehensive. Myanmar is currently under economic sanctions from the European Union, United States, United Kingdom, and Australia for its human rights abuses and oppression of pro-democracy political opponents. Syria has faced sanctions from the US since 2004 for what the United States alleges is Syria's support for terrorism and failure to stop militants from entering Iraq. In the past, sanctions more commonly included total bans on economic activity with the target nation. They were a devastating economic strategy whose modern effectiveness has been reduced by the complex evasion schemes of the ruling class.



The League of Nations Council in 1936<sup>4</sup>



Following the events of September 11, 2001, targeted sanctions were born. Targeted sanctions were created with the goal of reducing the harmful effects that economic sanctions often have on a country's citizens as collateral. In the case of Myanmar, this means asset freezes on more than thirty individuals and ten entities, travel bans for specific government officials, and arms

embargoes.<sup>5</sup> In Syria's case, the US has restricted financial services and exports for individuals and organizations linked to terror.<sup>6</sup> While this method of sanctions has increased their precision, concerns over human rights persists, especially in cases of large scale disaster. Sanctions can make it difficult for countries to receive the aid necessary to make it through these situations.

<sup>4</sup> Sharp, "The League of Nations: The 'Great Experiment' and the Failure of Collective Security, 1916-1936."

<sup>5</sup> ComplyAdvantage, "Myanmar Sanctions: What You Need to Know."

<sup>6</sup> BBC, "Syria Profile - Timeline."

# Current

Over the past fifty years, climate change has driven an increase in both the occurrence and strength of natural disasters, disproportionately impacting developing nations. As an example, Bangladesh suffered the loss of more than 400,000 people as a result of storms and floods in the 20th century.<sup>7</sup> These disasters cost Bangladesh not only the lives of its citizens, but also billions of dollars. While this situation was highly unfortunate, Bangladesh was fortunate not to be on the receiving end of economic sanctions, which can delay or even halt the dispersal of disaster relief.



Some countries have provisions set so that the sanctions they have on a country do not target humanitarian assistance, as the ultimate goal of sanctions is often to target the government and specific individuals and entities rather than ordinary citizens. However, while these provisions and targeted sanctions are intended to cause less harm, the sanctions mere existence frequently results in long term harm to the general population and can make it difficult to truly recover from a natural disaster even if aid is eventually received. Relief in the form of money, supplies, and specialized personnel is useful in the short term, but the economic disadvantages of sanctions exacerbated by natural disasters will often continue to plague the general population in the long term.

Fairly recently, the United States exempted Syria from sanctions on all transactions related to natural disaster aid. This exemption made it much easier for the general Syrian population to receive the life-saving monetary help they needed. While the gesture was greatly appreciated on behalf of the Syrian people, it does nothing to provide a framework for solving such problems in the future. The days right after a disaster are usually the most critical in terms of saving lives, which means delays in giving aid can cost lives unnecessarily.

In numerous cases, countries have been in support of lifting sanctions to support other countries through hard times; however, what the plan for this action looks like varies in a way that is unacceptable when dealing with such critical events. The High Commissioner has called for a critical reevaluation of unilateral sanctions for this exact reason.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Pavlinovic, "Climate and Weather Related Disasters Surge Five-Fold over 50 Years, but Early Warnings Save Lives"

<sup>8</sup> OHCHR, "High Commissioner Calls for Critical Re-Evaluation of the Human Rights Impact of Unilateral Sanctions."

# Directives

As the Sixth Committee of the United Nations, the chair would like for the committee to consider the following questions:

- Consider your member state's stance on sanctions. Have they ever used them? Does it view the use of sanctions favorably or negatively?
- Have sanctions ever been levied against your country? What for? What was the effect?
- How have sanctions impacted your neighboring countries?
- How does your country feel about foreign aid? Has your country ever extended foreign aid?
- How has foreign aid helped your country in the past?



## Topic 2

# Cobalt Mining in Sub-Saharan Africa

## Introduction

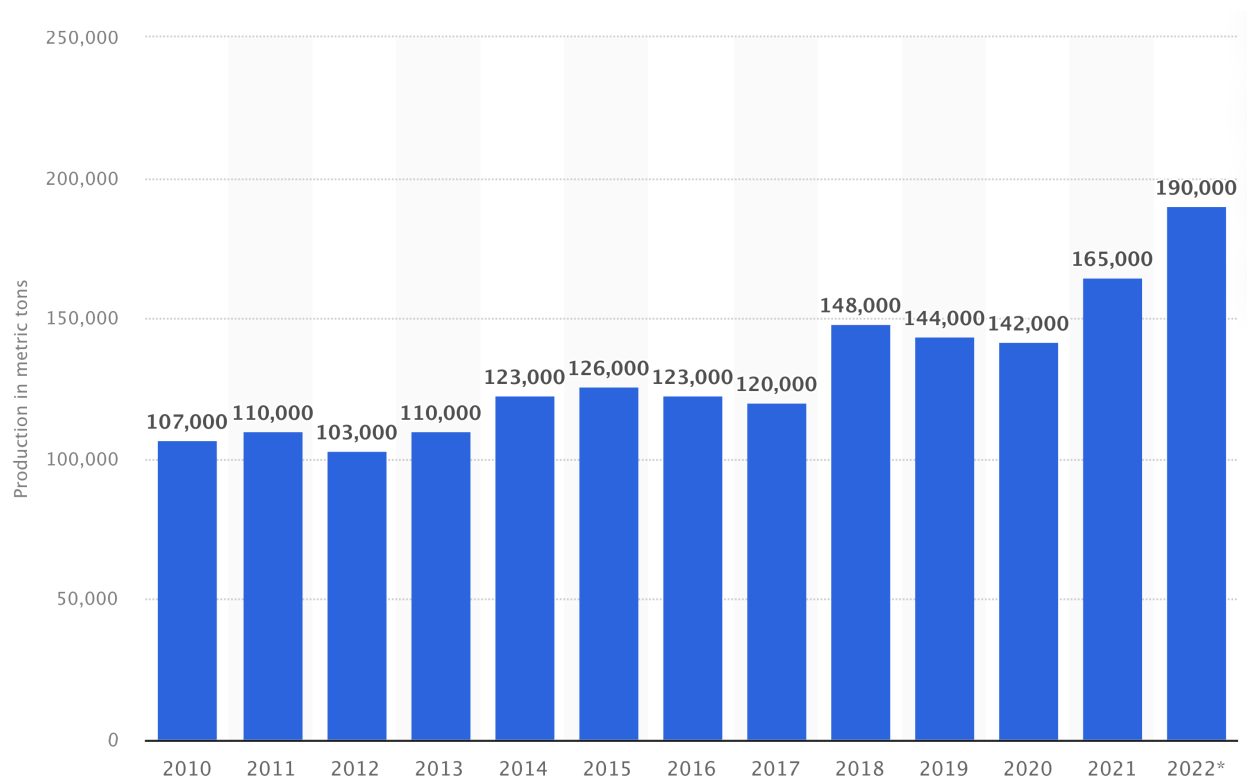
Cobalt is important. As a key metal in lithium-ion batteries, the modern world heavily relies on Cobalt for power storage, with 64% of refined cobalt globally being used in L-Ion batteries. The green energy movement to combat climate change over the recent years has led to the increase in production of electric cars which rely on cobalt for their batteries. In 2021, 6.6 million electric cars were sold across the world, more than double than the previous year, demonstrating the popularity of electric cars among the global population.<sup>9</sup>

A major producer of cobalt is the Democratic Republic of the Congo, producing nearly 70 percent of cobalt worldwide in 2022. Production has grown significantly to match demand: with 130,000 metric tons of cobalt produced in 2022, production more than doubled compared to 2012 (51 kilo-

<sup>9</sup> Richter, "Global Electric Car Sales Doubled in 2021"

-tons) And with its 3.5 million metric tons of cobalt reserves, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is expected to be an important contributor to the world's efforts towards decarbonization.<sup>10</sup>

However, the production of cobalt in sub-Saharan African countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo led to various issues including child labor, violent conflicts, and environmental degradation. An estimated 40,000 children work in cobalt mines every day in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the air is filled with toxic cobalt dust.<sup>11</sup> Industrial mining conglomerates often use so-called artisanal miners who function as effective freelancers.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the production of cobalt is increasingly intertwined with the violence and instability that exists in sub-Saharan African countries. Armed groups often trade cobalt for illegal weapons, which fuels even more violence across the Great Lakes region. Lastly, excessive extraction of cobalt places a great pressure on the environment with threats including pollution, deforestation, and soil erosion.



Mine production of cobalt in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 2010 to 2022

<sup>10</sup> Garside, "Mine production of cobalt in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 2010 to 2022"

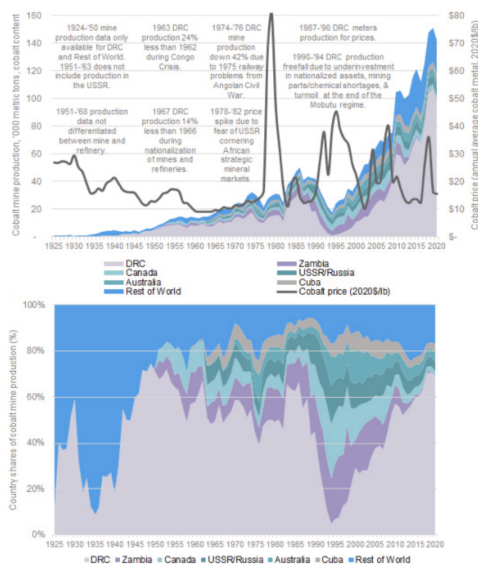
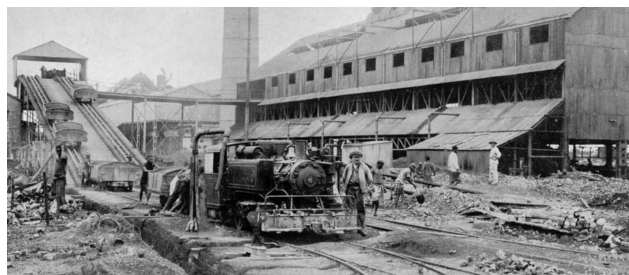
<sup>11</sup> Lawson, "The DRC Mining Industry: Child Labor and Formalization of Small-Scale Mining"

<sup>12</sup> Gross, "How 'modern-day slavery' in the Congo powers the rechargeable battery economy"



# History

Cobalt deposits in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) were first discovered in 1914 by Union Minière, a Belgian and British mining company near Lualaba, a southern province of present-day DRC.<sup>13</sup> Cobalt is produced as a byproduct of mining copper, which is so rich in the DRC you can pick it up off the ground. Union Minière began to extract cobalt from the deposits in 1924 and became the world's largest cobalt producer in 1926. This production remained even after Democratic Republic of the Congo's full independence in 1960. However, in 1967, President Mobutu, who gained full control of the country after the Congo Crisis, took over the nation's cobalt mining industry in the process of nationalizing the nation's economy. However, the inefficiency of the nationalization of the country's economy led to a decline in cobalt production in the 1970s, and its struggles continued until the 1990s due to the political instability in the country.



However, cobalt production in the Democratic Republic of the Congo increased due to rising demand for the materia following the invention and the growth of use of the lithium-ion battery in which cobalt is a key ingredient. However, many Western businesses left the Democratic Republic of the Congo due to its political instability and the high risk of return on investment after the Congo Crisis as well as ongoing conflict in the nation that has resulted in millions of deaths.<sup>14</sup> This created an opportunity for many Chinese companies who were looking to invest in the cobalt industry. In 2007, the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Chinese government reached an agreement for nearly \$6 billion in exchange for mineral concessions.

These investments nearly doubled the country's annual cobalt production to more than 50,000 metric tons in 2013, but at the same time, the growth of influence of Chinese companies in cobalt production has also led to China's greater dominance in not only the global cobalt market, but also the global battery market.

<sup>13</sup> Gulley, "One hundred years of cobalt production in the Democratic Republic of the Congo"

<sup>14</sup> Gulley, "One hundred years of cobalt production in the Democratic Republic of the Congo"

Cobalt production in this region has continued to grow since the early 2010's, as discussed earlier, the Democratic Republic of the Congo produced more than 130,000 metric tons of cobalt in 2022. However, the working conditions of most cobalt mines has remained relatively similar over time: artisan mining, involving children and women, is used in many cobalt mines and pose a danger to the health of all miners, often with very little pay.

## Current

The global demand for cobalt is growing by the day as the material is essential for the production of many technologies from batteries to petroleum refining, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo is at the center of the demand. The country is the world's largest cobalt producer, producing about 70 percent of global cobalt production per year.<sup>15</sup> However, various issues have continued to exist in the production of cobalt in the Democratic Republic of the Congo despite multiple condemnations and showing of concerns by the United Nations since before 2003.

Democratic Republic of the Congo has been scrutinized in the past in regards to the working conditions of its miners. The artisanal miners, although technically illegal, are seen working throughout mining sites in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The availability of the population willing to work for a few dollars a day, if not less, draws companies looking to maximize profits despite the potential breach of human rights issues at their worksite. These miners include women and children as for many families, they must make a choice to either work in the mines or have no food for the day. And they are given the same jobs as other miners, digging pits underground with no ventilation and a constant possibility of their pits collapsing on them.<sup>16</sup> Although the Democratic Republic of the Congo has laws that try to address some of the issues, they are largely ineffective and nearly impossible to enforce.

Adding to the human rights and child labor issues that exist in cobalt extraction in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are the environmental issues that come with mining minerals. The DRC has one of only three remaining largest tropical rainforests, and damage to its rainforest system could have a detrimental impact in mitigating climate change. However, the production of cobalt in the Democratic Republic of the Congo led to cobalt contamination of the environment around the mines, leading to water pollution, destruction of crops, and health hazards. Similar to other mineral mines, cobalt production has also resulted in millions of trees being cut and destroying the rainforest.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> UNEP, "Can the Democratic Republic of the Congo's mineral resources provide a pathway to peace?"

<sup>16</sup> Niarchos, "The Dark Side of Congo's Cobalt Rush"

<sup>17</sup> Davey, "The Environmental Impacts of Cobalt Mining in Congo"

This issue is not easy to resolve by any means. The Democratic Republic of the Congo passed a law to limit where artisanal miners could work, however, the country has struggled to enforce this law due to the resistance from the miners themselves.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the importance of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's cobalt-mining industry to the world as well as the livelihoods of the miners and their families makes it much more difficult to limit or halt the production altogether.



*DRC's Rainforest*

<sup>18</sup> Redaction Africanews, "DRC's 'artisanal' cobalt mines tainted by lack of compliance"

# Directives

As the Sixth Committee of the United Nations, the chair would like for the committee to consider the following questions:

- How much cobalt from Congo does your nation rely on?
- Does your nation have an interest in Congo's cobalt industry?
- Is your nation developing or already developed an alternative for cobalt?
  - If so, is this alternative economically feasible to replace cobalt?
- What are the potential obstacles of replacing cobalt with a different material?
- Has your nation experienced or are experiencing issues regarding child labor?
  - If so, what are the programs or plans that your nation has implemented to address these issues?
- How does your country view the growing Chinese influence in DRC's Congo industry?

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