

Crisis Committee
West Side Story



Crisis Committee

Kings Christian Collegiate Model United Nations

-February 25th -26th , 2022 -

Qais Chatur

Dear Distinguished Delegates,

It is my honour to welcome you to the eighth annual King's MUN Conference: Voices of the Voiceless. Since the debut of the King's MUN conference in 2013, we have striven to create a conference that enables students to push past their comfort zones, connect with their peers, and learn more about the world around them.

Model United Nations (MUN) is a youth simulation of the United Nations where students have the chance to debate the world's greatest issues, problem-solve, and produce creative resolutions with their peers. Throughout my MUN journey, I have developed my critical thinking, teamwork, leadership, and communication skills, which have transferred into many different avenues of my life and which I attribute to many of my successes in high school.

We are living in a time where certain people groups are marginalized and discriminated against based on prejudice and unjust systems. At King's MUN we strive to lift the songs of those who are oppressed and listen to the stories and experiences of those whose mouths have been sealed for far too long. This year, the theme of the King's MUN conference is Voices of the Voiceless. I hope you take this to heart both during the conference and as you move forward into your future.

These past few years have, without a doubt, been ones of hardship and challenge. The COVID-19 Pandemic has built many barriers not only between countries but within countries, communities, and families. At King's MUN we acknowledge the past to live actively in the present but look to the future with hope. One thing the COVID-19 Pandemic has not taken away is our creativity and will to connect to one another. With a range of committees branching from tutorial to advanced, and real to fictional, delegates with all levels of experience have an opportunity to collaborate with peers and grow as young leaders and changemakers at King's MUN, despite the current predicaments.

Once again, I am extremely excited to greet each and every one of you at the eighth annual King's MUN conference. Myself and the King's MUN Secretariat look forward to seeing you on Friday, February 25th and Saturday, February 26th, 2022.

Sincerely,

Arianna Mastrotonardo

Secretary-General, 2022

King's MUN

Background

Since its inception in 1945 after the Second World War, the 193 Member States of The United Nations have been committed to maintaining international peace and security while fostering relations amongst nations and promoting better living standards as well as establishing human rights. The main goal of the United Nations is to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems. To do this, the United Nations has split up into different bodies that all address different issues. The General Assembly is regarded as the main policymaking body of the U.N. All 193 members are represented in this branch, for anything to pass, a two-thirds majority of those who are present and voting is required. The Security Council is made up of 15 members who oversee measures that ensure the maintenance of international peace and security. The Security Council also identifies threats to international security and imposes sanctions as well as authorizes the use of force, including the deployment of peacekeeping missions. The Economic and Social Council make policies and recommendations regarding economic, social and environmental issues. The committee consists of 54 members who are elected by the General Assembly. The International Court of Justice is responsible for settling legal disputes submitted to it by States, as well as giving advisory opinions on legal questions. Lastly, the Secretariat is what keeps the U.N. machine running, it is composed of the Secretary-General, António Guterres, as well as thousands of U.N. staffers who carry out the daily duties of the United Nations, and work on international peacekeeping missions. So far, the U.N. has provided food to 90 million people in over 75 countries, provided vaccinations for 58% of children in the world, protected human rights with 80 treaties and declarations as well as much more progress across various socioeconomic issues across the globe. (History, 2018)

Crisis committees are decision-making bodies that have more power than traditional committees. Whereas General Assemblies put forth frameworks for member States to align their actions with, crisis committees focus on working quickly to tackle imminent issues and taking tangible action on them. This also means that crisis committees have the full power of the position they represent, as, in times of crisis, important decisions are needed to be made quickly and efficiently.

Topic 001: Healing the Rift between Rival Street Gangs

West Side Story is the re-telling of William Shakespeare's classic *Romeo and Juliet*, with the addition of more relevant topics to modern society. Like the play, it follows the story of two rival gangs. The Jets are the "white American" gang and the Sharks are the immigrant Puerto Rican gang. The story takes place in the 1950s, in New York City. Historically, this time period involved the beginning of the Golden age but was also known for the immense post-war poverty. These financial tensions provided more incentive for gangs to be formed, and gang violence to ensue.

To begin resolving the tension between the two gangs, we must first establish why there is tension in the first place. The Jets hate the Sharks because as mentioned before, they believe the Sharks are trying to steal the Jets' land. The Sharks hate the Jets because of racial insults, profiling, and poor treatment in general. The Jets then craft a plan to end the conflict once and for all. Riff, the leader of the Jets declares they will challenge the Sharks to an all-out fight, called the "rumble". This once again proves why they are the aggressors, and the Sharks accept the challenge as an opportunity to prevent future conflicts. When looking at ways to heal the tension, it is important to take into consideration whether or not the sporadic choice to hold a rumble as means of resolving the conflict was necessary, or could this tension have been dealt with in a different way? One more important factor to consider is that the law enforcement in the area is racially biased towards the Jets.

The second area of concern in which the main conflict stems from is the prohibition of relations between Bernardo's sister, Maria, and former Jet, Tony. This tension is catapulted when Bernardo interrupts Tony and Maria at the dance and sends Maria home early. How can two gangs come to a resolution when two non-gang affiliated members are not even allowed to engage in a relationship. We know from the end of the story that after the tragedies (deaths of Riff, Bernardo, and Tony) the feuding between the two gangs comes to an end with the end scene being the Jets and Sharks coming together to life Tony's body.

Questions to consider:

1. What could have been a better resolution for the feud besides the “rumble”?
2. What role does your character play in initiating conflict, and what could they have done differently to avoid the outcome.
3. Where does the blame lie, who is at fault for the three deaths? How should they be persecuted?
4. What is your characters opinion on the relationship between Maria and Tony?

Topic 002: Improving Relations with Migrant Groups.

The West Side story provides an introspective look into various social issues occurring during the 1960s. The main conflict is between “locals”, and a migrant group, the Sharks. Originating from Puerto Rico, the Sharks outline throughout the movie and play, the struggles that they face being an immigrant group in America. This is displayed in Bernardo’s verse in the song “America”, “Life is alright in America/If you're all White in America”. This is the premise of the Sharks’ thoughts on life in America. The first example that we are met with of this white privilege is how the only sign of law enforcement in the movie, Lieutenant Shrank and Officer Krumpke, repeatedly prove their alliance to the Jets which is shown by various instances of derogatory and racist terms being thrown at members of the Sharks throughout the story. There are examples of corruption like this around the world which is why SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) is a very necessary goal that the UN has set to rectify any insecurity, weak institutions, or limited access to justice across the globe. (UN, 2016)

The history of immigration in the United States has been pivotal in shaping the way Americans now perceive new immigrants. Immigration for “white” Europeans has for the majority, resulted in a smooth transition into society whereas it is a whole different story for people of color. Immigrants of color in the United States have been exploited for cheap labor, been treated as less than human, and have been unfairly accused of crimes for hundreds of years. SDG 10, reducing inequalities, was created to address these sorts of issues. Inequality within and amongst countries has been and is still a persistent cause for concern across the globe. Although, most of

the discrimination has been abolished from first world countries, lower-income countries still experience various inequalities. (UN, 2016) In the case of the West Side Story, it focuses on the major wave of Puerto Rican immigration to New York City in the 1950s. At a peak in 1953, 75,000 Puerto Ricans left Puerto Rico with many of them favoring various neighborhoods across New York City. Again if we look closely at the lyrics in “America” we can gain a better understanding of life in America for these Puerto Ricans, “Here you are free and you have pride/Long as you stay on your own side. Free to do anything you choose/Free to wait tables and shine shoes.” These lines shows how difficult it was to assimilate into American culture and society for the Sharks often being cast as outcasts, and needing to stay on their “own side”. For many immigrants, the idea of an American dream is always what brings them to America, but just because they don’t look like everyone else, they are denied the chance to thrive and be successful.

Questions to Consider:

1. What discrimination did your character face throughout the movie?
2. How can law enforcement be transformed into a more unifying and peacekeeping body?
3. Is your character at fault for discriminating against other characters or groups? Where does that ideology stem from?
4. How do you suggest discrimination to migrant groups in New York City can be reduced?



Resources

1. History.com Editors. "United Nations." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 4 Apr. 2018, <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/united-nations>.
2. SDG 16. "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions – United Nations Sustainable Development." *United Nations*, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/>.
3. SDG 10. "Reduce Inequality within and among Countries - United Nations Sustainable Development." *United Nations*, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/inequality/>.
4. Wise, Robert, Jerome Robbins, and Arthur Laurents. *West Side Story*. Santa Monica: MGM/UA Home Entertainment, 1961.