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UNHRC: Topic #1 - Worker's Poverty Crisis

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According to the Census Bureau in 2020, 37.2 million people, or 11.4 percent of the nation's population lived below what is considered the official poverty level.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the percentage of the world's workers who are living in extreme poverty increased from 6.7% in 2019 to 7.2 percent in 2020. This percentage increase means an additional 8 million workers are considered to be living in extreme poverty.<sup>2</sup> Even before the outbreak of the coronavirus in 2020, more than 1 in 5 workers lived in poverty.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, post Covid-19 this issue of poverty has continued, and if not gotten worse.

Resolution 44/13 titled, "Extreme Poverty and Human Rights", which was adopted by the Human Rights Council on July 16, 2020, addresses the ongoing issue of extreme poverty that exists in all countries, especially those that are underdeveloped. This resolution specifically addressed the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. As it states, "[The United Nations Human Rights Council] invites the Special Rapporteur to dedicate his next annual report to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the enjoyment of all human rights by persons in extreme poverty, identifying challenges and including recommendations and good practices to ensure that no one is left behind in the adoption and implementation of crisis management and post crisis recovery plans;".<sup>4</sup> Some topics that he covers in his recommendations include, how much the minimum wage should be set, having labor legislation include all workers, rules regarding union rights, and the state's responsibilities toward protecting the rights of workers.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/working-poor/2020/home.htm#:~:text=In%202020%2C%20the%20working%2Dpoor%20rates%20for%20men%20and%20women,and%20Asians%20\(5.5%20percent\)](https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/working-poor/2020/home.htm#:~:text=In%202020%2C%20the%20working%2Dpoor%20rates%20for%20men%20and%20women,and%20Asians%20(5.5%20percent))

<sup>2</sup><https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/goal-01/#:~:text=In%202020%2C%20the%20share%20of.8%20million%20workers%20into%20poverty>

<sup>3</sup><https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N23/206/05/PDF/N2320605.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>4</sup><https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G20/189/93/PDF/G2018993.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>5</sup><https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N23/206/05/PDF/N2320605.pdf?OpenElement>

The concept of fair wages has also been a topic of discussion when dealing with the worker's poverty crisis. Fair wages are defined as, "not only the output of the work but also the responsibilities of the worker, the level of skill and education required to perform the work, the impact of the work on the health and safety of the worker, specific hardships related to the work and the impact on the worker's personal and family life".<sup>6</sup> Essentially, the idea that people should be getting paid according to their contribution to society. In an article Oliver De Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, said "It is absurd that the jobs that are most valuable to others, especially people in poverty, such as care, charity work or health care, are among the lowest paid, while others are paid so handsomely for the social and environmental damage they create,".<sup>7</sup> De Schutter is emphasizing this pressing idea and how it is our duty to try and solve it.

The worker's poverty crisis is an ongoing issue that affects a huge portion of the world. It is our job as Member States of the UNHRC to recommend possible solutions to protect the human rights of all workers. Remember that the point of view should be your country's perspective on the topic, not your own.

Please take into consideration these questions when doing your research:

- What is more important to consider: a person's living wage or a fair wage? Or both? If so, how can we make both of these priorities?
- What further courses of action should the UNHRC take in order to minimize the number of people who are considered as living in extreme poverty?
- What should companies be doing in order to minimize this problem? What is their obligation to their workers?

Please make sure to always double-check your own work because there will be a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism. Additionally, do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns.

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<sup>6</sup><https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N23/206/05/PDF/N2320605.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/wages-should-reflect-contribution-society-not-just-ability-generate-profit#:~:text=NEW%20YORK%20>

My email is as follows: [abotnick@mail.yu.edu](mailto:abotnick@mail.yu.edu). I am looking forward to working with all of you and can not wait for all the solutions we will come up with.

Best of luck,

Ashley Botnick

Chair, United Nations Human Rights Council

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