



ECOSOC

Topic 1: The issue of international intervention in combating corruption
and authoritarianism globally

Chairs: Kelvin Wang and Ethan Liu

I. Introduction

International intervention in combating corruption and authoritarianism lies at the heart of sustainable development, human rights protection, and global stability. Corruption diverts public resources, weakens institutions, and erodes trust in governance, while authoritarian systems often entrench these problems by limiting accountability, suppressing civil society, and concentrating political power. Within the framework of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), this issue is particularly significant, as corruption and weak governance directly hinder progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 16 on Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. International mechanisms such as the United Nations Convention against Corruption, along with development policies advanced by institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, illustrate how the global community seeks to promote transparency and accountability; however, such efforts raise complex questions regarding state sovereignty, political neutrality, and the effectiveness of external pressure. As a result, ECOSOC must carefully consider how international cooperation can support governance reform while respecting national ownership and fostering long-term institutional resilience.

II. Definition of key terms

Corruption: The abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It can occur in public or private sectors and includes bribery, embezzlement, fraud, nepotism, and illicit financial flows. Corruption weakens institutions, undermines economic development, and erodes public trust.

Authoritarianism: A system of governance characterized by concentrated political power, limited political pluralism, restricted civil liberties, and weak accountability mechanisms. Authoritarian regimes often suppress opposition, control media, and limit judicial independence.

International Intervention: Actions taken by external actors, such as states, international organizations, or coalitions, to influence or assist another state's governance practices. This may include sanctions, diplomatic pressure, development aid conditionality, monitoring missions, or technical assistance.

Sanctions: Political and economic penalties imposed by countries or international bodies to influence a state's behavior. Sanctions may target governments, officials, industries, or individuals suspected of corruption or human rights abuses.

Conditionality: The practice of linking financial aid, loans, or assistance to specific governance or economic reforms. Institutions like the International Monetary Fund often apply conditionality to promote structural reforms.

Accountability: The obligation of public officials and institutions to answer for their actions and face consequences for misconduct. Strong accountability mechanisms deter corruption and abuse of power.

United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC): The primary international legal framework to combat corruption globally. It promotes prevention, criminalization, international cooperation, and asset recovery.

III. General overview

Corruption and authoritarianism remain deeply interconnected global challenges that significantly hinder economic development, social progress, and the protection of human rights. Corruption diverts public resources away from essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure, while weakening public trust in institutions. Authoritarian systems often exacerbate these problems by concentrating power, restricting political opposition, limiting press freedom, and undermining judicial independence, thereby reducing transparency and accountability. Together, these dynamics create environments in which misuse of power can persist with limited oversight.

Within the international system, the issue is particularly relevant to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), as corruption and weak governance directly obstruct the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 16 on Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. The global community has responded through legal frameworks such as the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), as well as through development assistance, institutional reform programs, election monitoring, sanctions, and financial oversight mechanisms supported by organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. While some argue that global cooperation is necessary to combat transnational corruption networks in order to protect human rights, others instead emphasize the importance of state sovereignty and caution against politicized or selective intervention. Additionally, measures such as economic sanctions or aid conditionality may have unintended humanitarian or economic consequences if not carefully designed.

IV. Major parties involved and their views

1) International and Multilateral Organizations

United Nations:

- Promotes international cooperation to combat corruption and support governance reform while upholding state sovereignty and international law.

World Bank:

- Supports governance reforms and anti-corruption measures through development financing and policy advice.

International Monetary Fund:

- Works to ensure global financial stability by providing financial assistance, economic surveillance, and policy advice to member states. In the context of corruption and governance, the IMF promotes fiscal transparency, strong public financial management systems, and anti-money laundering frameworks, arguing that sound economic governance is essential for macroeconomic stability and sustainable development.

2) Major Global Powers

United States:

- Advocates sanctions, financial transparency enforcement, and democracy promotion as tools to combat corruption and authoritarianism.

China:

- Emphasizes state sovereignty and non-interference, supporting anti-corruption efforts primarily through domestic initiatives and selective international cooperation.

Russia:

- Prioritizes sovereignty and often opposes sanctions or political pressure viewed as external interference.

3) Civil Society & Developing States

Transparency International and other NGOs:

- Advocate for accountability, rule of law, transparency, and international monitoring. Often support stronger global enforcement mechanisms.

Developing and Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs):

- Many support anti-corruption initiatives but emphasize capacity-building, financial assistance, and respect for sovereignty. They may express concern about the economic impact of sanctions or conditionality.

V. Relevant UN documents and articles

United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC): The primary international legal framework for preventing and combating corruption. It covers prevention, criminalization, international cooperation, asset recovery, and technical assistance. It is the most comprehensive global anti-corruption treaty.

Charter of the United Nations: Establishes the principles of sovereignty, non-interference (Article 2(7)), and the promotion of human rights and international cooperation. It forms the legal basis for debates on the legitimacy of international intervention.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR): Affirms fundamental rights such as freedom of expression, participation in government, and equality before the law, rights often restricted under authoritarian systems.

General Assembly Resolution 58/4: The resolution through which the General Assembly formally adopted the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

Human Rights Council Resolution 35/25: Recognizes the negative impact of corruption on the enjoyment of human rights and calls for stronger anti-corruption measures to protect democratic institutions.

Report of the Secretary-General on Corruption and its Impact on Human Rights: Explores how corruption undermines economic, social, and political rights and emphasizes international cooperation and preventive strategies.

General Assembly Resolution 68/195: Addresses the importance of the rule of law at national and international levels and links governance, accountability, and sustainable development.

VI. Questions to consider

- Under what circumstances is international intervention in a sovereign state justified to combat corruption or authoritarian practices, and how can such intervention respect the principle of state sovereignty?
- How effective are existing international frameworks, such as the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and UN monitoring programs, in promoting transparency and accountability in states with weak governance?
- Should the international community prioritize preventive measures like capacity-building, technical assistance, and institutional reform over reactive tools such as sanctions or conditional aid?
- How can civil society organizations, independent media, and whistleblowers be supported and protected to enhance governance and reduce corruption without triggering political backlash?
- How can international financial institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund incorporate anti-corruption measures into development projects without harming vulnerable populations?
- How can international actors ensure that anti-corruption and governance initiatives respect local political, cultural, and socio-economic contexts while still promoting universal principles of transparency, accountability, and human rights?

VII. Conclusion

Corruption and authoritarianism remain major obstacles to sustainable development, human rights, and democratic governance worldwide. While states bear the primary responsibility for ensuring transparency and accountability, international intervention, through frameworks like the United Nations Convention against Corruption, multilateral cooperation, sanctions, and development assistance—can play a critical role in supporting institutional reform and good governance. However, such interventions must carefully balance effectiveness with respect for state sovereignty, local contexts, and potential unintended consequences. Strengthening collaboration among states, international organizations, civil society, and financial institutions offers the most promising path toward reducing corruption, promoting accountability, and advancing inclusive, sustainable development globally.

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