

Background Guide

UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization:
Combatting Sportswashing



BunnyMUN III

L.B. POLY – October 19, 2024

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HEAD CHAIR LETTER

Hello Delegates,

My name is Will Weaver and I am so excited to be one of your co-chairs for the Bunny MUN III UNESCO committee. I am a junior at Long Beach Poly High School, and this is my second year in Model UN. I have loved my experience in Model UN so far, enjoying the knowledge I have gained from my research, and the skills I have obtained through attending conferences. And now, I am looking forward to chairing and being on the other side of the gavel!

Outside of MUN, I spend a lot of my time involved in music. I am in the marching band here at Poly, playing the baritone, but I also play the saxophone in Poly's jazz A band, and have enjoyed playing bassoon and piano for other bands in the past. I love to research biology on a small and large scale, spending time in the field with my dad collecting samples or building bird boxes. I also like to run, hike, and go skiing in the wintertime.

Sportswashing is a very interesting topic to me, and I have had a lot of fun doing research for this room. I know that MUN can seem very intimidating if you are new to it, but as long as you come prepared, I am sure that you delegates will have no trouble with it. I look forward to hearing your debate, and I am so excited to meet you all. Thank you delegates, and I wish you the best of luck!

Sincerely,

Will Weaver

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HEAD CHAIR LETTER

Hello Delegates!

My name is Jack Park, and I will be your Co-chair for UNESCO. I am a senior at Long Beach Poly High School, and this is my second year in MUN. Model UN has been such a great experience for me, and I have had so much fun interacting with fellow delegates, I couldn't be more excited to be vice chair for the first time for everyone here. I hope you guys will grow and learn from this room and have fun!

Some things that I enjoy are cooking (though I'm not the best at it!), playing board games, practicing tennis (Novak Djokovic > everyone), playing piano (Frédéric François Chopin > everyone), and going to the gym. I also enjoy camping and enjoy the wilderness by hiking, swimming, and rock climbing. My favorite spots are Big Bear, Joshua Tree, Sequoia, and Yellowstone!

I hope that you have enjoyed reading a little bit about me and that I have gotten to know you better as well. I cannot wait to meet you all and am so excited to chair for you all. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at the email listed below.

Best Wishes,

Jack Park

UNESCO| Co-Head Chair | jackbenjaminpark@gmail.com

VICE CHAIR LETTER

Hello Delegates!

My name is Mackenzie Mathieu and I am thrilled to be your vice-chair in the UNESCO sportswashing room this year! I am currently a senior and this is my second year in MUN. This program has given me the opportunity to understand different cultures and I love how every committee helps me learn more about events in our world.

I love to crochet, read, play water polo, watch hockey and be involved in clubs like Speech and Debate, Pace Club and Mentorship, and Female Leadership Academy. MUN holds a special place in my heart because it is aligned with my goal of majoring in Political Science in college.

As someone interested in the backside of politics, I am so excited to hear the solutions you find to combat sportswashing. Each story of sportswashing individually is fascinating and I hope you enjoy researching as much as I have. The advice I will leave you with is to commit to your country's policy as best you can. It might feel odd at first to advocate for something against your personal morals but the magic of Model UN comes from figuring out how to be diplomatic, even with a difficult country policy to follow. Good luck everyone!

Sincerely,

Mackenzie Mathieu

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HOW TO MUN

So, you're probably wondering: How do I prepare for debate? Well, here are some starting points to begin your country research!

1. Read through this background guide
 - a. find your country in Bloc Positions (pg. TKTK) and read that paragraph
2. Look for information on your country in the CIA World Factbook and BBC Country Profiles, linked here:
 - a. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/>
 - b. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/default.stm
3. Look at the Questions to Consider (pg. TKTK) and try to answer them (do some research on the internet!)
4. Do more research on the internet for:
 - a. previous country actions
 - b. previous NGO and United Nations actions
 - c. possible solutions

During the committee, all delegates will present an “opening statement.” This is a short introductory speech and will only last about 30 seconds to 1 minute—nothing too bad! You can practice and time your speech using a timer.

These opening statements are written beforehand. They don't have to be memorized, either. You can print or write your speech, then read off the paper.

Your opening statement should include:

1. Your country's position on the issue at hand
2. What your country has done in the past
3. Possible solutions that align with your country's position
 - a. This is what you will discuss in the main part of the committee! Including this in your opening statement is a great way to let other delegates know where you stand.

COMMITTEE DESCRIPTION

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, promotes international cooperation in education, science, culture, communication, and information to foster peace and security. It encourages knowledge sharing and mutual understanding to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the 2030 Agenda. Originating in wartime efforts by European governments in 1942 through the Conference of Allied Ministers of Education (CAME), UNESCO was officially established at a 1945 UN conference in London with 44 countries. Its mission is to foster peace through intellectual and moral solidarity, rather than just political and economic agreements.

UNESCO develops educational tools to promote global citizenship, free from hate and intolerance, and ensures access to quality education. It promotes cultural heritage and the equal dignity of all cultures, strengthening international bonds. The organization supports scientific programs as platforms for development and upholds freedom of expression as vital to democracy and progress. UNESCO helps countries adopt international standards and fosters the free flow of ideas. In the face of modern challenges, including attacks on cultural diversity and threats to human rights, UNESCO continues to uphold its mission of promoting education, science, and culture for peace and understanding.



TOPIC SYNOPSIS

Though the term sportswashing is relatively new, being coined within the past decade, the practice is almost as old as the sport itself. Sportswashing is investing in sports to improve a country or private company's reputation or divert attention from abuses that currently press the nation. This becomes an issue in nations that carry a record for poverty, labor, or environmental rights policy, especially regarding women, who face great injustices in their respective sports. In recent times, between the 2022 Winter Olympics in China and the heavy investment into sports by Middle Eastern Gulf states, sports washing is incredibly prevalent in the media. Delegates will have to consider different perspectives regarding investing and political involvement in sports, while also working to collaborate to devise solutions to sportswashing.

BACKGROUND

History and Development of Sportswashing

Delegates may be wondering, what exactly is sportswashing, and where did it come from? Sportswashing is the use of an athletic event by an individual or a government, a corporation, or another group to promote or burnish the individual's or group's reputation, especially amid controversy or scandal. One of the earliest examples of sportswashing and its origins was the infamous 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, hosted by Nazi Germany. Using this event as means of political propaganda to portray Nazi Germany as a worldwide host for sports masked their true intentions of taking control of Europe entirely. Over the decades, sports washing evolved and changed based on a country's desire or goal to be viewed. For example, the 1978 FIFA World Cup was used by Argentina as a way to portray their stability and peacefulness through sports, while covering their brutal dictatorship regime that still impacts many Argentinians to this day. While Argentina's goals for sportswashing were different from Germany's, the overall goal for Germany and Argentina was to clean their reputation to the public.

As international sports began to surge throughout the world, so did sportswashing. More recently, Russia and Qatar have been accused of sportswashing due to their abuses of human rights and conflicts regarding political and social views.



Qatar's 2022 FIFA World Cup was known for completely disregarding migrants who worked in the stadium. Thousands of workers died and many others were displaced, trapped with no money, and manipulated to sign a contract that forced them to

keep on working for Qatar. Russia's 2014 Winter Olympics and 2018 FIFA World Cup were prime examples of sportswashing due to their doping abuses towards the games while also hiding their true intention of conflicting with surrounding countries. Other issues such as racism, banning negative news reports and articles, and silencing activism were all hidden through these worldwide events that Russia was hosting, showing just how powerful and prevalent sports washing is. For example, Russia's interior ministry ordered police not to provide negative news to the public during the 2018 World Cup, and instead report only solved crime cases to portray a more positive image of the country. Russian police were instructed not to publish information about conducted raids or results of investigations into crimes such as robberies and murders.

Sportswashing has raised many concerns over ethics and morals, with some countries and organizations boycotting events or calling out for reform towards a specific event. However, sportswashing remains extremely common and is still an issue that countries like the ones you will be representing in this committee must address.

Economic and Political Motives

The purpose of sportswashing is to change the public image of a specific country by using athletic partnerships. Unsurprisingly, the goal of these expensive campaigns is defined monetarily, often with an increase in tourism, exports, and international connections. For government leaders, sportswashing acts as a simple way to increase economic standing, and therefore distract from their other policies. In situations like the Visit Rwanda campaign with the Arsenal Football Club, the partnership has helped the country generate \$445 million in tourism revenues, a 90% recovery to pre-pandemic levels. At the same time, severe restrictions on political opposition and freedom of expression face Rwandan citizens. Similar situations have

been found around the world where creating a positive public image inspires worldwide interest in both tourism and goods created in a sportswashing country. This helps increase the economy of these countries as the world population forgets the horrific actions taken on their citizens.

Politically, these economic gains can also help increase public support for certain leaders. While this is not true of all countries accused of sportswashing, many govern through dictatorships or unfree democracies. Because of this, and the



knowledge that a country's citizens are likely more educated about human rights issues, sportswashing is more likely to appeal politically to the international community. To outside viewers, the propaganda put out by these leaders announcing a desire to increase

the prosperity of their country is convincing. If the only memory a person has of an international political leader is they helped create a soccer tournament one year, the person's opinion will most likely be favorable. In addition, as countries work together to make these campaigns a success, they can foster more smooth connections, helping the sportswashing government for years to come.

Media's Role in Facilitating or Combating Sportswashing

Reporting by the media is the main way we distinguish between sportswashing and any other sports tournament. Many reporters are caught up in the excitement of a great game or are unwilling and unable to ask the hard questions that remind people worldwide of the human rights violations of a country. In countries with free speech and press, sportswashing is identified rather quickly, and the resulting publicity can backfire to an extent on the offending nation. The challenge for the media is

restrictions placed on reporting opportunities by many authoritarian countries. This was highlighted in 2020 when the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia executed 81 people on March 12, but the media focus the next day was on the Newcastle United win. In Saudi Arabia the government controls the media and refuses to allow the international press to investigate, therefore they molded the focus onto their newly purchased soccer team. Domestic media rarely will facilitate sportswashing on purpose, meaning that countries can get away with it if it coaxes the news into believing their facade. Going forward, it is important to find a way to allow the press to do their job and be able to check countries without freedoms that are more likely to commit sportswashing.

The Other Side of Sportswashing

Though sportswashing usually comes to cover up issues within a nation, it can sometimes come with the opposite effect as well. For example, the multi-billion dollar investment into sports by Saudi Arabia, following Qatar's success in hosting the World Cup, has drawn the eyes of the Western media in huge capacities. This can lead to heightened awareness of humanitarian issues from the fans, some of whom choose to speak out against it. News coverage that criticizes nations for sportswashing can call attention to the human rights issues at play and sometimes allow journalists to give a voice to those who need a platform to speak out against it. This may lead delegates to want to consider the effectiveness of sportswashing outside of their nation and facilitate UN involvement in the domestic issues that are being neglected in favor of sports investment. The prominence of propaganda and censorship is also key to sportswashing being successful, and preventing criticisms from taking hold of authoritarian regimes.

Sportswashing has a highly negative connotation. The vast majority of the time, this is fair, as it involves using sports for malicious purposes. However, some nations may be in favor of sports investment to build nationalism and unity. Nelson Mandela is

highly regarded as one of the first global leaders to use sports to redefine a country's international image, using the integration of black people into white-dominated sports to bridge the racial gap in South Africa. Today, countries throughout the world invest in sports for peaceful reasons as well, but it becomes a problem when there are deeply underlying human rights violations within that same nation. It will be very important for delegates to consider nuances in this debate about sportswashing, and to consider their country's position and history regarding sport investment.

UN INVOLVEMENT

Since the start of UNESCO's founding in 1945, the UN as a whole has been actively addressing the misuse of sports for political gain. The UN has regularly pushed itself as a program to not only establish peace and positive country development but also to prevent any kind of manipulation that one may mask through sportswashing. Agencies such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), monitor the conditions and integrity of major global events such as the Olympics or the FIFA World Cup, ensuring that the countries who participate in these mega events are not abusing any human rights or economic honesty.

International organizations, including the UN, have condemned sportswashing, more specifically, when it covers human rights violations. The UN pushes for peace and development towards all countries, but when regarding such a specific topic as sportswashing, the UN constantly struggles to hold nations accountable when sports are being taken advantage of.

Regarding one of the most significant actions the UN has placed in regards to sportswashing, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) published its "Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights" or UNGPs for short. This action aims to recognize the role in businesses and states regarding their human rights and integrity through two central pillars:

1. The State Duty to Protect against human rights abuses by third parties, including business enterprises, through appropriate policies, regulation, and adjudication;
2. The Corporate Responsibility to Respect Human Rights, meaning that businesses should act with due diligence to avoid infringing on the rights of others and to address adverse impacts in which they are involved

When pinpointing the UN involvement down to UNESCO, sportswashing has been addressed thoroughly through the International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity, and Sport. This tackles any corruption or violation of human rights through sports washing while simultaneously integrating these values into their country's policies, overall reducing the potential of sports misuse.

BLOC POSITIONS

Middle Eastern Bloc:

The Middle Eastern bloc has been frequently accused of sports washing, especially recently. Huge amounts of money have been invested into sports by many of the nations in the region to increase GDP and cleanse their national image. These nations are also among the most widely criticized for human rights issues, from the limiting of free speech, prevalent warfare, abuses towards women's rights, and criminalization of homosexuality. This bloc will advocate for continuing to use sports as a tool for increasing national prosperity and argue for all of the benefits that come with commercializing sports.

Eastern Europe Bloc

The Eastern Europe Bloc has a complex history with sportswashing, with some nations, like Russia, using major sporting events to positively influence national image and distract from human rights issues (as seen in the 2014 Winter Olympics and 2018 FIFA World Cup. In contrast) countries such as Poland and the Czech Republic advocate for transparency and ethical governance in sports, aligning with international standards. This division creates differing stances within the bloc, with some states pushing for accountability in sports, while others use it as a tool for soft power and political strategy.

Western Bloc

The Western Bloc firmly opposes sportswashing as a way to be used by governments to violate human rights and undermine democratic values. This bloc advocates for holding nations accountable for their human rights records when hosting international sporting events while also promoting initiatives that encourage transparency and ethical means of sponsorship. The bloc supports collaborative efforts with international organizations to implement agreements or boycotts against countries engaging in sportswashing, ensuring that athletes can express their concerns without fear of punishment.

African Bloc:

Many African nations are under military regimes and more are in unstable government systems, increasing the amount of sportswashing in the region. The investments made in international sports are used partly as tourism campaigns and intend to blind people to their human rights and environmental missteps. Instances of sports washing have been discovered everywhere from Rwanda to the Ivory Coast and Ghana, acting as cover-ups for human rights and environmental policy. With an increasing frequency of sportswashing in the region, surrounding the African Cup of Nations (AFCON) soccer tournament and other partnerships, it is crucial to find a solution to this grave issue in the African bloc.

Asia-Pacific Bloc

Similarly to Eastern Europe, the Asia-Pacific Bloc is divided over the issue of sportswashing. Countries like China have been major offenders for sportswashing in the past, namely during the 2022 Winter Olympics, using the large sporting events and

a peaceful slogan to distract from its human rights record and refusal to acknowledge the independence of Taiwan. Other nations in the Asia-Pacific bloc hold very opposing views towards sportswashing, being critical of China, and pushing for transparency and accountability from all countries that host these sporting events.

Latin-America Bloc

The Latin America Bloc generally stands against sportswashing, recognizing it as a means for governments to distract from human rights issues and political repression. Members emphasize the need for transparency and accountability in sporting events, advocating for international inspection of host nations with poor human rights records. The bloc supports initiatives that push athletes to voice their concerns about social and political injustices and calls for action to challenge the use of sports as propaganda and a means of masking true intentions.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Should international sports bodies be held accountable, and if so, how can reforms be implemented within these organizations?
2. Are sanctions on sports organizations or host countries effective in creating accountability?
3. Should there be international standards that countries must meet to host global sporting events?
4. What impact does sportswashing have on the global sports economy, and can economic pressure influence change?
5. Could sanctions or boycotts worsen conditions for local populations or heighten repression?

REFERENCES

For more on sportswashing:

1. [DW.com: Sportswashing in 2023: Can it be stopped?](#)
2. [Australia Human Rights Institute: What is sportswashing and why should we care about it?](#)
3. [Palatinate: Sportswashing: unethical, but sadly here to stay](#)

For more on understanding sportswashing:

1. [Taylor and Francis Online: Sportswashing: exploiting sports to clean the dirty laundry](#)

For more on politics of sportswashing:

1. [Irregular Warfare Center: Sportswashing: The newest weapon in influence operations in irregular warfare](#)
2. [Sagepub Journal: Unpacking the politics of Sportswashing: It takes two to tango](#)

For more on sportswashing in the media:

1. [The Conversation: Sportswashing is everywhere, but it may be backfiring](#)
2. [ECPMF: Manipulating the press– How sportswashing undermines media freedom](#)

For more on sportswashing cases globally:

1. [Council on Foreign Relations: Saudi Arabia's Investments raise questions of sportswashing](#)
2. [Sagepub Journal: Sportswashing: Media headline or analytic concept?](#)
3. [NPR: Saudi Arabia and China are accused of using sports to cover up human rights abuse](#)
4. [Arts and Humanities research council: Sportswashing as Disinformation](#)

For more on UN Involvement:

1. [UNODC on Safeguarding Sport from Corruption and Economic Crime](#)