

# SOCHUM

## OMUN 2022





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## Letter from the Under-Secretary-General for General Assemblies

Dear Delegates and Faculty Advisors,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you, on behalf of the General Assemblies team and the entire OMUN Secretariat, to the fifth rendition of the Ontario Model United Nations conference, hosted by Upper Canada College. My name is Alexander Dua, and I have the honour and privilege of serving as the Under-Secretary-General for General Assemblies at OMUN 2022. I am now in my fifth year at the College and cannot understate the positive impact MUN has had on my personal growth and education during my time here. The past two years have undoubtedly been challenging for everyone, and I am very much looking forward to welcoming delegates, both new and returning, to our conference.

This year, committees at OMUN are more innovative than ever. Delegates will be challenged to think of creative solutions to problems that are digestible at the human level. OMUN this year offers delegates the choice between two GA committees—the Economic and Financial Committee (ECOFIN), and the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM). Whether discussing global cryptocurrency regulation in ECOFIN or debating policies to combat unsustainable urban and suburban sprawl in SOCHUM, every OMUN delegate will leave not only with rich memories and new friendships, but also with a fresh outlook and perspective on the issues our world is facing.

To conclude, I would like to share some advice that I encourage all delegates to take while at OMUN: push yourself. OMUN is a fantastic opportunity to build confidence and take risks, and conferences like ours are few and far between. Therefore, I urge you to really make an effort to push yourself in committee, whether that means going against the grain by raising new issues, giving a powerful speech to share a unique perspective, or challenging the ideas of other delegates. Find your own way to push yourself out of your comfort zone—it will pay off. With that being said, I wish you all the best of luck in your committees, and I am looking forward to meeting you in April!

**Alexander Dua**

*Under-Secretary-General for General Assemblies*



## Letter from the Dais

Dear distinguished SOCHUM delegates,

It is with great joy and excitement that I welcome all of you to the fifth iteration of the Ontario Model United Nations (OMUN) conference this year! My name is Dimitri Oreopoulos (but you can call me Oreo) and I have the great honour of serving as your chair for the Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee (SOCHUM). I am in my senior year at UCC and still working on deciding what to study in university next year but I am confident in my passion for MUN, as a UCC delegate since grade 8 and our team's current secretary. Outside of the classroom, I am a huge nerd about music and cars, and an avid gym bro, so feel free to chat with me about any of these topics (although the Kanye vs. Drake debate is not up for discussion; Kanye is simply better). Your first vice chair is Michael Daiello, a grade 12 student at UCC who, after participating in MUN conferences as a delegate and executive team member for around 4 years now, is no stranger to Model United Nations. In his free time, Michael enjoys playing on the Varsity Hockey team and spending time with friends. Your other chair, Ryan Van Slingerland, is a grade 11 UCC student who is another experienced MUN delegate of several years. He enjoys studying economics and politics, plays tennis, and swims often.

Attached to this same PDF you will find the comprehensive background guide we have put together to aid you in your research ahead of the committee, so I'll keep things brief in the interest of allowing you to direct all of your attention to this excellent BG and any other resources you come across during your research process. At this point, we have all realised the role that dense, urbanised regions have unquestionably played in enabling the outbreak of the Coronavirus and the subsequent global transmission that occurred within the space of a few weeks in cities across the world. While this pandemic has reminded us all of the implications of living in densely-populated urban areas, there are many other consequences of urbanisation that we have yet to directly experience and that I encourage delegates to recognize in their speeches during this conference. In this committee, you all have the opportunity to draw attention to the pitfalls of the rapid urbanisation our world is experiencing at a rate that has only continued to grow throughout the past century and I implore you to use your voices to generate change.



It is this final message that I want to leave all of you with now as I conclude this letter: your ideas are your power, so don't be afraid to share them. Whether you are a seasoned MUN veteran looking to use this committee as their last dance, or a MUN rookie with talent that you want to show, it is my mission to ensure that this committee is an accepting and enriching space where your ideas will be heard and considered by all. Finally, have fun and enjoy the ride. As I see my final days of high-school MUN just ahead, I can assure all of you that it doesn't last long. Can't wait to meet you all soon!

**Dimitri Oreopoulos**  
*Head Chair*

**Michael Daiello**  
*Vice-Chair*

**Ryan Van Slingerland**  
*Vice-Chair*



## Topic Overview: Sustainable Urbanisation

### *Background*

At present, approximately 55% of the global population lives in cities or other urban settlements, and this number is only growing. As more and more people around the world are pulled into the middle class, urban populations will continue to grow, and by 2050 it is estimated that 68% of the global population will be living in a city.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, urbanisation comes with a lot of detrimental side effects to local economies, the environment, and more. That isn't to say that urbanisation is bad; urbanisation is generally a good thing both for the people urbanising and for cities in the long run, but the current process of urbanisation is far from sustainable.

The increased demand for cheaply manufactured goods precipitated into a move away from agrarian economies and lifestyles in Global South, meaning that there is a greater segment of the population needing to live in cities. Couple this with a global rise in basic commodity prices as well as more redistributive policies in the developing world, and the result is mass migration into cities.<sup>2</sup> However, most cities around the world face underinvestment and therefore cannot cope with the number of people wishing to urbanise.<sup>3</sup> Given that 90% of the urbanisation expected to take place between now and 2050 will be in Asia and Africa where household incomes are generally lower, collecting municipal taxes results in minimal gains, in turn resulting in constrained public resources, poor infrastructure, limited sanitation, slum-like conditions, and food insecurity.<sup>4</sup> For instance, 90-100% of the urban population in high income countries such as the United States, Australia, or Japan, are connected to a sewage system, whereas 77% of the urban population in Vietnam, 89% in Sri Lanka, 93% in the Philippines and 62% in Indonesia rely on on-site sanitation (OSS) in the form of septic tanks.<sup>5</sup> Septic tanks and other forms of OSS store waste rather than treat it,

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<sup>1</sup> John Rennie Short, Lina Martínez, "The Urban Effects of the Emerging Middle Class in the Global South," *Geography Compass* 14, no. 4 (January 17, 2020): 1-15, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12484>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Dag Detter, "Cities Are Struggling under the Strain of Their Own Popularity," World Economic Forum, November 27, 2017, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/11/why-cities-arent-prepared-for-their-popularity/>.

<sup>4</sup> Rai S. Kookana et al., "Urbanisation and Emerging Economies: Issues and Potential Solutions for Water and Food Security," *Science of The Total Environment* 732 (May 7, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2020.139057>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



resulting in environments that are conducive to the spread of disease, pollution of already limited surface and groundwater resources, and contaminated irrigation systems; there is a direct link between OSS and water and food insecurity.<sup>6</sup>

There is also a significant environmental cost to urbanisation. According to Seto et al. in 2011, “the conversion of Earth’s land surface to urban uses is one of the most irreversible human impacts on the global biosphere. It drives the loss of farmland, affects local climate, fragments habitats, and threatens biodiversity.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, research shows that over the next few decades, most urbanisation will occur in incredibly biodiverse regions, resulting in deforestation, loss of farmland, and the loss of animal habitat and life.<sup>8</sup> Urbanisation also contributes heavily to greenhouse gas emissions. As stated in a Yale University article, “direct loss in vegetation biomass from areas with high probability of urban expansion is predicted to contribute about 5% of total emissions from tropical deforestation and land-use change.”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, a 2020 study found that for every 1% increase in urbanisation [*sic*], a 2.7% increase in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions will ensue as a result of construction, traffic, the burning of biomass for electricity and heat, etc.<sup>10</sup> The United Nations itself has stated that poorly managed urbanisation leads to unsustainable development, especially in the Global South.<sup>11</sup>

On top of environmental concerns, there is also an economic aspect to urbanisation. Given the sheer number of people urbanising on an annual basis, especially in the Global South, cities need to spend exorbitant amounts of money to build, expand, improve, and maintain the infrastructure needed to cope with the growing population.<sup>12</sup> As stated previously, cities suffering from financial deficiencies cannot adequately provide for the many people forced into poverty as a result of high cost of

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Karen C. Seto et al., “A Meta-Analysis of Global Urban Land Expansion,” *PLOS ONE* 6, no. 8 (August 18, 2011): 1-9, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0023777>.

<sup>8</sup> “Environmental Impacts of Urban Growth,” Yale University Seto Lab. n.d., accessed February, 2022, <https://urbanization.yale.edu/research/theme-4>.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Asim Anwar, Mustafa Younis, Inayat Ullah, “Impact of Urbanization and Economic Growth on CO<sub>2</sub> Emission: A Case of Far East Asian Countries,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, no. 7 (April 7, 2020): 2531, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17072531>.

<sup>11</sup> Aisa Kirabo Kacyira, “Addressing the Sustainable Urbanization Challenge,” United Nations. n.d., accessed February, 2022, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/addressing-sustainable-urbanization-challenge>.

<sup>12</sup> Patricia Gordon, “Infrastructure Costs and Urban Growth Management,” *Sustainable Cities, Canadian International Development Agency, Siemens* (September 2012): 1-47.



living, meaning diseases are rampant.<sup>13</sup> In addition, inefficient property markets and poor land use create high levels of dispute and litigation, uncertainty in housing markets means that landowners have difficulty using their properties as collateral for entrepreneurial ventures, and lack of infrastructure and inadequate funding leads to the burning of cheap sources of energy such as biomass and fossil fuels which pollute the environment and create unhealthy living conditions.<sup>14</sup>

While it might seem as though sustainable urbanisation is only a concern of the developing world and Global South, urbanisation and suburbanization are also taking place in the developed world and Global North, at the expense of local economies and the environment.<sup>15</sup> Occurring specifically in North America and some parts of Europe, suburbanization and suburban sprawl are outpacing urbanisation, as urbanites turn to the suburbs for larger homes, more land, etc.<sup>16</sup> This move away from cities and the urban design accompanied with “the suburban experiment” destroys local economies and indebtens municipalities, forcing some into bankruptcy.<sup>17</sup> With government transfer payments, transportation spending, and debt—the financing methods used for suburbanization—municipalities trade nominal short-term cash benefits for long-term financial obligations of maintenance, covered up with a mix of faltering growth and debt. Given that real estate growth can not be sustained, America’s cities and suburbs are experiencing enormous financial hardship.<sup>18</sup> Housing costs soar as a result, and millions of people are on the verge of being forced out of their homes due to missed payments.<sup>19</sup> As well, there are numerous social costs of urban and suburban sprawl,

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<sup>13</sup> Rai S. Kookana et al., *loc. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> Huma Haider, “Costs of Urbanisation,” *Governance and Social Development Resource Centre* (November 25, 2009): 1-10.

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Brody, “The Characteristics, Causes, and Consequences of Sprawling Development Patterns in the United States,” *Nature Education Knowledge* 4, no. 5 (2013): 2, <https://www.nature.com/scitable/knowledge/library/the-characteristics-causes-and-consequences-of-sprawling-103014747/>.

<sup>16</sup> William H. Frey, “City growth dips below suburban growth, census shows,” The Brookings Institution. March 30, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2017/05/30/city-growth-dips-below-suburban-growth-census-shows/>.

<sup>17</sup> Charles L. Marohn, “Suburban Ponzi Scheme,” *Leadership and Management in Engineering* 13, no. 3 (2013): 181-189, [https://doi.org/10.1061/\(asce\)lm.1943-5630.0000234](https://doi.org/10.1061/(asce)lm.1943-5630.0000234).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Sam Winter-Levy, Bryan Schonfeld, “America’s Exceptional Housing Crisis,” *Foreign Affairs*. September 14, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-09-14/americas-exceptional-housing-crisis>.



including habitat fragmentation, water and air pollution, increased infrastructure costs, and inequality.<sup>20</sup>

As stated previously, urbanisation is not an inherently bad thing. If executed well, urbanisation brings important economic, cultural, and social benefits. Cities enable economies of scale and network effects while reducing the impact on climate of transportation in the long-term. As such, urbanisation can actually make economic activity more environmentally-friendly going forward, and the close proximity and wide diversity of people fuels entrepreneurship and innovation, in addition to creating employment.<sup>21</sup> To summarise, urbanisation has ramifications that reach far and wide, from the environment to the economy, food scarcity to personal health and safety, and so on and so forth. It is quite clear that the current global provisions for urbanisation, and the methods by which it is conducted and dealt with, are severely inadequate especially given the rate at which urbanisation is occurring.

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### ***Past Action***

Part of what makes this committee interesting is that the United Nations has been fairly reserved in terms of their approach to tackling the issues which stem from urbanisation. For the purposes of this committee, a focus will be placed primarily on four steps previously taken by the United Nations.

The first of the aforementioned key actions taken by the UN in regards to urbanisation was the establishment of the *UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda*.<sup>22</sup> Stemming from the *Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*, which had a target year of 2015, the *Post-2015 Development Agenda* was meant to serve as a bridge between the MDGs and its successor, the *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, which were in development at the time.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Samuel Brody, *loc. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> Zurich Insurance Group, “The Risks of Rapid Urbanization in Developing Countries,” Zurich Insurance Group. January 14, 2015, <https://www.zurich.com/en/knowledge/topics/global-risks/the-risks-of-rapid-urbanization-in-developing-countries>.

<sup>22</sup> UN Department of Public Information, “United Nations Press Release: UN Secretary-General Appoints High-Level Panel On Post-2015 Development Agenda,” United Nations. July 31, 2012, [https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/Press%20release\\_post-2015panel.pdf](https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/Press%20release_post-2015panel.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> General Assembly resolution 70/1, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/1 (25 September 2015), available from [undocs.org/en/A/RES/70/91](https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/70/91).



At the heart of the *Post-2015 Development Agenda* laid five pillars that would later blossom into what are now the SDGs:

- 1. Leave No One Behind.** After 2015 we should move from reducing to ending extreme poverty, in all its forms. We should ensure that no person - regardless of ethnicity, gender, geography, disability, race or other status - is denied basic economic opportunities and human rights.
- 2. Put Sustainable Development at the Core.** We have to integrate the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability. We must act now to slow the alarming pace of climate change and environmental degradation, which pose unprecedented threats to humanity.
- 3. Transform Economies for Jobs and Inclusive Growth.** A profound economic transformation can end extreme poverty and improve livelihoods, by harnessing innovation, technology, and the potential of business. More diversified economies, with equal opportunities for all, can drive social inclusion, especially for young people, and foster sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- 4. Build Peace and Effective, Open and Accountable Institutions for All.** Freedom from conflict and violence is the most fundamental human entitlement, and the essential foundation for building peaceful and prosperous societies. At the same time, people the world over expect their governments to be honest, accountable, and responsive to their needs. We are calling for a fundamental shift - to recognize peace and good governance as a core element of well-being, not an optional extra.
- 5. Forge a New Global Partnership.** A new spirit of solidarity, cooperation, and mutual accountability must underpin the post-2015 agenda. This new partnership should be based on a common understanding of our shared humanity, based on mutual respect and mutual benefit. It should be centered on people, including those affected by poverty and exclusion, women, youth, the aged, disabled persons, and indigenous peoples. It should include civil society organizations, multilateral institutions, local and national governments, the scientific and academic community, businesses, and private philanthropy.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development - The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda* (New York City: United Nations Publications, May 30, 2013), <https://www.post2020hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/UN-Report.pdf>.



In the context of this committee, numbers one, two, and three in the above list are the most relevant to the topic at hand, and reaffirm the UN's commitment to sustainable urbanisation.

As the target deadline for the MDGs passed and the work of the *Post-2015 Development Agenda* was completed, the UN officially introduced the SDGs, with a target year of 2030. In total, there are seventeen goals; for the topic at hand, goal eleven is the most relevant. Goal 11, "Sustainable Cities and Communities", aims to "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable".<sup>25</sup> This goal has a number of subgoals.<sup>26</sup> Aside from outlining targets, SDG 11 does not stipulate a multinational framework or plan for sustainable urbanisation and development.

The third key action taken by the United Nations in regards to sustainable urbanisation was the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), held in Ecuador in 2016.<sup>27</sup> This conference mainly concerned the sustainable development of new towns, cities, and other urban areas. In addition, the *New Urban Agenda* was also developed, which is discussed in the next paragraph. Effectively, Habitat III only called for new methods of urban development, and did not outline a method for which these new methods could be implemented.<sup>28</sup>

As mentioned above, the Habitat III conference did not implement any solutions or framework on a global level. Instead, they published the *New Urban Agenda*, also known as General Assembly Resolution A/RES/71/256, as a guide on sustainable urban development for individual nations to follow.<sup>29</sup> The *New Urban Agenda* makes a number of pledges, including to "promote measures that support cleaner cities", "strengthen resilience in cities to reduce the risk and the impact of disasters", and

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<sup>25</sup> General Assembly resolution 70/313, *Work of the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/313 (6 July 2017), available from [undocs.org/A/RES/70/313](https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/313).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Wolfgang Amann, Sandra Jurasszovich, "Habitat III – a Critical Review of the New Urban Agenda," *Housing Finance International* (2017): 35-39, no. Spring 2017., [http://iibw.at/documents/2017%20\(Art.\)%20Amann\\_Jurasszovich%20New%20Urban%20Agenda%20HFI.pdf](http://iibw.at/documents/2017%20(Art.)%20Amann_Jurasszovich%20New%20Urban%20Agenda%20HFI.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Habitat III Secretariat, *New Urban Agenda* (Quito, Ecuador: United Nations, October 20, 2016), <http://uploads.habitat3.org/hb3/NUA-English.pdf>.



“take action to address climate change by reducing their greenhouse gas emissions”, to name a few.<sup>30</sup>

Based on the above evidence, it is quite clear that the UN has been extremely limited in their response to this ever-worsening crisis. While they have outlined a number of goals for sustainable urbanisation and suburbanisation, they are yet to outline a cohesive plan for implementing measures that will ultimately lead to the achievement of those goals - that is ultimately the role of this committee. Another aspect the UN failed to address is the fact that the process of urbanisation is not uniform around the world. Sustainable urbanisation in the twenty-first century can be broken down into two main groups: urbanisation in the developing world, and suburbanisation in the developed world.

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<sup>30</sup> United Nations, “The New Urban Agenda: Key Commitments,” United Nations. October 2016, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2016/10/newurbanagenda/>.



## Guiding Questions

1. Are the goals set out by the UN specific to both the developing and developed world? How can they be improved?
2. What are some of the challenges associated with the current process of urbanisation in the developing world, and how can the process be made more sustainable?
3. What is the “growth ponzi scheme”, and how does it relate to the issue of unsustainable suburbanisation in the developed world?
4. Considering that SOCHUM is a GA committee, meaning that it may only pass non-binding resolutions, what are some potential solutions that could be implemented to address the issues of unsustainable urbanisation and suburbanisation?
5. How can the existing SDGs be employed to tackle the issue of urbanisation on a global scale?
6. How do the distinct issues of urbanisation and suburbanisation differ and what are some important considerations while attempting to develop “blanket solutions” that address both issues simultaneously?
7. Given the fact that nations participating in SOCHUM’s proceedings come from both the “developed” and “developing” worlds, is there any distinction that needs to be made between the two in the context of solutions, and are there any solutions that could be applicable to both?
8. In terms of economics, are there any market failures that are generated by the consequences of rapid urbanisation and suburbanisation, and how can future solutions that promote sustainable urban and suburban development counteract these market failures?



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