Preparation Paper/Abstract:

International Bioethics Committee (IBC)

“Genetic Manipulation and Gene Therapy”
About the Committee

The International Bioethics Committee (IBC) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a body composed of 36 independent experts from all regions and from different disciplines that follows progress in the life sciences and its applications in order to ensure respect for human dignity and human rights. It has been prominent in developing Declarations with regard to norms of bioethics that are regarded as soft law but are nonetheless influential in shaping the deliberations, for example, of research ethics committees and health policy. At VIMUN we will simulate an IBC State Conference.

Genetic Manipulation and Gene Therapy

Sequencing the human genome in 2001 revolutionized the world of science and new fields of biomedical research were established. New technologies in bio-engineering allowed scientists to modify the human genome and treat diseases with various kinds of gene therapy methods. Current topics as genetic manipulation, including reproductive medicine and stem cells treatments, also as gene therapy, led to severe discussions. Ethical issues raised and forced to consider international standards for biomedical research on ethics and access more brightly. This topic will challenge delegates to consider this issue from ethical, economic and public health policy angles.

Reproductive medicine made it possible to prevent and diagnose heritable genetic disorders before implanting the embryo by using in-vitro-fertilization. Biotechnology enabled manipulation of organism's genomes, so genes can be transferred, activated and deleted. Embryonic stem cell therapy has been proposed as a treatment for regenerative medicine and tissue replacement after injury or disease. Gene therapy was developed as a method to replace defective genes by inserting DNA into patient's cells as a drug. However, these technologies raised ethical questions of which uses are acceptable in clinical implementation and which are not. The lack of standards in this area demands action from the General Assembly.

The Declaration of Helsinski on human experimentation has fostered a heated debate with groups of different interests: scientists, health policymakers, human rights international NGOs, government agencies, and the public at large. This committee will seek to revisit previous ethical regulations and implement new health policies surrounding bioethics by creating innovative ways to resolve the conflict of interests between scientific pursuits and ethics and to firmly establish the regulations surrounding human experimentation across the globe.

From a public policy and health perspective, the committee must also address how the privacy of the information from these tests will be maintained, as well as who will ultimately have access to this information. How should governments balance information privacy concerns with the public health and economic benefits of knowing the genetic predispositions of the entire population? Finally, delegates will have to consider how to minimize the gap in access to these technologies across countries. This topic promises to be a contentious one that combines not only countries' ethical stances on genetic testing, but also their policy backgrounds regarding privacy and public health.