

IPL 220 Model United Nations Report

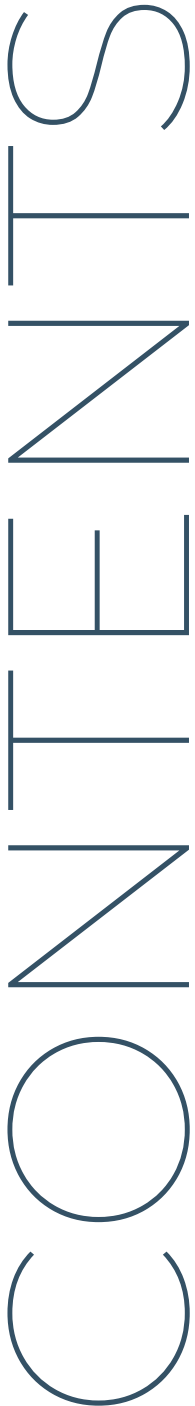


Fostering Security in the Indo-Pacific: Challenges and Opportunities

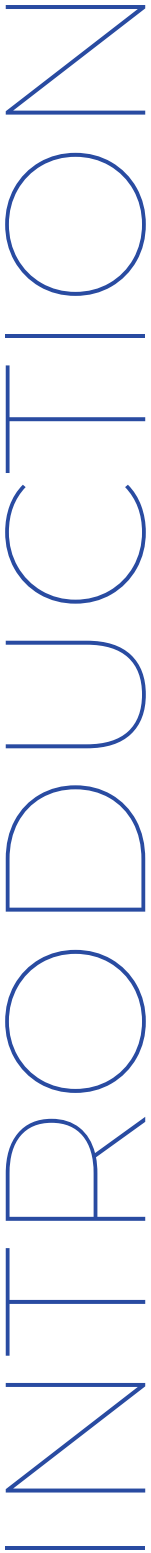


South African
BRICS Think Tank

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On the 24th of October 2023, the second-year International Relations Students at the University of Pretoria participated in the annual Model United Nations (MUN). The MUN is a compulsory component of the second-year curriculum and students need to submit position papers in advance. The position paper along with their performance at the debate forms part of their overall mark for the module. This component has been part of the IPL 220 course for more than two decades and this year formed part of the Department’s Ocean Regions Programme, funded by the NIHSS within its South African BRICS Think Tank initiative.

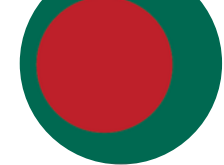
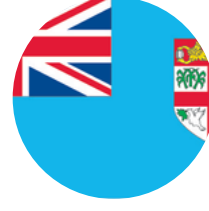
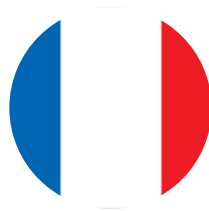
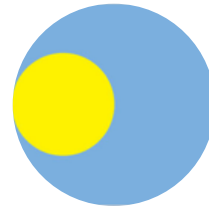
This year, the topic was “Fostering Security in the Indo-Pacific: Challenges and Opportunities”. This topic was originally chosen because the maritime component of international affairs is often not highlighted as prominently as territorial issues. In fact, this has led to “sea blindness”, where the importance of the oceans is not recognized and rather relegated to the periphery. Considering this, the teaching team of this module thought it would be pertinent and relevant to have a topic that brings the oceans to the forefront. Furthermore, by bringing the oceans on the agenda, it also provides those states that are usually relegated to the sidelines of important discussions, such as small island developing states, to the center.

As soon as the semester started students were split into 31 delegations. Each delegation was appointed a mentor (a third-year or honours student volunteer) to guide them through the process. Prior to the allocation of delegations, the mentors went through extensive training to prepare them for mentoring the groups. Over the course of the semester, several delegations made contact with their embassies and visited them.

The actual debate took place on the 24th of October 2023. During the course of the day, students had to deliver opening speeches, take part in moderated and unmoderated caucuses, and write draft resolutions - all while following the MUN rules of procedure. The debate was adjudicated by Rear Admiral Derick Christian (Ret.), Dr. Robin Blake, and Mr. Jaimal Anand, while Ruth Kasanga, Carika Middelburg, and Hosi Khosa acted as Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary respectively. Overall, the debate was a huge success.

The aim of this report is to highlight some of the key outcomes of this experience from the perspective of the adjudicators, mentors and most importantly, the students.

COUNTRIES REPRESENTED



THE STUDENTS

In the build-up to the debate, several delegations had the opportunity to visit their respective embassies or high commissions. This was a highlight for the students as it gave them the chance to put into practice the theory they learn in class.



The UK delegation with a representative from the UK embassy



The Czech delegation at the Czech Republic Embassy



The Sri Lankan delegation at the Sri Lankan High Commission



The Kenyan delegation with a representative from the Kenyan High Commission

One of the students from the United Kingdom delegation attested to this:

“The recent Model United Nations competition we all had to prepare for was without a doubt an invaluable experience – one which I would be reluctant to go through again. Representing the UK and leading a ten-member team for the first time was both exciting and exhausting. The highlight of the whole experience was getting to interact with actual diplomatic staff from the UK which did a great deal to improve our position paper and to reassure my worries about the employability of an International Relations degree. Working with ten people I was unfamiliar with was an unexpectedly smooth and pleasant experience though not one without issues.”

Another student, representing the Republic of Chile described their experience:

“The Model United Nations debate was a very interesting project that second-year International Relations students took part in. We were allowed to have a peek into the world of foreign policy decision-making, and it helped me understand that continuously engaging in negotiations with different states is not an easy task and requires one to be informed on the position of the state you represent regarding the topic you are discussing. I would truly say, hats off to our heads of state, foreign affairs ministers, and diplomats, this event has shown me that there is a lot of preparation that takes place behind the scenes before states present themselves at a UN General Assembly or other assemblies.

The topic we were given was “Fostering peace and security in the Indo-Pacific: Challenges and Opportunities,” and my group and I represented the Republic of Chile. As we engaged in this topic, I specifically learned the great importance of the ocean and how the exercise of sovereign control over some of the islands presents the opportunity for gaining a central and commanding position in the region.”

THE STUDENTS



The Philippine delegation at the Philippine Embassy



The Chinese delegation at the Embassy of the People's Republic of China



The Lithuanian delegation at the Embassy of Lithuania

A delegate from the Czech Republic noted the following:

“Regarding the Indo-Pacific region itself, I was astonished to learn just how divisive and complex the issues regarding the region were. This seemed to be largely in part to the variety of countries involved (and their varying views) and to the lack of law and cooperation regarding the region and oceans in general.

Furthermore, it felt like a very interesting practice in multilateralism, where we could practically experience both its advantages and disadvantages. The opportunity we were granted to not just discover a host of interesting information but to consolidate that information into something useful, was invaluable. It taught me that good information and an informed opinion are only important and useful when used in the right scenario and presented in a skillful manner because, at the core of all politics, people are involved.

In conclusion the MUN debate further deepened my love for Politics to such an extent that I cannot stop myself from consistently seeking out political debates and reading U.N resolutions, it is my opinion that the MUN is an invaluable experience for all Political Science or International Relations Students.”

A delegate from the delegation of the People's Republic of China described their experience as follows:

“The Module United Nations assignment was probably one of the best eye-opening academic experiences I have been through. Once I found out I would be representing the People's Republic of China I was elated because the People's Republic of China as we know it, is a major role player in the international system. Through research, it was clear to my delegation that we would have to successfully represent the state because of its role in the Indo-Pacific region. However, my delegation and I soon realized that we would also have to defend the People's Republic of China because it is not quite innocent in how it handles its relations. This was a great learning curve that showed us how the real world works! With the help of our mentor, Ikhlaas Basadien, who guided us so well, we were able to acquire extensive research and even managed to visit the embassy of the People's Republic of China where we were welcomed and given a platform to freely ask any questions we felt would help with our assignment. It was great learning more about foreign policy through the oceans and the importance of the Indo-Pacific region in International Relations. Participating in a model United Nations debate opened my perspective about how such events happen in the real world and I am truly grateful for such an experience.”

THE MENTORS

The mentors of which there were thirty-seven were a crucial aspect of the MUN. These third-year and honours students volunteered to assist the delegations with their preparations for the event. More than just provide guidance on the technical aspects of the simulation, the mentors became role-models to the students. Below, some of the experiences of the mentors are highlighted.

Omolemo Job (3rd Year BA Law student) - Republic of Kenya

“Beginning of the second semester I was given the opportunity by the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria to be a mentor for the MUN Delegation of the Republic of Kenya. Along with the multiple interactions with the High Commission of Kenya in Pretoria, I learned how key issues such as cyber threats, terrorism, climate change, and small arms affect Kenya's role in the Indo-Pacific region. I was brought to the knowledge that as guided by its foreign policy, Kenya plays a neutral role in this region and would prefer that this region be kept peaceful for all trade and production purposes.”

Lesang Petje (3rd Year BAdmin Public Management and International Relations student) - United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

“As a mentor to the United Kingdom delegation for Model United Nations, I gained many valuable insights and experience. It has offered a unique opportunity to guide and support young students as they tackle the complex issues of international diplomacy, and it has been excellent for my personal and professional development. My role as a mentor goes beyond simple guidance, creating a supportive environment in which students can develop critical skills and building lasting relationships were my main goals. It was incredibly rewarding to witness the growth of these students as they honed their negotiation, public speaking, and research skills. Furthermore, this experience highlighted the significance of patience and empathy in mentoring.”

Erin McEnroe (3rd Year BAdmin Public Administration and International Relations student) - Republic of Fiji

“As a mentor, I have learned and taken so much from this experience. I learned that it is important to let others shine their light and not just let one person dominate the group. There are exceptionally clever people who may be introverted and lack confidence but have so much to contribute, and I learned that it is important to recognize that and encourage those people. I also learned that delegation is key to working successfully and peacefully with regard to group work.”



A group photo of the mentors for 2023



Sentle Matlala and Zwivhuya Khorommbi



Omolemo Job presenting a gift of thanks to Amb. Jacqueline Kenani, the Deputy Head of Mission at the Kenyan High Commission



THE MENTORS

Siona Maganbeharie (3rd Year BPolSci student) - Solomon Islands

"I learned a lot about small islands and how they play such an important role in our world - something I never really knew about. I also learned how it is so important to foster security for our oceans and the dire need to combat climate change to protect the world we live in because if we do not there are so many consequences to face. After sitting in the debate, I have come to realize there are so many countries in the world that face problems such as climate change, IUU fishing, and militarization and how each problem affects every country differently. Furthermore, I have really seen the different ways in which different countries will take on such problems and how they all view certain situations and I found that all really interesting."

Kaitlyn Albertyn (3rd Year BA General student) - Republic of Kiribati

"While I had researched the topic before, it was truly fascinating to see the way the students interpreted the information and what points they were drawn to. For example, Kiribati's history with nuclear testing was something that I hadn't much focused on in my own research but emerged in theirs and I thoroughly enjoyed reading about it. This experience took more time than I originally thought, my doubts never quite went away, and I was less prepared than I could have imagined. However, it was an incredibly fun experience and was full of growth. Academically, I learned about the Indo-Pacific region twice- from my own perspective and from theirs."

3rd Year International Relations student - Solomon Islands

"From the MUN process, I have learned about the security implications of rising sea levels. I have learned that climate change is also a far-reaching security issue. And that small island states are not alone in facing the challenge of rising sea levels. Larger states also have a vested interest in helping small island states to adapt and build resilience. Furthermore, I have learned that the Permanent Five (P5) has a particular responsibility to address the security challenges facing small island states. Since they are the world's largest emitters of greenhouse gases, they have the power as well as an obligation to make a real difference. For example, the P5 can help by reducing their emissions, providing financial and technical assistance to small island states, and supporting multilateral institutions that are working to address the security challenges facing small island states."

Ikhlaas Basadien (3rd Year BPolSci International Relations and Public Management) - The People's Republic of China

"When you've traveled to a country, especially overseas which opens your eyes to the reality of the world and changes your perceptions on certain issues, it's something you wish others could see. Regarding being a mentor for China, I pushed in order to get the opportunity knowing I could employ what I've learned in my travels and utilize my skills to the fullest. In this, I knew I'd be able to teach and guide my mentees representing China things they would never forget. Being able to view certain interactions between these younger students allowed me a slight opportunity to remember what I once had gone through, something I missed immensely. Previously being a second year taking time for granted and now being so close to the finish line, I appreciated the opportunity to reminisce about the roller coaster of emotions waiting for your name to be called to win an award. I wanted to accomplish something the students would remember forever and that was guiding them to become the best delegation. From their responses, I have realized that what we have achieved, in fact, is something they will never forget. Something they have taught me is to never take for granted even a minute because it is that minute that can never be replaced. In the pursuit of our goals, we shouldn't forget to live a little. Lastly, the mentees taught me to live passionately and strive to achieve things with that same passion as through doing this everyone around us will catch it like a fever!"

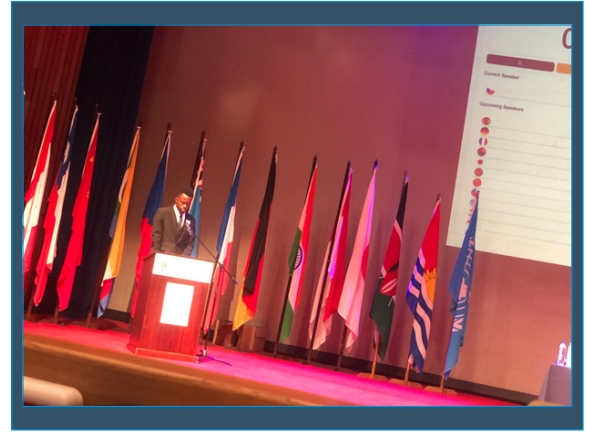
THE DEBATE

The debate itself was undoubtedly a highlight for many students. All delegations had to give a 90-second opening speech. During the opening speech, the delegates provided an overview of their country's stance and highlighted some of the potential solutions they planned on proposing.

The opening speeches highlighted just how diverse the states in the debate were: some states spoke of the importance of securing trade routes, others spoke of the existential threat of climate change, whilst others spoke of deep-sea bed mining.

After the opening speeches, delegates were permitted to motion for a moderated caucus. Various topics for the moderated caucus were raised and voted for. During the moderated caucus, the issue of climate change featured most prominently which attests to the number of states that are affected by it.

In fact, one of the comments made by the adjudicators at the conclusion of the debate was that even though the Indo-Pacific contains many powerful actors, the agenda was high-jacked by the island states. Persistently throughout the debate, the topic of climate change, and sub-components of it, such as 'high sea level rise', 'increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters', and 'ocean acidification' were raised by delegations. The topics pose the most pertinent threat to ocean and littoral states in the region. This demonstrates the power that states have to bring to the top of the agenda pertinent issues affecting them, if they work together.



A delegate presenting their state's opening speech



The delegation representing India



The US delegation with a representative of the US Embassy in Pretoria



Two delegates from the Republic of Kiribati

THE DEBATE



The moderated caucus was followed by the unmoderated caucus where delegates no longer had to follow the rules of procedure and instead were allowed to leave the room and lobby with other states for solutions.

During this time period, delegates presented their draft resolutions to one another in an attempt to gain as many sponsors and signatories as possible. This was an excellent exercise of negotiation and was thoroughly enjoyed by students.

By the time the moderated caucus and unmoderated caucus had adjourned the panelists were presented with over ten different resolutions. The resolutions demonstrated a wide variety of concerns, although all touching on similar issues, namely climate change. Interestingly when it came to voting for the resolutions, not a single resolution received the two-thirds majority that was needed for the resolution to pass.

This was a valuable experience for the students to witness because it demonstrates the actual dynamics at the United Nations, that is, that getting resolutions to pass is not easy. Reaching cooperation and consensus is not a given.



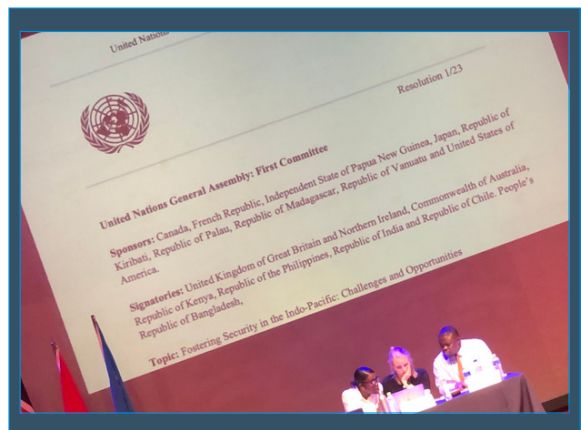
Delegates from the French Republic and the Czech Republic lobbying during the unmoderated caucus



The winning delegation from the People's Republic of China



Delegates from the Republic of Lithuania lobbying and writing their draft resolution



The panelists assessing one of the proposed resolutions

THE AWARDS

At the conclusion of the debate numerous awards were handed out, which include an award for the best position paper, best delegate, best spirit and overall best delegation.



Best Position Paper

The French Republic
The Republic of Chile



Best Delegate

Mr Keenan Kotze - The Czech Republic
Mr Flynn Carroll - The Republic of Korea



Best Spirit

The Republic of Vanuatu



Best Delegation

The People's Republic of China



The Republic of Vanuatu delegation



The People's Republic of China delegation



The Republic of Chile delegation



The French Republic delegation

A few observations from the day

Rear Admiral (Ret) Derek Christian

Firstly, considering that they are still at a 2nd year academic level, the students/delegates displayed a highly commendable level of insight, understanding and knowledge of increasingly complex problems in an increasingly fraught geopolitical region. Amongst the many challenges, it was quite rightly recognised that some of the issues would affect different countries differently. One example: the negative and very serious effects that climate change posed to the very existence of the smaller island states, in rising sea levels, were eloquently discussed at length by most of the delegations.

Secondly, the manner in which the interaction and/or rivalry between the major powers is playing out in the region, and the subsequent implications for smaller nations and how these smaller nations should deal with this, was repeatedly highlighted in the various written papers. As an example, one of the papers mentioned that smaller nations/island states needed to “genuinely co-operate” in areas such as “trade, security and environmental conservation”, and “to be more dedicated to their established agreements”, as a way of preventing undue influence from the larger nations. Indeed.

Thirdly, the delegates displayed a good understanding of, and respect for, the rules and procedures necessary to successfully participate in a session such as this. The occasional lapses of decorum were immediately corrected and the correct procedure complied with. In this regard, the role of the Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary in controlling the session were exceptional.

Lastly, although rather surprisingly, there was very little discussion in-session concerning the increasing regional militarisation and the potential (mainly) maritime threats that this posed. I say surprisingly, because this was certainly raised in most of the written papers and acknowledged as a matter that needed to be addressed. Almost all of the more powerful countries in the region are actively increasing and modernising their respective naval capabilities, and I thought that this might have prompted discussion about future maritime tensions in the region.

In conclusion, the excellent preparation and organisation by the MUN coordinators, and the enthusiastic participation by the students/delegates and their mentors, ensured a highly successful day.

The value of the MUN

Nurulhudah Okwayo (3rd Year BA Triple major International Relations, Politics and Economics student)

The Model United Nations at UP is a truly unique and valuable experience for students. It is an opportunity to learn about global issues, to develop their research and writing skills, to practice public speaking, and to collaborate with others from all over the world. But more than that, it is an opportunity to make a difference.

Students are passionate about making the world a better place. They are the next generation of leaders, and, if given a chance like the MUN, are equipped with the knowledge and skills to make a positive impact. What inspired me most during the MUN process was the passion and dedication of the students. I was amazed by their willingness to learn about complex global issues, develop their research and writing skills, and to engage in challenging debates. I was also inspired by their commitment to working together to find solutions to the problems facing the world today.

My gratitude goes to the coordinator and organisers - the Department of Political Sciences. It is clear that a lot of time and energy goes into planning and executing such a large and complex event. I am grateful to everyone who played a role in making the conference a success.

MUN is just one example of the many ways that UP is preparing students to meet the challenges of the 21st century. I am grateful for the opportunity to have been a part of the MUN experience at UP. It was an inspiring and rewarding experience, and I am confident that the students who participated will go on to do great things in the world.



Hosi Khosa, Ruth Kasanga, Daniela Marggraff, Carika Middelburg and David Kabwa



Nurulhudah Okwayo and Mhlali Mahala



THIS REPORT WAS COMPILED BY
DANIELA MARGGRAFF (MUN COORDINATOR)

CONTRIBUTIONS BY
REAR ADMIRAL (RET) CHRISTIAN
AND ALL **STUDENTS** AND **MENTORS** ARE
MUCH APPRECIATED