SUISSEMUN XIII

STUDY GUIDE

COMMISSION:

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

(UNHRC)

Topic A: The expansion of hardline criminal policies in El Salvador and their implications for human rights and due process guarantees

Topic B: The impact of sanctions imposed on Iran on the protection of economic and social rights of civilian populations

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President: Mateo Afanador

Vice-President: Salvador Martinez

REQUIREMENTS

Delegates must submit a single document comprising:

- **Position Paper (for each topic)**
  - Must include background on each topic, the delegation's position, actions taken by the represented country, and proposed solutions.
  - Written in third person. Must include cited sources. Maximum 5 pages per topic.
- **Opening Speech (for each topic)**
  - Must clarify the delegation's initial position and present one or more solutions. Reading time: 60–90 seconds. Written in third person.

ABOUT THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL (UN HRC)

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is an intergovernmental body established in 2006 by the General Assembly through Resolution 60/251, replacing the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights. Based in Geneva, Switzerland, it comprises 47 Member States elected by the General Assembly for three-year terms based on equitable geographic distribution, with a maximum of two consecutive mandates.

The Council's mandate is to promote and protect human rights worldwide, address violations, and issue recommendations to states. Its mechanisms include the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Special Procedures (special rapporteurs, independent experts, and working groups), and treaty bodies. It may also convene special sessions to respond to urgent crises of gross violations.

The UNHRC has played an active monitoring role in situations including the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the repression of protests in Iran, and the ongoing state of exception in El Salvador. For SUISSEMUN XIII, the Council is the appropriate forum:

both the hardline security model in El Salvador and the humanitarian impact of sanctions on Iran represent situations where international human rights law is in direct tension with sovereign state decisions, generating documented consequences for millions of civilians.

TOPIC A: THE EXPANSION OF HARDLINE CRIMINAL POLICIES IN EL SALVADOR AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DUE PROCESS GUARANTEES

Background

El Salvador has historically been one of the countries with the highest homicide rates in the world. Decades of civil war (1979–1992), structural inequality, and absent reintegration policies enabled gangs such as Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18 to consolidate as parallel powers to the state, controlling entire territories, systematically extorting merchants, and households, and conditioning the daily life of millions of Salvadorans, particularly in the most impoverished urban areas.

When President Nayib Bukele assumed power in 2019, his government maintained secret negotiations with gang leaders while publicly promising total security. Following an unprecedented violence spike between March 25–27, 2022, which left 87 homicides in 72 hours, Bukele requested a state of exception from the Legislative Assembly, approved on March 27, 2022. This measure suspended key constitutional due process guarantees free association, the maximum administrative detention period, and the right to immediate legal counsel (International Comission of Jurists (ICJ), 2026)

Although conceived as a 30-day temporary measure, the state of exception has been extended over 35 consecutive times through 2025, becoming a structural governance

instrument. By January 2025, authorities reported over 84,000 detentions under its provisions. President Bukele publicly acknowledged in November 2024 that at least 8,000 of those detained were innocent of the charges against them (Congressional Research Service (CRS), 2025)

Development and Current Situation

The Bukele security model has produced striking statistical outcomes: the official homicide rate fell from 53.1 per 100,000 in 2018 to 1.9 in 2024. The government also inaugurated the Center for Terrorist Confinement (CECOT), Latin America's largest prison, with a capacity of 40,000 inmates, and has presented this model internationally as an exportable solution to regional security crises.

Independent researchers note that official statistics exclude deaths in state custody, extrajudicial killings, and remains found in clandestine graves, which could raise the real homicide rate by up to 47% above the reported figure for 2023 (Congressional Research Service (CRS), 2025). Organizations including Amnesty International and CEJIL have systematically documented torture, denial of food and medicine to detainees, enforced disappearances, and severe overcrowding in detention facilities.

In the judicial sphere, the Assembly approved reforms permitting mass trials of up to 900 individuals simultaneously without effective individual legal representation. In 2025, Congress approved a constitutional amendment establishing life sentences, eliminating the previous 60-year cap (Mouser, 2026). The International Expert Group for the Investigation of Human Rights Violations (GIPES) presented findings to the UNHRC in 2025 documenting 403 deaths in state custody — including four minors — and 540 enforced disappearances, concluding there are reasonable grounds to believe crimes against humanity are being committed as the result of deliberate government policy (International Comission of Jurists (ICJ), 2026).

The state of exception has also been weaponized against civil society. Human rights lawyers, journalists, environmental defenders, and opposition figures have been arrested without concrete evidence. In May 2025, attorney Ruth López — named by the BBC among the 100 most influential women of 2024 — was detained in what Amnesty International declared a case of arbitrary detention in retaliation for her work (Amnesty International, 2025). According to Cristosal, at least 86 political prisoners are currently held in El Salvador. The Law on Foreign Agents imposes a 30% tax on international NGO funding and broad government powers to suspend civil society organizations, forcing Cristosal itself to suspend all operations in the country (Center for Justice and International Law, 2025).

From a regional perspective, the "Bukele model" has begun replicating across Latin America, with political leaders in Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, and Ecuador explicitly citing it as inspiration for their own security agendas. The GIPES warns this represents a structural threat to the rule of law in the region, legitimizing the concentration of executive power and the suspension of fundamental rights as normal governance instruments rather than last-resort measures (International Comission of Jurists (ICJ), 2026).

Key Questions

- To what extent can a state suspend constitutional guarantees in the name of public security without violating international human rights law?
- What is the international community's responsibility when a sovereign state adopts policies that reduce crime statistics but systematically violate fundamental rights?
- What mechanisms can the UNHRC activate to demand accountability for deaths and enforced disappearances in El Salvador's state custody?

- How should the Council respond to the export and replication of the "Bukele model" across the region?
- What reparation measures should be established for victims of arbitrary detention and persecuted human rights defenders?

Key Terms

- State of exception / emergency rule
- Due process and presumption of innocence
- Arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance
- Crimes against humanity
- Punitive hardline model / Bukele model
- Civil society, judicial independence

Suggested Resources

- ICJ — Crimes against humanity in El Salvador's public security policy (2026)
- WOLA — Political imprisonment in El Salvador (2025)
- Amnesty International — Two years of emergency rule in El Salvador (2024)
- CEJIL — Stop the criminalization of human rights defenders in El Salvador (2025)
- Kennedy Human Rights Center — How Bukele's El Salvador frames human rights as the enemy (2026)

TOPIC B: THE IMPACT OF SANCTIONS IMPOSED ON IRAN ON THE PROTECTION OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS OF CIVILIAN POPULATIONS

Background

The Islamic Republic of Iran has been subject to international sanctions regimes for over four decades, making it one of the most sanctioned countries in the world. The first significant restrictions were imposed by the United States following the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the Tehran hostage crisis. The regime intensified substantially from 2006, when the UN Security Council adopted binding resolutions — 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008), and 1929 (2010) — restricting trade in nuclear materials and related financial transactions.

The most critical escalation came in 2012, when the EU banned Iranian oil imports and SWIFT disconnected Iranian banks from international payment networks. Crude oil exports fell from approximately 2.2 million barrels per day in 2011 to around 500,000 by 2019, reducing state oil revenues by 60–80%. Total merchandise imports declined over 30%, from $62 billion in 2011 to $42 billion in 2019 (Farzanegan, 2025) (Farzanegan M. , 2025).

The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) opened a period of partial sanctions relief, but in May 2018 President Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States and reimposed sweeping sanctions under a "maximum pressure" policy. In February 2025, Trump signed a new memorandum ordering an even more robust enforcement campaign, and in September 2025, UN sanctions were reimposed following the Israel-Iran armed conflict (Clayton, 2025).

Development and Current Situation

As of early 2026, Iran is in severe economic crisis. Inflation reached 48.6% in October 2025; the rial surpassed one million per dollar in March 2025 and reached 1,750,000 per dollar by December 2025 — the lowest-valued currency in the world — reducing the monthly minimum wage to under $130 in real terms (The New Humanitarian, 2025). The IMF estimated unemployment at 9.5% in 2025, with disproportionate impact on youth.

Academic research has rigorously quantified the structural damage. (Farzanegan, 2025) (Farzanegan M. , 2025), using synthetic difference-in-differences analysis, estimated that sanctions caused an average annual decline of 17 percentage points in the size of Iran's middle class between 2012 and 2019: without sanctions, the middle class would have represented 84% of the population by 2019; in reality it stood at only 56%. This represents the loss of economic stability for tens of millions of people. By 2025, between 22% and 50% of Iranians fell below the poverty line, compared to approximately 12% in 2012.

The right to health has been severely compromised despite humanitarian exemptions in the sanctions regimes. Restrictions on banking and maritime shipping have generated persistent shortages of essential medicines and medical equipment. (Kokabisaghi, 2018) (Mohammadshahi, 2025), conclude in systematic reviews that exemptions have failed to protect the Iranian population from these adverse effects, and that sanctioning states have violated international human rights obligations insofar as foreseeable humanitarian consequences were not prevented. Iran's Ministry of Social Welfare reported in 2024 that 57% of the population experienced some level of malnutrition.

Research also documents a politically significant secondary effect: the erosion of the middle class reduces domestic pressure on the regime and may paradoxically strengthen the government, which can attribute economic hardship to external actors.

(Farzanegan M. R., 2025) (Farzanegan M. , 2025), warn that sanctions create a vicious cycle — mass impoverishment fuels discontent, met with intensified repression by a threatened authoritarian regime. This materialized in December 2025, when severe economic hardship triggered nationwide protests. The UNHRC convened its 39th special session in January 2026, with High Commissioner Volker Türk calling on the international community to address the impact of sanctions on the rights of the Iranian people while condemning the government's brutal crackdown. The mandates of the Fact-Finding Mission on Iran and the Special Rapporteur were both extended (OHRC, 2025) (OHRC, 2026).

From an international law perspective, this debate illustrates a structural tension in the multilateral system. Sanctioning states defend them as legal tools for modifying behavior threatening international peace. Russia, China, and a growing number of Global South states argue that unilateral coercive measures violate international law and generate humanitarian damage comparable to armed conflict (United Nations Security Counsil, 2022).The UNHRC is called to take a position on this controversy from the perspective of protecting civilian populations' economic and social rights.

Key Questions

- What concrete obligations do sanctioning states have under international law regarding the economic and social rights of civilian populations in targeted countries?
- Are current humanitarian exemptions in sanctions regimes sufficient to protect the rights to health, food, and education of the Iranian population?
- What role can the UNHRC play in establishing international standards that limit the humanitarian impact of sanctions on vulnerable civilian populations?

- How should the relationship between the Human Rights Council and the Security Council be structured when sanctions authorized by the latter generate documented rights violations?
- What is the acceptable threshold of civilian harm in the application of sanctions aimed at nuclear non-proliferation or regional security objectives?

Key Terms

- International economic sanctions / unilateral coercive measures
- Economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR)
- Humanitarian exemptions and right to health
- JCPOA / maximum pressure policy
- Middle-class erosion and civilian impoverishment
- Sanctioning state responsibility

Suggested Resources

- OHCHR — HRC special session on Iran: extension of mandates (January 2026)
- VoxDev — How sanctions eroded Iran's middle class (Farzanegan & Habibi, 2025)
- PMC — Effects of sanctions on Iranians' right to health (Kokabisaghi, 2018)
- The New Humanitarian — War and sanctions push Iranian workers to the brink (2025)
- Congressional Research Service — U.S. sanctions on Iran (2025)

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