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**Establishing and Maintaining
Public Trust**

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Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the UNSCW the topic synopsis entitled “Establishing and Maintaining Public Trust.”
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Prevention of Women's Rights Abuses Relating to Mandatory Dress Codes

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Section I—Introduction

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) facilitates change by assisting countries around the world with implementation of plans for economic, social and environmental development. A major goal of UN DESA is promoting sustainable development via data analysis, policy advice, and technical assistance. In support of this aim, UN DESA monitors progress for the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Section II—Background Information

Public trust is a core tenant of a participatory government, especially for developing countries. Public trust is the collective belief among a people that their government faithfully represents its constituents and is effective in its functions. Unfortunately, public trust in governmental institutions and other citizens is a common struggle for developing countries as they attempt to industrialize and democratize. Often, the widespread perception of government corruption and a lack of faith in its efficacy hinder the successful adoption of policies. Developed countries, on the other hand, witness trust erosion due to political scandals and heightened political polarization, producing a ripe environment for misinformation and conspiracy theories. Without public trust, it is unlikely that the government will adequately address the needs of the population.

A prominent example of public trust endangering developed society is the COVID-19 pandemic. Particularly evident in the United States, a small portion of the population disputed the government's policy of mandatory masks and social distancing. Although a significant portion of the population abided by the government's mandates, the overall lack of public trust in the government still created tension and led to an appreciable loss of life. The UN DESA has identified a correlation between confidence levels and mortality rates for many of the epidemics throughout the past decades. Globally, there is a discernible trend of declining public trust, with Europe serving as a notable exception. Europe experienced a steady rise in trust levels from approximately 37% to 40% in the years before the COVID-19 pandemic. This provides an example of the effects of a trust deficit in regions where public trust previously existed. However, in many underdeveloped countries, the government is forced to build that trust from the ground up.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development keeps up-to-date statistics on public trust, revealing a concerning trend of declining public trust in South American and Eastern European countries over the last 15 years. While many countries across the world are experiencing rapid economic growth and development, governments must prioritize building and maintaining public trust, especially in times of change, to prevent alienation of the public. Public trust in the institutions of government such as law and governance are the foundation on which finance, industry, and commerce are built. Public faith in the rule of law is a cornerstone of any fair and legitimate justice system; similarly, confidence in the healthcare system, be it public or private, is essential for a nation to maintain proper health and safety standards.

Section III—UN Involvement

Through various committees, including the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the United Nations has actively engaged in assessing and fostering public trust in government. Central to these efforts is the adaptation of political, social, and economic policies that have seen widespread success in countries with high public trust to formulate guidelines for developing countries. Through the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN DESA has developed protocols and procedures to inspire public confidence. However, it is a challenge to implement these procedures as they heavily depend on the cooperation and initiative of local governments and necessitate customization to suit the needs of each country. Social norms, religious customs, traditional and tribal beliefs, and other societal considerations make a more nuanced approach necessary.

Working together with the United Nations, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) gathers data and reports on trends that experts have observed. This organization provides crucial advice to the United Nations, identifying regions requiring focused attention and outlining key tenants of public trust and how to build it. One of the core values of the United Nations is the extension of democracy, and so they place an emphasis on developing methods to do so, which must include the cultivation of public trust.

Section IV—Possible Solutions

There are a wide variety of solutions that could address the challenge of cultivating public trust, including anti-corruption initiatives, economic support, and programs dedicated to fostering trust in specific government sectors such as law enforcement, social services, and so forth. However, these are broad topics, so this committee urges delegates to propose solutions backed by well-defined procedures and planning. Another aspect of these procedures should be about data collection, and ensuring that data is reliable, accurate, unbiased and actionable.

As an example, given that corruption is a leading cause of government distrust, proposing programs that enforce anti-corruption laws would be a useful solution. Delegates are tasked with creating guidelines for countries to adopt that would decrease corruption and provide a framework leveraging this achievement to increase public trust. Corruption infects all branches of government and can be especially prevalent in governmental bureaucracy. Therefore, protocols must be detailed and flexible to deal with the wide variety of places where corruption could take place. The purpose of this committee is to create these protocols and ensure their effective implementation. In the realm of data collection, a corrupt governmental agency will not report on its own corruption, so testimonies from the people and independent investigations must take place; these procedures must also take into consideration issues of national sovereignty. Delegates should not ignore the role law enforcement and security forces play in building up or eroding public trust.

As another example, economic support, such as funding from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), can play an important role in boosting a country's economic development by stimulating private business. These economic policies, which would ideally spread wealth to those who are impoverished, could boost public confidence in the government and lead to a more efficient society in the future.

Section V—Bloc Positions

African: The African Bloc has a wide variety of economic situations, so it is difficult to generalize the economic situation of the entire bloc. Some economically disparaged countries have low public trust and must work to build it up, while others are attempting to maintain public confidence after the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, the decentralized nature of many African countries makes it difficult to gather data surrounding public trust. This decentralization contributes to lower public trust in national governments, as many African citizens trust their local government much more than the national one. There are considerable hurdles to overcome regarding entrenched tribal and sectarian conflicts, both holdovers of colonialism.

Asia-Pacific: This bloc has a plethora of political situations, ranging from China to the Philippines. However, the bloc displays a few throughlines, which are that public trust is eroding due to the economic aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to these economic downturns, many of the country's citizens have economic anxiety and do not trust their governments to look after them. China has the highest ratings in the bloc, indicating that this economic powerhouse is experiencing fewer effects from the pandemic and is well on its way to recovery. Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines are among the lowest as their governments are struggling to respond to the economic effects of the pandemic.

Eastern European: Eastern European countries are struggling to both gain and rebuild public trust as recent governments have been embroiled in controversy. However, the split between public trust in Europe is along North and South regions, and so countries such as Italy and Greece struggle with public trust as they have experienced economic downturns in the past decade that have left them with higher poverty levels.

Latin American and Caribbean: The Latin American and Caribbean bloc has among the lowest data surrounding public trust as their governments struggle to integrate effective economic policies and it is widely believed that the government is not representative of the people. In Venezuela, 24% of the population trusts the government, which is abysmal and must be remedied. This is most likely due, like many other countries in this bloc, due to the widespread issues of poverty and entrenched political corruption. To restore public trust, the Latin American and Caribbean bloc governments must create institutions that serve their people without pressures from extralegal elements.

Western European and Others: Western Europe is the only bloc to have an increase in public trust during the last decade, so they should be focused on gathering data to prevent the erosion of that public trust and studying how they gained that public trust and how it can be adapted to other regions. The Nordic countries have some of the highest public trust ratings in the world. So countries in this bloc should study how they have implemented their political, social, and economic policies as a framework for others to follow. The United States is unique in this block because it has struggled with public trust during the last decade due to intense political disputes that have polarized the country.

Section VI—Questions That Should Be Taken Into Consideration

What is the most important effect of the decline of public trust?

What specific programs or institutions create public trust (or mistrust)?

What protocols have worked in the past to improve public trust?

How can your government improve public trust, and how can that provide a template for other countries to follow?

Section VI—Helpful Sites and Resources

Publication—Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)—Levels of Trust in Public Institutions

bit.ly/IIMUN2024-UNDESA01

(Shortened URL from oecd-ilibrary.org)

Publication—Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)—Trust in Government

bit.ly/IIMUN2024-UNDESA02

(Shortened URL from unwomen.org)

Publication—United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)— Trust in Public Institutions: Trends and Implications for Economic Security

bit.ly/IIMUN2024-UNDESA03

(Shortened URL from unfoundation.org)

Potential Search Terms: public trust, social trust, political trust, trust in developing countries, UN DESA, OECD