SEMMUNA

Southeast Michigan Model United Nations Association

SPECIALIZED COMMITTEE

UN Task Force on Critical Resource Stability

Background Guide

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A note to delegates:

This is not a typical committee. You are not just debating a long-term policy problem. You are responding to an active crisis. The decisions you make in this room will shape not only the immediate response to a global supply disruption, but the frameworks that govern critical resources for years to come. Come prepared.

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I. Introduction

The technologies that define modern life, from smartphones and laptops to electric vehicles and renewable energy systems, all depend on a group of materials known as critical resources. These materials are essential to the global economy, but their supply is limited, unevenly distributed, and vulnerable to disruption in ways that most people never think about until something goes wrong.

As demand for clean energy and advanced technology accelerates, competition for these resources has intensified. Governments, corporations, and international organizations increasingly understand that access to critical resources is not simply an economic question. It is a matter of national security, development, and long-term stability.

This committee has been convened at a moment of acute uncertainty. A significant disruption in global supply has exposed deep weaknesses in the international system and raised urgent questions about how critical resources should be managed going forward. Delegates will be asked to address both the immediate crisis and the structural reforms needed to prevent the next one.

> **Your challenge:** *Balance the immediate demands of a live crisis with the longer-term work of building a more resilient and equitable international system. Neither task can be ignored.*

II. What Are Critical Resources?

Critical resources are materials that are both essential to modern industry and vulnerable to supply disruption. They cannot easily be substituted, and losing access to them, even temporarily, can ripple across entire economies.

Resource	Primary Use	Why It Matters
Lithium	Batteries for electric vehicles and consumer electronics	The foundation of modern energy storage. No viable substitute exists at scale.
Cobalt	Battery cathodes; industrial alloys	Improves battery safety and performance. Approximately 70% of supply comes from the DRC.
Nickel	High-performance batteries; stainless steel	Increasingly important for next-generation EV batteries with greater range and durability.

These materials are not evenly distributed across the world. A small number of countries control a disproportionate share of global supply, while the majority of nations depend entirely on imports. That concentration creates a system where access to resources directly shapes economic development and industrial capacity, geopolitical influence and diplomatic leverage, and national security and strategic vulnerability.

The consequences of that imbalance are not theoretical. They are playing out right now, in the disruption this committee has been convened to address.

III. The Global Supply Chain

Turning raw materials in the ground into the battery in your phone requires a complex, multi-stage process that spans dozens of countries. Every stage is a potential point of vulnerability, and every point of vulnerability is a potential point of leverage.

Stage	What Happens	Key Vulnerabilities
Extraction	Raw materials are mined from the earth in resource-rich countries.	Political instability; infrastructure gaps; labor disputes; environmental crises
Processing and Refining	Raw ore is chemically treated into usable materials. This stage is heavily concentrated in China.	Geographic concentration; export controls; technology dependence
Manufacturing	Processed materials are assembled into batteries, electronics, and industrial components.	Dominated by industrialized nations; requires advanced technical capacity
Distribution	Finished goods are shipped across global trade networks to end markets.	Shipping disruptions; trade restrictions; tariffs and sanctions

> **Key insight:** *No single country controls every stage of this chain. That interdependence is both the system's greatest strength, enabling global efficiency, and its greatest weakness. A disruption at any one stage can cascade through the entire system.*

IV. Power in the Global Resource System

Power in the critical resource system is not held by any single actor. It is distributed, contested, and constantly shifting. Understanding who holds power, and why, is essential for effective negotiation in this committee.

Actor	Source of Power	Primary Interest
Resource-Producing Countries	Control over raw material supply; ability to restrict exports	Maximize economic benefit; assert sovereignty; develop domestic industry
Industrialized Importers	Economic influence; technological capacity; market access	Secure stable supply; diversify sources; protect manufacturing base
Corporations	Control over contracts, logistics, and investment decisions; capital	Profitability and market stability; minimizing regulatory constraints
International Organizations and NGOs	Normative authority; ability to set global standards; transparency mechanisms	Sustainability; fairness; equitable access for developing nations

> **Remember:** *Power in this system shifts based on circumstances. During a supply crisis, producers gain leverage. During a market glut, consumers do. The current disruption has changed the balance, and that changes your negotiating position.*

V. Key Challenges Facing the System

The global critical resource system was not designed with fairness or sustainability in mind. It grew from decades of individual decisions made without global coordination. Several serious problems have emerged as a result.

1. Supply Concentration

A handful of countries dominate production of the most critical minerals. The DRC accounts for roughly 70% of global cobalt supply. Chile and Australia together produce the majority of the world's lithium. China processes the majority of multiple critical minerals even when they are mined elsewhere. This concentration creates deep dependency for importing nations and amplifies the impact of any localized disruption.

2. Environmental Impact

Mining and processing critical resources can have severe environmental consequences: land degradation, water contamination, ecosystem destruction, and significant carbon emissions. Tighter environmental standards in one country often simply shift production to places with weaker protections, without reducing global harm. The tension between environmental protection and industrial demand has no easy resolution.

3. Economic Competition

Nations and corporations compete aggressively for access to limited resources. That competition can drive investment and innovation, but it can also increase geopolitical tension, encourage exploitative practices in resource-rich countries, and lock smaller economies out of markets they cannot afford to enter on competitive terms.

4. Market Instability

Critical mineral prices are notoriously volatile. Lithium prices tripled between 2020 and 2022, then collapsed in 2023. These swings make long-term planning extraordinarily difficult for governments and companies alike, and they tend to hit developing nations hardest. Countries without large financial reserves cannot absorb sudden price shocks the way wealthier economies can.

5. Inequality in Access

Smaller and less-developed economies routinely struggle to compete with larger powers for resource access. This creates a two-tier global system: resource-rich and technologically powerful countries shape the terms of trade, while others accept those terms or go without. As clean energy transitions accelerate global demand, this inequality is likely to deepen without deliberate intervention.

VI. Current Situation: The Supply Disruption

> **Important note on research and real-world events:** *This committee's scenario is based on conditions as they existed on September 1, 2026. Any real-world events that occurred after that date should not be introduced into committee debate. This is standard practice in Model UN. Committees are built around a defined research window, and delegates are expected to have prepared based on that window. Introducing news from after the cutoff date is not only unfair to other delegates who did not have that information during preparation -- it can derail months of careful planning for the entire committee. If something significant has happened in the real world since September 1st, it is genuinely interesting, but it does not belong in this room. Work with what everyone had access to.*

In recent weeks leading up to September 1, 2026, a significant disruption has emerged in one of the world's key resource-producing regions. The situation is still developing, and its full scope has not yet been determined. What is already clear is that the effects are being felt across global markets.

What Has Happened

Production in a major cobalt and nickel-producing region has been severely disrupted. The precise cause involves a combination of factors: escalating political instability within the producing country, a breakdown in negotiations between the national government and foreign mining corporations over royalty agreements, and a series of infrastructure failures that have halted extraction and transportation of raw materials. None of these factors alone would have been enough to cause a crisis. Together, they have created one.

Impact Area	Current Status
Global Supply	Supply of cobalt and nickel has fallen sharply below projected levels. Shortfalls are estimated at 15 to 25 percent of projected quarterly output.
Pricing	Spot prices for cobalt have risen approximately 30 percent since the disruption began. Futures markets are reflecting significant uncertainty about near-term availability.
Supply Chains	Manufacturers in the battery, electronics, and automotive sectors are reporting sourcing difficulties and production delays. Several major EV manufacturers have issued public warnings about production capacity.
Diplomatic Activity	Multiple governments have initiated emergency consultations with supplier nations. Some are moving to secure bilateral deals independently, without waiting for coordinated international action.
Smaller Economies	Nations without strategic reserves or existing bilateral supply agreements are already experiencing serious access constraints. For some, this is not a future risk. It is a present reality.
Corporate Response	Major mining corporations are reassessing their exposure to the affected region. Some are accelerating investment in alternative production sites. Others are lobbying their home governments for preferential access arrangements.

Why This Matters Beyond the Immediate Disruption

A supply disruption of this scale would be serious under any circumstances. What makes this one particularly consequential is what it reveals about the underlying structure of the global resource system. The crisis did not create the vulnerabilities that are now visible. It exposed vulnerabilities that already existed.

The dependence of the entire global battery supply chain on a single producing region. The absence of strategic reserves in most importing nations. The lack of any coordinated international mechanism for managing supply disruptions when they occur. The gap between the rhetoric of international cooperation and the reality of every-country-for-itself responses when things get difficult. These are structural problems. This committee's job is not just to respond to the immediate crisis. It is to start building the framework that prevents the next one.

The Window for Action

The disruption has not yet escalated into a full global crisis, but the window for coordinated action is narrow. History suggests that when supply disruptions of this kind are not addressed through multilateral cooperation early, they tend to resolve themselves through a different mechanism: the countries with the most leverage securing their own supply at the expense of everyone else. That outcome would worsen the structural inequalities that created this vulnerability in the first place. The international community must decide how to respond, and it must decide soon.

> **The stakes:** *How this committee responds to the immediate crisis will signal to the world what kind of international cooperation is possible on critical resources. The precedents set here will shape the next disruption, and the one after that.*

VII. Stakeholder Perspectives

Effective negotiation requires understanding not just your own country's position, but the positions, fears, and incentives of every actor at the table. Every stakeholder in this committee has a legitimate interest, and those interests frequently conflict.

Stakeholder	Core Interest	Key Concern
Resource-Producing Countries	Maintain sovereignty; maximize economic benefit from their resources	Being exploited or pressured into unfavorable terms by wealthier importers
Major Industrialized Importers	Secure stable, predictable supply for manufacturing and the energy transition	Over-dependence on single suppliers; vulnerability to export restrictions
Emerging Economies	Access resources affordably to fuel their own development	Being priced out of markets dominated by wealthier competitors
Corporations	Stable markets, clear contracts, and predictable regulatory environments	Political risk, sudden policy changes, and reputational exposure
NGOs and International Bodies	Sustainable practices, environmental protection, and equitable outcomes	Regulatory capture; weak enforcement; communities bearing costs without benefits

> **Diplomatic insight:** *The most durable resolutions are ones that give every major stakeholder something -- not everything they want, but enough that they prefer agreement to the alternative. Identify those overlapping interests and build from them.*

VIII. Finding Your Path: Approaches to a Solution

There is no single correct answer here. What follows are three broad approaches that countries and organizations have taken when dealing with challenges like this one. Think of them as different

paths, not a menu of fixed options. Most effective resolutions blend elements from all three. Your job is not to pick one and defend it rigidly. It is to understand all three well enough to build something that can actually work.

Path A: The Competitive Approach

Countries and corporations independently secure resource access through bilateral agreements, strategic investment, and stockpiling. The market largely determines who gets what.

What This Approach Can Do	What You Have to Think About
Can move quickly, without waiting for multilateral consensus	Systematically disadvantages smaller and poorer nations
Allows countries to protect their own interests directly	Can escalate into geopolitical competition and economic coercion
Market signals can incentivize new production and investment	Offers no real stability mechanism when a crisis hits

Path B: The Cooperative Approach

Countries work together through voluntary partnerships, information-sharing agreements, and coordinated supply management to build a more stable and equitable system.

What This Approach Can Do	What You Have to Think About
Promotes stability and reduces the risk of future supply crises	Requires real political trust, which is hard to build and easy to lose
Builds diplomatic relationships that can extend beyond this one issue	Voluntary agreements are only as strong as the political will behind them
Can offer meaningful protection for smaller economies	Difficult to maintain when geopolitical tensions run high

Path C: The Regulatory Approach

The international community creates formal, binding rules governing access, environmental standards, pricing transparency, and supply chain accountability, enforced through multilateral mechanisms.

What This Approach Can Do	What You Have to Think About
Creates consistent, predictable rules that apply to all actors	Extremely difficult to negotiate, especially when major powers disagree
Addresses root causes of inequality and instability, not just symptoms	Enforcement is only as strong as member states' willingness to comply
Gives smaller nations a seat at the table they do not have in bilateral deals	Can move too slowly to address an acute, ongoing crisis

The most effective resolutions tend to combine elements of all three paths. A resolution might establish a cooperative information-sharing mechanism while also pushing for regulatory

transparency standards, while honestly acknowledging the competitive dynamics that are already underway. Your goal is not to find the perfect answer. It is to find something realistic enough to pass, specific enough to actually accomplish something, and honest enough to reflect the real interests of the countries supporting it.

IX. Questions to Consider

As you research and prepare your country's position, think carefully about the following. Your resolution should address at least several of them directly.

- Who bears the greatest immediate cost of the current supply disruption, and what does this committee owe them?
- Should resource-producing countries be required to maintain export levels during a crisis, or does sovereignty mean the right to restrict exports under any circumstances?
- What specific coordination mechanisms would actually work in a real disruption, and who would be responsible for running them?
- How do you build a framework that addresses the immediate crisis without locking in arrangements that disadvantage weaker nations over the long term?
- What role should corporations play in a crisis response, and how do you get them to cooperate when their incentives point toward independent action?
- Is it possible to agree on emergency measures with countries that have fundamentally competing long-term interests?
- What would a fair distribution of the costs of this crisis look like, and who gets to decide?
- How do you build something durable when the pressure of a crisis pushes everyone toward short-term thinking?

X. Committee Simulation Guidance

This is a specialized committee, which means the format and pacing may differ from a standard General Assembly. Expect faster-moving debate, more improvisation, and a higher premium on coalition-building and quick thinking. The crisis context is not just flavor. It changes what effective participation looks like.

Step	What It Means in Practice
Understand Your Role	Know whether your country is a producer, consumer, or a mix. That determines your leverage and your vulnerabilities in this specific crisis.
Identify Allies Early	Find countries with overlapping interests before formal debate begins. The best coalitions are built in the hallway, not at the podium.
Engage in Debate	Speak early and often. Even a short speech positioning your country establishes your presence and signals to allies where you stand.
Form and Work Your Bloc	A bloc is only useful if it actually produces resolution language. Move from alignment to drafting as quickly as possible.
Write Concrete Resolutions	The best resolutions name specific actions, not just general principles. 'Encourages dialogue' is weak. 'Establishes a 90-day emergency coordination mechanism' is strong.

XI. Common Mistakes to Avoid

These are the patterns that consistently weaken a delegate's impact in committee. Read through them before the conference, and check yourself against them during it.

- Delivering eloquent speeches without working toward actual resolution language. Speeches do not pass. Resolutions do. Keep your eye on what you are building, not just what you are saying.
- Working only within your bloc and ignoring potential cross-bloc compromises. The most interesting diplomatic moments in this committee will happen when unexpected coalitions form. Stay open to them.
- Proposing solutions so ambitious they cannot gain majority support. A resolution that fails is worth less than a more modest resolution that passes and actually changes something.
- Forgetting the crisis context. This is not a theoretical debate. An active disruption is underway and the international community is watching. Your proposals should reflect urgency, not just aspiration.
- Treating the current disruption as the whole problem. The disruption is a symptom. The structural vulnerabilities it exposed are the real problem. Strong delegates address both.
- Ignoring smaller economies in your coalition-building. The countries that get left out of deals are the ones who vote against them. Build broadly.
- Introducing real-world events from after September 1, 2026. The research window for this committee closed on that date. Events that happened after it are not part of the scenario, even if they feel relevant.
- Getting so focused on your country's position that you stop listening. The delegates who make the biggest impact are usually the ones who pay the most attention to what others are actually saying.

XII. Key Terms

Term	Definition
Critical Resources and Minerals	Materials essential to modern industry that are at significant risk of supply disruption and cannot easily be substituted.
Supply Chain	The full process of producing and distributing goods, from raw material extraction through final sale to end users.
Resource Security	Reliable, uninterrupted access to the materials a country or company depends on for economic and industrial function.
Diversification	Reducing dependence on a single supplier, producing country, or trade route by developing multiple alternatives.
Value-Added Processing	Transforming raw ore into refined materials or components, capturing significantly more economic value than exporting raw ore alone.
Volatility	Rapid, unpredictable change in prices or supply levels that makes planning difficult for both governments and businesses.
Preambulatory Clause	The opening section of a UN resolution acknowledging the problem and citing relevant context (e.g., 'Recognizing,' 'Concerned that').
Operative Clause	The action section of a UN resolution proposing specific measures (e.g., 'Urges,' 'Calls upon,' 'Establishes').
Bloc	A group of countries with broadly aligned positions that collaborate to draft and support shared resolution language.
Coordination	The process of aligning policies or actions among multiple actors to achieve shared goals more effectively than any could alone.

XIII. Conclusion

The global race for critical resources is not an abstract geopolitical puzzle. It is a real and accelerating competition with consequences for economic development, environmental sustainability, and international security. The disruption that has brought this committee together is a preview of what the world can expect if the current system continues without reform.

Delegates in this committee are not simply responding to a crisis. They are shaping how the international community manages critical resources for the decades ahead. The frameworks you negotiate, the alliances you build, and the compromises you reach will set precedents that outlast this committee.

There is no single correct solution. The goal is to negotiate effectively, balance competing national interests honestly, and develop outcomes that are both realistic and durable. The situation is live. The time to act is now.

> **Final reminder:** *Ask yourself constantly: what does my country actually need, and who in this room can help us get it? That question, pursued honestly, is the beginning of real diplomacy.*

Sample Resolution

The following illustrates proper resolution format and language only. Your committee's resolution should be far more specific, should reflect your actual debate, and should propose concrete actions, not just general encouragement.

UN Task Force on Critical Resource Stability

Emergency Response to the Global Critical Resource Supply Disruption

Sponsors: Chile, Germany, Japan

Signatories: Brazil, Canada, Indonesia, Kenya, South Korea, South Africa

The Task Force,

Deeply concerned by the ongoing disruption to global critical mineral supply chains and its immediate impact on manufacturing, energy systems, and economic stability worldwide,

Recognizing the interconnected nature of the global resource system and the disproportionate impact of supply disruptions on smaller and less-developed economies,

Affirming the sovereign right of states to control their natural resources while acknowledging the shared responsibility of the international community to maintain stable and equitable access,

Recalling existing frameworks including the OECD Due Diligence Guidance and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights,

Emphasizing the urgency of coordinated international action to address both the immediate crisis and the structural vulnerabilities it has exposed,

Hereby:

1. ***Establishes*** an emergency coordination mechanism to facilitate real-time information sharing among member states regarding supply availability, pricing, and stockpile levels for the duration of the current disruption;
2. ***Calls upon*** resource-producing countries to maintain current export levels during the crisis period and to provide advance notice of any further supply restrictions;
3. ***Urges*** industrialized nations with strategic reserves to make a portion of those reserves available to smaller economies experiencing acute access constraints;
4. ***Recommends*** the formation of a standing expert panel to monitor critical resource markets and provide early warning of future supply risks;
5. ***Encourages*** all member states to invest in supply chain diversification and domestic processing capacity to reduce systemic vulnerability over the long term;
6. ***Calls for*** the development of minimum environmental and labor standards for critical mineral extraction, with particular attention to affected communities in producing countries;
7. ***Requests*** the Secretary-General to convene a follow-up conference within 180 days to assess progress and negotiate longer-term frameworks for equitable and sustainable critical resource governance.

Good luck. You are not just playing a role. You are practicing the kind of thinking the world genuinely needs. Prepare well, negotiate honestly, and make something real.