The Unnoticed Right: The Aspiration of Self-Determination and National Identity

In both historic and current world crises, the cries for self-determination, autonomy, and the inherent right to choose one’s fate are not a new agenda. Throughout conflicts of human history, the struggles for freedom and equality have shaped and formed new societies and nations. Each of these struggles brought with them a sense of hope and inspiration for the future. With the emergence of newly created nations, the possibilities seem endless; however, for many citizens of the world, this freedom of choice and right to choose one’s destiny is not open for everyone. The crossroads of human history often intersect where oppression and suppression interact with hope and opportunity. Senator Robert F. Kennedy witnessed a world where violence maintained order within states and where thousands of people were struggling for a voice and chance at the same global opportunities for life and peace. “Violence breeds violence, repression brings retaliation…and yet we seem to tolerate a rising level of violence that ignores our common humanity and our claims to civilization alike.” (JFK Library)

In the doctrines of human rights, no right is perhaps as precious or pertinent than the right to choose one’s fate and the fate of a society. Put simply, the right to self-determination existed long before the United Nations and international law codified this right. Self-determination is everywhere. From the crises of the Arab Spring in the Middle East, Latin American countries striving for autonomy, to the nations of Sub-Saharan Africa shaking the binds of authoritarianism self-determination is a necessary consideration for scholars and policy makers alike. Regrettably, the focus and support for self-determination often vanishes when viewed through the lens of national security or foreign policy. When conflict and problems enter state viewpoints, the hope and support for self-determination is often omitted from thought. Too often have states preached self-determination and destiny for all, then practiced a different policy of interventionism and
imperialism. How can the right for self-determination continue in the current international political climate? Do the numerous examples from history shed any light on how this right can be manifested and protected? The right to self-determination must be considered in the policymaking spheres and organizations throughout the world. For too long, the struggle for self-determination throughout the world has been disregarded in favor of narrow and ignorant interpretations of ethnic, indigenous, and political differences of people throughout the world. This examination will aid in the pursuit to create focus and dialogue for self-determination as a universal right to be respected and upheld; thus, the principles of this illustration are as follows: to identify the origins and history of the right to self-determination in order to present a careful analysis of the many levels of such a right, and how one can support the right to self-determine.

Throughout this examination, the concept of self-determination will be expanded and defined through historical examples as well as a theoretical evolution of the term and its meanings and implications. Next, this right will be examined through the United Nations system and in annals of international law to determine past challenges and successes as well as the future of this right within the United Nations. After, self-determination will be questioned by looking at the current state and practices of this right. Finally, the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization will be brought to center stage to examine the policies and support mechanisms this organization offers those who are currently struggling for self-determination. In all, this paper will chronicle the histories of people and nations linked to the right to self-determination in order to prove whether this human right is respected and whether it has a future in the international political system.

I. The Origin and Evolution of Self-determination
When inspecting the history of a right or sets of rights, the definition process is neither easy nor clear. Furthermore, the very nature of self-determination came under scrutiny many times throughout history. Each society and time period offered very different interpretations and principles underlying self-determination. These theories and policies of self-determination will be examined in order to receive a firm understanding of how the term will be applied to the present and future situations in world politics.

From a theoretical lens, the definition of self-determination requires adequate research. Additionally, before this concept can be defined and utilized as a human right, the very nature of this term as a political concept must be established. Within the realm of human rights, the division between individual rights and collective rights seems to be unimportant. Nevertheless, each sphere denotes very different aims and implications for the rights underneath the categories. Collective rights are determined by rights, “claimed by human beings as part of groups,” (DeLaet, 78). Throughout the evolution of human rights, there have been many “generations.” Each generation is created out of significant constraints and consequences for future rights and the struggles that people endure to receive them. The realm of collective rights falls under the third generation of human rights, which emphasize collective or group rights to many levels of society, as opposed to specific rights laid out for particular individuals. Specifically, these rights originate in the global reduction and struggle for decolonization of many nations (DeLaet, 78).

The right to self-determination is categorized and defined as a collective right, which applies to many individuals regardless of societal or cultural affiliation. The right to self-determination in context is viewed from the push for decolonization, which in turn, leads to the publicity of the collective rights and the age of the third generation of human rights (DeLaet, 78). What can be the formal definition of the right to self-determination if one can be found? The right to self-
determination is codified in various international covenants under the hospices of the United Nations. Specifically, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) set out that self-determination allows, “All peoples [to] have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development,” (Article I ICCPR/ICESCR). This broad definition of self-determination allows one to identify key components: that the right to self-determination is defined as a collective right that apply to groups of individuals and that the right allows such people to determine their socio-economic and political pursuits under international law. However, with a rather broad definition of such a right, the problem of interpretation and enforcement of the right to self-determination begin.

Outside of the textbook and broad definitions of self-determination, the problem and the practices of self-determination begin with the policies relating to international foreign policy. This is a classic conflict between theories and practices. Often, the success of human rights unfortunately depends upon the convergence of the definitions and sublime ideals compared to the actual policy priorities of various states. One key example of the origin and policy implications of self-determination exists in the realm of American Foreign Policy through the era of the goals of United States President Woodrow Wilson, during World War I.

President Woodrow Wilson came into office with a subliminal goal of a concept of self-determination. Moreover, this national self-determination became the cornerstone of Wilsonianism, a set of policy principles outlaid in his administration. Through his view of the world through a liberal lens, Woodrow Wilson developed a concept of national self-
determination by which, Wilson attributed ideals of free trade, democracy, nationalism, and strong leadership in effort to mold a coherent definition of self-determination (Lynch, 423).

Wilson praised these ideals as the cornerstones for his policies abroad. Furthermore, Wilson identified with a new nationalism, which did not embrace the tendencies of economic, military, or political imperialism. However, Wilson did see a moral component to United States leadership abroad (Lynch, 424). This moral aspect applied to the struggles of people, who tried to escape authoritarianism and oppression. Mainly, Wilson preferred to pursue this moral leadership by leading by example in many regions (Lynch, 424). However, the contradictions of Wilson’s policies create many implications. Specifically, with the emergence of a “democratic” movement and revolution in Russia in 1917 followed by the communist regime that occurred, tested Wilson’s true feelings regarding self-determination by backing away from the new Soviet regime, even though, self-determination allowed for this government to occur. However, as the existence was not of the sort that Wilson enjoyed, the regime could not be viewed in the same level of nationalism or self-determination (Lynch, 421).

In spite of a major contradiction, Wilson developed a framework for the League of Nations, dedicated to the propositions and principles of self-determination as defined above. While the League of Nations did not pass in the United States Senate, the principles of an organization of collective and international security, which supported and defended human rights including self-determination, did come to fruition with the United Nations decades later (Lynch, 426). A collective organization would respect the right to self-determination by creating a mediation area where national problems and interests relating to economics, politics, and societal dilemmas could be solved (Lynch, 426). Even though President Wilson’s policies regarding self-determination became muddied in the waters of public and foreign policy, Wilson’s example
shows a case example of a brief history of a right, which evolved through World War I and World War II leading to the emergence of the United Nations. Furthermore, this example unfortunately utilizes the contradictions in Wilson’s policies to illustrate that even with the highest goals and ideals that the right to self-determination became subordinate to state self-interests.

II. Self-determination in the United Nations System

As mentioned with the policies of Woodrow Wilson, the right to self-determination presented significant dilemmas for world leaders when policies crossed theoretical ideals. Often, the right to self-determination became subordinate to national self-interest and international norms. With the emergence of the United Nations in 1948, the right to self-determination received an international preference and more importantly, a voice by which, this right established a more significant presence in human rights and international politics. The United Nations System is vast and complex. The right to self-determination benefited from such publicity to become a mainstream, collective right. This section outlines how the right to self-determination became prominent through the United Nations as well as the various organization that support the initiatives of self-determination in order to comprehend current international efforts through the United Nations.

Within the governing documents of the United Nations, the right to self-determination is evident. The use of self-determination in the United Nations system will first be examined through the governing documents and other resolutions adopted by the United Nations. Specifically, the United Nations Charter outlines the concept of self-determination by, “respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace,” (UN Charter/Ch. 1, Art. 1). This passage in the first
Article of the first chapter of the United Nations Charter clearly outlines a respect for the right to self-determination and the support of this right within the realm of universal peace and stability. The Charter, adopted in 1945, is the governing principle/constitution of the United Nations by which the organization outlines specific principles within the Preamble and the various other chapters (UN-Charter-Preamble). In 1960, with the global decolonization movement, the United Nations further adopted measures to strengthen and solidify the organization’s commitment and support for the right of all people to self-determination. This process was achieved in part, thanks to the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (1960). This declaration outlines and welcomes the upcoming independent states and societies into the international community. Furthermore, the document states that, “all peoples have an inalienable right to complete freedom, the exercise of their sovereignty and the integrity of their national territory,” (UNESCO, Res.1514).

The Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples as well as the United Nations Charter outline significant support and ideals that the United Nations supports regarding the right to self-determination. Now, the concepts and documents of the United Nations may indeed outline hopes and wishes regarding self-determination, but the actual practice and implementation of these desires is another story within itself. Even though the General Assembly (GA) of the United Nations may publish reports and recommendations, these documents have a non-binding status (UN Foundation). This dramatically alters the enforceability and consensus of these aspirations. While keeping the previous document in mind, the following illustration aims at the practical and problematic implementation of such desires on behalf of the United Nations.
While keeping in mind the previous documents regarding self-determination in the United Nations, these terms within their respective documents lack a general definition and application. The general consensus regarding self-determination was a byproduct and result of the decolonization period and the collective rights era of human rights. However, it was not until 1970 that the United Nations expanded the attributes of self-determination to include other nations and people outside of decolonization (Kirgis, 305). This adjustment illustrates the constant flexibility and liquidity of various rights under the United Nations System. The United Nations released an additional resolution in 1970 aimed at international law and providing a more conclusive and detailed definition of self-determination. The Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations outlined an adherence to self-determination as, “any political status freely determined by a people, which constitutes a mode if implementing the right of self-determination,” (Kirgis, 305).

However, a key dilemma occurred with regards to level of representation. The legitimacy of a state as discussed before is crucial when applied to self-determination. The United Nations struggled with this concept by discussing what level of representation is considered to be complete, so that people have determined their government? Furthermore, do various regimes either authoritarian or democratic differ with respect to level of representation and determination? This aspect is determined by a degree of representation as well as degree of legitimacy. Additionally, the higher representation occurs in a state the less credence claims of self-determination are valid as well as the more destabilized a country, the more claims of underrepresentation will be valid (Kirgis, 308). This inverse effect is an excellent tool utilized by various international legal experts to try and address the distinct challenges between representation, state legitimacy, and self-determination.
III. The Right to Self-Determination in International Law

Aside from the United Nations, the right to self-determination is codified in the legal systems of international law. While the promotion and adoption of the right to self-determination is respected by the United Nations, the real policy and procedural work is carried out in the realm of international law. The following section is dedicated to the efforts of international law scholars and institutions aimed at supporting human rights of all especially the right to self-determination. By utilizing this area of law, the fight for self-determination is ensconced within legal reasoning and jurisprudence, which is mostly rare in international relations.

After the end of World War II, the Cold War in itself brought interesting international political dynamics to international relations and international organization including the United Nations. The policies of the two superpowers, the Soviet Union (USSR) and the United States, dominated international political discourse and procedures. Furthermore, the right to self-determination once again did not adjust well to these very reactionary policies. Specifically, within the Cold War blocs, there emerged informal rules to the game, granting political hegemony to the bloc leader in various international politics of the subsequent bloc members (McWhinney, 8). For example, the United States received hegemonic power in the international political affairs of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries.

Additionally, in these Cold War blocs, each superpower worked to gain authority over the countries and nations within their respective divisions while promising a policy of non-intervention in the affairs of the opposing hegemonic alliance (McWhinney, 8). With this example of international relations in the Cold War, how does the right to self-determination fit within these constraints? Quite frankly, the concept was ignored, as it had been during the Wilsonianism Era mentioned prior in this examination. By controlling the policies of nations in
these “blocs,” the country in charge of these blocs (The United States or the Soviet Union), maintained authority over much of the international political affairs of various nations (McWhinney, 8). In the Cold War Era, the policies of détente and rigid nuclear weapon deterrence, these blocs served to significantly undermine the self-determination and national autonomy of many nations in the name of deterrence between the two blocs and two superpowers (McWhinney, 8). The incorporation of Cold War blocs serves as an example of how self-determination acted in the international community during the Cold War of the 20th Century. Furthermore, this example also illustrates the lack of international legal consensus regarding self-determination and state autonomy. This view is also helpful in addressing the ever-present concern and power of international norms and interests and to show how the concept of self-determination can be easily ignored for the sake of domestic or hegemonic policy prerogatives. Even with international organizations and legal structures, the right to self-determination can be made silent due to these powerful domestic policies regarding intervention and foreign policy as seen in this example of the Cold War politics of self-determination.

However, there are international legal frameworks and agreements related to the right to self-determination and state recognition of hopeful emerging nations and state identities. While most scholars will dismiss the international legal framework as lofty and not practical, the legal framework provides interesting alternatives and guidelines related to the concept of self-determination. A key concept regarding international law is the right and definition of state recognition. In many cases, the authority and self-determination of nations hinges upon the recognition the state or entity receives in the international political community. The legal interpretation of state recognition by a currently existing state on behalf of a newly emerged state is defined as an inherently political act (McWhinney, 91). Furthermore, the recognition of this
state is dependent upon action by the political and governmental arms of various nations by
addressing the new nation in terms of a regional consensus of like-minded states in a particular
region (McWhinney, 91). Furthermore, this regional consensus is heavily reliant on matters of
trans-national economic and political concerns within the regional contingent of nations as
determined in political, economic or military involvement (McWhinney, 92).

The legal reasoning behind the concept of recognition is found in documents of the United
Declaration on Friendly Relations and Cooperation (McWhinney, 92). Specifically, these
documents outline priorities and guidelines associated with the definitions of nations regarding
the territorial integrity of a state. For example, if a plural-ethnic organization or territory
requested recognition, the patterns mentioned above including a regional consensus and policies
in line the international document mentioned here must be observed (McWhinney, 94).

Additionally, the state succession or policies of states requesting self-determination status
within existing states can also be viewed with skepticism in international law. The legal
precedent for a state wishing to succeed a current entity must exhaust the local, domestic and
federal constitutional or codified policies in search of remedy (McWhinney, 94). Obviously, this
aspect will create problems and animosities between the existing state and the new group seeking
to succeed the current state by attaining recognition in the regional or international community of
nations. However, in a more globalized and interdependent world, the domestic constraints
experienced by states wishing to break apart or secede a state are viewed as not as effective. This
is due to the aspect of the heavy or significant role regional or international organizations play in
the recognition of states through documents as stated above. An interested state wishing to seek
recognition status can now just only search for remedy in domestic courts but also in regional or
in international courts and institutions (McWhinney, 94). Thus, the importance of international legal institutions such as the United Nations or the International Criminal Court have compounded over the last few decades during the move toward a more globalized international political order.

IV. Self-Determination in Action

After discussing the various components of the principles in self-determination within the United Nations System and international law, the case for recognizing self-determination is beginning to take shape. However, a crucial aspect as yet to be discussed, is the practical examples regarding the various components of self-determination. As with any theoretical concept, the nature of the practicality is of the utmost importance. The right to self-determination is no different. The various examples of self-determination in international law and in the United Nations System is critical to understanding the overall concept; however, the practicality of such a right creates the difference between a right and a mere theory. For the purpose of this examination, the right to self-determination will be examined through core areas: ethnic, indigenous self-determination through minority/underrepresented groups and people, and recent successes within the realm of self-determination. These examples and case studies will provide a practical cost-benefit analysis to identify the rationale and the method for nations and people, who face the struggle to define their governments and communities.

First, the ethnic or indigenous struggles throughout history have resulted in struggles, failures, and some successes in pursuit of self-determination. When observing various struggles and conflicts regarding the right to form a new state or the right for self-determination, the ethical divisions within state often are labeled as the cause. Moreover, the rights of indigenous populations after a period of colonialism or external occupation are often trampled; thus, the
indigenous population will strive for separation. The scenarios just described are often the basis for claims for self-determination and separation from a state or government that does not provide security or basic rights. However, the ethnic challenges for states and their populations provide a context to understand territorial sovereignty. Territorial sovereignty is often where the conflicts between sovereignty and self-determination commence (Hannum, 1998). The right to territorial sovereignty does not simply imply that an ethical lens is required to understand various conflicts. Due to the natural nebulous definitions of sovereignty, the various ethnic groups within a state lacking territorial sovereignty highlight the various discrepancies within international law (Hannum, 1998). Author Hurst Hannum describes the various scenarios where ethnic self-determination force deep divisions within states lacking this critical component of governing; territorial sovereignty.

Hannum reiterates the need for serious change within the international community regarding ethnic rights for self-determination. The various components of ethnic struggles within states do not warrant external intervention. For Hannum, multilateral organizations such as the United Nations must highlight the importance of people or ethnic groups in succession/independence struggles and not territorial sovereignty (Hannum, 1998). However, Hannum also distinguishes an important concept when addressing claims for ethnic and indigenous self-determination. For the United States, the United Nations, or any other state addressing concerns for ethnic self-determination, it is important not to give deference or consideration to every ethnic group or population requesting assistance in struggles for self-determination (Hannum, 1998). Majority ethnic groups must respect the cultural and societal practices of all in the state, and the minority groups must also recognize that in some cases, the “trapped” minority ethnicities might not receive the same treatment (Hannum, 1998). This distinction is tremendously helpful in
addressing all of the concerns and claims for self-determination. A bold approach to recognize the legitimacy of the people rather than the territory is paramount when illustrating deference and respect for ethnic human rights.

In addition to the struggles regarding ethnic self-determination, another similar aspect regarding indigenous populations requires diligent protection and examination with respect to legitimate cases for self-determination. After decades of colonialism, conquest, and exploitation of indigenous people around the world, the inclusion of such populations within governments and representative bodies have been few, if included at all. The element regarding indigenous population and representation within electoral bodies has been ineffective (Murphy, 186). The question of citizenship for many indigenous populations is not the problem. The problem resides in electoral representation (Murphy, 186). Author Michael A. Murphy at the University of Toronto Law Review addresses various dilemmas faced by indigenous populations worldwide. The national legislatures are often places where indigenous voices’ are ignored; however, these bodies also represent the place where advocates and advances for the cause of indigenous representation can receive the best situation (Murphy, 186). Murphy illustrates how Canada has solved various historical discriminatory practices against local Aboriginal populations. Through generations of persecution and exclusion for national legislative agendas and representation, the Government of Canada formed a separate national assembly comprised of 75-100 representatives from all of the unique and distinct native communities throughout Canada (Murphy, 195). The First Nations Assembly possesses significant policy clout within the government and especially regarding matters and issues regarding native issues (Murphy, 196). However, not all of these recommendations were implemented, but Murphy argues that the steps taken in Canada include
and involve the national indigenous populations in places where historically the communities were excluded and discounted.

After discussing the struggles for ethnic and indigenous populations in the mêlées for self-determination, successful case studies in South Sudan and Kosovo represent the more recent successes in the various categories mentioned above. These case studies provide inspiration that change and self-determination is possible. In July of 2011, South Sudan became the newest independent country in Africa. The struggle for self-determination and independence for South Sudan was one of conflict, violence, and democracy. After centuries of historically divided communities between north and south, the South Sudanese exercised a referendum to declare independence for South Sudan. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between Sudan and South Sudan was signed in 2005, representing an important peaceful milestone for South Sudan that eventually led to independence after one of Africa’s longest civil wars (Dersso, 7). The majority Muslim government in the northern region dominated policy making regarding politics, religion, and the military for decades after independence; thus, the separation and exclusion faced by South Sudanese contributed to decades of violence until the CPA was signed in 2005 (Dersso, 7). The independence of South Sudan is important as it began a precedent that African countries and ethnic groups are not simply defined by the arbitrary boundaries imposed on the continent after decolonization during the 1950’s and 1960’s (Dersso, 7). Moreover, after the CPA was signed and implemented, this created jurisprudence on the side of African Regional Law, where self-determination within traditional territorial states is viewed favorably if harm and exclusion are demonstrated (Dersso, 8). The movement created by South Sudan’s independence in 2011 will not be fully understood for sometime by the majority of the world. However, regardless if this move creates more waves for self-determination in Africa, the vary nature of
the utilization of self-determination in determining South Sudan’s independence creates a scenario by which other suppressed societies and populations can find solace in regional law and organizations.

The other example of Kosovo used to illustrate the impact of independence and self-determination utilizes the various ethnic and indigenous components as noted earlier. This example showcases how various cases for self-determination are viewed in international law rather than simply domestic or regional organizations. After years of violence following the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, the small territory of Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008. A total of 46 nations including a majority of European Union nations and the United States have recognized Kosovo’s right to sovereignty (Borgen, 2008). Professor Christopher Borgen of St. John’s University School of Law chronicles the precedent of Kosovo’s move toward independence in international law. Regarding international law, the value of precedent in early cases is non-binding; thus, just because Kosovo received “independence” does not necessarily mean other nations can and will be treated the same (Borgen, 2008). However, key tests for Borgen include whether the Kosovo plight is considered a population worthy of recognition as a viable community. Further, the next test is in regard to succession as the next and only remedy to solve the crisis (Borgen, 2008). The 46 votes of sovereignty for Kosovo are similar to those votes regarding Bangladesh and Eritrea independence cases in the mid-20th Century (Borgen, 2008). However, the lack of response to the crisis in South Ossetia, which is also using Kosovo as an example for succession, is not necessarily related for Borgen. “Thus as a matter of law, one [case for self-determination] is not a precedent for the other. Political precedence is not the same as legal precedent” (Borgen, 2008). This example illustrates the complications present in international law. Moreover, this also shows how liquid the laws
regarding self-determination and independence can be and how heavily dependent these cases are on context for independence. It can be seen that for self-determination, context, and legal standing do matter, which unfortunately, complicates struggles for self-determination.

V. Underrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO)

Unlike Kosovo and South Sudan, various struggles of underrepresented people do not all end in success or even media acknowledgement. The battles in Kosovo and South Sudan highlight the importance of media coverage and political support for the rights of the underrepresented. While these are notable successes within the case for self-determination, a vast amount of people and yet-to-be nations need more support and encouragement. In effort to develop a viable solution for these underrepresented populations, this examination culminates in a discussion of an organization, which has resources both financial and political to ensure that the cries for self-determination do not go unnoticed. For decades the Underrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) dedicated time and energy to protect the right to self-determination of people and nations currently neglected within international politics. This discussion of the UNPO will focus on the organization’s mission, who the members are, and how their fight for the right to self-determination should be promoted and supported at all costs.

Within the UNPO’s Covenant, the foremost business for the UNPO is the redress of grievances and struggles in a public forum to provide community support for nations and populations striving for self-determination (UNPO, 2012). After the establishment of the UNPO in 1991 at the Hague in the Netherlands, the organization set forth policies and principles regarding their membership consisting of underrepresented nations and various populations. The UNPO outlines various principles of its organization including the following: democracy, self-determination, concern and respect for human rights, nonviolence, tolerance, and environmental
protections (UNPO, 2012). For the principles and work of the UNPO, the activities regarding self-determination as a right for all people is clearly noted in their work. The UNPO believes that by virtue of the right to self-determination, “people have the right to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development” (UNPO, 2012). The UNPO actively denotes the legal standing for people seeking the right to self-determination in international law by addressing the inclusion of the right to self-determination in various international conferences including the International Covenants on Human Rights, and within the doctrines of the United Nations (UNPO, 2012). Moreover, the International Criminal Court has upheld various cases for self-determination including Namibia, Western Sahara and East Timor, which suggests the significant deference to self-determination in international law (UNPO, 2012).

The membership of the UNPO consists of any nation or community of people, who are not currently represented in the UN or adequately represented in their current represented body (UNPO, 2012). For membership into the UNPO, each nation or population must satisfy five preliminary categories for membership. These areas include the following: belief in the equality of all Nations and Peoples and their right to self-determination, adhered to international accepted human rights standards, adhere to the principle of democratic pluralism and reject totalitarianism or any for of religious intolerance, reject terrorism as a form of policy, and have respect for all peoples and population groups, including minority and majority populations within territories inhabited by the participate but belonging to difference ethnic, religious or linguistic groups (UNPO, 2012). Any state or population group must agree to the aforementioned principles in order to be accepted into the organization. Presently, the UNPO has 42 members, which cover all major continents and hemispheres (UNPO, 2012).
The activities of the UNPO, especially at the United Nations, is very presented in reports and conferences all utilizing influence and lobbying efforts to supply the UN with the information regarding the UNPO membership and their grievances. Primarily, the UNPO serves as a medium by which the UNPO member-states are able to access proper tools to broadcast support for their various causes for self-determination and to participate in the discussion relating to international human rights (UNPO, 2012). The UNPO participates in various forums and conferences within the human rights framework of the United Nations System including the following: the UN Human Rights Council, The Universal Periodic Review, participation on treaty-based bodies of experts, and UN permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPO, 2012). The UNPO also has liaison support within the European Union system including the European Parliament and the European Commission in order to address the support and engagement of all indigenous and underrepresented nations affected by EU action and programs (UNPO, 2012).

In addition to international organization lobbying and support, the UNPO also initiates discussions and conferences relating to appeals and specific campaigns in support of self-determination. The UNPO is actively engaged in condemning the lack of progress within international institutions and supporting the advancement of currently recognized states when issues of sovereignty and governance affect UNPO member-states. Moreover, the UNPO’s appeals campaign focuses on ensuring adequate response to news and current events affecting its membership and reporting such disturbances to its contacts and support networks in the United Nations and European Union (UNPO, 2012). Specifically, the UNPO is actively promoting and supporting both financially and administratively various campaigns in line with the UNPO’s governing principles such as nonviolence, self-determination, human rights, and the promotion of democracy (UNPO, 2012). The UNPO also hosts annual conferences and forums where the
UNPO General Assembly and representatives from various international organizations and state
governments attend to be provided information and resources regarding the UNPO’s members
and their current concerns and updates on their quest for self-determination (UNPO, 2012). The
work of the UNPO in appeals and various campaigns focuses international support for the
members to connect with the proper international support systems such as the UN or EU in order
to present information. The UNPO serves as an important support group of sorts to focus, voice,
and implement the desires of its membership in addressing their current challenges, where
without UNPO support these voices are lost to international politics and policies.

In reflection, the work of the UNPO is critical for not just their members but all societies and
communities struggling to move on the path to self-determination. The support for the UNPO is
simple; without the organization, the voices of the current membership are placed on the
shoulders of domestic/regional bodies, which simply do not have the access to international
efforts as the UNPO as mentioned above. The work of the UNPO goes far beyond the
connections within the UN or the various conferences and reports issued for the plight of the
underrepresented nations and peoples. The effort of the UNPO focuses on providing support and
guidance for these communities struggling for a voice. Without the guidance of the UNPO, the
work and progress made in international law for people seeking self-determination would be lost
to the same ignorant policies of states as primary actors. For example, without the support of the
UNPO, the nation of Tibet would be forced to defer to the Chinese government, the exact
government, which does not believe the country should be independent. If the UNPO is not
supported financially and administratively, the last voice for the underrepresented nations will be
lost.
The progress for the member-states has not been tremendous; subsequently, any loss of funding or work on behalf of the UNPO would be devastating. The UNPO is the only international body specifically focused and organized for the purpose of representing the unrepresented and protecting the abused and oppressed (UNPO, 2012). The right to self-determination throughout this examination has been casted as a forgotten or neglected right that is casted aside in favor of domestic politics and interests. If the support of the right to self-determination is not supported through the UNPO, the voices searching for sovereignty and progress will be simply that, voices without information, concentration and action. The UNPO provides these attributes in order to represent the various nations and communities who have been thus far neglected.

Other human rights are indeed important as stated in the UNPO Covenant and founding principles (UNPO, 2012). The ordering of human rights itself is a self-fulfilling prophecy by which various rights are measured in their significance and other forgot and pursued. All human rights should be considered. However, the right to self-determination often combines various human rights in one encapsulated cry for governance. What right could be more fundamental than the right to determine autonomous action and existence? The support of the UNPO is crucial in supporting all human rights including self-determination.

When reflecting upon the right to self-determination, the sentimental and moral arguments of various nations and international organizations are simply words without meaning. The neglected and forgotten right to self-determination is casted aside in favor of simple domestic policies. This examination has discussed and presented compelling views and case studies all aimed at illustrating a case for the protection and promoting the right to self-determination. First, the various definitions of self-determination throughout history presented a historical basis for
examining and reviewing current agendas for self-determination. A brief look at the right to self-determination in the United Nations System addressed the numerous conferences and covenants aimed and enshrining the right to self-determination in international organizations. The right to self-determination was then presented to the standards and legal consideration of international law. The various cases and action regarding self-determination was presented in order to grasp current and practical knowledge and information regarding the precedent and potential future of the various cases for self-determination. Finally, the UNPO outlined the goal and aspirations of members-states seeking a voice and support within the international community. The history of the right to self-determination is always in flux and ever changing. The progress in certain decades can be met with reversions in another decade. However, one aspect remains constant; the support and importance of self-determination. This forgotten right, unless equally protected and promoted, is in danger of always remaining secondary to domestic politics. The right to decide one’s fate and society is not just a convenient political tool. This right is distinctly human insofar as every individual regardless of race, sex, political ideology, and religion seeks to live in peace. To end, the words of Robert F. Kennedy once again call for recognition and most of all, respect for all communities and societies.

But we can perhaps remember-even if only for a time- that those who live with us are our brothers, that they share with us the same short movement of life, that they seek—as we do- nothing but the chance to live out their lives in purpose and happiness, winning what satisfaction and fulfillment they can. (JFK Library)

The right to self-determination is not mere policy, nor is it an agenda to be molded or deposed. The very nature of human existence and community enshrine a hope of a common good and a common morality transcending borders and territories. For this principle, the right to self-determination cannot continue to be ignored; otherwise, one is simply ignoring the basic journey of life that all people travel. All united in a common search for peace and prosperity.
Works Cited


