



Maharani Gayatri Devi Girls' School Model United Nations, 2019
14th – 16th October, 2019

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

AGENDA: ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM OF PROLONGED
DISPLACEMENT OF REFUGEES AND AIMING AT A SUSTAINABLE
HUMANITARIAN SOLUTION

BACKGROUND GUIDE

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1. Letter from the EB

Dear Delegates,

A very welcome to all of you on behalf of the Executive Board of the United Nations Human Rights Council at MGD Model United Nations Conference 2019. It brings us great pleasure to be chairing a committee which is discussing such a pressing agenda especially in view of the current situations occurring across the world.

The rights of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) are matters of great concern for the world as a whole. Even though refugees have certain rights as entitled to them by various different conventions, the same does not apply for internally displaced people. As a matter of fact, the definition of internally displaced people is something which the world is struggling with as well.

As armed conflicts continue to escalate in various regions of the world, it has become absolutely imperative for the United Nations Human Rights Council to deal with the human collateral damage that these conflicts cause. Most parts of the Middle East and almost the entire continent of Africa is suffering from this problem. At MGD MUN 2019, we shall work on addressing this situation and reaching the most logical possible conclusion to ensure that all rights under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are guaranteed to IDPs and refugees.

Furthermore, as the topic area is extremely broad, we shall specifically be taking up the Syrian refugee and IDP crisis as a case study to discuss the issue during the MUN. While other cases across the world might be cited, the Executive Board believes that sticking to the Syrian issue will ensure structured discussions. The study guide has been designed accordingly.

We wish all delegates the very best and look forward to meeting you at MGD MUN 2019.

Regards,
Executive Board,
UNHCR,
MGD MUN 2019

2. Introduction

At the very onset, the Executive Board for MGD MUN 2019 would like to mention that we suggest that participating delegates understand their country's stance in relation to IDPs and refugees. Furthermore, they must understand whether their nations are suffering from an IDP or refugee crisis and what actions has the government taken to address these. Apart from this, there are also going to be some nations who are heavily assisting refugees. Research on these matters shall form the base for the country specific research process for this committee.

The introduction offers delegates with a basic understanding of the meaning of IDPs and refugees.

➤ **What do we broadly mean by Internally Displaced People (IDPs)?**

Internally displaced persons, or IDPs, are among the world's most vulnerable people. Unlike refugees, IDPs have not crossed an international border to find sanctuary but have remained inside their home countries. Even if they have fled for similar reasons as refugees (armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations), IDPs legally remain under the protection of their own government – even though that government might be the cause of their flight. As citizens, they retain all of their rights and protection under both human rights and international humanitarian law.

At the end of 2011, there were an estimated 26.4 million internally displaced people around the world, down slightly on the year before. UNHCR was helping about 15.5 million of the IDPs in 26 countries. These included the three countries with the largest IDP populations – Colombia, Iraq and South Sudan.

Millions of other civilians who have been made homeless by natural disasters are also considered as IDPs. In 2011, some 14.9 million people became internally displaced due to natural disasters, the great majority of them across Asia. UNHCR shares responsibility to protect this group with other humanitarian agencies and has been involved in recent crises such as 2008's Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, the Pakistan floods in 2010 and the Haiti earthquake the same year.

(As the meaning of IDPs varies from country to country, we have directly cited this information from the UNHCR official website to be absolutely clear on it)

➤ **What do we broadly mean by 'Refugees'?**

The practice of granting asylum to people fleeing persecution in foreign lands is one of the earliest hallmarks of civilization. References to it have been found in texts written 3,500 years ago, during the blossoming of the great early empires in the Middle East such as the Hittites, Babylonians, Assyrians and ancient Egyptians.

Over three millennia later, protecting refugees was made the core mandate of the UN refugee agency, which was set up to look after refugees, specifically those waiting to return home at the end of World War II.

The 1951 Refugee Convention spells out that a refugee is someone who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."

Migrants, especially economic migrants, choose to move in order to improve the future prospects of themselves and their families. Refugees have to move if they are to save their lives or preserve their freedom. They have no protection from their own state - indeed it is often their own government that is threatening to persecute them. If other countries do not let them in, and do not help them once they are in, then they may be condemning them to death - or to an intolerable life in the shadows, without sustenance and without rights.

(To make sure there is no discrepancy over the definition of 'Refugees', we have directly cited this information from the UNHCR official website to be absolutely clear on it)

➤ **What are the rights that refugees and IDPs are entitled to?**

All refugees and IDPs are entitled to each and every right that is guaranteed to all citizens of the United Nations under the contents of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Any violation of the same goes against the contents of the UN Charter.

Furthermore, the 1951 Refugee Convention elucidates various rights that refugees are entitled to and host nations are obliged to provide. All member nations are not a

signatory to this though. A similar convention for IDPs must also be mulled over during the MUN conference.

3. Displacement of Refugees across the Globe

Syrian Crisis:

The current situation of the Iraqi and Syrian refugees is somewhat similar, tragic and sympathetic, however the points of origination of their situation are far from each other. The Syrian refugee crisis originated because of the Arab spring back in 2011, however the Iraqi refugee situation is an on-going one since their country was invaded in 2003 under the pretext of finding weapons of mass destruction, by USA and UK.

Although the two reasons are different, their trajectory of their paths have combined into one, human rights violations by the terrorist organization Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS).

Let us understand the reason why the people of both these countries have landed in the same situation, which is concerning for the world community as for a great amount of time it has done nothing to help the people of that region.

The Aftermath of Civil War

After attacks on their cities, thousands of residents fled across the Turkish border, into Lebanon and surrounding countries. Since 2011 the number of refugees is estimated at over 9 million, who are taking refuge in neighboring countries or within Syria itself. According to the UNHCR, as of January 2015, almost 1,623,000 people have sought refuge in Turkey, over 622,000 in Jordan, 133,000 in Egypt, 235,000 in Iraq and almost 1,168,000 in Lebanon. Meanwhile, under 150,000 Syrians have declared asylum in

the European Union, while member states have pledged to resettle a further 33,000 Syrians.

The neighboring countries are now feeling the pinch in their economy as they cannot keep assisting the refugees coming from Syria due to financial and other limitations. Hence the Syrian refugee crisis is no longer a domestic situation, but has expanded into an international emergency that requires the coordination of all countries around the world to help these people find food and shelter, and more than that a country they can call as their own.

Iraqi Crisis

This was a pivotal point in modern history of Iraq when the British and American military forces entered into Iraq, on the pretext that they had strong evidence that the then ruler of Iraq Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and that he posed a threat to the world. On that very account, they invaded Iraq, launching carpet bombings (when fighter planes are used to drop bombs from an altitude) and ruining the existing society of the country.

The US invaded and occupied Iraq in 2003, and suddenly the already hard-lined religious groups got a stronger cause to fight against. They learned new tactics by observing the US forces and became hardened fighters with better methods.

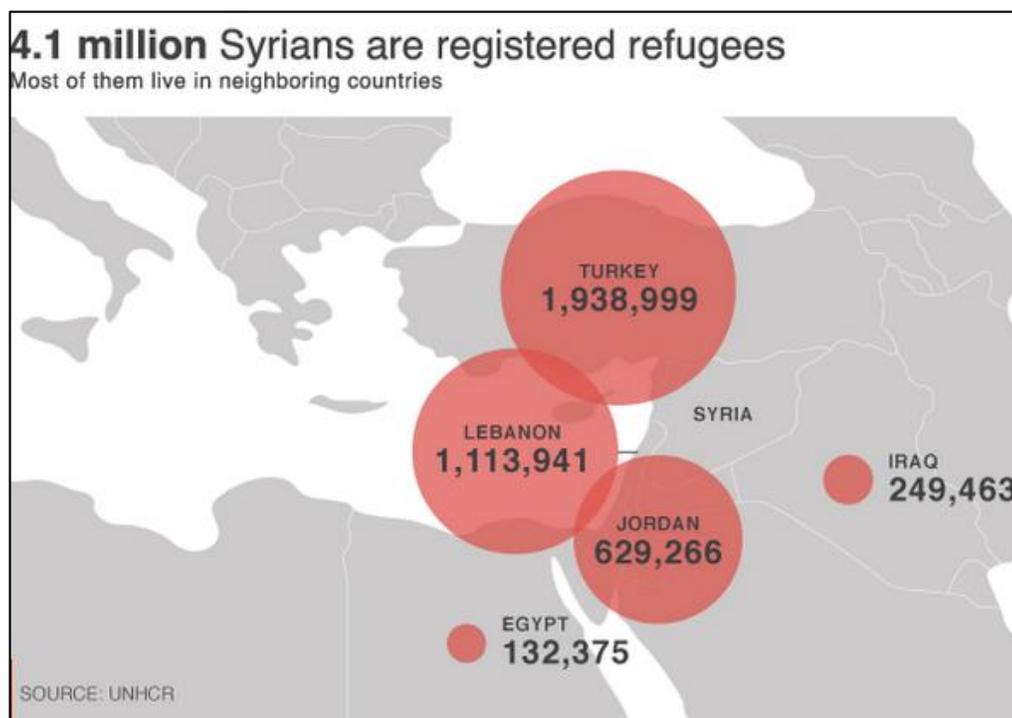
Before the rise of ISIS, the civil war in Syria had forced thousands of refugees to seek shelter in Iraq, and between 2003 and 2011, thousands of Iraqi refugees had fled to Syria to start a better life. However, currently the situation is such that approximately two million civilians in Iraq are categorized as internally displaced persons (IDPs). So what is an IDP? A United Nations report, *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* uses the definition,

“Internally displaced people (also known as DP/IDP in many civil and military organizations which assist) are people or groups of people who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to

avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border”

Simply put and internally displaced person is a resident of a nation who is moving around within his or her own country due to war, natural disasters or other reasons, but has not gone to any other nation seeking refuge.

Coming back to the issue at hand, these IDPs together with thousands of Syrian refugees who have entered into Iraq have been moving around within the country for shelter. Roughly three-quarters of them have also found refuge in what is known as the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), which is an autonomous region within Iraq.



Several international NGO along with the UN have worked from the beginning with the refugees emerging from Syria and Iraq. The United Nations has warned that a lack of funds will result in severe consequences, including serious regional security threats. Syria and Iraq’s neighbors initially had almost single-handedly taken on the burden of catering to the

needs of their refugees. However as the situation kept worsening, the numbers kept surging and in time the world community has come to terms with the fact that this is an international problem! Wealthy, able nations such as the oil-rich Persian Gulf states have shut their doors to the refugees citing reasons that concern national security.

These states—particularly the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar—have continuously failed to deliver on their financial pledges. This crisis has caused severe overcrowding in hospitals and schools, increased unemployment and poverty levels, weakened infrastructure, and social and political instability. However, the members of the European Union especially UK, Germany, France and other countries with their recent announcements have pledged their support to high number of refugees affected by the turmoil in the region. With this development, the international community has just begun catering to their primary responsibilities as global citizens towards their fellow humans, however much more work has to be done.

4. Problems faced by refugees in camps:

Refugee camps are temporary settlements built to accommodate the people who have fled their home countries. In recent years there has been an increase in the number of refugees in the world and this has resulted in the overflow of people in the camps. Due to this, refugees are facing a lot of problems such as:

HEALTH:

Due to crowding, refugee camps are often unhygienic, resulting in the increase of risk of catching infectious diseases. In refugee camps social workers visit every tent to provide medical assistance but still due to the lack of resources not every sick person, who is totally relied on free health care provided by aid agencies in camps, is able to receive these services.

The mental health of refugees also gets effected due to the situations and traumas they have faced in their home countries. This does not allow these refugees to think straight and often lead them in doing illegal things such as drug and human trafficking.

HOUSING AND SANITATION:

Due to the rapid increase of refugees in camps and shortage of supplies, many refugees have to build their own shelters with the locally available materials. These shelters are not very effective as they are not hygienic and are also not very strong to protect the people from external conditions.

The washrooms in the camps are to be shared among a lot of families and are not always sufficiently clean and disease free. Also drainage of water from bathroom and kitchen are poor and there is no proper disposal of garbage. All of these may lead to outbreaks of infectious disease increasing the risk of infections.

WORK AND ECONOMY:

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has a policy of helping refugees work and be productive, using their existing skills to meet their own needs and needs of the host country. However, refugee hosting countries do not usually follow this policy and instead do not allow refugees to work legally. In many countries the only option is either to work for a small incentive with NGOs based in the camp or to work illegally with no rights and

often bad conditions. Those without a job or without relatives and friends who send remittances, need to sell parts of their food rations to get cash.

5. Important Players

The League of Arab States

- Countries both rich and developing, across the globe have in some or the other way helped the refugee crisis in Iraq and Syria, however the whole world has been caught in surprise to see such little assistance coming from the rich Arab nations
- Supporters of the Arab nations claim they have donated generously in aid, but United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) accounts show Saudi Arabia has offered just £11million, this amount is not just hilarious but also shameful considering the lavish lifestyles of the Arab royalty, however, the Gulf states have provided in total around £600m through charitable organizations and individual donations.
- The world is blaming the Arab states that they are not doing enough however, it is also true that UAE has taken 160,000 Syrian refugees in the last three years, Jordan has received approximately 630,000 refugees, while Lebanon has more than 1.2 million of them and Egypt has taken approximately 132,000 refugees
- However, what is making it difficult for the refugees to enter the Arab states are the tough restrictions on visas (which are also very expensive), as without a visa refugees are barred from entering all Arab countries except for Algeria, Mauritania, Sudan and Yemen
- Other nations such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia have also provided financial aid however in the words of Sarah Leah Whitson who is the executive director of Human Rights watch for its Middle East and North Africa division, “Burden sharing has no meaning in the Gulf, and the Saudi, Emirati and Qatari approach has been to sign a check and let everyone else deal with it”.
- It would also give us a better perspective of the stand taking by the rich Arab nations, by knowing that Kuwait, which embarked on a plan in 2013 to expel 1m expats over the next ten years.

- What makes it more surprising for the world community are the facts such as in Saudi Arabia, one in three people are migrant workers and in the UAE, eight out of ten residents are from abroad, so it leaves little room for an argument that the countries are not open to immigrant population working in their country
- Instead of helping directly, Saudi Arabia has instead offered to pay for the construction of 200 mosques in Germany for newly arrived Muslim migrants. Now such developments give us the much needed inspiration to involve ourselves in global politics
- It is also intriguing given the fact that most refugees from Iraq and Syria follow the same religion as the neighboring countries which makes the theocratic argument falter from its very base
- It is worthy of noting that the Gulf countries are not signatories to the international conventions on refugee rights that Western countries and indeed most world countries have signed up to, which makes them formally less answerable to the world community in the current situation given their reluctance to assist as much they are required to
- The question is would they keep watching their brothers and sisters first getting massacred by ISIS and then by because of lack of humanitarian assistance, just because they were born a few hundred miles away from their land?

a. European Union

- The European Union has won many hearts across the globe for their quick and voluntary response for the refugees emerging out of the region
- The EU has pledged €4.2 billion have been mobilized for relief and recovery assistance for the Syrian Refugees and €66.7 million for the relief work of refugees from Iraq
- Germany being the forerunner in taking refugees, has already begun resettling the refugees within its territories and has said that it could take as many as could take 500,000 refugees annually for several years

- Similarly, France has stated it would take 24,000 refugees over the next two years. Sweden has taken 64,700 and United Kingdom would take 20,000 refugees over the next 5 years
 - Among other EU nations, Hungary, Austria, Denmark, Netherlands, Switzerland have also taken refugees from this region in varying numbers according to the United Nations
 - Greece, which lies on a popular transit route from Turkey north through the Balkans to Northern Europe, has seen more than 250,000 people arrive on its shores this year, according to the International Organization for Migration
 - What truly is remarkable is not the number of refugees taken but the response time spent by the EU nations in providing assistance as that has truly been instrumental in if not completely improving, then at least containing the situation from going bad to worse
 - Additionally, During the Third International Pledging Conference for Syria in Kuwait in March 2015, the EU and its Member States pledged €1.1 billion – the largest pledge by any donor – in humanitarian and development assistance to the Syria crisis
 - Various member states of the EU are also providing humanitarian assistance in various neighboring countries such as Lebanon where EU along with the UNICEF is assisting children of the most vulnerable Syrian refugee families living in host communities in Jordan
1. So a lot has been already done by the European countries however, their capabilities to keep dispensing assistance will exhaust one day, and before that time comes, it is upon us member nations to come up with a long term solution for the displaced persons both internally and internationally

b. Other Member Nations

- Among the other nations of the world that are far away from the region geographically, USA has agreed to admit atleast 10,000 Syrian refugees by the end of the next year and the number could very well go up to 75,000 till the following year

- USA has also provided \$574 million for the refugee crisis, as per the United Nations, however considering the popular opinion in the middle east that they are the ones who have started the crisis in the first place, they are doing much less
- Canada has also promised to accept 10,000 refugees over a three-year period
- Australia has also agreed to take in refugees numbering approximately to 14,000 and have agreed to support 240,000 people in UNHCR camps as part of its \$230 million aid program
- However, Amnesty International said other high-income countries such as Russia, Japan and South Korea have offered zero resettlements to the refugees, although the question is whether they consider the obligation for these countries to take these people in is moral or political

6. Conventions, Treaties and Pacts

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

2. Universal Declaration of Human Rights was by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948
3. This declaration came up directly because of the consequence of World War II where there came a time when mankind had to define the rights for its own survival
4. It consists of basic human rights that every individual is within his/her rights to enjoy irrespective of the country he or she belongs to, as it is binding on all member states of the United Nations
5. The particular Article (number 14) that specifically applies to us among the other articles reads as *“Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution”* which makes other countries obligated to provide assistance to the refugees in this situation

1951 Refugee Convention

- This is the particular convention that defined the meaning of refugee for the understanding of the world community
- Under the agreement certain rights for individuals asking for asylum in other nations are defined
- So we can understand it in a way, that this convention builds upon the existing Article 14 of the UNDHR
- As per the convention, a refugee is defined in the following manner, *“A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to*

such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

- This convention also ensures the innocence of refugees if they are found illegally entering other nations in search of asylum
- It really is a very interesting piece of document, as this particular convention is the basis on which most countries are in a position to legally assist the refugees entering their land from Iraq and Syria



Aerial view of UNHCR camp for Syrian refugees

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

- Known as the UN Refugee Agency is primarily formed to protect and support refugees at the request of a government or the UN itself
- It is only allowed in other words its mandate is limited only to provide aid, on a non-political and humanitarian basis, international protection to refugees and to seek permanent solutions for them
- The UNHCR also is allowed to help IDPs (discussed earlier) the application of which becomes extremely crucial in the current situation at hand

- The UNHCR has done a phenomenal job till now in assisting the refugees across the affected region, as it continues to be the lead agency for protection, camp coordination and camp management, NFIs and shelter in Syria and Iraq, and other neighboring countries involved in the relief work
- In Iraq the UNHCR's work has been limited due to the restriction to a lot of area owing to the terror established by ISIS
- It is extremely important for the committee to understand the importance of the UNHCR in the assistance work of the refugees and how the committee can utilize its resources to provide relief and solve the crisis at hand

7. Conclusion

- It is imperative for the international community to work towards a stable Middle East.
- The current crisis truly questions the evolution of mankind and what we as nations as well as individuals can do to help our brothers and sisters affected by war
- This crisis has already been termed as the greatest refugee crisis since World War II, as The UN high commissioner for refugees (UNHCR) reported in 2014 that the total number of refugees worldwide exceeded 50 million for the first time since World War II
- The enormous economic and social costs brought on by the crisis cannot be addressed by conventional emergency relief measures and the relief work needs much more active involvement of all member nations
- The international community needs to invest in the long-term development of refugee in the host countries like encouraging long-term development within these countries
- It is upon us to not let innocent lives be lost and help them with all our resources in the most efficient manner as the time to act is NOW



Refugees outside Hungarian borders to seek asylum

8. Questions A Resolution Must Answer (QARMA)

- How should we consider refugee problem in terms of opportunity, not a failure?
- How can we assure the long- term security for the refugees?
- To what extent should the Middle East and European countries who are currently hosting the refugees, infuse resources to ensure their well-being?
- Should we ease restrictions on asylum seekers within the UN nations?
- What can we do to assimilate Syrian and Iraqi children staying within the hosting nation so they don't lose their roots from of their countries?

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10. Additional Research Links

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- <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet20en.pdf>
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