Dear Delegates,

Our names are Kendall Garner and Alexander Papp, and we will be chairing the UNHCR committee, which is the United Nations Agency for Refugees.

Kendall is a first year student from Indiana studying Computer Science and Chinese at MIT. He participated in Model United Nations as a delegate throughout all four years of high school, and is excited to chair for the first time at MITMUNC. Beyond MUN, Kendall enjoys playing board games, traveling, and learning languages.

Alex is a Masters student in Civil Engineering at MIT. He obtained his bachelor's degree at Virginia Tech in May of 2017 and is excited to be chairing this committee at MIT. He grew up internationally and has been involved in Model United Nations in both high school and throughout undergrad.

We are very excited that you will all be joining us in February to discuss refugee issues around the world. This is a pivotal time for immigration policy, both in the United States and around the world. The discussions we have could very well emulate the debates held at the global level, and as future leaders, you may have a say in how these policies are enacted.

This is a sensitive issue for many. We want to encourage free and open discussion and represent the complex and often heated discussions happening around the world on the topic of refugees and migration. There may be some controversial aspects of these discussions. As such, we ask that you respect your fellow committee members and never engage in personal attacks.

We look forward to meeting all of you and can't wait to hear what you will all bring to the UNHCR.

Respectfully,

Alex and Kendall

Definitions:

Refugee: Refugees are people fleeing conflict or persecution. They are defined and protected in international law, and must not be expelled or returned to situations where their life and freedom are at risk.

Stateless Person: A Stateless Person is one who lacks a nationality or citizenship to any nation. As a result, they often aren't allowed to go to school, see a doctor, get a job, open a bank account, buy a house or get married.

Asylum-seekers: An asylum-seeker is someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed.

Internally Displaced People: Internally displaced people (IDPs) have not crossed a border to find safety. Unlike refugees, they are on the run at home.[1]

Returnee: A former refugee who repatriates to the nation they originated from.[2]

Forcibly Displaced People: Any individual who has been displaced as a result of persecution,

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[1] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "Who We Help." UNHCR, www.unhcr.org/en-us/who-we-help.html. Accessed 22 Nov. 2017

[2] United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Training Manual on Human Rights Monitoring". OHCHR, http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/training7part1112en.pdf. Accessed 25 Nov. 2017

conflict, violence, or human rights violations. This is an umbrella term that includes all Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Internally Displaced People.[3]

About the United Nations High Council on Refugees (UNHCR)

The United Nations High Council on Refugees (UNHCR) was established in 1950 to advocate for refugees and displaced people around the world. When it was first founded, UNHCR's primary concern was the millions of Europeans who lost their homes as a result of World War II. Over time, the conflicts have changed, but their mission has remained the same – assist refugees wherever they may be.

Currently, the UNHCR is made up of 101 EXCOM (executive committee) member states in the United Nations as well as 7 observer states. In addition to these countries, there are a number of intergovernmental organization members such as the European Union (EU) and League of Arab States (LAS).

UNHCR is situated in Geneva, Switzerland. As part of the United Nations' broader scope, they serve to guarantee every individual's right to seek asylum and find refuge in another nation.[4] On a holistic basis, they work with governments to inform policy and advocate for refugee rights. However, the UNHCR also goes into communities devastated by war and famine to provide essential services to displaced peoples. This can include offering food, water, supplies for shelter, assistance during migration, education, and health services.

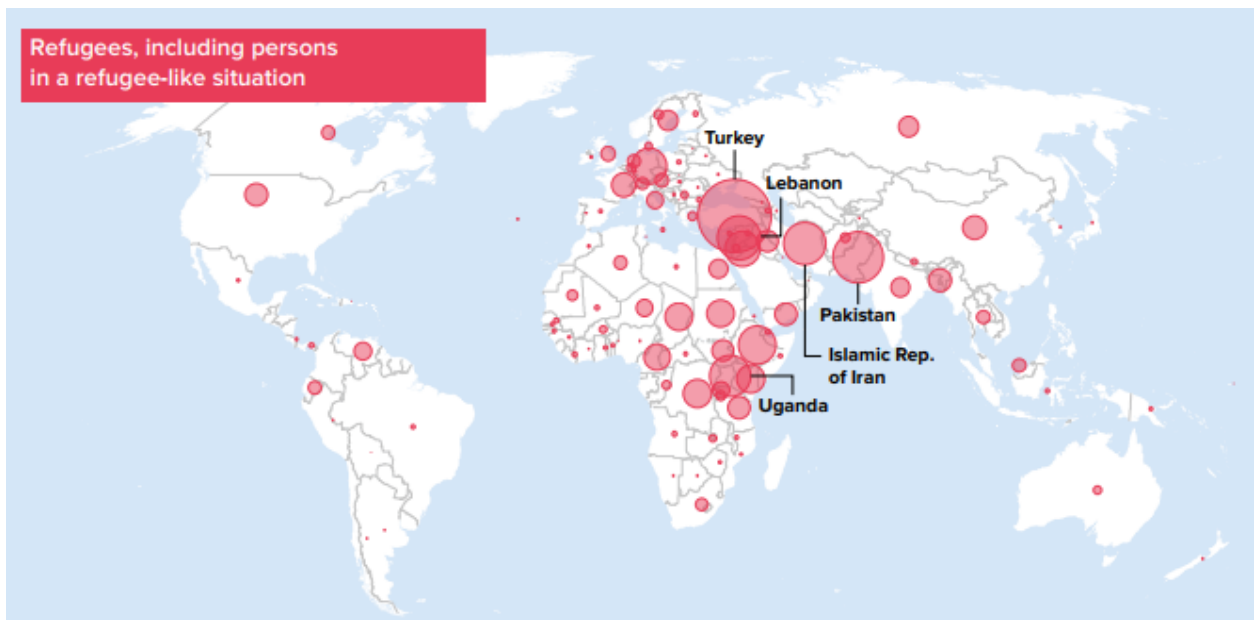The current High Commissioner for Refugees is Filippo Grandi. He was elected on the 1st of January, 2016.

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[3] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "Global Trends - Forced Displacement in 2016". UNHCR, http://www.unhcr.org/5943e8a34.pdf. Accessed 22 Nov. 2017

[4] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "What We Do". UNHCR, http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/what-we-do.html. Accessed 25 Nov. 2017
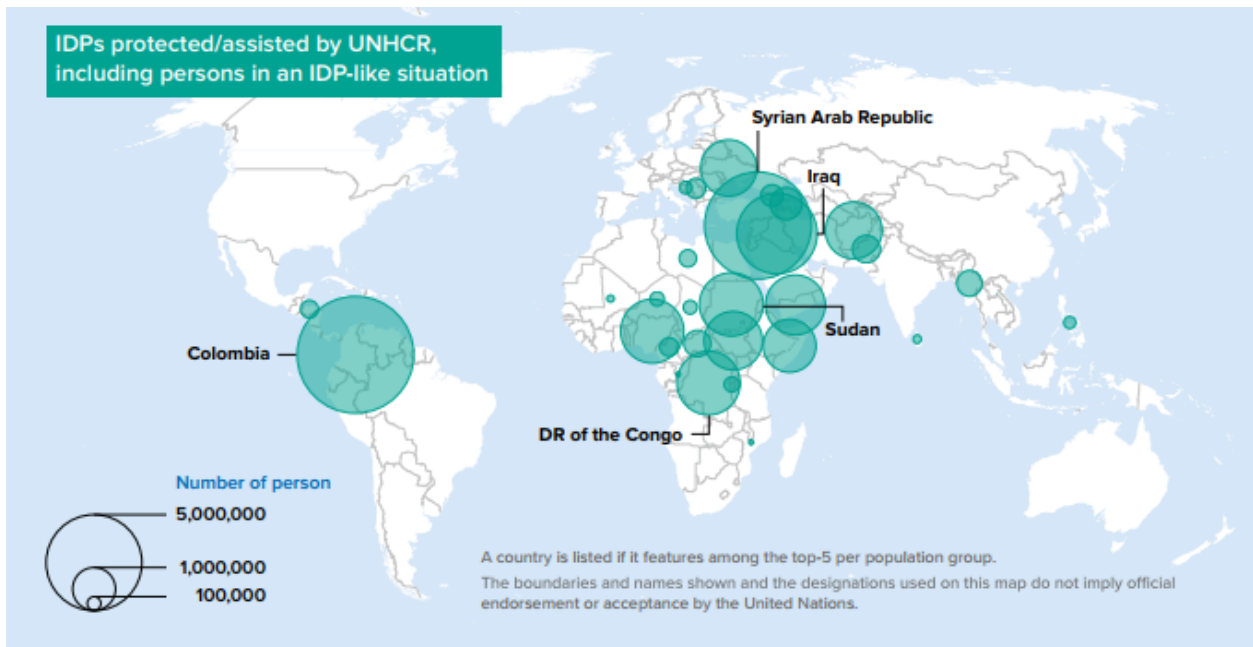
Facts and Figures

65.6 million forcibly displaced Individuals worldwide

2.8 million asylum-seekers

22.5 million people who were refugees at end-2016

Figures from Report on Global Trends from UNHCR.
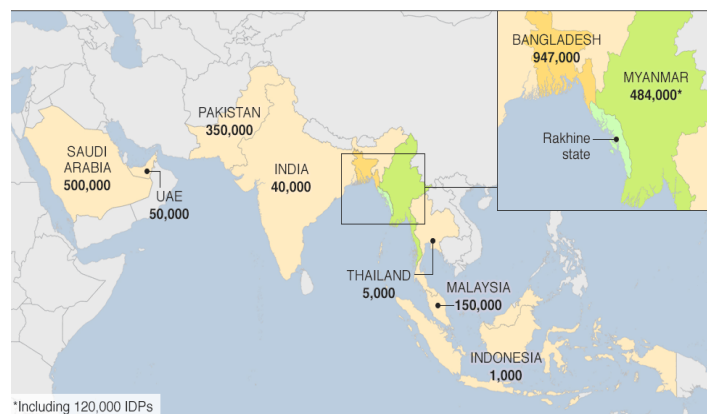
40.3 million internally displaced people

10 million stateless individuals[5]

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[5] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "Global Trends - Forced Displacement in 2016". UNHCR, http://www.unhcr.org/5943e8a34.pdf.

Topic 1: Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Myanmar

Background:

The Rohingya are a primarily Muslim ethnic minority living primarily in majority Buddhist Myanmar. Currently, there are over a million Rohingya living primarily in the the Rakhine region on the western coast. Despite their numbers, the Rohingya are not considered an official ethnic group by the government Myanmar and are denied citizenship and considered illegal immigrants from neighboring Bangladesh. Since the 1970s, pressure and acts against the Rohingya have resulted in numerous Rohingya fleeing the Rakhine state into neighboring Bangladesh, Thailand, and Malaysia[6]. As a result of these tensions, clashes arose between the Rohingya and other ethnic groups. However, with the rise of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), a collection of insurgents who claim to support Rohingya, these clashes became more violent. The climax of these clashes occurred on August 25, 2017, when ARSA attacked more than 30 police posts in the Rakhine state. In response, opposing troops attacked Rohingya villages, leading to a large influx of refugees fleeing Myanmar. [7]

A map of the number of Rohingya refugees in the region.[8]

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[6] Al Jazeera. "Myanmar: Who are the Rohingya?". Al Jazeera. http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/08/rohingya-muslims-170831065142812.html. Accessed Nov. 22, 2017.
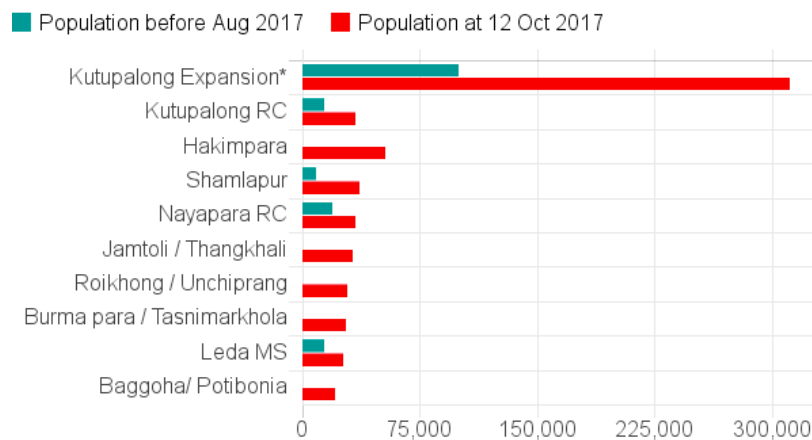
[7] BBC. "Myanmar Rohingya: What you need to know about the crisis". BBC. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-41566561. Accessed Nov. 22, 2017.

[8] BBC, "Myanmar Rohingya: What you need to know about the crisis"

Problems faced by refugees

Currently, one of the most pressing issues faced by the Rohingya fleeing Myanmar is protection. Despite insistence by the government of Myanmar, there continue to be acts of violence against the fleeing refugees. Furthermore, the trek from the Rakhine state to Bangladesh and neighboring nations is treacherous. As these refugees may have to rely on smugglers and/or makeshift rafts, they face great danger when attempting to flee Myanmar. This danger is highlighted by the death of over 60 Rohingya refugees who attempted to escape to Bangladesh by boat[9]. Even in the refugee camps, the refugees face animosity and

possible violence from the Bangladeshi host communities who refuse to recognize the Rohingya as a legitimate ethnic group. Furthermore, a large proportion of refugees being children, single women, and/or traumatized and may require additional support services.

A graph of the number of Rohingya refugees at certain settlements in Bangladesh.[10]

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[9] CBS News. "Dozens of Rohingya refugees killed as boat sinks." CBS News. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/rohingya-refugees-drown-boat-sinks-myanmar-bangladesh/ Accessed Nov 22, 2017.
[10] BBC. "Myanmar Rohingya: What you need to know about the crisis"

Currently, there are over 250,000 refugees which have been living in makeshift camps since 2017 in Bangladesh. Unlike more recent refugees, these individuals are deemed undocumented by the Bangladeshi government and have little access to aid.[11] With the influx of over 600,000 refugees into Bangladesh since August 25, the task of documenting already existing and new refugees has become more daunting, further slowing down the pace at which refugees can get access to aid.

In addition to impacting the speed of aid, the sheer number of refugees arriving has depleted the already slim amount of basic supplies in these camps. Additionally, these camps face severe overcrowding, with a lack of shelter forcing refugees to live in close quarters and increasing the chances of disease.

With over a half-million refugees scattered throughout at least six refugee camps and innumerable more makeshift settlements, one pressing issue is the distribution of aid. Due to hazardous terrain and a severe lack of existing roads and infrastructure, delivery of aid is often hindered. Coupled with a lack of documentation and the spontaneous establishment of makeshift settlements, these conditions may prevent camps and settlements from receiving the lifesaving aid. As a result, a lack of access to food, clean water and sanitation can lead to a rapid degradation of quality of life and possibly result in epidemics.

Past Solutions

To address the lack of documentation on refugees in Bangladesh, UNHCR has collaborated with the government of Bangladesh to use biometrics to register new arrivals. Furthermore, UNHCR has established mobile units and is collaborating with the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), to determine which areas require the most assistance

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[11] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "OPERATIONAL UPDATE: Bangladesh." UNHCR. http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Bangladesh%20-%20Operational%20Update%20-%206OCT17.pdf. Accessed Nov. 22, 2017.

and to ensure the delivery of aid[12]. Together with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and World Food Programme, UNHCR is seeking to build an additional 14,000 shelters and provide additional services. Furthermore, UNHCR has conducted five airlifts to deliver supplies, including tents and sheets, to camps. With the aid of Gonoshathaya Kendra (GK), the UNHCR established a diarrhea treatment center in Kutupalong, currently the largest refugee camp.

Topics to Discuss

While the nations of Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan each have over 300,000 documented refugees within their borders, closer nations like India and Thailand each house under 50,000. And yet, the GDP of Bangladesh is less than half of either GDP. Consequently, the question of responsibility arises. Should neighboring nations be required to, or receive an incentive to, adopt Rohingya refugees in order to alleviate the risk of overpopulation in Bangladesh? If these nations are unwilling to provide shelter, should they be required to pay a fine?

Even though funding remains a major issue for the UNHCR, another major issue lies in allocation of these funds. Due to the fluctuating nature of refugee camps and a lack of documentation, determining which regions require what kind of aid remains a challenging issue. Furthermore, the difficult terrain calls into question whether certain settlements should be prioritized over others, and whether settlements should be consolidated in order to reduce this complication.

Although the nature of the Rohingya crisis lends itself to be more regional, the response and call for aid is global. Whereas some nations near Myanmar, like Malaysia, have elected to house refugees, nations further detached regionally, like Australia or the United Kingdom,

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[12] UNHCR, "OPERATIONAL UPDATE: Bangladesh."

have pledged monetary support for the host communities. However, not all nations involved

are in agreement. The UN Security Council and the US have decried and called for a

cessation of the violence in Rakhine. China and Myanmar have shied away from the violence

and instead request aid to support the existing camps in Myanmar.

Ultimately, this committee is tasked with determining the best methods to support the already

existing settlements and refugee camps, while also preparing for situations where the influx

of refugees continues. Solutions such as the delivery of emergency supplies to camps are

short term. But in the long run, some solutions include the establishment of roads and

sanitation, or even considering the possibility of returning these refugees to Myanmar upon

conflict resolution. Implementing these solutions requires a coordinated approach involving a

multitude of nations, NGOs, and UN organizations. However, with the addition of each

player, the solutions become more convoluted as each party adds its own conditions. In the

end, the UNHCR is just a subset of UN organizations and is subject to the whims of its

member states; as a result, the ideal solution will be one that can not only tackle the

Rohingya crisis the best, but also respect the sovereignty and wishes of every involved

nation.

Topic 2: High Risk Migrant Movements across the Mediterranean

Background

Leaving your life and home behind may seem like a drastic decision, but for thousands of new refugees every day, they have no other option. Many do not get the luxury of flying out of their situation and are desperate enough to pursue dangerous and often deadly journeys to escape their situation. Every week, migrant vessels are discovered crossing the

Mediterranean or other bodies of water carrying hundreds of people, well above their safe capacities.

A boat carrying refugees and migrants drifts on the Mediterranean Sea shortly before rescue by the Italian Navy in 2014. © Italian Navy/Massimo Sestini[13].

While the conditions on these boats are often uncomfortable, they are also dangerous. Between January and May of 2017, over 1700 migrants are estimated to have died pursuing high-risk escapes from their origin countries, many in the Mediterranean Sea[14]. By November of 2017, as many as 3000 migrants were either dead or missing after trying to cross into Europe by the sea[15]. Most of these accidents have occurred between Libya and Italy.

In May of 2017, two boats capsized while crossing the Mediterranean, causing over 250 people to perish[16]. November 2017, another migrant boat sank killing 31. These two examples are only a small representation of the near-weekly incidents that occur. By the time this committee meets in February, it is likely that hundreds more will die. Every day that passes without a solution, more accidents occur and more people die.

Attempts to Combat Migrant Boat Disasters

When these ships are discovered, there are a couple of outcomes - the refugees may be sent back to whatever country they departed from (often Libya or Egypt), or they may be brought to sprawling refugee camps in Turkey, Greece, Italy, France, or Spain. It is difficult to assess how many refugees are making this crossing, or in some cases, even how many perish each

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[13]Italian Navy Photograph. "Massive loss of life reported in latest Mediterranean tragedy". UNHCR, http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/4/57178bcf6/massive-loss-life-reported-latest-mediterranean-tragedy.html. Accessed 24 Nov. 2017. (Caption from UNHCR)
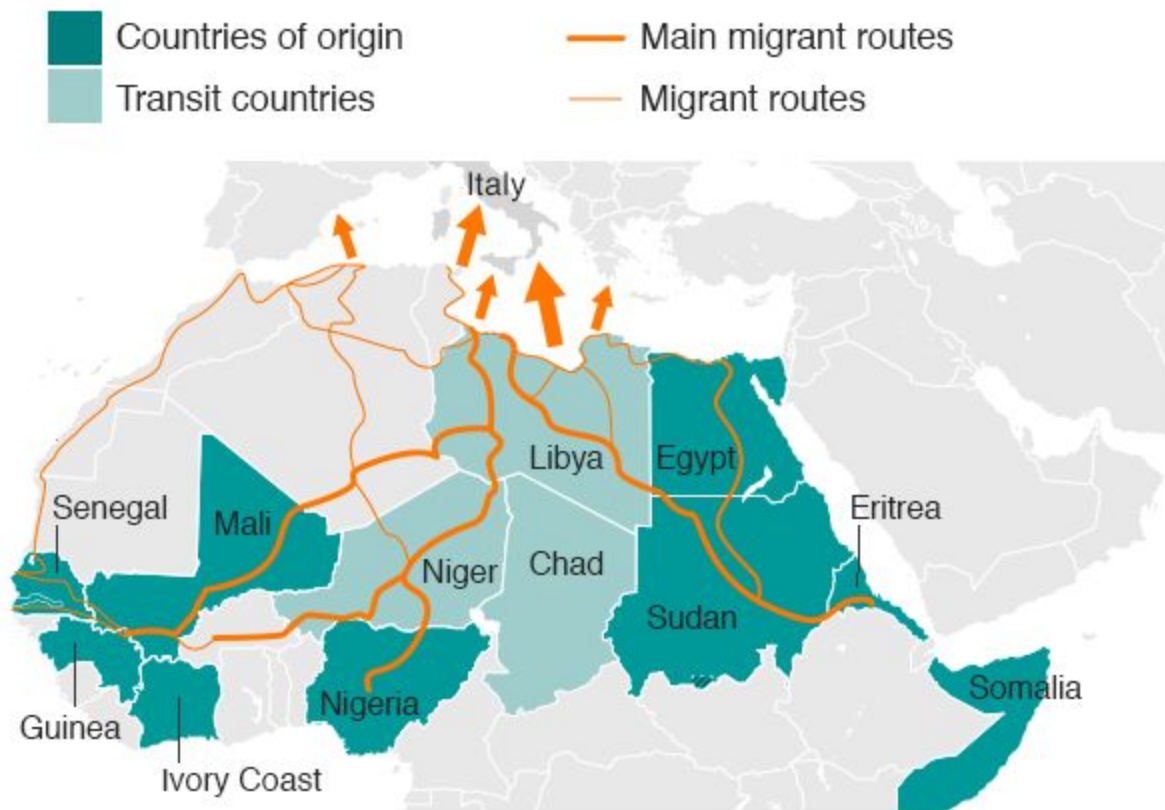
[14] Lizzie Dearden. "Nearly 250 refugees feared dead after two migrant boats sink in Mediterranean". The Independent, May 2017, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/migrant-boats-sink-mediterranean-250-refugees-dead-drowned-libya-italy-migrants-europe-a7725686.html. Accessed 22 Nov. 2017

[15]Reuters Staff. "Thirty-one bodies recovered after migrant boat sinks off Libya". Reuters, Nov. 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-libya/thirty-one-bodies-recovered-after-migrant-boat-sinks-off-libya-idUSKBN1DP0CM. Accessed 25 Nov. 2017

[16] Independent Link, Same as 13

year, due to the scale of these operations and the often-criminal nature of those facilitating these dangerous trips across the sea.

Central Mediterranean migrant routes

Many of the refugees pursuing the Mediterranean crossing have already endured long journeys from conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa[17]

The task of discovering and preventing these high-risk journeys often falls on the navies of individual Mediterranean nations like Italy or Libya. This places a major financial and humanitarian burden on these countries, even though they are often not the intended

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[17] UNICEF. "Central Mediterranean Migrant Routes". BBC, https://ichef.bbci.co.uk/news/624/cpsprodpb/12FDB/production/_94878777_migrant-routes-624.png. Accessed 25 Nov. 2017

destination of many of the migrants. In these countries, sprawling refugee camps have developed which often support thousands of refugees for months or even years at a time. Others are able to continue their journey but still face uncertainty in whether they will be able to integrate into their new host country.

There may be multiple solutions to preventing the migrant boat disasters, but they will have major implications for many countries. As mentioned, even after they are rescued, they need some place to go, but many countries do not want to carry the entire burden of accepting a large migrant population in the short term. Some nations like Poland and Hungary have elected increasingly far-right governments who do not want to accept any refugees. This has created a large rift in the European Union as other nations like Germany are more welcoming and want to come up with an egalitarian solution to the migrant crisis. This is all occurring while the United Kingdom is undergoing "Brexit" procedures, its exit from the European Union. A major argument for Brexit was the removal of policies that allowed many to immigrate to the UK from Europe and beyond. Meanwhile, the current administration of the United States has challenged how much the country was spending on international programs and the United Nations, and also proposed reductions in refugee quotas. A loss of support for UNHCR missions may jeopardize current operations and only further increase the risk for refugees.

Topics to Discuss

In this committee, we will try to institute policies that reduce the number of deaths on the Mediterranean from boat disasters, and try to prevent illegal boating operations. We will have to consider who will be responsible for patrolling the seas and whether they are financially responsible for supporting their own navy operations. Currently, the European

Union supports Libya and Italy in this effort, but it may not be enough. We may also want to establish how much we want to reduce the number of deaths each year across the Mediterranean, and create an accountability policy for enforcing it.

In addition to stopping these boats, we must also consider what happens to these refugees both before and after the rescue. Having legitimate, safe channels for refugees to travel to Europe may cut down on the number of ship accidents, but will also increase pressure on European countries to accept refugees and may cost a considerable amount of money to implement. The Mediterranean can be thoroughly surveyed with remote sensing, GPS, and radar to prevent these journeys to begin with, but then the refugees may be put at further risk in their situations in North Africa. Furthermore, we will have to determine what happens to the numerous refugee camps in Europe that continue to grow as more people make the Mediterranean crossing. Will these refugee camps sit as-is until their home countries are safe? Will the refugees eventually have a chance to integrate into their new countries? How will these refugees be distributed in different countries - will quotas be enforced? These discussions should also involve the origin and transit countries involved: Nigeria, Sudan, Egypt, and the Ivory Coast, among others. These states can protect refugees and prevent them from making the risky leap across the Mediterranean, or perhaps support them until a more permanent solution is developed. This will require UNHCR financial support as they often do not have the resources to maintain these services for hundreds of thousands of refugees.

For all of these questions, every country will have different motives, whether humanitarian, economic, social, or cultural. A solution to these problems will likely require the cooperation of everyone in the United Nations; but with many populist and nationalist governments

reemerging, this may be increasingly difficult to accomplish. Ultimately, we have to consider a solution that respects the sovereignty of every country while guaranteeing the human rights of all refugees.

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