



HRC

MITMUNC 2014

Dear Delegates,

My name is Jenny Sangliana, and I will be your head chair for the Human Rights Council. I am delighted to welcome you to the 6th annual MIT Model United Nations Conference. I have participated in many MUN conferences throughout high school and college both as a delegate and a chair. Outside of MUN, I am interested in medicine as I am currently studying brain and cognitive sciences at MIT. I hope you find the topics stimulating and more importantly, are excited to enrich your worldviews through thought-provoking debates.

Thanks,

Jenny Sangalia

History of the Committee

In 1946, a year after the United Nations was founded, U.N. Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), a subsidiary body of the U.N. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), was founded to promote and protect human rights. UNCHR met for the first time in 1947 and established a drafting committee for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations in 1948. In 2006, the U.N. General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to adopt resolution A/RES/60/251 and replace UNCHR with the U.N. Human Rights Council (HRC). The HRC addresses important human rights issues such as freedom of association and assembly, freedom of expression, freedom of belief and religion, Women's rights, LGBT rights, and the rights of racial and ethnic minorities. The HRC is composed of forty-seven members who are elected by the U.N. General Assembly. Each member serves a three-year term and is eligible for re-election at the end of term. However, no member may occupy a seat for more than two consecutive terms. The seats are distributed among the UN's regional groups as follows: 13 for Africa, 13 for Asia, 6 for Eastern Europe, eight for Latin America and the Caribbean, and seven for the Western European and Others Group. The General Assembly can suspend the rights and privileges of any member country if they have committed gross and systematic violations of human rights during its term of membership.

The HRC is structured around three key elements:

- An Advisory Committee that produces expertise and advice on matters relating human rights issues
- The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) every four years, during which each of the U.N.'s 192 member nations will receive human rights reviews by an HRC Working Group experienced matters specific to each nation
- A Complaints Procedure that allows individuals and organizations to bring accounts of human rights violation to the attention of the Council

The mission of the HRC is to protect and promote human rights in accordance with Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; 'Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty'. In the past, the UNHRC has adopted resolutions against defamation of religion and passed a number of resolutions concerning genocide. The HRC has endorsed the sub-commission of prevention of discrimination and protection of minorities in conflict zones and established working groups around the world to help fight crimes against violations of human rights.

Civil Rights Violations Following the Crisis in Syria

Introduction

Syria is considered one of the worst offenders of human rights in the Arab states. Under Ba'ath party and President Bashar al-Assad's regime, Syrians have experienced violations of their most fundamental human rights including right to personal privacy, freedom of religion, freedom from torture, and right to life.

Conditions worsened in March 2011 when protesters demanded the economic prosperity, political freedom, and civil liberties. President Al-Assad refused to halt the violence and implement reforms demanded by protestors such as the lifting of martial law, broader political representation and less restricted media, causing widespread violence through Syrian. The protests were met with resistance from armed government forces, who attacked and imprisoned protesters. Government forces faced opposition from armed rebel groups composed of defected Syrian Armed Forces and civilian volunteers.

In August 2013, a chemical weapon attack was reported near Syria's capital, Damascus, killing hundreds. Although it was not clear whether the armed forces or rebels are responsible for the deployment of chemical weapons, the use of chemical weapons triggered strong reactions from many countries.

According to the United Nations, an estimate of more than 100,000 people has died since 2011 with many more imprisoned. Roughly two million Syrian refugees have immigrated to surrounding countries and another 4.25 million Syrians are internally displaced. All over Syria, men,

women, and children of all ages have experienced shortages of food, malnutrition, and acts of sexual violation.

It is the responsibility of the U.N. Human Rights Council (HRC) to stop these violations of fundamental human rights and offer protective solutions for the persecuted community.

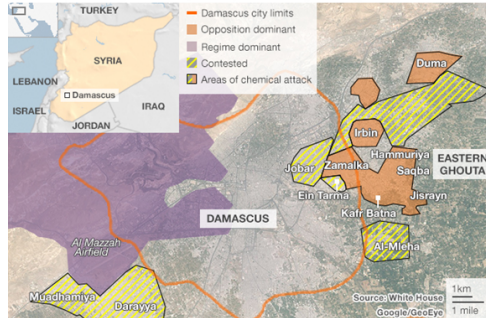
Unlawful Executions

Since 2011, Syria has been the death of more than 100,000 people, a majority of whom were innocent civilians. Amnesty International has documented unlawful killings carried out by both rebel forces and government militia. 19 unarmed men and one child were found in a neighborhood having been killed by government forces that suspected them of aiding the rebels. Their bodies bore marks indicating they had been tortured prior to being killed. A 105-page report by the Human Rights Watch, "You Can Still See Their Blood": Executions, Indiscriminate Shootings, and a Hostage Taking by Opposition Forces in Latakia Countryside," provides evidence of unlawful killing and torture of innocent civilians by rebel forces and a vast majority of children and women, who were taken as hostages.

In August 2013, a chemical attack was reported around Damascus and later confirmed by UN chemical weapons inspectors. The UN report found presence of sarin gas around the area of attack. Approximately 1,300 deaths were reported with more than 3,000 exhibiting signs of neurotoxicity. The chemical attack was described to be 'the most significant confirmed use of chemical weapons against

civilians since Saddam Hussein used them in 1988.

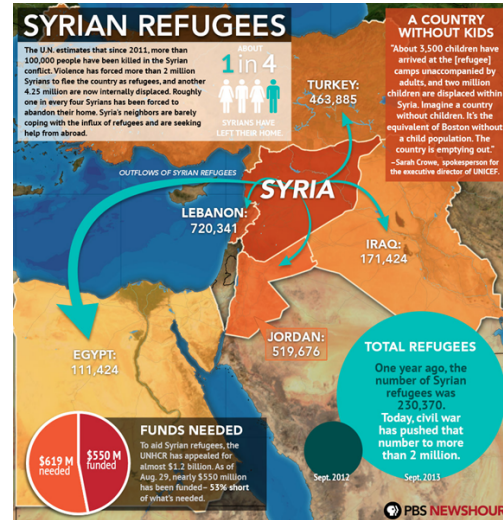
US intelligence map: Areas reportedly affected by 21 August chemical attack



Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

On September 2012, a report by the UN suggested that more 1.5 million people have lost their homes and livelihood since the start of the Syrian crisis. Since then, the numbers of Syrians who have fled the country or have been internally displaced have gone up substantially. Syria is now believed to be the second-largest producers of refugees, after Afghanistan. According to the UN agency of refugees, women and children make up 75 percent of the refugees. The number of children who have been forced to flee reached one million earlier in 2013.

Although Syrian refugees have fled to numerous countries, a majority has ended up in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. A growing number of Syrian refugees entering Jordan and Lebanon have led to increasing tensions between the communities. Health services and educational services are experience pressure to accommodate more people without sufficient financial help. In addition, many Lebanese and Jordanian men have been placed out of work because Syrian men are willing to work for less. The longer the refugees stay put, more and more strain will be placed on host communities.



Response from the United Nations

The HRC and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights mandated an independent Commission of Inquiry to investigate human rights investigations in Syria in 2011. Navi Pillay, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, have repeatedly called upon the Syrian government to assume its responsibility to protect and prevent and prosecute perpetrators of international crime. The Security Council has received significant pressure to refer the case in Syria to International Criminal Court (ICC).

European Union

The European Union (E.U.) imposed economic sanctions against the Syrian regime in 2011 and has heightened sanctions periodically since then. In November 2012, the E.U. released a statement calling for President al-Assad to step down to allow for political transition. The U.K. and France have expressed the possibility of sending arms, however, the remaining nations in the E.U.

are worried that further militarization will only induce more violence.

The League of Arab States

Although the League of Arab States (LAS) initially stated they would not take unilateral actions in response to the crisis in Syria, the League introduced a peace plan, which called on the Syrian government to halt violence, release prisoners, allow media presence, and remove military presence from civilian areas, after nearly nine months of violence. When the Syrian failed to uphold the peace plan,

the League suspended Syria's membership and imposed economic sanctions against Syria.

Further Reading

<http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php/crises/crisis-in-syria#III>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23927399>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-23849587>

Eliminating Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Introduction

Article 2 of the United Nations' Declaration of Universal Human Rights states that everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms without distinction of any kind such as sex. However, members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities worldwide are exposed to discrimination and violations of human rights due to deeply embedded homophobic beliefs combined with inadequate legal protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. LGBT communities are discriminated against in labor markets, politics, schools, and even within families.

Since the founding of the United Nations in 1945, the issue of LGBT rights and discrimination against LGBT communities have not been brought up until 2008. The statement proposed to the U.N. General Assembly calls for a condemnation of violence, harassment, discrimination, exclusion, stigmatization, and prejudice based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In 2011, the Human Rights Council (HRC) passed a first ever resolution reaffirming the rights of LGBT people. The resolution calls for a report detailing the situation of LGBT people around the world the implement and follow-up the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action.

Despite efforts by the UN, homosexuality still carries a stigma. In some 76 countries, homosexuality is still illegal and offenders are subjected to arrest, imprisonment, torture, and even prosecution. Conversely, only 53

countries have established anti-discrimination laws for members of the LGBT community. A legal standard for universal LGBT rights must be establish to eliminate discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, as LGBT rights are basic human rights.

History

Before the 1960s, there was no common non-derogatory term to describe the LGBT member. The first widely used term to describe non-heterosexuality, homosexuality, was thought to carry negative connotations. The new social movements of the 60s inspired some LGBT activists to become more radical and the gay liberation movement emerged. The gay liberation movement brought the issue of homosexuality to the public by publicly 'coming out' as a form of activism. This has influenced many contemporary LGBT movements, most recently, marriage equality.

However, the LGBT movement has faced and continues to face oppositions. Such oppositions may be motivated by religious beliefs, moral beliefs, cultural beliefs, political ideologies, homophobia, and a variety of other factors. Acceptance of sexuality varies across cultures. According to the 2007 Pew Global Attitudes Award, "Throughout Western Europe and much of the Americas, there is widespread tolerance towards homosexuality. However, the United States, Japan, South Korea, and Israel stand apart from other wealthy nations on this issue; in each of these countries, fewer than half of

those surveyed say homosexuality should be accepted by society. Meanwhile, in most of Africa, Asia and the Middle East, there is less tolerance toward homosexuality” [1].

Religious oppositions to homosexuality are seen in various religions. Within Christianity, there are a variety of views on the issue of homosexuality. Each denomination varies in their position on the issue. Some condemn homosexuality as a sinful act while others see it as morally acceptable. In Islam, homosexual acts are forbidden according to Sharia law and punishable by law in most Islamic states. In Saudi Arabia, Iran, Yemen, United Arab Emirates, Mauritania, Nigeria, and Sudan, same-sex intercourse is punishable by death penalty. In other countries, homosexual activities are punishable by fines, jail time, or corporal punishment. In Egypt, openly gay men have been prosecuted under general public morality laws. In Saudi Arabia, homosexual acts are punishable by public execution; however, the government will use other forms of punishment unless they feel homosexuals are challenging the authority.

Current Situation

Over the past decade, there has been a resurgence of LGBT movement around the world. Following the resolution proposed by South Africa in 2011, the HRC urged all countries to enact laws protecting basic LGBT rights. LGBT right laws include government recognition of same-sex relationships, adoption, laws for equal housing and employment, laws to protect LGBT children, etc. LGBT right laws vary greatly from country to country.

European Union and The Americas

Homosexuality is legal in the European Union (E.U.) and is socially acceptable in most EU states. Since 2000, discrimination in employment against members of the LGBT communities has been banned. LGBT rights are protected under E.U. laws and treaties although the degree of protection and recognition varies depending on the country.

In Canada, same-sex marriages have been legal and recognized since 2005. Brazil and Uruguay legalized same-sex marriages in 2013. In the United States, same-sex marriages are legal in 14 states and are federally recognized. However, it is banned in other states.

Asia

Israel is the only country to recognize same-sex relationships and have laws protecting LGBT rights. Homosexuality is outlawed in some 20 Asian countries. In Islamic regimes, homosexuality is illegal and there exists no laws that protect LGBT communities from discrimination. In some Muslim countries, same-sex sexual activity is punishable by the death penalty.

Africa

According to the International Gay and Lesbian Association, homosexuality is illegal approximately 38 African countries. In 13 countries, homosexuality is legal or there are no official laws pertaining to LGBT rights. In Mauritania, Sudan, and Nigeria, homosexuality is punishable by death. In some countries homosexuality is punishable by life imprisonment. South Africa expresses the most tolerant beliefs about homosexuality, but even so, LGBT rights are exclusive to the upper class.

Things to Consider

- De-stigmatizing homosexuality
- Overcoming religious, cultural and political differences between nations
- Role of government agencies and NGOs
- Establishment of international standards for LGBT rights

Further Reading

[1] <http://pewglobal.org/files/pdf/258.pdf>
<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=35976&Cr=sexual&Cr1=#.UqUrPGRDtbC>
<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/ga10801.doc.htm>
<http://iglhrc.org/>
“Human rights, sexual orientation, and gender identity” resolution passed in UNHRC