

## **Topic A: Rights of Translators**

Translators often play an imperative, yet overlooked, role in times of crisis. Native translator employees make up the bass of a counterinsurgency strategy reliant on building trust with local villages. They accompany military and special forces in everything they do (I.e. night raids, helicopter insertions and they often do so unarmed. Additionally, translators initiate the process of communication across State Departments, NGOs and many UN bodies. They are often employed at median wages for the help they offer, but the price they are forced to pay once their job with the counterinsurgency effort is over is a much heavier one.

A study conducted by Baker et. al in 2010 highlights the participation of the translators themselves in elaborating the range of the public narratives of the conflict that become available to the media and in doing so, influence the course of the war/crisis in ways that are subtle, often invisible but nevertheless extremely significant

(<https://www.stjerome.co.uk/tsa/abstract/12239/>)

Whether they are interpreting foreign documents or military strategies for their birth nations, opposing nations, or simply using their knowledge to benefit their community, translators and interpreters face real danger once the crisis has settled and they must attempt to return to normalcy. For example, Sadar Khan, a 26 year old Afghan native, has spent seven years working as a translator for the United States Army. In an interview done after the war has subsided, Sadar states he is proud of the service he has provided, yet he lives in fear every day - fear that his children might one day disappear, or that his wife will suddenly fall ill and no one in their community will want to take care of her. He lives in fear because essentially, he has lost the trust of the majority of the Afghani people and all they see in him is the hatred they feel for the foreigners they associate with the decrepit state of their current economy and government.

What is important to understand is that often times, in places such as Afghanistan, Pakistan among many others, villages are places of unique interconnectedness. The people in these villages are in constant contact and word spreads fast. Khan says, "[The villagers] are waiting for a small chance, like if the security gets a little bit worse. I am really concerned about my babies. I love them more than my life."

Despite their aid with the American effort, Afghani translators like Khan must wait anywhere from 3-6 years (if they are the chosen few who even get to wait) to be granted a special immigrant visa to travel to the United States, where they can make a living once more and establish a life they most likely would never have in their native land. Critics describe the process of applying for a visa as opaque, prohibitively complicated and achingly slow. A look at the workings of the Visa allotment may point to a source of the problem: the current version of the visa program started in 2009 when congress passed the Afghan Allies Protection Act (which made 7500 visas available for endangered Afghan employees of the US military and government) has only resulted in about 2000 visas. Where is the disconnect? The applications cost thousands, and there seems to be an endless pile of them to merely get an interview and once that process is done, there is still nothing in place to guarantee a trip to safety for these employees.

Now, the issue we have been focusing on not only occurs in Afghanistan but in other nations and situations as well. In general, there are many people who are employed by a foreign nation to help with their side of the issue and although it is up to that individual to choose to work for the foregone nation, the offer of the better than average pay is enough to win most

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over. Then the villagers, or the native's community turns to the ex-employee for any problems that arise once the conflict is over.

As the UNESCO committee, we are concerned with the rights of these translators and the definition of the rules and duties of the profession. The UNESCO would be tasked with promoting governments of countries where translators translate to defend the interest of translators, facilitate linguistic, cultural, scientific, and technical exchanges among translators and undertake certain activities.

As delegates do their background research they should thoroughly think about what policies can we build around protecting these translators. You may use previous related UNESCO resolutions or recommendations as starting point for you research.

Goodluck!

## **Topic B: Status of Israeli/Palestinian Heritage Sites**

### **Background on the Conflict**

The land of Palestine is the geographic region in Western Asia between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. The region is also known by some as the Land of Israel. The essence of the conflict that exists between the people who inhabit this geographically small land is that both Palestinians and Israelis claim proprietorship of the land(1). Situated in the location between Egypt, Syria and Arabia and the birthplace of both Judaism and Christianity, the region has had a long and turbulent history. Naturally, this historic land has become a crossroads of religion, culture, commerce and politics. In the history books, you can count the number of civilizations that have roots in this location: Ancient Egyptians, Canaanites, Israelites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Ancient Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, the Sunni Arab Caliphates, Crusaders, Ottomans, British and modern Israelites and Palestinians (2).

Partially due to this fluid rate of change in the area, the UNESCO is concerned with maintaining the cultural heritage of Palestine/Israel.

If we take a look back to the 19th century, the land of Palestine was inhabited by a multicultural population - approximately 86 percent muslim, 10 percent Christian and 4 percent Jewish - living in peace. For centuries, there was no conflict (3).



In the late 1800s, a group of Zionists, who represented an extremist minority of the Jewish population then decided to colonize this land. Their goal was to establish a stable Jewish homeland, and they considered locations in Africa and the Americas, before settling in Palestine. As more of their population moved into the area and the migration gained momentum, the indigenous

population became more and more alarmed by the sudden rush of Zionists into their previously settled land. During the time of the rise of power of Hitler and after the end of the Holocaust especially, hundreds of thousands of more Jewish people sought a sanctuary in their now proclaimed land. At this point in time, the conflict gained momentum. In 1947, the UN decided to intervene. Many of the indigenous Palestinian people were under the impression that the usual principle of “self-determination of peoples” would deb applies to allow them to create their own state and way of government. However, the UN decided to divide up the region and recommended that they give away a little more than half of their land to the Jewish state. Despite the fact that their numbers were growing, the Jewish population accounted for around 30% of the population at the time.

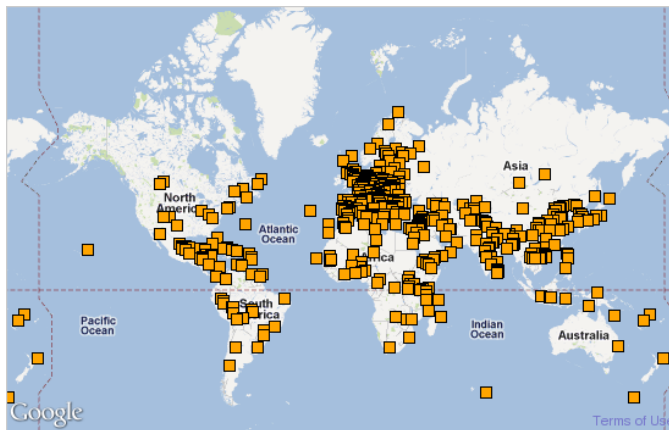
Now, the conflict between Israel and Palestine is one of the most “enduring explosive of all worlds’ conflicts”. According to Times, the Palestinian people have endured colonization, expulsion and military occupation for the past 100 years. During the period of the 1947-49 War, the neighboring Arab states joined forces with the Palestinians to move the Zionists back to secluded regions of the land. However, by the end of the war, Israel had conquered 78

percent of Palestine, over 500 towns and villages had been obliterated and a new map was drawn. It seemed that the culture of the Palestinians was being erased by the war. New towns were named in Hebrew (2-4).

Later, during the Six Day War, Israel still gained more land (1967). The current conflict exists on the basis of two primary issues. Firstly, there is the fact that the original population of what is now Israel was 96% Muslim and Christian and yet there people have inevitably been turned into refugees who are stuck in their ambitions to returning to their homes. Second, Israel's continual military occupation and confiscation of privately owned land in the West Bank and control over the Gaza Strip are incredibly oppressive and human rights violations have been committed in bombings, air strikes and acts of violence from both sides. Few of the Palestinians held in Israeli prisons have had a fair trial; physical abuse and torture are frequent and the borders of Palestine are controlled by Israeli forces. In 1993, it was decided by the Oslo peace accords that these territories were to be ultimately returned to the Palestinian state. However, after years of confiscation, the Palestinian population rebelled (an uprising known as the Intifada, 2000) (2-4).

#### Heritage Sites:

The UNESCO committee lists heritage sites (such as forests, mountains, lakes, monuments, complexes, or cities) that are of special cultural or physical importance. The program is responsible for cataloging, naming, and conserving sites of outstanding cultural or natural importance to there community of humanity. Under cenrtain conditions, the sites can obtain funds from the World heritage Fund. In 2005, the selection criteria for cultural heritage was modified so that there was one set of ten criteria. One of these criteria states that the manumitted site must "bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared"



The region in dispute between Palestine and Israel in fact holds some of the world's oldest heritage sites which have significant ties to the world's most prominent monotheistic religions. The heritage sites in this land are visited by thousands of pilgrims each year for religious and spiritual purposes. That is why, when the UNESCO reported in the lated 1990s that the occupation of the West Bank was endangering many of the Palestinian archaeological and cultural property in the area, a deliberate

campaign was started to maintain whatever piece of culture was left. The problem was defined as follows, "This endangers the Palestinian cultural heritage and denies the Palestinian people their cultural property...it also limits the opportunities for development and access to heritage sites and historic place of worship." (5)

In Spring of 2010, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu added two shrines (Hebron's



A farmer plants eggplant in the terraced field in the village of Battir, which has been nominated as a World Heritage site by UNESCO. (7)

Tomb of the Patriarch & Bethlehem's Rachels' Tomb) to Israel's list of national heritage sites and included them in a planned heritage trail that would span the North-South border of the Western Bnks. The issue is that this region was regarded by the Palestinian people as sacred in their own religion and they assert that this was just another way for the Israeli population to takeover what land Palestine had left. The United States has also publicly shown that it is not in agreement with Israel's unilateral designation of the two shrines as Israeli national heritage sites. Reportedly,

there have been several Arab-led draft decisions dealing with safeguarding the city of Jerusalem and education and cultural institutions in the Arab-occupied territories. For example, one resolution asked that the Israeli authorities remove the Palestinian tomb sites from their national heritage list and these drafts passed by majority but Israel stated that UNESCO failed as it stepped into the realm of politics rather than promoting the heritage of historical sites around the world. Furthermore, they have not been cooperative with other efforts led by UNESCO.

Even more recently, in June of 2014, the UNESCO World Heritage Program has nominated the village of Battir (south of Jerusalem) a Site in Danger. the fate of Battir is of international concern because of the potential human rights violations that will affect generations by ill-considered actions that cannot be reversed. Israel's illegal Separation Barrier will destine Battir and its people to become uprooted and people will thus be deprived of their rights to cultural participation, economic security, self determination and dignity. In this unique Palestinian village, there are also unparalleled cross cultural cooperations between Palestinian and Israeli organizations for the preservation of a cultural landscape. Israeli communities as well as Israeli Nature and Parks Authority have shown concern about the destruction of natural and historic landscapes if the planned route for the separation Barrier continues. (6-8)

This topic ties into the conflict between Israel and Palestine regarding their history. The debate will also focus on the general protection of historic sites in the path of landmark alterations due to violence and national unrest. Since the region in dispute specifically here holds some of the world's oldest heritage sites which have great historic and religious significance not only to the people directly living in these nations but also to the millions who identify with Islam or Judaism across the globe.



Questions to consider:

The debate will have a broad and specific theme: the conflict between Palestine and Israel as it relates to cultural, economic history, heritage and progress. Some specific debate will be necessary to move forward on the issue of setting up boundaries on heritage sites such as the one in Battir in addition to discussing how to determine who has the right to 'claim' sites such as tombs - if any side is to have sole proprietorship. The delegates of committee are expected to be factual, unbiased, diplomatic and respectful of the religions, cultural practices and sovereignties of each nation involved. Keep in mind that we want you to come up with detailed solutions that will be able to be implemented in disputed regions. As it stands, if Battir is to be ravaged, the economy of the region (which rests on Olive tree products and the freshwater wells located there) will both figuratively and literally shrivel up. It is up to us to define the problem, stand firm on our decisions and compromise with one another to settle this dispute and make ground for solutions to future ones that will surely arise with time.

1. How should UNESCO address the issue of protection of historically significant lands. With the non-cooperative past of Israel, how can they assure that progress can be made?
2. What do the fates of the village of Battir have in common with other villages that have been lost to the Israel confiscation?
3. How does the nomination of Battir as a World Heritage site even effect the conflict in Palestine? Will this aggregate situations: why or why not?
4. Where does your nation stand on the issue historically? Are there any diplomatic ways to get the two hostile nations to coexist?
5. Addressing the issue of the tombs and other monuments that are claimed by both sides - to whom do these sites belong? How do non-aligned states play a role? Should UNESCO explicitly define where it stands with issues such as this one?
6. What are some of the most up-to-date facts, figures and statistics regarding the issue?

References:

- (1) <http://www.un.int/wcm/content/site/palestine/cache/offonce/pid/11598;jsessionid=75E12AE0367B43DECE3357D9120E27CF>
- (2) <http://israelipalestinian.procon.org/view.resource.php?resourceID=000635>
- (3) (Justin McCarthy, author of The Population of Palestine: Population History and Statistics of the Late Ottoman Period and the Mandate, provides detailed information on population in the excerpt "Palestine's Population During The Ottoman And The British Mandate Periods."  
(<http://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Palestine-Remembered/Story559.html>)
- (4) This is touched on in: John V. Whitbeck, "What 'Israel's right to exist' means to Palestinians," Christian Science Monitor, Feb 2, 2007,  
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