

Human Rights Council (HRC)

Honorable Delegates,

Welcome to the Human Rights Council at MIT's fifth annual MITMUNC! My name is Marayna Martinez and I will one of your chairs for this conference. I am a freshman majoring in Course 6, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. This is my seventh year doing MUN and my fourth time chairing a conference. This is my first time chairing a high school conference; so, hopefully, this is will be an enriching experience of all of us!

Hello! My name is Nikita Kodali, and I will be your HRC co-chair this year. I am currently a sophomore majoring in Mechanical Engineering with a concentration in Controls, Robotics, and Instrumentation. Throughout the school year, I am involved with MIT Bhangra (an Indian dance team), TechX THINK team, Design for America, and the Undergraduate Association Events Committee. I am passionate about international development, and am currently working to expand a program based in Indian Institute of Technology in Chennai, India, to improve the quality of government education in India. I'm so excited to be a chair for this committee this year and I wish you all the best!

The Human Rights Council is a subgroup of the United Nations that focuses on promoting human rights and addressing human rights violations. We will be discussing two topics throughout this conference: children in armed conflicts and the refugee crisis in the Middle East. Both of these topics have pretty long histories, but they are also relevant right now. In this background guide, you will find some basic information about the topics, a few guiding questions, and some resources you should use for your own research. Keep in mind, this background is very general and you are going to need to do your own research specific to your country.

As far as expectations go for this committee, we would like to see some good discussion from everyone. That means two things. First, everyone needs to come prepared. The best resolutions and discussion comes from delegates that know their positions well and stick to them. Second, we need to have an environment where everyone has a chance to speak. Overall, the way the committee goes is really dependent on you guys. So, please come prepared and read to discuss. On a more general note, keep in mind the Human Rights Council is focused on protecting human rights. So, even though none of the topics are explicitly about human rights, you should still focus in on that idea.

We look forward to meeting you guys and I can't wait to see what you all come up with! Good luck with your research and I'll see you in February!

Best,
Marayna Martinez
Nikita Kodali
MITMUNC HRC Chairs

The Human Rights Council

The Human Rights Council is a subset of the United Nations General Assembly. Their main goal is to promote human rights around the world. These use four main avenues to help them achieve this goal.

1. **The Universal Periodic Review:** Periodically, the Human Rights Council sends third party surveyors to nations in order to determine whether or not they are violating human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Charter, and third party treaties determine the human rights they look out for.
2. **Special Procedures:** The Human Rights Council has a group of human rights experts that are mandated to investigate the human rights situations within specific areas. These experts report back to the HRC and, most of the time, the General Assembly.
3. **Advisory Committee:** This committee is a group of 18 experts that advise the HRC when requested. They provide mostly academic and research-based advice.
4. **Complaint Procedure:** The HRC takes complaints from individuals, groups, or non-governmental organizations that claim to be victims of human rights violations. The complaints are investigated and handled accordingly.

Using information from the avenues listed above, the HRC meets to discuss how to handle situations where human rights are at risk. They discuss the situations and seek to write resolutions that remedy the violations. During debate, the committee keeps the following principles in mind:

- Universality
- Impartiality
- Objectivity
- Non-selectiveness
- Constructive dialogue and cooperation
- Predictability
- Flexibility
- Transparency
- Accountability
- Balance
- Inclusive/comprehensive
- Gender perspective
- Implementation and follow-up of decisions

During committee session, members of the HRC also need to keep in mind the powers they are allowed to exercise. The HRC achieves most of its goals through

dialogue, capacity building, and technical assistance. Dialogue would include things like releasing reports on the state of human rights or beginning initiatives to raise awareness for a particular group or set of victims. Capacity building would be initiatives that direct manpower and resources towards areas of conflict. The HRC can't ask for peacekeeping forces. However, they can coordinate with non-governmental groups and recruit volunteers to offer technical assistance to areas in jeopardy. Because of their limited powers, resolutions produced in this committee should not contain strong operative clauses like those that would be used for a resolution from the Security Council.

Our Topics

Our topics are not new challenges. Children in armed conflicts and refugees have been issues that the Human Rights Council has been dealing with since its inception. However, due to recent events, these issues are now in a new and more challenge context. The Human Rights Council has set a good basis for handling these issues. The resolutions produced in this committee can take inspiration from past actions, but fresh ideas are needed to combat the specific situations that face the world today. Resolutions should also take into account past actions that didn't work and maybe think of ways to adjust their solutions.

How to Use This Guide

The next few pages of this guide will outline our two topics. History, possible positions, country blocs, and guiding questions will be provided. This guide is designed to get you started, but individual research will still be needed. Once, you have read through the guide, start thinking about the guiding questions and take a look at the citations and links. Look into your country's interaction with other nations, the HRC, and the two topics. Your position paper should reflect individualized research and ideas.

Understanding Children in Armed Conflicts

The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflicts lists 6 major violations that involve children in areas of conflict: killing and maiming, child recruitment, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, denial of humanitarian access, and abductions.

Killing and Maiming

Killing and maiming occurs when children are in areas targeted by bombings or in areas where landmines remain unexploded. According to Security Council Resolution 1882, systematically killing or maiming children constitutes grounds to be added to the Security Council's annual list of shame.

Child Recruitment

Children are recruited for a variety of tasks when it comes to warfare. Most commonly we associate child recruitment with child soldiers or children used for acts of terror like suicide bombings. However, children are also enlisted for dangerous tasks like carrying ammunition. Rescuing children from child recruitment is extremely difficult and the recovery process is brutal. The Rome Statute makes it a war crime for children under the age of 15 to be enlisted or persuaded into taking part in hostile activities.

Sexual Violence

Children in areas of war are susceptible to being enlisted into prostitution in exchange for basic human needs and safety. Sometimes child recruits are even forced to participate in acts of sexual violence. The Rome Statute makes sexual violence a war crime and a crime against humanity.

Attacks on Schools and Hospitals

Schools and hospitals are meant to be safe havens for children. However, this also makes these locations targets for acts of terror. Attacking schools and hospitals not only harms those that can't protect themselves, but also intimidates children, especially girls, into abandoning their educations or medical help. Schools and hospitals are classified as civilian areas and as such attacking schools and hospitals puts nations and groups on the Secretary General's list of shame.

Denial of Humanitarian Access

Humanitarian access can be denied to civilians as a warfare tactic or supplies lines could be lost during the fighting. Denying access to civilians or attacking humanitarian workers are acts that can be considered war crimes or crimes against humanity under the 4th Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocols.

Abductions

Children can be abducted from civilian areas and refugee camps. After they have been abducted, they could be used as child soldiers, forced into sexual slavery, or

trafficked across borders. Abducting children especially in areas of conflict is against the Geneva Conventions and seen as a war crime and crime against humanity.

Definitions

- Crimes Against Humanity: Widespread and systematic acts directed at a civilian population including murder, enslavement, torture, sexual violence, persecution of a particular subset of people, etc.
- War Crimes: Crimes that violate the Geneva Convention and the Rome Statute, this includes acts like targeting civilians or hospitals and schools, taking hostages, enlisting children under the age of 15, etc.

Current Events

Central Africa

As an area filled with civil war, several African nations have been cited for violations against children. Most recently, the Central African Republic, Sudan, and South Sudan were cited for violations and recommended for action by the Security Council. The situation in the Central African Republic has been ongoing mostly in the past two years. Rebel forces known as Seleka began to fight against the established government in 2012. After gaining allies from groups in surrounding nations, the Seleka fought against the Central African government backed by Chad, Gabon, Cameroon, Angola, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Republic of Congo. In March of 2013, the president fled the country and the leader of the Seleka declared himself president. The International Criminal Court indicted former President Bozize for war crimes and genocide and President Djotodia was formally recognized as the transitional head of state. However, the government began to show signs of division. A new group known as anti-Balaka (a Christian group) began to fight the majorly Muslim Seleka group. Recently, there have been reports of massacres and mass amounts of Muslim refugees. Meanwhile, since South Sudan's liberation, areas between Sudan and South Sudan have become areas of armed conflict. Somalia's ongoing civil war has also made it a place for major human rights issues especially those concerning children in armed conflicts.

Middle East

Middle Eastern nations such as Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic have also been listed on the November 2014 watch list. Three major conflicts in the Middle East have spurred possible human rights violations: the Syrian Civil War, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the presence of ISIS. The Syrian Civil War has put civilians in harm's way, which has led to mass amounts of refugees and internally displaced peoples. The Arab-Israeli conflict endangers civilians in the West Bank and Gaza strip. This past summer there were reports of groups using civilians as human shields. Meanwhile, the conflict with ISIS continues spreading to multiple nations and putting children in danger. ISIS is not affiliated with any nations, so rather than hiding in military bases, they tend to hide in civilian areas to gain protection from drone strikes. However, several drone strikes led by the United States and other western countries still target these civilian areas. Additionally, ISIS has been

reported to be abducting children and recruiting child soldiers. In November of 2014 a third party consulting group on children in armed conflict cited Iraq for recruiting children to fight ISIS.

These are just two hot spot areas in the news today. Smaller instances have been cited in nations like Myanmar, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, and the Philippines. Keep this in mind during discussion.

Guiding Questions

1. What are tactics that could be used to help refugees now?
2. What are some methods that could be used to help refugees find more permanent homes?
3. How can the committee guarantee that humanitarian aid is reaching the intended targets and places like schools are protected?
4. What can be done about child recruitment?
5. How can child soldiers be rescued and cared for?
6. Should drone strikes on civilian areas be a cause for concern?
7. What general protocols could be strengthened to lessen the danger for children in all armed conflicts?
8. What can be done to help children suffering in areas of particular conflict like those mentioned above?

Understanding the Refugee Crisis

This topic is much more narrow than the topic on children in armed conflict. For the purposes of this conference we will be focusing specifically on Middle East region. From a human rights standpoint, refugees are some of the most vulnerable people in the world. They are the most at risk for losing their basic human rights. In addition to basic human rights, the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 protocol lay out several other rights refugees have including the right to not be expelled, not be punished for illegally entering another state, work, housing, education, public assistance, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, and be issued identification documents. Despite this convention, many refugees are attacked by or turned away from surrounding nations. Refugees are also more susceptible to abductions, human trafficking, and child recruitment. Most refugees also lack food security and access to clean water.

Definitions

- Refugees: Persons who have left their country to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster
- Internally Displaced Persons: Persons who have fled their homes because of war, persecution, or natural disaster, but have crossed no international borders
- Food Security: The concept of having physical and economical access to food that meets dietary needs

Current Situation

Right now, the refugee crisis in the Middle East stems from the Syrian Civil War. In March of 2011, Syrian pro-democracy protests began in Deraa. When the government responded with violence, the protests spread and the opposition began to arm themselves. As the country descended into civil war, civilian areas became war grounds. The fights lead to the first influx of internally displaced people and refugees. The human rights violations and war crimes also escalated along with the war. The UN commission of inquiry cited both sides for instances of murdering and torturing civilians as well as cutting off civilian supplies as a method of war. In the summer of 2013, chemical weapons were used on civilian populations, killing hundreds and leading to even more refugees. After the chemical weapon strikes, the number of refugees rose to a total of nearly 9 million. An estimated 3 million are displaced outside of Syrian borders and 6 million have fled their homes within the country. The refugees that have fled to surrounding countries have put a major strain on surrounding nations like Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt. Lebanon's population has increased by twenty percent due to the influx of refugees. The Syrian refugee crisis reached record highs at the end of 2013 and the Human Rights Council had to make a massive appeal for help. The funds are slowly dwindling and new methods needed for a long-term solution. In addition to the already fragile state of Syria, ISIS had capitalized on the discord and begun to claim areas in Syria and Iraq. ISIS supporters and smaller ISIS camps occupy much of

northern Syrian. Now, the rebels and the Assad regime are still fighting and both are fighting ISIS along with other nations in the Middle East and western nations. Civilians are caught in the crossfire and in need of more effective international help.

Future

The refugee crisis is a multifaceted one. On the most basic level, there needs to be discussion about the best ways to make sure refugees have shelter, food, and clean water. Beyond that, there should be discussion about how to handle nations that attack or turn away refugees. Then, we need to hear about some long-term ideas to get refugees into more permanent homes and prevent more civilians from becoming refugees.

Guiding Questions

1. How can we collect enough humanitarian aid to support all the refugees?
2. How can we effectively get humanitarian aid to people in need?
3. How can we get nations in the area to accept refugees without overwhelming their own nations?
4. How can we protect refugees and internally displaced people from the Syrian Civil War and ISIS?

Sources

United Nations. Human Rights Council. *5/1 Institution Building of the United Nations Human Rights Council*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print.

"UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL." *Welcome to the Human Rights Council*. United Nations Human Rights Council, n.d. Web. 19 Nov. 2014.

"The Six Grave Violations | United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict." *United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the SecretaryGeneral for Children and Armed Conflict*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Dec. 2014.

"What Are Crimes against Humanity?" *ICC - What Are Crimes against Humanity?* International Criminal Court, n.d. Web. 01 Dec. 2014.

"What Are War Crimes?" *ICC - What Are War Crimes?* International Criminal Court, n.d. Web. 01 Dec. 2014.

"Countries Where Children Are Affected by Armed Conflict | United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict." *United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the SecretaryGeneral for Children and Armed Conflict*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Dec. 2014.

"Uppsala Universitet." *Database*. UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia, n.d. Web. 01 Dec. 2014.

"Sudan: The Reality after the Split." *Inside Story*. Aljazeera, n.d. Web. 01 Dec. 2014.

"Watchlist." *Watchlist*. Watchlist on Children in Armed Conflict, Nov. 2014. Web. 01 Dec. 2014.

"Refugees, Displaced, Statelessness, Consequences of War, Conflict, Persecution." *UN News Center*. UN, n.d. Web. 01 Dec. 2014.

"Middle East and North Africa." *UNHCR News*. UNHCR, n.d. Web. 01 Dec. 2014.

"Syria: The Story of the Conflict." *BBC News*. BBC News, n.d. Web. 30 Nov. 2014.

"Refugees." *UNHCR News*. UNHCR, n.d. Web. 29 Nov. 2014.

"Internally Displaced People." *UNHCR News*. UNHCR, n.d. Web. 01 Dec. 2014.

"Food Security." *WHO*. WHO, n.d. Web. 30 Nov. 2014.