

Message from the Director of the United Nations General Assembly Third

Delegates,

Welcome to the XXVII Dayton Model United Nations Conference and welcome to General Assembly Third (GA3). My name is Sam Pugh and I look forward to guiding this body in facilitating meaningful cooperation and creative solutions to real world problems.

As one of the six main organs of the United Nations (UN), comprised of all 193 Member States, the General Assembly (GA) is the primary platform for wide-ranging discussion surrounding all issues covered by the *UN Charter*. The “Functions and Powers” of the General Assembly are outlined in Chapter IV of the Charter and provide the assembly with broad authority to discuss and formulate policy related to any issues within the charter. Further, the GA may make recommendations regarding these policy decisions to any organ of the UN.

Specifically, GA3 is responsible for agenda items relating to social, cultural, and humanitarian issues. GA3 has discussed and passed numerous resolutions relating to the advancement of racial and gender equality, the right to self-determination, refugee rights, the protection of children, the rights of disabled and ageing people, and other areas of humanitarian concern. Moreover, GA3 is concerned broadly with social development in a variety of areas such as criminal justice and drug control.

This background guide will introduce you further to the responsibilities and mandate of GA3—I encourage you to use it as merely a guide to inspire your research and deeper understanding, not an exhaustive indication of avenues to be explored and discussed in committee.

The topics before this assembly are:

1. Combating Xenophobia and the Systemic Abuse of Religious Minorities; and
2. Promoting Food Security and Public Health in Yemen.

I urge you all to remember that this is a learning conference and encourage you to utilize it as such. My staff and I are here to aid in your growth as delegates and sincerely welcome any questions you may have in that regard.

Sincerely,

Sam Pugh

Director of the General Assembly Third

DAYMUNC XXVII

I. Combating Xenophobia and the Systemic Abuse of Muslims and Other Religious Minorities

Introduction

Freedom of religion is a foundational pillar of the UN, as expressly exemplified by Article 18 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*¹ and as enveloped in Article I of the *UN Charter*.² However, an increased number of Member States are using superficially legitimate concerns related to public safety and national security as justification to promulgate centuries of abuse and oppression toward religious minorities. In fact, this abuse has become so violent and so prevalent that on May 28, 2019, the GA declared August 22nd to be “International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief.”³ A study conducted by the Pew Research Center spanning over a decade revealed that both government sanctioned harassment of religious groups and social harassment of religious groups, including violence, has continued to increase since 2007.⁴

Of all religions, Christianity is the most persecuted globally. 245 million people in the world, coming from over 100 States, experience persecution and discrimination solely because of their Christian faith. On average, 250 of these people are killed each month.⁵ Muslims faced similarly large-scale religious intolerance with harassment being reported in 140 States in 2017.⁶ Despite their relatively small population size, Jewish people also faced alarming rates of persecution with reports of harassment from 87 States.⁷

The international community is currently operating in the direct aftermath of endless acts of terror against religious groups such as the 2018 mass shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in the United States, the deadly 2019 bombing of a Kabul mosque in Afghanistan, the horrific 2019 Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka, the ongoing, involuntary detainment of Uighur Muslims in Chinese re-education camps, and many others. In light of this humanitarian crisis and ever-increasing violence, it is imperative that immediate and calculated action is taken on a global level to ensure the safety and equality of all religious groups.

Existing Frameworks

¹ A/RES/217A, Article 18

² Charter of the United Nations, Article 1

³ A/73/L.85, A/RES/73/296

⁴ *A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen Around the World*. Pew Research Center. July 15, 2019.

⁵ High-Level Panel Discussion on “Rebuilding Lives, Rebuilding Communities: Ensuring a Future for Persecuted Christians

⁶ *A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen Around the World*. “Harassment of religious groups steady in 2017, remaining at 10-year high.” Pew Research Center. July 15, 2019.

⁷ See above.

Freedom from religious discrimination and persecution was made paramount to the UN's mission with the enactment of the *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*.⁸ This declaration affirms every individual's right to observe his or her or their religion without any interference from individuals nor State governments and calls on States to enact or rescind legislation where appropriate to ensure this religious equality.⁹ The Declaration does prescribe that religious freedoms may be limited where needed to protect public safety and the fundamental freedoms of others;¹⁰ however, this is not intended to be used as a justification for States to enact discriminatory policies under the guise of public safety or counter-terror. In fact, The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy highlights religious tolerance, coexistence, and understanding as foundational in achieving a sustainable and effective counter-terror strategy.¹¹

The *Durban Declaration and Programme of Action* further highlights the importance of concerted measures to end xenophobia and discrimination by embracing a victim-centered approach to enacting policy.¹² The *Durban Declaration* underscores the compounded levels of discrimination, harassment, and potential violence faced by women and other vulnerable members of religious minorities and urges the consideration of such factors in policy considerations.¹³ Among other things, this declaration also supports the enactment of affirmative action programs to increase access to equal opportunities for members of discriminated against religious groups.¹⁴ It further highlights preventative measures against hate and intolerance in the media, employment, health, policing, and education.¹⁵ The Special Rapporteur on Religious Freedom noted specifically that education should be the primary means of obtaining tolerance, further emphasizing the importance of preventing hate and discrimination in that setting.¹⁶

A vital aspect of protecting the right of people to their religious beliefs is protecting the places in which they worship and express those beliefs. The UN highlighted the importance of ensuring the safety of religious places of worship with the *UN Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites*.¹⁷ One protective measure this plan highlights is the foundation of interfaith alliances and dialogue to dispel the misconceptions and ignorance that often leads to violent attacks on places of worship.¹⁸ Furthermore, cooperation and collaboration between religious leaders from different faiths along with government officials is important to ending intolerance and protecting religious

⁸ A/RES/36/55

⁹ A/RES/36/55, Article 4

¹⁰ A/RES/35/55, Article 1.3

¹¹ A/RES/60/288

¹² *World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Discrimination Declaration and Programme of Action*

¹³ See above

¹⁴ See above

¹⁵ See above

¹⁶ HR/CN/1072

¹⁷ *United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites: In Unity and Solidarity for Safe and Peaceful Worship*

¹⁸ See above.

worship.¹⁹ The involvement of these leaders in education and youth outreach to protect this vulnerable population from being inculcated with violent and extremist ideologies is also crucial to preventing defamation and destruction of religious sites.²⁰ While these preventative measures should be foremost in the fight against violence against places of worship, it is likewise essential that States develop risk assessment programs and adequate emergency response plans that are prepared to prevent further hate and violence from spreading in response to such attacks.²¹

Conclusion

Violence and religious intolerance are plaguing the international community at an increasing and alarming rate. It is the duty of Member States to collaborate with religious leaders, non-governmental organizations, and other necessary parties and bodies to ensure the freedom and safety of all their people to practice any religion they choose. This freedom is not to be limited by discriminatory policies shrouded in a façade of public safety— all such policies should be rescinded and replaced with mechanisms aimed at ensuring the public safety of *all* people, regardless of their religious beliefs.

Questions to Consider

1. How can States square the need for protections against violent extremists and terror with the need to ensure religious equality for all, especially followers of Islam?
2. In a global community where most States' counter-extremism policies are discriminatorily aimed, directly or indirectly, at Muslims, what mechanisms can be implemented to combat white supremacy?
3. What specific measures can be taken to protect against the unique discrimination and harassment faced by aggravatedly vulnerable members of religious minorities such as women?
4. How can law enforcement and other governmental officials better respond to the needs of vulnerable religious groups and be prevented from, instead, further compounding the discrimination faced by them?
5. What measures should be taken to carry out the implementation of the *Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites*?
6. How should the international community respond to state-sponsored, religiously motivated atrocities such as the detainment of Uighur Muslims in China?

¹⁹ A/RES/66/167

²⁰ SC/RES/2354

²¹ SC/RES/2396

II. Promoting Food Security and Public Health in Yemen

Introduction

Civil war has been raging in Yemen since 2015, leaving thousands of civilian casualties and injuries in its wake. Parties to the conflict have contributed greatly to what the UN has deemed the “world’s largest humanitarian catastrophe” by intentionally blocking the delivery of outside aid.²² Civilians have been unlawfully detained, held in inhumane conditions and, at times, even taken hostage as a war tactic. These acts are stark violations of international law and have devastated the Yemeni infrastructure, leaving the State and its people in ruins. Most urgent, perhaps, is the impediment of civilian access to food, healthcare, and other basic needs resulting from this incessant conflict.

Two-million children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years suffer from chronic malnutrition in Yemen.²³ Out of the 30.5 million Yemeni people, 14.4 million need immediate food assistance in order to survive.²⁴ The intense conflict and resulting infrastructure devastation throughout Yemen restricts access to aid and compounds the food insecurity throughout the region further.²⁵

The extreme food shortage faced by the Yemeni people is exacerbated moreover by the inability to access healthcare services. 274 healthcare facilities have been either damaged or destroyed by the ongoing conflict, leaving 14.8 million people with no access to healthcare.²⁶ 14.5 million people lack access to basic necessities such as clean water and hygiene services, escalating the public health crisis even further.²⁷

Existing Frameworks

The humanitarian crisis in Yemen is compounded by poverty, corruption, and lack of democracy.²⁸ In response to political uprisings in Yemen in 2011, the UN acted to facilitate negotiations between the Yemeni government and its opposition. These negotiations resulted in the *Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative and Implementation Mechanism for the Transition Process in Yemen*, which aimed to foster a smooth and sustainable transition into democratic governance in Yemen.²⁹ To further aid in this transition, the Secretary General established the Office of the Special Envoy to the Secretary-General on Yemen (OSES-GY).³⁰ This Special Envoy used its resources to support a National Dialogue Conference between the conflicting regions and factions in Yemen; the Outcome Document resulting from this conference laid the foundation for a democratic and stable Yemen which will govern in accordance with human rights.³¹ Despite these efforts, the conflict in Yemen has persisted,

²² Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2019*, “Yemen Events of 2018”

²³ World Food Programme Yemen Country Brief, September 2019

²⁴ See above

²⁵ See above

²⁶ World Health Organization Yemen Situation Report

²⁷ See above

²⁸ Ronald Hovring, Norwegian Refugee Council, *10 things you should know about the crisis in Yemen*, January 25, 2018.

²⁹ Agreement on the Implementation Mechanism for the Transition Process in Yemen in Accordance with the Initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

³⁰ UNmissions.org, Office of the Special Envoy to the Secretary-General on Yemen

³¹ Office of the Special Envoy to the Secretary-General on Yemen, “National Dialogue Conference”

democratic governance is still not established, and the humanitarian crisis has continued to worsen. This desperate situation is left with little hope for resolve by future generations, as almost 50% of Yemeni youth were not in any educational program nor employed as of 2014.³² Consequently, these children especially vulnerable to exacerbate the crisis of poverty and lack of governance throughout Yemen rather than combating it.³³

The UN and its Member States have mobilized in response to this humanitarian crisis, organizing initiatives such as the 2018 Yemen High-Level Pledging event alongside the governments of Sweden and Switzerland.³⁴ This event resulted in donations needed to meet the urgent needs of the Yemeni people.³⁵ The 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan outlines further how the international community can collaborate to rebuild and stabilize Yemen, with a focus on the needs of civilians amidst such intense conflict.³⁶ However access to aid is made incredibly difficult by the closing of borders, airports, harbors, and other entryways into the country as a result of the conflict.³⁷ Women are faced with even greater challenges as Yemen falls last on a list in the UNDP's gender equality index—women's freedom of movement is greatly restricted, depleting access to aid further in a State where approximately 1/3 of displaced households are headed by females and gender-based violence has increased by 70%.³⁸

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has established a Country Program Framework for Yemen to span from 2019-2021 which outlines a plan to promote economic recovery and stability in Yemen in an attempt to counter these issues.³⁹ In furthering this, the UNDP has also partnered with UNAID to carry out the Yemen Emergency Crisis Response Project which aims to buffer the impact of the ongoing conflict on civilian households.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the involvement of neighboring and western countries in the conflict through selling weapons to warring parties, among other things, has only worsened the situation and lessened the impact of these efforts. Consequently, nearly three million people have been left homeless or forced to flee due to mis-aimed bombs in the region, even further stifling the reach of humanitarian efforts. Similarly, the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance has partnered with the World Health Organization (WHO) to meet the nutritional needs of Yemeni people and protect the health system from collapsing.⁴¹ In line with these goals, the WHO has worked alongside the UN International Children's Emergency Fund to reach nearly 400,000 people with life-saving cholera vaccines.⁴²

³² United Nations Development Programme Yemen, *Country Programme Framework*, July 2019-June 2021

³³ See above

³⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "2018 Yemen High-Level Pledging Event"

³⁵ See above

³⁶ 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan: Yemen, January- December 2019

³⁷ Ronald Hovring, Norwegian Refugee Council, *10 things you should know about the crisis in Yemen*, January 25, 2018.

³⁸ United Nations Development Programme Yemen, *Country Programme Framework*, July 2019-June 2021

³⁹ United Nations Development Programme Yemen, *Country Programme Framework*, July 2019-June 2021

⁴⁰ UNDP Yemen, "Yemen Emergency Crisis Response Project"

⁴¹ World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, "WHO and OFDA preserving and protecting Yemen's health system"

⁴² World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, "Second round of oral cholera vaccine reaches nearly 400 000 people in Aden, Taiz and Al Dhale'e"

Conclusion

Though significant steps have been taken to help the people of Yemen, the conflict is ongoing, and the people continue to suffer. Further efforts are needed both to meet the immediate needs of civilians impacted by this violent conflict as well as to rebuild the Yemeni infrastructure, so these response efforts are sustainable. It is the duty of the international community to act when faced with such profound humanitarian crisis as is the current state of Yemen.

Questions to Consider

1. How can response efforts aimed at meeting the immediate survival needs of civilians be made sustainable?
2. What can be done to prioritize the specific health-related needs of women and children in conflict-affected regions?
3. How can access to humanitarian aid be improved considering the ongoing conflict in Yemen?
4. What infrastructure-mechanisms can be implemented to address the public-health crisis?
5. How can access to health care services and other humanitarian aid be made more accessible to internally displaced persons? What efforts can be made to better reach these vulnerable populations?
6. What partnerships could be effective in reconstructing Yemeni civilization?