

**Sub-Saharan Model United Nations
Background Guide
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to Sub-Saharan Model United Nations (SAIMUN) Conference of 2019 and to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees plays a critical role in providing aid to refugees as well as ensuring the rights of refugees or displaced people are protected. Composed of 98 Member States, the UNHCR's mission is to provide international protection to refugees while seeking permanent solutions to problems regarding refugees.

The topics for the UNHCR are:

- I. Assessing Humanitarian Efforts in Africa and the Middle East
- II. Addressing the Syrian Refugee Crisis

We have provided this background guide to help you prepare for your committee debates. This background guide will give a general understanding of the history, recent developments, and current issues on each topic. Please note, this background guide only briefly discusses the committee's topics and does not provide insight to the position of any specific Member State. In order to be fully prepared for committee, delegates should conduct thorough research on their assigned Member States.

History

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), also commonly referred to as the United Nations (UN) Refugee Agency, was established on December 15, 1950 with the purpose of aiding those displaced by World War II. Initially, the committee was given a time line of three years to resolve the refugee crisis and then disband. It was not until July 28, 1951 that the UNHCR adopted the legal framework and guiding principles for the organization, known as the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

Throughout its inception, the UNHCR has faced many emergencies and crises dealing with the outpouring of refugees, starting in 1956 when the Soviets crushed the Hungarian Revolution and includes the decolonization of Africa in the 1960s, and issues in the Middle East primarily compose the 21st century efforts. The UNHCR has been of vital assistance to refugees, internationally displaced persons (IDPs) and stateless persons in almost every major conflict since World War 2 (WW2), in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Structure

The UNHCR acts under the authority of the General Assembly (GA) and reports to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Both the GA and ECOSOC provide the UNHCR with policy directives. The committee must act as a completely non-political character.

Mandate

The mandate as stated in the UN General Assembly resolution 428 (V) of 14 December 1950.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, acting under the authority of the General Assembly, shall assume the function of providing international protection, under the auspices of the United Nations, to refugees who fall within the scope of the present Statute and of seeking permanent solutions for the problem of refugees by assisting governments and, subject to the approval of the governments concerned, private organizations to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of such refugees, or their assimilation within new national communities.

However, the responsibilities of the UNHCR are constantly evolving; as situations around the globe change so much the UNHCR. In 2003, the UNHCR released the Agenda for Protection, “an ambitious, yet practical, program of action to improve the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers around the world”. All in all, the UNHCR vows to protect the forcibly displaced through government, non-governmental organizations, and private partnership.

I: Assessing Humanitarian Efforts in Africa and the Middle East

Refugees have been deprived of their homes, but they must not be deprived of their futures.

-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

Introduction

Crises, whether man-made or natural, cause immense suffering and uncertainty, not only because victims lose loved ones, homes, and livelihoods, but because their safety net also disappears—in the sense that victims of crises are usually left extremely vulnerable to violence, persecution, exploitation and other violations of their human rights. Luckily, since the onset of globalization and the expansion of transnational issues, joint efforts have been taken by international organizations and other major actors on the world stage to assist nations in crisis. From these crises, several terms are commonly used, but most often—refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). A refugee is “someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence.” A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. On the other hand, an internally displaced person (IDP) is a person who has been forced to flee his or her home for the same reason as a refugee, but remains in his or her own country and has not crossed an international border. More than 43 million people worldwide are now forcibly displaced as a result of conflict and persecution, the highest number since the mid-1990s. More than 15 million of the uprooted are refugees who fled their home countries, while another 27 million are people who remain displaced by conflict within their own homelands.

Background Information

The protection of millions of refugees and displaced persons is the core mandate of UNHCR. Grounded in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of human rights 1948, which recognizes the right of persons to seek asylum from persecution in other countries, “the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted in 1951, is the centerpiece of international refugee protection today.” The Convention was limited to protecting mainly European refugees in the aftermath of World War II, but another document, the 1967 Protocol, expanded the scope of the Convention and has thus given it universal coverage. The Convention clearly spells out who a refugee is and the kind of legal protection, other assistance and social rights he or she should receive from the countries who have signed the document, but unlike refugees, IDPs are not protected by international law or eligible to receive many types of aid. And as the nature of war has changed in the last few decades, with more and more internal conflicts replacing wars among countries, the number of IDPs has increased significantly. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, by the end of 2013, sub-Saharan Africa had the largest total number of IDPs (12.5 million) followed by the Middle East and North Africa (9.1 million). Currently, about 8.2 million people were newly displaced and 78% of all those newly displaced came from just five countries affected by conflict: Syria, DRC, the Central African Republic (CAR), Nigeria and Sudan.

Evidently, as the number of conflicts in the world increases, we see an unrivaled increase in the amount of humanitarian efforts worldwide; but most especially in the Middle East and Africa. Just like with every endeavor, there are challenges. Now more than ever, humanitarian efforts are met with several challenges that must be addressed in order to ensure the effectiveness of these efforts. One of the most common challenges facing the international community is that of aid diversion. From Somalia to Sudan and South Sudan, from Ethiopia to Syria, from Myanmar to the Philippines, it has proven increasingly difficult to distribute humanitarian aid without it being restricted by or diverted to government officials, rebel groups and other political actors.

Current Situation

As mentioned earlier, there are five top countries currently affected by conflict and with the highest number of displaced persons—Syria, DRC, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, and Sudan. For the purpose of this topic, we will focus on Syria (Middle East) and CAR (Africa).

A history of military coups and rebellion in the Central African Republic (CAR) has caused a sustained economic crisis in the country and impacted negatively on the national institutions' capacity to provide services and protection to the population. By virtue of its geography and history, CAR is located at the crossroads between two regions and two peoples: in the north, the Sahel with its pastoralist communities and majority Muslim merchants, and in the south, Central Africa with its communities of the savanna, initially animist but now predominantly Christian.

The Seleka power grab in March 2013 marked a fundamental reversal of CAR's traditional political landscape. For the first time since independence, a force stemming from the Muslim population of the north and east of the country held the reins of power. The ensuing clashes between Seleka and anti-balaka (Christian militia) forces "generated strong intercommunal tensions that were exacerbated by the instrumentalisation of religion, societal fractures and collective fears, reviving traumatic memories of the pre-colonial slave trade era." These tensions, which culminated in the killing and displacement of Muslims from the west, are still very high in the center of the country, the front line between armed groups. The conflict between anti-balaka and ex-Seleka is thus now compounded by a conflict between armed communities. In areas with frequent intercommunal clashes, the link between armed groups and communities is strong: ex-Seleka combatants are seen as the protectors of Muslims and anti-balaka fighters as the defenders of Christian communities.

Since December 2013, approximately 25 per cent of CAR's population has been internally displaced by the conflict, which has divided the country along ethno-religious lines. At the peak of the unrest in early 2014, more than 930,000 people were displaced. More than half of the population is still in need of humanitarian assistance. Concurrently, this conflict has had a regional impact, more than 190,000 Central African refugees having fled to Cameroon, Chad, the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) since December 2013. Since 2014, there has been a decrease in the influx of refugees to neighboring countries, but daily violent clashes continue to displace thousands already living in dire conditions. As opposing factions control vast areas and armed groups splinter, the situation is increasingly complex and unpredictable.

The presence of armed groups affects and limits humanitarian interventions. The looting of warehouses and aid convoys, threats to aid workers, and general insecurity, prevent humanitarian actors from fully deploying to rural areas and can lead to a temporary suspension of their activities. While the ongoing crisis has had an impact on the mainly Congolese (DRC) and Sudanese refugees, with some 6,000 Congolese refugees having opted to return to their country, the government position on asylum remains constructive. As the condition in CAR remains extremely volatile, the UNHCR and other world actors (including the national government), must keep taking appropriate actions to alleviate this crisis. Like António Guterres, High Commissioner for Refugees, aptly put it "The Central African Republic is falling through the cracks of international attention. This cannot be allowed to happen."

The situation in Syria is not much different. The Syrian Civil War began in the early spring of 2011, as part of the Arab Spring movement, with nationwide protests against President Bashar al-Assad's government. However, these peaceful protests quickly escalated after the government's violent crackdown, and rebels began fighting back against the regime. A United Nations report in late 2012 described the conflict as being "overtly sectarian in nature", between mostly Alawite government forces, militias and other Shia groups fighting largely against Sunni-dominated rebel groups. As of January 2015, the death toll had risen above 220,000 with estimates in April 2015 as high as 310,000,

with the majority of casualties being Syrian soldiers and popular resistance, followed by Islamist fighters.

With no political solution in sight and military confrontation continuing, the number of people affected by internal conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) is on a steady rise. Human rights violations and abuses continue to occur in the context of widespread insecurity and in disregard of international law, international humanitarian law, and human rights law. More than half of all Syrians have been forced to leave their homes, often multiple times, making Syria the largest displacement crisis globally. As of 31 July 2015, almost 1.2 million people have been internally displaced. Regretfully, the crisis only seems to be exacerbating. Currently in Syria, 12.2 million people remain in need of humanitarian assistance – a twelve fold increase since 2011 - **including more than 5.6 million children**, 7.6 million people have been displaced internally by this conflict, and an estimated 4.8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in hard to reach and besieged locations.

The majority of Syrian refugees are living in Jordan and Lebanon, the two smallest countries in the region, where “weak infrastructure and limited resources are nearing a breaking point under the strain.” In August 2013, more Syrians escaped into northern Iraq at a newly opened border crossing. Now they are trapped by that country's own insurgent conflict, and Iraq is struggling to meet the needs of Syrian refugees on top of more than one million internally displaced Iraqis. An increasing number of Syrian refugees are fleeing across the border into Turkey, overwhelming urban host communities and creating new cultural tensions. Further, hundreds of thousands of refugees are also attempting the dangerous trip across the Mediterranean Sea from Turkey to Greece, hoping to find a better future in Europe. Not all of them make it across alive of course, and those who do make it to Greece still face steep challenges — resources are strained by the influx and services are minimal.

Unfortunately, more than 50% of the Syrian refugees are children who have lost everything. Most have been out of school for months, if not years. The younger children are confused and scared by their experiences, lacking the sense of safety and home they need. The older children are forced to grow up too fast, finding work and taking care of their family in desperate circumstances.

In addition, Syria's development situation has regressed almost by four decades. Since the onset of the crisis in 2011, life expectancy is estimated to have shortened by almost 13 years and school attendance dropped more than 50 per cent. Syria has also seen reversals in all 12 Millennium Development Goal indicators. The Syrian economy has contracted by an estimated 40 per cent since 2011, leading to the majority of Syrians losing their livelihoods.

UN humanitarian agencies face a serious dilemma when delivering aid to Syria—in terms of finding effective measures to ensure that aid ends up in the hands of those who need it, even those in rebel held areas. In practice, more aid reaches populations who live in cities and towns controlled by the government as opposed to people who live in areas controlled by rebel groups. Some aid does make it to rebel-held areas, but delivering aid to the rebel controlled cities and towns require crossing a front line. This, in turn, requires negotiating with the Syrian government and rebel groups on a case-by-case basis, which means that far less aid makes it to rebel held areas. One solution to this problem might be to deliver aid directly to rebel held areas by crossing the border. Under this scenario, humanitarian agencies could load up their trucks in Turkey and drive across the border to rebel held towns and cities to deliver aid. The Assad government has most definitely not consented to this kind of cross border operation and there is a very real fear that should UN agencies like the WFP, UNICEF and others cross into Syria via Turkey to bring aid to rebel held areas without the consent of the government, the Assad regime would respond by kicking them out of Damascus. That means that the millions of civilian non-combatants, women and children who are currently served by relief

agencies in areas under the control of the government will go without the food, medicines, and vaccinations they need to survive.

Bottom line is: every year, the conflict has seen an exponential growth in the number of refugees and IDPs and the aggravation of general conditions in Syria. There are now four million Syrians scattered throughout the region, making them the world's largest refugee population under the United Nations' mandate, and at this rate, the U.N. predicts there could be 4.27 million Syrian refugees by the end of 2015 — the worst exodus since the Rwandan genocide 20 years ago.

Actions taken by the United Nations

The United Nations High Commissioners for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in 1950 by the General Assembly and their job is to take international action to protect refugees and solve problems with refugees. There have been organizations in the past dealing with refugees but the most efficient was the UNHCR and has stuck for the past 64 years. With so many people needing aid around the world, it is crucial for this organization to thrive in order to save lives and promote sovereignty to all member states.

In 1954, the new organization won the Nobel Peace Prize for its groundbreaking work in helping the refugees of Europe. More than a quarter century later, UNHCR received the 1981 award for what had become worldwide assistance to refugees, with the citation noting the political obstacles facing the organization. In more than five decades, the agency has helped tens of millions of people restart their lives. Today, a staff of some 6,600 people in more than 110 countries continues to help about 34 million persons.

By 1956, the UNHCR was facing its first major crisis when a huge number of refugees needed help after the Soviet forces crushed the Hungarian Revolution.⁴¹ Despite being a new organization and this being their first mass number of refugees to help at one time, they managed to resettle 100,000 people in the first 10 weeks of action. The UNHCR plans effectively and efficiently in order to be able to save people's lives while maintaining national sovereignty and protecting those refugees' human rights.

Along with refugees and internally displaced people, the UNHCR also promotes sustainable developments around the world. Close to 40 per cent of the population of the developing world lived in extreme poverty only two decades ago. Since then, the world has halved extreme poverty, with the UN's Millennium Development Goals greatly contributing to this progress. It is important to get these developing countries in a stable system of government while promoting peace within their territories and making them economically stable.

For the Central African Republic, the UNHCR is coming up with durable solutions to go back into the country and solve the problems with the internally displaced people. They already have plans with local and large corporations who are going to help almost 11,000 internally displaced people go through the procedures for their housing, land and property restitution. The UNHCR is in charge of 30% of all internally displaced people sites of the Central African Republic and run the Camp Coordination and Camp Management of all activities going in with the people who need assistance.

Syria had a major crisis from 2011 to 2013 with what started out as peaceful protests that escalated quickly and forced people to flee the country, forcing the UNHCR to help out with these refugees. The UNHCR had to scale up relief operations inside Syria and neighboring areas due to the large number of endangered people. By November 2012, the UNHCR had provided aid to more than 300,000 displaced people in Syria from this situation. Around June of 2013, it had become the biggest aid appeal in history adding up to \$4.4 billion. The UNHCR along with the governments of all surrounding countries came up with strategies to aid these large amounts of internally displaced people and refugees by using the camps and managing them as well as they could.

Committee Directive

What will the Central African Republic and Syria do to ensure that refugees and internally displaced people receive sufficient aid while maintaining national sovereignty? How can the refugees receive enough help while being given fair human rights? How do these countries plan on helping internally displaced people despite the fact that the UNHCR's original instructions do not specifically cover them? Can these countries come up with a way to protect these internally displaced people within their own borders? How will the Central African Republic and Syria fund the aid for these refugees and internally displaced people? Is it right to make certain countries take refugees and give them aid depending on what human rights laws they have for such people?

II: Addressing the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Introduction

The Syrian refugee crisis is the world's worst refugee crisis in a generation. This huge issue has created global turmoil. The number of those forcibly displaced from their homes has surpassed 50 million; one in every five among them is Syrian. The necessity of the international

International and Regional Framework

There is an array of international legal instruments that work to ensure equal rights for refugees affected by complex crises. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a foundational document that works to ensure equal rights for refugees. Article 14 states that "everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution. Furthermore, the Convention and Protocols Relating to the Status of Refugees is fundamental in defining the legal status of the word "refugee," the rights attached to that status, and the principle of international burden and responsibility sharing. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights are also integral human rights treaties that pertain to all human beings including refugees. Both of these treaties invoke human rights obligations for Member States and a separate set of rights for individuals such as access to healthcare and education and the right to self-determination.

Role of International System

The UNHCR is the lead agency that ensures equal rights for refugees during a complex crisis. UNHCR provides emergency assistance at the start of a complex crisis, including access to basic resources. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is the UN organ that provides initial humanitarian assistance during a complex crisis by coordinating a response, advocating for humanitarian issues, and developing policy. The UNHCR also assists with the registration of refugees, education and counseling, and the administration of refugee camps. When refugees are unable to return to their places of origin, the UNHCR assists with transportation, aid packages, and reintegration programs. UNHCR also facilitates resettlement and local integration programs. Regional organizations, NGOs, and community organizations share in the responsibility of providing assistance to refugees and ensuring equal rights. International cooperation in ensuring equal rights is fundamental, as refugees fleeing a complex crisis are especially vulnerable to food shortages, lack of shelter, gender-based violence, and other atrocities.

Current Situation: The complex crisis in Syria has resulted in the largest refugee crisis the world has witnessed since the 1940s. Mass protests erupted across Syria in March 2011, which triggered a brutal crackdown by the Syrian government and the beginning of a humanitarian disaster. 3.9 million Syrians have fled to other countries as refugees and that 7.6 million Syrians are internally displaced. Syrians are fleeing to surrounding countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt, which do not have the infrastructure to provide equal rights. The international community has responded in a number of ways to the Syrian refugee crisis. The UNHCR and OCHA developed the Syrian Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) to coordinate humanitarian assistance to those affected by the Syrian complex crisis. World Health Organization reached more than 13.8 million people in 2014 with emergency medical supplies, treatment, and equipment. Amnesty International states that 95% of the total numbers of Syrian refugees are located in five countries: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. The UNHCR has found that Lebanon is facing increased unemployment, decreased government revenue, and an overall decrease in economic activity as a result of the influx of Syrian refugees since 2011. Similarly, Jordan is facing economic strain, a lack of available public services such as health care, and shortages of water and food. Turkey also bears a huge burden due to the cost of taking in Syrian refugees as it pays 95% of the costs of housing citizens who have fled Syria and has received little funding assistance from the international community. Facing the huge financial burden of taking in more Syrian refugees, many of the bordering Member States have placed restrictions on the amount of Syrian refugees that can enter their countries. In a 2013 report, Amnesty International found that Jordanian border authorities would not let certain groups enter Jordan, would close the border for extended periods of time, and would forcibly return refugees to Syria. Lebanon has also begun to place restrictions strictly enforce entrance requirements on Syrian refugees entering the country.

Today, 39 million people have been forced to flee their homes due to conflict or natural disaster. 10 million are refugees and 29 million are internally displaced persons (meaning they have not crossed an international border). People displaced inside their countries face the same hardships as refugees but lack protection under international law. Usually, victims of war and oppression flee in large numbers, arriving in poor, underdeveloped states without the means to care for them. Most of these developing countries lack the sound infrastructure needed to facilitate a massive humanitarian response.

Making the situation worse, the conflict that forced them from their homes may destabilize the region in which they've sought refuge. They may flee to the safety of a refugee camp or settlement, only to be forced to flee again. When a refugee is forced to flee their home, they often leave all of their belongings behind. They walk dozens of miles to safety. If they arrive safely at their destination, they are still without food, water, shelter and medical care. And there is no guarantee they'll be able to stay.

Multiple non-governmental organizations have been actively involved in alleviating this crisis. The American Refugee Committee (ARC) is committed to making a difference wherever and however they are able. Gifts they receive from patrons help save lives and care for families suffering as a result of events completely out of their control. These gifts/donations will help restore clean water, give medical care, provide trauma counseling, and help people to rebuild their lives. ARC serves refugees and displaced people in Thailand, Pakistan, Uganda, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Somalia and Rwanda, and its programs around the world impact the lives of 2.5 million people each year in order to prevent terrorist's posing as refugees?

Intro and Overview

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