



Noble and Greenough Model United Nations

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High Commissioner for Refugees:
Syrian Refugee Crisis
Background Guide

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Sensitivity Statement

You are assuming the roles and responsibilities of diplomats, and therefore will be held to the ethical standards of the role. During NGMUN, we expect all delegate behavior to reflect the gravity and sensitivity of the international and individual impact of the topics being addressed, just as such topics would be addressed by professional diplomats. While the issues you debate are on the world stage and may seem distant from your lived experience, we ask that you approach debate with a high level of respect and sensitivity for others. Absolutely no racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, or any other forms of discrimination will be tolerated in or out of committee. This includes any such harmful rhetoric that can be attributed to the country or character you are representing. Any discriminatory language or ideas in speeches, resolutions, or at any other point in the conference is prohibited.



History and Current Situation

Syria, formally known as the Syrian Arab Republic, has been ruled by the Ba'ath party since 1963. The Ba'ath party, a highly radical socialist organization, is known for its human rights abuses and its violent suppression of any opposition parties. In 2010, the Arab Spring uprisings across the Middle East were met with similar violence in Syria. The Arab Spring protesters armed themselves and formed factions that came into conflict with Assad's regime. Assad's armed forces carried out debilitating strikes on highly populated civilian areas as an attempt to combat the opposition, displacing 14 million innocent Syrian civilians, of which 6.8 million have fled the country. Inside Syria, 70% of the population is in need of humanitarian assistance, and 90% of the population is below the poverty line. Terrorist groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) took advantage of the instability to begin carrying out terrorist attacks of their own. The refugees, both inside and outside of Syria, live in terrible conditions inside tent cities with little access to clean water, medical care, or adequate food. Some have been granted asylum in neighboring countries, but most nations do not want to admit large numbers of foreign refugees. Thus, many Syrians are trapped in limbo, unable to return to their homes and unable to find refuge elsewhere. To this day, almost 15 years later, the situation has not improved much. Fighting still rages in Syria, displacing more and more people. Refugees cross into Europe using unreliable boats, which often capsize and sink, killing many refugees, especially women and children.

Relevant UN Action

UNHCR was created in 1950 to address the refugee crisis that resulted from World War II. The 1951 Refugee Convention established the scope and legal framework of the agency's work, which initially focused on Europeans uprooted by the war. Beginning in the late 1950s, displacement caused by other conflicts, from the Hungarian Uprising to the decolonization of Africa and Asia, broadened the scope of UNHCR's operations. Commensurate with the 1967 Protocol to the Refugee Convention, which expanded the geographic and temporal scope of refugee assistance, UNHCR operated across the world, with the bulk of its activities in developing countries. By its 65th anniversary in 2015, the agency had assisted more than 50 million refugees worldwide.

With relevance to the Syrian refugee crisis, the UNHCR has intervened directly several times. The UNHCR was prominent in helping Syrian refugees in Lebanon. When the Lebanese government was unable to withstand the influx of refugees, the



UNHCR stepped in and eased the displacement for the refugees mainly by offering food and healthcare. They also helped register the refugees, so they would not be considered illegal in the eyes of the Lebanese government. The UNHCR's Mid-Year Trends report of June 2015 (based on information for mid-2015 or latest available information up to that date) reported an "unprecedented" 57,959,702 individuals falling under its mandate (for reference, on 1 January 2007, 21,018,589 people – or less than half of the number in 2015 – fell under the mandate of the UNHCR). The sharp increase was mainly attributed to the Syrian Civil War. The UN created mandatory refugee quotas that each member country had to accept. However, most countries found ways to evade or ignore these quotas. Even so, some refugees found new homes all over the world, especially in Europe. Unfortunately, this led to a massive rise in xeno- and islamophobia in Europe and other countries accepting Syrian refugees. Ethnic nationalist groups rail against what they perceive to be a violation of their country's sovereignty by the UN's mandatory quotas. As such, to prevent further violence against Syrian refugees and to increase public trust in the UN, many of the quotas have been lessened.

Questions to Consider

1. What is the role of each UN member state in helping to combat the Syrian refugee crisis?
2. How should that role be different based on how close a certain country is to Syria? For example, Turkey's responsibility versus New Zealand's.
3. How should the UN protect Syrian refugees without infringing on the sovereignty of Syria and other nations?
4. Should Peacekeepers be deployed to the region in order to protect the refugees? Does that infringe upon Syrian sovereignty?
5. How should the UN encourage the nations of the world to accept more Syrian refugees without violating other country's sovereignty?
6. Should the UN establish mandatory quotas of refugees each country must accept in a certain year? Should those quotas be enforced? How? How should the number of refugees for the quota be determined?
7. Should the UN focus on trying to stabilize Syria and making it a place for Syrian refugees to return to or focus on trying to get as many Syrians resettled elsewhere as possible?
8. How should the UN try to end the fighting in Syria? Who is to blame and who is responsible?



9. What about financial contributions? Does the UN have the right/ability to impose on sovereign nations the responsibility to take care of/pay for Syrian refugees if the country in question doesn't want to?
10. Finally, should the UN issue a harsh condemnation of Assad's regime or Assad himself? Should the UN encourage other international agencies to issue an arrest warrant or an accusation of crimes against humanity against Assad?

Work Cited

<https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/>