Human Rights Council - President's Letter

Chairing Style

Welcome delegates! My name is Taylor Elliott and it is a pleasure to be your Chair this year at the Saint Bonaventure University High School Model United Nations Conference of 2019. I have two years' worth of chairing experience from past high school conferences. I encourage all delegates to acquire good knowledge of rules of procedure. Needless to say, an effective and successful participation in the conference requires that you do sufficient research on the topics we will be discussing and a solid understanding of your assigned country's positions. The point of the conference is not solely to obtain awards but rather to work hard and learn from each other. I am looking forward to seeing you all in March!

Topics

The Human Rights Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic:

The Syrian Civil war started seven years ago in March 2011 as part of the Arab Spring but has continued to wreak havoc in Syria, the region and even the world today. Within this war, numerous human rights violations have been committed by the Syrian government of President Bashar al Assad. However, the opposition forces have also committed war crimes. Both, al-Qaeda and ISIS have been active participants in this war, fought alongside opposition forces trying to overthrow the Syrian government and both have committed many atrocities. The conflict is truly very complicated and involves so many local, regional and international players. Other parties include the Anti-Assad rebels, the free Syrian army and they Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), all who have allegedly committed war crimes and violated human rights.

In order for the Syrian Government to regain its control over its territory (which is now controlled by the rebels including ISIS and al-Qaeda), it has allegedly employed chemical weapons, and, according to opposition forces, continues to withhold humanitarian aid that various organizations have provided for survivors and internally displaced peoples. However, armed Anti-government groups have attacked, kidnapped, and tortured civilians as well. Syria has the worst ranking within the human rights index.

In the wake of the Syrian conflict, more than 400,000 people have died and more than 6 million have been displaced within the country according to the World Bank and other UN agencies. More than 5 million refugees have fled into surrounding countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq--many of them are seeking asylum in Europe. This flood of refugees to Europe has caused tremendous political upheavals in the European continent that benefited populist, ultra-nationalist and alt-right-wing parties that are totally opposed to refugees and immigrants. Due to the exhaustion of resources and limited space, many nations which have accommodated large influxes of refugees, are becoming hostile towards them; some have even restricted access to proper healthcare and education. Some host countries have implemented legal and administrative barriers which suppress the rights of said refugees. Countries such as Jordan

and Turkey are currently deporting hundreds of refugees per month, re-inserting these asylum seekers within the war-torn borders of Syria.

Questions to Consider:

- What is your country's relationship with Syria?
- Has your country been affected, directly or indirectly, by the Syrian crisis?
- Does your country host Syrian refugees? How many?
- Why is the international community seemingly incapable of halting human suffering and human rights violations in the Syrian civil war?
- Do international organizations have any role to play in halting the crisis? If so, which ones? How?
- What was the role of the Security Council in this crisis? Did it play any major role? Why or why not?
- Are there any existing committees or commissions focused on investigating war crimes in Syria?
- Does the sovereignty of the Syrian government supersede the call for a regime change?

Resources/Sources:

Human Rights Watch: Syria

Syria: Thousands of Displaced Confined to Camps

U.S. Mission to International Organizations in Geneva: The grave and deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic

Human Rights Council adopts six resolutions, including on Syria, extends mandates on Belarus and on Eritrea

'It's against the law': Syrian refugees deported from Turkey back to war

Why Jordan is Deporting Syrian Refugees

Quick facts: What you need to know about the Syria crisis

The Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar:

The country of Myanmar sits between India, Bangladesh, Laos, China, and Thailand. It has a population of 55 million people. But this small country has been a hot-button issue since the Rohingya crisis escalated beginning in 2015. The Rohingya are Muslims who live in the Rakhine state within Myanmar. The government insists that they are illegal immigrants--even though the Rohingya people argue that they have rightfully been in the Rakhine state for hundreds of years following their ancestors. The government refuses to grant them citizenship rights and wants to deport them to Bangladesh, where the Myanmar government claims they belong.

Since the end of British colonization, Myanmar's military has controlled the country ruling it as a dictatorship for approximately forty-eight years (1963-2011). For decades, the military's brutal regime was known for arresting outspoken supporters of military, murdering protesters, and taking part in a multitude of institutionalized discrimination policies against minorities. Even though Myanmar (formerly Burma) has transitioned to a new and more open political regime led by a former Nobel Peace Prize winner, oppression of this minority has gotten only worse. The government has failed to adopt policies that are compatible with international human rights standards and norms and failed to protect its minorities and has repeatedly turned a blind eye to what the military is doing. The government itself sometimes even denies that such a crisis exists!

The crisis escalated in 2015 when multiple attacks were staged against police stations and barracks within the Rakhine state made by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). In response, nearly 2 million Rohingya were forced to flee their homes, half of whom became refugees seeking asylum in countries surrounding Myanmar such as Bangladesh.

The elected government leader Aung San Kyi, daughter of the revolutionary Bogyoke Aung San, and winner of Nobel Peace Prize, has been in office since 2015, but has not taken action to stop the crisis. She has been profoundly criticized for shirking her moral responsibility and for the careless way she has handled the crisis, officially downplaying the ordeal of the Rohingya and claiming the government cannot do much to stop it from happening.

Questions to Consider

- Is the discrimination and killing of the Rohingya people considered genocide, acts of genocide, or ethnic cleansing?
- What has the Human Rights Council done in the past to investigate this issue? What other international bodies have gotten involved? Were they successful in halting human rights violations?
- When was the last time the United Nations was granted access to Myanmar? How limited was that access? Why?
- What role does the media play in this conflict?
- Is it appropriate to discuss constitutional reform within this council?
- What could this Council do to halt human rights violations?
- Are the military and the government in Myanmar two separate entities?
- How are the countries surrounding Myanmar affected by this crisis?
- Did the Security Council take up this issue?

Resources/Sources

Myanmar since 1988: Encyclopedia Britannica

Rohingya People

Quick Summary of What's Happening in Myanmar: Who Are The Rohingya? And More

[Myanmar under the Military Rule 1962-1988](#)

[Was Burma's 1988 uprising worth it?](#)

[Human Rights Watch: Rohingya Crisis](#)

[Who are the Rohingya?](#)

[How the Rohingya crisis is affecting Bangladesh — and why it matters](#)

Discrimination and Stereotyping of Persons based on Religion, Ethnicity, and Belief:

In March of 2011, the Human Rights Council identified an issue within Resolution 16/18 of Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence, and violence against persons based on religion or belief. This is an ever-growing issue that has yet to be seriously and comprehensively tackled by the international community. If we examine recent historical developments and the rise of the alt-right, populists, nativists, ultra-nationalists in different parts in the world, especially in the US and in Europe, we realize that a wave of 'intolerance' is sweeping across the globe. The situation is dire indeed.

The resolution calls upon states "to foster religious freedom and pluralism by promoting the ability of members of all religious communities to manifest their religion, and to contribute openly and on an equal footing to society" (WUNRN). In other words, this resolution recommends that nation-states create government programs to stimulate inter-religious tolerance and dialogue, implement sensitivity-training for government employees, and facilitate outreach initiatives.

The Action Plan, or Resolution 31/26 of the Human Rights Council asked for countries to provide reports explaining their progress towards incorporating these action items. Around the globe, however, many countries fail to provide these reports, complicating the Council's task of evaluating countries' contribution to this issue. These member-states' failure to fulfill these protections for their minorities is enabling and encouraging prejudice and discrimination against the "other."

Movements from around the world have stoked mass discrimination and violence against minorities, behaviors facilitated by islamophobic and anti-Semitic sentiments that governments have failed to seriously address. Non-state actors such as Islamist terrorist groups have only reinforced prevailing negative stereotypes. These negative stereotypes have incited violence against these religious and ethnic minorities that encompass vandalism of temples and mosques and sometimes even beatings and killings. Islamophobia and anti-Semitism continue to plague much of Europe. We also notice a troubling rise in similar tendencies against minorities in the United States. The flood of refugees into Europe on daily basis in the last couple of years has only added fuel to the raging fires. Intolerance is not limited to Europe. China has taken actions to create concentration camps for Uighurs Muslims in the Xinjiang province; over one million people are held in internment.

- Is intolerance an issue within your country?
- What populations are most affected in your country?
- What populations are most affected around the world?
- What countries should be the focus in this discussion?
- What are some past crises or conflicts that are relevant to our discussion?
- What role does the media play in this issue?
- How do countries protect their minorities form such discrimination and stereotyping?
- What specific human rights have to do with this issue?
- How can the Council promote tolerance?

Resources/Sources

[Human Rights Council concludes thirty-fourth regular session after adopting 41 resolutions and a Presidential Statement](#)

[Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2017](#)

[Women's UN Report Network: COMBATING INTOLERANCE, NEGATIVE STEREOTYPING & STIGMATIZATION OF, & DISCRIMINATION, INCITEMENT TO VIOLENCE & VIOLENCE AGAINST, PERSONS BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF](#)

[China's hidden camps: What's happened to the vanished Uighurs of Xinjiang?](#)

[China is creating concentration camps in Xinjiang. Here's how we hold it accountable](#)

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/G1803761.pdf
http://assets.bahai.org/2/news/yaran-special-report/un-statements/bic-statement-2012-06-13.pdf

[Advanced Unedited Edition: Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General](#): copy and paste link: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A_HRC_34_35_AUV.pdf