

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Hello all, I'm Katelyn Chiccino and I will be your chair for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). I am currently a Sophomore History major with a minor in Education at St. Bonaventure University. Additionally, I am a member of the ENACTUS, History Club, Running Club and I have a job at the Richter Center at St. Bonaventure. My Model UN experience has been most enlightening and exciting and I hope that all of you will have the same experience.

For this conference, I expect all of you to do research on your country and your topics. I also expect you to know rules and procedures. Equally important, I will make every effort to ensure a fun and enjoyable learning experience. I am looking forward to meeting all of you at the conference in the spring.

Topic #1: Status of Stateless Persons

Stateless persons are those who are not citizens of any country. The UNHCR estimated that there are currently 10 million stateless persons around the world. These people are not granted the benefits of being a part of a country and sometimes must go without basic necessities such as food, water, and healthcare services. They have no identification papers and often face discrimination. It is important to note that stateless persons are different from refugees or asylum seekers.

Previously, the UNHCR has passed two important agreements about stateless persons: the 1954 Convention Relating to Status of Stateless Persons and 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. The 1954 convention defined a stateless person and gave them basic rights. The 1961 convention tried to improve the conditions and reduce the number of stateless persons.

A lot has changed and new situations have come up leaving many people stateless so a new convention is needed. Our concepts of human rights have also evolved, which also should change our concepts of what a stateless person is and how states should treat them.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does this issue effect my country and how many stateless persons are there in my country?
2. What does my country do for the stateless persons and has my country tried to improve their conditions in the past?
3. Should we treat stateless persons similar to other persons (who have citizenship)?
4. Should the UNHCR work with other UN bodies to improve the status of stateless persons?
5. Should the UNHCR work with other non-governmental organizations?

Resources:

1 <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c155.html>

- 2 <http://www.unhcr.org/3bbb25729.html>
- 3 <http://www.unhcr.org/3bbb286d8.html>
- 4 <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c155.html>

Topic #2: Voluntary Repatriation

One of the priorities of the UNHCR is to provide refugees with rapid and safe return to their homes. This process is known as repatriation, and it can be difficult, especially when tens of thousands of people have been displaced. This topic focuses on voluntary repatriation; that is, not forcing people to return to their country if they choose not to. Many do not feel comfortable or safe returning to their country of origin because of safety concerns. But, others might not want to return because of living conditions and their preference for living in the host country. The UNHCR has provided multiple reference documents to assist countries and refugees. The most detailed document was the 1996 Voluntary Repatriation: International Protection handbook. The handbook addresses the UNHCR role, the right of refugees and repatriates, and steps for countries involved. Even with all the information in these and other handbooks, there still remain instances of failed repatriation attempts.

Questions for your consideration:

- Does my country have any refugees who need to return home?
- What is my country's policy concerning the acceptance of refugees?
- What is my country's policy on how long can refugees stay in the host country?
- Has my country participated in forced repatriation?

Sources:

- www.unhcr.org
- www.refworld.org

Topic # 3: Syrian Refugees

The ongoing Syrian civil war has created a very serious refugee issue. Millions of Syrians have become refugees in neighboring countries, especially in Lebanon and Jordan. In Lebanon, it is estimated that there are over one million refugees. But, Lebanon is a small country that has a population of only 4 million. Needless to say, the presence of Syrian refugees in a country like Lebanon created new problems. Lebanon is fragile and has been on the brink of civil war for over a decade now. Its sectarian make-up also complicates how the question of the Syrian refugees should be handled. There are also legitimate fears that the refugees will carry arms inside Lebanon and exacerbate the already fragile security situation. Lebanon also lacks the financial resources to handle such a large number of refugees. Jordan has faced similar problems.

Questions to consider

- What did the UNHCR do to deal with the question of Syrian refugees?
- What are the security implications of this crisis for Lebanon and Jordan (and other host countries such as Turkey)?
- What did your country do?

What should the International community do to help the host countries?
Should the UNHCR help repatriate the Syrian refugees?