

United Nations High Committee on Refugees

President's Letter

Hello Delegates,

My name is Brendan Thompson and I am a Political Science major at St. Bonaventure University. This is my second year chairing in the high school Model United Nations conference and I am very much looking forward to chairing the UNHCR council. I have been a co-chair and a delegate before, so I understand what challenges you face in producing a good debate. I encourage all of you to not be afraid to speak. My chairing style is laid back and I want to create an environment where it is easy and comfortable for everyone to speak many times, as I expect everyone to talk during this conference. A good way to make sure you have good material to talk about is to do research on how your country views a certain issue. I encourage you to do thorough research on your country, which is the only way to make meaningful contribution to the conference. I have given you some sources to research below each topic to address the issue. I do not expect you to know every single rule and I am not going to call you out if you forget a rule. However, I advise you to study the rules and procedures to keep the debate formal and productive. I would like to wish you good luck and I will see you at the conference.

TOPICS:

Addressing Statelessness

Statelessness is a large problem we have in today's world. There are at least 10 million stateless people in the world, and one third of them are children. Statelessness is usually a result of policy decisions that discriminate against religion, ethnicity, and other "undesirable people". Statelessness is still a major problem even with two international treaties in place to stop it. The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness are the key international conventions addressing this issue. They are complemented by international human rights treaties and provisions relevant of the right to a nationality. The UNHCR's goal is to end statelessness within 10 years. The three main goals to accomplish this feat are to:

- Resolve the major situations of statelessness today.
- Prevent the emergence of new cases of statelessness.
- Improve the Identification and protection of stateless populations.

The largest statelessness crisis in the world today is in Myanmar where one million Rohingya Muslims are being discriminated against by their country. In 1982, a citizenship law recognized 135 ethnic groups. However, it completely left out the Rohingya Muslims, which has had a lasting impact on their status in Myanmar. Other countries that have a large statelessness problem are Thailand, Nepal, Cote d'Ivoire, Latvia, the Dominican Republic, Indonesia, and Pakistan.

Questions to consider:

1. What exactly is statelessness?
2. What are the major causes of statelessness?
3. What countries bear the most responsibility for ending statelessness?
4. What countries need the most help in solving statelessness?
5. Should children and women be the focus on solving statelessness?
6. Should the United Nations intervene?
7. Should there be an international treaty to help resolve this question?

Sources:

<http://www.statelessness.eu/blog/world's-stateless-new-report-why-size-does-and-doesn't-matter>

<http://www.e-ir.info/2015/12/08/problems-with-facts-about-rohingya-statelessness/>

<http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/stateless-people.html>

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2014/11/unchr-launches-campaign-end-statelessness-201411451131537335.html>

The Syrian Refugee Crisis

The Syrian Civil war is one of the biggest crises the world is currently facing. The war has created millions of refugees. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), **4.8 million citizens** have fled to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq, and **6.6 million** are internally displaced within Syria. Along with this, about **1 million** have requested asylum to Europe. The war started in 2011, due to an uprising that descended into civil war between the government and the rebels. International and regional interventions have only made it worse. The war has been brutal and complicated, as different ethnic and religious groups have been fighting each other. Worse, Syria has become another place where ISIS and al-Qaeda operate and control large areas. This is the biggest refugee crisis in the world today, so it is imperative that this crisis gets resolved.

The European Union has come under fire for not organizing an approach to managing the refugees that come into Europe. Since there are one million refugees that have applied for asylum in Europe, the EU must decide how many they are going to take in and where they are going to live. To date, the EU has accepted the vast majority of Syrians who have requested asylum, having processed however relatively few applications. Despite the exponential increase in 2015, these have accounted for less than 10% of the total number of displaced Syrians. In contrast, absorbing the influx of refugees has been an enormous challenge for Syria's neighbors, with strong implications for the stability of the entire region.

Questions to consider:

1. What is the impact of millions of refugees leaving Syria?
2. Which countries should bear the most responsibility in accepting refugees?
3. How should the refugees be treated?
4. How should the refugees be vetted so that no terrorist groups come into a country accepting refugees?

5. Why haven't Gulf countries, like Saudi Arabia or Qatar, received refugees?
6. Has the UN done anything to alleviate the problem?

Sources:

<http://syrianrefugees.eu>

<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

<http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/syria-emergency.html>

<https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syria-refugee-crisis-faq-war-affecting-children>

Natural Disasters and Refugees

Between the years of 2008 and 2015, 203 million people were evicted from their homes from natural disasters. Climate change, food, water, and resources are all factors that will lead to an increase in the number of displaced people. The Swiss and Norwegian Nansen Initiative are hoping to be expanded upon, as it has proven successful so far. Along with this, in May of 2016, the UN Refugee Agency's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection promised to work harder on refugees caused by natural disasters.

99% of displaced people come from developing countries, where citizens are all located in small urban areas. Regions that have expanding urban areas such as countries in Asia are also affected by these disasters more than others. The frequency of disasters in these areas has caused many citizens to go into poverty and require aid for their survival and reconstruction of homes.

Questions to consider:

1. How much of a concern is climate change and disaster displacement to the UNHCR?
2. How is UNHCR currently addressing climate change and disaster displacement?
3. How is UNHCR enhancing the resilience of its person of concerns?
4. Natural disasters are bound to happen. Can displacement be ended?
5. What is your country doing to assist with displacement from natural disasters?
6. What more is your country willing to do? Who are they willing to assist? What are they willing to commit to?

Sources:

<http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/environment-disasters-and-climate-change.html>

<http://qz.com/460165/one-person-is-displaced-by-a-natural-disaster-every-second-and-asia-bears-the-brunt-of-the-destruction/>

<http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/540854f49>

<http://www.internal-displacement.org/assets/library/Media/201507-globalEstimates-2015/20150713-global-estimates-2015-en-v1.pdf>

<http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2016/5/574843f34/unhcr-pledges-better-protect-assist-people-displaced-disaster.html>

https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi_e_pub_disasters.pdf

<https://www.fastcoexist.com/1682141/mapping-the-31-million-people-displaced-by-natural-disasters-so-far>