



Background Guide

Social, Humanitarian, and
Cultural Committee
(SOCHUM)

Under Secretary-General Everett Kalman
Chair Hayleigh Keasling, Vice-Chair Riley Crump

IndianaMUNC VII

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A Letter from the Chair

Hello Delegates!

Welcome to IndianaMUNC VII, I will be your Chair for the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee. I cannot wait to see what we accomplish this weekend as we tackle these important topics and maneuver this virtual format.

I am a first year here at Indiana University in the Hamilton Lugar School for Global and International Studies. I am from a small town in southeastern Indiana called Liberty. This is my first year with IndianaMUN and I have thus far enjoyed every minute. This will be my first time being a chair so please bear with me, but I'm so excited to spend the weekend with you all. Outside of IndianaMUN I am an International Studies Major with a concentration in Diplomacy, Security, and Governance and am in the Arabic Flagship Program. I am a Hoosier Scholar Ambassador and am the Director of Philanthropy for Spruce Hall. I've loved learning Arabic so far and have just begun classes in French. Outside of school, my roommate and I are always running around Bloomington trying all the delicious food and thrifting cute and sometimes funky outfits to take Instagram Pictures in. I'm on a mission to try all of the coffee shops in Bloomington before I graduate and have already made it to quite a few of them. I love IU and everything it has to offer so if you have any questions about anything, I'd be happy to chat!

This year's SOCHUM is entitled Wandering But Not Lost: The Refugee Crisis in Iraq and Syria. This weekend we will work to address refugee safety amidst the current COVID-19 Pandemic, attempt to find ways to help settle the global refugee population, and finally, we will discuss how to rebuild Syria.

We will be utilizing Zoom and Slack for this committee, as are all other IndianaMUNC VII committees. Please make sure you have both of these programs downloaded on your devices and have the most recent versions of each. If at any point you have questions on how to use this technology or run into any issues, please contact me or other IndianaMUNC VII staff members.

I hope this background guide will point you in the right direction in preparation for committee and your delegation position, however, I sincerely hope that you will dive deeply into these topics in order to really produce some innovative and complex ideas. If you have any questions or would just like to chat, email me any time at hkeaslin@iu.edu or message me on Slack once our channel is set up. Riley Crump will serve as your Vice Chair and we are both so excited to meet you all and tackle this year's conference! See you in committee!

Your Chair,

Hayleigh Keasling



Introduction to the Committee

Headquartered in New York, United States of America, “The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee”, also known as SOCHUM was established in 1947 as the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly and therefore includes 193 member states.

The committee’s agenda revolves around various social, humanitarian, and cultural affairs mainly those pertaining to human rights issues. In the past, the committee has discussed issues such as gender-based discrimination, racism, exploitation of the indigenous, etc.¹

For IndianaMUNC VII, this committee will be discussing the COVID-19 crisis, refugee resettlement and the rebuilding of Syria. As delegates, you are expected to research the above topics and have an understanding of the limitations and challenges the international community faces along with the situations themselves. Additionally, you are urged to understand the gravity of the situation and make decisions keeping in mind the millions of people affected by your choices.

Over the course of three days, this committee aims to discuss and debate the above-mentioned issues and hopefully produce some effective, plausible, and efficient solutions for the same. Please note that prewriting is strictly prohibited and be assured that you will be

1 “Research Binder Friday: SOCHUM / GA3”, Best Delegate, February 9, 2017, <https://bestdelegate.com/research-binder-friday-sochum-ga3/#:~:text=Committee%20Mandate,general%20resolutions%20on%20these%20matters.>

2 “Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2019”, United Nations High Commission for Refugees, June 18, 2020,

given enough time in the committee to accomplish these tasks. Furthermore, remember that active participation, substantive contribution, and diplomacy are highly valued.

Topic 1 | Safety During the COVID-19 Crisis

History

According to the UNHCR Global Trends Report 2019, there are about 7 million refugees originating from Iraq and Syria.² These refugees who have been pushed by civil war and terror to flee their home find themselves in a much more vulnerable condition now than before the development of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even though refugee camps remained unscathed from COVID-19 for the initial months, as of October 2020, 240 refugees had already tested in refugee camps on the island of Lesbos in Greece which still remains one of the most frequently used entry points into Europe for refugees. Additionally, outbreaks have been detected in various other camps situated in Lebanon and Syria.³

This adds to already existing problems faced by refugees such as xenophobia, lack of job opportunities, poverty, violations of human rights, over-crowding of camps, etc. One of most important efforts to aid in this situation was on May 21, 2020 when the World

<https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2019/>

3 “COVID-19 Outbreaks Are Now Emerging in Refugee Camps. Why Did it Take so Long for the Virus to Reach Them?”, Time USA, LLC, October 9, 2020, <https://time.com/5893135/covid-19-refugee-camps/>



Health Organization and UNHCR signed a new agreement between the two agencies which updated and expanded on an already existing 1997 agreement aimed at providing healthcare and protecting refugees to aid with the COVID-19 crisis.⁴

Moreover, UNHCR's commitment to "stay and deliver" has been not reduced; in light of which they have been providing emergency assistance to refugees by providing shelter, sanitary supplies, food and financial aid.⁵

Current Situation

"In the camps where MSF provides medical care, families are congested inside single tents and have scarce access to adequate hygiene facilities. Mixing with other camp residents is an unavoidable daily task, and without enough aid, people have no choice but to go out and seek any work to support their families, despite knowing the increased risk of infection." said Tetyana Pylypenko, MSF medical coordinator in Iraq.⁶

Refugees are at much higher risk for COVID-19 due to a variety of factors including poverty, legal and financial barriers to affordable healthcare, as well over-crowding in refugee camps. With complete families living in the

same tent, self-isolation is impossible; so is taking proper precautions because to many refugees, even access to soap and clean water is not always constant. Adding to these problems, camps within Syria or Iraq face a lack of healthcare workers as hospitals are usually systematically targeted by civil violence. Such attacks have already killed more than 900 medical personnel since 2011.⁷ In addition to that, the sources of income for many refugees has been cut as most refugees worked as informal labor and do not labor rights. The education of young refugees has also been put on hold as lot of them lack the proper technology to participate in online learning, that is, if they even qualify for online learning.⁸

Furthermore, owing to border lockdowns around the globe many refugees are stuck in the middle of their journey with no way ahead and danger behind. Also, the evacuation of embassy staff means that UN officials can no longer process new referrals or organize departures. These lockdowns also mean that

4 "WHO and UNHCR join forces to improve health services for refugees, displaced and stateless people" World Health Organization, May 21, 2020,

<https://www.who.int/news/item/21-05-2020-who-and-unhcr-join-forces-to-improve-health-services-for-refugees-displaced-and-stateless-people>

5 "Refugees and COVID-19: A Closer Look at the Syrian and Rohingya Crises" New Security Beat, Wilson Center's Environmental Change and Security Program, July 13, 2020,

<https://www.newsecuritybeat.org/2020/07/refugees-covid-19-closer-syrian-rohingya-crises/>

6 "Iraqi Refugees 'Extremely Vulnerable' to COVID-19, MSF Says", VOA, July 13, 2020,

<https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/iraqi-refugees-extremely-vulnerable-covid-19-msf-says>

7 "A Crisis On Top Of A Crisis: Covid-19 Looms Over War-Ravaged Idlib" Refugees International, April 28, 2020,

<https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/4/27/a-crisis-on-top-of-a-crisis-covid-19-looms-over-war-ravaged-idlib>

8 "Refugees and COVID-19: A Closer Look at the Syrian and Rohingya Crises" New Security Beat, Wilson Center's Environmental Change and Security Program, July 13, 2020,

<https://www.newsecuritybeat.org/2020/07/refugees-covid-19-closer-syrian-rohingya-crises/>



UN officials can no longer stamp exit visas or conduct intake interviews for refugees.⁹ Moreover, COVID-19 has had adverse effects on the mental health of refugees many of whom already suffer from PTSD, anxiety, and depression. This has also led to a significant increase in the suicide rates in the community as the COVID-19 situations have increased their feeling of helplessness and confinement.¹⁰

Bloc Positions

One of the goals of the United Nations has always been international cooperation and that stands true for this committee as well considering it is a General Assembly committee discussing issues to a humanitarian crisis.

Moreover, countries housing large numbers of refugees would be more concerned about our agenda and they are the ones directly affected considering that outbreaks in refugee camps put their population at risk and increases the strain on healthcare infrastructure.

In addition to that, the countries where refugees originate from also have large numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs); that coupled with their ongoing unrest puts IDPs in an extremely vulnerable position which is a cause for concern for them.

In context of this committee, we understand that even though most countries agree that this problem needs our attention, there might be differences on various states wish to approach

⁹ “Locked out by COVID, refugees' lives on hold” Reuters, August 31, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-africa-refugees-in/locked-out-by-covid-refugees-lives-on-hold-idUSKBN25R0MO>

this. That is when your skills to effectively negotiate would be vital.

Questions to Consider

- How and what can preventative measures be taken, short-term and long-term?
- How and what measures can be taken when outbreaks occur?
- How can the poverty pandemic that COVID-19 has created amongst refugees be effectively combatted?
- How and what measures can be taken in order to ensure the well-being of the younger generation with special reference to education?
- How can the inaccessibility to healthcare services be addressed?
- How can the different operations be funded?
- How can the international community help refugees who are stuck in middle of their journey?
- How and what measure can be taken to combat the effects of COVID-19 on mental health of the refugees?

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Topic 2 | Global Refugee Settlement

History

In 1951, the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was adopted by 147 UN Member States. The convention binds signatories towards an established criterion towards the treatment of refugees. States must give refugees rights such as court access, options for education, and the ability to enter the labor force.¹¹ It was originally drafted in the aftermath of WWII but was broadened to worldwide refugees with the ratification of the 1967 protocol. Through the convention, states agreed to accept refugees and not turn them away, especially if their home countries are unsafe to return to.

In 2016, UN Member States adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The declaration illustrates the commitments of Member States acknowledging a shared responsibility to manage large movements of refugees and migrants in a humane, sensitive, compassionate, and people-centered manner.¹²

In order to deal with the influx of refugees crossing into their borders, many countries in the past decade have decided to tighten up their borders or close them altogether. Sealing these borders prevents refugees from physically entering the country in the first place in order to claim their asylum under international law and previous convention agreements. States like the U.S. and

¹¹ Zachary Laub, "The World's Swelling Refugee Population Has Shrinking Options," Council on Foreign Relations (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019), <https://www.cfr.org/refugee-crisis/>.

¹² United Nations General Assembly, "General Assembly Adopts Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, as United Nations, International Organization for Migration Sign Key Agreement | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases," United Nations (United Nations, September 19, 2016), <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/ga11820.doc.htm>.

¹³ Australia Refugee Council, "Statistics on People in Detention in Australia," Refugee Council of Australia, December 11, 2020,

Australia have begun to adopt detention as a means of dissuading people from trying to cross international borders. For example, in 2001 Australia¹³ began intercepting vessels at sea, and an estimated 1,750 migrants remain detained on South Pacific islands. Turkey has made deals with Greece that are being questioned by the international community despite from the EU under concerns over non-foulement jeopardization.¹⁴

Former UNHCR director Sadako Ogata said "There are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian problems,"¹⁵ States of the world must come together in order to help bring refugees the help they need and deserve.

Current Situation

Some of the most popular methods of addressing refugee settlement are what is being called durable solutions, solutions that help refugees in the long run. There are three main types of durable solutions, repatriation, local integration, and resettlement. Repatriation is most commonly practiced by host countries and is actually preferred by both asylum seekers and State governments. As defined by the Council on Foreign Relations, "In cases of voluntary or spontaneous repatriation, refugees either elect to be returned home or return home themselves. In other cases, refugees are forced to return home, even those who have established themselves in a host country over many years or, in the case of second-

<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/detention-australia-statistics/>.

¹⁴ Umut Uras, "Turkey, EU and the Imperilled Refugee Deal," European Union News | Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera, March 3, 2020), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/3/3/turkey-eu-and-the-imperilled-refugee-deal>.

¹⁵ Vivian Tan, "Ogata Calls for Stronger Political Will to Solve Refugee Crises," UNHCR, May 27, 2005, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2005/5/4297406a2/ogata-calls-stronger-political-solve-refugee-crises.html>.



generation refugees, were born in the host country.” However, this option isn’t always viable due to factors already discussed in this background guide. Local integration refers to the assimilation and naturalization of refugees in their host country, availing themselves of the rights they had been denied by their country of origin.

Resettlement is the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent settlement.¹⁶ Several Member States around the world have various individualized resettlement programs and often partner with Non-Governmental Organizations and other humanitarian actors to support these programs. In 2019, the UNHCR submitted the applications of 81,600 refugees to State programs for consideration and more than 63,000 individuals have left their former bases towards their resettlement countries.¹⁷ Despite these numbers, a very small number of registered refugees are actually successfully resettled.

Many traditional host countries like Jordan and Lebanon are running out of capacity and resources to take on further refugees, thus causing them to flood into Europe and other parts of the globe. In fact, more than 366,000 refugees have crossed the Mediterranean Sea to Europe in 2019 alone and another 2,800 attempted the journey, but either died or disappeared.¹⁸ However, many already highly populated European countries are struggling to adequately support these incoming refugees. Popular hopeful landing zones are Germany,

¹⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Resettlement,” UNHCR, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/resettlement.html>.

¹⁷ UNHCR, 2020.

¹⁸ Holly Yan and Arwa Damon, “European Migrant Crisis: More Refugees, More Troubles,” CNN (Cable News

Austria, the UK, France, Italy, Greece and Sweden.¹⁹ The international community has exhibited varying degrees of willingness to accept refugees.

Bloc Positions

Many UN member states have signed onto the various declarations and treaties throughout the years addressing resettlement. Yet as conflicts continue in Iraq and Syria, it may be time for the international community to re-assess the policies in those agreements in order to adapt to the current situation.

Instead of re-assessing the current agreements, these Member States could instead agree to actually enforce commitments and hold states accountable that currently are not holding up their end of the bargain.

The current global refugee crisis affects every delegation in attendance today and any solution will require the cooperation and unity of all parties. Blocs, States, and all stakeholders must address this issue now and work towards helping refugees find peace and security in a world that ripped them from their homes.

Network, September 7, 2015), <https://www.cnn.com/2015/09/07/europe/europe-migrant-crisis/index.html>.

¹⁹ Damon and Yan, 2015.



Questions to Consider

- What are the most effective forms of addressing refugee settlement?
- How can the Member States build off of past agreements and improve upon current commitments?
- How will the international community hold each other accountable towards their commitments?
- What will settlement programs look like amidst a pandemic?
- Does the UN need to address past and current breaches of international law regarding refugee settlement?

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Topic 3 | How to Rebuild Syria

History

After WWI, Syria experienced a turbulent French occupation, generally referred to as the French Mandate. By 1946, Syria was able to gain their independence. As the country began to shape their government, they experienced various coups and a very liberal period. Emerging from that turbulent period was Syrian air force commander and Minister of Defense, Hafez al-Assad. Through his influence and rank, Assad was able to rise to power in 1970²⁰. Hafez raised his first son Bassel to be his successor, however he was killed in a car crash in 1994. After the death of the first Assad son, the second son Bashar was left to fill his father's shoes. Bashar eventually weeded out his father's former administration and began to institute his own circle of elites.

As the Arab Spring began to reach its height in 2011, anti-government protests against Assad's rule broke out throughout the country. In the early weeks of that year, initial protests began to break out in the Syrian city of Daraa due to political unrest and government un-satisfaction, much like many of the other revolutions around the Arab World. On March 6th of the same year, some young boys painted anti-regime sentiments on a wall in the city and were later arrested and tortured by the police. A little over a week later, protests grew against the police brutality that had occurred. Tensions continued to escalate to the point Syrian security forces lethally fired into a crowd of protesters. People throughout the city and country of Syria began to call for Bashar al-Assad's resignation, fueled further by the regime's use of deadly force on civilians. As summer approached, demonstrators and regime defectors began to

²⁰ Neil Quilliam, "Syria: The Rise of the Assads," BBC News (BBC, November 4, 2015), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34709235>.

²¹ "Syria," Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed December 21, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Syria>.

organize as the Syrian National Council (SNC) and the Free Syrian Army (FSA). This led to a violent, full-fledged civil war which is still on-going today. By 2013, a militant Islamic group with ties to Al Qaeda, and functioning under the name of ISIL, (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) began to rise to power and started claiming cities as their own. They launched successful attacks on nearby Iraq, as well as some internal attacks gaining more land in Syria. In 2014 the United States began to launch counter attacks from the air in both Iraq and Syria in the hopes of stopping the spread of ISIL. The terror organization began to turn their interests towards the ethno-sectarian group the Kurds, located in Northern-Syria²¹. However, this strong group was able to take the upper hand by 2015, but this victory came at cost. Several Kurdish cities were destroyed, forcing thousands of people to flee, henceforth becoming refugees. Assad finally admitted to the issue ISIL was causing and began to accept the assistance of Russian troops. These Russian troops while meant to primarily be fighting ISIL, it quickly became clear they were taking out "anti-Assad" groups as well. In 2016, joint Russia and Syria began to address the major city of Aleppo, dropping heavy fire power on "rebel" groups, but consequently causing massive counts of civilian casualties²². Evidence of the Assad regime backed by Russia caught the attention of the international community. By 2018 the Syrian government began to regain territory from ISIL.

Current Situation

After almost a decade of civil war and internal conflict in the country, Syria is in shambles and still under the leadership of Bashar al-Assad's regime. The international community is more than weary of Assad's use of chemical weapons on the Syrian people. In spite of these factors, one of the world's largest humanitarian crises has arisen. There are to date more than 5.6 million registered Syrian

²² "Syria," Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed December 21, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Syria>.



refugees, 6.2 million displaced Syrians and another 12 million people in the country lacking basic human necessities²³. The Syrian government is riddled with corruption, both internal and external and is incapable of devoting enough resources towards rebuilding basic infrastructure like hospitals, roads and social welfare programs. Clearly the Assad regime is doing very little to rebuild Syria and provide for its people, the international community must address this issue and mitigate the on-going refugee crisis.

Bloc Positions

The multi-dimensional conflict in Syria is riddled with complicated factions and deadly proxy battles. While it started as a civil war, the conflict has evolved into a power play by states and organizations around the globe. Multiple states have a vested interest in the conflict: Assad's Syria (obviously), Russia, Iran, Turkey, the United States, and Israel. Ethnic groups like the Kurds play an important role, and terrorists like those in ISIL are a major threat.²⁴

President Assad is deeply committed to remaining in power. His grip on control was loosening during the Arab spring and subsequent protests, but he has instituted a brutal government with limited freedoms. He has used chemical weapons against his own citizens and is widely condemned around the world.

Russia and Iran are both supporters of Assad and want him to remain in power. Both states are committed to displaying their power and influence on the world stage. Turkey, however, opposes the Assad regime. Sharing a border with Syria requires a vested interest from Turkey. The civil war has led to millions of

²³ Kathryn Reid, "Syrian Refugee Crisis: Facts, FAQs, and How to Help," World Vision, June 11, 2020, <https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts>.

refugees heading towards Turkey, and the Turkish government believes they have met capacity. They want stability in Syria and a government that will not cause its citizens to seek refuge in Turkey.

The United States also opposes the Assad regime due to his flagrant disregard for human rights and disinterest in democracy. However, the US does not yet necessarily completely support one particular rebel group.

There has always been the ideal of a United Arab front and thus various Arab countries will play a huge role in re-shaping and rebuilding Syria.

Questions to Consider

- Should the international community work with or against the Assad regime?
- How or will Assad be held accountable for his use of chemical weapons?
- How will the international community address the refugee crisis?
- Does ISIL/ISIS need to be completely eradicated before progress can be made?
- How will the international community ensure that Syria rebuilds successfully while still protecting the nation's sovereignty?
- Will minority groups get a say in the rebuilding process?

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