

United Nations Human Rights Council

CHMUN XIX
General Assembly

Committee Background:

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is an intergovernmental subsidiary of the United Nations General Assembly. Established in 2006, the UNHRC succeeded the UN Commission on Human Rights, due to the frequent criticisms of the unsuccessful nature of the Commission. The Council is composed of 47 member states, who serve three year terms, and are elected by the General Assembly. Regional groups possess quotas for the total number of countries from a region elected to the Council, providing diversity in the overall makeup of the Council. The UNHRC primarily advocates for and aims to protect a high standard of human rights across nations. In 2007, the UNHRC placed an “institution-building package” into effect, which frames its procedures and work. Some of these procedures include the universal periodic review, during which a comprehensive assessment of human rights within the member states is conducted. Additionally, the advisory committee provides assistance to the Council through expertise, and research-based advice, while the complaint procedure is a means for human rights violations to be brought to the Council by individuals or organizations.

Topic 1: Addressing the Displacement of Syrian Refugees in Europe

Introduction:

The Syrian Refugee Crisis began in March 2011, after the Syrian government began violently suppressing anti-government protests. Such protests were a part of a larger movement known as the Arab Spring, which consisted of public anti-government demonstrations spread across North Africa and the Middle East. These demonstrations ended the authoritarian regimes of leaders in Tunisia and Egypt. In Syria, the protests challenged the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. The Syrian government made full use of military enforcement to suppress protests. In retaliation, opposing militia groups began to develop. This conflict eventually grew into the Syrian Civil War, which prompted millions of Syrians to flee the country. A majority of Syrians fled to neighboring nations, such as Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt, while many others sought refuge further, in European nations, particularly in Germany and Sweden. Furthermore, the Syrian Civil war internally displaced millions of Syrian citizens.

Initially, most Syrians were afforded international protection status and many European nations have local initiatives promoting free language courses or teaching. However, Syrian refugees who have migrated to Europe face a myriad of issues that prevent their integration and success in these nations. For instance, the restrictive nature of family reunification policies negatively impacts the wellbeing of refugees. Additionally, a lack of psychological support for refugees hinders their ability to integrate.

Current Events:

Over a decade later, both the Syrian Civil War and subsequent refugee crisis are active crises. The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated these issues and worsened conditions for Syrians still living in Syria. To date, 14 million Syrians have left Syria, while 6.8 million remain internally displaced. One million Syrian refugees have fled to Europe, making up the largest group of asylum-seekers in the European Union. In other Arab nations, such as Jordan and Egypt, measures of reinstating relations with the nation have begun and similar sentiments are beginning to appear within European nations. Although no Syrians have been forced to leave Europe, recent measures in European nations are cause

for concern and rising pressure for Syrian refugees to return to Syria. The deputy foreign minister of Poland in 2018, Andrzej Papierz, traveled to Damascus that year, in order to discuss the return of refugees. In 2020, Germany lifted its ban on deportations to Syria. In 2021, the temporary residence permits of some Syrians in Denmark were rescinded. In 2022, in the United Kingdom, an asylum application from a Syrian was initially rejected as the Home Office of UK did not believe that the individual faced a serious threat in Syria. However, human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, have come to the resounding conclusion that it is not safe for Syrian refugees to return to Syria. Furthermore, in recent years, Syrian refugees have struggled to find employment and housing, due to the restrictive and temporary nature of the residence and work permits they have been granted.

In addition, the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine has created an additional influx of refugees, displaced people, and asylum-seekers in Europe and most nations have provided extensive generosity to Ukrainian refugees, which has gone unmatched towards Syrian refugees.

Past UN Action:

The UNHCR has provided extensive support and humanitarian aid in response to the Syrian Civil War and Syrian Refugee Crisis. Through donations, volunteer support, and distributing basic necessities, the UN is able to assist vulnerable refugees. The Chair of the UN Syria Commission, Paulo Pinheiro, has spoken out against the treatment of Syrian refugees in comparison to Ukrainian refugees in Europe, and called for European governments to provide equal support for both Syrian and Ukrainian refugees.

Questions to Consider:

1. How can European governments be incentivized to support the Syrian refugees in their nations?
2. In what way can the integration of Syrian refugees in Europe be promoted?
3. What measures can be taken by the UNHRC to provide assistance to Syrian refugees in Europe?
4. How can the rights of Syrian refugees in Europe be protected?

Helpful Links:

1. <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/syria-emergency>
2. <https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts>
3. https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/ten-years-conflict-syrian-integration-europe_en
4. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria/independent-international-commission>

Topic 2: Eliminating Human Rights Violations in the Global Supply Chain

Introduction:

For businesses to put out a product or service, a wide network of raw materials, resources, individuals, and organizations are required. This network is known as the supply chain. In an increasingly globalized world, the supply chain of businesses often spans different nations which have vastly varying rules regarding labor and sourcing. More than 450 million workers constitute the global supply-chain industry. The broad nature of the global supply-chain presents ample opportunities for the mistreatment of workers in the supply-chain network. Many of these workers lack the resources, support, or chances to bring up the violations and abuse they have faced. Furthermore, since the supply-chain network is primarily international, it is difficult to employ definitive legal restrictions for companies and businesses. In addition, the complexity and length of the supply-chain network make it difficult for businesses to oversee production every step of the way, making it easier for violations and abuse to occur. Moreover, even when companies conduct internal reviews of how workers are treated, results are often hidden and not released publicly, giving companies the ability to not take accountability. While the UN Guiding Principles on Businesses and Human Rights has been developed and enacted, the lack of ability to enforce such principles means that corporations can agree to such terms on paper and ignore them in practice. As a result, nearly every single industry, from agriculture to clothing, is chock-full of human rights violations and little is done to rectify the abuse faced by workers. The violations that workers may face throughout the supply-chain network include unsafe working conditions, land, food and water violations, trafficking, child labor, forced labor, and modern slavery,. The supply-chain network provides a breeding ground for such abuse to occur and as such, has contributed to an international rise in trafficking, modern slavery, and forced labor.

Current Events:

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected the human rights violations occurring within the supply-chain industry. Job insecurity and lay-offs have pushed many workers into accepting jobs with harmful working conditions and practices, resulting in an overall global increase of mistreated workers. Additionally, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and subsequent war has extensively disrupted

the global supply-chain network. Businesses in high-risk areas affected by conflict often have more severe human rights violations. Furthermore, the supply-chain issues that spawned as a result of the war may push corporations to either not conduct due diligence on sources or sourcing from less socially responsible and/or reputable sources. However, in 2022, the European Union and the United State have taken measures which require increased due diligence within the supply-chain network. While large nations taking heightened action against misconduct and human rights violations in the supply-chain industry may set precedent for other nations to do so, there are still no legally-binding international laws regarding human rights in the supply-chain.

Past UN Action:

The United Nations developed the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), which is a global framework intended to set a standard for businesses and nations alike regarding the basic rights of workers and individuals under corporations. The UNHCR has also developed an “open-ended intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights” which is currently developing a treaty for businesses and human rights. The UNHCR administers several other initiatives and mechanisms that promote respect for human rights within businesses, such as the Accountability and Remedy Project, which seeks to improve businesses taking accountability for human rights violations, the Business and Human Rights in Technology Project, which is intended to ensure human rights and the implementation of UNGPs in business-related technology spaces, and the Business Human Rights Peer Learning Project, which supports the implementation of UNGPs across regions and industries.

Questions to Consider:

1. How can corporations be incentivized to conduct due diligence reviews?
2. What steps can nations take to ensure that businesses operating or headquartered within their jurisdiction do not use international sources that violate human rights?
3. In what ways can businesses be held accountable when found to have used sources violating their workers?

4. How can corporations move toward equitable, fair supply chains?

Helpful Links:

1. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/05/30/human-rights-supply-chains/call-binding-global-standard-due-diligence>
2. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/business-and-human-rights>
3. <https://news.stanford.edu/2021/12/20/reimagining-just-equitable-global-supply-chains/>
4. <https://globalnaps.org/issue/supply-chains/>

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Topic 2

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