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Syrian and Yemen Civil War

General Assembly: Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM)

Background Guide

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Committee Staff

William Gedney, chair

Chad Cao, vice-chair

Sudarshan Ramanan, Secretary-General

John Lee, Secretary-General

Jonas Rajagopal, Secretary-General



Welcome Letter

Hi Delegates,

My name is Will Gedney, and I am a senior at Boston University Academy. I am going to be your Chairperson for BUAMUN 2020. I hope you are all as excited to start the conference as I am. Our MUN committee will be emulating the United Nations Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM), which has been around since 1947. SOCHUM's primary purpose is to protect, maintain, and establish many human rights world-wide. They focus on helping refugees, victims of discrimination, children, and the homeless while discussing topics like human rights, global literacy, women's and children's rights, drug control, crime prevention, and the elimination of racism and discrimination.

My advice for your preparation is to not only research your topic but to also research your country, including your allies, stance on the matter, a little history, and any previous efforts made to alleviate the issue being discussed.

Your Head-Chair,

Will Gedney

BUA '21

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Committee Structure

The Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee was established in 1947 as the General Assembly's third central committee. It includes all 193 states of the UN and discusses mainly human rights issues relating to anything social, humanitarian, and cultural. SOCHUM and its subsidiary body, ECOSOC, draft and ratify resolutions, though unlike the Security Council, these resolutions are recommendations and states are not required to follow their guidelines. What makes SOCHUM unique is that each of the participating country's cultural environments is different, which must be considered when drafting resolutions. It is vital to preserve a nation's identity and traditions and consider its peoples' culture and norms when outlining a plan of action. The Committee meets annually in October, and unlike other bodies of the General Assembly, SOCHUM begins with an individual debate on topics. For more information on SOCHUM, you can visit <https://www.un.org/en/ga/third/index.shtml>.

Topic Background

Topic 1: Syrian Civil War

Tensions in Syria have been rising since the early 2000s when Bashar Al-Assad succeeded his father and inherited the presidential title. Since then, citizens of Syria have been dissatisfied with Assad's rule; Unemployment and corruption within the government have only been rising since he took office, and he has even been accused of torturing and murdering his political opposition. There is also persistent religious tension between the Sunni Muslim citizens and the majority Shia government.



Topic Background

Topic 1: Syrian Civil War

The Syrian Civil War started as a nonviolent protest in 2011, which was primarily inspired by the Arab Spring, a series of political and economic protests that began in Egypt and Tunisia. These protests inspired Syrian activists throughout the country. In March 2011, 15 Syrian school children were arrested for vandalism after creating Arab Spring-inspired graffiti. One of these children's deaths sparked nationwide protests, which called for the release of the remaining children and increased freedoms for the citizens of Syria. Bashar Al-Assad responded by killing and arresting hundreds of protestors. When citizens called for Assad's resignation, he declined, and subsequently, war broke out. By July 2011, Syrian rebels had formed the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and began fighting against the government.



Topic Background

Topic 1: Syrian Civil War

Since the start of the war, many new players have entered; The Syrian government has received support from Russia, Iran, and a few other small militia groups, and moderate rebel groups have received support from the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and other western countries. Furthermore, the state also became home to terrorist organizations, including ISIS and al-Qaeda, which thrive on the chaos and fight against both the rebels and the government. Deaths are estimated to be around 577,000 as of May 2020, 6.1 million refugees have fled the country, and another 5.6 million refugees are displaced within the state. Experts estimate that almost 13.1 million people require humanitarian assistance as a result of the crisis. Currently, Assad's regime has reclaimed control of most of the country's major cities.



Topic Background

Topic 1: Syrian Civil War

There have been many accounts of foreign intervention, most of which are carried out by the U.S. Since 2014, the U.S. has been running an airstrike campaign against terrorist groups in Syria, and in 2017 and 2018, the U.S. attacked Syrian chemical weapon sites. Russia has also been a consistent contributor to Assad's war efforts. Furthermore, since 2014, The UN has hosted nine peace talks between the rebels and the government, all of which failed. The outcome looks grimmer and grimmer as attempts to mediate continually fail, and fighting continues.



Topic Background

Topic 1: Syrian Civil War

Bloc Positions

USA/UK/France/Germany/Bulgaria (US and EU):

All of these countries have supplied the Syrian rebels throughout the years, providing logistical support and resources. Though they have not been actively fighting in the war. They have also repeatedly and openly condemned the Syrian government and its leaders. As a representative of one of these countries, you should be firmly against the government and try to help the rebels actively; using direct military intervention is your own choice.

Topic Background

Topic 1: Syrian Civil War

Bloc Positions

Syria/China/Russia/Iran:

All of these countries are active supporters of the Syrian government and are strongly against the rebels. Syria believes that they are in the right and have opposed offers for a UN resolution and continually condemned the rebels. Russia and China have both claimed to be neutral, but like the countries above, they have been providing resources for the Syrian government. Russia and Iran, in particular, have provided military support for Syria. Iran has been one of the most significant supporters of Assad's regime and has provided logistical, financial, and military support for the Syrian government. As a delegate from one of these countries, you should actively defend Syria and argue that the current government is legitimate enough to rule. You could also point out the flaws in the government the rebels fight for and explain why the current government is the solution.

Topic Background

Topic 1: Syrian Civil War

Bloc Positions

Turkey/Saudi Arabia/Libya/Morocco (Arab League):

The Arab League has criticized the Syrian government and has suspended Syria from the Arab League. Turkey and Saudi Arabia have provided a significant amount of military support to the rebels. They have also harbored refugees and provided financial and medical aid to them. As a delegate from one of these countries, you should feel strongly opposed to the Syrian government, and you should be calling for direct military intervention than other solutions.

Argentina/Venezuela (South America):

These countries do not have a clear stance on the issues and how they propose to resolve it. If you represent a South American country, look at how your state has contributed to similar problems within the UN. Check your country's relationships with either side of the conflict and see what alliances or enemies may sway your participation.



Topic Background

Topic 2: Yemen Civil War

The Yemen Civil War began in 2014 when Houthi insurgents, who demanded lower fuel prices and a new government, took control of Yemen's capital, Sana'a. In January 2015, following failed peace talks between the government and insurgents, the rebels took control of the presidential palace and the president, Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, and his government resigned from power. In response, a coalition of Gulf States led by Saudi Arabia and backed by the U.S. began a campaign against the rebels, which included airstrikes and strategic economic isolation. This led to Hadi reclaiming his presidential title in 2015, and the war has continued since. In July 2016, the Houthis and former president Ali Abdullah Saleh formed a political alliance to govern Sana'a and parts of northern Yemen. Although, in December 2017, Saleh called for his supporters to break away and take up arms against the Houthis; within two days, Saleh was killed, and his forces were defeated.

Topic Background

Topic 2: Yemen Civil War

It is estimated that 24 million people need assistance, making it the world's most massive humanitarian crisis. It is also estimated that 4 million people are displaced, and 100,000 people have been killed since 2015. Both sides of the conflict have violated international human rights and humanitarian law.

So far, The U.S. has taken repeated action against terrorist groups in Yemen, and a ceasefire has been agreed to after talks in Sweden. The Stockholm agreement required each side to redeploy their forces from Hudaydah and established a prisoner exchange program. Continued U.S. support may be partly because of Yemen's strategic location; it is positioned on a strait linking the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden, a standard route for oil shipments.



Topic Background

Topic 2: Yemen Civil War

Bloc Positions

Saudi-led Coalition (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Sudan, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco):

In 2012, Saudi backed Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, who ran unopposed as the only candidate for president. When the Houthis started to arrange mass protests and take over the Yemeni government, Saudi Arabia and these other countries denounced this as an unconstitutional coup d'etat. Ever since, the Saudi-led coalition has been strongly against the Houthi militia. The UN has also accused the Saudi-led Coalition of war crimes, including intentionally starving Yemenis as a tactic of war and killing thousands of civilians in airstrikes. As a representative of one of these countries, you should expect to vehemently oppose the Houthi and the loyalists of Ali Abdullah Saleh. You should expect to favor direct military intervention.

Topic Background

Topic 2: Yemen Civil War

Bloc Positions

US/France/UK/Germany/Turkey:

All of these countries have supplied the Syrian rebels throughout the years. As a result, they have also been supporting the Saudi-led coalition. Instead of military support, these countries have provided weapons, intelligence, and logistical support. The U.S., in particular, sold billions of dollars in weaponry to the Saudi-led Coalition. The UN has accused the U.S., France, and the UK of participating in the War Crimes, such as providing weapons for the Saudi-led coalition to murder innocent civilians. Despite being recommended to ban arms transfers by the UN, these countries have continuously provided arms to the coalition movement, resulting in billions of dollars in profits. As a delegation from one of these countries, you should expect to support the Saudi-led Coalition and expect to favor economic sanctions over direct military intervention.



Topic Background

Topic 2: Yemen Civil War

Bloc Positions

Russia/China/Iran:

While Russia remains neutral in the Yemen Civil war, they have held good relations with the country for centuries. They are avid supporters of the Houthis, and they have also supported and called for peace settlements, such as supporting an immediate cessation of Saudi airstrikes in Yemen. Like Russia, China has remained neutral and has close relations with Saudi, giving military aid to Saudi to use in Yemen. They have also supported initiatives to mitigate the conflict, such as peace talks. Finally, Iran has been outspokenly supportive of the Houthis and loyalists of Ali Abdullah Saleh. They have been one of the leading weapons suppliers to the Houthis. As a representative of one of these countries, you should expect to either be neutral or in favor of the Houthis. As Iran, you should favor direct military intervention, while China and Russia would support economic sanctions and a peace treaty of some sort.

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