



Dear Delegates,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the 2016 Montessori Model United Nations Conference.

The following pages intend to guide you in the research of the topics that will be debated at MMUN 2016 in committee sessions. Please note this guide only provides the basis for your investigation. It is your responsibility to find as much information necessary on the topics and how they relate to the country you represent. Such information should help you write your Position Paper, where you need to cite the references in the text and finally list all references in the Modern Language Association (MLA) format.

The more information and understanding you acquire on the two topics, the more you will be able to influence the Resolution writing process through debates [formal and informal caucuses], and the MMUN experience as a whole. Please feel free to contact us if and when you face challenges in your research or formatting your Position Papers.

We encourage you to learn all you can about your topics first and then study your country with regard to the two selected topics. Please remember that both committee members need to be well versed and ready to debate both topics.

Enjoy researching and writing your Position Papers.

We look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

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The Human Rights Council (HRC)

The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and make recommendations on them. It has the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year. It meets at the UN Office at Geneva.

The Council is made up of 47 United Nations Member States which are elected by the UN General Assembly. The Human Rights Council replaced the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

As the principal United Nations office mandated to promote and protect human rights for all, OHCHR leads global human rights efforts speaks out objectively in the face of human rights violations worldwide. The HRC provides a forum for identifying, highlighting and developing responses to today's human rights challenges, and act as the principal focal point of human rights research, education, public information, and advocacy activities in the United Nations system.

Since Governments have the primary responsibility to protect human rights, the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) provides assistance to Governments, such as expertise and technical trainings in the areas of administration of justice, legislative reform, and electoral process, to help implement international human rights standards on the ground. They also assist other entities with responsibility to protect human rights to fulfil their obligations and individuals to realize their rights.

Source: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/AboutUs/Pages/WhatWeDo.aspx#>

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Situation in Syria

Topic Background

The situation in Syria started peacefully, as part of the event commonly called “The Arab Spring” in early 2011. People in countries across the Middle East took to the streets to protest the long rule of their leaders. These protestors called for greater rights and more freedom.

In some countries, like Tunisia and Egypt, the rulers were overthrown without much violence. In Libya, the dictator Muammar Qaddafi was removed from power by a combination of rebel forces and attacks from a group of states backed by the UN Security Council¹.

Protests in Syria were met with the government increasing crackdowns on freedoms. These crackdowns eventually became full-on attacks on civilians, including the shelling and bombing of cities². President Bashar al-Assad has faced a growing pressure from the international community to end his oppression, but the violence continues. It is said there is widespread torture being carried out in state prisons.

The people of Syria are also very diverse, making efforts to end the violence difficult. Syria has many religions. Most Syrians are Muslims who practice the Shiite branch of Islam, with minority Sunni, Druze, and Christian communities. President Assad is the member of a branch of Islam, called Alawites, different than most of Syria. President Assad has claimed that if he is forced out of office, factions within Syria will be more likely to fight among themselves for control of the country³.

Making matters more complicated is the fact that members of the opposition have begun fighting back against the government. The Free Syrian Army is made up of soldiers who deserted from the Syrian Army, civilians wanting to fight the Assad government, and foreign elements who may not have Syria's best interests at heart. The exact make-up of the FSA is unknown, but they have been increasing their attacks against government officials and the Syrian Army.

The demands of either side are hard to bring together. The Syrian government wants all rebels to surrender themselves to prison and for all protests against the government to stop. The rebels want President Assad to step down from power and let free elections happen in Syria.

¹ United Nations. <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10200.doc.htm>

² Al Jazeera. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/05/20115117374683547.html>

² Al Jazeera. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/05/20115117374683547.html>

³ Al Jazeera. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/05/2012516145146401292.html>

Another issue that has taken up centre stage on a global platform is the existence of chemical weapons in Syria and how it poses a strategic threat in the Middle East. Larger countries such as Russia and USA have now been trying to work out a way in which these weapons can be disbanded and a peaceful compromise can be reached within the country, whereby there are no casualties and each side gets what they want.

For the 100,000 people who have left Syria⁴, and the 1.5 million who remain inside of Syria but have left their homes, the ongoing crisis impacts every part of their lives and its continued existence is debilitating to their very spirit. Reports coming out of Syria have hundreds of civilians dying every day. Should the international community fail to act, Syria will be continue a long and bloody civil war. The entire Middle East region will feel the results of such inaction.

Past International Action

After over a year of debate, the Security Council passed Resolution 2042 and Resolution 2043 in April 2012. These resolutions approved former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's role as Joint Special Envoy, a lead negotiator that worked for both the United Nations and the League of Arab States. Annan came up with six points known as the Annan Plan that would have President Assad leave power and would provide a process to find a new leader of Syria.

To support the Annan Plan and the ceasefire Assad agreed to under it, the Security Council created the UN Supervisory Mission in Syria (UNSMIS). UNSMIS was to watch over the ceasefire and report any violence to the Council. Over three hundred observers were sent to Syria; however, the ceasefire lasted less than a week.

Syria defends its recent attacks as being necessary to prevent terrorism from being carried out by the FSA. The Free Syrian Army insists that they must attack the Syrian government to prevent more attacks on civilians. Neither side has listened to UN Security Council resolutions or the Annan Plan. UNSMIS was pulled out of Syria on August 19, 2012⁵.

The UN Human Rights Council⁶ and UN General Assembly⁷ have also discussed the situation in Syria and passed resolutions calling for the violence to end. Neither of these bodies have the power of the Security Council to force changes. However, the UN Human Rights Council has published several reports with regard to the situation in Syria and the latest report is not painting

⁴ UNHCR. <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

⁵ BBC. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19314427>

⁶ UN Dispatch. <http://www.undispatch.com/behind-the-human-rights-council-vote-on-syria>

⁷ UN Dispatch. <http://www.undispatch.com/behind-the-scenes-in-todays-un-general-assembly-vote-on-syria>

a very good picture. These reports can be used as references by the Security Council when taking decisions with respect to Syria.

In addition, the United Nations has had several agencies on the ground to help end the humanitarian crisis in Syria, like UNICEF and the World Health Organization⁸. These programs are housing over one hundred thousand people in neighboring countries and providing medicine and food to people who have fled their homes inside of Syria. These programs are sadly underfunded and their efforts are being harmed by ongoing bombings and shootings. However, the humanitarian crisis also needs to be sorted out as it is getting more and more out of hand. The number of stranded and starved are over 250,000 and the number will only increase if a viable solution is not found.

Possible Solutions

There are two political blocs involved with the Syrian Civil War: one that is aiding the present government and one that wants to bring it down.

The NATO countries particularly United Kingdom, France and the United States of America are vehemently against the present Syrian government which has supposedly orchestrated the killings of thousands of civilians in the name of Civil War and look down upon their activities as the government in power. Other prominent supporters of the rebels are Turkey and the Arab League.

The Arab League plays a very important role in maintaining balance in the Middle East and according to them, the activities of Iran and the Syrian government are causing a great deal of imbalance to the stability of the region. The members, as per the decision of the League, have been allowed to back the rebels in Syria with arms.

The bloc that is supporting the Assad regime and wants them to continue to be in power include Iran, the Lebanese Hezbollah, Russia and several other countries aligned with the Russian Federation. Several of the other countries are backing Syria only because of their strategic ties with Russia, though one cannot comprehend what they really think of the entire issue. A more geographical insight into the matter would answer that question. Russia is completely backing Syria by providing all types of military support to them as of January 2014.

The United Nations Charter gives the United Nations Security Council the ability to act to protect “international peace and stability”⁹. It is also given the power to force countries to follow its resolutions, both in general under international law, and by using economic sanctions or

⁸ OHCHR. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/media.aspx?IsMediaPage=true>

⁹ UN Charter, Chapter V

military action. The world has hoped the Security Council will be able to find a solution which will bring the two sides together to create a new future for Syria. The goal of having a political solution to end the violence in Syria has been difficult to come to achieve.

Several attempts to come to a solution were vetoed by Russia and China as Permanent Members of the Security Council¹⁰. Both countries said that they wanted to prevent Western countries from bombing Syria like Libya. The US and other states argue that invading Syria was never the goal. Either way, no economic sanctions have been used against Syria by the Security Council.

Russia also accuses the West of being too favorable toward the rebels, and sending weapons to help them. The United States and others counter that Russia is still selling weapons to the Syrian government. Russia has been seen as the key to solving the problem for many outside observers. The Security Council needs to do three things to help solve the crisis:

- Come to an agreement on a way to end the violence between the two sides in Syria;
- Find a solution that both the Syrian government and the rebels will agree to;
- Make both sides allow humanitarian aid to reach affected civilians in Syria.

The Syrian government and the rebels' fighting is causing more and more damage to Syria. Entire cities are being destroyed as tanks and mortars fight on the streets. Every day, there are new stories about helicopters attacking civilians or army convoys being destroyed. Syrian refugees can only watch the news and hope their home is still there when they return, whenever that may be.

Further Research

Guiding Questions:

- What could make the two sides, government and rebel, come together to talk out their differences?
- What are the differences between what happened in Libya and the current crisis in Syria?
- How can the Security Council help the other UN agencies get food and materials to the civilians in Syria?

Research Sources:

¹⁰ New York Times. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/20/world/middleeast/russia-and-china-veto-un-sanctions-against-syria.html>

- [The Annan Plan](#): The full text of Kofi Annan's Six Point plan to end the crisis in Syria
- [UNSMIS](#): The official website for the UN Mission in Syria
- [BBC: Syria](#): A valuable resource for up to date news on events in Syria.

Questions:

1. What are some of the religious communities which exist within Syria? Which community is President Assad from?
2. Who makes up the Free Syrian Army?
3. Which foreign groups support President Assad and which would like to see him removed from office?
4. Who was named by the Security Council as the Joint Special Envoy for this crisis?
5. Which countries have vetoed resolution in the Security Council in regards to the conflict in Syria? Why did they do this?

Answers:

1. Some of the religious communities within Syria are: Shiite and Sunni Muslims, Druze and Christians. President Assad comes from the Alawite community.
2. The Free Syrian Army is made up of soldiers who deserted from the Syrian Army, civilians wanting to fight the Assad government, and foreigners.
3. Groups which support President Assad include Iran, the Lebanese Hezbollah, Russia, and some Russian allies. Groups which support the rebels include NATO countries (including the US, UK, France, etc.), Turkey, and the Arab League.
4. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was named Joint Special Envoy.
5. Russia and China have vetoed resolutions in the Security Council because they do not want Western countries to bomb Syria like they did in Libya.