



**United Nations Human  
Rights Council**

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## Letter from the Secretariat

Delegates,

Welcome to the background guides for MiniMUN 2019! Whether it is your first or third Model United Nations conference, it is our hope at MiniMUN that you will continue to further expand your knowledge of MUN, world issues, and the UN itself.

The purpose of this background guide is to introduce the committee and the topic, as well as help you write your position paper. Details on position paper and submission are available under the Position Paper tab on our website:

<http://chsminimum.weebly.com/position-papers.html>

The topics and committees were chosen to reflect the problems that our world leaders face. As a delegate, you will be stepping into the role of world leaders. You will take on perspectives different from your own, and you will push for what your country believes to be right.

We have diligently worked to make this year's topics even more captivating and advanced than previous years. If at any time, you are having trouble understanding the background guide, finding information on the topic, or writing your position paper, please contact your chairs for help. They are more than willing to assist you to make MiniMUN a productive and engaging conference!

We are very excited to see you at MiniMUN 2019!

**Christine Pang and Curran Myers**

**Secretary-General and Director-General, MiniMUN 2019**



## **Description of Committee**

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is an intergovernmental body that addresses situations of human rights violations. The UNHRC strengthens the protection and promotion of human rights worldwide. It was established to be able to replace the previous CHR. The previous CHR had been criticized because it allowed countries that had poor human rights to be members of the committee. The UNHRC was established by the General Assembly. It adopted a resolution on March 15, 2006. Meetings for the UNHRC are held in Geneva and they hold only three regular sessions a year, for a total of 10 weeks. Meetings are held throughout the year on the months of March, for a total of four weeks, in June, for a total of three weeks, and in September, for a total of three weeks. In addition to this the UNHRC at any time can decide to make a special session. These special sessions mainly address any violation to human rights and immediate emergencies. The UNHRC reports to General Assembly directly. If a country engages in a gross or a systematic violation of human rights during its UNHRC membership, the General Assembly is allowed to suspend the country that made this violation to human rights. In order for the suspension of the UNHRC to be able to happen two-thirds of the members present in the GA need to support the proposal.

UNHRC: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/pages/hrcindex.aspx>

# Loss of Human Rights in Conflicts Across the Middle East

## Introduction

The Middle East is currently in the spotlight under the international eye and in the media. In recent history, the Middle East has been filled with conflict and unrest. Some of these conflicts stem from religious differences, some are related to terrorism, and others to outside countries becoming involved in regional politics. In any conflict, there is a potential for human rights to be put in jeopardy, as government's crackdown against their citizens, which include women, minorities, refugees and others who are often already excluded by society.

Conflicts themselves can cause the loss of human rights due to the dangers posed to citizens. The right to life can be infringed upon, either by military action, such as the civilians killed in Syria by both Islamic State fighters and U.S. and Russian airstrikes, or by political action to silence dissent, like the murder of activists and journalists. Of the 33 job-related deaths of journalists so far in 2018 (as of July 19), 11 of them were murders that took place in the Middle East. Another 8 of the 33 journalist deaths also took place in the Middle East but were related to crossfire from conflicts or dangerous assignments. Minorities, ethnic groups and refugees can become targets for violence as well, due to the stress and distrust caused by conflict, and occasionally the root of the conflict centers on violence against a minority.

During times of conflict, there are often regime changes from one form of government, or one leader, to another. This can lead to loss of certain human rights related to democracy and governmental accountability. These rights include the ability to have a say in the transition of the government, the right to have a government that respects human rights by being accountable for past atrocities, and the potential for new laws that infringe upon human rights, such as freedom of expression and assembly. Freedom from discrimination for minorities and women is also an important topic, seeing how women and minorities can play important roles as

activists and protestors against oppressive regimes. Too often, however, their activism during times of conflict does not translate to a voice in the new government once the conflict concludes.

Lastly, disruptions caused to everyday life by conflicts can have negative implications for people's economic and social rights, like the rights to work, education, social security, food security, water, adequate housing and health. Some groups of individuals, like women, minorities and people in poverty, are most prone to lose access to these rights during times of conflict. Conflicts also have the potential to destabilize the government, disrupting governmental systems like social security and other types of welfare. Additionally, violent conflicts can prevent people from safely getting to school or work. This has the potential to cause a ripple effect, as it can prevent adults from earning income and can prevent others from attending school or education training.

## **History of the Middle East**

The Middle East has a rich history, from ancient Mesopotamian times to the Ottoman Empire, which ruled from 1299 all the way up until World War I, to today's post-Cold War world. The Ottoman Empire, at its peak, contained almost all of the Middle East as well as parts of northern Africa and southern Europe. By 1918, the Ottoman Empire had already been slowly losing power, and World War I caused its final collapse. However, since the Ottoman Empire had been ruling for 600 years, it created a power vacuum, which the colonial powers were quick to fill with their own influence. Similar to their approach with Africa at the Berlin Conference, the Western powers divided up the former Ottoman Empire into states. These states and new borders did not take ethnic groups, tribes, or religious sects into consideration. Many scholars point to this division as one of the roots of modern-day conflict in the Middle East.

The next big event in modern Middle-Eastern history was the Persian Gulf War, which began in 1990 with Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. When Hussein (then

President of Iraq) refused to abide by the UN Security Council's call that he withdraw from Kuwait, the U.S., NATO allies, Egypt and several Arab nations built up a military presence in Saudi Arabia. The U.S. and allied forces destroyed most Iraqi defenses, and a ceasefire was declared in February 1991. Despite this, the peace that followed was never truly peaceful. In 2002, U.S. President George W. Bush gave Hussein an ultimatum to either step down from his role as President of Iraq or the U.S. would invade. Hussein did not step down, and the U.S. took military action, thus beginning the Iraq War.

### **Ongoing Middle Eastern Conflicts**

In addition to this history, there is also the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict to consider. When Israel was founded as a Jewish state in 1948, it was immediately recognized by the U.S., but not by many other Middle Eastern countries. This status, or lack of, led to war in both 1948 and 1967. The 1967 war left Israel in control of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, two territories that had not originally been part of Israel and that were primarily occupied by non-Jewish Palestinians. The West Bank is currently under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority, but it is under occupation by Israel, which puts the Palestinians residing there through restrictions on movement and activities.

Human rights violations have occurred on both sides of the conflict. The Israeli treatment of Palestinians in the West Bank takes away their freedom of movement as well as forcibly removes them from land on the West Bank. Israeli forces have also killed or incarcerated many Palestinian protesters. The military wing of Hamas is considered by some to be a terrorist organization, and they have committed suicide bombings and other human rights violations against Israel as well.

Another Middle Eastern conflict that remains ongoing is the Syrian Civil War. In 2011, Syrian citizens began protesting against Syrian president Bashar al-Assad's regime. However, the protests eventually turned into a full civil war between the Syrian government under Assad, with support from Russia and Iran, rebel forces,

supported by the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Turkey, and the Islamic State (commonly known as ISIS). Throughout the course of the Syrian civil war, more than 400,000 people in Syria have been killed, 5.6 million have fled the country and another 6.5 million have been internally displaced. Displaced people and refugees from the Syrian conflict face many human rights violations, since they have been forced out of their homes, jobs and normal lives due to unsafe conditions.

Additionally, human rights violations in the Yemen conflict should be considered when addressing crises across the Middle East. In 2011, Ali Abdullah Saleh, then a longtime authoritarian president of Yemen, was forced to step down and give power to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. However, many people were not satisfied with this power transition, including former supporters of Saleh, thousands of citizens, and the Houthi militant group. These opposition groups rose up and attempted to take control of Yemen in 2015, causing Hadi to flee the country. Saudi Arabia and other Sunni-majority Arab states created a coalition to support Hadi's government, and this coalition is also backed by the U.S., UK and France. In the three years this conflict has begun, the humanitarian effects have been devastating. The UN has described it as "the world's worst man-made humanitarian disaster." At least 5,558 people of the 9,245 people that have died in the conflict were civilians. According to United Nations estimates, as of August 2018, 11.3 million people in Yemen immediately require humanitarian assistance in order to survive. Only half of Yemen's 3,500 medical centers are fully functioning, and they are currently in the midst of the world's largest cholera outbreak, with over 2,200 associated deaths.

## **Past UN Action**

There are three main areas of modern international law that are aimed at dealing with protection of victims of war: human rights law, refugee law and humanitarian law. International human rights law and international humanitarian law share the goal of preserving the dignity and humanity of all. Over the years, the General Assembly, the Commission on Human Rights and the Human Rights Council

have agreed that, in situations of armed conflict, parties involved in the conflict have legally binding obligations concerning the rights of humans affected by the conflict. These rights, which are inherent in all human beings, are interdependent and indivisible. The international community has thus adopted a comprehensive legislative framework so as to deal with violations of human rights in armed conflicts and war zones. International humanitarian law seeks to limit the effects of armed conflict and protects people who are not (or no longer) participating in the conflict, and restricts the means of warfare. It has to be applied equally by all sides of every armed conflict. In particular, Protocol I to the 1949 Geneva Conventions (1977) relates to international armed conflicts. Broadly speaking, international armed conflicts involve different states whereas national conflicts involve only governments and rebel forces operating within the borders of one country; yet, as this distinction is not always applicable, the international community has since recognized that some “internal” conflicts should be considered as international armed conflicts, and should be included under above-mentioned Protocol I.

Another pillar of this framework is the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (entered into force in 2002) which is the treaty that established the ICC and four core international crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression. Under the Rome Statute, the ICC can prosecute such crimes in situations where states cannot or do not want to do so themselves. If the crime is committed in a state which is not party to the Statute, the ICC has to receive an authorization from the UNSC before proceeding to any investigation. There are also a number of Security Council Resolutions on the protection of civilians during times of conflict.

## **Conclusion**

All of these separate Middle Eastern conflicts are causing human rights losses in an alarming rate across the region. These losses have occurred through restricting freedoms, breeding discrimination or, in the worst cases, taking away the rights to

health, safety and life, it is up to the delegations of the UNHRC to eliminate this conflict in the Middle East.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What is the current stance with human rights for all people despite differences in the country you will be representing?
2. How does this issue affect the delegation you represent and those around the World?
3. In what ways can the issue of lack of human rights globally be changed?
4. What efforts has your country or other member states made towards the human rights movement and how can that contribute to the changes in the Middle East?