



2009 - 2010 Model Arab League

BACKGROUND GUIDE

Council on Social Affairs

National Model Arab Leagues

(i.e., the National University or National High School MAL, Spring '10, in Washington, DC)

www.ncusar.org/modelarableague

National
Council
on US-
Arab
Relations



1. Addressing challenges facing political activists and civil society organizations in the Arab world, including the status of minorities

What's the Issue?

As more and more Arab nations embrace a spirit of free speech, both spoken and written, many activists and organizations are speaking out against their respective governments. Governments, in turn, are reacting to these individuals and groups with unprecedented force; incarceration is not uncommon when an individual or group speaks out against a government official, and reports about these incarcerations have caught the attention of many human rights organizations worldwide.

The effects of these incarcerations have therefore hindered journalists' ability to, in their estimation, accurately report certain issues prevalent in Arab nations. In addition, minority groups often rely on the press and human rights organizations to make their concerns known to other nations and organizations in an effort to bring resolution to problems that are occurring. Arab governments, meanwhile, contend that the reporting of these issues presents a threat to the security and welfare of the citizens in the respective nations.

With regard to minorities, language barriers often hamper communication. With minority groups speaking different languages than official languages, minorities are often not heard.

What is a Civil Society Organization and a Political Activist?

The London School of Economics Centre for Civil Society defines Civil Society Organizations as:

Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values... Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy group.

Political activists are similar to Civil Society Organizations in that they look to make a statement not as an organization but as a group of individuals.

Questions to Consider -- from your nation's unique perspective

- How do officials treat political activists and civil service organizations if they speak out against the government?
- Does a complaint against the government present a threat to the security and welfare of the nation and its citizens?
- Is it possible for activists to coexist in society without threatening the stability of that society?
- How do the Internet and new forms of media and rapid information distribution (as used in blogs, forums and RSS feeds) impact the discussion when addressing challenges facing activists?
- What role do foreign media and international NGOs play in this debate?
- How of groups whose native language differs from official languages still be heard by governments?

Resources to Review

Definition for Civil Society Organizations (in full)

http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what_is_civil_society.htm

Reporters Without Borders – An organization which reports information about journalists worldwide

<http://www.rsf.org>

2. Guaranteeing access to basic and continuing education for all people, especially girls, women, and other vulnerable populations

What's the Issue?

The World Bank reported in early 2009 that “the quality of education in the Arab world is falling behind other regions and needs urgent reform if it is to tackle unemployment”. This serious lack of access to quality education has been a root cause of many challenges facing the Arab world, including lack of infrastructure in some areas, increasing unemployment and a continuing disparity between the lower and upper classes. In addition, fewer educational opportunities for women have created a significant disparity between males and females in society, with illiteracy rates of females double of those when compared with their male counterparts in many countries in the Arab world. With regard to young people, parents are often encouraging young children to go to work instead of school due to economic conditions at home.

What is being done now?

Many NGOs, including UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) are working within Arab nations to provide educational opportunities for all, however economic infrastructure present in Arab nations has hampered the progress of these organizations.

Questions to Consider -- from your nation's unique perspective

- How does a lack of access to education for women and children effect the economic situation in my country?
- Should women and children receive access to education?
- How should the committee take religion into account when addressing this topic?
- Is education a luxury or a right for citizens of my country?
- What role(s) do NGOs play in providing access to education for all?
- How can Arab nations work together to improve the quality of education in our respective nations?
- What can be done to reduce the cost of education for citizens of my country?
- Even if education is available to the public, are jobs available for these educated citizens? If not, how can jobs be created?

Resources To Review

BBC: “Arab education falling behind”

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7227610.stm>

Empowering Women, Developing Society: Female Education in the Middle East and North Africa

<http://www.prb.org/Publications/PolicyBriefs/EmpoweringWomenDevelopingSocietyFemaleEducationintheMiddleEastandNorthAfrica.aspx>

United Nations Activities and Publications for the Advancement of Arab Women

<http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/databases/aaw/pub.asp>

Minorities in the Middle East: A listing of websites and articles to serve as a starting-point for researching minority groups

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/mideast/cuvlm/minorities.html>

3. Assessing compliance with the Arab Charter of Human Rights and other international human rights conventions to provide safeguards against denials and violations of human rights

What's the Issue?

The Revised Arab Charter of Human Rights and its references to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam have been great steps in recording many basic human rights owed to all citizens of the Arab world. Please find the texts of all of these Charters and Declarations below.

The issue arises with implementation. While some nations in the Arab world have embraced concepts with regard to the rights of citizens as described in these documents, the unfair treatment of citizens and instability within Arab nations have caused many to review these documents and assess government's compliance with the demands set forth in these documents.

Questions to Consider -- *from your nation's unique perspective*

- What issue(s) are stopping Arab nations from complying with clauses in these documents (below)?
- What can be done to determine specific violations?
- How can Arab League countries work together to provide an environment which safeguards against denials and violations of human rights?
- What role(s) do NGOs play in the context of safeguarding against human rights violations?
- What role(s) do nations outside of the Arab League play in this debate?
- What is policy for the country that I represent on the Arab Charter of Human Rights?

Resources to Review

Revised Charter of Human Rights (2004) Text

<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/loas2005.html>

The Revised Arab Charter on Human Rights: A Step Forward? – A commentary on the Arab Charter of Human Rights

<http://hrjr.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/5/2/361>

United Nations: Universal Declaration of Human Rights Text

<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

United Nations: International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Text

<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/b3ccpr.htm>

Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam Text

<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/cairodeclaration.html>

4. Re-examining public health as a human right in accordance with the 2009 UNDP Human Security Report, with particular attention paid to concerns related to H1N1, HIV/AIDS, maternal health and infant mortality, substance abuse, and disabilities

What's the Issue?

Significant improvements have been made with regard to public health in the Arab World but more are needed due to still increasing mortality rates and decreasing birth rates in some countries in the Arab world. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) describes its 2009 UNDP Human Security Report as follows:

The report argues that human security is a prerequisite for human development, and that the widespread absence of human security in Arab countries undermines people's options. Human security refers not only to questions of survival, but also basic needs such as access to clean water and quality of life concerns.

Although many components make up this report, the following two chapters are most pertinent to this discussion on public health as a human right:

- Hunger, nutrition and human security
- Approaching health through human security - a road not taken

Be sure to read these two sections closely and take note of issues that it brings up including the direct and indirect causes for food shortages (as noted in the report); such a lack of supplies affecting the of food per capita, and domestic conflicts which can mean irregular or in drastic cases, declining numbers of meals per capita. The human security section also connects the concepts of stability and personal welfare which adds a second layer to this debate.

The Role of the UNDP

The UNDP is an office of the United Nations which produces reports to serve as recommendations for other bodies which enact policy, such as the League of Arab States.

Questions to Consider -- *from your nation's unique perspective*

- How is the country that I represent already putting into action the recommendations found in the its 2009 UNDP Human Security Report?
- Working with other Arab League nations, how can we use the recommendations in the report to combat viruses, maternal health, mortality rates, substance abuse and disabilities?
- What role(s) do multi-national companies, along with NGOs play in this debate?
- What are the educational requirements needed to successfully implement recommendation(s) from this report?

Resources to Review

Article: Threats to human security impede development in the Arab countries

<http://content.undp.org/go/newsroom/2009/july/multiple-threats-to-human-security-impede-development-in-the-arab-countries.en>

UNDP Arab Human Development Report Text

<http://www.arab-hdr.org/contents/index.aspx?rid=5>

UNDP Website dedicated to Arab States

<http://arabstates.undp.org/>