



2009 - 2010 Model Arab League

BACKGROUND GUIDE

Special Committee on Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

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 existing protection gaps and considering measures to ensure that vulnerable populations in forced or voluntary migrations, including asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, refugees, returnees, and stateless persons, are protected according to international law and standards

What's the Issue?

This is a complicated topic with a simple aim: find and address migrant groups that are not currently protected, namely migrants that are vulnerable but do not fit into categories already identified and targeted by aid organizations. The largest groups to consider here are those that are forced to migrate, and those that voluntarily return to their homes but are still vulnerable and/or have lost their property. Current categories are listed: “asylum seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, returnees, and stateless persons. It is important to understand the differences between these categories, and then determine types of migrants not receiving recognition or aid.

Relevance to the Arab World

Conflicts are complicated, and the Arab world has no shortage of conflicts and complications. Refugees and other categories of migrants mentioned in the topic live in each Arab state with large clusters coming from places like Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, Somalia, and elsewhere. Because of the intricacies of conflict, populations move for different reasons, and are thus categorized differently. Displaced populations drain human and monetary capital from ‘displacing states’, and put undue strain on ‘receiving states.’ The goal, then, is to identify as many of these people as possible and address their needs for the good of all states.

Questions to Consider

- ❖ How might addressing refugee issues in other countries benefit all Arab states?
- ❖ How many displaced persons live in my country? Where are they from?
- ❖ What resources do displaced persons in my country have? Who is helping them?
- ❖ What rights are afforded to displaced persons in my country? Does my country accept displaced persons? Are they offered citizenship or other rights?
- ❖ What mechanisms already function to identify displaced persons? What would an Arab League role in that process look like?
- ❖ What is the proof that there is need for action in this area?
- ❖ How will those that do not want to return be handled, particularly if the ‘receiving state’ does not want them to stay?

Resources to Review

UNHCR Website (review what types of displaced persons are recognized, where they are...)

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>

UNRWA Website (UN agency mandated to help Palestinians specifically)

<http://www.un.org/unrwa/english.html>

ANERA: independent non-profit agency working to improve the lives of Palestinians

<http://www.nera.org/>

Human Rights Watch Reports (enter your search options, also News section helpful)

<http://www.hrw.org/en/publications/reports?filter0=692&filter1=11>

Refugees International

<http://www.refugeesinternational.org/who-we-are>

2. Developing League standards for accurate reporting, documentation, and record-keeping of refugee and IDP (internally displaced persons) populations

What's the issue?

Similar to topic 2, this issue has a more specific goal: setting standards. The language of the topic indicates that resolutions on this topic should not aim to resolve refugee issues, provide them assistance, or impact the conflicts and conditions that displace people. Resolutions should examine the various ways displaced persons are recognized and recorded and propose ways to make them more accurate. For example, a resolution proposing a new fund for refugees would be out of order.

Relevance to the Arab World

The question implies that reported numbers of refugees and IDPs are not accurate, which is a problem because these numbers are sometimes manipulated for various reasons. Some states may downplay their numbers as a way to minimize international attention, or perhaps inflate their numbers to maximize international aid. These are just examples of reasons why a more accurate, comprehensive record-keeping might be necessary.

Questions to Consider

- ❖ What are the benefits or drawbacks to more accurate reporting?
- ❖ What is the current method and capacity to track displaced persons? Which organizations and agencies are responsible for tracking?
- ❖ Which states host larger displaced person populations? What reason would they have to manipulate the numbers?
- ❖ How can the Arab League as an institution improve the accuracy of reporting?
- ❖ What are the roles of 'displacing states' and 'receiving states' with regard to recording and documenting displaced persons?
- ❖ How are these issues complicated by gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and age issues?

Resources to Review

Human Rights Watch Reports (enter your search options, also News section helpful)

<http://www.hrw.org/en/publications/reports?filter0=692&filter1=11>

Refugees International

<http://www.refugeesinternational.org/who-we-are>

UNHCR Website (review what types of displaced persons are recognized, where they are...)

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>

3. Reviewing the rights and duties of refugee receiving states as well as the obligations of expatriating or displacing states, including such factors as refugee access to supplies and aid workers and the economic consequences for receiving states

Who is responsible for refugee issues?

Along with basic issues of human rights and protection of life, states must examine to which level they are going to commit in giving aid to refugee populations and to which level they are required to receive refugees and assisting their needs. Refugees fleeing into other regions or other states bring practically nothing with them. These populations will require basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare. While host states often do have some structure of support, many do not have nearly enough to keep up with demand and may lack the political will to raise more support for foreign refugees. States also work with international agencies such as the United Nations and the International Red Cross to provide assistance to these peoples. States must examine how these populations of refugees will affect local populations in terms of spending on social welfare programs, unemployment benefits, and the availability of economic opportunities for both groups. Extending aid may put domestic spending in some areas at risk. While there may be a push within states and state governments to provide some relief, states must also be acutely aware of the reaction local populations may play when extending relief to refugee groups. States must consider their responsibilities to refugees and their own citizenry and seek solutions to address the issue of refugee access to basic life needs as well as ways states may be able to help repopulate them and possibly integrate them into their own countries if at all possible.

Relevance to the Arab World

With many conflicts currently being carried on in the Arab League sphere (Iraq, the West Bank/Gaza Strip) issues of refugee rights have become increasingly important. States in the region must take into account populations of people that are streaming through their borders and affecting local populations. Today there are millions of refugees throughout the region pushing the issue into every country's realm of concerns. While states must address the issue of these refugees in terms of their rights, they must also speak to the rights of their State's populations and the obligations they have to their citizens. Many states in the Arab world have signed agreements dealing with their treatment of refugee rights and access, a point that members must take into account when forming policies to address those who have taken refuge in another nation. Over the course of the last few years, economic downturns across the region have also put governments in a position where they must address issues of unemployment and economic growth. The issue of refugees in these states will only make these issues more pronounced and add pressure to deal with both issues as best as possible.

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

- How has your state treated refugees currently and in the past?
 - What are basic rights of refugees?
 - Which countries in the region have done better/worse at address the rights of refugees?
 - What are some of the main inhibitors to the well-being of refugees?
 - Within the context of human rights, what caveats exist in addressing refugee rights?
- Which international organizations are at work in the region and how are states working with them to address refugee issues?
- How can state sovereignty or Arab unity form perspectives on this debate?

Resources to Review

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

<http://ochaonline.un.org/HumanitarianIssues/tabid/1081/Default.aspx>

United Nations Relief & Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

<http://www.un.org/unrwa/english.html>

UNHCR – Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

<http://www.unhcr.org/43ce1cff2.html>

4. Re-examining member state adherence to international conventions regarding refugees and internally displaced persons, noting particularly the problem of forced migration related to ethnic, minority, and religious identity.

What are the rules and how must they be followed?

Currently, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHRC) estimates the number of refugees in the Middle East at 2,175,440 persons, more than any other specific region in the world.¹ Groups throughout the Arab world from Somalia to Sudan, Iraq to the Gaza Strip have been experiencing mass migrations of populations pushed from areas by massive conflict. Throughout its history the League of Arab States as well as other international organizations such as the United Nations has been working to clarify issues relating to basic human rights and the rights of refugees. Most nations in the League of Arab States are members of numerous declarations and conventions relating to human rights and must use these agreements when instituting new policies relating to human rights and on a broader view human rights in general, especially in an Islamic context. Consider among any others agreed to, three major declarations and conventions relating to human rights and the status of refugees: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (1990), and the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951)/ the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (1967).

Relevance to the Arab World

The issue of human rights is not new to the world. Areas in which nations come to agreements gives them heightened interest in maintaining cooperative relations in other areas such as economics, world health issues, and global security. Areas of human rights could provide areas in which the Arab states could come together with their more developed counterparts. These problems will not abate anytime in the near future and must not be continually pushed down the road to be addressed. Each Arab state will have to determine what it is they can afford to do to solve this problem and what issues it will deal with on a cultural level such as their national identity and racial make-up. Along with state interest, those in the Arab world also bring with them a unique perspective drawn from their Islamic religion. In the conventions they have signed, Islam has been cited as a moral background with which states must take into account. States may have to decide how much these moral imperatives will guide their practices and policies and how Islam will help shape their perspective

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

- Which international initiatives have made the most progress in terms of the rights of refugees?
- What are the major impediments to implementing these initiatives?
- Which international initiatives is your state a part of?
- How might your state contribute to or improve the efficacy of these initiatives?
- How could regional efforts to address the issue of refugees work to strengthen international agreements that have already been reached?
- Which issue areas have not been addressed by any international convention?
- How might the well-being of refugees be in the interests of your state?

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/4b04002b9.html>

Resources to Review

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

<http://ochaonline.un.org/HumanitarianIssues/tabid/1081/Default.aspx>

UNHCR Global Report 2008 – The Year in Review

<http://www.unhcr.org/4a2d0b1d2.html>

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c2.html>

UNHCR – Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

<http://www.unhcr.org/43ce1cff2.html>

UN Declaration of Human Rights

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

Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam

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

Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees

<http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b66c2aa10.pdf>

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

<http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/57jvgl>