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Committee Name: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Committee Difficulty: Beginner

Chair: Cara Smith

Co-Chair: Fadi Jaber

Topic 1 – Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar

Introduction

A Muslim minority group called the Rohingya has faced persecution and severe discrimination in Myanmar. The Myanmar military has forced over 740,000 Rohingyas to flee to Bangladesh, resulting in a major refugee crisis since 2017. The Myanmar military has been at the root of many human rights violations, including spree killings, sexual abuse, and the burning of villages. In addition to the previously stated atrocities, the group has allegations of ethnic cleansing and mass genocide against them. The UNHCR's primary goal in this committee is to provide emergency assistance and propose means to advocate for the basic rights of the Rohingya in Myanmar.

History of Conflict

After the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), a terrorist group, claimed responsibility for attacks on army and police checkpoints, there were clashes in Rakhine in August 2017. Following the military's ruthless campaign that resulted in the destruction of hundreds of Rohingya communities and the forced exodus of approximately 700,000 Rohingya

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from Myanmar, the government designated ARSA as a terrorist organization. Doctors Without Borders, an international medical charity, reports that during the first month of violence, from August 25 to September 24, 2017, at least 6,700 Rohingya were killed. Additionally, it is believed that land mines were placed close to border crossings that the Rohingya used to escape to Bangladesh and that Myanmar's security forces opened fire on fleeing civilians.

The violence has been referred to as ethnic cleansing and the humanitarian situation as catastrophic by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. In September 2018, a UN fact-finding team published a report asserting that the Myanmar government harbored "genocidal intent" against the Rohingya. The UN panel's head reported that the investigation revealed distinct patterns of military abuse, including the deliberate targeting of civilians, sexual assault, the promotion of anti-minority discourse, and the establishment of an environment in which security personnel are allowed to operate with impunity.

According to reports, since the beginning of 2018, Rohingya villages and farmlands have been destroyed by Myanmar authorities to construct infrastructure, security facilities, and residential areas. Although rights activists are concerned that these actions may be meant to accommodate communities other than the Rohingya in Rakhine, the government claims that these developments are being made in preparation for the repatriation of refugees. Furthermore, sources indicate that the military started enforcing its restrictions about a year before ARSA

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struck, casting doubt on the government's claim that its actions were a reaction to the assaults.

Rakhine State is not new to sectarian violence; security operations throughout the previous five years, particularly in 2012 and 2016, also forced tens of thousands of Rohingya to flee their homes.

Current Situation

Cyclone Mocha, the most powerful cyclone to visit the region in recent memory, made landfall in Bangladesh and Myanmar in May 2023, wreaking havoc. Millions of people in Bangladesh and Myanmar lost their homes, infrastructure, and livelihoods because of Cyclone Mocha. Ninety-three thousand Rohingya refugees were among the 2.3 million people in Bangladesh affected by the storm.

Residents of the camp have made every effort to rebuild before the rainy season peaks, as the monsoon rains began shortly after. However, thousands of people are still left outside in the weather because only a small portion of the collapsed and damaged shelters have been rebuilt. The UNHCR, its allies, and government organizations are positioned to offer emergency support to the impacted communities. There are continuous, rapid assessments. The supply of food supplies, safe drinking water, emergency shelter, and access to sanitary and medical facilities are the top needs right now.

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Topic 2: Facilitating Refugee Transitions in the Middle East and North Africa

Introduction

To this day, facilitating refugee transition in the MENA region remains a critical challenge. The region holds millions of refugees, primarily from Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Palestine, who have been displaced due to ongoing conflicts. The response to the crisis involves humanitarian assistance and long-term integration strategies to provide sufficient shelter, healthcare, and education. Many refugees reside in camps, while others are integrated into urban settings, often facing legal and social barriers. Delegates must collaborate to propose improvements to protection frameworks and support local economies in this region.

History of Conflict

Throughout its modern history, the Middle East, and North Africa (MENA) region has seen complicated conflicts and transitional periods, with displacement being a notable outcome. The region has experienced several refugee crises, ranging from the largest and longest lasting in history (the Palestinian refugee crisis, which began in 1948) to the situations in Sudan and Iraq in the 1990s and early 2000s and those who fled instability in Libya, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria in 2011 and later.

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Most people seeking safety have generally been welcomed by their neighbors, primarily through unofficial protection structures. This may be partially explained by the long-standing and well-established customs of asylum-granting in Arab and Islamic culture, which predate current international refugee legislation and, some would claim, lay its basis. Hospitality, fraternity, and solidarity values are also frequently linked to laws governing the admission of refugees escaping violence in the area. These patterns and regional dynamics still have an impact on the area today. Since 2011, geopolitical changes and persistent instability have had a significant impact on population movements and forced migration, particularly the Syrian refugee crisis.

Current situation

Over ten years after the Arab upheavals of 2011, the Middle East, and North Africa (MENA) still experience unparalleled levels of displacement. The country with the highest proportion of refugees per person is Lebanon (1 in 8), followed by Jordan (1 in 14) and Turkey (1 in 23). Millions of people are still internally displaced in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, where 2.6 million of the 4 million internally displaced Yemenis are facing potentially fatal food shortages. The prolonged conflict in Ukraine has raised food and fuel costs, further disrupted supply lines, and increased the expense of providing humanitarian aid to refugees and displaced persons in the region. These developments have exacerbated the COVID-19 pandemic's aftereffects. The consequences of climate change will exacerbate the current conflict-related causes—droughts, increasing sea levels, food shortages due to crop failure, or desertification—that force people to escape their home regions or nations in the ensuing decades.

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Conflict, bad governance, climate change, and deteriorating economic conditions have made life extremely tough for migrants, refugees, and other vulnerable groups that come from and live in the MENA area. The ongoing effects of the Syrian civil war and the lack of a long-term solution for most Syrian refugees are among them. Other issues include the displacement of Iraqis, Yemenis, and Syrians abroad, which is made worse by the effects of climate change, and the dearth of safe migration options in North Africa for both citizens and foreigners. Countries in the MENA region will continue to struggle with the political, economic, and social effects of migration if Europe is primarily concerned with negotiating agreements to keep migrants and refugees within MENA host states, even in the face of attempts at better international responsibility-sharing, like the 2018 Global Compact for Migration. Displacement may make social tensions and existing inequities worse if there are no investments made in climate resilience, responsive governance, equitable social policies, and chances for regular mobility as an adaptive mechanism.

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