



SOFIMUN
Sofia International Model United Nations

Edition: V/2012
Period: 21-28 July 2012
Location: Sofia, Bulgaria

Website: www.sofimun.org
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E-mail: info@sofimun.org

"Search Of Future Ideas, Models Us Now"

COMMITTEE:
UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

CHAIRS: MUNKHBOLD BADARCH &
ATHANASIA KEFALA

TOPIC:
REFUGEES IN NORTH AFRICAN AND ARAB
NATIONS



UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

The United Nations Human Rights Council was created in March, 2006 and is the successor to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, which was often criticized for the high-profile positions it gave to member states that did not guarantee the human rights of their own citizens. The Council is considered an international body within the United Nations System and its purpose is to address human rights violations.

The main reason for replacing the Commission of Human Rights was the fact that it received immense criticism for allowing countries with somewhat questionable stances on Human Rights to remain a member of the commission. This issue has been addressed by the Human Rights Council as Libya was suspended from the committee at the outbreak of the civil war. In fact the work of the Human Rights Council has been held to such a degree that there have been proposals to replace the Trusteeship Council (seeing that it has already served its purpose) with the Human Rights Council as one of the six principal organs of the UN. The HRC consists of 47 members chosen from the General Assembly for three year terms and a possible extension to it with 13 representatives each from Africa and Asia, 6 from Eastern Europe, 8 from Latin America and Caribbean and 7 from Western Europe and other Regions. Although the HRC meets three times a year, there can be additional sessions for specific issues if a third of the committee request it and there have been 19 such incidents since the creation of the HRC.

The Council assumes all the mechanisms, mandates, functions and responsibilities of the Commission for Human Rights. At the same time, it is tasked with the review, rationalization and improvement of these. This makes up the bulk of the Council's work in its first year.

„Special procedures“ is the name given to the mechanisms established by the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights and continued by the Human Rights Council to monitor human rights violations in specific countries or examine global human rights issues. Special procedures can be either individuals who are leading experts in a particular area of human rights, or working groups usually composed of five members. In order to preserve their independence they do not receive pay for their work.



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Topic A: Refugees in North African and Arab Countries

I. Introduction

Since the start of the Arab Spring at the end of 2010, hundreds of thousands of individuals fled Arab countries mostly to neighboring North African countries such as Algeria, Chad, Niger and Sudan. In 2010 Colonel Kaddafi closed the UNHRC office in Tripoli which led to people having to flee Libya in the hundreds even before the start of the civil war which lasted for over half a year. Reports suggest that more than a million Libyans sought refuge in those countries during the Libyan civil war. Whilst Italy welcomed refugees from North Africa at the start of the Arab Spring, it wasn't long before they closed their borders citing incapacity to facilitate the amount of incoming refugees after failed attempts to convince fellow EU member states to share the burden of refugees. As a result it became considerably more troublesome to flee the North African and Arab nations meaning that thousands of refugees have no means to leave the unstable region. The UNHRC has attempted taken measures to prevent human rights violations of the refugees which have made the situation more tolerable but obviously still a bit too far from ideal.

II. Situation prior to the Arab Spring

Prior to the global phenomenon known as Arab Spring, the situation of refugees in North African and Arab Nations was far less complex. There was the odd political refugee fleeing from Arab Nations as well as Palestinian refugees in Arab Nations as conditions in Palestine were made close to inhabitable by Israel. However, the situation exploded in December 2010 at the start of the Arab Spring as regional leaders resorted to extreme measures to stay in power which led to massive bloodshed and a huge influx of refugees to Europe (mainly Europe) to a point where the Italian government was unable to deal with the situation and therefore had to turn them away leaving them stranded in a middle of a number of bloody conflicts.

▪ The Arab Spring

On the 19th December 2011, Mohamed Bouazizi set fire to himself in protest of the way he was treatment by police. What followed were mass unrests of unprecedented magnitude in 17 North African, Middle Eastern and Arab countries with the governments of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya replaced by more or less democratic counterparts. Although most of the countries affected by what came to be known as the Arab Spring are relatively stable now, the Syrian civil war is ongoing with the international community unable to take active measures to bring peace and stability to the war stricken nation as the Russian Federation and Peoples Republic of China continue to veto any United Nations Security Council resolution which even implies a possible authorization of military action.

▪ Current situation of refugees



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Syria

Profile:

President: Bashar Al Assad

Number of refugees: approximately 100000

Countries receiving refugees: Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan



With president Bashar Al Assad seemingly prepared to do anything to stay in power and with the rebels not willing to surrender, there doesn't seem to be a resolution to the Syrian civil war in the near future. The majority of refugees fleeing the Syrian Civil War seek refuge in Turkey who after the Syrian military shot down a Turkish fighter jet are even more sympathetic to Syrian refugees and the Free Syrian Army. In addition to this, an estimated 25000 of 100000 Syrian refugees have fled to Lebanon with the rest fleeing to Turkey and other neighboring countries. However, other countries such as Jordan are not as welcoming as they imposed restrictions on the amount of Syrian refugees entering their borders. Refugees from other countries using Syria as a transit country to their final destination before the start of the conflict have no way of reaching their final destination as the conflict more or less closed off the Syrian border. 15 months into the conflict the refugee situation in Syria is extremely fragile with the UNHRC raising approximately 190 million dollars to support the Syrian refugees by the construction of refugee camps among other projects.

Although president Assad of Syria has periodically put a number of Syrian villages, most notably Homs under heavy artillery fire for lengthy periods of time, an international intervention into Syria seems a farfetched possibility rather than a probability for a number of key reasons. Firstly, there seems to be a consensus in the United Nations that only the Security Council can authorize military action (although the General Assembly does have a theoretical right to authorize an intervention) which means that permanent members Russia and China have the authority to prevent any resolutions consenting to an intervention from passing, a right that they will definitely utilize to the fullest extent seeing that Syria is one of the main recipients of Russian weapons. Secondly, there is an argument mainly supported by the Russian Federation and PR China that coalition forces gravely overstepped the mandate provided by UN Resolution 1973 in Libya and that a similar outcome situation should be avoided in the Syrian conflict. Moreover, whilst Libya was a relatively isolated country before even before the intervention, Syria is located in a strategically delegate region as tensions between the West and Iran will definitely intensify should an intervention into Syria take place. Finally, NATO, rather surprisingly to some refused to enter Syria even after the Turkish jet was shot down even if their policy clearly allows them to intervene should NATO want it.

Libya

Profile:

President (at the start of conflict): Colonel Muammar Kaddafi (deceased 20 October 2011)

Number of refugees: approximately 950000



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Countries receiving refugees: Tunisia, Egypt, Italy, Chad

A conflict which lasted for over 8 months, the Libyan Civil War has been the most devastating in the Arab Spring in terms of refugees fleeing the country most of them to Tunisia and the lucky few to Italy and further into the EU. As Colonel Kaddafi sealed off the Libya – Tunisia border in the middle of the conflict, it became considerably more difficult to flee the country in turmoil. Unlike the situation in Syria however, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1973 authorizing the maintenance of a no fly zone over Libya without much delay in March only a month after the start of the conflict. Since the UNHRC office in Tripoli was removed by Kaddafi a few months prior to the outbreak of violence, the provision of support refugees within Libya became increasingly difficult. Instead, refugee camps were created in countries where the majority of Libyan refugees fled to. After the death of Muammar Kaddafi in October of last year, the Libyan civil war finally came to an end yet very few of the refugees that had fled Libya decided to return home.



III. Response from the international community

As in a number of cases, what started off as protests quickly turned into civil wars, there was not much the UNHRC could do to help the refugees while they were still in their countries. Instead the UNHRC in cooperation with NGO's such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch condemned the leaders for gross violations of human rights and built refugee camps and provided funding to relatively stable neighboring countries such as Turkey to where most of the refugees fled. In the case of Libya, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1973 without too much delay but has not been able to act as decisively and collectively in the case of Syria as Russia and China claim that the mandate of resolution 1973 was exceeded by NATO forces.

IV. Issues to consider

- An end to the ongoing conflict
- Support to countries receiving refugees
- Future avoidance of Human Rights violations

V. References:

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