

ISRMUN 2017

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THE UNITED NATIONS Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee

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Committee: Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM)

Topic A: Strengthening the Capacity of Refugee Host Nations

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I. Committee Background

The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM), also known as the Third Committee, is a specialized branch of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. SOCHUM was established in 1948 to protect and enforce the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It focuses on social and humanitarian issues that influence and affect individuals everywhere. Additionally, the committee manages issues on the protection of children, the treatment of refugees, the elimination of racism, the freedom of political participation, the expression of cultures, among many others. Hence, the fundamental point of SOCHUM is to advance global peace and security, and verify that human rights are being followed around the world. In order to enforce its resolutions, SOCHUM closely collaborates with other UN committees and agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (Third Committee, 2017). Currently, the committee is striving to support and meet the needs of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of seventeen goals that promote advances in ending poverty, reducing inequality and establishing strong judicial institutions (SDGs, 2017).

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II. Topic information

A) History of Topic

According to the United Nations, a refugee is “someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence” (UNHCR, 2017). There are an estimated 65.3 million refugees around the world (Figures at a Glance, UNHCR, 2016). Host nations are countries that provide basic services, shelter, food, water, safety and anything necessary for a human to survive. They are mainly focused on providing the basic needs to refugees from neighboring countries. According to UNHCR, strengthening the capacity of refugee host nations means the promotion of sustainable solutions to help host nations aid those in need. It aims to strengthen logistical, material and human capacities and include the bringing together of different communities and the training of personnel (Furley and Otsea, UNHCR, 1999).

This issue has come to the forefront due to the increase in refugees around the world. Conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as famine and political instability in Somalia, Sudan and Eritrea, have forced refugees to flee their countries. The main problem is that most host nations do not have the resources to support the refugees entering their borders. In a report by UNHCR, it was found that 80% of the world’s refugee population was hosted by developing countries. This has placed a major strain on their economies and overall governmental spending budget, with many struggling to meet the needs of the refugee population. Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called this statistic “starkly uneven.” Moreover, the UN’s Global Trends report stated that Pakistan (a developing nation) has been the most affected by its

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refugee population. Pakistan has “710 refugees for each US dollar of its per capita GDP (Gross Domestic Product), followed by Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kenya with 475 and 247 refugees respectively.” Compared with Germany’s 17 refugees for each dollar of per capita GDP, it is clear to see how difficult it is for developing nations to help those in need (UNRIC, 2016).

In order to address this imbalance, the UN introduced an Agenda for Protection. The main aim of it is to ensure that all nations, developed and developing, share the responsibility for economic, environmental, socio-political, and security expenses related to refugees. The agenda consists of six main goals, which are: “strengthening implementation of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol; protecting refugees within broader migration movements; sharing burdens and responsibilities more equitably and building capacities to receive and protect refugees; addressing security-related concerns more effectively; redoubling the search for durable solutions for refugees; and meeting the protection needs of refugee women and children.” All of the goals are equal in importance and ensure that both refugees and host nations are protected and held accountable for their actions. Moreover, since funding is a major issue for host nations, the agenda encourages countries to “consider allocating development funds to programs simultaneously benefiting refugees and the local population in host countries” and to “consider including refugee-hosting areas in their national development plans to achieve the broad goal of sharing burdens and responsibilities more equitably and building capacities to receive and protect refugees” (UNHCR, 2003).

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In addition to the Agenda for Protection, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has established resilience-based interventions as a way to increase the capacity of refugee host nations. Resilience-based interventions build on points listed in the Agenda for Protection and place an emphasis on creating long-term solutions to help countries support refugees without straining their own resources. UNDP has urged its member nations to invest in national service delivery systems in areas with large amounts of refugees. This may have a high cost at the beginning, but in the medium-term it will lower transportation and worker costs as well as avoid the creation of parallel systems. It also suggested that nations invest in the infrastructure of refugee camps. This will avoid long-term issues related to housing and stop the spread of disease. To sum up, in order for nations to increase their capacities to help refugees, countries need to plan ahead. It may initially mean a high costs, but over the long-term resilience-based interventions will decrease the total amount of money spent by the host nation and improve the lives of refugees seeking help in those nations (UNDP, 2015).

B) Current Issues

Iran: According to UNHCR, Iran is the fourth largest refugee hosting country in the world. The country is home to one million registered and two million undocumented refugees from Afghanistan. Iran has hosted refugees from Afghanistan since the 1980s and has taken steps to increase its capacity. For instance, the nation has collaborated with various UN agencies such as the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNHCR to plan for the future and manage resources. Recently, Iran and the WFP conducted

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surveys to calculate the food and non-food requirements of refugees. The organizations are creating budgets to prevent food waste and effectively manage the amount of money spent per refugee. This will help Iran avoid food waste and only purchase items needed by refugees (The Borgen Project, 2015).

Russia: According to Human Rights Watch, Russia has done very little to aid and resettle refugees. In fact, since the Syrian civil war began in 2011, Russia has not offered any resettlement places for Syrian refugees. In 2016, the charity Oxfam International released a “fair share analysis” report on countries with the resources to help refugees affected by the Syrian conflict. The report, which took into account the nation’s gross national income (GDP), natural resources, debt, etc., found that Russia had the capacity to dedicate approximately 717 million United States dollars to helping resettle refugees from Syria. However, Russia has only dedicated one percent of this amount to helping refugees. In addition, in 2016, Russia rejected several requests from UNHCR to act as a host nation for Syrian refugees even though it had the capacity to take them in. Russia has rejected refugee applications due to the fear of terrorism, violence and the spread of disease (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

South Sudan: Violence between armed groups in South Sudan has caused around 1.6 million people to flee their villages and take refuge in refugees camps located within the country. Thousands of others have fled to neighbouring countries such as Uganda and Sudan. This increase in refugees has placed a huge burden on the UN and South Sudanese non-governmental organizations that aid refugees. The fighting has resulted in severe inflation, a scarcity of resources and overcrowding, which has caused outbreaks of disease and starvation. Currently, the refugees rely on food and water

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donations from surrounding nations, and the UN has been desperately appealing for donations from its member states. However, the South Sudanese government has done very little itself to resolve the situation (UN News Centre, 2016).

Kenya: Kenya is host to 300,000 refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia and South Sudan. In fact, the Dadaab refugee camp is the largest in the world. Refugees often do not have adequate food, water or sanitation and this has resulted in widespread outbreaks in disease. In order to increase its capacity to help those in need, the Kenyan government collaborated with the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Division of Global Migration and Quarantine (DGMQ). Together, they have increased the quality of medical screenings and protocols for refugees living in camps. Moreover, through the use of respiratory disease surveillance and onsite laboratories, Kenya has been able to increase its ability to detect, respond and treat outbreaks of disease which can save thousands of lives (CDC, 2016).

Lebanon: Since 2011, Lebanon has struggled to cope with the influx of refugees fleeing civil war in Syria. Lebanon, a small country of 4.5 million people, has taken in 1.5 million Syrians. This has greatly strained its economy, resources and infrastructure. According to CBS News, there have been widespread and frequent shortages in water and electricity since the creation of various camps for refugees. The need for shelter has grown so much that refugees have been building tent cities in public parks. Due to this, in 2015, the Lebanese government declared it had reached its refugee capacity and began limiting the amount of Syrian refugees it allowed into the country (CBS News, 2015).

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China: In an article by *The New York Times*, the UN stated that China was not doing enough to help and take in refugees. Instead, the nation focuses on sending aid and personnel to help countries in need. For example, when Nepal was devastated by an earthquake in April 2015, China sent relief supplies and search-and-rescue teams. However, it refuses to take in Rohingya refugees from Myanmar who are fleeing religious persecution. While China has the capacity to support refugees, it avoids hosting them because it does not want to become involved in the conflicts of other nations. Moreover, the Chinese government has stated that its priority is to help improve the lives of its own citizens and the acceptance of refugees could cause instability or drain its resources (Ramzy, *The New York Times*, 2015).

United Kingdom: The United Kingdom (UK) has struggled to aid refugees entering the country from Syria. The UK government has pledged to take in 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020, however, it currently does not have the capacity to do so. A study conducted by Keith Vaz, the chairman of the Home Affairs Committee, found that the country lacked the capacity to process large amounts of applications at one time and provide adequate housing. To remedy this issue, the UK is working with UNHCR, which will provide training, feedback and monetary support to help process and settle refugees. This UK hopes that this support will lessen over time to the point where it can handle large influxes of refugees without the aid of non-governmental organizations (BBC News, 2015).

Iraq: Since the Syrian civil war began in 2011, Iraq has taken in large amounts of Syrian refugees fleeing the fighting between the government and various armed groups.

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According to the UN, as of January 2017, around 227,971 Syrian refugees were registered in Iraq. Moreover, millions of Iraqis have been internally displaced by fighting between Iraqi forces and the Islamic State. In order to increase its capacity to help the millions of people in need, the Iraqi government has been working closely with 34 non-governmental organizations, including the UN, to coordinate actions in areas with high amounts of refugees. This coordination is aimed at ensuring that the safety and needs of the refugees are met, while lowering costs and creating accountability (Relief Web, 2017).

C) UN Action

With an increasing number of conflicts and natural disasters happening around the world, the United Nations has recognized that more needs to be done to help ensure the safety and basic needs of refugees residing in camps. As previously stated, the UN has taken action in order to help the nations that host refugees increase their capacities. The Agenda for Protection has helped highlight the need for nations around the world to share the responsibility for hosting refugees. It calls for all countries, not just developing ones, to ensure the wellbeing of those forced to flee their homes (UNHCR, 2003). In addition, through UNDP's resilience-based interventions, the UN has been helping countries improve processes to find long-term solutions for very serious issues caused by hosting large numbers of refugees. The UN's main goal is to find ways for nations to continue to take in refugees while not harming their own economies, environments and natural resources (UNDP, 2015).



III. Conclusion

To summarize, millions of people are fleeing their nations due to war and natural disasters. The recent influx in the number of refugees around the world has placed a heavy burden on nations that host them. This burden can often affect the host nation's economy, natural resources, transportation systems, etc. Through the strengthening of a host nation's capacity to meet the needs of refugees, the UN hopes to create sustainable solutions that eliminate the strain placed on a country that aids refugees. However, in order to increase the capacity of countries around the world, more needs to be done to create equality amongst host nations. As of right now, the majority of refugee host nations are developing countries with their own economic stresses and concerns. Without a system of equality, the strain can cause further problems such as famine and conflict, which could contribute to an increase in refugee populations worldwide.

IV. Essential Questions

1. What is a refugee? What causes refugees to flee their home countries?
2. What has the UN done to help nations increase their capacity to host refugees?
3. Is your nation a host for refugees? If so, where do the refugees in your delegation come from?
4. What has your nation done to increase its capacity to host refugees? Has it been successful? Why or why not?
5. Are there any organizations that are helping countries increase their capacity to help refugees?

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6. What impact does hosting refugees have on a nation?
7. What is the Agenda for Protection? How has it helped host nations?
8. What are resilience-based interventions?

V. Resources

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