HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
69TH SESSION ISSUES BOOK

REVIEW OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

COUNTRIES IN CRISIS: ADDRESSING LESSER KNOWN CONFLICTS

THE INTERSECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, SECURITY, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

MODEL UNITED NATIONS OF THE FAR WEST
69TH SESSION
THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL (HRC) IS A SUBSIDIARY BODY OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY. IT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PROMOTING UNIVERSAL RESPECT FOR THE PROTECTION OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS FOR ALL, WITHOUT DISTINCTION OF ANY KIND AND IN A FAIR AND EQUAL MANNER. THE COUNCIL IS MANDATED TO CONSIDER VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS, INCLUDING GROSS AND SYSTEMIC VIOLATIONS, AND TO MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE UN SYSTEM. THE HRC ALSO PROMOTES THE EFFECTIVE COORDINATION AND MAINSTREAMING OF HUMAN RIGHTS WITHIN THE UN SYSTEM.


(UN HANDBOOK, 2017-18)
As the 70th anniversary of the ratification of the United Nations’ (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) approaches, countries across the globe continue to lack concern for human rights issues. In past decades, nations across the globe have massively and carelessly contributed to the growing list of crimes against humanity. These violations of human rights, including episodes of genocide and ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and child marriage have repeatedly occurred in many nations—a prime example of how the world clearly does not learn from its mistakes. Member states involved with the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) continue to preach enforcement of the Council’s doctrine, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; however, many of these states continue to hypocritically perpetuate these issues. Following the failure of the enforcement of the Council’s declaration, it is important to review how the document is lacking and to begin the conversation on what changes could be made to bring the world closer to ending these problems.

In recent years, nations have begun to doubt the declaration’s modern validity and legitimacy, claiming that it is out of date and lacking commentary on issues that have recently come to the attention of the world, such as women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and the right to the Internet. Furthermore, the belief that the hypocrisy-ridden HRC is doomed to failure has led to the withdrawal of the United States, causing doubt that the remaining membership will be able to successfully move towards dealing with current human rights issues. In an interview with NPR,
U.N. expert Richard Gowen states his belief that the U.S. withdrawal could “tip the balance further towards autocrats,” and “European countries that remain on the Human Rights Council will struggle to set the agenda without U.S. help...that this is just the latest move by the Trump administration to back away from multilateralism.”

HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was inspired by the experiences of wars preceding 1948, the year in which it was crafted. Its 30 articles lay out everything that “all human beings” have a right to. This document was a huge milestone for the United Nations because it was the first time that nations across the globe could come together in agreement on a list of inalienable human rights. The Universal Declaration was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948. Motivated by the experiences of the preceding world wars, the Universal Declaration was the first time that countries agreed on a comprehensive statement of unalienable human rights. It begins by recognizing that “the inherent dignity of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,” and declares that human rights are universal, to be enjoyed by all people, no matter who they are, where they live, or what they practice.

The Universal Declaration includes civil and political rights, like the right to life, liberty, free speech, and privacy. The declaration also includes economic, social, and cultural rights, like the right to social security, health, and education. Furthermore, the Universal Declaration is not a treaty, so it does not directly create legal obligations for countries; however, it is an expression of

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5 Ibid.
the fundamental values, which are shared by all members of the international community. It has had a profound influence on the development of international human rights law. Some scholars argue that because countries have consistently invoked the Declaration for more than 60 years, it has become binding as a part of customary international law. According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Universal Declaration has also given rise to a range of other international agreements, which are legally binding on the countries that ratify them, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).  

THE STRUGGLES OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION

Even though the Declaration was written in order to limit the number of crimes against humanity committed across the globe, countries have seen its efforts fail miserably to date as the human rights agenda has fallen on hard times. For example, in much of the Islamic world, Muslim women lack equality, people who practice other religions are persecuted, and political freedoms are few. The Chinese model of development, which combines political repression and state capitalism, has attracted numerous admirers in the developing world. Political authoritarianism has gained massive ground in Venezuela, Turkey, Russia, and Hungary, to name a few. Countries as diverse as Russia and Nigeria refuse to legitimize LGBTQ+ rights and backlashes frequently plague nations like them for the same reason. The United States and other European countries that have traditionally been heroes in the human rights world have stumbled and fallen back from the quest. Europe itself has turned inward as it has struggled with a sovereign debt crisis, xenophobia towards communities of Muslims and other refugees, and disappointment with the EU and its overall purpose. Since the 9/11 attacks, the United States has

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6 IBID.
killed civilians in war-torn countries such as Afghanistan, while losing much of its moral authority. The world thought it was done with slavery, for example, but human trafficking (including sex slavery and child marriage) exists in many parts of the world. A recent report estimates that nearly 30 million people are forced against their will to work.\(^7\) Even with the Universal Declaration in place, abominations like these still exist in our world. Does this mean that the UDHR is failing, or is it the failure of the member states, or both?

WHAT THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION CURRENTLY LACKS

The UDHR, as previously stated, is a 70-year-old document, and since its creation, global developments have led to many additions of what people consider to be fundamental human rights. The UDHR only has 30 articles, and critics argue that the document is not up to date. For example, the UDHR does not have any articles concerning LGBTQ+ rights. Critics also argue that the UDHR is written in sexist language and leaves out female rhetoric in its articles. As the world moves forward in recognizing the rights of as many people as possible, rhetoric must also evolve accordingly in order to ensure that everyone is included and their rights protected.

Furthermore, some articles are contradictory to each other. For example, Article 26 states that parents of children ultimately make the decision of where children go to school; however, the UDHR at the same time prohibits educational discrimination.\(^8\) If parents wanted to send their child to a Catholic school, for example, they might not be able to do so because Catholic schools are often prejudicial to certain views (e.g., regarding homosexuality). The situation, then, requires the school to balance out purposeful discrimination. Fundamentally, however, because

\(^7\) ERIC POSNER, “THE CASE AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS” THE GUARDIAN, GUARDIAN NEWS AND MEDIA, 4 DEC. 2014, WWW.THEGUARDIAN.COM/NEWS/2014/DEC/04/-SP-CASE-AGAINST-HUMAN-RIGHTS.

\(^8\) “UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS: ARTICLE 26” CLAIMING HUMAN RIGHTS, WWW.CLAIMINGHUMANRIGHTS.ORG/UDHR_ARTICLE_26.HTML.
the UDHR grants parents choice while prohibiting educational discrimination, Article 26 contradicts itself. Such a problem undermines the UDHR.

Critics of the UDHR also question how the document can specify cultural relativism and be truly “universal” throughout all cultures of the world. For example, in 1948 the Saudi delegation refused to sign the UDHR, objected to the provisions on marriage (“Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses”). In Saudi culture, it is expected and proper that families will make marriage selections for their children. As the UDHR is often thought of a Western document that reflects Western values, critics claim that the document needs to be broadened culturally to include the values of non-Western cultures as well. Broadening the UDHR will also make more states willing to abide by the document. Like any facet of international law, concessions must be made in order to promote the wellbeing of as many world citizens as possible while not undermining a state’s sovereignty unless necessary.

Finally, the UDHR is silent on water and the Internet. Critics highlight these omissions. In recent years, there has been serious global discussion that access to the Internet should be considered a basic human right for many reasons, including access to critical information (weather, news, etc.) and online job searching, which has doubled since 2005. The right to water is also not enshrined in the UDHR. While there is right-to-life language to ensure human survival, the UDHR does not specifically reference food and water rights. Even though the UN has recently declared water a fundamental human right, the UDHR does not reflect this

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9 “UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS: ARTICLE 16” CLAIMING HUMAN RIGHTS, WWW.CLAIMINGHUMANRIGHTS.ORG/UDHR_ARTICLE_16.HTML.
10 KENNETH MCLAUGHLIN AND HUSAIN AL-HAKAMI, “DEBATABLE MARRIAGES: MARRIAGE AND CHILD MARRIAGE IN SAUDI ARABIA,” MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY, KING SAUD UNIVERSITY AND MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY, E-SPACE.MMU.AC.UK/606943/2/MARRIAGE%20AND%20FAMILY%20FINAL%20JAN%202016.PDF.
This issue becomes especially glaring when it intersects with the issue of climate change and the fact that water is becoming increasingly scarce in more and more areas across the globe. This year alone, the international community witnessed a record number of droughts in all parts of the world, from California to South Africa. Until the effects of climate change on water can be mitigated, it is up to the UN, via the Human Rights Council, to ensure that the right to water is guaranteed to everyone. The right to water is especially important, as it is required to sustain human life both in the form of direct consumption and in its uses to grow food and feed livestock that are also imperative to human survival.

THE HYPOCRISY OF MEMBER STATES

Since its creation, the Human Rights Council has been charged with monitoring human rights violations across the globe. In theory, the 47 Council states should also be stewards of proper treatment of humans and human rights. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Many countries with seats on the Council--China, Venezuela, Ethiopia, Egypt, Cuba, and the United Arab Emirates in particular--proceed hypocritically. According to The Washington Examiner, currently China has over a thousand known political prisoners, including protesters of the occupation of Tibet, advocates for Uighur minority rights, and citizens demanding universal freedoms of expression, to name a few. Furthermore, Cuba is known to have deprived its citizens of fundamental freedoms and kept political dissidents imprisoned for years. Venezuela and Ethiopia both detain and harass hundreds of citizens with opposing viewpoints to their governments. Egypt outlaws independent NGOs and arrests critics of its government. Saudi Arabia imprisons and tortures citizens suspected of “planting seeds of sedition.” And the United

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Arab Emirates kidnap critics of its authoritarianism.13 These contemporary examples of human-rights atrocities do not stand alone. Many states listed above, and others, have also committed atrocities that have gone unpunished by the HRC. Clearly, several member states violate the Council’s raison d’être. This hypocrisy inevitably cancels out any Council progress and ultimately hinders any possible future success in securing human rights across the globe.

CONCLUSION

The UDHR reflects the world’s 1948 mindset. Seventy years after its inception, much has changed. The Declaration therefore must be modified, if not modernized. Provisions on LGBTQ+ rights, water and food security, and the right to the Internet need to be explicit. In a revised document, cultural relativism should be considered to account for the wide range of differences in cultures around the world. Member states should be held accountable for their actions, and those with seats in the HRC should work to keep each other accountable. In a world that is becoming increasingly more connected and developed, human rights violations should be decreasing in number. The fact of the matter is, however, that they are not. It is the job of HRC member states to tackle the core problem, starting with the foundational document.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is your state’s position on the UDHR? Does your state believe it needs to be amended? Why or why not?

2. If your state believes the UDHR lacks contemporary provisions, what does your state suggest be added or changed?

3. How have the UDHR’s inadequacies (lack of certain provisions, inability to be mandated, etc.) affected your state historically? What about currently?

4. Does your state follow the provisions outlined in the UDHR? If not, which provisions are violated?

5. How has your state worked to end human rights violations in your country as well as worldwide? Are human rights a priority in your state? Which rights are overlooked?
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Today’s world is characterized by violence and conflict. Between gun violence, armed conflict, terrorism, political tension, climate change, and ongoing crises, there are plenty of problems for the world’s leaders to focus on. The Humanitarian Coalition defines a humanitarian crisis as “An event or series of events that represents a critical threat to the health, safety, security or wellbeing of a community or other large group of people, usually over a wide area.”¹ Crises and conflict often lead to a large displacement of people, causing several other problems as a result. The United Nations Development Programme states that “The average amount of time people worldwide live in displacement is now 17 years and the average conflict lasts for seven years.”² Basic human rights are often disregarded in times of conflict. Mass migration and conflict poses a greater risk of exploitation and violence against women and children, as well as other minorities. While there are several crises that deserve, and do receive, the attention and help of the United Nations, the Venezuelan and Myanmar refugee crises often go unnoticed by the general public and are thus not made a priority, despite being the fastest growing refugee crises today. In addition, political and social unrest in the United States has many UN member states on edge, and it is important to address the instability of the UN’s biggest financial contributor and one of the most influential countries in the world.

¹ "WHAT IS A HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY?" HUMANITARIAN COALITION, HTTPS://WWW.HUMANITARIANCOALITION.CA/INFO-PORTAL/FACTSHEETS/WHAT-IS-A-HUMANITARIAN-CRISIS.
² "OUR FOCUS: CRISIS RESPONSE" UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME, HTTP://WWW.UNDP.ORG/CONTENT/UNDP/EN/HOME/CRISIS-RESPONSE.HTML.
THE CRISIS OF VENEZUELA

Venezuela is undergoing a political and economic conflict that has great consequences yet often goes unnoticed. The root of the crisis dates back to 1999 with the election of former President Hugo Chavez, who introduced generous social programs that depended almost entirely on Venezuela’s abundance of oil, while also consolidating power into the executive branch of government. Chavez passed away in 2013 and was succeeded by Nicolas Maduro. Maduro further consolidated executive power and continued on the path of human rights violations that Chavez had allowed during his presidency. In 2014 the growing crisis came to a head when the price of oil dropped from “An average of $109 a barrel in 2012 to just $40 a barrel in 2016.” Due to their over-reliance on oil, Venezuela now has the highest inflation rate in the world, at an astonishing 18,000%, leading to a lack of basic necessities, including food and medicine, several protests, and a mass exodus of refugees to surrounding nations.

While the crisis in Venezuela has been ongoing for several years, this past May the re-election of President Nicolas Maduro caused the conflict to further escalate. Maduro won what some Venezuelans and world leaders are calling an illegitimate election. Many point to red tents that were set up outside of polling stations, where citizens with “fatherland cards”, which are social benefit cards, could scan for a chance to win a price from Maduro, as vote-buying and

5 CURTIS, “THE CRISIS IN VENEZUELA IS IN DESPERATE NEED OF INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION.”
6 “HOW VENEZUELA’S CRISIS DEVELOPED AND WORSENED.”
7 CURTIS, “THE CRISIS IN VENEZUELA IS IN DESPERATE NEED OF INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION.”
targeting of the poor. In addition, less than half of eligible voters turned out to vote, and many blame the fact that Maduro’s most promising opponents were barred from running at all.

Several human rights violations have taken place, and will continue to take place, as long as Venezuela remains unstable. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR), “Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person,” and “no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile.” A report done by the Organization of American States, released in May 2018, concludes that more than 8,000 extrajudicial executions have taken place since 2015, more than 12,000 Venezuelans have been arbitrarily detained, and there are more than 1,300 political prisoners in custody under Maduro’s administration. In addition, it is estimated that 1.5 million Venezuelans have fled to surrounding countries seeking refuge, placing immense pressure on nations such as Colombia, which was once very accepting but has had to crack down on immigration due to a strain on resources. Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos has been very generous to the thousands of refugees that have come to his country, allowing them access to public healthcare and schools, but says it has cost the government millions of dollars to do so. This is the case for other surrounding countries accepting refugees. Not only are those living within or fleeing from Venezuela in need of humanitarian assistance, but surrounding countries accepting refugees are in need of financial assistance and other resources in order to support these refugees. Nonetheless, the Venezuelan

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9 NEUMAN, “VENEZUELA’S MADURO WINS BOYCOTTED ELECTIONS AMID CHARGES OF FRAUD.”
13 COBB ET AL. “MIGRATE OR DIE: VENEZUELAN MIGRANTS FLOOD INTO COLOMBIA DESPITE CRACKDOWN.”
crisis remains the largest refugee crisis in the Western Hemisphere, and for those unfortunate enough to remain in the country, a worsening humanitarian catastrophe if a solution is not found.

MYANMAR AND THE ROHINGYA

The United Nations on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect defines “ethnic cleansing” as “A purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas. To a large extent, it is carried out in the name of misguided nationalism, historic grievances and a powerful driving sense of revenge.”14 The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar (also Burma) involving the majority Buddhist population and the minority Rohingya Muslims has been described by many as a “textbook example” of ethnic cleansing and the fastest growing refugee crisis.15

The conflict has a long history, but in 1982 the Buddhist-led government enacted the 1982 Citizenship Law that denied the Rohingya citizenship in Myanmar, taking away basic citizenship rights that other Burmese citizens are afforded.16 Then, in 2014, the Rohingya were completely left out of the census, further emphasizing their statelessness.17 Relations have remained tense, but in August 2017 the Rohingya began fleeing the country due to systematic violence in Rakhine State, carried out by the Myanmar military. The government claims that militant Muslims set fires to villages and incited the attacks, but evidence provided by victims and eyewitnesses shows that this is not the case, and that in most cases it was Buddhists dressed

16 “DISCRIMINATION IN ARAKAN” HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, HTTPS://WWW.HRW.ORG/REPORTS/2000/BURMA/BURM005-02.HTM.
17 “MYANMAR ROHINGYA: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE CRISIS.”
as Muslims who were starting the fires. In fact, since the initial attacks in August 2017, the government has continued to lie. For example, the government claims that only 400 people have died since August, when in reality the numbers are closer to 6,700 Rohingya alone, with more than 730 of those being children.

The UDHR outlines that every global citizen has the right to life and freedom of religion, among many other inalienable human rights. The Rohingya have been treated as less than human, simply because they practice a different religion than their majority buddhist counterparts. Refugees in Bangladesh report accounts of members of the Myanmar military coming into their homes, removing the men, and killing them in the streets. If the men are not killed right away, they are tortured and then later disposed of. Many Rohingya have also been jailed under false accusations, or not been given a reason for their detainment at all. The military has also used rape and gender-based violence as a way to terrorize the Rohingya, causing more to flee in fear. Access for international assistance to visit the region and investigate has continued to decrease, and most investigators have to piece together the story through witness accounts in refugee camps in Bangladesh.

There is no denying that human rights atrocities have taken place against the Rohingya by the Myanmar military. However, that is only one half of the problem. As of October 2017, an estimated 947,000 Rohingya were taking refuge in Bangladesh, 500,000 in Saudi Arabia, 350,000 in Pakistan, and another 246,000 are dispersed throughout the region in other states.

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19 HEAD, "ROHINGYA CRISIS: SEEING THROUGH THE OFFICIAL STORY IN MYANMAR."
25 "MYANMAR ROHINGYA: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE CRISIS."
addition, the military has placed landmines along the Myanmar-Bangladesh border, preventing anyone from returning. These numbers are staggering, and with the Myanmar government refusing to acknowledge the violence or it’s wrong-doings, there is no end in sight. As is the case in the Venezuelan conflict, countries accepting Rohingya refugees are also having their resources depleted and are in need of assistance from the UN. The priority for the international community is to force the Myanmar government to accept responsibility and allow the Rohingya to return to Rakhine. Because the Burmese government has continued to decrease access to foreign aid and investigators, it has been hard for the United Nations to observe the crisis and come up with a solution. However, the United Nations Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, visited refugee camps in Bangladesh in March 2018 and released a statement condemning the international community for turning their backs on the Rohingya. He also called on the Burmese government to take responsibility and create a safe country for the Rohingya to return to, and for the international community to provide support and assistance to the refugees, as well as Bangladesh. The United Nations was founded on ensuring that atrocities such as this one would not occur again, and with the Rohingya crisis being the epitome of ethnic cleansing and genocide, it is important that a solution is found and reparations are made.

RISING UNREST WITHIN THE UNITED STATES

With the United States being arguably one of, if not the most, influential state in the world, policies implemented and actions taken by the U.S. government can have unexpected consequences across the globe. While the actions of the U.S. government may not have a direct

27 ADAMA DIENG, “STATEMENT BY ADAMA DIENG, UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL ADVISER ON THE PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE, ON HIS VISIT TO BANGLADESH TO ASSESS THE SITUATION OF ROHINGYA REFUGEES FROM MYANMAR,” UNITED NATIONS, MARCH 13, 2018, HTTP://WWW.UN.ORG/EN/GENOCIDEPREVENTION/DOCUMENTS/2018-03-13%20STATEMENT_VISIT%20ROHINGYA%20BANGLADESH_FINAL.PDF.
28 DIENG, “STATEMENT BY ADAMA DIENG...”
impact on other states, what the U.S. deems acceptable or unacceptable can set a precedent for the rest of the world. This is why the 2016 elections, particularly the election of President Donald Trump, and actions following it have gained the attention of other world leaders and citizens and can have a dangerous effect on international diplomacy and aid. The United States contributes the most money to the United Nations; their contribution adds up to 22% of the entire budget, or about $590 million in 2018.29 With United Nations depending so heavily on the U.S. financially, it is important that this money remains a guaranteed contribution, and as of August 9, 2018, seven months past the February due date, the U.S. has yet to pay their bill.30 Their failure to contribute to the budget yet, paired with Trump’s anti-UN rhetoric, should be of great concern to the global community.

Aside from the financial concerns of Trump’s presidency, another concern for the United Nations and its’ member states is his blatant disregard for UN principles and policies. Trump’s decision to pull the United States from the Human Rights Council (HRC) showcases to the world that upholding human rights outlined in the UDHR is not a priority for the U.S., thus paving the way for other countries to follow suit. While other countries may not pull out of the HRC directly, with the U.S. refusing the follow the UDHR, and without there being a proper enforcement method in place, there is nothing stopping other countries from disregarding the Declaration as well.

The message the U.S. is sending is not the only concern. Trump’s policies, or lack thereof, have had a drastic impact on human rights within the U.S. itself. Under the current administration, infrastructure concerns have been ignored, leading to a lack of basic resources

such as clean water in some places like Flint, Michigan, and even electricity in others. Most pressing, Trump’s refusal to acknowledge and send aid to the ongoing crisis in Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria in September 2017 has led to the deaths of an estimated 1,427 American citizens as of August 9, 2018, and the number will only rise unless action is taken.\textsuperscript{31} These deaths are due to the fact that Puerto Rico is still without power almost a year later, leading to a lack of resources and access to hospitals, and deaths primarily due to complications with diabetes and sepsis.\textsuperscript{32} Puerto Ricans have been considered U.S. citizens since 1917, and are afforded almost all of the same rights as those living in a U.S. state, save a few, such as a vote in Congress.\textsuperscript{33} Therefore, the government has an obligation to provide proper assistance to the ongoing crisis, just as they would to a U.S. state in need. However, as is evident by the number of needless deaths and a lack of overall assistance an entire year later, the U.S. has not been meeting such obligations.

The crisis in Puerto Rico is just one example of the Trump administration’s shortcomings. While the United States and its’ ongoing issues is not nearly as much of a priority as other world crises, it is not something the world should take lightly. The U.S.’s sphere of influence is far-reaching, and a threat to American democracy can be a threat to the United Nations and global security as a whole.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are several crises worldwide that need to be addressed, though some go more unnoticed than others. The crisis in Venezuela is due to political unrest, inhumane


\textsuperscript{32} ROBLES, “PUERTO RICAN GOVERNMENT ACKNOWLEDGES HURRICANE DEATH TOLL OF 1,427.”

treatment of Venezuelan citizens, and a lack of basic resources thanks to an extremely high inflation rate. Because of this, thousands have fled to neighboring countries, putting pressure and strain on those governments to support a growing refugee crisis. In the Eastern hemisphere, religious persecution and systemic violence has caused thousands of Rohingya Muslims to leave Myanmar for a safer life in countries such as Bangladesh. While many hope to return home, with a government that continues to lie and refuses to accept responsibility, this seems unlikely to happen anytime soon. In the United States, growing unrest and a president that is openly against the United Nations threatens the global status quo. Because the U.S. finances 22% of the UN and holds a great influence over other member states, it is important that the global community keeps a close eye on relations both internally and externally. Nonetheless, all crises are important and worth discussing within the United Nations to ensure that every human is afforded their inalienable human rights.
QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

What countries in crises does your country have a particular interest in?

1. What kind of crisis might be taking place within your own country?

2. How do these crises (Venezuela, Myanmar, the U.S.) affect your country, either directly or indirectly?

3. What kind of actions has your country taken to provide assistance or relief to these crises in the past?
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The intersection of security, development, and human rights is essential to the success of the United Nations (UN). In order to thrive, countries must learn how to control this balance and their interconnecting attributes. While some states are able to find a harmony on their own, the United Nations often takes steps to create a universal starting line. The General Assembly created The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In this seminal document, thirty human rights are established, as well as the international community’s duty to uphold and defend said rights.\(^1\) In 2015, the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), successor to the Millennium Development Goals. The SDGs set forth the UN’s agenda. The Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) has said that “human rights are essential to achieving sustainable development.”\(^2\) In underdeveloped countries in the grip of civil conflict, violence undercuts sustainable development and human rights. The quest for immediate physical security becomes the overriding priority. Yet death can occur from starvation or sexual assault as well as from a bullet or bomb. The connection between security, human rights, and sustainable development is thus undeniably important. In the context of deteriorating security and unsustainable development, human rights tend to be trampled on or ignored altogether.

\(^1\) UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER OF HUMAN RIGHTS. (2016). THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE HTTPS://WWW.OHCHR.ORG/DOWNLOADS/ISSUES/RTD/INFONOTE_PEACE.PDF.

\(^2\) UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY. (1948). THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

\(^3\) OHCHR | SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND HUMAN RIGHTS. (N.D.). RETRIEVED AUGUST 4, 2018, FROM HTTPS://WWW.OHCHR.ORG/EN/ISSUES/MDG/PAGES/THE2030AGENDA.ASPX.
When human rights are not upheld, not only do people suffer, the state suffers as well. The following cases highlight the challenges and problems at hand.

THE CRISIS IN YEMEN

Currently, Yemen is struggling mightily to balance the need for human rights, security, and sustainable development. Since 2015, Yemen has been in the throes of a bitter civil war between the Saudi Arabia-led coalition, which includes the United States and Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, and the Houthis, supported by Iran and former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh. With the Hadi government unable to govern, the country is now sacrificing human rights, opting instead to have more security than ever. Houthi forces have attacked residential areas, in Ta’iz for example, while the Saudi coalition has repeatedly bombed civilian infrastructure.⁴ On December 4, 2017, Houthis killed Saleh while consolidating control over the capital city of Sana’a, which escalated the war. The continued violence created a “political and security vacuum.”⁵ President Hadi’s government now officially controls Lahj, Aden, and other parts of southern Yemen, while the Houthis control larger parts of the country, including Sana’a. As of April 2018, 75% of the population required humanitarian assistance and poverty levels had risen above 80%.⁶ In the month of October 2018 alone, more than 8,000 households from Al-Hudaydah have been displaced⁷. After more than three years of violence, a poor economy, and little security, diminishing human rights remain prevalent in Yemen.

In a Human Rights Council (HRC) mandated report, the OHCHR found that between March 2015 and August 30, 2017, at least 5,144 civilians had been killed and 8,749 injured.\(^8\)

What continues to make the Yemeni Civil War so destructive are the human rights violations committed by both sides. Both have targeted hospitals, schools, and residential areas,\(^9\) considered war crimes under Article 8 of the Rome Statute.\(^10\) Each side relied on shelling, air strikes, and other restricted weapons. While 22.2 million people are in need of humanitarian aid,\(^11\) making Yemen the worst humanitarian disaster in the world, the Saudi-led coalition announced a plan for the Yemen Comprehensive Humanitarian Operations (YCHO). Despite its name, critics thought it a thinly veiled war tactic.\(^12\) The plan agrees to open more ports and enlarge others for humanitarian aid, at the expense of Red Sea ports in exchange. The YCHO also casts doubt upon the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (UNVIM), which created a routine inspection for all commercial ships entering Yemeni ports.\(^13\) While the Yemeni civil war rages on, the UN is desperately trying to get humanitarian aid to the millions who need it, while both influential forces in Yemen actively work against them in the name of security and sustainable development.

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THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

Another example of the clash that can occur between sustainable development, human rights, and security can be found in Syria. In 2011, the Syrian government responded to peaceful pro-democracy protests with extreme violence. Many protesters were killed, or arbitrarily arrested and then tortured. Since the start of the civil war, which evolved into a brutal regional war that drew in Turkey, Iran, Hezbollah, the Islamic State, Russia, and the United States, Syrians have lived in constant fear of speaking against their own government, which has repeatedly violated their human rights. In April 2015, Syrian forces launched an unsuccessful, large-scale military siege in Daara, which continued for 11 days in an attempt to restore security. Due to the continuing violence, Syria’s economy has declined. The World Bank claims that the lack of health care access, housing, education, and food has exacerbated conflict. With Syria unable to solve its issues, the UN has attempted to assist the fractured state. As of October 2018, the province of Idlib is the only large area under control of rebel forces. The war seems to be reaching a close, as Russia and Turkey have created a demilitarization zone around Idlib and an order to withdraw weapons has been given. This call for demilitarization could lead to the end of the civil war, or it could lead to more death and destruction for Syrian civilians.

In 2012, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed its initial Syria resolution, S/RES/2042. It called for action in many ways, including a call upon all parties to “cease all armed violence in all forms” and “to authorize an advance team of up to 30 unarmed military

15 “WE’VE NEVER SEEN SUCH HORROR”
16 SYRIA OVERVIEW. (N.D.). RETRIEVED FROM HTTPS://WWW.WORLD_BANK.ORG/EN/COUNTRY/SYRIA/OVERVIEW
observers to liaise with the parties and to begin to report on the implementation.”18 More recently, however, the HRC has publicly condemned the human rights infractions and removal of humanitarian aid19. Despite the very public distaste that the Syrian civil war has created, in S/RES/2401 the UNSC called for a 30-day ceasefire so that humanitarian aid could be delivered20. While the United Nations tried to aid the conflict, its attempts came up short. Despite this resolution passing, no ceasefire occurred and Syria did not allow the delivery of life-saving medical attention to its own citizens21. Syria is continuing to struggle with finding harmony between security, human rights, and sustainable development, while the lives and well being of Syrians hang in the balance.

THE PLIGHT OF REFUGEES

By both necessity and force, a large group of Syrian and Yemeni citizens finds themselves refugees as a result of the Yemeni and Syrian wars. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over 5.6 million people have fled Syria22 and over 260,000 people have left Yemen23. The trek to safety that these refugees endure is inhumane, dangerous, and often lethal. One story of this travel comes from a sixteen-year-old girl who led her siblings out of Syria after her father, mother, and sister were killed in three separate attacks. Family survivors left the rubble of their home with nothing more than the clothes on their back, a

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23 YEMEN SITUATION REGIONAL REFUGEE AND MIGRANT RESPONSE PLAN. (N.D.). RETRIEVED SEPTEMBER 18, 2018, FROM HTTP://REPORTING.UNHCR.ORG/NODE/9982
family picture, and a piece of clothing that reminded them of their lost loved ones\textsuperscript{24}. After a long journey through the desert, the young head of family succeeded in saving her brothers and herself by reaching the berm, which she described as looking “like half of Syria was there” in tents\textsuperscript{25}. The escape from Yemen is no easier feat. One refugee described his travel to the east coast of Africa. The first obstacle in escaping Yemen is that the Houthis are currently blocking the land bridge to Saudi Arabia. The forced trip over the Gulf of Aden can be costly. For this particular refugee, he paid $300 to ride on a cargo ship and was shot at while boarding\textsuperscript{26}. His ship was lucky, however, as a similar ship that left earlier in the week was attacked and sunk for attempting to escape Yemen.

Sadly, the struggles of being a refugee do not end when one reaches “safety.” Often, refugees escape awful conditions only to reach a new country with its own internal human rights issues. A large number of Syrian refugees find themselves in Lebanon or Jordan. In Jordan, most refugees live in refugee camps, and in Lebanon, they live in informal refugee camps in cities and towns. The refugee crisis has hit Lebanon and Jordan extremely hard and is stressing their balance of security, sustainable development, and human rights. The increase in population is putting a strain on what are already limited resources and is increasing poverty in the host countries\textsuperscript{27}. The living conditions in these Syrian refugee camps are better than the war-torn rubble survivors left behind, but still not sufficient. Several refugees have developed medical

\textsuperscript{24} A SYRIAN TEENAGER DESCRIBES HER ESCAPE FROM WAR-TORN ALEPPO. (2016, OCTOBER 11). RETRIEVED FROM HTTPS://WWW.RESCUE.ORG/ARTICLE/SYRIAN-TEENAGER-DESCRIBES-HER-ESCAPE-WAR-TORN-ALEPPO
\textsuperscript{25} A SYRIAN TEENAGER DESCRIBES HER ESCAPE FROM WAR-TORN ALEPPO. (2016, OCTOBER 11). RETRIEVED FROM HTTPS://WWW.RESCUE.ORG/ARTICLE/SYRIAN-TEENAGER-DESCRIBES-HER-ESCAPE-WAR-TORN-ALEPPO
\textsuperscript{26} WARNER, G. (2015, MAY 08). IN HARD-TO-FLEE YEMEN, THOSE ESCAPING ARE NOT TYPICAL REFUGEES. RETRIEVED SEPTEMBER 18, 2018, FROM HTTPS://WWW.NPR.ORG/SECTIONS/PARALLELS/2015/05/08/405125442/IN-HARD-TO-FLEE-YEMEN-THOSE-ESCAPING-ARE-NOT-TYPICAL-REFUGEES
\textsuperscript{27} AN INTERNATIONAL FAILURE: THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS. (N.D.). RETRIEVED SEPTEMBER 19, 2018, FROM HTTPS://WWW.AMNESTY.ORG/EN/DOWNLOADS/ACT34/001/2013/EN/
conditions, such as asthma, from their time in the camps. Host countries have also begun to tighten security at their borders, often declining refuge to Palestinian and Iraqi refugees from Syria. Those affected by the Yemeni Civil War are often in similar situations. Yemeni refugees find themselves fleeing to countries in the Horn of Africa or Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia, refugees struggle to enter after reaching the border, as the Saudi government has recently received criticism for its “open border” policy and is thus tightening its security. Countries that would be able to economically sustain refugees in North America and Europe have chosen to focus on their security, by closing borders to the now displaced peoples. The tightening of borders to refugees is prevalent specifically in the European Union and the United States. Refugees who attempt to enter EU countries via Greece have to wait until their applications for asylum are processed. Applications are often denied, and the EU forged a deal with Turkey to accept deportations of refugees from Greece. The United States highly values its border security and the vetting process for refugees is extremely extensive, taking as long as two years for resettlement approval. In early 2017, President Donald J. Trump signed Executive Order 13769. This so-called travel ban targeted refugees from seven countries (including Yemen and Syria), making it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to enter the country under asylum.

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30 10 IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT REFUGEES IN SAUDI ARABIA. (2017, JUNE 14). RETRIEVED SEPTEMBER 20, 2018, FROM HTTPS://BORGENPROJECT.ORG/REFUGEES-IN-SAUDI-ARABIA/
32 REFUGEES IN AMERICA | USA FOR UNHCR. (N.D.). RETRIEVED FROM HTTPS://WWW.UNREFUGEES.ORG/REFUGEE-FACTS/USA/
Although life within Syria and Yemen remains harrowing and distressing, sadly it rarely improves for refugees from those shattered and devastated countries.

CONCLUSION

Since its foundation, the United Nations has seen human rights, security, and sustainable development perpetually connected. The UN has taken it upon itself to promote balance between the three and has done so via many different avenues. The General Assembly, Security Council, and Human Rights Council have all addressed this daunting challenge in general terms or on a case-by-case basis. The Yemeni and Syrian civil wars show how dangerous and revolting the lives of citizens can become when human rights are neglected in an attempt to boost security and/or sustainable development. In both cases, however, the attempt to improve the latter two at the expense of human rights has led to calamity. Without respect for human rights, countries struggle to maintain both security and sustainable development. As the world watches Yemen and Syria continue to implode, how should the international community intervene? What can be done when governments oppose assistance to their citizens?
QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Has your country ever struggled with the intersection of human rights, security, and sustainable development? If so, how did you cope?

2. What has your country done, or is doing, to aid countries at war that must balance human rights, security, and sustainable development?

3. Does your country believe that the United Nations should be more or less active in helping countries that are struggling? How should the UN approach states that do not want assistance?

4. What is your country’s refugee policy? Does it value human rights?

5. What can be done when P-5 countries veto, or threaten to veto, an R2P intervention that could end, or at least alleviate, the immense pain and suffering of millions of ordinary people?

6. Does the need for employment and job security, which can result in harmful living environments, undermine sustainable development and human rights in developed as well as developing countries?
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