

Dear Delegates,

My name is Chelsea Lee and I am so grateful to have the opportunity to serve as the Director of the Security Council at SMUSMUN 2024. I am currently in Grade 11 at St. Michaels University School in Victoria and would love to extend a warm welcome to you all. After discovering Model UN in Grade 7, I have attended numerous conferences, and cherish all the learning and skills they have provided me. Inside the committee room, there is an abundance of opportunities to grow and learn, meet new people and gain insight into global issues from different perspectives. I hope that you will find the Security Council an interesting and enjoyable committee, working with fellow delegates and engaging in fruitful debate.

This year, we will be discussing a highly essential and hot-button topic: Protecting Civilians in Conflict Areas. Although this topic is expansive and has many complicated problems to unravel, I have confidence in your abilities as delegates to collaborate diplomatically and creatively. I truly encourage all of you to come out of your comfort zones and navigate the topic at hand with resilience and innovation—no matter if SMUSMUN is your first conference or last. Along with my Chair Deristhi Govender and my Assistant Director Sierra Myers, I wish you the best of luck with your conference preparations and I look forward to talking and getting to know all of you.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at chelsea.lee@smus.ca, or for conference-related information, at modelun@smus.ca. I hope that all of you take away many cherished memories from SMUSMUN 2024!

Best Wishes,

Chelsea Lee, Director of the Security Council - SMUSMUN 2024

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Committee Overview

Established in 1945 through the establishment of the UN Charter at the end of World War II, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the UN's six main facets. It has a primary responsibility for upholding international peace and security. Consisting of 15 members, each member has one vote. Under the Charter of the United Nations, all Member States must comply with Council decisions. In addition, it is unique in its membership, scope, and power. The Security Council takes the lead in defining the existence of a threat to world peace or an act of aggression. First, it calls upon the parties to settle a dispute by peaceful means and then suggests methods of adjustment or terms of settlement. Interestingly, the UNSC has both a preventative and reactionary role in the UN, as it is meant to respond to international crises while maintaining international peace. Typically, in response to such large-scale crises, the Security Council can decree clear actions, including peace talks, mediations, negotiations, meetings, peacekeeping operations, and sanctions. What's more, according to Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, the UNSC can approve the use of force if there are no other viable options to keep the peace.

Topic Introduction

When armed conflict occurs, civilians are typically extremely vulnerable and face risks to their inherent human rights and safety. Thus, it is of the utmost importance to ensure the safety of civilians, with added incentive being that it is a part of international humanitarian law, outlined in the Geneva Convention. That being said, even with laws and structure in place, civilians continue to struggle through conflict crises. The United Nations Security Council is vital for

ensuring the protection and safety of civilians in times of conflict, and this background guide will consequently discuss the different ways of protecting civilians in conflict areas. Similarly, delegates in this committee will work towards finding solutions to address this issue.

Timeline

1949 - Four Geneva Conventions are created, ensuring protection and safety for civilians in conflict areas.

1977 - More conditions are added to the Geneva Conventions, increasing the strength of the protections for civilians, such as unexpected attacks and displaced civilians.

1994 - The Rwanda Genocide results in hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths, showing that the international community was unable to provide adequate protection and safety arrangements.

1999 - The United Nations Security Council adopts Resolution 1265 known as The Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict that aims to increase humanitarian law and rights internationally.

2005 - The World Summit Outcome Document creates the Responsibility to Protect principle, ensuring that the international community provides safety for civilians from genocide, war crimes, and other such problems.

2011 - The UNSC disapproves violence against civilians, holding Libya accountable for protecting civilians during the Libyan Civil War.

2019 - The UNSC adopts Resolution 2475 to protect people with disabilities during conflict.

2022 - The UNSC creates Resolution 2615, restating the cruciality of maintaining safety for civilians in conflict areas and requesting more accessible humanitarian and safety for people who need it.

2023 - The UNSC calls for immediate action in the Israel-Palestine Crisis, requesting the release of hostages held by Hamas and other groups and requesting that civilian populations in Gaza have access to basic services and aid.

Past UN Actions

Since forming in 1945, the UN has taken several actions to protect civilians in conflict areas.

The Geneva Convention

On August 12, 1949, the Diplomatic Conference for the Establishment of International Conventions for the Protection of Victims of War took place in Geneva. The conference resulted in the creation of four Geneva Conventions. In particular, the Fourth Geneva Convention relates to the "Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War." This fourth convention sets out a number of specific measures to promote the safety of civilians in war zones.

Security Council's Resolution 1265

On September 17, 1999, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1265, The Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. The resolution condemns the intentional targeting of civilians and promotes international humanitarian law and human rights. Additionally, the resolution suggests ways to accomplish compliance. Above all, the resolution supports peacekeeping missions that prevent conflict at the outset.

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) "Building a Culture of Protection" Publication

In May 2019, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs published a report titled "Building a Culture of Protection: 20 Years of Security Council Engagement on the Protection of Civilians". This publication highlights the importance of protecting women and children in conflict zones, preventing forced displacement and providing humanitarian aid and medical support. Like Resolution 1265, this publication recognizes the value of UN peace operations and promotes accountability by calling for adherence to international humanitarian law.

UN Department of Peace Operations' Policy on "The Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping"

On May 1, 2023, a policy titled "The Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping" came into effect. Implemented by the UN Department of Peace Operations' and guided by international humanitarian law, the policy presents a detailed approach to promoting peace and protecting civilians in conflict areas.

Current Situation

In nearly every conflict, civilians are caught in the crosshairs, whether that be directly through torture, rape, targeted killings, or indirectly through the food supply being cut off, neighbourhoods being destroyed, etc. Both are equally harmful and must be limited at all times. Sadly, there are too many conflicts going on around the world that are specifically targeting civilians to go over in detail, but the Ukraine-Russia conflict and the Israel-Hamas war are two battles that are at the forefront of current events, with both having a detrimental impact on

civilians. To begin, between February 24th, 2022, and January 31st, 2024, the Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine verified that between 10,500 and 16,500 civilians have been killed and close to 20,000 injured across Ukraine, including nearly 580 children killed and 1300 children injured. In reality, the casualty statistics are much higher than those reported. On June 30th, 2023, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights assessed that 90.5% of all civilian deaths were caused by deliberate Russian assault. The Russian military has planned and executed numerous indiscriminate attacks against civilians, including bombing neighbourhoods, schools, hospitals, and densely populated areas. In addition, Russian soldiers have performed and are performing torture and rape and are maiming and killing innocent civilians and their families. Aid organizations are continuing to provide emergency assistance in response to the latest attacks, alongside many other ongoing humanitarian interventions, but their combined actions are not enough. Furthermore, a similar and equally devastating scene is unfolding in the Israel-Hamas war. In the first week, the Israel Defence Forces carried out over six thousand airstrikes across Gaza, killing over 3,300 civilians and injuring over 12,000. Similar to Russia's assaults, the strikes hit specifically protected locations, such as hospitals, markets, mosques, schools, refugee camps, and civilian neighbourhoods. Israeli army spokesperson Daniel Hagari said himself that "the emphasis is on damage and not on accuracy" (The Daily Telegraph). The death toll in the Gaza Strip has now surpassed 28,000, with more than 67,600 Palestinians wounded. In addition, Hamas and other allied militant groups are also directly targeting civilians, including through massacres, assaults, and hostages. At the Re'im musical festival massacre, Hamas militants slaughtered 270 civilians, methodically shooting fleeing attendees as well as taking hostages and raping women. At the Be'eri massacre, approximately 70 Hamas militants slaughtered at least 130 people (around ten percent of the population of

Be'eri), including women, children, and infants, by going from house to house and shooting or capturing the residents. What's more, according to Israeli military forensic teams and eyewitness testimony, during a series of planned attacks on October 7th, 2023, Hamas militants raped, assaulted, and mutilated Israeli women and girls. On this day, over 250 civilians were taken as hostages, and over 130 have not been heard from.

Possible Solutions

Respecting and upholding International Humanitarian Law (IHL)

IHL sets out guidelines to reduce the impact of armed conflict on those uninvolved in combat. In order to protect civilians in conflict areas, all Member States need to include IHL in their “laws, military manuals and training” (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) so that those on the frontlines remain informed on the importance of respecting IHL. In the case of war crimes, all responsible parties should be held accountable and prosecuted accordingly to uphold IHL.

Political Declaration on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA)

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), “90 per cent of victims of attacks using explosive weapons in populated areas are civilians.” As such, the United Nations Secretary-General created a political declaration called Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA), which aims to prevent the use of explosive weapons during times of conflict. In 2022, 83 Member States endorsed the EWIPA in order to avoid civilian harm in conflict areas.

Protection of healthcare and humanitarian workers

In order for healthcare workers to respond to medical emergencies, they need to be protected in conflict areas. Article 19 of the Geneva Convention clearly states that “attacks against medical units and establishments must be avoided by parties in a war and instead, these establishments and personnel should be free to engage in their work at all times without the fear of being attacked” (International Committee of the Red Cross). In a similar light, humanitarian workers also need to be protected while delivering aid and parties involved in the conflict must refrain from targeting designated safe zones for civilians, such as humanitarian corridors.

Conflict Prevention

Since prevention is better than cure, Member States should take proactive measures to eliminate the possibility of conflict. The UN employs several strategies to prevent conflict. For example, the UN reduces tension in conflict-riddled zones through diplomatic approaches and mediation. In this regard, the UN deploys special envoys and facilitates political missions to promote peace. In addition, the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) recognizes that human rights violations signify impending conflict. As such, the OHCHR recommends implementing a “human rights monitoring and analysis” system to avoid escalating conflict. Furthermore, since terrorism can play a role in the initiation of conflict, the UN has adopted the “United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy” to help Member States implement steps to identify and reduce circumstances that precipitate terrorist acts. Finally, the UN understands the harm that weapons cause during the conflict. As a result, the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs suggests that all Member States work toward the “elimination of weapons

of mass destruction” and “regulation of conventional weapons” in an effort to achieve international peace and security.

Bloc Positions

The United Nations Security Council’s five permanent members (Russia, China, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States) are in a pseudo-bloc of their own as they have the power to veto any substantial resolution. This does not mean that they have the power to prevent or end debate, only that they can block the adoption of a resolution. That being said, the United Kingdom, France, the United States, and Switzerland are typically part of a Western Bloc, as they are all countries with strong ties to Western Europe and North America and are often characterized by democratic governance, capitalist economies, and close diplomatic relationships. They also all share similar views on civilians in armed conflict, in that civilians are entitled to specific protection under international humanitarian law. Keeping that in mind, there are many other countries in the United Nations Security Council that align with this so-called Western Bloc.

Japan and the Republic of Korea emphasize humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping operations, and adherence to international law. However, the Republic of Korea’s policies are also shaped by its unique geopolitical position on the Korean Peninsula and its relations with both the United States and North Korea. In addition, Ecuador, Malta, and Slovenia hold similar views on civilians in armed conflicts, emphasizing adherence to international law, support for peaceful resolution, and humanitarian assistance, even though they may not have as extensive a role in global security affairs as some other countries. Recently, both Ecuador and Malta have acknowledged the harm caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA) and

are committed to taking action on this issue. Furthermore, while China's stance on civilians in armed conflicts is quite complex as they are also engaged in peacekeeping and humanitarian aid, it is interesting to note that Algeria, Guyana, and China are quite similar in their views towards civilians in armed conflicts, leaning more towards a non-alignment approach while highlighting diplomacy and supporting international law. On the other hand, Sierra Leone and Mozambique are quite closely tied due to their respective experiences with devastating civil wars. Due to these circumstances, both countries view the issue at hand with a more inward approach that is structured by reconciliation, healing, justice, peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and humanitarian assistance.

Finally, Russia has a different stance on this topic than most other countries. While they support humanitarian assistance, political settlements through diplomatic means, and occasional peacekeeping and military intervention efforts, they are also highly critical of Western interventions, particularly those led by NATO or the United States, and emphasize the importance of state sovereignty and non-interference in the affairs of other countries despite possible violations of International Human Law, which is the principal factor affecting their view of civilians in armed conflicts.

Case Study: Syrian Civil War (March 2011 - Present)

Dissatisfied with Syria's unemployment levels, corrupt government and lack of democracy, Syrians began to revolt against the country's president, Bashar al-Assad. In response, the Syrian government employed violent measures during civilian marches to gain control of the situation.

Subsequently, Syrians took up arms to fight back, and on March 15th, 2011, the Syrian Civil War began.

Over the last 13 years, the conflict has resulted in more than 300,000 civilian deaths, a death rate that equates to almost 84 people being killed a day. Put differently, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has reported that these civilian casualties make up 1.5% of the Syrian Arab Republic's population. Many of these deaths occurred due to indiscriminate targeting. For example, according to the UNHRC, hundreds of civilians were killed or injured following the air raids on displacement camps in northwest Syria. In addition to these losses, many Syrians have died from the lack of food, clean water, and medical care.

Furthermore, there have been reports of the unethical use of chemical weapons, civilian arrests, torture of civilians, and looting. Given these dire circumstances, it is not safe for Syrians to return to their homes. As a result, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) highlighted that the Syrian Civil War has resulted in the largest global displacement crisis, with an estimated 12 million displaced Syrians. In light of these facts, the Syrian Civil War illustrates the dire conditions that civilians living in conflict areas face.

The UN Refugee Agency has been delivering food, water, shelter, and medical aid to displaced Syrians. Furthermore, with contributions from countries around the world, the UN established the Syria Humanitarian Fund (SHF) in June 2014. As of 2020, the SHF has provided 5.5 million Syrians with humanitarian aid. In addition, in 2016, the International Committee of the Red Cross worked alongside the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to create a humanitarian corridor. This

operation facilitated the evacuation of approximately 25,000 people and allowed those injured to receive medical care. Despite all the steps the UN has taken to help Syrians, more needs to be done to protect civilians on the frontlines.

Guiding Questions

1. Does your country participate in sanctions either domestically or internationally? Why or why not?
2. Have there been any major conflicts in your country where civilians were deliberately attacked? How did your country respond and why did this happen?
3. What are some solutions or steps forward that your country has taken to ensure the safety of their civilians?

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