

Houston Area Model United Nations Standard Committee



SOCHUM

Chair | Nini Dang
Topic B Background Guide
Houston Area Model United Nations 48
February 2-3 , 2023

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Note to Delegates

Howdy Delegates,

My name is Nini Dang and I'm super excited to be your chair for this year's committee. I am currently a junior attending the University of Houston double majoring in Political Science and Kinesiology! I've been doing Model UN since my freshman year and I've loved it ever since. HAMUN has been one of my favorite experiences so I hope I can make it as great as I can for all of you. HAMUN has given me the opportunity to meet a lot of the colleagues I work with/for today such as candidates like Mike Collier and Beto O'Rourke. This will be my third HAMUN as a chair so I hope that this experience will help you learn new skills, make new friends, or interest you further in national issues and finding solutions to our world's current issues. I'm very happy to be able to meet everyone in person as well as share the beautiful UH campus with you. This conference is what you make of it so do your research, get out of your comfort zones and more importantly; have fun! If you have any questions before the conference or need advice, don't hesitate to contact me. I'm looking forward to it!

Nini Dang

Chair of Sochum

She/Her/Hers

nini1dang@gmail.com





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Houston Area Model United Nations 48

February 2-3, 2022

4

Background Information

History of Committee

The Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM) is the third committee of the United Nations General Assembly. Formed in 1945 in response to the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, SOCHUM's purpose is to uphold the basic rights of human beings internationally. Specifically, the committee addresses issues of children's safety, elimination of racial discrimination, treatment of refugees, and rights to self determination, family, people with disabilities, and crime prevention. The goal of the committee is to settle these social, humanitarian, and cultural issues in a peaceful manner, while upholding the values of the U.N. SOCHUM encourages diplomacy and basic human freedoms for all people.

Topic Overview

Topic B will discuss the Strengthening Humanitarian & Disaster Relief Aid and what extent is humanitarian aid necessary and beneficial. It is our responsibility to provide aid to those who are oppressed and to ensure that the humanity of every person is accounted for. SOCHUM has the opportunity to mediate discussions between states, provide humanitarian support, and mobilize member states to act. However, no action can be taken in a country without the consent of the state, and so it is up to you to find solutions within the limits of SOCHUM.



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5

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Background

According to the OCED, humanitarian aid is defined as “assistance designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of emergencies.” It is essential to remember the goal of humanitarian aid. At its core, it is not a permanent solution — rather a temporary way of assisting victims until long-term plans are established. Throughout history, as natural disasters and war lay waste to nations, international disaster relief and humanitarian aid have been at the forefront of reconstruction. One of the first major actions taken by the United Nations after its establishment was the rebuilding of Europe after the Second World War. This accomplishment required the bringing together of many nations, united in their actions and purpose. The United Nations works to

coordinate the actions of many nations into one cohesive effort to aid people who need it. It serves as a funneling point for foreign aid to a singular goal: based on the principle that the sum is greater than the parts. These principles remain to this day. In 1991, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 46/182 which stressed the importance of international cooperation on humanitarian aid. It declared that humanitarian aid is of supreme importance in all emergencies. It established national sovereignty based on the location of the emergency — countries are the primary actor within their own lands — and reserve the right to refuse humanitarian aid to any degree. Resolution 46/182 also stressed neutrality and impartiality — every life is valuable and politics or beliefs should have no role in dictating aid. The humanitarian operations would occur through the newly established office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

From these fundamental principles and ideas, the United Nations established a basis for providing humanitarian aid. From there, the efforts of the United Nations intensified during the 1990s. As almost 50 million people were displaced due to conflicts, the United Nations rallied nations to help those in need. Raising \$800 million dollars, the United Nations was able to coordinate relief and assistance for more than 15 millions individuals across 15 countries. Additionally, steps were taken to react to natural disasters appropriately. The largest volcanic eruption within the past century occurred at Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines in 1991. 1,000 deaths were reported and the international community reacted to assist the nearly half a million individuals living in the vicinity of the eruption. Through organizations of the United Nations and direct country donations, the international community helped to provide immediate relief for those directly affected. A more modern example of humanitarian aid at work is the aftermath of the devastating Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. The third largest earthquake ever recorded was followed by a massive tsunami that devastated much of Southeast Asia, leading to deaths from Indonesia all the way to Kenya. With an estimated 230,000 deaths, this tragedy led to a widespread international response in the form of humanitarian aid. The international community as a whole pledged around \$14 billion in aid in the aftermath of the disaster. Programs such as UNICEF received over \$700 million which far exceeded the expectations of the United Nations, allowing for a successful rebuilding of the area.

History:

Humanitarian action has a long history. The modern view and system of humanitarian aid as we know it – a structured system for the provision of aid to those in immediate danger – has only really existed since the mid part of the 20th century. The principles for international aid first originated after the first world war, with the Treaty of Versailles. However, philosophies attributed to humanitarian action stem from many belief systems; the concept of Christian charity, the Islamic tradition of Zakat, and ethical concepts of appropriate wartime conduct as outlined by the Chinese, Greeks and Romans. Modern history shows that, as advances were made in weapons, communications and transport, there was a parallel growth in the scale of conflict. Those same advances, however, also allowed the distribution of aid on scales not previously seen.

Various Geneva conventions were defined, providing the current perspective on the appropriate treatment of civilians, wounded soldiers and prisoners during conflicts. Today, humanitarian disaster interventions are often depicted by the media as resulting from acute natural hazards such as earthquakes or floods, whereas, historically, such actions revolved almost exclusively around conflict situations. One of the earliest occurrences of formal international monetary aid was the Northern Chinese Famine of 1876-79. The post-war period saw an exponential rise in the number of aid agencies or Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), with over 200 organisations established in the four years immediately following the war. Leading organisations realised that there was a need for a formal and principled mechanism for international assistance.

Current Situation:

The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has more than doubled in the past five years. Crises have become more pressing in correspondence with a growing number of violations in international law, prolonged conflicts, and an alarming increase in natural disasters. With this growing necessity for the distribution of humanitarian aid. Former United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon emphasized the importance of an organized and robust humanitarian system. These efforts culminated in the World Humanitarian Summit. Taking place on 23-24 of May 2016, the World Humanitarian Summit brought together 180 nations with important non-governmental organizations, private corporations, and academia. At the conference, more than 3,500 commitments were made to better living conditions throughout the world. The World Humanitarian Summit established multiple agendas focusing on long-term success through preventing and ending conflict, investing in humanity, abandoning no one, and ending need. These commitments further specified the need to invest in stability, empower the young, and act preemptively to stop crises. After the conference, the need for humanitarian assistance continued to rise. The most prominent of the humanitarian issues during this decade (the 2010s) was the Syrian Civil War. Nearly 6 million refugees have fled from Syria since the war began in 2011.

The violent conflict between the Assad government, opposition groups, and ISIS led to a large amount of collateral damage to civilians and infrastructure. With over ten million civilians affected, the United Nations intervened. Through the OCHA's Whole of Syria approach (WoS), the United Nations hoped to provide aid to Syria. However, the Whole of Syria approach was constantly embroiled in turmoil. This turmoil became especially obvious when over 70 Syrian aid groups withdrew in 2016 over complaints about the influence the Assad regime was gaining over the entire humanitarian operation. In a letter to the United Nations, the withdrawing organizations, many of which were major actors in aid operations, noted examples of large contracts being awarded to organizations close to the Assad regime, including some that were sanctioned by the United States and the European Union. The organizations further expressed little hope in the United Nations' ability to act independently of governmental influences. It was a letter revealing the mistrust locals had about foreigners coming into a country and fully standing up for the humanitarian needs of the people — a common refrain among those needing aid. Little hope in the United Nations' ability to act independently of governmental influences. It was a letter revealing the mistrust locals had about foreigners coming into a country and fully standing up for the humanitarian needs of the people — a common refrain among those needing aid. Efforts to deliver aid to Syria were also embattled by the constant fear of humanitarian aid benefiting terrorists. Humanitarian groups are often forced to pay terrorist organizations for access to vulnerable populations that they seek to reach (al-Shabaab formalized this process making "registration fees" that could reach \$10,000). In 2018, the United States canceled nearly \$45 million in aid to a Syrian NGO that was directly linked to a terrorist organization. In a world where humanitarian groups follow every crisis, terrorist groups are having an easier time camouflaging in. Furthermore, the Rohingya refugee crisis remains a large humanitarian issue tackled by the United Nations beginning in 2015. The nearly a million refugees currently in refugee camps are the result of an international response to assist migrants. The OCHA organized the response along with UNICEF in an effort to better the living conditions in the refugee camps. Recently, the cyclones that struck Mozambique in the spring of 2019, have created another humanitarian crisis. Despite the destruction of the cyclones, the international response offers hope.

Safe spaces have been donated to protect vulnerable women and children from the United Nations Population Fund, temporary schools built and supported by UNICEF, and the UNDP reported more than \$1.2 billion in pledged donations for Mozambique. Nevertheless, in the Mozambique tragedy, a similar message remains: a want to remain independent. At the heart of the issue of humanitarian aid is this trade-off between need and independence. Aid inherently brings about dependence but people of disaster stricken countries wish to avoid being controlled in a neo-colonial way. Currently, the implementation of humanitarian aid through the United Nations is carried out through the Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The OCHA coordinates the distribution of humanitarian aid. Other UN organizations that play important roles in humanitarian aid distribution include the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Each of these organizations specialize in their respective field and the UNDP is responsible for operations during disasters. Many of these organizations, such as UNHCR and UNICEF, are funded almost completely from voluntary contributions from member states of the United Nations, nongovernmental organizations, and private citizens. However, the United Nations is not the only way of providing humanitarian aid. Nations can provide aid directly to another nation. A prominent example is the United States and its hundreds of millions of dollars spent in humanitarian aid to other countries. However, this aid can be used politically to force recipient nations to comply with the demands of the benefactor.

Country Policy (A Few Case Studies):

Syria: Syria has been embroiled in civil war for nearly a decade, making it one of the most pressing humanitarian crises of the twenty first century. Over 11.7 million Syrian civilians are currently in need of aid. 2 million rely on water supplies via truck delivery, and many more are dependent upon UN emergency food supplies delivered to camps built for internally displaced civilians. However, the Syrian government's attitude towards UN assistance has been less than welcoming. The country's representatives have stressed that aid can only be delivered effectively if member states of involved UN bodies, such as the Security

Council, refrain from politicizing humanitarian efforts. With the United States arming Syrian rebels and Russia supporting the current government, one of these representatives have questioned the legitimacy of the efforts of the UN, which has attempted to use economic pressure against the nation in the past.

France: For the most part, France has adopted an enthusiastic stance on their humanitarian strategies. In 2018, the European country adopted a new strategy for the following four years. The French government pledged to triple its annual financial contributions by 2022, and expand their program with a focus on solidarity and international stability. Some of their most notable new commitments include protection of humanitarian and medical personnel in conflict zones, developing post-crisis strategies, and becoming one of the top three European donors and one of the top five global donors in humanitarian aid contributions. France also has a comprehensive set of hazard risk management policies. Through careful assessment of the casualties and damages from every major disaster, these policies are modified on an annual basis.

United States of America: The United States is the largest foreign aid donor in the world. In 2017, the country accounted for almost a quarter of total official development assistance from major donor governments. That being said, the portion of their budget allocated for humanitarian aid is relatively small. Only 18% of their 50 billion dollar budget for foreign assistance was used for humanitarian activities in the 2017 fiscal year. The U.S. has extensive disaster management policies in place in order to mitigate the effects of natural disasters. For example, the National Disaster Recovery Framework provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) allows disaster recovery managers to operate in a unified and collaborative manner, focusing on how best to restore and revitalize the social and environmental fabric of American communities.

operate in a unified and collaborative manner, focusing on how best to restore and revitalize the social and environmental fabric of American communities.

People's Republic of China: In recent years, China has become one of the biggest players in humanitarian aid and emergency relief in the world. A 2014 report states that China has spent about 51.9 billion dollars on foreign aid in the past fifty years. The World Bank has also found that China's spending in humanitarian aid has increased by more than 5 million dollars in a decade. China's spending, however, seems to be almost completely dependent on the relevant issues that present themselves each year, as opposed to a constant governmental policy. For example, their spending spiked to nearly 90 million dollars in 2011 in response to the East Africa food security crisis, then dropped to less than 30 million in the following year, only to increase again to more than 50 million in 2014 in response to the Ebola crisis. After the catastrophic Wenchuan (or Sichuan) earthquake in 2008, the Chinese government has made significant efforts in improving their disaster risk reduction programs by improving their response and recovery sectors; enforcing new building codes, introducing extensive emergency drills in schools, and strengthening earthquake early warning systems. However, these programs still require more adequate funding, and they lack an integrated system for storing and sharing risk-related information.

Russian Federation: Since the mid-2000s, the Russian Federation has re-emerged as a donor of humanitarian aid. However, its contributions have remained relatively insignificant compared to those of the other world powers and developed countries. According to the OCHA, Russia has donated about 350 million (U.S.) dollars in the last 10 years, with humanitarian aid totaling about 0.002% of its national GDP. Russia mainly provides food and health-related emergency supplies to countries in need.

One important point to note, however, is that Russia has not agreed to the Principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship, which ensures that humanitarian aid should not be influenced by political motives.

Past UN Actions:

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) emerged in the wake of World War II to help Europeans displaced by that conflict. The agency leads and coordinates international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide.

The General Assembly created the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to provide emergency relief to some 750,000 Palestine refugees, who had lost their homes and livelihoods as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict. Today, some 5 million Palestine refugees are eligible for UNRWA services.

The UN General Assembly hosted a high-level meeting on 19 September 2016 to address large movements of refugees and migrants, with the aim of bringing countries together behind a more humane and coordinated approach.

UNFPA, the sexual and reproductive health agency, provides humanitarian assistance in all regions with a focus on meeting the health and protection needs of women, girls and young people. We provide life-saving sexual and reproductive health services and supplies, services and coordination for the prevention and response to gender-based violence, along with integrated services for mental health and psychosocial support and cash and voucher assistance.

The World Food Programme (WFP) provides relief to millions of people, who are victims of disasters. It is responsible for mobilizing food and funds for transport for all large-scale refugee-feeding operations managed by UNHCR.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is often called on to help farmers re-establish production following floods, outbreaks of livestock disease and similar emergencies.

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