Houston Area Model United Nations
Standard Committee

United Nations Human Rights Council



Chair | Ish Mehta
Topic A: Protecting Human Rights from Government Surveillance and Emerging Technologies
Houston Area Model United Nations 52
February 4 & 5, 2027

Atilgan Ozdil/Anadolu Ag

Chair Letter

Delegates,

Welcome to HAMUN! My name is Ish Mehta, and I am honored to serve as the Chair of this year's United Nations Human Rights Council committee.

I am currently a freshman at the University of Texas at Austin studying Finance. I have been a part of Model UN for over 4 years and have had the opportunity to compete in 9 conferences across the country, from Houston to Chicago. Model UN has been an integral part of my high school experience, helping me become more confident, improve my public speaking skills and learn how to think about complex global issues. But most of all, Model UN gave me the opportunity to meet some of my closest friends and has helped me form priceless memories.

I chose to chair the United Nations Human Rights Council as human rights is an extremely complex and debated topic in the world. I look forward to hearing the different perspectives that each delegation brings to the committee, and aim to create a space where delegates are challenged into thinking deeply, debating respectfully and are encouraged to work out thoughtful compromises and solutions to solve the issues.

In the end, I would emphasize the importance of having fun and enjoying the conference - meeting new people, making new friends and making some priceless memories. We want to make sure each one of us makes the most of this conference, so if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me or any other member of HAMUN staff.

I can't wait to meet and work with all of you!

Ish Mehta
Chair of UNHCR
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UNHRC Background

The United Nations Human Rights Council was first established in 2006 to help protect universal human rights and individual freedoms. The committee is given the power to launch investigations and fact-finding missions on alleged human rights violations, pass resolutions that represent international consensus and periodically review UN members own human rights records through the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

In recent years, the UNHRC has expanded in scope in response to several developments and issues in the world. Today, issues the committee discuss include digital rights, the impact of climate change on humans, and emerging conflicts. As Human Rights issues have become a more debated topic globally in recent years, and the definition of what a human right is itself continues being a divisive topic, the importance of the UNHRC has only increased.



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Background Information

There are an estimated 30-45 million people of Kurd ethnicity in the world. This makes them one of the largest ethnic groups in the world that lacks their own state. The Kurd population is distributed among various different countries in the Middle-east with around 15-20 million living in Turkey, 8-10 million living in Iran, 6-8 million in Iraq and ~2 million in Syria. Within these countries the Kurdish people often make up 10-20% of the population of these countries. Despite having sizable populations in these countries, Kurdish people face widespread discrimination and are often considered foreigners and/or 2nd class citizens in these countries.

It is difficult to estimate the number of Kurds that have been displaced in the Middle-east but it is estimated that millions of Kurdish people are currently displaced, some within their own state while others across borders. This often results in them lacking a proper home and access to resources and services like food, water, jobs and education. Civil Wars in Syria and Iraq have contributed party to this massive displacement, while many are also fleeing persecution from governments.



Above: Kurdish people fleeing during Iraq's Civil War

TOPIC HISTORY

Kurdish people have struggled to gain basic human rights for almost a century across the Middle-east. Initially though, the Kurdish populations right to self-determination was recognized in the 1920 Sevres Treaty which outlined a plan to give the Kurdish people their own state. In fact, from 1921-1924 Kurdish leader Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji declared a short-lived Kingdom of Kurdistan before being quickly suppressed.. However, plans for a Kurdish state would later be overturned by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne which split the Kurdish population across multiple states. This would result in almost a century of suppression often sponsored by states. In 1962 for instance, the Syrian government stripped approximately 120,000 Kurds of their citizenship leaving them stateless.

This would then be followed by Syria's "Arab Belt" program which forcibly displaced Kurdish people out of the northern region of Syria which was rich in natural resources. Human rights violations peaked during the Ba'athist regime's 1988 Anfal Campaign in Iraq during which the military destroyed over 3000 villages, forcibly displacing over 1.5 million people and killing more than 50,000 civilians. Meanwhile in Turkey, conflict between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and state forces has been ongoing since 1984 and has resulted in the displacement of 1-3 million Kurdish people. The international community began to notice, and on April 5, 1991 the UN security council passed resolution 688 which gave recognition to the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government in 2005.



Shelters for Kurdish Refugees

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Topic History Cont.

The Kurdish government would then prove to be an instrumental ally in the fight against ISIS. 2005 was also the year Iraq formally recognized Kurdistan as a region within Iraq leading to hopes of a potential lasting peace. However, tension erupted in 2017 again following a independence referendum. Additionally, there have been crackdown on Kurdish populations in Turkey in 2019 with around 73% of pro-Kurdish mayors being replaced despite winning the election. Additionally, in 2019 Turkey launch numerous cross-border attacks into Syria which displaced over 300,000 civilian with a vast majority being Kurdish. Meanwhile, in Iran protests launched in 2022, following the death of 22-year-old Kurdish woman Jina Mahsa Amini who was under police custody over the systematic repression Kurdish people in Iran and the protests led to the death of 140 protesters and the arrest of more than 7000.

Case Study A: Hasakah Census of October 5, 1962

On October 5, 1962, Syria revoked the citizenship of over 120,000 Kurds living in Syria. Instead they would be classified as either foreigners or as being unregistered. This population of stateless Kurds would end up growing to over 300,000. Strippng the Kurdish population of their citizenship, resulted in them being unable to vote, be formally employed, own property, receive higher education and receive a passport. Additionally, this also resulted in many Kurdish individuals have their property confiscated by the government leaving many displaced both internally and externally. In essence the Kurdish population in Syria lost access to many basic human rights like voting, receiving an education, and shelter.

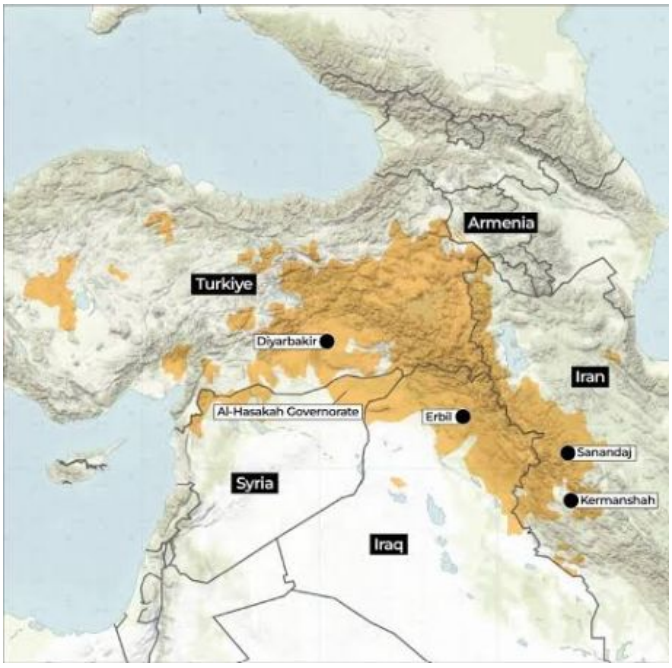


Kurdish Soldiers fighting ISIS

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Case Study A Cont.

It would not be until 2026 that Kurdish residents in Syria would finally be granted citizenship again following Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa issuing Legislative Decree No. 13 of 2026. The decree also abolished all the laws from the 196 census.



Above: Area's with the highest concentration of Kurdish population.

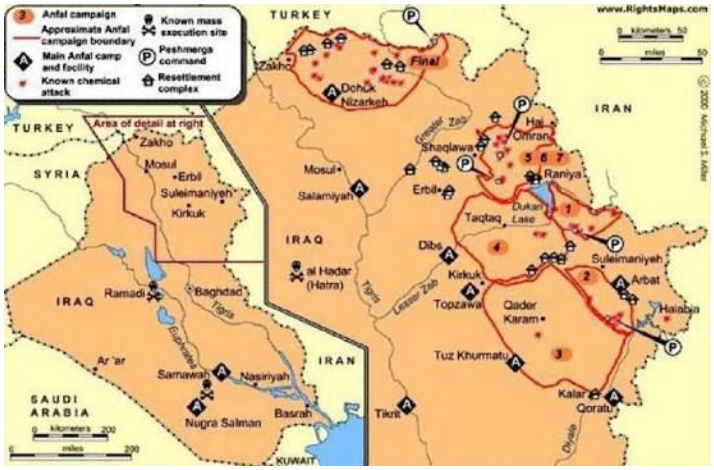
Case Study B: The Anfal Campaign and the Halabja Chemical Attack

During the final years of the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime launched the systematic Al-Anfal military campaign against the Kurdish population in northern Iraq. On March 16, 1988, this campaign would culminate with the Halabja chemical attack. During the attack, Iraqi warplanes bombed the border town of Halabja with a deadly mixture of mustard gas and nerve agents. About 5,000 civilians - predominantly women, children, and the elderly - were killed while several thousands more were injured and left with lifelong health complications. Across the broader campaign led by the military, over 3,000 villages were completely destroyed, more than 50,000 civilians were killed, and over 1.5 million people were forcibly displaced from their homes, with almost all the victims being of the Kurdish ethnicity.

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Case Study B Cont.

This catastrophic use of weapons of mass destruction and state-sponsored violence against a civilian population led to immediate international outcry which ultimately leading to the United Nations Security Council passing Resolution 688 which laid the groundwork for the eventual establishment of the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government as well as Iraqi recognition of the Kurdistan province in Iraq.



Above: Map of the Anfal Campaign

UN Past Actions

1988 - UN Security Council Resolution 620: Following reports of chemical weapon attacks affecting cities and civilian populations during the Iran-Iraq War, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 620 to condemn the use of chemical weapons, marking an early international effort to address the dangerous escalation of weapons that would soon devastate the Kurdish city of Halabja.

1991 - UN Security Council Resolution 688: Following the Ba'athist regime's crackdown on the Kurdish population, the UN security council passed Resolution 688 which condemned the repressions of the Kurdish population in Iraq. The resolution also declared that the massive displacement of the Kurdish population threatened international peace and security.

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Questions to Consider

How can basic human rights like food, water, shelter and access to jobs and education be guaranteed to the Kurdish population?

What oversight mechanisms can be established to ensure that countries to infringe on the rights of the Kurdish population?

What steps can be taken to solve the widespread statelessness of the Kurdish population across the Middle-east?

In what ways can aid be given the displaced Kurds and what steps can be taken to give them back the rights they have lost?

What steps can be taken to allow for the Kurdish population to be able to practice self-determinism?

What steps can be taken to prevent discrimination against people of the Kurdish Ethnicity?

Timeline

August 10, 1920 — Treaty of Sèvres: Recognized the Kurdish populations right to self-determination and outlined a plan to give the Kurdish people their own state.

July 24, 1923 — Treaty of Lausanne: Overturned plans for the establishment of a Kurdish state plans for a Kurdish state instead splitting the Kurdish population across multiple states.

October 5, 1962 — Syrian Census in Hasakah: The Syrian government stripped approximately 120,000 Kurds of their citizenship leaving them stateless.

1973–1975 — "Arab Belt" Policy in Syria: Syria's "Arab Belt" program forcibly displaced Kurdish people out of the northern region of Syria which was rich in natural resources.

Timeline

February–September 1988 — The Anfal Campaign & Halabja Massacre: Human rights violations peaked during the Ba'athist regime's 1988 Anfal Campaign in Iraq during which the military destroyed over 3000 villages, forcibly displacing over 1.5 million people and killing more than 50,000 civilians. On March 16, 1988, this campaign would culminate with the Halabja chemical attack.

1988 — UN Security Council Resolution 620: A past action by the UN Security Council addressing chemical weapons use during the Iran-Iraq War.

April 5, 1991 — UN Security Council Resolution 688: On April 5, 1991 the UN security council passed resolution 688 which gave recognition to the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government in 2005.

October 2005 — Iraqi Constitutional Recognition: Iraq formally recognized Kurdistan as a region within Iraq leading to hopes of a potential lasting peace.

2014–2017 — ISIS Conflict: The Kurdish government would prove to be an instrumental ally to the US in the fight against ISIS.

September 25, 2017 — Iraqi Kurdistan Independence Referendum: The Kurdistan government held a independence referendum with reignited tensions with the Iraqi government..

January 2018 & October 2019 — Cross-Border Incursions into Northern Syria: Turkey launched numerous cross-border attacks into Syria which displaced over 300,000 civilian with a vast majority being Kurdish.

September 16, 2022 — Death of Jina Mahsa Amini: 22-year-old Kurdish woman Jina Mahsa Amini was killed in police custody which launched widespread protests over the systematic repression Kurdish people in Iran and the protests led to the death of 140 protesters and the arrest of more than 7000.



TOPIC B APPENDIX

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TOPIC B APPENDIX

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