Forum: Advisory Panel on the Question of Collective Security in the Middle East

Issue: Providing Aid for Refugees and Other Discriminated Groups

Student Officer: Angeline Pan

Position: President

Introduction

It is proclaimed within the Universal Declaration Human Rights that all peoples of all nations shall have all rights and freedoms set forth within the Declaration without distinction of any sort. However, the sad truth is that not all individuals truly have these rights and freedoms within all nations and are forced to flee as a result. It is estimated that 51.2 million men women and children are displaced by unthinkable crises around the world. The majority of the refugee population is by source nations within the Middle East. In 2014, the number of refugees around the world exceeded fifty million for the first time since World War II. However, this is not the only reason for concern. It is more the changes in composition and characteristics of the world’s displaced population. Not only is the scale of forced displacement worsening in the world, more and more people are not escaping across international borders. Instead, they remain trapped, or choose to remain in their countries of origin. Half of these refugees consist of children either travelling alone or in groups desperately searching for sanctuary, and frequently become victims of human trafficking. The exponential increase in refugee numbers is causing great stress on host countries and aid organizations. In order to ensure all peoples or all nations across the globe, but especially in areas of conflict such as the Middle East, we must provide proper aid for refugees and discriminated groups.

Definition of Key Terms

Discrimination

Action that denies social participation or human rights to certain individuals based on prejudice, which may include treating certain groups or social categories in a manner that is worse than the way other groups or categories are treated. There are various types of discrimination such as but not limited to race, nationality, gender, and age.
Refugee

Individuals who are forced to flee their countries due to persecution or other human rights abuses caused by their religion, race, nationality, social group or political opinion, who are unwilling to accept protection from their own nation due to fears of persecution, or whose nations are unable to offer these individuals protection.

Protracted Refugee Situation

A protracted refugee situation is when 25,000 or more refugees originating from a country seek refuge in another country for at least five consecutive years.

Internally Displaced People (IDP)

An individual who is forced to flee their own home but remains within the country borders. While they currently do not fall into legal definitions of refugees, they are often referred to as so.

Background

The Middle East contains large areas of conflict and indiscriminate violence. It has various overlapping crises and humanitarian emergencies, and is likely to witness more internal and external displacement. The existing and emerging areas of volatile activity affect not only the citizens of the nation but also countries and organizations operating in the area. Since the turn of the millennium, various conflicts have erupted in multiple areas throughout the Middle East. In 2014, the largest source countries of refugees were Syria, Palestine, and Afghanistan. Syria, hosted the largest number of refugees (2.47 million) and Palestine hosted the second largest (1.6 million). Below is a breakdown of the situations of refugees within various countries in the Middle East.

Iraq

Escalation of armed conflict amongst administrative divisions of the country and constantly changing security situations has caused a movement of IDPs across central Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. However, access to these IDPs and refugees to provide aid is extremely limited and will likely remain so through certain areas in Iraq. Newly displaced refugees often find the increasing costs of accommodation and foods quickly deplete their limited financial resources. The number of refugees from Iraq seeking refuge in other countries is quickly rising. Depending on the changes to circumstances in Syria, the current number of refugees in Iraq from Syria is expected to remain at similar levels. Iraq is expected to have just over 2 million refugees seek asylum in the country, of which only around 500,000 will receive aid.

Syrian Arab Republic

Since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in March of 2011, an estimated 9 million Syrians fled their homes, taking refuge in neighboring countries or within Syria itself. As no political solution seems to be within
sight and military tensions continue to run high, these numbers are expected to increase. According to the UNHCR, over 3 million have fled to Syria’s immediate, neighbors, causing great problems within countries such as Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon. Around 6.5 million are displaced internally in Syria. Fewer than 150,000 Syrians have been provided asylum in the European Union, and their members have pledged to resettle 33,000 more Syrians. Around 85% of the resettlements are pledged by Germany. This conflict is the greatest producer of refugees in the world as of today. There are a total of 3,808,826 persons of concern, and a total of 3,726,696 Syrian refugees registered. Syria is expected to host nearly 7 million refugees from various countries and it is expected over half of these people will be helped by the UNHCR, however, nearly 3 million will still require assistance from other organizations and governments. The ongoing destruction of infrastructure, constantly shifting areas of conflict, violence and high levels of insecurity inhibit relief efforts, and will most likely continue to do so.

**Yemen**

The protests in Yemen were initially against economic conditions, unemployment, corruption, and the government’s proposals to modify Yemen’s constitution. Since 2011, the country has been riddled with political insecurity and instability, which caused social and economic situations to deteriorate. In additions, there have been separatist attacks and movements as well as tribal clashes that have cause new displacement. There is a steady flow of asylum seekers and migrants in and out of the country. Around 250,000 registered refugees are in the country, 95% of which are Somalis. Ethiopian asylum seekers represented over three quarters of arrivals in the beginning of 2014. While Yemen is currently granting temporary protection to Syrians, allowing access to services available to all refugees, such as health care and education, most Syrians are unregistered. More are expected to register. Despite any challenges, Yemen is still extremely hospitable to refugees and provides land and security for Kharaz Camp refugees. The number of IDPs was around 340,000 and the number fluctuated in response to level of ongoing conflicts within the country. Around 675,000 refugees are expected to seek asylum in Yemen this coming year, of which around 620,000 are expected to receive aid.

**State of Palestine**

The situation in Israel and Palestine has caused a large number of individuals to be displaced from their homes. Nearly one-third of registered Palestinian refugees (over 1.4 million) live in recognized Palestine refugee camps in the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Syria, East Jerusalem, Lebanon, and the West Bank. While these camps maintain schools, health care centers and distribution centers, socioeconomic conditions are poor with cramped living conditions, high population density, and inadequate basic infrastructure.

**Afghanistan**

As international security forces withdraw and economic transitions occur within Afghanistan, peace, security, and development are expected to be affected, however, the international community will not diminish the amount of aid sent to the country during this transitional time period. Currently, the main policy framework for sustained reintegration for those returning to the country is the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR). Those who have returned have contributed to rapid urbanization by migrating to towns and cities. However, many
will still require basic assistance as rising poverty and unemployment in these urban areas prevent reintegration into society. As of now, there is no asylum and refugee legislation in Afghanistan, but there is a draft awaiting inclusion in the 2015 agenda. Insurgency in southern Afghanistan is still spreading, and remains a threat to stability. Violence will continue to displace individuals, and humanitarian aid access is still limited due to insecurity, economic instability, and the Government’s limited ability to provide basic services. In terms of refugees, it is expected that all refugees will be helped in this coming year.

**Israel**

Of the approximately 55,000 asylum seekers in Israel, a majority are from Eritrea and Sudan, while others may come from the Ivory Coast, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Ethiopia. Though Israel is a signatory of the key international agreement that outlines refugee rights and countries’ obligations, the Israeli government has yet to pass asylum legislation, and as a result of the lack of procedure and clarity in policy, the country has one of the lowest refugee recognition rates in the world. In many refugees that cross the border by foot from Egypt are detained in overcrowded conditions. After prisons are filled to capacity, asylum seekers are released into cities without assistance, and access to basic services are next to nothing. Government stigmas upon refugees make it for them to simulate into society. These conditions make it extremely difficult to find secure work and these asylum seekers are susceptible to exploitation as a result.

**Jordan**

Jordan continues to be greatly affected by security situations in neighboring countries. There has been a great influx of Syrian refugees into the country as well as refugees from Iraq and Gaza. Jordan provides asylum to these refugees and grants Syrian refugees access to health care and education in host communities. Also, there are Syrian refugee camps where they ensure security. Despite the strain on national systems and infrastructure, Jordan continues to remain hospitable to refugees. The protection space if favorable for refugees, but it is fragile as Jordan has socio-economic issues. Approximately a million refugees are expected in the next year, and nearly all are expected to receive aid.

**Lebanon**

The impact Syrian crisis has caused burden upon the economy, political instability, demographics, and threatens security in Lebanon. Lebanon provides exceptional hospitality to refugee seekers, however, with over 1.3 refugees expected at the start of 2015, its resources will be stretched thin. The government has taken a pro-active stance in terms of engagement in refugee issues. Despite border restrictions, it is expected that Syrians requiring immediate assistance and protection will continue to receive aid and Lebanon will continue to serve as a safe haven. Here, refugees have access to most basic services, and Syrian refugees and Lebanese in local communities most affected by the influx of refugees are becoming more and more vulnerable despite the large-scale response to needs. The socio-economic vulnerability of these people continues to increase, and it is crucial that international solidarity and support is shown towards Lebanon who has taken in the largest number of Syrian refugees in the world. If Lebanon does not receive support, its ability to respond and withstand the Syrian crisis will be tested.
Discriminated Groups

Discrimination in the Middle East often stems from religion, ethnicity, and gender. The majority of citizens in the countries in the region is Muslim, therefore, those who do not practice Islam are a minority, and may face persecution for not strictly observing Sharia Law. Women in countries that observe Sharia Law may face persecution for certain actions and are discriminated in ways such as not receiving equal rights, restricted movements, and education. Even within Muslims, certain groups face persecution from other groups due to longstanding history of conflict; similarly, conflicts over ethnicity stem from conflicts in history.

Major Parties Involved

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The UNHCR helps lead and coordinate international actions to help resolve refugee issues and protect refugees worldwide. It mainly serves to ensure rights and wellbeing of refugees. It strives to ensure the right to seek asylum while retaining the options to return home voluntarily, integrate, or resettle in another country. The agency works in over 125 countries and helps tens of millions of individuals

Refugees International (RI)

The Women & Girls Program is committed to holding humanitarian actors, host governments, and donor nations and organizations accountable on satisfying the needs of women displaced by conflict. RI also works to identify the most vulnerable groups and strive to achieve adoption and implementation of policies by governments to address basic human rights and humanitarian needs.

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

The UNRWA was formed to provide assistance and protection for Palestine Refugees. Their services include healthcare, education, social services, relief efforts, microfinance, camp infrastructure and improvement, and emergency assistance at all times, in including times of armed conflict. Due to the unique nature of the organization because it is committed to one group of refugees, the descendants of Palestine males who lost both home and means of livelihood due to the 1948 conflict, including legally adopted children, all those who live in areas of operation who meet a certain set of criteria may receive aid.

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF has been working to bring both humanitarian aid and resilience interventions to meet the needs of refugee children, their families, host communities, and other groups that were affected as a result of the crises. Many of their efforts have been concentrated on Syrian refugees. They help provide access to safe water and attempt to ensure that individuals receive proper nutrition. UNICEF has also been working to build long-term resilience of communities affected by the Syrian crisis, especially in refugee hosting countries.
Amnesty International

Amnesty International is an organization that strives to protect the human rights of people all around the globe. It has been involved with issues pertaining to both refugees from Syria as well as discrimination and persecution of individuals in the Middle East for reasons such as but not limited to gender, religion, ethnicity, etc. It has worked in the area in numerous ways in order to attempt to alleviate discrimination of groups and has also worked to ensure the human rights of refugees in the Middle East.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

- Currently, groups fleeing from persecution and violence have been seeking asylum in neighboring countries. This is demonstrated perfectly with the Syrian Crisis. However, neighboring countries merely granting asylum is not a long-term solution. This is also demonstrated with the Syrian Crisis. Lebanon and Jordan have provided asylum to these refugees, but at great burden upon the socio-economic conditions of these two countries. These people are technically “safe” but many times, living conditions are difficult. Rudimentary aid can be given, but due to the sheer numbers of refugees fleeing into countries, resources are already limited.

- United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 defined principles for returning Palestinian refugees to their homes, and hoped to facilitate peace between Israel and Arab states. However, all six countries represented in the UN during that time voted against it. Many articles were not fulfilled as they were opposed by Israel, overshadowed by war, or rejected by the Arab states. Article 11 within the resolution called for Palestinian right of return. While the UN General Assembly continues to reaffirm this resolution annually since 1949, and many subsequent resolutions have reaffirmed the right of return, Israel continues to contest the Palestinian right to return.

- The 1951 Refugee Convention outlined the parameters of who would be classified as a refugee, refugee rights, and the obligations of states in dealing with refugees. This helped define guidelines on how to deal with refugees, and it helped establish standards and bound signatories in legal obligations. However, countries such as Israel are signatories but ignore certain parameters, and other countries that have not been signatories have been excellent in providing humanitarian aid and support to refugees.

Possible Solutions

- Encourage countries to help aid humanitarian relief efforts to asylum seekers and refugees in the country. As of now, it can be extremely difficult for organizations to reach these individuals due to circumstances
such as lack of infrastructure and lack of governmental support. Of course, in countries where these refugees exist due to governmental persecution, this would be difficult. Also, it is important to ensure that host countries understand their legal obligations to refugees and asylum seekers. One area to look into would be to provide countries incentives to help humanitarian efforts and fulfill their legal obligations.

- With already existing humanitarian efforts, improve upon the facilities and conditions for these refugees and asylum seekers. Ensure that these refugees’ basic needs are met, and that their basic human rights are also met. Consider improving upon rehabilitation programs to help refugees and asylum assimilate better into society, either back home, in the host country, or a third country. This includes education to remove any stigmas associated with being a refugee/asylum seeker in host communities, providing methods to allow these refugees and asylum seekers to earn stable financial incomes, guaranteeing these people with access to basic necessities such as food, water, shelter.

- One of the major issues regarding refugees and asylum seekers at the moment, particularly with the Syrian crisis is that the overwhelming numbers of refugees flooding into neighboring countries places a great burden upon all systems within these host countries. In order to resolve these issues, look into improving current systems so that they can withstand greater numbers. Also, work on legislation and agreements between countries and organizations to repatriate a certain population of these refugees and asylum seekers.

- As these refugees and asylum seekers enter new areas and countries, they are often at risk of exploitation. Therefore, it is imperative to ensure the security of these individuals. This can be done through actions such as creating designated refugee camps that provide security for the people living inside. Also, security can be provided through registration of refugees so that these vulnerable groups of people may be accounted for, and checkups can be done to ensure that these people are living securely.

- Education of individuals to alleviate the issue of discrimination. Level of discrimination due to social groups, cultures, race, gender, age, etc. can only be decreased when we understand one another and understand that despite differences, we are all fundamentally human, and our needs and desires are very similar in nature. While certain cultures have had longstanding conflicts that may prevent this from happening, any education may help alleviate the issue at hand.

- Provide opportunities and platforms where discriminated groups such as women are able to access the same rights as others within the community, such as education, and ensuring the security of these discriminated groups when doing so. This may be extremely difficult as this may cause conflict with the religion and laws of society. Therefore, governments may obstruct any attempted aid provision, and it is essential that government cooperation be gained, as it makes humanitarian aid and access to vulnerable groups more efficient and effective.
Bibliography


