

GA4: Special, Political, and Decolonization:

Committee Directive

Topic 1: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Established in 1950 in order to replace the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is the foremost provider of basic services¹. The UNRWA clothes, feeds, educates, and provides medical services to over 4.5 refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syrian Arab Republic. For operational purposes, the UNRWA defines a Palestinian refugee as someone whose "normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948 and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict²."

The UNRWA, though, has faced many difficulties throughout the years. Much of the problems stem, of course, from the ongoing conflict and harsh relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. For example, when the second Intifada began in 2000 and hostilities once again broke out between Israel and Palestine, the regression back to violence destroyed infrastructure, increased danger of injury/death, lost jobs, increased the need for aid and financial assistance, and, all around, worsened the lives of Palestinian refugees³.

Furthermore, with the 2006 democratic election in the Palestinian Authority which gave Hamas control of the government, Israel began a program to crack down on security around the Gaza Strip and West Bank through methods such as closing the borders, holding passports, and limiting supplies. As many Palestinians work in Israel, this has led to an increase in

¹ <http://www.un.org/unrwa/overview/qa.html#e>

² <http://www.un.org/unrwa/refugees/whois.html>

³ http://www.un.org/unrwa/genevaconference/press/comgen_speech.html

unemployment. Additionally, with rising prices and levels of inflation, many refugees are experiencing greater economic hardship. Also, foreign aid has decreased drastically. The UNRWA, itself, is facing major budget limitation. A successful resolution should address the pressing problems encountered by the Palestinian refugees and yield a unique yet effective solution for the UNRWA.

Topic 2: Assistance in mine action

There were approximately 5,751 deaths last year from landmines and even more have been injured⁴. Possibly more as many cases are not reported. Furthermore, mines are not just a risk for personal safety. Mines also damage infrastructure and the environment. “Millions of landmines are lying in the ground in over 60 countries⁵.” This predicament is compounded by the fact many of the mines are within developing countries that need the land, infrastructure, and aid that is hindered by the danger of mines. One of the topics the committee will address is assistance in mine action. Mine action, in short, aims to reduce the damage caused by mines whether socially, environmentally, or economically.

The United Nations considers the five main elements of mine action to be:

- “1. Mine clearance to remove landmines and UXO (Unexploded Ordinance) from the ground;
2. Risk reduction education to help people learn about the weapons, to find out where and how they are hidden, and to help reduce accidents among people living in mine-affected areas;

⁴ <http://www.icbl.org/>

⁵ http://www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/sds/introduction/slideshow_print.html

⁶ http://www.mineaction.org/section.asp?s=what_is_mine_action

3. Victim assistance to help those who have been injured by mines;
4. Advocacy to support a total ban on antipersonnel landmines;
5. Stockpile destruction to help countries destroy their stockpiled landmines and meet their obligations under the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Convention.⁶

Demining, of course, is a very important part of mine action. Demining, as a process, is very time consuming and rather dangerous. But this extended process is needed; because if the demining process leaves only a few mines behind, if the potential victims believe the mines are gone, they will be less careful, and the damage will be even greater. Even if the mines do not kill, the damage will be the massive. There is believed to be at least 473,000 landmine survivors, many of whom “require amputation, long hospital stays, and extensive rehabilitation⁷”. This provides a dilemma for the victims many of whom are the underprivileged in developing countries as emergency medical assistance can be quite expensive. Moreover, victims have a hard time finding employment. Victim assistance is not just limited to medical services, but also includes lobbying for the rights of the disabled, many of whom are discriminated against.

Therefore, risk reduction education and support of bans on antipersonnel landmines are important factors to protection and prevention of potential victims of landmines. Antipersonnel landmines are still being planted today, and forty countries are still not party to the.

Antipersonnel Mine Ban Treaty (“Ottawa convention”).

“When a country becomes a "state party" to the treaty, it agrees never to use, develop, produce, stockpile or transfer antipersonnel landmines, or to assist any other party to conduct these activities; to destroy all stockpiled antipersonnel

⁷ <http://www.icbl.org/problem/what>

landmines within four years; to clear all laid antipersonnel landmines within 10 years; and, when it is within its means, to provide assistance for mine clearance, mine awareness, stockpile destruction, and victim assistance activities worldwide.⁸”

The forty countries outside of the Mine Ban Treaty stockpile around 160 million antipersonnel mines; thirteen of these countries still produce these mines⁹. Delegates should be familiar with their country’s position and stance in dealing with landmines and UXOs including any treaties their country is party to. Delegates should focus on improving the sustainability of mine action assistance programs.

Topic 3: Question of the Western Sahara

When Spain’s colonization of the Western Sahara ended, three actors immediately stepped forward in hopes of controlling the former colony. Morocco and Mauritania both had historical claims to the territory. The Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO), a guerilla nationalistic organization, had fought the Spanish rule for years. The UN then attempted to solve the situation with the United Nations Visiting Mission to Spanish Sahara to investigate the claims to sovereignty. The UN supported a national referendum which was followed by the International Court of Justice rejection of the claims of Mauritania and Morocco and granting of the right of self-determination to the Western Sahara¹⁰. Spain, then, agreed to organize the referendum.

⁸ <http://mineaction.org/overview.asp?o=1116>

⁹ <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2007/es/introduction.html>

¹⁰ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/3466917.stm

¹¹ <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/minurso/background.html>

But before the referendum occurred, in November of 1975, the king of Morocco began the “green march,” in which an estimated 300,000 Moroccans marched into the Western Sahara and settled. From this, the Madrid agreement was created; Morocco acquired two-thirds of the Western Sahara, while Mauritania attained the remaining third. The Polisario front, however, quickly formed its own government, the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), and declared its independence in reaction. With the opposition provided by the Polisario front (who had the support of nearby Algeria), the Mauritania renounced its claim. This double-edged sword allowed Morocco to move in and occupy Mauritania’s former claim. Polisario, now based in Algeria along with a refugee camp, continued their guerilla warfare until 1991.

In 1991, the UN began to take further action and established the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) with resolution 690.

“The Plan provided for a transitional period during which the Special Representative of the Secretary-General would have sole and exclusive responsibility over all matters relating to a referendum in which the people of Western Sahara would choose between independence and integration with Morocco... The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees would carry out a repatriation program for eligible Western Saharan voters living outside the Territory. The transitional period was to begin with the coming into effect of the ceasefire and end with the proclamation of the results of the referendum¹¹.”

The referendum, in which the options would be independence or integration, was to be held in 1992. However, the transitional period never began. By 1994, the UN had finally both secured the cooperation of the parties and completed some integral work and began to identify who would vote in the referendum. The identification process proved impossible as the UN could not

get the two parties to agree to the identity of potential voters. By 1996, MINURSO was suspended, and most of the staff left.

Nevertheless, the identification process was restarted in 1997. In 2000, UN special envoy James Baker negotiated agreements on the release of POWs, the transition period, and the referendum, but he could not get any further with the identification process. However, he soon released his “Framework Agreement,” often called the Baker Plan. The Baker Plan granted the Western Sahara would be granted autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty, created a four year transitional period before the referendum, and gave voting rights to Moroccan settlers in the Western Sahara for more than a year¹². This plan, of course, was immediately rejected by both Morocco and the Western Sahara. The UN, compromising this plan, suggested granting the Western Sahara as a semi-autonomous region of Morocco for a transition of up to five years before the referendum with the options of independence, integration, or semi-autonomy. The Polisario front accepted the deal; however Morocco rejected the new plan.

Since then, the talks have once again stalled¹³. Delegates should research MINURSO and understand the process of self-determination, as well as whether or not their country recognizes the SADR as an independent State. Despite the fact that the SADR (Polisario Front) is not in attendance, the committee can focus on trying to come to a consensus keeping the interests of the Polisario front in mind.

¹² <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/wsahara/2003/0801baker.htm>

¹³ <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/214/09/PDF/N0821409.pdf?OpenElement>