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UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL (UNHRC)

Addressing the 2010 Arab Spring:

The immigration and religious conflict of the 2010 Arab Spring

CHAIRS

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1. COMMITTEE DESCRIPTION

1.1 WHAT IS UNHRC?

The United Nations Human Rights Council, more commonly known as UNHRC, is the United Nations group based around discussing and addressing globally relevant issues regarding violations of human rights, most of all, those advocating for humanity. Established in 2006 by the General Assembly, the committee replaced the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

The council adopts resolutions or decisions during regular sessions that express the will of the international community on given human rights issues or situations. Adopting a resolution sends a strong political signal which can prompt governments to take action to remedy those situations. Moreover, they authorize commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions, which produce hard-hitting evidence on war crimes and crimes against humanity. It has the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year and meets at the United Nations Office at Geneva.

The Human Rights Council consists of 47 Member States elected directly and individually by a majority of the 193 states of the UN General Assembly. Elections take place every year and each member serves a three-year term. Seats are equitably distributed among the five UN regional groups, with one-third of the members being renewed each year.

Additionally, the Human Rights Council plays an important role in promoting international cooperation in the field of human rights. Through dialogue, debate, and the adoption of recommendations, the Council encourages Member States to strengthen their commitment to the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms. It also provides a platform for states, international organizations, and civil society actors to raise concerns, share information, and

work collectively toward improving human rights conditions worldwide. In this way, the UNHRC serves as one of the primary international forums for addressing human rights challenges and encouraging accountability within the global community.

The Council also works closely with other organs of the United Nations system, including the General Assembly and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in order to coordinate efforts aimed at preventing violations and promoting respect for human dignity. Through its discussions, reports, and recommendations, the UNHRC contributes to shaping international norms and guiding the global response to human rights issues.

1.2 RESPONSIBILITIES AND POWERS

The UNHRC, like most United Nations organs, can only *suggest* governmental actions, and the documents in general, are passed through a simple voting majority. This committee can purely advise amendments, meaning that no decision taken within the debate time will be definitive or mandatory. Therefore, it is important to maintain a non-authoritarian tone while discussing and formulating resolutions and/or reformations (changes or additions in the original file) for said documents.

1.3 NOTE ON PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE

It is important to note that this committee and its topic involves a discussion on the factors of the Arab Spring up until September 15th 2012. It is expected that delegates approach the guide with *some* previous knowledge on the crisis and basic major events. This guide is *not* introductory. It is important to *note* that this committee and its topic involve a discussion on the factors of the Arab Spring up until September 15th, 2012. Therefore, it is expected that delegates approach the guide with *some* previous knowledge of the crisis and its

major events. This document is a point of reference, to be a stepping stone to the creation of your position paper, being an introduction and is *intended* to provide the basic comprehension on the topic. The Delegates are *deeply* encouraged to conduct further research, to *not* base your document only on the information given to you here on the background, to *fully* understand the positions of the countries they represent and to engage in more productive and informed debate during the committee sessions.

1.4 FREEZING DATE

The freezing date for the debate is September 15th 2012, meaning delegates cannot refer to any event that happened after September 15th.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

2.1. THE START OF THE ARAB SPRING

The Middle East is an area that englobes countries in Western Asia and North Africa. It is known for its diverse rich culture and beautiful places; however, it has always struggled with the authoritarianism of those who lead its countries. In fact, this is the major factor that led the Arab Spring to occur and the series of protests that followed ended in many governments being overthrown. The wide use of social media helped protestors communicate and organize themselves better but also drew in a lot of international attention to the cause.

The fight for the liberation of the countries had long been coming, that is when a man in Tunisia, called Mohamed Bouazizi, protested in a way that could not be ignored. During 2010, the president of Tunisia was Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, he had been president for the last 23 years, the country's population had been struggling economically for years and hated the corruption that ended the equality of the country.

In December of the same year, fruit street vendor Bouazizi, was approached by police officers who questioned the legitimacy of his cart and asked for a bribe. After that, enraged by the confrontation, the vendor went to the government building of his town (Sidi Bouzid) to complain. When his claims were ignored by the government officials, Bouazizi bought a can of gasoline and a box of matches and proceeded to self-immolate in front of the government building. The scene of him engulfed by flames to catch the attention of the government inspired those who were already so unhappy with the situation of the country.

2.2. THE EFFECTS

On January 14th 2011, the wave of Tunisian protests successfully forced President Ben Ali to leave power. With the victory in mind, the neighboring countries decided to take the same initiative and fight against the oppression of their authoritarian governments. The image below depicts some of the Middle Eastern Countries involved in uprisings:



(“Figure 1. Map of the Middle East and North Africa region. The countries...”, n.d.)

By the end of the first half of the same year, protests started to bloom in many countries of the region, such as Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Algeria, Jordan, Oman, Bahrain and Sudan. By February 14th, Hosni Mubarak, the almost 3-decade-ruling president of Egypt, resigned as

well, after years of total power over the country. On October 20th 2011, Libyan President Muammar Muhammad Abu Minyar al-Gaddafi was killed by a paramilitary group, ending his 42-year reign over the country.

With the use of social media becoming more usual, the news of the protests spread like wildfire, and encouraged all of those who were scared to join the fight for freedom. Moreover, there was more communication about the forms of force the governments used to suppress the protests, and in many cases people deemed them to be unethical or that they went against human rights.

For example, during the “January 25” protests Egyptian security forces, including riot police, police snipers and plain-clothed state security officers, as well as “thugs” working for supporters of ruler Hosni Mubarak, violently responded to the uprising, killing at least 840 people, other than the 6,000 others injured in just 18 days. Other examples of drastic measures taken by governments are Yemen’s “Friday of Dignity” with 50 killed civilians, the allegedly targeted trials of Bahrain people who knew of government illdoings in 2011, and the nation-wide internet shutdowns, as the February 18th shutdown in Libya, which were present in most countries

2.3. THE CONSEQUENCES

After the start of the protests, there were many positive consequences, such as the end of authoritarian regimes throughout the region and a period of intense self-expression. However, there were also a myriad of negative ones. In Syria, after the constant protests against the government, a civil war started, where paramilitary groups fight for control over the nation till this day. Even though many oppressive governmental systems were overthrown, political instability followed liberation, with paramilitary groups, civilians and ex-politicians competing to control these countries in vulnerability. Furthermore, the area

entered an even worse phase of economic hardship because of the civilian mobilization being turned to protests and survival.

Alternatively, there were also Middle Easterners who chose to migrate, and leave the zone of war and conflict their country was in. Therefore, while in the pursuit of a new beginning in places, mostly in Europe (Italy, Greece, Malta), another type of conflict started to emerge. The unusual amount of migration to the region caused a “migration crisis”, where the countries that were receiving these Middle Easterners claimed that they could not accommodate the quantity of people they were receiving.

Moreover, cases of European xenophobia came to light more and more during this period, sparking a lot of media outrage over the treatment the immigrants were receiving. One of such xenophobic cases are the drive-by shootings that happened in Rosarno, Calabria. In the Italian town, starting on the 11th of January of 2011, African seasonal migrant workers were injured by the shootings that lasted for three days. At least 34 people were injured and required medical treatment, of which at least 10 were migrants. After the violence, over 1,000 migrants left the town, most of whom were evacuated by law enforcement.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

3.1. POSITIONS OF MAJOR NATIONS

3.1.1. Republic of Tunisia

After the post- revolution election was held for the National Constituent Assembly on October 23rd 2011, the Enhadha movement occupied 89 out of 217 seats, becoming the largest block of the assembly. Subsequently, they led a government coalition, called the “Troika”, while making Hamadi Jebali (Ennahda) the prime minister, and Moncef Marzouki (CPR) the president. While Enxada was positioned as a moderate Islamist party, more conservative

Salafi - a conservative, reformist movement with Sunni Islam- groups started to rise, being opposed to the moderation of the Enhalah. Taking that into consideration, religious tension grew. Furthermore, the Constituent Assembly was tasked with drafting a new constitution for the nation, causing political polarization when debates about the role of Islam in the legislation, women's rights and freedom of expression while protecting religion, were present. Additionally, Political violence was becoming more present against activists and in cultural events.

3.1.2. Syrian Arab Republic

Demonstrations against President Bashar al-Assad were becoming more violent each time, with Aleppo becoming one of the most devastating battle zones. Bombardments destroyed the city, as happened in Damascus, the capital, where several Syrian officials were killed in a bombing in July. By August 2012 the United Nations estimated up to 22,000 deaths as a result of the battles happening in Syria. In addition, by September 2012, the UNHRC has reported more than 230,000 Syrian refugees in neighboring countries. The violence occurring is starting to evolve into an actual civil war.

3.1.3. Kingdom of Bahrain

Uprisings of the Shi'a communities fighting for equal rights were severely suppressed. With the myriad of uprisings, authorities prohibited protests and declared a state of emergency. With that, arrests and trials of innocent people by the "National Security Courts" were reported by the Human Rights Watch, where torture and un-warranted deaths were also documented. Even though the government established the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), which reported the mistreatments of the government, the implementation of measures based on the BICI reports were considered incomplete and slow by human rights

organizations. Governmental power and oppression persisted, with the monarchy remaining intact, and the parliament continuing to have extreme power.

3.1.4. State of Libya

After the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi, Libya conducted its first national democratic parliamentary elections since 1964, where the 200 members of the General National Congress (GNC), who would appoint a prime minister, and draft a new constitution. Moreover, the militias who fought against Gaddafi did not disband, and acted against the central command. Consequently, the fragmented armed groups, which were not integrated into arm or police, turned into a challenge for political stability. Additionally, a considerably concerning event occurred on September 11th 2012, where an armed assault targeted and killed the U.S. diplomatic Ambassador - J. Christopher Stevens - along with three Americans at the diplomatic mission.

3.1.5 Republic of Yemen

In February President Ali Abdullah Saleh, after his 33-year rule, agreed to give up his power under a Gulf Cooperation Council agreement, where his then vice-president took office after a one-candidate election took place. Furthermore, there was preparation for the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), a conference aimed to unite various political, regional, and social groups to aid the drafting of the new constitution. Many tribes and local militia groups continued to operate independently, despite the central government's goals. Even though there were many paramilitary groups, the Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was prominent and exploited the instability, they seized territory, such as the town of Radda, which was later surrendered. Not only did the constant conflicts make security reform difficult, it also worsened humanitarian conditions, which were rapidly deteriorating. The

Human Rights Watch noted on the human rights abuses and the multiple divided zones of control where ensuring basic services, and economic conditions are extremely difficult.

3.1.6. Arab Republic of Egypt

After the uprisings, President Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood was elected president, with an Islamist-conservative ideology, aiming to integrate the Sharia into Egypt's political framework. Following this, the government had power struggles between the president, the judiciary power and the military. Since Morsi had only just been elected, government officials appointed under Mubarak would repeatedly overturn some of Morsi's decisions, additionally, the military constantly asserts its power with constitutional declarations and use of legislative powers. As a result, when the President attempts to push back against these problems political tensions rouse. Later, in June of 2012 the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) acted to dissolve the newly-elected parliament, because of the allegedly unconstitutional seats occupied. This was internationally viewed as a way to boost military power and limit the legislature. In addition, concerns about media freedom, minority rights and constitutional drafting.

3.1.7. Italian Republic

Due to the wide range of instability in countries going through reform, migration was intense. One of the countries who received the most refugees is Italy, especially from Tunisia and Libya, where the people fleeing would attempt to reach Europe by sea. Lampedusa - a small Italian island in the Mediterranean - was a prominent entry point for these migrants, however, the small community and facilities of the island were overwhelmed by the mobilization. This all caused protests run by Lampedusa civilians because the accommodation for migrants far exceeded the island's capacity, even though there was also solidarity and support present for the arriving people. As a consequence of the high rates of

migration, debates about the subject flooded the media, and with it xenophobic and racist discourse was present, with negative representation for the migrants. Furthermore, these events of migration have been linked to the rise of conservative right-wing political parties who would further dissipate the xenophobic language. Moreover, even though the European Union had called for its members to “share the burden” of processing the arriving refugees, Italy urged its counterparts to help fairly distribute the responsibility, for the amounts were overwhelming Italy’s borders.

3.1.8. Hellenic Republic

Similarly to Italy, Greece was also a very common entryway, both through its sea and Turkish borders. With the amount of migrants being received, asylums and detention centers were full and there were multiple reports of unhygienic and overcrowded facilities. Moreover, in August 2012 “Operation Xenios Zeus” was launched by the Greek police, where widespread street identity checks of people perceived to be immigrants were conducted. In the operation, when one was identified as an immigrant they were detained and transferred to detention centers pending deportation. In Athens various reports of racist attacks were made, such as stabbing and attacks on immigrant-run businesses. Likewise, there was a social rise of the far-right group “Golden Dawn”, widely described as neo-Nazi and racist, with members being involved in violence against minorities.

3.1.9. Federal Republic of Germany

The discourse about migration and asylum conditions were ongoing in public debates, especially considering the augmentation of the numbers of Syrian applications in 2012. Furthermore, Germany has had an active far-right political group for decades, even though they weren’t as prominent in this era, in regional levels there was some movement. Even

though there weren't any major surges of racist violence, there were various isolated cases of xenophobic incidents and criminal acts of far-right actions along the year.

4. GUIDING QUESTIONS

Guiding questions are prompts designed to help delegates explore key aspects of the topic and stimulate debate. They serve as starting points for discussion and encourage deeper analysis of the issue at hand. However, delegates are not required to adhere strictly to these questions and are free to develop their own arguments and perspectives

1. Should international debts and reparations be restructured to stabilize the global economy?

This question regards the social and economic repercussions of the uprising and how the international community can aid those in need. Some considerable aspects are how the countries are willing to give support, how international monetary aid can be successfully planned, and what the countries themselves will accept the aid given.

2. What international measures should be taken to prevent similar events in the future?

This question instigates delegates to reflect on the situations that led up to the revolts and migration. They may plan what to do if it happens again or find a way to prevent it entirely. This question includes how the international community will react in the future in regards to the civilians' needs, prevention of violence, social equity, and the relationship between a government and its people.

3. How can we ensure that measures taken by governments against protesters and activists do not violate human rights, without diminishing the sovereignty of said countries?

In this question, the delegates will need to consider how nations have reacted to the movement. This includes the use of censorship, allegations of assassinations, oppression and aggression. It is relevant to question how these actions represent the morals and beliefs of the nations.

4. What measures can be taken to prevent discrimination against minority groups in post-migration situations?

This question is made to address the cases of xenophobia that refugees suffered after leaving their situation. Delegates will have to find a way to prevent polarization regarding immigration. It is important to take into consideration why this discrimination is happening and how it can be eradicated.

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