



MARKMUN O-LEVEL 2023



**UNITED NATIONS  
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

**STUDY GUIDE**

**Agenda : The Cause for Syrian Civil War and Preparation for its Aftermath with Emphasis on the  
Human Rights**

## *Letter from the Chairs*

*It is a pleasure to welcome you to the United Nations Human Rights Council at MarkMUN 2023. The topic we will be debating this year is set to be incredibly engaging, and will surely stimulate debate, critical thinking and discussion amongst all of you. In today's world, HRC Committee holds great relevance and the standards of intervention established by this committee will have far-reaching consequences on the international stage.*

*As a member of this committee, you will be expected to craft multidimensional approaches to human right issues while remaining cognizant of the complex political and diplomatic issues that best describe the country you represent. We are sure that you will impress us with your research and the depth of your analysis. We promise to do our very best from our part to make it your most constructive and joyful MUN experience.*

*The following background guide intends to guide you in the research of the topic that will be debated at MarkMun 2023 in committee sessions. Please note this guide only provides the basis for your investigation. It is your responsibility to find as much information necessary on the topics and how they relate to the country you represent. You are also required to submit your position paper to the chairs.*

*If you have any questions about the topic, background guide, or conference, please do not hesitate to contact us.*

*We look forward to see you at the conference! Let the debates begin!*

*Co-Chair - Ameer Irfan*

*Co-Chair - Ahmed Faisal*

## United Nations Human Rights Council



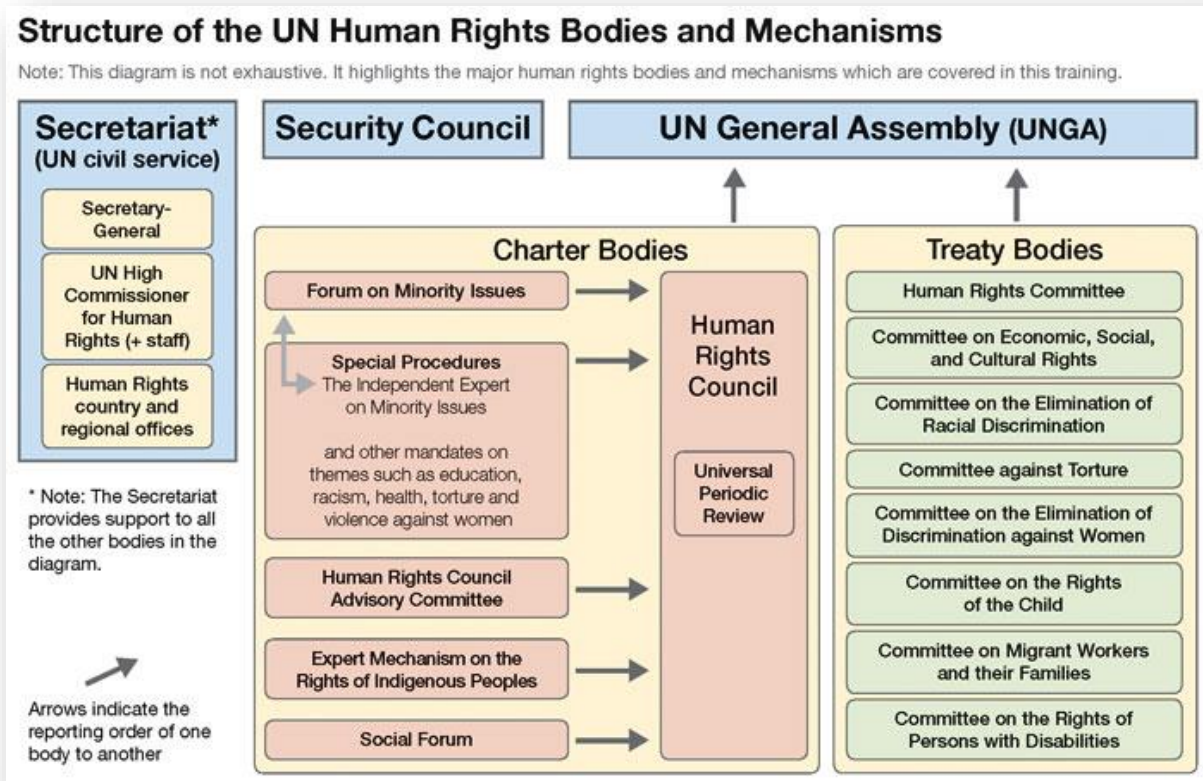
In the 17 years of its existence, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has actively defended human rights worldwide. Its mechanisms, such as universal periodic review and special procedures, provide a system for prevention, technical assistance and capacity-building, as well as a means to respond to cases of grave violations of human rights. Here, you can find the HRC's resolutions, which will give you a sense of the work done in this committee and the kind of solutions expected of you at the MUN.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which set out a universal core of human rights and fundamental freedoms for the first time. The Universal Declaration, together with other measures which followed, constitute the International Bill of Human Rights. These are important documents; you will want to understand at least a gist of their constituents.

The Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and make recommendations on them. It has the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year. It meets at the UN Office at Geneva. The Council was created by the United Nations General Assembly on 15 March 2006 by resolution 60/251. Its first session took place from 19 to 30 June 2006. One year later, the Council adopted its "Institution-building package" to guide its work and set up its procedures and mechanisms. Among them were the Universal Periodic Review mechanism which serves to assess the human rights situations in all United Nations Member States, the Advisory Committee which serves as the Council's "think tank" providing it with expertise and advice on thematic human rights issues and the Complaint Procedure which allows individuals and organizations to bring human rights violations to the attention of the Council.<sup>1</sup>

Human rights violations during the Syrian civil war have been numerous and serious, with United Nations reports stating that the war has been "characterized by a complete lack of adherence to the norms of international law" by the warring parties who have "caused civilians immeasurable suffering".

Member States of the Human Rights Council have passed numerous resolutions on Syria, perhaps the most important being its resolutions creating a Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Syria, which has been charged with investigating evidence of such crimes since its creation in August 2011. Since its establishment, the COI has produced 20 detailed and gruesome 6 reports on mass killings, rapes, forced disappearances and other crimes by the Syria government, rebel forces and the Islamic State – it is one of the few comprehensive efforts to document what is happening in the Syrian civil war.



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## The Background

The situation in Syria started peacefully, as part of the event commonly called “The Arab Spring” mid 2011. Individuals in nations over the Middle East rampaged to challenge the long run of their pioneers. These protestors called for more noteworthy rights and more opportunity. In some countries, like Tunisia and Egypt, the rulers were overthrown without much violence. In Libya, the dictator Muammar Qaddafi was removed from power by a combination of rebel forces and attacks from a group of states backed by the UN Security Council.<sup>2</sup>

Protests in Syria were met with the government increasing crackdowns on freedoms. These crackdowns eventually became full-on attacks on civilians, including the shelling and bombing of cities. President Bashar al-Assad has faced a growing pressure from the international community to end his oppression, but the violence continues. It is said there is widespread torture being carried out in state prisons. The people of Syria are also very diverse, making efforts to end the violence difficult. Syria has many religions. Most Syrians are Muslims who practice the Shiite branch of Islam, with minority Sunni, Druze, and Christian communities. President Assad is the member of a branch of Islam, called Alawites, different than most of Syria.

President Assad has claimed that if he is forced out of office, factions within Syria will be more likely to fight among themselves for control of the country<sup>(3)</sup>. Making matters more complicated is the fact that members of the opposition have begun fighting back against the government. The Free Syrian Army is made up of soldiers who deserted from the Syrian Army, civilians wanting to fight the Assad government, and **foreign elements** who may not have Syria's best interests at heart. The exact make-up of the **FSA** is unknown, but they have been increasing their attacks against government officials and the Syrian Army. The demands of either side are hard to bring together. The Syrian government wants all rebels to surrender themselves to prison and for all protests against the government to stop. The rebels want President Assad to step down from power and let free elections happen in Syria.<sup>3</sup>

Another issue that has taken up centre stage on a global platform is the existence of chemical weapons in Syria and how it poses a **strategic threat** in the Middle East. Larger countries such as **Russia and USA** have now been trying to work out a way in which these weapons can be disbanded, and a peaceful compromise can be reached within the country, whereby there are no casualties and each side gets what they want. For the 100,000 people who have left Syria <sup>(4)</sup>, and the 1.5 million who remain inside of Syria but have left their homes, the ongoing crisis impacts every part of their lives and its continued existence is debilitating to their very spirit. Reports coming out of Syria have hundreds of civilians dying every day. Should the international community fail to act, Syria will be continuing a long and bloody civil war. The entire Middle East region will feel the results of such inaction.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10200.doc.htm>

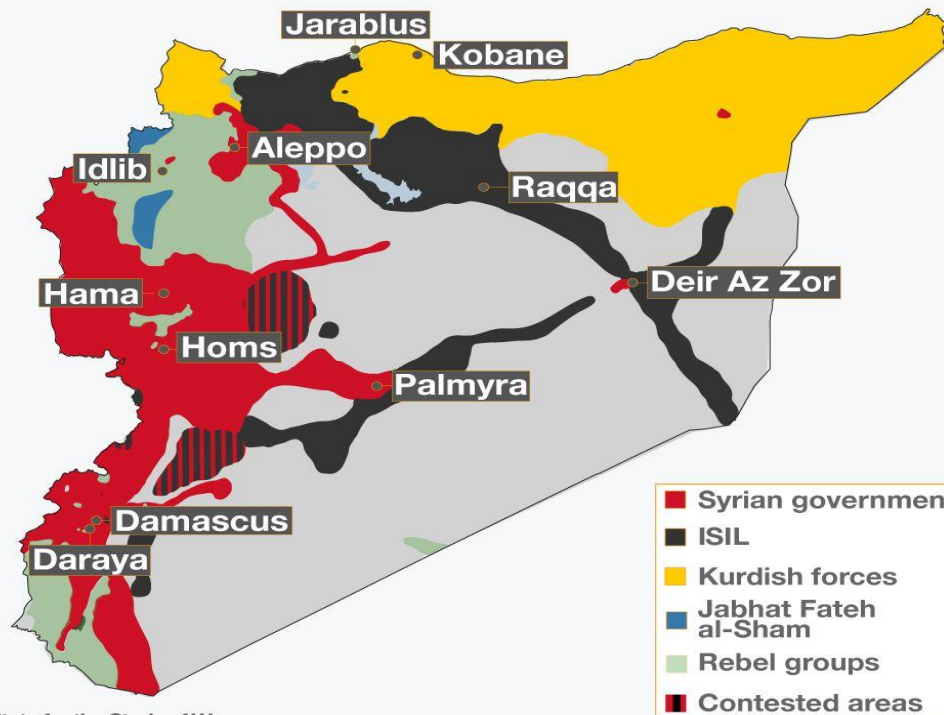
<sup>3</sup> <http://montessori-mun.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/HRC-Situation-in-Syria.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://montessori-mun.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/HRC-Situation-in-Syria.pdf>

Currently, Syria is witnessing the most intense battles international community has seen since the beginning of the war in **2011**. One of the main reasons why the conflict in Syria is ongoing is the difference in **perception** of the parties involved. For instance, even though the US and Russia have been trying to create a comprehensive plan for the future development of negotiations and structure of Syrian politics, they were **not** able to come to the effective conclusion. Despite the countries being on the **different spectrum** of the political support for the battling parties, the situation is worsened by the **mutual mistrust** and confrontation, especially in the recent events of the Ukrainian conflict. In addition to this, the US encounters an important **strategic challenge**: its allies - Turkey and Kurdish groups - are fighting against each other on the Syrian ground. Furthermore, parties involved have different perspective and vocabulary for defining the terrorist groups as well as the vision of the enemy which leads to the vicious circle of fighting among the groups rather than unified approach to eliminate the common enemy and bring stability to the war-torn country. As the Syrian Civil war entered its seventh year, non-combatants remain to be in the complete unsafety, facing ongoing conflict's affliction, brutality, constant destructions, and deadly apathy for the lives of civilians.

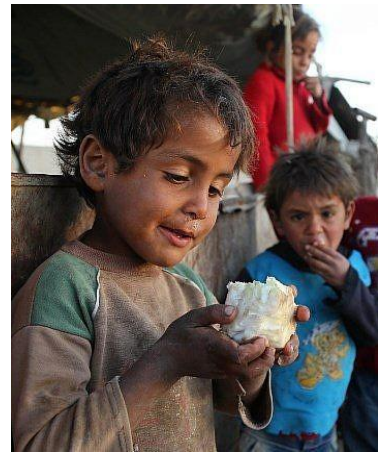
Currently, 6.6 million people are considered to be internally displaced in Syria; 5 million civilians struggle to survive in besieged cities and hard-to-reach areas, being threatened to lose the grave protection. More than 190,000 people have been already killed, with both sides of the conflict responsible for civilian deaths. 11.6 million people, a number which represents more than a half Syrian population before the conflict has erupted, have been forced to flee their homes, desperately seeking a secure livelihood. Approximately 4 million people, 1.7 million of whom - children, are refugees. They are mostly settling in five countries only: **Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Turkey** – nations, which face enormous challenges and struggle to cope with the crisis. As the conflict continues, no sustainable agreement, regarding both political settlement and humanitarian solutions, has been reached. Indeed, various local, regional, and international actors have been involved in prolonging and fueling the conflict through different wars waged on multiple fronts, where all types of weapons have been used, including those prohibited by international humanitarian law. One of the most ancient cities in the world, which served as a home for 2.1 million people, representing the largest Syrian city in the pre-conflict period – Aleppo – was divided between the government of Syria and armed opposition groups. Within 4 years only, in the time period of July 2012 to December 2016, Aleppo was ruined by daily fighting, intense cruelty, systematic bombardment from both air-to-ground munitions and ground launched artillery shells. Moreover, it was further exposed to the massive use of heavy explosive weapons in populated neighborhoods. Thousands of people have fallen dead while many more were left with severe injuries. Fundamental infrastructural structures such as electricity, water supplies, hospitals, health-care facilities, as well as mosques, markets, residential houses, and schools, were shattered. Other urban areas met the same fate - a sorrowful scenario of fatal destruction. Following the escalation of violence, humanitarian workforce strived to address civilians' perilously expanding needs, taking into consideration the limitations imposed upon the entrance of humanitarian relief. The United Nations Human Rights Council, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations have continuously warned about the unceasing worsening of humanitarian situation and the urgency of immediate humanitarian response.<sup>5</sup>

# Syria: Who controls what?



Source: Institute for the Study of War  
Updated: September 2016





## Past Initiatives



### Re-establishing fundamental Human Rights in post-conflict areas

“There is an overwhelming sense of consensus in the scholarly literature that contemporary conflicts have an inherently social character, affecting civilians and disrupting their lives through the conduct of collective violence. “However, this realisation has not been fully transmuted into the practice of post-conflict strategies pursuing development and reconciliation. The dominant approach to national and international peace building is focused primarily (and often solely) on re-building the state’s physical and institutional capacity. Far from undermining the importance of such processes, we will try to elaborate on why this kind of assistance is not enough. “The pursuit of reconciliation in this predominant peace building paradigm is realised mainly through high-profile, top-down initiatives: truth commissions, legal processes, constitutional reforms, public apologies “. Conflicts that use mass violence against the civilians and strategies of ethnic cleansing with most physical violence, necessitate approaches that rebuild communities and address their needs. Rebuilding trust and community networks in groups divided by violence should be pursued additionally to rebuilding state capacity.

UN division for Sustainable Development has founded a development account project which aims to provide support to countries emerging from conflict; African Union has published Policy on post-conflict reconstruction and development; both stating principles and necessary measures which need to be followed in-order for post-conflict countries to overcome the burdens during the long process of re-establishing fundamental human rights. They call upon all countries emerging from conflict to cooperate with their citizens and officials, and with the international community as well, to map future re-development and specify aims of the re-development programme. The first steps to be undertaken are: establishment of viable institutions, capable of ensuring lasting security and cooperation for the entire population, rebuilding infrastructure in order to 12 enable access to clean water, medical aid, work and education, strengthening of the capacity of security institutions, vitalisation of cooperation, etc. Billions of children and youth per year are left with no school or basic medical assistance owing to the armed conflicts. Education programmes would be of great importance for children who have experienced wars, conflicts, fleeing the home and discrimination, since it is commonly the only reintegration programme they could ever attend. Therefore, various organisations and foundations, such as The Foundation for Post-conflict Development, invest in building safe environments for children and youth to spend their time with friends, studying and playing. Since these programmes

teach children tolerance and understanding, it is more likely for them not to experience discrimination.

In recent years we have all witnessed increase in xenophobic and other bias-motivated forms of violence as a pernicious form of discrimination in which individuals are targeted because of their race, national or ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender, disability or other similar status. Within this framework, United Nations Human Rights Council already played a crucial role by making recommendations to the Member States on practical steps that each of them should implement in order to reduce xenophobic attacks and discrimination. It is widely known that the most recent victims of these attacks and discrimination are people fleeing from conflict zones, principally from Islamic states. Bearing that in mind, Member States should cooperate in order to ease reintegration process of the refugees and internally displaced people coming back to their country of origin, enabling them to overcome the great losses they have survived. Having said that, it is important that UN with the HRC, encourage Member States, with the emphasis on those involved in the conflict, to contribute to post-conflict reestablishment of fundamental human rights.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> [http://www.isarmun.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Study\\_Guide\\_HRC.pdf](http://www.isarmun.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Study_Guide_HRC.pdf)

**Key Issues to be discussed:**

- Indiscriminate Attacks and Direct Attacks on Civilians.
- Emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).
- Sexual Slavery and grave violence on women and children.
- Refugees and Displaced People.
- Unreachable and Unaccountability towards Humanitarian Aid.
- Unlawful Restrictions on Humanitarian Aid, Sieges, and Forced Displacements.
- Effect due to Unlawful Use of Chemical Weapons and Nerve Agents.
- *Role of foreign parties in the the civil war.*

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/syria>

**The Committee should aim to answer the following :**

- Can re-establishing of Human Rights happen in Syria as a tool of post-conflict situation?
- How can the HRC help the other UN agencies get food and materials to the civilians in Syria?
- What alternative approaches or solution can be incorporated into existing documents to improve their effectiveness?
- What strategies can institutions at the non-governmental, national, regional, and international levels implement to help better transition of countries emerging from conflicts?
- Should efforts to help reestablishment of human rights be concentrated in a specific region or regions and to certain human rights only?
- Should additional resources be appropriated to combat censorship and repression tools in countries lacking in freedom of speech and press?
- Should countries or groups involved in the conflict have greater responsibility regarding reestablishment of human rights?