The Worldwide Refugee Crisis

Committee: SOCHUM

Chair: Dan North
Letter From The Chair

Greetings, Delegates!

Welcome to the 43rd year of Saint John’s Model United Nations. For the duration of 2015-2016, I, Dan North, will be the secretary general of weekly meetings. Throughout the year we will have three topics, the first of which is the current refugee crisis. To all of the rookies in the room (freshmen, sophomores, juniors, or even seniors), I encourage you all to get involved and speak whenever you can. As a rookie sophomore, I didn’t initially believe that I had a real shot at making it on the Chicago conference, for it seemed as though the veterans were far better and knew the strange MUN jargon far more than I. However, I came to learn that MUNUC always includes a substantial amount of rookies from SJMUN. Furthermore, as I said in the first meeting last week, Chicago is definitely one of the highlights of my Saint John’s career. I am sure I would have the agreement of all of the seniors, juniors, and sophomores who have attended as well. Therefore, don’t miss out on that opportunity. Take advantage of every chance you get to participate in the debate.

For this topic, I am confident that we can reach a global consensus on how to accommodate these refugees in the nations present here today. Of course, not all nations are going to be keen on accepting refugees, such as Saudi Arabia. On the other end of the spectrum, Germany has made it clear that it plans to be highly accepting of Syrian refugees. Therefore, debate should be interesting and should really be rather fiery as debate ramps up between nations with diametrically opposed viewpoints. Best of luck to all!
**Statement of the Problem**

Plain and simple, the ongoing terror caused by ISIS is having exponential effects. Although at first thought, one might only see the threat and violence that ISIS poses, the results of the harm being caused in regions of the Middle East, such as Iraq and Syria, are causing many thousands of people to flee as refugees. In one view, it can be seen in a positive light that many people from this part of the world are resisting ISIS despite its tight grasp on the region. However, for the rest of the world, supporting this critical movement means being able to provide shelter and help for these refugees so that they can start new lives in safe areas.

While in good morals many may want to be able to help these people who are just trying to escape danger, assisting them may lead to more issues involving financing their funds, ensuring that they pose no threat to the new country’s security, and making sure they can successfully make a living to support themselves. Although the whole world is in the midst of either taking in refugees or considering doing so, countries in the Middle East surrounding the conflicted countries are mainly Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Jordan itself hosts more than 630,000 Syrian, Iraqi, and Palestinian refugees. Furthermore, due to the increasing number of the fleeting, more and more countries are being held responsible for accepting refugees at the border, such as Greece and Serbia.

The United Nations is having trouble being of help since it cannot find sufficient funding for humanitarian aid. Although there are people doing what they can to assist the refugees, at the end of the day, they need money that does not exist. The U.N. also has no way of ensuring that the refugees pose no threat to the security of host countries at this stage of the game.

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History of the Problem

Refugees in this developing asylum-related crisis have been fleeing from nations such as Iraq, Eritrea, and Afghanistan, with a significant percentage of refugees primarily emigrating from Syria as a result of the ongoing Syrian Civil War. This conflict, otherwise known as the Syrian Revolution, has been evolving since the spring of 2011, when, inspired by the recent revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, Syrian citizens began mass protests against the Assad regime, which met the opposition with violence, through military action against protestors, and some concessions, by releasing several political prisoners, originally imprisoned as threats to the regime. Within the first few months of conflict, refugee numbers reached approximately 1000 displaced citizens. Over the next year, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) was founded, and became the primary fighting force against Bashar al-Assad’s regime. The FSA, which had trouble with unifying its goals, soon had internal sects that associated with extremist militant groups, such as al-Qaeda. As conflict slowly worked its way through the country, more and more residents of Syria either became displaced from fighting or fled for fear of their well-beings and lives. By the two-year anniversary of the conflict, refugee counts had reached just below three million.

Many nations have been particularly wary of accepting these refugees, especially nations in the region. The Syrian Crisis and its Repercussions: Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees, a report written by Salam Kawakibi, a Syrian political analyst, and sponsored by both the European Union and the Migration Policy Center, describes some of these hostilities displayed by asylum-viable nations.

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3 Ibid
4 Ibid
5 Ibid
“The presence of refugees represents a securitarian challenge. Indeed, militias close to the Syrian regime try to intimidate or even terrorize these refugees, notably those who are politically active. The control of paramilitary forces outside the State machine also help to impose rules on Syrians exiled in Lebanon. Numerous refugees find themselves in a precarious situation with little or no financial resources. Lebanon, which is officially neutral, refuses to set up refugee camps and sometimes pushes Syrian immigrants back across the border. This has naturally provoked outrage on the part of NGOs. The Lebanese government has avoided setting up official camps, but that does not prevent clandestine camps, which give rise to a new form of exploitation; a tent is sold for between 300 and 700 dollars or rented for 200 dollars a month.”

Lebanon has since accepted Syrian refugees attempting to escape armed conflict, but, like the other nations accepting refugees for asylum in the region, lacks excessive funds to provide relatively humane conditions and materials for refugees to live in. In addition to economic shortcomings, camps have also lacked security and order, especially within Syria’s borders. There have been countless cases of sexual violence against women and girls in various camps by Syrian militants, and, because of their conservative culture, the victims of these crimes refuse to voice their woes. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), along with actress and global advocate Angelina Jolie, have called for an end to sexual violence in these refugee camps, and for improved security to ensure a legitimately safe haven for those in need.

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8 Ibid
As of December 2014, it was estimated that, due to this ongoing war, there were over nine million displaced Syrians, six and a half million displaced internally, three million displaced in Syrian neighbors Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq, and 150,000 refugees under the asylum of the European Union.\textsuperscript{9} In less than a year, these numbers have grown substantially, with nearly two million refugees in Turkey, 1.1 million refugees in Lebanon, over 600,000 in Jordan, and innumerable amounts of Syrian nationals in both Libya and Hungary looking to work their way further into Europe for asylum\textsuperscript{10}. While relatively close to the afflicted regions, the Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait, have not accepted any refugees, nor are they legally obligated to, seeing as they have not participated in the 1951 UN treaty on refugees.\textsuperscript{11}

European asylum is currently dominated by Germany and Sweden, Germany currently providing asylum to 100,000 refugees, and Sweden currently housing around 60,000 refugees\textsuperscript{12}. German Vice Chancellor, Sigmar Gabriel, has announced that Germany plans to accept 800,000 asylum applications in the coming year, and is capable of accepting half a million refugees each year for the next few years, if necessary\textsuperscript{13}. Other forerunners in European refugee acceptance include Hungary, France, Spain, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, and Bulgaria\textsuperscript{14}. Asylum is currently more favored in European countries for two reasons. First, refugees are attempting to get further away from violence and conflict that continues to spread through the Middle East,

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid
\textsuperscript{12}Ibid
whether between the Syrian government and revolutionaries or conflict caused by extremist Islamic groups in the area, such as ISIS\textsuperscript{15}. Secondly, nations in Europe have offered various opportunities to refugees that Middle Eastern nations are simply incapable of providing, due to lack of funding. For example, the nation of Germany has offered to provide education, health care, and job opportunities to refugees in order to rehabilitate them and assimilate them into society.\textsuperscript{16}

The wave of asylum seekers consistently moving towards Hungary’s border is thoroughly increasing, and the UNHCR has warned that international aid is necessary to provide shelter for these refugees. The UNHCR European refugee coordinator, Vincent Cochetel, stated that "[w]e need better co-ordination to make sure we don't have chaos at the border," and also reprimanded Hungary for allowing people to be left overnight "in a very dire situation" without adequate shelter\textsuperscript{17}.

**Past Actions**

The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1951 and the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1967 have been the most significant past actions. These conferences defined what a refugee is, what rights a refugee is guaranteed, and the legal obligations of states.\textsuperscript{18} The conventions have defined the difference between a refugee, someone who leaves their country for fear of persecution, and a migrant, who leaves for their not related to persecution. These conventions guarantee refugees certain rights, including the right for a

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid
refugee to not be returned to a country where they may face persecution and the lack of the right to education, the right to work, or other rights.

The UN has done much to help refugees in the Middle East. They have deployed peacekeepers to help provide stability in the region and protect refugees. These peacekeepers have set up refugee camps in nations harboring the most refugees. The UN has also provided financial aid to countries harboring the most refugees and have called upon numerous humanitarian organizations throughout the world to unite to help refugees. Furthermore, they have helped millions of people and multiple countries have supported them in their goals. Finally, the UN has also supported measures to help refugees integrate to their new countries, such as language and vocational training. Turkey and Jordan have taken in the most refugees from Syria and other Middle Eastern countries. As of 2014, Turkey had 1.59 million refugees. Most other countries have not taken in nearly that many, and in some cases have tried to prevent refugees from entering their country.

**Possible Solutions**

Possible solutions vary greatly. One possible solution is to crack down on smugglers, who are profiting from the refugee crisis. Wars in the Middle East, especially in Syria, have caused many to flee. However, these refugees have no immediate, safe way to be able to leave the country. This forces thousands of refugees from Syria, Iraq and many others to depend upon unsafe travel for the hope of settling in a safer country. These smugglers are the primary method of travel to safe countries. Some countries, such as Australia, have called upon the prosecution

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of smugglers to prevent further refugees from entering their countries. The UN, however, has called for all refugees to have safe access to other countries, and take the power away from smugglers by promoting safe transportation.21

Another way to solve this problem is for countries to share refugees equally. Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan bear the brunt of taking in refugees in the Gulf States. Greece, Serbia, Hungary, and Italy have had the most refugee arrivals, while Germany and France have the most applicants seeking asylum. Jean-Claude Juncker, European Commission president, is working on plans to redistribute 160,000 refugees who arrive in Italy, Greece and Hungary, forcing countries to take in migrants, even if they do not agree.22 This calls on all nations, not just the ones in Europe or the Gulf States, to take in more refugees, and help redistribute them equally. Others have called for richer nations to take in more refugees than poorer ones, because they are more economically stable.

Others look to stabilize the region. David Cameron, the prime minister of the UK, has supported the funding of refugee camps in Syria and throughout other Middle Eastern regions.23 This solution looks to give refugees a safe haven in their own country, while decreasing the number of refugees seeking asylum in other countries. The argument is that it will build up the infrastructure of the country, and prevent further civil unrest.

**Bloc Positions**

*Home Countries (Eritrea, Syria, Iraq)*: These countries are producing the highest numbers of refugees due to oppression, civil war, and the terror of ISIS, respectively. Therefore, these nations are at the core of the issue. However, despite the fact that Iraq has produced a large number of refugees, they have also taken in approximately 250,000 Syrian refugees. Eritrea and Syria, though, have fairly oppressive regimes in power, and therefore are causing their conflicts without impacting the others.

*Accepting Nations (United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Egypt, Turkey, France, Spain, Italy)*: All of these nations are aiming to help the refugee crisis as much as their countries can bear. Turkey has accepted 1.9 million refugees to date, yet a great number of them are under the age of 17 and cannot be sheltered. Egypt, though only hosting about 132,000 refugees, doesn’t house any of them in camps. In fact, an Egyptian billionaire has offered to buy an island for Syrian refugees. In Europe, Germany has stated that it will be accepting half a million refugees each year for the next few years, if necessary. Similarly, Sweden has joined Germany in the search for a Europe-wide solution for hosting refugees. France, though only hosting about 7,000 so far, has agreed to host 24,000 over the next two years. The United Kingdom, though agreeing to host 20,000 over the next five years, has stated that it looks to accept refugees from nations bordering Syria rather than from European nations.

*Cautious Countries (Denmark, Hungary, Libya)*: These two nations haven’t been particularly accepting of refugees. Hungary has received international attention for allowing the refugees to

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25 *Ibid*
remain overnight without sufficient shelter. Danish authorities have blocked highways and shut down railways to discourage refugees from crossing the border. Denmark even paid for Arabic ads to showcase the reduction in social benefits so that refugees wouldn’t travel into the Scandinavian nation. Hungary, in a similar effort, has constructed a 160-kilometer long barbed wire fence along the Serbian border. Both Libya and Hungary have been transport nations for refugees to travel into Western Europe, which has led to casualties in both cases, including the railways in Hungary and the capsized boat off the coast of Libya, which was rescued by Italy.

**Saudi Arabia and North Korea:** Both of these countries have taken in zero refugees. Saudi Arabia is not required to do so because, like the other Persian Gulf states, it didn’t sign the 1951 U.N. treaty to provide asylum to those seeking refuge. North Korea, which has been compared to Eritrea in their oppressive regimes (despite the fact that North Korea boasts a 100% literacy rate and Kim Jong Un has a 100% approval rating), has a refugee issue of its own, to which the United States has been willing to provide asylum.

**United States:** The United States has just agreed to accept 10,000 refugees in the next fiscal year and secretary of state John Kerry has noted that the number could go up if necessary. Therefore, although not a massive number in comparison to Turkey, Egypt, Sweden, and Germany, the United States has agreed to help despite its distance from the crisis. Furthermore, it has given the most in financial aid to the crisis than any other nation.

**Russia and China:** Russia has accepted a whopping two Syrians and doesn’t appear to be interested in helping the refugees in the future. “President Vladimir Putin said that Europe’s migration crisis was ‘completely predictable’, adding: ‘These are the policies of our American

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26 *Ibid*
27 *Ibid*
partners. Europe blindly follows within the framework of its so-called duties as an ally – and then must bear the burden."  

China, on the other hand, has refused to comment on accepting Syrian refugees, yet this is likely due to the fact that it is grappling with accepting refugees from Myanmar and Nepal.

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