

Dear Delegate,

The committee on the Special Political and Decolonization Session of the General Assembly welcomes you to the 2002 Washington State Model United Nations. As University of Washington students, our interests in the global community and the importance of universal understanding and peace encouraged us to partake in this year's event. Individually, we each carry our own separate knowledge and expertise on issues and encourage all the delegates to contact us if you have any questions or would just like to introduce yourself. The following is a list of your committee members:

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In light of the recent events, the importance of the political world stage has come to the forefront in determining the course of world affairs and the well-being of its inhabitants. I hope you enjoy this learning experience and I look forward to meeting you at the conference.

Sincerely,

Tim Shore

Chair, General Assembly-Special Political and Decolonization

## **History and Overview of the Committee**

The GA is the primary governing body and the main political voice of the United Nations. The 189 member states each have one to five representatives in the assembly. Democratically, each member state is allowed only one vote on all issues that are presented to the GA. Most decisions require a two-thirds vote of all present members to pass, and procedural and smaller decisions usually only require a simple majority. Although our assembly will probably not achieve a complete 189 delegates of the GA, there will be ample representation to give all of us a fairly comprehensive idea of how the real U.N. operates. The General Assembly is in session every year from September to December. Special and Emergency Sessions can be called at any time. Throughout the year, internal committees and subsidiary governing bodies carry out the work of the GA. The GA also approves the UN budget and apportions expenses among members. Although the decisions made by the GA are not legally binding to the individual state governments, the decisions of the GA dictate the opinions of the world on issues and provide a strong moral voice to the global population. See Chapter IV of the UN Charter for additional information about the General Assembly.

## **Topic 1: Legal Status of Refugees**

### ***Statement of the problem***

A refugee is defined as a person who flees, especially to a foreign country, to escape an oppressive government, religious persecution or an invading army. A refugee is not a migrant, who generally is seeking better economic conditions. Nearly every member state of the U.N. is affected by the plight of refugees; either by being the country of origin, asylum provider, or both. Although refugees have been a continuous phenomenon since the organization of ancient nation/states, the importance of fulfilling the humanitarian purposes of the U.N. have made the refugee situation a paramount concern. While each of us may have an image of a refugee in our mind from seeing images from Kosovo or boat people from Southeast Asia or Cuba, the scope of the world's refugees comprises a much larger and diverse group of peoples.

The complexity of the modern refugee crisis is as variant as the number of areas in the world where refugees are found. Politically, we can identify the points of origin of refugees as "hot spots." While there are many issues that need to be addressed to solve the problem of fleeing refugees, we will be focusing on creating a legal status for refugees so that the U.N. can more easily identify and help those in need of humanitarian assistance.

An important issue to be addressed is the large number of internally displaced people within a state. Although they may not be fleeing an entire government, they are refugees from their homes due to civil unrest within the country. When a refugee flees to another nation, it is easier to identify the numbers due to border controls and the host country bringing that number to the attention of the U.N. However, there are pockets of displaced peoples, for one reason or another, do not cross the borders out of the country of origin, but require as much (if not more) humanitarian assistance as other refugees.

Recently, a large complaint is the apparent selectiveness the more powerful countries exhibit in assisting refugees. During the Kosovo crisis, each refugee from

Kosovo received \$1.60 per day in assistance, while African refugees received \$.11 in assistance per day. The reasons for this disparity can be linked to the immediacy of the situation in Kosovo, media coverage, and its relative location to the wealthier states of the world. It is also worth noting that the refugees were returned fairly rapidly to their homes in Kosovo, while refugees in Africa have been displaced for years and years with more arriving every day. It is also worth remembering that as the Albanian Kosovo refugees were repatriated, many Serb and Roma Kosovo citizens became refugees in turn.

While considering resolution possibilities in determining the legal status of refugees, here are a few other issues to keep in mind. Many host countries have refused entry to refugees for one reason or another. Some states have a limit to the number of refugees they will accept (mass inflows of refugees can often destabilize a country), and some states refuse entry for their own reasons of intolerance to a displaced group. Also of concern, is the number of refugees who often arrive armed, or when refugee camps are raided by militants to capture children as soldiers, sex slaves, and cannon fodder.

Since the U.N. is committed to providing humanitarian assistance to refugees, it is important for this special session to determine the legal terms that will best assist the world citizens who are the most in need of comfort and sanctuary.

### ***History of the problem***

The refugee problem is something the United Nations has addressed ever since its inception. Post-World War II Europe created the largest refugee crisis on earth up to that time. Jews began immigrating to Palestine during the 19th Century, and their numbers swelled as refugees fled to the area due to Nazi persecutions. The GA voted to partition Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states in 1947. After the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, the Arab peoples of Palestine became the largest refugee group in the world, and remains so even today. The refugee assistance program that the U.N. established for the Palestinians in 1948 (UNRWA), has been and still remains the largest and most costly refugee relief program. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is the only U.N. program that reports directly to the General Assembly (through the Special Political and Decolonization Committee). Just from this example, you can see that refugee crises point to the most divisive global issues.

Historically, refugees have often been armed by a host country to fight back at their country of origin. Even the United States used this tactic in the early 1960's with the failed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. Much of the turmoil in Central Africa has occurred because countries of asylum have aggressively campaigned against the governments that the refugees have fled. It is undeniable that a host country is strained economically, politically, and internally when refugees flee to their borders.

Here are some important facts to keep in mind while researching the refugee topic:

- There are nearly 23 million refugees in the world, which equals the combined populations of the Scandinavian countries, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland.
- Eighty percent of refugees are women and children, and hundreds of thousands of them go to sleep hungry every night.

- Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, and Rudolf Nureyev were all refugees who, along with many others, later became famous and left their individual mark on history.

### ***Bloc Positions***

While there are no clearly defined bloc positions when it comes to humanitarian issues such as the legal rights of refugees, there are definite opposing positions depending on whether the country is a refugee asylum or a source of refugees. In many cases, a country is both a source and an asylum. An example are the former Soviet republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan. After their armed conflicts in the early 90's, ethnic groups left their homes and fled towards the borders of their heritage. This is also the case in former Yugoslav republics. Ideally, once the armed conflicts cease, the refugees could be allowed to peacefully return to their homes. In reality, ethnic hatreds do not dissipate so easily, and many refugees settle into another country and therefore they no longer remain refugees, but citizens of another country.

On the Palestinian issue, the Arab countries form the strongest and most cohesive voting bloc. In the GA, it is a consensus that the Palestinians should be repatriated, but it is the method of who and how and when that politicizes the issue.

### ***Past UN Action***

In 1951, the U.N. held a Convention in Geneva to determine the Status of Refugees. Later it was amended by a Protocol adopted in New York in 1967. The Convention and Protocol are the most comprehensive instruments governing the legal status of refugees at the international level. They contain the definition of refugee and the minimum humanitarian standards for their treatment. A refugee is denied refugee status if they have committed crimes against peace, war crimes, crimes against humanity and serious non-political crimes committed outside the country of refuge. It also depoliticizes the act of granting asylum. The Protocol was adopted to remove the limitations of time and geography that defined refugees in the original Convention.

Also in 1951, the GA established the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The UNHCR's core mandate is to (1) provide legal protection for refugees and to seek durable solutions to their problems, either by helping them to return voluntarily to their homes or by settlement in other countries; (2) assist other groups of people, such as those displaced in their own countries, and offer specialized services such as emergency food aid, medical assistance, community services and educational facilities.

The UNHCR oversees all of the UN refugee camps in the world, and has earned two Nobel Peace Prizes in its 50 years of operation. The UNHCR has launched a major drive to broaden international ownership of the 1951 Convention. Nearly three-quarters of the world's nations, that is 140 states are party to the Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol. Countries in South and South-East Asia and the Middle East have so far resisted ratifying the Convention.

### ***Proposed Solutions***

While the GA has done much to define and provide legal status to refugees, the Convention and Protocol have drawn criticism from several nations. Many of the complaints come from the rising number of asylum-seekers and whether their claims for

fleeing are genuine. While each nation has its own laws on refugee protection, the difficulty of finding an international agreement that doesn't conflict with the 1951 Convention can be many. Lately, many nations have betrayed some of the Articles in the Convention by expelling refugees back to their country of origin or detaining them in prison-style holdings while processing them.

A broader solution might be explored in solving emergencies of rapid refugee movements. The Kosovo crisis saw a quick and somewhat effective response from many countries in meeting the needs of the masses escaping from Kosovo. By comparison, the number of Afghan refugees is 2.5 million and rapidly rising. Neighboring countries have recently sealed their borders and the humanitarian catastrophe that awaits the refugees sealed within Afghanistan could be disastrous. In times of heightened war, the difficulty of fulfilling the dictums of the 1951 Convention need to be addressed and resolved.

One of the largest problems for the UNHCR is the number of migrants who flee for economical reasons. It is necessary to distinguish between a refugee and a migrant in any solution that you may draft. By clearly distinguishing between the two groups, it may help to clarify the issue for nations who have criticized the Convention based on economical issues.

Since the burden of hosting refugees is a major concern of participating nations, a sound solution should find a way of helping and perhaps rewarding those countries that have shouldered the largest number of refugees. The ideal solution would ease a nation's difficulties that shelters refugees, while insuring that every humanitarian aid is made available to the refugees.

## **Topic 2: Interim Governments**

### ***Statement of the problem***

In recent years, the UN has been called upon to set-up and execute interim governments to help emerging nations and areas achieve self-governing status. This has created new and unprecedented steps for the UN, and calls for an examination of what could possibly become an ever increasing duty around the world in the years to come. The most notable of these UN interim governments have been in East Timor and Kosovo. Both areas have been ravaged by oppression and ethnic disputes, so the UN's role has not only been as administrator, but as healer, educator, and rebuildder.

This committee focuses on decolonization and the propagation of enabling former territories to reach a state of self-governmental rule. In order to address the issue of interim governments, it is necessary to review the UN's role in developing and fostering independence for former colonial territories. East Timor itself was once a colony of Portugal until the 1970's when Indonesia took control of the area. In 1999, the East Timorese voted by referendum to become independent of Indonesian rule. With the establishment of UN Peacekeeping Forces in September, the UN set-up its interim administration October 26, 1999. The success of decolonization around the world since the UN's inception is unprecedented as over 80 former colonies have been admitted to the UN as sovereign nations. However, many of these nations have boundaries that were drawn up by the colonizing nations without taking into account the boundaries of the societies inhabiting them. It is difficult to determine when or where a group, like the East

Timorese, will determine their independence; but the UN should be prepared to implement interim governments wherever they may be required.

As the governing body that overlooks the decolonization of territories, it would be insightful to study how colonization affected the history of your country. Many of the world's largest and most deadliest wars have been fought for colonial possessions. World Wars I and II can be defined as the culminations of hostilities over colonial and empirical possessions. It has therefore been a primary focus of the UN to dismantle these old and damaging remnants of nation/state policies and encourage the establishment of governments that directly reflect the issues of the governed.

In regards to the transition from territory to independence, the UN has implemented the frameworks established by the League of Nations; utilizing the former colonizing nations as administrators of the territories. There are still sixteen territories that are in "Trust" to France, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States.

For our purposes it is necessary to look at the situations in Kosovo, East Timor, and Western Sahara. Each situation presents its own unique problems and level of involvement from neighboring countries. In Kosovo, it is not the intention of the UN to separate the region from Yugoslavia, but to allow it the autonomy of deciding its own future. East Timor, however, has separated from Indonesia and is working towards its own identity among the nations of the world. The United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) was established in 1991, to organize the referendum for Western Sahara. The UN is organizing the voting framework for Western Sahara's referendum deciding between independence and integration with Morocco. While Western Sahara does not have a UN interim government, the mission is there to organize a referendum whereby the inhabitants will choose integration into Morocco or independence. Each of these three situations requires specific administrative guidelines in order to achieve its goals.

### ***History of the problem***

While in the past the UN has sent peacekeeping troops to countries struggling with independence, such as Cyprus and Eritrea, the task of forming an interim government is needed in order to establish some sort of structure to an otherwise chaotic situation. After the defeat of the Axis powers in World War II, it was the victorious Allies who were instrumental in restructuring and implementing new governments for the defeated. Similar to post-war Germany, NATO and the UN have divided Kosovo into regions of control. Although over 30 nations participate in KFOR (the Kosovo Security Force), the five regions are led by the NATO states of France, Germany, Italy, the U.K. and the U.S. One of KFOR's tasks is to facilitate the implementation of the UN interim government. A complete time line of KFOR and the Kosovo situation is available at [www.kforonline.com](http://www.kforonline.com).

In both Kosovo and East Timor, the UN has employed the United Nations Volunteer Program to complement the professional staff. In an independent evaluation of the Kosovo UNV program by Gordon M. Kindlon, he found the support and preparation of volunteers to be undeveloped and made a frustrating situation even more frustrating. This is precisely the kind of problem the UN needs to address in order to develop a successful interim government program. Mr. Kindlon's findings and report is on the web at <http://kosovounv.tripod.com/kosovounvevaluation/>.

One of the greatest tasks for the interim governments is bringing together a government from what were once enemies in the situations: the native rebels, Spaniards and Moroccans in Western Sahara; the Serbs, Albanians, and Romas in Kosovo; and the Timorese, Portuguese and Indonesians in East Timor. By taking a closer look into the history of these three areas, you will see how delicate the nature of diplomacy becomes in these situations.

### ***Bloc Positions***

Bloc positions on this issue are generally categorized into strongly favorable, favorable, and unopposed. A UN interim government is likely to never be implemented unless all sides of the situation agree to the necessity of one. Using Kosovo as an example, NATO nations are deeply involved in facilitating and working with the interim government. But there is also a larger group of nations under the NATO title “Partnership for Peace” that are also involved in the situation. Non-NATO countries involved in Kosovo include Argentina, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Ireland, Jordan, Lithuania, Morocco, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, and the United Arab Emirates. These participating nations illustrate the diversity of support in situations of this kind.

Typical Bloc positions form according to international reactions and how the bloc countries, usually aligned by treaty, are directly affected by the crisis. As in all situations that the UN commits itself to, it will require a majority vote of member states to implement interim governments.

### ***Past UN Action***

Since interim governments are a new phase of involvement for the UN, the UN’s original charter is a light of guidance for the new governments to follow. While the interim government performs the duties of basic civilian administrative functions, the primary focus of the UN is to establish a framework in which the locals can achieve self-government. This begins by meeting with representatives from existing political and ethnic groups within the region. By bringing the groups together to discuss their future roles in government, the UN can help structure a government that is agreeable to all parties involved.

Of the important structures the UN has stressed in creating the self-rule governments is the establishment of distinctive executive, legislative and judiciary branches of government. In Kosovo, East Timor, and Western Sahara the UN has worked to establish democratic forums of election processes. It is also necessary to involve all political groups of the regions, even those who have lived a life more in battle than at peace. In order to rebuild the infrastructure of the region, the former fighters must now fight to create peaceful coexistence. As it is inscribed on the statue in front of the UN Building in New York, “And into plowshares turned their swords, nations shall learn war no more.”

### ***Proposed Solutions***

Interim governments have become a necessity in restabilizing regions like Kosovo, East Timor, and Western Sahara where oppression and disputes have silenced the voices of the inhabitants. In the future, the UN may have to employ future systems to

help establish self-rule and a chance for a peaceful resolution to an inflamed situation. If the UN has to embark on further programs, it will be helpful to examine what have been the successes and what may need improving.

Consider the importance of UN Volunteers and their grievances of being in frustrating situations. Some situations will no doubt be frustrating because of the years of distrust that have been in place. Some frustrations will, however, be directly related to bureaucratic red tape and poor administration. A sound solution should address the problems that UNV workers have encountered. A more thorough period of preparation and education for the UNV is an obvious course of action.

By looking at your own countries historical solutions in bringing infrastructure and administrative works to areas within their borders, it may aid you in discovering a structure in establishing order to chaotic conditions. Keep in mind that all parties involved must be represented and that UN doctrine plays a key role in determining the basic structure to any involvement, even if its temporary.

## **Conclusion**

As representatives to the GA, it is important to prepare yourself with as much information on your country as possible. The encyclopedia is a good way to introduce yourself to the country, its people, and their government.

Further political information should be available on the web. See if you can find the laws on refugees that pertain to your country. Of course, the UN's web page at [www.un.org](http://www.un.org) is your greatest resource. Here you will find the homepage for the GA and information on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Kosovo, East Timor and all related materials.

You may also look into international organizations that your country belongs to and their positions on the two topics. As delegates to your country, your level of preparation will make your actions at the conference that much easier and clearer for you.

Once again, please feel free to contact any of us with any questions you may encounter. Best of luck in the coming year and we look forward to seeing you all in April!