



THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOURTH COMMITTEE

SPECIAL POLITICAL & DECOLONIZATION

PURVIEW OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOURTH COMMITTEE

The Fourth Committee is charged with addressing a variety of political and peacekeeping issues. Its political work covers aspects of decolonization, mine action and Palestinian refugee issues. Its recommendations should address political aspects of an issue and not focus on the economic, social or development aspects of the topic. For example, while the Fourth Committee may discuss the political problems of the Syrian Golan, it cannot discuss the details of how to promote development in the area, a task better suited for the Second Committee. The Fourth Committee is also charged with the coordination and operational aspects of UN peacekeeping missions and the oversight of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. This is an important distinction from the Security Council, which develops peacekeeping missions and objectives. For more information concerning the purview of the UN's General Assembly as a whole, see page 25.

Website: www.un.org/en/ga/fourth/

ASSISTANCE IN MINE ACTION

Over the last 65 years, roughly 110 million landmines have been deployed across 70 countries. Unlike other weapons, deployed landmines remain dangerous long after a conflict is over and pose long term social, political, economic and public health problems for those countries affected. Unmarked or active minefields are often concentrated in countries that saw significant fighting in the late twentieth century. In 2014 the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) estimated 79 percent of those killed or injured by landmines were civilians. Following immense international action in the 1990s, the number of individuals injured each year by landmines has fallen dramatically from a high of 20,000 in 1996 to 3,308 in 2013, the lowest level of casualties recorded by ICBL. However, the need for continued mine action remains; up to 7.9 million people live near areas affected by landmines, and major stockpiles are still held by China, Russia, the United States, India and many more Member States. New mines have been laid in conflicts in Syria, Libya, South Korea and many other places. While many States talk about the dangers of landmines, the United Nations struggles to obtain commitments from Member States to both sign and ratify major landmine agreements and, once ratified, to implement the protocols of the agreements.

In 1996, after failing to ban landmines in Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and to effectively outline methods for eradicating landmine use, a group of 50 delegations, led by Canada, opened independent talks to establish a treaty to end landmine use. Late in the year, Protocol II was amended to restrict the transfer of mines and other similar devices alongside prohibitions on directing landmines against civilian populations. In the following year, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction came into force. This agreement, commonly known as the Ottawa Convention or the Anti-Personnel Mine-Ban Treaty, saw over 90 States and 1,400 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) call for the destruction of anti-personnel landmines (APMs) and the elimination of remaining stockpiles. In the

2015 report of the Secretary-General on Assistance in Mine Action, the Secretary-General reported that 162 countries have ratified the Ottawa Convention, with 157 States no longer holding stockpiles of APMs. The United Nations is continuing to work with the 31 States yet to complete their obligation to clear mines; 35 States have still not ratified the treaty.

In 1997 the United Nations established the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), an office in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations responsible for coordinating mine action and demining activities across the United Nations system. In 1999, the role of UNMAS was expanded to include coordinating between non-governmental organizations. UNMAS focuses on five areas of work: mine clearance, education, victim assistance, advocacy and stockpile destruction. The United Nations work on mine action is guided by the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2013-2018. For this period, the United Nations prioritized four strategic objectives: reducing the risk and impact of mines, providing comprehensive support to victims of mines, transfer of mine action function to national actors, and promotion and integration of mine action plans.

In addition to action against APMs, the United Nations has taken action against cluster munitions and explosive remnants of war (ERWs). In 2006, Protocol V of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons came into effect, which bound States Parties to take responsibility for the effect of unexploded munitions in their territory after a conflict. In 2010, the Convention on Cluster Munitions entered into force and called upon signatories to eliminate their stockpiles of cluster munitions. In his 2015 midterm review, the Secretary-General noted that 51 percent of suspected hazard areas have been declared free of landmines and commended Mozambique, which declared 97 percent of its districts free from landmines in January 2015. Similarly, Latin American States like Colombia have committed to reducing the number of deployed landmines in their territories. However, many States continue to maintain their stockpiles of landmines and APMs.

In light of international conflicts, some States have failed to maintain the Ottawa Treaty and have come under pressure to withdraw entirely. Libya and Syria have used landmines in recent conflicts. In 2014, Finland came under political pressure from its National Coalition Party to withdraw from the Ottawa Treaty entirely. Ukraine has faced similar pressures and new landmines have been placed on the border between Ukrainian and Russian troops. Compounding the problem, the United Nations struggles to keep landmines out of the hands of nonstate actors. Landmines are cheap, easy to make and effective. As a result, organizations like ISIL and Al-Shabab have begun to use APMs. The United Nations needs to work on both enforcing the Ottawa Treaty and expanding its measures to impact non-state actors.

Although extensive frameworks exist for eliminating APMs and limiting the use of cluster munitions, the United Nations still faces multiple issues with mine clearance activities. One of the goals of the current Inter-Agency Mine Action Strategy is to transfer mine action programs to national actors, but recent transitions have been difficult. Additionally, given the intent to transfer mine action programs to State



actors, the proliferation of NGOs and offices involved in mine action may hinder coordination. Continued action on denying the transfer of APMs to non-state actors remains important, as recent conflicts have seen an increase in the use of APMs and improvised explosive devices. Furthermore, in recent years the Secretary-General has noted an increasing number of mine action personnel being attacked, kidnapped or killed. As with all United Nations actions, funding remains a pressing issue. The existence of these issues should not distract from the significant progress made toward the elimination of APMs and assistance to the victims.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:

- How can the United Nations obtain universal adoption of the Ottawa Treaty and what steps can be taken to make it more effective?
- What steps can the United Nations take to protect mine action personnel working in complex conflict environments?
- What pre-emptive steps can the United Nations take to address APMs in current conflict areas and how can the United Nations prevent further use of landmines?
- How can the United Nations incentivise the reduction of existing APM landmines?

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PERSONS DISPLACED AS A RESULT OF THE JUNE 1967 AND SUBSEQUENT HOSTILITIES

Following the hostilities between Israel and its neighbors in June 1967, commonly known as the Six-Day War, an estimated 700,000 individuals were displaced from the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights. Most of those displaced ended up in one of 58 refugee camps recognized by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and received what was intended to be temporary humanitarian assistance until repatriation was possible. Due to continued political difficulties between the involved parties, a full agreement on repatriation has not been found, and what was intended by the United Nations as a temporary measure has, instead, become a long term project to provide humanitarian assistance. Today, those displaced by the Six-Day War and subsequent hostilities remain in a precarious position—as do their descendants. UNRWA currently supports more than an estimated 1.5 million individuals living in UNRWA-recognized refugee camps across the Middle East and an additional estimated 3.5 million living outside these camps, receiving some form of assistance from UNRWA.

After the Six-Day War, the Security Council passed a resolution calling for the rapid return of those displaced to their homes. Until that could be accomplished, the General Assembly called upon the international community to increase funding for UNRWA and to authorize the provision of temporary humanitarian relief measures to those displaced. The General Assembly based much of this work on the 1951 Refugee Convention, which provided the framework by which the General Assembly and other UN bodies have addressed persons displaced as a result of the 1967 hostilities. This authorization was later extended to those displaced as a result of subsequent hostilities in the region. Despite the call for immediate repatriation, the 1971 Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories found that the Israeli government had made little progress toward allowing repatriation. The Report found that repatriation activities were limited to a summer visitors program which admitted, on a temporary basis, only a few thousand displaced persons each year. In accordance with the 1993 Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, Article XII, the United Nations, Israel and refugee host countries attempted to resolve the repatriation issue affecting those displaced, but no permanent solution has emerged. Today UNRWA provides education, health and other social services in addition to support for microfinance and camp improvement projects.

Poverty, overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, limited economic opportunities, and unorganized and unclear administrative responsibilities are common in the refugee camps. UNRWA does not own the refugee camps, nor is it responsible for day-to-day operations; rather, the ownership, administration and responsibility for maintaining order in the camps and among displaced populations is considered the responsibility of the host states, while UNRWA provides humanitarian assistance to



those living in the recognized camps. This arrangement has led to unclear responsibility for providing services and maintaining order while contributing to an overall sense of lawlessness in the camps and to chronic underdevelopment.

Children are the hardest hit by their refugee status and poorly organized camps. Over 80 percent of the Palestinian refugee population lives below the poverty line; infant mortality rates are high; and school facilities are substandard and overpopulated. Children born in the camps must be registered as refugees at birth to qualify for services and must be born to registered parents. Tens of thousands of children go unregistered, leaving them stateless and vulnerable to the worst conditions of refugee life and unable to seek recourse.

To alleviate poor conditions in the refugee camps, UNRWA launched the Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Program (ICIP) in 2007. ICIP worked with local groups in the camps to identify needs and to support building projects that address overcrowding, poverty and inadequate infrastructure. The program was built on the premise that the largely urban refugee camps have different needs than temporary refugee camps, such as long-term urban planning. Urban planning was a key component of the rebuilding of the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon in 2008. In addition to providing humanitarian assistance, UNRWA worked to ensure that the rebuilding plan takes into account long term habitation in the camp and provision of utilities, economic opportunities and integration with the larger community, incorporating the 2015 Agenda on Sustainable Development and its applicable urban planning guidelines.

Repatriation, compensation and assimilation efforts remain one of the largest problems facing Palestinian refugees. Although recent resolutions passed by the United Nations General Assembly still call for repatriation of those displaced as a result of the hostilities, repatriation of both those inside and outside of the camps is not likely in the foreseeable future. Integration, asylum and dual citizenship have been past solutions for refugees. However, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan have resisted integration attempts, citing economic and infrastructural strain, political upheaval, and security concerns. Refugees in foreign camps have been denied rights to work and own property by State domestic laws; host States show no interest in amending or striking these laws. Host States have, in the past, attempted to force migration of Palestinian refugees to varying success. Refugees in Gaza and the West Bank are routinely further displaced within the camp by fighting. Israel has claimed many impediments to repatriation, including that Palestinian refugees are in the historic Palestine; security concerns related to the presence of Hezbollah and Hamas members and supporters among the refugees; and some refugees' resistance to repatriation into the existing Israeli state. In lieu of repatriation or assimilation, refugee advocates have tried to obtain financial compensation for property losses, an option first proposed by the General Assembly in 1948, but have had little success. The General Assembly discussed the concept again in 2014 and called on the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine to track and identify property and assets originally held by those displaced by the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities. So far, movement toward financial compensation has been inadequate.

An additional issue has severely curtailed UNRWA activities in Syria. As a result of the lack of a resolution for those displaced, UNRWA has provided services to the refugee camps beyond emergency humanitarian assistance. With regional instability creating ever-more-urgent situations

for existing displaced persons and increasing host countries' populations of internally displaced persons, the issue is both urgent and complicated. Balancing the long-term needs of those displaced as a result of the 1967 hostilities and those more recently displaced has spread United Nations efforts and resources thin. Documentation, resources and regional politics have prevented Palestinian refugees from traveling to Palestinian refugee camps farther away from the war in Syria.

The Fourth Committee will continue to address the situation of those displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities, along with the role of UNRWA in providing assistance to those displaced. With the lack of progress in repatriation, the Fourth Committee has increasingly looked at ways to alleviate problems in the refugee camps and reach arrangements acceptable to the involved parties. Funding and resource allocation remains a problem. In recent years there has been criticism of ICIP, notably that the organization accepts the denial of repatriation as a given going forward and instead treats the temporary refugee camps as permanent settlements. There is also concern that UNRWA has moved beyond its mandate of providing humanitarian assistance and is instead adopting a governmental and administrative role in the camps by coordinating with local groups on development projects beyond humanitarian assistance. Going forward, the Fourth Committee will need to balance the situations inside the camps and the problems faced by those displaced with a long-term resolution to the ongoing situation, most notably funding, coordination of UN and non-governmental organization services, refugee asset protection, and the desire and feasibility of repatriation.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:

- Under what conditions would repatriation of persons displaced by the 1967 and subsequent hostilities be feasible?
- How do the concerns of refugee populations in general differ from the concerns of those displaced by the 1967 and subsequent hostilities?
- What services and funding structures are most effective and most applicable for the population?
- How can the Fourth Committee aid in coordinating UN and non-UN services to those displaced?

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