SMSMUN 2024

UNHRC: The Human Rights Council



Agenda:

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure

Chair:

Princila Budaprithi

Dear delegates,

Greetings.

Welcome to 'The Human Rights Council' of KWSMUN 2026!!

It is my honor to be serving as your chair for the committee. I have tried my best to make the study guide as compact and simple as I could for you guys' convenience. Please make sure to go through the study guide thoroughly. I'm known to be very 'khadoos' in the committee and will give you 'lectures' in case of passivity. Please do not expect lenience. However, I will be at your disposal should you have any queries. Feel free to ask me as many questions, ideas, suggestions as you like. I am more than happy to help you with anything before and during the conference. I look forward to working with you all!!

Best wishes

Princila Budaprithi

Contents

Introduction to UNHRC 4
Mandate and Functions 5
Key Mechanisms 6
Agenda Overview 6
Topic Introduction 6
Background Information 7
Key Challenges 7
Protection of Civilians 7
Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) 8
Access to Humanitarian Aid 8
Regional and Humanitarian Impact 8
Past Actions by the United Nations 8
Current Situation 8
International and Legal Frameworks 9
International Law 9
National Frameworks 9
Role of the UNHRC 9
Moving Forward: Recommendations 9
Questions to Be Answered 10
Bibliography 10

Introduction to UNHRC

The Human Rights Council is an intergovernmental 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 making 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 United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG).

The UNHRC is composed of 47 Member States, which are elected by the UN General Assembly and serve for three-year terms. These member states are responsible for discussing and addressing situations of human rights violations, making recommendations, and providing support to countries in upholding their human rights obligations. The council's work spans a broad spectrum of rights, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

What the council does:

- Serves as an international forum for dialogue on human rights issues with UN officials and mandated experts, states, civil society, and other participants;
- 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;
- Holds crisis meetings known as special sessions to respond to urgent human rights situations, 36 of which have been held to date;
- Reviews the human rights records of all United Nations Member States via the Universal Periodic Review;

- Appoints the Special Procedures, independent human rights experts who serve as the eyes and ears of the Council by monitoring situations in specific countries or by looking at specific themes; and
- Authorizes commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions, which produce hard-hitting evidence on war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Mandate and Functions

The UNHRC's mandate includes the following key functions:

1. Promoting Human Rights Worldwide: The council is tasked with promoting the protection of human rights across all regions of the world.

2. Addressing Human Rights Violations: One of its primary roles is to respond to human rights violations wherever they occur, investigating abuses, making recommendations, and providing solutions to prevent future violations.

3. Upholding Accountability: Through mechanisms like the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the council evaluates the human rights records of all UN member states and holds them accountable to international standards.

4. Monitoring and Reporting: The UNHRC monitors the human rights situation in countries and reports on cases of concern. It engages with independent experts called Special Procedures, who are tasked with monitoring, advising, and publicly reporting on human rights issues.

5. Making Recommendations: The council passes resolutions to make recommendations for the promotion of human rights and provides support to states in fulfilling their human rights obligations.

Key Mechanisms

1. Universal Periodic Review (UPR): Established in 2008, the UPR is a mechanism through which the human rights records of all 193 UN member states are reviewed every four and a half years. It encourages states to improve their human rights policies and addresses violations.

2. Special Procedures: These are independent human rights experts appointed by the UNHRC to address either specific country situations or thematic issues. They include Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts, and Working Groups that provide insight into various human rights concerns.

3. Complaint Procedure: The UNHRC offers individuals and organizations the ability to bring human rights violations to the attention of the council, ensuring that affected parties have a platform to voice concerns and seek redress.

Agenda Overview

Topic Introduction

South Sudan has faced chronic instability and armed conflict since its independence in 2011, resulting in severe human rights violations against civilians. Recurrent violence between armed groups, inter-communal clashes, and political instability have disproportionately affected non-combatants, leading to mass displacement, loss of livelihoods, and humanitarian emergencies (UNMISS, 2023).

The protection of civilians is a core obligation under international humanitarian law, particularly in situations of non-international armed conflict such as South Sudan. Civilians, including women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, are entitled to protection from violence, arbitrary displacement, and human rights abuses (ICRC, 1949; Additional Protocol II).

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) form a significant portion of South Sudan's affected population. Unlike refugees, IDPs remain within their country's borders and therefore fall primarily under the responsibility of their own government, making international oversight and assistance crucial (UNHCR, 2022). This agenda examines how the UNHRC and the international community can enhance civilian protection, uphold human rights, and ensure dignity and safety for IDPs in South Sudan.

Background Information

South Sudan's civil war, which erupted in December 2013, was largely driven by political rivalry and ethnic divisions. Although multiple peace agreements have been signed, implementation has been slow and fragile, allowing violence to persist in several regions (United Nations Security Council, 2018). Armed conflict has led to widespread violations, including extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, forced recruitment of children, and destruction of civilian infrastructure.

Internal displacement in South Sudan is one of the largest in Africa. Millions of people have been forced to flee their homes due to violence, food insecurity, and climate-related disasters, often seeking shelter in Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites managed by UNMISS or in informal settlements (OCHA, 2023). These IDPs face severe challenges such as overcrowding, disease outbreaks, lack of education, and limited access to justice.

The humanitarian situation is further exacerbated by restricted access for aid organizations and ongoing insecurity. Attacks on humanitarian workers and facilities violate international law and hinder the delivery of life-saving assistance (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2023). Addressing civilian protection and IDP rights is therefore essential not only for immediate relief but also for long-term peace and stability.

Key Challenges

Protection of Civilians

Civilians in South Sudan continue to be deliberately targeted during armed clashes, particularly in rural and contested regions. Weak state authority and limited law enforcement allow perpetrators to act with impunity, undermining trust in institutions and prolonging cycles of violence.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)
IDPs often live in overcrowded camps with inadequate access to food, healthcare, sanitation, and education. Prolonged displacement exposes them to exploitation, gender-based violence, and long-term poverty, especially for women and children.

Access to Humanitarian Aid

Humanitarian organizations face significant barriers, including insecurity, bureaucratic restrictions, and direct attacks. These obstacles delay aid delivery and worsen humanitarian conditions for civilians and displaced populations.

Regional and Humanitarian Impact

The instability in South Sudan affects neighboring countries through economic disruption and cross-border displacement. Prolonged displacement weakens social cohesion and increases dependence on humanitarian aid, limiting prospects for sustainable development and peace.

Past Actions by the United Nations

The UN established the **United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)** with a primary mandate to protect civilians and support humanitarian assistance. The UNHRC has also mandated investigative bodies to document violations and promote accountability through reporting and advocacy.

Current Situation

Despite peace agreements, localized violence continues across several regions of South Sudan. Limited progress in political reforms and accountability mechanisms has hindered civilian protection, leaving millions dependent on international assistance.

International and Legal Frameworks

International Law

International Humanitarian Law obliges all parties to protect civilians during armed conflict. The **Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement** provide a normative framework outlining the rights of IDPs and the responsibilities of states.

National Frameworks

South Sudan's domestic legal system lacks the capacity and independence needed to effectively protect civilians. Weak enforcement and limited judicial access continue to undermine accountability.

Role of the UNHRC

The UNHRC monitors human rights conditions, documents violations, and issues recommendations to the South Sudanese government. It plays a critical role in mobilizing international pressure and supporting accountability mechanisms.

Moving Forward: Recommendations

- **Strengthening Civilian Protection:** Expand and reinforce protection mandates under UN peacekeeping operations.
- **Humanitarian Access:** Ensure safe and unrestricted access for humanitarian actors.
- **Accountability:** Support investigations and prosecutions for human rights violations.

- **IDP Support:** Improve camp conditions and promote durable solutions such as safe return or resettlement.
- **Peacebuilding:** Encourage inclusive political dialogue and community reconciliation.

Questions to Be Answered

1. How can international mechanisms better prevent attacks on civilians in South Sudan?
2. What steps can ensure accountability for crimes against IDPs?
3. How can humanitarian access be protected during ongoing conflict?
4. What role should regional organizations play in civilian protection?
5. How can long-term solutions for IDPs be implemented sustainably?

Debate angles:

- Safety in UN Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites
- Forced displacement and land rights
- Access to food, healthcare, and education
- Responsibility of the South Sudanese government vs international actors

Bibliography

- United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). *Human Rights Reports on South Sudan.*
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). *Internally Displaced Persons in South Sudan.*
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). *South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview.*
- International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). *International Humanitarian Law and the Protection of Civilians.*
- United Nations Security Council. *Reports on the Situation in South Sudan.*

- Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, 1998.

- The End -