

Topic 2: The Impact of Armed Conflicts on Human Rights

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Introduction:

The impact of armed conflicts on human rights is a pressing global concern, with recent events in the Middle East exemplifying the devastating toll on civilian populations. In Lebanon, political instability and recurring violence have compounded the country's economic collapse, leaving millions struggling to access basic needs and undermining fundamental rights. Meanwhile, Syria remains a focal point of humanitarian distress, with over a decade of civil war displacing millions and exposing civilians to indiscriminate violence, arbitrary detention, and war crimes. In Palestine, escalations in hostilities, including the recent conflict in Gaza, have further eroded human rights, with widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure, mass killings and torture of innocent civilians, and growing concerns over the treatment of displaced individuals and hostages. These crises not only highlight the direct consequences of armed conflict but also underscore the urgent need for international collaboration to uphold basic human rights and address the root causes of such protracted violence and persecution.

Topics of Discussion:

1. Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts
2. Rights of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)
3. Children and Armed Conflicts
4. Accountability and Justice Mechanisms
5. Impact on Access to Basic Rights and Services
6. Role of Non-State Actors in Human Rights Violations
7. Rehabilitation and Rebuilding Post-Conflict Societies

Key Words:

- **International Humanitarian Law (IHL)**: A body of rules that seek to limit the effects of armed conflict by protecting those who are not participating in hostilities and restricting the means and methods of warfare.
- **Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)**: Individuals forced to flee their homes due to conflict or violence but who remain within their country's borders.
- **War Crimes**: Serious violations of international law during armed conflict, including targeting civilians, torture, and using prohibited weapons.
- **Responsibility to Protect (R2P)**: A global commitment to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, emphasizing the role of international intervention when states fail to protect their populations.
- **Post-Conflict Reconstruction**: Efforts to rebuild societies and governance structures following the end of armed conflict, with an emphasis on ensuring peace, justice, and the restoration of human rights.
- **Genocide**: The deliberate and systematic destruction of an ethnic, racial, religious, or national group, often considered the gravest of crimes against humanity.
- **Refugee Status**: Legal protection granted under international law to individuals who have fled their country due to persecution, conflict, or violence.
- **Civilian Casualties**: Non-combatant individuals who are injured, killed, or otherwise harmed as a direct result of armed conflict
- **Forced Recruitment**: The coerced enlistment of individuals, including children, into armed forces or groups.
- **Sanctions and Embargoes**: Measures imposed by states or international organizations to restrict trade or other activities with countries or groups involved in human rights violations.

Key Actors:

- **Palestine**

Palestine is a central actor in discussions on the impact of armed conflicts on human rights, as the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict has resulted in widespread and systematic human rights violations over many decades. The Palestinian population, particularly those in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, faces severe restrictions on movement, access to resources, and the right to self-determination due to Israel's military occupation. Palestinians in Gaza suffer from regular military escalations, resulting in civilian casualties, the destruction of infrastructure, and the imposition of a blockade that limits access to essential goods and services, such as food, medicine, and clean water. In the West Bank, Palestinians experience settlement expansion, forced evictions, and discriminatory policies that restrict their freedom and undermine their living conditions.

- **Lebanon**

Lebanon is a key actor in the topic of due to its central role in regional instability and its complex relationship with ongoing conflicts in Syria, Palestine, and Israel. Lebanon has experienced its own history of civil war (1975-1990), which left a legacy of sectarian division and human rights violations that continue to affect its society. Today, Lebanon hosts a large population of Palestinian refugees who face limited rights and living conditions in refugee camps, often subjected to marginalization and lack of access to basic services. Furthermore, Lebanon's proximity to Syria places it in a critical position regarding the Syrian refugee crisis, with over a million Syrians fleeing to Lebanon since the onset of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. This massive influx of refugees has strained Lebanon's resources, creating social and economic challenges that exacerbate human rights concerns. Additionally, Lebanon's periodic confrontations with Israel, including the ongoing tensions over the occupied Shebaa Farms and Hezbollah's role in the region, further complicate Lebanon's human rights landscape, as civilians often bear the brunt of these conflicts. As a result, Lebanon's own struggles with governance, internal conflict, and refugee protection make it a crucial actor in discussions about the broader implications of armed conflicts on human rights.

- **Syria**

Syria plays a crucial role in discussions on the impact of armed conflicts on human rights due to the immense toll of its ongoing civil war, which has led to widespread displacement, death, and human rights violations. Since 2011, the Syrian conflict has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands and the displacement of millions, with civilians enduring indiscriminate attacks, the use of chemical weapons, and the destruction of vital infrastructure like schools and hospitals. The war has also created a massive refugee crisis, with millions fleeing to neighboring countries, exacerbating human rights challenges in those regions. The conflict has severely disrupted basic rights, such as access to education, healthcare, and freedom of movement, while leaving millions dependent on humanitarian aid. The Syrian war highlights the devastating effects of armed conflict on human rights, emphasizing the urgent need for international accountability and a lasting political solution.

- **South Africa**

South Africa plays a significant role in supporting Palestinian rights, drawing from its own history of apartheid and colonialism to advocate for justice and equality. The country has downgraded its diplomatic ties with Israel and frequently criticizes its policies toward Palestinians, likening them to apartheid. South Africa actively supports Palestinian statehood, endorses the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, and uses its influence in the African Union and UN forums to rally international support for the Palestinian cause. This solidarity underscores South Africa's commitment to addressing historical and structural injustices, positioning it as a leading advocate for human rights and a moral voice in the Global South.

Background Information:

Armed conflicts have a massive impact on human rights, affecting millions of civilians, especially in places like Syria. Since the start of the civil war in 2011, Syria has seen widespread human rights abuses, from chemical attacks to bombings of civilian areas. These actions have caused over 400,000 deaths and displaced millions. Many refugees have fled to neighboring countries like Lebanon, which has faced its own challenges in dealing with the strain of hosting over a million Syrians. The UN and other international bodies have called for accountability, but a lack of unity has made it hard to address these violations effectively.

Lebanon, caught between the Syrian and Palestinian conflicts, has also struggled with the human rights impacts of regional instability. The influx of refugees has put immense pressure on the country's resources, and the situation is compounded by the plight of Palestinian refugees, who have been living in Lebanon for decades. With limited rights and poor living conditions, they face significant hardships. South Africa, a strong advocate for human rights, has used its platform in organizations like the UN to call for stronger international responses to both the Syrian refugee crisis and the treatment of Palestinians, emphasizing the need for humanitarian aid and long-term solutions.

Palestine, too, remains at the heart of the region's human rights issues. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to result in displacement, restrictions on movement, and limited access to essential services, particularly in Gaza. The humanitarian situation is dire, with shortages of food, medicine, and basic necessities. South Africa has long been a vocal supporter of Palestinian rights, often drawing comparisons to its own anti-apartheid struggle. The international community, including actors like the EU and the US, plays a significant role in these issues, but a unified approach is still needed to address the human rights abuses and find a lasting solution to the conflict.

Potential Solutions:

To address the impact of armed conflicts on human rights, the international community needs to prioritize humanitarian aid and protection. Increasing funding for organizations like the UNHCR and the ICRC is essential to provide refugees and displaced people with food, medical care, and shelter. Additionally, creating safe zones and humanitarian corridors in conflict areas can ensure aid and civilians are not blocked by violence. Rebuilding essential infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, also plays a key role in long-term recovery for affected communities.

Another important solution is strengthening international legal frameworks to hold perpetrators accountable for human rights violations. This can be achieved by ensuring that institutions like the International Criminal Court (ICC) have the support and resources needed to investigate and prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity. Targeted sanctions, such as arms embargoes or travel restrictions on leaders responsible for abuses, can also pressure those involved in conflicts to cease violating human rights. Furthermore, supporting local human rights organizations and activists can help protect the most vulnerable populations in conflict zones and raise awareness about ongoing violations.

Diplomacy and conflict resolution efforts are critical for long-term peace. Promoting peace talks and negotiations between warring parties through international organizations like the United Nations can help broker ceasefires and lay the groundwork for lasting political solutions. International cooperation is necessary to reduce geopolitical tensions that fuel conflicts, with key actors like the United States, Russia, and the European Union playing pivotal roles in facilitating discussions. Additionally, addressing the root causes of conflict, such as poverty and inequality, through social and economic development can help prevent future violence, while post-conflict reconciliation efforts, including truth commissions and reparations, can promote healing and stability.

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