

Human Rights

**CHRISTIAN ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL
SCHOOL
MODEL UNITED NATIONS**

February 7-8, 2026



HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

CHAIR REPORT

Topic: Addressing the Human Rights Situation in Syria

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Message from the Chairs

Welcome, all Human Rights Councillors! We are your chairs, Andrew and Angela, both G10/F4/Y11 students from ICS and GSIS, respectively. We're very excited to chair you all at CAISMUN 3.0!

The Human Rights Council was founded in 2006 by the UN General Assembly to replace the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights, which was established in 1946. Both bodies have one key goal in mind: providing a multilateral forum to debate and discuss contemporary human rights issues. In a few weeks, you all will participate in the same way the HRC and UNCHR did.

As a beginner committee, the chair reports will contain most of the information you will need for the conference. However, delegates are encouraged to continue their own research in various formats to supplement the chair report.

To all, please reach out to us via email or WhatsApp if you have any questions during your preparation process. Looking forward to seeing you all in February!

Best regards,

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Procedure

As HRC is a beginner council, we recognize that many delegates may be unfamiliar with MUN procedure. Therefore, we will be less strict on adherence to procedure. However, delegates are still reminded and expected to familiarize themselves with HMUN procedure, which will be linked in the chair email.

General Overview

Historical Background

Throughout Syria's history, human rights have been consistently violated time and time again. The Syrian people have been ruled over by the Assad regime since 1970, succeeding a series of coups and instability within Syria. The Assad regime began with Hafez al-Assad, the President of Syria from 1971 to 2000, who centralized power following a Ba'athist revolution in 1963.

After Hafez's death, his son, Bashar al-Assad, took power in 2000. Since then, Bashar has instituted numerous authoritarian policies, further centralizing power in his own hands. Moreover, discontent with the regime has grown since then, spiraling into a civil war.

The Syrian Civil War

In March of 2011, Assad's authority was challenged by various militias, paramilitaries, and political groups, leading to the beginning of the Syrian Civil War. Between 2011 and 2024, the war largely remained at a standstill, with little progress made by either side.

However, in late November of 2024, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an anti-Assad militia, launched an offensive against the Assad regime. By capturing Aleppo, the capital of Syria, HTS dealt a major blow to Assad's government, leading to a chain of other losses for the regime throughout the rest of Syria.

By late 2024, the Assad regime was overthrown by a coalition of separatist groups, democratic activists, Al-Qaeda, and numerous other forces victorious in the Syrian Civil War, ending in the establishment of a new government under HTS leader Ahmed al-Sharaa.

The New Regime

Initially, Sharaa's regime was viewed as a step forward for Syria's human rights situation. In fact, Sharaa has implemented numerous political, economic, and social reforms that have supported the human rights of Syrians. The new regime, on the whole, has certainly benefited millions of lives with its reforms.

However, despite having a different leader and ideology from the last, the new government

has continued to kill, torture, and massacre civilians within Syria. Certain ethnic groups have been targeted and persecuted, and the human rights of many are still being violated.

Minority Groups

Throughout Syria's history, minorities have been a major target of government persecution. For example, during the Assad regime, Shia Muslims were far closer to the government than Sunni Muslims, leading to tensions between the two branches. These tensions only worsened during the Syrian Civil War, where Shia-Sunni relations soured as both pro and anti-government forces began to target Sunnis and Shia, respectively.

However, the tensions between ethnic and religious groups are not just limited to different sects of Islam. Within Syria, there are numerous ethnic and religious minorities, such as the Druze, Kurds, and Alawites. These groups have faced persecution throughout Syria's history by both state and non-state actors, of which have mostly involved mass killings, torture, and attacks targeted towards these minorities.

Refugees

As a result of the Syrian Civil War and various other regional sources of turmoil, refugees have become one of the largest issues facing the new Syrian government. As of 2025, there are 6.1 million international refugees and 7.4 million internally displaced persons according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. The refugee situation poses a crisis to both Syria and its neighbors, where both are burdened with the duty to care for the refugees and provide a way back home.

Serving as an economic and social burden to Syria's neighbors, various states have mistreated and rejected the refugees. Notably, several European states' populations have turned against receiving or hosting refugees, with anti-immigration parties surging in the polls and entering government. Now, more than ever before, the HRC has a duty to alleviate the burden of refugees on neighboring countries and support their journey back to Syria.

Key Terms

Term	Definition
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Human Rights	The basic rights and freedoms inherent to all people, regardless of their race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status.
Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)	A Sunni Islamist political organisation and paramilitary group involved in the Syrian civil war, now integrated as a part of Syria's army. President Sharaa used to be the leader of this group.
Sanctions	Measures taken by a state to coerce another to conform to an international agreement or norms of conduct, typically in the form of restrictions on trade or official sporting participation.
Ahmed al-Sharaa	The current leader of Syria, replacing Assad's regime in 2024 after defeating it in the civil war.
Terrorism	Violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups who are inspired by, or associated with, designated foreign terrorist organizations or nations
Transitional/Interim Government	A transitional government is a temporary government formed to manage a period of transition, often following state collapse, revolution, civil war, or some combination thereof.

Key Clashes

Clash 1: National Sovereignty vs. Global Pressure

As with every other global dispute, the clash of national sovereignty and global pressure comes to mind. Essentially, this means that two rights come into conflict: the right of the global community to enforce human rights, and the right to national sovereignty for individual states.

In this case, Syria has repeatedly violated human rights, which dates back to Assad's administration. Actions such as torture and massacres that the Sharaa government has taken clearly violate the human rights of many, as outlined in various international treaties and documents on human rights.

However, the HRC cannot simply override the Syrian government to enact reforms to improve the human rights situation in Syria. The HRC lacks the authority to ignore a nation's sovereignty, as the HRC's jurisdiction is drawn from the participating states' assent, not from the HRC itself. Therefore, this committee must recognize the limitations on the HRC's ability to act in certain areas and balance that with the global demand for the improvement of human rights in Syria.

As debate continues, delegates should weigh the practicality of particular measures or solutions, while keeping in mind how national sovereignty plays into this discussion. Furthermore, delegates can, and should, reference previous actions taken by the HRC in similar situations (i.e., North Korea, Venezuela, Russia, and other "pariah states")

Clash 2: Soft vs. Hard Power

In the past, the HRC has embraced the utilization of "soft power," where actions taken by the HRC were mostly "**attractive**," meaning that the HRC positively encourages and supports change through things such as incentives, influence, advocacy, and other actions to advance its agenda.

Despite being more passive than hard power, the ability of soft power to impact policy cannot be understated. The HRC is often cited by domestic politicians to justify policy, meaning that the HRC holds great weight in deciding the policy of various countries. Furthermore, the HRC is used as a canon for global standards on human rights worldwide.

Structurally, the Human Rights Council (HRC) lacks the independent authority to employ coercive measures typically associated with "hard power," such as imposing sanctions or deploying peacekeepers. Its formal mandate is limited to investigation, dialogue, and the making of recommendations to states and other UN bodies.

However, notwithstanding the "hard power" deficit, the HRC does hold the ability to recommend policy to both the General Assembly and the Security Council of the UN; institutions that hold far more authority, and in the SC's case, power to execute policy. As such, even if the HRC does not have the power to utilize hard power, the message sent by the recommendation of enforcement actions against human rights violations – such as sanctions or peacekeeping missions – will be substantial. Consequently, delegates must consider methodologies to obtain approval from the UN Security Council if concrete measures are to be implemented during resolution writing.

Ultimately, the members of this committee should take into account the limitations of the HRC's abilities, but also recognize the merits of each direction. Delegates should reference

precedents in previous cases of human rights violations, and the degree of action that the HRC took in each instance.

Clash 3: West vs. East

Unlike the Russian-aligned Assad regime, the establishment of a new state in Syria has offered a blank slate for global and regional powers to align themselves with. Russia, America, and various regional powers have motivations to expand their sphere of influence into Syria. Syria itself is a key state in the balance of power in the Middle East, being involved in numerous conflicts and rivalries such as the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Considering the new regime and the value that Syria has to geopolitics, East-West tensions will certainly flare up, with different global powers aiming to bring themselves closer to Syria. Within the context of this committee, delegates should recognize the geopolitical weight of Syria and the possible impact of global rivalries. Furthermore, for delegations with clear geopolitical alignments (i.e., the US, Russia, China, etc.), utilizing geopolitics in your rhetoric could prove to be useful in creating blocs and ideological lines for this topic.

Key Stakeholders

Syria	Now under a transitional government, Syria has implemented numerous reforms to its internal politics and has improved its human rights situation. However, numerous practices from the Assad government have continued, continuing particular human rights violations.
United States	Under the new Trump administration, US-Syrian relations have been called into question. Traditionally, the US has been a major opponent of Syria, mostly supporting Israel's interests in the region. However, this has changed greatly since the new Sharaa and Trump governments. The US seems to be more cooperative with Syria, signifying a possibility of reconciliation and support for Syria on this topic.
EU member states	Previously, the EU has taken in a large number of Syrian refugees and has invested in aid for Syrians. The EU has an interest in ensuring the return of refugees to Syria and preventing the refugee crisis within the EU from worsening.

Russia	Russia has previously served as a source of support for the Assad regime, and has indicated that it will continue this into Sharaa's administration. As a key global power, Russia aims to bring itself closer to Syria in its predicament and continue its policy of multipolarity in this issue.
Turkey	Formerly an active participant in the Syrian Civil War due to entanglements with Kurdish militant groups, Turkey has a hand in Syrian affairs due to their geographical proximity and its historical animosity with Syria.
Israel	Israel has previously been involved in the Syrian Civil War and has taken part in clashes with the Syrian government. Israel has a deep role in Syrian geopolitics and wishes to advance its agenda against the mostly Arab Syria.
Iran	As a country with close ties to Syria, Iran will look to discredit the "West" and grant support to Syria on this topic.

Past Actions

HRC Resolution 19/22

Written as a reaction to the worsening human rights situation in Syria in 2012, the HRC moved to condemn the Assad regime's activities and demanded the improvement of Syria's human rights situation through various actions. Despite the strong language used by the resolution in comparison to its predecessors, little was done by Syria to comply with the HRC's resolution. However, the fact that the HRC still condemned Syria's actions offered a justification for other nations to begin or continue punitive policies against Syria.

SC Resolution 2254

The resolution concluded a unanimous agreement on a political roadmap for Syria, focused on a ceasefire and a Syrian-led political transition. Its unanimous passage was seen as a rare moment of global consensus, which in theory paved the way for increased humanitarian access as well as a nationwide ceasefire (with the exception of counterterrorism operations). In practice however, the resolution's provisions (especially

for political transition) stalled, and the conflict's dynamics continued to be shaped by military action and diplomacy led by Russia, Iran, Turkey, and the United States.

SC Resolution 2504

This resolution itself focuses on the more humanitarian side of the topic of Syria as a whole, where the humanitarian catastrophe brought about by turmoil in Syria and neighboring nations was addressed. It aimed to address the various geopolitical problems brought about by the crisis, especially refugees – of which continues to be salient.

Another aspect of the resolution (and all others) is the many resolutions that were cited to provide support for this resolution. In the same way, delegates should aim to find ideological and empirical support from the resolutions enacted prior, and use the precedent set by the UN in their rhetoric.

Possible Solutions

Solution 1: Sanctions

As with every international conflict, sanctions are always an option to provide an incentive for Syria to improve its human rights situation. However, the pros and cons of taking actions such as sanctions must be weighed.

Firstly, the impact of sanctions must be understood. By their nature, sanctions impact the citizens of the state in which they are implemented, potentially hurting the lives of citizens with no relation to the conflict. When trade is restricted to particular countries, the resources that could have been traded to said country will be taken away, limiting the number of opportunities for both citizens and the government. Oftentimes, citizens with no correlation to the actions of the government being sanctioned are impacted alongside the government, bringing innocents into the crossfire.

Furthermore, sanctions may have the unintended consequences of radicalizing the population against the sanctioners. For example, states such as North Korea have lost much of their trade as a result of global sanctions against the state. However, the Kim regime has used the sanctions from “the West” as a propaganda tool to rally the populace, rather than allowing it to destabilize the regime.

While sanctions are a form of coercive “negative” action, they are used by states and international bodies to impose tangible economic and political costs on targeted governments. Supporters argue that in some cases, sanctions can weaken a state’s ability to pursue aggressive policies and shift domestic opinion against leadership. For example, since 2022, broad international sanctions have significantly reduced Russia’s trade revenue and limited its access to advanced technology and financial markets. Some analysts contend these measures have constrained Russia’s military capacity in Ukraine and contributed to growing domestic economic strain, though the long-term political impact within Russia remains debated.

***The HRC does *NOT* have the power to, on its own, enact sanctions upon any state; however, the HRC may *recommend* sanctions against particular states to the UNGA and UNSC for review.**

Solution 2: Humanitarian aid

As a “positive” tool for change, humanitarian aid can prove to be substantial for the advancement of human rights in a war-stricken land like Syria. Humanitarian aid has been used numerous times in the past for similar situations, where a destabilized state (in this case, Syria) required financial and material resources to aid in its recovery.

For example, aid in the war-torn regions of post-World War 2 Europe through the Marshall Plan was a major cause for economic growth, and the later restoration of liberties and quality of life in post-war Europe. In the same way, the HRC may consider sending humanitarian aid to Syria, with the hopes of bringing popular support for the regime, and possibly “normalizing” the former pariah state of Syria in its relations with the international community.

Some previous methods that the UN has used to stabilize war-torn countries can be cited as grounds for a similar policy in Syria. For example, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has established programs to care for and return Syrian refugees, with an estimate of nearly 560,000 individuals returning to Syria in 2024. However, humanitarian aid must be coordinated in tandem with host governments; the current situation in Gaza is a stark reminder of this need.

Solution 3: Accountability mechanisms

Outside of simply interacting with the state of Syria, the HRC could also take a multilateral approach to resolving this issue. In this case, establishing internationally-based accountability mechanisms, such as oversight commissions with mandates to ensure the upkeep of human rights standards in Syria, could prove useful.

However, a problem remains that oversight commissions may not offer enough as a “concrete” measure to address the problem as a whole. Therefore, delegates should use solutions like these as a complement to alternatives with major substantiality, namely humanitarian aid, and support for the new government.

Guiding Questions

1. How has your country handled similar human rights situations in the past?
 2. How much does your country value human rights?
 3. How has your country interacted with Syria in the past?
 4. What agenda does your country have with Syria?
 5. How can the UN and member states leverage sanctions or other measures to hold perpetrators accountable?
 6. What role can education and awareness campaigns play in addressing human rights violations in Syria?
 7. What can be done to foster greater international collaboration on the Syrian human rights crisis among UN member states?
 8. How can regional organizations, such as the Arab League, contribute to resolving the human rights situation in Syria?
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