Model United Nations of the Southwest

Topic Guides
Conference 56
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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FIRST COMMITTEE

CURBING THE PROLIFERATION OF ANTI-PERSONNEL AND CLUSTER MUNITIONS TO DETER CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

One of the most widespread and well-advocated causes that states have engaged in over the past few decades has been the effort toward ending the use of cluster munitions and antipersonnel landmines. High volumes of these weapons remain unexploded in places accessible to civilians, who may accidentally detonate these devices, often causing irreparable physical harm. Cluster munitions and landmines, along with other victim-activated explosive devices, led to over 60,000 casualties, including around 14,500 deaths, in 31 nations from 1999 to 2013, with thousands more similar casualties occurring in previous years. Despite downward trends in cluster munitions- and mine-related deaths since the beginning of the 21st century, these weapons have been used recently in multiple conflicts, such as those in Syria, Ukraine, and Myanmar.

Discussion surrounding the use of cluster munitions and antipersonnel landmines has continued for decades. The use of cluster munitions and antipersonnel landmines has been a prominent topic within the General Assembly First Committee for several years. In recent years, the General Assembly has adopted resolutions such as Resolution 64/84, which discusses the United Nations’ support of campaigns directed against these types of weapons, and the United Nations as a whole has served as a coordinator for implementing various treaties regarding cluster munitions and antipersonnel landmines.

Having gone into force in August 2010, the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions is the main international treaty focused on eradicating cluster munitions and is a legally binding document that includes several provisions outlining prohibitions on the production, use, and stockpiling of cluster munitions. The treaty requires the destruction of all stockpiled cluster munitions and the clearance of such munitions from contaminated areas and also offers assistance to states for carrying out these duties. At present, 89 states are party to the convention, while 27 are signatories that have not yet ratified the convention.

Outside of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, nongovernmental organizations and individual nations have engaged in concerted efforts against the use of cluster munitions. Work between governments and organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Cluster Munition Coalition led to a resolution being passed by the European Parliament in 2008 that requested all European Union nations to sign and ratify the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Since the Convention on Cluster Munitions went into effect in 2010, several countries, including non-signatories, have begun the process of destroying stockpiles or clearing land contaminated by cluster munitions. Efforts to enact national legislation implementing this convention continues,
with a total of 22 nations having passed laws in concordance with the treaty, and nearly half of signatories having submitted transparency reports, which are also required by the Convention. Major manufacturers who possess large stockpiles of cluster munitions, such as Russia, China, and the United States, have yet to sign the Convention.

Antipersonnel landmines continue to cause great suffering for thousands of civilians, but widespread usage of these weapons has decreased. Spearheaded by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines in the 1990s, a well-orchestrated crusade against these weapons led to the signing of the Ottawa Treaty, also known as the Mine Ban Treaty, in 1997. The Ottawa Treaty, which entered into force in March 1999, bans the manufacture and use of landmines and requires states that have ratified the treaty to destroy their stockpiles, clear all mined land, provide assistance to mine victims, adopt legislation to ensure that treaty terms are met, and report annually on their progress in these efforts. Since the Ottawa Treaty came into effect, over 47 million landmines have been destroyed and the international trade of these weapons has nearly ceased.

Discussion on the Ottawa Treaty and the issue of landmines continues despite a lack of involvement from many prominent military powers. In concordance with Article 12 of the Ottawa Treaty, states party to the agreement have met every five years since 1999 to review the various provisions of the treaty and states’ progress in implementing them. These nations also meet twice annually in the Meeting of States Parties and the Intersessional Standing Committee Meeting to discuss progress and seek assistance when needed. Annual resolutions are also put forth in the General Assembly and the General Assembly First Committee in favor of the Ottawa Treaty and a complete ban on landmines, with the overwhelming majority of member states consistently voting in their favor.

Few campaigns involving security issues have been as successful as those against cluster munitions and antipersonnel landmines, but as long as these weapons continue to destroy lives, they will remain an important issue within the international community. Reaching universal ratification of the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Ottawa Treaty may help significantly lower the number of civilian casualties resulting from the use of these weapons, but many states refuse to adhere to either treaty, mostly citing security reasons. Disagreements such as these will no doubt continue to spur debate in the world arena in the foreseeable future; however, moving forward, states should act creatively but practically in seeking strategies to reduce the dangers of cluster munitions and antipersonnel landmines faced by thousands of civilians across the world.
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DECREASING THE NUMBER OF CHILD SOLDIERS USED IN STATE MILITARIES

The use of children in armed conflict is a widespread occurrence, one that affects thousands of individuals every year. According to the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, published in 2007, a child soldier is any individual below the age of 18 who is recruited or used by a military or armed group for any purpose, including as a combatant, spy, or porter. Child soldiers are often unlawfully recruited by the armed forces of a state, either through violent coercion or at an age younger than legally permitted in that country. It should be noted that while current international standards do not forbid individuals aged 16 and 17 years from volunteering for military service, this practice is still frowned upon by much of the international community. The United Nations documented 4,000 cases in 2013 where children were recruited and used in conflict, but thousands more children are assumed to be serving with state armed forces in various countries throughout the world.

The United Nations is very involved with this issue, and its various bodies and entities have deliberated on the subject for years. The Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict serves as the main body within the United Nations that advocates for child soldiers and similar causes. The Special Representative spreads awareness of this issue, provides reintegration assistance for former child soldiers, and aids in collecting information on this subject for other agencies and individuals. While the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child take part in work to curb the use of child soldiers, the Security Council has also been instrumental in passing resolutions, such as Resolutions 1261 and 1612, which further this cause as well.

Adopted in 1989 by the UN General Assembly, the Convention on the Rights of the Child prohibits states parties from recruiting or using children under the age of 15 for armed conflict. In 2000 the General Assembly passed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, a treaty that set 18 as the minimum age of soldiers directly participating in hostilities and for compulsory recruitment by a state’s armed forces. States party to the Optional Protocol are required to submit a legally binding declaration setting a minimum voluntary recruitment age and defining specific safeguards for legal recruitment. Most states have signed and/or ratified both treaties, but several signatories have been accused of continuing to recruit children into their armed forces.

Several other international criminal, labor, and humanitarian laws have been put in place in order to deter child recruitment by state armed forces. The Rome Statute, which established the International Criminal Court in 2002, prohibits under any circumstances the conscription and enlistment of children younger than 15 years of age, as well as their direct use in hostilities. The International Labor Organization Convention Minimum Age Convention of 1973 requires states parties to take efforts to abolish all forms of child labor and set a minimum age of 18 for employment that may
harm the health or morals of young individuals. Adopted in 1999, the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention demands that states parties eliminate extremely harmful forms of child labor, including compulsory recruitment of children for armed conflict.

The UN Security Council has passed several resolutions to monitor and curb the use of children in state militaries. Under Resolution 1379, the UN Secretary-General releases an annual report listing states that recruit and use children. Resolution 1460 requires these listed countries to begin talks with the United Nations, agree to action plans to cease child recruitment and use, and implement these plans within a specified time frame. Mentioned earlier, Resolution 1612 established a system to monitor and report violations against children in conflict, including their illegal recruitment and direct use in hostilities. In addition to this, the resolution also created the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which recommends actions that governments, donors, and other UN actors can take to stop the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict.

The international community has several options when confronting this subject. The promotion and adherence to the international treaties regarding child soldiers remains one of the strongest actions states can take to protect young individuals from the horrors of armed conflict. Understanding the overwhelmingly negative effects war can have on children and providing reasons for states to refrain from involving these individuals in conflict may aid in stimulating productive conversation between nations on this issue. Assisting nations who wish to eliminate these practices within their borders will also be paramount moving forward, as some states simply do not have the resources to push forward their own protective measures. A combination of these strategies will improve the international community’s chances of ensuring that children will not be exposed to armed conflict in their most vulnerable years.
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Global energy production and use is one of the most important areas of focus for the United Nations. As of 2011, 2.5 billion people were without access to modern forms of energy, with 1.5 billion lacking access to electricity altogether. The global demand for energy has sharply increased over the past few decades, due primarily to population growth and the ever-growing role of technology in nearly all aspects of human life. In fact, statistics from the World Energy Council show that demand for energy rose faster than expected between 1993 and 2011 and that this trend is expected to continue. Different forms of energy, especially renewable sources, must be developed to meet this growing demand.

Although the large majority of energy is still generated with fossil fuels, the importance of renewable sources in the global energy portfolio has grown dramatically over the last forty years. A large amount of attention was first given to renewable energy during the 1970s, as volatile oil prices demonstrated the need to diversify energy production. In 1981, the United Nations hosted the Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy in Nairobi, which discussed many alternative forms of energy and led to the adoption of the Nairobi Program of Action for the Development and Utilization of New and Renewable Sources of Energy. As a result, the General Assembly created the Committee on the Development and Utilization of New and Renewable Sources of Energy in 1992. In 2002, as part of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the United Nations adopted the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation which called for an increase in the percentage of global energy use from renewable sources. In 2011, the United Nations and the World Bank started the Sustainable Energy for All Initiative, which sets goals of providing universal access to electricity and modern fuels for cooking, doubling the rate of improvement in energy efficiency, and doubling the share of renewable energy by 2030. Finally, in 2012, the General Assembly declared the years of 2014-2024 to be the United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All.

The World Energy Council identifies 8 types of renewable energy, each with different pros and cons. Nuclear power is highly efficient and generally has moderate and predictable costs, but faces rising compliance costs, concerns about waste disposal, and public fears of catastrophic accidents. Hydro power benefits from low operating costs and an absence of waste, but requires large amounts of land for significant projects and often faces widespread public resistance due to forced relocation and local environmental effects. Wind can be a simple and easy installed source of energy without waste or fuel costs, especially in remote areas, but suffers from intermittent power generation, grid integration challenges, and high initial costs that often require government subsidies. Solar energy is highly reliable, quickly installable, and useful in remote areas, but much like wind power faces problems with
intermittency, grid connection, and high costs. Bioenergy is incredibly simple to produce and can easily serve as an alternative energy source for transportation, but faces logistical problems and creates some harmful emissions. Finally, geothermal, marine, and peat can also be useful sources of renewable energy, but only in limited geographic areas.

A number of global issues are affected by renewable energy use. One of the most well-known is climate change. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the majority of global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions come from the consumption of fossil fuels. Lowering these emissions while still meeting global energy demand will require the continued development of renewable energy sources. Sustainable access to energy is also incredibly important for economic development, and renewable energy can perform a large role in this effort for the least developed countries. Additionally, as lack of access to natural resources is often a cause of conflict around the world, developing renewable energy sources can help promote peace and reduce conflict globally.

Despite these benefits of renewable resource, significant barriers to their adoption still exist. In fact, between 1993 and 2011, the percentage of global energy supply from fossil fuels remained constant at 76%. One of the most important barriers to renewable energy production is simply cost. Especially in the cases of wind and solar energy, prices of renewable energy tend to be higher than those of energy generated from fossil fuels. Countries that rely heavily on renewable resources as part of their energy portfolio face some of the highest energy prices in the world. To face the problem of high costs, the World Bank suggests that governments phase out untargeted fossil fuel subsidies, use targeted subsidies for renewable resources to promote access, establish a price for carbon emissions, adopt strict standards for energy efficiency, introduce policy incentives for renewable energy, and promote a good investment climate for energy. Today, this problem is even more significant in the face of falling oil prices. If this downward trend continues for several more months or years, countries may continue to rely on fossil fuels due to their lower costs and investment in renewable energy development may decrease. Now is truly a key time to discuss the promotion of renewable energy resources.
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Macroeconomic Policy Question Affecting Member States

Economic issues are always extremely important for member states, but economic policies have been highlighted since the financial crisis of 2008. While the crisis began in developed countries and had significant effects on those economies, drastic shocks were also felt in the economies of developing countries. This was for a number of reasons, including banking failures, reduction in domestic lending, reduction in export earnings, and reduction in financial flows to developing countries. The end result was much lower rates of growth in many of the least developed countries. Macroeconomic policies must be used to continue the reversal of this trend and to solve other, lesser known issues.

One key area in which macroeconomic policy can be used is in promoting growth in member states. The different ways in which this can be accomplished vary based on the economic conditions in each individual country. In countries suffering from an overreliance on exports, policies to increase domestic consumption and reduce savings rates are necessary to correct the trade imbalance. In post-conflict countries, macroeconomic policy can be used to promote growth and development by contributing to the sustainability of peace. Examples of such policies include filling the demand gap created by a lack of economic activity in the private sector, finding new sources of revenue, and actively managing exchange rates to promote competitiveness. In countries rich with natural resources, governments must attempt to diversify the economy to avoid over-reliance on one resource, prevent market distortions created by huge levels of investment, and reducing economic inequality that often occurs in these economies. These are just some of the ways that appropriate macroeconomic policies can be used to promote growth in different economies.

Another area in which macroeconomic policy can be utilized is in efforts to reduce poverty. One way this can be done is by introducing policies designed to increase employment. Obviously, being employed is a first step in escaping poverty, and poor, unskilled workers are usually the first to lose their jobs when unemployment increases. Counterintuitively, controlled amounts of inflation can actually be beneficial for poverty reduction, as small amounts of inflation are often linked to an increase in employment. Additionally, most people in poverty tend to be debtors, and inflation in an economy lowers the real value of debts. Furthermore, policies designed to stabilize the economy, such as investment in infrastructure, technology, and human resources, help poverty reduction, especially in the least developed countries. Developing countries tend to have a large number of people just above the poverty line, and any economic contractions can lead to a disproportionate increase in the amount of people below this line. Finally, increased public expenditure in sectors like healthcare, education, and security can improve the quality of life for the poor and help people escape poverty.

One other area in which good macroeconomic can be beneficial to member states, though certainly not the only other area, is in the promotion of gender equality.
UN Women works with member states to create macroeconomic policies that empower women. Examples of such policies used in the past are creating subsidies targeted toward trafficked women, survivors of domestic violence, and women filing for divorce, developing stronger social safety nets for households headed by women, and increasing investment in areas of the economy that tend to employ more women. These policies have had significant success in improving the condition of women in many developing countries.

One of the key areas of macroeconomic policy that the United Nations is directly involved in is the gathering of data and statistics on macroeconomic conditions. This is usually done on a regional basis, with groups like the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean, and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific focusing on data in their respective regions. These commissions also provide macroeconomic policy recommendations for countries within their purview, which can be tailored to respond to regional economic needs and trends. They will continue to play an increased role moving forward as the United Nations attempts to help member states continue their recovery from the financial crisis.
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Due to the increasing secrecy of many nations regarding security and interrogation methods, and understanding that many member states are in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the issue of torture—particularly state sponsored—must be addressed.

Certain member states, including the Philippines, United States, and Mexico have recently faced allegations over state-sponsored torture. The torture report put out by the US government is a good tool in getting background knowledge on the US’s involvement in torture. The United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment has currently been ratified in 157 member states. Article 1.1 states:

“For the purpose of this Convention, the term "torture" means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him, or a third person, information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in, or incidental to, lawful sanctions.”

In 1977 the Declaration of Tokyo was put forth and contains a useful definition of torture: “For the purpose of this Declaration, torture is defined as the deliberate, systematic or wanton infliction of physical or mental suffering by one or more persons acting alone or on the orders of any authority, to force another person to yield information, to make a confession, or for any other reason.”

For more information on high profile torture cases, the Amnesty International (a human rights focused NGO) website is a fantastic tool. Their definition reads: “Torture is the systematic and deliberate infliction of acute pain by one person on another, or on a third person, in order to accomplish the purpose of the former against the will of the latter.”
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In 2002, the UN adopted six goals related to promoting education to be completed by 2015. They include:

- Goal 1: Expand early childhood care and education
- Goal 2: Provide free and compulsory primary education for all
- Goal 3: Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults
- Goal 4: Increase adult literacy
- Goal 5: Achieve gender parity
- Goal 6: Improve the quality of education

In a continuation of this ongoing project to promote education for all, we will be discussing the promotion of childhood literacy. UNICEF and UNESCO both affirm that it is unlikely these goals will be reached by the end of this year. According to UNESCO, there are approximately one billion illiterate adults around the world and women make up two thirds of all illiterate people. In a 2014 progress report, UNICEF stated, “Globally, the youth literacy rate increased from 83 per cent to 89 per cent over two decades, while the number of illiterate youth declined from 170 million to 126 million. Regional and gender disparities persist, however. Literacy is lowest in least developed countries and higher among males than females. In the most recent years for which data are available, young women accounted for 61 per cent of the total illiterate youth.” This gender disparity is significant as is the relation between income and illiteracy. In this same UNICEF report it is articulated the statistics behind this disparity: “Gender disparity patterns vary between countries in different income groups. Among low income countries, disparities are commonly at the expense of girls: 20% achieve gender parity in primary education, 10% in lower secondary education and 8% in upper secondary education. Among middle and high income countries, where more countries achieve parity at any level, the disparities are increasingly at the expense of boys as one moves up to the lower and upper secondary levels. For example, 2% of upper middle income countries have disparity at the expense of boys in primary school, 23% in lower secondary school and 62% in upper secondary school.”

Regions with the lowest literacy rates and the largest gender gaps are primarily in South Asia and West and Central Africa. UNICEF also reports “Worldwide, 91 per cent of primary-school-age children were enrolled in school in 2012...The challenge is most acute in West and Central Africa, where net enrolment is 73 per cent. Although the number of out-of-school children of primary school age declined globally from 100 million to 58 million between 2000 and 2012, progress has stalled since 2007.” The US NGO Reading Rockets reminds us that, “All of the domains of a child’s development — physical, social-emotional, cognitive, language and literacy—are interrelated and interdependent.” According to the National Adult Literacy Survey, “in the US alone, adult illiteracy carries an estimated price tag of more than $17 billion per year as a result of lost income and tax revenue, welfare, unemployment, crime and
incarceration, and training cost for business and industry." These implications are troubling and it is important we don’t ignore them. UNICEF and UNESCO are two great sources for more information. I encourage you to read their full reports on literacy and primary education.

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THE SITUATION IN SYRIA

The situation in Syria refers to the Syrian Civil War, which began in May of 2011, following widespread anti-government protests beginning in March of the same year. The conflict is primarily between the Bashar Al-Assad led regime and a number of rebel groups. The rebel groups are composed mainly of the Free Syrian Army and the Al Qaeda affiliated Al-Nusra Front. Notable international supporters of the Syrian regime are Russia, China, Venezuela, Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. Notable supporters of the opposition group include the United States, France, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Libya, and the United Kingdom. The presence of the Al-Nusra Front has made cooperation between rebel groups and their supporters difficult. Many countries see the group as too radical to be supported, while many other countries see the group favorably in comparison to the United States’ controversial involvement.

The conflict is a major international humanitarian catastrophe, with over 220,000 people killed since it began. The conflict started as the Syrian government deployed the army into the cities of Daraa and Homs, and into parts of the capital city, Damascus. The conflict escalated in July with the siege of Hama, which left hundreds dead. In August of 2011, Assad’s regime received widespread criticism for its brutal crackdowns and alleged crimes against humanity. In November, Syria was removed from the Arab League for failing to implement a peace plan. In February of 2012, Russia and China vetoed United Nations declarations condemning Syrian violence. A United Nations-brokered peace was negotiated on April 11 as part of the UN’s peacekeeping and observation efforts, but continually escalating violence ultimately forced the United Nations to withdraw its mission forces by June 16. In August of 2012, Syria was officially charged with war crimes by the United Nations Human Rights Council in the massacre of Houla in May, which left hundreds of civilians dead. Violence continues throughout 2012, while rebel forces clash and compete for control with regime forces in Homms, Damascus, Aleppo, and other major cities. In April of 2013, France and Britain report to the United Nations that Syria has used chemical weapons against rebel forces. In May 2013, Lebanese military group Hezbollah begins sending troops to fight as aid to the Syrian army, following Israeli airstrikes in Syria. In an effort to aid the rebel forces, the European Union lifts the arms embargo to Syrian rebels on May 27. It is reported that by June 2013, more than 93,000 have died as a result of the conflict. Syria is found to have deployed chemical weapons, and by September of 2013, Syria’s chemical weapons facilities were destroyed. In January of 2014, photos emerge of Assad’s regime torturing prisoners on a large scale.

An additional obstacle to peace in Syria is the presence of ISIL, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, which has quickly become dominant in parts of Syria. ISIL opposes the Syrian government and the moderate rebel forces alike, which hinders the
efforts of peacekeeping organizations, and to some extent distorts the priorities of Syrian missions.

The United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) was established by Security Council resolution 2043 of 21 April 2012 as part of the Joint Special Envoy’s six-point plan designed to end the escalating conflict. The mission was part of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), established in 1974 to monitor tensions and promote peace in the Syrian region.

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THE CONFLICT WITH ISLAMIC STATE

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is a terrorist organization led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and has branded itself as a transnational Islamic State. The group is formed primarily from the remains of Tanzim Al Qaeda fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (Al Qaeda Organization in the Country of the Two Rivers) which became known commonly as Al Qaeda in Iraq. The group has risen to international prominence following its aggressive military occupation of areas in Syria following the eruption of violence in March of 2011. The group has some ties to Al Qaeda but is generally recognized as the more eminent global threat. There are a few key features of ISIL that make it a unique global threat.

The first major feature of ISIL is that it has a well armed and well-trained military. Many of the military leaders of ISIL were leaders under the regime of Saddam Hussein and have many years experience fighting the United States as insurgents. Many now consider the group to be a militia rather than a terrorist group, and see its actions as part of an ongoing open war. The war it fights is a transnational war, meaning that it crosses multiple national boundaries. Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan are all immediately affected.

A second major feature is the group’s demonstrated financial capability. Since 2011 ISIL has controlled the majority of Syria’s oil refineries, and the inability for international actors such as the US to police the sale of its oil supplies has led the group to relative financial power. It has been estimated that the group makes anywhere from $1-3 million US dollars per day from extortion, kidnappings, oil sales, theft and human trafficking. Qatar and Saudi Arabia have been accused by some of financing the group, although no evidence has been shown to support that claim.

A third major feature of ISIL is its Islamist goals. Although most international Islamic communities have ridiculed the group for its claim to be an “Islamic State,” it has set out for itself the goal of being a worldwide caliphate. Al-Baghdadi has proclaimed an Islamic Caliphate in Syria and Iraq, with himself as Caliph. Much of its media campaigns have involved recruiting soldiers and supporters from across the world. While most come from the Middle East, others have come as far as central and western Europe and the Americas. The propaganda campaign of ISIL has earned the group notoriety, especially surrounding the group’s practice of public executions, often with children present in the video. Perhaps no other terrorist organization in the world has had as much attention as ISIL.

In August of 2014, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2170 condemning the human rights abuses of ISIL and the Al-Nusra Front. Although the Security Council listed ISIL as a splinter-group of Al-Qaida, it is widely disputed. The document names 6 individuals in connection to Al-Nusra Front and Al-Qaida and highlights specific cases of human rights abuses in its wide-ranging condemnation of the group.
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