



GRITMUN
Human Rights
Council
Background Guide

Human Rights Council

Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalism

Dear Delegates,

We are very pleased to welcome you all to the first GRITMUN at UMBC. We would like to introduce you to the Office of the United Nations Human Rights Council. The topic that we will be working today will be on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalism. This conference background guide will help you further build your research - but keep in mind that this guide should not be the only source that should be relied on. The more research you do outside of the background guide, the better debate in the committee will be. Background knowledge about this topic and your assigned member state will provide the perspective you need to propose and draft resolutions. We look forward to seeing you at the conference!

Best regards,

Swati Singh and Zane Poffenberger, United Nations Human Rights Council

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The Human Rights Council (HRC) is one of the main organs of the United Nations (UN), and it is “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.” During this committee session, the Human Rights Council will discuss preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalism globally, focusing on the acts perpetrated by non-state actors. The HRC, as a UN body, has an international scope, working to promote the United Nations Declaration of Human rights for people around the world - including Africa, Asia, the Americas, Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

The term “violent extremism” is commonly used hand in hand with “terrorism,” however, terrorism is only one example of “violent extremism,” according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. This dynamic between non-state extremist groups, and regional governments, forms from a gap where radicalization and violence can breed. The United Nations Development Programme lists some risk factors for the breeding of non-state extremist groups as “unemployment or poverty, perceptions of injustice, human-rights violations, social-political exclusion, widespread corruption or sustained mistreatment of certain groups.” When the structure of the government is lacking, non-state actors will fill in the gaps. When the people of a member state are already being mistreated by the government, the swift manipulation and radicalization of a population will occur more easily.

The 21st century has brought a new wave of violent extremism, and with advances in technology and communication - the world has become more and more aware of the actions being perpetrated with the Taliban entering Afghanistan in 2001. Globally, this list of attacks from violent extremists and radicals is increasing.

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All of these increased numbers of violent events have captured everyone's attention. There are still innocent lives being taken that go unnoticed and unreported in many Arab States, Africa, Central Europe, and Asia.

In the midst of these conflicts, Member State's governments are still failing to address the inequalities that led to the radicalization in the first place, increasing the size of the vacuum that allows non-state factors to take control over more people through a monarchy, such as Hezbollah and ISIS. The failing risk of these political transitions with weak institutions and law enforcement that cannot keep a check and balance provides the gap for violent extremism to persist. Therefore, as a part of the HRC, your job is to work on coming up with solutions to protect innocent lives.

Violent extremism and radicalism has caused turmoil and suffering throughout large parts of human history. These conflicts have been often marked by violations of human rights through mass killings, displacement and other violent means. The end of World War II and the world shock around the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany against the Jewish people prompted the newly founded United Nations (UN) to establish a specific council to protect human rights. The UN established the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 1946 which quickly produced and adopted the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In 2006, the UN Commission on Human Rights was replaced with the UN Human Rights Council which operates in a similar manner and on the same issue. Although there are many violent extremist and radical movements currently facing the world, it is important to look back in time to understand how past leaders have attempted to counter its ability to exist.

The end of World War II brought about a new order in which international organizations would bring states together to address global issues. The issue of protecting and ensuring human rights in the global community has been a difficult task for the UN. Extremist ideologies exist on every continent and have been adopted by terrorist groups and even states.

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These ideologies often place blame on certain minorities groups within a state and subsequently utilize violent means such torture and killings to enforce their manner of thinking. Many nations such as former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Cambodia, The People's Republic of China, Sudan, Syria and Iraq have had either terrorist groups or state sponsored violations of human rights. The conflicts of the past and how the UN Commission on Human Rights will assist in understanding what action can be taken. The UN Commission on Human Rights has a varied history on how it set out to and to what extent it accomplished its goal of promoting human rights. From its establishment in 1946 to 1967, the Commission mostly focused on promoting human rights and assisting states in crafting treaties. However, in 1967 the Commission adopted a policy of interventionism and the Commission became a body of investigation, criticism and promotion of Human rights through action.

However, the Commission's resolutions which had no enforcement mechanisms, were often criticized as ineffective in preventing human rights violations or promoting human rights. One major conflict that drew criticism against the council was their failure to label the ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia as a genocide. The Commission on Human Rights was eventually replaced with the UN Council on Human Rights which continued the work to promote the maintenance of human rights in the global community. The history of the violations of human rights by extremist and radical state action and groups is well documented throughout modern history. The UN has attempted to promote human rights and prevent violations of them, but many nations, NGOs and advocacy groups criticize its effectiveness. History of past events and actions can aid you in the need to address the current need to promote human rights and prevent human rights violations.

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The topic of preventing and combating violent extremism and radicalism in the context of promoting and protecting human rights has always presented a challenge to the Human Rights Council. The council's mandate, as mentioned earlier, implores that the body must ensure that "universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all and address situations of violations of human rights, including gross and systematic violations, and make recommendations thereon". The body therefore is responsible for investigating, discussing, making reports on possible human rights violations around the globe. The global community has seen arise in extremist and radical behavior that endangers human rights by not only state actors such as Myanmar and Venezuela but also non-state actors such as ISIL in the Middle East and Boko Haram in Nigeria. Therefore it is the responsibility of the Human Rights Council to promote the protection of human rights to member states, but also develop a capacity to combat non-state actors ability to endanger citizen's rights within their respective state.

The Human Rights Council has utilized a number of methods in an attempt to combat violent and extremist action from further damaging human rights within certain areas. In Myanmar, both the government and extremist Buddhist groups have been reported to be conducting genocidal acts against the Rohingya people, a minority Muslim group. The Human Rights council conducted a UN fact finding mission and reports on possible human rights violations. This mission, along with testimony from NGOs and Rohingya people promoted the UNHRC to adopt a resolution that established an independent commission to continue to collect information on possible violations and continue to monitor the situation. The Council eventually adopted a resolution that called for six generals within the Myanmar military to be prosecuted for committing genocide against the Rohingya people. The Council has many tools to utilize in upholding its mandate, but extremist behavior beyond states has been more difficult to counter.

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Non-state actors such as terrorist groups have been known to commit human rights violations in many conflict areas due to the vacuum created by the weakened government of a Member State. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is an example of an extremist group that gained large swaths of land and resources when it controlled territory in Iraq and Syria. ISIL is not a sovereign state and therefore, is not an entity beholden to any international body. The UNHRC did issue a resolution condemning the atrocities and war crimes that ISIL committed against various populations, but the Council was left with very few options in attempting to prevent the human rights violations, because they are not as monitored due to ISIL not being a sovereign state. Eventually, a coalition led by the United States and other nations reduced much of ISIL's control to a few areas, but the UNHRC was unable to prevent the ongoing human rights violations that were being perpetrated by the groups extremist acts and ideology.

The UNHRC has a wide capacity to adopt resolution and action in order to promote and protect human rights around the globe. The issue of violent extremism and radicalism embraced by both state and non-state actors has presented a highly strenuous situation for the Council. Conflicts continue to rage around the globe where violent ideologies are restricting human rights and endangering the freedoms of millions. The Council is responsible for ensuring that its mandate of protecting human rights and freedoms along with investigating any violations needs to be at the forefront of any resolution or action adopted by the body. Tens of millions of people have had their rights and freedoms limited by violent extremist states and non-state actors. The action taken by the UNHRC on current areas of concern such as South Sudan, Yemen, Venezuela and many other regions will likely determine if the council can uphold its mandate and provide action for the international community.

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A country's stance on issues within the UNHRC largely depends on their own record on the issue of human rights and freedoms. States such as Spain, Australia, Japan, South Korea and other democratic states call for the UNHRC to involve itself in human rights concerns around the globe. They are more likely to call for fact finding missions, testimony from groups and individuals and to have the council adopt resolutions calling for action. These nations often have little to no issues within their own borders regarding human rights, but are often the first ones to condemn or call for investigations on possible violations by state and non-actors alike.

In contrast, there are many nations who sit on the UNHRC who have been criticized and condemned themselves for their human rights record. States like Qatar, Bahrain, Afghanistan and Pakistan have been criticized by other states, NGOs and even by UN bodies as being either repressive towards its citizens or denying certain human rights such as freedom of religion. These states are often more hesitant to adopt resolutions or at least call for greater evidence prior to adopting resolutions. Finally, there are states on the UNHRC that have been condemned or cited by the UN for their record on human rights. States like Sudan, Libya, the Philippines are states where governments have perpetrated human rights violations and have been condemned for it. These states are often reluctant to pass resolutions about possible violations and are often defensive about their past on human rights.

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These questions are here to help you complete your research and provide insight to our debate at GRITMUN:

- How can member states ensure that non-member states do not violate human rights declaration?
- In what ways can member and non-member states come with comprehensive strategies to protect the human rights declaration including the threats by the non-state actors?
- How can HRC work with Non-Governmental Organizations to prevent the rise of extremist and radicalist innocent lives?

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