



BRAMUN2026

Brazil Model United Nations

Study Guide

United Nations Human Rights Council

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LETTER FROM THE DAIS

Dear Delegates,

We hope this message finds you well, and we are truly delighted to have the opportunity to chair the Human Rights Council at this edition of BRAMUN—hopefully, you are just as excited as we are. Our names are Lara,



Rapha, and Zoe, and we will be your three chairs. What we undoubtedly share is a deep passion for the Human Rights Council: a forum where the world's most pressing human rights challenges are examined and where the defence of dignity, justice, and equality remains at the centre of every discussion—something increasingly vital in today's global landscape.

This year, our committee will be focusing on two highly significant topics: Criminal Dominance in Marginalised Communities and Human Rights in War Zones. Both issues demand careful research, critical thinking, and an open-minded approach. We encourage you to engage with these topics thoughtfully—come prepared to defend your country's stance, but also to consider new perspectives and collaborate with others. The true strength of our committee lies in transforming diverse viewpoints into constructive, actionable resolutions.

Above all, our priority as your chairs is to ensure that the Human Rights Council remains a safe, respectful, and dynamic space for all participants. We trust you to represent your countries with professionalism, respect, and intellectual curiosity.

We are genuinely looking forward to the debates, diplomacy, and creative solutions that will emerge from this committee. Whether this is your first conference or you are a seasoned MUN participant, your voice is valued here. Do not hesitate to ask questions, challenge assumptions, or take initiative—this is the place to grow as thinkers, speakers, and representatives.

We, as your chairs, are here to support you every step of the way. Please feel free to reach out with any questions, concerns, or ideas before or during the conference; our emails are listed below.

Sincerely,

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COMMITTEE DESCRIPTION



Photo inside of the UN Human Rights Chamber - The Human Rights and Alliance of Civilizations Room, Geneva, Switzerland

(Jean-Marc Ferré UN Photo: <https://www.un.org/en/ccoi/human-rights-council>)

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is an intergovernmental body within the UN, made up of 47 member states, responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights globally. It meets regularly at least three times a year, usually in February/March, June/July, and September/October, at its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. These sessions may span 3, 4, or 5 weeks, depending on the range of topics under discussion. In addition, special sessions can be called at any time to address urgent human rights crises, provided one-third of member states request them.



Originally established by the UN General Assembly as the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, the council was created to support millions of vulnerable people who had been displaced in the aftermath of World War II. While the agency still carries out its mandate to assist refugees, asylum seekers, stateless individuals, and forcibly displaced communities, its mission has since broadened to encompass the protection of all human rights issues worldwide. The head of the UN Human Rights Council is Jürg Lauber, the President for 2025. The UN has a separate, related role: the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which is currently held by Volker Türk

Topic A: Confronting Criminal Dominance Over Marginalised Communities



A major highway running past the shanty town was closed for hours because of a gun battle between the police and criminals that caused traffic jams on one of the city's main east-west arteries. Deep budget cuts to all Rio's public services because of the economic crisis has weakened police resources in the favelas.

(BBC - Photographer unknown):

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-41369507>

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Introduction

Economic disparities, or economic inequality, refer to the uneven distribution of resources like income, wealth, and economic opportunities among different groups in a society. These disparities are driven by complex political phenomena, including globalization, technology, public policies, historical injustices such as racism, and unequal access to education and healthcare. The impacts of economic disparities can include strained social cohesion, hindered economic growth, increased social problems, and a reduced quality of life for disadvantaged populations. In the absence of formal support, residents often form tight-knit informal settlements, where survival depends on mutual aid; and, increasingly, the influence of local criminal networks.

These usually densely populated communities are built without government permission, on steep or unstable land. Due to reasons such as lack of formal recognition, budget priorities, presence of dangerous groups, police neglect, discrimination, and corruption, there is often a lack of access to basic public services within these communities. These needs tend to be filled by criminal organizations, such as drug trafficking gangs or militias (often composed of off-duty police and prison guards), who take control, by providing services and establishing local government and law—and through that, systems of justice, punishment, etc. In many cases, they provide basic services such as food, loans, protection, or even conflict resolution, which fosters community loyalty or, in many cases, unwanted dependency. Correspondingly, power is often established in a violent manner, leaving residents feeling trapped or vulnerable (Wallenfeldt). This is often accompanied by staggering crime, with frequent firearm exchanges causing harm, including to innocent bystanders and children. A good example is shantytowns, or “favelas” in Brazil. The 2022

Census found 12,348 Favelas and urban Communities. According to Rio on Watch, a significant majority of the slums are still controlled by criminal organizations, however, the Pacifying Police Units (UPPs) are stationed in 174, or 18% of the favelas.

Gangs and criminal groups can benefit significantly from establishing such territorial and social control. By providing services and establishing governance where it once lacked, residents may be less likely to cooperate with law enforcement, effectively shielding the gang's operations. These areas also become key recruitment grounds, especially for youth with limited access to education or employment, as gangs offer a sense of identity, status, and income that formal institutions fail to provide. Over time, some gangs gain a degree of legitimacy, especially when they are perceived as more reliable or less abusive than the police. Control over territory also allows them to run illegal enterprises - from drug trafficking to extortion - with minimal interference. In this way, gangs benefit not only financially but also strategically, turning overlooked communities into strongholds of criminal power.

When a criminal group establishes power and authority, combined with outside stigma and marginalisation, the extent to which these communities interact with outside politics or businesses is often limited. Local power and institutions, at times, can be even more influential than national governments (Resende). Not only does this make it more difficult for state institutions to impose themselves into the slums, but, incrementally, fear grows within the residents of opposing the criminal authoritarians. This creates a sort of positive feedback loop — the state's absence enables illicit control, and that control, in turn, keeps the state out. Approximately 1.1 billion people currently live in slums or slum-like conditions in cities, with 2 billion more expected in the next 30 years. (UNStats)

This doesn't just have local implications. It can hinder both a country's internal and external sovereignty. Criminal dominance in marginalized communities promotes authoritarianism and violence, eroding both democratic

integrity and state sovereignty. When large groups of a country live under the pillars of violence, the very foundations of democracy are weakened. These groups impose control through coercion, fear, and parallel systems of authority, leaving residents with little space to participate in civic life or exercise political rights. The lack of public services, combined with the pervasive presence of criminal actors, effectively suppresses political engagement and alienates entire communities from democratic processes. Moreover, practices such as clientelism — where politicians exploit the vulnerability of these populations by offering short-term promises in exchange for votes — further distort democratic outcomes and perpetuate cycles of dependency and mistrust. In Brazil, for instance, favelas make up a shocking 8% of the population as of 2022; a percentage so large it could overturn whole elections.

Externally, the existence of such lawless zones damages a nation's international image, exposing deep social inequalities and governance failures that transcend borders. Beyond domestic consequences, these power vacuums enable the expansion of transnational crime networks, as drug trafficking routes and illicit economies connect marginalized areas with neighboring countries. Drug trafficking routes often run through Brazil's vast and poorly monitored territory - including favelas - and connect with neighboring countries such as Paraguay, Bolivia, and Colombia, forming a part of the wider South American drug trade. These routes are used to move narcotics such as cocaine and marijuana across borders, often toward ports for eventual export to Europe, West Africa, and North America (Miraglia). This not only fuels violence and corruption across regions but also undermines international cooperation and regional stability, turning local criminal dominance into a global security concern.

History

Early Roots of Criminalisation

The relationship between crime, control, and marginalisation has evolved over centuries, shaped by social hierarchies, economic challenges, and state policies that often criminalised vulnerability rather than actual violence. The origin of criminal dominance can be traced to the colonial era, when entire communities were branded as criminals. The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 in British India stands as a factual example. Nomadic and tribal groups were registered, surveilled, and restricted in movement based solely on their birth. Similar dynamics were employed worldwide. In the United States and Europe, minority groups were disproportionately subjected to policing and imprisonment. From the nation's founding through the mid-20th century, people of color accounted for nearly half of all prisoners despite representing much smaller portions of the population. These early systems established the ideological foundation that linked marginalisation to criminality.

Institutionalising Control in the 20th Century

During the twentieth century, these discriminatory practices evolved into formal systems of mass control. In the United States, the emergence of the "War on Drugs" and "Tough on Crime" policies institutionalised racial and social bias through mandatory sentencing and aggressive policing. The "broken windows" approach, aimed at maintaining public order, criminalized poverty by targeting petty offenses and visible disorder in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Similarly, in post-colonial states, poor or minority populations faced punitive measures rather than social support. Marginalized communities became subject to continuous surveillance and incarceration, leading to entrenched cycles of poverty and imprisonment. For example, during the 1980s in the United States, the introduction of mandatory minimum sentences for crack cocaine—disproportionately used in Black communities—led to significantly

longer prison terms compared to powder cocaine, which was more commonly associated with white users.

The Late 20th Century and the Persistence of Structural Inequality

By the late twentieth century, the consequences of these policies were evident. Over policing, economic issues, and limited access to education reinforced conditions that fostered crime. Governments responded with further punishment rather than reform, deepening the divide between law enforcement and the communities they served. Organised crime also took root in neglected areas, where the state's absence or corruption left space for non-state actors to assume control. In such environments, criminal groups offered protection and informal governance, creating a dual dominance, by both the state and by criminal organisations.

Current Situation

As state authority weakens, criminal dominance has become one of the most pressing governmental challenges worldwide, particularly in communities where poverty, social neglect, and weak institutions prevail. Across continents, the same pattern emerges: where the state retreats, criminal power takes over. In regions historically marked by social exclusion, such as urban slums, informal settlements, or rural peripheries, criminal networks have evolved into the *de facto* authorities. These groups fill the vacuum left by inadequate public services, providing what governments fail to deliver: security, justice, and livelihood, while simultaneously perpetuating fear and dependency through violence and coercion. This duality blurs the line between protector and oppressor, leaving residents caught between the brutality of the state and the control of illicit actors.

In Latin America, the world's most unequal region, organised crime has become a political force. Brazil's favelas, Mexico's cartel-dominated towns, and Haiti's gang-controlled districts illustrate how poverty, neglect, and corruption converge to undermine state authority. In Brazil, over 12,000 favelas host millions living under the competing rule of gangs and militias, both of which profit from the absence of legitimate governance (IBGE). Mexico's "narco zones" have developed parallel economies that rely on fear, patronage, and community integration (UMD). At the same time, Haiti's escalating gang warfare has rendered much of Port-au-Prince ungovernable, prompting UN intervention (OCCRP). These realities show that criminal dominance is not a symbol of chaos, but a structured response to inequality and state failure.

In Africa, weak institutions, political instability, and rapid urbanisation have created similar dynamics. The entanglement of weak institutions, rapid urbanisation, and political fragility has created fertile ground for criminal dominance.. In Nigeria, armed bandit groups and Boko Haram exploit poverty and distrust toward the state, controlling villages and displacing millions.

Somalia's fragmented justice system allows Al-Shabaab and other actors to operate in their own legal and taxation systems. While in South Africa, the legacy of apartheid's spatial segregation persists through gang dominance in Cape Town's townships, where criminal groups maintain community loyalty by providing protection and financial aid in the absence of reliable state intervention. Across the whole continent, the combination of corruption and underfunded law enforcement sustains an environment where crime often substitutes for governance.

Beyond Africa and Latin America, the dynamics of criminal dominance also extend across Asia. Across the region, governments often confront crime not through reform, but through repression, a strategy that deepens the very conditions it seeks to resolve. The Philippines' "war on drugs" and Myanmar's illicit mining industries exemplify how state violence and criminal economies can become intertwined, as both exploit vulnerable populations for power and profit. In China, sweeping anti-crime campaigns reflect a state-centric approach that prioritises authority over accountability, frequently at the expense of human rights. In India, the enduring stigma from colonial-era criminalisation continues to marginalise nomadic and denotified tribes, leaving them excluded from formal opportunities. Meanwhile, the triads of East Asia and methamphetamine networks in Southeast Asia transcend borders, linking poverty, migration, and weak governance into transnational exploitation.

Globally, these conditions have eroded trust in state institutions and blurred the boundaries between legality and illegality. International organisations such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UN-Habitat, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have attempted to bridge the gap between security and development, emphasising community policing, urban reform, and inclusion. Yet, the persistence of corruption, inequality, and lack of political will has hindered the process. This causes questions to arise surrounding not only the idea of good governance,

which has shifted and changed many times whilst this issue still exists, but the concept and fallacies of sovereignty and democracy as a whole. Does this issue represent a structural state failure so deeply embedded that its effects have become normalised within society, to the extent that successive governments have been unable to implement lasting solutions? Does it point to the enduring complexity of human governance — where marginalisation, informality, and resilience coexist in the absence of effective state presence? Or does it reveal the central priority of power in politics, where governments will focus on gaining and retaining power, rather than addressing challenging internal structural problems that affect a marginalised minority of the population?

Past UN Actions/Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Over the past two decades, the United Nations has developed a multifaceted approach to confronting criminal dominance in marginalized communities. The approach developed from once being focused on security-based, sometimes armed intervention when needed, to a more balanced approach, focusing on integrated strategies that combine governance, social development, and human rights.

In the early 2000s, UN-Habitat began framing urban exclusion and violence as interconnected issues, recognizing that the absence of state institutions in informal settlements created a power vacuum. To illustrate this, in 1996, Nairobi, Kenya, the “Safer Cities Programme” was established to address the aforementioned connections between social and cultural issues with urban violence. UN-Habitat worked with the Nairobi City Council, community leaders, and the police to introduce local safety audits, youth employment projects, and community-based crime prevention plans - re-establishing communication between residents and authorities, reducing tensions, and creating safer public spaces. The Nairobi project became a model for later “Safer Cities” initiatives in countries like South Africa, El Salvador, and Cameroon. UN programmes emphasized slum upgrading, access to housing, and local governance as essential components of public safety. This was an important milestone, as it acknowledged that restoring state legitimacy was an extremely difficult task, and policing alone would only instill more fear and widen the gap. Rather, properly addressing the issue requires investment in people, services, and infrastructure.

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 further solidified this perspective. SDG 11, which calls for making cities “inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable,” recognised that problems like crime, violence, and insecurity in cities are not just caused by criminals themselves, but actually stem

from social and political issues: poverty, inequality, lack of government presence, and poor public services.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) was established in 1997 through the merger of the United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) and the Centre for International Crime Prevention (CICP), aiming to strengthen the UN's capacity to combat drug trafficking, organized crime, corruption, and terrorism under a unified framework as interconnected issues. UNODC developed practical guidance for community-oriented policing, justice reform, and crime prevention through social and environmental design. These tools helped member states translate abstract goals into actionable strategies, emphasizing prevention, local engagement, and accountability. The 2010s therefore saw a shift from reactive policing toward preventive, people-centered approaches - an evolution that reflected growing recognition of the social roots of criminal dominance. For example, the "Handbook on Police Accountability, Oversight and Integrity" (2011) and the "Community-Oriented Policing Guide" (2014). These documents provide frameworks for building trust between police and marginalized communities, emphasizing prevention, transparency, and collaboration rather than force. This made real life changes, such as in Kenya's community policing initiative, known as "Nyumba Kumi" (Ten Houses). Implemented with UNODC's technical support, it encouraged citizens to work with local police to improve safety and share information on criminal activity within neighborhoods. This ended up being integrated into Kenya's National Police Service reforms, with the aspiration of reducing heavy-handed policing and increasing public trust, particularly in informal settlements like Kibera.

During this period, the UN also expanded initiatives focused on slum upgrading and community development. Through partnerships with local governments and NGOs, UN-Habitat worked to improve infrastructure, secure land rights, and strengthen local governance in marginalized areas where the state was largely absent. Keeping this in mind, said programmes were often

constrained by limited resources and political instability, and their success differed.

As organized crime became increasingly transnational in the late 2010s, the UN's focus expanded from local governance to regional security. Analytical work by UNODC and partner institutions such as the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) began documenting how criminal networks exploited weak state control in marginalized communities to facilitate trafficking, smuggling, and corruption across borders. These findings influenced Security Council debates, helping create resolutions, like UNSCR 2480 (2019) in Mali and UNSCR 2645 (2022) in Haiti, which formally recognized organized crime as a threat to peace and stability. In response, the UN began integrating crime prevention and governance restoration into its peacebuilding missions, reflecting a clearer understanding of the political nature of criminal power in fragile states.

By the 2020s, more assertive action was being taken. The Security Council responded by authorizing multinational support missions, imposing sanctions, and assisting local authorities in restoring governance and organizing elections. This marked a return to more security-heavy interventions, yet now mixed with development and governance objectives.

These approaches highlight how the issue has been approached differently and rightfully recognized as more complex over time. Confronting criminal dominance demands a balance between immediate stabilization and the gradual rebuilding of institutions. While security interventions can temporarily restore order, without legitimate local governance and sustained public services, their impact remains fragile and short-lived.

In recent years, the UN has increasingly emphasized regional cooperation and transnational strategies to curb the economic and logistical power of organized crime. By supporting cross-border initiatives, financial investigations, and arms-control measures, the organization seeks to dismantle the international

networks that sustain local criminal governance. However, the effectiveness of these measures depends heavily on political will and coordination among member states, which remains uneven.

POSITION OF MAJOR BLOCS

United States of America

The USA plays an important role in the global debate on criminal dominance over marginalised communities. Domestically, the issue is deeply rooted due to racial and social prejudice. Slavery, segregation, and systematic discrimination have all shaped policing patterns. The War on Drugs, declared in the 1970s, expanded punitive sentencing, disproportionately targeting black and Latino populations. Today, the United States maintains one of the highest incarceration rates globally, with minority groups mainly overrepresented. This created a cycle of poverty, criminalisation and social exclusion. Recent initiatives such as the First Step Act (2018) and the proposed George Floyd Justice in Policing Act signal an ongoing effort to reform sentencing, increase accountability, and reduce racial disparities. Civil movements, such as Black Lives Matter, have intensified domestic and international pressure for reform. The U.S. supports anti-crime capacity building through USAID and the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL).

France

France approaches this issue through the lens of universal republicanism, a model that emphasizes equality under the law while rejecting official recognition of ethnic or racial categories. This ideology complicates efforts to address racial disparities, as French law prohibits collecting data based on race or ethnicity. However, tensions persist between expectations and lived realities; communities of immigrant and muslim backgrounds, concentrated in urban areas, face disproportionate policing, unemployment, and social exclusion. Incidents of police violence and racial profiling have drawn the attention of both the international and national communities. Historically, France's colonial past in North and West Africa continues to shape its social standards, as many

descendants of colonised people occupy marginalized positions within French society. While the French government often frames these security issues in terms of counterterrorism and public order, France tends to reinforce systematic discrimination. In International forums, the country defends its model of universalism, emphasizing socio-economic development and civic integration over identity-based solutions.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom recognises the persistence of ethnic disparities in policing and the criminal justice system. People from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are disproportionately stopped, arrested, and incarcerated. Policies like stop-and-search have been widely criticized for embedding bias into daily policing. In response, the UK has undertaken reform programs such as Lammy Review (2017) and the Tackling Racial Disparity in the Criminal Justice System (2020) strategy, which aim to improve transparency. The UK's colonial past also continues to influence domestic and global perceptions of justice and policing. Nationally, public pressure following incidents like the Windrush scandal and police violence has led to renewed debate about structural racism. Internationally, the UK has promoted rule of law assistance and governance programs through the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), often focusing on policing and judicial reform in developing countries.

Egypt

Egypt's position on criminal dominance and marginalised communities is shaped by its security-centric governance model. The state has broad powers to counterterrorism and emergency laws, often leading to the criminalisation of political opposition, protest movements and emergency laws, often leading to the criminalisation of political opposition, protest movements and vulnerable groups. Marginalised populations, including rural poor, women, LGBTQ+

individuals, and religious minorities, often face limited access to justice, arbitrary detentions, and inadequate legal protection. Human rights groups, including Amnesty International and the Human Rights Watch, have documented widespread abuses such as enforced disappearances and unfair trials. Nevertheless, Egypt has cooperated with international agencies, such as the UNODC and UNDP, on justice sector reform and anti-corruption initiatives. Efforts have also been made to expand access to legal aid and improve juvenile justice systems. The government typically frames these reforms within its national security agenda, emphasizing stability and sovereignty over external criticism. Egypt adopts a defensive and sovereignty-oriented position, opposing external interference in its domestic affairs.

Somalia

Somalia's challenges come from decades of conflict, state fragility, and limited institutional capacity. The justice system is fragmented, combining formal, customary and Sharia frameworks. This structure often leaves marginalized groups, particularly women, internally displaced persons and minority groups without equal protection under the law. Criminal dominance in Somalia manifests not only through crime syndicates but also through non-state actors like Al-Shabaab, who exert territorial control and impose their own legal order. The Somali government, supported by UNODC, UNDP and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), has initiated reforms to strengthen the rule of law, rebuild courts, and train police forces. However, corruption, insecurity and resource mechanisms remain the main source of conflict resolution in rural areas, though they often exclude women and minority groups. Somalia advocates for international assistance and capacity-building, emphasizing respect for local customs while improving access to justice and human rights protections.

Nigeria

Nigeria faces a complex interplay of poverty, corruption, and institutional weakness within its criminal justice system. Marginalised communities, particularly in the northern regions and urban slums, suffer from limited access to justice, prolonged pretrial detention, and police misconduct. The Nigerian Police Force has been repeatedly accused of extrajudicial killings and corruption, most notably during the EndSARS protests of 2020, which drew global attention to police brutality. Despite adopting the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (2015) to streamline trials and protect detainees rights, enforcement remains inconsistent. Nigeria has collaborated with UNODC, the EU, and the African Union initiatives to combat corruption, trafficking, and organised crime. However, deep structural inequalities, ethnic divisions, and governance gaps continue to enable criminal dominance in marginalised areas, where informal or vigilante groups sometimes act as de authorities. Nigeria positions itself as a Global South advocate, emphasizing sovereignty, local context, and the need for international cooperation without imposition. It supports reforms that enhance transparency, training and community policing but highlight resource limitations and demand technical assistance.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description
1871	<p>In 1871, the British colonial government enacted the Criminal Tribes Act in India, marking one of the earliest examples of state-sponsored criminalisation of entire communities. The law required numerous nomadic and tribal groups to register with authorities, restricted their movement, and subjected them to constant surveillance, solely based on hereditary identity rather than individual guilt. This policy institutionalised the idea that poverty and marginalisation were signs of inherent criminality. Its legacy persisted long after independence, shaping discriminatory policing and social stigma against "denotified tribes". The Act stands as a foundational moment in the global history of criminal governance, revealing how systemic injustice and exclusion can be built into the law itself, paving the way for cycles of distrust, alienation, and informal power structures that still affect vulnerable communities worldwide.</p>
1929	<p>In May 1929, major organised crime leaders in the United States of America gathered in Atlantic City, New Jersey, for what became known as the Atlantic City Conference. It was one of the first attempts by criminal syndicates to formalize cooperation and territorial control. The meeting symbolized the transformation of gangs from violent street groups into structured</p>

	<p>organizations that sought long-term stability and influence over local communities. By coordinating markets and setting “rules”, the conference revealed how criminal groups could mirror state functions: mediating disputes, enforcing laws, and managing economies. The event marked the beginning of transnational criminal governance as an organized system rather than isolated acts of crime.</p>
<p>1970</p>	<p>In October 1970, the United States of America enacted the Organized Crime Control Act, introducing the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) statute. This law gave prosecutors the unprecedented ability to charge leaders for crimes committed by their subordinates, recognizing that criminal power often operates hierarchically; like corporations or governments. RICO transformed international legal frameworks by setting a precedent for holding entire criminal organizations accountable. Its influence extended globally, shaping the development of anti-mafia and anti-cartel legislation across Europe and Latin America. Although designed to dismantle mafia-like structures, RICO also exposed how traditional state systems were often ill-equipped to combat groups that provided governance-like services within marginalized communities. It demonstrated that the challenge of criminal dominance was not only social, but also deeply institutional and legal.</p>

<p>2000</p>	<p>The United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), also known as the Palermo Convention, was adopted on the 12th of December , 2000, in Palermo, Italy. It became the first legally binding global treaty to combat organized crime, human trafficking, and corruption. By emphasizing international cooperation, the Convention acknowledged that criminal networks exploit weak governance, economic inequality, and porous borders. It introduced frameworks for extradition, asset recovery, and witness protection, marking a turning point in global recognition that organized crime was a threat to the development of human rights. The Palermo Convention remains foundational to today's global justice system, directly addressing the systemic conditions (like poverty, exclusion and lack of state capacity) that allow criminal groups to dominate marginalized communities and replace legitimate institutions with their own informal power.</p>
<p>2003</p>	<p>On the 29th of September 2003, the Palermo Conference officially entered into the force after reaching the necessary number of ratifications. The moment represented a major milestone in transnational law enforcement, as over 190 countries became bound to cooperate in investigating and dismantling criminal networks. The Convention's activation institutionalised shared responsibility among states for preventing the spread of criminal governance. Its protocols against</p>

	<p>trafficking in persons, migrant smuggling, and arms trafficking directly addressed how vulnerable populations are exploited by organized crime. Importantly, the entry into force emphasized the link between underdevelopment and insecurity; highlighting that communities without access to justice, education, and state protection are not susceptible to criminal control. The Convention's implementation encouraged a global shift from reactive policing toward prevention, inclusion, and the protection of marginalised populations.</p>
2018	<p>On the 24th of January, 2018, China launched the “Special Campaign to Crack Down on Organized Crime and Eliminate Evil”, a massive nationwide operation targeting criminal gangs, corrupt officials, and local power brokers. The campaign aimed to restore state control and eliminate the local “protective umbrellas” that allowed crime to flourish. While the initiative successfully prosecuted thousands of offenders, it also sparked human rights concerns regarding arbitrary arrests and lack of transparency. Nevertheless, it exemplified how states facing local criminal governance often resort to aggressive, security-heavy policies. China's campaign exposed a global dilemma: balancing the need to dismantle criminal influence with the obligation to respect civil liberties. It reflected the tension between sovereignty, justice, and human rights</p>

	<p>that continues to shape international debate on how to best confront criminal dominance.</p>
<p>2020</p>	<p>The COVID-19 pandemic exposed how deeply criminal networks are embedded in marginalized societies. With governments paralysed by lockdowns and overwhelmed health systems, gangs in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia, stepped into governance roles. They distributed food, enforced curfews, and suspended extortion to win community loyalty. Reports from Brazil, Mexico, El Salvador, and South Africa documented how criminal groups exploited the crisis to consolidate legitimacy and public trust. This moment revealed that when state institutions fail to deliver basic services, illicit actors can fill the vacuum with speed and efficiency. The pandemic also intensified inequalities, with marginalised residents facing both economic collapse and coercion from armed groups.</p>
<p>2022</p>	<p>Between 2022 and 2023, Rio de Janeiro witnessed a major transformation in its urban criminal landscape. Militia groups (often composed of off-duty police) lost control over large territories to the Comando Vermelho, one of Brazil's most powerful gangs. The shift revealed how fragile the balance of power can be in marginalized communities where the state's presence is weak or contested. With over 12,000 favelas across Brazil, these areas often experience dual governance: one by the state, and another by armed groups, services and justice. The ongoing conflict between</p>

	<p>militias and gangs not only increases violence but also determines how millions experience security, housing, and rights. These territorial changes underscore the complexity of comforting criminal dominance, showing the state that neglect and corruption allow entire neighborhoods to slip under parallel systems of rule.</p>
<p>2024</p>	<p>On January 9th, 2024, Ecuador's President Daniel Noboa declared an "internal armed conflict" after coordinated attacks by criminal gangs, including assassinations, prison riots, and bombings. The government deployed the military domestically and designated criminal groups as terrorist organizations. This unprecedented escalation marked a blurring of lines between organized crime and insurgency. While the declaration aimed to restore order, it also raised concerns about militarization, human rights abuses, and the erosion of civilian oversight. The Ecuadorian crisis illustrated how criminal governance can evolve into large-scale violence that destabilizes entire nations. It also reflected a regional trend, particularly in Latin America, where governments respond to deeply social problems with warlike strategies that risk deepening the marginalization they aim to resolve.</p>

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

A UN agency that works to reduce poverty, promote sustainable development, and strengthen democratic governance worldwide.

African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)

Regional peacekeeping mission created by the African Union with UN support to stabilize Somalia and combat extremist groups.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

A UN body that helps countries fight drug trafficking, organized crime, corruption, and terrorism while promoting justice and human rights.

De Facto Authority

Authorities in fact, people or groups who exercise power and perform state-like functions, even though they are not legally recognized by the government.

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)

The United Kingdom's government department responsible for foreign policy, international development, and humanitarian aid.

“Narco zones”

Short for narcotics zones, a place where drug trade becomes the foundation of local power and governance.

Criminal Tribes Act of 1871

A colonial law passed by British India that labeled certain tribal and nomadic groups as “inherently criminal” .

First Step Act

U.S. law aimed at reforming the criminal justice system by reducing mandatory prison sentences and improving rehabilitation for inmates.

Apartheid's Spatial Segregation

The forced separation of racial groups in South Africa into different living areas during apartheid.

The State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL).

U.S. government agency that supports global efforts to combat drugs, crime and corruption.

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)

Term used in the United Kingdom to describe communities that are not part of the white majority population.

United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

An independent U.S. agency that provides foreign aid and development assistance to promote democracy, economic growth, and humanitarian relief.

FURTHER RESEARCH

1. "One in Five: Disparities in Crime and Policing" — The Sentencing Project
<https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/one-in-five-disparities-in-crime-and-policing/>
2. "Policing Marginalized Communities"
<https://www.law.upenn.edu/live/news/15410-policing-marginalized-communities>
3. "International Statistics on Crime and Justice"
https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Crime-statistics/International_Statistics_on_Crime_and_Justice.pdf
4. "Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice"
<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/humanrights/areas/crime-prevention.html>

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- ❖ How can your delegation balance the need for national security with the obligation to protect human rights in law enforcement operations within marginalised areas?
- ❖ How does your delegation define the relationship between poverty, inequality, and criminal dominance? Does your government treat it as a security or a development problem?
- ❖ To what extent has historical marginalisation or state neglect in your country contributed to the rise of criminal control within specific communities?
- ❖ What social and economic policies does your delegation propose to prevent criminal groups from becoming the main providers of protection, justice or employment ?
- ❖ Should international organisations (UNODC, UNDP, UN-Habitat) intervene in cases where a state fails to protect its citizens from criminal rule, or would this violate national sovereignty?

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Topic B: Human Rights in War Zones



Rohingya refugee boys salvage a gas cylinder after a major fire in Balukhali camp at Ukhiya in Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh, Sunday, March 5, 2023.

[Mahmud Hossain Opu/AP Photo] By Haythem Guesmi

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Introduction

Human rights violations in war zones occur when conflict destroys the legal protections that are meant to safeguard civilians. Under international humanitarian and human rights law, people caught in conflict are guaranteed the right to life, protection from torture and inhumane treatment, access to medical care, and the right to remain free from deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure. Yet, in modern conflicts, these guarantees have become increasingly difficult to uphold. Current conflict often unfolds inside densely populated cities rather than on distant battlefields, placing ordinary civilians directly in the path of violence and causing entire communities to lose access to safety, healthcare, education, and stable living conditions.

These violations are not isolated; they form part of a global humanitarian crisis whose scale continues to escalate each passing year. By 2024, more than 122 million people had been forcibly displaced by conflict and persecuted, meaning one in every 67 people worldwide had been driven away from their homes. Children are especially vulnerable; 473 million children live in or near conflict zones. Civilian casualties have also risen sharply. The United Nations recorded over 33,000 civilian deaths in armed conflict during 2023, a 72% increase from the previous year, and monitoring suggests that at least 48,000 civilians were killed in 2024 alone.

Beyond the direct impact of airstrikes, shelling, and small-arms fire, civilians suffer from the indirect consequences of war, blocked humanitarian aid, collapsing healthcare systems, food shortages, disease outbreaks, and deliberate attacks on infrastructure. Damaged water systems trigger outbreaks of cholera and other preventable diseases. The destruction of hospitals forces people to go without surgeries, childbirth assistance, cancer treatment and emergency care. These cumulative harms often persist long after hostilities end,

embedding human rights violations into the social, economic and political fabric of post-war societies.

The severity of these numbers reflects the reality that certain conflicts have become deeply entrenched, trapping millions in cycles of displacement and abuse. According to UNHCR, more than one-third of all forcibly displaced people originate from Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan, and Ukraine. At the same time, ongoing crises in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen, Somalia, Myanmar and Gaza continue to erode human rights on a massive scale. These conflicts overlap with deeper structural vulnerabilities: weak institutions, poverty, corruption, ethnic and religious tensions, climate shocks, and the collapse of public services. In such an environment, residents find themselves trapped between armed groups, foreign interventions, state forces, and humanitarian blockades, unable to secure physical protection, enjoy civil liberties or achieve accountability for institutional neglect.

Human rights violations in war zones are therefore not isolated events, but complex, multilayered crises. They arise from government breakdown, militarisation of civilian spaces, and erosion of norms that were once respected under international law. Their consequences extend beyond individual countries, influencing regional stability and long-term development. Together, these patterns illustrate how armed conflicts no longer only threaten physical safety, but the entire framework of rights, institutions, and essential services that sustain civilian life.

History

Human rights violations in war zones is an ever changing issue, and new angles of approach are being incrementally explored. The way the international community understands and responds to them has changed dramatically over time. Before the 19th century, warfare was largely governed by tradition and the moral codes individually followed by different armies. Civilians were often treated as collateral damage, and there were no universal, binding rules, such as international humanitarian law's definitions of *jus in bello* and *jus ad bellum* specifying what could or could not be done in conflict. This began to shift in 1859, when Henry Dunant, Swiss humanitarian, businessman, social activist, witnessed the aftermath of the Battle of Solferino (June 24, 1859) and was horrified by the lack of medical care for wounded soldiers. He began fighting and sharing his outrage through activism, which led to the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross and, eventually, the First Geneva Convention (1864), aiming to provide the legal basis for the laws of war, aiming to protect people who are not or no longer participating in hostilities through treaties. This was the first major attempt to formally limit violence during war and protect individuals who were no longer fighting, marking the start of modern International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

The real expansion of human rights protections in war came after the First and Second World Wars. The massive destruction, displacement, violence and overall losses made it clear to the international community that change was needed, and some more serious guidelines for dealing with such crises must be developed and modernised.

The Nuremberg and Tokyo trials were post-World War II international tribunals established to prosecute high-level leaders for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and crimes against peace. They introduced the idea that individuals, rather than only states could be held accountable for wartime atrocities. Soon after, in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

was established, setting international norms and laws for all, prioritising safety of human rights.

The updated Geneva Conventions of 1949, along with their 1977 Additional Protocols, broadened protections to include civilians, prisoners of war, and victims of both international and internal conflicts. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 were four conventions, focused on:

- First (1949) → Wounded and sick on land
- Second (1949) → Wounded, sick, and shipwrecked at sea
- Third (1949) → Prisoners of War (POWs)
- Fourth (1949) → Civilians

This was important because by the late 20th century, most wars were no longer fought between states but within them, often involving insurgent groups or fragmented militias.

Despite these legal frameworks, the second half of the 20th century revealed just how often human rights collapsed during war. Conflicts in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Kosovo showed repeated patterns: ethnic cleansing, sexual violence used as a weapon, the recruitment of child soldiers, and deliberate attacks on villages to terrorise populations. The Rwandan genocide was a 1994 mass killing in which extremist Hutu forces murdered around 800,000 Tutsi people (and moderate Hutus) in about 100 days, driven by ethnic hatred, political tension, and long-standing discrimination. Due to the sheer number of deaths in such a short period time, the Rwandan genocide is considered one of the largest and brutal genocides of the 21st century. Unfortunately, the international community failed to act, and it left behind a mark of shame and failure, some blaming the inaction on legal and political restraints, and others on the fact that Rwanda was not strategically important, so global powers actively decided to invest and little time or resources on it. Either way, there was extreme pressure for change to come.

These incidents, along with international pressure, pushed the UN to create ad hoc tribunals like the ICTY (for crimes in the former Yugoslavia) and the ICTR (for Rwanda). These courts were meant to fill the gap when national governments were unwilling or unable to prosecute mass atrocities, but their work also showed how inconsistent international action could be, since they only appeared after huge pressure and in very limited cases. This led to the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2002, designed as a permanent court to try individuals for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. However, its effectiveness remains debated, especially because powerful states refuse to join or cooperate, seeing the ICC as a threat to their own sovereignty.

The September 11th attack was a 2001 terrorist attack where hijacked planes were flown into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the USA, killing thousands and leaving a lasting mark on the international community. This led to things becoming more complicated. Warfare became increasingly asymmetric, with non-state armed groups using tactics like suicide bombings, human shields, and targeting civilian infrastructure. States, in turn, expanded their use of drones, airstrikes, mass surveillance, and emergency powers. This created new debates about what "human rights in war zones" even means when battles take place in densely populated areas or when combatants blend into civilian communities, leading to questions and lasting debates; the line between protecting a civilian's human rights, and defending against a war criminal, no matter the individual, began to blur.

Current Situation

The current situation of Human Rights in War Zones reflects on decades of unresolved ethnic tensions, weak state institutions, geopolitical interests, and technological advancements that have shaped modern warfare. Serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law are common in many armed conflicts. In certain circumstance, some of these violations may even constitute genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity. While international humanitarian law, particularly the Geneva Conventions and related agencies set clear standards for the protection of civilians, medical workers, refugees, and prisoners of war, compliance remains inconsistent and weak. Armed conflicts today are increasingly characterized by non-state actors, cyber warfare, proxy involvement of foreign powers and narrow lines between military and civilian targets. Conflicts often include separatists groups, militias, private military contractors, and terrorist organisations operating alongside national powers. This complicates direct accountability as many armed groups are not formal to international treaties and protocol. Countries usually justify military operations by stating it is in the interest of national security or efforts of counterterrorism, while non state actors may lack formal command structures, increasing the risks of violations such as torture, forced recruitment, targetting civilians and sexual violence. Additionally, international enforcement mechanisms remain limited, as bodies such as the UN, ICC or regional tribunals often face political obstacles, lack jurisdiction over non-state actors or depend on state cooperation to investigate abuses. Powerful nations may also use their political influence to shield allies from sanctions or prevent resolutions that would authorize humanitarian interventions or investigations. The growing use of private military companies further complicates legal responsibility as contractors operate across borders with unclear legal status and limited transparency.

Evolving forms of warfare often outpace existing legal frameworks, widening the gap between international norms and the reality of modern conflict, undermining accountability by making it difficult to determine who is legally responsible for violations, the documentation of crimes, and pathways to justice. States are legally responsible for the conduct of their armed forces and for protecting civilians under international humanitarian law, while non-state armed groups often lack clear command structures or legal obligations, making it difficult to hold individuals accountable for violations. Modern warfare disproportionately affects civilian populations, particularly in highly populated urban areas where the use of airstrikes, drone operations, chemical weapons, and siege tactics contribute to high casualty rates, and widespread destruction of infrastructure. As cities turn into battle fields, millions are forcibly displaced internally and across borders. Refugee flows place additional strain on neighbouring countries, often leading to border militarization and diplomatic disputes over sharing accountability.

The long term economic and social impacts are severe. Wars destroy schools, hospitals, trade routes, and resource production systems, while armed groups frequently exploit natural resources to fund conflict and foreign governments or corporations that profit through extraction, trade or arms sale. Humanitarian organizations face restricted access due to blockades, militarized checkpoints, bureaucratic barriers, and target attacks on aid workers, in many cases nations weaponize aid by controlling food, water, and medical supplies to exert political pressure. As a result, civilian populations endure starvation, disease outbreak, trauma, food insecurity, and cultural destruction that persist long after ceasefires.

Past UN Actions/Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Over the past decades, efforts to protect human rights in war zones have evolved significantly, shifting from purely legal frameworks to wider humanitarian, peacekeeping, and accountability mechanisms. Bl abla bla

The modern foundation was established in 1949 with the adoption of the Geneva Conventions, which created the first universal legal protections for civilians, prisoners of war, medical workers, and displaced populations. Although negotiated outside the UN, these Conventions became central to all subsequent UN resolutions and missions, serving as the main international benchmark for evaluating abuses in war zones. Their later expansion through the 1977 Additional Protocols recognised that most contemporary conflicts were internal, not interstate, and required clearer protections for civilians caught in civil wars, insurgencies, and occupations.

As conflicts throughout the 1990s, including Rwanda and the Balkans, revealed catastrophic failures to protect the populations, the UN began to strengthen its operational capacity. In 1999, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1265, the first resolution dedicated solely to the protection of civilians in armed conflict (POC). This marked a turning point by treating civilian protection not as a humanitarian concern alone, but as a matter of international peace and security. States were urged to agree with international humanitarian law, ensure humanitarian access, and prevent deliberate attacks on non-combatants.

The failures to prevent genocide in Rwanda (1994) and Srebrenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995) directly led to the creation of new accountability mechanisms. In 1998, the establishment of the Rome Statute established the International Criminal Court (ICC), giving the international community a permanent institution capable of prosecuting individuals for war crimes and crimes against humanity. This was a crucial development as now violations were no longer seen as tragic consequences of war, but as

punishable international crimes. UN fact-finding missions and commissions of inquiry eventually began sharing evidence with the ICC, reinforcing its global role.

In the early 2000s, the UN Peacekeeping system also underwent significant reform. Missions were increasingly mandated not to just observe, but to actively protect civilians, a shift seen in operations in Sierra Leone, the DRC, South Sudan and Mali. The creation of the OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) strengthened the UN's ability to coordinate emergency relief, monitor humanitarian access, and assess the human rights impact of active conflicts. These reforms reflected the growing understanding that protecting civilians required more than legal norms; it required logistical planning, early warning, and coordinated field presence.

A major milestone occurred in 2005, when all UN member states adopted the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) at the World Summit. R2P stated that states must protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and that the international community has a role when states fail to do so. Though controversial, R2P reframed mass civilian suffering as a shared global responsibility. It influenced later Security Council debates on Libya (2011), Syria and South Sudan, even when political division prevented collective actions.

In the 2010s and 2020s, the UN shifted toward more specialised tools. OCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights) and the Human Rights Council created independent commissions of inquiry in conflicts such as Syria, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Myanmar, and the occupied Palestinian territory, documenting violations, interviewing victims, and identifying responsible parties. The UN also developed reporting mechanisms for children and armed conflict, attacks on hospitals and schools, and use of starvation as a method of warfare, each of which transformed specific patterns of abuse into global policy concern.

Despite these advances, implementation remains inconsistent. Peacekeeping missions are often under-resourced, humanitarian access is routinely restricted, and political divisions inside the Security Council frequently block strong action. Still, these UN efforts collectively shaped the modern understanding of human rights in war zones, providing legal foundations, operational roles, and accountability mechanisms that continue to guide international responses today.

POSITION OF MAJOR BLOCS

United States of America

The United States is a central actor in discussions of human rights in war zones due to its extensive global military presence and influence over international humanitarian policy. Operations across the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe often involve direct intervention or support to allied forces, raising concerns regarding civilian casualties, compliance with international humanitarian law, and the conduct of military operations. At the same time, the United States is a major contributor to humanitarian assistance, United Nations peacekeeping, and international investigations into human-rights violations, granting it substantial authority in shaping accountability mechanisms and responses to crises. Its foreign policy reflects a combination of liberal internationalist principles, including the promotion of human rights and democracy, alongside realist considerations of national security, alliances, and geopolitical influence. This dual approach frequently leads to a selective application of scrutiny, with sanctions and investigations emphasized against adversaries while violations by allies receive limited attention. The United States also plays a significant role in influencing which conflicts gain international focus and determining the priorities for humanitarian intervention. Its position demonstrates how strategic interests and normative concerns intersect, making it a pivotal actor in establishing the scope and direction of international human-rights enforcement in conflict settings. Understanding the United States' policies provides insight into the balance between military engagement, humanitarian responsibility, and the promotion of accountability in war zones.

France

France maintains a prominent role in addressing human rights in conflict settings due to its historical and ongoing military engagement, particularly in Africa and the Middle East. Its interventions in the Sahel, including Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and the Central African Republic, place France at the forefront of debates on civilian protection, counter-terrorism operations, and adherence to international humanitarian law. French forces operate in complex environments where insurgency, terrorism, and state fragility intersect, highlighting the challenge of safeguarding human rights while maintaining security. Beyond military action, France actively promotes multilateral humanitarian initiatives, supports United Nations investigations of alleged abuses, and encourages reforms in peacekeeping operations. As a leading member of the European Union, France exerts considerable influence over collective European positions on sanctions, conflict resolution, and refugee protection. Its policy approach combines a commitment to human rights and international law with the pragmatic considerations of strategic and regional security interests. France's involvement exemplifies the dual responsibility of states engaged in military operations: to protect civilians effectively while advocating for robust normative standards. Its approach underscores the tension between operational necessity and ethical obligations in war zones and reflects a broader strategy of integrating military engagement with diplomatic and humanitarian leadership.

Russia

Russia is a highly influential and often controversial actor regarding human rights in conflict zones, largely due to its involvement in conflicts such as Ukraine, Syria, and the Caucasus region. Military operations conducted or supported by Russia have been linked to allegations of indiscriminate attacks, targeting of civilian infrastructure, and collaboration with armed groups accused of human-rights violations. Russia consistently frames its interventions as legitimate counter-terrorism measures or protective actions for specific populations,

challenging Western narratives and complicating the enforcement of international humanitarian norms. Its actions illustrate a realist approach, prioritizing the protection of national interests, regional influence, and state sovereignty, while engaging selectively with multilateral frameworks. Russia's position within the United Nations system enables it to resist certain accountability mechanisms, block or amend resolutions critical of its allies, and influence debates on civilian protection and state responsibility. Its role underscores the tension between geopolitical strategy and human-rights obligations, highlighting the difficulties of establishing universally accepted standards in conflict situations. Russia's involvement demonstrates how strategic, political, and ideological factors intersect with international humanitarian law, shaping the Council's ability to respond to war-zone abuses effectively and consistently.

Egypt

Egypt's significance in discussions of human rights in war zones stems from its regional influence and its proximity to multiple ongoing conflicts, including those in Gaza, Libya, and Sudan. Egypt plays a key role in facilitating humanitarian access, mediating ceasefires, and influencing the flow of aid, directly affecting civilian protection in surrounding crisis zones. The country is also a major contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations, shaping standards for military conduct and accountability. Egypt's foreign policy emphasizes stability, counter-terrorism, and state sovereignty, reflecting both its domestic political context and strategic interests in the region. While engaged in humanitarian and diplomatic initiatives, Egypt often seeks to limit external scrutiny over state conduct, reflecting a cautious approach to international intervention. Its positions highlight the complex balance between supporting civilian protection and maintaining political and territorial control, illustrating the broader challenge of reconciling human-rights obligations with national and regional security priorities. Egypt's engagement in the UNHRC context

demonstrates the interplay between regional leadership, operational responsibility, and adherence to international norms, emphasizing the need to consider both practical and political dimensions when addressing human rights in conflict zones.

Nigeria

Nigeria's relevance to human-rights concerns in conflict zones is primarily linked to its experience with insurgency, terrorism, and intercommunal violence, particularly in the northeast where Boko Haram and ISWAP are active. These conflicts have produced widespread displacement, civilian casualties, gender-based violence, and allegations of military misconduct, highlighting the challenges of protecting human rights amid protracted internal conflict. Nigeria's responses illustrate the balance between counter-terrorism objectives and adherence to international humanitarian standards, as well as the difficulties of ensuring accountability in asymmetric warfare. As Africa's most populous nation and a major regional power, Nigeria also influences broader continental approaches to security and human-rights policies, advocating for support to conflict-affected states while emphasizing the importance of national capacity-building over punitive measures. Its experience demonstrates the intersection of state fragility, insurgency, and civilian protection, offering insights into practical strategies for mitigating human-rights abuses during ongoing conflicts. Nigeria's context emphasizes the importance of combining security, humanitarian, and governance interventions in order to uphold human rights in challenging operational environments.

Somalia

Somalia represents one of the most complex and enduring examples of a conflict environment with persistent human-rights challenges. Decades of civil war, insurgency, and foreign intervention have created a landscape in which attacks on civilians, forced displacement, famine, and obstruction of humanitarian aid are widespread. The Somali government's limited capacity to enforce law and order necessitates significant involvement from international actors, including the African Union, the United Nations, and other partners, highlighting the challenges of accountability and civilian protection in fragile states. Somalia's experience underscores the intersection of terrorism, state fragility, and humanitarian crisis, illustrating the difficulties of applying international human-rights norms in unstable environments. The country's situation raises critical questions about the role of external actors in conflict management, the obligations of states to protect civilians, and the effectiveness of international mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing human-rights standards. The Somali case provides important insights into the practical, political, and operational challenges inherent in safeguarding human rights during prolonged and multifaceted conflicts.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description
1949	<p>In 1949, states adopted the Fourth Geneva Convention, the first treaty in the Geneva framework that focuses specifically on the protection of civilians in time of war. It codified rules prohibiting murder, torture, collective punishment, hostage taking and deportation of civilians, and regulated the conduct of occupying powers toward local populations. Coming directly after the mass atrocities of the Second World War, it recognized that civilians had become central targets of armed conflict and needed explicit legal safeguards. Today, it remains the core legal instrument defining what constitutes a war crime against civilians in both international and occupation contexts, and it is a central reference when assessing human rights violations in contemporary war zones.</p>
1977	<p>In 1977, states adopted Additional Protocols I and II to the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Protocol I strengthened protections for civilians in international armed conflicts, including rules on indiscriminate attacks and the requirement to distinguish at all times between civilians and combatants. Protocol II extended humanitarian law for the first time to many internal or non-international armed conflicts, setting minimum standards for the treatment of persons not taking part in hostilities, including those in civil wars. These instruments</p>

	<p>responded to the changing nature of conflict after decolonisation, when most wars were being fought within states. Together, they expanded the legal framework used today to judge airstrikes on cities, sieges, and abuses by both state and non-state actors, and they are directly relevant when evaluating whether conduct in war zones respects or violates civilian rights.</p>
<p>1994</p>	<p>Between April and July 1994, around 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu were killed in Rwanda in approximately one hundred days, while the UN peacekeepers and the wider international community failed to stop the violence. The genocide was carried out largely with low-tech weapons such as machetes, inside communities, churches and schools where civilians should have been protected. It exposed the gaps between the existence of legal norms and the political will to enforce them. Rwanda then became a defining example of how civilian populations can be targeted for extermination and how inaction by external actors can enable widespread violence, later shaping debates about prevention, early warning, and the responsibility to protect populations from genocide and war crimes.</p>
<p>1995</p>	<p>In July 1995, more than 8,000 Bosniak Muslim men and boys were killed by Bosnian Serb forces in and around Srebrenica, a United Nations-declared “safe area” during the Bosnian War. Dutch peacekeepers were unable to prevent the town's capture or the subsequent mass executions and forced transfers of women and</p>

	<p>children. International courts later recognised Srebrenica as genocide, the first such ruling in Europe since the Second World War. The massacre highlighted the limits of lightly armed peacekeeping mandates and the dangers of promising protection without the means to deliver it. Srebrenica is central to understanding civilian vulnerability in supposedly protected zones, and it influenced later reforms on robust mandates, accountability mechanisms, and the politics of intervention when states fail to shield their populations.</p>
1998	<p>In July 1998, nations adopted the Rome Statute, creating the International Criminal Court (ICC) with jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and, later, the crime of aggression. The Statute lists serious violations of the laws of war, such as intentional attacks on civilians, medical facilities and humanitarian workers, and makes individual commanders and political leaders criminally responsible. This was a turning point in efforts to end impunity for crimes committed in war zones. The ICC provides a permanent mechanism to investigate and prosecute those responsible for large-scale abuses, signalling that deliberate attacks on civilians, grave violations, are not only political issues but international crimes that can be punished beyond national borders.</p>
2005	<p>At the 2005 World Summit, all UN member states endorsed the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in the Outcome Document. Paragraphs 138 and</p>

	<p>139 affirm that each state has the responsibility to protect its population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, and that the international community should assist states, and in extreme cases take collective action, when national authorities fail. R2P emerged directly from failures in Rwanda and Srebrenica. It reframed mass atrocities against civilians as a matter of international concern rather than a purely domestic issue, strengthening the normative basis for preventive diplomacy, targeted sanctions and, in rare cases, military intervention aimed at protecting populations from the worst abuses.</p>
<p>2011</p>	<p>In 2011, in Syria, peaceful protests demanding political reform and basic rights were met with violent repression, which escalated into a complex armed conflict involving the Syrian government, opposition groups and multiple foreign interventions. Over time, the war became a symbol of the erosion of civilian protection: widespread bombardment of urban areas, chemical attacks, starvation sites, torture and attacks on medical facilities were documented extensively by UN bodies and humanitarian organisations. Millions were displaced inside Syria or became refugees. Overall, the Syrian conflict exposed the limits of international mechanisms to stop systematic violations, despite clear evidence of crimes against humanity and war crimes, and it showed how protracted urban warfare can destroy entire health and education systems.</p>

<p>2015</p>	<p>In March 2015, a military coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates intervened in Yemen's civil war to support the country's internationally recognised government. The intervention rapidly intensified the conflict, leading to widespread airstrikes, blockades against Houthi-controlled areas and large-scale fighting across civilian areas. Over the years, the war has produced what is described as one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with tens of thousands killed directly and hundreds of thousands more dying from hunger, disease and limited healthcare access. Markets, hospitals, and water systems were repeatedly struck, while blockades and economic collapse fuelled famine and cholera outbreaks. Yemen demonstrates how prolonged conflict, combined with the obstruction of aid and attacks on essential services, can devastate entire populations and blur the lines between direct military violence and indirect human rights violations.</p>
<p>2022</p>	<p>On February 24th 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, dramatically expanding a conflict that had already begun in 2014. The war was quickly marked by large-scale attacks on cities, including missile and drone strikes on residential buildings, energy infrastructure, hospitals and evacuation routes. International investigators, including the OCHR, have documented alleged war crimes, including deliberate or indiscriminate attacks on civilians, executions in towns, forced deportations and widespread use of</p>

	<p>explosive weapons in populated areas. Millions of Ukrainians have been displaced inside the country or abroad. Ukraine portrayed how modern interstate warfare can evolve into a prolonged humanitarian crisis in which civilian protection, accountability, and respect for international law are tested on a global stage.</p>
<p>2023</p>	<p>On October 7th 2023, attacks by Hamas on southern Israel killed more than 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and led to the capture of approximately 240 Israeli hostages. This marked one of the deadliest single days for civilians in Israel's history and triggered an Israeli military response aimed at dismantling Hamas' military capabilities and securing the release of hostages. As the conflict expanded, densely populated urban areas in Gaza became active war zones. UN bodies, including the OHCHR, UNICEF and OCHA, reported humanitarian impacts on Palestinian civilians, including displacement, disruptions to healthcare, and damage to residential areas and essential infrastructure. The 2023 Israel-Hamas war demonstrates how urban conflict, hostage-taking, and the presence of armed groups within civilian areas create extreme challenges for civilian protection and the application of humanitarian law.</p>

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

War Crime

A violation of the laws of war, such as intentionally attacking civilians, mistreating prisoners, or targeting hospitals and humanitarian workers.

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

UN agency that monitors documents and reports human rights violations around the world.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

UN agency that coordinates emergency aid and monitors humanitarian needs during wars or crises.

International Humanitarian Law (IHL)

A set of rules that limit how wars are fought and protect civilians.

Urban Warfare

Fighting takes place inside cities/densely populated areas, where civilians are likely to be harmed.

Siege Warfare

A military tactic in which armed forces encircle a town or area, cutting off food, water, electricity, or medical supplies.

Geneva Conventions

A series of international treaties that outline the rights of civilians, prisoners, and wounded people during armed conflict.

International Criminal Court (ICC)

An International Court that investigates and prosecutes individuals accused of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Human rights in armed conflicts: Civilian protection under evolving warfare tactics — Hidayat Ullah, Kainat Muhib & Zahoor Rahman
<https://sss.org.pk/index.php/sss/article/view/35>
2. THE INTERNATIONAL LEGAL PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN ARMED CONFLICT — Jamsheed Ahmed Sayed & Arshid Iqbal Dar
<https://ierj.in/journal/index.php/ierj/article/view/1229>
3. Human Rights in Armed Conflict: Law, Practice, Policy — Ezequiel Heffes (International Review of the Red Cross)
<https://international-review.icrc.org/articles/human-rights-armed-conflict-law-practice-policy>
4. The Rights to Privacy and Data Protection in Times of Armed Conflict — ICRC / IRRC
<https://international-review.icrc.org/articles/the-rights-to-privacy-and-data-protection-923>
5. Increasing the safeguarding of protected areas threatened by warfare through international environmental law — Jérôme de Hemptinne
<https://international-review.icrc.org/articles/increasing-the-safeguarding-of-protected-areas-924>
6. Bad, mad, and cooked: Moral responsibility for civilian harms in human-AI military teams — Susannah Kate Devitt
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379744715_Bad_Mad_and_Cooked
7. Balancing Power and Ethics: A Framework for Addressing Human Rights Concerns in Military AI — Mst Rafia Islam & Azmine Toughik Wasi
<https://arxiv.org/abs/2411.06336> arXiv

Books:

- Armed Conflict and Human Rights Law: Protecting Civilians and International Humanitarian Law — Daniel Ivo Odon Routledge+1
- The Grey Zone: Civilian Protection Between Human Rights and the Laws of War — Mark Lattimer & Philippe Sands (eds.) Bloomsbury Publishing
- International Law and Policy on the Protection of Civilians — Stuart Casey-Maslen & Tobias Vestner gcsp.ch
- Forcible Protection of Civilians: The International Legal Framework for Peace Operations — Hanna Bourgeois larcier-intersentia.com
- Human Rights in Armed Conflict: Law, Practice, Policy — Gerd Oberleitner icrc.o

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- ❖ To what extent has your delegation ratified the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols?
- ❖ What domestic laws exist to prosecute war crimes or prevent human rights abuses in your delegation's country?
- ❖ What policies exist in your delegation's country to regulate the ethical use of technologies?
- ❖ Has your delegation been accused of war crimes or humanitarian violations?
- ❖ Does your delegation fund UNHCR, WHO, Red Cross, or humanitarian corridors?

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