Immigration, Humanitarian Crises, and International Stability
Background Guide

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“...Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom... Now, therefore the General Assembly proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations...”

- Preamble, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 (UN.org)

Background:

Human rights is a rather modern concept. Slavery was abolished in 1865 with the ratification of the 13th amendment of the U.S. Constitution, however, it was not until 1964 that public segregation in public places, and employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin was put to an end by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Around the world, there is even greater variability in the timeline of human rights granted to people in different nations. The concept of inherent entitlement to these rights is vulnerable to the subjectivity of the nations of the world, and their comprehension of what freedoms/liberties citizens enjoy, which would be inexcusable to infringe upon.

The definition of human rights is also a question of concern posed by many individuals. The standard for the embodiment of human rights is not universally accepted in practice. There are nations that are regularly witness to de facto violations of human rights. Most nations are adamant that the list of basic human rights is far more extensive; encompassing everything from
a clean environment, education, health care, even marriage rights. Immigration has evolved into an equally contentious issue. Immigration will always be a human activity, as it has been since the beginning of our species. Today, immigration goes hand in hand with a nation’s concern for national security.

Violations of human rights, as defined by the United Nations, “the rights to which everyone is entitled—no matter who they are or where they live—simply because they are alive” occur all over our planet. The complexity surrounding the definition of human rights is that it is all-encompassing, and each nation has its individual, though not always too distinctive, laws established to protect the rights of its citizens.

Immigration, similarly a prominent topic of contention in most every nation is a concern to the international community. Often the cause an individual, family, sect, etc., for leaving a nation is to escape hardships, or challenges grounded in one nation, for the prospects of a brighter future to be found in a foreign nation. The concern for immigration begins with countries being forced to determine how to care for these individuals, and if they should even accept them into their borders. The Migration Policy Institute reported “according to estimates from the 2012 ACS, the U.S. immigrant population stood at almost 40.8 million, or 13 percent of the total U.S. population of 313.9 million” (migrationpolicy.org).

History:

The international community is now facing the question of “should all those who have the power and resources to help displaced people, do so at the expense of their nation. The United Nations has seen any countries struggle with refugees, and illegal immigrants bypassing the legal infrastructure. The U.N. Refugee Agency reports that “factors that have contributed to the increase in the scale of international migration include globalization and growing disparities in living conditions… many are seeking employment or educational opportunities, others want to reunite with family members and still more are fleeing persecution, conflict or blind violence in their countries” (UNHCR). Devastatingly, most nations throughout history have been forcefully reluctant to receive refugees. The arguments against doing so stresses the economic drain that will be produced in both the host country, as well as the loss for economic opportunities to be harvested from the country experiencing emigration, commonly referred to as a “brain drain”.

The United Nations stresses the moral obligation of first world countries to provide aid when they are able to do so; human rights should be of the utmost importance to every nation. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was taken up at the first session of the General Assembly in 1946…the document would formulate what it termed a preliminary draft International Bill of Human Rights” (UN.org). Although immigration is largely considered to be a major concern in the realm of human rights issues, it would be another 60 years before an official U.N. summit would be held to address the topic. The first-ever UN summit on migration was held in October, 2006; proposed by former United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan,
and the Special Representative for Migration, former Attorney General of Ireland, Peter D. Sutherland.

Mr. Sutherland describes the summit as an opportunity for “over 150 countries [to] gather every year to consider joint action that addresses common challenges—from ensuring that migrant workers are paid fairly and treated decently, to cracking down on smugglers and traffickers, and changing public perceptions of migrants. It is a safe harbor in which governments build trust and a common understanding” (Sutherland, 1). The creation of the summit has not seen the cessation of hardships, nor of crimes committed against human rights, leading to millions of displaced individuals around the globe every year. Sutherland argues that one of the greatest shortcomings of policy makers, is that they narrow-mindedly see migration as a sign of failure, a problem that needs to be fixed, in lieu of an opportunity to harvest diversity, and to protect the rights of the migrant population (Sutherland 1). Immigration is not a crime, nor should it be viewed in a negative light. Immigration diversifies a nation’s demographics, encourage tolerance and acceptance, and brings people together.

Currently, major human rights issues are occurring in every hemisphere of the planet, causing migrants to flee to other nations in the hopes they will find refuge. The center of the discussion about human rights and migration is not centered around the United States and the growing population of migrant children, but travels the planet touching upon nations such as Guatemala, Venezuela, China, Syria, Libya, Palestine, Israel, and Iraq to name a few.

**Recent U.N. Involvement:**

*Human Rights*

The International Human Rights Law was established in 1945, demanding that governments of all nations act accordingly to promote and protect human rights, fundamental freedoms, and in doing so also refrain from acts that place humans at risk. To support the success of this doctrine, the United Nations ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDR). Standards are constantly being defined, issues are being identified, and solutions researched, in order to maintain that resolutions to human rights violations, and preventative measures are up to date. The United Nations is still finding inconsistencies, and injustices requiring the attending of an international treaty, convention, etc. in order to address the issue; the list includes, but is not limited to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

The ultimate goal of United Nations efforts is to thwart conflict around the globe, and foster the conditions to create a sustainable peace in nations struggling with conflict. Since 1948, the U.N. has been involved in 69 peace keeping operations. Currently, there are 16 active peace keeping operations.
**MINUSCA**: MINUSCA is the most recent operation instigated by the United Nations. MINUSCA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic) was established in April 2014. The status of the Central African Republic is straddling the lines between order and chaos. In April, Ban Ki-moon, secretary general of the United Nations described the situation in the Central Republic of Africa in an opinion piece for the Washington post, “the past year has brought, in quick succession, the violent overthrow of the government, the total collapse of state institutions and a descent into lawlessness and sectarian brutality” (Ki-moon, 2014). Muslims in CRA have been the targets of horrific violence carried out by Christian militias. The country is on the verge of a mass genocide. The U.N. has taken control of the peacekeeping operations in CAR, using the force of “about 1,800 additional peacekeepers and police joined the mission as the UN took control, along with 4,800 African troops and 1,000 international police” (Smith, 2014).

*Immigration*

The United Nations accesses several sources to research data on migration and population density in different regions of the world; it recruits the help of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the UN Population Division, and the UN Statistics Division. The U.N. relies upon the Population Division to provide data on international migration and development. The Population division prepares reports on demographic reports, as demographics are constantly changing as people continue to move from one place to another.

Refugees demand a great amount of attention and action from the international community. According to a 2010 report from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the estimated count for people who were forcibly displaced was 43.1 million worldwide. Often, the United Nations peacekeepers are the only source of protection and assistance these people can rely upon. The UN establishes camps in many regions of the world struggling with a large population of displaced people. According to the United Nations website, “UNHCR is the lead agency with respect to the protection of refugees and the internally displaced. With the International Organization for Migration (IOM), it is the lead agency for camp coordination and management. And it shares the lead with respect to emergency shelter with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.” (UN.org).

Human Rights Violations & Issues of Immigration From Around the World:

It would be impossible to wholly identify all or even border on the identification of all of the human rights violations and issues of immigration, both perceivable & legitimate, from all around the world. The purpose of this section is to provide a snap shot of the current issues which have led nations to a desperate, and precarious status.

*Asia Pacific*: The prolific populations of both China, India, and other countries in Asia, have led to an insufficient distribution of resources. In addition to this, the majority of the population in these countries lives below poverty level. In North Korea there is little access to any legitimate freedoms for the general population; violations ranging from forced labor, scarce food, to
restriction from any freedom of expression. Despite China evolving into one of the world’s most powerful countries, it has often been challenged for its policies towards human rights. People in China are victims of abuses including, but not limited to: land-seizures, economic inequality, miscarriages of justice, and the restriction of freedom of expression since the government has control over the media and publications.

Middle East & African region: The world is outspoken against human rights abuses throughout the Middle East, and throughout the continent of Africa; particularly against the abuses committed against women. In the Middle East, the rise of the extremist quasi-state, ISIS, or ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) has led to widespread atrocities against human rights; women are held captive and subject to brutal rape and torture, others are sold as sex slaves, murdered. After being attacked, these women are perceived “as “soiled goods,” …are ostracized by their own societies… These raped women become targets for honor killings in their own families and communities. The governments of Iraq and Syria have also failed to protect these women and give them any assistance…”(Esfandiari, 2014).

In Africa, the use of child soldiers is still a major issue. The U.N. reports that in the Central African Republic alone, more than 6,000 child soldiers are being used to fight in the conflict. These children are exploited, robbed of their childhood & innocence, and forced to commit horrific crimes.

Latin American Region: Thousands of children every year make the treacherous journey from Central and South America in order to reach the United States in hopes they can escape a difficult & dangerous living situation to either re-unite with loved ones, or simply gain a fresh start in a developed nation of opportunity. The countries they come from (most Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras), have severe and alarming poverty rates, and crime rates mostly linked to gang violence. The cause of a majority of the economic disparities within the population is due to wide spread corruption throughout the governments of these nations. Most people in these countries live in sub-standard or debilitating conditions, few have access to a decent education, and even less to health care and medical assistance.

Western European and North America Region: Since the late 1800’s when immigrants began to arrive at Ellis Island in the United States, immigration & its effects have been of concern to people living in the United States. Today the United States is extremely concerned with the safety of its borders, and the prevention of illegal entry. In politics, an overwhelming amount of energy and debate is invested in the topic. Many immigrants from Central and South America come to the United States illegally. Many U.S. citizens perceive this as a heavy burden on the United States. The alternative argument is that these immigrants are good for the United States; they allow businesses to operate at a cheaper cost because of the use of cheaper labor. This in turn allows them to charge less, and yield opportunities for citizens who would otherwise be occupying these positions to specialize and advance in their field of interest. In providing jobs to these immigrants, they can enjoy a higher quality of life, escape undesirable circumstances, and become contributing members of society.
A major human rights concern in Europe revolves around gypsies. Gypsies are not uncommonly found in Europe. In fact, they “are found across all of Europe and make up the continent's largest ethnic minority. There are about 11 million of Gypsies in Europe are found across all of Europe and make up the continent's largest ethnic minority. There are about 11 million of Gypsies in Europe” (Tremlett, 2012). The number has grown since Tremlett’s article published in 2012. Gypsies are often discriminated against, suffer forced evictions, are marginalized, and do not have access to proper health care. The marginalization by European governments stems from the association of gypsies with criminal behavior.
Works Cited


Sutherland, Peter D. “Migration 2.0: A time for action at the UN Summit on Migration and Development”.

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