

# IMUN General Assembly

## Officer Report 2021

### *The question of ethnic cleansing and measures taken to eradicate it*

There is much debate as to whether ethnic cleansing is a novelty of the 20<sup>th</sup> century or if it is an issue that dates back hundreds of years ago. Nonetheless, it is clear that it needs to become a problem of the past. Ethnic cleansing has been defined in different ways by scholars and policy makers both inside and outside of the United Nations (UN. a condensed definition is that ethnic cleansing is purposely “rendering an area ethnically homogeneous” through many times “violent and terror inspiring means” resulting in the deportation or forcible displacement of persons belonging to particular ethnic groups”. (S/25273, S/1994/674, Encyclopaedia Britannica). This agenda issue report will briefly explore the modern history of ethnic cleansing and its humanitarian, social, and economic implications; discuss the most relevant pathways for solutions and areas for improvement; sources for research and the most relevant delegations of the debate.

Some experts defend that ethnic cleansing began as far back as the 9<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC; however, it is clear to all that ethnic cleansing has been on the rise since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This rise is attributed to recent developments “such as the rise of powerful nation-states fueled by nationalist and pseudo-scientific racist ideologies in conjunction with the spread of advanced technology and communications.” (Encyclopaedia Britannica) Some of the most notable examples of ethnic cleansing during the 20<sup>th</sup> century are the persecution of Jews during the Holocaust, the deportation of ethnic groups from the Caucus and Crimea by the former Soviet Union in the 1940s, as well as the forced displacement and killings in the 1990s in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. It was mostly these instances of ethnic cleansing that sparked a debate in

the international community on the controversies of ethnic cleansing and the measures that needed to be taken to avoid and eradicate it.

There is some controversy surrounding the difference between ethnic cleansing and genocide. Genocide is a legal term under the International Court of Justice which is synonymous with mass-killings and requires international intervention in its event under the Security Council (SC) resolution A/RES//60/1. Conversely, despite being mentioned in several UN resolutions, ethnic cleansing can be achieved through different methods than genocide and is not recognized as a legal term of which you can be convicted. (History) The main difference is the intent: while the intent of ethnic cleansing is to remove an ethnic group, genocide can have a different intent. Thus, to facilitate the debate, genocide will be considered one of the ways through which ethnic cleansing can be achieved.

After the failure of the UN to prevent and stop the ethnic cleansing and genocide in Rwanda and in the Balkans in the 1990s, it became abundantly clear that there was something at fault with how the international community took action against mass instances of human rights violations. This was because there was a lot of ambiguity surrounding the extent foreign powers could interfere when something like ethnic cleansing and its accessory violations of human rights are reported. This controversy was centered around concerns of breach of sovereignty. In response to these concerns, following a report by the International Commission on State Sovereignty (ICSS), the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, clarified that sovereignty afforded a government the right to govern a nation undisturbed, but it also tasked that government with the responsibility to protect their citizens and their human rights. If a government was systemically unable or unwilling to do so, this responsibility fell on the international community. The concept of the Responsibility to Protect soon became accepted widely by world nations, embodying “a political commitment to

end the worst forms of violence and persecution. [Seeking] to narrow the gap between Member States' pre-existing obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law and the reality faced by populations at risk of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity." Moreover, the 2004 report by the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change which endorsed the Responsibility to Protect, reported that this global promise was exercisable by the SC through last resort military action. For the purposes of this debate, delegates are encouraged to focus beyond the intervention capabilities of the SC and think of more global solutions.

Although ethnic cleansing is not recognized as a crime in it of itself, it is important to combat and strive to eradicate it since it mostly leads to the persecution of certain ethnic groups and several accessory humanitarian crimes. "A United Nations Commission of Experts mandated to look into violations of international humanitarian law committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia (...) stated \that the coercive practices used to remove the civilian population can include: murder, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, extrajudicial executions, rape and sexual assaults, severe physical injury to civilians, confinement of civilian population in ghetto areas, forcible removal, displacement and deportation of civilian population, deliberate military attacks or threats of attacks on civilians and civilian areas, use of civilians as human shields, destruction of property, robbery of personal property, attacks on hospitals, medical personnel, and locations with the Red Cross/Red Crescent emblem, among others." (UN – Ethnic Cleansing) Moreover, women are usually victims of the most inhumane treatment, suffering from systemic rape and enslavement, seeing as they are viewed as the carriers of the next generation and are usually left defenseless by men who leave to fight in resistances. (Encyclopaedia Britannica) These actions can be qualified as crimes against humanity and are in breach of articles 3,4,5,6,7,9, and 25 of the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Thus, it is vital to put an end to ethnic cleansing practices to ensure the protection of innocents.

The humanitarian implications of ethnic cleansing are clear; however, the social and economic implications are also relevant. The most important of these is the subsequent refugee crisis that may ensue. In the event of ethnic cleansing, survivors or those being forcibly displaced/deported many times become refugees, migrants, or internally displaced persons (it is important that delegates are familiar and know the difference between these terms). Seeing as ethnic cleansings usually happen in Less Economically Development Countries (LEDCs) which are usually surrounded by other LEDCs, there is a lack of infrastructure and funds to withstand the flux of refugees/migrants into neighboring countries or to care for internally displaced persons. This can in turn generate a separate crisis with all of the issues that accompany a crisis of this type. The potential for the aggravation of an issue such as ethnic cleansing shows the need for prevention of swift action against instances of ethnic cleansing.

“[Ethnic cleansing] is usually treated by the media in one of two ways: either it receives maximum publicity as a horror story about which the world should care and do something about, or it is ignored or never reaches the news agenda.” (Independent) It is important to understand how ethnic cleansing metastasizes in our modern world to effectively evaluate solutions in order to eradicate it. Since the first recognized occurrence of genocide in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – the persecution of Darfuris in Sudan in 2003 – there have been a number of ethnic cleansings such as: the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya in Myanmar; the Nuer and other ethnic groups in South Sudan, Christians and Yazidis in Syria and Iraq, the mutual ethnic cleansing and genocide between Christians and Muslims in the Central African Republic; (Business Insider) the Kurds by Turkey; (Independent) and the one million Uighur Muslims in concentration camps in China (Aljazeera).

Due to the wide variety of conflicts and sociopolitical tensions that result in ethnic cleansing, it becomes very difficult to tackle every situation directly and specifically. Delegates are encouraged to find common trends in these occurrences to coordinate global solutions in lieu of local ones which are only temporarily effectual. One thing is clear, there is a lack of information and awareness regarding ethnic cleansing, either because it's believed to have no mediatic value or because it is politically convenient. This renders decision making slow and unsure since reliable information is key to decide whether or not and to what extent international actions is necessary.

When considering solutions, delegates should focus on prevention and early action. However, this has proven to be a challenging thing to do because sufficient information is missing, because official bodies are sluggish to act, or because of a plethora of other factors. The SC's 2004 follow-up report to the Millennium Summit reports that in order to "meet the challenge of prevention" the world and the UN needs to: "improve international regulatory frameworks and norms"; be better informed and analyze this information better; rely on preventative diplomacy and mediation; and consider preventative deployment. (A/59/565) Moreover, increasing partnerships with national, international, and local/regional (public or private) organizations is an interesting avenue seeing as it can help build establish the necessary infrastructure to ensure the aspects necessary for effective prevention.

A challenge is that, historically, the UN had more success in using preventative diplomatic methods to diffuse inter nation conflict than in diffusing conflict within a nation. A reason for this is that, Member States do not want to see their internal affairs internationalized and are less likely to resort to a public forum. (A/59/556) Additionally, it would be helpful to keep in mind the issue of sovereignty. Solutions drafted should safeguard a nations sovereignty while ensuring its citizens' safety. It is important to create a complete framework for the assessment of a situation

and the employment of the right solutions seeing as sovereignty concerns may delay necessary action

A secondary preventative aspect is that ethnic cleansings usually happen in LEDCs and nations with less governmental structure and/or stability. Therefore, drafting solutions towards the improved stability of these nations is a promising idea. Nevertheless, the focus of the debate should be directly on ethnic cleansing so clauses on this issue should not be too extensive.

Unfortunately, because there are ongoing conflicts that result in ethnic cleansing delegates need to also consider how to combat it while it is happening at full-scale. It is advised that delegates take into consideration the protection of at-risk civilians and important cultural heritage. Also, it is important that solutions remain focused on the goal of the debate: the eradication of ethnic cleansing. Keeping in mind that it is not within the powers of the GA to levy sanctions or deploy peacekeeping troops, the development of “out of the box” ideas is necessary. Similarly, delegates should keep in mind the powers and prerogative of the General Assembly (GA): the GA issues non-binding resolutions.

Regarding funding, this is an essential aspect of any structured plan to solve an issue, thus, delegates need to incorporate it into solutions. Considering that many affected countries are LEDCs and lack infrastructure for solutions, an important aspect of this part of the debate will be finding the necessary sources of funding.

The UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect as well as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International and the Human Rights Watch are reliable sources of information. Also, consulting passed resolutions and committee reports can help understand how past solutions can be improved on. It is vital that delegates research their

nation's policy on this issue, for which a good starting point is the country's national website. A useful source of information are policies and solutions set for this issue by regional and national organizations such as the Organization of American States (OAS), The Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the African Union (AU) seeing as they have experience in creating appropriate infrastructure and framework necessary for the implementation of solutions.

Lastly, the delegations most affected by this issue are those who have experienced or are experiencing ethnic cleansing such as: Sudan, South Sudan, Myanmar, Iraq, Syria, China, the Central African Republic, etc. Moreover, several countries like the United States of America who have shown a tendency for foreign intervention and those who are very vocal about human rights such as Canada, Denmark and Sweden will have a lot to contribute. Organizations such as Amnesty International, the Human Rights Watch, and the European Union which are very involved in humanitarian issues also have a strong position. The World Trade Organization and the World Bank will also play a major role when debating funding. Although the aforementioned delegations have the strongest position, all delegations have a stance and can provide vital contributions to the debate.

It is important that delegates keep the goal of the debate in mind: the eradication of ethnic cleansing. This can be achieved through two primary avenues preventative measures and direct action. Delegates should tackle both avenues to create an effective plan for a solution while considering the accessory challenges that accompany this issue such as: sovereignty issues; nations' sluggish cooperation, financial issues, etc. It is key, to remember past solutions and conflicts, building on successes and failures. Delegates need to have a firm grasp on their delegation's policy, and to do extensive extra research since this research report only scratches the surface of this issue.

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