United Nations General Assembly
Economic and Social Council

Background Guide

Stanford Model United Nations Conference 2019
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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to SMUNC 2019! My name is Sylvie Ashford, and I’m currently a Junior studying International Relations, Arabic, and Religious Studies. Entering my eighth year of involvement with Model U.N., I’m very excited to work through these highly relevant topics with all of you.

As you begin to research the tragedy and chaos of the Syrian conflict, you may find it hard to keep up. The eight-year war has a complex, confusing, and ever-shifting narrative. The actors that color its every day are multifaceted and diversely motivated. In committee, you will have to address a wide array of political, economic, and humanitarian issues based on real-world information. The challenges of balancing such intersectional goals embody the unique role of ECOSOC in the U.N. system and will characterize the Syrian situation for the foreseeable future.

Although you may hold personal opinions on the Syrian conflict and reconstruction, your task will be to represent your character and their realistic interests. Make allies in committee, but always prioritize your characters’ interests, affected groups, and when appropriate, the interests of the greater international community—in that order.

As you prepare, be sure to use this background guide as a basic resource before exploring more detailed topics on your own. The more specific and extensive your research, the more creative and successful you can be in committee. The strongest delegates will seek to understand how the interests of international public, private, and civil society actors interact in the Syrian context.

First time delegates: I am here for you! Feel free to reach out to me with questions or concerns so that I can help you participate and enjoy yourself as much as possible throughout the conference. In order to be eligible for awards, please submit your position papers to sylviash@stanford.edu.

I’m looking forward to reading your position papers, and I hope you’re as excited as I am to debate some of the most pressing issues of our time.

Yours in Diplomacy,

[Signature]

Sylvie Ashford
II. Topic Summaries

“We have to choose between a global market driven only by calculations of short-term profit, and one which has a human face.” ~ Kofi Annan

**Topic A:** Discussing the role and rights of the Syrian people in post-war reconstruction

The economic potential of the Syrian reconstruction has attracted public and private investors from around the world. Infrastructure and related development projects, however, have been marred by reports of corruption, land-grabbing, and other human rights violations. The Syrian regime has been internationally criticized for recent laws that threaten the economic rights of Syrians in favor of deal-making with international investors, such as Law 10 of 2018. The regime is also accused of blocking the repatriation and/or social reintegration of the 11.8 out of 19.5 million Syrians currently displaced. This committee will develop policy recommendations for member states regarding foreign development contracts in Syria and business with the Syrian regime. How can the UN organization and member states encourage private investment and development while centering the needs and rights of the Syrian people to return to their homes?

“The damage done in one year can sometimes take ten or twenty years to repair.”

~ Chinua Achebe

**Topic B:** Coordinating development partnerships in Syria in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal #17

The scale of the Syrian reconstruction calls for international collaboration between governments and civil society. This effort already involves organizations focused on humanitarian aid, infrastructure development, economic empowerment, human rights protections, and peace promotion. ECOSOC is uniquely able to coordinate social and economic development projects between public sector and civil society partners, as over 3,500 NGOs hold consultative status in the chamber with speaking privileges. What do these partners need from UN member states and the UN organization to work efficiently? How can these diverse actors work together to promote sustainable development in compliance with human rights standards? What Sustainable Development Goals should partners prioritize in Syria over the next five, ten, fifteen years?
II. Introduction to the Syrian Conflict

In March 2011, protests in Syria erupted in response to a decade of political corruption, oppression, and a faltering economy under President Bashar Al-Assad.¹ Like many of Syria’s neighbors during the regional burst of revolutions and uprisings known as the Arab Spring, demonstrations spread and turned violent.² As government forces attacked and killed protesters, thousands of civilians unified and militarized. Opposition groups, aligned with different ethnic and social factions, and eventually backed by different international players, fought the government and each other for territorial control. In the chaos of a civil war, extremism flourished; groups such as Daesh grew in numbers and entered the territorial battle.³ Eight years later, over 400,000 dead, millions displaced, and over thirteen million in need of humanitarian assistance, the Syrian civil war may finally be nearing an end.⁴ Extremist groups are waning in territory and numbers, and opposition groups have slowly lost regions of the country to government control. As you read this guide, the UN and other international actors are preparing for the challenges of a post-conflict Syria still under Assad’s rule.⁵

From the beginning of the conflict, President Assad has declared an intent to combat internationally backed terrorism.⁶ To respond to terrorists, the Syrian government has exercised military power to a great extent, simultaneously killing and detaining tens of thousands of rebels, or supposed rebels. The regime has been found by independent international investigations as

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¹ “Why is there a War in Syria?” BBC News, February 25, 2019
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
https://www.csis.org/analysis/syria-when-and-how-does-war-end
⁶ “Why is there a War in Syria?”
well as specific countries and coalitions to have violated international law. Alleged transgressions vary from chemical weapons use, illegal under the Geneva Conventions and other international statutes on war crimes, to illegal detention and killing of innocent civilians, illegal under all international legal doctrines [See this timeline for more].

![Trend of Registered Syrian Refugees](image)

**UNHCR Refugee Data as of July 2018**

Both primary sides of the conflict have used military actions to target terrorists and advocates of extremism. The two most prominent groups are currently Daesh, or the 2014-formed Islamic State of Syria and the Levant, and Tahrir al-Sham, a Syrian branch of al-Qaeda composed of multiple extremist groups that unified in 2017. Other targets of the Syrian government, however, include dozens of political, non-extremist groups such as the Free Syrian Army and the Syrian National Coalition.

International parties have arguably played just as big a part in the conflict as Syrian actors, particularly Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, the United States, France, and Britain. Russia has been the only major actor to consistently and militarily support the Assad regime, opposing the U.S., France, and Britain (often referred to in U.S. media as the U.S.

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8 “Why is there a War in Syria?”
Coalition or Western alliance).  Although the Western alliance has not always acted simultaneously or backed their peers’ decisions, France, the U.K, Canada, and the United States have offered support to opposition groups and criticized Assad’s government at various points in time. Both Iran (allied with Assad) and Israel (not officially allied with either side) have both supported different Syrian groups along religious lines, and always in opposition to each other.  

Although Turkey initially opposed Assad’s government, the country has begun supporting the regime in recent months.  Turkey, as well as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, has been criticized for arming extremist-affiliated groups without regard for political or humanitarian consequences.  Political critics suggest that the Syrian conflict has morphed into a deadly proxy war, in which these countries use the Syrian battleground as a stage to settle their own disputes. Even with international support for various members of the opposition, however, Assad’s regime is winning.

Syrian Territorial Control Map as of June 2018.

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10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.


III. Topic A: Rights in reconstruction

a. Background

Most Syrians have been forced out of their homes over eight years of violent civil war. Out of an estimated 19.5 million people,14 5.6 million Syrians are refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and North Africa,15 while 6.2 million are internally displaced.16 As the Islamic State’s territory dwindles and opposition groups yield their strongholds to Assad’s government, however, thousands of Syrians are reentering the country each day.17 Nearly 166,000 refugees have independently sought resettlement since 2016.18 As these Syrians aim to rebuild their lives and society, the Assad regime and international community will face practical and legal issues surrounding economic reconstruction. In order to address complex issues such as transitional justice processes, Syrians must be able to return to their homes, farms, and businesses.

President Assad ratified the controversial “Law 10” on April 2, 2018, setting forth conditions by which the government could repossess private land for redevelopment.19 After a neighborhood is zoned for construction, the law initially granted property owners thirty days to prove their ownership. Without adequate documentation, owners would forfeit all property rights to the government and receive no restitution.20 In response to international criticism that this law

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16 “UNHCR - Syria Factsheet (January 2019)” ReliefWeb, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2019. [https://m.reliefweb.int/report/2978228](https://m.reliefweb.int/report/2978228)
would effectively seize all land owned by displaced persons and refugees, the parliament amended the law in November 2018 to grant property owners one year to prove legal rights.\textsuperscript{21} The law remains, however, a powerful tool by which the government could permissibly raze abandoned private homes and slums. Assad has stated that the law is only intended to facilitate needed reconstruction and infrastructure development. The vague wording of the legislation, however, fuels international skepticism.\textsuperscript{22} Forty countries, led by Turkey and Germany, filed an official U.N. complaint that argued the law served as a means to expropriate capital from Syrian civilians.\textsuperscript{23} Legal scholars warn that the law, while profitable for the regime, could prevent the twelve million displaced Syrians from ever returning to their daily lives.\textsuperscript{24} The thousands of detainees in Syrian prisons—most of whom are held without documented due process—as well as currently disappeared persons—many of whom were killed extrajudicially—are also at risk of losing property and post-mortem rights to family inheritance.\textsuperscript{25}

Further, some argue that the law disproportionately targets members of the opposition and certain ethnic minorities with redevelopment projects, while reallocating repossessed properties to pro-Government groups and individuals.\textsuperscript{26} Most of these recipient individuals are not of Syrian origin, and instead hold Iraqi, Afghan, Pakistani, or Iranian citizenship.\textsuperscript{27} Some scholars label this process of “restructuring” national demographics, particularly to prioritize

\textsuperscript{22}Ahmed “Assad’s Law 10: Reshaping Syria’s Demographic.
\textsuperscript{23}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26}“TIMEP Brief: Law No. 10 of 2018.”
Shia Muslims over non-Muslims and smaller religious minority groups, “ethnic-cleansing.”\footnote{Ibid.} This argument also followed Law No. 66 of 2012 which nullified ownership rights over “highly populated and slum areas,” and triggered a mass eviction in Damascus.\footnote{Al Zein, 9.} Two new projects in highly populated areas have recently been announced with related implications.\footnote{Al Zein, 9.}

This series of property legislation has clear international impacts. After the Syrian GDP dropped 80% between 2010 and 2016, the regime has regularly entered into talks with international governments and private actors about funding Syria’s national reconstruction.\footnote{Aron Lund, “Dispossession or development? The tug of war over Syria’s ruined slum dwellings,” The New Humanitarian. July 4, 2018. \url{https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2018/07/04/dispossession-or-development-tug-war-over-syria-s-ruined-slum-dwellings}} Foreign investors are attracted to large land deals made possible by rezoning private land. Syrian sales to major multinational corporations and the governments of Iran, Russia, India, and China are already generating billions of dollars.\footnote{Igor A. Matveev, “Despite high price of Syrian reconstruction, business, influence opportunities abound,” Al-Monitor. February 27, 2019. \url{https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/02/russia-syria-iran-reconstruction.html}}

\textit{b. Relevant Documents}

• “Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-Based Evictions and Displacement.” Articles 56, 60, 64-67.\(^\text{36}\)

• The U.N. Sustainable Development Goals.\(^\text{37}\)

c. Helpful Sources

• USAID Syria Profile: [https://www.usaid.gov/syria](https://www.usaid.gov/syria)
• TIMEP Syria: [https://timep.org/areas-of-focus/syria/](https://timep.org/areas-of-focus/syria/)

d. Questions to Consider

• What private and public investors are currently working with the Assad regime?
• What kinds of investment projects (public infrastructure, housing, private industries) are most lucrative? Most necessary?
• What are positive and negative impacts of international investment on Syrians?
• What partners and voices should ECOSOC consider when discussing this topic?
• How can the U.N. organization and member states encourage private investment and development while centering the needs and rights of the Syrian people to return to their homes?


III. Topic B: Coordinating Development Partnerships

a. Background

Beyond the massive refugee and IDP crisis, domestic problems are wide-ranging in Syria. To begin with, some 80% of Syrians are living in poverty.38 More than 50% of Syrian social infrastructure is currently unusable due to damage and conflict zones.39 As a result, 70% of Syrians lack consistent access to clean water, 95% lack access to healthcare without foreign assistance, and one third of schools are out of use.40 At least two million Syrian children are currently out of school, and the country as a whole has been set back twenty years in time in terms of the education system’s progress.41 With food production down 40% and the workforce dramatically depleted, private sector activity is negligible on the whole.42 In terms of political and legal stability, the Assad regime’s consolidation of power over the course of the war eradicated all legal mechanisms for post-war justice processes.43

The scale of the Syrian reconstruction calls for international collaboration between governments and civil society. This effort already involves organizations focused on humanitarian aid, infrastructure development, economic empowerment, human rights protections, and peace promotion. In terms of humanitarian aid, at least 171 non-governmental organizations and UN bodies are providing the most emergency support.44 Funding from these actors—primarily regional (Islamic), European, and American—goes towards health, shelter,

40 Maher.  
41 Ibid.  
42 Ibid.  
43 Ibid.  
and sustenance initiatives.\textsuperscript{45} Emergency humanitarian fundraising, however, has consistently fallen short of its necessary targets. In 2017 and 2018, urgent pleas for contributions towards billion dollar efforts successfully collected <30\% of their goals.\textsuperscript{46} These failings are commonly attributed to a lack of political will in wealthy countries and the limited means of smaller non-governmental organizations. Another problem is a lack of centralized responsibility for Syrian refugees or an end in sight to the humanitarian crises at hand.\textsuperscript{47}

In terms of development partnerships in Syria, one example includes the ongoing multi-million dollar projects overseen by the UNDP.\textsuperscript{48} These projects include implementing nationwide solid waste management and access to electricity, funded by Japan as well as a number of European companies and non-governmental organizations.\textsuperscript{49} Smaller initiatives fall under the UNDP’s overarching project “Positioning Syria for longer term development planning” with a focus on “Capacity, skills, advocacy, and knowledge management on SDGs, including for cross cutting issues, and localisation of the SDGs, enhanced for the CO staff and local partners from public and private sectors, and other relevant civil society actors.”\textsuperscript{50} The achievements of this project, however, are not yet public, and it is unclear whether any coordinated efforts have found success in late-war Syria with regard to local development or economic empowerment.

\textsuperscript{45} “UNOCHA Syria Hub.”
\textsuperscript{46} “Humanitarian funding gaps and impact,” Relief Web, December 14, 2018
\textsuperscript{\url{https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/humanitarian-funding-gaps-and-impacts}}.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} “Basic Infrastructure and Surface Rehabilitation.”
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} “Positioning UNDP Syria for longer term Dev planning,” Syria, UNDP, May 19, 2019.
\textsuperscript{\url{http://www.sy.undp.org/content/syria/en/home/projects/Positioning_UNDP_Syria_for_longer_term_Dev_planning.html}}.
In the realm of human rights related initiatives in Syria, the U.N. has organized fact finding and data collection projects since the early days of the war. 51 In terms of peace-keeping, the U.N. has also authorized teams to monitor cease-fires and help parties ensure that the terms of mid-war agreements have been upheld by all sides. 52 In both of these categories of endeavors, non-governmental organizations have taken it upon themselves to contribute to fact-finding (such as human rights watch) 53 or journalistic coverage of peace-brokering and information-sharing related to conflict resolution. 54 To date, however, there has been a lack of partnership-based fact-finding, human rights, or peace-keeping projects in Syria.

In each category, partnerships are facing obstacles that range from weak funding to poor coordination or a lack of local participation. New projects may prove necessary as unexpected challenges arise. Currently uninvolved private actors, NGO partners, or even U.N. member states may hold the resources or institutional knowledge critical to solving such problems. An ECOSOC resolution establishing a framework for these activities in Syria could prove effective as ECOSOC is uniquely able to coordinate social and economic development projects between governments, public sector, and civil society partners. Along with member state representation, over 3,500 NGOs hold consultative status in the committee chamber with speaking privileges.

b. Relevant Documents

- The U.N. Sustainable Development Goals. 55

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https://www.peacewomen.org/e-news/article/summary-un-efforts-syria

52 Ibid.


54 “Final Communiqué of the Action Group for Syria (Geneva Communiqué),” The University of Edinburgh, July 6, 2012 
https://www.peaceagreements.org/wview/784/Final%20Communiqu%C3%A9%20of%20the%20Action%20Group%20for%20Syria

55 “Sustainable Development Goals.”
● SDG Guidebook: “Maximising the impact of partnerships for the SDGs.”

● Summary “2019 ECOSOC Partnership Forum.”

c. Helpful Sources

● Syrian Civil Society Database:
  [https://citizensforsyria.org/mapping-syrian-cs/simplesearch/](https://citizensforsyria.org/mapping-syrian-cs/simplesearch/)


● USAID Syria Profile: [https://www.usaid.gov/syria/fact-sheets/syria-country-profile](https://www.usaid.gov/syria/fact-sheets/syria-country-profile)

d. Questions to Consider

● What are the most relevant public, private, and civil society actors in the Syrian context?

● What do these partners need from UN member states and the UN organization to work efficiently?

● How can these diverse actors work together to promote sustainable development in compliance with human rights standards?

● Is there institutional precedence for ECOSOC to develop a framework for development partnerships in Syria?

● What Sustainable Development Goals should partners prioritize in Syria over the next five years? ten? fifteen?

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