



NHSMUN

National High School Model United Nations

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A Note on the NHSMUN Difference

Esteemed Faculty and Delegates,

Welcome to NHSMUN 2027! We are Armen Bagdassarian and Sabeeh Mirza, and we are elated to serve as this year's Secretaries-General. Thank you for choosing to attend NHSMUN, the world's largest and most diverse high school Model United Nations conference. As a space for collaboration, consensus, and compromise, NHSMUN strives to transform today's brightest thinkers, speakers, and collaborators into tomorrow's leaders. We believe that an emphasis on education through simulation is paramount to the Model UN experience.

Realism and Accuracy: Although a perfect simulation of the UN is never possible, we believe that one of the core educational responsibilities of MUN conferences is to educate students about how the UN System works. We strive to invite real UN, NGO, and field experts into each committee through our committee speakers program. Moreover, we arrange meetings between students and the actual UN Permanent Mission of the country they are representing. These exclusive resources are only available due to IMUNA's formal association with the United Nations Department of Global Communications and consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. No other conference goes so far to deeply immerse students into the UN System.

Educational Emphasis: At the heart of NHSMUN lies education and compromise. Part of what makes NHSMUN special is its diverse delegate base. As such, when NHSMUN distributes awards, we strongly de-emphasize their importance in comparison to the educational value of Model UN. In particular, our daises look for and promote constructive leadership and diplomacy that strive toward consensus, as real ambassadors do in the United Nations.

Research and a Dedicated Staff: Our staffers care deeply about delegates' experiences and what they take away from their time at NHSMUN. Our Directors spend over six months preparing Background Guides, in addition to Update Briefs written to reflect the rapidly changing nature of the topics to be discussed. Our staffers are trained rigorously to provide the best conference experience possible. Our daises provide thoughtful comments on submitted position papers. Our staff aims to tailor the committee experience to delegates' reflections and research, but also to facilitate an environment where all delegates' thoughts can be heard.

Empowering Participation: The UN relies on the voices of all of its member states to create resolutions. This is our philosophy at NHSMUN too. Our Rules of Procedure and our staff focus on making every voice in the committee heard, regardless of country assignment or skill level. Additionally, unlike many other conferences, we also emphasize delegate participation after the conference. Delegates spend countless hours researching topics critical to the UN and broader international sphere.

Delegates, it is our sincerest hope that your time at NHSMUN will be thought-provoking and stimulating. NHSMUN is an incredible time to learn, grow, and embrace new opportunities. We look forward to seeing you work both as students and global citizens at the conference.

Best,

Armen Bagdassarian
Secretary-General

Sabeeh Mirza
Secretary-General

Position Paper Requirements

Delegate research and preparation is a critical element of attending NHSMUN and enjoying the debate experience. We have provided this Background Guide to introduce the topics that will be discussed in your committee. We encourage and expect each of you to critically explore the selected topics and be able to identify and analyze their intricacies upon arrival to the conference.

The task of preparing for the conference can be challenging. To assist delegates, we have updated our [Beginner Delegate Guide](#) and [Advanced Delegate Guide](#). These guides contain more detailed instructions on how to prepare a position paper and excellent sources that delegates can use for research. Use these resources to your advantage. They can help transform a sometimes overwhelming task into what it should be: an engaging, interesting, and rewarding experience.

To accurately represent a country, delegates must be able to articulate its policies. Accordingly, NHSMUN requires each delegation (the one or two delegates representing a country in a committee) to write a position paper for each topic on the committee's agenda. More information about how to write and format position papers can be found in the [Research Guide](#). To summarize, position papers should be structured into three sections.

I: Topic Background – This section should describe the history of the topic as it would be described by the delegate's country. Delegates do not need to give an exhaustive account of the topic, but rather focus on the details that are most important to the delegation's policy and proposed solutions.

II: Country Policy – This section should discuss the delegation's policy regarding the topic. Each paper should state the policy in plain terms and include the relevant statements, statistics, and research that support the effectiveness of the policy. Comparisons with other global issues are also appropriate here.

III. Proposed Solutions – This section should detail the delegation's proposed solutions to address the topic. Descriptions of each solution should be thorough. Each idea should clearly connect to the specific problem it aims to solve and identify potential obstacles to implementation and how they can be avoided. The solution should be a natural extension of the country's policy.

Each topic's position paper should be **no more than 10 pages long** double-spaced with standard margins and 12 point font size. This is a maximum; **3–5 pages per topic is often a suitable length**. The paper must be written from the perspective of your assigned country and should articulate the policies you will espouse at the conference.

Each delegation is responsible for submitting position papers on or before **February 26, 2027**. If a delegate wishes to receive detailed feedback from the committee's dais, their position paper must be submitted on or before **February 5, 2027**. The papers received by this earlier deadline will be reviewed by the committee dais and returned before February 26. Instructions on how to submit position papers will be shared directly with faculty advisors.

Submission instructions for position papers will be sent to faculty advisers via email. If delegations are unable to submit their position papers on time, please contact us at nhsmun@imuna.org.

Delegations that do not submit position papers will be ineligible for awards.

Committee History

In the early 2000s, one pressing issue hindered progress toward the Millennium Development Goals: corruption. Around the world, corruption became an increasingly recognized obstacle to sustainable development, good governance, and the rule of law. In December 2000, the United Nations General Assembly established the Ad Hoc Committee for the Negotiation of a Convention against Corruption. Rather than merely evaluating the scope of corruption, the Committee was specifically tasked with developing a broad and effective international legal instrument against corruption.¹

On October 31, 2003, the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) was adopted by the UN General Assembly through Resolution 58/4. This was passed under the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which serves as the Convention's secretariat. The purpose of UNCAC is to develop a thorough solution to a problem that happens anywhere and involves anyone relating to corruption. The Convention subsequently opened for signature at a high-level political conference in Mérida, Mexico, in December 2003, and entered into effect on December 14, 2005. The mandate for the Convention covers three main points. First, promoting and strengthening measures to prevent and combat corruption efficiently and effectively. Second, promoting, facilitating, and supporting international cooperation and technical assistance in the prevention of and fight against corruption, including asset recovery. Third, promoting integrity, accountability, and the proper management of public affairs and public property.²

The UNCAC's mandate is divided into eight chapters containing 71 articles. Chapter I establishes the Convention's general provisions, including its purpose, scope, and definitions. Importantly, Article 4 establishes the principle of protecting sovereignty. It requires states to implement their obligations consistently with sovereign equality, territorial integrity, and non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other states. However, this does not mean that states are prohibited from prosecuting corrupt officials from another country. Instead, the Convention requires states to exercise jurisdiction in accordance with international law and their domestic legal frameworks.³

The Convention therefore balances international cooperation against respect for national sovereignty. States cannot simply enter another state's territory and exercise governmental or judicial authority there without authorization, but they can cooperate through mechanisms such as extradition, mutual legal assistance, and other forms of international cooperation established under the Convention.⁴

Chapter VI addresses technical assistance and information exchange. It calls on states to develop training programs for personnel responsible for preventing and combatting corruption and to cooperate in providing technical assistance, particularly for developing countries. Chapter VII establishes the mechanisms for implementation, most importantly the Conference of the States Parties (CoSP), which promotes and reviews the implementation of the Convention. Finally, Chapter VIII contains the Convention's final provisions, including implementation, settlement of disputes, signature and ratification, entry into force, amendments, denunciation, and related procedural matters.

1 United Nations, "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee for the Negotiation of a Convention Against Corruption on the Work of Its First to Seventh Sessions," report, General Assembly, October 7, 2003, https://www.unodc.org/pdf/crime/convention_corruption/session_7/422e.pdf.

2 Model Diplomat, "Convention Against Corruption – Definition | Model Diplomat," accessed September 1, 2026, <https://modeldiplomat.com/learn/glossary/convention-against-corruption>.

3 "Full Text of the UN Convention Against Corruption - UNCAC," The Global Civil Society Coalition for the UNCAC, accessed September 1, 2026, <https://uncaccoalition.org/about/conventions/un-convention-against-corruption/full-text-of-the-un-convention-against-corruption-uncac/>.

4 UN, "LEGISLATIVE GUIDE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION AGAINST CORRUPTION," UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2006), https://www.unodc.org/pdf/crime/convention_corruption/cosp/Ebook/Corruption_Legislative_Guide_E.pdf.

TOPIC A

UNCAC | NHSMUN 2027

Combating Corruption in Humanitarian Aid Distribution



Introduction

Humanitarian aid is defined as the distribution of food, medicine, shelter, and other essential items to people affected by conflict, disaster, or famine. It is one way that international states can express care and shared responsibility. In the 19th century, intense activism created a blueprint of modern humanitarian aid, with its goal to address a lack of food and homes. At its core, humanitarian aid is guided by three core ideas: humanity, freedom, and neutrality. The ultimate goal is to alleviate suffering whenever it is found. The aid should be given based on need alone without personal bias. This includes being separated from military or political goals. As aid missions have expanded globally, the legal frameworks guiding their delivery and distribution have evolved to address increasingly complex challenges. Notably, the issue has evolved beyond the simple delivery of aid to address widespread corruption in the humanitarian aid system. The development of accountability processes in response to corruption shows how legal standards have evolved alongside the system. Studying these issues shows why corruption and accountability remain ongoing challenges for the international community.¹

In the 21st century, the transport and distribution of humanitarian aid have faced many challenges. Armed groups, criminals, and governments often control, take, or sell aid materials. Smaller and more vulnerable communities are often disproportionately affected by this corruption. Specifically, displaced populations consisting largely of women and children are most affected. Many shelters lack access to water, food, and medicine, worsening the effects of aid misuse. This has contributed to many online movements such as #WhereIsTheMoney, which allows donors and the public to speak up about the misuse of humanitarian funds. In a study by Dr. Jonathan Boxman, a statistical analyst in military history, he argues that areas with long-term conflict such as Somalia, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Gaza demonstrate that aid misuse is not just an error, but a feature integrated in the modern aid system.²

There are a number of reasons why corruption remains rampant. Oftentimes, citizens are too scared or have no interest in reporting fraud. Additionally, they believe that if they do report it, their aid will be reduced. Local aid units also lack the correct resources to teach staff how

to properly perform their duties. In return, this makes staff more susceptible to corruption.

As humanitarian crises become longer and more difficult, international responses need to adapt to address these faults. Some countries want stricter checkups, external reviews, and better accountability, meaning that clarity is needed to make sure aid is given to its correct recipients.³ Others say that delaying humanitarian aid to make sure it has the correct supervision does not consider active conflict zones, caused by armed groups. These diverse views on how humanitarian aid should be checked, funded, and delivered show how different parties shape the current efforts to address corruption. However, most parties agree that preventing corruption will require honesty, urgency, and stricter laws.

History and Description of the Issue

EARLY CAMPAIGNS FOR HUMANITARIAN AID

Humanitarian aid is commonly thought to be a 20th-century practice. In reality, it dates back to the Napoleonic Wars, fought in Europe between 1803 and 1815. In the last years of the war, Davout, the Minister of the Armed Forces of France, ordered his army to set fire to a German city's hospital and suburbs, including Berg, Grindel, and Hamm. This led to the destruction of over 1,207 buildings, with the damage valued at 35 million francs, or approximately USD six to seven million.

Following this event, local groups were formed to help those in need and address the food scarcity and homelessness in Dresden. At the same time, a British group called the "Committee for Relieving the Distress in Germany" (CRDG) was also raising money and gathering supplies. These two groups, based in Britain and Germany, worked together to send food, clothing, and bandages across borders. This was an early concept of what is now understood as humanitarian aid. It had all the specific features seen today: volunteers helping foreigners, giving essential items like food and medicine, and prioritizing women, children, and wounded soldiers.⁴

The 19th century was an era of modern social activism. This period saw the creation of the Red Cross and its founding body, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). On February 17th, 1863, the five-member drafting committee of the ICRC held a meeting to discuss the narrow mandate of the Geneva Public Warfare Society. In this meeting, they voted to establish themselves as the Permanent International Committee for the Relief of Wounded Soldiers. Importantly, on the 15th of September, the creator of the ICRC, Henry Dunant, demanded that "neutral status" be granted to medical personnel, as well.

The October 1863 Geneva Convention was crucial in securing the cooperation of modern states. During the convention, representatives developed recommendations for governments to adopt protections for wounded soldiers and medical personnel. These efforts laid the foundation for the Geneva Convention, which was later formalized by diplomats who translated Dunant's ideas, in his 1862 book "A Memory of Solferino", into a legal framework. In the context of early humanitarian aid, the Red Cross is significant because it not only promoted goodwill assistance but also pushed for state accountability and legal protection for those providing and receiving aid.⁵

In 1870, a famine hit northern China after many years of drought, resulting in crop failure. Families had to sell their clothes, furniture, houses, and land to survive. After the Chinese government took notice, the Governor of Shansi organized food transports, but these efforts were futile. Poor roads made transportation difficult, and many local officials took the rations for themselves. This gap was fulfilled by the China Famine Relief Committee, based in Shanghai. The committee managed to raise over 200,000 taels of silver from Japan, India, and other various settlements. Missionaries visited each home and distributed coins based on need, which managed to sustain families until rain returned in the summer of 1879.⁶

During the Cold War, the tradition of international aid took on a new form. In 1956, the Soviet Union crushed another uprising in Hungary, forcing 200,000 Hungarians to flee. In response, the US Air Forces directed airlifts supplies to Red Cross facilities in Switzerland, Austria, and West Germany. Today, this is known as Operation Mercy. As the crisis evolved, President Dwight D. Eisenhower offered thousands of Hungarians asylum. The United States European Command (USEUCOM) created a staging area, or a temporary location for aid before its distribution, near the Munich-RIEM Civil Airport, during Operation Safe Haven. Soldiers and airmen brought accommodations and medical supplies

for these facilities. Over seven months, the USEUCOM managed to safely transport over 30,000 refugees to the US. The efficiency of this operation makes it widely seen as the greatest military humanitarian effort since the Berlin Airlift.⁷

Today, military intervention with humanitarian aid has been normalized. This includes the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), a US military command that conducts military and humanitarian operations across Africa. In Mauritania, AFRICOM constructed seven animal vaccination centers to treat the farmers' animals. Chad received anti-malaria and deworming medicine for over 6,500 people from the command. During AFRICOM's medical missions, it treated people displaced by Boko Haram, an extremist group known for kidnapping and forcing people to follow their ideologies. The military command also led a life-saving effort off the coast of North Africa by picking up a distress signal from a sinking migrant ship with over 131 passengers aboard. They cooperated with Maltese and Libyan authorities to perform the successful rescue.⁸

Laws regarding humanitarian aid have always been evolving since the first Geneva Convention. This happened in 1864, when France, Switzerland, and the UK created the first obligation to protect health workers and wounded soldiers. The Geneva Convention in 1906 gave the same protection to naval forces, while the discussion in 1929 focused on the treatment of prisoners of war.

After World War II, they had to implement four Geneva Conventions. These agreements outlined protections for civilians in conflict zones and required aid to be provided impartially. These Conventions were widely accepted by the international community, establishing these protections as a universal norm. The additions in 1977 expanded these protections to victims of non-international conflicts, as well. These conventions are important to understanding the obligations surrounding humanitarian aid.⁹

The story of humanitarian aid has always been evolving.¹⁰ Today, countries from all over the world work together to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches those in need. The goal of many of these projects remains true to where it all began: to ease suffering and save lives.

PATHWAYS FOR CORRUPTION IN HUMANITARIAN AID

Humanitarian aid is intended to ease suffering and save lives; however, inside conflict zones, the flow of money and supplies can create an ideal environment for corruption. Corruption takes several common forms. One example includes armed groups acting as “gatekeepers,” by controlling the distribution of aid. These groups control civilian areas and may charge aid agencies travel fees or impose unofficial taxes to let supplies through.

Another common form is the theft and diversion of aid. Stolen aid is often resold on illegal markets. Corrupt officials may also alter recipient lists, create fake names and identification numbers, or manipulate statistics to favor certain groups. These practices can be difficult to detect and verify. Worst of all, corruption can lead to the abuse of vulnerable populations. Aid workers may demand favors in exchange for assistance, taking advantage of the extreme power imbalance that exists in areas affected by conflict.¹¹

Because there is a lack of transparency surrounding aid distribution in the Middle East and North Africa, civil society groups have developed tools to address corruption. For example, the Coalition for Accountability and Integrity (AMAN), a Palestinian civil society organization, has outlined specific rules for aid workers to prevent corruption at the point of distribution. Trained journalists also help monitor corruption in reconstruction efforts in the region. They have developed tools such as the Gaza Track, which provides the public with real-time information on humanitarian aid.

Yemen has seen social media campaigns such as “#WhereIsTheMoney?” that demand greater transparency from donors. In Morocco, Transparency Maroc, an organization that works to combat corruption, partners with local organizations in areas affected by earthquakes to monitor aid delivery and identify potential corruption risks.¹² Even when formal oversight systems are weak, local communities have organized to demand transparency and ensure that aid reaches those who need it most.

Most citizens have no way to prevent the devastating effects on public health caused by the theft of medical supplies and the misuse of disease prevention funds. To address these issues, organizations must consider penalties for misuse and independent auditing to protect resources in health-related sectors. Even military-led humanitarian aid, such as AFRICOM, require clear standards when choosing vendors and tracking resources. In these ways, these organizations can ensure that medical care, clinics, and disaster response efforts actually benefit local communities.¹³

A study conducted by the Humanitarian Policy Group on aid delivery in Liberia examined corruption risks in camp leadership, aid

distribution, and beneficiary registration. The study found that limited agency funding, intense pressure to deliver aid, and a lack of safe channels for whistleblowing and legal redress allowed misconduct to continue.¹⁴ Similarly, another Humanitarian Policy Group study looked at corruption in Afghanistan following a significant increase in aid after 2001. The study found that weaknesses in government systems and the rapid growth of diverse aid organizations created numerous opportunities for fraud, particularly in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Herat.¹⁵

While these examples show how aid channels can create opportunities for corruption, there is a lot of misinformation about the extent of corruption in humanitarian aid. For example, the widely repeated claim that 20 percent of humanitarian aid is lost to corruption has been discussed as a “zombie statistic” because it lacks credible evidence. In reality, research tracking financial flows in conflict areas such as Ukraine and Afghanistan, shows that aid is not being lost to corruption on a massive scale. Instead, some resources are lost because the systems needed to track and monitor aid can slow its delivery and make it more difficult to reach recipients



Humanitarian Aid in Liberia

Credit: US Air Force

efficiently.¹⁶

In the United Kingdom, many investigations conducted by the UK Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) have found various ways that fraud can occur in aid deliveries. In this context, fraud includes bribery, theft, and other corrupt actions by government officials. The UK's Public Sector Fraud Authority estimates that between 0.5 and 5 percent of government spending is affected by fraud and error.

Reports from the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), however, recorded detected fraud losses of more than 2.2 million GBP in 2020 and 2021. Compared with total spending of more than 9.9 billion GBP, these detected losses represented only about 0.02 percent of spending. While this figure appears very low, authorities questioned whether it reflects genuinely low levels of fraud or whether fraud is simply going undetected. They also raised concerns that overly strict controls could create another problem by compromising the quality or efficiency of aid delivery.¹⁷

Aid workers reported several barriers to reporting fraud: 73 percent said people are discouraged or afraid to report it, 71 percent said they lack incentives to look for fraud, and 69 percent feared that reporting fraud could damage the reputation of aid organizations and lead to reduced funding. The UK has since focused on strengthening the “second line of defense,” which includes guidance, training, and supportive systems. This is based on findings from the ICAI, which state that the second line of defense is under-resourced. Specifically, many organizations lack sufficient managers and training resources, leaving staff more vulnerable to fraud. The UK also faces challenges with mission leaders, who may not fully understand the programs operating in their countries. This results in unclear responsibilities and disruptions in aid dispersal.¹⁸

LEGAL OVERSIGHT AND POLICY STANDARDS FOR HUMANITARIAN AID

In the realm of humanitarian aid, legal oversight helps ensure that aid is delivered effectively and without corruption to at-risk populations and those who need it most. The Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) provides a framework for the responsibilities that guide humanitarian aid. It includes principles such as humanity, impartiality, independence, and neutrality within its nine commitments. These commitments define what communities in crisis can expect from organizations providing support. At its core, CHS establishes a system of accountability that places affected people at the center of decision-making. This promotes active participation and local engagement while requiring safeguards to “do no harm,” including protections against exploitation, abuse, and environmental damage.¹⁹

The rules of CHS oversight are specific and practical. Specifically, it actively pushes organizations to manage resources responsibly, remain on alert for corruption, and create simple and safe ways for citizens to report problems without fear of consequences. Moreover, the CHS requires every organization to apply these policies consistently in all of its efforts and formally state that they meet those standards. By encouraging fair partnerships, enforcing staff codes of conduct, and protecting personal data, the CHS has transformed broad humanitarian goals into concrete, inspectable responsibilities. Together, these measures create a strong accountability system that requires aid groups to answer not only donors and governments, but also to the communities they are meant to serve.²⁰

While CHS establishes practical standards for how humanitarian organizations should operate, these standards exist within a broader international legal framework. The International Humanitarian Law (IHL) provides the legal foundation for many of these principles, including impartiality, neutrality, and the protection of civilians. Together, the CHS and IHL create

similar systems of accountability that determine both how aid is delivered and the responsibilities organizations have toward affected populations.

These legal and accountability standards become especially important during emergencies, when humanitarian organizations must respond quickly while still following established procedures. When disasters strike, the UN cannot simply jump into action without an organized plan. It must follow a specific structure for preparing for and responding to emergencies. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response serves as the central framework for guiding staff during humanitarian emergencies. Importantly, it outlines the preparation that begins before a crisis occurs. The UNHCR works behind the scenes to analyze risks, identify potential scenarios, and develop response plans with governments and other partners. It also identifies the resources, funding, and coordination needed to ensure that life-saving assistance can be delivered efficiently once a crisis begins.

If a humanitarian crisis is considered too severe for the UN committee addressing it and the affected governments to manage effectively, the UN can declare it an internal emergency. This designation is intended to accelerate processes that would normally take longer, such as purchasing supplies, hiring staff, and establishing partnerships. The ultimate goal is to ensure that assistance reaches people in danger as quickly as possible. Throughout this process, humanitarian responses must also follow the CHS to remain organized, effective, and fair.²¹

The IHL is a body of treaties and rules governing the treatment of people affected by armed conflict. These legal protections developed through international agreements, most notably the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. The principle of humane treatment, which requires parties to a conflict to protect people who are not directly participating in the conflict, lies at the core of IHL. Article 27 of

the Fourth Geneva Convention establishes a general requirement for the humane treatment of protected civilians. It requires parties to respect civilians' people, including their honor, family rights, religious beliefs, and customs. Additionally, it prohibits unfair treatment based on factors such as race, religion, or political opinion. Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions provides basic protection for people affected by internal armed conflicts. It requires humane treatment and prohibits violence, torture, and degrading treatment. Together, these rules support the principles of humane treatment and non-discrimination.²²

The Geneva Conventions also contain provisions that directly address humanitarian relief. For example, Article 59 of the Fourth Geneva Convention requires an occupying power to agree to and facilitate relief efforts when an occupied population does not have adequate resources. This can include food, medical supplies, and clothing provided by states or impartial humanitarian organizations. Article 61 further requires relief to be distributed with appropriate cooperation and supervision, helping ensure that assistance reaches those who need it.²³ These provisions reinforce the importance of impartiality in humanitarian aid: assistance must be provided based on need rather than on which side of a conflict a person supports.

Impartiality means that aid workers cannot decide who is "innocent" or "guilty" when determining who receives assistance. Instead, aid should be distributed according to the severity of people's needs, without discrimination based on their identity or affiliation with a particular side of a conflict. Although governments and parties to conflict have responsibilities toward affected populations, impartial humanitarian organizations can also provide assistance when they are able to do so.

Another important principle within this framework is neutrality. Under the "Law of Neutrality," states that are not participating in a conflict are generally expected to avoid becoming involved in

the conflict. Humanitarian organizations similarly seek to remain neutral by avoiding aligning themselves with any party. This allows them to provide assistance to affected populations without being perceived as supporting one side of the conflict.²⁴

The Hague Convention V was adopted during the Second Peace Conference in 1907 and established rules regarding the rights and duties of neutral states during conflicts. Under this Convention, providing humanitarian aid to wounded and sick people on one side of a conflict is not necessarily considered a violation of the “Law of Neutrality.” To keep aid truly humanitarian, it must be provided based on need rather than political interests. If only one side of a conflict receives assistance for political reasons, the aid may no longer qualify as humanitarian. The 1968 International Court of Justice (ICJ) *Nicaragua v. The United States* case helped establish this distinction. In this case, the ICJ examined the US’s one-sided assistance to Contra rebels opposing the Sandinista government and distinguished humanitarian assistance from support intended to benefit one side of the conflict.

There are also rules surrounding consent in humanitarian aid. Although many humanitarian aid efforts are often well received by governments, international law places limits on their ability to refuse or obstruct humanitarian assistance. In extreme cases, such as when civilians face starvation, access to humanitarian aid becomes especially important. Humanitarian groups and workers must also be protected from conflict and attacks while providing assistance. When these

protections are seriously violated during armed conflict, the violations may be considered war crimes.²⁵

These rules have proven to be beneficial in many humanitarian aid missions. However, the cholera outbreak in Haiti is one example of what happens when such rules are ignored. In 2010, a disastrous 7.0 Magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, killing an estimated 220,000 people and injuring over 300,000.²⁶ During this time, UN peacekeepers from Nepal had been staying at a UN camp in Haiti. Due to poor sanitation and waste containment, sewage from the camp had traveled into local waterways, spreading cholera, a deadly, infectious disease. Because Haitians had not experienced cholera in more than half a century, and many were living in crowded relief camps following the earthquake, the disease spread fast.²⁷ As of today, the official death toll stands at 9,200 people, though some studies argue the actual number is closer to 28,000 when taking into account under-reporting.²⁸

The International Health Regulations expect countries and organizations to be transparent, which includes truthfully reporting disease outbreaks and investigating their cause. In these ways, it ensures that civilians remain safely informed, and future outbreaks can be prevented. Initially, the UN denied any connection to the cholera outbreak. The organization’s initial refusal to admit its role in the outbreak made it worse, as it slowed containment efforts and obscured the exact source of the contamination.

Years later, scientists discovered that the strain of cholera that infected thousands of Haitians

When corruption becomes widespread, less aid reaches civilians, reducing access to essential supplies such as food and medicine.

was a direct match to the strain possessed by the Nepalese peacekeepers.²⁹ Because the UN has legal immunity, the Haitian victims' class-action lawsuit was dismissed, and they were denied compensation. Today, while the UN denies complete responsibility, they acknowledged that their peacekeepers were the likely cause and apologized for not "do[ing] enough with regard to the cholera outbreak and spread in Haiti."³⁰ This tragic case is a reminder of why organizations must "do no harm" to the citizens they are supposed to serve. When organizations refuse or ignore these rules, the consequences can be devastating and lifelong.³¹

Even with all the previous rules set up, the policy and legal sector of humanitarian aid is always evolving. When regulations are not enforced, aid workers can make civilians more vulnerable. Aid workers can even become vulnerable themselves by becoming targets of designated attacks.

CONSEQUENCES OF PROLONGED CORRUPTION

Corruption can easily take root in humanitarian aid channels, causing severe and long-lasting consequences in areas that are already

devastated by conflict or disaster. The 2013 Ebola epidemic in West Africa demonstrated how corruption can interfere with humanitarian and public health responses. Supplies were reportedly diverted by elites, salaries were inaccurately reported, and containment measures could be bypassed through bribery. In Sierra Leone, approximately 30 percent of funds allocated to the Ebola response were reportedly spent without documentation showing where the money went. This lack of financial transparency made it difficult to determine whether the funds were being used as intended.³²

Corruption can also make natural disasters more deadly. Construction companies or workers may bribe officials to overlook safety regulations, leaving buildings more vulnerable to collapse during earthquakes. A study by the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre found that 83 percent of earthquake deaths over the past 30 years occurred in countries with high levels of corruption, where construction codes were often not properly enforced.³³

Health epidemics are another example of the impact of corruption. Wealthier patients may receive priority in treatment, leaving more vulnerable people at the bottom of hospital



HIV test at Assa, Kenya

Credit: Major Gregg Tooley

waiting lists. The same U4 study found that, of the USD 7.35 trillion spent on healthcare each year, up to USD 455 billion is lost to corruption. Corruption can also undermine disease containment efforts when individuals bribe their way through quarantine checkpoints, allowing diseases to spread further.³⁴

The former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon estimated that 30 percent of aid provided to developing countries failed to reach its intended destination due to corruption. With nearly 102 million people relying on humanitarian assistance, those who are most in need can be particularly vulnerable to gaps in the aid system.³⁵ This is illustrated by a Devex journalism project called “What Went Wrong,” which collected more than 142 reports from Kenyan citizens who had received aid. The project examined why many aid projects were stalled or discontinued. Rather than receiving the promised benefits, many communities reported confusion and unmet expectations, with some already anticipating that promised assistance would never come.

Approximately 58 percent of the projects documented involved cash transfers that eventually stopped. Other projects involved water systems or unfinished schools and housing. In some cases, instability caused by illicit activity and terrorist threats also contributed to projects being abandoned by aid workers.³⁶ These examples demonstrate how corruption, weak implementation, and regional instability can prevent humanitarian assistance from reaching communities.

The effects of corruption extend beyond financial losses. When aid recipients receive little explanation for why projects and promises are not fulfilled, the resulting lack of transparency can create frustration, distrust, and feelings of abandonment. When major organizations such as the World Bank and U.N. agencies fail to communicate with affected communities, information may remain within private or government channels rather than being shared publicly. This can reinforce existing power

imbalances and undermine trust in humanitarian organizations, making aid a source of uncertainty rather than reliable support.³⁷

The consequences of corruption in the healthcare sector of humanitarian aid can be particularly severe. While the general public is left to bear much of the burden, more than 45 percent of people worldwide believe that corruption directly affects their healthcare.³⁸ The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has found that infant and child mortality rates in highly corrupt countries are nearly twice those in countries with lower levels of corruption.³⁹ Across more than 25 African countries, approximately 50 percent of respondents reported experiencing shortages of healthcare workers.⁴⁰

Bribes and informal payments can place an additional burden on civilians, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. In Uganda, health workers reportedly retain more than 68 percent of user payments, while in Pakistan, the figure exceeds 90 percent.⁴¹ The UNHCR has also reported that corruption and political unrest have contributed to a humanitarian crisis in South Sudan. Illegal taxes imposed on humanitarian projects have disrupted food aid operations and made it more difficult for assistance to reach vulnerable populations. South Sudan also ranks near the bottom of the UN Development Index (HDI), which measures development based on health, education, and standard of living.⁴² International aid organizations often spend more on providing basic services than the government itself.⁴³

When corruption interferes with these efforts, the consequences can extend beyond financial losses, contributing to shortages of food, weakened healthcare systems, and reduced access to essential services for the people who need them most.

Current Status

THE ‘WAR’ ECONOMY

In conflict-affected settings, humanitarian assistance can be directly connected to a “war economy.” This is a system in which armed groups, criminal networks, and corrupt officials profit from instability. In other words, violence may become a tool for controlling territory or trade. Armed actors can use humanitarian resources to generate income and strengthen their influence. Corruption intensifies these risks by allowing people involved in these criminal networks to divert funds and supplies. As a result, aid can unintentionally become a tool to sustain conflict.

Armed groups and other powerful criminal actors may generate revenue by taxing, diverting, or imposing humanitarian aid. In some conflict settings, they demand unofficial “fees” at checkpoints or impose conditions on who may receive it.⁴⁴ Humanitarian organizations feel obligated to send aid or accept these conditions because refusing to do so might prevent communities from receiving even a portion of it. However, these circumstances can actually strengthen the groups responsible for violence and harm civilians further. The misuse of humanitarian relief can also contribute to long-term aid dependency. When corrupt officials or armed groups begin to rely on aid as a source of revenue, humanitarian assistance can become another resource to be exploited. Rather than supporting the development of stable and self-sufficient communities, the ‘war economy’ can reinforce dependence on aid while creating incentives for continued corruption and conflict. In this way, humanitarian assistance can unintentionally become part of the economic systems that sustain instability.

Somalia shows how armed groups and local “gatekeepers” can exploit humanitarian assistance. Some three cartels may have diverted an estimated 30 to 50 percent of World

Food Programme cargo funded by hundreds of millions of donor dollars.⁴⁵ Investigations also found that roughly half of the individuals listed as camp residents did not exist. Fraudulent registration can redirect assistance away from those who actually need it. Al-Shabaab, a violent extremist group active mostly in Somalia, has reportedly required international organizations to pay registration fees of more than USD 10,000 and a 15 percent tax on relief supplies.⁴⁶

In Syria, President Bashar al-Assad’s government required aid organizations to operate using a low exchange rate in 2019, allowing the government to take a portion of international donations. This reportedly generated approximately USD 60 million in 2020. Syrian military forces also blocked aid organizations from reaching areas held by rebel groups in northern Syria.⁴⁷

Afghanistan, Sudan, and Ethiopia demonstrate three additional ways that humanitarian resources are actually part of conflict economies. In Afghanistan, the Taliban has reportedly imposed a fifteen per cent tax on humanitarian assistance. It also issued printed receipts, creating a formalized system for extracting revenue from aid. Sudan has faced similar problems. Hundreds of thousands of liters of donated diesel reportedly disappeared and were later repurchased by the UN at five times the original price.⁴⁸ In Ethiopia, investigations found that wheat supplied through US Agency for International Development (USAID)-linked programs had been diverted through flour mills to the Sudanese military. The United States then temporarily paused aid statewide and introduced electronic tracking devices to reduce diversion.⁴⁹

Haiti provides another example of how political instability can create opportunities for criminal groups to interfere with humanitarian assistance. Following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in 2021, the resulting political instability weakened government control. By 2025, criminal groups controlled 90 percent of Port-au-Prince, including critical routes for imports.⁵⁰ On March 16, 2024, a UNICEF container with medical

equipment, including resuscitation equipment and supplies for maternal and neonatal care, was reportedly looted by criminal groups.

The examples from Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, Syria, and Haiti demonstrate several common ways that war economies exploit humanitarian assistance. Armed groups and governments may do tax aid, divert supplies, or loot shipments entirely. These practices allow those in power to generate revenue while maintaining control over civilians and humanitarian organizations.⁵¹ They also increase the cost of delivering assistance, reduce the amount of aid reaching intended recipients, and can force organizations to negotiate with groups responsible for violence.⁵²

These patterns are more likely to persist where public institutions lack the capacity or independence to investigate corruption. According to Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index, 66 percent of countries scored below 50 points, or below the midpoint of perceived public-sector corruption. In these settings, bribery, nepotism, and exploitation can make it easier for armed groups and corrupt officials to divert aid without meaningful consequences. Effective responses must prioritize strengthening public institutions. This

can help build safe channels for reporting and support investigations that hold both public and non-state actors accountable.⁵³

Humanitarian assistance can also be weakened when political, military, or commercial interests are involved. The humanitarian principle of independence requires aid organizations to maintain autonomy from political, military, and economic objectives. The US floating-pier initiative in Gaza, which cost more than USD 230 million and operated for only about twenty days, demonstrates this.⁵⁴ It faced logistical challenges that limited the amount of assistance delivered. Its short lifespan and close association with a military-led initiative subjected it to criticism that the project did not effectively provide aid. Governments and humanitarian organizations must therefore ensure that aid initiatives have clear objectives, realistic implementation plans, and decision-making that does not take into account external pressure.

CASE STUDY: THE NORTH DARFUR AID CRISIS

In North Darfur, Sudan, there is a serious humanitarian crisis unfolding. Currently, violence,

North Darfur children

Credit: Chansey



acute starvation, and physical abuse are a reality for thousands of citizens. The war stemmed from a power struggle between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) or the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Both are paramilitary groups who hoped to become the official government of the country. Abdel Fattah al Burhan is the military leader of the SAF. He is in charge of the traditional state military and wants to maintain the original dominance. Hamdan “Hemedti” Dagalo is the military leader of the RSF. He wants to expand his economic power and paramilitary groups to seize control of the state. As the two groups battle for control, Sudan has begun to suffer from the world’s largest displacement crisis⁵⁵

Tensions have slowly grown between the two groups and until coming to its peak in 2023. On April 15, 2023, a shooting in the capital city of Khartoum between the two groups kickstarted the civil war. Moving forward, the SAF and the RSF became desperate to control key cities like Fasher in Darfur.⁵⁶ Humanitarian aid convoys have been blocked from accessing the region, unable to reach citizens. The top UN humanitarian official in Sudan described the town of Tawila, located 50 kilometers from the capital of El Fasher, as “one of the epicenters of a humanitarian catastrophe.” The town is home to approximately 600,000 displaced people. Most residents are women and children who have been arriving in the region since April. Nearly 12 million people have been forced to migrate in Sudan. Specifically, El Fasher, the last major sector of government involvement in the Darfur region, has been taken over for 500 days by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). As a result, 260,000 civilians have been trapped by barricades that were built to block movement, and the area is surrounded by countless landmines and unexploded devices.⁵⁷

Aid workers have been directly targeted throughout this conflict. There have been 120 casualties of aid workers reported since April 2023. Due to this, food and medical supply deliveries have slowed down. Residential areas remain overcrowded, creating the perfect

environment for disease. Cholera and dengue fever are thriving from limited clean water and poor sanitation.⁵⁸

Additionally, many displaced people also report facing abuse from fighters. One eyewitness, a Sudanese woman named Jawaher, described her experience being approached by fighters. The men beat her, stole her possessions, and then proceeded to open fire against two people who were travelling with her. When she arrived in Tawila, she was warned about cholera, dengue, and measles. She described the effect of the lack of vaccines and food by the sight of children with thin limbs and swollen stomachs. As violence continues and aid agencies face difficulty reaching these areas, the death toll continues to rise.⁵⁹ The RSF’s capture of El Fasher on October 26, 2023, demonstrates this violence and desperation even further. The capture claimed 1500 lives. The international community views the RSF’s actions during this capture as crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. The RSF committed mass murder, rape, hostage taking, and child recruitment. Thousands were forced to flee to Tawila to escape the horrors of this siege.⁶⁰

Doctors Without Borders estimates that in Sudan, 70 percent of children below five suffer from acute malnutrition.⁶¹ Meanwhile, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has established that various humanitarian organizations within the conflict are on the verge of collapse. This is because there is no way to bring aid or effectively distribute it inside of Sudan.⁶² UN Women also inform that abuse against women is on the rise and is actively being used as a weapon of war.⁶³ Further, ethnic violence is apparent as fighters often target dark skinned Arab communities.⁶⁴ Currently, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is launching investigations into possible war crimes. Yet the UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk believes that simply an investigation or fragile aid pipelines are not enough to stop the suffering in Sudan.⁶⁵

The attacks that had a direct effect on the halt

of humanitarian aid started on June 3, 2025, in North Darfur. Attackers targeted an aid convoy that was 80 kilometers away from El Fasher. This caused the deaths of five Sudanese humanitarian aid workers who were contracted by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). Several others were injured. The convoy was made up of fifteen trucks that were carrying needed nutritional supplies for Sudanese refugees. They had traveled 1,800 kilometers from Port Sudan via the Red Sea coast. Though the convoy's arrival was announced beforehand, the crew faced several drone attacks during their journey. This was the first aid convoy that had reached El Fasher in a year, yet the operation failed. Fighter trucks were planted to await the aid convoy's arrival and carry out an attack. The UN called the attack "horrendous," and the WFP, followed by UNICEF, explicitly reminded all parties that under IHL, relief supplies must have a safe and guaranteed journey to their destination. Shortly after this, an international hospital was bombed and hit by drone strikes in Al Obeid, which affected the majority of the electric grids in Sudan.⁶⁶

Over the last sixteen years of this conflict, the government has delayed the issuance of travel permits and banned flights for aid workers. This has contributed to the lack of medicines and the growth of famine and disease. The Sudanese government believes that humanitarian aid is a threat, and that they are protecting their citizens. They publicly arrested Doctors Without Borders staff due to a report they published on female abuse in Sudan. Aid workers have

been detained at gunpoint in camps. Most notably, the government expelled the Norwegian Refugee Council that housed 100,000 displaced people in the camp they managed. Even Jan Egeland, the UN Relief Coordinator, was not allowed to land in Darfur. The South Sudanese government passed a law that restricted non-governmental organizations (NGOs) by giving the Sudanese Humanitarian Aid Commission the freedom to deny any aid registration without an appeal process. Due to this, the Sudan Social Development Organization was forced to shut down its clinics and nutrition centers since it had to reapply as per this new law and was denied.⁶⁷

Villages across North Darfur have also faced some critical attacks. In July 2026 the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) destroyed Marahik, Oruwa, Saloma and Ana Baji. Survivors in Saloma, located south of El Fasher, recount having their homes burned to the ground. There have also been many drone strikes affecting power stations in North Kordofan. There was a 15-day power outage due to drone strikes on electrical grids in Ad Dabbah, an important hub of power to Darfur.⁶⁸ To prevent the violence in Sudan from becoming worse, the UN has requested that USD 2.9 billion be allocated to the situation in 2026. This plan remains in action, yet only 25 percent of it has been for as of May 2026.⁶⁹ These events combined have left the civilians of North Darfur facing both extreme violence and starvation for over a decade.

In 2024, 384 aid workers died around the world, making it the worst year of casualties in history.

EMERGING RISK POINTS IN HUMANITARIAN AID DISTRIBUTION

Humanitarian organizations such as the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) are meant to protect people facing crises. Yet, in recent years, aid workers have been facing an increasing amount of danger. This has led the Security Council to propose the creation of new legal standards to be able to keep these workers safe. The war in Gaza accounted for over 320 deaths. Aid workers also face governmental restrictions as to what aid can be delivered and to whom. To stop this, on May 24, 2024, the Security Council passed resolution 2730, which reminds countries that they are responsible for the protection of humanitarian aid and UN workers. It also restated that countries have to follow IHL and that aid must reach civilians quickly and safely without any hardship. If aid workers face attacks, it suggests that countries should conduct investigations into the attack. In December 2024, the current Secretary-General António Guterres also urged for additional solutions to add to the resolution, such as more mental health support and safety protections.⁷⁰

Since supplies for civilians have often been stolen or diverted, researchers created a model that tracks physical movements in aid materials while running simulations based on agent experience. Using this data, they have been able to track population grids and UN truck disruptions across the world. The model revealed four main pathways that, in total, make up 95 percent of lost aid. The most common risk point is second-hand distribution by unauthorized personnel. This often redirects aid into alternate networks causing 45 percent of lost aid supplies, equaling 12,340 metric tons per year. Another 20 percent comes from fees being paid to informal checkpoints, then 18 percent from transport using alternate routes for profit, and lastly theft from warehouses making up 12 percent.

Researchers looking to solve these problems of lost aid have found the following solutions. Instead of having trucks go down the same routes as before, a system flags unsafe check points truck drivers hit, and provides alternative approved paths. This can reduce the diversion of aid by 30 percent. The authentication of digital wallets using cryptography as verification was another idea. Cryptography is the process of turning important data into math and codes so



UK Aid in Ethiopia

Credit: UK Government

only authorized people can read it.⁷¹ This strategy can reduce loss of aid by 18 percent and improve aid distribution by 45 percent.⁷²

Risks do not only stem from direct corruption. The breakdown of physical infrastructure and security of roads can limit aid access as well. Roads are often destroyed or damaged during wars, along with bridges and rail lines. This has been demonstrated in Ukraine, where convoys had to change routes to Poland, Moldova, and Romania just to enter the country. Warehouses are storing aid and materials are also commonly bombed. This is seen in Gaza where there have been several warehouse bombing incidents, making it near impossible to store and protect materials once they reach their destination. Further, under immense pressure sources of power and technology often collapse and electric grids often fail. There are also fuel shortages that stop transportation, and result in medicines, such as vaccines and insulin, being unable to maintain their required cold storing temperature. All of these factors make it difficult for aid to be shipped, received, and used by vulnerable populations. More so, when this aid is stolen or sold on local and illegal markets, already facing inflation, the price of them is unaffordable by most. Many agencies, such as the WFP, have to build their own emergency centers in bordering countries to send bulk shipments to struggling groups. Yet, they still struggle to receive aid permits or push past blockades to deliver the aid materials.⁷³

Over the past few years, there has been a growing trend of violence against aid workers. During 2024, along with the 383 aid workers who died from violent attacks, another 308 were injured, 125 were kidnapped, and 45 were wrongfully arrested. The first half of 2025 saw even more attacks against aid workers than before. In 2025, regions with the highest mortality in aid workers included Gaza, Sudan, South Sudan, Nigeria, Lebanon, and Ethiopia. Due to the increase in armed conflicts, many countries feel it is safer to retreat since they have no certainty of IHL being followed and are concerned with

putting more people at risk.⁷⁴

A new risk point for humanitarian aid is the funding collapse of 2025. This began when the US, which represents a third of funding for humanitarian aid, froze and diminished its funding. President Trump disassembled the USAID and 83 percent of its aid projects were cancelled.⁷⁵ This cut thousands of staff members and eliminated protection services in several countries. As the U.S. scaled down their capacity of trained personnel, communications, logistical and security risk management, other personnel were affected. The loss of funding in USAID greatly impacted the NGO Partner Liaison Security Offices, as they lost 80 percent of their resources. UN Safe and Secure Approaches in Field Environments had a drop in participants as well. This means fewer aid workers have been taught how to endure potentially dangerous situations in the future. National staff from local organizations remain the default responders as these international organizations lose their funding and capacity.⁷⁶

The sudden closure has also led to a lot of security incidents as ex-employees, patients, and groups have made their frustrations clear through protests and public reactions. Local vendors have been trying to receive their payment at gunpoint. Those in need of essential services, such as HIV patients who no longer have access to their medicine, have rioted. In Nigeria, the shutdown of aid sites has increased displacement as many criminal groups have been able to grow their territory of operation.⁷⁷ The remaining humanitarian aid groups face the choice of abandoning vulnerable communities or accepting dangerous risks if they choose to continue to operate. Diplomatic efforts in the form of UN resolutions, negotiations, and efforts regarding humanitarian aid and corruption must decide how they wish to move forward. The rising violence against aid workers during 2024-2025 to the dismantling of funding for humanitarian aid remain important issues that threaten lives all over the world.

Bloc Analysis

POINTS OF DIVISION

The critical concern for each of these blocs is who should be responsible for overseeing humanitarian aid. Positions range from prioritizing strong external oversight and independent enforcement, to balancing international oversight with local control, to placing primary responsibility on national governments and reducing foreign involvement.

Some countries believe that aid should be monitored through external oversight mechanisms. They support third-party monitoring and independent audits to ensure that humanitarian organizations are accountable for how funds and supplies are used. They view these requirements as necessary conditions for receiving humanitarian aid rather than as excessive interference. On the other hand, some countries believe that effective oversight requires a combination of external monitoring and local involvement. They argue that overly strict external oversight could unintentionally harm civilians, particularly in areas where armed groups control access to supplies or humanitarian operations. However, they support greater involvement when existing oversight mechanisms fail to adequately protect aid workers and supplies. Lastly, some countries place greater emphasis on national ownership of humanitarian aid and oversight. These countries generally favor systems in which their own governments manage aid, with external assistance provided only when necessary or requested. They argue that greater reliance on foreign aid can weaken domestic institutions and limit the development of local economies and government capacity.

MAJOR DONOR AND OVERSIGHT STATES

The majority of this bloc is composed of the world's biggest humanitarian aid donors. Together, these countries account for approximately 80 percent of all monitored aid

funding. The US alone provides over 40 percent, totaling approximately USD 14 billion, followed by the European Commission, the UK, and Japan. Their sizable financial contributions help explain their emphasis on efficiency, transparency, and oversight in aid distribution. Some countries also meet the United Nations target of contributing 0.7 percent of their Gross National Income (GNI) to Official Development Assistance (ODA). This committee was established through the UN General Assembly Resolution 2626 on October 24, 1970, as part of the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade. In 2025, only four of the 34 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries met or exceeded this target. These countries included Norway, Luxembourg, Sweden, and Denmark.⁷⁸

For this bloc, legal enforcement is essential to ensure that corrupt organizations and individuals can be held accountable. Countries such as the US and the UK have adopted strict anti-corruption laws, including the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) and the UK Bribery Act of 2010, which establish penalties for bribery and certain forms of corruption involving international business and transactions.

The UN resolution titled “Strengthening of the Coordination of Emergency Humanitarian Assistance of the United Nations” also reflects the priorities of this bloc. Adopted in December 2024, the resolution demonstrates international support for improving transparency and coordination in humanitarian aid. Many countries in this bloc also have legally binding anti-corruption rules and well-established procedures for monitoring private contractors and public agencies, particularly when public funds are involved. According to the OECD’s Public Integrity Indicators, members of this group meet approximately 76 percent of the standards for risk management and regulation. Together, these practices reflect the bloc’s broader emphasis on external oversight, financial accountability, and stronger regulation of humanitarian aid.⁷⁹

COUNTRIES AFFECTED BY CORRUPTION IN AID

This group of countries supports a flexible and diverse approach to humanitarian aid accountability. Rather than relying on one rigid enforcement system, they believe oversight should depend on each country's circumstances. This includes factors like political stability, level of government capacity, and degree of institutional development. They argue that imposing the same strict monitoring system on every country may not be effective and could unintentionally harm communities in need. Many countries in this group have also moved away from, or are working to reduce, their dependence on humanitarian aid by developing their own emergency response and social protection projects. Examples include Colombia, Peru, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Nigeria.⁸⁰

As these countries have strengthened their own systems, many have also become donors and partners to humanitarian organizations themselves. Oftentimes, these countries then share their experiences with countries seeking to reduce their dependence on foreign assistance. The G7+ is a group of more than 20 conflict-affected and transitional countries, including Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, and Somalia. Because they have experienced the challenges associated with both receiving and delivering aid, these countries are concerned that excessive external enforcement could interfere with a country's independent ability to manage humanitarian crises. They believe national authorities may be better equipped to address certain forms of corruption and misuse when they have the capacity to do so. The G7+ Fragility Spectrum framework provides an example of a more flexible approach, which allows oversight and management strategies to change based on each country's specific conditions and institutions.

Through initiatives like the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, the group has advocated for approaches and exit strategies that reflect each country's unique circumstances

rather than imposing uniform rules. They argue that strict requirements can be difficult to implement in conflict zones, where armed groups may control supply routes and local third parties may have connections to these groups. In such environments, requiring complete documentation and tracking every aid delivery could delay or temporarily interrupt assistance, potentially creating additional harm for civilians.⁸¹

COUNTRIES MOVING BEYOND AID

This bloc views foreign aid as more than an economic resource but argues it can also serve as a political instrument. Some countries in the Global South believe that donor countries and international organizations can use aid to influence domestic policies and government reforms. They are also concerned that long-term dependence on foreign assistance can weaken national institutions and limit governments' ability to develop their own systems for responding to crises. With more than 20 million people depending on humanitarian aid each year, these countries seek greater control over how assistance is managed and distributed. Many support mechanisms that allow recipient governments to negotiate terms of aid and reduce the leverage individual donors may hold over them. They also favor developing national anti-corruption systems and sharing information between governments to improve oversight of aid received through government channels.⁸²

Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa have promoted similar approaches through their BRICS partnership, which began as BRIC in 2006 and expanded to BRICS in 2010. These countries have generally advocated for greater independence from Western-led financial and political institutions and for a larger role for developing countries in global decision-making. Within humanitarian aid, this approach emphasizes that donors should not attach political conditions, such as government reforms, to assistance. Instead, recipient governments should have control over their government

structures and play a central role in receiving and distributing aid. External legal requirements may therefore be viewed as intrusive when they undermine national authority over resources. Russia, China, and India have emphasized the role of national governments in managing aid and have criticized approaches that rely too heavily on external humanitarian organizations. For example, China's foreign aid system largely operates through government channels, while Russia has prioritized direct bilateral agreements that can bypass international organizations. Countries including Nicaragua, El Salvador, Mali, and Ethiopia have also expressed concerns about foreign organizations directly managing aid, over national control of the process.⁸³

to directly enforce decisions or punishments on individual states. It also does not have a peacekeeping mandate and therefore cannot deploy personnel to protect aid deliveries or intervene directly in a country's domestic legal system. The committee must operate within the principle of state sovereignty, meaning that enforcement ultimately depends on individual states. UNCAC's strength instead lies in developing international standards, supporting monitoring and review mechanisms, and encouraging states to align their domestic laws and institutions with international ones. Delegates should therefore focus on creating practical frameworks that improve transparency, accountability, and international cooperation.⁸⁵

Committee Mission

The Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) serves as a forum for strengthening international cooperation against corruption. Established by the 2003 UNCAC, the committee works to promote transparency, accountability, and international cooperation to prevent and combat corruption. In the context of humanitarian aid, these responsibilities are particularly important because corruption can divert resources away from vulnerable populations while making misconduct difficult to detect and investigate.

UNCAC's mandate addresses several forms of corruption that can affect humanitarian aid, including fraud, bribery, and money laundering. Articles 5 and 9 of the Convention encourage to prevent corruption and make government work and purchasing more transparent. Chapter V helps countries recover funds obtained through corruption. These provisions give UNCAC an important role in strengthening the systems used to prevent and respond to the misuse of humanitarian resources.⁸⁴

However, UNCAC does not have the authority

TOPIC B

UNCAC | NHSMUN 2027

Countering the Role of Corruption in Human Trafficking



Introduction

Human trafficking operates heavily within the realm of corruption. In many ways, corruption enables traffickers to work at a larger scale with protection. Officials are sometimes directly working with traffickers. Research done by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports that human trafficking could not occur on such a large scale without the involvement of corruption.⁸⁶ Human trafficking occurs in groups of people who work together to traffic people. These groups are called trafficking rings. When officials work with human trafficking rings, there are many times where certain crimes go completely “unnoticed” or unpunished. This happens because corrupt officials often ignore illegal operations when they are reported. They also are known to falsify inspection outcomes to disrupt investigations and prosecutions. These forms of protection give human traffickers freedom to operate and keep exploiting their victims.⁸⁷

Survivors of human trafficking report that they often met corrupt officers and public officials while they were being exploited. Encounters like these often discourage survivors from coming forward and reporting what happened to them. However, the corruption does not end there. Corruption can be seen at higher levels with immigration officials, labor inspectors, and medical professionals. It can even sway prosecutors, judges, and politicians.⁸⁸

There are many different forms of human trafficking. In each form, corruption both facilitates and hides victims. Sometimes victims have no choice but to participate in forced labor. Other times, victims are trafficked for their organs and denied access to proper healthcare. Though it is one of the least reported forms of trafficking, it is the most detrimental to the health of its victims.⁸⁹ Across all forms of human trafficking, women are targeted often. They are often targeted for sex trafficking. For victims of human trafficking, their journey does not end once they have escaped. It is difficult for them to support themselves and find help due to the stigma around and lack of support for them. When seeking legal help, victims can be treated as if they are criminals.⁹⁰

The corrupt actors in human trafficking

often fly under the radar when schemes are found. Officials accept bribes to ignore these operations. There are a few methods the UN believes can halt this process. The first is using strategic, risk-based preventative measures to shield institutions and people from becoming corrupt. The second is expanding investigations and using technology to uncover hidden networks. The third is creating stronger and safer reporting channels for victims. This option also includes strong witness protection and victim-centered justice. This will encourage victims to expose corrupted individuals and traffickers. Finally, the UN wants to strengthen regional and international cooperation through sharing case studies and investigating methods that work across borders.⁹¹

History and Description of the Issue

FORCED LABOR AND CRIMINALITY

Human trafficking has a variety of motivations. The most common is labor, accounting for 42 percent of trafficking victims around the world in 2022.⁹² Labor trafficking is when people are

forced or coerced into doing labor or services. This can include debt bondage, forced labor, and child labor. Labor trafficking can be found in farm work, factories, and domestic help networks.⁹³ Forced labor is significant in low-income and high conflict areas. This includes regions like sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East.⁹⁴

Many public officials are not properly trained in assessing a forced labor situation or turn a blind eye completely. However, the United Nations' Actions-Means-Purpose (A-M-P) Model provides a practical framework for distinguishing forced labor trafficking from poor working conditions.⁹⁵ To identify trafficking, officials must determine whether a person was recruited, transported, transferred, harbored, or received. Then, they must determine whether the trafficker used force, fraud, coercion, deception, abuse of vulnerability, or other improper means. In labor settings, warning signs may include debt bondage, withheld wages, confiscated identity documents, restricted movement, threats, abusive living conditions, or excessive overtime.⁹⁶ Training labor inspectors and other law enforcement to recognize these indicators can help them identify possible victims and take action. The model was used in 2017 for an educational campaign in the United States. The educational campaign is called SOAR to Health and Wellness. SOAR stands for "Stop, Observe, Act, and Respond" and trains healthcare workers on how to identify and respond to cases of human trafficking.⁹⁷ The A-M-P Model helps countries like the United States build their trafficking detection systems. By creating a baseline approach to defining trafficking, it becomes easier to build a more complete approach to crime. It can also be helpful to policymakers as they can build laws around this definition.

However, corruption can undermine every stage of this process. An inspector may accept a bribe to ignore unsafe or exploitative conditions.⁹⁸

They may also give an employer advance notice of an inspection or falsify an inspection report. Politicians or other public officials may also protect businesses or recruiters with connections and influence. When officials do not investigate credible allegations or enforce laws consistently, traffickers are strengthened and can continue operating while victims remain trapped in the system.⁹⁹

Another form of human trafficking is forced criminality. This is when victims are coerced into performing illegal acts. It includes drug trafficking, theft, fraud, and online scams.¹⁰⁰ These activities can happen in businesses, casinos, hotels, and compound-like buildings designed for victims. In Southeast Asia, organized criminal groups have recruited people through fraudulent job offers, moved them across borders, and confined them to these scam compounds where they are forced to carry out online fraud. Technology has made these schemes easier to expand across borders. According to a 2024 UNODC threat analysis, criminal networks can misuse artificial intelligence and deep-fake technology to create fake identities and documents. They can also produce convincing scam messages and automate parts of online fraud. This allows networks to target more people and earn larger profits. Artificial intelligence itself does not cause increased rates of trafficking but can make criminality operations more profitable and scalable in the long run.¹⁰¹

Corruption in this area, similar to forced labor, emerges in the investigations of such operations. Officials can accept bribes and ignore credible reports, and the United Nations Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) stated that many law enforcement officers also worked in the trafficking operations. Further, rather than being identified as people who were coerced into crimes, victims may be detained for immigration violations or prosecuted for acts they were forced to perform. In Southeast Asia,

there were some cases in which people released from scam compounds were charged for food, bedding, transportation, or even release from detention.¹⁰² This makes it difficult for victims to truly be freed from extortion both during and after the trafficking operation.

In 2000, there were major changes to the criminalization of human trafficking. For example, the United Nations adopted the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.¹⁰³ The protocol defines human trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of people. A trafficker needs to use either force, fraud, or deception. The goal must be to exploit people for a profit.¹⁰⁴ However, trafficking continues to evolve beyond this initial definition. The digital age and global media have introduced new avenues of exploitation. Traffickers can use platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, or WhatsApp to broaden their reach.¹⁰⁵

Forced labor and forced criminality demonstrate that corruption can strengthen trafficking at every stage of the crime. Corrupt officials or private actors may enable recruitment through fraudulent documents or unregulated labor recruitment.¹⁰⁶ They may also allow movement across borders and ignore exploitation during workplace investigations by accepting bribes. They can also work closely with traffickers by warning them about raids or interfering directly with prosecutions. These actions make trafficking networks more profitable and harder to detect while preventing victims from receiving protection or seeking justice.¹⁰⁷ Effective responses to

corruption in this form of trafficking must address the two together by strengthening anti-corruption regulations and implementation in the public sector. This should also take a victim-protection approach, where punishment for crimes is directed at corrupt actors who sustain these illegal operations.

ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Organ trafficking is one of the rarest forms of human trafficking.¹⁰⁸ Organ trafficking can be defined as trafficking for the purpose of profiting from human organs and tissue for transplantation.¹⁰⁹ Due to its medical nature, it requires individuals who have a high level of knowledge in the field. Between 2017 and 2023, there were at least 175 cases reported by around 25 countries. The majority of victims were reported to be from North Africa and the Middle East. As with many forms of trafficking, the targets were people struggling financially.¹¹⁰ In other areas such as Europe, the victims were also at-risk populations. They were unemployed, homeless, or migrants. Organ removal is also one of the most harmful forms of human trafficking. Many victims are killed or left to die once the organs have been removed.¹¹¹ Organ removal makes a profit of USD 1.5 billion every year.¹¹²

Organ traffickers are very sophisticated, organized and hidden. In order to find victims, they use local advertising, social media, or recruiters. Traffickers also rely on corrupt healthcare officials, hospital administrators, and customs officers to operate. Corrupted healthcare workers may release or sell patient

About 12,000 organ transplants per year are thought to be illegal. That equals roughly 10 percent of all transplants worldwide.

data to traffickers. That information can help traffickers identify possible victims and recipients.¹¹³ Even though there are many national and international initiatives to increase the number of voluntary organ donations, there are sometimes long wait times for those seeking organ transplants. Traffickers can exploit this high demand to sustain their operations.

One such phenomenon is transplant tourism. This is the practice of patients traveling internationally to purchase an organ or undergo an organ transplant. This may occur due to organ shortages or long waiting times.¹¹⁴ However, buying and selling organs is largely illegal, so transplant tourism relies on underground black markets and traffickers who connect victims with individuals seeking immediate care. Transplant tourism is often seen in countries like Egypt, Pakistan, Mexico, India, and China.¹¹⁵ These countries have large amounts of vulnerable people who are either tricked into organ donation or voluntarily give up their organs for some form of monetary compensation. Oftentimes, however, they never receive this compensation and are instead abandoned without proper post-removal care. The average donors are thirty-four years old, unable to read, bonded laborers, and have a mean monthly income of roughly USD 15. More than 75 percent of the average donor's motivation is debt. However, after taking part in organ trafficking, only 4 percent were able to pay off their debts.¹¹⁶ The background of patients includes wealthy middle-aged males from developed states. This includes areas like North America, Australia, Japan, and Saudi Arabia.

Corruption within organ trafficking is present every step of the process. When donors are being screened, they are greatly deceived. They are promised post-operative care and then do not receive it. They are also misled about what the procedure means and the risks and potential long-term consequences. Sometimes donors are told that they do not need either of their kidneys, that they have a third kidney, or that kidneys grow back when a kidney is removed. After the procedures, it is very difficult to differentiate

between an illegal or legal procedure. It is hard to tell because more hospitals and clinics that participate in organ removal disguise the illegal transplants as donations. In fact, criminal healthcare workers that perform surgeries use the principles of confidentiality to not answer certain questions that could help discover organ trafficking schemes.¹¹⁷

While donors in organ trafficking are considered victims, they are often treated as criminals. This is because they are paid and tricked into signing forms that indicate consent. At first glance, this makes them look like willing participants in the process. However, it has been established that they are often manipulated into donations. For this reason, authorities often require a psychological evaluation to determine if the donor was coerced into organ donation.¹¹⁸

Outside of the hospital, public officials can influence the corruption of organ trafficking too. The same demand for organs influences officials to help operate organ trafficking networks for large amounts of money. Public officials can forge documents and grant immunity to those convicted. The money received can help fund their campaigns or be used for personal gain. Organ trafficking becomes a connected system through the corruption of public officials.

In Bangladesh, organ vendors can be described as “living cadavers.” They exploit and recruit vulnerable people by using misleading newspaper advertisements that tell victims they are doing a noble act by donating their kidneys. After assuring them that they would cover all travel and healthcare costs, they do not. They suffer long-term complications, are housed in poor conditions, are released prematurely, and have extensive surgical scars. In some cases, they even convince victims they will be able to safely pass into another country by providing fake passports. However, when the donors attempt to cross the border, they are seized and trafficked.¹¹⁹

In 2022, the UNODC created the Toolkit on the Investigation and Prosecution of Trafficking in

Persons for Organ Removal. The toolkit includes a training simulation for a crime scene that teaches law enforcement how to identify and collect evidence from medical surgeries and clinical settings. It also includes a comprehensive investigation and prosecution manual and new protocol for interviews with victims. The use of the toolkit will improve the justice system for victims by creating stronger cases.¹²⁰

TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN

Human trafficking of women and girls primarily takes two different forms. The first is sexual exploitation. This is the most well-known form of human trafficking.¹²¹ In 2020, victims of sexual exploitation made up 36 percent of human trafficking victims overall.¹²² Females represent 96 percent of victims trafficked for sexual exploitation.¹²³ The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) was created to define anti-trafficking federal law in the United States. The TVPA created the 3 P's Approach, which stands for Protection, Prosecution, and Prevention. This has become the global standard for addressing sex trafficking.¹²⁴ When it was amended by the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act of 2015, it added a definition for sex trafficking. Sex

trafficking is classified as when individuals over eighteen perform commercial intercourse through the use of force, fraud, or coercion. If the person is under the age of eighteen, they are considered to be victims of sex trafficking.¹²⁵

One of the main reasons victims are forced into sex trafficking is emotional vulnerability.¹²⁶ This includes those with mental illnesses, unfulfilled emotional needs, or substance abuse disorders.¹²⁷ Women with mental health issues may be unable to make the right choices or assess a dangerous situation. Traffickers may be able to use drugs and addiction as a way to control their victims.¹²⁸ Having a lack of community also heavily contributes to emotional vulnerability. Most people have a strong desire to belong and feel loved. When isolated, people search for a community. Traffickers see this and manipulate their victims into performing sexual acts by framing their trafficking rings as a family or community.¹²⁹

Financial problems can also be a major factor.¹³⁰ Having a lack of financial stability can lead to uncertainty and limited options. For women, financial instability can stem from a loss of a job, unexpected bills, divorce, or homelessness. For example, a study done in the city of Chicago



Teaching early child marriage awareness

Credit: Fahad Aziz Laghari

showed that 56 percent of trafficked women were coerced into trafficking situations when they were young and homeless.¹³¹ Traffickers take advantage of these women by promising to provide for them. They promise them good money. In exchange the women are trapped into performing sexual acts. Financial promises often lead to unsuspected trafficking situations. This is because rather than initially exploiting them, the traffickers offer hope for a better life and delude them.¹³²

Political instability can also lead to women getting involved in sex trafficking.¹³³ During a war, people may be kicked out of their country for religious or political reasons. Many people leave on their own to find a safer place to live. This leads to a lack of financial stability and emotional vulnerability that can lead women into sex trafficking. Traffickers could also pretend to be nice and trick or threaten victims into forced sex trafficking.¹³⁴ In some cases, traffickers offer to help political refugees and bring them to a new country. However, once the victim arrives, they require them to pay expensive travel fees and become indebted to the trafficker. The trafficker continues to manipulate the victim by using their unfamiliarity with the environment, laws, language, and culture.¹³⁵

The other primary form of trafficking for women and girls is forced marriage. The UN defines a situation to be forced marriage when one or both of the people getting married did not freely agree to it. Therefore, it is not always a form of human trafficking. It is considered human trafficking when one or more of the people are forced, deceived, or coerced into a marriage that

leads to abuse or exploitation. Exploitation can include sexual violence, forced labor, or domestic servitude. These marriages are often put together by family or community members. They can involve emotional blackmail, isolation from others, physical violence, or financial control. The root cause is often complex. Without an education, it is hard for young women to get jobs and support themselves financially.¹³⁶

Young girls can also be a target for forced marriages. Child marriage occurs when at least one person in the marriage is under the age of eighteen.¹³⁷ In 2025, the Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT) and the UNODC released a policy brief that emphasizes survivor-centered approaches in communities with high poverty, displacement, and conflict. It encourages countries to take forced and child marriages more seriously. Currently, there are many religious and cultural groups that still support forced and child marriage and lobby against its restriction.¹³⁸

Corruption within sexual exploitation and forced marriage is similar to many other forms of human trafficking. Sex trafficking depends on systems that allow traffickers to recruit and exploit people without being stopped. Corruption can create those conditions when public officials or private actors accept bribes or abuse their authority. Sex trafficking often takes place in settings where victims are already difficult to identify. Traffickers may exploit people in hotels, bars, massage businesses, and online platforms.¹³⁹ These may appear lawful from the outside. However, when public officials fail to investigate credible reports,

Under international law, all marriages between minors are considered to be forced because they are not able to give voluntary, informed consent.

victims may be moved or threatened further.

One example of how corruption played into trafficking is the 2022 Uzbekistan Trafficking Case. Yulduz Khudaibergenova, an orphanage director in Urgench, Khorezm Region, Uzbekistan was accused of forcing the residents to earn money through prostitution. It was reported that she coerced three under aged girls to have sexual relations with two regional officials for almost a year. According to the Uzbekistan Criminal Code, the guilty could have served up to 15 years in prison. Instead, Khudaibergenova was sentenced to 5.5 years in prison and the two regional officials were given only 1.5 years of restricted freedom.¹⁴⁰ Once the public learned of this, they were outraged. As a result the Khorezm Regional Prosecutor's Office filed a protest and the Supreme Court of Uzbekistan called for a retrial. The two ex-officials ended up being sentenced to three years in prison. The United States also sanctioned the two ex-officials with visa and financial restrictions underneath the Global Manitsky Act. This case showcases how corruption operates even within the systems designed to protect victims and punish criminals. The orphanage where these girls were being prostituted was state run, meaning multiple layers of government operated together to cover things up.¹⁴¹

In countries where commercial sex work or immigration violations are criminalized, victims may be arrested or detained because they are treated as offenders rather than victims. This can discourage survivors from seeking protection and trauma-informed care. Victim-centered procedures and confidential reporting options are crucial to ensure survivors can seek fair treatment and traffickers receive punishment. Governments should therefore address sex trafficking and corruption as interconnected crimes. Strengthened borders, regulations, and investigations can all play a role in eliminating both corruption and sex trafficking operations.

EFFECTS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING ON VICTIMS AND ACCESS TO SUPPORT

About 27.6 million people are being trafficked worldwide.¹⁴² No matter how they were trafficked, the conditions they are exposed to have a lasting impact. After their experience, survivors often have trauma. This can impact their health, financial stability, and social wellbeing.¹⁴³

Victims' health is often harmed after being trafficked. They may have experienced forced labor, organ donation, or commercial sex. Victims typically need serious medical attention following a trafficking experience. They may have used toxic chemicals and heavy equipment. This can cause infections, respiratory problems, and other injuries. Victims of commercial sex are at a higher risk of sexually-transmitted diseases like HIV or AIDS. Many organ trafficking victims are also left with sensitive trauma.¹⁴⁴ All of these health impacts need to be addressed quickly.

Many victims also face mental health disorders. This results from spiked anxiety, insecurity, and fear in trafficking situations. In some cases victims undergo severe manipulation, which causes psychological distress. In fact, multiple studies show high levels of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in human trafficking victims. The mental distress victims are placed under can often lead to future trouble in relationships, guilt, shame, and mental trauma.¹⁴⁵ In some victims, the mental conditions can become so severe it leads to cognitive impairment, permanent or temporary memory loss, depression, or suicide.¹⁴⁶

Victims often struggle to support themselves during and after recovery. Most victims were chosen to be trafficked because of their financial instability. During recovery, that makes it significantly harder for them to rebuild their lives. For some, traffickers make the problem worse by leaving them in a large amount of debt and with poor credit. This makes it difficult to apply for housing, a job, or any financial aid. In the case of forced criminality, victims might have criminal records for exploitation or sex trafficking. These criminal charges even further

restrict their options for making money and supporting themselves.¹⁴⁷ Many victims also lack the education or skills necessary to get a job. Many who were trafficked from a young age might not have been able to go to school or learn new skills. These factors leave victims unable to support themselves.¹⁴⁸ Unfortunately, the inability to support themselves leads 50 percent of victims back into trafficking or sexual exploitation within seven years.¹⁴⁹

One of the major indicators for why victims are chosen is a lack of family or community. After becoming a victim, community is even harder to build back up. This is because of social stigmas around human trafficking.¹⁵⁰ A stigma is a negative label given to someone different from the given social norm.¹⁵¹ Even if they did have a few friends prior to being trafficked, most become isolated and unable to ask for help. When a victim is trafficked internationally, they may be isolated simply due to language barriers. International migrants may be unable to form connections or come into contact with people they know due to geographic barriers or unfamiliarity with the culture of the country they are in.¹⁵² The social isolation and inability to return to normal life makes these victims susceptible to being trafficked again or suffer from other forms of abuse.¹⁵³

Despite the struggles victims face, there are many organizations with the purpose of aiding human trafficking victims. One tool is national human trafficking hotlines. These hotlines can be national or international and run by private or public organizations. They are one of the safest and quickest tools for victims to get help. However, there are many barriers to hotlines. One is that their success depends on the organization behind it. In order to operate well, they need enough workers to answer the phone, funding, and strong protocols. It is also crucial that they protect caller privacy. There must also be a high level of trust between the citizens and their government. This trust is what encourages victims to seek help and call the hotline. That is why maintaining privacy is so important for

the hotlines to be successful. These hotlines also play a key role in collecting data for anti-trafficking efforts.¹⁵⁴ This can help experts develop and adjust strategies for the current state of the issue.

Even when receiving legal aid, human trafficking victims suffer from corruption. One of the most common forms of trafficking corruption is bribery. Officers receive payment from traffickers in exchange for tips about the next raids, inspections, or investigations so they can clear the evidence and move the victims. Sometimes when a victim escapes they end up being taken right back to the trafficker they escaped from. This can damage the trust between victims and governments, thus leading them to not reach out for help from anti-trafficking efforts like hotlines. Another example of mistrust in the system is formed after victims make a report at a police station. When this happens, some officers can be bribed to not investigate the victim's case or begin a different investigation instead.

During criminal justice proceedings, public officials, prosecutors, and members of the judiciary could be corrupted. Corrupt judges will dismiss charges against a trafficker, reduce their sentences, delay court dates, release them, or leak information. Corruption in this area can also lead to the victim's location being leaked. In many situations, the victims are treated as criminals. This is because police are often not trained to detect a trafficking scheme. For example, sex trafficking victims can be seen by police as prostitutes, which is illegal in many places. The trafficking victims are then tried as criminals instead of helped as victims.¹⁵⁵ Even outside of the legal context it can be difficult for victims to gain justice. Certain immigration officers or law enforcement agents can deport or harass victims into silence, stopping them from pursuing civil claims or appeals.¹⁵⁶ The laws around human trafficking are also often corrupted by bribery and backroom deals. Some politicians accept bribes from trafficking rings in order to pass laws favoring traffickers. They can influence prosecutors and judges as well when it comes

to pardoning traffickers or overlooking evidence. This makes it incredibly difficult to fully shut down trafficking rings, as those involved are very easily able to pick up where they left off after being pardoned.

Current Status

THE ROLE OF CONFLICT ZONES IN HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Conflict zones force people to leave their homes in desperation.¹⁵⁷ This displacement pushes people away from their support systems and safety. As a result, people often become both socially and culturally isolated. They lack access to resources and opportunities to make money and support themselves.¹⁵⁸ Further, war and instability have the power to destroy any protections that society once had. This displacement and breakdown of law creates the perfect setting for criminals and human traffickers to exploit others. Situations such as these are most commonly reported in regions such as the Middle East, North Africa, and Eastern Europe.

Human trafficking is more than just a crime, it is a weapon of war. It can be used to create income for armed groups during conflict.¹⁵⁹ For example, forced labor can generate close to USD 10,000 per victim.¹⁶⁰ Other than financial gain, militaries can use trafficking as a way to control and terrorize communities of people in the territory they are invading. When victims are trafficked into forced labor they often perform services to support military operations such as being cooks, porters, guards, or messengers. This forced labor can often include children as well. Refugee camps serve as hubs for traffickers attempting to find women and children to exploit. The forms of exploitation that are most common in conflict settings include sexual exploitation, sexual slavery, and trafficking for child soldiers.¹⁶¹

There are an increasing number of international military soldiers who partake in commercial sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation is considered commercial when there is an exchange of money or goods for sex. The UN Peacekeepers received 100 allegations of sexual exploitation against them in 2023. This is an apparent increase from 79 in 2022. 90 percent of these allegations reportedly came from two UN missions in the DRC and Central African



Vietnam child soldier

Credit: US Army Signal Corps

Republic. Both of these missions took place in conflict zones with the aim of protecting civilians and establishing peace.¹⁶²

The recruitment and trafficking of child soldiers occurs mostly in conflict zones. They can be trafficked for many reasons. Child victims could be forced into combat. They could serve in a support role like gathering resources, cooking, cleaning, or acting as a messenger. In Africa in 2023, violence against children in armed conflicts increased by 21 percent from 2022.¹⁶³ Child recruitment by armed groups has been seen in twelve African countries. Between 4,500 and 5,000 children have become victims to armed groups.¹⁶⁴ Between eighty and ninety armed groups have been caught recruiting and using children in their conflicts.¹⁶⁵

Children can become victims of militant groups in many ways. Between 2005 and 2022 there were more than 105,000 children who were recruited during a conflict. That number is even believed to be higher due to lack of reporting or information. They can be abducted into the militant group, threatened, coerced, or manipulated. Some children's families force them to join to help earn money and hopefully escape poverty. These children become witnesses to horrible acts of war and violence. They are deprived of nutritional foods, healthy living conditions, and are subjected to substance abuse. These factors often lead to difficulties reintegrating into society after conflicts. In an attempt to return, for some they are seen as suspicious or are just rejected by their communities. Others might struggle to fit into the life they had before. This can be caused by the psychological distress they were under. That makes it difficult to process and verbalize their experience under the concern of how people or their family will react.¹⁶⁶

The concern of rehabilitating trafficking victims has become prevalent in South Sudan. There, thousands of children have been trafficked by militaries to serve in the conflict. It is difficult to enforce international laws here due to the instability. Many cases are unreported because it

is not the focus of the communities. That is why the UNODC started an initiative to strengthen cooperation in South Sudan and enhance responses to human trafficking in conflict settings. The UNODC trains law enforcement officers who are preparing to be deployed for peacekeeping missions. They give them the skills to identify, document, and report cases of human trafficking in these conflict-affected regions.¹⁶⁷

The instability during conflict makes it ripe for corruption. These conflicts often lead to broken governments, judicial systems, job markets, and lack of community support structures. Without the formal structure of everyday living, people are forced into poverty. The need for money and lack of protection leads many more people to becoming a trafficker. The vulnerability of populations during conflict makes areas rife for corruption. Refugee camps and displaced people become targets for traffickers. In some cases, corrupt camp officials will take the opportunity to build relationships with traffickers and establish their own trafficking rings.

Once conflicts conclude, human trafficking is often overlooked in humanitarian responses. Trafficking operations thrive in the post-conflict chaos. The reconstruction period allows for continued distraction without many large government organizations and laws. This period also continues to make it difficult to prosecute traffickers. Conflict and post-conflict judges are often regular people who also need money. They are easy to bribe and persuade to rule in favor of traffickers or against victims. Overall, conflict zones are prime locations for corruption and trafficking.¹⁶⁸

GLOBAL FORUM FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS

The United Nations took big steps forward in representing human trafficking victims in 2021 with the "Political Declaration on the Implementation of the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons." Within this declaration, The General Assembly

expressed solidarity with the victims of trafficking. They understood the need to include victims in the fight to end human trafficking. The General Assembly successfully created a global understanding of what trafficking is and how it affects victims lives during and after being trafficked.¹⁶⁹ However, real action taken after the declaration was published were limited. This was due to a lack of funding, global distraction, and its non-binding nature.¹⁷⁰ Some countries, such as the United States, Switzerland, and Colombia have succeeded in following this declaration. These countries as well as sixty others worked with the declaration to create the Advancing Competency To Support Family Violence Survivors (PACTS) Project. This project aims to increase investigations and the prosecution of traffickers, strengthen human rights protection and framework for trafficking victims, and boost engagement in policy debates at a global level. It successfully sponsored the first International Forum of Prosecutors Countering Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling in December 2024 in Vienna, Austria. They discussed transnational investigation techniques and agreed to pursue the discussion in smaller groups that specifically affect their countries.¹⁷¹

The UNODC created Voices of Resilience. It was funded by the European Union (EU). Voices of Resilience is the first United Nations Global Forum for Human Trafficking Survivors. It was held June 24 through June 25, 2025 at the Vienna International Centre in Vienna, Austria.¹⁷² There were more than thirty-five survivor leaders there. They also had one hundred representatives from governments, service providers, and civil

society organizations. Their goal was to listen **36** to the survivors and put their ideas into actions against trafficking.¹⁷³

One survivor was Frey A Worku. Ms. Worku was born and raised by her mother in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. After graduating from college she wanted to move closer to home to contribute to her community and build a future for herself. However, her hometown brought her very few work opportunities and a growing family burden. This forced her to move abroad. A broker in the Middle East recruited her and promised her an excellent job. She had to pay a large fee to begin. As soon as she arrived, she waited for hours to be picked up. While she was waiting, the man took her passport, ID, and cell phone. She was taken to a cramped apartment and was forced into a 60 hour work week. After becoming ill, she was provided no medical or psychological help and had to pay for everything on her own. When she was sexually assaulted by a guard, she received no support. It took her six months to get her passport back. She had to leave all the money she earned because her managers controlled her bank account. When she finally made it back to Ethiopia and reported her experience, she faced a lot of stigma and hardship from her community. She co-founded the Finot Charitable Association in 2023. The Association is a survivor-led organization that runs awareness campaigns for vulnerable people in Ethiopia.¹⁷⁴

Ms. Worku and other survivors at the Forum emphasized that the hardest part is not just escaping their trafficker. They explained their trauma from their time in the justice system, their

By bringing victims into the conversation, we open more pathways to locating where corruption is and how to best reduce human trafficking as a whole.

experience with law enforcement, and support services that did not have the experience or means to help victims. They also highlighted the importance of combatting stigmas and stereotypes about human trafficking victims. The speakers told the forum that this shift needs to not just come from institutions but from society as a whole.¹⁷⁵

The forum ended with the creation of a Call to Action. It urges governments to use nine key principles created by the survivors' experiences.¹⁷⁶ The Call to Action builds on the 2021 United Nations General Assembly Declaration. It does this by calling for the involvement of survivors in creating victim-centered responses.¹⁷⁷ The first principle is about engaging and recognizing survivors as experts. Identifying their invaluable perspectives to shape advisory processes. The second principle is about understanding and addressing the impact of trauma during recovery. The third principle is providing sustained support for recovery and independence. The goal of this principle is to provide long-term and consistent support in all areas of recovery from trafficking. The fourth principle is to develop better identification practices that are not based in generalizations

and stereotyping of trafficking. The fifth principle is about ensuring the safety of victims and survivors. The sixth is about tailoring protection measures to child trafficking victims. The seventh principle is about strengthening legal protections and victims' access to justice. It urges the strengthening of legal protections by making sure they are trauma-informed. The eighth principle fosters collaborative, cross-sectoral protection partnerships. Cross-sectoral means that it includes different sectors and in this case, borders. The ninth and final principle is confronting corruption and ensuring accountability in protection responses.¹⁷⁸

Voices of Resilience successfully created this roadmap to protect, encourage, and inform survivors around the world. Since the Call to Action's release in 2025, governments have been able to create and reform policies grounded in the realities human trafficking victims face every day.¹⁷⁹ This is a very important aspect of policy making for human trafficking and anti-corruption measures.

Council of the Baltic Sea States

Credit: Estonian Foreign Ministry



CASE STUDY: COUNCIL OF BALTIC SEA STATES

The Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) is a regional political organization. Its members include ten member states and the European Union.¹⁸⁰ The ten member states include Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, and Sweden.¹⁸¹ Before the creation of the CBSS, the Baltic Sea Region faced many conflicts. These conflicts included World War II and strong Soviet Union control. After the Soviet Union collapsed, there were reduced tensions and better East-West relationships. This set the stage for the CBSS. The CBSS was created in 1992 after major geographic and political changes in the Baltic Sea Region after the end of the Cold War. At the beginning, the key focuses of the CBSS included humanitarian aid, supporting new democracies, encouraging economic and technological assistance, protecting the environment, promoting sustainable energy, enhancing cultural ties and education, and improving transportation and communication infrastructure. They also wanted to create a space for discussion and partnership between the Baltic Sea Region.¹⁸² Currently, CBSS has three priorities. The first priority is creating a strong regional identity and building strong connections to support their development. The second priority is enhancing social security and safety. The third priority is to develop a sustainable society.¹⁸³

The Baltic Sea Region faces many cases of human trafficking. While the exact number is unknown, in 2013, the Baltic Sea States estimated that there were between tens and hundreds of cases in their region alone.¹⁸⁴ This region is a hub for human trafficking. This is because of the demand for cheap labor and sexual services. These are key indicators that are prime for traffickers. Some traffickers work alone or in small groups while others are a part of organized crime. In trafficking networks, traffickers often combine human trafficking with other crimes such as migrant smuggling, drug

trafficking, or money laundering. The combination of these crimes greatly destabilizes the Baltic Sea Region when it comes to the human rights of victims, public safety, and the rule of law. Solving these issues falls under the second priority: a safe and secure region.¹⁸⁵

In 2006 the CBSS formed the Task Force Against Trafficking in Human Beings (TF-THB). It was created by the CBSS Member State heads of government. Its goal is to strengthen anti-trafficking policies and make stronger preventive and protective work. The TF-THB is composed of representatives from the CBSS member states including ministries responsible for anti-trafficking coordination and efforts. It holds regular expert sessions in Stockholm. It works with national and international expertise to discuss policy for regional anti-trafficking projects. Each member state rotates holding the position of the Chair every year. When the TF-THB meets they assist the CBSS Presidency and member states. Its responsibilities include creating and implementing transnational projects, representing themselves at events and in international networks, and spreading their results.¹⁸⁶

In 2025, the TF-THB created their 2025-2030 Strategic Plan. The plan has eight objectives. The first objective is to serve as a center for regional knowledge. The second is to understand human trafficking within organized crime. The third is addressing all types of exploitation of human trafficking including new developments. The fourth objective is to target the key factors enabling human trafficking. The fifth is collaborating to form partnerships with other CBSS bodies, regional networks, and international stakeholders. The sixth is improving victim protection and empowering them. The seventh is to emphasize the gender dimension of human trafficking and advance policies and practices that take into account gender-based risks faced by LGBTIQ+ individuals. The eighth objective addresses human trafficking and mixed migration flows.¹⁸⁷

Outside their strategic plan, the CBSS has worked on many projects regarding human trafficking. One project is the “Practical and Empirical Approach to Address Trafficking in Human Beings for Sexual Exploitation in the Baltic Sea Region” (PEX-BRS). PEX-BRS aims to reinforce the capacity of frontline workers to identify and combat human trafficking through the use of evidence-based data. It stands on two pillars. The first is the production of evidence-based information on sexual exploitation. The second is an effort to raise the ability of frontline workers and enhance operational responses. It targets public sector professionals who work with victims of human trafficking. One activity of the project is an investigation protocol for law enforcement. So far, it has accomplished many of these pillars. One outcome was the creation of a specialized investigation protocol for the CBSS and Ukraine. To boost discussion, the CBSS hosted the European Forum Against Trafficking of Human Beings. Lastly, they published an empirical analysis of sexual exploitation trends from 2020 to 2024. The TF-THB will develop an investigation protocol that will provide guidance and operational methods that will support investigators and prosecutors in CBSS member states. Another project will generate studies related to the overall scope, trends, and development tendencies, demand, rights, and vulnerabilities of human trafficking and sexual exploitation victims.¹⁸⁸

Bloc Analysis

POINTS OF DIVISION

Though states acknowledge the need to address corruption in human trafficking, they differ in how to tackle the issue.

Notably, many states deliberate whether to strengthen law enforcement or invest more in victim-centered approaches. Some countries support prioritizing a stronger police force

to target corruption, while others argue that focusing on rehabilitating victims and listening to their experiences to find solutions is more effective.¹⁸⁹

Other states push for improving border security, believing that stricter border regulations are the key to preventing human trafficking. Opponents to this solution argue that migration policies will be too restrictive, and may lead to riskier migration operations.¹⁹⁰

Additionally, some states support improving border security or implementing stronger anti-corruption measures within their government institutions. However, this solution often draws contention over who should implement and overlook the government institutions. Some countries believe it should be up to domestic oversight and others believe it should be rooted externally.

Another point of deliberation involves debate in the prioritization of criminal punishment versus prevention tactics. This pertains to countries either prioritizing harsher penalties for trafficking or investing more into rehabilitation, education, and reform.¹⁹¹

COUNTRIES SUPPORTING THE STRENGTHENING OF CROSS-BORDER LAW ENFORCEMENT

Most countries who support the strengthening of cross-border law enforcement are often separately identified as a destination country. A destination country is one where the traffickers plan to take their victims.¹⁹² In 2022, UNODC recorded 436 different cross-boarder trafficking flows. It demonstrated that victims of at least 162 different nationalities were trafficked into 128 different destination countries. As destination countries, their main priority is strengthening cross-border law enforcement. Destination countries primarily want this strengthening in the origin countries who are permitting trafficking to leave their country. Destination countries also want to prosecute the public officials who

help facilitate trafficking, increase financial investigations, and improve victim identification protocols and protections. As countries with a large influx of victims, they prioritize offering victims sanctity and healthcare. Since 2019, there has been a 45 percent increase in detected trafficking victims in Western and Southern Europe. This lends countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain, the Netherlands, France, Poland, Australia, and Italy to be primary destinations for cross-border trafficking.¹⁹³

COUNTRIES SUPPORTING THE REDUCTION OF DEMAND FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Countries who support a reduction in demand are often separately identified as origin countries. Origin countries are the countries where trafficked people are taken from.¹⁹⁴ There are several factors that contribute to the “success” of an origin country for human traffickers. These can include high levels of poverty, conflict and instability, weak governing systems, and intense population growth. Origin countries’ main priority is reducing the demand for human trafficking victims from their country. They want to hold businesses and organizations accountable for forced labor in their supply chains and improve international law enforcement cooperation. Within their country they advocate for policies that reduce poverty rates, increase employment and education, and combat corruption amongst police and border officials. The largest region for origin countries in trans-national trafficking is Sub-Saharan Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 26 percent of cross-border trafficking flows. Other examples of origin countries who are taking action against the demand for human trafficking include Myanmar, Brazil, and India.¹⁹⁵

TRANSIT COUNTRIES WITH HIGH LEVELS OF MIGRATION

Transit countries are the in-between countries where trafficking victims are moved through in

between their origin country and the destination country.¹⁹⁶ Transit countries often process a large number of migrants every year, thus weakening their security. This leads to higher levels of corruption and an increase in the likelihood of human trafficking. This is because there is more opportunity for bribery and corruption of officers and an increased ability to fly under the radar. Thus, their priorities for policy include strengthening border security, combatting the corruption at the borders, and increasing peaceful cooperation with neighboring states to promote safer borders. Like destination countries, transit countries also focus on improving victim identification protocols as a means of intervention. Countries that could be considered transit countries are Mexico, the United States of America, France, and Saudi Arabia.¹⁹⁷

Committee Mission

The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) is the only universal addressed anti-corruption instrument. It was created in Vienna, Austria and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on October 31st, 2003. This was a pivotal turning point in the fight against corruption. It was the first time countries came together to unite and commit to fighting corruption. The UNCAC has a unique approach to tackling corruption. It emphasizes preventative measures, criminalization and law enforcement, international cooperation, and asset recovery. Asset recovery is when a country or person gets back something it had lost or had been taken from it.¹⁹⁸

The main decision making body of the UNCAC is the Conference of the States Parties (COSP). Once a country has ratified the UNCAC, they become an automatic member of the COSP. They meet every two years and adopt resolutions and decisions that aim to achieve the convention’s objective.¹⁹⁹ For example, at the 11th meeting of the UNCAC COSP, they discussed

migrant smuggling and the role corruption plays in its continuation.²⁰⁰ The COSP also has many working groups within it that target specific issues. One is the Gender, Inclusion, and Corruption Working Group. In the 13th meeting, they dove into the facilitation of human trafficking through corruption and how that affects women in Latin America.²⁰¹ The UNCAC continuously takes tireless actions in order to help combat human trafficking and the corruption that enables it.

Research and Preparation Questions

Your dais has prepared the following research and preparation questions as a means of providing guidance for your research process. These questions should be carefully considered, as they embody some of the main critical thought and learning objectives surrounding your topic.

TOPIC A

- 1 Has the country that you represent experienced the misuse, diversion, or corruption of humanitarian aid? What measures has the government or non-governmental organizations taken to prevent these issues?
- 2 How does your country apply and interpret the principles of impartiality, accountability, and neutrality when receiving humanitarian aid?
- 3 How much aid has your country received during its past or present?
- 4 What policies and technologies has your country implemented, or could it implement, to protect humanitarian aid workers?
- 5 Have political or environmental crises led to a need for humanitarian aid in your country?

TOPIC B

- 1 Does your country experience large amounts of migration in and out of the country? What are the security protocols in place to facilitate the movement of people?
- 2 What are the current procedures your country utilizes to identify and respond to cases of human trafficking? Have these efforts been successful?
- 3 How does your country respond on a global level to the suggestion of anti-corruption practices and anti-human trafficking efforts?
- 4 What forms of human trafficking are experienced the most in your country, and how heavily are these experiences influenced by economic, social, and/or political factors?
- 5 Does the anti-human trafficking corruption frameworks your country has built involve the voices of survivors?

Important Documents

TOPIC A

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About the Authors

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Arianna Ramirez is an undergraduate at Miami Dade College, where she is studying business. With Venezuelan roots, she is a native of Caracas. Participating in Model UN since 2021 and has staffed over 5 conferences, two Crisis and three GA committees. Additionally participating in NHSMUN twice as a delegate and once as a staffer for DISEC. Arianna is also the winner of the Sustainable Development Shark Tank with a project called Ecobricks. She is also involved in a Venezuelan volunteer group called “Juventud,” participating in over five trips in Yaracuy, two in Minas de Baruta, and two in Los Naranjos. After the two consecutive earthquakes in 2026, she worked for weeks providing hands-on assistance to the people affected. She distributed supplies, filled trucks with humanitarian aid, and accompanied people in the most affected sectors: La Guaira, San Bernardino, El Nuevo Circo, and Los Palos Grandes.

TOPIC B: AVA FEDERICI

Ava Federici is an undergraduate at New York University, where she studies business and psychology. Growing up in Southern California, she has debated in Model United Nations since 2021 and earned Best Delegate five times. She has chaired numerous ECOSOC committees and served as the Secretary-General of her high schools conference in 2025. In 2027, she will also have served as the Under-Secretary-General of General Assembly Committees at New York University's collegiate conference. Outside of Model UN, she participates in Mock Trial and looks forward to continuing her career by attending law school in the coming years.

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