



**PRESIDIUM *for* CHANGE**  
FOR A BETTER WORLD

PRESIDIUM MODEL UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE 2024

# UNHRC

## BACKGROUND GUIDE



**UNITED NATIONS**  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
COUNCIL



**AGENDA:**

Protection of Human Rights  
Defenders in Conflict Zone

**PRESIDIUM SCHOOL MUN 2024**

**LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

Greetings,

We welcome you all, in the capacity of the members of the Executive Board of 9th Edition of Presidium MUN taking place on 18th & 19th October 2024. Since this conference shall be a learning experience for all of you, it shall be for us as well. Our only objective shall be to make you all speak and participate in the discussion, and we pledge to give every effort for the same.

How to research for the agenda and beyond? There are several things to consider. This background guide shall be different from the background guides you might have come across in other MUNs and will emphasize more on providing you sources where you find matter for your research than to provide you matter itself, because we do not believe in spoon-feeding you, nor do we believe in leaving you to swim in the pond all by yourself. We promise that if you read the entire set of documents, you shall be able to cover 70% of your research for the conference. The remaining amount of research depends on how willing are you to put in your efforts and understand those articles and/or documents. So, in the purest of the language we can say, it is important to read anything and everything whose links are provided in the background guide.

What to speak in the committee and in what manner? The basic emphasis of the committee shall not be on how much facts you read and present in the committee but how you explain them in simple and decent language to us and the fellow committee members. The entire conference aims at analyzing your understanding of the agenda and not how much you have studied. So, kindly focus upon analysis and explanation, because we are interested in knowing how much you know and remember that you will know only if you read and work.

We wish you all the very best and feel free to ask doubts, if any.

Regards,

Executive Board

9th Edition of Presidium MUN

Presidium School, Gurgaon

**INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE**

**Official Website:**

[Welcome to the Human Rights Council | OHCHR](https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/home)

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/home>

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) was established by the UN General Assembly with the passing of resolution 60/251 in 2006. The first UNHRC session occurred in June of that year. Over the course of 2006 and 2007, its mechanisms and functions were formed, and it was established as an “intergovernmental body within the United Nations system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and making recommendations on them”. The main objective of the UNHRC is to draw attention to human rights issues, discuss them, and give suggestions about how to properly address them and provide justice to those affected. The council is composed of 47 UN Member States elected by the General Assembly.

The UNHRC replaced the UN Commission on Human Rights, which was created in 1946 to “weave the international legal fabric that protects our fundamental rights and freedom”. Some reforms implemented in the UNHRC included the Universal Periodic Review mechanism, which allows the UNHRC to investigate human rights situations in all UN Member States. Another was the Advisory Committee, which serves as the UNHRC’s “think tank” to offer “expertise and advice on thematic human rights issues”. A system to process “complaints” was also added, where human rights violations could be brought to the attention of UNHRC. Finally, the UNHRC works with UN Special Procedures, which include special rapporteurs, representatives, independent experts, and working groups which look to monitor human rights around the world. Fundamentally, the purpose of the UNHRC is to promote international human rights standards.

- The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is an inter-governmental body within the UN system, tasked with promoting and protecting human rights globally.
- Comprising 47 member states elected for three-year terms, the Council addresses human rights violations, conducts reviews of each UN member state's human rights record through the Universal Periodic Review, and can establish investigations into specific situations.
- UNHRC also engages with civil society and makes recommendations to improve human rights practices. Despite its significant role, the UNHRC has faced criticism for the inclusion of member states with questionable human rights records and perceived biases in its operations.

## PRESIDIUM SCHOOL MUN 2024

- The way we see the world and act on it depends on the information we have. This is why freedom of expression and freedom of the press are fundamental rights, and the free flow of ideas is a key driver of vibrant societies and human progress.

The Council serves as a forum for dialogue among States, with input from other stakeholders. As a result of its discussions, the Council may issue resolutions calling on States to take specific actions or uphold certain principles, or it may create mechanisms to investigate or monitor questions of concern. The Human Rights Council has created or renewed the mandates of various “special procedures.” The special procedures are experts appointed to monitor human rights around priority themes or in specific countries with serious human rights problems. The special procedures may be individual experts (“special rapporteurs” or “independent experts”) or working groups. The Council also manages the Universal Periodic Review, a process through which each UN Member State’s overall human rights record is reviewed.

### INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENDA

#### *Agenda: Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Conflict Zones*

#### Armed Conflict

**All cases of declared war or of any other armed conflict which may arise between two or more of the High Contracting Parties, even if the state of war is not recognized by one of them.**

Ongoing Military conflicts;

As of 2024 there are more than 70 armed conflicts in the world, the vast majority of which are taking place in North Africa and the Middle East. Non-combatants, especially human rights defenders, are particularly vulnerable due to their proximity and involvement in these conflict zones.

#### Conflict Zones

Conflict zone refers to war or political instability that disrupts essential services such as housing, transportation, communication, sanitation, water, and health care which requires the response of people outside of the community affected.

**For the purpose of understanding protection of human rights defenders in conflict zones, deliberating over these 5 international conflicts happening around the world right now serve as an important baseline**

- UKRAINE-RUSSIA WAR
- PALESTINE-ISRAEL CONFLICT
- SUDANESE CIVIL WAR
- MYANMAR CIVIL WAR

## PRESIDIUM SCHOOL MUN 2024

- HAITI GANG VIOLENCE

### **Human Rights Defenders**

Human rights defenders are people/organizations who work to protect or promote human rights, either individually or with others, for example, human rights monitors working with national human rights organizations, human rights ombudsman or human rights lawyers.

### **Role of Human Rights Defenders in Conflict Zones**

In conflict zones, HRDs play a crucial role in:

- Documenting human rights violations.
- Advocating for the rights of marginalized populations.
- Facilitating dialogue and peacebuilding efforts.
- Providing critical information to local and international communities.

### **Threats Faced by Human Rights Defenders**

#### **Physical Threats**

HRDs often face direct threats to their safety, including:

- Violence from state actors or non-state armed groups.
- Kidnappings, torture, and extrajudicial killings.
- Harassment and intimidation.

#### **Legal and Institutional Barriers**

In many conflict zones, HRDs encounter:

- Repressive laws that criminalize their work.
- Lack of accountability for perpetrators of violence against HRDs.
- Discrimination and marginalization, particularly against women, minorities, and indigenous people.

#### **Psychological Impact**

The stress and trauma associated with working in conflict zones can lead to:

- Burnout and mental health issues.
- Isolation from their communities and support networks.
- Fear and anxiety about their own safety and that of their families.

## International Legal Framework

### United Nations Declarations and Resolutions

- **UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (1998):** Affirms the right of individuals to promote and protect human rights. **Source:** [The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders | OHCHR](#)
- **UN Security Council Resolutions:** Addresses the protection of civilians in armed conflict and the importance of supporting Human Rights Defenders. **Source:** [Resolutions | Security Council](#)

### Recent International Trends

The current geopolitical scenario both includes conflicts between states as well as non-state armed groups. Thus, the effective implementation of *International Humanitarian Law* within both of these contexts will differ somewhat; has led to the following developments;

- ❖ Both the Russia Ukraine and the Israel Palestine conflicts are to some degree territorial disputes which have 2 well established states partaking in them. Therefore, broader geopolitical interests have played an active role in determining the outcomes of these conflicts which include how human rights defenders are treated. This calls for greater involvement of either non state civil society institutions or neutral states taking up an active role in preventing human rights abuses.
- ❖ The conflict in Myanmar deals with the implications of violence and human rights violations involving stateless non-combatants including human rights defenders, as a consequence of which there is not adequate international legal protection of human rights defenders who aren't citizens of any state. This calls for greater involvement of international human rights organizations as well as a more active role of the ICC and the ICJ and strengthening the scope of their jurisdiction when it comes to violations of human rights.

**Source:** [International Criminal Court Home | INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW](#)

## PRESIDIUM SCHOOL MUN 2024

- ❖ The Middle East and North Africa region has witnessed governments persistently suppressing peaceful protests and silencing dissent through intensified repression, rather than addressing the fundamental reasons behind the protests and building new social contracts. This has resulted in growing authoritarianism, repression of dissent, and human rights abuses, despite the initial hopes of the Arab Spring. Human rights defenders in the region face increasing threats to their legitimacy and agency, with public health measures having been used as a pretext to crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators, activists and journalists; as well as serious restrictions on access to resources and overall funding limitations, threatening the sustainability of the human rights organizations.

**Source:** [Human rights in Middle East and North Africa Regional Overview Amnesty International](#)

### Repression of Dissent

Across the region, authorities continued to violate the rights of people who expressed critical or dissenting views, including online, whether about their government or security forces, human rights, economic policies, international affairs or social issues deemed “*immoral*”.

In the aftermath of Iran’s “Woman Life Freedom” uprising in 2022, authorities intensified their crackdown on women and girls defying compulsory veiling, and the harassment of relatives of unlawfully killed protesters and bystanders seeking truth and justice.

In Algeria, authorities prosecuted activists and journalists for expressing critical views, mainly online, and shut down media outlets. Iraqi authorities attacked the right to freedom of expression and attempted to introduce laws and regulations to curb this right.

In Tunisia, authorities escalated their crackdown on dissent, increasingly using unfounded conspiracy and terrorism charges against high-profile opposition figures and other critics, and frequently using a new draconian cybercrime law. Members of the Ennahda opposition party were particularly targeted, with many of its leaders held in long-term pretrial detention. Over 50 political activists were investigated under trumped-up charges of “conspiracy,” while dozens of social and environmental protesters were unjustly persecuted.

In Saudi Arabia, the authorities relentlessly targeted perceived dissidents. The Specialized Criminal Court (SCC), established to try terror-related crimes, sentenced individuals to lengthy prison terms following grossly unfair trials for exercising their rights to freedom of expression or association, including peaceful online speech. **Case of:** [Salma al-Shehab | USCIRF](#)



## PRESIDIUM SCHOOL MUN 2024

During the annual climate change conference (COP28), hosted by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a mass trial began of over 80 Emiratis, including human rights defenders and prisoners of conscience already imprisoned for a decade, on trumped-up terrorism charges. At least 26 prisoners of conscience remained held in the UAE for the peaceful expression of their beliefs.

### Documents and Reports

**1. Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders:** The Special Rapporteur regularly submits reports that address the challenges faced by HRDs in conflict zones and provides recommendations for their protection.

**Source:** [Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders | OHCHR](#)

**2. Human Rights Watch Reports:** Human Rights Watch publishes reports that document the experiences of HRDs in various conflict zones, highlighting specific cases and advocating for their protection.

**Source:** [Reports | Human Rights Watch](#)

**3. Amnesty International Guidelines for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders:** These guidelines provide practical recommendations for states and civil society to enhance the protection of HRDs, particularly in hostile environments.

**Source:** [universal-declaration-of-human-rights](#)

**4. Front Line Defenders Annual Reports:** Front Line Defenders publishes annual reports on the situation of HRDs globally, with a focus on those operating in conflict zones.

**Source:** [Annual Reports | Front Line Defenders](#)

**5. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) Resources:** FIDH provides various resources, including reports and toolkits aimed at protecting HRDs in conflict settings.

**Source:** [international federation for human rights](#)

**6. International Justice Resource Center (IJRC):** The IJRC offers information on legal frameworks for the protection of HRDs, including international treaties and human rights mechanisms.

**Source:** [International Justice Resource Center](#)

**7. OSCE Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders:** The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe provides guidelines and recommendations for member states on protecting HRDs.

**Source:** [Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders | OSCE](#)



## PRESIDIUM SCHOOL MUN 2024

### Sources for Research

- <https://www.omct.org/en/what-we-do/human-rights-defenders>
- <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/>
- <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/extended-report/>
- [Human Rights and Armed Conflict](#)
- [The history of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders: its genesis, drafting and adoption](#)

**NOTE:** Kindly note that this Background Guide is not exhaustive in nature and is merely a vessel to guide your research procedures by hinting at a few of many key focus areas and the degree of the technicality and analysis that is expected out of every one of you. Research should not be limited to the background guide and the links provided here, delegates are encouraged to go beyond and research all relevant information.

With this, we wish you all the best and anticipate two days of exemplary academic deliberations!