



INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN SYRIA : COMBATING THE SOCIO- LEGAL ISSUES

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Abstract

The Syrian Crisis can often be classified as a humanitarian crisis or a war. But every war is followed by a series of human rights violations and a unwanted reshuffling of the society. A nation's most integral aspect is its society, and when society crumbles, the nation loses its identity. The subsequent topics deal with the issue in Syria and how a proxy war has completely destroyed the society. Now, with the defeat of the ISIS, Syria has to return to a state of normalcy, but it is difficult to do so after being at war for the past 7 years. The topics present herein discuss the role of international organizations in restoring the society and its people to its former state.

1. International Organizations

International Organizations exist in various forms relating to different needs of the society. According to different commentators, the following necessities must be fulfilled by the entity to qualify as an International Organization,

- Its membership must be composed of states or other international organizations.¹

- It must be established by a treaty or other instruments governed by the international law.²
- It must have autonomous will and separate legal personality separate from that of its members.³
- It must also be competent to adopt norms that are addressed to its members.⁴

In the initial times the international organizations were merely concerned with settlement of bilateral disputes, but with the increasing trade relationships the parties to the dispute increased from two to many, which gave rise to some ad hoc conferences for the settlement of that particular dispute. Some examples of this were the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, Paris Conference 1919, Treaty of Versailles, etc. But since these did not have any binding effect other than those who were a party to it, the need of such International Organization which could have binding effect on all the States, was much essential to counter the uprising disputes. With such intention the League of Nations was formed after the First World War and in its failure to achieve the mission, the United Nations was formed after the Second World War. The UN also gave rise to several other organizations that looks into various aspects of the society. These organizations together upkeep the existence of world peace and along with that it keeps several other aspects into check, such as child development, protection of world heritage sites, medication for the needy and the injured, maintenance of trade relationships etc.

1.1 The Syrian Crisis

¹ Morgenthern, Legal Problems of International Organizations (1986), pg.19

² Schermers and Blokker, International Institutional Law, pg.23 (para.33).

³ Seidl-Hohenveldern, "The Legal Personality of International and Supranational Organizations" (1965) 21 REDI 36, p.66

⁴ Reuter, International Institutional Law, pg.215-218.



As history reveals, Syria had a great civilization, and a semi-independent state, ruled by the unchallenged authority of Hafez al-Assad for many years.⁵ With the help of the Lebanese and Israel occupied Palestinian terrorists, he converted Syria into a regional power and developed an understanding with Iran who opposed the US and Israeli Governments. After his death in 2000, his son, Bashar al-Assad, became the President. He started his rule moderately but soon adopted his father's harsher military policies. Syria is a heterogeneous society with diversity on the basis of finance, ethnicity, religion, tribe etc.⁶ The population mix is: (about 74 per cent), Alawites and Druze (16 per cent) and Christians (10 per cent). There is also a tiny Jewish population.⁷

The present crisis in Syria started in March 2011, when a student posted graffiti in the streets of Dara, which was countered by the Syrian militias and this led to violent protests for demanding more power and liberty regarding politics and economics. Instead of listening to the demands, the government used force to suppress the uprising which intensified and led to the division of the country socially and politically and to counter the forces, the rebel groups took up arms. There were two groups made by the world powers, Pro-Syrian Group, which consisted of Russia, China, Iran and Hezbollah; and the Anti-Syrian Group, which consisted of US, Britain, France, Israel,

Turkey and Saudi-Arabia; all participating either actively or passively in the crisis and playing their own interest in the form of a proxy war.⁸

The Syrian oppositions were helped by US, France, Turkey and Arab States. The crisis further aggravated when 5000 al-Qaeda insurgents⁹ were sent to Syria and they started implementing their own agendas. Owing to this Russia and Iran came to support the Assad government and Hezbollah sent the fighter jets in lieu of that and in July 2013, supply of the arms were increased by the "Friends of Syria" resolution.

The ideological conflict was turned into a military conflict by Iran and Saudi-Arabia. Syria is a vital piece of land for the Iranian regional influence in the Middle East. On the other hand Russia has a political and military interest over this land. It has the only naval base near the Tartus Port and has a multi-billion deal with the Assad government regarding defense and arms, which it intended to carry on.

As for the Chinese government, they have a pre-existing conflict with the US government and thus, though passively, it had taken part in the proxy war, for its competition in the Korean Peninsula and South China Sea, which were controlled by both of them.¹⁰

⁵ George Lenczowski, *The Middle East in World Affairs*, 3rd edition (New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), pp.309-71.

⁶ R.D. McLaurine, Don Peretz and Lewis W. Snider, *Middle East Foreign Policy: Issues and Processes* (New York: Praeger, 1992), pg 241

⁷ The data is taken from the CIA World Fact Book, available at www.cia.gov, retrieved on 8 September 2013.

⁸ For details see Emile Hokayem, *Syria's Uprising and Fracturing of the Levant* (London: IISS, 2013).

⁹ It included Jbhatul Nusra, who was declared as a terrorist entity by the US later on.

¹⁰ Sui Lee Wee, 'China's Xi tells Obama Syrian crisis can't be resolved with military strikes', Reuters, 6 September 2013



US fought the proxy war basically to maintain its status as the only super power in the world and break the Iranian regional influence which would ensure Israel's security and break down the Syrian defense and this would led Damascus's inability to challenge the superiority. This would also undo the strategic link between the Iranian regional influence and the Hezbollah.¹¹ In this, the Britain supported the US and France strengthened its influence in Libya and Sudan.

The crisis saw over 1,00,000 deaths and over 2 million refugees fled to Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. Cluster bombs, Thermobaric weapons, Anti-tank missiles were used by the Syrian Military. Ballistic missiles which were used by Iran to destroy the ISIL camps Deir ez-Zor area in eastern Syria, killed over 1400 people. The crisis gave rise to genocide eventually.

By 2015, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General reported that "there is a complete and utter absence of protection of civilians in the Syrian Arab Republic.¹² According to a 2015 report on health care in Syria, "civilians as well as healthcare personnel, medical facilities, and ambulances are deliberately and routinely targeted as part of the military strategy of the Syrian Government"¹³.

2 International Organizations Involved

To stop the ongoing crisis in Syria and help the civilians to better deal with the situation, several organizations have taken active part

and helped the Syrian government to establish peace and security for its citizens.

2.1 Peace Direct

Peace Direct is an international organization that helps and supports the local people to stop war and build humanitarian conditions in the world's most fragile areas. It is mainly led by the local people with an objective to tackle the cause of violence and rebuild living conditions. Starting from a small basement office in a flat in London, to a dynamic and respected organization, it has supported 25 countries in a span of 14 years.¹⁴

In the Syrian Crisis it has worked along with its partner names Zoom In, in the northern region of Idlib where there was a bulk of population who were seriously affected by the crisis. During the indiscriminate bombing by the world players, mane civilians have suffered grave injuries and many have even lost their limbs. The majority of older people have left the place before the starting of the civil war and thus the consequences were mainly seen by the younger ones who have to travel in the open, with great risk of their lives, for wok.

Peace Direct along with Zoom In made a project to target 80 young men and women who were of the age ranging from 15 to 35 years and is suffering from permanent disabilities. The target areas were fixed to be those where the air strikes have already taken place and which are now comparatively of less prone to attacks than other areas in Syria.

¹¹ Jodi Rudoren and Isabel Kershner, 'On Obama's Plan, A Message Emerges in Israel: Stay Quiet', The New York Times, 2 September 2013

¹² Report of the Secretary-General, Implementation of Security Council Resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), UN Doc. S/2016/272 (2015).

¹³ Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, UN Doc. A/ HRC/34/CRP.3 (2017), Para 15.

¹⁴Peace Direct, About Us (Apr 15, 12:59 AM), <https://www.peacedirect.org/about/>.



Zoom In started working with the local peoples and the community leaders and started identifying the victims of the crisis. The victims were given vocational training along with psychological support for their betterment in dealing with the disabilities and the way that have affected their lives. The organization also installed techniques around the conflict transformation to support the disagreements with family and friends with positive attitude and in a non-violent manner. The training period was basically of two months and then they were subjected to a mentor for their progress check and finally they were helped in linking them to any opportunities for increased support, training or employment through local organizations in their network.¹⁵

2.2 Turkey as an International Organization

While not an international organization in the strictest sense, the contribution of Turkey, one of the countries bordering Syria to the west is important. Turkey has played a major role in mitigating the refugee crisis rising from Syria, and as of 2019, has played host to the largest number of refugees. The total number of registered Syrians, as surveyed by the Government of Turkey is around 2,225,147.^{16,17} The reason for this is that the approach to rehabilitation of these refugees is

multifaceted, and divided into two separate types:-¹⁸

- Non – Camp Approach: Basing upon UNHCR’s estimations, only 12% of the refugees are placed in camps or makeshift tents while all of the others have been rehabilitated into urban areas, and are living and earning out of their own volition.
- Government Financed Approach: The government financed approach as the name suggests is the one where aid is provided and daily help is administered to the refugees. As of 2015, the Turkish Government has spent 7.6 billion dollars on the rehabilitation and the upkeep of refugees.

The influx of refugees from Syria started in 2013 and the Turkish Government was quick to implement laws so as to legitimize and control the movement of these individuals while within the territorial limits of Turkey. The ‘Law on Foreigners and International Protection’ introduced the defined the term ‘Temporary Protection’ (TP) which referred to civilians. The rulebook lays down the process of issue of TP status, the basis of admission and grant of TP status and removal or exit of TP status. Not only does it regulates the membership, but also bestows certain rights and liabilities to the holders of TP status. Overall, the law was formulated to reduce the possibility of arbitrary decisions

¹⁵Peace Direct, Syria, Vocational Training and Psychological Support for the young people with disabilities caused as a result of war (Apr 15, 12:58 AM), <https://www.peacedirect.org/where-we-work/syria/>

¹⁶Haber Turk, [https://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1130284-numan-kurtulmus-turkiyede-kayitli-2-milyon-225-bin-147-suriyeli-var\(Apr. 9, 2019, 9:01PM\).](https://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1130284-numan-kurtulmus-turkiyede-kayitli-2-milyon-225-bin-147-suriyeli-var(Apr. 9, 2019, 9:01PM).)

¹⁷ Majority of the refugees are concentrated around the Turkish capital of Istanbul, while other provincial areas are host to a fraction of the capital’s amount.

¹⁸ World Bank, Turkey’s Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis and the Road Ahead (Apr. 9, 2019, 8:53PM)

[http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/583841468185391586/pdf/102184-WP-P151079-Box394822B-PUBLIC-FINAL-TurkeysResponseToSyrianRefugees-eng-12-17-15.pdf.](http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/583841468185391586/pdf/102184-WP-P151079-Box394822B-PUBLIC-FINAL-TurkeysResponseToSyrianRefugees-eng-12-17-15.pdf)



being taken with regards refugees, while also enforcing a strict screening process for Syrian entrants. The law however has a wider scope as it is applicable to individuals of all countries and not just Syrians.¹⁹

Hence, while we see that Turkey is not an international organization, their contribution towards relief efforts in Syria are commendable and worthy of every praise.

2.3 European Union

The European Union is a regional organization comprising of a majority of European member states, and enjoy a more or less closed economy. The European Union has time and again pledged its support for providing relief to the distraught masses in Syria. The EU and its member states have provided aid and assistance to the affected individuals by way of humanitarian and stabilization assistance. As of 2018, 18 billion Euros have been allotted and/or provided for relief operations in Syria. From 2011, the EU has spent close to 7 million Euros for medical consultations, child and maternal care. The EU has also provided food to an approximate of 5 million Syrians in additions to monetary relief that was provided to farmers in Syria to return to their means of livelihood. The rehabilitations projects for the Syrians as provided by the EU are truly commendable. As for 2019 – 2020, the EU has pledged a total of 2.4 billion dollars to provide support to Syria and other middle-eastern countries undergoing crisis.²⁰ The European Union is the largest donor for

affected masses and according to their most recent press release²¹; they plan to provide more aid and relief. However, it is observed that with the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union, there may be some unforeseen ramifications to the humanitarian aid to Syria. However, such changes are merely speculative and need to be taken with a grain of salt.

2.4 International Rescue Commission

The International Rescue Commission started work in Syria during 2012 and has to date, been one of the most active organizations working for the Syrian masses. The IRC however believes that humanitarian efforts should not be stopped following the defeat of the ISIS. The IRC has hence pledged to provide psychological counseling and other forms of non-monetary reliefs for those who were under the regime of the ISIS. It is their firm belief that unless the duress and the abuse suffered by these people under the ISIS are mitigated, the people of Syria will remain forever scarred and will thus hamper the development of the nation, post-ISIS occupation.

To put things into perspective, it is first important for us to discuss the importance of the IRC and their contributions. Their objective since 2012 has been to help rebuild the lives of millions of Syrians who have lost their way of life and livelihood due to the war. The IRC was one of the first organizations to set up camps and clinics when the war started. They have also created

¹⁹ Government Of Turkey, Temporary Protection Regulation, Law on Foreigners and International Protection (Apr. 9, 2019, 9:10PM) http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/_dokuman28.pdf

²⁰ European Commission, Syria, How are we helping? (Apr. 9, 2019, 8:19PM) https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/middle-east/syria_en

²¹ European Commissions, Syria crisis, European Commission – Press Release(Apr. 9, 2019, 8:30PM) http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-19-1628_en.htm



special camps for the protection of women and children including the introduction of the concept of 'safe spaces' where women and young girls who are victims of abuse and sexual violence can share their experiences. The idea behind such an initiative is to provide a sense of belonging to these individuals. These camps also provide vocational training to develop skills of these women so that they need not be dependent on anyone.²²

2.5 United Nations

The United Nations is the largest and also the most effective international organization that currently exists. Hence, it is understood that they themselves have drawn up certain plans for upholding peace and stability in Syria. At the onset of the conflict in 2012, the United Nations Security Council passed resolution 2043, which sanctioned the formation of United Nations Assistance Mission in Syria or the UNASMIS. The UNASMIS consisted of 300 unarmed military observers and an equivalent civilian component under the command of a NATO General.²³ UNASMIS for supposed to operate for a period of 90 days but had to withdraw early because of intensification of the conflict between the belligerents and the Assad-led government forces. It has been highly debated among theorists that the need of the hour is the deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping force. However, since the defeat of the ISIS, this demand has died down. We feel it is pertinent that now is the time for the deployment of peacekeeping

forces, which can also double up as vessels for distribution of humanitarian relief. The post-ISIS Syrian regime is uncertain and ripe for exploitation from elements within and as such it is the duty of the United Nations to make sure that such an incident does not come to pass.

2.6 The White Helmets

This is an organization famous by the name of Syrian Civil Defense (SCD) formed in 2014 by James Le Measureier and is headed by Raed Saleh. The White Helmets' motto is taken from the Qur'an: 'to save a life is to save all of humanity'. It is a volunteer organization which is operating in the parts of Syria and Turkey which are controlled by the rebels. The volunteers, who included former bakers, tailors, engineers, pharmacists, painters, carpenters and students, specifically worked for the medical evacuation, urban search and rescue in response to bombing, evacuation of civilians and essential service delivery. The organization saved lives of 114000 people and in perusing such 204 volunteers lost their lives.²⁴ The White Helmets were formed in October, 2014 by seven governorates teams across Syria.

In the late 2012, the revolution in Syria descended into conflict by the aerial strike on the civilian objectives and neighborhoods which caused enormous deaths. The situation was such that no public service was afforded to the needy people. This was the time when a group of people volunteered for emergency

²² International Rescue Committee, How does the IRC help in Syria, Crisis Watch : Syria(Apr. 8, 2019, 9:20) <https://www.rescue.org/country/syria#how-does-the-irc-help-in-syria>

²³United Nations Security Council, S/RES/2043(Apr. 3, 2019, 8:16)

<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Syria%20SRES%202043.pdf>

²⁴The White Helmets, A Story of Hope (Apr 15, 1:04 AM) <https://www.whitehelmets.org/en/>



responses. They basically were for evacuation of their friends and neighbors trapped under the rebels during the ongoing crisis. These groups were first trained in Turkey, for works of urban research and rescue, in 2013. Their data, eye witness testimonies and photographic evidences, which they collected, were of vital importance to the United Nations Commission of Investigation, an organization which works for regulation of prohibition of chemical weapons and mass civilian punishment by targeting the hospitals and medical facilities and putting the vulnerable to starvation. For their gathering of information, the White Helmets were targeted by a “double tap”²⁵ aerial strike by the Syrian forces and Russian warplanes.²⁶

2.7 Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD)

CAFOD is a part of the largest age network and is a official Catholic Church agency based in England and Wales. With the help of the local priests, midwife, water engineers the organization have tried to reach the local communities at grass root level remarkable in the countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the middle East. It has a global church network which envisages 165 countries. The team, in times of crisis, has a mandate to act fast and provide essential living commodities such as food, water, shelter and etc for the people who have lost everything and also prepares them mentally to rebuild their lives and prepare them for any future that they hold.²⁷

²⁵ Once the bombarded the civilian objects and when the White Helmet volunteers came to rescue the people, the bombarded the areas again to kill the volunteers.

In the 8 years of humanitarian crisis in Syria, the organization has specifically worked for the development of the refugee status of the people who fled to different other countries such as Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Syria itself.

According to United Nations Reports 4 Lakh civilians died, 6.1 million were made homeless within the country and 13.1 million of them were living in an unsustainable in human conditions and required urgent humanitarian aid.

Few of the homeless civilians had migrated to Lebanon and looking into their in human conditions the CAFOD agency provided them with food, shelter and medical care. When Lebanon faced a calamity which was caused by the storm, Norma; 151 informal camps and 11 thousand refugees were affected. The CAFOD had considerable contribution towards these needy people in their poor living conditions of refugees before and after the storm. The organization is specifically working with the Caritas Lebanon in Bakaa valley where they are supporting vulnerable including children, disabled and elders with primary health care, accommodation and psychological service.

In Syria they are providing help by supporting church partners and providing food, medical aid, relief supplies and accommodation in areas both held by forces of Government and opposition.

²⁶ White Helmets, A Story of Hope (Apr 8, 8:10 PM) <https://www.whitehelmets.org/en/>

²⁷ Catholic Agency of Overseas Development, what does CAFOD do? (Apr 10,9:40 PM) <https://cafod.org.uk/About-us/What-we-do>.



As per United Nations High Commissioner for refugees report, 673414 civilians have registered their refugee status in Jordan. The organization is helping over 2 Lakh immigrants with cash grants, food, safe accommodation and support for education. When the government of Jordan rejected the free treatment of the refugees in November 2014 the organization Caritas Jordan started providing health care services to the refugees who have suffered imminent physical and psychological harms. A similar activity is carried out in Iraq by the organization.²⁸

3 Conclusion

The Syrian Crisis has given rise to not only given rise to issues regarding human rights and its violations but also the societal impact of such a conflict. Most of the international organizations other than probably the UN have any jurisdiction or authority to bring about mediation or ceasefire between the warring parties. So what do these organizations do? These organizations, as can be surmised from their contributions stated above, operate to mitigate the impact of the war on the society. Some of these organizations have set-up camps specially for women, children and other individuals who were previously exploited by the ISIS, these camps act as safe spaces where the women share their experiences, the children are provided education and the young women are taught basic skills. All of these are done to strive towards one common goal : re-integration to society. The organizations, in very simple words, are trying to rebuild a society which has been destroyed by war, and their efforts for such are indeed commendable.

²⁸ Catholic Agency of Overseas Development, Syria Crisis explained, How is CAFOD responding in the countries affected by the conflict in Syria? (Apr 10,

10:26 PM) <https://cafod.org.uk/News/Emergencies-news/Syria-Q-A>.