

L'Amoreaux Collegiate Institute
Model United Nations 2019



League of Arab States



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Hello delegates, my name is Omar Ameen and I will be your chair for the League of Arab Nations committee. I am currently in grade 11 and I've been part of L'Amoreaux's Model United Nations team since grade 9 and have since grown to love debate. This will be my first time chairing a committee for my school's conference. I cannot wait to chair this year's committee, which will definitely be amazing, and look forward to navigating through our topics. If you have any questions regarding the background guide, feel free to email me at omar.ameen@student.tdsb.on.ca See everyone there!

My name is Pirasha Piratheepan and I am the co-chair of the League of Arab States committee. I'm currently the VP of operations for my school's Model UN. I'm in grade 11 and have been a part of Model UN for three years. I really enjoy being a part of lively debates and I'm looking forward to attending more conferences and to our own as well. I'm excited to see each delegate strive with their passion and the excitement in each committee.

Topic 1: Reconstructing the Gaza Strip

Overview

For millennia, the Middle East has been a global crossroads for trade, politics, and warfare. Varied waves of settlers and conquerors have made the region a hotbed of rich ethnic, religious, and political diversity. However, due to this diversity, tension has been evident in various regions across the Middle East, such as the Gaza Strip, a 140-square-mile region of land on the Mediterranean coast. Due to its cultural and religious significance to both Arabs and Israelis, as well as its valuable coastal location, Gaza has become a point of conflict for decades, enduring years of war, violence, and protest. This strife has resulted in significant physical destruction to the region.

There are several factors slowing Gaza's reconstruction, the most noteworthy being the heavy restrictions on travel into and out of the region. Rifts between Hamas—which currently exercises political control over the region—and the Israeli and Egyptian governments have only increased the level of security at crossing points. The stark limitation on travel has stunted the region's economy so greatly that it faces the threat of long-term damage. Palestinians remain trapped within the Gaza Strip without access to medical services and basic resources needed to survive. The situation for those that are capable of escaping is not much better. Those that do escape, seek asylum in various other League of Arab States (LAS) countries, but are usually stripped of travel and citizenship rights.

Despite mediation from the United Nations (UN) and constant efforts from the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), reconstruction remains a slow and arduous process. Although the 2014 UN Cairo Conference focused on the reconstruction of Gaza, several pledges have yet to be fulfilled from all parties involved. "The cycle of building and destroying has continued—only worse," UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated during the conference; however, this is not to say that progress has not been made. Only one week after the meeting, the UNRWA increased its humanitarian efforts to bring aid to Palestinians. Services consisted of providing food, water, and sanitation facilities to over 600,000 people as well as calling for increased access to building materials.

Given the slow rate of progress and the increasingly dire humanitarian situation, it is time for LAS to focus its regional lens on reconstructing the Gaza Strip. The League of Arab States can bring regional assistance to Gaza and facilitate mediation between feuding member states. The severity of the issue, coupled with the unique scope of LAS, provides for creative and sufficient debate to ensure a better atmosphere and standard of living for all Arab inhabitants.

Now in its eleventh year, Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip continues to devastate the region and exacerbate desolate living conditions. Currently, only 10% of the population has access to potable drinking water, 77% are below the poverty line, and 46% remain unemployed. For over a decade, Palestinians in Gaza have lived on four hours of electricity per day and breakfast often consisting of hot water and salt. Due to restrictions on electricity, the energy

crisis of the region has worsened, endangering healthcare and wastewater management services. In 2013, Gaza's only power plant was forced to buy fuel from Israel, as Egyptian fuel became too costly. However, in 2017, the Palestinian Authority's decision to refuse payment to Israel for electricity to Gaza as a punitive measure against Hamas damaged an already battered community. The lack of electricity prevents clean water from being pumped into homes, children from studying, and residents from using the lifts in their high-rise apartment buildings. This power scarcity has also affected hospitals and healthcare centers in the area; in early 2018, a hospital with over 66,000 patients and a children's medical center was forced to halt operations.

This poor quality of life is a consequence of the strict Israeli blockade, which has locked Palestinians in Gaza while keeping food and resources out. Meanwhile, Egypt has also cut off access to Egypt through the Rafah crossing since October 2014. This crossing is important as the sole non-Israeli exit for Palestinians as well as an alternative trade route for Gaza. Of the small minority that is eligible for exit permits—mostly patients in need of medical treatment—one-third have been rejected. In 2016, there were 20% fewer truckloads of goods entering and exiting the region as there were prior to 2007. On top of this, Palestinians are discouraged from agricultural activity, as access to the Israeli perimeter fence is unsafe within 300 meters. Limited access to construction materials on Israel's part has slowed the repair of homes, leaving several displaced families without shelter. The wider impact of the blockade, however, is the fact that Gaza will likely become uninhabitable by 2021. Restricting an entire population of food, water, and resources for over ten years has proven disastrous, as well as inhumane. Increasing activism from human rights groups has put pressure on Israel to ease the blockade, yet the siege remains unabated due to hostilities with Hamas.

In response to the trajectory of humanitarian response, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has enacted a 2018-2020 Humanitarian Response Plan.⁶⁷ It also aims to look past short-term solutions and ensure that the economy and efficiency of humanitarian aid is ameliorated in Gaza. The plan focuses on three main points: the rights, basic needs, and security of Palestinians. The first objective aims to uphold both international humanitarian and international human rights laws to ensure that host countries and duty bearers are held accountable. At the heart of the crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) are various human rights issues which often go overlooked. An important step in mitigating the issues is establishing accountability and humanitarian assistance interventions in most affected populations such as Area C, East Jerusalem, and in the Gaza Strip. These areas require the strengthening and alignment of legal frameworks within international treaties and laws. The second and third objectives go hand in hand by focusing on providing Palestinians with basic needs as well as the ability to cope with crisis and threats. In order to do so, the OCHA aims to provide access to basic water, sanitation, hygiene, education, and neonatal care services. In Gaza, specifically, this means providing education supplies to underserved students and teachers as well as repairing shelters for people internally displaced by the 2014 conflict in Gaza. The third objective focuses on improving access to long-term services. For example, these may include developing emergency response protocols in schools and health centers, providing rehabilitation for the assets of farmers or breeders, and creating contingency-planning exercises for natural hazards or disasters.

Topic 2: Qatar Diplomatic Crisis

Overview

Qatar is a country on the Arabian Peninsula that shares its only land border with Saudi Arabia and is otherwise surrounded by the Persian Gulf. Due to the country's geography, Qatar is heavily reliant on trade, and as such, favorable relations with its neighbors are paramount for Qatari development. Qatari foreign relations, however, have been complex since the country became independent in 1971. A hallmark of Qatari foreign relations is the precarious balancing of maintaining relationships with a number of groups and governments that often have conflicting ideologies, such as rival countries Iran and Saudi Arabia or secular governments and the Muslim Brotherhood. This ability to balance conflicting relationships is in part the genesis of the Qatari diplomatic crisis.

On 5 June 2017, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia collectively cut all ties with Qatar. This was a result of two issues identified by the three major powers of the region. The first issue was Qatar's alleged ties and support to Islamist groups, and the second was Qatar's relations with Iran. For its part, Qatar has acknowledged ties to the Muslim Brotherhood but has denied any ties or involvement with militant groups, such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Secondly, Qatar's relations with Iran have caused tension between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which stems from the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Both countries are powerful in the region and seek to expand their influence beyond their borders. Qatar has aligned with Iran in the Middle East's power struggle, offering its support in significant amounts of wealth and political power. As a result, the countries aligned with Saudi Arabia and those concerned with Qatar's relations with Iran and Islamic extremist groups expressed serious concerns.

The countries that have cut ties with Qatar have not only ended diplomatic relations, but also have cut trade ties by banning any Qatari aircraft in their airspace, placing heavy economic sanctions, and removing Al Jazeera, a Qatari news network from their television channels. All Qataris living in any of the Saudi bloc states have been asked to leave and return to Qatar. This situation has resulted in an economic, diplomatic and technological isolation for Qatar. The Saudi bloc that has cut ties with Qatar has made a list of demands. These demands are for Qatar to curb their diplomatic ties with Iran, sever all ties to "terrorist organizations," hand over "terrorist figures," and stop all funding for individuals or organizations designated as terrorists by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Bahrain, and the United States. These also include the shutdown of Al Jazeera and other Qatar-funded news outlets, the closure of a Turkish military base, and the halting of joint military cooperation inside Qatar. Lastly, they demand an end to interference in other sovereign countries' internal affairs, pay reparations and compensation for loss of life caused by Qatar's policies, and align with other Arab countries militarily, politically, socially, and economically. As of yet, Qatar has declined to comply with the terms, and the crisis has come to a stalemate.

The economic implications on Qatar seem minimal now but could grow substantially. Over 40% of Qatar's food supply is imported through land routes in Saudi

Arabia and most other imports come in from shipping ports that are under UAE control. This is reflected in how the businesses of the region are laid out. Corporations are spread between the Gulf Cooperation Countries and often interconnected. Due to the cutting of all trade ties, these businesses and trade are being affected significantly as it disrupted the supply of goods and many businesses suffered losses due to the loss of employees and lack of regular trade with overseas clients. The panic also led citizens to withdraw large sums of money from their bank accounts, resulting in severe economic fluctuations that harmed the economy overall. Similarly, due to the economic integration of the country, Qatar's total financial holdings were composed of around 25% foreign holdings. After the blockade, these holdings dropped by 17%. This rapid withdrawal means that the lending market in Qatar would be massively altered and force businesses to close and banks to suffer huge losses. The blockade has also forced Qatar to gather food imports from alternate sources, raising the cost to around ten times the norm, however the cost to the consumer is not that high, meaning the Qatari government is subsidizing food expenses for the population. This has led the Qatari government to take steps to counter economic losses and alter fiscal policy to prevent economic collapse.

To ensure that Qatari banks and businesses stay solvent, the government has had to rely on massive capital injections. Capital injections can take many forms, but at their core, they come in the form of cash or debt issuance to allow the entity to continue to operate. In this case, the Qatari government has injected close to USD 40 billion into the Qatari economy and financial system to help counter losses suffered due to the blockade. It is important to note that this investment of USD 40 billion is not intended to drive growth, and as a result, this type of government spending is unsustainable. As the economy becomes reliant on these capital injections to simply remain steady, the potential for economic crisis increases every day. Moody's, a credit rating agency, downgraded the country's rating from "stable" to "negative." These ratings are important as the agency assigns countries with a score that signifies their creditworthiness. This score attempts to predict how likely it is that a lender will default in their loan, which is to be unable to repay the funds. The lower the creditworthiness of a country the more difficult it becomes for that state to borrow money. In Qatar's case, this is significant in showing how deeply invested the government is in ensuring the economy is stable, as well as the crisis' tangible effects on the economic outlook for Qatar.