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Model Arab League BACKGROUND GUIDE

Council of Arab Social Affairs Ministers

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**National
Council
on US-
Arab
Relations**



Original draft by Sofia Chavele-Dastamani, Chair of the Council of Arab Social Affairs Ministers at the 2022 National University Model Arab League, with contributions from the dedicated staff and volunteers at the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations

Honorable Delegates,

It is with great honor that I welcome you to the 2021-2022 Model Arab League season! My name is Sofia Chavele-Dastamani, and I will be serving as the Chair for the Council on Arab Social Affairs Ministers at the National University Model Arab League. I am a senior at New York University Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates, where I study Biomedical Engineering. From travelling to Egypt to participate in my first conference to building the first MAL conference in the GCC, Model Arab League has been a huge part of my university life, and it has been incredibly rewarding to see our team grow internationally. I have been active in Model Arab League for the past three years, while serving as the President of Model Arab League at NYU Abu Dhabi team for the past two years.

Being an avid Model United Nations participant in high school, MAL gave me the opportunity to explore the new region I called home and learn more about the issues that shape its socio-political reality. It also taught me true leadership, both by being next to some of the most motivated students I have ever met, to leading our own student club at NYU. Whether it is your first conference, or your fourteenth, I am excited to see the unique skills you will bring to our debates and the perspectives you will share with the committee.

The topics that will be discussed as part of the Council of Arab Social Affairs Ministers this year will cover a wide variety of social challenges that the modern Middle East and North Africa are currently facing. As always, these will be discussed through the perspectives of your respective assigned countries. As such, I recommend that you approach your role in this committee with respect and maturity, respecting your fellow delegates and remaining in character at all times. Similarly, I would place emphasis on the importance of preparing tirelessly for your participation in this committee – this background guide should serve as merely the starting point of your research. Please feel free to reach out at any time with any questions during your preparation or participation. I am looking forward to meeting all of you and facilitating yet another exciting season of Model Arab League!

Best wishes,

Sofia Chavele-Dastamani
Chair, Council on Arab Social Affairs Ministers

Topic I: Exploring measures to enhance journalistic mobility while ensuring the protection of journalists in conflict zones.

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

Journalists play a fundamental role in ensuring access to reliable and objective information around active conflict. As an extension, they play an active role in achieving durable peace, reporting on human rights and portraying different perspectives in conflict. The role of civilian journalists in active conflict is complex. Though they should fundamentally be protected under international humanitarian law as neutral civilians in armed conflict, they are often perceived as biased, with parties involved in the conflict actively silencing their reporting by attacking journalistic teams, destroying their equipment or arbitrarily detaining them.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres describes journalists covering conflict as “essential workers for a durable peace”. Yet, journalists directly involved in reporting conflict in active warzones experience violence, fatal attacks, arbitrary detention, denial of visas and complete restriction of movement across conflict zones and borders¹. In 2018 to 2019 alone, 67 killings of journalists in countries experiencing armed conflict were documented, among which, half occurred directly while covering battlefield hostilities. To amplify the vast injustice experienced by journalists, 87% of cases of impunity for crimes against journalists remain unsolved globally². The above statistics, accompanied by the observed apathy by governments in building the necessary systems to identify and protect journalists as neutral parties in active battlefields, truly highlight how journalism remains a dangerous profession.

B. History in the Arab World

Journalism is fundamental in projecting an objective regional and international view into conflict. Journalists, globally, have a key role to play in the collective effort to relay news on a global level. However, the Middle East is considered among the most dangerous regions for journalists to cover. The Press Freedom Index reflects this view, with Saudi Arabia, Syria, Bahrain, Egypt, Sudan and Iraq among the most repressive Middle Eastern countries for journalism³. The protection of journalists in the Arab world is critical in amplifying the freedom of press. Yet, over 500 killings of journalists have been reported within the Arab League since

¹ “Journalists Covering Conflict, Essential Workers for A 'Durable Peace' Says Guterres | | UN NEWS.” United Nations, United Nations, news.un.org/en/story/2020/11/1077432.

² “UNESCO Director-General's Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity.” UNESCO, 18 June 2021, en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists/dgreport.

³ “2020 World Press Freedom Index: Reporters Without Borders.” *RSF*, rsf.org/en/ranking.

1996⁴. Yemen, Syria and Iraq constitute the three most dangerous assignments, at a total of 154 journalist deaths. Most of these deaths are due to airstrikes and bombings by military forces: in the case of Syria, the Syrian Army, its allies and Turkey, and Islamic State, the Houthis and militia in Yemen and Iraq.⁵

Non-state actors in MENA have increasing political power and influence, which has further threatened press freedom. Journalists who report their activity in a negative manner are often detained or killed. The Islamic State has killed over 65 journalists in Iraq and Syria⁶ and the Houthis sentenced four Yemeni journalists to death⁷, while detaining dozens more⁸. Non-state actors are playing a growing role in the suppression of independent reporting of conflict.

As Arab regions are under attack, it also becomes important to protect local journalists from foreign aggression. In recent examples, Palestinian journalists have been killed and suffered severe trauma from the continuing Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip. Israeli attacks on 15 May 2021 attacked multiple buildings, including the al-Jalaa tower block, the al-Jawhara and al-Shorouk office buildings that housed international media offices, in an attempt to silence journalists⁹. Palestinian journalists report that their task of reporting in Gaza is particularly dangerous due to the lack of protective equipment such as helmets, which are banned from entering the Gaza Strip under the continuing blockade.

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

Providing sufficient documentation to verify journalists has also been efficient in enabling journalistic mobility and enhancing, to what extent possible, their safety in the battlefield. Examples include special passports for journalists (pressepass), journalist visas for entry and country-specific media passes. Journalists reporting conflict can also wear designated press

⁴ “UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists.” UNESCO, UNESCO, 2021, en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists/observatory?field_journalists_date_killed_value%5Bmin%5D%5Byear%5D=&field_journalists_date_killed_value%5Bmax%5D%5Byear%5D=&field_journalists_gender_value_i18n=All&field_journalists_nationality_tid_i18n=All&field_journalists_local_value_i18n=All&field_journalists_status_value_i18n=All&field_journalists_type_of_media_tid_i18n=All&field_journalists_judicial_tid=All&field_unesco_region_value_i18n=Arab+States.

⁵ “Ten Years after the Arab Spring, the Region’s Media Faces Grave Threats. Here Are the Top Press Freedom Trends.” Committee to Protect Journalists, 25 Jan. 2021, cpj.org/2021/01/ten-years-after-arab-spring-media-threats-press-freedom-trends/.

⁶ 65 Journalists Killed in Iraq, Syria. Committee to Protect Journalists, 2021, cpj.org/data/killed/?status=Killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&type%5B%5D=Journalist&sourceOfFire%5B%5D=Political%20Group&cc_fips%5B%5D=IZ&cc_fips%5B%5D=SY&start_year=2011&end_year=2021&group_by=year.

⁷ “CPJ Calls on Houthis to Reverse Death Sentence Against Yemeni Journalists, Release Them from Custody.” Committee to Protect Journalists, 11 Apr. 2020, cpj.org/2020/04/cpj-calls-on-houthis-to-reverse-death-sentence-aga/.

⁸ “In Houthi-Controlled Yemen, Silence, Exile, or Detention; at Least 13 Journalists Held.” Committee to Protect Journalists, 3 Jan. 2018, cpj.org/2017/12/in-houthi-controlled-yemen-silence-exile-or-detent/.

⁹ Al Jazeera. “Gaza Tower Housing Al Jazeera Office Destroyed by Israeli Attack.” *Gaza News | Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 15 May 2021, www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/15/building-housing-al-jazeera-office-in-gaza-hit-by-israeli-strike.

vests. Usually, countries can also require a special registration or carnet of equipment carried into a conflict zone (recording the serial numbers and models of cameras, microphones, etc.). Equipment can also be subject to import regulations and restrictions and is often evaluated at entry. Member States should publish these guidelines so that journalists know what equipment is allowed in a zone of armed conflict. Additionally, international journalism associations recommend that journalists complete a thorough risk assessment before departing on an assignment in a dangerous zone, including preparing a proof of life document to be shared with a key contact, that allows them to be identified in case of a kidnapping.

On an international level, the only solutions under international law have been regional monitoring, widespread condemnations and unilateral sanctions. Select protocols and conventions highlight the importance of safeguarding civilian lives in conflict. The Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts attempts to do exactly that. To date, it has been ratified by all members of the Arab League except for Libya and Somalia¹⁰. Additionally, measures for the protection of journalists have been outlined in key UNESCO declarations such as the 2007 Belgrade Declaration on assistance to media in conflict areas and countries in transition¹¹ and the Medellin Declaration on securing the safety of journalists and combating impunity¹².

Recent attempts have also been made to bring light to journalistic mobility and safety in the Middle East and North Africa region. The International Federation of Journalists have launched a “Building a Culture of Safety for Journalists in the Middle East and the Arab World” programme, and held a regional conference on “Safety and Justice: Protecting Journalists in the Middle East and the Arab World”.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What relevant legislation exists surrounding journalistic mobility and the protection of journalists in conflict zones in my country and within the League?
- In recent years, have there been any situations in which journalists in my country were attacked, killed, or unrightfully detained, and if so, how did my country respond?
- What are some key trends surrounding deaths of journalists in my country (refer to the UNESCO database linked below)?
- Using these identified trends, how can my country better support the safety of journalists?

¹⁰ “Additional Protocol (I) to the Geneva Conventions.” *IHL Databases*, International Committee of the Red Cross, 1977, ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/470.

¹¹ *Belgrade Declaration*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2007, www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/prizes-and-celebrations/celebrations/international-days/world-press-freedom-day/previous-celebrations/worldpressfreedomday2009000000/belgrade-declaration/.

¹² *Medellin Declaration*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2007, www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/prizes-and-celebrations/celebrations/international-days/world-press-freedom-day/previous-celebrations/worldpressfreedomday2009000/medellin-declaration/.

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- What are the fundamentals of a code of conduct for journalists reporting on active conflict zones?
- How can staff officers and officials be informed of the role and function of journalists?
- What measures can be put in place to prevent journalists from overstepping the boundaries of their duties?
- How should willful attempts to confiscate, damage or break journalists' equipment in an attempt to silence reporting be prevented and prosecuted?
- How can the League establish an agreement on the cross-border protection of civilian journalists and facilitate journalistic mobility within the League in situations of conflict?
- How can the background of journalists be verified before they are granted protection?
- Under what conditions should international journalists be provided with protection and freed?
- How can the movement of journalists across and out of warzones be facilitated?
- In situations of extreme escalation of conflict, how can the removal of journalists from the battlefield be facilitated?
- How can journalists be protected from non-state actors?
- How can safety alerts systems for journalists be set up on a pan-Arab level, to alert them of heightened violence?
- How can safe houses be set up for journalists in areas of conflict, and how can these be supported by the government?
- What documentation should be requested from journalists (press passports, visas, equipment import permits)?
- How can journalists in the region better be trained to protect their safety and how can they be supported following their assignment in a dangerous conflict?

IV. Additional Resources

- [Committee to Protect Journalists](#)
A guide on Journalist Security, with focus on covering the news in conflict. Provides an insightful overview on security training, rules of war, checkpoints, and satellite technology.
- [UNESCO - International Programme for the Development of Communication](#)
The IPDC is the only multilateral forum in the UN system designed to promote a healthy environment for the growth of free media in developing countries. Get inspiration from their latest projects and guidelines.
- [UNESCO observatory of killed journalists | UNESCO](#)

A UNESCO-produced map of all killed journalists globally, which can be filtered by country and includes links to the related condemnation / description of events by UNESCO's Director-General. May be useful in extracting statistics and identifying key situations and trends in your country and within the Arab League.

- <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/europe/article/safety-and-justice-protecting-journalists-in-the-middle-east-and-the-arab-world.html>

Resolution produced by the regional conference entitled "Safety and Justice: Protecting Journalists in the Middle East and the Arab World"

- [Committee to Protect Journalists: Top press freedom trends ten years after the Arab Spring](#)

Topic II: Proposing reforms to fixed sponsorship and the Kafala system with an emphasis on preventing forced labor and abuse of migrant workers.

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

The Gulf is the third largest receiving region for global migrants, with non-citizen workers representing 49.5% (Saudi Arabia) to 95.8% (UAE) of the domestic labor force. Non-citizen workers have assisted by providing the additional labor required to support the region's ambitious development plans in a post-oil era. Non-citizen workers cannot legally be considered migrants, as they are brought to the country through temporary employment contracts and virtually no access to citizenship or permanent residency. Their entry and stay is facilitated by the Kafala system, a sponsorship program under which the Kafel (sponsor), usually a citizen of the destination country, is legally and economically responsible for the guest worker during the duration of their employment contract. The Kafala system has two defining structural features. Firstly, it is centrally administered and regulated by the State's Ministry of the Interior, meaning that as an institution, it enjoys full freedom to provide and evoke residency without any outside intervention. Secondly, the Kafala utilizes citizen sponsorships as a built-in enforcement mechanism, by holding citizens directly accountable for the residency violations of non-citizens.

Built to provide cheap labor into fast-developing GCC nations, the system has brought in development and boosted local business. However, the Kafala system has enabled sponsors to abuse their power over their sponsored parties. Sponsors are reported to charge incredibly high visa and placement fees to allow workers to enter the country under their sponsorship, withhold their passports upon arrival, provide extremely low wages and poor working conditions in isolated worker camps and abuse employees. As such, there has been growing concern and controversy around the Kafala system as a system that prospectively enables abuse and exploitation of vulnerable workers,¹³ while also enhancing unemployment of citizens due to the growing dependency on foreign labor.

B. History in the Arab World

The Kafala system was introduced in the 1950s as a system to control and facilitate migration into Arab countries, to enable foreigners to obtain short-term employment in regional projects, particularly in the GCC countries¹⁴. For decades, the Kafala has regulated the relationship between employers in the GCC, Jordan and Lebanon and workers primarily from West Asia. As a system, its purpose is to rapidly provide cheap, temporary and rotating labor to be used in development projects during affluent periods, that can be expelled during less affluent periods.

¹³ Lori, Noora. "Temporary Workers or Permanent Migrants? The Kafala System and Contestations over Residency in the Arab Gulf States." *Center for Migrations and Citizenship*, Nov. 2012.

¹⁴ Rak, Patrick. "Modern Day Slavery: The Kafala System in Lebanon." *Harvard International Review*, Harvard International Review, 9 Mar. 2021, hir.harvard.edu/modern-day-slavery-the-kafala-system-in-lebanon/.

Gulf governments support that workers hosted under the Kafala are not considered migrant workers, but are rather in the country on a temporary basis, supported by fixed-term employment contracts. The Kafala system emphasizes the temporary nature of workers, as the terms of their visas prohibit them from applying for permanent residence, bringing their families in the country, or enjoying the educational and health benefits of a resident. However, as temporary workers depend on this employment type to continue supporting their families, they often take on a new project, with a different employer or in a different GCC country, guest workers become permanent. Though there is no official data available on the retention of temporary workers, as an example, Bahrain's foreign worker communities are well-established and have been for decades.¹⁵

In the region, the Kafala system has generally fostered a dependency on foreign labor, that is significantly cheaper and easier to import than activate locally, that has attracted growing concern around rising unemployment rates among Gulf citizens. The Kafala system additionally represents a conscious policy to exclude foreign workers from any access to permanent residency and separate them from the local communities of expats and citizens. The Kafala system has created a very unregulated recruitment industry in the region: agencies often travel to regions with intense poverty and recruit workers that wish to produce income to support their families at home. Upon arrival to the country, workers' passports are confiscated and they are introduced to poor working conditions, with workers living in camps and cramped rooms. The poor conditions and abuse of the system can be reflected in the multiple suicide attempts of workers under the Kafala system: in Lebanon, on average two domestic workers were dying a week, often by suicide¹⁶. Overall, as many as 84% of workers would not have traveled if they were aware of the truth about the working conditions and the Kafala system¹⁴.

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

Following overwhelming condemnation of the Kafala system internally and by international organizations, countries using the system have made varied efforts to reform the Kafala system. Bahrain announced that it would dismantle the Kafala system in 2009. Bahrain's Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) was supposed to take on the role of sponsoring migrants, but has since then only maintained a regulator of work authorizations. Though the Kafala system remains intact in Bahrain, migrant workers no longer depend on employers to enter and exit the country and can change employment without the approval of their current employer. Kuwait similarly announced the abolishment of the Kafala in 2011, but has since only allowed migrant

¹⁵ Lori, Noora. "Temporary Workers or Permanent Migrants? The Kafala System and Contestations over Residency in the Arab Gulf States." *Center for Migrations and Citizenship*, Nov. 2012.

¹⁶ Ip, Fish. "Dreams for Sale: The Exploitation of Domestic Workers from Recruitment in Nepal and Bangladesh to Working in Lebanon." International Domestic Workers Federation, 22 Jan. 2015, idwfed.org/en/resources/dreams-for-sale-the-exploitation-of-domestic-workers-from-recruitment-in-nepal-and-bangladesh-to-working-in-lebanon.

workers to change sponsors and enabled workers with university degrees to sponsor themselves¹⁷.

Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (HRSD) announced that the country will abolish the Kafala system in March 2021, replacing it with a new contract between employees and employers. This reform would allow the Kingdom's 6.7 million workers to obtain exit and re-entry visas and gain employment in KSA without the approval of a sponsor. Employee mobility, under the new plan, would allow expatriate workers to transfer between employers. Additionally, Exit and Re-Entry Visa reforms would allow workers to travel outside KSA, whereas Final Exit Visa reforms would allow workers to leave KSA after the end of the employment contract, all without their employer's approval. It also introduced a Special Privilege Residency Permit (*Premium Iqama*) that enables all those with ties to the country to enjoy privileges only granted to Saudi citizens, such as owning real estate, educational and health services. These services are managed under the smartphone application *Absher* and the Ministry's portal (*Qiwa*).¹⁸ Today, months after the theoretical implementation of the new migration laws, human rights groups warn that reforms have been insufficient, with the abusive and exploitative elements of the Kafala system still potentially prevalent. Particularly, Human Rights Watch flag that workers against whom an absconding charge has been filed cannot benefit from these reforms, and employers often file such claims to retain power over their employees. In a recent press release, it called upon the Saudi government to allow workers to freely change jobs, exit and enter the country and end racial discrimination against migrant workers¹⁹.

Following the recent turbulent events in Lebanon, which left Kafala workers working for well below living means as the Lebanese pound plummeted, multiple organizations began working with the Lebanese government to reconstruct the labor laws surrounding the Kafala system. New legislation drafted by the Labor Ministry of Lebanon, will allow 48h work weeks, overtime pay and will amend the binding nature of the Kafala system²⁰. Despite clear legislative efforts, these new regulations also must be approved and correctly implemented across the system. A recurring theme thus emerges: countries pledge to abolish the Kafala system, but do not take concrete steps towards the complete reform of the employment process, usually resorting to simply changing individual restrictions and rules, while keeping the core system intact. As more and more

¹⁷ International Labor Organization, Migrant Forum in Asia Secretariat. Reform of the Kafala System.

¹⁸ Sovereign Group. "Saudi Arabia to Abolish 'Kafala' Sponsorship System in March 2021." The Sovereign Group, 8 Dec. 2020, www.sovereigngroup.com/news-and-views/saudi-arabia-to-abolish-kafala-sponsorship-system-in-march-2021/.

¹⁹ "Saudi Arabia: Rights Groups Say Kafala (Sponsorship) System Reforms Fall Short on Freedom of Movement." Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/reforms-to-saudis-sponsorship-kafala-system-and-rights-groups-say-these-reforms-are-not-adequate/.

²⁰ Kanaan, Alaa. "'Treated like Slaves', Migrant Workers Bear Brunt of Lebanon Crisis." Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 8 Oct. 2020, www.reuters.com/article/lebanon-crisis-migrantworkers-int-idUSKBN26T2HC.

countries using the Kafala system push for reform, an effective resolution should look into how to ensure the implementation of new legislation around worker migration.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- Does my country use the Kafala system or send workers to other member states under the Kafala system?
- How is the migration of workers supported in my country?
- How prevalent is worker migration into my country?
- Has my country suffered from rising rates of unemployment due to imported labor?
- Have there been any demonstrations or complaints by labor workers in my country? How have these been addressed by the government?
- What laws surround migration and worker visas in my country?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- Should the Kafala system be abolished?
- Given its significance as a legal system of migration and sponsorship in the Gulf, what are the implications of abolishing it and what would the system to replace it look like?
- Should temporary workers have access to programs to expand their stay or request permanent residency?
- How can States be protected from the rising rates of unemployment of their nationals and become less dependent on foreign labor?
- How can the recruitment agencies that comprise the Kafala system be better regulated?
- How can fair compensation and proper working conditions under the Kafala system be guaranteed and monitored?
- Should the free exit and entry of migrant workers be facilitated?
- How should workers obtain permission from their employers to leave the country and how can approval be verified (see No Objection Certificate, Exit Permit, Final Exit Visa)?
- Under what conditions should migrant workers be allowed to change jobs? How can this change be facilitated across employers?
- How can governments within the League regulate agencies to ensure that migrant workers are not trafficked into forced labor?
- Who should qualify for self-sponsorship?
- Under what conditions should long-term and second generation migrants be granted citizenship status?

IV. Additional Resources

- [Council on Arab Relations - What Is the Kafala System?](#)

An overview of the Kafala system as a legal framework, its origins, and its geographical prevalence

- [Temporary Workers or Permanent Migrants? The Kafala System and Contestations over Residency in the Arab Gulf States](#)

Migration and the Kafala system in the Arab Gulf States: A look into its temporary nature and the formal institutions backing it

- [International Labor Organization: Reform of the Kafala System](#)

Analysis into the differences between the Kafala system in select destination countries within the League and the initiatives taken on by the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia to reform the Kafala system and relevant labor laws

- [Human Rights News: Saudi Arabia announces changes to Kafala system](#)
- [Harvard International Review: Modern Day Slavery: the Kafala System in Lebanon](#)

Topic III: Establishing measures for cross-border patient support and networks for emergency response assistance.

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

In emergency response assistance, speedy regional logistical and humanitarian aid assistance is key in limiting human loss. Where state healthcare systems fail, patients and victims of conflict will often form healthcare-seeking patterns of migration, often leading them to nations where healthcare is widely available and privatized. Beyond emergency situations, patient mobility is critical on a regional level: Arab patients often look to the Western world for medical tourism, whereas local centers of excellence can be enhanced, simplifying critical care for patients in the region.

The COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 brought along an urgent, widespread situation which thoroughly tested the region's ability to pool resources, from PPE and oxygen tanks to ventilators and 3D printers. It became a lived example of an emergency situation which requires swift networks of cross-border collaboration, patient support, and emergency response assistance. It provided researchers, and the Arab League, with hundreds of lessons learned²¹ surrounding emergency response, and made one thing clear: our region needs to be more prepared in utilising cross-border collaboration to alleviate life-threatening emergencies.

B. History in the Arab World

Conflict transforms the landscape of health and healthcare across the region, motivating the targeted victims of conflict towards health-seeking migratory movements and behaviors. In the case of Iraq, where state healthcare has collapsed under prolonged conflict, patients seek relief in Lebanon's increasingly privatized, booming healthcare system, establishing a new therapeutic migratory pattern.

Healthcare is conceptualized as a governmental affair, a service provided to the public. Conflict in the Middle East has brought along mass displacements across the region, which challenge public health systems and call for debate around the responsibility of such public health systems to treat non-nationals, along with the questions of state sovereignty and the preservation of population health beyond citizenship status.

²¹ "COVID-19 Crisis Response in MENA Countries." *OECD*, www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/covid-19-crisis-response-in-mena-countries-4b366396/.

In times of conflict, systems of public healthcare collapse due to lack of resources and due to targeted attacks, and civilians have to struggle to access treatment. WHO reports that in Syria, in April 2013, “57% of public hospitals had been damaged and 36% were out of service.”²²

On a micro-scale, medical facilities and points of care are often perceived as contested sites between opposing sides in a conflict. Access to healthcare is used as a weapon of terror, tools for propaganda, and doctors are sometimes forced to withhold care from patients²³. For example, during the 2011 Bahrain uprisings, security forces occupied the Salmaniya Medical Complex, entered wards to beat patients suspected of involvement with the political opposition, established security checkpoints around hospitals, and prevented ambulances from reaching patients. In Syria, in some areas controlled by Syrian rebels, hospitals were renamed Free Syrian Army hospitals²⁴. In such situations, swift systems and networks for cross-border patient mobility can neutralize healthcare and provide urgent assistance to civilians.

Beyond emergency situations, medical tourism in the Middle East is expected to grow at a CAGR of 8.5%, projected to be \$1.35 billion by 2026²⁵ and is thus growing fast, especially for countries in the Gulf, demonstrating a clear need for concrete laws surrounding patient mobility in the region. Though most Gulf countries trust primarily Western institutions, typically in Germany, the UK, and US, for medical tourism, local innovation seeks to motivate patients to stay within the region. For example, Dubai Health Authority recently launched the “Dubai Health Experience”, the world’s first medical tourism portal. As such, pathways for patient mobility are now, more than ever, available for patients in the region to adapt for use in situations of crisis.

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

Crises on a cross-border scale have long troubled the Arab League, although systems to respond to pandemic, humanitarian, and environmental crises have been lacking in organization and pan-Arab support. This section examines some excellent examples to approach building networks for emergency response assistance and facilitating cross-border patient support.

In the last decade, USAID responded to crises in 24 countries in the MENA region across 70 disasters, through a unique system of organization called the Disaster Assistance Response

²² World Health Organization. “Donor Update, The Syrian Arab Republic - 9 April 2013 - Syrian Arab Republic.” *ReliefWeb*, reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/donor-update-syrian-arab-republic-9-april-2013.

²³ Kherfi, et al. “Protracted Conflicts and Public Health: Re-Thinking Geographies of Health Care Provision in the Middle East.” *Middle East Centre*, 20 July 2020, blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2018/11/30/protracted-conflicts-and-public-health-re-thinking-geographies-of-health-care-provision-in-the-middle-east/.

²⁴ Dewachi, Omar, et al. “Changing Therapeutic Geographies of the Iraqi and Syrian Wars.” *The Lancet*, Elsevier, 20 Jan. 2014, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140673613622990.

²⁵ “MEA Medical Tourism Market SIZE, Share, Trends: 2021 to 2026.” *Market Data Forecast*, www.marketdataforecast.com/market-reports/middle-east-and-africa-medical-tourism-market.

Teams, responding to emergencies surrounding displacement in Iraq in 2014 and explosions in Beirut in 2020, among others²⁶. This is a good example of an emergency response system that can be replicated on a pan-Arab level, with multiple regional centers supporting coordination and response efforts and teams in each country trained in general crisis response (earthquake, explosions, fire) ready to be deployed internally and in neighboring regions.

COVID-19 is a textbook example of the kind of crisis that requires swift cross-border collaboration, a unified course of action, and coordination in sharing key equipment. During the crisis, World Vision Syria published a joint statement with other NGOs, demanding access to cross-border aid. This motivated the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2533, authorising UN cross-border operations and unfettered humanitarian access to Syrians²⁷. As such, a key consideration which will be expected in your resolutions is formalizing networks of humanitarian and healthcare assistance and setting plans in place to provide cross-border aid in a way that is neutral to any evolving conflict and harmless to the civilians reaching it.

Pooling resources and expertise, particularly in dealing with patients with rare diseases, is key in reducing medical tourism beyond the region and developing regional centers of expertise. In an international example, the EU organizes situations of ‘planned scarcity’ and pools resources and expertise from a group of Member States for patients with rare diseases to receive cost-efficient healthcare at a regional center of expertise. As it does not make sense, nor is it feasible, to develop very specialized medical expertise into every rare disease on a national level for members of the Arab League, it is crucial that centers of excellence on groups of rare diseases are created, combining the expertise of multiple member nations to streamline patient treatment. A key example of such an initiative is the Centre for Arab Genomic Studies in the UAE, an NGO which serves as a regional center of expertise on genetic disorders in the Arab World²⁸. Delegates should consider how such regional centers of expertise can be organized and facilitated in the region, as well as their prospective key areas of focus (ex. blood diseases, cancer, genetic diseases).

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- How did my country approach COVID-19 and which countries did it offer/receive aid and assistance from? Do I see any emerging networks of emergency cross-border collaboration?

²⁶ “Humanitarian Assistance in Review: Europe, the Middle East, and CENTRAL Asia: Fiscal YEARS (FYs) 2011 – 2020 - World.” *ReliefWeb*, reliefweb.int/report/world/humanitarian-assistance-review-europe-middle-east-and-central-asia-fiscal-year-s-fys.

²⁷ “COVID-19 Emergency Response - Middle East and Eastern Europe Regional Situation Report #11 - 30 JULY 2020 - Afghanistan.” *ReliefWeb*, reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/covid-19-emergency-response-middle-east-and-eastern-europe-regional-situation-11.

²⁸ “Center for Arab Genomic Studies - a Division of Sheikh Hamdan Award for Medical Sciences.” CAGS, cags.org.ae/en.

- Does my country's public health system only offer treatment to nationals?
- If my country houses immigrants or migrants, to what extent have we offered them access to healthcare?
- What emergency situations have emerged in recent years that have required international assistance in which we received/offered aid? What obstacles were faced?
- How prevalent is medical tourism in my country and what are the key locations? If in the region, could any formal agreement be put in place between my country and key destinations in establishing cross-border patient support?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- How can we establish networks of referral for outsourcing specific health services (for patients of rare diseases or generally) to other Member States?
- How can patient flow systems be structured and supported?
- How can we build and support regional Arab centers of expertise on rare diseases?
- How can we establish a system of national healthcare contact points and implement an Arab reference network for patients that may need to seek healthcare services within the League?
- In providing healthcare services to foreign patients, how do we approach differences in medical procedure and culture across Arab States?
- How do we structure Pan-Arab Health guidelines and emergency response plans? Delegates can form and debate their own pan-League legislation or elaborate emergency response plan.
- How do we ensure patient safety and quality of care on a League level, especially in situations of conflict? How can we establish medical points of care as neutral zones in a conflict?
- How should emergency response teams be structured, geographically and organizationally? Should they be managed regionally or centrally, through a pre-designated Arab League center?
- How do we maintain neutrality of aid and humanitarian assistance and avoid putting patients' lives in jeopardy in providing assistance?
- Lessons learned from COVID-19: what equipment and networks of assistance would have supported the Member States better?
- How do we finance cross-border emergency assistance and patient travel on a League level? Should there be an emergency fund or should it be up to the discretion of individual states?

IV. Additional Resources

- [EU Cross-border Healthcare and Health Law](#)
Report on EU's laws surrounding patients' rights in cross-border healthcare. Includes useful discussions around patient flows and the financial dimensions of patient mobility.
- [\(Dis\)connectivities in wartime: The therapeutic geographies of Iraqi healthcare-seeking in Lebanon](#)
An interesting case study looking into the therapeutic geographies established by the Iraqi conflict, with a focus on the healthcare-seeking behaviors of Iraqi victims in Lebanon, following the collapse of state healthcare
- [Protracted Conflicts and Public Health: Re-thinking Geographies of Health Care Provision in the Middle East](#)
An insightful view into how conflict shapes healthcare in the Middle East
- [Changing therapeutic geographies of the Iraqi and Syrian wars](#)
- [WHO Emergency Partnerships and Networks](#)
Read more about WHO's collaboration with healthcare partners, emergency medical teams, the Global Outbreak and Response Network and get inspired for your own solution-building.
- [Interorganizational Networks in Disaster Management](#)

Topic IV: Discussing the management and documentation of demonstrations and protests while preventing excessive use of force.

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

Protecting the right to peaceful assembly is fundamental in ensuring that everyone is able to express their grievances or aspirations in a manner that is peaceful and respectful to public order²⁹. Article 21 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) recognizes the right to peaceful assembly with no restrictions other than those imposed in conformity with the law and the interests of national security and public order³⁰. Assemblies and demonstrations are often the only means certain groups have to bring their grievances to the attention of the public. In situations of public demonstrations, however, there are multiple practical considerations to keep in mind. As large crowds assemble and emotions run high, dangers to public safety and order emerge. As such, a group of practical guidelines should be put in place to ensure a swift system that allows authorities to recognize situations of danger, restricting protesters in a manner that conforms to the strict tests of necessity and proportionality. Fundamentally, policing operations should work to facilitate safe and peaceful public assembly and ensure the well-being of all present.

Documenting protests, demonstrations, and on a larger scale, revolutions, is critical to sustaining an objective and insightful record into public opinion and the historical events that lead to change. The way in which authorities manage protests is a matter of legitimate public interest that often uncovers the extent to which a government facilitates freedom of expression. The media, and individual accounts of protests shared on social media, provide valuable insight into the authorities' handling of demonstrations and the containment of disorder³¹. Media and social media serve as a 'public watchdog', enabling the sharing of information and diverse opinion, as expressed in protest. Often, abusive application of legislation and arguments around the protection of national safety are used to detriment the freedom of expression, censor criticism, and foster a climate of fear and self-censorship.

B. History in the Arab World

In recent years, the Arab Spring brought to the surface vast violations of the ICCPR Article 21, with States actively deploying excessive use of force against peaceful protests, along with misusing anti-terrorism laws to arbitrarily detain protesters and silencing reporting around protests. As a whole, Egypt, along with a few other Arab Spring countries, present an interesting case for Article 21 of the ICCPR. The declaration of a state of emergency by the Egyptian military on August 14, 2013, initiated a series of instances of its violation. The Egyptian military played an active role in restricting demonstrations, using excessive force to silence a series of post-July 2013 peaceful protests, with reports indicating that the military opened fire on peaceful

²⁹ *Facilitating Peaceful Protests*, Geneva Academy, 2014.

³⁰ "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights." *OHCHR*, www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx.

³¹ *Media Coverage of Protests and Demonstrations*, Council of Europe, 2018.

sit-ins and unarmed protestors³². Three journalists were killed in the fighting: a cameraman for Sky News, a reporter for a UAE-based newspaper and a reporter for an Egyptian state newspaper, and several other journalists were arrested. At the same time, Minister of Interior Mohamed Ibrahim said that Egyptian forces “insisted on maintaining the highest degrees of self-restraint”, with Egyptian state news reporting that demonstrations were handled in a “highly civilized way.”³³ The common theme of state media cover-ups in protest handling re-emerges and the importance of having objective on-the-ground reporting and documentation of protests, so as to evaluate the authorities’ handling of demonstrations and monitor the protection of human rights, re-emerges in the Arab world.

The Jordanian State deployed a completely contrasting strategy in the management of the Arab Spring protests. Minister of Interior Hussein al-Majali approached the protests with a strict non-brutal policy towards protestors. This strategy was dubbed as “soft policing” (*al-amn al-na'im*), and is commonly credited for allowing Jordan to avoid the mass violence observed during the Arab Spring in neighboring countries Syria and Egypt. This is a textbook example of the true efficiency and benefit of deploying a non-violent strategy towards the management of protests. It is particularly beneficial in enabling citizens to see police as a potential alliance instead of an antagonist. Though Jordanians were protesting against state repression, a common chant in the protests was “ihna w-il-darak w-il-jeish b-tijma'na lugmet il-'eish” (we, the gendarmerie, and the army are united by our concern for making a living). The benefits of minimal-force, peaceful and efficient protest management extend far beyond protests: to this day, Jordan’s public trust in the security apparatus remains among the highest in the region³⁴.

The issue remains relevant today, all across the Arab League. In recent news, on 15 January 2020, Lebanon’s riot police indiscriminately beat and arrested largely peaceful protestors and journalists. Large amounts of teargas were openly fired towards protestors in a densely populated residential area. Over 45 protestors were transported to nearby hospitals for emergency care, 55 people were arrested and over eight media workers covering the protests were beat by police. A journalist reporting on the protest described that he was hit in the head despite repeatedly screaming “press, press”. Similarly, riot police threatened media onsite with violence and destroying their equipment if they did not stop recording. The Human Rights Watch requested that the Interior Ministry holds law enforcement officers accountable for this instance of extensive use of force, reminding that police “need to abide by international crowd control standards”³⁵.

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

Since the Arab Spring, governments within the region have ensured that the necessary precautions were taken to limit the use of social media as enablers of divisive social and political

³² Vassefi, Tara. “An Arab Winter: Threats to the Right to Protest in Transitional Societies, Such as Post-Arab Spring Egypt.” *American University International Law Review*, vol. 29, no. 5, 2014.

³³ David. “Hundreds Die as Egyptian Forces Attack Islamist Protesters.” *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, 14 Aug. 2013, www.nytimes.com/2013/08/15/world/middleeast/egypt.html.

³⁴ “Policing and Protests: Insights from the Middle East.” *Brandeis University*, www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/crown-conversations/cc-3.html.

³⁵ “Lebanon: Police Violence against Protesters.” *Human Rights Watch*, 28 Oct. 2020, www.hrw.org/news/2020/01/17/lebanon-police-violence-against-protesters.

movements. Often, counter-terrorism and cybersecurity laws enable governments to prosecute protesters on grounds of false news and misuse of social media. One striking example is that of the Egyptian Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP), a branch of Public Prosecution dedicated to prosecuting crimes related to state security and terrorism, has prosecuted Egyptian activists. Amnesty International concluded that that Egypt abused the role of the SSSP by using “counter-terrorism legislation to detain individuals for acts that should not even be criminalized”³⁶. Similarly, Bahrain has strict rules around divisive social media posts, which can land protesters up to five years in jail³⁷. Considering these post-Arab Spring measures on a pan-regional level, which use the strategy of blocking the citizens’ access to the internet as an alternative way to manage and prevent protests, it becomes interesting to consider how new legislation surrounding the management and documentation of protests may fit under this.

Social media has always played a crucial role in the documentation of protests on a regional level. During the revolutionary movements of the Arab Spring in 2010, especially in Egypt’s Tahrir Square, the Committee to Document the 25th January Revolution emerged. The Committee was essentially a volunteer group of historians, anthropologists, political scientists, and mere protesters in the frontline of the Arab Spring, and worked to collect oral testimonies, social media posts and media quotes to document the revolution. Similarly, a variety of new solutions around crowd-sourced documentation of protests emerged: data-mining tools to scrape the web for social media and blog posts around a protest, thus gauging public opinion, Facebook pages serving as digital exhibits of revolutions, using tagged content from protesters, university-led initiatives to gather oral history from students, websites featuring leaked government documents seized by protesters, among others³⁸. Social media naturally emerge as digital platforms for documentation of protests, and as we consider this topic, it becomes worthwhile to contemplate how such collectives of public memory can be managed and utilized.

Beyond blocking the platforms that enable the organization and documentation of protests, some member states have moved to prohibit protests altogether. For example, the UAE prohibits workers from organizing public demonstrations unless there is ‘a valid basis’³⁹, such as unpaid wages, poor living conditions, and the lack of safety protocols. All protests that do not fall under these categories face risk of prosecution and deportation. For workers who are often illiterate and have no way to approach the authorities on an official basis with their concerns, protests are the only way to be heard in situations of injustice. As such, protests may be necessary not in just

³⁶ “Egypt: Abuses by the Supreme State Security Prosecution.” *Amnesty International*, 1 June 2021, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/1399/2019/en/.

³⁷ “From Free Space to a Tool of Oppression: What Happened to the Internet since the Arab Spring?” *TIMEP*, timep.org/commentary/analysis/from-free-space-to-a-tool-of-oppression-what-happened-to-the-internet-since-the-arab-spring/.

³⁸ Dougherty, Roberta L. “Documenting Revolution in the Middle East.” *CRL*, www.crl.edu/focus/article/7437.

³⁹ Wafa Issa, Staff Reporter. “All Protests ‘Must Have a Valid Basis’.” *Uae – Gulf News*, Gulf News, 24 July 2019, gulfnews.com/uae/all-protests-must-have-a-valid-basis-1.243955.

expressing public opinion but also defending the rights of individuals. A resolution should seek to approach this problem on a multilateral level, clearly defining the situations under which public demonstrations are legally permissible, and providing alternatives for individuals with no other access to formal complaint/appeal processes.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What laws exist in my country surrounding protests?
- Have there been any protests in recent years, and if so, how were they managed on a governmental level?
- What has the role of social media been in documenting any protests in recent years in my country?
- Does my country have laws around the use of social media to organize and document protests?
- What are the conditions under which protests are legally permissible in my country?
- Have there been any recent records of protests organized by citizens (social media groups, digital/physical records, etc.)?
- How does my country approach freedom of expression?
- Is my country a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- Would it be possible to establish Arab League-wide directives for the management of protests?
- How should transnational protests and movements be managed and how can utilize League resources for cross-border management of protests?
- How can intelligence be shared across the League on lessons learned from the management of previous protests?
- What qualifies a protest as legally permissible?
- How can the documentation of protests be facilitated, while respecting regional laws on social media use?
- Could regional centers of documentation of protests be established, for the purpose of preserving modern history?
- In lieu of protests, how can we better assist formal complaint processes for individuals who do not have access to formal channels of communication with officials (ex. Illiterate workers)?
- Under what circumstances should the authorities be able to use force during protests?
- Under what circumstances should journalists be allowed to report at public protests?
- Should photography and video recording be permissible during protests, and if so, what guidelines should be put in place?
- How can law enforcement officials be trained to respond to public demonstrations?
- How should the media be handled and protected during demonstrations?

IV. Additional Resources

- [Global Expression Report](#)
Summarizes major developments in freedom of expression around the world using qualitative data from 161 countries
- [Center for Research Libraries: Documenting Revolution in the Middle East](#)
- [The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy: From Free Space to a Tool of Oppression: What Happened to the Internet Since the Arab Spring?](#)
- [Gulf News UAE: All protests 'must have a valid basis'](#)
- [The Economist: Protests are making a comeback in the Arab world](#)
- [Geneva Academy: Facilitating Peaceful Protests](#)
- [Protest, Revolt and Regime Change in the Arab World. Actors, Challenges, Implications and Policy Options](#)
- [An Arab Winter: Threats to the Right to Protest in Transitional Societies, Such as Post-Arab Spring Egypt](#)
- [Journalism under fire: UNESCO raises alarm over surge of attacks on media workers covering protests](#)