

**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

**Yemeni Refugees**



**Headwaters Model United Nations  
Background Guide**



<b>Note to Delegates</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Background of Council</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The Issue at Hand</b>	<b>5</b>
Historical Background	5
Current Situation	6
<b>Possible Solutions</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Helpful Vocabulary</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Further Reading and List of Delegations</b>	<b>10</b>



## Note to Delegates

Dear Delegates,

Hello, my name is Rafe Price, I am a Junior at Headwaters, and I have been a part of model UN for about three years. I've spent a lot of time working on this background guide and I hope you all find it useful. Currently, there is a massive humanitarian crisis in Yemen stemming from high levels of poverty and multiple civil wars. That alone created an enormous refugee problem, which has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. There are a lot of interesting opportunities for delegates to make an impact at this conference. I'm very excited to have the opportunity to chair for this committee. I wish all of you the best of luck.

-Rafe Price

If you have any questions or if anything in this guide is unclear, please feel free to email me at [Rafe.Price@headwaters.org](mailto:Rafe.Price@headwaters.org)



## Background of Council

The UNHCR was founded in 1950 to address the need for an international body to aid the many Europeans who had been displaced in the aftermath of the Second World War. Afterward, the committee expanded to aid refugees and displaced people around the world.<sup>1</sup> Over the last 70 years, the UNHCR has played a major role in supporting over 50 million asylum seekers and internally displaced people (IDP), stateless people, refugees, and returnees.<sup>2</sup> The UNHCR has received two Nobel peace prizes for “protecting refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people, and assisting in their voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement to a third country.”<sup>3</sup> Currently, the UNHCR operates in 135 countries across 6 continents.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/history-of-unhcr.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/who-we-help.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1954/summary/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/where-we-work.html>



## The Issue at Hand

### Historical Background

In 1990, the Yemen Arab Republic and the Democratic People's Republic of Yemen, commonly known as North and South Yemen respectively, announced that they would be forming a united Republic of Yemen.<sup>5</sup> Only four years later, in 1994, the new nation fell into civil war when a large tank battle began in the small city of Amrān. In the sixty-five days that followed, thousands were killed, including many civilians.<sup>6</sup>

The next decade and a half was largely uneventful. This period is most characterized by an increase in protests, conflict between rebels and the government, and rising tensions in the general population. Although these events foreshadow much of the conflict in the country's near future, they are now overshadowed by events that occurred nearly a decade ago.

In March of 2011 large-scale protests broke out in the capital city of Sana'a which called for President Ali Abdullah Saleh to resign. The government responded by firing tear gas and live ammunition into the crowds of protesters. Fifty Yemeni civilians were killed with many more arrested or injured.<sup>7</sup> In November of the same year, Abdullah resigned his position to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. This transition of power failed to placate the general populace, as Hadi failed to address the issues of Al-Qaeda forces in the country, a southern separatist movement, government corruption, and

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<https://history.state.gov/countries/yemen#:~:text=On%20May%2022%2C%201990%2C%20the,Embassy%20in%20Aden%20never%20reopened>

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<https://www.nytimes.com/1994/07/08/world/yemen-claims-victory-in-civil-war-after-seizing-rebel-city.html>

<https://www.hrw.org/reports/YEMEN94O.PDF>

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<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/18/yemen-police-massacre-45-protesters>



nation-wide food insecurity.<sup>8</sup> This environment was capitalized upon by the Houthis, a large group of anti-Yemeni-government rebels that stemmed from a political group originally formed in the late 1980s. The Houthi began to expand their territory in the north, a move supported by many of the northern Yemenis who also strongly distrusted the Yemeni government.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the next four years, the Houthi forces gained more and more control of the nation. Many have accused the Iranian government of backing the Houthi rebels, something which they have completely denied. Notably, multiple shipments of rifles, anti-tank guided missiles, and munitions have been intercepted which appeared to be en route from Iran to Yemen.<sup>10</sup> In late 2014 the Houthi successfully captured a number of important army and security positions in Sana'a. In early 2015 this Houthi control prompted the Yemeni government to flee, allowing the rebels to take full control of the capital. At this point, the government of Saudi Arabia decided to intervene in an attempt to reclaim the country. This was the beginning of a full-blown conflict between the Iranian-backed Houthi, and the Saudi-backed Yemeni government.<sup>11</sup> This war is active to this day and is generally referred to as the Yemeni Civil War.

## Current Situation

The turmoil within the nation has weighed heavily on the people of Yemen, leading to what the UN considers to be the most severe humanitarian crisis in the world.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29319423>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/09/yemen-the-forgotten-war/>  
<https://www.dw.com/en/yemens-houthi-rebels-who-are-they-and-what-do-they-want/a-50667558>

<https://www.trtworld.com/middle-east/who-are-the-houthis-22592>

<sup>10</sup>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/09/16/why-iran-is-getting-blame-an-at-tack-saudi-arabia-claimed-by-yemens-houthis/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/09/yemen-the-forgotten-war/>  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/09/16/why-iran-is-getting-blame-an-at-tack-saudi-arabia-claimed-by-yemens-houthis/>



<sup>12</sup> An estimated 3.6 million Yemeni have been displaced, roughly 12% of the population.

<sup>13</sup> The majority of these displaced people are in the city of Hajjah, a town about 80 miles northwest of Sana'a. Additionally, as many as 24 million Yemeni rely on aid to survive, about 84% of the population. Cholera outbreaks are terrifyingly common, malnutrition is widespread, and water is scarce.<sup>14</sup>

As if the situation in Yemen was not severe enough, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on the country. The healthcare systems have almost completely crumbled under the added pressure of the pandemic. Only around half of all medical facilities in the country are still operational and staff shortages plague those that have remained open.<sup>15</sup> With the lack of medical infrastructure and poor testing capabilities, the number of covid cases in the country is unknown. Only 2,097 cases have been formally recorded, but the UNHCR estimates that the true number is much higher.<sup>16</sup>

With the vast challenges faced by many Yemeni citizens seeking safety, it's no wonder that so many have looked to nearby nations for refuge. Roughly 27,700 Yemenis have fled the country as of 2019, but many more are in need of relocation, especially with the Covid-19 pandemic. Another complication is the fact that Yemen already has a large population of refugees, with 283,989 foreign refugees, mostly Somali, already in the nation.<sup>17</sup>

The UNHCR has been working diligently in the country already in an attempt to provide aid to as many people as possible. Currently, the UNHCR is on the ground

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<sup>12</sup>

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2020/06/15/yemen-and-covid-19-the-pandemic-exacts-its-devastating-toll/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2647?y=2020#year>

<sup>14</sup>

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/09/14/deadly-consequences/obstruction-aid-yemen-during-covid-19#>

<sup>15</sup> <https://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2647?y=2020#year>

<sup>16</sup> <https://twitter.com/YSNECCOVID19/status/1273707326818725891>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53106164>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/yemen-emergency.html>



providing acute malnutrition treatment, nutritional education, cash assistance, and shelter kits, among other forms of community support.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/yemen-emergency.html>





## Possible Solutions

- Find a way to provide asylum for thousands or millions of Yemenis
- Work to end the civil war and promote economic stability
- Provide further aid and funding for humanitarian support in Yemen

## Helpful Vocabulary

**Asylum Seeker-** A person who has left their home country and seeks international aid, but has not yet been granted refugee status.

**DDR-** disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration training. DDR refers to the process former combatants undergo when they enter a refugee camp. This training was put in place to promote the longevity of peace and ensure the safety of refugee camps.

**Durable Solution-** long-term solutions to a refugee crisis, traditionally considered to be voluntary repatriation of the home country, integration into a host country, or resettlement in a third country.

**IDP-** internally displaced people. People who have been forced to flee their own homes but remain within their home country.

**Returnee-** A refugee returning from abroad.



## Further Reading and List of Delegations

**Yemen** - The home of most of the people affected by this crisis. The structural issues and long-term conflict seen in Yemen are at the core of this subject. Check out these links when beginning research.

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/09/yemen-the-forgotten-war/>

**Islamic Republic of Iran** - The Iranian government has been accused of aiding the Houthi rebels in their fight against the Yemeni government. These are well substantiated claims. Check out these links when beginning research.

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/09/16/why-iran-is-getting-blame-an-attack-saudi-arabia-claimed-by-yemens-houthis/>

**Saudi Arabia** - The Saudi government is one of the main groups supporting the Yemeni government monetarily. They're a large player in this conflict and, in some ways, they are directly responsible for its continuation.

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>

<https://www.thirdway.org/primer/2020-country-brief-saudi-arabia-and-its-role-in-yemen>

**Switzerland** - Switzerland has served as the location for many of the discussions between the warring factions in Yemen. They also provide a large amount of aid to the country.

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>

<https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/countries/jemen.html>

**United States** - The United States has been in strong support of the Yemeni and Saudi governments. They also provide millions of dollars per year in humanitarian aid.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/21/us-war-crimes-yemen-stop-looking-other-w#>

<https://ye.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/>

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>



**United Kingdom** - The United Kingdom has been in strong support of the Yemeni and Saudi governments. They export a large amount of arms and ammunition to supply the Yemeni forces.

<https://www.bustle.com/p/what-is-the-uks-role-in-the-yemen-crisis-27625551>

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>

**France** - France has remained fairly neutral in the conflict, and instead has focused almost entirely on the humanitarian aspect of the crisis. They have been large donors towards humanitarian aid in Yemen.

<https://uk.ambafrance.org/France-expresses-concern-to-Saudi-Arabia-about-Yemen-s-humanitarian-situation#:~:text=France%20is%20very%20concerned%20about%20the%20conflict%20under%20way%20in,civilians%20and%20combatants%5D%20and%20proportionality.>

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>

**Germany** - Germany has been in strong support of the Yemeni and Saudi governments. They have also contributed over 100 million Euros towards humanitarian aid.

<https://www.dw.com/en/germany-makes-125-million-yemen-humanitarian-aid-pledge/a-53660259>

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>

**Oman** - Oman has remained neutral on the Yemen crisis and conflict. There are around 2,500 Yemeni refugees living in Oman currently, a number which will surely rise in the near future.

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>

<https://carnegie-mec.org/2019/03/22/oman-s-boiling-yemeni-border-pub-78668>

**Egypt** - The Egyptian government has aligned themselves with Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni government.

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1734601/middle-east>

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>

**Somalia** - More than 14,000 Yemeni refugees have fled into neighboring Somalia. Due to their fractured government Somalia's position on the crisis in Yemen is not immediately clear.

<https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/yemen-unrest-makes-somalia-unlikely-safe-haven-refugees>

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>



**Djibouti** - Djibouti has been one of the nations to accept the most Yemeni refugees.

They have remained fairly neutral in the conflict itself.

<https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Djibouti%20Inter%20Agency%20Operational%20Update%20Response%20to%20Yemen%20Situation%20%5BENG%5D%20-%20March%202018.pdf>

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>

**Ethiopia** - Ethiopia has accepted around 10,000 Yemeni refugees and has also had many of their people flee to Yemen. They support the Yemeni and Saudi governments.

<https://www.ethiopianreview.com/index/2340#:~:text=Yemen%20and%20Ethiopia%20enjoyed%20extensive,spices%20and%20cattle%20to%20Yemen.>

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>

**Sudan** - Sudan has been in support of the Saudi and Yemeni Governments since around 2015. They have also accepted around 1,200 Yemeni Refugees.

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sudan-yemen-sending-hundreds-troops-saudi-arabia>

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>

**Brazil** - Brazil has been a strong supporter of the Saudi and Yemeni governments, providing arms and ammunition to them.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/23/yemen-brazil-made-cluster-munitions-harm-civilians>

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>

**India** - India has shown support for the Yemeni government, but has stayed largely neutral in the conflict. They have also provided little humanitarian aid.

<https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29255/indias+humanitarian+assistance+to+republic+of+yemen>

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>

**China** - China has provided a moderately large amount of humanitarian aid to Yemen.

They have made contacts with members of the Houthi party and have not worked closely with the Yemeni or Saudi governments.

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339144148> [The Chinese Perspective on the Yemen Crisis](#) (You'll need to message the authors of this paper for access. I



didn't reach out myself, but if you're interested it could be some very good information.)

<https://www.trtworld.com/middle-east/what-is-china-doing-in-yemen-32183>

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>

**Japan** - Recent press releases suggest that the Japanese government takes a neutral stance.

[https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle\\_e/yemen/index.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle_e/yemen/index.html)

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>

**Russia** - Russia has remained mostly neutral in the Yemeni crisis. They have also provided a large amount of humanitarian aid to the country.

<https://tass.com/politics/1163577>

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>

**Sweden** - They have positioned themselves as a neutral party in the conflict, but have also been providing arms to supply the conflict. They have also worked to collect over 2 billion in donations for humanitarian aid in Yemen.

<https://asiatimes.com/2019/09/sweden-tries-to-have-it-both-ways-in-yemen/>

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>

**Qatar** - Qatar has provided a large amount of aid to Yemen building housing, hospitals, and schools. They, however, have not accepted Yemeni refugees.

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/qatar-and-gulf-crisis-how-its-dividing-yemen>

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/>