



Arizona Model United Nations 64

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Committee

Background Guide

Chair Introduction

Hello! My name is Deanna Zhou, and I will be your chair for this committee. I am a junior studying Biology at the University of Arizona. I joined UA's Model United Nations last spring with no background, and it has been a rewarding experience since then. The work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is especially meaningful to me because my parents are immigrants, and I grew up hearing stories about the difficult conditions people around the world are forced to endure. As chair, I hope to see active participation and strong collaboration among delegates. I encourage you all to engage with one another and step outside of your comfort zone.

Committee Introduction and Purview

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the UN agency mandated to protect and support refugees and displaced persons worldwide. Established in 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly in response to the mass displacement following World War II, UNHCR was originally intended to be a temporary organization. However, due to the persistence of global displacement crises, its mandate has been repeatedly extended, most notably in 2003, when the General Assembly affirmed that UNHCR would continue its work “until the refugee problem is solved.”

UNHCR’s core mission is to safeguard the rights and well-being of displaced populations. This includes ensuring access to asylum, providing humanitarian assistance, and supporting durable solutions, including voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement in third countries. Today, UNHCR operates in over 130 countries, working closely with governments, non-governmental organizations, and other UN agencies to respond to refugee emergencies around the world.

The committee’s purview is limited to refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and stateless individuals. Unlike political or security-focused bodies, UNHCR does not engage in military action or impose sanctions. Instead, it addresses displacement through humanitarian aid, international cooperation, legal protections, and long-term protection strategies.

UNHCR reports to the United Nations General Assembly, primarily through the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee), which reviews the High Commissioner’s annual report and adopts resolutions related to humanitarian and human rights concerns. The agency is also guided by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

For the 65th Annual Arizona Model United Nations Conference, this committee will follow AZMUN's General Assembly Rules of Procedure. Debate and decision-making will proceed under standard General Assembly formats, including moderated and unmoderated caucuses, draft resolutions, and voting procedures.

Topic I: Living Conditions in Internally Displaced Persons Camps in the DRC

For decades, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has experienced persistent armed conflict, political instability, and natural disasters, resulting in one of the world's largest internal displacement crises. As of recent estimates, the DRC hosts nearly 7 million internally displaced persons, making it the largest IDP crisis in Africa. Many IDP camps are overcrowded and underfunded, leaving displaced populations vulnerable to violence, exploitation, and disease.

UNHCR operates extensively in the DRC, working alongside the Congolese government, NGOs, and UN partners to provide emergency shelter, protection services, healthcare, and support for long-term solutions. Organizations such as UNHCR, OCHA, ICRC, and the International Rescue Committee coordinate humanitarian responses, though access is often limited by insecurity and insufficient funding. Despite these efforts, humanitarian needs continue to outpace available resources.

African states emphasize respect for national sovereignty while calling for increased humanitarian funding and regional cooperation. Western states often prioritize protection standards, accountability, and donor-based humanitarian assistance. Developing regions stress the need for international burden-sharing and long-term development support rather than short-term aid alone.

The UNHCR encourages solutions focused on improving humanitarian access, strengthening camp security and infrastructure, expanding protection for vulnerable populations, and supporting durable solutions such as voluntary return and community-based integration. Delegates should consider cooperative, humanitarian-centered approaches that balance emergency relief with long-term stability.

Questions to Consider:

- What are the primary factors contributing to poor living conditions in IDP camps in the DRC, and how do ongoing conflict and insecurity limit humanitarian access?
- How can UNHCR and partner organizations improve access to basic necessities within IDP camps despite funding and security constraints?
- What measures can be taken to better protect vulnerable populations in IDP camps from violence, exploitation, and abuse?
- How can the international community support durable solutions for IDPs in the DRC while respecting national sovereignty?
- What role should regional organizations, neighboring states, and host communities play in addressing internal displacement and improving long-term stability in the DRC?

Resources:

- [Democratic Republic of the Congo Annual Results Report 2024 | UNHCR](#)
- [Up to 75,000 people living in a remote camp in eastern DRC facing ‘hellish conditions’](#)
- [Democratic Republic of the Congo Crisis Response Plan 2025](#)
- [Democratic Republic of the Congo Refugee Crisis Explained | USA for UNHCR](#)

Topic II: Preventing the Recruitment of Children in Armed Conflicts

The recruitment and use of children in armed conflict has been a persistent issue in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) for decades. Armed groups have historically exploited children as soldiers, particularly in the conflict-affected eastern provinces. In the DRC, thousands of children have been forcibly recruited or coerced into joining armed groups. Girls make up a significant proportion of recruited children and are especially vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation. The continued use of child soldiers deprives children of education, inflicts long-term psychological trauma, and perpetuates cycles of violence and instability within affected communities. Despite national and international efforts to curb the practice, child recruitment has continued as violence has intensified in recent years.

UNHCR works closely with UNICEF, MONUSCO, and local partners to identify at-risk children, advocate for their protection, and support rehabilitation and reintegration programs. The DRC has ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, setting 18 as the minimum age for military participation, and recruitment of children under 15 is classified as a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Despite these measures, progress remains limited due to insecurity and funding shortages.

African states emphasize prevention through community-based protection and reintegration support while balancing sovereignty concerns. Western states prioritize accountability, child protection mechanisms, and funding for demobilization programs. Developing regions stress addressing root causes such as poverty, lack of education, and instability.

The UNHCR encourages approaches that focus on prevention, strengthen child protection systems, expand reintegration programs, and foster greater cooperation between humanitarian actors and local communities. Delegates should consider solutions that address both immediate protection needs and long-term stability.

Questions to Consider

- What factors contribute to the recruitment of children by armed groups in the DRC?
- How can UN agencies identify and protect children at risk of recruitment?
- How can nations prevent re-recruitment and support long-term reintegration of former child soldiers?
- How can the international community improve coordination with the DRC government while respecting national sovereignty and humanitarian principles?
- What strategies can be used to address social reintegration challenges faced by former child soldiers, particularly girls who have experienced exploitation or abuse?

Resources

- [Children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo | Report of the Secretary-General](#)
- [DRC: Thousands of Children Face Escalating Violence and Exploitation Amid Intensifying Conflict](#)
- [Democratic Republic of the Congo - United States Department of State](#)

Topic III: Supporting cross-border refugees from DRC

Prolonged conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), particularly in its eastern provinces, has forced millions of civilians to flee across international borders for decades. Major displacement waves followed the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, and violence has continued through recurring conflicts such as the M23 rebel movement. As fighting intensifies, civilians increasingly seek safety in neighboring countries. Over one million Congolese refugees live in exile across Africa, such as in neighboring countries, including Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, and Tanzania. Refugee camps are frequently overcrowded and underfunded, with limited access to education, healthcare, and sanitation.

UNHCR works with host governments and humanitarian partners to provide protection, shelter, and aid. In countries such as Burundi and Uganda, UNHCR has supported the establishment of new refugee sites, relocation efforts, and protection monitoring for vulnerable populations, including women, children, and survivors of violence. However, humanitarian responses remain constrained by insecurity, limited access, and chronic underfunding.

African host states emphasize international burden-sharing and financial support while maintaining open-border policies. Western donor states focus on humanitarian funding, protection standards, and long-term solutions such as integration and resettlement. Developing regions stress the need for sustainable development assistance to reduce pressure on host communities.

UNHCR encourages approaches that strengthen humanitarian assistance, support host communities, expand access to education and livelihoods, and promote durable solutions such as voluntary repatriation, local integration, or third-country resettlement. Delegates should consider cooperative, regional strategies that balance refugee protection with host-country stability.

Questions to Consider

- What challenges do neighboring host countries face when accommodating large numbers of Congolese refugees, and how can the international community help?
- How can UNHCR and partner organizations improve living conditions in refugee camps and support host communities?
- What measures can be taken to ensure access to education, healthcare, and livelihoods for Congolese refugees in host countries?
- How can African states cooperate to manage cross-border displacement more effectively?
- What long-term solutions are most viable for Congolese refugees, given ongoing instability in the DRC?

Resources

[An IRC Brief on Displacement and TIP in Central Africa](#)

[UNHCR: Escalating violence in eastern DR Congo deepens humanitarian crisis in Burundi](#)

[Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo | Global Conflict Tracker](#)

[Congolese refugees in Burundi in dire need of support](#)

Example Official UN Resolution

United Nations Security Council. *Resolution 2808*. UN Doc. S/RES/2808, 2025.

[https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2808\(2025\)](https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2808(2025)).