

# World Health Organisation

## CIMUN

Topic 1: Promoting an effective response to COVID-19 in war-torn  
member states

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## Introduction

The pandemic has changed everyone's life: the introduction of new limitations, wearing a mask and moving most of our learning and jobs online. Despite these changes most people's standard of living did not change drastically allowing them to maintain a decent life despite the pandemic. That was not the case for people living in war-torn countries, who's life was already pushed to the limits because of the unbearable living conditions they were forced in. For them the pandemic represented another threat which they were not ready to face, most cities in these countries have been evacuated and people are forced to live in refugee-camps where it's impossible to practice social distancing and where the healthcare system is not ready to support those who get sick. In addition most of the governments of these countries are not able to support the population and provide measures to limit the effect of the virus such as vaccinations because of the conflicts that their country is facing.

A wave of Covid-19 in a war-torn country will and has brought more destruction than in other areas, therefore it is imperative for delegates to work together in order to develop an effective response to the virus and help the population of war-torn member states.

## Key Terms

**War-torn country:** A country heavily damaged by war. In the majority of the cases war-torn countries are facing internal conflicts between groups within the country, they face the destruction of many infrastructures and buildings and a substantial loss of human lives.<sup>1</sup>

**Refugees:** people who have been forced to leave their home or their country because of a conflict.

**Covid-19:** infective virus discovered in China in December 2019, affects lungs and the respiratory system. It has developed different variants which must be taken into consideration depending on the country. Vaccinations are taking place world wide however they are not

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<sup>1</sup> World Population Review, *War Torn Countries 2021*

completely effective against variants and many cannot afford them or the country is not equipped to provide enough doses.

**Pandemic:** the spreading of an infectious disease in this case Covid-19, with cases reported all around the world.

**Social distancing:** a measure implemented to prevent the spreading of the virus which strongly encourages people to stand at least 1 meter from each other. When that is not possible other measures will be put in place such as placing plexiglass and wearing facemasks, however not all countries and communities can afford that.

## Background Information

Around the world millions of people are living in refugee-camps after being displaced by war and conflicts in their countries, bombing and other destructive practices force them to leave their home and most of their possessions behind in order to save themselves. Life in the camps deprives them of comforts such as running water and often electricity, and the healthcare system is not able to support many of the wounded because hospitals are often subject to bombing and other attacks. If present, medical facilities are often far away from the camps and the long journey can kill many patients even before they enter the hospital where most of the time there are not enough nurses and doctors.

The Pandemic has made life in the camps even worse, people cannot protect themselves and their families from the virus because preventive measures such as: social distancing, washing their hands frequently and sanitizing hands and surfaces are luxuries that they cannot effort. People are also weakened by other illnesses and the lack of food due to the famine which means that the virus will be causing far more deaths than in other wealthier countries. Another issue that is underestimated by the governments of war-torn states is handling the dead, the land available for

burial is insufficient to offer space for those who died because of Covid and the overwhelming numbers might deprive families of hearing of a loved one passing away and have closure.<sup>2</sup>

The absence of a stable government is another factor that dooms war-torn states and leaves them more vulnerable to Covid-19, with the ongoing conflicts destroying cities and killing civilians, money and resources are being spent towards limiting the damage caused by the war, which leaves little to no funds available towards fighting the virus. While in other countries governments have worked tirelessly towards developing measures to respond to the Covid crisis, governments in war-torn member states were not able to do the same and people have not been provided with the same preventive measures leaving them more vulnerable. In addition the lack of communication between different areas of these countries has made it almost impossible to accurately count the number of Covid cases and the number of deaths, therefore making it harder for governments to develop an effective response.

War-torn countries are also suffering because of the unequal distribution of vaccinations, which experts think could cause around twice as many deaths compared to an equal distribution. Producers prioritize wealthier countries because they are able to pay for all the doses they order, this leaves poorer countries with not enough doses or without the proper material to inject them in safe conditions.<sup>3</sup>

The Pandemic also had an influence on the ongoing conflicts in these countries, armed groups exploited the destruction brought upon by the virus to recruit new members and act while governments were busy. The first wave of Covid brought an increase in civil wars because the groups used the state of weakness of the country to their advantage, some countries experienced a slight decrease in conflicts between March and June 2020, however that was not an achievement. Conflict parties used this time to recruit new members between the displaced and suffering, taking advantage of a crisis to polarize as many people as possible and get them to join their cause. Another factor that gave an advantage to these groups was the lack of international

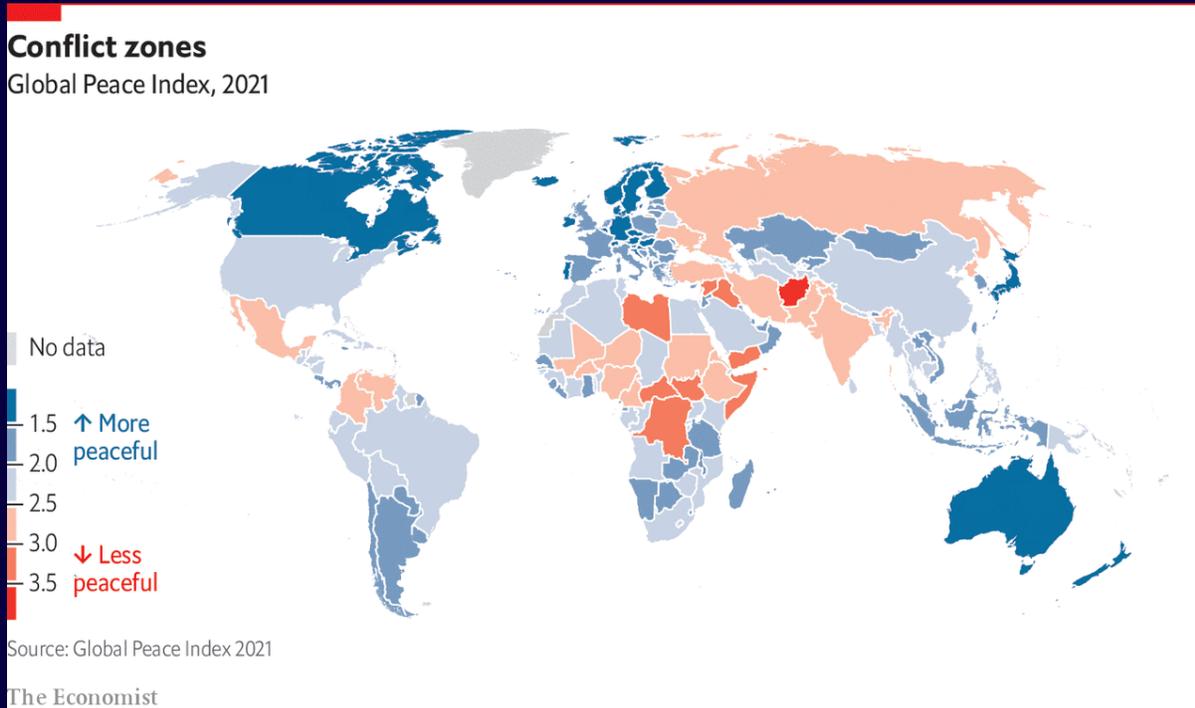
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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Fonseca, *Covid-19 in Conflicts zones*

<sup>3</sup> Cindy Hallak, *COVID-19: The silent killer in war-torn countries*

attention as countries were focused on fixing their own Covid crisis, this gave them the opportunity to commit more crimes and create more destruction away from the public eye.<sup>4</sup>

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved



### Afghanistan

Afghanistan is currently in the world's spotlight because of the conflicts that are taking place within the borders. The Taliban have in fact taken over the capital Kabul and most of the areas in the countries in an incredibly short amount of time since the USA cleared out their forces in the country. Even before the fall of the government the country was still struggling with providing an efficient response to the virus because of the lack of urbanization in many areas of the country. Areas near the border with Pakistan and other areas further away from the cities are remote locations that often don't answer neither to the former government nor the Taliban, these areas are almost impossible to reach as the absence of roads forces people to walk or travel by mule. Because of this many citizens could not be reached by healthcare workers and tested for

<sup>4</sup> Lito Wilson, Coronavirus Escalated Armed Conflicts in Several War-Torn Countries

Covid-19, the same goes for vaccinations which have now been stopped after the fall of the government<sup>5</sup>. The United Nations has remained committed to helping Afghanistan however dynamics might change depending on the decisions of the new Taliban government.

### Syria

Syria has been facing an intense nine year rebellion against President Bashar al-Assad and the Pandemic threatened to further damage an already exhausted population. Even if Covid-19 momentarily slowed down the civil-war, it was an enormous threat to those 6.6 million people who had been evacuated from their homes and lived in refugee-camps. Despite having organized measures to stop the spreading of the virus, they were not efficient, as only a few hundreds of people were getting tested each day and results were under-reported, making it almost impossible to assess the situation. In addition the country is facing an economic crisis which the pandemic only enlarged with the rising prices of necessary goods.<sup>6</sup>

### Yemen

Yemen is undergoing a civil war since 2014, people who live in extreme poverty are forced to live in camps where tents are made with rudimentary materials and cannot access facilities to satisfy their basic needs such as hospitals.<sup>7</sup> In the camps entire families are forced to stay in the same room which means that it is practically impossible to be protected if a family member is positive to Covid-19. In addition there is no running water which means that people cannot wash their hands regularly and they are forced to decide whether to buy soap or food. According to the United Nations people in Yemen cannot effort to worry about the Pandemic because of the other illnesses that threaten to kill those who were displaced by the war and because of the famine which further limits the food people have available.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Glinski and Ezzatullah, *Afghanistan's Vaccine Roadblocks*

<sup>6</sup> Mehme Ozalp, *Covid-19 Pandemic in War-torn Syria*

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Palmer, *Inside one refugee-camp in war-torn Yemen*

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, *Yemen cannot even effort to worry about the Coronavirus*

## Colombia

Colombia is currently facing at least five ongoing conflicts, according to the ICRC, and four parties are recognized: the Republic of Colombia, the National Liberation Army (ELN), the Gaitanistas Self-Defence Forces (AGC), the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), and the structures of the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. The Pandemic has strongly increased the state of fear of the Colombian population not only because of the deaths that the virus caused but because the number of civilians murdered increased.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately violence did not only escalate towards civilians but the healthcare system and its workers became a target too, since the start of the Pandemic in 2020, 325 attacks were reported, which is the highest number recorded in 24 years according to the Red Cross committee in Colombia.<sup>10</sup>

## International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

Is in an impartial and independent organization whose mission is to offer humanitarian help to people living in conflict zones. They have worked in most war-torn countries and protected civilians by offering medical attention and protecting their dignity. They also promote fairness and aim to strengthen the enforcement of humanitarian law.<sup>11</sup>

## World Health Organization (WHO)

The World Health Organization is an international organization partnered with the United Nations. This organization offers reliable information about the virus such as statistics and data or reports and measures to protect ourselves. WHO is also responsible for large scale operations in conflict areas and they are extremely active regarding epidemics and pandemics and other world problems that affect people's health such as air pollution.

<sup>9</sup> ICRC, *Armed conflicts in Colombia*

<sup>10</sup> ICRC, *Health systems deal with a Pandemic and violence in Colombia*

<sup>11</sup> ICRC, *Who we are*

## Relevant UN Resolutions and Reports

### Resolution 2565, *Increased Global Cooperation to Facilitate COVID-19 Vaccine Access in Conflict Areas* (2021)

On February 26th 2021 the Security Council announced they will be adopting resolution number 2565 after a unanimous consensus. This resolution calls all member states to work towards making Covid-19 vaccines available in conflict areas by requesting conflict to pause in order to allow a facilitated distribution of vaccines, and by increasing production and distribution of the vaccines. The resolution embraces the concepts of “solidarity, equity and efficacy” and invites the countries with developed economies to collaborate and donate vaccines to poorer countries in order to guarantee an effective response to the Pandemic.<sup>12</sup>

There are no relevant reports available regarding this topic, however delegates are highly encouraged to read press releases from the official website of the United Nations which tackle the decisions taken by the Security Council and the Secretary Generala. These are valuable sources of information which also give great insight on real UN debates.

## Previous Attempts at Resolving This Issue

### Healthcare workers sent in conflict zones afflicted by Ebola

Ebola is an infectious disease that caused an epidemic between 2014 and 2016 mainly recorded in Africa, WHO and other international organizations organized support lines to provide health care workers to help when the virus was peaking and to administer vaccines even years later. These humanitarian missions became the target of many armed groups, this made reaching more isolated communities an issue and limited the effectiveness of the response. Despite this solution being used for a different situation, similar actions could be taken in order to provide aid against Covid-19.

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<sup>12</sup> UN, *Security council calls for global cooperation*

### Calling for a global ceasefire

On March 23rd 2020 the Secretary General called a global ceasefire in order to allow humanitarian aid to be sent even in countries that are undergoing conflict, this was further confirmed by the application of resolution 2532 after a meeting of the Security council. Another call to end all violence was made on April 5th after noting that significant violence was also taking place inside households.

## **Possible Solutions**

### Vaccination campaigns sponsored by the United Nations in order to prevent the spreading of the virus in refugee-camps

Refugee-camps cannot provide the needed measures to prevent the spreading of Covid-19 and if the virus starts spreading within the refugees it will cause uncontrolled deaths due to the lack of a well-functioning healthcare system. In order to avoid this, refugees should be offered the possibility to get vaccinated so that if they come in contact with the virus they will be less likely to catch it or if they do the symptoms will be threatening.

### Create support lines between members states to provide countries affected by conflicts with the necessary protective measures

As stated earlier in the report, member states in conflict zones have a less developed economy and a government which is not able to restore it and therefore can't provide the population with utilities such as masks, hand sanitizer or medications. Wealthier member states could help these countries by offering those protective measures at a reduced price or even donate it in order to ensure the end of the Pandemic. Member states could also provide medical staff which is often lacking in conflict zones because of the targeting of medical facilities and the limitations that some cultures pose on the population which don't allow some people to study and become doctors or nurses.

### Protect healthcare facilities and workers with groups of UN peacekeepers

Sending UN peacekeepers in conflict zones to protect health care workers will not only allow more effective treatment, but more healthcare workers will join the support missions because they will ensure greater security.

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