Social Development Council

Destruction of world heritage sites during both armed conflicts and through other means, as well as ensuring their accessibility to all people

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Introduction

History is an intrinsic part of our world as it shapes each society to be the way it is today. Whether people take pride in their past, learn from it, or exploit it for their own gain, cultural heritage is and always will be a monumental symbol of what once was. Similarly, nature plays an important role in many cultures, whether through tradition or survival. The recent insurgence of armed conflicts puts much of the heritage at risk as there have been several instances where monuments and artifacts of untold value were destroyed on a mere whim. As such, it is imperative to find a way to safeguard these sites while maintaining the balance between protection and limitation.

Key Terms

Cultural heritage - "artifacts, monuments, a group of buildings and sites, museums that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance" [1]

Natural heritage - "natural features, geological and physiographical formations and delineated areas that constitute the habitat of threatened species of animals and plants and natural sites of value from the point of view of science, conservation of natural beauty"[2]

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, responsible for ensuring equal access to education, preservation of culture, and bolstering scientific developments. UNESCO is responsible for appointing World Heritage sites and guarding their well-being, in case of threats, the organization operates in ways to ensure maximum preservation.

World Heritage Site - "cultural and/or natural sites considered to be of 'Outstanding Universal Value', which have been inscribed on the World Heritage List by the World Heritage Committee" [3]

Accessibility - the quality of being able to be reached or entered

OUV - outstanding universal value, having "cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity"[4]

Conservation - preventing the waste and/or degradation of something

Preservation - maintaining something in its original or current state

[1] Cultural heritage | UNESCO UIS
[2] Natural heritage | UNESCO UIS
[3] What is a World Heritage Site? | Historic Environment Scotland
[4] Outstanding Universal Value: definition and

Restoration - efforts to restore something to its original form following destruction or deterioration

ISIS/Daesh - also known as the Islamic State, it is a jihadist terrorist movement that wished to establish an Islamic caliphate in the Middle East, rising to power during the years 2014-17 on the territories of Syria and Iraq

Jihadism - apart from its meaning in the Islam religion itself, it is also a neologism that refers to the militant expansion of Muslim beliefs

General Overview

World heritage sites are protected by international law for a reason. They are often centuries old and hold immense historical value; yet, they continue to be attacked. Historically, there have been repeated offenses towards heritage sites perpetrated by armed groups outside of conflicts, as well as the destruction being a direct effect of wars, such as sieges and bombings.

Such sites may also hold key pieces of history important to shaping the cultural identity of ethnic or regional groups. Depriving the local population of these is detrimental to their functioning as their sense of self is being stripped away. For example, a particular emphasis was placed on these historic sites and monuments during the 19th century in Europe, where the notion of nationalism emerged after a long reign of convoluted ethnic blurs. In the Austro-Hungarian empire, this was evident as Slavic nations began to reinstall their languages and cultures after being subjected to profound Germanization. During this time, people turned to their history to reestablish their national identity and pride, once again demonstrating just how important cultural heritage is to people across time and space.

1. War casualties

During wars and armed conflicts, the goal is simple - defeat the enemy. With so much at stake, it is easy to pay no mind to the "insignificant" things, i.e. those not helping to achieve victory in the immediate sense. This is the reason why many historical sites have been damaged during war efforts, such as the Great Mosque of Aleppo, impacted by the civil war in Syria, which was believed to hold the remains of Zechariah, father of John the Baptist. John is an important figure in both Christianity and Islam, where he is viewed as a prophet (or rather a "forerunner to Jesus"), making the destruction of the mosque that much more poignant due to Syria being a deeply religious country.

Furthermore, armed conflicts often damage their natural surroundings, whether it be through the drainage of resources or unscrupulous movements, putting natural parks and other reservoirs of great value at immense risk. Notably, the Virunga National Park in the

DRC is threatened as armed groups continue to illegally poach and deforest the area as part of their military campaigns.

A convention for the protection of heritage sites during armed conflicts was put into place - namely, the 1954 Hague Convention - however, many places have been destroyed since, calling its effectiveness into question. Further measures must be considered to ensure the proper protection of the cultural and natural heritage subject to risk.

2. Purposeful destruction

While some world heritage sites have been destroyed by being caught in the crossfire, that is not always the case as armed military groups target historic places for political or financial reasons. This is often seen especially in the Middle East, a place rich with history due to giving birth to many of the ancient civilizations, such as Mesopotamia. The region is also known for its Islamic insurgence and jihadism, often coupled with radicality.

A famous instance of when an armed group targeted historical sites may be found in Syria once again, where ISIS, as part of its campaign, destroyed the ancient city of Palmyra dating back to the third millennium B.C. During its rampage in the late 2010s, ISIS pillaged historic monuments, selling their loot on the black market and using the profit to bankroll their war efforts. This case in particular demonstrates the danger of such destruction, as, apart from the cultural loss, their actions continue to further fuel the conflict, resulting in worse outcomes all around.

UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova highlighted how "It goes hand in hand with the destruction of diversity, persecution...of minorities.", further emphasizing the broader role of history in modern society. World heritage sites are undeniably a part of the unique cultural identity of each respective region. Bokova further stated that these actions deprive the people of "their identity". Protecting and cultivating culture simultaneously allows for the celebration of cultural differences and the expression of freedom, all notions which are a threat to the regimes being established by groups like Daesh.

Furthermore, it is also thought by many experts that such drastic actions demonstrate absolute power and dominance over the population, solidifying the perpetrator's control through fear.5 This goes hand in hand with the installation of an autocratic regime; through the demonstration of sheer prowess, the armed groups can tighten their hold on their territories.

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5 Targeting culture: The destruction of cultural heritage in conflict - House of Lords Library

3. Natural Disasters

Not all destruction of heritage sites is caused by man, however, that does not mean that proper precautions should not be taken. Natural disasters often lead to terrible damage being done. In 1966, a flash flood in Florence caused thousands of irreplaceable pieces of art to be destroyed across numerous heritage sites, with the water levels rising to 7 meters6. Unfortunately, this is not the only case when world heritage sites were destroyed or threatened. Climate change is an alarming development regarding the safety of such places; for example, the recent spread of wildfires in the Mediterranean, as well as the increase of earthquakes in the Middle East all pose a significant threat to the safety of cultural heritage across the globe.

4. Accessibility

While discussing the destruction of world heritage sites it is also important to look at the other side of the coin, i.e. their accessibility. A common connotation in the modern world, accessibility may relate to disabled visitors. WHO reports show that over 15% of the world population is currently charged with some form of impairment. According to several statistics, most museums are not able to welcome visitors with physical disabilities, and implementing the appropriate measures is often a challenge due to the historic nature of the buildings, where laws prevent any changes from being done to the site. In such cases, accessibility and protection go head to head, so it is important to resolve this paradox to allow for an inclusive environment. In terms of natural heritage sites, there is a similar issue where disabled visitors are often left at a disadvantage regarding their visit, however, altering these heritage sites is impossible without damaging nature, their most crucial component, which once again proposes a similar complication to be resolved.

Another reason why heritage sites are inaccessible may be due to their sanctity. Limiting the access to places of worship or others of the same nature is to be expected while attempting to honor local practices and beliefs, however, this once again decreases the accessibility of certain places. It is essential to establish a careful balance between limiting and granting access to sacred places. A universal law may not be applied as each culture approaches this issue differently, nevertheless, a solution should be discussed.

Lastly, armed conflicts significantly alter the accessibility of world heritage sites. For example, during the Syrian civil war, most monuments were completely sealed off. Though the situation has changed, this begs the question of whether wars and armed clashes should have an impact on the closure of such sites, and what precautions should be taken to ensure the safety of potential visitors during those times.

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[6] Play with Google Arts & Culture

Current Situation

There are currently a number of situations where heritage sites are being threatened, chiefly the wars in Ukraine and Palestine. There have already been reports of Russia destroying cultural sites in Ukraine, so it is more pressing than ever to come to a sensible conclusion regarding their protection to prevent further damage. UNESCO is actively working in the area, with its recent report estimating the war having resulted in $ 3.5 billion worth of damages7 to the culture and tourism sector. In the Gaza Strip, extensive bombings and air campaigns are taking place, posing significant danger to cultural sites in the region. As of June 2024, UNESCO has identified damage to 50 such locations, and with the conflict showing no signs of slowing down, this is seen as an alarming threat to the cultural identity and heritage in Palestine.

Furthermore, as discussed previously, the jihadist movement in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region is particularly dangerous due to the amount of culturally significant sites present, most notably one of the wonders of the world, Petra in Jordan. The Houthi insurgency in the Arabian peninsula, while partially a spillover from the Israel-Hamas conflict, has already instigated numerous bombings, such as the ones perpetrated by the US and the UK. This once again reaffirms the need for a resolution of the issue at hand in order to prevent any significant damage.

As well as that, natural heritage sites are also increasingly under fire from the consequences of armed conflicts. Africa, for example, hosts many national parks and reserves which, as illustrated previously, are threatened by the ethnic disputes taking place across the continent, notably in the DRC. Furthermore, an increase in recent natural disasters is also putting these natural sites at risk, such as the fact that "natural disaster statistics reveal that disasters are occurring more frequently and with greater intensity".8

Past solutions

1954 Hague Convention - the convention is the first multilateral treaty detailing the action to be taken to protect cultural heritage in case of armed conflicts, outlining the necessity of member states to safeguard the sites as well as defining the key terms.

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7 [Ukraine: UNESCO estimates the damage to culture and tourism after 2 years of war at $3.5 billion](#)
8 [Natural Disaster Facts And Statistics 2024 – Forbes Advisor](#)

1970 UNESCO Convention - the convention prohibits illicit activities relating to cultural heritage, such as trafficking or transfer of ownership of cultural property.

1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention - the convention interlinks elements of nature conservation and cultural preservation, further defining what may qualify as a world heritage site. The convention also outlines the responsibilities of member states to actively identify potential heritage sites, as well as employ appropriate measures to ensure their protection.

2017 Resolution 2347 - the Security Council resolution firmly condemns and outlaws the destruction of cultural property, as well as reaffirming measures regarding illicit trafficking.

Major parties and their views

Russian Federation

Being one of the perpetrators of the war in Ukraine, Russia has been, as stated previously, accused of significantly damaging culture sites in the country, with UNESCO strongly condemning the country's repeated attacks on Odesa, reportedly damaging several world heritage sites. However, the country has denied actively destroying such locations and rather claims to have taken proper precautions to prevent intentional damage from being done[9].

Ukraine

Ukraine feels deeply devastated by the destruction of many of its cultural heritage sites. The country is calling for sanctions against Moscow, while implementing some of its own policies to protect its landmarks, such as satellite monitoring and on-the-ground response systems. Overall, the country strongly believes that cultural heritage should be protected as it continues to experience the negative effects firsthand.

United States of America

The US shares the view that it is imperial to protect culture sites and limit the threats posed. The American Institute for Conservation has stated that the country "strongly opposes the practice of targeting any cultural heritage site for destruction, and condemns the intentional destruction or damage of cultural heritage sites".[10] USA is also reportedly actively working on preventing further damage being done in Ukraine, condemning Russia's actions in this regard.

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

The UK, similarly to the USA, believes in the preservation of heritage sites, understanding their importance. During the ISIS operations in Iraq and Syria, the country launched an extensive programme tasked with protecting as much cultural heritage as possible, ratifying the Hague

[9] Ukraine's Cultural Heritage Under Attack, Official Says
[10] On Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage Sites

Convention. Since then, the country has only solidified its view in regards to the destruction of sites in Ukraine. An official government statement reads that "the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage is a war crime and the UK is working with international partners to support Ukraine in protecting its cultural treasures."11

French Republic

France reaffirms the view that cultural property and heritage sites should be protected. In the past, the country has collaborated with the UAE to host a UNESCO conference, representing its commitment to the cause. French ambassador to the UN Francois Delattre has spoken on the issue, saying that "it is our collective responsibility to preserve international peace and security and to prevent the destruction of cultural heritage by murderous attempts to deny history and prevent its use to finance terrorism and fuel conflicts."12

People's Republic of China

In the past, China has experienced numerous instances of radical modernization resulting in severe loss of cultural heritage, most notably during Mao's Cultural Revolution. Since then, the country has invested significant funds into the preservation and restoration of heritage sites, however, many places were still lost to infrastructure and development. In 2021, China introduced a six-year plan for cultural development, detailing the necessity for the development of "socialist culture" as well as listing "strengthened protection of intangible cultural heritage"13 as one of its key goals.

Syrian Arab Republic

As mentioned previously, Syria suffered great losses to its cultural heritage during the era of the Islamic State, when prominent monuments like the ancient city of Palmyra were destroyed. The decade of civil war in the country left little room for development, so to date, no official policies have been implemented regarding the protection of heritage sites.

State of Israel

In 2003, Israel introduced the Heritage Plan, outlining some of the policies and measures to be implemented regarding the conservation of built heritage. Currently, the country's operations in Gaza greatly threaten the cultural heritage in Palestine, with the statistics saying that over 50 sites had already been damaged, however, the country has not made any official remarks on the issue.

Republic of Iraq

Similarly to Syria, Iraq was also impacted by Daesh's reign in the Middle East, resulting in the destruction of multiple prominent heritage sites, such as the Great Mosque of Al-Nuri situated in Mosul, one of the oldest cities in the country. Since then, restorative actions have taken place in the form of the campaign "Revive the spirit of Mosul" being launched in 2018 by UNESCO in partnership with the Iraqi Government, symbolizing the country's appreciation for the severity of the issue of protecting and restoring world heritage sites.

11 Ukrainian cultural heritage must be preserved: UK statement to the OSCE - GOV.UK
1 Cultural heritage remains highly threatened - France ONU
2 Guideline for cultural development during 2021-25 period unveiled
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UNESCO The organization is the culmination of the international community's efforts to preserve and address world heritage sites. It has cemented the pillars that make up the issue at hand, formally ratifying and adopting the term "world heritage site" in its 1972 World Heritage Convention. UNESCO "seeks to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world"14, and to date, the organization has 194 members of which 167 contain world heritage sites.

Timeline of key events
- 1945 - formation of UNESCO
- 1954 - The Hague Convention signed
- 1970 - 1970 UNESCO Convention signed
- 1972 - World Heritage Convention signed
- 2011 - Start of the Syrian civil war
- 2013 - Destruction of the Great Mosque of Aleppo
- 2014/17 - ISIS active in Iraq and Syria
- 2015 - Destruction of Palmyra by Daesh
- 2017 - Resolution 2347 passed
- 2020 - Russian invasion of Ukraine

Questions a resolution should answer

What form of protection should be implemented on world heritage sites?

Will there be a form of reproof or sanctioning inflicted on the party responsible?

To what degree should heritage sites be preserved, and when is restoration appropriate?

Should the legal framework regarding heritage sites be revised?

Is it to ensure greater accessibility in terms of disabilities?

Should holy/sacred places be accessible to all?

Important documents

World Heritage List - https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/

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[14] UNESCO World Heritage Centre

1954 Hague Convention - 1954 Convention | UNESCO

1972 World Heritage Convention - The World Heritage Convention

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Social Development Council

ENSURING BETTER ACCESSIBILITY OF AND SAFETY FOR AID WORKERS IN CONFLICT AREAS

Written by: Veronika Hauferová **Introduction:** Aid workers have been key actors in solving

humanitarian crises for over a hundred years. In
today's world, their presence is as crucial as ever with the threat of armed conflicts troubling many regions. In such areas, the standard of living has been lowered to unbearable conditions. The inhabitants of zones such as the Gaza Strip are fully reliant on the help of this humanitarian assistance. However, these workers, who deliver essential services to warzones are constantly exposed to dangers. The number of instances of their violent treatment has in the past few years begun rising, urging for a change in the system. Just last year, the death rate of aid workers increased by 120% compared to 2022[15]. The efforts of aid workers are furthermore constantly hindered by a lack of accessibility to the designated areas. With nearly 50% of all attacks on aid workers occurring on the road[16] it has become more than necessary to tackle the issue of their safe and secure transportation to places of need. It is necessary to delve into the development of new safety protocols and find a solution to this global risk, exploring even the potential of technology with diplomacy as our key tool.

Definition of Key Terms:

Aid worker- An individual working in a country where there is a war, no food, etc. in order to help people[17]

Humanitarian aid- Assistance that is used to relieve suffering of affected populations during

emergency situations. It is aid that directly benefits people and should be channeled regardless of race, ethnic group, religion, gender, age, nationality or political affiliation.[18]

Safety protocol- A document which helps to prevent injuries and accidents by explaining how to complete the job with minimal risk while overall including safety requirements developed during a risk assessment.[19]

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[15] Protecting humanitarian aid workers: an urgent call - The Lancet
[16] Location of attacks (1997-2023) | Aid Worker Security Database
[17] AID WORKER | English meaning - Cambridge Dictionary
[18] Humanitarian aid, explained, Humanitarian aid - European Commission
[19] Hazard Reviews & Safety Protocols.

Conflict Area - Conflict area refers to an area struck by war or political instability that disrupts essential services such as housing, transportation, communication, sanitation, water and health care.20

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) - A set of rules that seek to limit the effects of armed conflict. It lays out the responsibilities of states and non-state armed groups during an armed conflict. Few of its requirements are the rapid and unimpeded passage for humanitarian aid during armed conflicts and the freedom of movement for humanitarian workers in conflict areas. This law is based on the 1949 fourth Geneva convention and the 1977 and 2005 Additional Protocols.21

Non-governmental organizations- These organizations consist of a voluntary group of individuals that attempt to achieve social or political aims while not being controlled by the government. Many, such as INSO, are directly involved in ensuring humanitarian safety. Over the past five years, NGOs have been advocating better protection of humanitarian space and have been concerned around the security of frontline workers.22

Humanitarian corridor- An arrangement to facilitate the movement of civilians and other persons protected by the IHL and the delivery of humanitarian assistance. They tend to be established in situations of active hostilities when movements are dangerous.23

Protected zones- Areas that host people who are not or are no longer taking a direct part in hostilities: civilians, wounded and sick fighters and aid workers.24

General Overview:

[25] The first recorded instance of a major attack on aid workers occurred in 1964 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where two aid workers tied directly to the UN (ILO, UNHCR) were murdered while traveling through the country. This operation was conducted by a group of rebels. Back then these incidents were viewed as a rarity. Sadly, in today's world the number of aid workers killed each year moves in the hundreds. Starting in 2008 a new pattern of terrorism in conflict zones has emerged which began targeting aid workers and humanitarian professionals.26 However, it is crucial to keep in mind that killings are not the only threat that aid

20 Children in Conflict Zones - PMC
21 International Humanitarian Law - European Commission
   Nongovernmental organization (NGO) | Britannica
22 04 Humanitarian corridors | Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank
   Enhancing the security of civilians in conflict | Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank
   Summary of Introduction to International Humanitarian Law (IHL)
3 The Assault on Aid Workers: A New Pattern In Terrorism
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workers face during their missions. The numbers of humanitarian workers kidnapped and wounded keep rising exponentially as well. In 2022, there were 195 recorded cases of kidnapping and the overall number of victims in statistics (1997-2022) add up to 6 810 individuals27. These risks are especially common in the Afghan territory, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Somalia, and several other countries located in Africa or the Middle East.

A question arises as to why aid workers are so often targeted in arms conflicts. By providing support to persons who suffer the consequences of violent exchanges, they inevitably become a threat to the goals of one side of the conflict. This puts them in a risk-filled position. Another reason can be antagonism from the very communities of developing countries where they are dispatched. Past events, such as the cholera outbreak that occurred in Haiti during the year 2010, have rooted mistrust towards UN personnel. During this specific occurrence, although the epidemic was detected in record time, 10,000 fell victim to the illness. A group of 400 UN peacekeepers who traveled from Nepal, where the disease was endemic, had refused the access of an investigative healthcare team into their camp, and the transfer of their waste water into Haiti's waterway immensely raised the severity of the pandemic. When this was revealed, the UN battled its guilt for another six years before admitting accountability.28 Similar negative experiences with UN workers have emerged, such as the post-conflict health crisis in Timor-Leste in 2002, which was also preceded by the dispatch of UN personnel in the area. The safety of aid workers is moreover often compromised by the lack of hygiene and security provided to them. During the Covid-19 pandemic, new dangers arose and new safety protocols had to be made. This showed the necessity of new procedures which would be made ahead of time and could ensure possible events which would endanger the missions. The IHL awards protection to hospitals and UN facilities which have in the past been targets of several bombings. A possibility that the committee should discuss is the establishment of protected zones and the circumstances under which such territories can be created. To attempt to solve this issue to the committee's highest capability, it is important to recognize that there are several forms of humanitarian aid delivered. Some prominent examples that are often present in armed conflicts are supplying shelter, distributing food rations, clean water or providing medical care, along with ensuring proper sanitation. Convoys carrying food rations have often been purposefully targeted by armed groups in efforts of weakening the opposing side through starvation. This puts aid workers, operating trucks through roads in conflict zones, at risk of being caught in the crossfire of an attack aimed at their cargo. Medical workers, while also dealing with lack of medical supplies caused by a severing of a supply line, are also sadly very often the targets of attacks themselves. Their skill brings attention to the opposing side of the hostilities, and due to inadequate security, according to the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition, 2562 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care took place in 2023.29

27 [Major attacks on aid workers: Summary statistics](#)
28 [The origins of the 2010 Haiti cholera outbreak - Alternatives Humanitaires](#).
29 [2023 Attacks on Health Care in War Zones Most Ever Documented: Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) Report - PHR.](#)

According to sources, 46.6% of these attacks occur on the road30. This brings us to another pressing issue for discussion. The accessibility of aid workers in conflict areas. There are two instances which the committee must recognize. Some areas are, due to the conflict at hand, hardly accessible. This is the case for example the Gaza Strip which has been, since October 2023, under total blockade by the Israeli and Egyptian forces who limit any electricity, water, food or gas to enter the region with the later established exception for the incoming humanitarian aid. However, this allowance of aid remains unstable as the Israeli government periodically blocks supplies of life-necessary materials into Gaza. This constant shifting of humanitarian aid flow restricts the accessibility of aid to workers in the Gaza Strip and thereby increases the risk they face during their every-day tasks.

Another example of the lack of accessibility of aid to workers in conflict areas can be seen in countries such as DR Congo, which ranks as the country with the fourth worst road infrastructure in the world. Due to the poorly built and facilitated means of transport, aid workers face a challenge in not only performing their tasks securely but also reaching the designated area at an effective pace.

It is the duty of this committee to focus on problems of this nature, specifically looking into how technology can be used not only to ease transport and make areas of conflict more accessible to humanitarian workers but also increase their protection through, for example, advanced surveillance systems or communication tools. Furthermore, it is important to explore the ethical dimensions of communication with armed groups with respect to the current situation in their active region.

Current situation:

Both years 2023 and 2024 marked an increase in attacks on aid workers. In 2022 there were 444 victims of violence and 116 aid workers killed31. However, there has been a decrease in the number of kidnappings between the years 2022 and 2023, with the numbers falling from 195 victims to 91 victims. The most hazardous regions remain to be South Sudan and the Gaza strip. Nevertheless, the number of incidents in Ukraine and Haiti have been rising rapidly as well.

Now, new safety protocols need to be created and put into conduct as the trend of violence against humanitarian workers keeps becoming more prominent and little legal response is being administered. In 2024, the Security Council passed and adopted the resolution 2730 with 14 votes in favor and an abstention from the Russian delegation. This document denounced disinformation, information manipulation and incitement to violence against humanitarian and UN personnel. Even so, the public opinion still expresses doubts and claims that so far there was "very little impact in real terms"32.

30 Location of attacks (1997-2023) | Aid Worker Security Database
3 https://humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/ho_aws-preview_july_23_final.pdf
1 Atrocities Against Aid Workers
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The accessibility of aid workers has been addressed through discussions about humanitarian corridors which allow safe passage for and to aid workers. Currently, the IHL recognizes that even zones that are under special protection from law are not quite secure.

Over the past four years there have been several breaches of humanitarian corridors, the most known being the blockade of the Lachin Corridor by Azerbaijan in December 2022, the Russian shelling attacks on humanitarian corridors in Ukraine that have been taking place from 2022 to present and the breaches of countless attempts at the initiation of humanitarian corridors in 2023 Sudan. These events affect the entire civilian populations of the regions by depriving them of water, food and other supplies as well as causing casualties. Aid workers are also affected by these breaches as they are not granted safe access to their places of deployment. Additionally, there have been cases of aid workers being bound to conflict zones due to the hazards of their transportation elsewhere.

Major parties and Their Views:

United States of America – The United States of America has been a major donor of humanitarian aid over the years. They have been the largest donor of humanitarian aid into Syria's ongoing conflict. The country cooperates with international organizations such as the UN or non-governmental organizations in order to provide emergency medical services and supplies as well as food and other relief items. The humanitarian aid being provided by the United States has helped during the ongoing conflicts on the African continent where the US has, as early as the year 2012, spent almost $ 300 million in food assistance[33]. The country has been working towards an improved accessibility of aid by establishing the Denton Program which uses leftover space in U.S military cargo planes to transport humanitarian assistance to conflict areas. In 2024 the White House released a statement expressing their outrage and heartbreak over the death of humanitarian workers in Gaza with a promise to act towards a safer environment for volunteers in active conflicts[34].

Russian Federation – The Russian Federation has a controversial history surrounding this topic. The country provides humanitarian personnel in the Palestinian territory and has very recently, in July 2024, publicly expressed its concern over the death of 278 humanitarian workers in the Gaza region. Furthermore, they have drawn attention to the lack of accessibility of aid workers due to the closing and destruction of the Rafah crossing. However, in recent months Russia has been accused of breaching the Mariupol humanitarian corridor with shelling attacks in their war with

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[33] Humanitarian Responders | Partner With Us | U.S. Agency for International Development
[34] Statement from President Joe Biden on the Death of World Central Kitchen Workers in Gaza | The White House

Ukraine. The Russian attacks have reportedly claimed the lives of 11 aid workers. The armed forces have also supposedly illegally detained and abused at least 39 aid workers35.

<u>Syrian Arab Republic</u> – The Syrian Arab Republic is a region with an ongoing active conflict. The violence is ensued by rebel groups who operate in opposition to the government. The communication between these rebel groups and international organizations is complicated and attempts to establish cooperation for an increased security of aid workers in the region are mostly unsuccessful. The Syrian Arab Republic currently places among the most critical regions in regard to this issue due to its compromised security with over 534 recorded attacks on humanitarian workers as of 202236. The risk is especially high in northwest Syria where ceasefire is violated on a daily basis. Furthermore, the accessibility of aid workers in this territory is inadequate as the region now has just a singular UN-authorised crossing in northwest Syria out of the four originally created. The humanitarian workers have to lobby for the lifting of bureaucratic restrictions by local authorities which hinder travel. This shows the inadequacy of efforts coming from the Syrian government to ensure the safety of aid workers.

<u>Republic of Iraq</u>- The Republic of Iraq is a country dealing with sectarian violence as well as the activity of ISIS. This puts the country in a position requiring humanitarian workers. Currently, the safety and accessibility of aid workers in Iraq is not in a highly critical state. The country counts 75 incidents involving aid workers (1997-2023)37. However, Iraq was the witness to one of the most tragic attacks on aid workers back in 2003 during the Canal Hotel Bombing. An event, during which a truck bomb exploded outside the UN headquarters in Baghdad, claiming the lives of 22 people. It is a tragedy that the international community remembers to this day. During Saddam Hussein's government (1979-2003) the approach towards aid workers in Iraq was quite hostile and restricted. The current Iraq government has however become more involved in humanitarian matters, taking steps towards a more stable environment in the region.

<u>Ukraine</u>- The conflict between Ukraine and Russia has greatly escalated on the 14th of February 2022. Since then, many countries and international organizations have begun to supply Ukraine with humanitarian aid. So far, 11 aid workers have fallen victim to Russian airstrikes and shelling attacks38. Reportedly, the humanitarian corridor Mariupol failed and a good number of humanitarian infrastructure has been hit by shelling, missiles and drone strikes. Furthermore, electronic warfare has disrupted aid delivery, hindering the accessibility of aid workers in the region. Aid workers are facing newly developed technology like for example kamikaze drones.

35 https://humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/ho_aws-preview_july_23_final.pdf

36 Issue Brief Syria - 2022- Humanitarian Access, Continuity of Services and Protection of Humanitarian Workers
37 Total incidents by country (1997-2023) | Aid Worker Security Database
38 https://humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/ho_aws-preview_july_23_final.pdf

The Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky has expressed deep grief over the deaths of aid workers and voiced gratitude for the assistance provided.

State of Israel- The State of Israel has in the past been accused of breaching the IHL with its treatment of civilians and humanitarian workers who are dispatched in Gaza. According to the Human Rights Watch, Israel has attacked known aid worker locations, targeting aid worker convoys as well. The Israeli President Isaac Herzog has in a public speech apologized for the deaths of certain Gaza aid workers, however the country has yet to work towards the improved accessibility of and safety of aid workers who are passing, on their territory or in the Gaza strip.

Non-governmental organizations- Non-governmental organizations are large actors in the field of providing humanitarian assistance. Many governments, including The United States and Russian Federation, work in cooperation with them to provide humanitarian assistance into conflict areas. One of the most prominent NGOs in this field are the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Doctors Without Border or the International Rescue Committee (IRC). To ensure the safety of their aid workers, these groups implement strict safety protocols including armed escorts. Non-governmental organizations have long been amongst the strongest advocates for the focus of establishing safety protocols and measures to protect aid workers in conflict zones.

Timeline of Key Events:

- 1977 - Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions of 1949
- 19. 8. 2003 - Canal Hotel bombing in Iraq
- December 2008 - UN Security Council resolution 1863
- 2. 6. 2004 - MSF Ambush in Afghanistan
- 13. 10. 2011 - Dadaab Refugee Camp attack in Kenya
- 11. 6. 2016 - Attack on Terrain Hotel in South Sudan
- 9.10.2023 - Establishment of a total blockade of Gaza

Previous attempts to Solve the Issue:

Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols- The Geneva Conventions are international humanitarian laws primarily created by the ICR. They are made of four treaties and three additional protocols and cover the international legal standard for humanitarian treatment in war. Their content specifically addresses and establishes the protection of humanitarian aid workers in conflict zones. Without regard for race, color, sex, religion, birth, or wealth, they safeguard the wellbeing of medical workers, wounded soldiers, and prisoners of war. The established protocols

came into play, for example, during non-international armed conflicts such as the Russo-Georgian war or the Iraq war.39

2005 Humanitarian Reform Agenda- This agenda led by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs focused on the improved coordination of humanitarian aid. The new organization enhanced the safety of aid workers and the effectiveness of humanitarian response. It promoted cluster approach, which works on the basis of establishing a leadership for each sector that the mission covers like for example health, food security and hygiene. This leadership is constructed from a combination of relevant NGOs and UN agencies. The Humanitarian Reform Agenda improved the cooperation of UN aid workers with NGOs. This effort was followed up by the 2011 Transformative Agenda, which expanded on the cluster approach. Since then, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has been producing reports detailing present conditions that provide a wider understanding of this initiative's impact.40

UN Security Council resolution 1863- This resolution was passed in 2008. Focusing on the situation in Somalia, it attempted to answer the question of how to carry out safe and unhindered humanitarian assistance. The document, now accessible in the United Nations digital library, emphasizes the need for the protection of humanitarian workers. It establishes a United Nations peacekeeping mission that would be well resourced and assist the newly authorized AMISOM (African Union mission in Somalia). The resolution called for international efforts to provide support for the safeguarding efforts that would improve the accessibility and safety of aid workers in this conflict.

2016 World Humanitarian Summit- Held in Turkey by the UN, this event explored how to improve and enhance leadership and aid delivery in and out of conflict areas, deepen cooperations with active NGOs, and make use of modern technology to upgrade the safety and level of humanitarian responses. It tackled the issue of the increasing demand for limited resources in armed conflicts. The summit linked together representatives of governments, prominent NGOs, and even members of the private sector. Combining their insights, "The Grand Bargain41", which granted more favorable costs for life-essential materials needed in humanitarian missions, was established. Additionally, attention was brought to new innovative drones, and how they could be efficiently used to ensure a safe delivery of humanitarian aid for all involved parties as well as surveillance.

Questions a Resolution Should Answer:

How can the international humanitarian law (IHL) be strengthened in order to make the operations of aid workers in conflict zones more secure?

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39 Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols | Wex | US Law | LII / Legal Information Institute.

40 IASC Transformative Agenda
41 The Grand Bargain (Official website) | IASC

How can country governments cooperate with non-profit organizations to ensure better safety for aid workers in conflict areas?

How can advanced technology be used to create a safer environment for aid workers?

What are the boundaries of communication and diplomacy with armed groups in areas of conflict?

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