BACKGROUND GUIDE

SOCHUM

Social, Cultural & Humanitarian Commitee

INDEX

LETTER FROM THE EB

Dear Delegates,
We as the Executive Board are delighted to welcome each one of you. For many it may be the first ever MUN conference in your educational experience, and we strongly encourage you to go through the study guide that has been prepared for you as a part of the conference to get an in-depth understanding of the issue that will be discussed in the committee. Youth radicalization in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is a critical issue with far-reaching implications. The region has seen a significant number of young individuals drawn into extremist ideologies, leading to instability, violence, and hindering development. Understanding and addressing this issue is crucial for several reasons, including security, stability, youth empowerment and the protection of human rights. As the delegates of your respective countries, it is your responsibility to figure out the root causes and come up with creative solutions, preventive measures, reintegration methods all while analysis various case studies and international legalities involved. This background guide should be used solely as a basis for your research, and not as your primary source. There is a lot of content available beyond the study guides too. You are expected to research, collate, list down possible points of discussions, questions and plausible responses and be prepared to enjoy the intellectual energy in the group. At the same time, it is not only about speaking and presenting, but very importantly it is also about the ability to listen, understand viewpoints and learn from each one's perspectives. Please feel free to contact any one of us at any time during or before the conference if any assistance is required. Wishing all of you a great learning experience. Looking forward to having you with us.
Best wishes,
The Executive Board

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HISTORY AND MANDATE

The Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, commonly known as SOCHUM (Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee), is one of the six main committees of the UN General Assembly. SOCHUM addresses a broad range of issues related to social, humanitarian, and cultural matters, with a strong focus on human rights. SOCHUM was established in 1947, shortly after the formation of the United Nations in 1945. It was part of the UN's broader effort to address a wide range of global issues, including those related to human rights, social development, and cultural preservation. In its early years, SOCHUM focused on the protection and promotion of human rights. This included issues such as the rights of refugees, the abolition of slavery, and the promotion of social development. Over time, the scope of SOCHUM's work expanded to include awide array of social and humanitarian issues. This reflected the evolving understanding of human rights and the need to address various social challenges facing different populations around the world. During the Cold War, SOCHUM became a forum for ideological battles between the Eastern and Western blocs. Issues related to human rights and social development were often debated within the context of these broader geopolitical tensions. After the end of the Cold War, SOCHUM's work gained renewed focus on global cooperation to address social and humanitarian issues. The committee's work began to include more collaborative efforts on issues like sustainable development, the rights of indigenous peoples, and the promotion of cultural diversity.

INTRODUCTION TO AGENDA

Youth radicalization is a significant challenge in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, posing a threat to regional stability, security, and development. This phenomenon involves the adoption of extremist ideologies by young individuals, potentially leading them to engage in violent activities. The MENA region, with its unique socio-political dynamics, requires tailored strategies to address the complex factors contributing to youth radicalization.

Socio-economic disparities, political instability, and a lack of opportunities are major drivers of radicalization in the MENA region. Many young people face unemployment, poverty, and a sense of disenfranchisement, making them vulnerable to extremist groups that promise a sense of purpose and belonging. Addressing these root causes through economic development, job creation, and social inclusion is essential to prevent radicalization.

Education is a powerful tool in countering extremist ideologies. In the MENA region, it is crucial to promote educational reforms that emphasize critical thinking, tolerance, and respect for diversity. By fostering environments that encourage dialogue and understanding, schools can play a pivotal role in steering young people away from radical influences. Additionally, providing vocational training and higher education opportunities can help empower youth and reduce their susceptibility to radicalization.

Community engagement is also vital in combatting youth radicalization. Local communities, religious leaders, and civil society organizations must work together to create support networks and positive alternatives for young people. Initiatives such as mentorship programs, sports activities, and cultural events can help build resilience against extremist ideologies by fostering a sense of belonging and purpose.

Mental health support is another critical component. Many young individuals drawn to radical ideologies are grappling with personal issues, such as trauma or identity struggles. Providing accessible mental health services and support networks can address these underlying vulnerabilities, reducing the risk of radicalization.

The internet and social media are significant platforms for radicalization in the MENA region. Extremist groups exploit these digital spaces to recruit and indoctrinate young people. Implementing robust online monitoring and counter-narrative strategies is essential. Governments, tech companies, and civil society must collaborate to identify and dismantle extremist content while promoting positive and constructive online interactions.

In conclusion, combatting youth radicalization in the MENA region requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach. By focusing on socio-economic development, educational reforms, community engagement, mental health support, and online vigilance, the region can protect its youth from the lure of extremism and build a foundation for a more peaceful and secure future.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is renowned for its historical significance, being the birthplace of some of the world's earliest civilizations and major world religions.The MENA region saw the rise of influential ancient civilizations, such as Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq) and Ancient Egypt. These societies contributed significantly to human history through innovations in writing, law, and architecture.Following the spread of Islam in the 7th century, the region experienced a golden age from the 8th to the 14th century. This era was marked by substantial advancements in science, medicine, mathematics, and literature, with cities like Baghdad and Cordoba becoming centers of learning and culture. The region was largely unified under the Ottoman Empire from the 14th century until the early 20th century. The Ottoman rule brought a degree of stability and saw a flourishing of the arts and architecture. The decline of the Ottoman Empire and subsequent European colonization in the 19th and early 20th centuries significantly altered the political landscape. Countries like Britain and France imposed artificial borders and established mandates, leading to long-term political and social challenges. The mid-20th century witnessed a wave of independence movements across the MENA region. Countries gradually gained independence from colonial powers, leading to the establishment of new nation-states. During the Cold War, the MENA region became a strategic arena for the United States and the Soviet Union. This period also saw the rise of Arab nationalism and leaders like Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, who promoted pan-Arab unity. Since the creation of Israel in 1948, the region has been marked by ongoing conflict and wars between Israel and its Arab neighbors, leading to significant political and social repercussions.

YOUTH RADICALIZATION IN MENA REGION

Radicalization leading to violent extremism (RLVE) is a complex process in which individuals or groups adopt extreme ideologies and engage in or support violent actions to achieve political, ideological, or religious goals. Understanding and addressing RLVE involves examining its drivers, stages, and strategies for prevention and intervention. Radicalization is the process by which individuals or groups come to adopt extreme political, social, or religious ideologies that oppose or reject the status quo and mainstream ideas. It often involves a gradual shift towards more radical views. Violent extremism refers to the beliefs and actions of individuals who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious, or political goals. This can include terrorism and other forms of politically motivated violence.

REASONS FOR YOUTH RADICALIZATION IN MENA REGION

Youth radicalization in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is driven by a complex interplay of socio-economic, political, and cultural factors. Understanding these drivers is crucial for developing effective strategies to counter radicalization and prevent violent extremism. Here are the key reasons for youth radicalization in the MENA region

- **Political Instability and Conflict:**

Many countries in the MENA region have experienced prolonged political instability, civil wars, and conflicts, such as in Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Iraq. These environments of chaos and lawlessness create fertile ground for extremist groups to recruit disaffected youth.

- **Authoritarianism and Repression:**

Authoritarian regimes and repressive governments often limit political freedoms and civil liberties, leading to frustration and a lack of legitimate political outlets for grievances. This can push some young people towards radical ideologies that promise change through violent means.

- **High Unemployment and Economic Marginalization:**

The MENA region has some of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world. Lack of job opportunities and economic disenfranchisement can lead to feelings of hopelessness and frustration, making extremist ideologies that promise socio-economic change more appealing.

- **Poverty and Inequality:**

Economic disparities and widespread poverty exacerbate social tensions and contribute to feelings of marginalization and exclusion. Young people from impoverished backgrounds may be more susceptible to radicalization as they seek to improve their circumstances or express their grievances.

- **Lack of Educational Opportunities:**

Inadequate access to quality education and vocational training leaves many young people without the skills needed for employment and critical thinking. This lack of education can make them more vulnerable to extremist propaganda and recruitment.

- **Corruption and Governance Failures:**
Widespread corruption, nepotism, and lack of accountability in government institutions erode trust in the state and create a sense of injustice. Disillusionment with ineffective and corrupt governance can drive youth towards radical movements that claim to offer a more just and fair system.

- **Identity and Belonging:**
Many young people in the MENA region struggle with identity issues and a sense of belonging. Extremist groups often provide a sense of purpose and community, offering young recruits an identity and a cause to fight for.

- **Cultural Marginalization and Discrimination:**
Perceived or real marginalization of certain ethnic, religious, or cultural groups can lead to feelings of resentment and alienation. Extremist ideologies that emphasize resistance and empowerment can be attractive to marginalized youth.

- **Religious Influences:**
Misinterpretations or extremist interpretations of religious texts can play a role in radicalizing youth. Extremist groups exploit religious sentiments and manipulate religious teachings to justify violence and recruit followers.

- **Trauma and Psychological Distress:**
Exposure to violence, trauma, and loss, especially in conflict zones, can lead to psychological distress and a desire for revenge or change. Extremist groups often exploit these emotions to radicalize and recruit young people.

- **Sense of Injustice and Revenge:**
Personal or community experiences of perceived injustice, such as state violence, discrimination, or foreign intervention, can foster a desire for revenge and drive individuals towards radical ideologies that advocate violent responses.

- **Global Jihadist Networks:**

International extremist organizations like ISIS and Al-Qaeda actively recruit youth from the MENA region, using sophisticated online propaganda and local networks. These groups exploit local grievances and global jihadist narratives to attract recruits

- **Foreign Interventions:**

Military interventions by foreign powers, such as the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, can exacerbate local grievances and contribute to radicalization. The presence of foreign troops and the collateral damage from military operations can be used by extremist groups to gain support.

- **Social Media and Online Propaganda:**

Extremist groups use social media and online platforms to spread their ideologies, recruit new members, and coordinate activities. The internet allows these groups to reach a broad audience, including disenfranchised youth, and to create a sense of virtual community.

- **Exposure to Violent Content:**

Continuous exposure to violent content and propaganda through media can desensitize youth to violence and normalize extremist ideologies, making them more likely to engage in or support violent actions.

Addressing youth radicalization in the MENA region requires a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach that tackles the root causes and provides positive alternatives for young people. Strategies should focus on improving political governance, creating economic opportunities, enhancing access to quality education, fostering social cohesion, and providing psychosocial support. By addressing these underlying factors, it is possible to reduce the appeal of extremist ideologies and build more resilient and inclusive societies.

ACTION TAKEN BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO COMBAT YOUTH RADICALIZATION

The international community has taken numerous actions to combat youth radicalization, including discussions and resolutions by the United Nations (UN). These efforts are aimed at addressing the root causes of radicalization and implementing comprehensive strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism. Here are some key actions and initiatives:

The UN General Assembly adopted the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which includes measures to address conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. This strategy emphasizes the importance of addressing issues like prolonged unresolved conflicts, dehumanization of victims of terrorism, lack of rule of law, and socio-economic marginalization.

This landmark resolution focuses on Youth, Peace, and Security. It recognizes the positive role young people play in maintaining and promoting international peace and security.

The resolution calls for increasing the participation of youth in decision-making at all levels and ensuring that they are actively engaged in shaping sustainable peace. It also urges Member States to provide youth with educational and economic opportunities to prevent radicalization.

Resolution 2354 endorses a comprehensive international framework to counter terrorist narratives, which includes countering violent extremism and the role of youth. The resolution stresses the importance of addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and calls for enhanced cooperation among Member States to develop effective counter-narratives.

Developed by the UN Secretary-General, this plan of action calls for a comprehensive approach to preventing violent extremism. It includes recommendations on promoting education, skill development, and employment opportunities for youth, as well as fostering social inclusion and addressing grievances that drive radicalization. The plan emphasizes the need to engage youth as partners in preventing violent extremism.

This resolution focuses on the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and addresses the need for Member States to develop strategies for dealing with returning and relocating FTFs, including through rehabilitation and reintegration programs. It highlights the importance of providing support to youth to prevent their radicalization and recruitment by terrorist groups. This resolution reviews the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and reaffirms the importance of addressing conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. It calls for Member States to develop national and regional strategies that address factors such as lack of education, unemployment, and social marginalization, which can contribute to youth radicalization.

GCERF is a global fund dedicated to supporting local initiatives to strengthen community resilience against violent extremism. It funds projects that provide education, vocational training, and community engagement activities aimed at preventing radicalization, particularly among youth.

The GCTF is an informal, multilateral platform that promotes a strategic, long-term approach to countering terrorism and violent extremism. It has developed several good practices and frameworks, including initiatives focused on youth engagement, education, and community resilience.

UNESCO works to prevent violent extremism through education by promoting global citizenship education, which aims to instill values of peace, tolerance, and mutual understanding in young people. UNESCO's initiatives focus on enhancing critical thinking, media literacy, and intercultural dialogue.

Based in Abu Dhabi, Hedayah is an international center of excellence for countering violent extremism. It works on capacity-building, research, and dialogue to develop and disseminate good practices for preventing radicalization, particularly among youth.

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CASE STUDIES

Syria

The Syrian conflict began in 2011 following pro-democracy protests against President Bashar al-Assad's regime. The peaceful demonstrations quickly turned into a full-scale civil war involving various factions, including the Syrian government, opposition forces, Kurdish groups, and extremist organizations such as ISIS and Al-Nusra Front.

Decades of authoritarian rule and violent suppression of dissent created widespread discontent.The conflict deepened sectarian divides, particularly between the Sunni majority and the Alawite-led government.Various international actors, including the US, Russia, Iran, and Turkey, have intervened, complicating the conflict and providing opportunities for extremist groups to recruit.

Over 500,000 deaths and millions displaced, creating a massive refugee crisis. Destruction of infrastructure and the economy, leading to widespread poverty and unemployment.The chaos has allowed extremist groups to gain footholds and recruit disaffected youth.

Efforts include multiple UN resolutions for ceasefires and peace negotiations, though success has been limited. Significant international humanitarian aid, though access remains challenging due to ongoing conflict.

Yemen

Yemen's conflict intensified in 2015 when Houthi rebels, backed by Iran, took over the capital, Sanaa, prompting a Saudi-led coalition to intervene in support of the internationally recognized government. The conflict has resulted in a complex humanitarian disaster.

Longstanding political fragmentation and weak state institutions.The Sunni-Shia divide, exacerbated by regional power struggles between Saudi Arabia and Iran.High poverty and unemployment levels, especially among youth.

Over 24 million people in need of assistance, with widespread famine and disease.

Significant use of child soldiers by various factions, impacting youth severely.The conflict has created a power vacuum exploited by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIS.

Initiatives like the Stockholm Agreement aimed at ceasefires and humanitarian access. Efforts by international organizations to provide aid, though hindered by blockades and ongoing fighting.

Libya

Following the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that toppled Muammar Gaddafi, Libya descended into chaos with competing factions and militias vying for power. The country remains divided between the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Libyan National Army (LNA).

The collapse of central authority and the proliferation of armed groups.Historical tribal and regional rivalries intensified by the conflict.Destruction of the oil-dependent economy, leading to unemployment and poverty.

Libya has become a hub for human trafficking and arms smuggling. Frequent clashes leading to significant civilian deaths and displacement.Extremist groups like ISIS have exploited the instability to establish a presence.

Facilitating peace talks and efforts to establish a unified government. Efforts like the Berlin Conference to bring stakeholders together for a political solution.

Iraq

Iraq has faced continuous conflict since the 2003 US-led invasion. The rise of ISIS in 2014 marked a new phase of violence, especially in Sunni-majority areas. Despite military defeats, ISIS remnants and sectarian tensions persist.

Shia-Sunni tensions exacerbated by government policies and external interventions.Longstanding resentment towards foreign troops and interventions by regional powers.High unemployment, corruption, and lack of services.

Millions displaced and significant portions of the country in ruins. Ongoing threat from ISIS and other extremist groups despite military victories. Continuous cycles of violence and lack of opportunities drive youth towards extremism.

International military efforts led by the US to combat ISIS.International support for rebuilding infrastructure and providing humanitarian aid, though progress is slow.

The international community has engaged in various efforts to address the conflicts and prevent youth radicalization in these war-torn countries. Addressing the root causes of instability, fostering inclusive governance, and providing socio-economic opportunities for the youth are essential for long-term peace and stability in the MENA region.

QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

When drafting a resolution to address the agenda of combating youth radicalization in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, it is essential to answer several critical questions. These questions should focus on understanding the causes, identifying the target groups, outlining effective measures, and ensuring sustainable and inclusive implementation. Here are the key questions a resolution must answer:

- What are the root causes of youth radicalization in the MENA region?

- Who are the target groups for the interventions?

- What are the key objectives of the resolution?

- What measures and strategies will be implemented to combat youth radicalization?

- What role will different stakeholders play in the implementation of the resolution?

- How will the effectiveness of the resolution be monitored and evaluated?

- What are the potential challenges and risks, and how will they be mitigated?

- How will sustainability be ensured for long-term impact?