2024 - 2025
Model Arab League
BACKGROUND GUIDE

Council of Arab Social Affairs Ministers

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Honorable Delegates,

It is my great honor to welcome you to the 2024-25 Council of Arab Social Affairs Ministers. My name is Rebecca "Bex" Little, and I'm humbled to be serving as your chair this year. I am looking forward to leading discussions and facilitating thoughtful debate at this year's national conference. I am a senior at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock double majoring in Political Science and Nursing with a minor in Legal Studies. This is my third year participating in the National Model Arab League, and my first year as a committee chair. I am looking forward to seeing what diverse perspectives and facts are brought forth in debate and how these debates will evolve to produce thoughtful resolutions.

It is my hope that this background guide will act as a foundation for your research, but also serve as a tool to inspire and facilitate further research and produce healthy debate. Preparation is the key to success. You do not need to know every fact on every topic, but having a foundational knowledge of the topics and the impacts they have on the Arab world will ensure a healthy debate and success within the conference. Understanding your nation's perspectives, beliefs, and ideals is of the utmost importance, and delivering these perspectives while staying "in character" is paramount. Be creative in your problem-solving of the issues while maintaining the integrity of the nation that you represent. It is important to keep in mind that every delegate may not agree with every resolution, and that is ok. These differences of opinion are what help to foster healthy debate. Resolutions should be fully-realized and well rounded, and address the complexity of the issues presented. Under no circumstances should any resolution be pre-written. This is an opportunity to hone our diplomacy skills. Pre-written language not only hinders your opportunity to grow but also hinders your colleagues' learning experience. In the event there is any pre-written language added to resolutions it will be addressed with the national council.

In the spirit of friendly competition, it is imperative that the debates that do occur remain free of any biased or bigoted behavior. Like the Arab League, this committee is made up of persons of various beliefs and backgrounds. Any bigoted behavior, including but not limited to racism, sex or gender discrimination, Islamophobia, antisemitism, ableism, or otherwise WILL NOT be tolerated within this committee. This committee will be a safe space for all those who enter it.

I look forward to this year's competition season and seeing you all in D.C.

Humbly,
Rebecca "Bex" Marie Little

Topic I: Examining the impact that conflict has on women's access to medical care and menstrual health products, focusing on Internally Displaced People and refugees.

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

Menstrual health is a vital part of women's healthcare - not only affecting reproductive health but also affecting mental, emotional, and general physical health. Ineffective or poor menstrual hygiene can have dire impacts and create serious health risks such as infertility, birth complications, and urinary tract infections that can exacerbate these issues. Poor general hygiene, as it intersects with menstrual health, can contribute to the spread of other illnesses such as HepB[1]. According to the World Health Organization migrants and/or refugees are some of the most vulnerable members of society and face some of the most inadequate and restrictive access to healthcare.[2] These affected persons are frequently from areas of conflict and face increased exposure to communicable diseases, food and water borne diseases, hypothermia, burns, unwanted pregnancy and delivery complications, in addition to other non communicable diseases as a result of the migratory experience, while policies of the receiving nations also compound these risks as the policies can be exclusionary and restrictive especially towards women and girls.[3]

Advocating for and promoting access to menstrual health education and menstrual health products acts to ensure autonomy, dignity, and health privacy for women. This advocacy also helps to build social environments that give the female citizenry equal voices in their personal care and helps to foster an environment of nondiscrimination allowing women and girls personal choices about their futures.[4] It should come as no surprise that women who live in poorer regions and areas with less developed social structures and women who have become internally displaced or are refugees face even more adversity when it comes to accessing menstrual health resources and feminine hygiene products and thus experience the negative side effects even more. "This is exacerbated for women (including those with disabilities) who are positioned outside of normative constructs of the white, able, middle-class woman."[5]

In addition to the lack of access that can be attributed to socioeconomic status, taboos, stigmas, and other discriminatory social norms can further increase girls and women practicing

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[1] https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/water/brief/menstrual-health-and-hygiene
[2] https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/refugee-and-migrant-health
[3] Ibid.
[4] https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/water/brief/menstrual-health-and-hygiene
[5] Ibid.

unsafe personal hygiene practices. Studies also show that the provision of menstrual hygiene products significantly lowers cases of bacterial vaginosis and sexually transmitted infections.[6]

B. History in the Arab World

While the World Bank does not have the data on an exact number of refugee camps in the MENA region, they do report that there are over 9.1 million refugees in the Arab world.[7] However, there are 58 UNRWA camps housing approximately 2 million Palestinian refugees.[8] World Bank also reports that across the globe there are over 117 million forcibly displaced persons. Of which, 6 million are Palestinian refugees, 63.3 million are IDPs, and IDPS account for 53% of all forcibly displaced people with an estimate of 13.7 million displaced within their home country because of internal conflict.[9] According to UNHCR, women and girls make up approximately 50% of *any* refugee, or IDP, and are increasingly vulnerable to discrimination and violence because of their gender.[10]

Period poverty, or the lack of access to safe and hygienic menstrual products is an increasing problem in the Arab world. The problem is rooted in misogynistic taboos, patriarchal social norms, and stigmas that lead to shame, fear, and an ultimate lack of education about one's body and how to properly provide personal hygiene to oneself. This lack of personal hygiene education leads to unsafe sanitary practices such as using cloths, newspapers, and other items not intended for menstrual health such as period pad replacements, or using the same pad multiple times/days leading to infections and the spread of disease. Lack of access to female personal hygiene products also has intersectional consequences beyond physical health. UNICEF reports that 30% of girls are missing part or all of their schooling during their period, which highly impacts their educational success, 20% lack the necessary information on periods, and 20% of girls expressed the need for support to manage menstrual pain.[11]

It is known that women in poorer regions experience more adversity around menstrual health. This adversity is exacerbated when applied to internally displaced persons and refugees. Refugee and IDP camps lead to a lack of privacy and dignity that leads to mental health concerns.[12] Failing infrastructure, access to clean water, waste management, and clean facilities compound the issue. In spite of the issues surrounding menstrual healthcare programs designed

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[6] https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/6/11/e013229.full.pdf

[7] https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SM.POP.REFG?locations=1A

[8] https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping_palestinian_politics/refugee_camps/

[9] https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/forced-displacement

[10] https://www.unhcr.org/us/what-we-do/how-we-work/safeguarding-individuals/women

[11] https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/period-poverty#:~:text=30%25%20girls%20are%20missing%20some,an%20app%20to%20track%20cycles.

[12] https://www.arabnews.com/node/2317076/middle-east

to support menstrual healthcare in the Arab world are facing funding cuts.[13] During major humanitarian crises and times of conflict when food, medical aid, and shelter is the priority - menstrual health gets overlooked and refugees and IDPs are impacted the most. The health crisis that women face around their menstrual health then increases the risk of other infections and health concerns. These health concerns then act as inhibitors for women and girls being able to reintegrate into society by limiting access to training and educational programs.[14] The lack of access has far-reaching and long-lasting implications on not only physical health, but mental health, educational outcomes, social integrations, and even economic ramifications.

C. Finding Solutions to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

Menstrual health has been an ongoing problem in the Middle East for several decades, and is only getting worse. The issues around safe and affordable menstrual care are rooted in social stigmas, religious beliefs, and economic disadvantages. While menstrual health, or menstruation is absolutely natural and a necessity for reproduction it has been continually overlooked as an important health issue in the Middle East and made worse by attitudes toward women's healthcare. According to the World Bank, more than 500 million women lack access to menstrual products and menstrual health facilities.[15] This lack of access has only increased in Gaza, where due to the ongoing crisis, access to safe and clean menstrual products has become even more scarce in an already struggling geographical region. Significant change must begin now. Women's lives depend on it.

The catalyst for this change is multi-tiered, thus the solutions delegates propose will also be multifaceted, should promote interleague dialogue, and aid in fostering relationships that help mitigate the crisis. Delegates should be mindful in their resolutions of other states' financial limitations and the existing struggle they are facing as it relates to refugees and IDPs, especially pertaining to women and girls.

Things to consider in creating solutions are individual nations populations, GDPs, existing refugee percentages, and social perspectives toward women and menstrual health. Educational programs, increased accessibility to menstrual products, access to safe and clean water, and other interleague health initiatives could be potential considerations in helping mitigate this crisis while coming up with unilateral "best practices" to implement solutions. Within the MENA region, approximately 100 million children do not have access to clean water, and three out of ten homes don't have basic hand washing facilities.[16]It is imperative that even more attention should be paid to parts of the region experiencing political unrest or war, as women and girls are even more affected by period poverty in those areas. In Gaza alone, 700

[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/water/brief/menstrual-health-and-hygiene
[16] https://www.anera.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/OTG-Period-Poverty-Gaza-Lebanon.pdf

million menstruating women and girls have been displaced and there is a monthly need for 10 million disposable pads.[17]

II.   Questions to Consider in Your Research

- How can countries overcome stigmas and improve education around menstrual health?
- How can countries improve access to menstrual health products, especially in poorer regions and conflict zones?
- What actions can be taken to help curb the increasing infection rates among women and girls due to poor menstrual hygiene access and education?
- What are the driving forces that feed into the gender-based disparities women and girls face, especially as it relates to menstrual health?

III.   Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- How is a balance between privacy, autonomy, and social norms with menstrual health education?
- How do we access and improve the outcomes of promoting safe and equitable menstrual health education?
- How to equitably allocate menstrual health resources so that those with the most need, especially refugees and IDPs are not overlooked?
- What social initiatives could be implemented to allow refugee and IDP women and girls access to period products to better assist in their reintegration into society?

IV.   Additional Resources

https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/6/11/e013229.full.pdf
Publication written by Penelope A Phillips-Howard, et al. based on a study of how a lack of access to menstrual products can negatively impact girls in their educational pursuits and increase their exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, and how to combat these negative impacts.

https://theconversation.com/dirty-red-how-periods-have-been-stigmatised-through-history-to-the-modern-day-206967#:~:text=Another%20example%20of%20the%20stigmatisation,woman%20as%20%E2%80%9Cin%20season%E2%80%9D.
Article on how menstrual health and periods have been stigmatized throughout history, and the culture of shame that is often associated with menstruation.

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[17] Ibid.

https://www.anera.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/OTG-Period-Poverty-Gaza-Lebanon.pdf
An article on period poverty, by ANERA (American Near East Refugee Aid), and the challenges that women and girls face in the MENA region and solutions to combat these challenges head on.

https://www.arabnews.com/node/2317076/middle-east
This is a report on how lack of access to menstrual hygiene products deepens gender inequalities in the Middle East for women and girls.

https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/period-poverty#:~:text=30%25%20girls%20are%20missing%20some,an%20app%20to%20track%20cycles.
This is a synopsis, with an attached full pdf, of issues surrounding menstrual health education and access to period products for children in the MENA region. This article shows the negative impacts of period poverty on young girls, but also how a lack of education can impact young boys.

https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/water/brief/menstrual-health-and-hygiene#resources
This article highlights how essential menstrual health and hygiene is to the empowerment of women and young girls. A holistic approach to combating period poverty is provided as well as highlighting priority areas of improvement. There are also numerous links to other article and resources to build on your research.

Topic II: Identifying and mitigating youth radicalization and extremism through League-wide efforts, and establishing social tactics to prevent or counter them.

I.   **Introduction to the Topic**

A. **General Background**

Merriam-Webster defines *radicalization* as, "to make radical especially in politics"[18] and defines *radical* to be "3: a) very different from the usual or traditional, b) favoring extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions, c) associated with political views, practices and policies of extreme change, d) advocating extreme measures to retain or restore a political state of affairs."[19] *Extremism* is defined by Merriam-Webster as, "1: the quality or state of being extreme, 2: advocacy of extreme measures or views; radicalism"[20], and *extreme* is defined as "1b: going to great or exaggerated lengths; radical."[21] With these definitions acting as a baseline and guide, for the purposes of the National and Regional conferences I have formulated a more definitive definition. The delegates in the Council on Arab Social Affairs Ministers will define "radicalization" as an individual adopting increasingly extreme political, social, or religious ideals and beliefs and the processes in which this occurs. "Extremism" will be defined as the holding, advocation, and/or promotion of violence, discrimination, hatred, or intolerance-based ideologies whose goals and aims are to eradicate the fundamental freedoms of others. This should hopefully create consistency in everyone's understanding of how radicalization and extremism is to be interpreted and help guide you in your research.

Persons most susceptible to radicalization and extremism are youth between 15 (and perhaps even younger) to 24 years old[22], especially those from the poorest regions of society. Youth living in war-torn areas are especially susceptible to radicalization and extremism as they are more vulnerable due to the instability of the social structures of their area.[23] Radicalization and extremism can appear to provide a sense of security, belonging, and personal and social identity that they do not find in their regions due to failing governmental operations, social support, and infrastructure.[24] The instability of the region fuels the radicalization and extremism

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[18] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/radicalize

[19] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/radical

[20] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/extremism

[21] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/extreme

[22] https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth#:~:text=Who%20Are%20the%20Youth%3F,of%2015%20and%202024%20years.

[23] https://www.iemed.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Mapping-the-Drivers-of-Radicalization-and-Violent-Extremism-in-MENA-and-the-Balkans.pdf

[24] https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/mena/publication/mena-economic-monitor-fall-2016-economic-and-social-inclusion-to-prevent-violent-extremism

moving individuals to disapprove of any views outside of their own. Once "radicalized", extremist groups are often formed. The goal of these groups is to promote and advance their extreme ideas and to establish governments with their extremist ideologies as the founding principles. These groups flourish off of the recruitment of youths by disseminating propaganda that is aimed at the youth population promoting the promise of a better life and circumstances, and reinforcing the idea that their current circumstances are the cause of inaction by "the enemy".[25]

B. History in the Arab World

We all can see the world changing around us, especially with technology. The way people are exposed to extremism and radicalization has not been immune to these changes, in fact, technology and access to information have made radicalization even easier. The Middle East has not gone untouched by these technological advancements and its intersectionality with extremism and radicalization. While it is true that youth and marginalized people are more susceptible to radicalization and extremism, now anyone with technological access is a potential victim as well. On one hand, it can be hard to determine just how much of an impact technology has on youth radicalization as most reports on radicalization are based on history, yet on the other hand we know that groups such as ISIS utilized social media in their radicalization campaigns.[26]

The history of extremism and radicalization, and their impact across the league can be attributed to numerous social conflicts and/or uprisings such as The Arab Spring, the ongoing war in Gaza, food and water scarcity, and terrorist organizations such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda.[27] Extremism and radicalization undermine the human rights of the entire region. The peace and security so many that are radicalized are seeking is actually what is being most threatened. This breach of security leads to further social deterioration.[28] Religion also plays a role in youth radicalization and extremism. Many of the violent extremist groups are associated with radical Islamic ideology with a focus on youth radicalization and an increase in public support.[29] One

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https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Child-Victims/Handbook_on_Children_Recruited_and_Exploited_by_Terrorist_and_Violent_Extremist_Groups_the_Role_of_the_Justice_System.E.pdf
[26] https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260382
[27]

https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/future-violent-extremism-middle-east#:~:text=March%2023%20marked%20two%20years%20since%20the,attacks%2C%20assassinations%20and%20bombings%20in%20Iraq%20and
[28]

https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2023/December/youth-led-action-to-prevent-terrorism-and-violent-extremism.html
[29]

https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/countering-radicalization-and-violent-extremism-through-policing-africa#:~:text=According%20to%20a%20United%20States,%2C%20conflict%2C%20and%20organized%20crime.

primary goal among "religious based" violent extremist groups is to impose "sharia law" throughout the region and eliminate secular states.[30] Not only is this harmful to the nations in the MENA region but also acts as a catalyst of bias and discrimination on a larger scale toward those who practice the Islamic faith. With the continued deterioration of the social setting in war-torn countries and areas in crisis, radicalization and extremism becomes cyclical even though most youth reject the notion.[31]

C. Finding Solutions to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

There is an old saying "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure", in other words, a little bit of prevention can go a long way. Taking preemptive measures by developing social programs and increasing education on extremism and radicalization is an ideal place to start to address the issue. Education on the realities of extremism and radicalization and the empty promises that they promote is necessary to combat the crisis. As previously mentioned, youth, refugees, and IDPs are the most at risk of being radicalized and it is known that issues such as food and water scarcity, overcrowding, poverty, lack of personal opportunity and growth, and even the actions of the nation-state accepting refugees can seriously increase the likelihood of radicalization and extremism if the individuals needs are not being met and if there is a lack of social programs to help assist in meeting these needs.[32]

Taking all of these impacts into consideration, a direct plan of prevention must be put in place. One of the biggest priorities for radicalized persons is security which is often related to financial independence. Creating job training opportunities for youth, refugees, and UDPS should be thoroughly considered. Creating rehabilitation and reintegration programs for those impacted by radicalization and extremism is vital to a stable social structure in the region.[33] Alternatives to extremism must exist to effectively combat it.

Attention should be placed on conflict zones and regions facing the most dire circumstances. Implementing strategies and programs to combat food and water scarcity, positive increases in educational outcomes, empowering women and girls, and the promotion of inclusivity and respect of diversity is of the utmost importance, as deficits in these areas are catalysts for the youth radicalization and extremism crisis.[34]

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[30] Ibid.

[31] https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2023/December/youth-led-action-to-prevent-terrorism-and-violent-extremism.html

[32] https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE166.html

[33] https://hedayah.com/work/mena-region/

[34] https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Discussion%20Paper%20-%20Preventing%20Violent%20Extremism%20by%20Promoting%20Inclusive%20%20Development.pdf

II.   Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What are the direct and indirect impacts that radicalization and extremism have had on the region? In your country specifically?
- Does your country have displaced persons and refugees or other groups who may be more prone to extremism or radicalization? Are there other populations that may be susceptible to radicalization that are being overlooked?
- Beyond poverty and/or general feelings of insecurity or unhappiness, what else could be contributing factors to radicalization and extremism?
- How do we create policies that directly combat radicalization on a league wide scale?

III.   Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- What league wide, trans-border, initiatives can address radicalization and extremism?
- Are there rehabilitation programs for those who have already been radicalized?
- Are communities that have been affected by radicalization and have faced its direct harms entitled to some sort of restitution?
- In an effort to mitigate the radicalization of youth, refugees, and IDPs, what policies can the league implement to make this a reality?

IV.   Additional Resources

https://hedayah.com/work/mena-region/
In this a website by Hedayah -The International Center of Excellence For Countering Extremism and Violent Extremism, that shows the various resources and programs they provide for the MENA region. Looking into these programs and resources could be a great tool to help develop additional resources for countering extremism.

https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260382
This is an article by UNESCO that discusses the impact that social media has had on youth and violent extremism.

https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE166.html
As refugees are even more susceptible to radicalization and violent extremism, this article looks at this issue with that perspective in mind, and how refugee radicalization can be diminished by studying past crises in the Middle East.

https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2023/December/youth-led-action-to-prevent-terrorism-and-violent-extremism.html

This is an article by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime highlighting youth awareness of how susceptible youth can be to radicalization and extremism and how youth are leading their own fight against youth radicalization and extremism.

Topic III: Exploring methods to promote cultural events, celebrations, and outreach to increase interest in Arab countries and culture both internationally and within the Arab League.

I.   Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

Culture and heritage are part of the foundation of all societies. Cultural diversity helps to foster environments where different outlooks, beliefs, and personal practices contribute to more peaceful societies. Utilizing cultural diversity in diplomatic relations can help strengthen interregional and international relationships, and be used as a tool for increased communication and awareness of social and cultural differences leading to more positive outcomes in diplomatic relationships.[35] The understanding and preservation of cultural and/or heritage projects (tangible artifacts and sites of historical significance that require preservation to maintain integrity and survival, as well as intangible heritage assets like linguistic, religious, and cultural histories that require ongoing education and social exposure for increased understanding) not only improves inter-Arab League understanding of the history of the Arab world, but shines a light on the Arab world across the globe.

An eye toward the Arab world and the culture, diversity, arts, natural resources and their preservation can increase nations revenue from increased tourism as global citizens become more aware of and eager to learn about the history of the Arab world. With a heightened interest in the Arab world, local economies will flourish as the distribution of culturally specific goods and services such as dry goods or spices, art, and entertainment increases. A heavy focus on cross-cultural outreach and the implementation and promotion of culturally specific events can help the member states reach diplomatic solutions while also preserving the heritage and promoting the history of the Arab League. According to UNESCO there are over 90 world heritage sites across the Arab League, and even more cultural and ancestral heritage.[36]

B. History in the Arab World

The Arab world and its inter-regional and international diplomatic relationships are greatly impacted by the histories and cultures of the region. Understanding the diversity within the Arab world and having mutual understandings of cultural differences fosters positive

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369373497_The_Role_of_Culture_and_Identity_in_International
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[36] https://www.unesco.org/en/world-heritage/grid?hub=68246

diplomatic relationships.[37] History shows us how much cultural understanding and acceptance can affect peace. Throughout the history of the Arab world there have been several conflicts that have been based on a lack of acceptance of cultural diversity and interest. A lack of understanding and acceptance of various cultural identities and the variations between ethnic and religious representations within, and outside of, the Arab region have led to inter-regional conflict. The Israeli-Palestinian war is perhaps the most current and highly visible example of the conflicts that can occur when a lack of cultural, ethnic, and religious identity collide with politics.[38]

Cultural tensions were a driving force between the Hutu and Tutsi groups that led to the Rwandan Genocide in 1994, and The Kashmir conflict between Pakistan and India is rooted in disagreements over regional claims and the intersectionality of religious culture.[39] Historically, a lack of understanding and interest in cultural, religious, ethnic and social variations have led to deeper social divides throughout the region, and thus created a breakdown in communication and effective diplomacy.[40] Increasing cultural understanding is the foundation to cultivating peace between diverse groups. The arts, music, film and literature can be agents of cultural diplomacy and tools for the promotion of understanding and inclusion. It is through educational programs and displaying various cultural identities that diplomacy and league wide unification can be reached.[41]

C. Finding Solutions to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

Implementing programs and initiatives to promote the various cultures,historical celebrations, historically significant artifacts and sites throughout the Arab region will not only act as a catalyst for interest in the Arab world but also as a tool for diplomacy and peace. In 1970 ALESCO (Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization) was formed with the purpose of promoting and improving Arab culture, arts, sciences, and language.[42]

Working alongside NGOs can also prove to be beneficial to the Arab League, in fact many well-known institutions host exhibitions and programs on Arab culture for their local communities. This education on Arab culture, art, and religion helps to cultivate an interest in Arab culture across the league and throughout the globe that promotes tolerance, inclusivity, and understanding.[43] Educational programs, such as Model Arab League, also act as a tool for the

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[37] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369373497_The_Role_of_Culture_and_Identity_in_International_Relations

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] https://www.alecso.org/nsite/en/component/content/article/814-who-are-we-v2?catid=63&Itemid=220

[43] https://www.arabnews.com/node/2361566

promotion and education of Arab culture. Previously Christie's in London, in collaboration with the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Culture and Youth and the Barjeel Art Foundation, held an exhibition that featured works by Arab artists that highlighted the Arab League's diverse political, artistic, and historical perspectives.[44] The Arab World Institute located in Paris, France also serves as a bridge between the Arab world and the rest of the globe allowing guests to be fully immersed in educational and artistic experiences to help further their understanding and appreciation of Arab culture.[45]

Foreign policy, and international diplomacy are greatly impacted by the interest generated in Arab culture. When environments of understanding and collaboration are nourished, intercultural dialogues and multilateral cooperation are improved, thus having positive impacts on important social issues.[46] Promoting cultural diversity and education through art, music, literature, and education helps develop an understanding of the history of the Arab League while also giving support to educational programs, creative endeavors, and fostering global citizenship. Promoting cultural events, celebrations, and outreach can also increase the value of national historical and cultural significance, therefore enhancing social inclusion and participation on a national and global scale.[47]

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What measures are currently in place within my country to promote and/or protect cultural heritage?
- What inter-regional efforts have been made to address cultural heritage preservation?
- How much of my country's GDP is from tourism and can that be increased?
- How do we maintain cultural interest toward the region during times of conflict so that tourism and social stimulation isn't negatively impacted?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- Can a baseline of what is or is not considered culturally significant be established?
- What protections can be implemented to ensure the protection and preservation of historically significant cultural sites and artifacts?

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[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46]
https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/cutting-edge-standing-out-reaching-out-cultural-diplomacy-sustainable-development
[47] Ibid.

- What penalty, if any, would be imposed if cultural artifacts and sites are damaged or destroyed, and who would be responsible for implementing these ramifications?
- How does the Arab League ensure that all member states receive equal and equitable protection of their states specific historically significant sites/artifacts?

IV. Additional Resources

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369373497_The_Role_of_Culture_and_Identity_in_International_Relations
This is an article on how Culture and Identity play a pivotal role in diplomatic relations and the challenges that come with cross-cultural exchanges. Cultural competency and sensitivity is highlighted, and how national identities affect foreign policy and international diplomacy are studied.

https://www.unesco.org/en/world-heritage/grid?hub=68246
This is a great resource from UNESCO of world heritage sites. You can narrow down your search by region and/or nation to look at the UNESCO registered historical sites that would be most pertinent to your country of representation. Your nation's government websites would be an ideal tool to use to find additional information on nation specific sites as well.

https://www.alecso.org/nsite/en/component/content/article/814-who-are-we-v2?catid=63&Itemid=220
ALESCO, The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization, is primarily concerned with activities in the Arab League related to culture, science, and education. There are many resources available at this site to help guide you in your research on culture and cross-cultural exchanges in the MENA region.

https://www.arabnews.com/node/2361566
Article by Sara Al-Mulla on how Arab culture can be promoted around the globe.

https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/cutting-edge-standing-out-reaching-out-cultural-diplomacy-sustainable-development
UNESCO article on cultural diplomacy and how the use of cultural diplomacy can be mutually beneficial for the countries involved while helping to create long term solutions.

Topic IV: Discussing ways to enhance and promote interfaith dialogue within the Arab League and in member states.

I. Introduction to the Topic

    A. General Background

        Religious based tensions in the Arab world are not new. The middle east has a history of religious conflict, with the region currently having the highest rates of religious conflict in the world.[48] Christians and other non-Muslim persons face increased persecution from other religious and social groups and the government.[49] The two main sects of Islam –Sunni and Shia– have remained at odds since the death of the Prophet Muhammed.[50] There is also the ongoing war between Israel and Palestine and their perceptions of land ownership/territorial rights based on religious ideology.

        While there are commonalities across the Arab League such as cultural practices, ethnicities, the Arab language, arts, and religion there is still a great divide among Arab nations that is founded in stereotypes and biases around these perceived commonalities. The divisiveness often leads to more violence, increased misunderstandings, instability in the region, and population displacement.[51] Interfaith dialogue and religion as a soft power can have a formidable impact on inter-League and international diplomacy, one primary example being the Abraham Accords.[52] In the Abraham Accords signatories agree to, and recognize, the importance of interfaith dialogue in the effort to promote a culture of peace between the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and the rest of the world, and that religious freedom and coexistence is vital to the strengthening of peace in the Middle East.[53]

        NGOs like IDPC (Interreligious Platform for Dialogue and Cooperation in the Arab World) are actively trying to bridge the gap between the various religions in the region and create open dialogues that lead to better understanding and acceptance of religious differences. IDPC's purpose is to advocate for every community in the Arab world to create a more peaceful region.[54] It is believed that interfaith dialogues can act as a catalyst for positive change in diplomatic

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[48]

https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2016/07/07/6-facts-about-religious-hostilities-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/
[49] Ibid.
[50] https://www.history.com/news/sunni-shia-divide-islam-muslim
[51]

https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2016/07/07/6-facts-about-religious-hostilities-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/
[52]

https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/interfaith-dialogue-in-the-united-arab-emirates-where-international-relations-meets-state-branding
[53] https://www.state.gov/the-abraham-accords/
[54]

https://www.kaiciid.org/what-we-do/we-convene/platform/interreligious-platform-dialogue-and-cooperation-arab-world-ipdc

relationships as long as citizens and faith leaders are willing to work across the lines of religious division.[55]

B. History in the Arab World

State sovereignty and nationalism have become important issues as the nations of the Middle East have become more independent and autonomous in their governance. While this national independence has allowed for prosperity for certain nations it has also fueled nationalism by increased discrimination against those with differing ethnic, cultural, and religious affiliations. With a specific focus on religion, most citizens in the Arab world are followers of Islam with the majority belonging to the Sunni sect and the minority belonging to the Shia sect.[56]

The ongoing conflict in Gaza has only made the religious tensions in the region worse. This conflict goes back to 1948 when the state of Israel was created thus causing the first Arab-Israeli war leaving 750,000 Palestinians displaced and a region culturally, geographically, and religiously divided.[57] The most recent Palestinian-Israeli conflict that began in October 2023 has left more than 85 percent, nearly two million Gazans, displaced and just under 40,000 Palestinians dead. Hamas, Hezbollah, ISIS, and the Houthis have become important military and political influences that create a constant threat on religious freedom in the Middle East.[58] The conflict surrounding Israel has gone on for decades and at one point all 22 member states of the Arab League committed to not deal with Israel in any capacity. This commitment has somewhat dissolved with the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1978, the Oslo Accord in 1993, and the Abraham Accords in 2020.[59]

C. Finding Solutions to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

Interfaith dialogue across the Arab League is a key component of unification and diplomacy for member states and a vital source for the promotion of peace.[60] Individual state governments working together with NGOs will help to improve interfaith conversations and lead to a deeper understanding of differing religious perspectives and faith based needs. Solutions should be mindful of state sovereignty while being open to the complexities of various views within the region. The UAE has tackled the issue of interfaith dialogue head on as this dialogue impacts international relationships and state-branding.[61] Interfaith dialogue as a form of diplomacy has also been utilized by Saudi Arabia with the creation of the KAICIID Dialogue Center (King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural

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[55] https://www.usip.org/publications/2007/03/crisis-interfaith-relations-middle-east

[56] https://www.history.com/news/sunni-shia-divide-islam-muslim

[57] https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/israeli-palestinian-conflict

[58] https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/explainer-roots-and-realities-10-conflicts-middle-east

[59] Ibid.

[60] https://www.arabnews.com/node/2284061

[61]
https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/interfaith-dialogue-in-the-united-arab-emirates-where-international-relations-meets-state-branding

Dialogue) in 2005. The late King Abdullah stated, "The Torah, the New Testament and the Qur'an all seek the well-being of humanity, and therefore it is our duty as believers to work together for the benefit of humanity."[62]

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What sect of Islam is most prevalent in my nation? (i.e. Sunni or Shia)
- What is my nation actively doing to promote interfaith dialogue within the region?
- Outside of Islam what other religions are practiced in my country?
- Are the citizens of my country able to practice their faith, whatever it may be, openly and freely?
- How do we address interfaith dialogue across the league while maintaining state sovereignty?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- How can the Arab League as a governing body, along with member states, work to create a system that promotes interfaith discussions?
- How can member states work to reduce religious based tensions and violence throughout the league?
- What measures can be put in place to aid in the acceptance of religious diversity across the region?

IV. Additional Resources

https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/interfaith-dialogue-in-the-united-arab-emirates-where-international-relations-meets-state-branding
This is an article by David H. Warren from the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University. Here there is a reflection on interfaith dialogue in the UAE and how religious diplomacy can be used as a "soft power" in foreign policy throughout the Arab World.

https://www.history.com/news/sunni-shia-divide-islam-muslim
This is an article presented by the History channel that gives the reader a better understanding of Islam's Sunni-Shia conflict. There is a look into the history of the religious division and how it is still impacting the Middle East today.

https://www.kaiciid.org/what-we-do/we-convene/platform/interreligious-platform-dialogue-and-cooperation-arab-world-ipdc

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[62] https://www.arabnews.com/node/2284061

The Interreligious Platform for Dialogue and Cooperation in the Arab World (IPDC) works to foster interfaith relationships within the Arab World by utilizing a large network of diverse religious communities whose common goal is to coexist peacefully.

https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2016/07/07/6-facts-about-religious-hostilities-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/
This is a short article by Pew Research Center giving brief facts about religious hostilities in the Middle East.

https://www.usip.org/publications/2007/03/crisis-interfaith-relations-middle-east
This is an older article, but still pertinent as the tensions around interfaith dialogue and religious peace in the Middle East are still existent, and interfaith cooperation is unsteady.