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YUNMUN XXX

Middle East Summit

Topic 1: Repatriation of Women and Children

Although ISIS has been mostly defeated throughout Iraq and Syria, the Middle East is still in many ways reeling from the aftermath and struggling to bounce back. One of the major issues that the international community must currently face is the myriad of women and children scattered across Europe and the Middle East, yearning to return to their home country.

When ISIS began to fight in the war in Syria and in Iraq, thousands of foreign fighters flocked to the tumultuous region to aid in the fighting¹ and along with them came their wives and children. Now, since the fighting is mostly over, their wives and the children they bore during the fighting desire to be repatriated to their original countries, or to be able to smoothly transition to living in new countries with full citizenship. In the meanwhile, many of these women and children are being detained in camps and prisons across eastern Syria, Iraq and Libya and are continuously suffering there. In fact, according to the New York Times, “in overflowing camps in eastern Syria, the wives and children of ISIS fighters who fled the last shreds of ISIS territory are dying of exposure, malnutrition and sickness. Children are too spent to speak. Women who have renounced the group live in dread of attacks from those who have not.”²

On the other hand, a percentage of the ISIS fighters *were*, in fact, women and children. Many children were involved as spies and bomb-planters, and sometimes as fighters or suicide bombers. ISIS employed women to enforce the caliphate’s morality brigade or, in some cases, utilize weapons in battle.³ These foreign fighters abandoned their loyalty to their original countries to support ISIS and even if some claim they were brain-washed, the residual feelings of perfidy remain.

Furthermore, many researchers and international journalists suspect that ISIS might be on the rise once again.⁴ If this is so, what if these women and/or children perform acts of terror in the future? What ensures that they are not going to act this way anymore or retract their repentance? It is the responsibility of a country to protect its citizens from any threat to individual and collective safety.

There are many issues that arise within this topic, leaving the international community to face a hefty challenge. Women and children have to leave their prison countries but simultaneously are rejected by their home countries. Many countries globally have revoked citizenship, rendering thousands stateless. While bringing them home could pose an obvious danger, so could abandoning them in the camps, leaving them desperate and disenfranchised. Where should they be welcome now?

This is the harsh dialectic that countries in and around the Middle East must acknowledge and balance: the value of embracing the right of everyone to return to their home country, without barriers; and the responsibility to ensure justice for the worst crimes committed in Syria and Iraq for those most responsible.

¹ <https://www.nber.org/digest/jun16/w22190.html>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/08/world/middleeast/isis-prisoners-children-women.html>

³ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/04/the-west-needs-to-take-the-politics-of-women-in-isis-seriously/>

⁴ <https://www.cnn.com/2019/03/05/middleeast/iraq-isis-return-intl/index.html>

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The following issues should be reflected upon and considered while researching the topic:

1. Is there a mechanism to determine which women and children have committed crimes/acts of terror? Is there an objective system to distinguish between who will and will not become a future threat?
2. What should the process of prosecuting those involved look like? Should they be receiving similar treatment to their male counterparts who were more active fighters?
3. How, if at all, should these women and children be received by their countries of origin?
4. What type of requirement of proof should there be to be allowed into their original country? If they should be allowed back in, what plans should be set in place to ensure that there will be no resurrection of their past behavior?
5. If they will not be let back in, how can their humanitarian rights be upheld properly? What steps should be taken to implement this?
6. Whichever stance and action your country intends to take, how does your country plan on countering the opposing arguments?

This is only a basic overview of the current controversy and I urge you to do your own research to familiarize yourself with the topic (for more extensive reports on the topic, feel free to read the International Center for the Study of Radicalization’s report in 2018⁵). There are many issues that must be addressed under the topic of repatriating women and children, with different countries addressing different issues. Do not limit your research only to the topics mentioned above; these will be the starting point of our discussion. Similarly, it is not necessary, nor advised, to mention all of these questions in your papers. It is important to remain truthful to your country and to research not only the topic, but also your country’s policies and experience in the war in Syria and with ISIS. Multiple resolutions can be passed on this topic; however, conflicting resolutions will not be allowed to pass. *Please remember that while sub-committees and sanctions can be helpful, they will not solve the problem on their own.*

I urge you to research this topic and your countries in depth so you can be prepared for the complex discussions we will be having. Please be sure to present your country’s position and be familiar with the guidelines listed in the YUNMUN Student Handbook, especially those regarding plagiarism, as each paper will be checked for plagiarism through Turnitin.

Best of luck,

Ellie Blanchard
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⁵<https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICSR-Report-From-Daesh-to-%E2%80%98Diaspora%E2%80%99-Tracing-the-Women-and-Minors-of-Islamic-State.pdf>