

YUNMUN XXX

Middle East Summit

Topic 2: Freedom of Speech in the Middle East

Within the foundational framework of the United Nations, there is an undeniable belief that the ability to exercise freedom of speech is essential for the continual success of the international community.¹ Media freedom and access to information “feeds into the wider development objective of empowering people... and helps people gain control over their own lives. This can only be achieved through access to accurate, fair and unbiased information, representing a plurality of opinions.”²

Simultaneously, however, there is a great danger in allowing any and every type of speech to be publicly circulated. Article Twenty of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights mandates that “[a]ny advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.”³ Furthermore, there has been research done that links the ‘free reign’ of speech to incitement of past genocides, such as those in Rwanda, Sri Lanka and Myanmar⁴.

Finding the delicate balance of maintaining the freedom of citizens and the stability of society has been an ongoing struggle for the international community as a whole and for the United Nations in particular.

This is particularly relevant to the Middle East Summit due to the recent fluctuant tension between many countries and their citizens. Moreover, over the past few years, there has been a skyrocketing number of instances making international headlines, further pushing this difficult but essential conversation to the forefront of the international conversation. Some of these occurrences include the death of Jamal Khashoggi in 2018,⁵ the shut down of Egyptian⁶ and Iranian social media,⁷ and the censorship of Qatar’s media outlets on behalf of Saudi Arabia and the UAE.⁸ Various laws have also been set in place in many Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq⁹ and Jordan.¹⁰

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

² <https://www.un.org/en/events/pressfreedomday/background.shtml>

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/06/technology/myanmar-facebook.html>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45812399>

⁶ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/egyptian-forces-arrest-1-300-people-after-anti-sisi-protests-11569428342>

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/02/technology/iran-protests-social-media.html>

⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/06/media-blocks-qatar-violate-free-speech-hrw-170614133625971.html>

⁹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/freedom-expression-threat-iraq-190305160511222.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/jordan>

This past year, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres delivered an address on this topic¹¹ and in it, vowed to soon present a “global plan of action on a fast-track basis” to counter hate speech around the world. This topic is on the forefront of the international conversation and must be addressed in order to preserve the values held so dear on either side of the tension.

The U.N. should and must fight the ever-present hate speech in the world today. Yet, simultaneously, caution must be taken. The more expansive that the definition and strength of enforcement of hate speech includes under international law, the more it generates an obvious and contemporary danger for freedom of expression that is already under global attack.

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

1. Where should the line be drawn between free speech and threatening discussion? Should it be a widespread definition or subjective based on the country?
2. What strategies should the Middle East, as a region, employ to successfully promote an environment that allows for adequate diversity of opinion?
3. Should countries that violate these strategies be held accountable by the international community? If so, to what extent?
4. Should anti-religious speech be included in the definition of hate speech?

There are many issues that must be addressed under the topic of free speech and different countries are addressing different issues. Do not limit your research only to the topics mentioned above; these will be the starting point of our discussion. It is important to remain truthful to your country and to research not only the topic but also your country, specifically if your country has any past records of punishing individuals for blasphemy or hate speech. 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,

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¹¹ <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2019-02-25/remarks-the-human-rights-council>