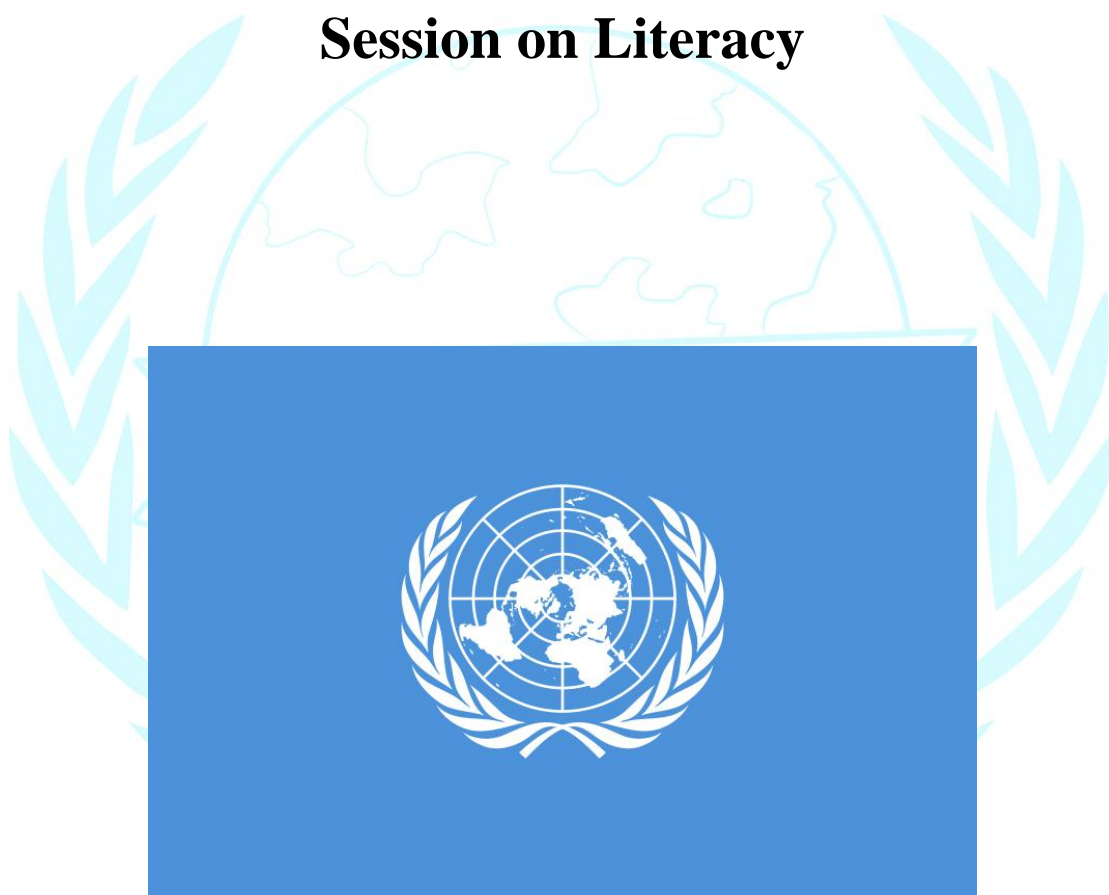


SFLSMUNC 2013 Background Guide

The Economic and Social Council: Special Session on Literacy



Chair: Jorja Knauer

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2. Welcome Letter

2 August 2013

Greetings delegates,

My name is Jorja Knauer, and it is with great honor and privilege that I introduce myself to you as your chair for the Special Session on Literacy. I am currently in my fourth and final year at Barnard College of Columbia University, where I major in Russian Regional Studies.

I have been an active member of the Columbia International Relations Council and Activities club (CIRCA) since my first year at Columbia. This past year, as the Head Delegate, I organized, trained, and led competitive delegations around the United States, Canada, and Western Europe, including the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands. As a delegate, I've competed and won Best Delegate at conferences hosted by Georgetown University, Boston University, and New York University, and I've won additional awards at McGill University and the University of Chicago, among other universities.

This Special Session on Literacy is to be contextualized as a special session for the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), as requested by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The ECOSOC deals with economic, social, cultural and health matters, in addition to human rights and fundamental freedoms. It coordinates the work of the UN and the specialized agencies, including UNESCO.

An overview of the topic and the committee itself is included in this Background Guide. However, I urge you to view the information included in this Background Guide simply as a starting point for your research and preparation for the conference. Each delegate should enter the first committee session with a clear understanding of the topics at hand and the structure and function of the committee, in addition to his or her country's respective positions and resources on the issue. That being said, I encourage all of the delegates to study the relevant positions and policies taken by UNESCO in the past, as well as the operating procedures for the ECOSOC.

I'm very excited for you to explore solutions to this important matter. We can use literacy as a benchmark by which to measure a country's broader, general level of education. And, by increasing different people's access to education, we can open the path to economic development in the rapidly changing, technology-driven era in which we all live. Through creative action and skillful diplomacy, you as the delegates can develop comprehensive solutions to some of the world's most daunting issues.

If you have any questions before the conference, feel free to contact me by email at jnk2119@columbia.edu. I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,
Jorja Knauer

3. Committee Structures and Procedures

For all intents and purposes, this Special Session is structured as a special session of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). As stated in Article 62(1) of the UN Charter, the ECOSOC “may make or initiate studies and reports with respect to international economic, social, cultural, educational, health, and related matters and may make recommendations with respect to any such matters” to specialized agencies such as UNESCO, as well as to the General Assembly and to the Members of the UN.¹ In addition, as a special session of the ECOSOC this body “may furnish information to the Security Council and shall assist the Security Council upon its request.”² This body may also establish “commissions as may be required for the performance of its functions.”³



Above, Room of the ECOSOC. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Special sessions of the ECOSOC may be held at the request of a specialized agency.⁴ For this conference, this Special Session is being held at the request of UNESCO, with the purposes of using the Council’s resources and influence to further UNESCO’s educational activities in pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals.

The positions list reflects the committee's status as an ECOSOC special session: the forty countries represented in this committee simulation are all current members of the Council's 54 member government. Seats on the Council are allotted based on geographical representation and are elected by the General Assembly for overlapping three-year terms. Forty countries will be represented, and each delegation will consist of two delegates. The two delegates representing a single state will be expected to put forward a cohesive, consistent policy for the duration of this simulation.

With a broad mandate, this committee is responsible for discussing the multifaceted issue of illiteracy and creating policy suggestions for the member states, based on the discussion that has taken place during the committee's session.

4. Committee Background and Context

This Special Session on Literacy takes place within the broader context of the Millennium Development Goals and ongoing efforts by various parts of the United Nations, including but not limited to specialized agencies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

i. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

On 16 December 1966, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as part of the International Bill of Rights, a multilateral treaty, along with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In so doing, the international community stated that the right to education must be guarded like any other of the rights preserved in the International Bill of Human Rights.

The Covenant became effective 3 January 1976, and it commits its party states to work toward the granting of a myriad of economic, social, and cultural rights to humans around the world. These rights include labor rights and the right to health, the right to an adequate standard of living, and the right to education. The right to education is the most important part of the Covenant for this committee.

As stated in Article 13 of the Covenant,

“education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the

activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.”⁵

All states that are parties to the Covenant acknowledge the following fundamental truths about education, as summarized in Article 13, sub-clause 2:

- 1) Primary education shall be necessary and available free to all;
- 2) Secondary education of various forms, including technical and vocational secondary education, should be made accessible to all, particularly through the introduction of free education;
- 3) Higher education shall also be made equally accessible by every appropriate means;
- 4) Fundamental education shall be encouraged to the greatest extent possible for individuals who have not received or completed the whole period of their primary education;
- 5) All states party to the Covenant shall pursue the development of school systems, in addition to an adequate fellowship system, and the improvement of the material conditions of teaching staff.⁶

Additionally, the Covenant expresses respect for the freedom “of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to choose for their children schools... which conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State.”⁷ Article 14 asserts that each state who is a party to the Covenant and which has not yet secured compulsory, free primary education within its territory must, within two years, create and adopt a detailed plan of action for the implementation of such a system within a reasonable number of years.⁸

The barriers to literacy still facing millions of individuals the world over must be overcome, linked as the right to education is to political participation and “the civil and political rights to freedom of opinion, thought, conscience and religion.”⁹

As of 2013, 160 states are party to the Covenant. However, an additional seven countries, including the United States of America, have signed but not yet ratified the Covenant. The other states that have signed but not ratified the Covenant are: Belize, Comoros, Cuba, Palau, Sao Tome and Principe, and South Africa. This means that the treaty, though technically in effect, does not apply to the United States as well as for the other seven signatories to the Covenant.

ii. Millennium Development Goals

At the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000, world leaders met at UN Headquarters in New York City to adopt the United Nations Millennium Declaration. The Millennium Declaration asserts every individual’s fundamental rights to dignity, freedom, and equality. The Declaration also insists that every

individual be free from hunger and violence and encourages tolerance and solidarity.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the eight time-bound international development goals that are meant to operationalize the ideas established in the Millennium Declaration. All 189 UN member states and at least 23 international organizations have agreed to achieve these goals by the deadline in 2015. The MDGs are to:

- 1) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
- 2) Achieve universal primary education, i.e., ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling;
- 3) Promote gender equality and empower women, specifically:
 - a) Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015;
- 4) Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate;
- 5) Improve maternal health;
- 6) Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases;
- 7) Ensure environmental sustainability;
- 8) Develop a global partnership for development.¹⁰

To accelerate the process of the MDGs, in June 2005 the G8 Finance Ministers agreed to provide enough funds to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the African Development Bank (AfDB) to cancel approximately \$50 billion in debt owed by states which are members of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). HIPC refers to a group of 39 developing countries which have high levels of poverty and debt overhang and which are therefore eligible for special assistance from the IMF and World Bank. The additional funding provided by the G8 allows the recipient states to redirect financial resources from paying off debts to a more productive use in social programs to improve education and alleviate poverty. Despite this additional assistance, however, progress towards reaching the MDGs remains uneven.

The topics of this committee are directed at Goals (2) and (3), that is, at universal primary education and gender equality, respectively. To quote the Council itself, education, through literacy, “is closely linked to the civil and political rights to freedom of opinion, thought, conscience and religion, as well as political participation.”¹¹ Without education, an individual is effectively denied access to the knowledge and skills necessary to participate effectively in a free society.¹² Similarly, education allows for social mobility and access to economic rights.

iii. An Overview of UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was created in 1945. Abstractly, UNESCO's purpose is to establish a lasting peace based on humankind's intellectual and moral solidarity, by promoting international collaboration in order to advance universal respect for justice, human rights, the rule of law, and the fundamental freedom proclaimed in the United Nations Charter. In practice, UNESCO aims to contribute to peace and security through education, science and culture.

UNESCO is known as the “intellectual” agency of the United Nations.¹³ It is on the power of intellect that people must rely, the UNESCO website asserts, if they are to “expand their horizons and sustain the hope of a new humanism.”



In its efforts UNESCO repeatedly stresses that humanity is capable of addressing the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development. Specifically, UNESCO emphasizes: intercultural dialogue; the necessity of education, scientific research and the sharing of knowledge for the purpose of understanding and anticipating environmental changes; that the educational, scientific and cultural fabric of societies, along with respect for fundamental rights, guarantees these societies' resilience and stability; and that the full participation of everyone in the new global public space is required for peace and development.

UNESCO works to build and strengthen networks among nations. UNESCO strives to:

- Mobilize for education
- Build intercultural understanding
- Pursue scientific cooperation
- Protect freedom of expression

Its five major programs are: education, natural sciences, social and human sciences, culture, and communication and information.

5. Overview of the Topics

i. Female Illiteracy and Gender Inequality in Education



It is an unfortunate truth that in many countries, gender inequality persists in all aspects of daily life. Around the world, “women continue to face discrimination in access to education, work and economic assets, and participation in government.”¹⁴ In developing regions, women have fewer social benefits and, in general, hold less secure jobs than do men.¹⁵

When they are limited in access to education, these women are denied economic rights. Literacy promotes social mobility and allows the individual to take full advantage of the opportunities of society, inasmuch as literacy allows an individual to acquire and possess the necessary skills required to perform a given job or societal function. In many cases, job training is hindered by illiteracy and low levels of education in general.

In accordance with Target 3.A of the Millennium Development Goals, the international community has achieved equality in primary education between

girls and boys.¹⁶Gender gaps in youth literacy rates are narrowing as well. On a global scale, in 1990 there were 90 literate young women for every 100 young men, though in 2010 this increased to 95 literate young women.¹⁷Despite these accomplishments, however, that target has not yet been achieved at all levels of education.

Many factors undermine gender equality in education. Violence directed at women continues to undermine progress toward gender equality, and poverty remains a persistent barrier to secondary education, especially among older girls.¹⁸In many areas, attitudes towards girls and household labor practices form significant barriers, and it is important to focus efforts on keeping girls in school once they reach adolescence. Other factors include poverty, geographical isolation, ethnicity, and disability. In an effort to fight these various factors, UNESCO strives to:

- 1) Promote gender equality in national education laws, policies and plans;
- 2) Expand access to learning opportunities in both formal and non-formal education;
- 3) Develop the capacity of education policy-makers, planners, teachers and other education personnel regarding gender-sensitive approaches;
- 4) Support countries to make education content gender-sensitive and free from discrimination;
- 5) Address obstacles to learning such as gender-based violence and HIV and AIDS.¹⁹

ii. Regional Focus: Sub-Saharan Africa

Despite the progress it has made since the Education for All (EFA) goals were adopted in 2000, Sub-Saharan Africa still lags behind other regions of the world for education. About 38% of the adult population in sub-Saharan Africa, 153 million adults, still lacks the basic literacy skills needed in everyday life, and women account for over 60% of the region's adult illiterate population. In 2007, only 15% of children in the region were enrolled in pre-primary education, whereas approximately one-third of children were enrolled across developing countries.²⁰Ethiopia and Nigeria are among the ten countries in the world with the lowest adult literacy rates.

The factors leading to marginalization in sub-Saharan Africa are myriad. Wealth and gender are two of the primary determinants for educational opportunity in the region. When these factors intersect with language, ethnicity, region and rural-urban differences, however, the path to literacy can become even more complicated for each individual.²¹In Nigeria, the average child spends almost 7 years in school. But whereas a wealthy urban child will average around 10 years in school, a poor rural girl may average less than six months, depending on the region she is born into. Conflict in Chad has led to large-scale internal

displacement and an influx of refugees from Sudan. These factors, among others, result in over 90% of young people receiving fewer than four years of education.²² In Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, and Malawi, primary school participation declined, and Eritrea and Liberia “suffered reversals related to current or recent conflict.”²³ Additionally, the number of children out of school still looms large, at about 32 million. This figure represents roughly 25% of Sub-Saharan Africa’s primary school age children and almost 45% of the global out-of-school population.²⁴

Progress toward the MDGs has been more pronounced in some states in the region than in others. Madagascar, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Zambia have already broken through the 90% threshold towards universal primary education enrolment, and Benin should reach the same level by the 2015 deadline.²⁵ Since 1999, pre-primary education enrolment has nearly doubled in Sub-Saharan Africa, to around 10 million in 2007.²⁶ Between 1985 and 1994, Burkina Faso and Chad, with some of the world’s lowest literacy rates, respectively doubled and almost tripled their adult literacy rates. Countries such as Benin, Burundi, and Senegal also registered large increases in the time period. Between 1985 and 2007, the adult literacy rate in sub-Saharan Africa increased by an average of 17% to reach 62%. Bilingual education seems to lead to improvements in learning achievement, enrolment and attendance in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Mali.



Strong economic growth in the region led to an increase in public spending on primary education, mostly stemming from government budgets assigning greater importance to education.²⁷ The share of education in total international aid dropped, but in absolute terms the total annual aid to education to sub-Saharan

Africa has increased since 2000.

6. Bloc Division

LEDC (less economically developed countries)

In less developed countries, nearly one quarter have a population in which the adult majority is illiterate, although a similar number of countries report of illiteracy under 10 percent. More than half of the least developed countries however, did report a majority of illiterate adults.

Latin America: illiteracy is relatively low in this region and the Caribbean. Haiti is the only country with an illiteracy rate over 50 percent, and more than 60 percent declare that their illiteracy is under 10 percent. Overall, Latin America is striving towards having a relatively stable educational system, which is expected to provide cheap and basic education to all population.

Africa: The case in Africa is far less hopeful. Unlike those in Latin America, 40 percent of African countries have illiteracy rates over 50 percent, and no country has a rate below 10 percent. It should be noted that women are far less educated than the average shows. Conscious of the close relationship between economic development and the level of education, African countries will be aiming at lowering their illiteracy rates, though economic and energy problems, as well as culture traditions and social taboos, deters this process.

Asia and Oceania: In Asia and Oceania, nearly 40 percent of the countries have illiteracy rates between 10 and 30 percent, and over one third has illiteracy rates below 10 percent. About 6 countries still have rates over 50 percent.

Overall, close to 900 million adults in LEDCs remain illiterate. Not an optimistic figure.

MEDC (more economically developed countries)

The European Commission: The European Commission supports literacy through its support to the national education strategies – as sector budget support, pooled funding or project support. 20% of EU aid goes to Human development in the EU budget - education constitutes an important part of that. The EU has been instrumental in the piloting of an early grade reading assessment in several regions, as a tool for measuring literacy learning.

USA: Surprisingly, 1 in 4 children in America grow up without learning how to read. As of 2011, America was the only free-market OECD (Organization for

Economic Cooperation and Development) country where the current generation was less well educated than the previous. Unlike the EU, The US government has not shown particular interest in helping other countries reduce illiteracy.

China: Chinese have long held literacy as an important moral template for cultural identity and modernity. China has made great inroads to better rural education, however, there is still a significant gap between the rural and urban education systems. Male children are still chosen to receive more education than female children, especially in rural settings.

7. Questions to Consider

Please use these questions as a starting point from which to formulate your own creative solutions to the problems faced by this committee.

1. *What steps can this ECOSOC Special Session take to end gender discrimination, specifically the discrimination that puts up barriers to female literacy? How can the international community come together to effectively reach the Millennium Development Goals for ending gender inequality and achieving universal primary education by the 2015 deadline?*
2. *What solutions can be devised for improving literacy rates in Sub-Saharan Africa? Should there be a specifically regional solution, or is there a broader template for ending illiteracy in other developing regions as well? Which aspects of a regional solution can be applied on a larger scale?*
3. *To what extent can any solutions developed in this committee simulation be transferred onto local actors, including but not limited to state officials and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)?*
4. *How can this Special Session encourage mass social mobilization campaigns and advocacy measures, involving more active civil society, for promoting access to education?*

8. Positions List

1. Albania
2. Austria
3. Belarus
4. Benin
5. Bolivia
6. Brazil
7. Bulgaria

8. Burkina Faso
9. Cameroon
10. Canada
11. China
12. Colombia
13. Croatia
14. Cuba
15. Denmark
16. Ecuador
17. Ethiopia
18. France
19. India
20. Indonesia
21. Japan
22. Kuwait
23. Malawi
24. Netherlands
25. New Zealand
26. Nicaragua
27. Nigeria
28. Pakistan
29. Qatar
30. Republic of Korea
31. Russian Federation
32. Senegal
33. South Africa
34. Spain
35. Sudan
36. Sweden
37. Turkey
38. Turkmenistan
39. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
40. United States of America

9. Assignment

SFLSMUNC requires each delegation to submit one position paper for each committee they attend (including the Cabinet of United Kingdom). Position papers act as good guidelines to further researches. Reading the feedback from the Dais and position papers of other delegates will help delegates figure out the flow of the committee in advance. A good position paper should consist of the following basic sections:

- A brief introduction to the current situation of the topic, strengthening the

importance of the agenda pending discussion;

- Current mechanism for addressing the issue, be it domestic, regional or international conventions, organizations, treaties or resolutions;
- Country's position on the topic and constructive and concrete proposals for the coming conference in further addressing the issue.

Delegates must base their position paper on the three perspectives stated above. Please clearly state out all the materials that are quoted from other sources using MLA format.

The detailed format and submission information of position papers are listed below:

- Position paper should be no more than one page;
- The font of the position paper must be Times New Roman sized 12 pt.;
- Delegate's name, school, representing country and the name of the committee and its topic must be shown on the page;
- The file name of the position paper must be "Committee Name_Country Name"; (e.g. UNESCO_China.doc/docx)
- The file of position paper must be attached to the appendix of the mail; DO NOT put the position paper directly in the message body;
- The position paper must be submitted to our official Email address, which is for assignment submission, document submission, questions, and notifications: sflsmun2013@126.com.
- The deadline for the position paper is 23:59 GMT+8, Oct. 7th, 2013.
- The subject of the email should be the name of your country and your committee.

Should delegates have any academic question concerning the conference, please submit your question to the Email address listed above.

Sample Position Paper

Committee: Disarmament and International Security Committee

Topic: Protection of Civilians in Modern Warfare

Country: Japan

Delegates: Zhang San, Li Si, Shanghai Foreign Language School

Japan argues that the civilian protection, whether in times of peace or during wars, is hindered by several newly emerged factors, including the rapidly developing weaponries, the controversies over motives for war, the possible infringement on national sovereignty and the non-execution of existing conventions.

Japan has made substantial efforts on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, ratifying *The Hague Convention* and *The Geneva Convention* that both clarified

the definition of civilian, which Japan considers to be the premise of civilian protection. Under a number of well-established normative frameworks, Japan, as a nonpermanent member then of the UN Security Council, significantly contributed to the process of laying out *Resolution 1674*, a reaffirmation of *Resolution 1265* and *Resolution 1296*, which majorly focused on securing human safety and human rights of civilians involved in modern warfare. Regarding the IHL as the fundamental of civilian protection, Japan actively participates in the PKO missions, and lodges strong condemnation and firm opposition against behaviors harming civilians, particularly women and children, concerning sexual violence, arbitrary detention, savage torture, deliberate attack on humanitarian personnel and other violations against the law.

Japan insists that state sovereignty is a responsibility rather than a privilege, and advocates the R2P system as a valid and necessary mechanism for civilian protection. Moreover, Japan proposes the following steps be taken for the effective enforcement of civilian protection. Primarily, persons not belonging to regular armed forces or corps should be classified into two categories, the aggressive and the non-aggressive, where the aggressive refers to citizens carrying out or seeking for attacks, or posing potential threats to others in domestic conflicts, terrorism combats or non-aggressive wars; unpremeditated harms resulting from self-defense are identified acceptable when towards the aggressive, but not towards the non-aggressive; harms in an aggressive war to either the aggressive or the non-aggressive are deemed to be unreasonable. Secondly, intentional attacks to civilians aiming to trigger panic or chaos in the region as well as for other strategic purposes may never be adopted. In addition, the type of war should be determined by the UN Security Council at its outbreak. If intentional attacks to civilians persists or even aggravates, further operations including weapon embargo, asset freezing, eco-sanctions and humanity interventions should be considered. With regards to an increasing number of terroristic threats, unmanned flight missions deployed to knock out a certain target must receive permission from the government of countries involved before brought into action so as to avoid the violation of national sovereignty. Similarly, the distribution of humanitarian aids should also go through such a procedure in order to stand neutral and efficient. Furthermore, no-fly zones should be established in regions neighboring the conflict scene, especially in residential areas and above UN refugee camps, to ensure the absolute security of civilians, personnel and infrastructures. The interference by UN military troops should be taken only as the ultimate measure.

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