SOCIAL, HUMANITARIAN AND CULTURAL COMMITTEE

Addressing the Humanitarian Consequences of the Prolonged Disruption of Commercial Shipping in the Strait of Hormuz

Chair: Daivik Bansal
Co-Chair: Arianna Mehta

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee of the Kanakia International School MUN 2026! I'm Daivik Bansal, your chair for what I hope will be a challenging and meaningful session, and I am excited to welcome each of you to the committee.

Our agenda: **Addressing the humanitarian consequences of the prolonged disruption of commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz.**

The Strait of Hormuz is more than a narrow passage between nations. It is a vital artery of global commerce, connecting economies, communities, and millions of lives. When that artery is disrupted, the consequences extend far beyond ships and markets. Rising prices, shortages of essential goods, disrupted supply chains, and increased pressure on vulnerable populations can turn a geopolitical crisis into a humanitarian one.

As delegates of SOCHUM, your responsibility is not simply to debate the causes of the disruption, but to confront its human consequences. How do we protect civilians when essential goods become harder to access? How can humanitarian assistance continue to reach those who need it? And how can the international community respond without deepening the very crisis it seeks to resolve?

I expect thoughtful diplomacy, strong research, and, most importantly, a willingness to look beyond national interests. Challenge one another, but do so constructively. Bring forward solutions that are practical, inclusive, and capable of protecting those who bear the greatest burden of this crisis.

The floor is yours. The crisis is real. The consequences are human. And the solutions you propose could shape the course of this committee.

Good luck, delegates. I look forward to seeing what you bring to the table.

Yours in the pursuit of humanitarian action,
Daivik Bansal
Chair, Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee
Kanakia International School

LETTER FROM THE CO-CHAIR

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee at KMUN. My name is Arianna Mehta, and I will be serving as your Co Chair for this session, alongside my Chair, Daivik Bansal.

I have been involved in Model UN for six years, across a range of committees and conference formats, and I hold this committee to a high standard. Preparation is not optional. I expect every delegate to arrive with a solid understanding of their country's position, a clear grasp of the background behind this crisis, and the readiness to speak on it with confidence.

This year, SOCHUM will address ***the humanitarian consequences of the prolonged disruption of commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz***. This is a real, ongoing crisis with direct consequences for seafarers, refugees, food security, and humanitarian systems worldwide. I expect delegates to approach it with the seriousness it deserves, even as you're still building your skills as diplomats.

I'm really hoping to see active participation from all of you. Come prepared, read the background guide, and try to know your country's position well. But more than anything, I want this to be a space where you feel comfortable speaking up, asking questions, and trying new things, even if you're still getting the hang of it. Every delegate improves by participating, so don't be afraid to jump in.

Daivik and I are committed to running a rigorous but supportive committee, and we expect delegates who are ready to rise to that standard. Questions regarding the topic, procedure, or expectations should be directed to us well in advance of the conference.

I look forward to a demanding and rewarding session.

Regards,

Arianna Mehta

Co Chair, SOCHUM

KMUN 2026

INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee, commonly known as SOCHUM, is the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly. It is one of the six main committees of the Assembly, and every Member State of the United Nations holds a seat and a vote within it.

SOCHUM's mandate covers the advancement of human rights, humanitarian affairs, social development, and the protection of vulnerable populations. Its agenda has historically included the rights of migrants and refugees, the treatment of workers, the protection of civilians, the right to food, and the elimination of discrimination in all its forms. It is the committee where the General Assembly examines the human consequences of global events, rather than their strategic or security dimensions.

Delegates must understand the limits this imposes. SOCHUM cannot authorise the use of force, impose sanctions, mandate a peacekeeping deployment, or issue any decision binding upon Member States. Its resolutions are recommendatory. This is not a weakness to apologise for; it is the nature of the body, and the most capable delegates will work within it rather than against it. The instruments available to this committee are norm-setting, obligation-clarifying, reporting and monitoring mechanisms, funding appeals, and the considerable political weight of near-universal membership. A resolution passed here cannot open the Strait. It can, however, establish what the world expects of those who close it.

Delegates should also note that this committee convenes while the crisis is ongoing and unresolved. There is no settled outcome to work backwards from. The situation on the ground has shifted repeatedly and may shift again.

BASIC SUGGESTIONS BEFORE YOU START RESEARCHING

A few aspects that delegates should keep in mind while preparing:

Procedure: The purpose of procedural rules in any committee is to ensure organised and efficient debate. This committee will follow the UNA-USA Rules of Procedure. While the Executive Board will be reasonably strict in applying them, substantive discussion of the agenda remains the priority. Delegates are advised not to restrict their statements out of hesitation regarding procedure. A strong argument imperfectly raised is worth more than silence.

Foreign Policy: Adherence to the foreign policy of one's allocated country is the single most important aspect of a Model United Nations conference, and the element that distinguishes it from other debating formats. To violate one's foreign policy without adequate justification is among the most serious errors a delegate can make. This agenda will make that difficult for several delegations, because the humanitarian case and the national interest frequently point in opposite directions. Delegates facing that tension should not resolve it by abandoning their country's position; they should represent the tension honestly, as real diplomats do.

Role of the Executive Board: The Executive Board is appointed to facilitate debate. The committee itself decides the direction and flow of discussion. Delegates constitute the committee and must therefore be uninhibited in presenting their positions on any issue. The Executive Board may, however, pose questions or request clarification at any point in order to advance debate and test participants. Delegates should expect to be asked not only what their country wants, but why its stated humanitarian concern is credible given its own conduct.

Nature of Sources and Evidence

This Background Guide is intended solely for research purposes and must not be cited as evidence to substantiate statements made during the conference. Evidence or proof for substantiating statements made in formal debate is acceptable from the following sources:

1. United Nations:

Documents and findings published by the United Nations or any related United Nations body are held as credible proof to support a claim or argument. For this agenda, delegates should pay particular attention to the International Maritime Organization, the International Labour Organization, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Food Programme, UNICEF, UNCTAD and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

2. Multilateral Organisations:

Documents from international organisations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the European Union, NATO, ASEAN, SAARC, OPEC, the

African Union and the International Criminal Court may also be presented as credible sources of information.

3. Government Reports:

These reports may be used in a manner similar to State-operated news agency reports and can, in all circumstances, be denied by another country. A report denied by a particular country may nonetheless be accepted by the Executive Board as a credible piece of information.

4. News Sources:

Reuters: any Reuters article that clearly makes mention of the fact being stated, or that contradicts a fact stated by a delegate in council.

State-operated News Agencies: these reports may be used in support of or against the State that owns the agency. Such reports, if sufficiently credible or substantial, may be used in support of or against any country as such, but in that situation may be denied by any other country in the council. Some examples are IRNA and PressTV (Islamic Republic of Iran), RIA Novosti (Russian Federation) and Xinhua News Agency (People's Republic of China).

Note: Under no circumstances will sources such as Wikipedia, or newspapers such as the Guardian or the Times of India, be accepted. However, notwithstanding the aforementioned criteria for the acceptance of sources and evidence, delegates remain free to quote or cite from any source as they deem fit as a part of their statements.

INTRODUCTION TO THE AGENDA

The Waterway and Its Significance

The Strait of Hormuz is a passage of roughly twenty-one miles at its narrowest point, connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. It is bounded to the north by the Islamic Republic of Iran and to the south by the Sultanate of Oman's Musandam exclave and the United Arab Emirates. It is shallow — no deeper than roughly sixty metres in places — and therefore acutely vulnerable to military disruption.

In ordinary conditions it is the single most important maritime corridor on earth for energy. Roughly 20 million barrels of crude per day, about 20 per cent of global consumption, passed through the strait in 2024, and around one-fifth of global LNG trade also transits the route, primarily from Qatar. More than 80 per cent of oil and gas shipments through Hormuz are destined for Asian markets, making economies in China, India, Japan and the Republic of Korea especially exposed to any disruption. In 2025, roughly 25 per cent of the world's maritime trade in crude oil and petroleum products, as well as roughly 19 per cent of liquefied natural gas, passed through the Strait.

Its strategic weight derives not only from volume but from the absence of alternatives. While Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates possess limited pipeline capacity that can reroute some crude exports away from the passage, most Gulf producers — including Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar and Iran — rely almost entirely on it to move exports, and the majority of exports through Hormuz have no practical alternative routes.

Delegates must resist the instinct to treat this as an energy agenda. Oil and gas are the mechanism; they are not the subject. What passes through Hormuz also includes fertilizer, food, medicine, and the cargo on which humanitarian operations across three continents depend — and aboard every vessel are civilians whose safety is governed by international law.

The Present Crisis

The onset of United States and Israeli military operations against Iran in late February 2026 triggered Iranian retaliations, including Iranian efforts to assert control over the Strait of Hormuz via threatened and actual attacks on commercial shipping. Iran announced the closure of the Strait on 2 March 2026, after which outbound traffic from the Persian Gulf tracked by automatic identification systems came to almost a complete halt, with crude oil outbound shipments falling to almost zero and liquefied natural gas and fertilizer-related shipments dropping abruptly thereafter.

The disruption has proven durable rather than momentary. Traffic through the chokepoint fell from more than 100 vessels a day to just five, and crude exports from the Gulf region dropped by nearly 47 per cent compared with before the war, from about 17 million barrels a day in 2025 to roughly nine million as of August 2026, with direct crude exports moving via the strait falling to an average of just 2.2 million barrels per day.

A negotiated resolution has repeatedly come close and repeatedly failed. The United States and Iran agreed to an initial ceasefire on 7 and 8 April that included Israel, but in the following weeks the conflict shifted to a contest between the two over restricted access to the Strait. Direct negotiations took place in Islamabad on 11 and 12 April between the United States Vice President and the Iranian parliament speaker — the highest-level direct engagement between the two States since 1979 — but when those talks failed, the United States Navy began a blockade of the strait to prevent the passage of ships transiting through Iranian ports. On 14 June mediators announced a memorandum of understanding intended to bring the conflict to a formal end within sixty days, but in July the conflict resumed after Iran struck three commercial vessels that bypassed its preapproved route.

The Humanitarian Consequences

This is the substance of the agenda, and delegates should structure their research around four distinct categories of harm.

First, the seafarers. The most immediate and most neglected consequence has been the entrapment of merchant crews. The IMO Secretary-General confirmed on 24 April that around 20,000 seafarers on around 1,600 vessels remained in the Gulf, that vessels had been seized and detained, and that supplies aboard stranded ships — including water, food and fuel — would begin running short. He urged flag States, non-governmental organisations, industry bodies and the States of nationality of the seafarers to offer assistance, and highlighted the importance of fair treatment in terms of welfare and payment of wages. As of late August, at least 70 attacks on international shipping had been verified by the IMO, with 19 seafarers killed. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has called for urgent action on the plight of stranded seafarers facing what his Office described as a dire humanitarian and human rights crisis, noting that some seafarers have been abandoned at sea by shipowners who left them without support, repatriation, and even their owed wages. An IMO evacuation plan prepared in coordination with Member States and industry, intended to safely evacuate around 6,000 seafarers from the region, is currently paused.

Second, food security. The Strait is a critical artery for agricultural inputs, not merely fuel. Around 1.3 million tonnes of fertilizers per month can no longer transit the Strait, with no viable land-based alternatives available, and the reduced availability of ammonia-, urea-, phosphate- and sulfur-based fertilizers may lower production of staple crops such as wheat, maize and rice within six to nine months while pushing food prices upward. The agricultural systems of Brazil, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan rely strongly on fertilizers traded through the Strait, while Gulf countries themselves face food shortages, unable to import food or export energy and fertilizers. Roughly 30 per cent of globally traded fertilizer is currently immobilised, with significant disruptions to key inputs including urea at 40 per cent and sulfur at 50 per cent. According to the World Food Programme, an additional 2.5 million people in Somalia, 2.3 million in Afghanistan and 1.3 million in Sri Lanka had already been pushed into acute food insecurity or hunger as of 4 June.

Third, humanitarian operations. The crisis has raised the cost and slowed the pace of aid delivery worldwide. UNICEF has warned that maritime diversions around the Cape of Good Hope are adding between two and four weeks to shipping times; air freight costs for vaccines shipped from India to Ethiopia, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have risen by up to 70 per cent; trucking costs for lifesaving therapeutic food destined for Somalia, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have increased by a third; sea freight costs for supplies bound for Yemen and Mozambique have surged by as much as 150 per cent; and supply disruptions could delay critical humanitarian cargo by four to six months. Save the Children has reported that every five-dollar increase in oil prices adds around 340,000 United States dollars a month to its shipping, fuel, food and medical expenses, and humanitarian organisations have called for the establishment of a dedicated humanitarian corridor through the Strait to allow stranded aid shipments to move more quickly and at lower cost.

Fourth, migrant workers and remittances. The Gulf hosts one of the largest migrant labour populations in the world, and the disruption has placed that system under strain. Migrant workers in the six Gulf Cooperation Council countries sent an estimated 124 billion United States dollars home in 2024, supporting families across Asia, the broader Middle East and Africa. The Gulf Cooperation Council States host over 30 million migrant workers, including around 21 million from low- and middle-income countries, and account for almost 20 per cent of remittance flows to those countries. Around 55,000 passengers, mostly migrant workers, were stranded by roughly 300 cancelled flights to Dhaka and Chattogram in the first nine days of the crisis. India, the world's top recipient of remittances, received 135.4 billion United States dollars last year, 38 per cent of it from workers in the Gulf.

The Question of Tolls and Transit

A distinct legal controversy has emerged over the terms on which passage may be restored. Reporting has described a Tehran toll system controlling Hormuz traffic, and the Iranian parliament has moved to formalise Hormuz Strait controls. Notably, neither the United States nor Iran is party to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, while Oman is. The IMO has stated that there is no international agreement under which tolls can be introduced for transiting international straits, and that any such toll would set a dangerous precedent. The United Nations has reiterated that charging tolls for safe passage runs contrary to international law.

For SOCHUM, the significance is not the legality of the toll in itself, but its humanitarian effect: whether relief cargo, crew changes and medical evacuations can be made conditional on payment, and whether any State may lawfully price access to assistance.

The Case for Treating This as a Humanitarian Emergency

Those who argue for robust international action contend that the civilians affected bear no responsibility for the underlying conflict and that their protection is a matter of settled law rather than political preference. Merchant seafarers are civilians. Aid cargo enjoys protection under international humanitarian law. The right to adequate food is recognised in the

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the deliberate obstruction of food supplies has been treated by international bodies as a matter of grave concern. On this view, a chokepoint may be a strategic asset to the States that border it, but the populations who depend on what passes through it did not consent to that arrangement and cannot be made to absorb its collapse.

Proponents further argue that the distributional injustice is stark. The states suffering the sharpest humanitarian consequences — Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Sri Lanka, Nepal — are neither belligerents nor beneficiaries. They have no navy, no pipeline, and no seat at the negotiating table.

The Case for Caution and Sovereignty

Opposing delegations will emphasise several counterarguments, and delegates should take them seriously rather than dismissing them.

The first is sovereignty. The Strait comprises the territorial waters of coastal States, and any mechanism that inspects, escorts or verifies shipping necessarily operates within them. States wary of precedent will argue that humanitarian language has historically been used to justify intrusions on sovereignty that outlasted their stated purpose, and that a corridor established in the Gulf today becomes a template elsewhere tomorrow.

The second is causation. Delegations will dispute vigorously whether the humanitarian harm originates in the closure of the Strait, in the military operations that preceded it, in the naval blockade that followed, or in unilateral economic measures that predate all three. This is not a technical disagreement; it determines who any resolution names, and it will likely decide whether a text passes.

The third is competence. Some delegations will argue that the General Assembly is simply the wrong organ — that questions of navigation and maritime security belong to the Security Council and the International Maritime Organization, and that SOCHUM's involvement risks producing a document with moral ambition and no operative effect.

The fourth is selectivity. Delegations will ask why this crisis commands attention when comparable humanitarian emergencies do not, and whether the international community's concern tracks human suffering or commercial exposure. It is an uncomfortable question and it deserves a genuine answer.

TIMELINE OF RECENT EVENTS

1980–1988 — The Tanker War and the Law of the Sea

The maritime component of the Iran-Iraq War is the closest precedent to this agenda. Iraq attacked Iranian oil facilities and Iran retaliated against Gulf state and international-flagged shipping; by the end of 1987, Iraq had conducted 283 attacks and Iran 168, killing 116 merchant sailors, leaving 37 missing and 167 wounded, of many nationalities. The United States escorted reflagged Kuwaiti tankers from July 1987 in the largest naval convoy operation since the Second World War. In July 1988 the USS Vincennes shot down Iran Air flight 655, killing 290 civilians. The Strait itself was never closed. In the same period, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea was adopted in 1982, codifying the regime of transit passage through international straits — though neither the United States nor Iran is party to it, while Oman is.

1990–1991 — The Gulf War and the Displacement of Migrant Labour

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait produced one of the largest displacements of migrant workers in modern history. Some 30,000 Filipinos were flown out of Kuwait, Iraq and Saudi Arabia — the largest repatriation in the Philippines' history until the pandemic — alongside the flight of millions of other foreign workers. The episode established that instability in the Gulf is, for much of Asia and Africa, primarily a labour and remittance emergency rather than an energy one.

2006 — The Maritime Labour Convention

The International Labour Organization adopts the Maritime Labour Convention, described as the seafarers' bill of rights, which entered into force in 2013. It consolidates obligations on wages, repatriation, medical care and shipowner liability for abandonment. Amendments adopted in 2025 further strengthened recognition of seafarers as key workers. This is the primary legal instrument now being tested — and, in the view of several United Nations bodies, violated — in the Gulf.

2019 — Escalation at the Strait

Following the American withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and the adoption of a maximum pressure strategy, tensions sharpen considerably. The United States blames Iran for attacks on six oil tankers near the Strait; Iran downs an American surveillance drone; and in July Iran seizes the British-flagged Stena Impero. A multinational escort coalition is formed. Importantly, Iranian forces at this stage did not act comprehensively or seek to fully prevent or redirect cross-Strait traffic — the distinction that separates 2019 from 2026.

2020 — The Crew Change Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic strands several hundred thousand seafarers aboard vessels beyond the expiry of their contracts, unable to be repatriated. In December, the General Assembly adopts a resolution urging States to designate seafarers as key workers and facilitate crew

changes and repatriation. This is the most important precedent for this committee: the clearest instance of the General Assembly acting within its recommendatory powers to resolve a global seafarer emergency. Delegates drafting operative clauses should begin here.

2022 — The Black Sea Grain Initiative

Signed in Istanbul under United Nations and Turkish auspices, the Initiative permitted grain and fertilizer exports from Ukrainian ports through a contested maritime zone under an agreed inspection regime, until Russia withdrew a year later. It is explicitly among the precedents the United Nations has drawn on in designing its response to the present crisis, and the most plausible model any resolution here will propose.

2026 — The Present Crisis

Rehearsed by the Iranian Parliament's June 2025 vote approving closure of the Strait, which was never executed, the crisis begins in earnest on 28 February 2026 with large-scale United States and Israeli strikes on Iran. Iran announces closure on 2 March, and traffic falls from more than 100 vessels a day to roughly five. A ceasefire in April collapses after talks in Islamabad fail; the United States imposes a naval blockade; Iran introduces a transit toll the IMO warns would set a dangerous precedent. By late April, roughly 20,000 seafarers aboard around 1,600 vessels remain trapped with water, food and fuel running short. Fighting resumes in July. By late August the IMO has verified at least 70 attacks on shipping and 19 seafarers killed, with at least 6,000 seafarers still stranded, some abandoned at sea by shipowners without repatriation or owed wages.

BINDING PAPERWORK

Delegates are expected to know which instruments bind their country, which do not, and where their own government's ratification record is inconvenient. That last category is where most of the sharpest exchanges in this committee will occur.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982)

- Parties: 169 parties. Notably, neither the United States nor Iran is party to UNCLOS, while Oman is.
- Relevance: Codifies the regime of transit passage through straits used for international navigation, under which passage may not be impeded or suspended. The Council of the IMO has stressed that the right of transit passage should not be threatened, impeded, denied, hampered, impaired or suspended.
- Current Reality: Iran has asserted control over the Strait and introduced a transit toll system; its parliament has moved to formalise these controls. The IMO has stated that no international agreement permits tolls for transiting international straits, and that any such toll would set a dangerous precedent.
- Committee Impact: Both principal parties can claim the Convention does not bind them, which produces an unusual situation in which the states with the least legal obligation have the most physical control. Delegates who master this asymmetry will dominate the legal debate.

Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (as amended 2025)

- Parties: Over 100 States, covering the overwhelming majority of world gross tonnage, including major flag States.
- Relevance: The seafarers' bill of rights. Governs wages, repatriation, medical care, shore leave, and shipowner liability for abandonment. The 2025 amendments strengthened recognition of seafarers as key workers.
- Current Reality: The ILO's Special Tripartite Committee has stressed that the Convention remains fully applicable during crises and that upholding it is more critical under present circumstances, urging States to facilitate crew changes and repatriation and to respect seafarers' right to choose whether to work in high-risk areas without fear of consequences for future employment. Meanwhile, the OHCHR has documented seafarers abandoned at sea by shipowners who left them without support, repatriation, or even their owed wages.
- Committee Impact: This is the operative instrument of the agenda. The gap between what the Convention requires and what is happening is the strongest factual basis for any resolution.

International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (1974)

- Parties: Near-universal among maritime States.
- Relevance: Establishes the duty of masters to render assistance to persons in distress at sea and sets minimum safety standards for vessels.

- Current Reality: The IMO has warned of mines throughout the Strait and the threat of further attacks, and has issued guidance on the training and certification of seafarers affected by the situation. Assistance and evacuation have repeatedly been suspended for security reasons.
- Committee Impact: Useful for delegates arguing that the crisis has suspended obligations that were never meant to be suspendable.

Geneva Conventions (1949) and Additional Protocols (1977)

- Parties: Universal ratification of the 1949 Conventions.
- Relevance: Protect civilians and civilian objects in armed conflict. Merchant seafarers are civilians; humanitarian relief consignments are entitled to passage.
- Current Reality: The Secretary-General has called on all parties to respect international humanitarian law, protect civilians, and avoid disrupting the essential services on which they rely. At least 19 seafarers have been killed.
- Committee Impact: The strongest legal footing available, but invoking it requires naming a party to an armed conflict — which is precisely what several delegations will resist.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)

- Parties: 171 States. The United States has signed but not ratified.
- Relevance: Article 11 recognises the right to adequate food and the fundamental right to be free from hunger; Article 12 recognises the right to health.
- Current Reality: The World Food Programme reports an additional 2.5 million people in Somalia, 2.3 million in Afghanistan and 1.3 million in Sri Lanka pushed into acute food insecurity as of 4 June.
- Committee Impact: Converts the food security discussion from a humanitarian appeal into a rights claim, and gives frontline states a legal vocabulary rather than only a moral one.

International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990)

- Parties: Approximately 60 States — almost entirely countries of origin. No Gulf Cooperation Council State is party, nor are most major labour-receiving States.
- Relevance: Protects migrant workers regardless of status, including on wages, documentation and repatriation.
- Current Reality: The Gulf Cooperation Council hosts over 30 million migrant workers, including around 21 million from low- and middle-income countries, who sent home an estimated 124 billion United States dollars in 2024. Around 55,000 passengers, mostly migrant workers, were stranded by roughly 300 cancelled flights to Dhaka and Chattogram in the first nine days of the crisis.

- Committee Impact: The most productive ratification gap in the room. Origin States are parties; host States are not. Expect Bangladesh, the Philippines, Indonesia and India to press this hard against the Gulf delegations.

Charter of the United Nations (1945)

- Parties: All Member States.
- Relevance: Article 2(7) restricts intervention in matters essentially within domestic jurisdiction. Articles 10 through 14 define the General Assembly's competence to discuss and recommend.
- Current Reality: The Secretary-General has established a task force to develop mechanisms to alleviate the humanitarian crisis, drawing on precedents including the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen, the Black Sea Grain Initiative, and the Gaza mechanism under Security Council resolution 2720.
- Committee Impact: Defines the ceiling on what this committee can adopt. Delegates proposing enforcement should expect to be reminded of it.

IMPACT ON STAKEHOLDERS

Impact on Seafarers and Maritime Workers

The most direct and least visible casualties of this crisis are the civilians employed to move cargo. At its peak, around 20,000 seafarers aboard roughly 1,600 vessels remained trapped in the Gulf, with supplies of water, food and fuel running short aboard stranded ships. At least 70 attacks on international shipping have been verified by the IMO, with 19 seafarers killed. The High Commissioner for Human Rights has described a dire humanitarian and human rights crisis, noting that the recorded figure of at least 6,000 seafarers still stranded is not exhaustive, as many others are unaccounted for. The IMO's evacuation plan remains paused.

The harms are cumulative rather than singular: physical danger, psychological strain, indefinite separation from families, denial of shore leave and medical care, unpaid wages, and — for those abandoned outright — the loss of any employer willing to accept responsibility. The nationalities most affected are overwhelmingly those of South and Southeast Asia, meaning the burden falls on states with the least leverage over the belligerents.

Impact on Import-Dependent and Crisis-Affected States

States already dependent on imported food, fuel and aid have absorbed the sharpest secondary shock. Roughly 30 per cent of globally traded fertilizer has been immobilised, with urea at 40 per cent and sulfur at 50 per cent, and around 1.3 million tonnes of fertilizer per month can no longer transit the Strait with no viable land-based alternatives. The Food and Agriculture Organization has warned that reduced availability of ammonia-, urea-, phosphate- and sulfur-based fertilizers may lower production of staple crops such as wheat, maize and rice within six to nine months while pushing food prices upward.

The timing compounds the damage. Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan and Ethiopia have been entering planting seasons for staple crops with compromised supply of the fuel-reliant irrigation, transport and fertilizer inputs on which yields depend. Observed conditions in April included traders in Mogadishu refusing Somali shilling notes and rural transport fees in Sudan reaching levels at which moving food becomes uneconomic.

Impact on Humanitarian Operations

Relief agencies face simultaneously higher costs and slower delivery. UNICEF reports that diversions around the Cape of Good Hope are adding two to four weeks to shipping times, that air freight costs for vaccines from India to Ethiopia, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have risen by up to 70 per cent, that trucking for therapeutic food to Somalia, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo has increased by a third, that sea freight for supplies bound for Yemen and Mozambique has surged by as much as 150 per cent, and that disruptions could delay critical humanitarian cargo by four to six months. Save the Children has calculated that every five-dollar rise in oil prices adds roughly 340,000 United States dollars a month to its operating costs. Agencies have called for a dedicated humanitarian corridor through the Strait.

Delegates should grasp what this means in practice: the same donor funding now reaches materially fewer people, at a moment when humanitarian financing is already contracting.

Impact on Migrant Workers and Remittance-Dependent Economies

The Gulf is among the world's largest labour markets and the crisis has destabilised it. The Gulf Cooperation Council States account for almost 20 per cent of remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries. Evidence has emerged of weakening labour dynamics — lower overseas recruitment, reduced deployments, growing repatriations — even where headline remittance flows have not yet fallen. India, the world's largest recipient, received 135.4 billion United States dollars last year, 38 per cent of it from Gulf workers; remittances account for roughly 10 per cent of gross domestic product in the Philippines, where about 2.4 million citizens work in the Middle East. Analysts have warned that a sharp drop could reduce the ability of some South Asian nations to fund their external liabilities.

Impact on Gulf and Littoral States

The producing states are not exempt from harm. Gulf countries face immediate consequences including food shortages and economic losses, unable to import food or export energy and fertilizers. Their populations — a majority of whom, in several cities, are foreign nationals — face rising costs, employment insecurity, and disrupted transport links.

Impact on Global and Regional Powers

The response of major powers determines the trajectory of the crisis. Where they act with restraint and coordination, the humanitarian consequences can be contained; where they treat the waterway as a theatre of competition, the populations least involved absorb the cost. Around 84 per cent of crude flowing through Hormuz is destined for Asian markets, which means the powers most exposed economically and those most capable militarily are not the same states — a divergence that has slowed every attempt at resolution.

BLOC POSITIONS

The Littoral and Gulf Bloc

Comprising Iran, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and Iraq. This is not a unified bloc and delegates should not treat it as one. Its members share geography and little else. Iran frames its conduct as lawful assertion of sovereignty within its own waters and argues that sanctions, not the Strait, constitute the real humanitarian emergency. Oman, as the southern littoral State and the only principal party to UNCLOS, positions itself as an indispensable neutral channel. The Gulf Cooperation Council members are united in wanting flows restored and divided over how, with Qatar and Kuwait having no pipeline alternative, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates possessing limited capacity to reroute, and Bahrain the most exposed of all. Iraq has no alternative outlet for its southern exports. Unresolved sovereignty disputes at the mouth of the Strait, and the memory of 1990, continue to divide this bloc internally.

The Maritime Security Bloc

Comprising the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Israel and, ambivalently, Türkiye. These delegations hold that freedom of navigation is non-negotiable, that the humanitarian consequences flow from the closure rather than from the military operations or the blockade, and that any resolution must name the party obstructing passage. The United Kingdom has convened a process among foreign ministers of over forty countries on the situation. The bloc is not internally uniform: France and Türkiye prefer legalist and multilateral framing, and Türkiye's position on Israel diverges sharply from the rest.

The Sovereignty and Counterweight Bloc

Comprising Russia, China and Venezuela, with variable support from others. These delegations argue that the crisis originates in the military campaign that preceded the closure and in unilateral coercive measures that predate both, and they will resist any mechanism that permits inspection, escort or verification within territorial waters. China's position contains a genuine tension: it is the largest buyer of Gulf crude and Iran's principal economic partner, and it has reportedly played a role in nudging Tehran toward ceasefire. Delegates in this bloc will work actively to detach the Global South from the maritime security bloc.

The Labour-Supplying and Importing Bloc

Comprising India, Pakistan, Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia and Bangladesh. On paper the most numerous and, if organised, the most powerful group in the committee. Its members supply the crews, supply the migrant labour, and import the energy. Their shared interest is in binding obligations on flag States, shipowners and host States regarding repatriation, wage recovery, crew changes and reintegration. Their divisions are political — India and Pakistan, and varying willingness to criticise either Washington or Tehran. Pakistan's role in mediating the 2026 ceasefire gives it standing disproportionate to its economic weight.

The Frontline Humanitarian Bloc

Comprising Yemen, Sudan, Egypt and Somalia, with natural sympathy from other least-developed and import-dependent States. These delegations did not participate in the conflict, hold no leverage over it, and are absorbing its consequences most severely. Their argument is distributional: that the international community's attention has tracked commercial exposure rather than human suffering, and that any mechanism which prioritises energy cargo over food, fertilizer and medical supplies reproduces the injustice. Their credibility is their strongest asset and their lack of leverage their weakest.

The Maritime Legal and Neutral Bloc

Comprising Greece, Malta, Switzerland and, in practice, Oman. Greece is the world's leading ship-owning nation and Malta operates one of the world's largest registries, giving both direct exposure to detained vessels and abandoned crews alongside significant flag-State obligations. Switzerland brings neutrality, the depositary function for the Geneva Conventions, and humanitarian diplomatic capacity. This bloc's function is to convert competing political demands into workable legal text. If it engages actively, it will likely write the resolution that passes; if it waits to be courted, the committee will polarise without it.

KEY ACTORS

The Islamic Republic of Iran

The northern littoral State and the party whose conduct is directly at issue. Iran announced the closure of the Strait on 2 March 2026 and has since sought to formalise control through a transit toll system, which its parliament has moved to codify. Its position rests on three claims: that the strikes of 28 February constituted aggression against its territory, that measures taken within its own territorial waters are an exercise of sovereignty, and that decades of sanctions have inflicted humanitarian harm on Iranian civilians which the international community has consistently declined to address. Delegates should note the counter-pressure: Iran itself exported 1.5 million barrels per day through the Strait in early 2025, and prolonged closure damages its own principal markets in Asia.

The United States of America

The dominant external military power in the Gulf and a party to the conflict. Following the failure of talks in Islamabad, the United States imposed a naval blockade on shipping transiting to Iranian ports, and has proposed escorted transit framed as a humanitarian gesture. Its position holds that freedom of navigation is non-negotiable and the humanitarian crisis is Iran-caused. It will resist any text implying that its own military operations or the counter-blockade generated humanitarian harm. Its non-party status to UNCLOS and to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights will be used against it.

The Sultanate of Oman

The southern littoral State, whose territorial waters form half of the Strait, and the only principal party to UNCLOS. Oman has historically maintained working relations with Tehran while hosting Western partners, and has engaged in talks with Iran over the Strait. It is the most credible mediator in the room and the delegation most capable of producing text that both blocs can accept. Its constraint is that neutrality carries costs when both sides apply pressure.

The Republic of the Philippines

The world's principal supplier of merchant seafarers and, for this committee, the most directly affected State by population. Thousands of Filipinos have been repatriated with government assistance and hundreds more await it, and around 2.4 million citizens work in the Middle East, with remittances accounting for roughly 10 per cent of gross domestic product. The Philippines has the strongest claim to speak for the people at the centre of the agenda and the institutional memory of the 1990 evacuation to draw on.

The People's Republic of China

The largest single purchaser of Gulf crude and Iran's most important economic partner, with reporting indicating Beijing's role in securing Iranian agreement to the April ceasefire. China's stated position emphasises sovereignty, non-intervention, and South-South

cooperation, while its material interest lies squarely in restored flows. How a delegate manages that contradiction will largely determine how well China performs in this committee.

The Federal Republic of Somalia

The clearest case of a State absorbing consequences it had no part in creating. World Food Programme data record an additional 2.5 million Somalis pushed into acute food insecurity, with therapeutic food transport costs up by a third and observed conditions including traders refusing national currency. Somalia is also adjacent to the Bab al-Mandab, now a second front. Its argument — that the conflict was fought elsewhere and the hunger arrived here — is the moral centre of the agenda.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

The following are indicative directions a resolution might take. They are starting points, not a checklist, and delegates are expected to contest, refine and go beyond them. Nothing below is agreed, and several of these proposals are mutually incompatible by design.

Protecting and Evacuating Stranded Seafarers

The most immediate obligation is to the civilians currently trapped. Any credible resolution addresses them first.

- Call for the resumption of the paused IMO evacuation plan, with coastal States providing safe anchorages, provisions, fuel and medical access to stranded vessels regardless of flag.
- Formally designate seafarers as key workers with guaranteed rights of transit, shore leave and medical care, following the precedent established by the General Assembly during the 2020 crew change crisis.
- Establish a deconfliction and notification channel through which the movement of vessels carrying stranded crews can be communicated to all parties.
- Affirm the right of seafarers to refuse work in designated high-risk areas without consequences for future employment, and require shipowners to document compliance.

Establishing a Humanitarian Maritime Corridor

The most ambitious proposal on the table, and the most legally contested. Its viability depends entirely on how it is designed.

- Establish a time-limited corridor for the passage of food, fertilizer, medical supplies and crew rotation vessels, distinct from commercial energy traffic.
- Model verification on existing precedents — the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen, the Black Sea Grain Initiative, and the mechanism established under Security Council resolution 2720 — as the Secretary-General's task force has already proposed.
- Vest administration in neutral States or United Nations agencies rather than parties to the conflict, with Oman, Switzerland and Malta as candidates given their legal standing and declared neutrality.
- Include an explicit sunset clause and consent requirements to address the sovereignty objection that any such mechanism sets a permanent precedent.

Addressing Abandonment, Wages and Flag-State Liability

Existing law already covers most of this. The failure is enforcement, not drafting.

- Call on flag States to enforce the financial security provisions of the Maritime Labour Convention, under which shipowners must guarantee repatriation and outstanding wages.

- Establish a central registry of abandonment cases arising from the crisis, maintained jointly by the ILO and IMO.
- Create an emergency wage recovery facility funded by shipowner contributions, protection and indemnity clubs, and voluntary State contributions.
- Publish the identities of vessels and beneficial owners who have abandoned crews, as a reputational enforcement mechanism where legal enforcement fails.

Safeguarding Food Security and Fertilizer Access

The largest number of affected people are not at sea. They are in agricultural economies facing a planting season without inputs.

- Prioritise fertilizer, food and medical cargo over commercial energy cargo in any restored or partial transit capacity.
- Mandate FAO and World Food Programme early warning reporting keyed to planting calendars in the most affected States.
- Encourage regional fertilizer reserves and discourage export restrictions that compound scarcity, drawing on the lessons of the 2022 food price crisis.
- Provide concessional financing and import support for least developed and import-dependent States facing simultaneous fuel and fertilizer shocks.

Sustaining Humanitarian Operations

Agencies are delivering less with the same money. That gap is closable without touching the Strait at all.

- Establish a dedicated funding window to offset documented increases in freight, air transport and insurance costs for humanitarian cargo.
- Encourage pre-positioning of supplies outside affected corridors and pooled procurement among agencies to reduce duplicated cost.
- Call for the waiver of tolls, fees and surcharges on verified humanitarian consignments by all parties and port authorities.
- Support common logistics arrangements so that smaller agencies are not priced out of delivery entirely.

Protecting Migrant Workers and Remittance Corridors

The largest affected population overall, and the one least represented in the states that control the waterway.

- Call on host States to guarantee payment of outstanding wages and end-of-service entitlements, and to prohibit the retention of workers' passports.
- Establish cost-sharing arrangements for repatriation so that origin States with limited fiscal capacity are not left to fund evacuations alone.
- Support reintegration programmes in origin States for returning workers, including recognition of skills and access to credit.

- Encourage the reduction or waiver of remittance transaction fees for affected corridors during the period of disruption.

Monitoring, Reporting and Accountability

Where this committee cannot compel, it can document — and documentation is the precondition for everything that follows.

- Request the Secretary-General to report periodically to the General Assembly on the humanitarian consequences of the disruption, disaggregated by affected population.
- Support independent verification of attacks on civilian vessels and the preservation of evidence for future accountability processes.
- Establish a standing review of the humanitarian effects of maritime chokepoint disruption, so that the next such crisis does not begin without a framework.
- Affirm that violations of international humanitarian law against civilian mariners will be recorded regardless of the perpetrator's identity or status.

QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION MIGHT ANSWER

Note: These questions are only a guideline and delegates are encouraged to go above and beyond these.

1. What obligations do flag States, shipowners and port States owe to seafarers stranded, detained or abandoned in a conflict-affected waterway, and how can those obligations be made enforceable rather than aspirational?
2. Should seafarers be formally designated key workers with guaranteed rights of transit, repatriation, shore leave and medical access, following the precedent established during the 2020 crew change crisis?
3. What recourse exists for seafarers abandoned without wages or repatriation, and who bears the cost when a shipowner disappears?
4. Can a humanitarian corridor for food, fertilizer, medical supplies and crew rotation be established through a contested strait, and on what model?
5. If such a mechanism requires inspection or verification within territorial waters, how can it be designed to avoid setting a precedent for intrusion on sovereignty?
6. May a State lawfully impose a toll, fee or precondition on the passage of humanitarian cargo, and what consequences should follow if it does?
7. How should scarce transit capacity be prioritised — by energy value, by humanitarian urgency, or by some agreed formula — and who decides?
8. What protections are owed to migrant workers in host States affected by the crisis, particularly regarding wage payment, documentation, repatriation cost and reintegration, given that the principal host States are not party to the relevant convention?
9. How should the additional costs borne by humanitarian agencies be met, and should a dedicated financing mechanism be established?
10. What monitoring and reporting arrangements should be created to document the humanitarian consequences of maritime chokepoint disruption, and to which body should they report?
11. Does the international community owe anything to States suffering severe secondary consequences from a conflict in which they are not participants, and if so, what?
12. What standards should govern the conduct of all parties toward civilian vessels and their crews, and how should violations be recorded for future accountability?

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Whether this committee can produce anything that matters

SOCHUM cannot open the Strait. Delegates must decide whether to accept that limitation and write the strongest possible normative and monitoring instrument, or to attempt language that exceeds the Assembly's competence and risks producing a resolution that fails or is ignored. Both approaches have defenders. Consider whether the 2020 crew change resolution changed State behaviour, and what made it effective if so.

Whether the crisis can be addressed without assigning blame

Any text that names a responsible party will be opposed by that party's supporters; any text that names no one risks describing a humanitarian emergency with no cause. Delegates should consider whether a resolution focused purely on obligations owed to affected populations — regardless of who created the situation — is a principled compromise or an evasion.

Whether humanitarian mechanisms create dangerous precedents

Every proposed corridor involves inspection, verification or escort in waters claimed by a State that has not consented. Delegations concerned with sovereignty will argue that a mechanism established here becomes a template applied elsewhere. Consider whether safeguards — time limits, consent requirements, neutral administration — can genuinely address that concern or merely postpone it.

Whether cargo should be prioritised, and how

If limited passage is restored, someone must decide what moves first. Energy cargo commands the highest commercial value and the most powerful advocates; food, fertilizer and medical supplies serve the most vulnerable populations. Consider whether an agreed prioritisation formula is achievable, and what happens in its absence.

Whether seafarers' rights survive a security emergency

The ILO maintains that the Maritime Labour Convention remains fully applicable during crises. In practice, crews have been detained, denied repatriation, and abandoned. Consider what makes a labour convention enforceable when the parties obstructing it are not the shipowners but States, and whether the right to refuse work in high-risk waters is meaningful for a crew already inside them.

Whether the response has been selective

Delegates will ask why this disruption commands sustained international attention when comparable humanitarian emergencies do not, and whether the answer is the scale of human suffering or the scale of commercial exposure. The question is uncomfortable, legitimate, and likely to be raised by the delegations with the least to gain from raising it. It deserves a genuine answer rather than a procedural one.

Whether the burden should be redistributed

The states suffering most severely are neither belligerents nor beneficiaries. Consider whether any obligation of compensation, concessional financing, or preferential humanitarian access is owed to them, by whom, and on what basis — and whether such a claim has any precedent the committee can build on.

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