

## **Committee: Historical Crisis 2**

### **Topic: Arab Spring**

#### **Report of the Chairs**

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### **I. Theme of the Conference**

Model United Nations San Antonio (MUNSA) is a conference dedicated to fostering authentic and passionate debate amongst delegates in order to generate solutions to current global issues. The theme of *MUNSA XXIV: Envision* encapsulates our mission to urge delegates to foresee a future in which these problems have been dissolved. With collaboration in mind, delegates from every committee are encouraged to visualize innovative resolutions and a prosperous world to come. Together, we will propel ourselves into an age in which brilliant ideas converge to transform our world and address its most paramount issues.

### **II. Rationale**

The Arab Spring was a series of protests that started in Tunisia with the self-immolation of fruit vendor Mohammed Bouazizi in late 2010. These massive civil uprisings erupted due to a variety of economic and political factors in addition to an overarching outcry against government corruption.<sup>2</sup> The protests spread rapidly across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), precipitating foreign disputes, regime change, domestic turmoil, and reform. The Arab Spring fundamentally transformed the Middle East and proved that citizens' voices can bring about sweeping changes to nations' economic, social, and institutional policies. The theme of the conference encourages delegates to visualize a new world and employ diplomacy and discussion to make it a reality; these protests exemplify how citizens and leaders can invent a new future for themselves and spark real change. Against the shifting political backdrop of a Middle East in crisis, delegates must seize the opportunity to work with each other to address these movements and forge peaceful solutions to the crisis at hand.

### **III. Crisis Description**

On the eve of the Arab Spring, the Middle East was positioned for change. In many nations, autocratic leaders and a corrupt government monopolized power, and citizens suffered at the hands of the economic mismanagement, poverty, repression, and human rights violations that plagued their nations. Increased numbers of young people led to a more volatile public, and dissatisfaction with the government ran high. Additionally, the rise of social media meant that the Middle East was more interconnected than ever, making the entire region a powder keg for popular uprisings that could easily be publicized online.<sup>9</sup> The spark to ignite the conflagration came on December 17, 2010, when Tunisian fruit vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set fire to himself in front of the local governor's office in Sidi Bouzid in protest of a corrupt government and police. Bouazizi, the sole income earner in his family, had attempted to gain redress at the office after being harassed by government officials, who had hindered his fruit-selling business. For many Tunisians, Bouazizi's struggle to earn an income in times of high unemployment and his experiences with a corrupt government aligned with their grievances with the Tunisian leadership. Consequently, Bouazizi quickly became a symbol of the ensuing Jasmine Revolution.<sup>3</sup> Bouazizi's self-immolation opened the floodgates of discontent, and Tunisians took to the streets to call for change, including the resignation of long-time President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Protests began in Sidi Bouzid and spread, eventually reaching the capital, Tunis. While Ben Ali promised some changes in response to the protests, it was not enough: the uprising only calmed with the overthrow of the government in mid-January, when Ali stepped down and fled.<sup>4</sup> Ben Ali was replaced by Fouad Mebaaza, the former President of the Tunisian Chamber of Deputies, as Interim President, and a more free, fair society was seemingly on the horizon.<sup>7</sup> The initial protests quickly spread to other nations in the region as videos of the demonstrations and the violent police responses to protestors were shared online and in the news, inspiring discontented citizens across the region to demand reform and democracy.<sup>2</sup>

The Arab Spring was influenced by its interactions with broad trends in the Middle East. The great diversity of ethnicities, languages, and cultures within the various nations affected by the Arab Spring reflected the continuing factionalism in the region. This posed challenges to reform and the incorporation of a wide variety of groups into a shared, stable government.<sup>8</sup> Islam and its affiliated political ideology, Islamism, also heavily influenced the Arab Spring<sup>6</sup> and

framed the crisis in the ongoing debates of the Muslim world.<sup>1</sup> The struggle between secular and Islamist government was woven into the promise of democracy as new governments were formed and the role of religion in government was reevaluated. While some nations have made it clear that religion is not a cardinal element their respective governments, Islam is still pivotal to Arab Spring, as the role of Islam in government, as well as Islamic fundamentalist groups, became entangled in the crisis.<sup>6</sup> Debate and compromise on the issues of factionalism and Islamism is an important consideration when evaluating the course of the Arab Spring.

In order to address this crisis, we call upon the leaders of a variety of Middle Eastern and North African nations to collaborate in order to maintain order and peace in the region while simultaneously addressing the protestors and their demands. Delegates should be prepared to discuss and shape the shifting identity of the Middle East during this time of upheaval and change while simultaneously navigating through the complex network of Islamism and factionalism in the region. Through collaboration and innovation, delegates must find peaceful, stable ways to rise to the challenges of guiding their nations into a new era for the Middle East.

#### **IV. References and Research Resources**

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## **V. Note to the Delegates**

Greetings! We hope that this crisis will be as exciting for you to participate in as it was for us to prepare for you. We are eager to see what solutions you come up with, and we look forward to some fascinating debate. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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