

Forum: Human Rights Council (HRC)

Issue #1: The question of restricting foreign aid to states with human rights violations.

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Guiding Questions as you Read

- How does foreign aid to violating states enable or exacerbate human rights abuses?
- What alternative mechanisms can protect vulnerable populations when aid is restricted?
- Who suffers most from aid to violating states: citizens, refugees, or donors?
- How do these abuses cause poverty and instability?
- What types of human rights violations, such as torture or suppression of free speech, most commonly occur in states receiving foreign aid?

Introduction

Key Terms

Human Rights
Foreign Aid
Inequality
Repressive
Economic Assistance

"Human rights are not a privilege conferred by the government. They are every human being's entitlement by virtue and humanity."—Mother Teresa. Human rights violations encompass actions by states that infringe on fundamental freedoms, such as torture, arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killings, and suppression of free speech. ("Universal Declaration of Human Rights | United Nations"). These abuses often occur systematically, undermining democratic institutions and creating environments of fear and uncertainty. Beyond immediate harm, they erode societal trust and perpetuate cycles of poverty and inequality. It also destabilizes regions through prolonged conflict or migration crises (Prasad and Eeckeloo). Common violations include enforced disappearances, gender-based violence, and censorship of dissent. While international frameworks, such as the UN Charter and regional treaties, aim to hold states accountable, enforcement remains inconsistent, allowing violations to persist without consequence ("States Must Stop Predatory, Anti-Rights Order Taking Hold"). Additionally, foreign aid, which emphasizes economic, military, and humanitarian assistance from donor nations or organizations, totaled over \$200 billion globally in 2024. However, this sharp decrease from previous years demonstrates a weakening of global

commitment to supporting vulnerable communities and human rights ("International Aid Falls in 2024 for First Time in Six Years, Says OECD"). Yet, providing aid to states with documented human rights risks may enable atrocities, as funds can strengthen repressive regimes rather than aid vulnerable populations. As a result, a moral and strategic dilemma arises; unrestricted aid may incentivize violations, while targeted restrictions could exacerbate humanitarian needs among innocent civilians. This issue affects billions, including citizens in aid-recipient states, donor taxpayers, and refugees fleeing abuse. ("The Impact of Foreign Aid Cuts").

Definition of Key Terms

Human Rights: A basic right that every person should have, such as justice and/or freedom ("Cambridge Essential American English Dictionary").

Universal Declaration of Human Rights: A historical landmark document adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948 (United Nations).

Protect: To keep someone or something safe from harm or damage ("Cambridge Essential American English Dictionary").

Sovereignty: The power a country has to control its own government and make decisions ("Cambridge Essential American English Dictionary").

International Humanitarian Law: A set of rules that tries to limit the effects of armed conflict for humanitarian reasons (INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS).

Human Rights Violations: The rejection of a state or non-state actor's abuse, ignore, or

deny any basic rights mandated by international law, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ("Human Rights Violations Explained - Human Rights Protection Fund")

Foreign Aid: A donation or bequest that is given by a richer country to a poorer one. Usually done in the form of money or food ("Cambridge Essential American English Dictionary").

Conditional Aid: A type of financial assistance provided, subject to requirements that the recipient must meet to receive or retain the funds (Kenton).

Sanctions: An official order that requires the stop of trade, usually taken against a country to make it obey international law ("Cambridge Essential American English Dictionary").

Embargo: An order to temporarily stop something, especially the tradition of giving out information ("Cambridge Essential American English Dictionary").

Hard Power: The use of military power to persuade countries to do something. Neocolonialism ("Cambridge Essential American English Dictionary").

Soft Power: Using cultural and economic influences to persuade other countries to do something ("Cambridge Essential American English Dictionary").

Humanitarian Crisis: An emergency that poses a critical threat to the health, safety, security, or well-being of a large group of people ("Humanitarian Situation Report | 1 May 2026 | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs -

Occupied Palestinian Territory").

NGOs: Stands for non-governmental organizations, which try to achieve social and political aims, but are not controlled by the governments, an example is the United Nations ("Cambridge Essential American English Dictionary").

Accountability: Being responsible for what you choose to do and being able to give a reason for your actions ("Cambridge Essential American English Dictionary").

Inequality: An unfair situation in society where some people have more opportunities, money, and advantages than others ("Cambridge Essential American English Dictionary").

Repressive: Using force or strict control to limit people's actions and freedom ("Cambridge Essential American English Dictionary").

Economic Assistance: Financial support provided to help a country improve its economy and meet the needs of its people (Reverso English Dictionary).

Current Situation

Key Terms
Human Rights
Violations
Consequences
Foreign Aid

Foreign aid is crucial for the survival of countries that are unable to help themselves. Foreign aid is defined as a donation that a country with more money gives to a country with specific needs. This could be military, food, or money ("Cambridge Essential American English Dictionary"). Many countries need foreign aid; they are going through immense humanitarian crises, violating the human rights of many people. Human rights laws are an essential

part of the world that helps define a clear line between what is right and what is wrong (USD MSHA faculty). Many countries and individuals believe that foreign aid should be limited to countries that follow human rights law, while others argue that cutting aid might hurt innocent individuals. (Douch et al.) This topic raises important questions about what is morally right and/or what is believed to be the best decision for countries.

Countries Restricting Foreign Aid

Due to the many violations and loss of humanitarian aid, nearly 300 million people globally need assistance ("Global Aid Crisis: 13 Countries Most Affected by International Aid Cuts | the IRC"). Many countries restrict foreign aid not only due to humanitarian concerns but also for political and social reasons, which often lead to violations of human rights (Cheeseman et al.). Donors usually use aid suspensions as punishment in response to a country receiving aid not doing what they claim it should. Research shows that high corruption and poor human rights weaken the effectiveness of receiving aid and funds. (Dasandi et al.).

Emerging Trends

"In 2025, aid cuts by the White House have had an outsized impact, threatening essential services and weakening global health security" ("Global Aid Crisis: 13 Countries Most Affected by International Aid Cuts | the IRC"). The U.S. was one of the top donors alongside Germany, Japan, and France, but in 2025, it significantly dropped by 57% ("The Great Aid Recession: 2025's Humanitarian Crash in Nine Charts | Council on Foreign Relations"). This cut has created a threat to the global human rights ecosystem, as disrupting the health funding has worsened some outbreaks and current wars. However, it has been said that many reductions have impacted the people more negatively than the violators ("Report: Foreign Aid Cuts Threaten Global Human Rights

Ecosystem").

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

The United States

The United States often takes a contradictory approach to foreign aid. Although U.S. law formally requires aid recipients to meet human rights conditions, in practice, aid decisions are frequently shaped by strategic, security, and economic interests rather than by strict human rights enforcement (Stewart). As of 2026, U.S. foreign aid is more centralized under the Department of State after the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was absorbed in 2025, making aid more directly tied to U.S. foreign policy priorities (Hansler and Maher).

China

China opposes restricting foreign aid based on human rights violations, emphasizing sovereignty and non-interference in international affairs. Additionally, China is a major provider of loans and development aid, often with fewer political conditions. An estimated 60 billion annually is provided in economic assistance to developing states, including those with poor records, arguing that aid promotes development without political strings attached (Quicassa). Recently, China has significantly expanded its role in foreign aid and development cooperation over the past seven decades, especially through platforms like the Belt and Road Initiative, and now seeks a more proactive global position by aligning its assistance with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Yuan et al.).

Russia

Russia often gives humanitarian and development aid to strengthen its influence, spread propaganda, and support friendly regimes, even when those regimes contribute to instability or abuse human rights. Russia also rejects aid restrictions tied to human rights, prioritizing alliances and a multipolar security order over accountability, meaning its foreign aid is strategically designed to advance foreign policy goals and expand influence ("Poisoned Gifts: Humanitarian and Development Aid in Russia's Foreign Policy"). Rather than using one centralized aid agency, Russia distributes assistance through a wide network of state-linked organizations, gaining flexible control over how aid is delivered.

Japan

Japan's foreign policy has changed significantly. In terms of its development, there has been a move towards being increasingly strategic over time. Traditionally, Japan avoided providing aid tied to military purposes because of constitutional restrictions and its post-war pacifist stance. However, Japan has begun to expand its security-related assistance. This includes the creation of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2023. This shift indicates a move towards using aid more strategically and for regional security. Japan's ODA aims to support development and human security while also strengthening Japan's national interests and promoting a free and open international order based on the rule of law (Nishida).

France

France combines human rights continuity with strong humanitarian engagement. It's focused on targeting the Sustainable Development Goals as well as tackling global inequalities. France is a key EU donor involved in programs in Africa and conflict regions.

Supporting education, infrastructure, and healthcare via government entities. France also requires transparency, accountability, and certain obligations regarding how it provides foreign aid ("Paris Aims for Effective Aid: Report on French Development Assistance"). France can suspend state development aid in response to illegitimate governments or major human rights violations. This means they will not provide directly to the government; they will support civilians by funding refugee assistance, protection, and mental health programs through both NGOs and UN agencies (Chudjakov).

United Nations Involvement

The Human Rights Council (HRC) intergovernmental body for human rights issues

This intergovernmental body serves as a forum to discuss the abuses. Past resolutions and pressure have led many governments to improve their behavior towards the violation of their citizens' rights. This panel also helps shape the UN's response towards the crises by creating investigations, commissions, and mandates when a country is in a bad situation where it needs help ("Human Rights Council - Center for Global Law and Justice | Resource Hub"). This council focuses on reviewing human rights-based situations where member states must respond to urgent emergencies. They respond to how governments should protect their citizens and enforce human rights ("United Nations Human Rights Council - Definition and Facts").

UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights

The special rapporteur Olivier De Schutter said, "Unprecedented cuts to global aid and intensifying attacks on multilateralism are undermining decades of progress in the fight against poverty" ("Attacks on World Order and Global Aid Derailing Decades of Progress on Poverty, Warns UN Poverty Expert"). As countries are slowly turning away from international cooperation, there might be a terrible domino effect behind it

because of aid budget cuts. The mandate was created to raise awareness of the plight of people living in extreme poverty, where it is crucial to identify the obstacles. This mandate aims to examine multidimensional poverty, as many groups have been living in vulnerable situations ("About the Mandate"). This special rapporteur produces thematic and important reports that document not only economic but also other policies. Aid arrangements and international financial institutions are affecting poverty today ("Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights (A/HRC/38/33)—Social Protection and Human Rights").

Timeline of Events, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

Date	Description of Event
1973	The United States Congress passed the Foreign Assistance Act of 1973, which included section 32, the Abourezk Amendment. This marked the first time U.S. law formally linked foreign aid to human rights, stating that the head of state should deny economic or military assistance to any foreign government that practices the internment or imprisonment of its own citizens for political reasons ("S.1443 - Foreign Assistance Act of 1973").
1997	The European Union establishes human rights as an "essential element," making it a mandatory component of all external agreements, including trade and development aid. This legally links financial assistance to a partner country's respect for human rights and democratic principles, allowing the EU to suspend aid if these conditions are violated. The milestone transferred human rights from a moral suggestion to a

contractual requirement, providing a formal mechanism to discontinue aid in response to severe violations. (*The Human Rights Clause in the EU's External Agreements*)

2000

The UN adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which, although they did not explicitly mandate strict conditionality measures, encouraged donors to align their funding with more human rights values, such as accountability and non-discrimination. This shift was a turning point, steering global aid policy towards a more "rights-based" approach. (*Human Rights and the Millennium Development Goals in Practice: A Review of Country Strategies and Reporting*)

2005

The UN establishes a stronger framework for victims' rights and passes a set of landmark principles regarding the rights of victims of severe abuses. It fundamentally changed how international donors and agencies view the relationship between financial aid, justice, and reparations. It solidified the standard that humanitarian and development assistance must always uphold, rather than weaken, established human rights norms and international law. (*Resolution 2005/35 on Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law*)

2017

The European Union began redefining how it handles governments with poor human rights records, opting to delay or adjust specific budgets. Crucially, they maintained funding for basic services and

humanitarian needs. This move represented a more strategic form of conditionality, designed to put pressure on state leadership without causing collateral damage to the civilian population (Tempest).

- 2020 Recognizing that broad aid cuts often disproportionately harm the most vulnerable communities, major donors such as Canada, the Nordic states, and the EU have refined their strategies. Instead of total withdrawals, they began carving out protections for essential sectors. This meant withholding military transfers or direct government budget support while simultaneously ensuring that funding for healthcare, education, etc., remained intact (Gafuri et al.).
- 2023-2026 In October of 2023, the Israel-Gaza conflict began. Since then, Israel has repeatedly restricted the entry of human rights aid into Gaza, including food, fuel, and medical supplies, claiming the measures were needed to stop supplies from falling into the hands of armed groups. In early 2024, Israeli authorities shut down the border crossing at critical times, only permitting a select number of aid trucks, and occasionally blocked fuel deliveries altogether, bringing Gaza close to widespread famine and forcing UN agencies to suspend aid operations temporarily (Cooney). Recently, Israel has also introduced stricter rules for international NGO's and limited entry of aid workers, which humanitarian groups say blocked essential support and weakened relief efforts ("Israel: Ban on 37 Aid Groups Makes Life Unbearable for Genocide Survivors in Palestine, Say UN Experts").

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Past attempts to limit foreign aid to countries with human rights violations have had mixed results. Human rights conditions were first established in the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act of 1973 and later expanded by the EU and other donors. These conditions required countries receiving aid to improve areas such as free elections, protection of civil liberties, reduced political repression, and respect for human rights, which have helped reveal abuses and sometimes led to partial aid suspensions in response to crackdowns or electoral fraud. However, enforcement has been inconsistent, especially when donors have strong strategic or economic interests. Large-scale reductions or suspensions of aid programs have sometimes harmed civilians by weakening healthcare, education, food assistance, and humanitarian relief ("Lives on the Line: The Human Impact of US Foreign Aid Shift"). Overall, conditions can publicly pressure governments and encourage improvements such as fairer elections, greater transparency, and stronger legal protections, but they have rarely changed abusive regimes without additional measures, such as targeted sanctions and more support for local human rights defenders. These policies have been less successful at forcing governments to change their behavior but have played a clear role in shaping how donors distribute aid and improve accountability ("When Aid and Aid Conditionality Become 'Human Rights Violations'"). Foreign aid is far more likely to produce economic growth when recipient governments have stronger human rights protections and institutions. In countries affected by corruption and repression, aid is often less effective because resources are more likely to be misused or diverted from reaching development goals. This suggests that monitoring human rights conditions can help donors judge whether aid will actually lead to positive outcomes, making conditionality a practical tool rather than simply a moral argument (*Aid Effectiveness: Human Rights as a Conditionality Measure*).

Possible Solutions

When the conversation of restricting foreign aid to states with human rights violations comes to life, governments and international organizations should start to strengthen their rules so that no harm is done. For starters, countries could start to keep foreign aid more targeted and conditional. Rather than choosing a rapid response to the issue, a stronger approach would be to evaluate the country's profile, and rather than completely cutting out aid, solutions will be open. If aid is simply cut off, many civilians could suffer because of the lack of materials. Some aid supports governments directly, and others help civilians with food and resources. Because of that, the best way to view a solution is to focus on whether aid is helping people or supporting the leaders who are causing the harm. Aid should be used responsibly, so support civilians rather than using it against them. Aid can sometimes be used wrongly, causing leaders to use it unethically.

The United Nations can help guide these decisions through its human rights work and rules. By monitoring some abuses and reporting any violations that are occurring it can help and hold countries accountable for their actions. This approach could be seen as balanced, as it supports and tries to protect human rights without punishing the innocent people who are harmed by the lack of support. This also suggests that the best policies might come from limiting abusive authorities while still giving assistance that protects vulnerable people and their civilians. In that sense, the goal should be to look at the issue at hand by assuming responsibility and monitoring any kinds of abuse.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16

SDG 16, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions.

The question of restricting foreign aid to countries with human rights violations encompasses many of the UN's social development goals, but most prominently Goal 16, which aims to build effective, accountable, and safe societies for sustainable development as well as the protection of human rights ("Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions—United Nations Sustainable Development"). It correlates to the core of the issue, foreign aid, although it has many purposes, such as military, economic, or developmental; all of these contribute to developing societies and ensuring a collaborative effort (Ross). Foreign aid is most effective when the receiving countries have strong and honest institutions. If they are transparent and accountable, it is more likely to be used as intended instead of being wasted through corruption. ("Accountability, Participation and Foreign Aid Effectiveness - GSDRC"). Without the rule of law and good governance, large amounts of aid can create dependency or even worsen conflict by strengthening corrupt groups.

Useful Links for Research (Appendix)

The appendix is a list of useful links that can guide research. In the appendix, there are short descriptions of links that help understand their relevance to the issue. Additionally, each description of what the article is about includes a possible use for it in the delegate's research. Common uses of the resources are related to giving perspective on each country's viewpoints, possible contribution to the debate, current events related to the issue, statistics that can be used in the debate, amongst other uses.

https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/type/peacekeepers_trauma.asp

<https://www.oecd.org/en/about/news/press-releases/2025/04/official-development-assistance-2024-figures.html>

Source A: This article provides data about foreign aid totals and their recent decline. It provides crucial quantitative data about the recent events in aid. It is useful to gather data and know what is occurring in countries.

<https://www.rescue.org/13-countries-impacted-aid-cuts>

Source B: This source from the International Rescue Committee explores how the different countries are going through international aid cuts. It identifies the most affected countries due to their current situations.

<https://icmglit.org/the-great-aid-recession-2025s-humanitarian-crash-in-nine-charts/>

Source C: This source addresses the humanitarian aid collapse in 2025, specifically the data backbone on the US's major rate drop. It left millions of people without any support, leading to devastation.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/about-council>

Source D: This source from the United Nations HRC sector explores how the HRC addresses human-rights violations and emergencies. It focuses on different recommendations that they make based on the ongoing issues about aid restrictions.

<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/lives-line-human-impact-us-foreign-aid-shifts-enar>

Source E: This source specifically argues how the cuts in the U.S foreign aid have harmed many civilians due to the weakening of public services and humanitarian relief. It specifies in the countries that are already going through human rights abuses and shows how these restrictions are further hurting vulnerable populations.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X22001681>

Source F: This source strictly argues how foreign aid is likely to produce and scale up economic growth when governments respect human rights and build strong institutions. It frames human rights as a crucial part of society's growth and looks at whether aid will actually reach its goals.

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