

Forum: Historic Security Council (HSC)

Issue: 1953, The question of shutting down labour camps whose policies goes against the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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Introduction

As the United Nations was founded on the principle of the respect of Human Rights, the creation of labour camps with aggressive policies towards the inmates represent a main violation of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed in 1948 (United Nations, 1948).

The concept of labour camps was originally developed as a form of detention for criminals to act as their sentence. Unfortunately, the original purpose of this detention methods escalated and many individuals ended up being convicted to labour camps without a clear reasons and sometimes even without a trial in the first place. The people detained in labour camps vary from prisoners of war to domestic criminals. However, when the practice of labour camps became more widespread the majority of the interns was political opponents. Given the historical context in which labour camps started developing, it is important to have an understanding of the major events of the mid 20th century, therefore the "History" section of this report is of significant importance.

Seeing as another terrible practice of concentration and extermination camps also took place in the 20th century, it is extremely important to define the difference between these two. As suggested by the name, labour camps involve labour as the form of punishment for the crimes that were supposedly committed, concentrations camps, on the other hand, are indefinite forms of detention that most likely involve some sort of physical torture and often death (Merriam-Webster, 2017). Unfortunately, this happened during the Holocaust and World War II and is therefore not under the jurisdiction of the United Nations as it was non existent at the time, therefore, only the difference should be noted. For the sake of sticking to the issue at hand, this report will only focus on the practice of labour camps.

During the 20th century, labour camps became extremely widespread and were not confined to a single country. As a matter of fact, they appeared under all sort of political regimes, socialist, communist and fascist, for example.

Definition of Key Terms

The definition of key terms shall provide delegates with specific terminology that will enable them to understand the issue in depth. This section shall include any specific terminology pertaining to content, it is highly advisable that any official documents, treaties,

peacekeeping missions, and events are defined in this section. Definitions shall be no longer than a few paragraphs. This section serves as a knowledge only section, meaning that no evaluation of any information is required.

Labour camp = detention facilities where inmates are required to engage in labour activities as part of their criminal sentence. Also known as work camps. (Wikipedia, 2017)

Principle of self determination = principle which allows states to become independent through the creation of a constitution (Thürer, 2008)

Political Opposition = individual or group of individual which disagrees with the political views of whoever is in power and does not fail to openly share the opposing views (IGI Global, 2017)

Political Ideology = set of opinions or beliefs of a group or an individual, examples are capitalism, communism or socialism (Vocabulary.com, 2017)

Universal Declaration of Human Rights = UN Declaration that gathers all human rights for all citizens of UN Member State and therefore sets guidelines for subsequent violations (United Nations, 1948)

Arbitrary Arrest = arrest of one or more individuals done without a clear reason and often without a trial (United Nations, 1948)

Torture = act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession (APT, 2017)

History

As previously mentioned, in order to fully understand what led to the creation of labour camps in the first place it is fundamental to have an overview of the political, economic and social situation in the 20th century.

End of World War Two

As World War Two ended on 2 September 1945, the consequences and impacts it had on many of the United Nations Member States are countless and significant as they strongly affected future historical developments. The first consequence is that in the aftermath of WWII many big and powerful empires disintegrated and left their place to smaller nations which finally obtained the principle of self determination. This led to better connection between nation and a better level of globalisation was also reached thanks to the slow spreading of better technologies. A big issue that was dealt with after the war was the huge number of casualties that it had caused, both amongst civilians and in the military. Another major factor that developed as a consequence of World War Two were the significant tensions occurring between the United States and the Communist Soviet Union. More about the origins and outbreak of the Cold War will be explained in a separate paragraph.

However, what is important to consider regarding World War Two in regards to the issue at hand, is the general destruction that it caused, deaths and poverty but also the creation of nations which never existed before (UK Essays, 2013).

The Soviet Union

After various failures and successes during World War Two and its aftermath, the Soviet Union is living a very delicate period at the beginning of the 1950s. The main event taking place in this time is the outbreak of the Korean War, between 1950 and 1953, which starts worsening relations between the Communist Soviet Union. Secondly, the Soviet Union officially recognised China as a Communist state and 1950 represents the beginning of the 30 year alliance between the two (BBC, 2013) . Meanwhile Stalin's communist regime inside the Soviet Union is still extremely strong and his removal of all kinds of opposition continues. This is why the domestic affairs of the Soviet Union are so relevant to the issue at hand. As a matter of fact, labour camps were one of the main way Stalin would deal with opposition. Citizens of the Soviet Union were completely deprived of their freedoms and civil rights and every aspect of life was controlled by the government. The living conditions were poor due to lack of food, low wages and terrible working conditions.

Origins of the Cold War

The hate that Western nations had for communism at this time, was never kept hidden. Manipulation of public opinions and general repression were common ways used to create a distorted image of this political ideology and feed the tense relations with the USSR. The clear disagreements between the US and the USSR lay their origins in Potsdam in 1945, when Truman, President of the USA, Churchill, Great Britain's Prime Minister, and Stalin, current holder of Soviet power, all met to decide the fate of Germany after having lost the war. USSR argued for higher reparation costs in order to obtain money to rebuild their own country. However, the US strongly disagreed as they thought they would end up having to support Germany just like they had done after World War One and they did not want their money to go to rebuilding the Soviet Union. This disagreement escalated quickly and was raised at a European level when the USSR and the US both started contemplating the idea of obtaining complete power over Europe. The United States and Britain started making efforts to take control over Europe and the response by the USSR was just to strengthen their already existing grip in the region. The issue of the atomic bomb also brought additional tension to the table, with the USSR exploding their first hydrogen bomb in 1953.

The reason the Cold War is relevant to the issue of labour camp is because the growing tension between the USSR and the US created more suspicion and general growth of political opposition.

Key Issues

In this case, there is really one major key issue in this topic: the violation of human rights. All violations of human rights are very easy to see and direct violations of articles from the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The issue is that the concept of labour camps violates so many human rights that developing a solution will be a long and complicated process. As the United Nations we should actively stand to resolve these violations and

therefore it is important to identify which human rights are violated before they can be tackled and a solution can be developed.

Civil Rights

Violation of civil rights is key in order to understand the issue of labour camps. As a matter of fact, they are often a root cause of what leads to someone being brought to a labour camp in the first place. Labour camps are often used as a detention practice for people opposing the regime who is in power. This means that people are not allowed to express their opinion freely and therefore deprived of their freedom of speech as well as freedom of press. This is clearly an issue as it is a direct violation of Article 18 and Article 19 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948).

Article 18.

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19.

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Equal Right to Life

Another clear violation of human rights occurring in labour camps which is probably the most basic one, is the appropriation of a person's life. As a matter of fact, people who are deported to labour camps often end up getting killed. What makes this violation even more significant, and against the UN Declaration, is that such deportation to labour camps and consequent killings often take place due to race and political beliefs, as a way to get rid of the political opposition. This in particular is a violation of the very first article of the Declaration. (United Nations, 1948)

Article 1.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Slavery and Torture

Part of the punishments that people held under detention in labour camps are often victims of all kinds of torture, both physical and physiological, and in more extreme cases labour camps often can be considered slavery. These are direct violations of articles 4 and 5 in the Declaration. (United Nations, 1948)

Article 4.

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5.

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Arbitrary Arrest and Right to Trial

This violation of human right is extremely important to understand as it is the main connection to where labour camps originate from. As a matter of fact, the people detained in labour camps are often political opponents that the regime in power wants to eliminate. This is done through arbitrary arrest and a trial is basically never conducted. This is a direct violation of article 9 and article 11.

Article 9.

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 11.

(1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

(2) No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

Major Parties Involved

The major parties involved section shall explain the stance/policy of any relevant country on the topic at hand. It is advised that when providing the stance of a country, no speculation/opinion is included, rather only relevant facts are mentioned. There shall be at least 5 major parties, 3 of which must be Power of Five nations, 1 of which must be a United Nations Organization or Non-Governmental Organization.

The major parties involved in this issue are not only those who physically created labour camps but also countries involved in historical disputes taking place in 1953, mainly the Cold War.

United States of America

The USA is relevant in this case seeing as it was directly involved in the Cold War with the USSR. Even though most labour camps were actually located in the Soviet Union, several americans were imprisoned there and categorised as political opponents. Therefore, the US has a great interest in providing a solution to the existence of labour camps for the sake of their citizens. However, it is important that the US identifies the Cold War as one of the major and root causes of the creation of labour camps in the first place.

United Kingdom

Despite not playing a key role in the actual Cold War dispute and not owning any labour camps themselves, the UK finds themselves involved due to their good relations with the USA and their historical fear of communism in the past decades, leading up to the Cold War.

Soviet Union

Bulgaria & Hungary

As the Russian Red Army entered Bulgaria they started a process of elimination of political opposition directly after their arrival. This included several killings but also the subsequent creation of labour camps. People with different political ideologies and members of the political policies were all taken to labour camps. When considering the labour camp situation consider that Bulgaria is part of the Soviet Union after all, at this time. (Todorov, 1999)
A very similar thing took place in Hungary.

Timeline

1945 → End of WW2 and Potsdam Conference

1945-1949 → Appearance of labour camps in Bulgaria

1946 → Churchill's Iron Curtain Speech

1947 → Marshall Plan

1948 → United Nations Declaration of Human Rights

1948-1949 → Berlin Blockade

1949 → Soviet Union first explosion of atomic device

1949 → Soviet Union recognises Communist Government of China

1949 → NATO formed

1949-1953 → Political prisoners are relocated in labour camps in Bulgaria

1950 → Soviet Union and China Alliance Treaty

1950 → Outbreak of Korean (History on the net, 2016)

Evaluation of Previous Attempts

Unfortunately, as of 1953, no previous attempts have been taken to solve this issue. This is mainly due to a very important factor, that most of the labour camps were unknown of by the United Nations and by the people everywhere in the world. Tackling an issue that was not known off is obviously practically impossible. As a matter of fact, the magnitude of the issue was a lot bigger than thought of and many of the locations remained unknown. Furthermore, an issue like this that directly relates to human rights infringement requires specialised Non Governmental Organisations which were non existent at this point or did not have an effective jurisdiction.

Possible Solutions

Possible solutions for this problem include the possible creation of an NGO for the safeguarding of human rights which will tackle this issues directly. Other solutions such as the use of sanction in order to increase the jurisdiction of the UN and increase the authority it has over country, might also be effective.

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Appendices

- I. Overview and Definition of Gulags <https://www.britannica.com/place/Gulag>
- II. Russia and the USSR - Labour Camps
<https://books.google.se/books?id=vYlqpmIqYZ4C&pg=RA1-PA3&lpg=RA1-PA3&dq=labour+camps+ussr&source=bl&ots=6-V6hilu3R&sig=ulhDXeX1yeW-2Pf7EOANuI5ROVE&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjXju2NhtfWAhXIFJoKHZFIAfo4ChDoAQg1MAM#v=onepage&q=labour%20camps%20ussr&f=false>
- III. Forced Labour in Soviet Russia 1917-1953
<https://socialhistory.org/en/collections/forced-labour-soviet-russia-1917-1953>