

Romero Journal

International Humanitarian Crises



The Romero Journal seeks to amplify the voices of the marginalized in our communities and promote social justice. Inspired by Saint Oscar Romero, a martyr and exemplary justice-seeking catholic, the The Romero Journal strives to deliver the stories that inspire solidarity, compassion, and action. As a branch of Political Advocates of the Sacred Heart, The Romero Journal also serves to inform the SHP student body about opportunities of activism and advocacy.

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The Yemen Humanitarian Crisis

Dorreen Darya-Bari ('21)

Yemen is facing the largest humanitarian crisis in the world. If you have no idea what is going on in Yemen, are confused about how it all happened, or want to know how to help, then keep on reading.

On May 22, 1990, the North and South of Yemen unified under President Ali Abdullah Saleh. As a result of public uprisings, during Arab Spring, the authoritarian president was forced to hand over his power to Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi in 2012. As president, Hadi struggled to deal with a variety of problems, including attacks by Jihadists, a separatist movement in the south, as well as corruption, unemployment, and food insecurity. Then, an angered and armed group called the Houthis moved into Sana'a, the capital city, and took over government institutions. President Hadi and other government officials were ousted from Yemen after the takeover in March 2015.

Consequently, Saudi Arabia launched a military intervention, with the support of nine allies, to kick out the Houthis and restore power to Hadi's government. However, the civil war has only heightened in Yemen as each of the warring parties attempts to gain power. This has led to widespread hunger, destruction, and the displacement of millions of innocent civilians. So far, the war has yielded economic collapse, a cholera epidemic, and a failing health system that was already damaged by years of political unrest

The most substantial byproduct of the violence is the staggering impact on human life, the escalating displacement of Yemeni citizens, as well as the most severe food, water, and medicine crisis in the world. More than 50% of the country's health and sanitation facilities have either been destroyed or damaged due to the conflict. Hence, over 20.5 million people lack access to clean water. Approximately 80% of Yemenis are reliant on humanitarian assistance, many with weakened immune systems and a lack of trust in the health system. Unfortunately, the *UN's Humanitarian Response Plan* for June through December of 2020, is facing a shortfall of more than \$2 billion while 17 million people are starving and the rates of malnutrition are at an all-time high. Children continue to be killed in the conflict, and damage to schools has disrupted access to education, leaving them even more vulnerable than ever before. In 2017, the United Nations said a child under the age of five was dying every 10 minutes from preventable causes, including hunger, disease, and violence.

On top of their declining standard of living, economy, and millions of lives lost, the people of Yemen have to face a global pandemic as well. The health system in Yemen was already failing before the spread of COVID-19, and the pandemic is only making it worse. The risk of disease has skyrocketed with limited medicine imports making it over the border. More than a quarter of the confirmed cases have died as a result of the pandemic – over five times the global average. Of the health facilities that remain open, most lack basic equipment like masks and gloves, let alone oxygen ventilators and other essential supplies to treat COVID patients. Many health workers aren't receiving their salaries, and 10.2 million children don't have access to basic healthcare. As the pandemic spreads, the overall number of malnourished children under the age of five could increase to a total of 2.4 million. Finally, as schools have shut down across the country, an additional 5.8 million children are unable to access education.

Yemen's humanitarian crisis has gone largely unnoticed, but the world cannot afford to turn a blind eye on it any longer – too many lives are at risk.

Here's how you can help. The best way to help Yemen is to educate and donate. Please take the time to read other articles, linked below, and spread the word. Together, we can stop normalizing destruction and corruption in the Middle East.

[Project HOPE](#), [Mona Relief](#), [Baitulmaal AHED](#), [Islamic Relief USA](#), [UNICEF](#), [The UN Refugee Agency](#), [International Rescue Committee](#), [Doctors Without Borders](#), [Save the Children](#)
[Zakat Foundation of America](#)

Female Genital Mutilation in Sudan

Grace Duncanson ('22)

Sudan, located in North-East Africa, has a female population of around 22 million, and according to [UNICEF](#), nearly 9 out of 10 women age 15 to 49 have undergone the painful and dangerous procedure of female genital mutilation; this statistic does not even account for the 35% of girls age 5 to 9 who have been cut too.

Female genital mutilation, specifically the infibulation procedure practiced in Sudan, is the extremely painful and possibly fatal practice of creating a “seal” by removing the clitoris and cutting and sewing over the labia majora of the vagina; this operation has been proven to have absolutely no medical benefits, and it causes a huge variety of physical and mental health problems. To be specific, according to the [World Health Organization](#), consequences of this discriminatory procedure include excessive bleeding and pain; a number of infections; severe shock; urinary, sexual, and menstrual problems; childbirth complications and infant death; and mental illnesses.

Regardless of the health effects on women and girls that FGM has, many religious conservatives in Sudan have worked tirelessly to prevent any legislation that outlaws the dangerous procedure. In Sudan, it is a widespread cultural and traditional belief that female genital mutilation is essential for girls' reputations, marriageability, modesty, and purity. There have been laws in the past in Sudan that restricted the procedure and tried to ban it, but the laws have not been enforced and prosecutions have not been carried out. The practice of female genital mutilation violates several international human rights provisions that protect women and girls, but activists fighting to criminalize FGM have been met with obstacle after obstacle from the Sudanese government, preventing them from getting it effectively banned. Former president Omar Al-Bashir, leader of Sudan from 1989 to 2019, rejected previous attempts to ban FGM, but he is no longer in charge during Sudan's transition to a more democratic system, which is now under the rule of prime minister Abdalla Hamdok.

Despite several obstacles, Sudanese women and their allies have created an empowering social movement that seeks to officially ban and criminalize the procedure of female genital mutilation. The new transitional government in place in Sudan following the coup has stated their commitment to eliminating the practice from the country by 2030, describing how it is outdated and not at all justified

by or advocated for in any beliefs or practices of Islam, regardless of what many believe. On April 22nd, 2020, a new amendment to the criminal code was passed in Sudan that criminalizes the procedure, stating that anyone who performs FGM, whether in a medical establishment or anywhere else, faces 3 years in jail and a fine. This is a major win for the safety, health, bodily autonomy, and rights of women and girls in Sudan. There are fears that the practice of female genital mutilation will shift to underground and secret operations, but Sudanese women have hope, and the amendment is a huge step in the right direction of reforming the justice system and protecting human rights.

Venezuela: How Things Went From Bad to Worse

Zoe Schneider ('21)

At this point, nearly everyone has come to the consensus that 2020 has been a year full of turmoil, disappointment, and uncertainty. But the story in Venezuela, at least as much as I can cover in a brief article, went from terribly bad to astronomically worse. Though Venezuela is rich with oil and was at one point a rising power in South America, the country fell into an economic crisis in 2010. The crisis has been exacerbated by shortages of medicine, medical supplies, food, and water, as well as blackouts, and widespread political corruption. Additionally, President Nicolás Maduro's questionable re-election in 2018 led to public outcry and "a 2019 military uprising instigated by opposition politician Juan Guaidó", as described by [History](#). The [Human Rights Watch's 2020 World Report](#) detailed Venezuela's intense infringement on civil liberties, the eradication of independent governmental institutions and fair judicial systems, violence against protesters and political opponents, and much more. There have been an estimated 18,000 extrajudicial killings (the killing of a person by governmental authorities or individuals without the sanction of any judicial proceeding or legal process) since 2016 alone, often targeted at low-income communities. This is just a snapshot of the "terribly bad" pre-2020 — and it really just scratches the surface.

One of the many things 2020 has brought has been the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which we've seen vary in impact and intensity depending on each government's response. Before the pandemic made its way to Venezuela, a March 2020 report estimated that 79% of Venezuela's population lived in extreme poverty, meaning that their paycheck was essential to their survival. Sheltering-in-place was not an option for most Venezuelans because many need to leave their homes to earn money, collect community provided meals, and even search for water during water and power shortages. Additionally, the government isn't the only source of law and order in Venezuela. Many neighborhoods are controlled by gangs, who define their own laws and punishments for violators of quarantine. As mentioned, Venezuela doesn't have the healthcare infrastructure or necessary resources to address a pandemic like COVID-19, leaving most without treatment or testing. [NPR](#) reported that there could be around 13,000 cases of COVID as of August 11th, 2020, with an approximate 30% increase in cases weekly. Because there is nowhere near the level of testing needed, these are very rough numbers, and even if there were proper tests, it's uncertain if the government would accurately report them.

Unfortunately, as we've witnessed in the U.S. as well, COVID has the capacity to deeply damage a nation's economy, and Venezuela's was already failing. Venezuela's number one industry is oil, which Maduro shut down when COVID became a threat, leaving many people vulnerable. Interestingly, Venezuela's second source of income comes from remittances (money that family members working in other countries send back home), due to the fact that 15% of the population has emigrated since 2014, leaving additional economic turmoil in their wake. 35% of Venezuelans rely on these remittances, though due to the global nature of the COVID-19 crisis, they all have been severely impacted. This has resulted in a 40% reduction of household income, meaning that those who were in extreme poverty before, are even worse off. Not to mention, the official channel for remittances is extremely corrupt, with the government taking most of the money for themselves.

While the U.S. can elect different leaders in a couple of months if they're dissatisfied with how the pandemic has been dealt with, Venezuelans are living under a corrupt authoritarian regime without a clear way out, and one they likely didn't choose to begin with.

Uighur Concentration Camps in China

Sofie Wheeler ('21)

There are about 11 million Uighurs that live in Xinjiang, China, and since 2017, roughly 1-3 million of them have been placed in concentration camps. Uighurs, also known as Uyghurs, are a religious and ethnic minority in China. Most Uighurs practice a modern form of Sunni Islam. Xinjiang, located in northwest China, has been under Chinese control since 1949 and is rich in oil and resources making it a coveted economic region. Since 1949, the area has attracted more Han Chinese, the ethnic majority in China. Since their migration, tensions have risen in Xinjiang between the Han and the Uighurs. The Uighurs have protested their treatment from the government and the Han, and some of these protests have led to riots. The government blamed these riots on the Uighurs, making them be viewed as a separatist and extremist group. The Uighurs have fought back, and in some cases, their attacks have turned violent. Although some cases have turned violent, the grand majority of Uighurs are peaceful and just want to be left alone to practice their religion in their homeland.

Because the Chinese government sees the Uighurs as a threat to their authority, they have passed laws to suppress them. In 2017, the Xinjiang government passed a law that prohibited women from wearing veils and men from growing long beards. Many of their mosques have also been destroyed. In 2017, the Chinese government started to force Uighurs into concentration camps; there are at least 85 camps in Xinjiang. The Chinese government denied the existence of the concentration camps but after footage was leaked, which included watchtowers and barbed wire fences, the Chinese government confessed that they were "re-education centers" for Uighurs. Uighurs have been detained, interrogated, and beaten because of their religious affiliation. They are forced to undergo psychological programs such as studying communist propaganda. Chinese officials have also reportedly used other forms of torture against them such as waterboarding and sexual abuse, assault, and even rape. Uighurs inside and outside of the camps are subject to cheap labor, and it has also been revealed that Uighur women have

been forced to take birth control or to have abortions, and are forced into camps if they resist. This is the largest mass internment of an ethnic-religious minority group since the Holocaust in World War II.

A letter in July 2019 to the UN Human Rights Council condemned the Chinese government for the internment of Uighurs. 22 countries signed the letter, most of them being European; the US was not among these countries. Four days later, in response to the letter, 37 countries defended China, congratulating them for protecting their country from terrorism and extremism. The list of countries included many Middle Eastern countries including the Muslim-majority countries of Egypt, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. Later in 2019, more than 30 countries, including the US, condemned China at the UN General Assembly for their oppression of the Uighurs.

In June, President Trump signed into law the *Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020*. This law imposed sanctions on foreign individuals and entities involved in the abuses of Uighurs in Xinjiang. It also required the President to send Congress an updated list of individuals and entities involved in the abuse of Uighurs. The US sanctions angered China resulting in them placing sanctions on US officials like Senators Marco Rubio and Chris Smith. Both Congressmen have been very outspoken about the human rights abuses of Uighurs in China. The US also blacklisted 11 Chinese companies that were tied to the labor abuse of the ethnic minority. However, the Trump administration's some-what tough approach to dealing with the situation comes as the US continues to grapple over COVID-19 and its ties to China. Nonetheless, the situation in Xinjiang needs to be a priority of the US Government and they need to do more to pressure the Chinese Government. In this case, economic pressure might be the most effective tool if it forces US companies to break ties with China.

Give Me 5 Minutes, I'll Give You The Truth About Femicide In Turkey

Kate Newton ('22)

Whether or not you are aware of it, Turkey is in the midst of a femicide. You might be questioning yourself, what exactly is a femicide? Femicide, or feminicide, is the act of intentionally killing women and girls simply due to the fact that they are female. It is a sex-based hate crime. However, not all of the violent hate crimes against women result in death. A 2009 study found that 42% of Turkish women, from ages fifteen to sixty, had suffered physical or sexual violence by their husbands and partners (McKernan). Many of these women are abused by their own partners or family members due to honor culture. Honor culture is when a person, normally male, feels as though they must protect their reputation by responding to insults or conflict with violence. This idea leads to honor killings, where a perpetrator will end up murdering someone because they believe the victim has brought shame or dishonor onto their family or has violated the principles of their community or religion. According to an article in the New York Times, between 2003 and 2008, Turkey had more than 1,000 female victims of honor killings (Kingsley).

But why is this happening? Why are innocent women in Turkey being murdered and physically abused? Recently, women in Turkey have begun demanding they be given more rights. As their conservative Islamic country progresses, they too want progress. Turkish women want modern rights. They want to be able to go to work, attend school, divorce or break up with their partner if they are unhappy, make their own decisions, and not be forced to do things against their will. Unfortunately, the more choices these women offer up, the more extreme the backlash becomes. The Turkish president, Tayyip Erdoğan, and his conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) insist that these opportunities threaten traditional family values. Still, these brave women face tear gas and rubber bullets while protesting for their modern rights. Despite the government's effort to suppress these women, they continue to challenge the idea that 'a woman's natural role is a mother' and that 'women are not equal to men'.

In 2011, the Turkish government adopted the Istanbul Convention which focused on gender-based violence and domestic violence. This convention offers support and protection to victims and helps prosecute their offenders. Overall, it helps protect women from their abusive partners, and that is exactly why President Erdoğan and his party are trying to get rid of it, as it encourages divorce and 'immoral' lifestyles. If Turkey gives women more rights, and the government uses its power to fight off male violence, the society would benefit, allowing Turkey to progress. President Erdoğan does not see it this way and is trying to remove legislation that protects women from gender-based violence.

Unfortunately, the problem is only getting worse. Last year, in 2019, 474 women were murdered by their partners or relatives, which is the highest rate in this past decade (McKernan). However, the Turkish government admitted that they do not keep records of the number of women murdered. When women ask for help from the police or their government officials, nothing is done. Since nothing has been done, these women have decided to take things into their own hands. Their ability to fight for the life they know they deserve is incredible and inspiring, and their promise to the women killed that they will hold offenders accountable is so admirable.

With such high murder rates in 2019, 2020's numbers are, sadly, expected to be even higher because of the coronavirus lockdown. Although no report has yet been released of how many more women lost their lives to the femicide this year, a young woman was murdered in July which sparked outrage. Pinar Gültekin's remains were found in the Aegean province of Muğla on July 21, 2020; Pinar had been beaten and then strangled to death by her ex-boyfriend, Cemal Metin Avcı. After he murdered Pinar, he burned her body in a garbage bin and covered it in concrete. He has been arrested, and according to the women protesting, he will be held accountable. Sadly, this horrible and sickening crime against this young woman is just one account among thousands, of the horrible treatment of women in Turkey in the past few decades. Vigils were held across three cities in Turkey for Pinar, and because of her, and all the other women before her, outrage has sparked and fire has caught.

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Kingsley, Patrick. "Turkey Acquits 2 Men in Berlin 'Honor Killing' of Their Sister." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 30 May 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/05/30/world/europe/turkey-germany-honor-killing.html.

Non-Reusable Plastic is like, so Last Year.

Samantha Campos ('21)

On August 6th, 2020, the MV Wakashio, a cargo ship, leaked an estimated total of 1,200 tons of diesel and fuel oil when the ship's hull cracked. The oil leaked into the lagoons off of the Eastern coast of Africa, specifically into Mauritius waters, which house an ecosystem that contains very environmentally sensitive marine life. The oil crept 15 kilometers into the shoreline causing damage to the ecosystem, but scientists and conservationists are expecting long-lasting impacts. For example, the fumes and chemicals from the oil have seeped into the coral, fish have been found with high levels of arsenic in them, and there is always the risk that the health of native animals could plummet should they drink the water or consume anything that has ingested the oil. Unfortunately, when an oil spill occurs, only about 10% of the oil gets successfully removed from the area. Additionally, the specific type of oil is new — this low-sulfur oil and has yet to be a part of an oil spill so there is little information on how the possible long-lasting impacts of the spill will manifest themselves.

Oil spills are not unheard of. Every now and then a ship that is transporting oil will someone break will on its delivery. These ships are often a part of ship traffic, which is a system that is very damaging to the environment; it leads to water and air pollution, destroys ecosystems and marine life and introduces invasive species that can cause damage to the native animals and environment. It is crucial that world governments start caring more about the health of our oceans. This is not just about cutting back on our use of plastic straws, I'm talking about sustainability: reusable water bottles, buying sustainable clothing-which is pricey, but worth the splurge-, using less single-use plastics like makeup containers, shampoo bottles, etc. We have to start being more conscious about our ecological footprint, taking into account that seemingly small actions or purchases that might not seem dangerous, but, over time, can become just as harmful as oil spills.

“This is what we’re about: We plant the seeds that will one day grow.” — Oscar Romero

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