

Forum: Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee (SOCHUM)

Issue: Addressing the issue of persecution of religious minorities.

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Introduction

A minority, by the general definition of the United Nations, is a distinctive group within a state dominated by others. Although most countries enshrine freedom of religion in their constitutions, the right given to minorities was oftentimes at most a “paper promise” due to the governments’ failure to fulfill it. Today, the mistreatment of religious minorities continues to be a topic of concern. Across the globe, violence and atrocities fueled by religion-based discrimination are being committed against minority communities. The persecutions may range from harassment and public humiliation to physical brutality and, in extreme cases, eradication. In recent years, a pattern of Christians and Muslims being the most widely harassed groups has been consistent. In 2018, harassment of Christians was found in 145 countries while that of Muslims in 139 countries. Because of the influence religion had on society, governments worldwide have either overlooked, tolerated or even endorsed discriminatory practices targeting minorities.

The repression of minority groups based on their religion and belief is an attack on human rights upheld by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR): the rights indiscriminate to religion under Article 2 and the freedom of belief under Article 18. Thus, it is of utmost importance for measures to be taken in response to this ongoing issue. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, on

multiple occasions, urged support for victims of prosecution due to religion and accountability of those who perpetrated religion-motivated offenses. To achieve such goals, delegations must come to a consensus on how to eliminate religiously motivated persecutions and protect religious minorities.

Definition of Key Terms

Persecution:

Hostility and ill-treatment towards groups because of their race, religion or political beliefs.

Religion:

The belief in a higher power/authority that guides one's life and ideals.

Minorities:

A distinct group within a state dominated by another group.

Apostasy:

The abandonment of any religious beliefs or political ideals.

Relocating:

To move to a new place and establish one's home or business

Domination:

The exercise of control over someone or something

General Overview

Reasons for persecutions of other religions

Certain countries/groups decide the persecution of other religions due to multiple reasons. One of these reasons is that their own religion/belief doesn't agree or coincide with the other religion. This could be due to opposing practices or different beliefs of the higher power. Another reason could be a personal vendetta from the leader, that comes from personal feelings or remorse against that religious minority.

Examples of Persecutions throughout history

One example of an instance of persecution throughout history is the persecution of Jewish people in Nazi Germany during the 1940s. This event included incidents such as the Holocaust, which ended with 6 million dead Jews at the hand of the Nazi Party and their leader Adolf Hitler. Another example is the persecution of Muslims in China, where China is accused of relocating around 1 million Uighur Muslims from the Xinjiang province, and moving them to more than 1,000 "re-education camps." Finally, the punishment of death due to atheism in 13 different countries such as Iran, Qatar, and Afghanistan. These countries all have laws against "apostasy", also known as the renunciation of religion. This includes the restrictions against any atheists from marrying, attending any public school, being recognized as a citizen, and even capital punishment.

Repercussions for persecuting

The possible repercussions for persecuting religious minorities are quite severe. There can be multiple consequence types such as economical and social consequences. Economic consequences can be caused when the government or a large organization prevents a group of people from working in certain jobs or not working at all, just because of their religious beliefs. This can cause economic disorder which could lead to an increase in homeless rates, that would cause different levels of problems for the country and its economic

growth. All because of a group of people being discriminated against because of their religion.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

China

In recent years, concerns have been raised over China's systemic persecution of the Uyghurs, a Muslim minority ethnic group mainly situated in China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region. Reports received by the UN proved that over one million Uyghurs were being detained in internment camps, where alleged widespread tortures and rape were widespread. Uyghurs were also reportedly forced to work in low-skilled and labor-intensive industries. Moreover, China was accused of committing genocide against the Uyghurs through population control measures such as coerced sterilization. According to a scholarly report, abortions were imposed upon Uyghur women who exceeded birth quotas, while contraceptive intrauterine devices (IUDs) were installed involuntarily onto women who did not exceed the quota. Former detainees in camps have spoken out about being given birth control drugs. Additionally, since 2016, Uyghurs have been tracked via technology through collections of biometric data (DNA, high-fidelity voice recordings, and face scans). In defense of the internment camps, China claimed that they serve for "vocational education and training", an effort to combat terrorism and poverty. Chinese authorities also hit back against claims regarding forced labor and genocide against Uyghurs, condemning them as fabrications, rumors, and absurdities.

India

Starting from the time when the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office in 2014, there have been many concerns related to the discrimination against Muslims within India's

borders. Since the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) passed in December 2019, irregular immigrants pertaining to a number of religious communities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan were made eligible for citizenship, but Muslims were excluded. The amendment, along with several processes with the aim of identifying illegal migrants, led to protests across the countries. In response, the leaders of the BJP accused the protesters of being traitors and incited violent acts against them. Since 2015, scores of members of religious minorities have died due to mob violence affiliated with the BJP amid rumors that they traded or killed cows for beef. Another highly persecuted group in India is Christians. As reported in 2018, eight out of India's twenty-nine states have "anti-conversion" laws that particularly target Christians. In 2020, Christians were subjected to a minimum number of 328 violent incidents, according to violence to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). From January to November 2021, a report by the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) revealed there were 39 cases of anti-Christian threats or violence in the state of Karnataka.

Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, a Buddhist-majority country, the Christian and Muslim minorities were reported to experience discrimination and violence frequently. In 2012 and 2013, reports documented over 350 violent attacks against Muslims and over 150 attacks against Christians, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). On Easter Sunday 2019, major bomb attacks on churches and hotels across several cities left at least 290 Christians dead and hundreds more injured. As said by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, these violent incidents were encouraged by the lack of actions taken to protect these religious minorities (since there was impunity for the perpetrators).

Myanmar

In Myanmar, a country dominated by Buddhists, Rohingya Muslims were subjected to violations of religious rights. People from the community were ostracized by the government, getting denied their citizenship, and even excluded from the 2014 census. Starting in 2017, Rohingya Muslims were forcibly displaced starting from a crackdown by Myanmar's military. In the first month of the attack, over 6,700 were killed, including a minimum of 730 children below the age of five, according to the medical charity Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). Moreover, it was reported that Rohingya women and girls suffered from rape and abuse. According to scholars, the roughly 1 million Rohingya who remained in the northern Rakhine province are at risk of genocide.

Iraq

Iraqi Yazidis, an ethno religious minority in northern Iraq, face constant persecution by the Islamic State of Iraq (ISIL or ISIS) organization. According to the Yazidis community, they have faced 72 attempted genocides during the course of history. Since the late 16th Century, Yazidis were labeled as heretics for their belief systems and accused to be "devil worshipers" by Muslims. In 2014, ISIS launched a terrorist attack against the Yazidis community in the Sinjar region, forcing hundreds of thousands of Yazidis to flee and seek refuge, on top of subjecting them to genocide through forced conversion and mass execution. During the year, more than 3,000 Yazidi women and children were kidnapped. According to a report, "more than 200,000 displaced Iraqi Yazidis are living in refugee camps, where poverty is deepening."

Afghanistan

Under Taliban, reports have shown religious minorities being persecuted through extrajudicial killings and displacements. Some targeted groups include Hazaras,

Sikhs, and Hindus. During the previous time the Taliban was in power, Hazaras (a Muslim minority group) made up the majority of victims in the two reported massacres. In 2021, when the Taliban took over, one massacre in the Ghazni province left at least nine Hazara men killed; whereas in another, thirteen Hazaras were killed in the Daykundi province. In the following months, 4,000 Hazaras were reportedly evicted from their homes. Furthermore, the community suffered violence, such as the killing of religious leaders, carried out by the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP: the Afghan branch of the Islamic State). In October 2021, the ISKP was responsible for several bomb attacks on Hazara mosques, including one that killed over 100 people and another more than 47.

United States

The constitution of the United States respects the freedom of religion by prohibiting laws that inhibit its free exercise. At the Global Call to Protect Religious Freedom briefing in 2019, the president of the United States called on countries to act upon safeguarding the freedom of religion through measures such as ending religious persecutions, abolishing laws that limit religious liberty, and prosecuting offenders of religiously motivated violence. The president also promised funds to support religious freedom, religious sites, and relics. The United States has also taken initiatives to condemn violations of religious freedom in other countries, including being the first to declare China's treatment of its Uyghurs as a genocide.

United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, freedom of religion is a protected right under Article 9 of the Human Rights Act 1998. The country was active in taking actions to encourage religious liberty. In 2019, the United Kingdom partnered with the United States on a joint statement about aiding religious minorities in humanitarian crises. On November 23, 2021, the Foreign Secretary announced

that a global summit will be hosted in July in the capital to advocate the freedom and rights of religious communities.

Canada

Canada was ranked in second place globally in religious freedom, according to the ranking by U.S. News & World Report. As a country with freedom of religion being a constitutionally guaranteed right, Canada has supported religious liberty through various efforts. In 2015, Canada promoted international collaboration by establishing the International Contact Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief. In July 2021, Canada hosted two national conferences regarding discrimination against the Muslim and Jewish communities. The government also made condemnations of persecutions against religious minorities in other countries, such as those committed in Afghanistan.

Netherlands

Ranked by the U.S. News & World Report, the Netherlands has the most religious freedom in the world. Freedom of belief is a protected right within the Dutch Constitution. According to reports published in 2017, government ministers have responded to religious discrimination by condemning anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents as well as updating the national action plan to counter views that discriminate against religious communities. Additionally, measures were taken by the government to help support Islamic and Jewish institutions, including establishing a working group to discuss security at Islamic institutions.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
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1579	The Union of Utrecht, a treaty signed by seven northern provinces of the Netherlands, promised the freedom of religion of every person and the exemption from scrutiny due to one's religion.
10 December 1948	The United Nations proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, setting out the freedom of religion along with others as the fundamental rights entitled to all human beings.
25 November 1981	The United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. The resolution outlined rights and obligations with regard to religion.
1988	The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 was passed to make the promotion of religious freedom a foreign policy in the United States.
May 2014	The BJP party led by prime minister Narendra Modi came to power, aggravating anti-muslim and anti-christian persecutions in India.
August 2014	In the Sinjar region, the Yazidis population suffered genocide carried out by the Islamic State of Iraq (ISIS).
February 2017	President Xi Jinping issued an order that all religions in China

should be subordinate to China's interests. Following a knife attack in Xinjiang that killed five, a crackdown was implemented against Uyghurs.

August 2017	A genocidal military crackdown in Myanmar was launched on Rohingya Muslims.
21 April 2019	On Easter Sunday, Christians were subjected to a series of deadly bomb attacks across Sri Lanka.
2021	In Afghanistan, the Hazara community suffered massacres from the Taliban and multiple bomb attacks by the ISKP.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- On May 28, 2019, the UN adopted a resolution called "International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief." Where they decided on August 22 to be an international day to raise awareness and importance to those who are victims of these violent acts due to religion or belief.
 - Resolution was adopted under the General Assembly on May 28, 2019, the resolution is recorded as [A/RES/73/296](#)
 - A similar resolution was adopted Dec 17, 2017 registered as [A/RES/72/165](#) list's a similar establishment of an international day for "Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism"

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Various measures were employed by countries to combat the issue concerning the oppression of religious minorities, which include:

1. Promote freedom of religion via international alliances,

Canada created the International Contact Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief to promote joint efforts in advocating for religious freedom. Until 2020, the group participants have included roughly 30 countries and international organizations.

2. Acknowledge acts of genocide aimed at religious minorities,

In response to attempts to eradicate religious minorities worldwide, countries began to label such actions as genocide. For example, several countries in the Western world have condemned China through initiatives declaring its actions against Uyghurs to be genocide, including the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Belgium, and France. By recognizing the seriousness of the issue, more attention is brought to it thus more resolving efforts will be made.

3. Sanction persecutors of religious minorities,

To force an end to human rights abuses of religious minorities, countries have imposed sanctions on perpetrators. Over the suppression of the Uyghur population, China was sanctioned by the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, as well as the European Union. Likewise, Myanmar's military, which persecuted Rohingya Muslims, has received sanctions from countries like the United States.

Possible Solutions

One possible solution would be to create more inclusivity in each country by allowing the implementation of new laws that are fairer and more beneficial to these religious minorities. Examples of these could be making it illegal for any discrimination due to belief to occur, and if it's reported then any person, business, or group could be either fined in some way or if it's severe enough the person who directly did the discrimination could face worse punishments such as small jail time.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

The sustainable goal with regard to the issue is Sustainable 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. This SDG can not be attained without resolving the religious minority-targeted persecutions. Therefore, it is crucial to look into ways that strive for more inclusivity and harmony within societies. No one should express and exercise their religion in fear of any consequence.

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Appendix

- <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N19/155/77/PDF/N1915577.pdf?OpenElement>
 - Official resolution adopted by the UN in the General Assembly that focuses on the establishment of an international day to commemorate victims of violent acts that are based on religion or beliefs.
- <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/01/06/muslims-islam-china-india-myanmar-persecution-repression-biden-human-rights/>
 - Article that gives an example of persecution of a religious minority, in this case, the Uighur Muslims in China, highlighting specific actions and decisions the Chinese government has made.
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/11/15/41-countries-ban-religion-related-groups-jehovahs-witnesses-bahais-among-the-most-commonly-targeted/>
 - Research article that covers official government bans of religions or religious based groups in countries. It also includes lists of these countries and the percentages for each area of the world that contains these countries with the bans.

- <https://www.un.org/en/hate-speech/understanding-hate-speech/hate-speech-and-real-harm>
 - From the UN website, brings a lot of examples of hate speech with three of them including ones based on religion, those being The Holocaust, The Cambodian Genocide, and The Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Myanmar.