

Forum: Human Rights Commission 1

Issue: Measures to combat intolerance, discrimination, and violence based on religion or belief

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Introduction

“If my religion is right, then you and yours must be wrong, and we cannot let people go around thinking they know the truth when they do not.” This is an idea that many people have, around the world. Having a belief of a superhuman, someone who has the controlling power, higher than authority and government officials, and worshipping them is known as religion. Today, there are 4,200 religions all around the world, each with their own system of beliefs, ideologies, traditions and fundamentals. Religion can have significant impacts on an individual’s lives and the way they experience life. One who is religious may have beliefs based on their religion, sometimes experiencing discrimination as a result. Others who are not as religious may have beliefs imposed on them by their family and friends. Since each religion is different, most people don’t celebrate holidays from other religions. For example, a Christian is most likely to celebrate Christmas but not Raksha Bandhan, while a Hindu is most likely to celebrate Raksha Bandhan but not Christmas.

Some people choose their friends and partners based on their religions and beliefs, limiting them from gaining perspective. They find believing in the same higher power and having the same or similar morals makes it easier to cope with challenges and with each other. With the lack of knowledge and perspective, people start to have an intolerance of other religions. They tend to see only what they want and misinterpret people from other religions. Such as how Karl Marx, the inventor of communism, stated that is a barrier to true happiness. He said “The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness.” In a country with total communism, religion should be abolished because it is seen as “an opium to the people.” As no country to this day has completely abolished religion, no country has fully become communist.

Regardless of the personal or religious belief of a person, they should not influence or discriminate against another based on the fact that their belief is different. Religion is seen as a barrier by many and they believe that in order for the world to unite, there should be one religion, which is their religion. They start to spread and influence others with their religion and if that does not work, they try to dehumanize others for following other religions. However, discrimination do not have to be about

religion, and can also be based on ideologies. During the uprising of Hitler, for example, he convinced Germany that the Jews were to be blamed for the loss of the world war and started taking steps towards genocide, which included dehumanization.

Definition of Key Terms

Religion

Having a belief for an individual or a group of individuals who are considered superhuman, a power above all authorities. When a large group of people have the same beliefs and worship the superhuman figure(s), it is known as a religion.

Discrimination

Categorization of a person and the treatment of that person based on the category, whether in favor of or against. They could be categorized into groups based on their religion, height, race or class/social status.

Intolerance

Not being able or choosing not to accept one's views, perspective, or beliefs that is different from their own.

Violence

Using force or power with the intention to hurt, kill or injure other people.

Dehumanization

To take away human characteristics, qualities and properties from an individual, looking at them through a different lens and seeing them as anything other than a human being.

Background Information

Since the beginning of religion, there have been numerous conflicts due to different religions and different beliefs. Looking back at the Second World War, the holocaust was a big example of violence and discrimination against religions. Currently, one of the most talked about religious conflict is Islamophobia in the United States.

The Holocaust

During the Second World War, the German power, known as the Nazis, led by Adolf Hitler, persecuted and murdered six million Jews. The Nazis believed that the Germans were “racially superior” and the Jews were “inferior” and were an alien threat to the German community. In 1933 there were over nine million Jews in Europe but by 1945, the Nazis had killed two thirds of the Jewish population. Since the Nazis considered themselves superior, Hitler declared all races other than the Aryan race, the predominant race of Germany, as subhuman. The Nazis started putting symbols and badges on their uniforms, and if one did not have the swastika symbol on them, they were distinguished as subhuman.

In 1933, the Germans had set anti-Semitic laws in place, which were all against the Jewish population. These laws included of Jewish children not being allowed to go to school and or have pets or bicycles. They prohibited Jews having relationships with any German or related blood, and deprived them of any political rights they had. Despite one’s religious beliefs, The Nuremberg laws classified anyone with at least three Jewish grandparents as Jewish. This created a barrier and a separation between the Jews and the Germans, due to their religious beliefs. They were seen as a threat and as a problem that needed to be removed, which is why they proceeded to the mass killings known as “the final solution.” In order to convince the public the Jews were a threat, they used propaganda techniques. Portraying Jews as “plague carrying rats.” After convincing the general public what a threat they were, Jews were sent to concentration camps where if the diseases and the torture didn’t kill them, the Nazis did. The concentration camps were the final, execution stage of the genocide. These were where most of the Jews were killed, by gassing them as it was “a much more efficient way to reach the ‘final solution.’” The tighter the victims were packed, the quicker they would suffocate in the gas chambers.

This genocide is a clear representation of the violence that is connected directly to religion and belief. The Nazis directly targeted the Jews mainly because of their beliefs being different to theirs. The intolerance did not stop at discrimination but continued on to become one of the biggest genocides in history.

Islamophobia

Ever since the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, the American fear of international terrorism has grown. In 2001 alone, there was an increase of 28 police reports of hate crimes against Muslims. This so called “crusade” against what George W. Bush labeled as “the axis of evil” brought growing suspicion towards the Middle East. After the invasion of Iraq by the Americans in 2003, the fear turned more from the Middle East as a whole to Muslims in particular. With the Islamic State on the rise and the perspectives in which The United States has reported it, the fear of Islam has increased. This has resulted in the Muslims and their beliefs being portrayed as violent and harmful to the public.

In March 2017, a woman riding the New York City subway verbally attacked a African American woman who were wearing a hijab and a man for looking like he was from the Middle East. The woman claimed the woman and man who were sitting and riding the subway "do not belong here" as they are not "one of us." This harassment continued on for a few minutes until a Latino woman, Tracey Tong, stepped in, explaining to the woman that they are their brothers and sisters as they are living in the same country as they are in. This is one of the many Islamophobic intolerance and discrimination that has been occurring, especially since the 9/11 attacks. On an average, nine mosques have been attacked every month in the year of 2017 in America.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Myanmar (Burma)

With a population of 52 million, Myanmar (Burma) has more than 100 ethnic groups. The official name is the Republic of the Union of Myanmar as in 1989 it was changed from Burma. Since 2012, Myanmar has been having serious conflicts between Buddhists and Muslims communities. In March 2013, a march led by the Buddhists left 40 dead. The Buddhist country has Muslims as its minority (only 4% of the population), and in 1962, Muslims were beginning to become excluded. This meant exclusion from parliamentary discussions, the right to being a citizen and the right to vote despite them living in the country for generations. The Rohingyas, the biggest Muslim group in the country, have been persecuted by governmental forces, an act which continues to this day. Since 1948, the government has carried out over 10 operations against the Rohingya group. They have burned down mosques, committed looting, and driven them off their land. Aside from these, the Rohingyas are also subject to forced labor and frequent theft.

China

The people's republic of China has the world's largest population of 1.3 billion. It is officially an atheist state and has one of the world's lowest percentages of people who are religious. Buddhism is one of the most popular religions in China however there are Muslims and Christians in the country. The country has up to 300 million religious believers and it is said that there are more Christians in China in 2009 than the entire population of Italy. Article thirty-six of the Chinese constitution not only bans discrimination of religion but also says that Chinese citizens can "enjoy freedom of religious belief." However, the constitution also protects religious beliefs as it says the constitution does "not guarantee the right to practice or worship." Although 'normal' in this situation is not defined and broadly interpreted, it claims only normal religious activities can be practiced.

Buddhism alone in China has a history of over 2,000 years and the country currently has close to 13,000 Buddhist temples. Islam was introduced into the country in the seventeenth century and now

the country has over 18 million citizens who have an Islamic faith. Catholicism, just like Islam, was introduced into China in the seventeenth century but not until the Opium War in 1840 did Catholicism actually start becoming as widespread as it is now. China currently has four million Catholics and around 5,000 churches all around the country.

Saudi Arabia

In terms of land, the 13th largest country in the world is located in Middle East in Asia. Saudi Arabia's national language is Arabic and the main religion is Islam. The country has a population of roughly 27 million with 12 million being foreigners. In Saudi Arabia, policies and laws restrict religious freedom and the government usually enforces these laws in practice. According to the basic laws in this Islamic state, Sunni Islam is the official religion and the constitution of the country is the Qur'an and the public practice of any other religion in the country is considered an illegal act. Those who did not comply to these interpretations of the Islam by the government would face serious political, legal, economic, social and religious discrimination which resulted in limited education and/ or employment opportunities.

Children who are born with Muslim fathers are born Muslim by law regardless of where and how they have been raised. Although there have been no reports of execution, converting out of Islam is punishable by death. In November 2015, a Saudi court sentenced a Palestinian man for abandoning his religious belief, apostasy. In March of 2014, the Saudi Arabian interior ministry issued a decree that branded all atheists, which is 5% of the Saudi population, as terrorists. Non Muslims are not allowed in Mecca or Medina as religious officers may divert the drivers or pass out a fine for trying to enter those regions.

Saudi Arabia is one of the countries with very strict laws regarding their official religion and anything that goes against that is punishable. Although it does not use violence based on religions and beliefs very often, they do discriminate and limit opportunities for those who do not comply to the government's interpretations of the Islam and Qur'an.

Parliament of World's Religion

The vision of this organization is that: "religious and cultural fears and hatreds are replaced with understanding and respect", alongside six other goals that will tackle religious intolerance, discrimination and violence. The Parliament of world's Religion (PWR) was created to "cultivate harmony among the world's religious and spiritual communities." They seek to create harmony and not unity, as unity with religion is the loss of the uniqueness and the character of each religion, whereas harmony would add respect to other religions and more cooperative relationships would be formed.

"Religion is used as an instrument for division and injustice, betraying the ideals" while it shapes the lives of billions. The religion is considered part of the identity and the PWR's goals are all helping the world understand this and rather than creating a conflict, creating peace. They have spoken on this

topic numerous times, raising awareness among people of difference and they claim it has “opened the way for a new era of cooperative action among the world’s religious and spiritual communities.

The organization in November 2018 is hosting its 7th international parliament of world’s religion in Toronto, Canada. It is said to have over 10,000 participants. The parliament will last for seven days and will have a number of workshops, programs and dialogue. In Toronto, Canada, more than 140 languages are spoken, and “at least 47% of Toronto’s population speaks a native language other than French or English.” The city represents more than 200 ethnic origins and more than half of its population is born out of Canada. The Co-chair of the host committee Mark Toulouse, said in an interview “As one of the most international, multicultural, and religiously pluralistic cities in the world, Toronto provides a perfect venue for the Parliament of the World’s Religions.”

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
January 30th 1933	Start of the Holocaust
March 22nd 1933	Germans open first concentration camp for the Jews in Dachau
May 8 1945	End of the Holocaust
21 October 1960	Roman Catholic Leaders restrict all Catholics from voting for the Democratic party in Puerto Rico
1st January 1999	Muslims and Christians march in New Delhi protesting Hindu fundamentalists
21st August 1999	President of Kenya at the time, Daniel arap Moi recognizes that his head of civil services, Richard Leakey is a good man despite being an atheist
19th February 2000	A teacher in Michigan is suspended for lending a student a religious book
11 September 2001	9/11 terrorist attack in America

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief, 14 December 2007 **(A/HRC/RES/6/37)**
- Freedom of religion or belief: mandate of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, 18 June 2010 **(A/HRC/RES/14/11)**
- Freedom of religion or belief, 22 March 2013 **(A/HRC/RES/22/20)**

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Previously, the UN Security Council had set up Ad Hoc international tribunals in order to bring justice to victims and their families if they had suffered through war crimes, crimes against humanity, and a system of genocide. They had their first international tribunals set up in Yugoslavia and Rwanda, where there were genocides due to ethnicity. Although these tribunals were and have not been set up for religious discrimination, they have brought justice to many on issues similar to religious intolerance.

The UK youth parliament has campaigns against religious and racial discrimination. Their goal is to combat discrimination especially with the Muslims and the Jews. The United Kingdom has numerous other campaigns all to help combat religious discrimination such as Fair Admissions campaign and JustGiving. In 1972, there was a treaty set up “the Treaty Protection of Religious rights.” Alongside this, the Universal Human Rights Declaration Article 18 is to do with religion and belief and the freedom of it.

Possible Solutions

One of the most basic possible solutions is the raise awareness of the issue at hand. This would result in shedding light to the issue so people are able to voice their opinion on how they believe this issue could be solved.

A vital step needed to combat intolerance, discrimination and violence against religion and belief would be to stop dehumanization, as dehumanization is what leads to discrimination and violence and genocide. The best way to do this would be by education. The difference between raising awareness and educating the public is that awareness only sheds light to the issue, while education helps them learn and move forward from the issues. By educating the public, especially the younger generation about other religions and the consequences of discrimination, they would be able to grasp a better understanding of the world around them from a younger age. It would give them the knowledge they would be lacking and it would help them learn the differences and similarities, getting rid of stereotypes. This could be done by using the internet: using online teaching methods to communicate or getting individuals to give free lectures in universities and schools across the world.

It cannot stop at education. Despite the fact that education is the basis of combatting the issue, there is still a need to set up treaties or laws and make sure the laws are implemented. Treaties or conventions would be able to set punishments for those responsible for any such acts against religions, while laws would help reduce the rate of these issues.

This issue, like most in the UN, is not something that can be solved overnight. Whatever the solution, it will take time to be implemented and carried further and there should always be checkups to update the resolutions.

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