

Forum: GA3 Social, Humanitarian and Cultural

Issue: Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, incitement to violence based on religion or belief

Student Officer: Oroni Hasan, Sanjana Kumar

Position: Deputy Chair, Deputy Chair

Introduction

With communities becoming increasingly diverse as a result of globalization, hate-crimes have persisted in nations around the globe, such as the violent attacks and killings against Burmese refugees in Thailand, severe beatings and sexual assaults on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people in Turkey, and the violent attacks on migrants from Central Asia by current supporters of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NAZI) in Russia. Minorities and marginalized people primarily bear the burden of negative sentiments and stereotypes, where they are exposed to brutality such as arson, vilification, exclusion and racial bias. Although media is able to capture glimpses of these abuses, it is not able to report the everyday discrimination that prevails in many communities. The social stigmas of a homogenous state leads to the oppression of minorities by deteriorating the overall quality of their lives and confining their opportunities, potential and abilities.

To gain a deeper understanding of the issue, it is essential to know why intolerance and discrimination occur in the first place. Our surroundings and social environment are the key factors that result in one's behaviour. A person's upbringing that revolves around stringent cultural beliefs may lead to that person's contempt towards people of other ethnicities, religions, nationalities and other racial characteristics. Terrible experiences with a person of a different culture and race could also result in the hatred and, or, fear of the whole populace. Other factors may also include superiority complex, ignorance, financial dispute and implicit bias. Depending on the severity of these factors, they can also instigate violence among people. While the reasons vary, intolerance and stigmatization have a detrimental effect on the cultural atmosphere of a society.

Some instances include the abuse on LGBTQ members in Uganda, the 40% increase in attacks on Hispanic people in the US between 2003 and 2007, and the insidious acts of verbal and physical mistreatment towards migrants in Morocco and Malaysia. Intolerance and discrimination are not only

detrimental to people's well beings and the culture of a society, but also become violations against human rights when they incite violence and harm.

Definition of Key Terms

Intolerance

Intolerance can be defined as a strong resistance to accept or acknowledge the views, beliefs, or ideals of another individual. Religious intolerance can be shown from citizens of society, or even governments. Intolerance can lead to discrimination against a group of people with specific beliefs and values.

Negative Stereotyping

Negative stereotyping occurs when a presumptuous generalization is made about a group of people, often based on gender, race, religion, beliefs, or age. Negative stereotyping can be destructive towards one's perception of oneself, and can also create cause for harassment, abuse, and violence.

Stigmatization

Stigmatization stems from social stigmas which cause discrimination against people, often regarding their culture, race, religion, beliefs, gender, or other factors. Stigmatization can make one feel disrespected, unaccepted, and segregated from society.

Religion

Religion is a set of spiritual beliefs of a metaphysical nature, which are often passed down from generation to generation. Religion constantly evolves, and is often interpreted differently, even by people who share the same religion. There are many different types of religions, and is often a vital part of many people's lives.

Incitement to Violence

Incitement to violence refers to one's encouragement or provoking of another to carry out abusive, threatening, and harmful behavior. Incitement to violence with reference to this topic is in response to religion or beliefs.

Background Information

The Role of the United Nations in Combating Religious Intolerance

The problem of religious intolerance is far from new and has therefore been on the top of the UN's agenda since its founding after the second World War where some of the greatest atrocities were committed due to religious intolerance. However, it is not until almost forty years later that the UN finally put forward the 1981 UN Declaration on Religious Intolerance, unfortunately, it was never implemented. Due to the lack of implementation to such treaties or any efforts taken to improve the issue, the international community split but came together again in 2011 to produce the Human Rights Council resolution 16/18. This also came along with shortcomings, however it was a start to a number of discussions surrounding the issue and dialogue between different groups can be the first step towards a shared solution.

Case Study: Islamophobia

The Muslim Rohingya

The Muslim Rohingya, a marginalized population residing mainly in Rakhine State of Myanmar, are recent victims of intolerance and violence based on religion. Myanmar contains a considerable number of ethnic groups and is generally diverse in that matter, however, with about 90 percent of the population being buddhist; under 5 percent being muslim and tensions between ethnic groups carried from the last century escalating, the Rohingya have been subject to countless forms of oppression. Denied citizenship by the government of Myanmar, they were not allowed to obtain higher education; land owned by them was seized and many of the Rohingya males were overworked in forced labour. The marginalization recently escalated into violent persecution.

After reports of militants from the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) attacking Myanmar border posts on the 9th of October 2016, The Myanmar security forces retaliated, claiming on having targeted militant Rohingya groups only. However, attacks on innocent civilians by burning their villages were reported along with instances of killing, rape and abuse towards Rohingya woman and girls particularly. These human right abuses and the occurrence of 'ethnic cleansing'

have exacerbated one of the most prominent issues today: The Refugee Crisis. Due to persecution, many Rohingya were forced to flee.

A case like the Rohingya gives a prominent example of all the problems that could and would arise from religious persecution.

Islamophobia in the West

Islamophobia in the last decade has seen an increase in the West and there are a number of reasons for it. After the September eleven attacks, the fear of the general public only increased and more recently the Arab spring and the rise of what is known to the west as terror groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has built on that fear. However, Islamophobia also saw an abnormal increase in the run up to the Iraq war, suggesting that the civilians fear of what to them is an unfamiliar religion and group was exploited in order to gain public support for destructive wars.

Of course an issue that must be addressed is extremism and terrorism, two aspects that naturally any civilian would voice their concern about. It is not difficult to see that throughout history, the support gained by extremist groups comes along when people are most desperate. It was seen before World War II when the support of the extremist right wing group the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP)- which was later renamed the NAZI party- first increased due to the aftermath of the first World War. The case of the rise of extremism in the Middle East and parts of Africa is due to similar reasons. The disparity caused by the situation in Syria that is exacerbated by outsider influences and wars such as the Iraq or Afghanistan wars leaves people in need to hold on to any particular group that would promise improving the situation. Also all of these events usually result to a halt on education, leaving young, impressionable minds more vulnerable to exploitations by such groups. Religious intolerance and violence, therefore, only increases retaliation as people feel helpless; creating a cycle of fear and violence.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

The United States of America

In the past, the United States has often been a beacon of support for many countries, MEDCs and LEDCs alike. Prior to Trump's inauguration, the nation worked hard in order to minimize and eradicate racial and religious discrimination. However, Trump's new travel ban conveys a new

governmental scope of religious intolerance, suspending the providing of visas to applicants from countries such as Libya, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, North Korea, and Venezuela (Gladstone).

North Korea

North Korea is a nation in which freedom of religion is quite limited. While growing up, children are often taught about the negative impacts of religion on society, which makes some apprehensive towards the concept of religion, and creates the need for others to conduct religious activities in private, without others knowing. Thus, North Korean values do not include religion, and there are often harsh consequences as a result of it (“Ji-Min Kang”).

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

The OHCHR aids in the preservation of human rights around the globe. Their main objectives revolve around international cooperation, awareness, establishment of infrastructures and human rights organizations, and responding to human rights violations. The OHCHR has played a large role in the creation of many vital resolutions which tackle the issue of intolerance and discrimination based on religion and beliefs, including resolution A/HRC/RES/16/18 (“Welcome”).

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
November 25 th , 1981	The adoption of the UN Declaration on Religious Intolerance
April, 1999	‘The Defamation of Islam’ resolution is brought before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights by Pakistan
2006	The approval of the resolution entitled ‘Combating Defamation of Religions’ by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
March, 2011	The adoption of the Human Rights Council resolution 16/18
January 7th, 2016	The Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris, France
October 9 th , 2016	The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) attacking Myanmar and the Myanmar security forces retaliating.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief, 12 April 2011, (A/HRC/RES/16/18)
- Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, 25 November 1981, (A/RES/36/55)
- Freedom of religion or belief: mandate of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, 23 June 2010, (A/HRC/RES/14/11)
- Freedom of religion or belief, 29 January 2018, (A/RES/72/177)
- Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance, 2 July 1985, (A/40/361)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Previous attempts include past worldwide conventions and conferences, along with the persistent adoption of resolutions and treaties. The General Assembly of the United Nations participated in the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa, where the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) was adopted. The DDPA is an action plan that focuses on eliminating racism and intolerance by providing feasible measures to combat violence as a result of discrimination.

Additionally, The United Nations created the resolution A/RES/70/157, titled “Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief,” which was a prominent resolution that addressed this issue of intolerance and discrimination. The first half of the resolution expresses concern over related topics such as religious intolerance, violence against minorities, derogatory stereotyping, and other criminal acts and incidents of intolerance. The latter portion of the resolution recommends the boost in collaborative networks, communication, more training and outreach strategies, as well as encouraging states to foster a more free and diverse atmosphere, adopt measures that combat the issue, and to help strengthen and improve international efforts against discrimination.

Although the Durban Conference and the resolution were two of the most notable previous attempts, the UN and a few other organizations alone cannot help alleviate this severe worldwide crisis. There must also be support from the general public and a communal effort to resolve this issue. Local governments also need to take action in order to curb the harming effects of racist treatment.

In the past, Australia has been an example of taking action and educating the population on this issue. The Australian Government created and implemented the National Anti-Racism Strategy in 2011, which focused on public awareness, education, and engaging the young generation. The Strategy also aimed at informing the Australian population on racism and its preventive measures, empowering people to take practical action against racism, and helping individuals to realize that racism is unacceptable. Education and encouragement of preventing racism is an effective way of setting a positive outlook and open-minded mentality on race. However, this method takes a long period of time to see the positive changes and progress in a society.

Possible Solutions

The first approach to combating intolerance is to realize that it is unlikely for this phenomenon to ever extinguish. Discrimination is a natural behaviour, which is driven by the natural instinct that one's racial characteristics is better than another person's; in other words, ego drives discrimination. Yet, brutal physical violence as a result of intolerance and racist sentiments can be reduced.

One potential solution is the implementation of a national legislation which provides minimum standards that do not go below international levels; this is mandatory in order to provide people who are prone to racist attacks with more protection. Regulations should foster a positive cultural atmosphere and ensure people are protected in both the political and cultural world where they would not be overburdened by society's stigmas and stereotypes. Amendments to current laws or reparations to loopholes in national legislations may also improve the issue at hand, especially if they have the potential to instigate more violence or seem to not alleviate the crisis. With this idea in mind, legislations could focus on condemning or prohibiting the discrimination against religion, culture, colour, ethnicity, nationality and other racial qualities.

Simultaneously, regulations should aim to provide a population with equal privilege to opportunities, services and goods. There could also be local specialized bodies or police that are dedicated to resolving discriminatory acts so that people are able to quickly report any abuse they experienced; this solution would be more suitable in places that have a high rate of violence as a result of intolerance and racism.

Amended legislations have the power to drastically reduce hate crimes; yet, it may not change people's inner bias towards other races, which fuel the attacks that occur. Hence, it's mandatory to instill an open-minded mindset among the general public by implementing education on this topic, as well as promoting a more diverse atmosphere in a community. Children should be highly encouraged to embrace a diverse mentality and learn about this issue while they are still young, which can potentially make them

a more open-minded future generation. Yet, as this is a current issue, all age groups should be targeted since intolerance can occur at any place and any time.

Educating people is a very effective way to reduce discrimination and intolerance; however, it can take a while to see the desired effect in our society. Additionally, it takes longer for most elders to change their mentality quickly as they are used to the knowledge they have had. Thus, a quicker solution is to maximize the use of technology and social media as a way to boost worldwide awareness. The more the general public know about this topic, the more likely we will see action. People may be motivated to advocate against discrimination and lead campaigns to minimize the detrimental effects of intolerance.

Furthermore, enhancing data collection on hate crimes and racist violence is mandatory in order for states and organizations to gather extensive and comprehensive information on the issue. A good collection of data would also allow intergovernmental and international groups to observe and analyze the problem in places where it occurs the most, as well as allowing them to form more appropriate solutions.

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