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INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

The United Nations Human Rights Council is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system consisting of 47 Member States. This council is responsible for the promotion and protection of Human Rights. The Council also plays a great role in the fight against all forms of discrimination. The UN Human Rights Council operates in all regions of the world through an extensive network of field offices with the purpose of making sure that all the people in cooperating countries understand their rights and propagates uniformity in the provision of rights in all the nation states. It checks if all people can use their rights properly and what governments do to protect the rights that are given to individuals, and if governments do what they agreed to at the United Nations. It also helps people whose rights were taken away, and acts as a body that can even bring justice at the scale of government- citizen interactions.

"We will not enjoy security without development, we will not enjoy development without security, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights."

-Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan



TOPIC: PERSECUTION OF RELIGIOUS, RACIAL AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

INTRODUCTION

Every country in the world includes people belonging to national, ethnic, religious or racial minorities who enrich the diversity of their society. However, sometimes more often than not, minorities face diverse forms of discrimination and abuse resulting in marginalisation and exclusion. Establishing enforcement of basic human rights for these minorities requires that we implement the international human rights standards - it is your responsibility as a delegate of the United Nations Human Rights Council to work towards this aim.

The United Nations commonly defines human rights as rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of nationality, sex, ethnicity, race, religion or any other status. These rights are often expressed and guaranteed by law, in the forms of treaties, general principles and other internationally agreed upon regulations. They are universal, unassailable, equal and non-discriminatory. There is no internationally agreed definition as to which groups constitute minorities. However, in its first article of the United Nations Minorities Declaration of 1992 minorities are referred to as the base of national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity and provide that States should protect their existence.

According to Francesco Capotorti, Special Rapporteur of the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, a minority is “a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state, in a non-dominant position, whose members – being nationals of the State- possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language”.



HISTORY OF THE TOPIC

“In any case, what is noteworthy is that the idea that one can be persecuted for something other than one’s convictions, for example, for simply belonging to a definite group, for the colour of one’s skin, for one’s ethnos or whatever, is completely absent from the debate. The prior condition for this semantic extension is without doubt the development of racist theories throughout the 19th century.”

-Jean-Pierre Cavaillé³

Practices of persecution against ethnic and religious minorities can be traced as far back as the beginnings of recorded human civilisation. Throughout history they have taken the form of “ethnic or religious cleansings”, consisting in the elimination or deportation of ethnic or religious groups in order to homogenize states’ populations or assert the majority’s domination.

The earliest example of such persecutions was seen under the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC), the first Assyrian ruler to impose forced resettlement as a state policy. Minority groups living on conquered lands were carried off or massacred and their place taken by new settlers, in an effort to give them a sense of propagating the core ambitions of their empire. The Babylonians, Greeks and Romans continued this policy - often for the prevailing reason of slavery. The Roman slavery system was the first exploitation system to be based on the inequality between ethnic groups, “strangers” or “barbarians” being subject to repeated abuses on the basis that they were not Roman citizens. There were episodes of religious persecutions during early civilisation, but it was only during the Middle Ages that the persecutions of religious minorities became fully institutionalized. During the 14th and 15th centuries, massacres and expulsions tended to target Jews, which were the only sizable minority in most countries. Meanwhile Spain conducted the same violations against its Muslim minority, expelling all “Moriscos”(converted Muslims) in the early 17th century. In France, the Edict of Nantes was revoked in 1685. The Protestant minority was denied freedom of worship and was then violently prosecuted, resulting in Protestants fleeing abroad.



In North America, the survivors of the removals of Native Americans conducted in 1830 were robbed from their lands and settled in the “Indian Territory”. They were later assigned to reservations after the rest of their remaining lands were opened to white settlers by the Homestead Act of 1862. The 19th century saw the first example of the complete destruction of an ethnic minority as the goal of a state, when Turkey began directing efforts to persecute Greeks and Armenians. By 1894, 200,000 Armenians were killed and approximately 1.5 million died in the 1915 genocide perpetrated by Turkey.

Human rights abuses and violations based on ethnic-religious discrimination reached their height with the Nazi campaigns against Jews. The Nazis aimed at the total annihilation of the Jewish people. The Holocaust combined elements of deportation, expulsion, population transfer, massacre, genocide and other inhumane treatments. Concentration camps were set up with a range of purposes including detention of people, forced labour and mass murder. Altogether about six million European Jews were murdered, with 250,000 Gypsies.

The wars which led to the breaking apart of former Yugoslavia at the end of the 20th century involved widespread violations of human rights and humanitarian law against ethnic and religious minorities, including mass killings and murder, systematic rape, torture and other crimes against humanity. The term “ethnic cleansing” was used to describe the range of abuses committed in former Yugoslavia in order to achieve “ethnic purity”. During the spring of 1992 for example, Muslim and Croat residents of entire enclaves were wiped out in a Bosnian Serb attempt to “purify” lands that had fallen under their control. In the summer of 1992 the Bosnian Serbs set up a gulag of prison camps holding Muslims and Croats, where repeated atrocities were committed. This conflict was also the stage of a massive use of war rape as a part of ethnic cleansing, to displace targeted ethnic groups. Over 35,000 women and children were detained in Serb-run “rape-camps”. Rape was used to destroy cultural and social ties of the victims and their communities - for Muslim women, being subject to such abuses represented disgrace and exclusion from the religious community.



Targeting the Tutsi ethnical group, the Rwandan Genocide took place from April to July 1994. An estimated 560,000 Tutsis were killed during this period. This massacre took place in the context of the Rwandan Civil War, an ongoing conflict from the beginning of the 1990s. The genocide was planned by politicians in high places, some militias called themselves the “Army of Jesus”, believing that their mission was to destroy God’s enemies. International observers reported that countless human rights abuses and violations were perpetrated against the Tutsi community throughout the civil war.

Apartheid, (which translates into “apartness” from Afrikaans) is a policy that governed relations between South Africa’s white minority and nonwhite majority for much of the second half of the 20th century, sanctioning racial segregation and political and economic discrimination against non-whites. The establishment of apartheid in South Africa saw blatant racial discrimination in all aspects of life in the name of upholding the policy.





Although the legislation that formed the foundation of apartheid had been repealed by the early 1990s, the social and economic repercussions of the discriminatory policy persisted into the 21st century.

TIMELINE

745-727 BC: State policies on forced resettlement establish by Assyrian ruler 1300s and

1400s: Jewish massacre and expulsion (only existent sizable minority) 1685: Edict of

Nantes revoked in France

1830: Removal of the Native Americans and the robbing of their lands 1862:

Homestead Act, establishment of reservations

1941-1945: The Holocaust 1992:

Bosnian Serb “purification” 1994:

Rwandan genocide

1948-1994: The apartheid era



CURRENT SITUATION

Although enhancing and upholding the rights of ethnic and religious minorities around the world has been a key issue and topic of debate in the UN's agenda in the past decades, recent reports show clear evidence of the fact that those minorities are still faced with severe violations of human rights, alongside social exclusion, economic marginalization, poverty and discrimination.

According to the 2016 "Religious freedom in the world" report, out of the 196 countries in the world, 81 countries are identified as places where religious freedom is improperly provided. Among these countries, 20 are designated as "high" with regard to lack of religious freedom and high persecution of religious minorities. 14 of those experience persecutions linked with extremist

Islam: Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Maldives, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. In the remaining six countries, persecution is linked to authoritarian regimes: Burma(Myanmar), China, Eritrea, North Korea, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan. The report has come to the conclusion that in recent years, global religious freedom entered a "period of serious decline", characterized by a rising tide of persecution aimed at marginalised religious communities. Although Muslim countries dominate the list of states with the most serious religious freedom violations, abuses also occur in Western countries, which are predominantly and historically Christian. These are due to two factors, a disagreement over whether religion should be strictly limited to one's personal views and the fact that openness to different religions is under the threat of increasing societal concern about extremism. Christians are the religious minority who experience the most incidences of persecution (keep in mind that this is the number of incidences and not the severity of the same) due to their wide range of settlements across the globe. However Muslim minorities still experience the more appalling share of persecution, whether it be from other Muslims or from authoritarian governments. Jews in Western Europe are subject to violence and other human rights abuses - recent occurrences of such violence have resulted in increased emigration to Israel,

which in turn is locked in its own conflict with the Palestinian minority. Finally, the countries of Western Europe are becoming increasingly multi-confessional and diverse and although this should be considered a source of cultural, economic, and social enrichment, it has generated political and social tensions in western societies and has sometimes led to abuses of minorities' right to the free exercise of their religion.



Ethnic and religious minorities finding exclusion from economic life, both in the developed and developing world has become a common issue that every society must tackle. They face discrimination when seeking employment in the private sector, and are poorly represented in the public sector employment process. The UN has isolated several factors which contribute to the exclusion of minorities, among which we find ethnic tensions and discrimination by employers based on religious considerations as the leading reasons. These minorities are also prevented from exercising their economic and social rights by the unequal distribution of resources and services and the lack of basic infrastructure in regions where they have settled.

Contemporary racism is often perceived as “racism without race”. Practices or ideas are characterized as racist if they are “oriented in intention or effect towards the production, reproduction or affirmation of unequal relations”. In simpler terms, any ideas or practices which may put a section of society in a position where they feel that the situation is unequal is classified as racist.

Taking the American situation into consideration, recent evidence shows African Americans’ greater mistrust of white society. More college-educated blacks than black high school dropouts believe that it is true or might be true that “the government deliberately investigates black elected officials in order to discredit them,” that “the government deliberately makes sure that drugs are easily available in poor black neighborhoods in order to harm black people,” and that “the virus which causes AIDS was deliberately created in a laboratory in order to infect black people.” In a 1995 Washington Post survey, when asked whether “discrimination is the major reason for the economic and social ills blacks face,” 84 percent of middle-class blacks, as against 66 percent of working-class and poor blacks, agreed. This result, showing a growing feeling of alienation as people get more exposed to society is anything but good.



PREVIOUS UN ACTIONS

In 1948, the General Assembly declared that the United Nations could not remain indifferent to the fate of minorities – human rights violations and abuses against ethnic and religious minorities have been on the UN’s agenda since then.

The main point of reference regarding the rights of minorities is the “United Nations Declaration on Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic religious and Linguistic Minorities”, adopted by the General Assembly in 1992. This Declaration reaffirms the right of all minorities to enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms. Other principles include the protection of existence, promotion and protection of identity and the right to effective political participation. Consistent with the provisions of the 1992 Minorities Declaration, the 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action urged Governments to create favorable conditions and take measures that would enable people belonging to minorities within the respective government’s jurisdiction to express their characteristics freely and to participate on an equitable basis in the cultural, social, economic and political life of the country in which they live. The Durban Programme of Action specifically calls for the creation and implementation of policies that promote a diverse police force free from racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and religious intolerance.⁽¹²⁾ One of the Programme’s recommendations is that in recruiting for public employment, including the police force, States ensure the participation and representation of all groups including ethnic and religious minorities.

Overall, the scope of the United Nations actions concerning the protection of ethnic and religious minority rights covers the following:

- Survival rights
 - Promotion and protection of identity of the ethnic, racial and religious minorities
- Equality and non-discrimination
- Meaningful participation



1992 Minorities Declaration

The main aim of this declaration was to promote and encourage respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. It included guidelines to assure the provision of essential fundamental human rights for all sections of society, and specifically mentioned regulations for the fair treatment of minority groups.

2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

This declaration focused on providing measures for the prevention, education and protection of eradication of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance at the national, regional and international levels respectively. It highlighted important points to consider regarding human rights education.



BLOC POSITIONS

This section will highlight which countries were against the UN Declaration on the rights of persecuted ethnic, religious and racial communities, so as to get a good understanding of the numerous country positions.

COUNTRIES AGAINST THE DECLARATION

While Western countries will be opposed to the declaration considering it might promote anti-semitism, several European countries will also be opposed to it blaming focus on the Western countries and ignorance of issues in the developing world.

Australia, Canada, Germany, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and the United States often fall under this side of the discussion. Keep in mind that many of the countries that originally were against the declaration either directly or through amends have since reversed their position.

COUNTRIES SUPPORTING THE DECLARATION

Countries that support the declaration will aim to enhance the rights of the ethnically, racially and religiously discriminated without major amends to the topic put forth. South Korea, New Zealand, Russia and Chile often fall under this side of the discussion. Again, keep in mind that due to changes in situations, the reversal of the initial stances of the countries happens.



POINTS A RESOLUTION MUST ADDRESS

- 1) Are the existing UN mechanisms, units and programs sufficient to address the multiple cases of human rights abuse that ethnic, religious and racial communities are faced with today?
- 2) What measures can be taken by your government to ensure effective respect towards religious freedom in your country?
- 3) How can the UN empower members of ethnic, religious and racial minorities faced with discrimination in the exercise of their economic, political, cultural and employment rights?
- 4) What steps can be taken by your government for the effective enforcement of human rights



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EXTRA RESOURCES

Edict of Nante – <https://www.britannica.com/event/Edict-of-Nantes>

Native American Reservations - <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/the-gilded-age/american-west/a/the-reservation-system>

Homestead Act –
<https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/homestead-act#background>

The Holocaust -
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/introduction-to-the-holocaust>

Apartheid – <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/history-apartheid-south-africa>

Rwandan Genocide - <https://www.britannica.com/place/Rwanda/Genocide-and-aftermath>

