
UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Religious Freedom

The right to practice one's religion freely and without fear of persecution and discrimination is a fundamental human right that is more often than denied to many people. Despite being outlined in Articles 2 and 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations, scores of people are mistreated on the grounds of their religion across the globe. This is a contentious issue, and has been throughout history. From the persecution of early Christians by the Roman Empire, to the Holocaust, and to the violence perpetrated against the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, violence has always punctuated the path of the religions of the world, despite such religions preaching peace and tolerance of one another.

The debate of religious freedom is not a new one, but it's more relevant now than ever. I chose this topic because in a time marked by the rise of extremism and terrorism, the majority of people are often held accountable for the actions of a few. The world we live in today is very different from what it was a while back. Most nations are secular: religion is no longer intertwined with law. Religion is no longer the melting pot of political and intellectual discourse. A governing religious body does not hold most people accountable for their faith in the deities they worship. We see now that religious freedom is not one, but rather part of a broader set of freedoms. Everyone should have the freedom to express what they believe in, be it secular or religious. Everyone should have the freedom to assemble on the basis of these beliefs. Everyone should have the right to believe, or not to believe. We are a global society that is unfortunately built on the concept of the "other." We fear what is different from us, and immediately ostracize them, whether explicitly or implicitly. In today's world this manifests itself in many ways. The post 9/11 world is one that is marked by an exponential rise in hate-crimes directed towards Muslims and Sikh men, who are mistaken as Muslims because of their turbans. Religious minorities such as the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and the Ahmidayya community in Indonesia face continuous violence and discrimination, to the point where they are forced to flee from their homes.

This is a controversial issue, no doubt, and is one that addresses inherent racism as well as we peel away the layers. Its controversial nature is exactly why it is important. Freedom of speech, thought, and belief is a contentious issue, and always has been, because where is the line drawn? Should such a line even exist? What can we do to ensure such rights, and how can we safeguard the rights of those who face backlash because of the actions of a few? As you start your research, I hope you keep these questions in mind, and I hope you look at everything with an open, yet critical eye.

Exploitation, Forced Labor and Trafficking

Human trafficking is the trade in humans, most commonly for the purpose of sexual slavery, forced labor and extraction of organs and tissues. It is a serious crime and direct violation of the basic



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human rights articulated to everyone. They are sold for a price, and forced to endure unimaginable torture, pain and humiliation at the hands of their traffickers. Despite a wide variety of efforts by the international community, every year, millions of people systematically fall victim to human trafficking: men, women and children alike. An estimated 46 million people are tied up in modern-day slavery across the globe.

Slavery has existed since the dawn of civilization. It took millennia and countless atrocities to realize the mistake. I chose this topic because despite all the protests, despite all the change we have managed to make, we are still not rid of this crime against humanity. Human trafficking is the world's fastest growing enterprise, and this unprecedented growth rate does not seem to be slowing down. There are millions of people who suffer at the hands of traffickers daily. The people who make our clothes in Bangladesh. The workers building the FIFA 2022 stadium in Qatar. Many of them, despite being given the chance to speak go to the police, refuse to do so for fear of further persecution. The problems that survivors of trafficking face are immense, even after their ordeals are seemingly over. Many of them do not speak English, are uneducated and have suffered severe psychological trauma. It is unfortunate that the governments of the world do little to aid in the reintegration and rehabilitation of survivors of trafficking, and most of them are left to fend for themselves in a society that ostracizes them for their past. Survivors of sex trafficking are seen as prostitutes. They are given little to no psychological support, and sometimes their lack of inclusion in society can lead to re-trafficking, and the vicious cycle continues.

This is the aspect of the problem I want you all to think about. It's one that's often overlooked, as most international efforts are directed to prevention efforts and tighter immigration control. These people have suffered unimaginable horrors, and it's unfeasible to think that their problems will be over as soon as they are liberated. The psychological trauma that they are put through, often in the form of intimidation and abuse, can leave wounds that are difficult to heal. I want you to consider the measures the international community can put in place to ensure that the cycle of trafficking stops. Think about how rehabilitation efforts can be strengthened so that these people, who come from a place where they were less than human, can, in time, feel normal again.

