

**OFFICE OF THE
UNITED
NATIONS HIGH
COMMISSIONER
FOR HUMAN
RIGHTS**

DEAR DELEGATES,

The Chair warmly welcomes you to the World Health Organization officially. We are honored to lead the delegations participating in this committee at the first edition of PAPMUN. As members of the Chair, our main role is to guide the development of proposals and ideas, so that a meaningful discussion of the topic can be achieved.

We are pleased to welcome delegates to the WHO committee who are aware of global challenges. Providing a critical perspective, forming an objective point of view, and engaging in learning, investigation, and understanding will collectively enrich our experience. The mission of WHO is to collaborate internationally to ensure public health, respond to health crises, promote access to medical care, and recognize health as a human right.

Finally, the Chair would like to thank you for your participation. The presence, sharing, and cooperation is fundamental for the development of the WHO committee. Do not hesitate to share your ideas, remember that each contribution can help diversify the debate. Once more, the Chair is pleased to form part of this meaningful experience for your academic, professional, and personal development. We will meet you at PAPMUN 2025.

Sincerely,
MIA REGINA MENDOZA
President of the committee

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights) is the leading United Nations entity on human rights. Its commitment is to promote and protect the full range of human rights. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights was established in December 1993, a few months after the World Conference on Human Rights adopted the Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action.

The mission of UN Human Rights is to address the pressing human rights violations, especially those that put life in imminent peril, focuses attention on those who are at risk and vulnerable, pays attention to the awareness of civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights, including the right to development.

Operationally, OHCHR works with governments, legislatures, courts, national institutions, civil society, regional and international organizations, and the United Nations system to develop and strengthen capacity for the protection of human rights. Institutionally, OHCHR is committed to give strength to the United Nations human rights programme and provide it with the highest quality support.

To fulfil its mission, UN Human Rights follows a vigorous framework of results known as the OMP (OHCHR Management Plan). This guideline of the current OMP covering the period 2024-2027 is based on lessons learned from implementation, broad consultations with a wide range of collaborators including Member States, the UN system and civil society in the context of the Human Rights 75 initiative, and an analysis of the impact of major global trends on human rights. The OMP is aligned with and contributes to the delivery of intergovernmental frameworks, and it is strongly anchored to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

“Freedom of religion is the right to choose what religion to follow and to worship without undue interference. This fundamental right is guaranteed by article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. Freedom of religion or belief has many dimensions and intersects with other human rights, such as the right to freedom of expression or the right to life.”

The UN Human Rights Office works to ensure respect for freedom of religion or belief, the prohibition of incitement to religious hatred, and the promotion of diversity in society. Its efforts focus on two main initiatives. The first is the Rabat Plan of Action, which addresses the distinction between freedom of expression and incitement to hatred, including religious hatred. The second is the “Faith for Rights” framework, which builds on the Rabat Plan and suggests ways in which “Faith” can effectively support “Rights,” allowing both to mutually reinforce one another. In parallel, the Office prepares reports on efforts and measures taken to combat intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence, and violence against individuals based on religion or belief (Human Rights Council resolution 16/18). Additionally, the Office supports the work of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

CONTEXT OF ONGOING ISSUES OF RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION AND RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN ASIAN COUNTRIES: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF CURRENT CHALLENGES:

“Religious oppression and restrictions on freedom of expression continue to pose significant challenges in various Asian countries. Religious oppression is defined as the act of limiting or suppressing an individual’s ability to practice their religion freely, often accompanied by laws or social norms that target minority religious groups” (UNHCHR, 2023). In many regions, these forms of repression violate multiple human rights. Although the international community has established numerous frameworks and declarations to protect religious freedom and expression, these rights are still routinely compromised. Asia is marked by cultural and political factors that contribute to maintaining oppressive practices, with significant consequences for individuals and communities.

This committee will examine religious oppression and restrictions on freedom of expression in Asia, where social, political, and economic factors exacerbate these issues. One of the primary causes of this problem is restrictive

government policies. For instance, countries such as China and Myanmar have implemented laws and measures targeting specific religious groups. China's policies in Xinjiang, which include surveillance and detention of Uyghur Muslims, are justified by the government as anti-terrorism efforts but are widely criticized as severe human rights violations (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Myanmar has also faced international scrutiny for its treatment of the Rohingya Muslim population, where widespread violence and displacement have been reported. In these cases, restrictive policies are used as tools for control, creating an environment of fear and discrimination.

Another contributing factor is cultural norms and social pressures. In some regions, dominant religious or cultural groups impose their beliefs on others, leading to the marginalization of religious minorities. For example, in countries such as Pakistan and Indonesia, religious minorities like Christians, Hindus, and Ahmadiyya Muslims often face discrimination, social exclusion, and violence. Blasphemy laws in Pakistan are used to silence dissent and punish those who express differing religious views, leading to a climate where people fear to speak openly (Amnesty International, 2023). This social oppression is further reinforced by the belief that deviating from dominant religious practices is disrespectful to cultural values.

A third major factor is the lack of protection for freedom of expression. In countries like India and Bangladesh, individuals who criticize religious extremism, advocate for secularism, or challenge dominant beliefs are often silenced. Journalists, activists, and academics who speak out against religious discrimination or advocate for minority rights frequently face threats, legal actions, and even violence. Governments may justify these restrictions as measures to maintain public order, but the result is a restricted space for open dialogue and advocacy (Reporters Without Borders, 2023). This suppression of expression stifles progress and perpetuates discrimination against minority groups.

As previously noted, these forms of oppression remain pervasive in many Asian countries, highlighting the need for international action to protect these fundamental rights. Addressing religious oppression and limitations on freedom of expression is essential for promoting human rights, social justice,

and peace in affected regions. This oppression not only limits individuals' ability to express themselves and practice their faith, but also has a broader negative impact on society, contributing to conflict, social unrest, and the perpetuation of human rights violations.

One of the key rights violated by religious oppression is the right to freely practice one's religion, which includes access to religious spaces and the freedom to observe religious rituals. This restriction results in social isolation for minority groups, as they are often discouraged or prevented from engaging with their communities openly. Additionally, restrictions on freedom of expression prevent open discussions on religion and human rights, creating a culture of fear where dissenting voices are silenced. This not only undermines individual freedoms but also deprives society of the diversity of perspectives essential for social progress.

Another negative implication is the potential for increased social and political instability. When individuals are unable to express themselves freely or practice their religion openly, they may feel marginalized, leading to increased social tensions and conflict. For example, policies that target specific religious groups or restrict free speech often led to protests, international condemnation, and, in some cases, violence. This cycle of repression and resistance affects the entire region, as neighboring countries are often drawn into these conflicts, either through migration, diplomatic tensions, or economic impacts.

In 2017, the United Nations Human Rights Council, along with various international organizations, adopted the Faith for Rights framework, which encourages governments to protect religious diversity and uphold freedom of expression. The framework is designed to promote dialogue, tolerance, and understanding among diverse religious communities. However, it has faced challenges in implementation, particularly in countries where government policies or social norms conflict with these principles. The framework has received support from several countries, including Canada, Norway, and the Netherlands, which continue to advocate for its adoption and enforcement. In 2022, the Faith for Rights framework reported progress in countries where dialogue, education, and human rights initiatives have been implemented, yet

challenges remain in regions where political opposition to these principles is strong.

Other organizations and advocates are working to raise awareness and promote coordinated action across social, political, and educational sectors to address religious oppression and support freedom of expression. An example is Amnesty International, which documents cases of religious discrimination and repression, providing resources for governments and communities to promote tolerance and protect human rights. The organization's efforts are aimed at empowering individuals and communities to foster environments of inclusivity.

GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. How is religious oppression affecting my delegation's citizens?
2. What actions is my delegation's government taking to address this issue, both nationally and internationally?
3. What international agreements has my delegation signed to protect religious freedom and freedom of expression?
4. What measures have been implemented within my country to protect minority rights and freedom of expression?
5. How does religious oppression impact the broader international system?
6. What is my delegation's relationship with countries most affected by this issue?

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