

**Issue:** Measures to prevent the suppression of religious minorities

**Forum:** Special Conference 1

**Position:** Chair

**Name:** Medhini Pathirana



## Introduction

The freedom of religion as listed in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a basic human right that should be enjoyed by every human in the world. Unfortunately, this has never been the true state. This applies especially for religious minorities, those that make up the smallest percentages of the world's religious diversity. Historically, the need to make an area ethnically/religiously homogeneous has resulted in the persecution of the religious minorities that often not have the literal manpower or the ability to fight back. Religion has often been named the top reason for many of the world's biggest troubles and this is evident even in the last century, in which the World War's occurred, spurred by religious conflicts, there have been multiple of the biggest conflicts and civil wars/revolutions due to religion, for example the Islamic revolution in Iran, the genocides in Myanmar and the emergence of extremist groups such as ISIS and Boko Haram.

These events and instances are worrying for religious minorities who are being targeted, because they can often end up in the most extreme forms of persecution and discrimination such as genocide and ethnic cleansing.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Oppression:** Prolonged cruel or unjust treatment

**Religious Persecution:** Systematic oppression and discrimination against an individual or a group due to their religious beliefs

**Ethnic Cleansing:** The forced deportation or genocide of people belonging to a particular ethnic group in an attempt to make an area ethnically homogeneous

## General Overview

As the publicity of atheism, non-religion and unitarism becomes more apparent, there is a projected image of the world becoming a less religious world as it becomes more modern, globalized and connected. This, however, is not the case as recent research has concluded that the growth of religious populations worldwide is predicted to be 23 times what the growth of the non-religious will be between 2010 and 2050.

The impact of this is major as it does not only mean the growth of all religion, the expansion of relatively new religions but also the change in the demographics and the populations and powers of all religions. The number of people associated with a religion is expected to grow to 8.1 billion people in 2050, up by 2.3 billion in 2010. As mentioned previously, the growth of non-religious people would be significantly lower, only moving 0.1 billion up, a great contrast from the highest point in the 1970's where one in five people were religiously unaffiliated under communist rule.

*The table below displays the change and the distribution of religions between 2010 and 2050:*

### Size and Projected Growth of Major Religious Groups

	2010 POPULATION	% OF WORLD POPULATION IN 2010	PROJECTED 2050 POPULATION	% OF WORLD POPULATION IN 2050	POPULATION GROWTH 2010-2050
Christians	2,168,330,000	31.4%	2,918,070,000	31.4%	749,740,000
Muslims	1,599,700,000	23.2	2,761,480,000	29.7	1,161,780,000
Unaffiliated	1,131,150,000	16.4	1,230,340,000	13.2	99,190,000
Hindus	1,032,210,000	15.0	1,384,360,000	14.9	352,140,000
Buddhists	487,760,000	7.1	486,270,000	5.2	-1,490,000
Folk Religions	404,690,000	5.9	449,140,000	4.8	44,450,000
Other Religions	58,150,000	0.8	61,450,000	0.7	3,300,000
Jews	13,860,000	0.2	16,090,000	0.2	2,230,000
<b>World total</b>	<b>6,895,850,000</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>9,307,190,000</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2,411,340,000</b>

Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

An interesting point to know is the diversity of religions predicted to arrive to the members of the G8 nations. Currently 7 of the 8 members are Christian majority nations. However, in 2050 this is to drastically change according to religions growth paths that have been predicted. This is not only because of the change in religion but the change in economic powers and G8 nations. The most unique will be China and Japan, where there is to become high levels of religious diversity with there not being one overall religion in either country.

However, as you see in the table above that sections for folk religions and other religions are both categories which are to decrease in size. This leaves them at risk of persecution to a greater extent, if nothing is done to counteract it.

Religious persecution presents itself in various manners and therefore remains a difficult and complex problem to figure out. Firstly, there is the matter of religious extremist groups that are taking the discrimination and persecution to a drastic level. This includes groups such as ISIS and Boko Haram. But this manner is not limited to private extremist groups but also to governments, to be seen Myanmar with the Rohingya crisis and intolerances of varied religion in a few Middle Eastern countries such as Iran.

## Major Parties Involved

### **The United States of America**

The land of the free, as the United States is often referred to, is known to have historically been the country where the practice of religion of any choosing has been open to any person, since the establishment of the first amendment. Of course, such a bold statement may be contradicted at times, but up until the present day, America has remained a refuge for all religions and a country that is made up of many.

It is still an overall Christian majority country, and there have been recently more news coverage about Muslim civilians in America, surrounding President Donald Trump having blocked/limited migrants from mainly Muslim majority countries. But this has mainly to do with extremist acts and his beliefs that it is the Islamic people who are responsible for this as he has stated before.

### **Iran**

The Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the only Muslim majority countries with an overall greater percentage of Shia Muslims than Sunni Muslims. There, the Shia population makes up approximately 90 to 95% of the total population.

## Estimated distribution of Shia Muslims in the Middle East



The country has a history defined by religion, being an Islamic Republic and a unitary state and being run by a supreme leader, presently, the long-running supreme leader Ali Khamenei.

Iran was consumed by the Islamic revolution 1978 to 1979, having accumulated to this boiling point after years of conflicts where in the last Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was overthrown, and the country was changed to an Islamic Republic. This was fueled by the opposition of a man named Ayatollah, Ruhollah Khomeini who was against the ideals and reforms of the current Shah, which included the right for religious minorities to hold office. Therefore, passing the revolution, Iran was left with an extremely Islamic nation, one where everyone was to be monitored to be held to sharia law. This resulted in the nation being one of extreme intolerance and unaccepting of other minority religions in the country.

In the present day while the situation is not as controversial, the majority still remains devote Shia Muslims, and therefore there is socially, politically and demographically still bias and favor towards this. This is to be seen in the education systems of the country in which there is in-depth focus upon the Shia religion, but other religions are altogether ignored.

## Myanmar

The importance of Myanmar to this issue is one of the current times, because of the refugee crisis and the genocide of the Rohingya people that is happening presently. The Rohingya people are a minority of the country in terms of ethnicity but also religion as only 4.2% of the country is Muslim such as them. The dominant religion in the country is Buddhism.

The government does not recognize the Rohingya people and thus they are stateless, accumulating to (before the current crisis) to ten percent of the world's total of stateless persons. The government has states that it believes that the Rohingya people are not indigenously Burmese people but illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, only agreeing to grant them citizenship as they identify themselves as Bengali.

Though this has been going on for decades, in 2012, violence erupted between Rohingya and Buddhist populations, resulting in hundreds of deaths. Additionally, in 2017 the situation deteriorated drastically as the national army go involved and in the Rakhine State of Myanmar, started measures that basically were meant to eradicate the people and drive them away. This meant thousands of deaths, and millions fleeing to the Bangladesh border.



## Timeline of Key Events

- **1863:** The Bahá'í religion is founded by Bahá'u'lláh in this year. This is one of the world's youngest religions but is also one of the religions that is most spread around the world.
- **1942 – 8 May 1945:** The Holocaust of World War II is clearly one of the most detrimental and well-known genocides of world history, in which the systematic murder of 6 million European Jews occurred in the period of Nazi Germany. The Jewish population in Germany before the Holocaust made up 0.75% of the total population and 1.7% of Europe.
- **25 August 2017 – ongoing:** The latest attacks on the Rohingya people of Myanmar ensued, the latest ongoing event of decades of ethnic cleansing in the country. The Rohingya people are the largest percentage of Muslims in Myanmar but are still a religious minority of Myanmar, due to 88% of the population being Buddhist and Islam only being 4.2%. Of course, this number is assumed to be higher, only kept this low due to the government not registering the Rohingya people who are therefore undocumented. There is an ongoing genocide being performed by the national army, leading the Rohingya to be forced to migrate to Bangladesh as asylum seekers.

## Previous attempts to resolve the issue

Firstly, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is the fundamental document of the United Nations and of Human Rights has gone over the fact that every person is allowed full freedom of religious and should not be subject to persecution because of it. This, of course, is not a combative action against the issue but outlines the criminal act of persecution of religion.

However, The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is a legally binding treaty which when ratified means that countries will have to comply with the statements provided. In this Covenant there are articles that protect the freedom of religion, but of course that is provided that the necessary countries sign, ratify and adhere to the articles.

Another broad attempt to raise awareness for this issue is reduced inequalities which is an umbrella term that contains the problem of freedom of religion as well.

## Possible Solutions

What remains to be done is to bring the focus to the oppression of minority religions and the prevention of it. This seems necessary to first be done on a case by case basis, such as Security Council action on militant, extremist groups that go against certain religions and also nations which are discriminating against religions in their countries on a nation-wide level.

Moving forward, treaties and binding resolutions should be made to not only counteract this issue but also to set guidelines on how it would be monitored.

## Appendix/Appendices

### Appendix 1: How Religious with the World be in 2050:

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/10/how-religious-will-the-world-be-in-2050/>

### Appendix 2: Changing Religion, Changing Economies:

<https://religiousfreedomandbusiness.org/changing-religion-and-changing-economies>

## Bibliography

<http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195326246.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195326246-e-9>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion\\_in\\_Myanmar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Myanmar)

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566561>

<https://libertyandhumanity.com/themes/international-human-rights-law/human-rights-mechanisms-and-international-law/>

<http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-population-of-europe-in-1933-population-data-by-country>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Holocaust](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Holocaust)

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-population-of-europe-in-1933-population-data-by-country>

<https://www.holocaust.cz/en/history/final-solution/general-2/the-persecution-of-german-jews-after-the-nazi-seizure-of-power/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First\\_Amendment\\_to\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_Constitution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Amendment_to_the_United_States_Constitution)

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/americas-true-history-of-religious-tolerance-61312684/>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/01/iran-1979-revolution-shook-world-2014121134227652609.html>

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/ethnic-cleansing>

[https://www.indexmundi.com/iran/demographics\\_profile.html](https://www.indexmundi.com/iran/demographics_profile.html)

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25434060>

<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/religion-and-politics-iran>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme\\_Leader\\_of\\_Iran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_Leader_of_Iran)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Background\\_and\\_causes\\_of\\_the\\_Iranian\\_Revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Background_and_causes_of_the_Iranian_Revolution)

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2018/03/19/religious-persecution-is-hindering-childrens-education/#1694aef47047>

<https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/one-of-the-world-s-youngest-religions-celebrates-its-bicentenary-1.3315107>

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/05/fastest-growing-major-religion/>

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/10/how-religious-will-the-world-be-in-2050/>