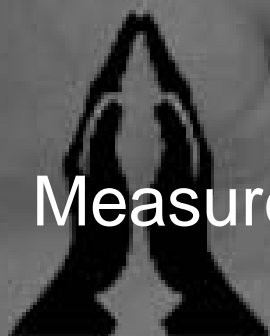


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# Human Rights Council

Measures to protect religious diversity



**MODEL UNITED NATIONS**  
THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THE HAGUE

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<b>Forum:</b>	Human Rights Council
<b>Issue:</b>	Measures to protect religious diversity
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## Introduction

The topic of religion and religious diversity is a very complicated one. Everyone has the right to have a belief or religion; this is clearly dictated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 18. Although this is stated in one of the most ratified agreements to be made on the subject of human rights, there are still major issues related to freedom of belief. In countless cases, perhaps even in the majority of cases, the basis of conflict has been religion. The conflict may range from civil war to international war. Such wars range from ancient times, for example the Christian crusades, to the modern ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel. There have been many previous attempts to resolve the problem which have been effective to an extent, although in multiple cases the resulting treaties, covenants etc, have been blatantly ignored. For example, in Iran, Sudan and Saudi Arabia turning away from the local religion is punishable by death. This has caused very big problems and ultimately conflict. Further action is needed if we are to live in a world where everyone respects each other and religion is not the source of unnecessary conflicts. The previous attempts, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have been a good start but must be followed up.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Religion

Religion is the collective belief of how things came to be, cultural systems and order in the universe. Religion has many different forms, this has some correlation to the area of the world but religion is mostly a belief that many people worldwide agree on.

### Diversity



Diversity is the variety of something; in this case religious diversity means the variety and identity of many different religions all living side by side.

## Human Rights

Human Rights are the rights given to all humans regarding living standards and political rights, and these rights apply to everyone regardless of race, sex, religion or language.

## Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a document stating all the rights that everyone has and also their freedoms to which they are entitled to.

## General Overview

### Monitoring

There have been many treaties put into practice in the past, which are often enforced by committees and international bodies. One of these treaties is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The terms of this covenant are enforced by the Human Rights Committee. The Human Rights Committee is made up of independent experts. Furthermore, countries are being encouraged to have their own agencies, in order to ensure that a country abides by the legally binding terms of resolutions. As of now 25 member states of the United Nations have such agencies.

### Conflicts

It should not be assumed that religious conflicts do not happen in the 'modern west'. Northern Ireland is a very recent example of a religious conflict which ultimately led to 3526 people being killed. This conflict was between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Although there were other political factors in this conflict, religion was the underlying reason for this conflict. An unfortunately grave conflict was the one in Sudan. This conflict claimed the lives of 2 million people. This was a conflict between Christians, Muslims and Animists. This has been resolved to an extent due to the peace agreement in 2011. We have seen countless times in the past that these conflicts have been disastrous; therefore we must continue to make progress in preventing said conflicts.

### Education



Education is key to the progress within any community to promote religious diversity and respect. Recently there have been extreme radical terrorist groups who claim that they are doing what their faith tells them to do, for example Islamic State. Many experts say that Islamic State has misinterpreted the Koran. In the past several years armed insurgency by some groups has caused a trend of judging Muslims to be extremists. In some serious cases people have thought that just because you are Muslim you must be a terrorist. To most people this is outrageous but it does happen. This is why religious education is key to understanding people and their faith in a respectful and truthful way.

### Sharia law

Sharia law is a law based on the Muslim faith mostly found in theocratic countries. The reason this is important in relation to religious diversity is that there are extreme consequences for not abiding by Islamic customs. In countries that use Sharia law, for example Iran, you could be punished by death for not following Islam. This is a violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As an international community we must negotiate with these countries to stop this.

### The Holocaust

The Holocaust was the extermination of Jewish people generally in Nazi occupied areas. This took place from 1933-1945. The Nazis did this because they thought people should be only in one type.

## Major Parties Involved and Their Views

### United Nations

The United Nations has had a huge impact on maintaining and protecting religious diversity. Firstly, they have passed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which is generally accepted by most countries to be part of international law. Article 18 states that “everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion”. Furthermore the Universal Declaration Human Rights was also passed by the United Nations. This says something similar to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Please note that in most cases anything passed by the General Assembly of the United Nations is not legally binding so when countries decide to follow a certain treaty it is



on a completely voluntary basis, Only clauses passed by the United Nations Security Council can be legally binding.

### Human Rights Committee

All states which have ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights are required to report to the Human Rights Committee on a regular basis or when asked to do so. There needs to be increased pressure on countries that have not ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Human Rights Committee meets 3 times a year in Geneva.

### Israel and Palestine

This conflict between Israel and Palestine is in itself is a very complicated issue, although the basis of this conflict is simply the dispute over the holy land. Jerusalem is a holy place for many religions, and the dispute over it has been an ongoing problem. Within what is known as Israel, i.e. not including Palestine, the religion is mostly Judaism. In Palestine the main religion is Islam. The dispute over the holy land has been going on since ancient time as both groups feel that the holy land belongs to them. This is another dispute over belief which has cost many lives.

### The Council of the European Union

The European Union has adopted a set of guidelines to respect religion and protect religious diversity. In these guidelines there are clauses stating that all 'states have an obligation to guarantee human rights protection'. We need more guidelines like this globally and to apply pressure on all countries to abide by them to really protect religious diversity.

### Extremist groups

Extremist groups, in a religious sense, are groups of people who interpret their religion in the wrong way. This is generally expressed with violence. Examples of this include the conflict in Northern Ireland where there were issues with the other religion which caused tension, due to a particular interpretation of their religion. A more recent example is Islamic State who have misinterpreted their religion and used it as an excuse for violence. This has been an ongoing problem. It not only harms the people caught in the conflict but also the rest of the world. In the news people constantly hear about extremist Islamic groups, and in some places this has led to the stereotype that all Muslims are terrorists, which in itself leads to further serious problems. We need to protect religious diversity by showing people the reality and truth about what different religions say.

## The Vatican City (Holy See)

The Vatican City, being the center of Roman Catholicism, has a big influence on what happens in the world when it comes to religion. The Pope has publically promoted the liberty of religion as to not repress any religions to try and maintain religious diversity. This has been an influence on many people to have someone at the top of a certain religion who says that one should respect others' religion, and this hopefully will help maintain religious diversity.

## Timeline of Events

Below are some of the most important landmarks in making progress into protecting religious diversity, and living with respect. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was the base treaty on which everything else was based. Each one of the items below was a step forward, perhaps the most significant being the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Belfast agreement was also of great importance because it resolved an active conflict with a political agreement, regarding the situation in Northern Ireland.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of event</b>
1096-1099	This was the period of the first crusades, with the purpose of trying to capture the 'Holy land'
1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted
1950	European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms adopted
1965	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination adopted
1966-2001	The main period of conflict in Northern Ireland, which was caused by religion
December 23, 1966	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly
1983-2005	Sudan Civil war took place, as a result of conflict between the Muslim and Christian in Sudan, claiming the lives of around 2 million people



May 23, 1988                      Belfast agreements endorsed by Northern Irish voters in a referendum. (read further)

### Belfast agreement

The Belfast agreement was a political agreement which was a major part in the peace process of Northern Ireland. It included many political parties and agreed upon decommissioning weapons and civil and cultural rights.

## UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The United Nations is the organization that unites countries to come to agreements to prevent and resolve conflict. The United Nations played a vital role in the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The International Covenant on Civil and Political Right and the Human Rights Committee. This committee helps monitor and enforce the rights that everyone deserves.

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 23 March 1966 (**2200A**)
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948 (**271A3**)
- European Union Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief, 24 June 2013

## Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

There have been attempts to resolve the issue of protecting religious diversity although they have not been entirely successful. For example all the treaties that have been passed virtually repeat the same things and are not legally binding. Consequently not all countries abide by them. Perhaps smaller scale actions would be a better solution to this problem.

## Possible Solutions

There are several ways on which this issue could be resolved. Firstly, there could be incentives for countries that have not ratified the treaties which include clauses providing

guidelines on how to respect human rights including religious belief. A couple of examples could be The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Iran and Sudan. It is of vital importance to prevent the use of the death penalty for merely expressing your view. This could be done by providing consequences for countries that do not follow suit. These could include economic sanctions for example, or boycotting of events. The best way to solve this however is through political negotiation.

Education is vital to moving in the right direction. A way to do this is to make religious education compulsory in education institutes, which explain other religions in a non-biased way. We could also encourage places of worship, such as Synagogues, Mosques or Churches to encourage respect for other religions more than they already do. The education would also help to prevent stereotypes from forming.

A new body of the United Nations, or an independent organization could be created between states to travel around the world and give speeches, to those who cannot afford education or have been fed propaganda since they were young, resulting in very biased views. An example of this could be in Israel and Palestine, as due to their situation each group of people has learned to hate each other. This could also be done in places where there is propaganda against religions such as Islam due to the action of extremist groups such as Islamic State. They would have seminars on what the Koran really says so that people understand Islamic State is a group of people who have misinterpreted the Koran.

Maybe a less formal and less political way to help resolve tension is to create neutral zones in places of conflict. In such places both parties, especially children, could play sports together or take part in other recreational activities to learn from a young age to live in peace and show respect, so not allowing religion to become a deciding factor.

To protect diversity there could be increased monitoring of countries to try and enforce human rights. Please note however that you cannot act on sovereign territory of a foreign country and that only the Security Council can pass legally binding clauses.

Other examples of solutions could be to encourage multicultural schools so that people learn about those from other cultures and religions from a young age.

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