

Forum: United Nations Human Rights Committee

Issue: Protecting minority rights against the face of right-wing nationalism

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Introduction

Right-wing nationalism continues to pose a threat to liberal democracies and minorities. It is fueled by those in power who are threatened by globalization and social change. This results in the rise of populism in politics, exacerbated by the politics of fear and anger pushed forward by political leaders through the process of 'scapegoating' or the blaming of minorities for a society's setbacks.

In many societies, minorities are often victims of armed conflict, political oppression and internal strife. People belonging to national, ethnic, religious and/or linguistic minorities are repeatedly prone to multiple counts of discrimination and they may lack access to, among other things, housing, land and property, and legal statuses such as a citizenship.

The promotion and protection of minority rights especially require attention on the recognition of minorities, guaranteeing their rights to equality and freedom from discrimination, promotion of multicultural educations, inclusion of their presence in public life, inclusion in societal development and the guarantee of land and housing.

Definition of Key Terms

Minority Rights: Legal rights given to minority groups as both on the individual and collective levels. Often urged on by civil rights movements, minority rights ensure the protection of minority groups and equal treatment under law.

Minority: A minor portion of persons in a society who differ from the majority population through ethnicity, religion, language, etc.

Protection of Minority Rights: The prioritized protection of rights for minorities based on universal human rights in general and the deep rooted principles of equality and nondiscrimination. This usually entails

Ethnic Nationalism: Also known as ethno-nationalism is the branch of nationalism

connected to ethnicity. This includes the belief system where nations are defined by shared heritage, language and ethnicity.

Right-wing Nationalism: Though there is not a true definition of right-wing nationalism, the general consensus is that political ideology usually pushes for exclusivity in population and ethnicity. The result is advocacy for anti-immigration agendas and scapegoating against minorities and societal institutions more commonly referred to as 'the establishment.'

Scapegoating: In this context, the singling out and usually unjust blaming of minority groups for social turmoil. Scapegoating typically rises with right-wing populist movements, increase in crime rates and economic recessions.

General Overview

As stated in the introduction of the report, the protection of minority rights against the face of right-wing nationalism requires an updated consensus on the definition and requirements for certain groups to be considered as minority groups. Furthermore, a thorough research of previous attempts to protect minority groups under law is needed. Finally, the classification of Internally Displaced People (IDP) and indigenous peoples is required to evaluate their status within minority groups and whether or not their rights should be protected in the same way. It is important to note previous attempts to help minorities under law, reasons for such attempts, and their various degrees of success.

Minority

The first challenge in the topic of minorities is how to identify and classify a minority. Debates usually include the topic of Internally Displaced People (IDP) and indigenous people, especially regarding whether or not they are classified as minorities. IDPs are persons who have been forced to flee their hometowns but have remained within their own nation's borders, excluding them from the general refugee status. They are, however, a smaller part of the population who hold less rights and opportunities compared to others. Hence, they are often referred to as minorities. Humanitarian agencies and Member States are frequently called upon to uphold and protect the rights of IDPs, who are frequently deprived of adequate shelter, food and health services, to the same standard as all citizens. Indigenous people, the original ethnic group in an area who often obtain their own distinctive rights based on their historical presence to the territory, while technically often a minority, are classified differently from minorities due to their possession of different rights.

Nevertheless, the main challenge with minorities is looking into their inclusion into society and ensuring that they are given equal rights. Sociologically, minorities are people who experience relative disadvantage compared to those of the majority social and ethnic group. A person can be part of more than one minority group (i.e. Christian, Asian in a European country) or can also be part of a minority group and a dominant group (i.e. Muslim, Caucasian). Many efforts to bridge the gap between minorities and dominant social groups

have been made over numerous congresses and legislations. The most notable effort, however, comes from the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, adopted by the UN General Assembly on the 18th of December, 1992.

Minority rights

The push for minority rights first came at the 1814 Congress of Vienna, which evaluated the situation of the German Jewish population, especially focusing its efforts on Prussia, Russia, and Austria. The question of approving protection for their minorities ended up being cast aside, resulting in intolerance and organized discrimination.

The 1856 Congress of Paris focused its attention on the situation of Jewish and Christian groups in the Ottoman Empire. British efforts mostly came from prime minister William Gladstone, who advocated for international attention on the crimes toward Bulgarians by the Ottoman Empire. The Congress of Berlin in 1878 dealt with the status of Jewish populations in Romania, Serbia, and Bulgaria. Most efforts in the 19th century to protect minorities failed to produce any societal reform, and subsequently did not prevent nations' mistreatment or disregard of minority groups.

Modern day efforts to improve minority rights include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 27), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, two Council of Europe treaties (the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Copenhagen Document of 1990, to varying degrees of success.

Protection of Minority Rights

Following the end of the First World War and what is essentially now regarded as the creation of the nation-state, minority issues came on the forefront for the League of Nations. A reasonable amount of "minority" treaties were adopted to protect certain groups, addressing many of their key concerns.

Such protection commonly included were the rights to equality and non-discrimination; the right to citizenship; the right to use one's own language in public and private; the right of minorities to establish their own religious, cultural, charitable and educational institutions ;the right to receive an "equitable" level of financial support to minority schools from the state, in which instruction at the primary level would be in the minority's mother tongue; and entrenchment of laws protecting minorities so that they could not be changed by subsequent statutes.

In 1948, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was a large step in the right direction for the protection of human rights and historically, one of the most important pieces of legislation. Its anti-discrimination provisions and other articles are crucial for persons belonging to minority groups. While the General Assembly was unable to agree on any formulation in the Declaration concerning minority rights directly, it did add that the United Nations “cannot remain indifferent to the fate of minorities”.

Later in the United Nations, a declaration on minority rights was debated for a decade, followed by the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. The preambulatory clauses recognize that protecting minority rights will “contribute to the political and social stability of States in which they live” and, so, “contribute to the strengthening of friendship and cooperation among peoples and States”.

Ethnic and Right-Wing Nationalism

Ethnic nationalism is one of the main reasons for the modern-day oppression of minorities and the increasing flow of refugees and internally displaced people around the world. Ethnic nationalism politicizes minorities’ cultures and incentivizes the ‘cleansing’ of minority culture and rights in the community. This, in turn, leads to the expulsion and even the extermination of minorities.

Right-Wing nationalism poses a threat for minorities due to the unmerited blame it casts on certain minority groups. The rise of right-wing nationalism in certain European states, for example, has already resulted in an increase of anti-semitism and scapegoating of minority welfare recipients. This is a direct example of recent political pressure to lower welfare provided to minorities who are in need of financial help. This ideology makes it so minorities seem as an economic burden rather than a potential for future growth. Due to this, minorities are put in such a disadvantage due to

Scapegoating

The word “scapegoat” is used a lot in discussions about politics and minorities. For example, US President Donald Trump, appealed to some voters with rhetoric that appeared to scapegoat Mexicans and Muslims for various social and economic problems. The scapegoat mechanism is dangerous to various degrees, as it aims to find a group to blame for the problems in society, instead of tackling them. The most notorious instances of scapegoating can be seen in Nazi Germany’s blaming of the Jewish minority for the weakening of the nation’s economy, or American right-wing affiliated organizations’ accusing of black and immigrant minorities for crime rates. Another example of scapegoating and how it affects minorities can be seen with the South American immigrants to the United States who often have their families separated and are denied refugee status and are scapegoated to the

point where they are used for political leverage. Scapegoating has been the largest barrier to eliminating prejudice against minority groups and advancing legislation that protects minority rights.

Major Parties Involved

Most efforts on the protection of minority rights came from international organizations rather than Member States themselves. These include the League of Nations, the Supreme Council, the United Nations and more specifically the OHCHR. Currently the biggest areas of discussion in minority rights are in the Middle East, and increasingly ethnically diverse regions such as Western Europe and North America where minorities are now under threat of right-wing nationalism and right-wing propaganda and political agendas.

Timeline of Events

1814	The Congress of Vienna marks the first legal attempt to protect minorities under law. The congress was disregarded by Prussia, Russia and Austria.
20 February 1919	In the Versailles Peace Conference, the Supreme Council created the “committee on new states and for the protection of minorities.”
10 December 1948	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, consisting of 30 Articles, affirms human rights.
18 December 1992	Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities states that persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities have the right to their own culture, practice of religion, use of language without discrimination.

UN Involvement

Previous documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights have been essential for the advancement of the protection of minority rights. However, the only major direct involvement from the United Nations came from the ‘Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities’ where minorities were directly mentioned and prioritised.

Relevant UN Documents

Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1945: <http://www.un-documents.net/a3r217a.htm>

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights:
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/47/a47r135.htm>

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Previous attempts to urge the protection of minority rights include the Congress of Vienna, the Versailles Peace Conference and the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

The Congress of Vienna failed to make an impact in minority groups; however it was the first stepping stone for progress in the rights of minorities. The congress ultimately failed to uphold its intentions on minorities due to the general disregard from its participant nations.

The first successful attempt on progress for minority rights came in the Versailles Peace Conference. It was crucial for two reasons. Firstly, states had the incentive to sign minority treaties for diplomatic recognition. Secondly, the Supreme Council including Member States in the peace conference created a 'first of its kind' committee to help minority groups in Europe, torn apart by World War I. This not only proved to be effective, as countries had finally started regarding and recognizing minorities, but it also served as an example for future attempts in the betterment of minority rights.

Lastly the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities updated efforts to help minorities' freedoms and showed its effectiveness due to a higher number of recognition through the UN general assembly.

Possible Solutions

The biggest challenges in protecting minority rights in the face of right-wing nationalism are the creation of laws solely for minorities and ensuring that Member States abide by them. Many laws regarding rights often do not mention minorities and are usually based on generalized terms such as "all citizens". While this would be ideal in theory, there are many instances where this hasn't worked. Laws should also include clauses that directly mention minorities to ensure their protection. Member States should be incentivised for their minority protection programs and organizations. Minorities often aren't crucial for government campaigns, therefore, many of them get overlooked. It is important to make sure member states don't disregard efforts to protect minorities under law. Lastly, there is a larger societal

problem from the way minorities are perceived. Information and awareness programs would not only help reduce minority stigmas from the right-wing nationalists but would also reduce scapegoating.

Notes from the Chair

Delegates should focus not only on protecting minority rights but also on evaluating on the right-wing's prejudice against minorities.

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“Ethnic Nationalism” Oxford Academic Group,
<https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article-abstract/7/2-3/186/1531625?redirectedFrom=PDF>

UN OHCHR Publication Minority Rights: International Standards and Guidance for Implementation HR/PUB/10/3,
https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/MinorityRights_en.pdf

Resolution A/RES/3/217 A Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
<http://www.un-documents.net/a3r217a.htm>

HR/PUB/12/7 UN OHCHR Publication Promoting and Protecting Minority Rights,
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Minority Rights Group International, <https://minorityrights.org/>