

**Committee:** General Assembly 3 - Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian

**Issue:** The protection of minorities and conservation of minority cultures

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## Introduction

Ever since the emergence of globalization, the increase of economic integration, political and institutional levels, our society has experienced a growth in a number of culturally diverse groups of people, including religious, ethnic, national and linguistic minorities. A great variety of situations on the subject of minorities exist, and it is unfortunate to know that they still go through numerous forms of discrimination and marginalization.

In regards to their social, economic and political positions, minorities are considered to belong to a non-dominant group that often experiences inequality in a situation where multiculturalism is unacknowledged. Their ethnicity, religion, culture and language differences lead to struggles in sustaining socio-cultural practices and thus are subjected to certain persecutions by the dominant groups whom categorize the minorities with negative connotations. Though some minorities live together in



areas isolated from the dominant part of the population, there are others that live dispersed throughout the country. This brings us to the issue that unequal representation for such groups living scattered across areas lead to ruthless treatment and inequality, having to suffer from lack of access to certain needs as well as endure physical violence in areas of tension and conflict.

**Caption #1:** *Rohingya refugees (Muslim minority from Myanmar) after crossing the border into Bangladesh*

It is of central importance that the promotion and protection of rights targeted at minorities are upheld and advised. Member states have considered solutions and thoughts toward this issue however, it is a sad reality that the activism for this problem is only often heard and not effectively handled.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Minority

Though there is no accepted definition on this term internationally, it is often seen as a group of individuals that are differentiated from the social majority and are determined by classifying how much power the group has. Minorities are commonly considered to be disadvantaged and in vulnerable positions.

### Multiculturalism

A situation where the diversity of ethnic cultures and racial groups in a community is maintained and respected. The different groups deserve special acceptance of their differences and have equal rights and support.

### Discrimination

A prejudicial judgement and treatment of a particular group of people, especially on account of age, sex and race. Being discriminated against doesn't just simply mean that people have to be physically harmed but they just need to be treated worse than others.

### Social exclusion

A form of discrimination, just like marginalization where people or individuals (based on their social class, category or group) are excluded from certain social, political and economic life of within their community.

### Ethnic minority

Ethnic minorities refer to a group of individuals that have a specific race or nationality living in areas where a majority have different national or cultural traditions.

### Sexual and gender minority

A group of individuals whose sexual identity, orientation and practices differ from the majority. The terms sexual minorities and gender minorities are often used to describe members of the LGB (Lesbian, gay and bisexual) community and Trans community respectively.

### **Ethnic cleansing**

The imprisonment or mass killing of ethnic minority, often because they are unwanted and for the purpose of setting up an ethnically homogenous community/geographic area.

### **Xenophobia**

The hatred or prejudice against people from other countries.

## **Background Information**

### **Minority rights**

Within national territories of all states, there are at least one or more minority groups. The groups are often differentiated from the population by their distinguished linguistic, ethnic or religious identities. The relations between minorities and majorities are of great concern today and has been since the past. Harmonious relations and respect for the identities between these two groups are a valuable asset to society, ensuring the rights and equality of the minorities. The idea of enhancing cultural pluralism and multiculturalism with the protection of minorities' rights represent the common heritage of humanity and is regarded as a factor to fostering further development in our society.

Today, we are able to notice the violation regarding minority rights and their cultures. Their defense against violence is often inadequate, not having provided the necessary protection. In fact, many cases have shown that violence against minorities is not considered a crime but rather an act that dominant groups can easily impose on non-dominant groups.

### ***Promotion of minority rights***

Dating back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, non-dominant groups have tried to preserve their religious and cultural diversities. Although broader issue of minority protection wasn't fully addressed, the United States and the French Revolution in the late 18th century proclaimed the free exercise of religion as an essential right. Along with that the 1815 Congress of Vienna which convened after Napoleon's defeat and the 1878 Treaty of Berlin (acknowledging rights for religious community of Mount Athos) both recognized minority rights to some degree. Also the 19th century wasn't fully directed towards the protection of minority group. However, the

first world war had left minority concerns the main subject issued of international politics. This effort to conserve their cultures emerged with the formation of nation States and the League of Nations' adoption of minority treaties allowed the recognition and protection of minority rights under international law. Gradually, when the United Nations replaced the League of Nations in 1945, there were developments in procedures and mechanisms concerned with minorities.

Like any other individuals, members of minorities all have to be ensured that their rights are enshrined and are treated justly. Today, to promote inclusion of minorities and to secure their rights worldwide, the United Nations and other international organizations recognize the necessity to protect those that wish to conserve and flourish values and practices in which they share within members of their community. For instance, non-governmental organization called the Minority Rights Group International (MRG) works toward securing the rights of various minorities worldwide and with their effective strategic litigation, indigenous communities and local minorities are ensured to have enough support regarding their access to basic services and developments within certain catastrophic environments, where the entrenched poverty is what minorities often experience.

## Addressing inequality against minorities

### Discrimination in various forms

Minorities are the targeted victims of discrimination and the inequality against them exists on various grounds where they are often categorized in. Discrimination may take place in public services, education, employment and even housing resulting in ineffective delivery of human resource services and insufficient support of their cultures.

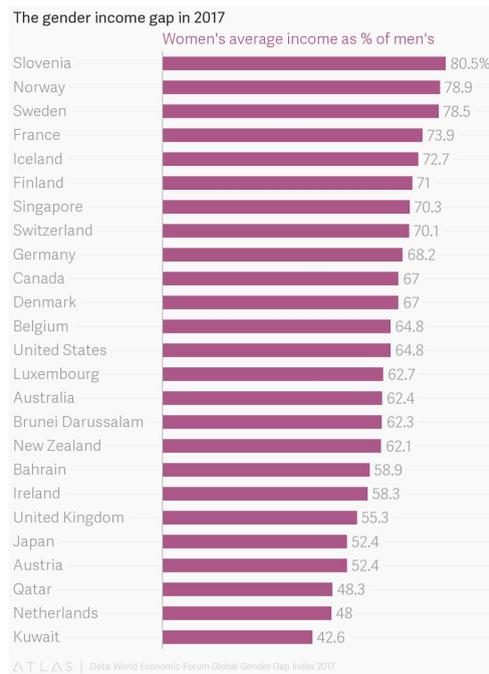
Women may face several obstacles to equality in a wider society or within their

communities where they are considered a minority group. Not being able to share the same power, opportunities and rights as men, women across the world still have to endure sexism.

Frequently, workplaces are where women are subjected to discrimination.



**Caption #2: The global gender income gap widening - Global Gender Gap Index 2017**



**Caption #3: Women’s average earnings as a percentage of men’s earnings**

In regards to religious minorities, the situation of Rohingya refugee crisis a significant issue to consider. The long-persecuted Muslim minority faced brutal violence from the actions of the Myanmar's army and Rakhine (ethnic group in Myanmar) women have been physically traumatized by rape and murder. The denial of their human rights has not just been demonstrated through the nation’s military but also the government’s refusal to see them as citizens.



By September 2017, over a third of the Rohingya community had fled the country. The Burmese government's policy of ethnic cleansing has been condemned by the UN. However, Myanmar has rejected the issue against the Rohingya, claiming that there is genocide and ethnic cleansing.

**Caption #4: Members of an Islamic organisation display placard during protest against persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Bangladesh (2017)**

## Timeline of Events

Shown below is a timeline in regards to the events considering minority rights:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of event</b>
1619-1861	Slavery in the United States before the civil war
1814-1815	The Congress of Vienna (International concern for human rights first recognized)
1865	President Abraham Lincoln's "Emancipation Proclamation" (Lincoln ended slavery overall in the US)
1875	Jim Crow laws enforce segregation of African Americans and whites
1920	The 19th amendment, granting women the right to vote, passed
1948	President Harry S. Truman issues Executive Order No. 9981 (Desegregation of Armed Forces)
1948-Now	Rohingya refugee crisis
1954	Desegregation in education, ending legal racial segregation in public schools
1963	Martin Luther King Jr - "I Have a Dream" speech, calling for an end to racism in the US The Equal Pay Act (first laws in American history aimed to reduce gender discrimination within workplace)
1964	Civil Rights Act of 1964. Prohibited discrimination in a variety of settings (public places, employment-on the basis of religion, sex, race or color)
1965	The General Assembly adopted the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (entered into force on January 4th 1969)
1966	16th of December - The Adoption of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (entered into force on March 23rd 1976)
1990	The UN General Assembly proclaim 1993 the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples
1995	The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, adopted within the Council of Europe
2001	World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa
2016	Mr. Vitit Muntarbhorn from Thailand designated as the first UN Independent Expert on violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity by the Human Rights Council
2017	Myanmar's Rohingya Refugee (religious minority) crisis rise again

## UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The United Nations has formally addressed the rights of individuals categorized as minorities and since the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on essential standards to ensure the rights to minorities, the UN involvement has gained increasing interest.

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 10 December 1948 (**A/RES/3/217**)
- Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 9 December 1948 (**A/RES/3/260**)
- Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, 18 December 1992 (**A/RES/47/135**)
- Human Rights Council, 3 April 2006 (**A/RES/60/251**)
- Global efforts for the total elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Program of Action, 19 December 2006 (**A/RES/61/149**)
- Forum on Minority Issues, 28 September 2009 (**A/HRC/RES/6/15**)

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