

# CGS MUN

**Committee: Youth Assembly**

**Issue: Religious discrimination**

**Student Officer: Angeliki Vytogianni**

**Position: Co-head**

## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the biggest and most crucial problems that our world is currently facing is the issue of religious discrimination, that troubles people of all ethnicities, all religions and all ages. This includes when citizens from different religious groups and denominations are treated unfairly either due to legislations or under institutional conditions. It can also occur in the social part of one's life or even when someone is seeking something as simple as basic healthcare or education. Religious discrimination is not really different from any other form of racism, and thus should be handled accordingly. The different types of religious discrimination are religion prejudice, non-recognition of religions and killings sanctioned by a religion.

Although sad, it is true that then and now religions have been the source of great violence and suffering to many. Such violence is the way people express discrimination towards other religions or beliefs and is not limited to physical acts of aggression, but can also be other ways that discriminate or harm particular groups of people. Examples range from harassing others in the street, to denying them public services and, in some extreme cases, denying citizenship and committing atrocities, like ethnic cleansing, against people with different or no religious beliefs. A very characteristic example of the latter is the ethnic cleansing and the refugee crisis, as a result, that is currently happening in Myanmar.

## **DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

### **Religion**

Because religions are shared collections of beliefs in controlling of superhuman powers, it is not easy to define them in a few paragraphs. In brief, though, religions are

# CGS MUN

collections of transcendental beliefs that have been passed on from believers to converts, that are held by adherents to be meaningful and serious and are either based on a formally documented doctrine and are called 'organised religions' or established cultural practices and are called 'folk religions'. Both types have the “religious professionals” that are responsible for the leadership, the governance and the embodiment of some formal aspects of the religion.

## **Discrimination**

Discrimination is the behaviour of treating people or groups of people differently, usually in a worse way than others, based on their skin colour or their looks, financial situation, sex, sexuality, religion or ethnicity. More specifically, examples of discriminatory behaviour include harassment, inappropriate jokes, insults, name-calling or displays such as offensive posters or cartoons directed to a person or a group with different characteristics than the person that has this discriminatory behaviour. In some cases, discrimination is also expressed in wages where lower wage is offered to a woman or an immigrant for the same amount of work as a man, hiring where job interviewers will ask about family status and health issues and based on these answers only they hire people, or housing, where people refuse to rent an apartment to people with children or to people under 25 years old because they are noisy and do not look after the place.

## **Persecution**

Persecution is the discriminatory behaviour, the cruel and unfair treatment of a person or a group purely because of their political beliefs, their race or their religion. It can take the form of victimization, abuse, torture or torment and a very characteristic example is the religious persecution against Christians in the Roman Empire from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.

## **Harassment**

Harassment is the term used to describe the systematic and continued unwanted actions of one party or group, sometimes including threats and demands, that are intended to annoy another person. The purposes vary, from attempting to cause problems to wanting to get granted favours of all kinds, such as sexual favours, pleasure of any kind or illegal payment. The reasons can be usually found in discrimination based not only on religion, but

# CGS MUN

also on many aspects of one's life. Harassment is the main expression of discriminatory behaviour towards someone, where someone harasses a person or a group because of the reasons mentioned above.

## **Religious prejudice**

Religious prejudice is a form of religious discrimination that occurs from an unfavourable opinion of a religion or faith that is formed without any thought or knowledge on the matter. This is extremely dangerous because the feeling and opinion of this religion is preconceived and the person or group expressing their dislike to a religion does so without having any reasonable hostility. Instead, opinions and attitudes of a hostile nature regarding a religious group are being expressed.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Religious discrimination has been an ongoing phenomenon since the Ancient times and therefore has taken many forms and has been expressed through different behaviours from time to time. As the centuries were changing, different religions were the ones that faced discrimination and their supporters were the ones who faced punishment each time. The first signs appeared approximately in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD and in our times, there are still cases of religious discrimination in multiple countries.

### **Religious discrimination in the Roman Empire**

In the period from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, the Roman Empire continuously expanded and as a result it became an empire that included many different nationalities, cultures and religions, from a great variety of regions in their known world. The Romans recognized that fact and they tended to be tolerant, if not supportive, to most religions. Exceptions were some of them that were banned because of political unrest that they created or because of the involvement of human sacrifice. In general, tolerance was exceptionally shown to any religion or faith that had similarities to the polytheism of the Romans, mainly because of syncretism, seeing the same gods under different names in different places of the Empire. This being so, religions of the wider Empire were more likely to be accommodated and

# CGS MUN

accepted by the Romans. However, this acceptance was not extended to religions that were of a hostile nature to the state and as a result of its monotheistic nature, the exclusive faith of the Jews and Christians was set apart as something definitely not within the normal limits according to the Romans' minds. According to the Emperors' beliefs, Jews posed no significant threat to the empire as they had formed their own nation inside the Empire. Same did not happen with the Christian community that was perceived as a possible destabilizing force that would threaten the peace of the Roman Empire.

The Christian Church represented something very new at the time, the religion of the "One True God". Setting itself apart from the usual faith in the polytheism of the Romans resulted in many people blaming them for the misfortunes of the Empire. Extreme acts of discrimination and hostile behaviour against the Christians begun and historians have characterized them the worst endured in the Empire, with Nero being the first Emperor to start the persecutions. Christians were dressed in animal 's skins and hunted by the Emperor 's hounds". Traditionally, Nero was believed to be the Caesar under whose reign Paul and Peter suffered martyrdom. And while St Peter is rumoured to have been nailed to crosses, St Paul who was in prison in Rome could not be crucified because he was a Roman citizen and so he was beheaded during Nero 's reign.



*This sketch shows the exact behaviour of the Romans towards Christians in the first centuries of the Empire.*

## **Religious discrimination in early America (16-18<sup>th</sup> century)**

Although Puritans (English Protestants who wished to reform and purify the Church of England of what they considered to be unacceptable residues of Roman Catholicism) were

# CGS MUN

victims of religious persecution in Europe, they supported the theory of the need for uniformity of religion in the state and tried to get the governance of America in its early years. Once in control in New England, they sought to break "the very neck of Schism and vile opinions." Puritans expelled dissenters, everyone that had a different vision on the issue of religion than them, from their colonies, an expression of religious persecution that was the fate in 1636 for Roger Williams and in 1638 for Anne Hutchinson, America's first major female religious leader.

The period after the Revolutionary War in America saw many conflicts between the various states and Christian denominations. Virginia, which was home to the largest portion of Anglicans loyal to the Church of England, was where the most tragic cases of religious persecution against Baptists and Presbyterians happened. Anglicans physically assaulted Baptists, bearing theological and social animosity and disagreement as the reasons. In 1771, a local Virginia policeman yanked a Baptist preacher from the stage at his parish and beat him to the ground outside. Similarly, in 1778, Baptist ministers Barrow and Mintz were conducting services at the Mill Swamp Baptist Church in Virginia and as soon as the hymn was given out, a gang of men rushed the stage and grabbed the two ministers, took them to the nearby Nansemond River swamp, and dunked and held their heads in the mud until they drowned to death. Soon after, the Americans became subject to political manifestations because of the religious conflicts. At the time, some states issued collecting funds to establish state churches that were to be the shelter for people of dogmas, in order to eradicate conflicts between Baptists and Presbyterians. Each state's governance, based on their constitution and its policy on religious establishment, decided on different measures, from tax money to preaching licenses.

## **Religious discrimination in the Middle Ages**

The Dark or Middle Ages was a period of intellectual darkness due to the loss of the classical learning, which was perceived as light. Later historians picked up on this idea and ultimately the term 'Dark Ages' was transformed into 'Middle Ages'. Broadly speaking, the Middle Ages is the period of time in Europe between the end of antiquity in the fifth century and the Renaissance, or rebirth of classical learning, in the fifteenth to sixteenth century.

# CGS MUN

During that period, religion in Western Europe was dominated by Christianity. The great cathedrals of Europe were built and the Catholic Church started building its universities in Paris, Oxford, Cambridge and Tubingen. It was the only Church in Europe and the laws of the land and leading roles in the government were all in the hands of each state's church leaders. This being so, citizens of Europe in the Middle Ages had no religious freedom and were obliged to comply with the rules of the Catholics whether it was their wish or not.

As Christianity was the dominant religion during the Middle Ages, its attempts to purify the church and society led to many campaigns against other religions, which were led by bishops, scholars and warriors who made efforts to make the Christian world free of all the non-Christians. This included Jews, Muslims and Pagans and Gypsies.

Islam was in its golden era during the Middle Ages. The philosophers, scientists and engineers of the Islamic World were some of the greatest contributors to knowledge, arts, civilization and architecture and hence the spread of this religion was perceived as another threat to Christianity. The Muslims increased their territory in fighting wars with Christian and Hindu rulers. The Pope Urban II in 1095 proclaimed a "holy war" against Islam with the conquest of Jerusalem by Islamic Turks.

Judaism in the Middle Ages was practiced in private to avoid persecution, while Jews suffered the most as they were considered to be the greatest threat to Christianity.

Technically, they did not face physical violence and torture because the Church was consistent in its condemnation of Jewish persecutions. Yet, they happened anyway. Anti-Semitic hatred increased among the common masses by quoting biblical texts which put the blame of the crucifixion of Christ on the Jews. They were banished from various European countries. England expelled all Jews in 1290; France in 1306; Spain in 1492. Europeans disliked the Jews for their affluence and for the closed nature of their society, which seemed to scorn Christians and threaten the domination of the Catholic Church. Jews were in fact tradesmen and goldsmiths, in the whole of Europe, so all these works that dealt with money were considered not pure by the Catholics.

## **Religious discrimination in the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

The religious persecution against Jews, though, was at its peak during the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

# CGS MUN

in World War II. More specifically, leading to World War II, nearly all Jewish firms in Nazi Germany had either collapsed under financial pressure and declining profits, or had been forced to sell out to the Nazi German government as part of the "Aryanization" policy inaugurated in 1937. As the war started, massacres of Jews took place originally as part of Operation Tannenberg against the Polish nation. The much larger and methodical mass killings of Jews began with the onset of Operation Barbarossa. And so, the destruction of European Jews took place with the active participation of local police including Belarusian, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian.

## **MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED**

### **United States of America**

1979 was the year that during a consultation on the issue, the United States Commission on Civil Rights defined religious discrimination in relation to the civil rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, stating that: While religious civil liberties, (the right to hold or not to hold a religious belief) are essential for Freedom of Religion, religious discrimination or persecution occurs when someone is denied "the equal protection of the laws, equality of status under the law, equal treatment in the administration of justice, and equality of opportunity and access to employment, education, housing, public services and facilities, and public accommodation because of the way they have decided to exercise their right to religious freedom".

### **Canada**

In Canada, during the 90's decade, the Newfoundland had only Christian schools, to be exact, four of them, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, and inter-denominational (Anglican, Salvation Army and United Church). Only certain Christian parishes were granted the right to organize publicly supported religious schools, thus tax money was used to support a selected group of Christian denominations.

Canadian faith-based university, Trinity Western University is currently in a very challenging position that comes from members of the legal and LGBT community that

# CGS MUN

question certain "religious values", such as the freedom to discriminate against other people, and denying LGBT students the same rights as straight students, while having the freedom to educate students in a private university context.

## **Germany**

The main faith that has faced discrimination because of religion is Scientology. Since the first signs of their religion, scientologists in Germany have been facing specific political and economic restrictions. This religious discrimination comes rather from political parties than citizens, which do not accept Scientology. They are barred from membership in some major political parties, and businesses and other employers try to expose a prospective business partner's or employee's association with the organization.

There was an attempt to ban Scientology in late 2007 by German federal and state interior ministers, but they abandoned the project after a year, because of insufficient legal grounds on the matter. In spite of this failed initiative, according to polls, most Germans tend to favour banning Scientology, while the United States government were repeatedly concerned over the discriminatory behaviour towards individual Scientologists.

## **Greece**

Since the Greek independence in 1821, the Greek Orthodox Church has been granted a privilege status and Christianity is the dominant religion in Greece. The religions that are recognized are the Orthodox church, Roman Catholic, some Protestant churches, Judaism and Islam. However, there have been repeated complaints from Muslim minorities that the Greek society practice systematic discrimination towards them. Recently there were some studies by professors of a British University, conducted on the matter that showed that religious minorities face greater constraints on occupational access in more prestigious jobs compared to less prestigious jobs. Except for this, there was not any specific bias directed to Muslims only, shown in this study.

# CGS MUN

## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
313 A.D.	The edict of Milan is signed by Constantine and Licinius. Christianity is legalized and freedom of religion is recognized.
11 <sup>th</sup> century	The Crusades, military expeditions, begin. They were organized by western European Christians in response to centuries of Muslim wars of expansion.
December 1948	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is signed at the third UN GA session and the right to religion freedom is expressed in Article 18.
1979	The USA Commission on Civil Rights defines religious discrimination in relation to the civil rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution.
September 2001	A series of four coordinated terrorist attacks by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda against the United States takes place.

## UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in Article 18 the right to religious freedom is clearly stated. It states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

A very considerable effort to eradicate any form of religious discrimination and

# CGS MUN

promote religious freedom has been made by the United Nations Human Rights Council. There is a campaign titled “Speak Up, Stop Discrimination”, currently on the Internet that aims at combating discrimination based on a person’s religious beliefs and expresses the UN’s concern for the issue.

Apart from this, a Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief has been appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council, to identify the emerging obstacles that prevent people from the right to religious freedom. The independent expert is also invited to present recommendations on ways that will help overcome such obstacles and establish



*Part of the UN's Campaign against religious discrimination*

## **PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE**

As the issue of religious discrimination is one that still troubles our world, there have not been any significant attempts to find a solution and establish peace between religions. Many countries have been especially eager to recognize religious freedom as a fundamental right of each person. The first recognition of freedom of religion was made during the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, when Roman Emperors, Constantine and Licinius signed the edict of Milan. It was also the first edict to legalize Christianity and to allow freedom of worship. Although it was frequently ignored, it was a great step towards the acceptance of all religions and the tolerance of Christianity within the Roman Empire. Since then, most developed countries have recognized the right to religious freedom in their Constitution but have yet to enforce strict laws that will prevent even minor discriminatory behaviours.

# CGS MUN

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The most important and effective solution that participants must propose is education on the issue of religious discrimination. People need to be educated on the profound consequences of discriminatory behaviour because of religion or beliefs. This could be done through organizing campaigns and adding explicit lessons at school that will target at eliminating all forms of religious discrimination and teaching children to accept all religions and not make distinctions based on that factor. In addition, in order to target discrimination at the workplace, an efficient measure is the establishment of a training program that will raise awareness of diversity issues and will promote respectful behaviour towards and from each and every colleague.

Participants should also emphasize on the fact that religious institutions must be able to provide the right and unbiased knowledge to their adherents.

Apart from solutions that are based on the education of people, in the Action Paper there should also be solutions that deal with religious extremists of any religion and their severe punishments and deterrents. For example, one suggestion is the enforcement of strict laws that will discourage those who resort to violence because of religious differences.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/discrimination>

<http://najc.ca/human-rights-guide/what-are-some-examples-of-discrimination/>

[http://www.humanreligions.info/what\\_is\\_religion.html#TwoPara](http://www.humanreligions.info/what_is_religion.html#TwoPara)

<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/harassment>

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/religious-prejudice-0>

<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/prejudice>

<https://academic.oup.com/past/article-abstract/153/1/3/1457133?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

# CGS MUN

<http://eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/viewFile/254/284>  
<https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297a/The%20History%20of%20Religious%20Conflict.htm>  
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/middle\\_ages/overview\\_middleages\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/middle_ages/overview_middleages_01.shtml)  
<http://www.thefinertimes.com/Middle-Ages/religion-in-the-middle-ages.html>  
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/early-europe-and-colonial-americas/medieval-europe-islamic-world/a/introduction-to-the-middle-ages>  
<https://www.crisismagazine.com/2003/the-church-and-the-jews-in-the-middle-ages-2>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNobaSEckHQ>  
<https://www.britannica.com/event/Crusades>  
<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005469>  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.htmlz>  
<http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2018/02/20922/>  
<http://home.snafu.de/tilman/krasel/germany/uno94scn.html>  
[https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Discrimination/Pages/discrimination\\_religious.aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Discrimination/Pages/discrimination_religious.aspx)  
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/freedomreligion/pages/freedomreligionindex.aspx>  
<http://www.hinduwebsite.com/ask/why-are-religions-destructive.asp>  
<http://www.kimmichaels.info/articles/unifying-science-and-religion/14-articles/105-can-we-resolve-religious-conflicts>  
<https://www.biographyonline.net/military/constantine.html>

## **Pictures' Bibliography**

<https://www.miltons.law.za/religious-discrimination-in-the-workplace/>  
<https://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=34033>  
<https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/thematic-areas/human-rights/equality-and-non-discrimination/>