



Committee: UNICEF

Topic: Protecting children's religious rights.

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Introduction

UNICEF stands for the United Nations International Children Emergency Fund. During World War II, on December 11, 1946, the General Assembly founded UNICEF to provide healthcare for children. UNICEF has worked on getting children a better quality of life. The committee, in the present day, is focused on coming to a solution to protect children's religious rights.

To get a better understanding of the topic, a child is considered a person under the age of eighteen.

Religion is the system of beliefs and practices based on people's faith and worship, with a strong influence on people's world view. Religion can consist of rituals, stories, and symbols adapted by a society.

In certain countries and continents, children are often affected by religion: children are forced to keep their parent's or country's religion and are not able to choose their own beliefs. It is essential to know that parents can guide their children to what they will believe in, but it is also important to remember that children can decide whether to adopt their parents' or their countries' beliefs. The purpose of this debate is to come together as a committee and find a way to enable children to define their ideas without unnecessary pressure.

According to the World Population Review, 86% of the world's population follows a religion. The eight most followed religions are Christianity with 2.98 billion people, followed by Islam with 1.91 billion, then Hinduism with 1.16 billion, after Hinduism there is Buddhism with 507 million, Judaism with 14,7 million, folk religions with 430 million, and on top 7 there are other religions with 61 million, and 1.9 million with unaffiliated religions (Religion by Country 2022, n.d.). Countries like Saudi Arabia, Vatican City, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Republic of the Maldives are religious states, sometimes with strict religious practices. Extremists might discriminate against young girls and other groups based on their religious beliefs. Virginity and fertility of women are an example, while exalted in some religions, in others taken away from them. On the other hand, the countries of China and Cuba impose atheism nowadays. Children and adolescents are often restrained from practicing their faith and beliefs. Children, like

adults, should be free to choose and practice their religion, this is protected by article 14 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that “States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion” (Philippe, 2012). Participating in religious activities has proven that it is less likely that adolescents to fall into different kinds of addictions, such as smoking, drinking, and sexual activity, which also decreases the possibility of depression.

In America, the Religious Liberty Law states that all Americans, no matter their age, have the right to choose their religion freely, and they do not have the obligation to join a religious group if they do not want to. It is essential to know that some children are unaware that this law is established and cannot do anything about it.

Certain religious practices may be harmful to children, and limiting or ignoring their freedom of choice will only make them prone to dangerous experiences that may even cause them permanent damage.

For instance, in Iran, a woman named Mahsa Amini was killed as a consequence of not wearing her hijab (Muslim veil) in September 2022. Iranian law states that anyone who “explicitly breaches any religious taboo in public shall get a maximum two-month jail sentence or 74 strokes on the whip”. Mahsa was beaten up by police officers, and she ended up dying. Police forces in most countries do not have jurisdiction over religious matters. In Afghanistan, the situation is alarming. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom informed that minors have faced detention, harassment, and death due to their beliefs.

In China, the Chinese Communist Party is officially atheist. Article 36 of the Chinese constitution says that citizens “enjoy the freedom of religious belief.” (Kurlantzick, 2020). It prohibits discrimination based on religion, and forcing people to believe in something specific is officially banned. Although China is officially an atheist republic, many religions are still recognized (Albert & Maizland, 2020). Nonetheless, human rights organizations have reported religious persecution and enforced disappearances of priests and other religious leaders (UCA News Reporter, 2021; International Christian Concern, 2022).

In Afghanistan, the situation is alarming. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom informed that minors have faced detention, harassment, and death due to their beliefs. The Taliban has killed individuals because of what they believe. Afghanistan's government was defined to be the worst government in terms of religious protection (VOA News, 2022). It is confirmed that many Hindu, Jewish and Sikh minors have flown away from the country after the Taliban returned to power. Sikhs live and

work in Kabul, and Taliban representatives made a visit to ensure their safety, but Hindus left for India. According to the American State Department (2022), community leaders say that there are just 550 Sikhs and Hindus left in Afghanistan, and now the groups are currently at even greater risk due to security concerns and a lack of official protection in recent years.

Religious dress codes may be restrictive for children, especially for girls. Islam for example mandates a more formal minimum clothing standard for both males and females. Islam demands that both men and women dress simply, modestly, and with dignity. A man must constantly be clothed from navel to knee in loose attire. A Muslim woman must at the very least conceal the specifics of her body from the public by covering her hair and body with loose, modest clothing; some Muslim women additionally choose to cover their faces and hands, though some countries mandate so. Female travelers of all ages are advised to cover their hair to avoid unwanted attention (Crislip, 2019). France has banned the use of Muslim veils and other religious symbols, producing protests and criticism for the intrusiveness of the measure (Chambraud, 2018).

Genital female mutilation is the complete or partial removal of feminine genitals. This practice does not have any health advantages. On the contrary, it has many hazards such as problems during childbirth, cysts, bleeding, and infections. In countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, FMG is still practiced for religious reasons, and more than 200 million girls are victims of this practice.

In countries like India, female infanticide is practiced. This practice consists of killing girls or female babies on purpose. Female infanticide also includes sex-selective abortion, which consists of getting an abortion if the unborn child is a female. This practice is causing a ratio imbalance of gender (The Pixel Project, n.d.).

Early marriage is the practice where an infant is forced to formally or informally get united with an adult individual. Child marriage takes away the girl's childhood, and opportunities and threatens her mental health and stability. This is a problem since the girls are normally forced to quit school and often suffer from domestic violence (UNICEF, n.d.).

Religious differences are often the cause of armed conflict and other violent outcomes. Children are often forced to flee and join displaced communities, with their families, in the best-case scenario. They are then exposed to mental and physical harm, lose access to education and healthcare, and become prone to child trafficking (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.).

There are other ways children's rights are being violated. One of these cases would be cults. According to the US department of justice, a cult is a totalitarian pseudo-religious group governed by religious principles formulated to suit the plans of the cult leader (Landa, 1984). This often restrains children from education and medical care outside the cult. Because people from cults are limited from accessing the real world, they often all have the same flawed ideas and behaviors which make them vulnerable. Since the leaders have the need for leadership, kids are the most affected since they are the most vulnerable. Kids get punished and prohibited from parental bonding, since having parental bonding can be a threat to the cult's leader. Children are also forbidden to leave, and their families are threatened.

Conclusion

It is vital to find a solution to this problem as fast as possible. Since, children from all around the world are being victimized because of their religion, which is something they as kids do not have the freedom to choose. Our committee recommends focusing on:

- Access to a proper education
- Promote the enforcement of the rights of the child
- Promote gender equality
- Promote religious studies as a way of fostering respect among people with different beliefs.
- Family guidance while respecting parental educational rights
- Promote interreligious dialogue between believers and leaders
- Cooperate with religious leaders of accepted religions

Children have the right to use their language, culture, and religion - even if these are not shared by most people in the country where they live.

Nobody has the authority to interfere in the religious decisions of children, since the Right to Religion is something that everyone has, including children.

Our committee encourages your delegation to find a solution on how to stop violence and discrimination against children's beliefs.

Committee, here are some sources where your delegation can find more information about the topic:

<https://www.thepixelproject.net/vaw-facts/about-female-infanticide/> (The Pixel Project, N.D.)

<https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage> (UNICEF, N.D.)
<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/religion-by-country>
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/FactSheet23en.pdf>
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<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/faith-and-children-s-rights-multi-religious-study-convention-rights-child>

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