



Committee: UNICEF MS

Topic: Protecting Children's Religious Rights

Chair: Luis Antonio Granados

Moderators: Andres Sanchez Soberon

Introduction

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, or UNICEF, was inaugurated in 1946 after WW2 (Children's Rights Alliance, n.d.). It is the most important organization that protects children and adolescents' rights. Partnering with more than 190 countries that committed to partnership and innovation, where millions of children's lives have changed. It offers support in humanitarian crises, armed conflict, and natural disasters. Physical and mental immaturity, special care, and appropriate legal protection are indispensable for children. In the 75 years that UNICEF has been active, the world has faced a big variety of crises, like climate change or armed conflicts, even though UNICEF has remained persistent in its work for children, fighting day-to-day against poverty, violence, diseases, and discrimination.

Children all over the globe still suffer violations of their rights. They are denied their rights and freedom. There have been many solutions implemented such as giving the parents the education and the sources to make them and the kids change their way of thinking about different types of cultures, beliefs, and religious ways of thinking, but it has not been enough. Around the world, numerous factors violate children's religious rights. Freedom of religion is not recognized all over the world. China, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia are examples of fundamentalist countries where the government is strict with the ideas and religion that the people follow. These governments, among others, have violated religious freedom rights in many cases. China has officially recognized five religions: Catholicism, Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, and Protestantism. Any other faith is formally prohibited, those religions are officially accepted but actually, attacks and discrimination against catholic groups are extremely high (CFR, 2020). North

Korea, Cuba, Vietnam, and several Soviet Republics have also banned different religions.

Development

In 1989 the UN adopted "The Declaration of the Rights of the Child ". Article 14 guarantees that every child has the freedom to choose their religion and beliefs. The USA and Somalia are the only countries in the world that haven't ratified the convention, (The United Nations, 2015). This indicated that children have the right to freedom in their thoughts, religion, and conscience. Freedom of religion is crucial because of the influence it has on people, and the use of beliefs in making a decision, as 85% of the population identifies with a religion, (Religion by Country, 2022). There are a variety of international agreements that defend religious rights, like article 9 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, (Philippe, 2012), and the European Convention on Human Rights, article 9.

Countries like Saudi Arabia, and the Republic of the Maldives are theocracies, this means that clergy exercises governmental power in the name of a superior being, and other religions are strictly prohibited or in some cases extremely controlled, people with different beliefs do not have access to the same education that others have and the lack of work opportunities are an example of discrimination common in theocratic countries, (Philippe, 2012). Countries like Jordan and Greece have a state religion, which means that government and state have a really strong relationship, religion is written into the constitution. Other countries like Mexico and Brazil have an established separation of church and state and recognize freedom of religion (Philippe, 2012), in these countries, there is not an established religion and the issues of discrimination and freedom of religion are not as frequent as in other regions and governments, the Christian majority does not face strong rejection, and they do not often discriminate other beliefs. In other regions of the world, some religions are completely prohibited, and children and groups that follow these beliefs are strongly affected. In Afghanistan, Christians are hunted by

the Taliban regime, easily accused of blasphemy without fair trials, and their lives are constantly endangered (Oxford, 2011).

A great number of armed conflicts have occurred because of religious controversies, this directly affects children of the countries that are involved in these conflicts, causing spikes of displacement. Refugee children face increased dangers of human trafficking, reduced access to quality education, poor healthcare, increased risk of trauma, and sometimes family separation (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.). In the Balkans, the religious war is officially over, but the tension between Orthodox, Catholics, Christians, and Muslims remain. In the Caucasus children and people die every day because of the conflicts between Christians and Muslims, and like these many cases and situations are happening all around the world, where children are being killed or are not being respected (*Children Rights*, n.d.).

UNICEF has made a renewed pledge with 100 world leaders to encourage the protection of the rights of all children in South Asia. Fifty years ago UNICEF started working with religious leaders and groups to advance children's rights, and since 2020 with COVID-19 this relationship is stronger. Faith leaders, celebrities, and UNICEF have been collaborating on a variety of child-related issues for decades. Since then, religious and faith-based leaders have assisted governments in reducing harmful customs, prejudice, injustice, and vaccination reluctance (UNICEF, 2022).

Freedom of conscience, religion, and belief, as well as the right to renounce your faith and convictions or to modify them, are supported by the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights and the ICCP. Nevertheless, several states in Africa have critical situations involving discrimination, persecution, and intolerance on basis of religion and beliefs. Some religious groups are denied basic human rights. Social pressure on people to profess a faith or to remain religious is seen in most of the territory of Africa. The most restrictive government and social structures are found in North African nations, however, the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) has called the African Commission on People's and Human rights to take steps to address the

violation by actors of freedom of religion and conscience in Africa, bring up matters pertaining to the abolition of all types of discrimination based on religion, request parties to offer details on the state of religious freedom in their recurring reports to the commission, and adopt mechanisms to protect freedom of conscience and religion, and appoint a rapporteur on religion in Africa.

A problem that disproportionately affects women or girls in religious minorities as well as LGBTQ+ people is that freedom of religion is conceptually opposed. Millions of people's circumstances, whose particular requirements and preferences lie within both human rights intersections, are not well presented by this. Muslim women face most restrictions with restrictive dress codes that prohibit them from showing their hair and sometimes their face in public. Other rules prevent them from accessing education or work (UNICEF, 2022). Christian cults may also force differentiated education for girls, limiting their options for adult life to serving the household (Yacapsin, 2013).

Conclusion

It is important to grant religious freedom because children deserve basic human rights, and their rights are violated all over the world, In order to find solutions, the committee recommends focusing on:

- Grant every child access to education
- Decrease discrimination rates
- Promote interreligious dialogue
- Cooperate with religious leaders and foster the comprehension of their doctrine
- Foster an understanding of religious studies as a neutral science
- Promote mechanisms to protect religious freedom
- Implement supervision to comply with existing legal protections
- Understanding the challenges and protecting religious refugees

Working with a basis of respect, dialogue, and collaboration, our committee will reach important agreements to protect the world's childhood.

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