



DAISMUN XI

FORUM: General Assembly

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Introduction:

Even though its land area is only roughly half that of China or the United States, Southeast Asia is one of the most religiously diverse regions in the world. It is home to Indonesia, which has the largest Muslim community in the world, the Philippines, which has the largest number of Roman Catholics outside Latin America, and Thailand, which has the largest proportion of Buddhists in the world. Moreover, Singapore is the most religiously diverse state in the world, with Vietnam at third. Even among Southeast Asian countries with a strong majority religion, different faiths remain culturally significant, such that no single country within the region is religiously or culturally homogenous. Even though in Southeast Asian countries with a large majority of religions, diverse religions remain culturally important, so that no single nation within the region is religiously or culturally homogeneous.

4.61% of Southeast Asians follow indigenous religious beliefs. While there are no precise figures of individuals with *syncretic* beliefs, indigenous rituals and ideologies have often shaped the way certain believers and cultures pursue their religion, creating distinctive forms of professing and exercising religion that merge more conservative manifestations of faith with local history and culture. Multiple faith groups share and compete for space, at times literally, and what may be called multiple religious identities can occur unreflexively inside a single individual.

However, Southeast Asia's history of religious diversity still holds the weight of centuries-old tension and profoundly entrenched religious tensions. Violence, bigotry and rebellion in the name of religion have long been problems in South East Asia, straining ties between citizens of different faiths. Southeast Asia is also an emerging front on the "war on terror." In 2012, the United States conducted its first strike in Southeast Asia, targeting alleged leaders of the Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah who orchestrated terrorist attacks in the region.

The challenges encountered by some groups are difficult to generalize. They vary depending on the population and the background of the state. To illustrate, Ahmadi Muslims are a persecuted minority in Sunni Muslim-majority Indonesia, Muslim separatist movements continue to operate in Thailand and the Philippines, and the Vietnamese government strongly regulates and restricts Buddhists and other religious groups. Furthermore, Myanmar is facing one of the biggest religious cleansing seen in the world today, with hundreds of thousands of individuals being persecuted. Religious culture is also often related to race and communal identification. Some populations, particularly indigenous peoples, undergo simultaneous modes of persecution so that their religious freedom is suppressed by depriving them of other human rights.

Key Terms:

Moro



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The Moro people are the Muslim national minority with 13 ethnolinguistic groups. The major groups are Tausug, Maguindanao and Maranao who are primarily in Mindanao, southern Philippines. About 10-14% of the 80M Filipinos are Moro. The majority of the Moro people are peasants, subsisting mainly by farming and fishing.

Salvation Army

An international movement and an evangelical part of the universal Christian Church.

Islamic Defenders Front (FPI)

Indonesian hardline Islamist organization

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

A regional intergovernmental organization comprising ten countries in Southeast Asia

Jihadist

Adjective describing Jihadism, a 21st-century neologism found in Western languages to describe militant Islamic movements perceived "existentially threatening"

Syncretic

Combining of different beliefs, while blending practices of various schools of thought.

Major Parties Involved:

Philippines

The Philippine Government has sought to deal with the discrimination of Muslims in the Philippines. Islam is the main religion in the Southern Philippines, and although the exact figures are contested, Islam is the second-largest religion in the nation. The continuing inequality in income and aggression in the Muslim-majority regions of the Philippines has created a vicious cycle of chaos and suffering that the government has yet to put an end to.

Myanmar

Last year, Myanmar's legislature passed laws that limit the freedom of religion of non-Buddhists by governing facets of civil law, such as weddings and births, as well as political law, by limiting the voting privileges of temporary certificate holders such as the Rohingya. In addition, Myanmar faces serious economic sanctions as a result of its recent coup in 2021 and its weak handling of the Rohingya crisis.

Indonesia

There has been some reluctance in calling Islam in Indonesia Islam per se, as its manifestations in Indonesia are always coloured by Indonesian cultures, have evolved differently from the "pure" Middle Eastern expressions of Islam, and there is a dichotomy held by some of them concerning Indonesia's "corrupted," "smiling" Islam and militant, *jihadist* Islam. However, Indonesia is the country with the largest Muslim community in the world and has been used as a model for democracy and the promotion of human rights in Muslim-majority countries.

Thailand

Violence in the south of Thailand, primarily in the Malay Muslim provinces, has slowly intensified since early 2004, worsened by the catastrophic heavy-handed policies of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. There is widespread fear in the community that has been left uncontrolled; instability could turn into a mass insurgency,



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or even a regional *jihad*, although there is no proof to date of foreign intervention in bombings and killings that have become almost common occurrences.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue:

The government of the Philippines has taken some steps to create institutions that address the exclusion of Muslims. One such step was Presidential Decree 1083 of the Code of Muslim Personal Laws, which also decreed the creation of Shari'a District Courts and Shari'a Circuit Courts. Although the heavy presence of Catholic morality persists in civil law, Muslims have the option of taking their cases before the Shari'a courts. Muslim Filipinos may get married or divorced, resolve their property disputes, and follow succession in compliance with Shari'a law. It is clear that the incorporation of Muslim family law in the legal system is a small achievement in the light of continued material circumstances, but it is still an important precedent for greater acceptance and inclusion in the Philippine tradition of legitimized Islamophobia and Catholic slant.

The government of Indonesia does not impose an official religion, following Pancasila, the five principles at the foundation of the Indonesian state enshrined in its constitution. It seems to take something of a middle way between secularism and Islamism. The first principle of Pancasila says that the state is founded on the belief of "One and Only God," but does not specify which or whose God that is, maintaining a religiously neutral position and creating a constitutional barrier to the creation of an Islamic state. The constitution also explicitly provides for the right to freedom of religion.

The UN and its partners have launched a Joint Response Plan (JRP) for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis calling for US\$951 million to continue delivering lifesaving assistance. As of early August 2018, the JRP remains just 32 percent funded.

Timeline:

(Year)	(Event)
1898	The USA suppresses <i>Moro</i> revolts and abolishes all <i>Moro</i> Sultanates, ending direct Muslim rule in the Philippines.
The 1930s	The United States encourages the migration of Catholic Filipinos to areas with a concentrated <i>Moro</i> population.
October 24, 1945	The UN Charter is established. Since its founding, one of the UN's top priorities has been religious equality and freedom, stressing the importance of "fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, or religion" in its charter.
1948	The Thai government mandates the use of the Thai language in schools in an effort to create a unified "Thainess". This directly affected Malay Muslims since it was an effort to turn them into Thai Muslims.



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December 21, 1948	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is established. It is one of the most important documents in standardizing the inalienable rights that should be available to all humans irrespective of citizenship. (1966).
1963	Diem government's political favouritism of Catholics and its political and legal discrimination against Buddhists causes South Vietnam to experience the 'Buddhist Crisis', famous for its iconic photos were taken of Buddhist monks immolating themselves in protest.
August 8, 1967	Foundation of the <i>Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)</i>
1970s	The Mindanao <i>Moros</i> openly rebel in the Philippines
1977	Myanmar, the country then known as Burma, launches Operation Dragon King (Naga Min) in Rakhine state. The Rohingya ethnic minority are considered "illegal" after being stripped of their citizenship, thus beginning a cycle of forced displacement.
1989	After a military crackdown that followed the repression of the prominent rebellion, Burma was renamed Myanmar. The ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council grow its military presence in the northern Rakhine state, and the Rohingya are allegedly subject to forced labour, forced displacement, rape, summary executions and torture. Some 250,000 Rohingya are fleeing to Bangladesh.
1998	The <i>Islamic Defenders Front</i> is founded.
2003	Of the 20 camps that were built in Bangladesh in the early '90s, two remain Nayapara camp near Teknaf (above) and Kutupalong camp near Ukha. Living conditions remain dire—a study finds that 58 percent of children and 53 percent of adults are chronically malnourished.
2006	Some 79 percent of the shelters in the two remaining camps in Bangladesh are flooded during the rainy season. The substandard conditions contribute to cases of diarrhea, respiratory infections, and malnutrition.
August 25, 2017	A violent military crackdown in Rakhine State, with reports of targeted attacks, murder and arson, forces hundreds of thousands of Rohingya to flee for their lives. This marks the beginning of the largest exodus of Rohingya refugees to Bangladesh.
September 2017	Due to the rapid influx of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, UNHCR declares the Rohingya crisis an emergency.
October 2017	More than 600,000 Rohingya refugees flee to Bangladesh in the first three months of the crisis. Most Rohingya take shelter in the refugee settlements of Nayapara and Kutupalong in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.



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July 2018	Between July 23rd and July 25th, monsoon storms cause heavy flooding and landslides in Rohingya refugee camps throughout Bangladesh. With over 602,000 refugees in the Kutupalong-Balukhali expansion site alone, overcrowding in the settlements exacerbates the risk of landslides. UNHCR responds to this emergency by reinforcing shelters and relocating families to safer ground.
April 2019	Due to their stateless status, most Rohingya Muslims do not have any form of documentation that verifies their identity. In April, UNHCR begins registering Rohingya refugees, giving them an identity for the first time.
August 2019	As of August 2019, half a million Rohingya have been registered and given documentation that verifies their identity. This documentation will protect their right to voluntarily return to Myanmar when it is safe.
2020	Preparation for COVID-19 in the world's largest refugee camp starts, scaling up activities and setting up isolation beds in our projects in Cox's Bazar district.
November 27 th , 2020	A violent attack on Christians occurs at a Christian village on the island of Sulawesi, Indonesia. A Salvation Army officer serving as a pastor was brutally decapitated and hacked to death; three other church members were also killed, burned in a Salvation Army post used for prayer meetings.
December 30 th , 2020	The Islamic Defenders Front and its symbols are officially banned in Indonesia

Possible Solutions:

In the short-term, it is crucial to build refugee camps and establish support programs that foster a supportive environment for victims of religious persecution in Southeast Asia.

A proposed long-term solution for the issue has been to take a similar approach to that from the United States of America in which the government and religion are completely separated from each other. This will decrease the intervention of the government in the countries religion and vice versa. However, it is important to take into account the wide diversity present in Southeast Asia since a complete separation of religion and the state has proven to cause protests and actually go against certain beliefs from religions, such as Islam.

Furthermore, when addressing the most important persecution in Southeast Asia, the Rohingya crisis, five main areas must be addressed in order to achieve a sustainable solution. Firstly, since crimes against humanity have taken place, there is a need for accountability in order for this not to happen again. Secondly, the ongoing of Rohingya inside Myanmar must stop for them to settle down. Thirdly, the Rohingya in Bangladesh is still in a vulnerable position and must receive humanitarian aid. Fourthly, even though the repatriation of the Rohingya to Myanmar is a dim prospect, it is necessary to bring peace to this nation-less community. Finally, steps towards accountability are available from past genocides and must be taken.



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What is evident is that religious freedom needs dignity and acceptance by the government and the community of those religious and non-religious individuals. This includes the expansion of civil and political rights in a way that neither ignores nor overemphasizes religious morality and encourages a strong free society where even fundamentalist groups can talk and engage those who believe differently. This kind of transparent, diverse environment could help build more inclusive, stable and secure communities.



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