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Rohingya: The problem of minority groups

Al Khanif

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The Rohingya have long experienced state-sanctioned discrimination. Recently, they have been persecuted as a result of the influence of hate speeches by Buddhist monk Ashin Wirathu.

His speeches added fuel to communal conflicts in 2012 and 2013. Since then, many Rohingya people have fled Myanmar and become stateless.



refugees, most leaders in Southeast Asia earlier said that the Rohingya were not welcomed in their jurisdictions because they did not want to have a second wave of 'boat people' after the Vietnamese in the early 1970s.

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group with a similar experience. The Myanmar government persecute the Chin and Rohingya to preserve the homogenous national culture and security.

In the Chin and Rohingya cases, religion in Myanmar is still used as a pretext to separate communities and to stir up distrust of those regarded as different. Even though Myanmar is not a theocratic state, dominant Buddhism influences state policies on the treatment of the Rohingya and Chin.

Even though the persecution of the Rohingya is motivated by religious hatred, the Rohingya should be defined as a minority group in general rather than a religious minority.

Minorities should benefit from affirmative action and greater protection.

The category of religious minority may equally be regarded as an ethnic and/or a linguistic minority. For instance, it is not clear whether European Jews are a religious or an ethnic minority, or incorporate elements of both.

Thus one criterion for identifying minority status is the existence of objective characteristics that distinguish the group from the rest of the population within a particular state, such as the distinctive characteristics of ethnicity, language and religion.

Thus, a minority is a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state, in a non-dominant position. Therefore, minorities should benefit from special measures such as affirmative action and greater protection.

Yet some states argue that the affirmative action to protect minorities could disrupt sociopolitical stability if the majority challenged the special protection given to minorities.

In India, religious minority generally refers to those who are not Hindu. Hindu fundamentalists such as the Rashtriya Swayanmsevak Sang have accused Christian missionaries, who are most active in poor rural and tribal areas, of preying on the most susceptible in society '€ buying their souls with education, medical aid and economic assistance.

Some Buddhist monks affiliated to Sinhala Buddhism in Sri Lanka similarly restrict Muslims from selling halal food, accuse them of dominating business and of trying to take over the country.

Jehovah's Witnesses congregations in Russia have been deemed a threat to society and local governments often simply forbid Muslims from even trying to register as adherents to a religion or to join a religious organization.

In Israel, a volatile mix of politics and religion also forced the passing of the basic law declaring that Israel is the national home of the Jewish people and does not recognize it as a national homeland of any other people.

Even though Israel claims to be a democratic state, this law potentially discriminates against the practice of other religions and the rights of non-Jews to have basic rights, such as the right to housing, work and education.

The political influence of Zionism in Israel has also created the largest number of refugee minorities in modern



countries.

Therefore, minorities have become a global phenomenon even since the establishment of the UN and the

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The writer studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London and is writing a PhD dissertation on Protecting religious minorities within Islam in Indonesia: A challenge for international human rights law and Islamic law.

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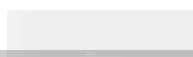
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