

**Forum:** Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee  
**Issue:** Religious beliefs that violate human rights  
**Student Officer:** Melenia Stasinopoulou  
**Position:** Co - Chair

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## PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

My name is Melenia Stasinopoulou and I will be serving as the Co - Chair of the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (GA3) during the 7<sup>th</sup> Platon School Model United Nations Conference. Having participated in both the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> PSMUN Conferences it is my honor to participate in this year's conference. This will be my 10<sup>th</sup> conference up to now and my second time serving as a Student Officer.

As the co-chair of GA3, I am here to make sure that every single one of you gets the most out of this Conference. This is why I would like all of you to know that I will always be available for any help you might need during your preparation period and, of course, during the Conference itself. In that respect, this study guide aims at getting you familiarized with the key issues that revolve around the rather complicated and certainly exhilarating topic of Religious Beliefs that violate Human Rights. It will constitute, I hope, a good starting point for your research which should, however, extend to other sources as well.

I hope that this experience will prove to be a rewarding and enlightening one for you and I am looking forward to meeting you in the conference. My best wishes for a fruitful and challenging debate.

Feel free to contact me ([smelenia2001@gmail.com](mailto:smelenia2001@gmail.com)) for any questions you might come up with, whether they concern the topic or the rules.

Kindest regards,

Melenia Stasinopoulou

Co - Chair of the Humanitarian Committee

## INTRODUCING TOPIC

When we talk about human rights and religion, we need to keep in mind some important marks about religion. Mostly all religions have appeared in pre - modern times (whereas human rights is a modern concept). Moreover, even the world's big religions have a lot of dissimilarities whilst they have similarities.

Furthermore, even the followers of single religion do not have a single reading of their religion. Fundamentalism, traditional and modernist are all concepts met within any religion. No matter the type of interpretation that they have, the followers of any religion cannot quit some of the religion's teachings. Essentially, to the rights that religions attribute to humans, they attribute to inviolable rights to God or the celestial God, etc. and they think there are of a higher order than human rights. Even though there are a lot of differences between religions when it comes to the extent and nature of the divine rights. Lastly, religions care about human dignity.

Our concept of religion should not avert human rights, because human experience over history and vice versa both show that human rights are a necessity in a healthy and enjoyable life. This has been proven both by positive experiences (i.e. experiences of those who had them) and negative experiences (i.e. experiences of those who have been deprived from them). Religion has no right to reject and to refuse necessities for an enjoyable and healthy life. In the pyramid of needs devised by Abraham Maslow, human rights fulfil the needs which are lower in the hierarchy of need and therefore more crucial, while religion fulfils need higher in the hierarchy and thereupon less crucial. Thus, human rights - even if socio-economic human rights or political-international human rights - are highest in rank than religion. So, religion cannot disrespect human rights as that would avert the developing of the higher needs that deadlocked humans to religion.

Human rights are the only criterion and measure on which all human beings agree despite all their differences and disagreements in the realm of religion. Disregarding human rights is equivalent to depriving human beings of the only thing that can protect them from cruelty and injustice. Religion, which underlines human dignity, cannot shut down the only court that stands between human beings and the violation of their dignity; to do so would be to sacrifice human dignity.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Islam and Human Rights". The Huffington Post. 2017  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/akbar-ganji/islam-and-human-rights\\_b\\_6812760.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/akbar-ganji/islam-and-human-rights_b_6812760.html)

## KEY TERMS

### Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

According to the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)<sup>2</sup> is a milestone document in the history of human rights. Drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world, the Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations. It sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected.

### Magna Carta

The Magna Carta is a basic document that states liberties guaranteed to the English people. It proclaims rights that have become a part of English law and are now the foundation of the constitution of every English-speaking country.

### Fundamentalism

A form of a religion, especially Islam or Protestant Christianity, that upholds belief in the strict, literal interpretation of scripture<sup>3</sup>

### Modernism

- i) A style or movement that aims to depart significantly from classical and traditional forms
- ii) A movement towards modifying traditional beliefs in accordance with modern ideas, especially in the Roman Catholic Church in the late 19th and early 20th centuries<sup>4</sup>

### ISIL/ISIS

Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) since June 2014, the Islamic State, transnational Sunni insurgent group operating primarily in western Iraq and eastern Syria. First appearing under the name ISIL in April 2013, the group launched an offensive in early 2014 that drove Iraqi government forces out of key western cities, while in Syria it fought both government forces and rebel factions in the Syrian Civil War.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "United Nations Declaration on Human Rights". un.org.  
<http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

<sup>3</sup> "Fundamentalism". Oxford English Dictionary.  
<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/fundamentalism>

<sup>4</sup> "Modernism". Oxford English Dictionary.  
<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/modernism>

<sup>5</sup> "ISIS". Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2017  
<http://school.eb.co.uk/levels/advanced/article/609554>

## Al - Qaeda

Al-Qaeda is a terrorist group that was founded by Osama bin Laden in the late 1980s. It began as a logistical network to support Muslims in Afghanistan fighting against what was then the Soviet Union during the Afghan War. <sup>6</sup>

## HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The artillery of Cyrus the Great (first king of Persia), conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. On that time he freed the slaves, advocated that everyone had the right to choose their own religion and entrenched racial equality. These decisions were documented on a baked-clay cylinder in the Akkadian language. Known today as the Cyrus Cylinder, this record has been accepted as the world's first Human Rights Charter. It is translated to all six official languages of the United Nations and it arranges the first four Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

The idea of human rights extended fastly to India, Greece and lastly Rome. There the idea of "natural law" appeared, in observation of the fact that people likely followed certain unwritten laws throughout their life, and Roman law was based on lucid ideas coming from the nature of things.

Documents maintaining individual rights, i.e. the Magna Carta (1215), the Petition of Rights (1628), the US Constitution (1787), etc, are the written heralds of the majority of today's human rights documents.

All along World War II ninety million people died driving Human Rights for the first to extinct. Hence, the states pledged together establishing the United Nations (1945). Their ambition was to "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person". So, on the 10th of December 1948, under the supervision of Eleanor Roosevelt the UDHR was ratified by the 56 member states of the United Nations. The vote was unanimous, even though eight nations decided to abstain.

The UDHR, commonly referred to as the international Magna Carta, extended the revolution in international law ushered in by the United Nations Charter – namely, that how a government treats its own citizens is now a matter of legitimate international concern, and not simply a domestic issue. It claims that all rights are interdependent and indivisible. Its Preamble eloquently asserts that:

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<sup>6</sup> "Al-Qaeda". Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2017.  
<http://school.eb.co.uk/levels/advanced/article/574570>

*“[R]ecognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world”.<sup>7</sup>*

In Europe, America and Africa, regional documents for the protection and promotion of human rights extend the UDHR. For example, African states have created their own Charter of Human and People’s Rights (1981), and Muslim states have created the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (1990). The dramatic changes in Eastern Europe, Africa, and Latin America since 1989 have powerfully demonstrated a surge in demand for respect of human rights.

It is widely known that throughout human history, Human Rights face severe violations, most of them coming from religious beliefs. If we go back in time there a lot of violent events coming from religion. Starting with the crusades in Byzantine years and Christianity’s want to expand throughout the globe and coming to 1980s with the first attack from the Islamic State at the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon.

Unfortunately, this was the first but certainly not the last attack. Nowadays, most of the violations come from the Islamic State. Al-Qaeda and then ISIS have made monstrous attack not only leaving behind a lot of catastrophes but violating human rights at their highest point.

The incident of the 11th September 2001 is one of the most remarkable ones. Four airliners hijacked by 19 al-Qaeda members in the East Coast of the United States: two planes crashed into and destroyed the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and surrounding buildings in New York City. One of them went into the Pentagon in Arlington County, Virginia and the other one broke into pieces near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, in an unsuccessful attempt to hit Washington, D.C. The cause of the attack, regardless the stated motives (support of Israel by US, sanctions imposed against Iraq, presence of US military in Saudi Arabia) has some implicit motives, one of them being religion. The 9/11 attacks are absolutely religious. They are seen as "a sacrament ... intended to restore to the universe a moral order that had been corrupted by the enemies of Islam." It is neither political or strategic but an "act of redemption" meant to "humiliate and slaughter those who defied the hegemony of God."<sup>8</sup>

Another more recent attack the “November 2015 Paris attacks” were an array of related terrorist attacks that occurred on Friday 13 November 2015 in Paris, France and Saint - Denis. The first attack was outside the Stade de France in Saint - Denis, all along a football match when three suicide bombers battered. Various mass shootings followed as well a suicide bombing at cafes and restaurants. Gunmen accomplished

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<sup>7</sup> “A short history of Human Rights”. [hrlibrary.umn.edu](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/hereandnow/Part-1/short-history.htm).  
<http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/hereandnow/Part-1/short-history.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Benjamin; Steven Simon (2002). *The Age of Sacred Terror*. Random House. p. 40. ISBN 978-0756767518.

another mass shooting and took hostages at an Eagles of Death Metal concert in the Bataclan theatre. This led to a hamper with the police. The attackers were shot or blew themselves up when police raided the theatre.

Furthermore, the Belgium bombing attacks on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2016 (two at Brussels Airport in Zaventem, and one at Maalbeek metro station in central Brussels). Thirty-two civilians and three perpetrators were killed, and more than 300 people were injured. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) claimed responsibility for the attacks.

The most recent attack of them all is the one that occurred at a nightclub in Istanbul, on 1 January 2017. At least 39 people were killed and at least 70 were injured in the incident.

These are some remarkable attacks having religious beliefs causes but many more have occurred in the past. All these attacks coming from Islamic militant groups have one purpose to present these groups as defenders of the Muslims. These imply a lot of violations on human rights (right to equality, freedom from discrimination, right to life, liberty, personal security, etc.), rights that are universal and must be followed.

## COUNTRIES INVOLVED IN THE ISSUE

### United States of America

The United States has a dynamic civil society and strong constitutional protections for many civil and political rights. However, a lot of US laws and practices, especially in the fields of criminal and juvenile justice, immigration and national security manage to violate international human rights. Frequently, the people that are least able to defend their rights in court or through the political process (immigrants, children, prisoners, etc.) are those who most likely suffer abuses.

### France

In January and November 2015 and July 2016 France suffered deadly attacks. The November attacks incited a nationwide state of emergency supported and protracted by parliament until the first months of 2017. Government is capable to conduct searches without a warrant and to imprison people without a judicial approval weakening the rights to liberty, freedom of movement, privacy and freedom of association and expression. The government unsucceeded to chase essential improvements to counter abusive identity checks, including ethnic profiling. Furthermore, reports of Islamophobic and anti-Semitic attacks grew.

## Syria

Due to the absence of meaningful efforts to end war the violence in Syria has increased. Isolated detention and torture remain uncontrolled. Armed groups that are against the government have attacked civilians, used child soldiers, kidnapped and tortured. The extremist group of Islamic State (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria, Jabhat al - Nusra, were responsible for targeting civilians, kidnappings and executions.

## Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch (HRW) is an international nongovernmental organization that checks into thoroughly and documents human rights violation and urge policies to prevent such abuses. Human Rights Watch charges fact - finding investigations of human rights abuses and oversees various countries to make sure they do not violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which blueprints as aforementioned fundamental civil, social and political rights.

## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Event
1945	The United Nations are established
1946	Commission on Human Rights was established the UN Economic and Social Council
1948	The UN General Assembly adopts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the primary international articulation of the fundamental and inalienable rights of all human beings and the first comprehensive agreement among nations with regards to the specific rights and freedom of all human beings.
1953	The Council of Europe creates the European Commission on Human Rights and the Court of Human Rights.
1968	The First World Conference on Human Rights is held in Tehran. The United Nations convened member states to evaluate the failures and successes of human rights promotion since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to work toward the elimination of racial discrimination and apartheid.
1969	The Organization of American States (OAS) adopts the American Convention on Human Rights
1978	The Human Rights Watch was founded

20.09.1984	The Buddhist Borobudur temple in Java (Indonesia) was damaged by 9 bombs
06.09.1986	Neve Shalom Synagogue attack (Turkey) from a group of fanatic Muslims
04.02.1990	A bus carrying Israeli tourists in Egypt was attacked by Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine
25.09.1995	The 1995 Paris Métro and RER bombings were a series of attacks by the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria in France, continuing through October 17, 1995.
April 23, 2000 – September 19, 2000	2000 Sipadan kidnappings by 6 Islamist militants (Malaysia)
11.09.2001	4 airliners hijacked by 19 al-Qaeda members in the East Coast of the United States:
23.10.2002	The Moscow theater hostage crisis was the seizure of the crowded Dubrovka Theater by Islamists
25.05.2013	La Défense attack: an Islamic extremist wielding a knife attacked and wounded a French soldier in the Paris suburb of La Défense
August 2014	ISIL fighters massacred some 700 people, mostly men, of the Shu'aytat tribe in Deir ez-Zor Governorate (Syria)
13.11.2015	A series of terrorist attacks in Paris kill 137, and wound 368. They involved a series of coordinated attacks which consisted of mass shootings and suicide bombings
22.03.2016	2016 Brussels bombings includes two suicide bombings in Brussels Airport and one bombing in Brussels Metro that resulted in 35 deaths and more than 300 wounded
25.03.2016	Three ISIL suicide bombers strike security checkpoints in the Yemeni city of Aden, killing 26 people
19.12.2016	2016 Berlin attack during which a truck was driven into the Christmas market next to the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church at Breitscheidplatz in Berlin, left 12 people dead and 56 others injured
01.01.2017	ISIS attack in a nightclub in Istanbul

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

### Legislation

Even though there are several treaties, conventions concerning Human Rights and of course the Universal Declaration of Human Rights many countries don't seem to abide by these. Thus, is essential not the creation of a new legislation framework but the reinforcement of the already existing ones.

### Punishments

If an individual has violated human rights in any way should be imprisoned. This may look extreme, but others will see it as an example to avoidance to act like them. Furthermore, if a government works with extremist groups and violates human rights should accept penalties.

### Intergovernmental cooperation

It is crucial for governments to cooperate in good faith. In a issue like this one that has to do with human rights and it affects the whole world the cooperation of one member state is not enough, it needs all member states to find a golden section.

### ID check

As mentioned before, most human rights violations by religious beliefs come from extremist groups. Even though, these groups have their base in Middle East most of the attacks happen in Europe and the US. Thus, it is important for ID checks to happen especially for those who look to migrate in European countries or the US.

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## MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

Video about the history of Human Rights

[http://progmedia.akamaized.net/videos/humanrights/en/story-of-human-rights-documentary\\_640\\_en.mp4](http://progmedia.akamaized.net/videos/humanrights/en/story-of-human-rights-documentary_640_en.mp4)