



GA2: Social and Humanitarian Committee

Student Officer: Defne Dođru

Issue: The marginalization of minorities in MENA

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Turkish International Model United Nations





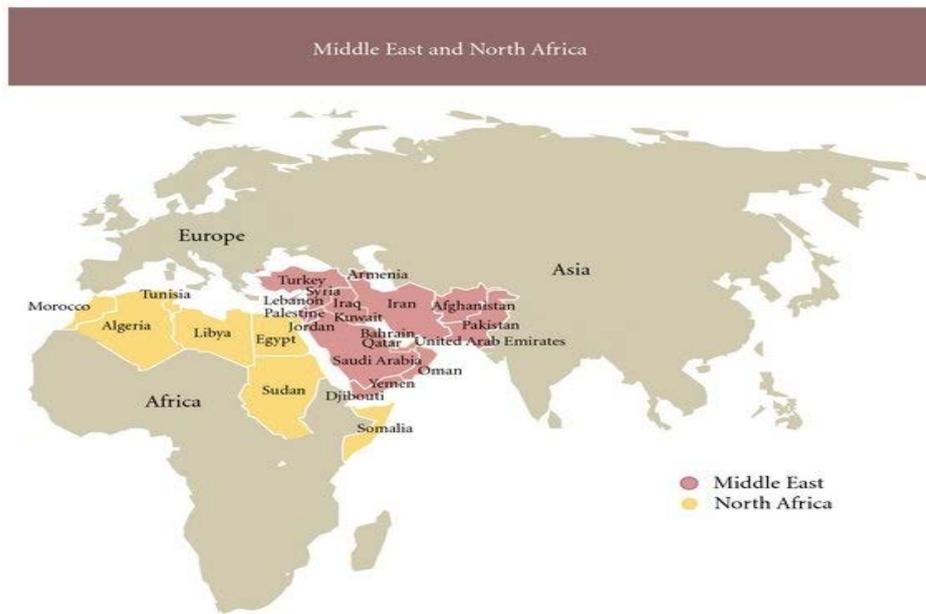
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## I. Introduction

Marginalization has been an important research topic since the beginning of the 1960s. This was due to the realization that some developing countries showed strong economic growth, and the sharing of the rewards of the success among the members of the society was increasingly unequal. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is a diverse region filled with people from different religious, ethnic, and national societies. It is easily affected by political and economic events, and socio-political transformations such as the women's rights movements and the Arab Spring in the last decade.



Picture 1: The Map of the MENA Region

MENA is a region with a potential for growth; however, most of the ethnicities in the MENA region are being marginalized in many ways which causes most of the problems in the region. Almost all of them face several challenges; one of the most important problems they face is society denying their existence due to their differences. Many minorities face discrimination and are not being treated equally compared with other societies within their countries. Because of the differences in their socio-cultural practices and history, minorities have a hard time adjusting to the majority of the community. Minorities also feel insecure in the community due to being small in number and being discriminated against because of their different



identities. This discrimination leads to unequal treatment and minorities being deprived of even some fundamental rights. Several states deny the existence of minorities as well as pretending that they are not being discriminated against; however, most of the problems that occur in the Middle East are mostly related to the vulnerable status of minorities in the region.

## II. Involved Countries and Organizations

### Israel

The Arab-Israel conflict is one that has been going on for a long time and which even damages the meaningful and valuable debate on the Middle Eastern minorities. The ethnic majority in Israel are Jews, so with strong considerations of national interest what Israel aims is to identify, patronize and even, at some point, exploit the diversity and the internal divisions among the non-Jewish populations. Domestically, this approach helped Israel to identify and nurture a number of non-Sunni Muslim minority populations including Christian Arabs, Druze, Circassian, Bedouins, and Bahais. An intentional divide-and-rule strategy like this has drawn harsh criticism and is perceived as a purposeful effort to weaken the status of Arabs both inside and outside of Israel. So Israel has been viewing non-Muslim minorities as a potential ally in the Middle East for a long time. This Arab-Israel conflict also works as a cover that enables the countries to lay aside the discussions on minorities as a conspiracy of Israel or Zionists. Also, as the Jewish-Arab domestic relations continued to deteriorate steadily, the Jewish majority continued to view the Palestinian minority as not only provocative and disloyal, but also as a demographic threat due to its continuously increasing birth rates. The Palestinian citizens have been politically marginalised and economically underprivileged for a long time and they are not willing to accept the systemic inequality that has been going on which complicates the conflict and negotiations since the negotiations always come to the question of whether the Palestinians will recognise the Jewish character of Israel.

### Turkey

There are several religious and ethnic minorities in Turkey; however, Kurds are the largest ethnic and linguistic minority in Turkey. Their state in the country causes many political, national and international problems. Kurds are mostly concentrated in the eastern and south-eastern regions of the country and large numbers have migrated to the urban areas located in western Turkey as well. In eastern and south-eastern regions they are overwhelmingly the majority. Not only are they the largest minority, but they are also the ones that are most discriminated against. Following the start of hostilities and fighting between the government and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) which is an armed opposition organization that is seeking independence, in 1984, their circumstances increasingly deteriorated. Millions of citizens have been displaced as a result of rising violence on both sides. Following the start of new conflicts in July 2015, the



government outlawed Kurdish protests and censored access to websites that dealt with the subject. In September, the predominantly Kurdish city of Cizre was subjected to a prolonged curfew purportedly imposed by Turkish authorities in an effort to contain PKK rebels, which left inhabitants without electricity and with restricted access to food, water, and medical care. Turkey launched an operation called “Operation Euphrates Shield” in order to begin a military intervention on 24 August 2016. Nationalists allegedly attacked Kurdish organizations, companies, and people as well. Since then this conflict has taken many more lives including those of many Kurdish civilians. Meanwhile the PKK and some other associated groups were responsible for numerous attacks in Istanbul and other places and the Turkish military were accused of torture and many killings in the area. Numerous regions have been ravaged by the bombings and caused many people to get displaced away from their homes. Alongside this, private schools with Kurdish language curriculum were shuttered and Kurdish teachers, government employees were dismissed (*Minority Rights Group, 2018*).

## Iraq

There are many ethnicities (Christians, Yazidis, Kurds, Turkmens) that can be considered as minorities in Iraq. Minority Rights Group International claims that 96 percent of the country is Muslim so it can be considered that there is an overwhelming majority compared to the minorities. Even though the Iraqi Constitution recognizes that there are multiple nationalities in the country and guarantees the rights of the minorities in the country, the minorities do not even have their basic human rights ensured when their situations are considered. For example, many minorities like Turkmens, are not able to use their language in school for education even though they have constitutional guarantees. Not only do they have language restrictions, but also they are faced with linguistic restrictions. Many vicious attacks have been made on the minorities like Christians, and other people are being targeted just because of the origin of their names and surnames. Some minorities are being forced to move away due to the problems they are facing. The lack of political representation in Iraq’s political system is also one of the most problematic things that minorities face. The interests and concerns of minorities in the Iraqi state are not politically represented by the government. Furthermore, it disregards the indigenous or ethnic status of minorities and does not recognize or protect them in dangerous situations. Instead, they are viewed as the minority by the government which is mostly religious. Several groups have been compelled to identify as members of bigger minority groups as a result. For instance, Shabaks and Faili Kurds were obliged to identify with a wider Kurdish majority, yet they see themselves as separate from it (*UNPO, 2013*).

## OHCHR (The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights)



The UN Human Rights Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa region is located in Lebanon (ROMENA). Actors from the region's governments and civil society organizations participate in ROMENA-led initiatives as the convenor of regional conversations on human rights concerns. ROMENA is also in collaboration with the UN Human Rights Training and Documentation Center in Doha and it mainly aims to enhance human rights in the nations by monitoring, reporting, and being in cooperation with governments that enables them to get technical assistance as well. There is also a Center for South-West Asia and the Arab Region. Through capacity-building, public outreach, and human rights education, its operations also seek to improve regional and national organizations that promote and defend human rights.

### III. Focused Overview of the Issue

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is a very diverse, multicultural, and dynamic region with a big potential for growth and development. There are many different cultural, ethnic, and religious groups that contribute to the diversity. Since there are many different communities, the region is easily affected by the political and economic transformations and events going on in the world and the region. Because of the many communities that live in the region, there are many parties that have different opinions and perspectives creating problems within the countries. The controversial perspectives lead up to problems and chaos in the region and countries being in unstable conditions. When other foreign countries get involved in the problems the chaos gets more complicated and leads to bigger problems like war. There are many ethnic and religious minorities in the region. Some of them are just in one country and some of them like Kurds are spread around multiple countries like Turkey, Iran, Iraq etc. Minorities in the region face many challenges whilst trying to make their voices heard and this leads to the region being in an unstable condition.

#### 1. Discrimination and Denial of Existence

Even though these minorities enrich the diversity of their societies, they face several forms of discrimination which eventually results in marginalization and exclusion. Minorities' circumstances have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as well. Institutional discrimination can be seen in many countries in governments, corporations and education systems. The discriminatory actions lead to inequality in the society which leads to people being unable to obtain jobs, education and proper healthcare.

Discrimination also starts with denying the existence of minorities. Kurds can be given as a primary example to this situation. For a really long time, the Turkish government and the authorities actually did not recognize the Kurds as a society and banned the usage of the Kurdish language in the country. This attitude was best shown by a Turkish official's comment from May 1971: *"We accept no other nation as living in*

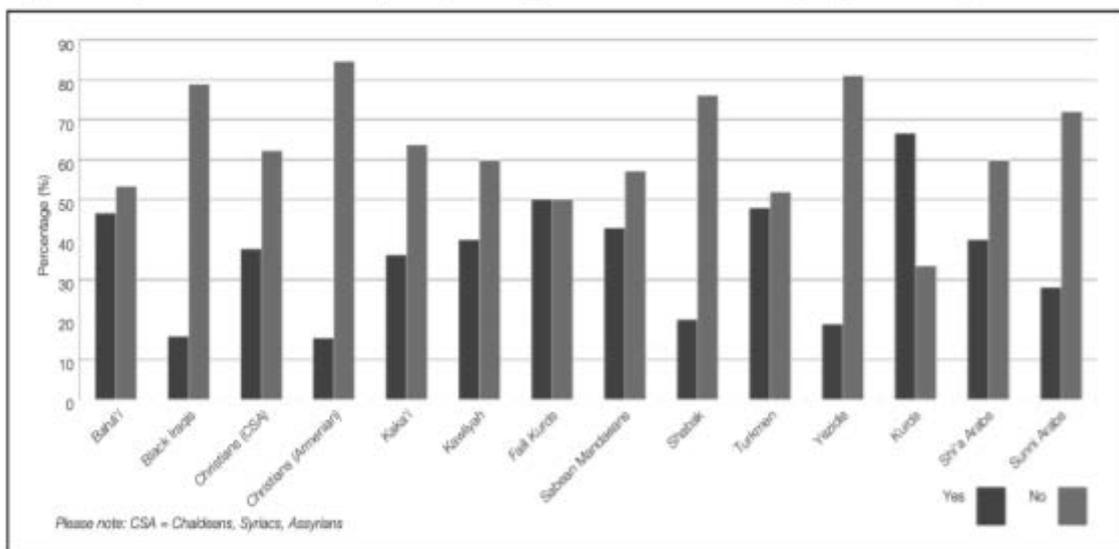


Turkey, only the Turks. As we see it, there is only one national in Turkey: the Turkish nation. All citizens living in different parts of the country are content to be Turkish.” (Kumaraswamy, 249) The similar thing has happened in Israel as well but this time with Palestinians. As Palestinians started to gain recognition and secure acceptance from other countries in the world the Prime Minister Golda Meir announced that they do not count Palestinians as people and the “Palestinian people” do not exist. Likewise, the Arab and Islamic nations' inability to accept Jews as both a religious and a national group hinders their capacity to make peace with the Jewish State. Such denial-based mindsets impede the Middle East from having a serious conversation about its minorities. Since there is denial, no concrete improvements are being made in the region in order to secure the rights of the minorities.

## 2. Security Problems

Another important problem for minorities is security. Not having inclusive national policies makes minorities vulnerable and open to the most severe types of insecurity, including violence, marginalization, and poverty as well as putting them in a disadvantaged position in the structure of power. The past condition of Iraq can be given as an example of this. The religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq had faced violence since 2003 until ISIS was defeated and this violence even included bomb attacks on their village in the Nineveh Plains and religious and political institutions, being taken as hostages, being kidnapped and minority-owned businesses being attacked. In December 2011, the violence spread to the autonomous Kurdistan region where many people had come in order to find peace and security. Lots of people then fled Iraq and many people did not leave their houses and/or hid their religious belongings like religious symbols. In 2011 after the withdrawal of the United States army, anxiety arose in the disputed areas of the north

Figure 1: Do you feel safe when leaving home, traveling or at work/school/university? (by community)



Picture 2: Graph 1 of MRC & IMC 2011 Research



where many minority communities lived since the US forces diffused the tension in the area between two competing powers. The attacks and targets on minorities continued and minorities continued to fear for their lives and their safety. According to the research carried out by MRG (Minority Rights Group) and IMC (Iraqi Minorities Council) in 2011 where three hundred people from 14 ethnic/religious communities were asked about their opinions on their safety and security, it was clearly seen that almost all of the minority groups did not feel safe going out of their homes.

In 2014, the Islamic State group (ISIS ) took over much of Nineveh province in Iraq, including Mosul, the provincial capital. Genocide was carried out by terrorist organizations against minority ethnic and religious groups. On December 9, 2017, the Prime Minister of Iraq, Haider al Abadi, declared victory over ISIS however the negative impacts of the events on minorities did not end. After the military defeat of ISIS in Iraq, the religious minorities (Christians, Yazidis etc.) have stated that their top security concern became the widespread unemployment problem, not ISIS anymore. Also, even though it can be seen that a lot of progress has been made in recovering the minority communities of Iraq since the conflict with ISIS, the healing process is obviously not finished yet. Many Iraqis are still displaced from their homes and they can't access essential services. Their economic opportunities are also absent, one of the multiple problems not resolved since the defeat of ISIS. Adad Youssef, who is the chairman of the board of directors of the Alliance of Iraqi Minorities stated that the alliance is working on making sure that minorities are treated equally and actively participate in society, particularly in politics. Youssef also stated that it is crucial for the Iraqi government to implement measures that encourage minorities to stay in Iraq and become a part of a diversified society. He underlined the urgency of closing the refugee camps and resettling the refugees in their homes. He also added that, by exerting pressure on the Iraqi government to implement legislation protecting minorities, preventing discrimination, and developing areas where minorities are located the international community may assist (*Sen, 2021*).

## IV. Key Vocabulary

**Marginalization:** the act of treating someone or something as if they are not important.

**Exclusion:** a situation in which someone or something is not allowed to take part in an activity or to enter a place.

**Discriminatory:** treating a person or a group of people differently from other people, in an unfair way.



## V. Important Events & Chronology

Date (Day/Month/Year)	Event
May 1971	Turkish official statement denies the existence of Kurds
1989	Taif Agreement- Ended the civil war and stipulated that in the Lebanese national assembly there has to be equal representation of Christians and Muslims.
December 2011	Violence was spread to autonomous Kurdistan region & U.S. army withdrew from the region
June 2014	ISIS invaded the Nineveh Plains where minorities were located. Many Yazidis fled their homes.
December 2017	Victory declaration against ISIS
September 2021	Yazidis who fled Iraq are stuck in the Poland-Belarus border for a week with nothing to eat

## VI. Past Resolutions and Treaties

- Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities:

<https://www.equalrightstrust.org/sites/default/files/ertdocs//Declaration%20on%20the%20rights%20of%20minorities.pdf>

This declaration was adopted without vote by the General Assembly on 18th of December 1992. It aims to secure the rights of the minorities and ensure the national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities to live their culture, use their language freely both in public and private, practice their own religion without getting discriminated against.

- UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-minority-issues>

This rapporteur acknowledges that minorities still continue to face many problems in many countries and new problems are being added to their lives such as legislation policies and etc. The rapporteur proposes a solution to enhance the rights of minorities as well as keeping them safe



- Written Statement for the Discrimination of Minorities:

<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/276978?ln=en>

Written statement submitted by the International Human Rights Association of American Minorities, a non-governmental organization on the Roster upon the prevention of discrimination against and the protection of minorities.

## VII. Failed Solution Attempts

The United Nations has done a forum on minority issues (there is a link at the “Useful Links” section) previously which highlighted many problems that minorities face in the community. The forum made recommendations on the educational, social and economic life of minorities by discussing how their health and education levels may be increased. Effective strategies were stated at the forum by highlighting the importance of the issue and minorities’ rights as well as human rights. In the forum, the state of women in minority societies was also discussed. As well as giving general recommendations, there were also recommendations that were given to national, regional and local governments such as recommending them to ensure domestic legislations that would guarantee their rights in the society. However, since it was a forum, these recommendations were given but not many concrete actions were taken in order to guarantee the rights of the minorities.

The UN General Assembly appointed a special committee that was called “the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine” which aimed to make recommendations on the land’s upcoming government, after Britain’s announcement in February 1947 that showed its intention to terminate the Mandate government. The special committee recommended that two separate states should be established as Jewish and Arab which were going to be joined by economic union in order to protect the religious and minority rights. Even though Jewish organizations collaborated with the UNSCOP, the Arabs rejected and launched a war of annihilation aimed at the Jewish state.

## VIII. Possible Solutions

Many countries view the issues faced by minorities as a conspiracy against national unity and integrity. However, instead of seeing them as such a big threat, the countries in the region could see them as an essential part of the region with the culture they bring and develop a new national identity that would acknowledge, accept, and include different national, religious, and linguistic minorities. Even though countries have some guarantees in their legislations which say that minorities are a part of the country and



they all have basic human rights, the countries must establish legislations that can be taken into account more than previous ones, by stating the consequences of certain situations. Countries should also review and amend their legislations for education by getting rid of all the inequalities caused by discrimination. People who come from different ethnicities have the right to learn about their culture and their mother tongue so countries should provide such opportunities for people. They should also be able to express their thoughts/emotions freely in public without being concerned about the consequences.

This forum on minority issues has lots of ideas about how these ideas can be implemented and what should be done in order to lessen discriminatory actions.

## IX. Useful Links

- [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/MinorityIssues/Forum\\_On\\_Minority\\_Pub\\_en\\_low.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/MinorityIssues/Forum_On_Minority_Pub_en_low.pdf)

This document talks about the problems that minorities face in daily life in a detailed way.

- <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/19553>

This article talks about the properties of the minorities in the Middle East as well as their histories. It also consists information full of data.

- <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4327776?seq=1>

This article gives a detailed information about the Kurdish problem in Turkey including its full history.

- [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283184303\\_Minority\\_Politics\\_in\\_the\\_Middle\\_East\\_and\\_North\\_Africa\\_The\\_prospects\\_for\\_transformative\\_change](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283184303_Minority_Politics_in_the_Middle_East_and_North_Africa_The_prospects_for_transformative_change)

This article talks about the minorities in the MENA region and how a difference can be made with a transformative change.

- <https://manaramagazine.org/2022/03/17/addressing-the-challenges-facing-iraqs-yazidi-community-in-2022/>

This article talks about a specific minority group in Iraq and the problems they face in the conditions of Iraq.

- <https://minorityrights.org/programme-countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/>



This is a site for the Minority Rights Group which is an international human rights organization that is trying to secure rights for minorities around the world.

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