

Challenges Facing Implementation of the Declaration:
Regional Perspectives

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Introduction:

Political regimes differ in their ways of dealing with minority issues, and specifically on the measures and recommendations issued with the Declaration. Twenty years has passed since the Declaration was issued and many states in my region, the Middle East, don't even recognize the existence of ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities.

In a region which is very rich with its multiplicity of minorities, very little progress has been made so far in implementation of the declaration on the official and popular fronts.

I will briefly summarize in my short comments the challenges and difficulties facing the implementation of the declaration and specifically in the Middle East region.

I will divide those challenges into four categories, for the reason of simplicity to come up with proper recommendations.

Political Challenges:

- 1- Most of the regimes in the region run very closed political systems that monopolizes power in a way that does not spare any space for other groups especially minorities to participate in the government. In most cases minorities are not becoming integral elements in governing the states affairs.
- 2- Governments also don't recognize the existence of minorities, let alone their rights. This is reflected in all policies that don't even consider the presence of minorities and their interests. No accurate information about their number and status is available.
- 3- The absence of institutionalized state agencies that deal with minorities' issues leads to weak implementation of the declaration and unaccountable authorities.

Legal Challenges:

- 1- In most cases, there is no integration of international conventions and instruments in local laws and regulations. In many cases, there are major contradictions in the legal systems with basic human rights values.
- 2- Legal authorities do not provide platforms and procedures that deal with violations and discriminations against minorities.
- 3- Lawmakers, judges and judiciary staff are not educated, prepared or aware of the issues related to minorities' rights.

Cultural Challenges:

- 1- There are no efforts at all directed towards education, propagation and awareness of minorities and their rights. This lead to misinformation and stereotyping about minorities.
- 2- There is very little interchange between different social groups, especially minorities, such as intermarriages, intercommunications and so on, mainly within tribal and regional restrictive societies.
- 3- No-tolerance social environment always creates an atmosphere of hate and mistrust, which justifies intimations to minorities and violations of their rights.

Local Organizations and Communities:

- 1- National human rights organizations mostly follow official guidelines and don't have independent agenda on the issues of minorities and implementation of the declaration.
- 2- Minorities groups are not aware of their rights and methods to protect them, and in many cases, some of them they even hide their affiliations as a measure of protection.

Examples of Good Practices:

- 1- In Saudi Arabia: Shiites minority initiated a program to invite influential personalities to attend an educational program and tour to their region, including art shows, cultural events and meetings.
- 2- In Egypt: Young people have initiated a Facebook page to track all hatred speeches and acts against minorities with full coverage.
- 3- In Bahrain: A social TV program used to be aired by the official TV station which provides Sunni and Shiite views in different issues.
- 4- In Oman: A high ranking official attended a group marriage ceremony of different social backgrounds.