

Esteemed delegates

Thank you for joining me on this exploration into "Legal Structural Approaches to a More Inclusive Society."

Let us look at this theme through the lived experiences of a persecuted group that has suffered silently for decades with minimal international attention. Consider the story of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, systematically excluded in some countries from education, employment, and social opportunities. They have been stripped of their right to vote and faced ominous cyber and anti-terror legislation, facing criminalization for their deeply held religious practices, with the ultimate sentence being the death penalty just for identifying as Muslims. This narrative unfolds in some countries, particularly under the shadow of the Second Amendment to the Pakistani Constitution and Ordinance XX.

However, it may surprise you to learn that the Ahmadiyya Muslim community once thrived. Prior to systematic legal exclusion, Ahmadis played a pivotal role in the foundation of Pakistan and excelled in various facets of society, including politics, the military, and sports. Notable Ahmadi personalities include Chaudhry Zafrullah Khan who served as the first Foreign Secretary of Pakistan and later as President of the UN General Assembly and President of the International Court of Justice. Professor Abdus Salam became the first Muslim Nobel Laureate in science, and MM Ahmad who served with distinction in the Civil Service.

Ironically, during this period of prosperity and success, it was the legal framework that protected the rights of all citizens, ensuring equal treatment. Unfortunately, this landscape underwent a drastic transformation after the Second Amendment in 1974 and marked a significant turning point, contributing to the challenging circumstances faced by minorities in Pakistan today. The amended law not only eroded the rights of Ahmadis but also directly led to the persecution they now face, contributing to the abuse of other minorities such as Christians and Hindus. With longstanding systematic persecution under regressive laws, coupled with demands of religious extremists and intense hostility in everyday life, many Ahmadis are left with no choice but to seek asylum abroad. This year alone, there have been more than 40 attacks against the Ahmadiyya Community in Pakistan, ranging from individuals being targeted to places of worship being desecrated, with the most recent incident occurring a few days ago.

This tragic narrative extends beyond Pakistan, resonating globally where Ahmadis endure structural and legal discrimination. It exemplifies the impact of legal structures—both in working and failing—underscoring the pressing need for comprehensive responses. The story emphasizes the urgency to protect minorities, ensuring equal opportunities and fostering inclusivity whilst upholding fundamental human rights.

Legislation should guide us in addressing disparities, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and celebrating the unique contributions of minority communities to our collective tapestry. Our laws must go beyond shielding against discrimination; they should act as catalysts for preserving and cherishing minority cultures. A free and independent judiciary is essential for the effective safeguarding of human rights and guaranteeing freedom, justice and equality. Additionally, ensuring equal access to technology and fostering digital literacy within minority communities is crucial. Imagine a world where digital inclusion determines socio-economic participation, and legislative measures bridge the digital divide, empowering minorities with the necessary tools for full participation in the digital age.

The Ahmadiyya example showcases how legal structures can either protect or perpetuate persecution. Imagine a collective effort involving legal experts, human rights advocates, and religious leaders addressing injustices. Picture diplomatic channels advocating for the

repeal or amendment of discriminatory laws, ensuring equal rights for all, regardless of beliefs.

In building a more inclusive society, let us not merely skim the surface of United Nations legal instruments like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Imagine these instruments not as dry documents but as powerful tools emphasizing the principle of non-discrimination, waiting to be wielded for tangible change.

The Rabat Plan of Action has emerged as a roadmap, a guide to nations seeking to combat religious discrimination. Imagine legislative reforms unfolding, balancing the delicate act of criminalizing incitement to religious hatred while safeguarding freedom of expression. Picture environments where individuals are protected from discrimination, where ideas flow freely, fostering an open exchange that transcends boundaries.

And in the symphony of inclusivity, let the Faith for Rights initiative be transformative. Picture diverse faith communities engaging in dialogue, envision legislative provisions that actively accommodate religious practices in workplaces and educational settings. Consider commitment 6 as a soft law instrument, standing up for the rights of all minority individuals. Picture a world where minority communities are not just tolerated but fully integrated into the social fabric, a tapestry woven with threads of mutual understanding.

In conclusion, let this be more than a theoretical commitment—let it be a journey of empathy translated into concrete action. Let us use instruments such as the Rabat Plan of Action and Faith for Rights to be our guiding stars, not distant constellations but beacons lighting up the path to justice. Let's transform rhetoric into a powerful, enduring narrative—a tale of real transformation, where inclusivity is not just a principle but a deeply ingrained reality.

Effective, independent and functioning legal structures are paramount for safeguarding the rights of all. Perhaps rather than reinventing the wheel, our focus should be on ensuring existing structures are purpose-fit and implemented to guarantee the full and equal participation of all individuals. This commitment requires political will, anchored in the pursuit of absolute justice for everyone.

May our combined efforts pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable future, where justice transcends boundaries. As we mark the 75th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, let's intensify our endeavours to secure, promote, and strengthen the spirit and objectives of the Declaration.

Thank you for your attention.

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