

Massacre of the Mourners
A Case Study on Hazaras' Target Killing in Balochistan

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Executive Summary

This case study documents the ongoing sectarian target killings of the minority Hazara Shia Community in Quetta Balochistan and covers a period of 1994 up till March 20, 2010. In July 2003 and March 2004 suicide attacks were carried out on Imam Bargah and Aushora procession by a militant group that identified itself as Lashaker-e-Jangvi. The incidents took a toll of hundred of worshippers and mourners. In both cases the victims were primarily Hazaras, a minority Shia Muslim ethnic group that has been the target of religious bigotry and other serious human rights violations. The governments totally shut eyes and left the ethnic and religious minorities and the Hazara Shia community in particular, at the mercy of sectarian target killers. Extremist have committed large-scale abuses against Hazara civilians with impunity. The study participants emphasize upon the United Nations, and other human rights organizations to investigate the target killings and to systematically monitor human rights and humanitarian laws violations of the Hazara shia people in the province of Quetta Balochistan.

It was March 2, 2004 that a considerably long procession comprising of Shia mourners was peacefully and steadily marching on its pre-specified route. Such processions are, of late, being regularly taken during every Islamic calendar year, at "Aushura", the 10th day of Moharram, to recall the most unfortunate incidence for Muslims when Imam Hussain, the beloved grandson of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), was martyred in the battlefield of Karbalah (Iraq).

"Appropriate security measures are taken by administration on such occasions. The entire specified route of procession is sealed by the Law Enforcing Agencies, twelve hours ahead of the scheduled time table of the event, against all sorts of traffic (vehicular or pedestrian) except the officials on duty. Shops etc. on the route are kept closed and the people are not allowed to come out even of their houses. Hotels are got vacated and locked. Thorough search is made even of the letter boxes enroute, to ensure security and safety of the procession, augmented by deployment of heavy number of armed Police/ F.C. personnel" states a law enforcement agency officer.

That day, at noon time, while the procession was passing through Liaquat Bazaar of Quetta City, two persons started firing of bullets on the mourning participants of the procession through window of a hotel on the first floor of a building. The room from where firing was opened was locked from outside, giving impression to the security personnel, during reconnaissance, that occupants had left the premises. The unexpected attack was so sudden and intense that before the law enforcing people could hardly recover and become alive of the situation to comprehend the brutal act, the procession turned into dead bodies and fluttering seriously injured human beings, lying on the road, with human blood floating all over the scene of incident. During the state of peril and commotion, hues and cries, while dead bodies and wounded were rushed to hospital, the frustrated survivors turned into a furious mob. Soon after, petrol cans were brought and the shops in the area belonging to owners other than Shia community were set on fire. In retaliation, shops and Cinema House in the area, being properties of Shia community, were burnt to ashes.

"My maternal uncle was among the martyrs of that day...he survived a daughter and a wife" tells a young Hazara¹, a minority community whose ancestors migrated to Quetta from the central Afghanistan where they still comprise of the third largest religious ethnic group. "The

family didn't expect what was going to happen. He left the house early that morning after taking a cup of tea and indicted to return late that night. But instead it was the news of his death that struck the poor family on that mournful day. My widowed aunt had really a tough time afterwards. Her husband, the sole breadwinner of the family, used to drive a rickshaw to earn livelihood. His untimely death made the life of my aunt and cousin very miserable". "Had there not been covert mechanisms of helping out of the victims by our Hazara community, they might have no option but to die of starvation and pauperism". "They could not have acquired the route of begging. You would not encounter any Hazara person, man or woman, boy or girl, asking for alms on the roads."

"We are Shia Muslims and hence targets of sectarianism" tells another youth while reflecting on the reasons of Hazaras target killing. The Hazaras are of Mongolian origin and are recognized by their characteristic physical features which have made them more vulnerable. "Ours is a double jeopardy", says a young Hazara in a low tone. "Our enemy is invisible but we are distinguished by our physical attributes". "Standing in group of people from variety of ethnic backgrounds, a Hazara can easily be distinguished among all other tribes and ethnic groups", says another young chap augmenting his colleague.

In Pakistan most of the Hazaras live in and around the city of Quetta, Hazara Town and Mehri-a-Abad being their specific communities. "These days are so terrifying for us that we can not leave the premises of our community with peace of mind", says a helpless voice. "Individuals of our community who used to work in offices located on Sariab Road (a predominantly Baloch area, notorious for target killings), around 70% of them have resigned from their jobs because they can not take risk of their lives. Those who can't afford to resign are under constant threat and have been suffering from severe anxiety...the moment they leave their houses, their parents, dependents and wives sit on *musallah*, start praying under utmost nervousness for their safety and pay gratitude to Almighty Allah on their safe return". "Parents now forbid their children to go beyond *Mezan Chaowk* (an area that separates Mehr-i-abad and the main city)". This mental agony is being faced almost daily by this ill fate community. "Under continued, severe stress and dread my health has deteriorated. I feel I am being followed by some target killer. I have become a diabetic. Doctor advises that I must regularly walk long distance to burn my sugar but I can not because of the fear of being targeted outside" tells a dejected government servant.

For the last some years a new trend of immigration has been observed of Hazaras. "In fact having no way out, Hazaras have started escaping from Quetta. The destiny is mostly Australia". "Our youth is seeking refuge in other countries but that is no more an easy solution. First they get to Indonesia on legal basis and afterwards they sneak into Australia through illegal ways".

"Sailing on a fragile boat from Indonesia to Australia for illegal entry is not an easy voyage. Among people struggling to move to Australia, there are people as old as 50 years. These are those family heads who do not want to put the life of their children in danger and instead they take this risk themselves...there are certain families who have put at stake their entire life's earnings on such risky migrations".

"Since 2003, more than 300 Hazaras have been slain while around 1000 have been injured and have become disabled. Initially only few of our youth went to other countries and that were on student visas. Now, with the rise in target killing they are moving in large numbers no matter if they have to do this on illegal means...When the own country is not able to provide security of life, our people have no other choice but to escape to other countries but

now even that has become more difficult as the visas are been negated to our community. There is violation of international law”.

“Around 50-60 visa applications, with all formalities fulfilled, reach Indonesian embassy daily. Astonishingly they (Hazara applicants) are being refused without giving any reason. Despite being complete in all respects, the passports are returned without any stamp, not even mentioning that the request has been rejected”.

“We believe that behind this discrimination against Hazaras, the interior ministry is involved who has asked the embassy to categorically reject the applications of Hazaras from Quetta.”

Seemingly the discrimination doesn't end here. If a lucky one gets the visa by chance, he or she would still have to pass through internal immigration channel. “They (immigration officers) bother our people on the airports. They have come to know that our people are fleeing and hence they take benefit of this weakness and bother our people a lot. They threat these passengers of offloading from the aeroplanes for the purpose of snatching bribes”.

“These are really challenging times”, says a grown up boy. “I tell you no one leaves happily. Who would like to leave one's job, parents, family members, friends, recognition in community, the land where one's forefathers were born and ancestors are buried, where one has spent the days of one's childhood. The fact of the matter is that there is no security here and they (government) don't allow us to leave this place either”.

Methodology

Due to the prevailing deteriorated law and order situation, coupled with declination of the concerned government officials to extend any cooperation towards addressing the issue of sectarian killing, the sights of incidence could not be visited by the researcher, and, as such the researcher remained tightly circumscribed in his official and private meetings. Accordingly this study relies on face to face interviews with Hazara Shia Community intellectuals, victims of human rights abuses and aggrieved family members of the victims.

These accounts have been further corroborated by other independent sources. Names of victims, sources, witnesses, and survivors have been withheld.

Underlying Discrimination

“The events since March 2004ⁱⁱ highlight the severe restrictions on freedom of religion for Hazara Shia Community. After the Ashura incident the government tried its best to limit the Ashura procession and other shia religious festivals”. “The repeated target killings of Shias in general and, of Hazarabs in particular, are colossal and becoming constant with the march of time. There seems to be no end to this mission/agenda which has not only taken valuable lives of common people but has deprived Hazarabs of able specialists in the field of medicine, education, litigation and enforcement of law and order, as well. The gap which may take years ahead, perhaps, to fill in”, exclaimed a notable in deep grief.

“Such hatred was not pronounced once, even if it existed in past” but “you will now notice that under the government nose hated speeches against Hazara Shias are delivered on Friday sermons and city walls are chalked with hate slogans declaring them Kafirs (infidels). Government officers treat us as persons of dubious faith, and hence, as second rate

citizens" complains an activist. Late Mowlana Azam Tariq, member National Assembly, in 1998 declared the Shias as Kafirs (Infidels). "The force of such religious pronouncements, and their consequences for denying Shia their religious freedom, can be seen in the actions" stated a local education officer. "Shias are not allowed to teach respective religion or history in schools. Among the episodes of discrimination and harassment against Shia students reported in schools, college, and universities in 2006 Sunni teachers in schools in Quetta called Shia students "unbelievers" on several occasions (students recorded such episodes on their cell phones)."

"Members of Hazara Shia community face discrimination in the judiciary too, ranging from denial of access to justice to arbitrary arrests and discriminatory verdicts. In case of Walayat Hussain Advocate last year (2009) when he was killed his family tried to meet chief justice, but they were denied of this genuine desire. No suo moto action has been taken by any court or any judge of the court in this respect".

"I have reasons to believe that something heinous is going on in the echelons of power. How is it possible that the most wanted terrorists and killers like Dawoodi Badini and Usman Saifullah Kurd escape from a cell in the Anti-Terrorist Force's (ATF) highest security zone? Attacks during the recent past in which Hazaras have been targeted could be linked to this escape"¹ thinks a human rights activist from Hazara community. He further says "State discrimination against the Shia stems from the official Hanifi and Wahhabi creeds and is manifested in the state's religiously infused education system, state sponsorship of official religious worship, and a judiciary which draws its legitimacy from Sunni-Wahhabism. It is this umbrella of religiously legitimized or religion-infused state institutions under which prominent Islamic thinkers and clerics, often state officials, continue to propagate incitement to hostility against the Shia. The Saudi government tolerates such speech, sometimes even by silencing its critics. There are two weekly news papers Zarb-e- Momin and Zarb-e- Haq which openly declare Shias as Kafirs (infidels) and provoke non-shias towards violence, but government has turned its back".

Although International lawⁱⁱⁱ and United Nations declarations^{iv} prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion and protect the rights of religious and other minorities but there is a luke warm attitude in this regard by the authorities".

The first incident of the sectarian target killing began in 1999 in which the Hazara notable Sardar Nesar was gunned down, but luckily he was saved and sustained injuries.

"Media coverage remains limited in respect of reporting such gruesome incidents for the viewers and readers. Both electronic and print media do not give the beyond imagination sufferings of victimised families which may become newsworthy in order to sensitize the government and its law enforcers about their responsibilities to bring happenings of such terror acts to stand still, besides creating awareness as to how the victimized families suffer adversely after deaths of their loved ones".

¹ 18 January, 2008, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi's most wanted terrorists Dawoodi Badini and Usman Saifullah Kurd escaped from a cell in the Anti-Terrorist Force's (ATF) highest security zone.

One such inhuman and unimaginable incident took place on the evening of February 24, 2009 near Sariab Road and Balochistan University in Quetta city. Gulab Shah along with his six sons after closing their welding shop sat in their vehicle to return their home; hitherto, armed men opened indiscriminate firing at vehicle outside their shop killing father and his five sons on the spot. The only survivor was Syed Jalil Shah, one son who sustained injuries.

He looked extremely grieved during interview. He told that bodies of his father and five brothers were shifted to civil Hospital Quetta by Frontier Corps personnel where after reaching the hospital their cell phones, money and other valuables were found to be stolen.

When asked whether he or his family members received life threat his answer was in negation. Looked deeply distressed and painful, Jalil said that his family members had been living for the last 30 years on Sariab Road in an environment of peace and brotherhood. They shifted from Sariab Road three years ago after terror attack on Ashura procession on March 2, 2004 in Quetta. Citing the reason for shifting from Sariab Road, he said that Shias were receiving life threatening letters to leave Sariab Road after Ashura tragedy. Hatred developed in Sariab area following the Ashura mayhem as few houses of Shias had also been set ablaze by religious extremists in Sariab area. "No government representative ever visited hospital to offer condolence or compensation", he said. "My life is ruined; nothing has been left in our family... We were targeted simply because we are Shias".

Sitting by the side of Jalil, old widow of Gulab Shah and mother of five sons who all fell victims of unforgivable and terrible tragedy of simultaneous target killings, tears rolling down her wrinkled cheeks shared the gloomy experience "I do not have anything in my life now, I have lost my all precious assets including my husband and five young sons, two of them recently married. I have become a live corpse. I am passing through ordeal".

The widow, the mother of the victims, who could not control her tears disclosed that she had received a letter saying '*Jihad Mobarak*' (congratulation on Holy war) to us, and deaths to you people. She boldly said she was no more afraid of death.

Finally, Jalil who had witnessed merciless killings of his father and five brothers said that he had decided to sell his shop—which meant permanent economic murder of the victimized family.

"I foresee a bloody clash between the communities of this area (Balochistan) in near future. All the political parties are representing different ethnic groups and deplorably religio-political parties are in power and unfortunately their words do not match their deeds. Relations are aggravating especially amongst different ethnic groups and sects in the province", suggests a human rights activist. "I must say the political solution of our issue seems a far reality", expresses a political worker. "Our youth is educated but doesn't seem interested in politics much. Hazara Democratic Party (HDP) is the only political body we have. However there are some spiritual or religious entities being followed by some youth, too".

"The target killings are product of the failure of policies of the state as successive governments played their unreasonable role during the last three decades in the region. The unjustifiable interference of the last governments in Afghanistan gave birth to numerous problems including Kalashnikov, Jihadi and drug culture in Pakistan". "The terrorists aimed at sabotage peace and order, and create ethnic and sectarian hatreds among the people

belonging to Hazara, Baloch or Pashtoons and the settlers who have been living here peacefully for centuries”, expresses the same political worker.

“People were very optimistic and had great expectations of the incumbent governments formed after the February 18, 2008 elections, in Balochistan. Unfortunately, the expectations of the people proved only mirage when the government failed to maintain the mandate of peace and order in the provincial capital. As result of poor governance, Hazaras are falling repeatedly victims of target killings, robbery, kidnapping for ransoms and other acts of crimes in Quetta”.

“We are citizens of Pakistan. The constitution of Pakistan guarantees protection to life and property of its citizens in the country. When the law enforcement agencies’ personnel fail to fulfil their responsibilities, then it becomes the role of the judiciary to take notice. People and civil society of Hazara tribe contributed in the struggle of lawyers’ movement which led to the restoration of sacked judges of superior courts in the country. Now, everyone believes that judiciary is independent. Then, the superior judiciaries including the Balochistan High and the Apex Courts should take suo moto notice of target killings of Hazaras in Quetta. Their judges should summon the top officials of law enforcers and ask them as to why they have failed to protect life and property of Hazara citizens as enunciated by the constitution. We welcome the judiciaries if they take suo moto notice of the assassination of Shaheed Hussain Ali Yousafi and murders of other Hazaras as the High Court took notice of murders of three Baloch nationalist leaders recently. We hope that the superior judiciaries will also take notice of targeting peaceful Hazara citizens. We also hope that the judiciaries will bring to justice those involved behind brutal target killings of Hazaras in Quetta”.

Hazara Qawmi Jirga (HQJ) is a tribal body which plays significant role in resolving tribal issues and disputes among Hazara tribe in Quetta. Accordingly, the target killings of Hazara, the HQJ raised the issue on tribal level. The HQJ and other tribal elders of Hazara tribe have time and again brought the matter to the notice of the Balochistan Chief Minister, Governor, Prime Minister and the President. “The authorities are not serious to bring to justice those involved behind acts of terror against Hazaras. Had some terrorists been brought to justice then these would have become precedence for others to keep end acts of terrorism. I hold the government responsible for growing acts of terror and target killings in Quetta”, states a representative of HQJ.

A famous educationist is of the view that “government should set up a commission under social welfare department for taking initiatives for economic and social supports of such families who are victimized of nasty target killings or other terrorism acts”. He suggested that the government should legislate to provide compensations to victimized families whose breadwinning members fall victims of terror acts.

“We need to establish a commission under agencies such as (the) Human Rights Commission, Community leaders, Civil Society Members and High Court Representatives and with participation from the Bureau of Investigation and Public Prosecutions, to investigate the continued sectarian target killings of our community.... It should prosecute those suspected to be involved in the killings and encouraging others towards religious bigotry and hatred against the Hazara Shia Community. The commission should hear eyewitnesses to the events and make its findings public, and, be vested with the power to order compensation to those who suffered from sectarian target killing”, suggests a young human rights activist.

“Looking around the wide spread discrimination I would urge that some unbiased body be established to serve as a watchdog on the situation. Such a body should be empowered to protect freedom of worship for the Shia, according to their belief specially in areas with a high Shia population, including freedom in the building and upkeep of mosques and *Imam Barghs*, printing, importing, and distribution of religious material, and the holding of public religious celebrations”, emphasized another young scholar.

“In my view the root cause lies deep in the very foundation of the education system. We need to promote neutral education system which does not support the religious differences but promotes pluralism and acceptance” was the idea of a student, however another one contradicted it and stated, “the education system needs to protect the freedom for parents to ensure their children receive religious education in accordance with their beliefs, and for children to choose and practice their own religion. This should include a right at school to abstain from or opt out of the religious teachings that are contrary to their beliefs, and, wherever possible (and at a minimum in all areas where Shia form a significant percentage of the population), to receive religious education according to Shia beliefs on par with Sunnis. Exercise of that right should entail allowing Shia to teach religion in schools”.

Addressing the absence of a critical mass of Hazaras in employment was suggested as another solution. “Our constitution needs to ensure equity and equality in employment and access to institutions of higher learning, including in the security services, high ministerial positions, local, provincial and the Shura Council, and military academies”.

“Ensure equal access to justice, including by mandating that all persons are equal before the law regardless of their sectarian identity, and that qualified Shia jurists can work as judges in regular courts, especially in areas with thick Shia population”.

A commission is direly needed to carry forward interfaith initiative organized by the different groups, to explore ways to share space for religious worship in Quetta and other areas of the province among adherents of different Muslim creeds while respecting Province's dominant religious practices. The commission should pay special attention to Friday prayers sermons to monitor hate speeches which can provoke people.

Government should engage its high religious officials, such as the office of the mufti, the Council for Senior Religious Scholars, and the Ministry for Islamic Affairs, Preaching, and Religious Guidance to rebut religious discrepancy.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Aushora	The 10th day of Muharram in the Islamic calendar when martyrdom of Imam Hussain, the grand son of the Holy Prophet, is celebrated
Hazara Shia	The ethnic minority group belongs to Mongolian race who follows the Shia Islamic faith
HDP	Hazra Democratic Party
Imam Bargah	The house of the <i>Imam</i> (religious leader)

Taliban/AI- Quaida	An extremist movement
Lashaker-e-Jangvi	A banned extremist group
Sipah-e-Sahaba	A banned extremist group
Nawab	Lord
Mufti Kafir	The grand religious scholar who writes religious decrees Infidels
Zarb-e- Momin	Islamic Weekly news papers
Zarb-e- Haiq	Islamic Weekly news papers
Hanafi	Follower of Imam Muhammad Abu Hanifa
Wahhabi	Followers of Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab

Footnotes

ⁱ The Hazara are a Hazaragi (a dialect of the Persian language) speaking ethnic group who lives in Balochistan province of Pakistan (especially in the city of Quetta). They are overwhelmingly Shia Muslims. Their ancestors came from the central region of Afghanistan where they still comprise of the third largest religious ethnic groupⁱ. Hazaras also reside in large numbers in Iran, mainly as refugees.

They hold high positions in the government of Balochistan, the federal government, and the Police force. In Pakistan, Hazaras are mostly in business and have high education levels. They are integrated into the local social dynamics of the respective areas they have settled into and operated several successful trades and business. Hazaras are also politically active in Quetta and have a political party known as the Hazara Democratic Party. Other notable Hazara settlements can be found in Karachi, Lahore and more recently in Multan.[29] The current Minister of Quality Education & Clean Drinking Water in Balochistan is a Hazara and representation in the National Assembly, as well. The most notable Hazara in Pakistan was General Musa Khan, who served as Commander in Chief of the Pakistan Army between the period 1958 to 1966.

ⁱⁱ The inception of ongoing sectarian target killings of the minority Hazrah Shia community in Quetta, Balochistan took place in the year 1999 when Hazarah notable, former provincial minister, Sardar Nesar was gunned down. Luckily he sustained injuries and escaped death. Subsequently a row of merciless target killing of innocent Hazarah people commenced. The second tragic incident took place at Poodgili Chowk, en-route Hazarah Town when a vehicle was ambushed and ten Hazarah people travelling therein fell victim of target killing mission of the terrorists. This was followed by gunning down of 12 Hazarah police cadets coming in a vehicle from the Police Training School on the Sariab Road on June 8, 2003 by terrorists.

In continuation again Hazarachs became victims of first suicide attack when terrorists blew themselves after indiscriminate firing in Friday congregational prayer at Imam Bargah Kalan (the Central Mosque where Shias gather to offer prayers). On March 2, 2004 the mourners procession of Ashura (the tenth of Islamic calendar month) fell victim of brutal terror when suicide bombers blew themselves up after fierce firing at the innocent mourners.

On January 26, 2009, Hussain Ali Yousafi, Chairman of the Hazara Democratic Party who was known as a nationalist and secular liberal leader against religious fanaticism and extremism who promoted religious and communal harmony among the people in the region, was brutally assassinated.

This sad incident was followed by target killing of Wilayat Hussain Advocate. On March 1, 2009, in row of gruesome target killings, Haji Ghulam Sakhi and his young son Ali Asghar also became victims of target killing on Zarghoon Road, at a five minutes walking distance from Governor's House and Chief Minister's Secretariat, the high security zone in Quetta. Both were sitting in their shop when 2 motorcyclists arrived and sprayed them with volley of bullets.

On March 24, 2009, Gulab Shah Hazarah along with his five sons was gunned down by armed men.

iii The most important international human rights treaties that spell out the meaning and extent of these prohibitions and protections include the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the Convention against Discrimination in Education, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

These are the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981), the UNGA Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities (1993), and the UNESCO Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice (1978).

The 1978 UNESCO declaration declares "[a]ny distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, ethnic or national origin or religious intolerance motivated by racist considerations" to be incompatible with human rights. The Convention against Discrimination in Education, in article 1, also includes religious factors among prohibited discrimination. The UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief declares that "discrimination between human beings on the grounds of religion or belief constitutes an affront to human dignity."

The prohibition against discrimination applies to the enjoyment of all fundamental rights, including the rights to development, work, and access to justice. States are bound to guarantee equal access for everyone to "[e]conomic, social and cultural rights, in particular: (i) The rights to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work, to protection against unemployment, to equal pay for equal work, [and] to just and favourable remuneration."

Equally, law enforcement and judicial officials must not discriminate between persons on the basis of their ethnic origin, and the state is bound to guarantee "the right to equal treatment before the tribunals and all other organs administering justice; [and the] right to

security of person and protection by the State against violence or bodily harm, whether inflicted by government officials or by any individual group or institution."

The prohibition against racist laws, policies, and acts obliges states to take preventive and remedial action against racism. According to the UNGA's 1993 declaration, states are obliged to protect minorities, such as the Shia, by taking "measures to create favourable conditions to enable persons belonging to minorities to express their characteristics and to develop their culture, language, religion, traditions and customs."

The 1993 declaration also says that states must protect the identity of minorities "within their respective territories" by encouraging "conditions for the promotion of that identity" and measures allowing minority members to "participate fully in the economic progress and development in their country. The Convention on the Rights of the Child specifically requires the education of a child to be directed to the "development of ... his or her own cultural identity, language and values" and gives a child of a religious minority the right "to enjoy his or her own culture, [and] to profess and practise his or her own religion. The 1981 UNGA declaration states that, in education, a child "shall not be compelled to receive teaching on religion or belief against the wishes of his parents."

In the 1981 UNGA declaration, the "freedom to have a religion ... and freedom ... to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching" is protected, and "coercion which would impair [t]his freedom" is prohibited. More specifically, assembly for worship, observance of religious holidays, maintaining and erecting buildings for worship, acquiring items for use in religious rituals, religious teaching and appointment of religious leaders, fundraising for religion, and communication with coreligionists are activities that fall within the protection of freedom of religion.

The state's obligations go beyond not preventing religious minorities from exercising their rights. The ICERD is clear that states must not "undertake to sponsor, defend or support racial discrimination by any persons or organizations," and states must "condemn all propaganda and all organizations which are based on ideas or theories of superiority of one race or group of persons of one colour or one ethnic origin." The UNGA's states must especially "not permit public authorities or public institutions, national or local, to promote or incite racial discrimination," and prosecute any individual who does so. Furthermore, states should "encourage, where appropriate, integrationist multiracial organizations and movements," and "establish and maintain appropriate charitable or humanitarian institutions."

International law not only protects the identity of minorities and prohibits discrimination, but guarantees the rights of minorities to actively participate in the public and cultural life of society, including by "maintain[ing] their own associations." Minorities have "the right to participate effectively in decisions on the national and, where appropriate, regional level concerning the minority."