

Advocacy and Action: The OIC's Role in Safeguarding Muslim Minorities

Hassna Al-Ghamdi¹ 

*Jeddah University
Saudi Arabia*

Abstract: This article examines the crucial role of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in protecting the rights of Muslim minorities worldwide, particularly in Europe and Asia. The OIC's efficacy in safeguarding minority Muslims in non-member states has been a topic of both commendation and critique, despite its extensive authority. The examination commences by scrutinizing the fundamental aims of the OIC and the legal frameworks it utilizes to interfere in matters that impact Muslims globally. The article evaluates the OIC's reactions to instances of discrimination and violence against Muslims in Europe, including the ongoing difficulties faced by Muslim communities in France and Germany, as well as the legal and social barriers encountered by Muslims in Myanmar and China in Asia. This assessment is based on in-depth case studies. These incidents demonstrate the intricate nature of the OIC's engagement, encompassing diplomatic conversations, issuing condemnations, and initiating and supporting legal measures on international forums. Moreover, the article rigorously assesses the influence of OIC's actions in these locations, examining the results and the wider geopolitical consequences. The text explores the limitations encountered by the OIC, such as the political dynamics inside its member states and the impact of major global powers. The conclusion consolidates these observations to assert that although the OIC has achieved noteworthy progress in promoting the rights of Muslim minorities, there are still substantial obstacles that need to be addressed.

Keywords: Muslim minorities, OIC, Europe, Asia, Islam, Islamophobia

¹ Hassna Al-Ghamdi is an Associate Prof of modern history at Jeddah University. Her main researches focus on issues of Muslim World and the Modern History of Saudi Arabia, and she has a number of books and articles on related topics. Contact E-mail: hassna_ghamdi@hotmail.com

OIC Position in the issue of Muslim Minorities

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is the second-largest intergovernmental organization in the world, behind the United Nations, in terms of membership. It includes 57 nations across Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Established in 1969, the OIC has been a powerful champion for more than 500 million Muslims living in countries that are not members of the organization. The OIC has consistently and tirelessly addressed the issues and objectives of these individuals (OIC 2024).

The OIC has implemented several resolutions to strongly support Muslim communities in non-member states, recognizing their importance as an integral part of the global Muslim *Ummah*. These resolutions are based on a strong charter that prioritizes the defense of the rights, dignity, and cultural and religious identities of these communities (OIC 1972). The reference is to the OIC Charter of 2021. The organization has implemented a robust institutional framework specifically designed to advocate for the challenges faced by these communities, guaranteeing their complete ability to exercise their rights.

The policy of the OIC towards Muslim communities is both pragmatic and firmly based on principles, rigorously adhering to non-interference in the domestic affairs of the countries where these communities are located. It upholds the autonomy, self-governance, cohesion, and geographical boundaries of these countries. However, the OIC is dedicated to upholding open channels of contact with these populations, always with the approval and coordination of, or complete transparency with, the respective governments. The organization's continuous endeavors are focused on promoting peaceful settlements to conflicts and tackling contentious matters, with the ultimate goal of establishing an environment conducive to the growth and active participation of Muslim community members in order to enhance the stability, progress, and prosperity of their respective nations (OIC 2020).

While certain Muslims enjoy complete citizenship and are entitled to their individual national constitutions and laws, others encounter significant social and economic prejudice. This includes difficulties in finding job and gaining access to higher education, as well as more serious violations of civil and human rights. Certain regions necessitate economic assistance and humanitarian support in the aftermath of natural calamities (HRW Team 2022).

There is a considerable variation in the political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of Muslim communities. They face and are affected by a range of challenges, such as the emergence of conflicts, political instability, increasing xenophobia, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim attitudes, deep-rooted economic inequalities, and the cultural hegemony of dominant social groups (PRC Team 2011).

In non-OIC member states, Muslim populations have shown impressive resilience and ability to adapt. They have effectively assimilated, upheld indigenous legislation, and made significant contributions to the social advancement and economic success of their host nations. Muslims in certain states have attained key positions in administration and parliament, and have achieved notable success in the fields of economy, science, and intellect (UNDP 2022).

From the beginning, the OIC has consistently dedicated itself to safeguarding the rights of Muslims in countries that are not members of the organization. It stands in unity, especially with those who are being persecuted. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has utilized its diverse organs and organizations, such as the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the Islamic Solidarity Fund (ISF), to significantly contribute to improving the economic and social circumstances of these communities. This has been achieved through the provision of financial support for development projects and humanitarian assistance (IsDB Team 2020).

Overview of Muslim Minorities around the World

The worldwide Muslim population exhibits significant diversity, encompassing a wide range of geographical areas, cultural backgrounds, and socio-political contexts. In 2020, Muslims accounted for around 24.1% of the global population, which is roughly 1.9 billion individuals. This makes Islam the second most prevalent religion worldwide, following Christianity (PRC Team 2011). Although numerous countries have a majority of Muslim inhabitants, there are also substantial Muslim communities in different regions of the world. These marginalized groups play key roles in the social, economic, and political domains of their various nations, yet frequently encounter distinct obstacles and prejudice.

India and China have significant Muslim populations in Asia. India is home to the world's third-largest Muslim community, consisting of more than 204 million individuals. This accounts for around 14.9% of the country's overall population (PC Team 2011). Muslims in India encounter numerous obstacles, such as socioeconomic inequalities and sectarian violence, despite their considerable population. The Hui and Uighur communities are the predominant Muslim groups in China, with substantial populations residing in the Xinjiang area. The Chinese government has subjected the Uighur Muslims to rigorous examination and oppressive actions, such as widespread detentions and surveillance, which are supposedly intended to combat extremism and separatism (HRW Team 2021).

Europe is home to a significant Muslim minority, which is estimated to be roughly 44 million individuals or approximately 6% of the overall population (PRC Team 2011). France, Germany, and the United Kingdom have the highest populations. The Muslim population in Europe is composed of individuals from many ethnic

backgrounds, such as South Asians, Turks, Arabs, and Africans. This diversity is a result of the colonial histories and labor movement patterns that occurred during the 20th century. European Muslims have successfully managed intricate identity dilemmas, effectively reconciling their Islamic beliefs with their national allegiances. The issues of integration, prejudice, and Islamophobia continue to be relevant, with different levels of social acceptance in different nations.

The Muslim communities in the United States and Canada have been expanding in North America, mostly as a result of immigration and rising birth rates among Muslims. The projected size of the Muslim population in the United States is approximately 3.45 million, which accounts for 1.1% of the overall population (Lipka 2017). The Canadian Muslim community constitutes approximately 3.2% of the total population of the country, and it is projected to increase in the future (SC Team 2011). These communities exhibit remarkable diversity, encompassing a wide range of the worldwide Muslim diaspora. Although these communities have generally achieved high levels of education and economic integration, they have been impacted by concerns such as prejudice, state surveillance, and hate crimes, especially after the events of 9/11.

Despite their minority status in many locations, Muslim communities in Africa make substantial contributions to the socio-economic and cultural fabric of their country. In countries such as Ethiopia, where Muslims constitute 34% of the population, and in South Africa, where they account for approximately 1.9%, these groups are extensively assimilated into the social structure (CIA Team 2022). Frequently situated in vital economic centers or along ancient trade routes, such as in Kenya and Ghana, Muslim minorities play crucial roles in commerce and industry. Nevertheless, there are also significant challenges that persist, such as economic inequalities, social marginalization, and occasionally, religious animosities and disputes. Muslim communities in places such as the Central African Republic have experienced substantial violence and forced migration. It is imperative to prioritize the protection of the rights and successful inclusion of Muslim minority in order to promote peace and progress on the continent, while simultaneously tackling these underlying structural problems (CIA Team 2022).

The Muslim population in Latin America and the Caribbean is very small, but it is seeing growth as a result of recent immigration. The Muslim populations in countries such as Brazil and Argentina consist mainly of individuals who are descendants of Lebanese and Syrian origin. The Muslim population in the region is quite small compared to global statistics, with estimates indicating approximately one million Muslims (PRC Team 2009).

Muslim Minorities in Europe

Muslims have a significant impact on the population and social structures of European countries, as a result of multiple waves of immigration motivated by diverse factors. They have made substantial contributions to the advancement and cultural enrichment of Europe, showcasing Islam as a faith characterized by tolerance and respect (Lipka 2017). However, in the last twenty years, the public opinion of Muslims has worsened due to a rise in unfavorable stereotypes, Islamophobia, and racial discrimination. These issues are often made worse by biased media portrayals and the political goals of xenophobic organizations (Allen 2016).

Young Muslims encounter significant barriers to upward social mobility, which are further exacerbated by regular instances of marginalization and prejudice. This systematic inequality results in emotions of hopelessness and isolation among these individuals. Statistically, Muslims in Europe face a disproportionate burden of socio-economic disadvantages, including inadequate housing, worse educational achievements, and elevated unemployment rates in comparison to their non-Muslim peers (ESE Team 2023). Additionally, they have a higher probability of being employed in industries that need less specialized skills and offer lower wages (EUAFR Team 2017).

The legal acknowledgment and position of Islam differ greatly throughout European nations, shaped by the unique interactions between the state and religion that exist in each country. Several countries have implemented legislation to govern certain parts of religious practices, such as the management of mosques, halal slaughter, and the public exhibition of religious symbols (Al-Shahi 2013). In contrast, it is noteworthy that in many countries, Islam is not officially acknowledged. However, this lack of recognition typically does not hinder the observance of Islamic rituals or diminish the rights of Muslims in those areas (Sinno 2008, 45).

The task of comprehending the complete scope of these problems with precision is made more intricate by the unwillingness or official stance of several European nations to gather data pertaining to religious identification (OSF Team 2009). The absence of comprehensive data impedes the capacity to develop focused and efficient policy initiatives that could tackle the particular demands and difficulties encountered by the Muslim population throughout Europe.

The OIC's policy framework has been proposed to provide support to Muslim populations in Europe. It aims to promote discussion, improve integration, and preserve cultural and religious identities, while also preserving the sovereignty of European nations (OIC Team 2011). Nevertheless, given the rising issues of Islamophobia, hate speech, and institutional discrimination against Muslims in Europe, it is crucial to critically assess the effectiveness and impact of the OIC's actions.

The Contact Group on Muslims in Europe was founded by the OIC during the 13th Islamic Summit Conference in Istanbul, Turkey in 2016. Its purpose is to serve

as a collaborative platform between civil society and government organizations, with the aim of strategizing against bigotry and promoting socio-economic integration (OIC Team 2016). Although the group claims to enhance the influence of Muslims, especially in politics and society, the tangible results of these gatherings, such as the 2019 sessions in New York, are poorly defined and lack substantial evidence of any meaningful impact or significant improvements in the everyday lives of European Muslims (Şerif Bahçecik 2013)

The OIC's reaction to the increase in Islamophobia and the electoral triumphs of right-wing populism in Europe appears to be more responsive than constructive. Although these political groups frequently manipulate anti-Muslim sentiments for electoral gains, the techniques employed by the OIC often seem to be simple restatements of their intentions rather than effective and substantial efforts to address the issue (Şerif Bahçecik 2013). This prompts inquiries on the OIC's capability and readiness to successfully address these issues at their core, rather than relying on high-level discussions that often fail to resonate with the impacted communities on the ground.

In addition, the political consultation process with the European Union, which involved discussions in Brussels in March 2019 and virtual sessions in July 2020, underscores an ongoing dedication to addressing religious prejudice (OIC Team 2020). However, the concrete results of these consultations, especially in terms of their impact on policy changes or enhancing the firsthand experiences of Muslim communities, are not easily observable or measured.

The OIC's bilateral interactions, including those with the Russian Federation, highlight a diplomatic strategy that emphasizes the promotion of moderate Islam and the prevention of extremism. Nevertheless, the extent to which these high-level talks affect the lives of ordinary Muslims, particularly those who experience daily biases, is still a subject of debate (V.Talbot, 2019)

Although the OIC's endeavors are well-meaning and carry symbolic significance, there is a noticeable disparity between their diplomatic efforts and the actual circumstances faced by Muslims in Europe. The organization should readjust its methods to actively participate in both governmental and international discussions, while also achieving tangible and significant results that effectively promote the rights and integration of Muslims in European cultures.

Muslim Minorities in Asia-Pacific Region

The Asia-Pacific area is home to almost 62 percent of the worldwide Muslim population, whereas the Middle East and North Africa account for only 20 percent (PRC Team 2011). Significantly, more than 300 million Muslims, or for one-fifth of the whole Muslim population, reside in nations where Islam is not the prevailing faith

(PRC Team 2011). The nations with the highest Muslim populations are Indonesia (203 million), Pakistan (174 million), India (171 million), Bangladesh (145 million), Iran (74 million), and Turkey (74 million). These six nations comprise 85 percent of Asia's Muslim population and 53 percent of the worldwide Muslim population (PRC Team 2011). From a geographical perspective, approximately 50 percent of Muslims in Asia are located in South Asia, while the remaining population is almost equally distributed between Southeast Asia (26 percent) and Central and Western Asia (24 percent) (PRC Team 2011). Asia's Muslim population is disproportionately small in the Pacific region, accounting for less than 1 percent.

Due to the large number of Muslims across Asia and the unique difficulties experienced by these groups, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has made these issues a top priority and closely observed their situations. The OIC has taken significant measures to protect their rights and enhance their influence within their societies. Moreover, it has contributed to the facilitation of peaceful resolutions for conflicts and controversial matters. This engagement is carried out with a strict commitment to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of the nations involved, utilizing direct and constructive discussion with their governments (OIC Team 2023). This approach is in accordance with the mandates established by the Islamic Summit Conference and the Council of Foreign Ministers (OIC Team 2023), ensuring that actions are in line with globally accepted standards and the common desires of member nations.

Myanmar

Since 2012, the level of ethnic and religious tensions in Myanmar has increased, making it challenging to determine the precise number of Muslims residing in the nation. Approximations indicate that there are approximately 2.2 million individuals who identify as Muslims, making up roughly 4% of the total population. This figure includes over 1 million Rohingya people residing in Rakhine State (OHCHR Team 2018). The Rohingya, classified by the United Nations as one of the most oppressed populations worldwide, have endured decades of prejudice and brutality. In 2012, the UN classified the atrocities carried out by Myanmar's military and security forces as "ethnic cleansing," indicating a heightened severity of the situation (OHCHR Team 2018).

The situation of the Rohingya deteriorated considerably following the 2017 military campaign, resulting in over 1.1 million Rohingyas seeking refuge in Bangladesh and other neighboring nations out of apprehension for additional assaults (HRW Team 2017). The individuals who remain are subjected to continuous and severe oppression, violence, exclusion from political participation, and limitations on their liberties, such as limited access to education, healthcare, and means of earning a

living (HRW Team 2017).

The International Criminal Court launched an inquiry in November 2019 in response to the reported crimes committed against the Rohingya people. Simultaneously, Gambia initiated legal proceedings against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), alleging that Myanmar violated the 1948 Genocide Convention (Al Jazeera Team 2019).

The United Nations has seen a lack of advancement in resolving the Rohingya crisis and has highlighted Myanmar's continuous accountability for the worsening state of affairs. In September 2019, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar emphasized that Myanmar had not taken any steps to deconstruct the systematic violence and persecution directed at the Rohingya (OHCHR Team 2019). Furthermore, an attempt to repatriate the Rohingya community in August 2019 was unsuccessful since they refused to return without assurances regarding their safety and rights as citizens. This highlights their ongoing concern about human rights violations (OHCHR Team 2019).

The OIC has made it a top priority to solve the dire situation of the Rohingya, who have experienced significant hardship, persecution, and injustice. The OIC has played a crucial role on the global stage, diligently striving to draw worldwide attention to the severe circumstances experienced by the Rohingya, arguing for fairness, and advocating for responsibility (OIC Team 2012). The OIC demonstrates its unwavering dedication through various activities that seek to advocate for the rights of the Rohingya on the global platform. The Islamic Summit and the Council of Foreign Ministers have issued crucial resolutions and calls to action, urging the Myanmar government to reinstate the fundamental rights of the Rohingya, including their full citizenship rights. The OIC has also supported initiatives to enable the voluntary, secure, respectful, and long-lasting repatriation of the Rohingya to their native land (OIC Team 2012). One important part of the OIC's efforts involves endorsing resolutions in favor of the Rohingya at both the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. In addition, the OIC has proactively participated in one-on-one conversations with global allies such as the European Union, Russia, China, and the United States to raise awareness of the issue on the global stage (OIC Team 2012).

The OIC Contact Group on Rohingya, in conjunction with the unwavering endeavors of the OIC Secretary General and his Special Envoy, have played a pivotal role in spearheading endeavors to mitigate the plight of the Rohingya community, both as internally displaced individuals and as refugees, particularly in Bangladesh. The OIC created the Ad Hoc Ministerial Committee on Accountability for Human Rights Violations against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. This committee promptly initiated legal action by filing a case with the International Court of Justice to ensure that those responsible be held accountable (OIC Team 2012).

Gambia, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), initiated a significant legal action against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice in The Hague in November 2019. The case accuses Myanmar of doing acts that violate the 1948 Genocide Convention. On January 23, 2020, the Court made a significant decision by issuing a preliminary verdict. This ruling requires Myanmar to take action to stop any more crimes of genocide against the Rohingya people and to preserve evidence relating to the case (Cour International de Justice 2020). This ruling represented a notable milestone in the ongoing endeavors of the OIC to ensure justice for the Rohingya population.

China

China's population includes around 24 million Muslims, accounting for approximately 1.6 percent of the entire population. Nevertheless, the most significant levels of these substances are located in the northwestern areas of Xinjiang, Gansu, and Ningxia, along with Yunnan Province in the southwest and Henan Province in central China. Out of these groups, the Hui ethnic group stands out as the main Muslim community, with an estimated population of 10.6 million. They are mainly concentrated in the Ningxia autonomous area in western China (CSP Team 2020).

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, which is one of China's five autonomous regions specifically designated for national minorities, has a population of 23 million people from different ethnic backgrounds. The Muslim population in this region is a substantial majority, representing 60% of the total population, which encompasses about 13 million Uyghurs (USDoS Team 2021). The region is distinguished for its significant Islamic infrastructure, consisting of roughly 24,000 mosques, with an average of one mosque for every 530 Muslims. In addition, the region is home to 10 schools that specialize in Islamic sciences and more than one hundred religious groups, highlighting a dynamic community that is strongly connected to its religious and cultural heritage (Kim 2023).

The OIC has been addressing the intricate geopolitical situation with the Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, China. The OIC faces a delicate diplomatic challenge regarding the Uyghur Muslims, who have been under intense international scrutiny due to allegations of human rights violations by the Chinese government. The OIC adheres to non-interference principles but also aims to protect the rights and honor of Muslims globally.

The OIC's approach to the matter of Uyghur Muslims can be described as careful and developing, demonstrating the organization's overall strategy of managing the interests of member states while upholding its dedication to Muslim populations worldwide. This approach is clearly demonstrated by its actions in recent years. In January 2019, a delegation from the OIC General Secretariat visited China to

firsthand assess the status of the Uyghur Muslims. This visit was a critical step in understanding the conditions they were facing (OIC Team 2020) (The reference is from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in 2019. This visit facilitated the establishment of a direct line of communication between the OIC and the Chinese government, enabling discussions on shared concerns and the exploration of potential collaborations between the Muslim world and China.

In December 2019, a delegation consisting of representatives from certain member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the General Secretariat visited China. This visit was arranged by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The purpose of this tour was to further the discussion on the status of Muslims in China and evaluate the conditions directly (OIC Team 2020) (The reference is from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in 2019. These encounters indicate a diplomatic strategy focused on promoting comprehension and collaboration rather than conflict.

Nevertheless, the initiatives of the OIC have elicited a variety of responses. Some critics contend that the organization has exercised excessive caution and has not exerted enough pressure on China in response to claims of human rights abuses against the Uyghur population (HRW Team 2020). On the other hand, some saw the OIC's involvement as a practical strategy to handle a sensitive matter, where engaging in direct conflict might potentially lead to the rupture of diplomatic relations with a formidable country such as China.

The tactic employed by OIC in relation to the Uyghur Muslims demonstrates a meticulous approach to diplomatic equilibrium. It strives to tackle the issues faced by the Uyghur population by actively engaging in discourse, all while carefully negotiating the intricate political consequences of aggressively challenging China. This approach highlights the difficulties that international organizations encounter when dealing with human rights while also considering the importance of respecting a country's sovereignty and the geopolitical interests of its members.

India

India's Muslim population, estimated at around 171 million based on the 2011 census, is the third highest globally, behind Indonesia and Pakistan. This community constitutes around 10% of the worldwide Muslim population. Muslims are the predominant population in territories such as Lakshadweep and Jammu and Kashmir, and they have substantial populations in other Indian states, including Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Bihar, among others (PC Team 2011).

In the past, Muslims have occupied significant roles in India's political arena, with three Muslims having served as Presidents—Zakir Husain, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, and A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. While no Muslim has ever served as Prime Minister, Mohammad Hidayatullah and Mohammad Hamid Ansari have held the positions of Vice President. In addition, a significant number of Muslims have held ministerial

positions in different Indian governments. India's cadre of famous business executives, artists, and thinkers includes a significant representation from the Muslim minority (Farooqui 2020).

The impact of Islam is clearly discernible in multiple aspects of Indian civilization, enhancing art, culture, languages, architecture, cuisine, and medicine. The presence of numerous mosques and historical sites around the country serves as evidence of the significant influence of Islamic civilization on Indian heritage (Rahman 1977). In spite of the Indian constitution's commitment to protecting freedom of thought and establishing a secular state that is free from religious discrimination, there has been a significant increase in animosity towards Muslims in recent years.

Ever since Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister of India in 2014, the condition of Muslims in the country has been more tense and difficult. The Modi administration, supported by its nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has faced allegations of creating an environment that may indirectly promote bigotry and violence towards Muslims through its policies and rhetoric (Roth 2020). One of the most momentous and contentious actions taken during Modi's tenure was the annulment of the special privileges granted to the primarily Muslim region of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019. This action not only deprived the territory of its self-governing status, but also intensified conflicts and resulted in considerable social and political turmoil in the area (UN Team 2019). Moreover, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) enacted in December 2019 has faced extensive condemnation due to its discriminatory treatment of Muslims. The act provides citizenship to migrants from nearby countries, save those who are Muslim, a provision that some critics contend violates India's secular constitution (UN Team 2019).

There is growing alarm over the safety and rights of Muslims in India due to reports of escalating violence and social ostracism directed towards them. Instances of lynching, riots, and deliberate acts of violence have been documented, with the Delhi riots in February 2020 being one of the most lethal (Neogi 2022). These occurrences exemplify an alarming pattern of increasing sectarian tensions during the current administration, raising significant concerns about the prospects of secularism and minority rights in India.

The OIC is closely monitoring the increasing difficulties faced by Muslims in India, who make up the biggest Muslim minority outside of the member states of the OIC. In recent years, the impact and actions of Hindu extremist organizations have grown stronger, causing significant worries inside the OIC. The campaigns undertaken by these groups against Muslims, including violence by Vigilante Cow Protection groups and efforts by hardline Hindu elements to push Muslims into converting to Hinduism, are particularly troubling. These conversion attempts frequently include educational initiatives designed to reduce the influence of Islamic rituals and revise historical accounts in order to denigrate other religions (OIC Team 2022).

The General Secretariat of the OIC published a statement in December 2019,

expressing profound worry over the changing scenario regarding citizenship rights in India and the ongoing Babri Mosque conflict. The OIC restated its demand for the safeguarding of Muslims, the security of Islamic holy places, and the rigorous observance of international laws and treaties that protect the rights of minorities without bias (OIC Team 2022).

The situation escalated to a critical juncture after the violent incidents in New Delhi in February 2020, where riots between different religious groups resulted in substantial loss of life and damage to Muslim-owned assets, including mosques. The General Secretariat of the OIC strongly denounced these acts of violence and urged Indian authorities to take resolute measures. The OIC stressed the importance of promptly capturing and prosecuting the individuals accountable for inciting and perpetrating acts of violence against Muslims. The Indian government was strongly advised to guarantee the safety and security of all Muslim citizens and safeguard Islamic sacred sites across the nation (OIC Team 2020).

The OIC's endeavors highlight its dedication to promoting and safeguarding the rights and well-being of Muslims worldwide. The OIC endeavors to promote a more inclusive and respectful environment for the Muslim community in India by consistently addressing these concerns on global platforms and actively collaborating with Indian authorities. These actions are implemented as part of the wider OIC strategy to support the ideals outlined in the United Nations Charter and related international agreements. The aim is to foster peace and harmonious coexistence among various religious and ethnic communities.

The OIC strategy for safeguarding the Muslim minority in India has frequently faced criticism for its delayed and diplomatically cautious nature. This depiction suggests that the OIC prefers to respond to episodes of violence or prejudice against Muslims in India only after they have gained substantial international notice. The OIC's engagement is reactive rather than proactive (Bhattacharjee 2022).

The OIC's response to the Delhi riots in February 2020, as well as the concerns related to the Citizenship Amendment Act, was considered to be tardy. Critics contend that this lack of significant international pressure on the Indian government enabled the situation to worsen (Bhattacharjee 2022). The delayed answers undermine the potential influence of OIC's initiatives, hence diminishing their efficacy in managing crises in real-time. In addition, the remarks made by the OIC often lack explicit requests and are expressed in broad terms, suggesting a hesitance to explicitly address the Indian government's policies that impact Muslims. The OIC's use of a gentle diplomatic strategy has prompted concerns regarding its dedication to safeguarding the rights of Muslims in nations that are not part of the organization. This is particularly relevant in situations where the OIC's position may be influenced by geopolitical considerations (Ali 2023). Furthermore, the OIC has failed to exhibit a coherent strategy or explicit long-term goals in its endeavors to tackle the difficulties encountered by Indian Muslims. Although the group often advocates

for the safeguarding of rights and safety, it conspicuously lacks tools to guarantee implementation or to oversee adherence to its requests (Ali 2023). The lack of a strong and practical plan greatly diminishes the legitimacy and influence of the OIC in its role as a defender of Muslim minorities worldwide.

These criticisms imply that in order for the OIC to be recognized as a powerful global Islamic authority, it must adopt a more proactive and strategic strategy. This approach should involve prompt reactions, specified requirements, and efficient methods for ensuring the rights and security of Muslims worldwide.

Philippines

Islam was first brought to the Philippines during the 3rd century AH by Arab traders. Following the arrival of Magellan, independent Islamic sultanates developed in Manila and the southern provinces, displaying strong resistance against the Spanish colonial armies. These battles were distinguished by their opposition to the imposition of Christianity, signifying the initiation of the region's historical defiance against foreign control (Angeles 2013).

Currently, Muslims constitute approximately 6 percent of the overall population in the Philippines, predominantly concentrated in the region of Mindanao and the adjacent Sulu Archipelago in the southern part of the nation. Mindanao is the second largest island in the country, following Luzon. Muslims have migrated to major urban centers like as Manila, Baguio, Dumaguete, Cagayan de Oro, Iligan, Cotabato, and Davao. Nevertheless, the presence of Muslims in government is severely limited: there is only one Muslim appointee in the Cabinet, out of a total of 301 members in the House of Representatives, just 13 are Muslims, and there are no Muslims in the Senate (Angeles 2013).

Substantial advancements have been achieved in the peace process in the southern Philippines, an area that has been plagued by prolonged disputes and military hostilities. The adoption of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) by the inhabitants of five provinces and three major cities in Western Mindanao in January 2019 was a significant milestone. This legislation enabled the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), which replaced the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). It also provided the Muslim-majority population in these areas with increased authority and jurisdiction (GOVPH Team 2019). President Rodrigo Duterte formally launched the BARMM on March 9, 2019, and appointed Al-Haj Murad Ebrahim as the interim Chief Minister (PHNA, 2019). This development signifies a substantial advancement towards self-governance and autonomy for the Muslim minority in the region.

In recent years, there has been notable progress in attaining peace and stability in the southern Philippines. A significant milestone occurred when the Philippine

Parliament officially approved the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), under the leadership of President Rodrigo Duterte's government. This significant legislation facilitated the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), marking the beginning of a new era of self-rule and government in the region (GOVPH Team 2018).

The OIC has played a pivotal and significant role in promoting enduring peace in a region plagued by conflicts. The OIC has played a significant role in achieving important milestones such as the signing of the Tripoli Agreement in 1976 and the Jakarta Accord in 1996. In addition, the OIC commenced the Tripartite Talks in 2007, which included the Philippine government, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and the OIC itself. These talks resulted in the formation of the Bangsamoro Coordinating Forum (OIC Team 2007). The OIC has persistently and energetically advocated for the advancement of the peace process in the southern Philippines. In January 2020, a technical delegation from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) visited the region to evaluate the most recent advancements and reassert its dedication to the peace project. This delegation participated in meaningful meetings with important players, such as the Prime Minister of BARMM, government officials from the Philippines, and leaders from both the MNLF and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), along with members of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (OIC Team, 2020). The OIC's contacts highlight its committed endeavors to assist and contribute to the establishment of lasting peace in the southern Philippines.

Thailand

Thailand has a significant Muslim community, making up approximately 5 percent of the country's total population, which is the second largest religious minority in the country. The "deep south" of Thailand, specifically the provinces of Narathiwat, Yala, and Pattani, is predominantly inhabited by followers of the Islamic faith, making Islam the main religion in this region. The regions neighboring the Malaysian border have a predominantly Malay Muslim population. However, Thailand's Muslim population also consists of descendants of immigrants from South Asia, China, Cambodia, and Indonesia, as well as ethnic Thais (Imtiyaz 2022).

The Central Islamic Council of Thailand, which was founded through a royal decree, offers authoritative advice on Islamic affairs to the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Interior. The Thai government provides financial assistance for the construction of mosques, facilitates sponsored pilgrimages to Hajj, and offers funding for Islamic educational institutions in support of the Muslim population. Thailand is home to numerous Islamic primary and secondary schools spread around the country. The Thai Ministry of Justice acknowledges Sharia as a coexisting legal framework for

Muslims, specifically in the southern provinces, mostly with family law issues like as inheritance (Imtiyaz 2022).

Since 2004 and 2005, the southern areas have been subjected to martial law and an emergency decree, respectively, which have bestowed upon military, police, and civilian authorities substantial powers. These rights encompass the ability to prolong pre-trial custody terms and carry out search operations without the need for judicial supervision (HRW, 2005). Granting the armed forces the authority to handle internal security matters has resulted in accusations of inequitable and excessive treatment of Muslims, intensifying tensions in these regions afflicted by conflict.

The OIC is now involved in overseeing the peace negotiations, which are being led by Malaysia, with the goal of settling issues involving the Pattani Muslim communities in Thailand. The OIC has consistently emphasized the need for these groups to work together towards a peaceful and long-lasting solution, in line with the instructions from the Islamic Summit and the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM), and by following the principles outlined in the joint statements between Thailand and the OIC in 2007 and 2012 (OIC Team 2012). The OIC upholds its dedication to promoting dialogue and peace by adhering to a demanding schedule of events and meetings. These exchanges entail the participation of Thai government officials and leaders from different Muslim groups, which demonstrates the OIC's proactive strategy towards peacebuilding. This engagement is a component of a wider strategy that was launched in early 2020 with the objective of stimulating peaceful discussions between the Thai government and the Pattani Muslim populations (OIC Team, 2021). The OIC's ongoing endeavors highlight its commitment to promoting a peaceful settlement in the region, showcasing its essential position as an intermediary in international conflict resolution.

Conclusion

The article has explored the OIC's involvement in protecting Muslim minorities in both Europe and Asia, with a focus on its diplomatic efforts, legal interventions, and the challenges it faces in non-member states. The OIC's ability to act as a voice for Muslim communities around the world is both a strength and a limitation, as the effectiveness of its actions largely depends on the political will of its member states, as well as the broader international geopolitical landscape.

One of the key findings of this article is the recognition that the OIC, despite being the largest intergovernmental organization representing Muslim interests, faces significant constraints in fully realizing its objectives. While it has the authority to issue condemnations, support legal initiatives, and engage in diplomatic discussions, the real impact of these efforts varies greatly depending on the specific context and the cooperation of both member and non-member states. For instance, in Europe,

where Muslim minorities in countries like France and Germany face increasing discrimination and social barriers, the OIC's interventions have been met with mixed results. Although the organization has raised awareness and pressured European governments to reconsider policies perceived as discriminatory, its efforts have been largely symbolic, with little tangible legal or social change for the affected communities.

Similarly, in Asia, the OIC's engagement with the situations in Myanmar and China presents a complex picture. In Myanmar, the Rohingya crisis has prompted the OIC to take a more proactive stance, supporting international legal actions against the government for its treatment of the Muslim minority. However, despite these efforts, the Rohingya continue to face significant human rights abuses, raising questions about the actual influence of the OIC in the international legal arena. In China, the treatment of Uyghur Muslims has also been a major concern, yet the OIC's response has been more restrained due to China's geopolitical power and its close ties with several OIC member states. This highlights the political limitations the organization faces when dealing with powerful global actors.

The OIC's work is further complicated by internal political dynamics within its member states. The diverse political and economic interests of the OIC's 57 members often result in conflicting priorities, making it difficult for the organization to present a unified front on issues concerning Muslim minorities. For example, some member states maintain strong economic or strategic relationships with countries accused of violating the rights of Muslim minorities, which weakens the OIC's ability to apply consistent pressure. Additionally, the lack of a binding legal mechanism within the OIC limits its capacity to enforce decisions or compel action among its members.

Despite these challenges, the OIC has made noteworthy progress in raising awareness about the plight of Muslim minorities and positioning itself as a defender of their rights on the global stage such as Muslims in Philippines and Thailand. Its diplomatic efforts, while limited in some cases, have brought much-needed international attention to the struggles of Muslim communities in countries where they face marginalization. The OIC's support for legal measures, such as those related to the Rohingya in Myanmar, represents a step in the right direction, but much more needs to be done to translate these initiatives into concrete, lasting improvements for Muslim minorities.

In order to enhance its effectiveness, the OIC must adopt a more assertive and cohesive strategy. This includes strengthening its legal frameworks and building a more unified stance among its member states. The organization should also explore ways to engage more effectively with global powers and international institutions, using diplomatic channels to forge stronger alliances and build consensus on the protection of Muslim minorities. Additionally, the OIC's efforts should focus on long-term strategies that go beyond immediate responses to crises, addressing the root causes of discrimination and violence against Muslims.

References

- Al Jazeera Team. 2019. "Gambia Files Rohingya Genocide Case against Myanmar at UN Court." *Al Jazeera*, November 11, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/11/gambia-files-rohingya-genocide-case-against-myanmar-at-un-court>
- Allen, Chris. 2016. *Islamophobia. Islamophobia*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315590080>
- Alpers, Edward A. 2009. *East Africa and the Indian Ocean*. New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publishers.
- Al-Shahi, Ahmed and Richard Lawless. 2013. *Middle East and North African Immigrants in Europe: Current Impact; Local and National Responses*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Angeles, Vivienne S. M. 2013. "Islam in the Philippines." *Obo*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780195390155-0102>
- Bahçecik, Şerif. 2013. "Internationalizing Islamophobia Anti Islamophobic Practices from the Runnymede Trust to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation." *Ortadoğu Etütleri* 5, no. 1: 141-165.
- Bhattacharjee, Kallol. 2022. "More Nations Express Outrage; India Flays OIC." *The Hindu Newspaper*, June 7, 2022. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/oic-pursuing-divisive-agenda-says-india/article65501380.ece>
- CIA Team. 2022. "South Africa - the World Factbook." *CLA*. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/south-africa/>
- COUR INTERNATIONALE DE JUSTICE. 2020. "APPLICATION de LA CONVENTION POUR LA PRÉVENTION et LA RÉPRESSION DU CRIME de GÉNOCIDE (GAMBIE C. MYANMAR)." *COUR INTERNATIONALE DE JUSTICE*, January 23, 2020. <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/178/178-20200123-ORD-02-00-EN.pdf>
- CSP Team. 2020. "China Statistical Yearbook 2020." *China Statistics Press*. <https://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/ndsj/2020/indexeh.htm>
- ESE Team. 2023. "Labour Market Statistics at Regional Level." *Eurostat Statistics Explained*, April, 2023. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Labour_market_statistics_at_regional_level
- EUAFR Team. 2017. "Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey - Main Results." *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights*, November 28, 2017. <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/second-european-union-minorities-and-discrimination-survey-main-results>
- GOVPH Team. 2018. "Republic Act No. 12018." *GOVPH*. <https://www.>

- officialgazette.gov.ph/2024/08/12/republic-act-no-12018/
 GOVPH Team. 2019. "Republic Act No. 12019." *GOVPH*. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2024/08/28/republic-act-no-12019/>
- Horton, Mark, and John Middleton. 2010. *The Swahili: The Social Landscape of a Mercantile Society*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- HRW Team. 2017. "Rohingya Crisis." *Human Rights Watch*, October 21, 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/blog-feed/rohingya-crisis>
- HRW Team. 2021. "Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots." *Human Rights Watch*, April 19, 2021. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/19/break-their-lineage-break-their-roots/chinas-crimes-against-humanity-targeting>
- HRW Team. 2021. "China: Events of 2020." *Human Rights Watch*, January 13, 2021. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/china>
- HRW Team. 2022. "World Report 2022." *Human Rights Watch*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022>
- Imtiyaz, Yusuf. 2022. "Muslims as Thailand's Largest Religious Minority." In *Routledge Handbook of Islam in Southeast Asia*, edited by Syed M.K. Aljunied. London and New York: Routledge.
- IsDB Team. 2020. "2020 IsDB Annual Report." *Islamic Development Bank*. <https://www.isdb.org/publications/2020-isdb-annual-report>
- Kim, Young Chul. 2023. "The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region—The Bridge Between Islam and Orientalism." In *China's Engagement with the Islamic Nations*, edited by Young Chul Kim, 213-230. Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31042-3_11
- Lipka, Michael. 2017. "Muslims and Islam: Key Findings in the U.S. And around the World." *Pew Research Center*, August 9, 2017. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2017/08/09/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/>
- Neogi, Oishika. 2022. "Delhi Riots: For Muslim Teens Who Were Shot, No Justice in Sight." *Al Jazeera*, March 2, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/2/the-living-memories-of-the-2020-delhi-riots-in-india>
- OHCHR Team. 2018. "Report of Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar (27 August 2018)." *OHCHR*, August 27, 2018. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/myanmar-ffm/reportofthe-myanmar-ffm>
- OHCHR Team. 2019. "Report to the 42nd Session of the Human Rights Council (16 September 2019)." *OHCHR*, September 16, 2019. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/myanmar-ffm/report-hr-c42th-session>
- OIC Team. 2007. "Muslim Communities in Non-Member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation." *Organization of Islamic Cooperation*. new.oic-oci.org/Lists/ConferenceDocuments/Attachments/2113
- OIC Team. 2011. "38 Th SESSION of the COUNCIL of FOREIGN

- MINISTERS ASTANA, REPUBLIC of KAZAKHSTAN.” *Organization of Islamic Cooperation*, June 30, 2011 <https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=384&refID=27>
- OIC Team. 2012. “Final Communiqué of the Extra-Ordinary Executive Committee Meeting on Myanmar Muslim Rohingya Minority Held on 5 August 2012, Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.” *Organization of Islamic Cooperation*, August 5, 2012. <https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=566&refID=61>
- OIC Team. 2012. “Joint Communiqué issued by the Government of Thailand and the OIC in May. 2007” *Organization of Islamic Cooperation*, August 01, 2012 <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=9794&refID=4271>
- OIC Team. 2016. “Opening of the 13th Session of the Islamic Summit Conference in Istanbul and Issuing the Final Communiqué and the Declaration Tomorrow.” *Organization of Islamic Cooperation*, April 14, 2016. https://www.oic-oci.org/topic/?t_id=11088&t_ref=4363&lan=en
- OIC Team. 2020. “Muslim Communities in Non-Member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.” *Organization of Islamic Cooperation*. https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/media/books/minority_book_en.pdf
- OIC Team. 2020. “OIC Condemns Violence against Muslims in New Delhi.” *Organization of Islamic Cooperation*, February 27, 2020. https://www.oic-oci.org/topic/?t_id=23240&t_ref=13947&lan=en
- OIC Team. 2020. “Report of the 47Th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM).” *Organization of Islamic Cooperation*, November 28, 2020. <https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=6625&refID=3255>
- OIC Team. 2021. “OIC Delegation visits Southern Thailand to assess situation of Muslim communities.” *Organization of Islamic Cooperation*, March 01, 2021 https://www.oic-oci.org/topic/?t_id=17428&t_ref=9244&lan=en
- OIC Team. 2022. “RESOLUTIONS on POLITICAL AFFAIRS ADOPTED by the 48TH SESSION of the COUNCIL of FOREIGN MINISTERS.” *Organization of Islamic Cooperation*, March 23, 2022. <https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=8660&refID=4261>
- OIC Team. 2023. “Extraordinary / Emergency Meetings Foreign Ministers.” *Organization of Islamic Cooperation*, July 31, 2023. <https://www.oic-oci.org/confdetail/?cID=14&lan=en>
- OIC. 1972. “Charter.” *OIC*, March 4, 1972. https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=53&p_ref=27&lan=en
- OIC. 2020. “OIC-CERT Annual Report.” *OIC*. <https://www.oic-cert.org/en/download/210325%20Annual%20Report%20V1.pdf>
- OIC. 2024. “About Us.” *OIC*. https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=52&p_ref=28&lan=en

- OSF Team. 2009. "Muslims in Europe: A Report on 11 EU Cities." *Open Society Foundations*. <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/muslims-europe-report-11-eu-cities>
- PC Team. 2011. "Census 2011 India." *Population Census*. <https://www.census2011.co.in/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20census%20reports>
- Pouwels, Randall L., and Nehemia Levtzion. 2000. *The History of Islam in Africa*. Columbus, OH: Ohio University Press.
- PRC Team. 2009. "Mapping the Global Muslim Population." *Pew Research Center*, October 7, 2009. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population/#:~:text=Living%20as%20Majorities%20and%20Minorities&text=Of%20the%20roughly%20317%20million>
- PRC Team. 2011. "The Future of the Global Muslim Population." *Pew Research Center*, January 27, 2011. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population/#:~:text=The%20world>
- Rahman, Ali. 1977. "Islamic Architecture in India after Independence." *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute* 37, no. 1/4: 108-117.
- Roth, Kenneth. 2020. "World Report 2021: Rights Trends in India." *Human Rights Watch*, December 21, 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/india>
- SC Team. 2011. "2011 National Household Survey: Data Tables." *Statistics Canada*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/dt-td/Index-eng.cfm>
- Sinno, Abdulkader H. 2008. *Muslims in Western Politics*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Tajwar, Ali and and Sultan Hassena. 2023. "Emerging role of the organization of Islamic cooperation in the global governance since 1969." *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 10, no. 1. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2202052>
- Trimingham, J. Spencer. 1962. *Islam in West Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- UN Team. 2019. "Update of the Situation of Human Rights in Indian-Administered Kashmir and Pakistan-Administered Kashmir from May 2018 to April 2019." *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, July 8, 2019. https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IN/KashmirUpdateReport_8July2019.pdf
- UNDP. 2022. "Human Development Report 2021-22." *United Nations Development Program*, September 8, 2022. <https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2021-22>
- USDoS Team. 2021. "China (Includes Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Macau): Xinjiang." *United States Department of State*. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/china/xinjiang/>

Хасна Ал-Гхамди

Заступништво и акција: Улога ОИС у заштити муслиманских мањина

Сажетак: Овај чланак истражује кључну улогу Организације исламске сарадње (ОИС) у заштити права муслиманских мањина широм света, нарочито у Европи и Азији. Ефикасност ОИС у заштити муслимана мањина у државама које нису њене чланице била је предмет и похвала и критика, упркос њеним великим овлашћењима. Анализа почиње разматрањем основних циљева ОИС и правних оквира које користи како би интервенисала у питањима која погађају муслимане широм света. У чланку се процењују реакције ОИС на случајеве дискриминације и насиља над муслиманима у Европи, укључујући текуће тешкоће са којима се суочавају муслиманске заједнице у Француској и Немачкој, као и правне и друштвене препреке с којима се муслимани суочавају у Мијанмару и Кини у Азији. Процена се заснива на детаљним студијама случаја. Ови случајеви показују сложену природу ангажмана ОИС, који обухвата дипломатске разговоре, упућивање осуда и покретање и подршку правним мерама на међународним форумима. Поред тога, у чланку се темељно анализира утицај активности ОИС на овим подручјима, испитујући резултате и шире геополитичке последице. Текст такође разматра ограничења са којима се ОИС суочава, као што су политичка динамика унутар земаља чланица и утицај великих светских сила. Закључак обједињује ова запажања и тврди да, иако је ОИС постигла значајан напредак у промовисању права муслиманских мањина, и даље постоје озбиљне препреке које треба превазићи.

Кључне речи: муслиманске мањине, ОИС, Европа, Азија, ислам, исламофобија