



**Presentation of Ranjit Singh, ICAAD Advisor at the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights  
Forum on Minority Issues: "Beyond freedom of religion or belief: guaranteeing the rights of religious  
minorities"  
(Translated from French)**

At the outset, I want to thank this Assembly for allowing me to share a perspective on the promotion and protection of the identity of religious minorities. International Center for Advocates Against Discrimination (ICAAD) is a non-profit organization that works to empower marginalized communities globally to address structural discrimination in their legal systems using an interdisciplinary approach combining law, technology, and art. ICAAD focuses on three program areas: minority rights, women's rights, and religious freedom.

The religious identity of minority communities has been severely threatened by Western democracies over the last decade. Language that reflects majoritarian ideals and prejudices towards minority communities have become embedded in legislation. Since 9/11, Muslims, Arabs, Sikhs, and South Asians have been victims of attacks and aggression solely because of their appearance. Following this event, each community has taken steps to reduce prejudices and to discuss the value of pluralism while working training law enforcement to better serve and protect these vulnerable populations. To tackle this problem, a holistic approach is necessary to disseminate and break down the barriers of prejudice within a society. Nevertheless, the identity of religious minorities is still in danger due to certain laws and policies.

One example is the existing legislation in France that purports to uphold the principle of Laïcité. In principle, Laïcité must allow the right to worship one's faith freely in society, otherwise, the separation between religion and state becomes blurred and the state becomes irreparably entangled in religious practice. Laws that exclude manifesting one's belief in public schools (law of 15 March 2004), on ID cards (Reglement ID picture of 2005 of Home Ministry) and in public (2011 ban on veil) undermine Laïcité.

Despite successive decisions of the UN Human Rights Committee 1852/2008, 1876/2009 and 1928/2010, which has found France in violation of Article 18 of the International Protocol on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the UN Human Rights Committee has been unable to move France in amending its legislation. Nonetheless, we also want to emphasize the potential for positive outcomes. Currently, the Central Bureau of Religious Affairs, affiliated to the Ministry of the Interior, which is the main contact between religious groups and the French administration, provides a means of collaboration for various religious minorities to exchange and share their difficulties with the administration.

And finally, from one of the positive practices within the European Union, we would like to acknowledge the work with the authorities in charge of security and transport to the European Union which led to the change of regulation 185/2010 and 2010/774/EU on the control of passengers at European airports, so it is no longer allowed to touch the dastar (turban) of a Sikh, hijab of a Muslim, or a Kippah of a Jew. This helps to maintain the dignity and inviolability of one's religious identity.

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