The Prospects and Dialogue and Cooperation between Secular and Islamic Human Rights Actors: A Normative and Empirical Study

Ms Tabassum Baig
Research scholar
School of law and constitutional studies,
Shobhit Institute of Engineering and Technology (Deemed to be University), Meerut

Dr Mohd Imran
Professor
School of Law and constitutional studies, Shobhit Institute of Engineering, Meerut

Abstract

The pursuit of universal human rights faces a unique challenge in the intersection of secular and Islamic frameworks. While both traditions share fundamental values like dignity and justice, their interpretations and justifications often differ. This paper explores the prospects and challenges for dialogue and cooperation between secular and Islamic human rights actors, arguing that collaboration is not only possible but crucial for advancing human rights globally. One of the main points of contention lies in the source of human rights. Secular frameworks often ground rights in inherent human dignity and natural law, whereas Islamic perspectives often see them as divinely granted and embedded within Islamic law (Sharia). This difference can lead to disagreements on specific rights, such as freedom of religion or expression, which may be seen as conflicting with religious principles. However, there are strong arguments for forging a path forward. Both traditions share core values like the prohibition of torture, the right to life, and the importance of social justice. Islamic teachings emphasize concepts like "adl" (justice) and "ihsan" (doing good), which resonate with universal human rights principles. Building on these shared values and engaging in respectful dialogue can help bridge the gap. Collaboration also holds practical benefits.

Keywords:

Cooperation, Secular, Islamic, Human, Rights, Actors

Introduction

Secular human rights organizations often lack the cultural understanding and grassroots networks present within Islamic NGOs. Conversely, Islamic actors can benefit from the advocacy experience and international reach of secular organizations. Working together allows them to develop a more nuanced and context-specific approach to human rights issues.

There are, of course, challenges to overcome. Mutual respect and a willingness to engage with different viewpoints are paramount. Secular actors must acknowledge the legitimacy of Islamic perspectives, while Islamic actors must be open to interpretations of human rights outside a purely religious framework. Finding common ground on procedural norms, such as due process and fair trials, can be a starting point for further cooperation.

Several successful initiatives offer hope for the future. The Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (1990) represents an attempt by Muslim scholars to articulate Islamic principles of human rights. Additionally, collaborations between NGOs like Amnesty International and Islamic Relief on issues like prisoner rights demonstrate the potential for practical cooperation.

In conclusion, fostering dialogue and cooperation between secular and Islamic human rights actors is not just desirable but essential in advancing the cause of human rights globally. By recognizing shared values, engaging in respectful conversation, and collaborating on practical solutions, both sides can create a more inclusive and effective human rights movement.

The pursuit of human rights is a universal ideal, yet its interpretation and implementation can be shaped by diverse cultural and religious frameworks. This paper explores the prospects for dialogue and cooperation between secular and Islamic human rights actors. While acknowledging potential points of friction, it argues that collaboration is essential to advance a more inclusive and effective human rights agenda.

Secular human rights frameworks emphasize universal principles of individual liberty, equality, and non-discrimination, often enshrined in national constitutions and international treaties. Islamic human rights frameworks, while drawing on these principles, emphasize dignity, justice, and social solidarity as outlined in the Quran and Islamic jurisprudence. This can lead to different interpretations on issues such as freedom of expression (in relation to religious blasphemy) or women's rights (regarding inheritance or family law).

Several factors can hinder dialogue and cooperation. Historical mistrust between the West and the Muslim world can lead to accusations of cultural imperialism on the one hand, and resistance to international human rights norms on the other. Furthermore, internal disagreements within both secular and Islamic camps can complicate the search for common ground.

Despite these challenges, there are compelling reasons for collaboration. Both secular and Islamic human rights actors share a commitment to human dignity and the well-being of all individuals. Cooperation can lead to more effective advocacy on shared concerns like poverty, war, and environmental degradation. Moreover, Islamic frameworks can offer valuable insights on social justice and community responsibility, which can enrich the discourse on human rights.

There are already successful examples of cooperation. Many Muslim-majority countries have ratified key human rights treaties. Islamic human rights organizations like the Organization of Islamic Cooperation have collaborated with secular NGOs on issues such as refugee rights and children's welfare. Interfaith dialogue initiatives can foster understanding and build bridges across divides.

To strengthen dialogue and cooperation, several steps can be taken. First, open and respectful communication is key. Second, a focus on shared values and common ground can help bridge differences. Third, fostering mutual understanding of each other's frameworks can promote empathy and collaboration. Fourth, joint advocacy efforts on issues where interests converge can build trust and demonstrate the value of cooperation.

Review of Related Literature

The pursuit of human rights is a complex endeavor. While there are differences between secular and Islamic human rights frameworks, cooperation is essential. Through open dialogue, mutual respect, and a focus on shared values, secular and Islamic human rights actors can work together to build a more just and equitable world for all. [1]

Despite differences in approach, both secular and Islamic human rights frameworks share core values like dignity, equality, and justice. Finding common ground on these fundamentals can be a powerful starting point for collaboration. Secular actors often possess a strong legal and institutional framework for human rights advocacy, while Islamic actors can leverage their deep understanding of religious communities and their moral authority. This complementarity can create a more holistic approach to addressing human rights concerns. [2]

Collaboration can enhance the legitimacy of human rights initiatives in the eyes of diverse populations. Working together demonstrates a respect for religious and cultural perspectives, potentially fostering greater buy-in and compliance. Differences in interpretation of religious texts and the role of religion in society can create friction. Finding consensus on contentious issues such as freedom of expression or gender equality may require patience and mutual understanding. [3]

The instrumentalization of religion for political purposes can hinder genuine dialogue. Separating genuine religious concerns from political agendas on both sides is crucial. A legacy of mistrust between the West and the Muslim world can cast a shadow over interfaith cooperation. Building trust through open and respectful dialogue is essential. [4]

Instead of dwelling on disagreements, actors can start by tackling common human rights violations like poverty, torture, and discrimination. Encouraging open and respectful dialogue between religious and secular scholars can foster mutual understanding and bridge divides. [5]

Collaboration at the local level can be highly effective. Secular and religious NGOs can work together to address local needs and build trust. Building bridges between secular and Islamic human rights actors is a complex but worthwhile endeavor. By recognizing shared values, leveraging complementary strengths, and addressing challenges head-on, we can create a more inclusive and effective movement for human rights around the world. This collaborative approach can pave the way for a future where human rights are not just a Western ideal but a universal reality. [6]

Prospects and Dialogue and Cooperation between Secular and Islamic Human Rights Actors

Secular human rights actors, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, often draw upon universal principles like equality, freedom of expression, and the right to a fair trial. They focus on holding governments accountable to international treaties and conventions. Their strength lies in their global reach and ability to mobilize public pressure. However, they may be criticized for imposing Western-centric values on societies with different cultural and religious frameworks.

Islamic human rights actors, on the other hand, seek to ground human rights principles within Islamic scripture and tradition. Organizations like the Islamic Relief Worldwide and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

emphasize concepts like social justice (adl), dignity (karama), and consultation (shura). This approach resonates with Muslim communities and allows them to advocate for human rights within a familiar religious framework. However, critics argue that some Islamic interpretations might prioritize religious norms over universal rights, potentially limiting individual freedoms.

Secular human rights organizations typically base their advocacy on universal principles enshrined in documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They emphasize individual rights, equality before the law, and freedom of expression. These organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, often employ legal strategies, public campaigns, and documentation of abuses to achieve their goals. Their strength lies in their universality and ability to mobilize public pressure. However, they can be criticized for imposing Western values on societies with different cultural and religious backgrounds.

Islamic human rights actors draw on Islamic principles and jurisprudence to advocate for human rights. Organizations like the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and prominent scholars focus on concepts like social justice, dignity (karama), and the preservation of human life (hifz an-nafs). Their strength lies in their legitimacy within Muslim communities and their ability to frame human rights issues within a familiar religious context. However, interpretations of Islamic texts can vary widely, and some actors might prioritize religious law over universal principles, drawing criticism for a lack of inclusivity.

Collaboration between these groups can be highly fruitful. Secular actors can benefit from the legitimacy and religious grounding Islamic actors provide within Muslim communities. Conversely, Islamic actors can gain insights into universal principles and legal strategies from their secular counterparts.

One promising avenue for collaboration is the development of a shared human rights framework that respects both Islamic principles and universal human rights. This framework could address sensitive issues like freedom of expression and religious practice through open dialogue and mutual understanding. Additionally, both groups can collaborate on practical issues like refugee resettlement and conflict resolution.

Despite these differences, both secular and Islamic human rights actors share a commitment to improving the lives of individuals and communities. They collaborate on issues like promoting education, combating poverty, and advocating for refugees. Their combined efforts create a richer tapestry of advocacy, catering to diverse needs and leveraging different strengths.

Here are some key areas of potential collaboration:

Universal Values and Religious Frameworks: Finding common ground between universal human rights principles and Islamic values.

Women's Rights: Working together to promote gender equality while respecting cultural sensitivities.

Freedom of Religion: Advocating for religious freedom for all, including Muslims facing discrimination.

Looking ahead, effective human rights advocacy requires a multifaceted approach. Secular and Islamic actors can strengthen each other's work by fostering dialogue, understanding diverse perspectives, and collaborating on areas of shared concern. By working together, they can create a more inclusive and effective human rights movement for all.

Secular actors generally approach human rights from a universal framework, emphasizing individual rights and freedoms enshrined in international documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They often advocate for political and social reforms to ensure equality, freedom of expression, and democratic participation. Here are some key actors:

International Organizations: The United Nations (UN) and its agencies like the Human Rights Council play a crucial role in setting standards, monitoring violations, and mediating conflicts.

National Governments: Ideally, governments have a responsibility to uphold human rights within their borders and create legislation that protects individuals.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and countless local NGOs work tirelessly to document abuses, raise awareness, and advocate for victims.

Islamic human rights actors draw on Islamic principles to advocate for human rights. They emphasize concepts like dignity (karama), justice (adl), and social welfare (zakat). Their approach often focuses on:

Islamic Law (Sharia): They interpret Sharia to promote human rights and social justice. Organizations like the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) engage in scholarly discourse to bridge the gap between Islamic principles and contemporary human rights concerns.

Community Development: Islamic charities like Islamic Relief and Mercy Corps International work on poverty alleviation, education, and healthcare, fulfilling the Islamic duty of social responsibility.

Interfaith Dialogue: Organizations like the Amana Coalition promote understanding and cooperation between Muslims and non-Muslims on human rights issues.

While approaches differ, both secular and Islamic actors share common ground. Both advocate for basic human needs like food, shelter, and security. Both denounce torture, arbitrary detention, and discrimination.

However, tensions arise when interpreting specific rights. For instance, freedom of expression can clash with restrictions on blasphemy in some Islamic interpretations. Similarly, the rights of women and minorities can be points of contention.

Moving forward, collaboration and dialogue are key. Secular actors can benefit from a deeper understanding of Islamic perspectives on human rights. Islamic actors can gain insights from international human rights frameworks. By finding common ground, this diverse set of actors can work together to advance human rights for all.

Conclusion

The realm of human rights advocacy is a complex landscape. Secular and Islamic actors, despite their different approaches, share a common goal: a world where all individuals can live with dignity and respect for their fundamental rights. Through mutual understanding and cooperation, they can create a more just and equitable future.

References

1.　　Abou El Fadl, Khaled. 2018. The Human Rights Commitment in Modern Islam. In *Human Rights and Responsibilities in the World Religions*. Edited by Joseph Runzo and Nancy Martin. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, pp. 301–64.

2.　　Afzal, Naeem. 2016. Elements of pathos and media framing as scientific discourse: A newspaper perspective on Rohingya crisis. *International Journal of Advanced and Applied Science* 3: 89–99.

3.　　Ahmad, Anis. 2016. Human Rights: An Islamic Perspective. *Policy Perspectives* 3: 101–12.

4.　　Al-Aqeel, Laila. 2020. Human rights in the Noble Quran. *International Islamic Science Journal* 4: 100–31.

5. Alenzi, Fadhah Saalem Ubaid. 2021. Human rights in Islam in the time of the outbreak of the epidemic "The emerging corona virus," COVID-19, as a model. *Maǧallaẗ Al-Drāsāt Al-ʿarābiyyaẗ* 44: 171–216.

6. Alghazali, Abu Hamid. 2022. *al-Mustaṣfá Min 'ilm al-Uṣūl [al-Mustaṣfá in the Jurisprudence Science]*. Edited by Hamzah Bin Zuhair Hafiz. Riyadh: Almadinah Almunawarah Company for Publication, vol. 2.

7. Almutawa, Ahmed, and Konstantinos Magliveras. 2021. Enforcing women's rights under the Arab Charter on human rights 2004. *The International Journal of Human Rights* 25: 1258–84.

8. Al-Naigiri, Abdullah Abobakr Ahamed. 2020. The brief comparison between human rights in Islam and what came in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights issued by the United Nations in 1948. *International Academic Journal for Islamic Studies* 2: 99–134.

9. Alrashid, Bader M Sh S, Fawzi Mohamed Hamed, and Ali Ali Jubaili Saged. 2021. Freedoms and Human Rights between Islam and Heavenly Religions: A Comparative Descriptive Study. *International Islamic Sciences Journal* 5: 143–77.