

Religious and Sectarian Policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Iran is a vast land in which several ethnic groups with different languages, dialects, religions, and religious schools of thought live. Influenced by the historical antiquity of this land and over the centuries, these different groups of people have learned to coexist peacefully with each other and have respect for different beliefs and faiths.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has defined and determined its religious policies in alignment with these realities. Therefore, it can be observed that despite Islam having been considered the official religion of the country and Shiism as the official religious school of thought, a legal space has been considered for the existence of other religions and religious schools of thought. According to the law, simply having a particular religious faith does not deprive people of enjoying civil, political, and social rights, and, therefore, all

Iranians, irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, and religion are protected by the law of the country.

Usually, in every society, a particular religion or school of thought is dominant, but there are always people with other beliefs who are called “minorities”. In the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, those who have a religion other than Islam and a religious school of thought other than Shiism are called “religious minorities”.

Paying attention to the rights of minorities is so important that Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states: “In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use

their own language. This Covenant has been approved by the National Parliament of Iran and according to Article 9 of Iran’s Civil Code, this covenant is like a domestic law, and compliance with its contents is mandatory.

The Islamic Parliament of Iran has paid attention to the rights of minorities and has addressed this issue in Articles 11 to 14 of the Constitution. In the Constitution of Iran, Shafi’i, Hanbali, Hanafi, Maliki, and Zaidi minorities are recognized Islamic Schools of thought while Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians are considered religious minorities, and rights are considered for them include:

1. Freedom in performing religious ceremonies and rituals.
2. The right to religious education based on one’s religion: it means that religious minorities are not required to undergo religious educa-

tion based on the official religion of the country and can receive education based on their own religion.

3. These schools enjoy official status in matters pertaining to religious education, affairs of personal status (marriage, divorce, inheritance, and wills), and related litigation in courts of law.

4- As per Article 67 of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the members of the parliament belonging to the religious minorities will swear by their own sacred books while taking this oath.

5. The right to manage local affairs: in every region where the followers of any religious school of thought are the majority, local regulations will be based on the teaching of that school within the limits of the authority of the councils and while preserving the rights of the followers of other schools of thought.

6. The Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians have their own representatives in the Islamic Parliament of Iran.

7. All religious associations and places of worship are exempted from paying taxes in any form.

8. The possibility of using religious holidays in addition to the official holidays of the country.

9. According to Article 26 of the Constitution, all recognized religious minorities have the right to form parties, associations, and communities according to the established criteria provided they do not violate the principles of independence, freedom, national unity, the criteria of Islam, or the basis of the Islamic republic.

10. All religious minorities, Armenian Christians, Jews, Assyrian Christians, and Zoroastrians, are allocated government budgets through their representatives in the Islamic

Parliament of Iran.

The religious and sectarian policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran should be viewed in two parts, domestic and international. In the domestic sector, more emphasis is placed on creating peaceful coexistence free of discrimination so that all people can benefit from all the educational, scientific, economic, etc. opportunities available in Iranian society. Efforts are being made to provide a suitable platform for meeting the spiritual needs of all citizens, strengthening religious institutions belonging to all religions and religious schools of thought within the framework of the law, and ensuring peaceful coexistence and the expansion of tolerance among followers of different religions and schools of thought. There is an opportunity for congregational acts of worship for the religions recognized by the constitution, in their own place and according to their rituals and rites, which is evidenced by Sunni mosques, churches, etc.

In the international arena, the most important religious policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is to pay

attention to the unity of Muslims all over the world, especially among the neighboring countries. Despite the constant efforts on the part of some Western countries to create rifts among Iran's neighbors and with Iran, the Islamic Republic of Iran has made many political efforts, along with cultural efforts, to resolve the differences with its neighbors, and has always tried to act as a mediator for peace in its neighboring lands. And Hajj provides the best opportunity for this move; i.e., creating unity among Muslim countries.

Supporting the Muslim people of "Palestine" is one of the religious-political priorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and all these years, it has never recognized Israel in any political, cultural, and sports forums, and has always referred to the Israeli regime as the "Usurper Regime of Quds" and insisted on opposing its usurping policies and atrocities.

One of the important activities carried out in the form of a non-governmental organization in the field of bringing Muslims together, reconciling different Islamic schools of thought, and resolving Shia and Sunni differences, has been the formation of "The World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought" in the year 1990.

In the view of this Forum, the only way to protect the Islamic nation is the unity of Muslims and their cooperation in the cultural, scientific, economic, and political fields. Expansion of communication among thinkers, scholars, institutions and proximity trends, formation of dialogue circles among Islamic schools of thought, promotion of coalitions and joint organizations, proximity media, and other effective and unifying measures are some parts of the programs of this forum.

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