

Presentation by Ms. Amin Tahsina Ferdous, Vice President RFYN Bangladesh

- Oppression.
- Terror.
- Fear.
- Rights.

If four words could sum up the world we live in today. These would be it.

Initially one would think that with three of these four words being a reflection of the copious amounts of negativity, the world faces the world we live in is now more black than it is white and more evil than good.

We would be wrong.

For while Oppression, Terror and Fear all signify just that - if there was one word strong enough to counterbalance all three it is - 'Rights'.

In a world filled with shades of grey, 'rights' are what serve as the perfect moral compass, that show us true north. Human Rights only more or so.

Before we launch into further discussion on the matter, let us first 'define' Human Rights. -

Vaguely speaking they are the rights every human being is born with for the sole reason, that they are born human.

More specifically - They are the basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled, often held to include but not limited to the right to life and liberty, freedom of thought and expression, and equality before the law.

Now, our topic today is Human Rights and Religious Freedom in Bangladesh.

The question that then arises is 'how does one recognize 'religious freedom' as a human right in the context of any country?'

Does the mere presence of the legal standing suffice?

For if it does, than would almost all countries in the world have that very standing - However somehow, mosques being burnt down, or harassment over sheikh turbans somehow doesn't strike me as 'religious freedom'.

Dag Hammarskjöld, once said -

Freedom from fear' could be said to sum up the whole philosophy of human rights.

So using fear as a yard stick I ask, In Bangladesh, a country of a staggering over 80% Muslim majority, would I fear walking out onto the road with a cross hanging from my necklace? Would I fear getting on a public bus when I am wearing the red vermilion which is called in Bengal sindoor that demarks a married woman of Hindu faith?

I am proud to be able to say - I would not.

You see, Ladies and Gentlemen, going back in history, to when the Bangladeshi Liberation War started, you will find that for the first time in history, a war for independence was waged, not merely because discrimination was rampant, but

because in that moment of time an entire territory of people considered each other *one* entity, beyond, color, beyond race, beyond religion and it is that very philosophy that enables each Bengali, no matter how rich or poor, how well known or obscure, to be confident in their own essence to practice their own religions and beliefs without fear of harassment, of being targeted or of any form of vicious ignorance at all. For in Bangladesh, not only does our very constitution declare secularism, but its history GIVES us the tolerance that is needed to secure secularism.

And THAT, Ladies and Gentlemen, is what truly signifies 'Religious Freedom'. Not the PRESENCE of a law that you may use when you are attacked, but the LACK of the forethought that such a situation may arise. As stated so eloquently before: The Lack of Fear.