**[Human rights in Europe](https://nation.com.pk/03-Dec-2020/human-rights-in-europe%22%20%5Ct%20%22_new)**

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The West is always proud of its human rights, especially European countries and indeed Scandinavia, for good reason, too. But the record is not as good today as in the past, and also not as good either for all groups and countries in the past as we were told; wars have been waged overseas and more; indigenous people in the West have only been treated more fairly in the last generation or two, including the Sami people in Norway, Sweden, Finland and on the Kola Peninsula of Russia—and in Denmark, the Inuit people (earlier called Eskimos) in Greenland. Today, they have influence over many issues in their original areas of settlement, and in many cultural and economic fields. However, there is more to be done for and by the ‘fourth world people’ to gain recognition.

It should also be stressed that although there has been religious freedom in the West, people are not always as tolerant as they should be, and as they think are, towards minority denominations of Christianity and other religions, especially Islam. I believe that generally Jews have been accepted, and even admired, in spite of belonging to another religion, which, like Islam, is an Abrahamic religion and thus closely related to the two other religions. The treatment of Jews by Nazi Germany remains a scar on Western civilisation forever. That time, many Western countries could have protected the Jews better. In Norway, for example, there have recently been some new books revealing that the Norwegian Resistance Movement during the German occupation 1940-45, did not do as much as they should have to help the Jews with information, hide or flee the country. Also, the leaders of the Church of Norway, that time a state church, did not do enough to help the Jews. Much of the reason for this may have been subconscious attitudes and ignorance, but sometimes, it was purposely not prioritised.

During WWII and the next couple of decades, there were few religious and cultural minorities in Norway and the rest of Scandinavia, and relatively few in other European countries, at least before the time that most colonies gained independence. Today, Norway and Sweden have about twenty percent immigrants and many come from ‘far away’ countries; in Oslo and Stockholm, some fifteen percent belong to Islam. This happens at the same time as the Norwegians and Swedes themselves are less active in institutionalised Christianity, which may have helped to lessen tensions between religions and sub-groups.

I don’t expect religion to become a major source of conflict in European countries, as some of the populists and right-wingers often claim, using extremist groups in Islam as excuse for their arguments. I believe that possible conflicts within countries in Europe will be based on class and inequality. Immigrants, irrespective of religion, are overrepresented in the poor underclass in Europe, along with jobless, drug addicts and others who fall outside the mainstream society. If European countries let these issues drift and pay less attention to integrating immigrants and poor people in mainstream society, conflicts may occur.

The European politicians, leaders in religious associations, private sector CEOs, NGO leaders, and so on must actively seek to develop greater equality and integration. That is indeed to continue to build on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Declaration (1948) and many later declarations for equality, which Europeans are so proud of. If the countries will fall into deeper social divisions, sometimes described as ‘20-60-20’ divisions (with 20 percent under-class, 60 percent middle-class, and 20 percent upper-class), then there will be frictions and conflicts—as there should be because the aim of all societies must be equality for all. If the West, and the Europeans in particular, can pursue the values of equality and pluralism, they will do well for themselves and be a lighthouse for the world, as they indeed wish to be. But then they must place the human rights at the top on the agenda—at the expense of capitalist economic success, but that will also follow if they do that.

Last week, Norwegian media released a shocking decision by the Norwegian Immigration Appeals Board (UNE), which many politicians, members of youth wing organisations, and numerous other bodies and individuals found to be against the values and principles of the country and its human rights. The decision was that an immigrant, Mustafa Hasan, having come to the country at the age of six with his mother and other siblings, was expelled from the country as he had turned 18, legally being an adult. His mother and two brothers have already left. The reason for the expulsion was that his mother shall have misstated her nationality upon arrival, saying she was Palestinian but it was later discovered she was originally from Jordan, although having lived in the Palestinian Area for long. Mustafa Hasan is now going to be punished for what his mother did, and will be deported from the only country and culture he really knows. If Western countries behave like this, they don’t honour the international human rights and in this case, also not the spirit of Norwegian laws and the common values of people. I am sure UNE is covering itself legally, but that doesn’t make it right. Now when the media and politicians have drawn attention to the case, the decision will most likely not be enacted. However, soon there may be similar cases. Sadly nothing happens to those who make such wrong decisions; they are not ‘deported’ from office. From newspaper reports, it seems that Mustafa Hasan is a good musician, and if he gets to do his last year of secondary school before matriculation, he can contribute to his adopted home country and beyond, and voluntarily visit both Palestine, Jordan, and elsewhere, and return home to Norway again, assuming he wishes to do that. It is a scar on Norway’s and the West’s human rights record that cases of this kind occur, and it shows the need for revival of the immigration and human rights policies and practices—which is not only important for victims of the laws, but also the future of the West at large.

There are many who voice the right European and universal values and stand up for human rights, equality and the rights of immigrants. Pope Francis (83) is a voice of conscience of Europe and the whole world, irrespective of faith and success in life. In his new book released last week, entitled ‘Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future’, he writes: “Closing out an immigrant in need, regardless of his or hers religious faith, out of worry for the Christian culture, is a massive misrepresentation of Christianity”. He writes that to close out and send away immigrants is a contradiction and it is against faith. I am sure the Pope would support Mustafa Hasan in his wish to stay in Norway, his real home country. Let us all do what is right and good, and try to live more in the image of God.