

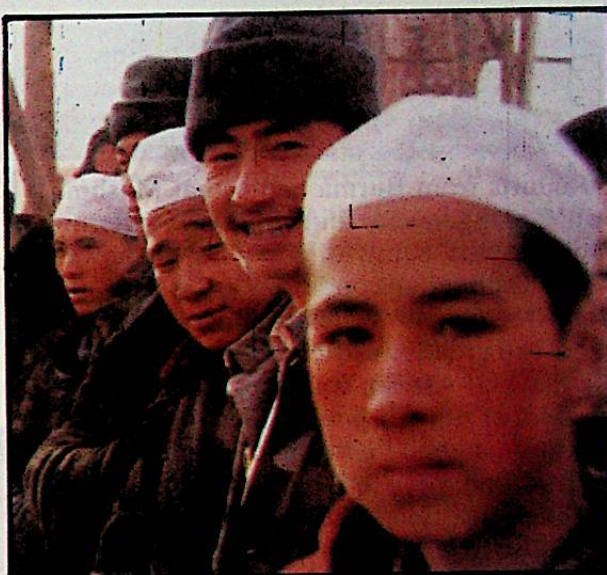
Muslim Minorities Worldwide

What the Ummah Owes Them?

While the editorial staff of the *Journal* was weighing the probability of a cover story on the Muslim minorities problems against other important Muslim issues, King Fahd's announcement to hold an international conference on the Minorities in Makkah came to tip the scales in favour of the former. Immediately after the announcement, the editorial office of the *Journal* became a beehive, bustling with activities with Abdullahi Sheikh Mohammad and Sayyid Hasan Mutahar providing background material and participating in interviews, Muhammad Abdul Quadir travelling to Jeddah to get the first-hand viewpoints of the specialists in the field, Muhammad Nasir piecing the information together and Muhammad Khalil Mirza helping with documentation for the story.

The Muslim minorities around the world representing one third of the Ummah are scattered in over 40 countries and face problems that range far and wide — from restrictions in the freedom of worship to cultural, economic, educational and political problems. But these problems have taken a new turn over the past few years. In some areas sudden general improvements have been recorded as in the cases of Muslims in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In other areas the confrontation between the oppressed Muslims and their oppressors heightened and reached a climax with resort to even armed bloody struggle.

According to the London-based Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs, Muslim minorities in several countries are facing a



Problems of Muslim minorities range far and wide.

critical situation. Latent hostility and distrust are found almost everywhere due to the rise of religious and ethnic consciousness among majority of the people of the world. It is no longer a matter of one or two countries where the survival and continued existence of Muslim minorities are threatened. The phenomenon is universal and problems have taken a precedent, like of which has never been faced by the world community, the Institute notes.

Against the background of this bleak picture, positive achievements realized in some parts of the globe cannot be ignored. The collapse of Communism and the adoption of democracy by nearly all states of Eastern Europe has alleviated to some extent the problems of Muslims in Bulgaria, Soviet Union and other former Soviet satellite countries.

In Bulgaria, the Muslim community, earlier deprived of even such basic rights as calling themselves by Muslim names, now enjoy wider freedom to perform their religious rites and pursue their daily activities in a style and manner compatible with the dictates of their faith. In the Soviet Union, Hungary, Albania and other East European countries, similar improvements in the conditions of Muslims have been reported.

Hostile Campaigns

But if the onslaught against Muslims in Eastern Europe has somehow slowed down, other campaigns against them elsewhere in the world have regrettably intensified.

Reports from Burma had it that Muslims were facing genocide and systematic extermination at the hands of the junta in power there. Their living conditions are dismal and their freedom of worship and other basic rights are greatly restricted.

In several African countries, although the freedom of worship was granted to Muslims, educational and economic opportunities open to them were too small and their sufferings and privations were far too great. They were also constantly exposed to Christian missionary schemes exploiting their poverty and want and aiming at converting them to the Christian faith.

In south-east Asia, the Filipino Muslim minority community in the south of the country, which continues to seek self-determination for the Mindano, Sulu, Palawan and Tawi-Tawi islands, is condemned to frustration as their demands and agreements providing solutions for their problems are completely ignored by the Manila Government.

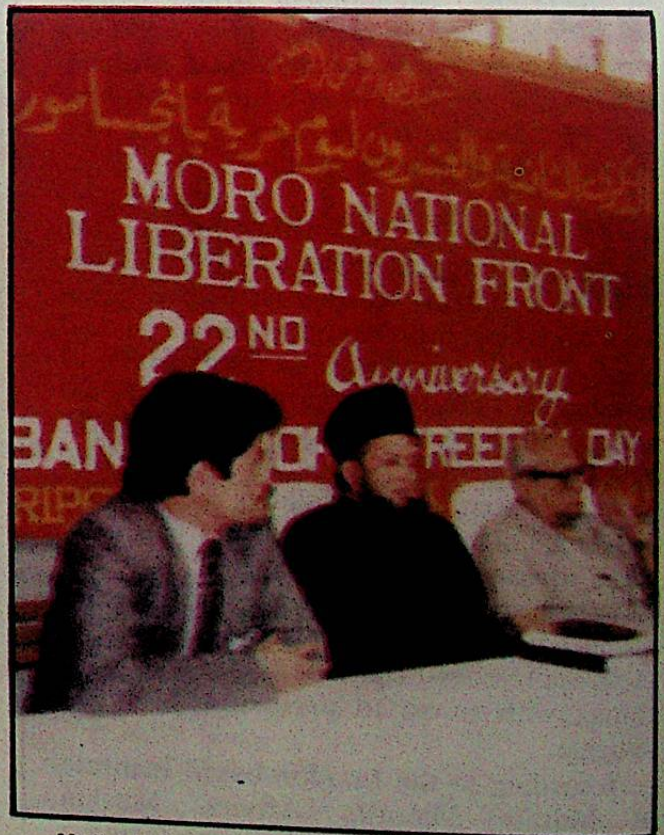
In the Indian sub-continent, the largest Muslim minority in the world is facing constant persecution and violations of its rights. Attempts to demolish the historic Babri Mosque in Ayodhya and the infringements on the rights of the Kashmiris to self-determination endorsed by the United Nations remain the centre-piece in the onslaught against Muslims. In the Valley of Kashmir, where bloody conflicts have been going on for the past 18

months, the situation is becoming extremely tense with no tangible solution in sight in view of the Indian intransigence to come to terms with the peace-loving people of the Valley on the basis of the UN-sponsored resolutions.

As the problems of Muslim minorities in many parts of the world become so acute and defy all apparent solutions, experts on Muslim minority affairs are suggesting fresh approaches, new tactics and bold steps to diffuse the tension and reach some understanding on the nature and depth of the problems.

What are these fresh approaches and what steps are needed to be taken to implement them in a manner meeting the aspirations of the Muslim minorities?

What are the depths of Muslim minority problems and how best they can be tackled? How will improvements in their conditions affect their lives and on what scale. These and others are some of the pressing questions needed to be answered to shed some light on the problem.



Muslims in Southern Philippines continue to seek self-determination.