Sharia is Islamic law derived from the teachings of the Quran and of Muhammad. Sharia is a set of principles on various aspects of life including marriage, divorce, finance, and religious rituals. Muslims around the world vary in their practice of Sharia. It is not a list of rules but rather a set of principles on aspects of life. Aspects of Sharia are included in the legal codes of several Muslim countries, including Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan and Iran. In the West, there is a long-running debate as to whether Sharia can coexist with secularism and democracy.

The UN Secretary-General’s 2006 report, in-depth study on all forms of violence against women, notes that "violence against women is not confined to a specific culture, region or country, or to particular groups of women within a society." [1] In this context, it is therefore of the utmost importance to ensure that women’s rights advocates and women asserting their rights are not silenced. Such silencing would make acceptable spurious claims that women’s rights and gender equality are alien and illegitimate in Muslim contexts and would condone the use of violence as a mechanism of control over women. It is more important than ever to amplify women’s voices and give support to national strategies for individual and collective empowerment in ways that would promote democratization from the inside out. This change will promote the right to gender equality as the inalienable right of the 600 million women who constitute half of the Muslims in the world.

The most controversial example of Sharia law existing in a western country occurred in France. In 2010, France passed law that stipulated that “no one may, in a public space, wear any article of clothing intended to conceal the face.” [2] The law has the effect of banning the wearing of the full Islamic veil in public, which covers the whole body, leaving only a narrow slit for the eyes. Subsequently, a woman was prosecuted for wearing her traditional garb. A committee of independent experts from around the world decreed that “the State has not demonstrated how the full veil presents a threat in itself for public security to justify this absolute ban,” the decision read. It added that the French Government had not adequately explained why hiding one’s face is forbidden for religious reasons, while it is authorized in other contexts such as sports or artistic settings.[3]

These experts also concluded that the ban, rather than protecting fully veiled women, could have the effect of confining them to their homes, impeding their access to public services and marginalizing them. [4] The committee acknowledged that governments’ law enforcement entities must be able “in some circumstances” to demand that individuals

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3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.
show their faces, meaning they would have to uncover them in specific and “concrete situations” where public security was at stake or for formal identification purposes.\(^5\)

**Questions to Consider**

- How should the UN ensure that freedom of religion is protected in all its member-states?
- Should Sharia law be allowed to co-exist in non-Muslim countries?
- Should the UN interfere in the applicability of Sharia law?

**TOPIC B. Review of the 1984 World Population Plan of Action**

The current world population of 7.6 billion is expected to reach 8.6 billion in 2030, 9.8 billion in 2050 and 11.2 billion in 2100, according to a new United Nations report.\(^6\) With roughly 83 million people being added to the world’s population every year, the upward trend in population size is expected to continue, even assuming that fertility levels will continue to decline.\(^7\)

The 1984 World Population of Action was developed out of the United Nation’s World Population Conference held in Bucharest in 1974.\(^8\) The Plan provided recommendations for the development of population goals and policies and socioeconomic policies. The Plan recognized that population growth and economic development are mutually related and that efforts to reduce population growth do not obviate the need to pursue development activities.\(^9\)

The Plan had 10 core recommendations:\(^{10}\)

- encourages nations to develop population policies;
- recognizes the right of individual governments to determine their own population policies;
- calls on countries to make a concentrated effort to reduce mortality and infant mortality;
- upholds the right of all couples to determine the number of children they want to have;
- calls upon governments to make family planning education and services available for all individuals;
- calls for the integration of family planning services and other health services;
- recommends reducing urban pressure by promoting regional and rural development policies and development programs;
- urges governments to improve population collection procedures in their respective countries in order to facilitate population and development planning;

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\(^5\)Ibid.


\(^7\)Ibid.

\(^8\)Ibid.

\(^9\)Ibid.

\(^{10}\)Ibid.
The Plan places a high priority on conducting population research and research aimed at developing more effective contraceptive methods. The successful implementation of the plan depends primarily on the actions taken by individual countries.\textsuperscript{11}

In 2017, the UN published a revision of the 1984 Plan.\textsuperscript{12} The report is called The World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision and was published by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The 2017 revision provides a comprehensive review of global demographic trends and prospects for the future. The information is essential to guide policies aimed at achieving the new Sustainable Development Goals.\textsuperscript{13}

From 2017 to 2050, it is expected that half of the world’s population growth will be concentrated in just nine countries: India, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan, Ethiopia, the United Republic of Tanzania, the United States of America, Uganda and Indonesia (ordered by their expected contribution to total growth).\textsuperscript{14}

In recent years, fertility has declined in nearly all regions of the world. Even in Africa, where fertility levels are the highest of any region, total fertility has fallen from 5.1 births per woman in 2000-2005 to 4.7 in 2010-2015.\textsuperscript{15} Europe has been an exception to this trend in recent years, with total fertility increasing from 1.4 births per woman in 2000-2005 to 1.6 in 2010-2015.\textsuperscript{16}

The report highlights that a reduction in the fertility level results not only in a slower pace of population growth but also in an older population. Compared to 2017, the number of persons aged 60 or above is expected to more than double by 2050 and to more than triple by 2100, rising from 962 million globally in 2017 to 2.1 billion in 2050 and 3.1 billion in 2100. Globally, the number of persons aged 80 or over is projected to triple by 2050, from 137 million in 2017 to 425 million in 2050. By 2100 it is expected to increase to 909 million, nearly seven times its value in 2017. Population aging is projected to have a profound effect on societies, underscoring the fiscal and political pressures that the health care, old-age pension and social protection systems of many countries are likely to face in the coming decades.\textsuperscript{17}

Substantial improvements in life expectancy have occurred in recent years. Globally, life expectancy at birth has risen from 65 years for men and 69 years for women in 2000-2005

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
to 69 years for men and 73 years for women in 2010-2015. Nevertheless, large disparities across countries remain. 18 Although all regions shared in the recent rise of life expectancy, the greatest gains were for Africa, where life expectancy rose by 6.6 years between 2000-2005 and 2010-2015 after rising by less than 2 years over the previous decade. 19 The increased level and reduced variability in life expectancy has been due to many factors, including a lower under-five mortality rate, which fell by more than 30% in 89 countries between 2000-2005 and 2010-2015. 20

Questions to Consider

- Should this committee be concerned with falling rate of fertility? Should measures be taken to increase the rate of fertility?
- How would this committee seek to improve the 1984 World Plan?

19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.