

**Network Session  
Human Rights Activists Workshop**

**Integrating South Korea's Muslims  
into Society Successfully  
– Some Thoughts.**

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1. South Korea has an emerging and growing Muslim community. This community is made up of long-term and short-term migrants, refugees, international students, businesspeople and even local Koreans makeup part of this community. However, Islam continues to be viewed as something alien and incompatible with Korean society, leading to several negative outcomes.

2. These negative outcomes include: an unfounded fear of Islam and Muslims, viewing Islam as belonging only to “Foreigners,” which often means that Islamophobia and racism are connected, it leads to the social exclusion of Muslims, especially Korean Muslims, who cannot openly declare their religious beliefs for fear of being outcast. To summarise, negative outcomes harm social harmony, leading to divisions and hate of the Other.

3. One very clear example of the harm to social harmony is the ongoing controversy in Daegu where Muslim students continue to struggle to build their mosque. Despite winning their legal case, residents and other anti-Muslim demonstrators continue to play tricks such as blocking the construction site by parking their cars across the narrow street, so that the construction workers cannot enter to do their work. These demonstrators are also engaging in what might be referred to as small acts of terror by leaving pigs heads fresh with blood very close, to or in front of the mosque, continuously hoisting banners on buildings in the streets around the mosque with offensive messages printed on them, and even encouraging local landlords to evict their Muslim student tenants. Here, the issue is no longer about the law, but about basic human rights, and the violation of social norms, which damage relations between Muslim students and local Daegu residents.

4. As a Muslim woman myself, I have had several strange encounters that remind me that whilst I have lived in South Korea for almost 6 years, teach Korean students at university, pay taxes and try to be a good member of society, this country can never be my permanent home. These strange encounters include being scolded by Korean non-Muslims for being an “insincere” Muslim because of my style and outward appearance, for following a “barbaric” religion that hurts women, and perhaps the worst is being labeled irrational for remaining Muslim.

5. So, the question is, how can activists help the Muslim community in South Korea to thrive? How can activists engage in meaningful activities that bring Muslims (foreign and Korean) into the fold of Korean society? There is no straight answer and no quick solutions. However, I would like to offer the following practical suggestions that I think may be helpful:

1. Since it can be difficult to source halal meat, instead activists can campaign for the wider availability of vegetarian Korean foods in workplace, schools, the armed forces and other public places, especially where there are higher concentrations of Muslim people.

2. Create spaces for Muslims and non-Muslims in Korean society to meet and interact. Conversation is desperately needed between these groups!

3. Campaign for the anti-sensational and fair reporting in the media when covering stories related to Islam and Muslims to BREAK the unfortunate link between Muslims and terror that now exists in the minds of many non-Muslims all across the world.

4. Public education and outreach programmes (e.g Islamic Culture Days, simple lectures for citizens who engage in “lifelong” learning etc.) will be helpful.