

*United Nations*

*Educational, Scientific, & Cultural  
Organization (UNESCO)*



*Exploring the impact of  
cultural appropriation  
on communities across  
the globe*

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## *I. INTRODUCTION*

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) encourages international collaboration in the areas of education, culture, science and communication by promoting peace around the globe and security for all citizens. Despite World War II's effects and development halt across the globe, nations were remaining extensively in progress, nations were searching for approaches for establishing their educational system when the conflict was done. The very first assembly for the congress towards the establishment of an educational and cultural organization (ECO/CONF) took place in London on November 1-16, 1945 (UNESCO)

UNESCO was founded on November 16, 1945 with the aim of promoting global stability and peace of communication, science, education, and culture. Twenty nations agreed to the constitution that had been approved upon that day, and it became operative in 1946 (UNESCO, 2021). Through the development, transmission, and exchange of research information, education and training activities, and the establishment of international norms and recommendations, UNESCO adjusts its fields of inquiry to expected future changes. "delegates must maintain UNESCO's core values throughout the course of the event to continue with the Organization's mission in the hope for the promotion of education, culture, and society." (Willett, n.d).

Political systems are insufficient for gaining the citizen's genuine and persistent support. With this in mind, UNESCO creates great learning materials to support individuals to avoid hate and be tolerant global citizens. UNESCO works towards ensuring that all citizens including children have access to excellent education opportunities. UNESCO improves international connections by promoting cultural heritage and recognizing the equal value of all cultures. Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right for democracy and development, and UNESCO is in charge of promoting and defending it (UNESCO, n.d).

Cultural appropriation has a major impact on the citizens' culture & education. UNESCO established a global agreement in 1972, named "The Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage". The primary motivation underlying the conventions was the desire to protect the cultural legacy of the planet for future generations to inherit (Museovirsato, n.d.).

Utilizing racial, religious, or social groups' costumes, characteristics, or social formations without approval or awareness is known as cultural appropriation. People who divert culture take those identities and act as if they originate from them (Murphy, 2023). “Cultural appropriation is about power” [...] “It's about who has the power to steal from somebody else and not offer any consequences” (Lester, 2010). Individuals who belong to marginalized communities and are interested in knowing more about themselves may find cultural appropriation upsetting.

Cultural appropriation can affect some citizens that explore the impact that native american symbols and stereotypes have on indigenous communities. Indigenous teenagers' self-esteem is affected by professional characters that culturally appropriate native American imagery and symbolism. (Weinberg College of Arts & Sciences, 2024). Furthermore, it's important to appraise that the laws are crossing boundaries for those vulnerable communities, affecting their economies and cultural identities because of a lack of sense of respect.

The term “cultural appropriation” is frequently utilized to cover the displacement of cultural antiques, costumes, clothing, soundtracks, or imagery from their original setting. They are utilized by a different, independent, and external group, and their significance is overlooked (Butler & Butler, 2022). This issue is deeply concerning, and needs to be addressed by several communities.

## ***II. HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM***

The concept of “cultural appropriation” first appeared and was recognized in the later period of the 20th century, and its use increased after 1980. Even so, the idea of appropriating or exploring another culture has been on our collective minds since the 19th century (PBS, 2019). The reason why the appropriation commenced was because of the debate over issues like colonization and how majority and minority populations coexist.

### Colonialism and historical context

Colonialism can be defined as “control by one power over a dependent area of people”(Encyclopedia Britannica, 1998). It happens when a particular nation conquers a different one; subjugates its citizens, and takes advantage of them, generally while enforcing

its particular language and cultural norms on them. In the year 1914, Europeans had colonized most of the world's civilizations at a certain point (Blakemore, 2023). The increased demand for colonization was not just a result of conventional colonial nations such as the Russian foreign investment in economic decisions. Perhaps, one of the main characteristics of modern imperialism became the formation of other countries fighting for colonial share. Notably countries like: Belgium, Italy, Germany, the United States, Japan, and the Asian powers. The rapid growth of colonial powers in a brief period significantly accelerated the process of colonial expansion. The great quantity of unoccupied territories that could be inhabited was controlled and restricted. Therefore, During the same time period, as more countries attempted to establish colonies, the value of speed expanded. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1998).

Within thirty years, two worldwide wars, a catastrophic financial crisis, and depleted military resources left European society worried. While its financial system recovered, Western Europe failed to maintain the colonial mechanisms that had previously permitted it to establish hegemony over the globe. Throughout World War II, nationalist organizations advocating for self-determination emerged triumphant on a global scale, resulting in a swift transformation of the global political landscape as previous protectorates and colonies gained independence. By 1975 the United Nations, which was jointly established by 51 nations in 1945, featured 144 member states.

The Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union created a shifting worldwide landscape throughout the succeeding decades of colonialism crumbling. The United States sponsored open markets, and democratic institutions were adopted by numerous recently independent governments. Others emulated the one-party system of governance and state-directed economy of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, embracing their communist philosophy. In Vietnam, after a thirty-year war that claimed three million fatalities, Communist forces under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969) demolished the French and subsequently the Americans. The notorious Pol Pot (1928-1998) led Maoist Khmer Rouge insurgents seized power in neighboring Cambodia in 1975. Before the ruthless Khmer Rouge was overthrown by the Vietnamese invasion, more than a million Cambodians perished (Encyclopedia.com, s. f.).

The academic debate on Western colonialism gave rise to the practice of cultural appropriation in the 1970's. Although there are recognizable similar predecessors of this term, no individual has ever claimed responsibility and claim for its invention and development. Kenneth Coutts-Smith, a British historian, invented the term "cultural appropriation" in 1976 and utilized it in his article. Although there have been occurrences throughout history that some perceive to be cultural appropriation, Coutts-Smith's study is associated with starting the majority of the current discussion on this issue. Cultural appropriation, like many other concepts of this kind, progressively worked its way into mainstream society and left educational settings (Kendall, 2024).

### [Intersectionality](#)

Despite the term "Intersectionality" not yet being widely used, the recognition across the academic and policy-making context is increasing. Before the expression was employed in Scottish policy development, it must first be adequately explained, and its consequences for research and analysis of data acknowledged. The concept of intersectionality was initially used in 1989 by American analytical constitutional law race scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and it developed in the African-American feminist movement (The Scottish Government, 2023).

To give an idea, an example is the term "Fok" by individuals who are not Black constituted an instance of cultural appropriation. This is partly because of the knowledge that the expression has a profound historical and cultural background, featuring its roots in Black culture. It is possible to interpret non-Black people's use of "Fok" as an attempt to minimize the profound meaning and significance that black people attribute to the term. When the expression is used in a way that supports negative assumptions about black people, this becomes extremely problematic (FasterCapital, n.d.).

In this last decade, discussions on cultural appropriation have seen the rise of intersectional views underscoring intricate relationships between power relations and different identities. Appropriation of minority cultural elements by the dominant cultures from majority groups has been a constant theme throughout history often resulting in explorations as well as distortions. Although race along with other social identities have always been linked to this issue, recently people have also started to discuss sexuality and gender. For example, while white people wear black hairstyles, it may be suggested that they

not only disrespect cultural heritage but also impose gender stereotypes, beauty standards, and racial prejudice in their broader sense. Social media has made the cultural appropriation discussion popular by letting the public see how it affects people with mixed marginalized identities. And so in their bid to stop different types of discrimination and promote real cultural admiration alongside reverence, proponents and scholars have underlined the value of an intersectional way of viewing cultural appropriation, demonstrating the importance of the different perspectives on cultural appropriation (Research Guides, n.d.).

### Freedom and Respect

Reality suggests that it is occasionally quite difficult to prove what is “appropriate” content without appearing to be inexperienced or narrow-minded. In the year of 1967, it was demonstrated by William Styron in his book “The Confessions of Nat Turner” that the perspective of a slave on a plantation is an outstanding example of appropriation. That information garnered favorable evaluations initially, and the next year the author of the relevant knowledge was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. A variety of black people criticized the knowledge, claiming and believing that that exact information is potentially dangerous, misleading the portrayals of the slave experience (CNN, 2016).

The issue of cultural appropriation is about striking a balance between the freedom to express oneself and observing that which underpins our various cultures. Free will is what enables one to interact with and appreciate numerous cultures globally so that along these lines creativity triggers intercultural awareness on higher levels. Nevertheless, as far as this freedom is concerned there should be some limitations so as not to disrespect the originality of traditions practiced by other people, including what they mean within their historical context. If cultural exchange is not carried out with care, appropriateness may lead to stereotypes being maintained while losing out in terms of context and enhancing the marginalization of certain communities that are already underprivileged. Therefore, we must exercise extreme caution in maintaining this balance through cultural exchanges that honor and elevate the cultures they appropriate rather than exploiting them (Admin, 2023).

A nuanced approach is needed to attain a balance between freedom and respect for cultural misappropriation, by recognizing both freedom of speech and the obligation to honor various cultures as well in their creative work, people should be free to explore and use cultural sources, but it should be done in the context of cultural sensitivity and understanding

their own cultural identity. To respect what has already transpired in history and what it stands for in terms of cultural symbols such as rituals and ceremonies that are employed in society. Additionally, it involves acknowledging particular cultural practices with their settings or individuals associated with them. In turn, one has to be careful not to take on cultural customs mistakenly; making them look like part of some commercial promotion campaign anywhere else around the world, without knowing where they originated from. Instead, one should work towards making positive changes by supporting the people involved and hence respecting their humanity. By accepting both freedom and respect in cultural exchange, people can create a more comprehensive and fair cultural landscape that embraces variety and yet remains true to every single cultural tradition (United We Pledge, 2023).

### ***III. CURRENT SITUATION***

In recent years, people have suggested forms of political vindication that criticize what has become known as cultural appropriation, which is seen as a legitimate way of integrating into one's culture elements that are present in a different one, without doing it justice or resigning it in a superficial way. For example, people of German origins use impersonations to mix in at the carnival of traditional Comanche clothing. (Psicología Y Mente, n.d.)

The fashion industry can have a big role in “Cultural appropriation”, as many cultures find it offensive to their traditions and selves. “In our current moment, most fashion labels are, thankfully, much more wary of being culture vultures—and if they are appropriate, they are more readily called out on social media. At least for now, though, my archive from the resale market continues to grow.” (Allaire, 2023).

For millennia, artists and designers have been influenced by one another. Communities would be left with a far narrower perspective of the world and various ways of being on it, in addition to a limited palette of ideas if that vital stream of creative interaction were cut off. Furthermore, it might be difficult to distinguish between cultural appropriation and appreciation—after all, why replicate something you don't love? (Jacobs, 2022).

There is a necessity to have a discussion about cultural appropriation as it calls for interacting with foreign cultures in a way that is polite and ethically upright. If persons from

other places copy or borrow from each other without acknowledging or understanding their sources, it could be seen as an encouragement for stereotypes, belittling the significance of traditional practices and exploitation. Having thoughtful conversations about cultural appropriation encourages people to be aware of each other's feelings and show respect; also it reminds them of various cultural identities which we need to appreciate. Consequently, by calling attention to the origin and importance of cultural practices and artifacts, we get to think deeply about them, thus promoting respect for every individual's history in such a way that it becomes part of humanity. Talks of this manner also assist in deconstructing power relations that result in the promotion of mutual understanding based on equality and consent rather than exploitation or domination. It is important to understand why cultural appropriation is a problem. While there are people who are fully willing to incorporate a style from another culture, historical occurrences that have made that person's conduct offensive to the group, past and present, may have happened to the group that created the style. Consider a white American who has their hair done in cornrows, due to the dominance of white Americans in the United States, appropriating African-Americans' hairstyles, particularly cornrows, which are used for protection and have always been a common thing for them, without being noticed or even identified how it came to become important among these people. Due to their protective hairstyles, African-Americans have been historically stigmatized and misrepresented (Cuncic, 2024).

Many individuals have different opinions and perspectives about cultural appropriation since it has ties with specific historical times, social contexts, or particular cultures. These individuals hold that it encourages understanding among people thereby increasing tolerance for dissimilar cultures by taking and assimilating features from outside societies. They are of the opinion that encouraging innovation and creativity through the interaction of different cultures leads to a more diverse worldwide society. On the other hand, there are some people who feel that cultural borrowing only promotes clichés; makes religions or cultural ceremonies trade; and pushes minority populations into corners since they lose feeling in such activities as a rite, practice, or norm. People who wish to blend with other ethnic groups must use reason and respect; hence, one of the things that need to be appreciated are qualities of originality and meaning as regards foreign materials and customs when trading the two. It is important to relate to all types and perspectives so as not only to take into consideration power disparateness but also to include how divergent communities evolved in a historical sense and what it eroded on other societies (Developer, 2021).



#### *IV. UN ACTIONS*

The United Nations has previously taken actions towards cultural appropriation and addressed the need for the protection of cultural heritage. The United Nations Organizations have prioritized protecting the rights of affected communities, like indigenous groups, and raising awareness on the differences between cultures; promoting cultural appropriation and appreciation. In 2016, the United Nations signed a resolution emphasizing the value of upholding cultural rights and heritages and acknowledging the potential harm that cultural appropriation may pose to indigenous societies (United Nations, n.d.).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has, for the most part, tackled cultural appropriation through its frameworks and activities. In 2017 UNESCO introduced the global series of reports “Re-Shaping Cultural Policies”. As the only report of its kind, it offers a comprehensive assessment of the state of the cultural and creative industries worldwide using fresh, insightful data that illuminates new global trends. It also makes policy recommendations to support creative ecosystems that will support a sustainable world by 2030 and beyond (UNESCO). The “Re-Shaping Cultural Policies” report lays much emphasis on the importance of adopting new laws protecting cultural diversity; as well as guarding against cultural appropriation. UNESCO delves into worldwide contemporary developments and issues that concern mixtures among various cultures, in addition to making proposals about the promotion of politeness and multiplicity. (UNESCO, 2017)

The Human Rights Council of the United Nations has debated and endorsed many suggested resolutions about cultural appropriation. In March 2019, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples issued a thematic report on cultural appropriation and how it affects indigenous communities. This action identifies instances of cultural appropriation and offers state-level policies to safeguard and advance indigenous peoples' cultural rights (United Nations, n.d.).

The General Assembly passed Resolution 75/170 in December 2020 with the intention of fostering international collaboration in order to combat cultural appropriation and promote cultural diversity. The resolution emphasizes the value of identifying and

safeguarding cultural elements and the promotion of intercultural understanding via sensitization and education (United Nations, n.d.).

The United Nations is extremely concerned and attentive toward the social impact of the line between “cultural appreciation” and “cultural appropriation”. Within the realm of social impact, cultural appropriation often reinforces the very hegemonies that consumers, organizations, and businesses are attempting to oppose. The General Assembly established an online joining event “Celebrating Black in Tech: Cultural Appropriation vs. Cultural Appreciation” in 2021 in order to prevent and create awareness of the difference between “cultural appreciation” and “cultural appropriation” (Manpreet. K, 2021). Additionally, a resolution on "Acknowledging the significance of returning cultural property to its countries of origin or their restitution" was passed by the UN General Assembly in 2022. It therefore emphasized the significance of honoring nations' ownership rights in light of their history (Dubois, 2022).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) initiated the decade-long campaign to safeguard and rejuvenate the languages of the indigenous peoples, which form an intrinsic part of their identity and heritage. Intangible Cultural Heritage UNESCO, 2023. Communities have control over their culture by using traditional knowledge and protection in its practices via UNESCO’s 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

## ***V. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS***

Cultural appropriation is the distortion or mistreatment of marginalized cultures, which sustains stereotypes and hinders cultural identities. The cultural exchange that comes with respect rather than exploitation can easily be driven by looking for solutions. Having solutions helps individuals and the international community to raise an environment that includes every type of culture, appreciates and values them, and ensures that we recognize their contributions towards our lives so as not only to show respect but also to appreciate them. The following are possible measures that could be taken in the face of this issue:

- Strengthening the awareness and education of culture:

- Providing cultural education is crucial to address the significance of other cultures to create respect.
- Advising individuals to acknowledge cultural elements and differences without appropriating them.
- Cultural sensitivity training:
  - Systematizing cultural sensitivity training in social places like schools, workplaces, and other institutions to create awareness in evading cultural appropriation.
  - Promoting guidance to let individuals know how sensitive and important culture is for all individuals and avoid hurting and disrespecting others.
- Cultural exchange programs
  - Promoting mutual understanding and respect between cultures.
  - Expediting genuine learning and interaction to promote positive interactions between cultures and avoid cultural appropriation.
- Legal protections
  - Establishing the legal framework through which the intellectual property rights of these marginalized groups are protected.
  - Avoiding exploitation while giving power over their cultural heritage to the people from which they come.
  - Creating laws that acknowledge and appreciate cultural heritage, involving rules on how to represent the culture in sectors like media or fashion.

## ***VI. COUNTRIES INVOLVED***

### **1. United States of America**

Cultural appropriation is a major theme in America. The United States of America has become home to people from different cultures and has a past involving colonization, forced labor, and settlement by foreigners (Kendall, 2024). The US usually incorporates cultural practices from small groups into those practiced by large groups, a process that occasionally

amounts to exploitation or lack of respect. This is the case in fashion, music, sports, entertainment, African American hairstyles, and other cultural symbols, which are frequently used without proper understanding or respect for their origins. For instance, Native American headdresses and Kimonos are used by people outside their respective cultures. Considering there are both cases of problematic appropriation and legitimate cultural interchange, the United States has a complicated relationship with cultural appropriation. Events like celebrities taking on historically African American haircuts or the fashion industry using Native American motifs have generated a lot of discussion and controversy (Holley, 2019).

## **2. Commonwealth of Australia**

Australia is one of the most influential nations in the world for discussion on Cultural appropriation. This is mostly caused by the way that this nation has handled indigenous populations—who possess their cultural heritage—since colonialism began more than 200 years ago. Non-Indigenous people have frequently used aboriginal Australian artwork, including paintings, sculptures, and carvings, without giving due credit or payment for the products they purchased from the artists. Evidence is also shown in other domains; such as music, where white singers frequently perform aboriginal tunes in front of audiences around the globe without giving proper credit or acknowledgment to their homeland. Criticism has also been leveled in Australia because Indigenous symbols and traditions are used extensively where not enough background or honor is given. An illustration involves issues arising because of the employment of customary aboriginal models in attire and interior design; yet such artists may have little if any attachment to these tribes (UCLA,2004). The distinction that should be established between cultural appropriation and appreciation is becoming increasingly clear to those working in educational institutions and activities in Australia. This has involved respectful partnerships and public education among various groups, including Islanders. These processes will involve obtaining permission from certain groups that benefit and respect indigenous people, who are most important in both parties' cases. Cultural exchange fosters consent that is appropriate for those responsible, among other decisions made by all stakeholders involved in this particular area that we are discussing today. (UCLA, 2004)

### **3. French Republic**

The French Republic is an important participant in the discussion over cultural appropriation due to its colonial past and impact on global culture. France has come under criticism for appropriating elements of the cultures of its former colonies in Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa without offering them proper credit or acknowledgment. It is evident that French artists frequently incorporate cultural symbols and practices from high art and popular culture that originated in places like Haiti, the Caribbean, Louisiana, or Nigeria in Africa; at times, they utilize this to reinforce prejudice, and at other times, they distort the original meaning (Harber, 2024). The music industry in France has a history of adopting musical styles from Africa and the Caribbean, generally without acknowledging the efforts and problems faced by first musicians. These actions consequently drag society back as they facilitate the continuation of economic and social disparities that exist up to date. (Harber, 2024)

### **4. Dominion of Canada**

Since the 1980s, cultural appropriation has been a contentious topic of discussion in Canada. Cultural appropriation has become a worldwide concern in recent years, partly due to the growth of social media. The topic of cultural appropriation is being discussed more and more in the domains of artistic and literary creation, while it is still frequently brought up in relation to the widespread consumption of cultural products (Cultural Appropriation, s. f.). There has been criticism leveled against Canada for taking measures that do not respect Aboriginal culture, especially in the arts, sports, and fashion industries. This involves the use of conventional symbols or practices of aboriginal origin for economic gain and other illegitimate purposes without acknowledging or compensating their creators. It suggests the government had a commission that served as the foundation for all subsequent government initiatives. According to this study, Canadian artists' imitations of indigenous cultural practices may be detrimental to humanity. This has sparked general discussions about cultural awareness and observance. Canada's federal government and different cultural organizations keep working on projects and measures implementing policies leading to the promotion of respect for cultural

values instead of attempts to embrace them. These aim at encompassing and reverence cultural landscapes.

## **5. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**

Cultural appropriation addresses are fundamental in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, taking into account both historical and contemporary global influence. One of the world's leading colonial powers, the UK has cooperated extensively and has exploited or commodified many other cultures. This colonial past has affected how these cultural elements are used by English fashion, media, and entertainment industries, but they do not give credit where it's due or show any respect (Journal, 2023). British designers and brands have been significantly criticized for appropriating cultural symbols and attire from marginalized communities in the fashion industry. Examples encompass the utilization of Native American headdresses during music festivals, the integration of African and Asian patterns into clothing lines, as well as pretension concerning cultural objects such as bindis. Furthermore, there have also been accusations of cultural appropriation in the UK's entertainment and media industries. Oriental civilizations are portrayed with clichés and stock characters that have lost their historical significance in films, TV series, and literature. Currently, it is important to note that cross-cultural contacts ought to be more courteous (Teal-Rutkovsky, 2023).

6. Japan
7. People's Republic of China
8. Republic of Korea
9. Federal Republic of Germany
10. Federative Republic of Brazil
11. Italian Republic

12. Kingdom of Spain

13. United Mexican States

14. Russian Federation

15. Republic of India

16. Republic of South Africa

17. Kingdom of Thailand

18. Republic of Indonesia

19. Republic of the Philippines

20. New Zealand

21. Republic of Turkey

22. Hellenic Republic

23. State of Israel

24. Arab Republic of Egypt

25. Federal Republic of Nigeria

26. Argentine Republic

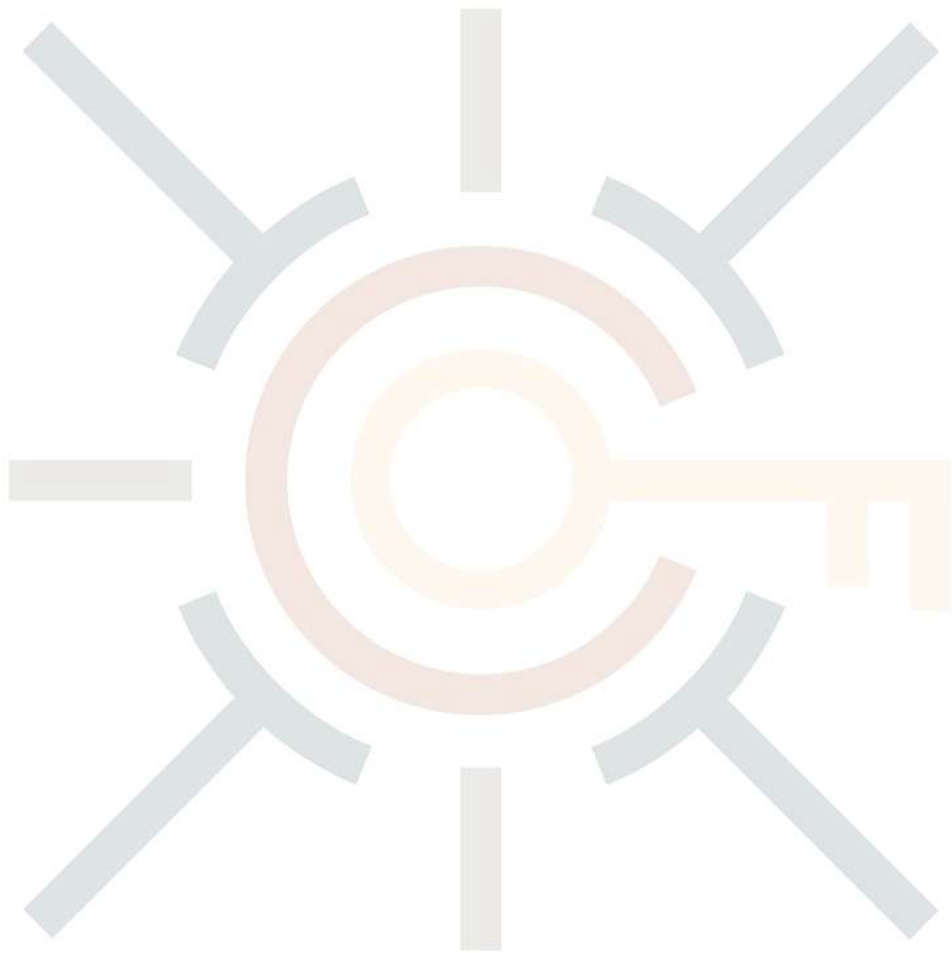
27. Kingdom of Morocco

28. Islamic Republic of Iran



29. Islamic Republic of Pakistan

30. Swiss confederation





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