

An Ottoman “Bill of Rights” (1856)

It being now my [the sultan’s] desire to renew and enlarge still more the new Institutions ordained with the view of establishing a state of things conformable with the dignity of my Empire and...by the kind and friendly assistance of the Great Powers, my noble Allies,...The guarantees promised on our part by the Hatt-i Humayan of Gulhane,...are today confirmed and consolidated, and efficacious measures shall be taken in order that they may have their full and entire effect.

All the Privileges and Spiritual Immunities granted by my ancestors..., and at subsequent dates, to all Christian communities or other non-Muslim persuasion established in my Empire under my protection, shall be confirmed and maintained.

Every Christian or other non-Muslim community shall be bound...to examine into its actual Immunities and Privileges, and to discuss and submit to my Sublime Porte [the Ottoman government] the Reforms required by the progress of civilization and of the age...The ecclesiastical dues, of whatever sort or nature they be, shall be abolished and replaced by fixed revenues of the [Orthodox Christian] Patriarchs and heads of communities... In the towns, small boroughs, and villages, where the whole population is of the same Religion, no obstacle shall be offered to the repair, according to their original plan, of buildings set apart for Religious Worship, for Schools, for Hospitals, and for Cemeteries.

Every distinction or designation tending to make any class whatever of the subjects of my Empire inferior to another class, on account of their Religion, Language, or Race, shall be forever effaced from the Administrative Protocol.

As all forms of Religion are and shall be freely professed in my dominions, no subject of my Empire shall be hindered in the exercise of the Religion that he professes...No one shall be compelled to change their Religion...and...all the subjects of my Empire, without distinction of nationality, shall be admissible to public employments...All the subjects of my Empire, without distinction, shall be received into the Civil and Military Schools of the Government...Moreover, every community is authorized to establish Public Schools of Science, Art, and Industry.

All Commercial, Correctional, and Criminal Suits between Muslims and Christians or other non-Muslim subjects, or between Christians or other non-Muslims of different sects, shall be referred to Mixed Tribunals. The proceedings of these Tribunals shall be public: the parties shall be confronted, and shall produce their witnesses, whose testimony shall be received, without distinction, upon oath taken according to the religious law of each sect.

The organization of the Police...shall be revised in such a manner as to give all the peaceable subjects of my Empire the strongest guarantees for the safety both of their persons and property....Christian subjects, and those of other non-Muslim sects,...shall, as well as Muslims, be subject to the obligations of the Law of Recruitment. The principle of obtaining substitutes, or of purchasing exemption, shall be admitted.

Proceedings shall be taken for a Reform in the Constitution of the Provincial and Communal Councils, in order to ensure fairness in the choice of the Deputies of the Muslim, Christian, and other communities, and freedom of voting in the Councils.

As the Laws regulating the purchase, sale, and disposal of Real Property are common to all the subjects of my Empire, it shall be lawful for Foreigners to possess Landed Property in my dominions.

The Taxes are to be levied under the same denomination from all the subjects of my Empire, without distinction of class or of Religion.

A special Law having been already passed, which declared that the Budget of the Revenue and Expenditure of the State shall be drawn up and made known every year, the said law shall be most scrupulously observed.

Such being my wishes and my commands, you, who are my Grand Vizier, will, according to custom, cause this Imperial *Firmanto* to be published in my capital and in all parts of my Empire; and will watch attentively, and take all the necessary measures that all the orders which it contains be henceforth carried out with the most rigorous punctuality.