



Proceeding of 2nd Malikussaleh Internasional
Conference on Law, Legal Studies and Social Science
(MICoLLS) 2022

The Role of the Korea Muslim Federation (KMF) in Guaranteeing the Right to Access Halal Products for Minority Muslims

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Abstract

This study aims to find out how the role of KMF in ensuring access to halal products for Muslim minorities in South Korea. This is because of the importance of halal food for Muslims and the lack of knowledge of Koreans about Islamic teachings and halal food. To that end, the South Korean government through MAFRA cooperates with KMF in the process and provision of halal certificates for Korean food. This research includes qualitative research with case studies. Methods of data collection using interviews and documentation. While the data analysis was carried out in several stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study indicate that the role of KMF is very good in halal product certification, because KMF is the only institution that has the authority in halal certification. There are several things that KMF does to ensure access to halal products, namely halal product certification, collaboration with the Government, and increasing human resources in halal product certification.

Keyword

KMF, Halal Product, Minority Muslims

A. Introduction

South Korea is not a Muslim-majority country. The majority of South Koreans (56.1% - according to the 2015 national census) do not follow a particular religion. The rest are people who follow religion, which are divided into Protestant (19.7%), Buddhist (15.5%) and Catholic (7.9%) religious groups of the total population. Another 0.8% are adherents of other religions, such as Confucianism, Won Buddhism, Cheondoism, Daesun Jinrihoe, Daejongism, and Jeungsanism. Meanwhile, the population that adheres to Islam in South Korea is only about 0.2%, so Muslims are included in the minority in this country (Fathil, 2011).

Based on Mastercard and Crescent Rating reports, by 2022 the population of Muslims or Muslims has reached 2 billion people and spread in around 200 countries. The number of Muslims is roughly equivalent to 25% of the global population. The majority or 67% of adherents of Islam are in the Asian region. The highest distribution is in South Asia with a percentage of 35.6%, then in Southeast Asia 13.8%, West Asia 12.7%, Central Asia 3.4%, and East Asia 1.5%. There are also many followers of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa with a percentage of 17.9%. Then as many as 12% of Muslims are in North Africa, 2.7% in Europe, and the remaining 0.4% are scattered in various other regions. The world's Muslim population is dominated by men, as many as 50.8%, while women are 49.2%. As many as 70% of global Muslims are recorded to be under the age of 40 in 2022.

The population is expected to continue to increase to almost 3 billion in 2050 or about 29.7% of the total world population. With this, the followers of Islam in the world become the second largest religion after Christianity. The number of Muslims currently reaches 23.4% of the world's population today. The growth of the Muslim population also affects the consumption of halal food which has reached around USD 1.3 trillion or around 17% and is estimated to grow to around USD 2.5 trillion in 2019. Based on this, the demand for halal food demand or needs globally .

The growing Muslim population in South Korea also has an impact on increasing Muslim consumption. Muslim immigrants living in South Korea asked the government to provide facilities and infrastructure to get halal food easily. About 135,000 Muslim immigrants living in Korea are looking for halal-certified food. The rise of Muslim popularity as one of the consumers of the food market is expected to experience rapid growth (Park, 2013).

In addition, South Korea is also one of the countries that become a reference for tourists. The number of Muslim tourists is increasing from year to year. In 2016, the country managed to hit the figure of around 800,000 for Muslim tourists. To attract Muslim tourists, especially Muslim tourists from Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Middle East, South Korea uses food or culinary diplomacy, namely Korean Halal Food as its tourism strategy. However, along with the rapid growth of the Muslim population and the level of consumption of Muslims in the world, halal food has been able to attract the interest of many countries around the world, especially Muslim minority countries. Some of the Muslim minority countries are Japan, Thailand, Australia, China, Taiwan, and others.

The importance of halal food for Muslims and the lack of knowledge of Koreans about Islamic teachings about halal food have made the South Korean government through MAFRA cooperate with KMF in the process and provision of halal certificates for Korean food. The certification applies to halal restaurants in Korea as well as to Korean food products. KMF is the only Muslim organization in Korea that issues halal certificates for K-food. KMF has also collaborated with the Korea Food Research Institute to develop the halal K-food industry. For this reason, this paper will examine the role of KMF in ensuring access to halal products for minority Muslims in South Korea.

B. Research Method

This research is a qualitative research (Creswell, 2014) with the type of case study research (Yin, 2003) in the Korea Moslem Federation (KMF) of South Korea. Determination of informants from this study using purposive sampling technique with snowball. (Moelong, 2013) The key informants are the Head of KMF Busan Abdus Salam and Syaikhoni. The research method is interviews and documentation. The data analysis was carried out in several stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions. (Matthew B. Miles, 2014)

C. Results and Discussion of Research

The role of KMF in Guaranteeing Access to Halal Products for Minority Muslims includes several things, namely halal product certification, establishing cooperation with the government, and increasing human resources in halal product certification.

1. Halal Certification by KMF

The South Korean government does not have a law requiring halal certification for its food. However, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (MAFRA) has a law governing the food industry promotion act which states that the ministry is ready to support the promotion of the Korean food industry. And in the second paragraph the 4th point states that the master plan will support the industry in improving the quality of food, demand and supply as well as in the "Matters for improving the quality of food, supply and demand for food, and the certification system" certification system.

There are approximately 150 companies whose products have obtained halal certificates. South Korea, which is also supported by the speed of technology, has digital assistance as a means of modern halal tourism. The Digital Assistance is in the form of an application in English that can help Muslim tourists find Muslim-friendly facilities such as the nearest mosque, restaurant, etc. This application is also able to determine the direction of the Kaaba and prayer times. This application can even detect the barcode on food plastic to find out whether the food being sold is halal or not. (Nur Kusumaningrum, 2017)

South Korea is listed as one of the developed countries that marks the economic revival of the Asian Miracles (NIEs) countries. The mass media noted the development of Muslim-friendly South Korean tourism. Hongdae, Cheong dam, and Gangnam are some areas that are quite prominent as Muslim tourist destinations. In these three areas, there are many halal-certified restaurants and shopping centers equipped with places of worship that make it easier for tourists to pray. In addition, South Korea also introduced a digital application called "Halal Korea". This application is designed to make it easier for Muslim tourists visiting Korea. This application provides several features including *Salah*, *Qibla*, Travel, Community, Scans, Restaurant, and Market. In the 'Salah' feature, visitors can find out information about prayer times and with the help of google maps, this feature is able to show the location of the nearest mosque. The advantage of the 'Salah' feature is that tourists can listen to the complete chanting of the holy Quran. The "Korean Halal" application allows tourists to meet fellow Muslim travelers who are also visiting Korea through the 'Community' feature. (Nur Kusumaningrum, 2017)

For restaurants or companies that want to obtain halal certification from KMF, there are procedures and mechanisms that must be carried out, namely: (Syaikhoni, 2022)

- a. The company or restaurant submits the documents needed to submit an application for halal certification.
- b. The company pays the administrative fees needed in the halal certification process.
- c. KMF conducts research, inspection and review of the company's factories. The inspection includes an examination of the product materials used, such as: process, place, proof of purchase of materials, how to cut the food product. Then the

examination of samples of additional materials for further investigation in the laboratory to be checked for halal, especially for materials that are haram or containing alcohol. If the product contains ingredients that are haram, then the product cannot get halal certification or replace the material with halal ingredients if you want to continue to get halal certification from KMF

- d. Hold a meeting with the Korean Halal Sharia Approval Committee to discuss the final research and issuance of halal certification carried out by KMF
- e. To guarantee the halal product, a company or restaurant that has obtained halal certification, KMF appoints an internal auditor in each company or restaurant who is tasked with supervising its halalness. If in the future the company or restaurant is found to have violated the use of haram ingredients, then KMF has the right to revoke its halal certification. In addition, every food product that has obtained halal certification is required to renew or extend its certificate every two years with the same procedure as for the first time doing halal certification. If the company or restaurant does not renew its certificate, the company is no longer entitled to halal and the halal certificate is returned.

Currently, there are more and more halal K-foods that have received certification from KMF. Korean halal food is a halal product provided by the Korean government for Muslim tourists who have collaborated with KMF institutions in improving the quality of tourism services. (Syaikhoni, 2022) So that it can attract Muslim tourists to visit Korea by feeling calm and safe when eating at halal restaurants that have received halal certification from KMF and do not hesitate when buying packaged Korean food products. With the halal certificate, Muslim tourists are more comfortable in consuming Korean food.

2. **Making Cooperation with Government**

The South Korean government's cooperation with the Korean Muslim Federation, both through KTO and MAFRA, has made halal certificates as South Korea's new soft power medium to establish better relations with Muslim countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Middle East countries. (Salam, 2022) With this certification, the South Korean government has great potential to enter the world halal market where previously the Muslim market share, especially in the halal market, had not been utilized properly. With this it can be seen that South Korea's foreign policy is to expand cooperation with Muslim countries through halal certification of food products in order to gain national interest in the form of increasing the economy. (Syaikhoni, 2022) The halal certificate in Korea itself is given by KMF where KMF has an important role in developing the halal food industry and establishing relationships with Muslim countries where KMF has close relations with Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Indonesia, Malaysia and so on. Although the halal certificate is only applicable in Korea, the South Korean government continues to strive for the halal certificate to be valid in Muslim countries through diplomatic channels and holding international exhibitions and conferences that carry the theme of Korean halal food.

3. **Improving Human Resources in Halal Product certification**

KMF selected several Korean Muslim youths to be sent to several prominent Islamic countries to study Islam and conduct research through scholarships. (Park, 2013) The goal is the cadre of educated and superior Muslim leaders so that they can be used as investments in the future of Islam in Korea.

Fortunately, the governments of Islamic or Muslim countries are very supportive of the Korean Muslim youth cadre program by providing full scholarship assistance. Through the coordination of the KMF organization, this program is running and several Korean Muslim youths who have been selected have received assistance from Islamic countries. Initially some Korean Muslim students had the opportunity to study Islam (Fathil, 2011) only in Saudi Arabia, King Abdul Aziz University. (Syaikhoni, 2022; Salam, 2022; Kettani, 2005) But then there are several campuses that provide opportunities for Korean Muslim students who want to study Islam, including Kuwait, Morocco, and Malaysia. (Geun, 2014) In February 1962 CE, 11 Korean Muslim students including 3 women were sent to the Klang Islamic Institute in Malaysia to study Islam for 6 months. (Grayson, 2002)

D. **Conclusion**

South Korea is also one of the countries that become a reference for tourists. The number of Muslim tourists is increasing from year to year. The importance of halal food for Muslims and the lack of knowledge of Koreans about Islamic teachings and halal food have made the South Korean government through MAFRA cooperate with KMF in the process and provision of halal certificates for Korean food. The certification applies to halal restaurants in Korea as well as to Korean food products. KMF is the only Muslim organization in Korea that issues halal certificates for K-food. KMF has also collaborated with the Korea Food Research Institute to develop the halal K-food industry. The role of KMF in Guaranteeing halal product includes halal certification, making cooperation with government and improving the Human resources in halal product certification.

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