





The Freedom of Religion or Belief & Foreign Policy Initiative (FoRB&FPI) is an interdisciplinary research network of academics based at the University of Sussex, which aims to advance the policy discussion on the challenges and opportunities of advancing FoRB regionally, internationally and through foreign policy.

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# Executive Summary

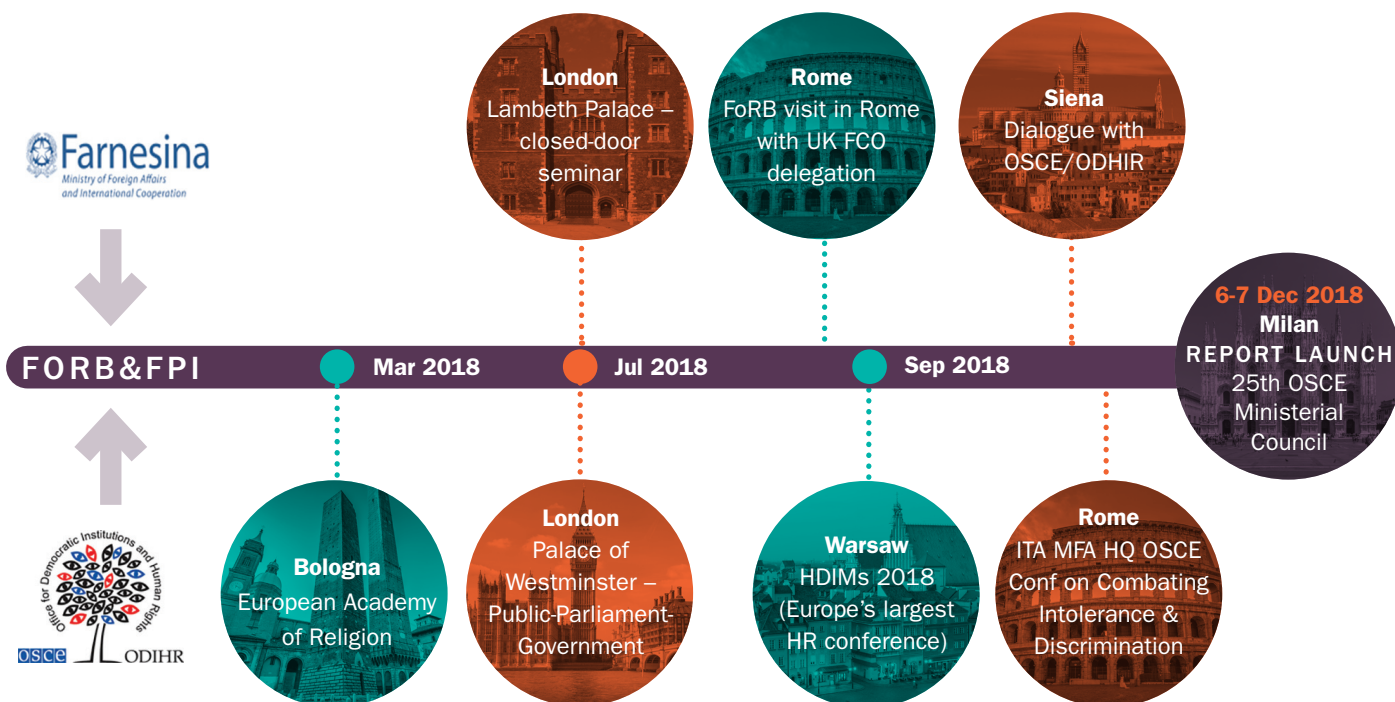
Persecution and discrimination on the basis of religion and belief are on the rise in many parts of the world. The fundamental human right of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) is in crisis. In response to growing persecution and discrimination in recent years, the international community has committed to a broad range of efforts to prevent and combat intolerance based on religion or belief: strengthening policy tools, global advocacy efforts and international coordination to protect FoRB. There is, however, a growing feeling that the current policy approach is failing and that new bottom up strategies, i.e., engaging with local stakeholders and developing activities in response to local concerns, is the way forward.

Building on this insight, a multi-stakeholder consultation process, led by the University of Sussex (FoRB&FPI) and run under the patronage of the 2018 Italian OSCE Chairmanship in partnership with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Policy

Planning Unit) and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), was established to encourage governments and international organizations to consider interreligious engagement – engagement with religious actors and interreligious dialogue and collaboration – as a vital policy tool to advance FoRB for all, providing recommendations and strategies of how to do so.

The consultation involved 94 policy-makers, experts, religious and civil society representatives from the OSCE region and beyond (see list on page 28), who engaged in three official meetings in Bologna in the context of the European Academy of Religion (March 2018), in London (July 2018) in the UK Parliament at Westminster Palace and at Lambeth Palace and in Warsaw (September 2018) at the OSCE/ODHIR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. The FoRB&FPI team participated in a number of additional informal meetings, follow-up presentations, discussions and interviews.

## THE CONSULTATION PROCESS



## KEY MESSAGES

- In order to fulfil their obligations under the international human rights law framework, States must take steps to prevent interference with the right to FoRB by non-State actors. At an international level, interreligious dialogue and collaboration has been recognised as a key way to achieve the full protection of FoRB and as an obligation of OSCE participating States.
- Both quantitative and qualitative indicators and evidence point unequivocally towards the fact that respect for FoRB has been continuing to deteriorate globally. In particular, recent years have seen the growth of a worrying trend of social hostility between communal groups throughout the world. This report highlights *negative stereotyping, stigmatization, hate speech, intolerance and communal violence based on religion or belief*, characterized by a growing role of societal actors as FoRB violators, in the context of the indirect failure of the State to protect this right or instability of fragile-States and regional conflicts.
- Despite recent efforts to protect FoRB through foreign policy tools, global advocacy efforts and international coordination, this approach has largely been unsuccessful. Top down advocacy approaches must be complemented by bottom up developmental strategies. Governments and international organisations must support innovative partnerships with various FoRB stakeholders on the ground such that development interventions actively address religious or belief discrimination, support coexistence beyond sectarian lines, and promote inclusivity in religiously heterogeneous communities.
- Religious engagement in foreign policy is a call for a new dialogue and mutual learning between secular and religious institutions in the acknowledgement and respect of their different domains, responsibilities and missions, but in the realization that collaboration and partnership may be essential to tackle new global challenges and to strengthen the common good.
- *Interreligious engagement strategies* – engagement and partnership with interreligious actors, groups, coalitions, platforms and activities – are crucial policy tools internationally to advance human rights, including FoRB, combat intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief and foster the development of peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16).
- By creating opportunities for positive interactions between individuals, creating spaces for dialogue and identifying common ground, interreligious dialogue and collaboration has the potential to strengthen mutual understanding between different, and traditionally hostile, communities and, thereby, improve societal cohesion and foster new forms of active citizenship participation.
- Interreligious engagement strategies can include a variety of forms of interreligious dialogue and collaboration ranging from theological exchanges to day-to-day socializing and common social action by different religious, spiritual and philosophical groups and individuals. All these forms can be impactful in advancing FoRB depending on issues and contexts provided that the policy design and implementation have carefully linked the local with the global level and the secular with the religious dimension.
- States should seek to facilitate and provide an infrastructure or environment to enable interreligious engagement to take place, yet, States must not monopolize this practice and must also allow religious communities to organize interreligious dialogue and collaboration.
- In facilitating interreligious engagement, States must respect the human rights of participants and remain neutral and impartial in matters of FoRB. This includes not discriminating between religious communities, not seeking to coerce communities to participate against their will and not seeking to influence religious doctrine.
- The choice of language adopted during interreligious engagement activities to advance FoRB should be context dependent. In some instances, religious language may be more effective than the language of human rights.

The key assumption of this report is that religious actors should not only be seen by policy makers as the *victims* or the *perpetrators of FoRB violations*, but as partners in building long-term strategies to advance FoRB for all and to foster pluralism, social cohesion and sustainable peace.

# The Definition of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) as a Fundamental Human Right

*Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.*<sup>1</sup>  
Article 18 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (FoRB) is enshrined in article 18 of the UDHR and multiple international and regional human rights instruments, that apply to States in the OSCE region<sup>2</sup> as well as OSCE Concluding Documents.<sup>3</sup> As human rights are ‘universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated’, FoRB forms part of the international human rights framework and should not be dissociated from other rights. Specifically, the mutually reinforcing nature of FoRB and the freedoms of expression, assembly and association must be acknowledged.<sup>4</sup>

The right to FoRB encompasses an internal and external element. The internal element, the right to hold a religion or belief, is to be broadly construed and encompasses not only traditional religious beliefs but all theistic, atheistic and non-theistic beliefs as well as the right not to believe.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the external element, the right to manifest ‘religion

or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance’,<sup>6</sup> was intended to capture all conceivable manifestations of religion or belief<sup>7</sup> and has been interpreted expansively in practice.<sup>8</sup> The right to manifest religion or belief is, however, subject to the limitations set out in international instruments. Specifically, limitations on this right must be prescribed by law and ‘necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others’.<sup>9</sup>

The emphasis on ‘freedom’ suggests that FoRB is ‘primarily of a defensive nature’.<sup>10</sup> While non-interference with FoRB by States was initially understood to be the core of FoRB,<sup>11</sup> it is increasingly recognized that States must also take steps to prevent interference with this right by non-State actors under the *respect, protect, fulfill* framework.<sup>12</sup> Within the OSCE, participating States are obliged to ‘foster a climate of mutual tolerance and respect between believers of different communities as well as between believers and non-believers’ in accordance with the Concluding Documents of the Vienna Meeting 1983 and the Budapest Meeting 1994.<sup>13</sup> At the UN level there is increasing recognition of the need to engage religious leaders and actors,<sup>14</sup> alongside civil society organisations,<sup>15</sup> in order to ensure the realisation of the right to FoRB in practice.

<sup>1</sup> Article 18 Universal Declaration Of Human Rights GA Res. 217A (III), UN Doc A/810 At 71 (1948) (UDHR).

<sup>2</sup> Article 18 UDHR; Article 18 International Covenant On Civil And Political Rights 999 UNTS 171, Entered Into Force 23 March 1976 (ICCPR); Article 9 Convention For The Protection Of Human Rights And Fundamental Freedoms CETS No 005, Entered Into Force 3 September 1953 (ECHR).

<sup>3</sup> OSCE, ‘Helsinki Final Act 1975’, VII Para 1, 3; OSCE, ‘Concluding Document Of The Madrid Meeting 1980 of Representatives of the Participating States of the Conference on Security And Co-Operation in Europe, Held on the Basis of the Provisions of the Final Act Relating to the Follow-Up to the Conference’, Questions Relating To Security In Europe, Par. 12, 13 And 14; OSCE, ‘Concluding Document Of The Third Follow-Up Meeting, Vienna, 4 November 1986 To 19 January 1989’, ‘Questions Relating To Security In Europe’ Paras 11, 16, 17; OSCE, Document Of The Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE Ar. 9.4 And 18.1-18.6; OSCE, ‘Budapest Document 1994 Towards a Genuine Partnership in a New Era’ Chapter VIII, Par. 27 And OSCE, ‘Istanbul Document 1999’ Charter For European Security, Par. 19.

<sup>4</sup> UN General Assembly, *Vienna Declaration And Programme Of Action*, 12 July 1993, UN Doc A/CONF.157/23, Part I, Para 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Kokkinakis v Greece* (1994) 17 EHRR 397 Para 31. See Also, HRC, ‘General Comment No 22’ On ‘The Right To Freedom Of Thought, Conscience And Religion (Art. 18)’ UN Doc CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4 Para 2.

<sup>6</sup> Article 18 Universal Declaration On Human Rights.

<sup>7</sup> A Krishnaswami, *Study Of Discrimination In The Matter Of Religious Rights And Practices*, UN Doc E/CN.4/Sub.2/200/Rev.1, 17.

<sup>8</sup> HRC, ‘General Comment No 22’ on ‘The Right To Freedom Of Thought, Conscience and Religion (Art. 18)’ UN Doc CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4 Para 4.

<sup>9</sup> Article 18(3) ICCPR. See also article 29 UDHR.

<sup>10</sup> M Nowak, *UN Covenant On Civil And Political Rights: CCPR Commentary* (2nd Edn, NP Engel 2005) 411.

<sup>11</sup> SE Berry, ‘A “Good Faith” Interpretation Of The Right To Manifest Religion? The Diverging Approaches Of The European Court Of Human Rights And The UN Human Rights Committee’ (2017) 37 *Legal Studies* 672, 675.

<sup>12</sup> See, For Example, UNGA, *Interim Report Of The Special Rapporteur On Freedom Of Religion Or Belief* 2 August 2016 UN Doc A/71/269 Para 23.

<sup>13</sup> OSCE, ‘Concluding Document, Vienna’, ‘Questions Relating To Security In Europe’ Para 16.2; OSCE, ‘Budapest Document’ Chapter VIII, Par. 27

<sup>14</sup> UN Office On Genocide Prevention And The Responsibility To Protect, *Plan Of Action For Religious Leaders And Actors To Prevent Incitement To Violence That Could Lead To Atrocity Crimes*, 2017, 17-19.

<sup>15</sup> UNGA, *Annual Report Of The United Nations High Commissioner For Human Rights Addendum Report Of The United Nations High Commissioner For Human Rights On The Expert Workshops On The Prohibition Of Incitement To National, Racial Or Religious Hatred*, Rabat Plan Of Action On The Prohibition Of Advocacy Of National, Racial Or Religious Hatred That Constitutes Incitement To Discrimination, Hostility Or Violence’ 11 January 2013 UN Doc A/HRC/22/17/Add.4 para 56.

# Current Trends in FoRB Violations

Religious persecution and discrimination appear to be on the rise in many parts of the world. In the foreign policy and legal language, the fundamental human right of FoRB is in crisis. It is threatened by religious extremist movements, secular oppressive governments, and different combinations of actors and ideologies, which affects many religious believers, across all religious and belief communities including atheists. Both quantitative and qualitative indicators and evidence point unequivocally towards the fact that respect for FoRB has been continuing to deteriorate. According to Pew Research Center, in terms of longer-term trends, the median score of the government Restrictions on Religion Index has increased in all regions of the world since the Center elaborated this index and released its first data in 2007.<sup>16</sup>

As the last 2018 report of the USCIRF states, “This ongoing downward trend often intersected with authoritarian practices characterized by hostility toward dissent, pluralism, independent media, and active civil society, or took place under the guise of protecting national security or countering terrorism”.<sup>17</sup> Similar trends are confirmed by the recently released report of the the European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance, which also emphasises the worrying worldwide increase in religiously motivated violence and social hostility.<sup>18</sup>

FoRB violations manifest in a multiplicity of ways. Thinking in terms of a continuum of violation intensity, upholding FoRB requires combating intolerance, discrimination, persecution, incitement to violence, and violence against persons based on religion or belief. At the extreme of the continuum of violations of FoRB is the choice still faced unfortunately today by many believers to give up their religion or belief, face death or exile.

Violations of FoRB can be broadly categorized into two different, though inter-linked, dimensions: direct denial and interference with this right by State and the failure of States to sufficiently protect this right. For the purposes of this report, we would like to highlight three levels of FoRB violations: 1) the State/Governmental level, which reflects the direct dimension of state denial; 2) Non-State/Societal level, which focuses on the role of societal actors as FoRB violators and the indirect failing role of the state in

protecting this rights; 3) the Fragile-state/Conflict level which emphasizes the situation of degeneration of FoRB violation into sectarian and communal violence in the context of collapsing/fragile-states and regional instability.

## 1. STATE/GOVERNMENTAL LEVEL

The human right of FoRB can be violated by laws or policies that prohibit or restrict apostasy, blasphemy, proselytism, registration of religious communities, places of worship, and religious symbols in the public sphere. Increasingly “anti-extremism” laws (or protecting national security) are used as a tool to curtail FoRB. State agents may incite to religious violence or actively discriminate against members of specific religious or belief communities. Often these violations affect religious minorities but victims can be also different vulnerable groups: non-religious groups/individuals (atheists) and majority-religions oppressed by authoritarian states.

## 2. NON-STATE/SOCIETAL LEVEL

The human right of FoRB can be violated by negative stereotyping, stigmatization, hate speech, intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. This form of religious or belief discrimination are part of a worrying growing social trend throughout the world, thriving on the crises of established collective identities, concerns about social cohesion exacerbated by other social conditions including economic insecurity. In turn, this results in ‘othering’, that is, the construction of the self-identity through the opposition to a negative-valued, dangerous or threatening Other.

## 3. FRAGILE-STATE/CONFLICT LEVEL

The human right of FoRB can be violated as part of sectarian and communal political violence between religious groups or groups defined also by a religious element in the context of fragile/collapsing states and regional instability. These are cases in which the intensity of the FoRB violation becomes associated with political violence and may take the shape of intra-state conflict and humanitarian crises. Often these are complex political conflicts and struggles for power where a prominent and acute role of FoRB violators is taken by non-state actors in a context of the *de facto* absence of the legitimate authority of a state.

<sup>16</sup> Pew Research Center, Global Restrictions on Religions, Annual Report, 2017 & 2018.

<sup>17</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (2018), Annual Report.

<sup>18</sup> European Intergroup on FoRB and Religious Tolerance (2018), Annual Report.

# The International Policy Context I: Recent Initiatives to Protect FoRB through Foreign Policy

In the last few years the foreign policy tools, the global advocacy efforts and the international coordination to protect FoRB has been strengthened - e.g. the creation of new observatories (France and Italy), new offices and roles (Norway, Canada, UK, Denmark, Germany and EU), new resolutions and guidelines (UN HRC Res 31/26, EU FoRB guidelines) as well as new multinational and

transnational networks such as ICGFoRB (diplomats) and IPPFoRB (parliamentarian).<sup>19</sup> These initiatives have different characteristics and aims, which sometimes reflect different conceptions of FoRB and state-religions arrangements and have contributed to the creation of a dense network of FoRB-related bodies that can be mapped in the following groups according to their declared aims<sup>20</sup>:



## A) MONITORING AND INFORMING

A first group aims at providing information about the situation of FoRB in different countries. In this framework monitoring and evaluating the social and legal developments that can affect the respect of FoRB provides a sound basis of data and knowledge to inform public opinion and the work of political, cultural and religious actors.

### EXAMPLES ARE:

The Observatoire Pharos, created in France in 2012 and the Observatory on Religious Minorities in the World and on the Respect for Religious Freedom created in Italy in 2017. Both initiatives were conceived as partnerships between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and civil societies.



## B) ASSISTING

A second group is comprised by the international organizations that provide legal assistance to countries that are in the process of legislating on FoRB, with the aim to bring national provision in line with international instruments protecting FoRB.

### EXAMPLES ARE:

The OSCE-ODIHR Panel of Experts on FoRB and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission.



## C) PROMOTING AND DEFENDING

Some bodies adopt a more political-diplomatic approach to the issue of FoRB: their stated aim is to promote and, when necessary, defend FoRB all over the world through foreign policy. Collecting data, monitoring and evaluating activities are more directly connected to the implementation of a set of foreign policy tools aimed at promoting/defending FoRB, which can go from the discrete diplomatic demarches for prisoners release cases to raising FoRB issues in bilateral government-to-government dealing to the more mega-phone diplomacy as the 'naming and shaming' strategies.

### EXAMPLES ARE:

The Office of International Religious Freedom of the U.S. Department of State and the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom; the EU Special Envoy for the promotion of FoRB outside the EU, and the FoRB special envoys of respectively Denmark, the UK and Germany; as well as the UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB, appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, who has a similar mandate.

<sup>19</sup> Petito, F., Philpott, D., Ferrari, S. & Birdsall, J. "FoRB – Recognising our differences can be our strength: Enhancing transatlantic cooperation on promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief", Policy Brief, University of Sussex, 2016, available at [http://forbforeignpolicy.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/FoRB\\_Transatlantic\\_policy\\_briefing\\_2016.pdf](http://forbforeignpolicy.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/FoRB_Transatlantic_policy_briefing_2016.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Fabio Petito is indebted for this mapping to discussions over the years with Prof Silvio Ferrari.



In order to strengthen the effectiveness of the growing international constellation of FoRB initiatives and bodies, the last couple of years have seen the creation of important multinational and transnational FoRB networks such as the inter-governmental International Contact Group on FoRB (ICCFoRB), the International Panel of Parliamentarians for FoRB (IPPFoRB), which have strengthened the international coordination and cooperation respectively among Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Parliaments in this policy area. These networks have initially emerged as a way of strengthening the transatlantic cooperation but are now gradually expanding beyond the Western world as it is proved, for example, by the creation of the Commonwealth Initiative for FoRB (CiFoRB).

There is, however, a growing feeling that the current FoRB-protection approach appears on the whole to be failing. Governments have started to realize that there are limits to their reach and influence, particularly in matters of religion. Behavioural change is given effect primarily at the local level. Local and non-state actors are therefore essential. Top down approaches (i.e. high-level declaratory statements and government to government activity) must be complemented by bottom up strategies (i.e. engaging with local stakeholders developing activity in response to local concerns).<sup>21</sup> Innovative ways of engaging on the ground and in a collaborative way with actors equipped to speak with authority about change-making regarding FoRB represent an important addition to traditional government-to-government or international organisation approaches to improve FoRB and to combat intolerance and discrimination worldwide. Therefore, governments and international organisations need to provide a forum where such engagement and dialogue can take place.<sup>22</sup> There is also need for new innovative partnerships between various FoRB stakeholders and development agencies on the ground such that development interventions actively address religious discrimination affecting individuals and communities, support coexistence beyond sectarian lines, and promote inclusivity in religiously heterogeneous communities. Some promising examples of this new emerging approach are: the Istanbul Process and the Rabat Plan of Action, developed following the consensual adoption of the Resolution 16/18 on combating intolerance by the UN Human Rights Council in 2011; the

2016 Marrakesh Declaration (Muslim leaders for the right of religious minorities) and the 2017 Beirut Declaration (an interreligious platform and message to advance the role religious communities can play in fostering human rights including FoRB).

As part of these new bottom up and collaborative strategies of engagement the key message of this report is that engagement with religious actors and interreligious dialogue and collaboration are crucial policy tools to promote FoRB and combat intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. Its key assumption is that religious actors should not only be seen by policy makers as *either the victims or the perpetrators of FoRB violations*, but as partners in building long-term strategies to advance FoRB for all and to foster pluralism, social cohesion and sustainable peace.

This report challenges the widely held contemporary assumption that the growing role of religion in international affairs is essentially a militant and violent-prone form of politics, or that religion poses an inherent threat to international order and stability. Instead, this report assumes that religion is politically ambivalent: on the one hand, it can promote political violence and conflict, but on the other, also peace building, reconciliation and non-violent civic engagement.<sup>23</sup> Hence somehow, by reversing the picture we ask: *How can religious leaders, communities and other various religious-based organisations help governmental and international organisations to de-escalate violence, build peace and combat intolerance and discrimination in the context of the current crisis?* This more reflexive and multifaceted understanding of the role of religion in international relations has informed a new policy oriented discussion, which is now often referred to as 'religious engagement' in foreign policy.

<sup>21</sup> See the UK APPG IFoRB Report "Article 18: From Rhetoric to Reality" 2017 available at <https://appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/media/Article-18-report-1710.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> See for example the Istanbul Process and the Rabat Plan of Action, developed following the consensual adoption of the Resolution 16/18 on combating intolerance by the UN Human Rights Council in 2011. More recent initiatives of this type include the 2016 Marrakesh declaration (Muslim leaders for the right of religious minorities) and the 2017 Beirut declaration (an interreligious platform and message to advance the role religious communities can play in fostering Human Rights including FoRB).

<sup>23</sup> Appleby, R. S. *The ambivalence of the sacred: religion, violence, and reconciliation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999.

# The International Policy Context II: The Religious Engagement Approach in Foreign Policy

Over the past decade governments have considered the global resurgence of religion in international affairs as a specific policy challenge which requires strategic thinking and appropriate policy responses. As a result, more recently a new policy oriented discussion focusing on 'religious engagement' in foreign policy has emerged. Religious engagement does not refer to the simple diplomatic activity of 'reaching out' to cultivate good relations with religious actors. These initiatives are not new and are arguably part of the common diplomatic culture. Rather the idea of religious engagement points to a new policy strategy and ways in which governments and international organisations can engage religious non-state actors (religious leaders, communities and various religious-based organisations) abroad on a wide spectrum of global issues to promote humanitarian assistance, development, human rights and peace-building.

Ministries of foreign affairs of countries such as France, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Norway, Italy and Hungary have started to strengthen their capacity to engage religion in order to 'make better policy and to make a bigger difference', as the title of a recent conference sponsored by the UK Foreign Office suggests.<sup>24</sup> An important stage in this development was the publication of an influential report by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs entitled *Engaging Religious Communities Abroad: A New Imperative for US Foreign Policy*.<sup>25</sup> Critically reflecting on the failures and lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan, the report shows how the Western community failed to understand the key role that local mainstream Islamic communities played in providing education, sanitation, and other social services when the state structure no longer existed, as is the case with a so-called failed state. Framing religion exclusively through the counter-terrorist framework prevented constructive engagement with religion as part of the solution to build stability, the central objective of the international community's new comprehensive approach to security and development.

Based on this evaluation, the US State Department launched a new 'US Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement', which paved the way for the creation of the Office of Religion and Global Affairs in 2015 within the US State Department to advise the Secretary of State. The aim of this new US strategy is to 'encourage(s) U.S. government officials to develop and deepen their relationships with religious leaders and faith communities as they carry out their foreign policy responsibilities,' and develop a more robust engagement with religious leaders and communities abroad specifically to promote development and humanitarian assistance; advance human rights, including FoRB; and prevent and resolve conflict.<sup>26</sup>

The concept of 'religious engagement' is fairly new in foreign policy making, and arguably is still very much a work in progress and open to a variety of interpretations and forms of national implementation. Focusing on the role of interreligious dialogue, it has been argued that religious engagement has not only the potential to improve the knowledge base for foreign policy but also, through new secular-religious partnerships, to stretch the political imagination and create new practical innovations to respond to global policy challenges.<sup>27</sup> In any case, the new policy strategy of religious engagement requires a new set of skills and mindset for both governments and religious actors as the preconditions to build new capacity aimed at delivering innovative government-religious partnerships. A quite radical change of policy mindset, including the removal of what are increasingly described as 'secular blind spots' in governments, is needed. More importantly, religious engagement is a call for a new dialogue and mutual learning between secular and religious institutions in the acknowledgement and respect of their different domains, responsibilities and missions but in the realization that collaboration may be crucial to face some of the new global challenges and to strengthen the common good.

<sup>24</sup> "Religion, foreign policy and development: making better policy to make a bigger difference", Wilton Park, 5 February 2014, <https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/conference/wp1311/>

<sup>25</sup> Appleby, S. and R. Cizik, eds., *Engaging Religious Communities Abroad: A New Imperative for U.S. Foreign Policy*. Chicago: Chicago Council, 2010.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.state.gov/s/rga/strategy/>

<sup>27</sup> For a reflection on this perspective, see Petito, F. and S. Thomas, 'Encounter, Dialogue and Knowledge: Italy as a Special Case of Religious Engagement in Foreign Policy', *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 13, no. 2 (2015): 40-51 & Ferrara, P. and F. Petito, 'An Italian Foreign Policy of Religious Engagement: Challenges and Prospects', *The International Spectator*, 51 no. 1 (2016), 28-43.



Over the last few years, research and policy have begun to recognise the positive role that religious leaders can play in promoting peace, inclusive societies and sustainable development.<sup>28</sup> This recognition has led to the creation of new international initiatives and global platforms of religious engagement to promote peaceful and inclusive societies in the spirit of the Sustainable Development Goal 16, for example: The International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD), to harness the positive impact of religion in sustainable development and

humanitarian assistance;<sup>29</sup> and the UN led “Fez Process” for religious leaders to prevent incitement to violence (see the 2017 Plan of Action)<sup>30</sup>. In general, a more focused consideration of the role of religion in development has started to trickle down throughout the UN system<sup>31</sup> in the acknowledgment that engaging religious leaders and communities can promote sustainable development and more effective humanitarian assistance, as the EU has also recognised in some recent policy documents.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> See for example the World Bank (2015), Conference Report, *Religion & Sustainable Development: Building Partnerships to End Extreme Poverty*, Key Findings & Recommendations for Action.

<sup>29</sup> See <http://www.partner-religion-development.org/>

<sup>30</sup> UN Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes (2017), available at [https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/Plan%20of%20Action\\_Religious\\_Prevent-Incite-WEB-rev3.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/Plan%20of%20Action_Religious_Prevent-Incite-WEB-rev3.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> See the UN Interagency Task Force on Engaging Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development Annual Report of 2016 & 2017.

<sup>32</sup> See the U.S. Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement available at <https://www.state.gov/s/rga/strategy/> and the European Parliamentary Research Service (2017) ‘Religion and the EU’s external policies: Increasing engagement’.

# The Convergence between FoRB-Protection and Religious Engagement in Foreign Policy

Crucially for this report, engaging religious leaders and communities can also help to advance human rights, including FoRB. Religious actors must be seen as responsible partners in building a long-term solution to religious intolerance and discrimination and in fostering equality of rights and appreciation for religious pluralism. This innovative insight has been assumed as the basis of the Rabat Plan of Action and the Beirut Declaration, which have recently been institutionalised through a new stream of UN work in the field of human rights, i.e., the UN 'Faiths for Rights' initiative launched in 2017.<sup>33</sup> As far as FoRB protection is concerned, ultimately, if it is true that all religions are minorities somewhere, it is then not inconceivable to think of majority religions in a particular country also as key stakeholders in protecting the freedoms of minority religions with regard to the State.

Beyond PaRD, other valuable transnational policy and diplomatic networks have been created focusing on religion and diplomacy and on international freedom of religions of belief, such as the Transatlantic Policy Networks on Religion and Diplomacy (TPNRD) and the International Contact Group on FoRB (ICGFoRB). There is a need for representatives of these networks and initiatives to engage more in coordination, cooperation and sharing of best practices as recommended by a recent expert working group on US foreign policy convened by Georgetown University on the ground that "Promoting religious freedom and engaging religious actors are separate but complementary functions".<sup>34</sup> This is even more necessary given that despite greater recent recognition that religious actors play a significant role in the development and stability of contemporary societies, there is evidence that religious and interreligious actors are rarely welcome at the leading global policy tables as argued by a recent World Faiths Development Dialogue Report.<sup>35</sup>

Some disclaimers, however, should be in place from the beginning as to 'right-sizing' and not 'over-charging' the role of religion in this policy area. Of course recognizing that religions can play a positive role in tackling FoRB violations, does not mean that everything is reducible to religion and, therefore, state actors must be careful not to overcharge religions with tasks for which they should not have responsibility. Further, although religious actors must not be excluded from political tasks, it is vital that they do not lead these efforts in order to maintain the division between the political and religious.

If there is too much overlap between religion and power, it becomes difficult for religious leaders to maintain credibility. Further, the instrumentalised use of religious actors by political actors may also be problematic, as the legitimacy of religious actors is undermined if they are viewed as permitting state interference in religious matters. It must also be noted that the root causes of tensions between religious communities may not lie in religion itself. Other causes of tension such as socio-economic disadvantage must not be overlooked in efforts to increase understanding between religious communities. In some way, the issue of root causes is not what is at stake in this discussion as engagement with religious actors and interreligious dialogue and collaboration can actually be an effective tool to combat discrimination and persecution even if the religious factors are not the predominant or exclusive factors driving them.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> See <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/FaithForRights.aspx>

<sup>34</sup> Report (2018) on Engaging Religious Actors and Promoting Religious Freedom in US Diplomacy, Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown University available at: [https://isd.georgetown.edu/sites/isd/files/ewg\\_statement\\_july\\_26\\_-\\_formatted.pdf](https://isd.georgetown.edu/sites/isd/files/ewg_statement_july_26_-_formatted.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Katherine Marshall (2017), *Interfaith Journeys: An exploration of history, ideas, and future directions*, Report, The World Faiths Development Dialogue available at <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/publications/interfaith-journeys-an-exploration-of-history-ideas-and-future-directions>

<sup>36</sup> Mandaville, P. and S. Silvestri. "Integrating Religious Engagement and Diplomacy: Challenges and Opportunities". *Brooking Institute Issues in Governance Studies* 67 (2015): 1-13.

The key message of this report is that engagement with religious actors and interreligious dialogue and collaboration are crucial policy tools to promote FoRB and combat intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. Thus, we call for a change in the dominant policy approach adopted by governments and international organisations in response to the global crisis of FoRB: Religious actors should not only be seen by policy makers as either the victims or the perpetrators of FoRB violations, but as partners in building long-term strategies to advance FoRB for all and foster pluralism, social cohesion and sustainable peace.

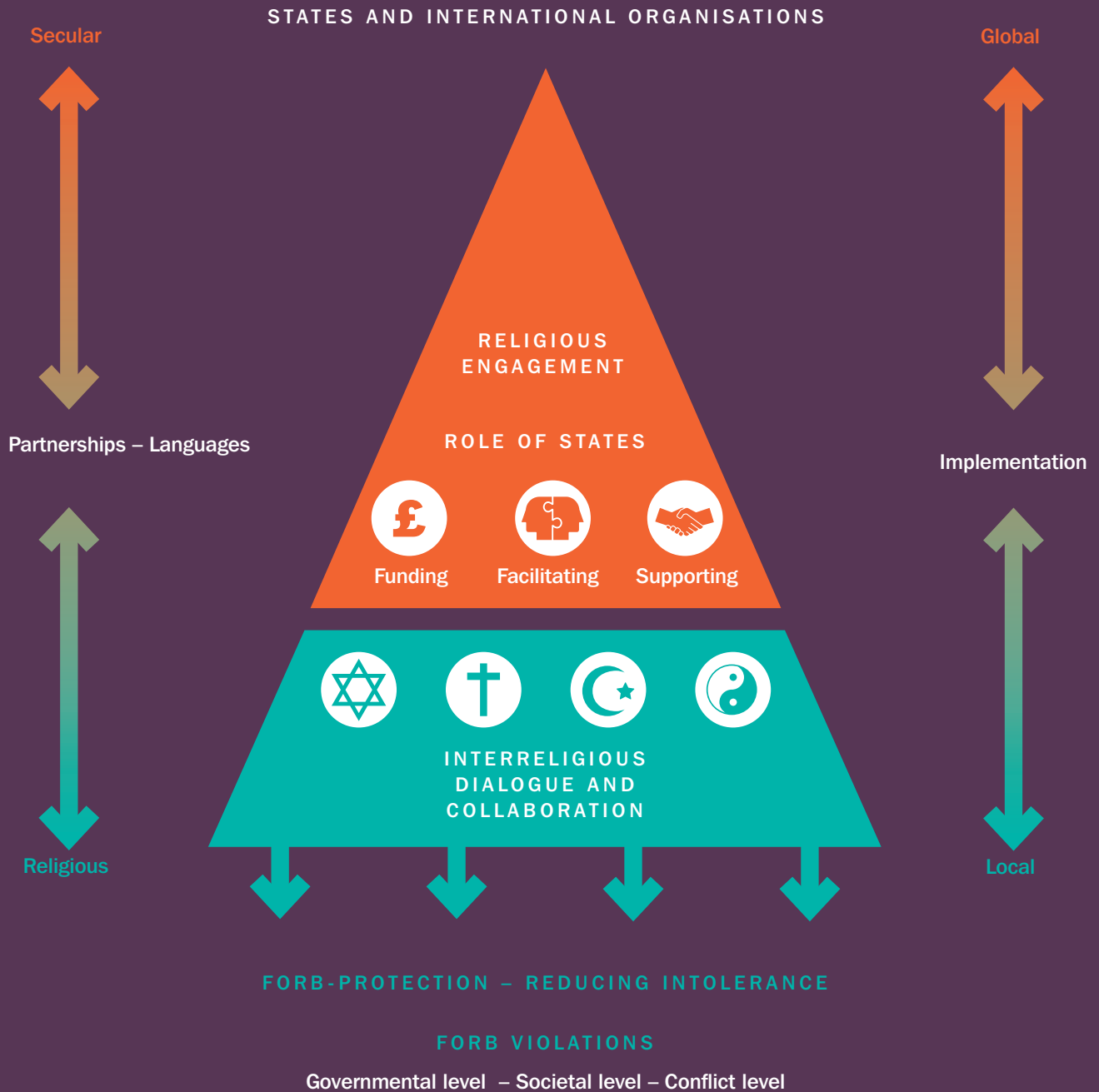
## Interreligious Engagement as Policy Strategy

We use 'interreligious engagement' as shortcut label/formula for what is more precisely the interactions and combination of two dimensions (two words, one from each dimension): the vertical dimension of 'Religious Engagement' and the horizontal one of 'Interreligious Dialogue and Collaboration'. As we have argued in the previous section, religious engagement in foreign policy relates to the vertical dimension of secular-religious partnership focusing on the way states and international organizations can engage – and partner with – religious non-state actors (religious leaders, communities and various religious-based organisations) to promote different policy objectives, in our case, to

combat intolerance, discrimination and strengthen FoRB. In this context, the 'interreligious' refers to the horizontal dimension and to the fact that objects of policy engagement are specifically interreligious actors, groups, coalitions, platforms and activities – not a single or multiple separate religious actors. This distinction is made for the purpose of conceptual clarity and is based on the assumption that a demarcation of religious and political spheres is central to facilitating a policy of interreligious engagement, however the secular/religious and political/religious divides may be difficult to clearly define.



# What Interreligious Engagement Looks Like



# Interreligious Dialogue and Collaboration

The dimension of interreligious dialogue and collaboration focuses on the activities involving religious leaders, communities and other religious actors and belief organisations. These activities can take a multitude of forms ranging from theological exchanges and sharing of religious experience focusing on the religious and spiritual traditions themselves, to day-to-day socializing and practical collaboration and common action by different religious, spiritual and philosophical traditions on specific social, economic or political issues.<sup>37</sup> Some activities can be formal and/or high-level meetings between official representatives often with a view to emphasize commonalities, whereas others can be informal and/or grassroots initiatives at the local level, for example, in neighbourhoods or schools.

Interreligious dialogue and collaboration as a sustained, global practice is a relatively new phenomenon and its participants and goals have widened and deepened significantly over the last two decades.<sup>38</sup> Probably the most significant trend of this growth has seen interreligious dialogue moving steadily from theology to practical collaboration. As a recent Woolf Institute Report has effectively explained, while acknowledging that there are phenomenal challenges to go beyond formal dialogue among leaders and reach communities to tackle the pressing tensions among them: 'Once a field of dialogue-centred practice rooted in theological concerns, the interfaith movement has evolved into a concerted, if not always coherent, effort to mobilise religious resources to respond to pressing social and political issues.'<sup>39</sup>

Theological exchanges and inter/intra-religious dialogue may be useful to isolate extremism and provide justifications for interreligious collaboration. Both may enable religious leaders to understand their religion as compatible with pluralism and can facilitate the identification of common themes across religions (i.e. human dignity) that can form the basis of future interreligious collaboration. It may be beneficial to involve extreme elements of religious

communities in intra rather than interreligious dialogue, in order to avoid claims of legitimacy emanating from inclusion. Interreligious dialogue is clearly not enough to generate the anticipated outcomes of combatting intolerance, discrimination and strengthening FoRB but it can well be a pre-condition to move the focus to the need for interreligious collaboration and action.

Interreligious collaboration is increasingly recognized as central to peace building in order to create conditions of peace, as well as preventative diplomacy.<sup>40</sup> Religions possess resources, such as forgiveness, that the state does not, and therefore, collaboration between different religious communities involved in conflict is vital. This is particularly important when governance is weak e.g. in context of transitional justice. While there is no one-size-fits-all to interreligious collaboration and efforts are context specific, there seems to be potential in a policy strategy of interreligious engagement to promote FoRB and combat intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief that harnesses informal grassroots interreligious collaboration, with the appropriate measure of elite participation by high-ranking religious leaders.

Contact theory emphasizes the role that positive interactions between individuals play in the creation of societal cohesion and prejudice reduction.<sup>41</sup> Such interactions seek 'to break down prejudices, stereotypes and misconceptions of others, and to generate mutual understanding, reciprocal identification, societal trust and solidarity'.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, by creating spaces for dialogue and identifying common ground, interreligious engagement has the potential to strengthen mutual understanding between different religious or belief communities. However, empirical research has shown that other factors will directly influence whether interreligious dialogue and collaboration will successfully reduce intercommunal tensions and, thereby, improve respect for FoRB and other human rights, namely: who is being engaged; how are they being engaged and what role does identity play in the activities.

<sup>37</sup> For a useful discussion of four types of interreligious dialogue inspired by the perspective of the Catholic Church, namely dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue religious experience and dialogue of theological exchange, see The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, (1991) 'Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ', Vatican City.

<sup>38</sup> For a useful updated virtual platform and electronic database on interreligious dialogue see The Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) Dialogue Knowledge Hub, available at <https://www.kaiciid.org/knowledge-hub/about-dkh>

<sup>39</sup> John Fahy and Jan-Jonathan Bock (2018), *Beyond Dialogue? Interfaith Engagement in Delhi, Doha and London*, Cambridge, The Wolf Institute.

<sup>40</sup> David R. Smock, ed., (2002) *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace; Susan Hayward (2012) *Religion and Peacebuilding Reflections on Current Challenges and Future Prospects*, USIP Special Report, 1-12; Scott Appleby, Atalia Omer, and David Little (2015), eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*, Oxford University Press.

<sup>41</sup> See generally, Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Addison-Wesley, 1954).

<sup>42</sup> Loobuyk, 'Towards an Intercultural Sense of Belonging Together: Reflections on the Theoretical and Political Level' in in Meer, Modood and Zapata-Barrero (eds), *Multiculturalism and Interculturalism - Debating the Dividing Lines* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016) 225 at 230.



Within contact theory, it is central that the members of each group participating in interreligious dialogue and collaboration activities must have an equal status (e.g. religious leaders). If the outcomes of the engagement is to be generalizable from the individual to the group level, then it is important to involve participants who are likely to be able to influence public opinion, as a result of their status.<sup>43</sup> However, participants must also be seen as typical members of the group and include groups that hold extreme views. Engagement activities must be designed to require participants to work towards a common goal in a cooperative manner (e.g. scriptural reasoning). Notably, conditions of competition within the dialogue activities or the absence of common goals are likely to increase rather than reduce prejudice.<sup>44</sup> Further, social time should be built into engagement activities in order to develop affective ties.<sup>45</sup> Additional factors such as common language and the voluntary nature of contact will also influence the likelihood that dialogue activities reduce prejudice and bias.<sup>46</sup>

If interreligious dialogue and collaboration is to successfully reduce prejudice and to be generalizable from the individual to the group level, then religious identity should be at the heart of such activities.<sup>47</sup> There is a careful balancing act that should go in the design of such strategies of interreligious engagement, that can only take the form a contextual judgment. On the one hand, contact theory suggests that it may be useful to identify some common ground between participants and recategorize participants under a superordinate identity that they share, e.g. religious leaders.<sup>48</sup> If religious differences are a cause of anxiety that may reduce participation, then activities may in the

short term seek to make religious identity less salient. By generating a pleasant encounter with a perceived 'typical' member of the 'other', this then provides a platform from which to engage on religious issues. Nonetheless, interreligious dialogue and consultation must centre around religion if prejudice is to be reduced in the longer term.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, in fact, these considerations should be balanced with the acknowledgment that recent empirical research on the relationship between religious identity and violence/peace seem to suggest – rather paradoxically one could say – that religiously-inspired violence and antagonism is often characterised by doctrinally 'weak' and superficial religious identities – if not religious ignorance and indifference – as these are the most conducive substratum to violent politicisation by political entrepreneurs. In contrast doctrinally 'strong' religious identities – rooted in a culture and nurtured by an intergenerational process of transmission of tradition – would seem to be more common amongst religious actors committed to conflict-resolution and peace building (religious peacebuilding) in so far they retain their credibility and authenticity as 'religious actors'.<sup>50</sup>

The insights provided by contact theory and in particular, the potential for interreligious engagement to improve relations between traditionally hostile communities and positively impact respect for human rights has been recognized in academic literature<sup>51</sup> and was supported by evidence from both religious representatives, international organisations and civil society stakeholders during the consultations that have informed this report.

<sup>43</sup> Cuhadar and Dayton, 'The Social Psychology of Identity and Inter-group Conflict: From Theory to Practice' (2011) 12 *International Studies Perspectives* 273, 287

<sup>44</sup> Sherif, *In Common Predicament: Social Psychology of Inter-group Conflict and Cooperation* (Houghton Mifflin 1966).

<sup>45</sup> Cuhadar and Dayton, 'The Social Psychology of Identity and Inter-group Conflict: From Theory to Practice' (2011) 12 *International Studies Perspectives* 273, 286

<sup>46</sup> Wagner and Mechleit, "'Gastarbeiter" in the Federal Republic of Germany: Contact between Germans and Migrant Populations' in Hewstone and Brown, *Contact and Conflict in Inter-group Encounters* (Basil Blackstone, 1986).

<sup>47</sup> Cuhadar and B Dayton, 'The Social Psychology of Identity and Inter-group Conflict: From Theory to Practice' (2011) 12 *International Studies Perspectives* 273-288.

<sup>48</sup> See, generally, Cuhadar, 'Assessing Transfer from Track Two Diplomacy: The Cases of Water and Jerusalem' (2009) 46 *Journal of Peace Research* 641-658.

<sup>49</sup> Cuhadar and B Dayton, 'The Social Psychology of Identity and Inter-group Conflict: From Theory to Practice' (2011) 12 *International Studies Perspectives* 273-288.

<sup>50</sup> Petito F, 'In Defence of Dialogue of Civilizations: With a Brief Illustration of the Diverging Agreement between Edward Said and Louis Massignon', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 39:3 (2011), 759-79.

<sup>51</sup> Bery, 'Aligning Interculturalism with International Human Rights Law: "Living Together" without Assimilation' (2018) 18 *Human Rights Law Review* 441.

# The Role of States

This report outlines how interreligious engagement can be operationalised by States at both a domestic level and through their foreign policy, in order to improve respect for FoRB and in fulfillment of their obligations under international human rights law. In the context of article 18 ICCPR, it has been asserted by the former UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Heiner Bielefeldt that States have an obligation to build ‘societal resilience against religious intolerance’.<sup>52</sup>

However, it is challenging for States to strike the appropriate balance between facilitating interreligious dialogue and collaboration and not undermining the individual right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and other human rights obligations. Nonetheless, many of the best practices identified during the consultation process provide clear guidance and simultaneously align closely with State obligations under international human rights law.

**At the Twentieth Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Kiev the significance of ‘interfaith and interreligious dialogue and partnerships for the protection of FoRB was explicitly recognised in Decision No. 3/13, where participating States were called upon to**



Promote and facilitate open and transparent interfaith and interreligious dialogue and partnerships;



Aim to prevent intolerance, violence and discrimination on the basis of religion or belief, including against Christians, Jews, Muslims and members of other religions, as well as against non-believers, condemn violence and discrimination on religious grounds and endeavour to prevent and protect against attacks directed at persons or groups based on thought, conscience, religion or belief;



Encourage the inclusion of religious and belief communities, in a timely fashion, in public discussions of pertinent legislative initiatives;



Promote dialogue between religious or belief communities and governmental bodies, including, where necessary, on issues related to the use of places of worship and religious property.<sup>53</sup>

Rather than seeking to lead or influence interreligious engagement, the primary role for States, identified through our consultation process, is to facilitate and provide an infrastructure or environment that allows interreligious engagement to take place. The State can further provide financial or political support for interreligious engagement activities and places within the state’s purview can provide ideal fora for interreligious engagement activities, e.g. schools, universities or museums. The former UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB, Heiner Bielefeldt has identified opportunities for States to facilitate interreligious engagement. These include a range of complementary initiatives encompassing formal and informal interreligious dialogue, ‘that is, dialogue projects undertaken explicitly under the auspices of religious differences as well as forms of communication in which people meet without necessarily displaying their respective religious identities’.<sup>54</sup> By facilitating interreligious engagement in this way, States fulfil both their obligations to secure the right to FoRB. However, it must be emphasized that the State must not have a monopoly in this respect, and interreligious dialogue and collaboration organized by religious communities or civil society must be allowed to take place.

However, there is a balance to be struck by States between facilitating interreligious engagement and not violating the individual right to FoRB. In particular, it is important that States should not try to influence religious doctrine or undertake activities that can be construed as prioritising one religious or belief community over another. As a result, the role of the State ‘as the neutral and impartial organiser

<sup>52</sup> Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief A/71/269 2 August 2016 para 23

<sup>53</sup> Decision no. 3/13 Freedom of Thought, Conscience, Religion or Belief (MC.DEC/3/13 of 6 December 2013).

<sup>54</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt UN doc A/HRC/25/58 26 December 2013 para 46.

of the exercise of various religions, faiths and beliefs',<sup>55</sup> remains paramount. If States seek to operationalize interreligious engagement to further a political agenda or legitimize differential treatment between religious communities, interreligious engagement is unlikely to achieve its aims. Furthermore, interreligious dialogue and collaboration should not be high jacked by governments and/or majority-religions as an official public relations exercise to respond to criticisms of State and societal violations of FoRB in specific states.

The role of the State as a facilitator of interreligious dialogue and collaboration must be distinguished from the legal relationship of the state with religious communities. States must not seek to coerce representatives from religious communities to participate in interreligious engagement against their will. In particular, official recognition of religious communities must not be tied to participation in the interreligious engagement process. Although inclusivity is a central principle of interreligious engagement, the right to freedom of association must be respected. Coercion is likely to undermine the effectiveness of interreligious engagement as a tool to break down barriers and stereotypes between religious communities, by breeding resentment. However, States should leave the door open for non-participating religious communities to participate in interreligious engagement at a future time.

While States can facilitate interreligious engagement, in order to comply with FoRB, States must remain neutral and impartial in matters of FoRB, and must not discriminate between religious communities.<sup>56</sup> This must not be interpreted to require secularism but, nonetheless, it is clear that States should not seek to reinterpret religions, seek to impose solutions in intra-religious disputes or answer theological questions.<sup>57</sup> Notably, while theological debate and inter/intra-religious dialogue may be useful to isolate extremism and provide justifications for interreligious collaboration, this must be led by religious actors and not the state and/or political actors, if it is to be effective.

As a matter of principle, State facilitated interreligious dialogue and collaboration processes should seek to ensure that no religious or belief (including non-believers) communities are excluded from participation. However, from a pragmatic perspective, in some instances it may be beneficial to restrict participation to interested parties when interreligious dialogue or collaboration seeks to address a specific cause of tension between 2 or 3 religious or belief communities. It is important to engage not only with moderate voices but also those holding more extreme or illiberal views. In engaging with these groups, the State must be clear that participation does not connote endorsement. Nonetheless, these extreme voices must be able to speak freely, in accordance with the right to freedom of expression which includes 'the right to express views that offend, shock or disturb',<sup>58</sup> if interreligious engagement is to be meaningful. In accordance with international obligations in relation to gender mainstreaming, States should seek to ensure the presence of women, particularly female community leaders, in interreligious dialogue and collaboration.

<sup>55</sup> *Leyla Şahin v. Turkey*, 10 November 2005, European Court of Human Rights, No. 44774/98, para 107. See also, UN HRC, 'General Comment No 22' on 'The Right to Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion (Art. 18)' UN doc CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4, para 10.

<sup>56</sup> UN HRC, 'General Comment No 22' on 'The Right to Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion (Art. 18)' UN doc CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4, para 2.

<sup>57</sup> *Supreme Holy Council of the Muslim Community v. Bulgaria*, 16 December 2004, European Court of Human Rights, No. 39023/97 para. 96; Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church para. 120.

<sup>58</sup> *Handyside v. United Kingdom*, 7 December 1976, European Court of Human Rights, No. 5493/72 para 49.

# Interreligious Engagement and the Secular Language of Human Rights



A common theme during the consultation process concerned the use of the secular language of human rights and whether this is conducive to effective interreligious engagement. Ultimately, stakeholders engaged in the consultation process emphasised that the choice of language adopted during interreligious engagement activities should be context dependent. In some instances, it may be strategic to use alternatives to the language of FoRB and human rights in order to convey the same message but in culturally congruent ways. In some contexts religious language may be more effective than the language of human rights. For example, in some non-Western contexts expressions like inter-communal harmony and inter-religious respect may be used to express genuine concern for FoRB. Further, the choice of language is also dependent on the nature of the actors involved. If diplomats and policy makers are to be seen as trustworthy actors in this field, they should avoid any perception of favoritism. In this case, reliance on the secular language of human rights might be more appropriate. At the same time, however, this process should require an improved religious literacy in government. Policy makers should be able to understand the religious perspectives and constraints of religious actors for interreligious engagement strategies to be successful.

By providing a common framework that transcends specific religious traditions, human rights standards are able to provide a basis for interreligious engagement. This may be particularly useful in a religiously charged environment. On the other hand, the language of human rights may not be familiar or appropriate in a local context. Further, human rights may be viewed as a Western import. Although the legitimacy of this assertion was strenuously rejected by a number of stakeholders during consultations, this perception may still undermine interreligious engagement and should not be disregarded. Instead, stakeholders suggested framing issues in terms of common human and spiritual principles or values, where consensus between religious and belief communities can easily be found.<sup>59</sup> A key example in this respect is the concept of dignity, which has both secular and religious meaning. Similarly, rights can be translated through the local culture, for example in some Asian contexts FoRB concerns could be more effectively discussed in terms of interreligious harmony.

<sup>59</sup> *Handyside v. United Kingdom*, 7 December 1976, European Court of Human Rights, No. 5493/72 para 49.

Rather than viewing the language of human rights and the language of religion as in opposition, they can be viewed as mutually reinforcing. The UN Faith for Rights Initiative and, in particular, the 18 commitments drafted under this initiative that provide religious justifications for the protection of FoRB evidence that the secular language or rights and the language of religion are not necessarily opposed.<sup>60</sup> In fact, scriptural reasoning activities, in the form of religious leaders working cooperatively together for the common purpose of identifying religious justifications for the protection of human rights, have potential as interreligious engagement strategies. There is an enormous unexplored repository of cultural and religious resources and arguments to advance FoRB and combat discrimination based on religion or belief from *within* and *across* religious traditions and creating the conditions for their global emergence and local implementation through interreligious engagement strategies has significant impact potential.

Strategies of interreligious engagement have also the potential to contribute, in the public sphere of liberal-democratic societies, to a new post-secular sensitivity accepting that the moral intuitions of religions and spiritualities may become important resources to cure the pathologies of modernization, including the crisis of an individualistic system of relations, which prevents the construction of real and strong communities.<sup>61</sup> In this context, interreligious dialogue and collaboration become one of the most dynamic and promising areas of active citizen participation and new socio-political leadership especially among young religious citizens. For this new generation of citizens, interreligious activism is about learning to live together and building together a better common society in the belief that values such as democracy, freedom, equality, inclusion and justice are not necessarily best pursued within an exclusively secular framework.

Let us conclude by quoting at length some moderately critical remarks of a largely sympathetic participant and commentator to this consultation process, who effectively highlighted the intellectual and political challenge faced by our approach in the hope that it could be successfully solved:

Does this freedom really require interreligious engagement? Many religions do not share the concept of freedom of religion or belief that is prevailing in liberal States. Are we sure that involving religions in the re-shaping of this notion is not conducive to increasing conflicts among religions and between religious and secular actors? My answer is, it is worth trying provided religious and secular actors are ready to start discussing their respective philosophies and theologies of freedom of religion or belief. It is going to be a difficult dialogue because it implies asking whether the Islamic conception of freedom of religion or belief is insufficiently comprehensive, whether the Christian conception is too much focused on religion as a form of belief, or whether the Western States' idea of this freedom is too much indebted to the Enlightenment philosophical categories. Up to now these uncomfortable questions have been carefully avoided in the official interreligious dialogue and in the diplomatic exchanges between States and faith groups. However, if we are not ready to address them, it is safer to go back to the idea of mutual respect, which does not require the level of commitment implicit in the engagement. These are the challenges we need to face. There are no easy solutions but getting aware of what expects us is the first step to answer them.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> UN OHCHR, '18 Commitments on "Faith for Rights"' <[www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/21451/18CommitmentsonFaithforRights.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/21451/18CommitmentsonFaithforRights.pdf)> accessed 20 November 2018.

<sup>61</sup> Habermas, J and et al, 2010. *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-secular Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press)

<sup>62</sup> Silvio Ferrari, discussant's comments to the panel 'Benefits, Conditions, Challenges and Risks of Interreligious Engagement (Dialogue and Collaboration) for FoRB: A New Policy Forward', House of Commons, Palace of Westminster, London, 12 July 2018.

## Case Studies

The three case studies chosen for this report were selected to present a variety of interreligious engagement strategies, as well as the challenges and opportunities faced by those applying them on the ground. They draw from a range of contexts, practices and areas of the world, each providing insights into the complexities of interreligious engagement and successful project implementation. The following questions will guide you while reading each study:

- What are the lessons we could draw from this successful project in terms of recommending to policy makers the use of strategies of interreligious engagement to reduce inter-religious/communal tensions and improve respect for FoRB?
- What is the role/partnership of the state and other international and public authorities in the context of this field project of interreligious engagement?
- What role did the State/other governmental authorities in supporting this field project? Was there any risk of potentially negative action, interference or lack of engagement?
- How did the religious language and interreligious dialogue vision in this project complement the secular framework and language of human rights in promoting FoRB and combatting discrimination? Where there any limitations or risks to this approach?

### Case Study 1: Strengthening FoRB through Religious Argumentation: The Marrakesh Declaration as a Basis for on-the-ground Trainings of Imams

The Network for  
Religious and  
Traditional  
Peacemakers



[www.peacemakersnetwork.org](http://www.peacemakersnetwork.org)

Throughout the past decade religious minorities across the world, and particularly in Muslim majority countries, have faced tremendous persecution and existential threats due to an increase of terrorism and violent extremism. These challenges can be addressed by using authentic Islamic Theology, as displayed by the *Marrakesh Declaration*. This entails building on the Charter of Madinah, which used by Prophet Mohamed 1400 years ago, affirms respect for all Madinah citizens without distinguishing their religious beliefs. The *Marrakesh Declaration* was signed in 2016 by over 300 Islamic leaders, ministers, muftis and religious scholars from more than 100 countries in response to the persecution of religious minorities, such as Christians and Yazidis by ISIS. The Declaration was also endorsed by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) during their 2016 summit in Istanbul.

**The Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers** bridges grassroots peacemakers and global players to work towards the establishment of sustainable peace, using such declarations in intra-religious and interreligious settings to promote FoRB and as tools to combat intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief.

An example of the latter is the training of **Nigerian Religious Peacemakers** in the Gombe Province of Northeastern Nigeria. Led by Network Secretariat Executive Director, Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi, the training sought to increase the capacity of Nigerian Christian and Muslim leaders to carry out reconciliation and peacemaking processes. The joint teaching focused on FoRB and utilized the recently adopted *Marrakesh Declaration* to spotlight religious freedom for religious minorities in Muslim majority communities. Notably, none of the trainees had any prior knowledge of the Declaration and, therefore, its significance as a potential foundational tool to advance the religious freedom of religious minorities.

The Network provided Gombe religious leaders with methods and tools on how to teach Christians and Muslims an alternative way of being authentically religious, in order to counter practices promoted by Boko Haram. Over the four days of training, a variety of topics were discussed, ranging from theological perspectives in interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding, to Christian and Muslim collaboration to address the threat of terrorism in Nigeria. The most notable outcome of the training was the commitment of all 60 pastors and Imams who participated to create core groups in their own houses of worship in order to continue spreading the training's message. The core groups will meet separately in their localities to develop interreligious peacemaking programs, promote peacemaking and combat intolerance and discrimination in their respective congregations.

Similarly, the Network utilized the Marrakesh Declaration in its **Theological Training on Peacebuilding and Inter-religious Dialogue for Imams in the Central African Republic (CAR)**. In a context strained by five years of violence, often portrayed as religiously motivated, the Peacemakers Network, in cooperation with Finn Church Aid and KAICIID, organized a three-day theological training in Bangui in January 2018, bringing together 33 Imams from all provinces of the CAR. Under the leadership of two Moroccan scholars, the Imams, representing different regions of the country, explored Islamic concepts of peacebuilding and inter-religious dialogue, including the Marrakesh Declaration.

CAR's National Reconciliation Cabinet Director from the Ministry for Social Affairs and the President of the Alliance of Evangelicals in CAR also attended the theological training. In addition to peacebuilding and interfaith dialogue, the training in Bangui focused on increasing the commitment of Muslim leaders to intra-Muslim unity by using their crucial role in society to endorse peaceful messages.

To this effect, the training was deemed very successful as it brought together Imams, who once objected to working together, expressed a newfound willingness to collaborate in the future, and noted that they were better equipped to address issues in their communities at the grassroots level.

To learn more about the *Marrakesh Declaration*, visit [www.marrakeshdeclaration.org](http://www.marrakeshdeclaration.org).

## KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Policy makers should use widely recognized theological contents to support communication and advocacy strategies, particularly in the area of education curricula. The Marrakesh Declaration is one of the most powerful of these tools and deserves a concerted effort by policy makers to raise awareness of its significance as an effective tool for establishing harmonious conviviality in Muslim-majority countries.
- Policy makers should make space for civil society (track 1.5 collaborations) when advancing FoRB as a policy priority. They should focus more on highlighting the positive examples of initiatives by religious actors that promote FoRB rather than primarily focusing on reports of worldwide persecution. By doing so, policy makers can win the hearts and minds of religious actors who are working hard to advance FoRB and break their sense of isolation.
- The human rights agenda and the alliance of tolerant interpretations of religious traditions can merge together, as demonstrated by the UN Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes and the UN Faiths for Rights framework. The need for policy makers from various governments to follow up with their implementation of concrete policies based on the above is crucial.
- Policy makers must be aware of the language used when promoting FoRB – for example, FoRB advocacy needs to be more context-specific and customized to the local culture while maintaining focus on its outcomes. Furthermore, there are many nuances surrounding FoRB, and the way its mentioned in certain contexts, such as used by the West, can be seen as part of a missionary agenda and fomenting proselytism. The use of concepts like religious pluralism and inter-religious harmony may be preferable and more effective in such situations. Contextual understanding needs to be translated to effective local policy.

## Case Study 2: The Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites & the Case of Mount Zion



<https://www.sfcg.org/>

The **Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites** (*Universal Code*) was launched in 2011, by a quartet of non-government organizations (NGOs), Search for Common Ground, the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights, One World in Dialogue, and Religions for Peace, after a three-year development process in consultation with senior leaders from diverse religions and faiths worldwide. The *Universal Code* maps out a practical code of conduct and policies for holy sites globally, seeking to preserve sacred places, ensure the safety of believers and stimulate interreligious cooperation.

Since its launch, the Universal Code has matured into a dynamic initiative with field projects throughout the world and has proven to be a useful tool that naturally adapts to the needs of the local context. Field projects range from educational and training activities to monitoring and research.

In the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict and frequent violence around holy sites, Search for Common Ground's Jerusalem office, together with the Jerusalem Intercultural Center, and with the endorsement of the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land, began a field project in 2015 entitled *Window on Mount Zion*. Working with religious actors, relevant authorities and local NGOs, the goal was to reduce interreligious tensions and build cooperation as well as to protect places of worship. Mount Zion, just outside Jerusalem's Old City walls, is a crucial location given its shared holy site to Jews, Christians and Muslims - the Tomb of King David – known to Muslims as Nabi Daud – and the Room of the Last Supper. Centuries long conflict over ownership and religious rights on Mount Zion, fuelled by rivalry and intolerance, as well as more recent religiously motivated hate crimes, had resulted in an atmosphere of mistrust, suspicion and violence. The *Window on Mount Zion* initiative presented a shift in perspective, believing that “when conflict is handled constructively, it can generate progress”, thus bringing about positive change.

With this perspective in mind, the *Window on Mount Zion* initiative set out to promote interreligious dialogue and collaboration via the following three components: (1) recruiting local religious leaders, identifying their shared goals and concerns, and finding collaborative solutions; (2) establishing a body of volunteers to help maintain a harmonious atmosphere on site; and (3) organizing workshops and visits for police officers and youth to increase interreligious understanding.

Specifically, this entails quarterly tenants' meetings of representatives from the various religious institutions with relevant government ministries, the municipality and the police as observers, at which residents explore shared issues and take collective action. These meetings have resulted in a joint condemnation of hate crimes, the enlistment of authorities to repair safety hazards, improved police security as well as discussion of a common vision for Mount Zion, which would have been inconceivable prior to the project. In addition, *Window on Mount Zion* actively recruits and utilizes volunteers to reduce tensions at religious events on the Mount by offering guidance and explanations to visitors and pilgrims. Furthermore, the Old City Police Force, comprising 250 officers, took part in workshops that provided professional training on religious sensitivities and the attachments of the different religions to the shared holy site. In 2016 for the first time ever, religious leaders on Mount Zion jointly denounced the desecration of the Dormition Abbey located on Mount Zion. As the initiative also focuses on youth education, between 2016-2018 over 1,000 Israeli high school and pre-army students participated in experiential tours of the shared holy site on Mount Zion while exploring the rich heritage of the Abrahamic religions at the location. Additionally, hundreds of Palestinian youth have taken part in tours of Jerusalem's Old City to expand understanding of the religious attachments of the different religions to their sacred spaces.



As one project volunteer powerfully put it: ‘I was at the entrance of the Room of the Last Supper, guiding the movement of tourists instead of the police. Christians can see that a Jew is trying to help them. They see a good Jewish example’. and he was echoed by a similar feedback by an Israeli police officer :“This training should be included in police colleges as basic training for all police who work in the Old City. It is very good and helpful.”

As the *Window on Mount Zion* initiative is now recognized as a model for religious coexistence, Search for Common Ground is using its learnings to expand the *Universal Code*'s reach to other locations around the world. As Search says, this approach works in improving collaborative actions across faiths and building mutual respect on issues relating to holy sites. Additionally, the quartet of NGOs has, as a goal, to encourage international state organizations such as the UN to develop resolutions in the spirit of the *Universal Code* for the protection of holy sites world-wide.

To learn about the *Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites*, visit <https://www.codeonholysites.org/>

## KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Both the development of the *Universal Code* and the various field projects would not have been implemented without funding from various international governments and quasi-government institutions. Policy makers have also provided advice and help in the international domain as the NGOs have sought to build international state support for the *Universal Code*. At the same time, it is essential that government funding for activities relating to contested holy sites and indeed for interreligious engagement projects in general, are provided by a neutral third party that is not perceived as partisan by the parties to the conflict.
- Sustainable solutions to interreligious conflict are built on trust and finding common ground which takes time, patience and inclusivity. This is best carried out by a non-governmental organization that does not advocate a specific political stance.
- Despite the above risk, relevant state authorities, whether national and/or local, are important stakeholders. Attacks on holy sites can greatly exacerbate tensions in a conflict, with Jerusalem's Old City as a prime example of this manifestation. The task then is to ensure that involvement of these stakeholders' support, and not detract from, the goals of the initiative. In the *Window on Mount Zion* project, religious actors played the main lead, with representatives of national and local authorities, as well as the police, providing a supporting role. In this way mutual trust was built and the religious leaders took ownership of the process.
- Institutionalizing best practices in order to sustain them is an important role of the state. Constructive educational programmes for youth, police and other professionals that are proven to have reduced interreligious tensions need to be incorporated into school curricula on a regular basis.

## Case Study 3: ParliaMentors: Building Inter-faith Youth Leadership and Active Citizen Participation



<https://faithbeliefforum.org>

The Faith and Belief Forum (F&BF) is a UK based grassroots interfaith organisation that seeks to strengthen social cohesion and interfaith relations through a range of targeted projects in schools, universities and communities. Rather than addressing specific violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief, their programmes attempt to address the root causes of division and religious intolerance by equipping learners; building movement and projecting voices. By focusing on youth, F&BF aims to strengthen social cohesion by increasing the capacity of participants to influence their communities. In particular, grassroots programmes aim to develop the skillset of participants in relation to interfaith engagement through collaborative approaches.

The innovative and UN award winning *ParliaMentors* programme has particular potential to reduce religious intolerance by creating a mutually beneficial fora for university students within the UK to cooperate in order to realise their aims. Students of different faith and belief (including non-belief) backgrounds are brought together to collaboratively develop, implement and deliver a social action project. Participants receive practical training, are supported by F&BF, NGOs and *ParliaMentors* alumni to deliver the project and receive mentoring from Members of Parliaments (MPs) or Peers. Over the past decade, approximately 450 students have completed the *ParliaMentors* programme although participants' involvement in F&BF's work frequently extends past the period of the programme – most notably, as alumni mentors and through the F&BF's *Interfaith Summit*.

The programme directly responds to a need identified by F&BF to give younger people a political voice and provide leadership opportunities. By equipping students with diverse faith and belief backgrounds to take an active role in their communities and developing key leadership skills, the *ParliaMentors* programme aims to strengthen opportunities for effective citizen participation and recognises the civic role that interreligious dialogue and collaboration can play, especially amongst youth.

As explained by one *ParliaMentors* participant: *“Whether it’s a religious identity or a cultural identity or a national identity, people will have different identities and I think that’s what’s great certainly about this country in that so many people from different religions have worked together and come together and that’s something I think we need to respect... I think as a society slowly we are moving more towards people being open about their identity whatever that might be. And I think it always is an essential part of any person to understand really who they are.”*

While the F&BF run the project independently, they are dependent on partnerships across all major political parties in the UK, in order to recruit MPs and Peers as mentors. This creates opportunities for future leaders to get involved in political life by attending meetings in Westminster and the constituency, providing shadowing opportunities and access to political events. It also provides space for increased conversations about faith and belief in the political arena and raises awareness of the existence of MPs and Peers of faith and how this influences their work. In so doing it aims to overcome the sense of exclusion from political processes that is often keenly felt by youth of different faith and belief backgrounds. By engaging future leaders of faith or belief (including non-believers) who draw on their faith or belief in order to approach the challenges posed by diversity, the *ParliaMentors* programme aims to move past the secular language used by government to recognise the positive societal role that faith and belief can play.

While the project is based in the UK and engages UK politicians, it is partnered with the British Council Active Citizens Programme which is a global social leadership programme working with partner organisations across the world. Through this, participants connect with emerging leaders from other countries and have a chance to meet them through 'International Study Visits'. Consequently, in addition to forging ties between faith and belief communities at a national level, the *ParliaMentors* programme also aims to forge ties internationally and highlights the potential replicability of this programme in different contexts.

The type of grassroots programmes offered by the F&BF are central to successful interreligious engagement activities. By bringing together groups of students of different faiths and beliefs to cooperatively deliver a common aim, the design of the programme meets many of the prerequisites for successful collaboration. While faith and belief identity may not be central to the specific collaborative activity, this diversity remains at the centre of the programme. Notably, the initiation and organisation of an annual Interfaith Summit by *ParliaMentor* participants highlights that equipping young people to engage with others different to themselves in pursuit of a common social goal, further down the line allows them to tackle more sensitive issues surrounding faith and belief. By providing leadership training and mentoring, *ParliaMentor* also increases the capacity of participants to take up leadership roles in their communities and influence debate about faith and belief. In so doing, the potential for the outcomes of the project to be generalized from the individual to the community level is greatly increased.

Further information *ParliaMentors* can be found on F&BF website: <https://faithbelieforum.org>

## KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The support and active engagement of politicians with the *ParliaMentors* programme is central to its success.
- By bringing together future leaders in order to develop a social action project, *ParliaMentors* facilitate the engagement of participants who might otherwise not wish to discuss their identity but are more willing to express their values through action.
- The pursuit of a joint collaborative goal can serve to bring people together in a much more powerful way than only speaking to one another and the bonds created through shared work lead to much more open and deep discussions about identity later on in a group's time together.
- In order to increase its reach and impact, the programme only selects a small number of students identified as well connected, engaged, young, emerging leaders in faith communities, who might not otherwise have access to traditional power structures.
- By developing key leadership skills alongside interreligious dialogue and collaboration, the potential for outcomes to be generalized from the individual to the community level is greatly increased.
- By providing space for conversations around faith and belief in the political arena, this type of programme increases the accessibility of leadership roles to youth of faith, who might otherwise feel alienated by politics.
- A clear strategy for sustained alumni engagement is needed to ensure that the skills developed during the programme are not lost afterwards. Interfaith engagement shouldn't be about one off events or interventions. Over time trust is built, and can lead to deeper, more meaningful work
- The nature of the programme and its focus on social action means that there is potential for it to be replicated in a number of different contexts.

# Recommendations

OSCE participating States have committed to advancing FoRB and pursuing interfaith and interreligious dialogue and partnerships for this purpose. In order to fulfil their obligations and fully utilise interreligious engagement, the following recommendations are emphasized for policy makers:

## IDENTIFY

interreligious engagement as a priority in Ministries of Foreign Affairs' strategy to protect FoRB, combat intolerance and promote sustainable peace;

## ESTABLISH

funding streams in different government departments for the implementation of interreligious engagement strategies. It may be beneficial in certain contexts to explore links with other relevant agendas, for example, the SDGs and counter-narrative;

## RECOGNIZE

that if interreligious engagement is to advance FoRB, human rights must be viewed as mutually reinforcing and high-level interreligious dialogue must be strategically coupled with interreligious collaboration on the ground;

## HIGHLIGHT

the growing best practices in relation to interreligious actions, especially those led by young religious citizens and invest in training and educational programmes for a new generation of interreligious youth leadership;

## RECOGNIZE

that interreligious engagement does not have to be State-sponsored and initiatives by civil society organizations and religious or belief communities should be encouraged. States should seek to facilitate interreligious engagement through the provision of facilities and infrastructure;

## RECOGNIZE

that States must remain impartial and, therefore, must not discriminate between communities, seek to influence religious doctrine or use interreligious engagement to further a political agenda. States must not use coercive measures to force religious or belief communities to engage in interreligious engagement against their will;

## ENSURE

that interreligious dialogue and collaboration is inclusive, especially by encouraging the participation of women and reaching out beyond the usual suspects;

## GUARANTEE

that interreligious dialogue and collaboration is designed with the specific context in mind. In particular, the context should determine the appropriateness of using the language of human rights or instead identifying common values that transcend specific religions or beliefs;

OSCE should task ODIHR with preparing guiding principles and a collection of good practices on interfaith and interreligious dialogue and partnerships for OSCE participating States.

# Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to all the individuals and organisations who contributed to the consultation. Special appreciation goes to Kishan Manoocha, Salvatore Martinez, Silvio Ferrari and Armando Barucco for their generous institutional support and intellectual engagement; Megan McMichael and Medeni Fordham at the University of Sussex for their great professionalism and constant availability; Margaret Galy at the FCO and Katharine Thane at the UK APPG ForB for their principled support and collaborative attitude.

We would also like to express our special thanks to three organizations and their representatives, Mohamed Elsanousi and Alessandro Rossi of The Network for Religions and Traditional Peacemakers, Sharon Rosen of the Search for Common Ground, and Chanel Noel of the Faith and Belief Forum, for providing invaluable information to put together the case studies included in this report.

The project was funded by the ESRC Sussex Social Science Impact Fund (SSSIF) and has received additional support from the Religions and International Relations Programme and the Towards MED initiative promoted by the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI) and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.



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