



FoRBLN High-level Dialogue Series

Leave No One Behind: Freedom of Religion and Belief and The Sustainable Development Goals

The [Freedom of Religion or Belief Leadership Network](#) (FoRBLN), the [International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief](#) (IPPFoRB), [African Parliamentarians for Human Rights](#) (AfriPAHR), the [Danish Institute for Human Rights](#) (DIHR), the [#Faith4Rights Initiative](#) and [Religions for Peace](#) (RfP) warmly invite you to a series of High-Level Dialogues on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and freedom of religion or belief (FoRB).

These dialogues aim to provide space for collective learning, as a step towards action through sharing of experiences and research - including papers published by DIHR - from people working internationally and regionally on the SDGs and FoRB. The dialogue will integrate OHCHR's #Faith4Rights toolkit and methodology of peer-to-peer learning. Through these meetings, we aim to assist parliamentarians and faith and belief leaders to work on FoRB's intersections with the SDGs in their respective contexts.

[Agenda 2030's Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all UN Member States in 2015. They are a 'plan of action for people, planet and prosperity' to 'strengthen universal peace in larger freedom' and 'eradicate poverty and inequality in all its forms and dimensions'. The 17 SDG goals are [integrated](#), but each have their own themes, targets and indicators. Action towards one SDG – for example achieving gender equality (SDG 5) or good health and wellbeing (SDG 3) - affects the outcomes of others.

Agenda 2030 is explicitly grounded in human rights. At the SDGs' core sits the pledge to '**leave no one behind**'. The SDGs' interdependence and core pledge mean that many of the SDGs require ensuring that no one experiences inequality because of their religion or beliefs. The human right to FoRB – **freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief** - is the internationally recognised and universal right that seeks to ensure everyone's enjoyment of diverse, inclusive and equitable societies. It is found in Article 18 of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** and the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**. FoRB is a right that we all equally share and is interdependent with all other human rights, including gender, health, and education rights. FoRB relates to core parts of our identity, meaning and purpose. These identities – and sometimes FoRB itself - are however, are used globally to entrench inequalities and to justify discrimination and violence towards communities and individuals.

The UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB's 2020 report to the UN General Assembly emphasised that 'no one will be left behind only when sustainable development efforts advance the political, social and economic inclusion of people belonging to all religious or belief groups.' His report proposed indicators to identify inequalities and their impacts that these groups experience. Ensuring that we have no blind spots in this area is crucial. The webinars will explore the connections, intersections and gaps between the SDGs and FoRB, and FoRB's important role in making sure that the SDGs are successfully reached and maintained.

To **support action** at national and regional levels on pursuing FoRB within the context of the SDGs, the webinars will help parliamentarians and faith and belief leaders explore the key issues and 'blind spots' in relation to the SDGs and FoRB.

Event Information

This high-level dialogue series will be launched during this '[Decade of Action](#)', a year on from the SDGs' '[Global Goals Week](#)' (18-26 September 2020), with the first consultation on 23 September, 2021. Participants will be able to share their experiences with other attendees, including international and regional practitioners on SDG topics and FoRB, including through national and regional break-out groups. FoRBLN resources will be provided ahead of the meetings to help participants decide how they can take next steps in their own contexts. Personalised and tailored FoRBLN support will be available after the webinars to help participants to operationalise their next steps.

To register for the high-level dialogue meetings or to ask any questions, please email: contact@forbln.net

Programme of Events

The UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief, OHCHR, and other international and regional faith and non-faith-based partners working on the SDGs and FoRB will join the consultations. Marie J. Petersen, author of the DIHR reports, will also be sharing her key findings from her research on FoRB and the SDGs.

Thursday, 23 September, 2021 – 1:00pm (GMT+1)
Applying a FoRB lens to Achieve the SDGs.

Participants include:

Dr Ahmed Shaheed - UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religions or Belief

Prof. Dr Azza Karam - Secretary General, Religions for Peace, former Coordinator/Chair of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development

Hon. Nqabayomzi Kwankwa, Member of the National Assembly of South Africa and Founder and Chair of the African Parliamentarian Association for Human Rights (AfriPAHR)

Dr Marie Juul Pedersen, Senior Researcher, The Danish Institute for Human Rights
(*CREID / IDS rep., Institute of Development Studies / Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID)*)

At the core of the Agenda 2030's SDGs sits the pledge to 'leave no one behind', which SDG 10 confirms includes tackling religious or belief-based inequalities that FoRB protects against. The interrelation and interdependence of FoRB with all other human rights, including the fundamental right to 'non-discrimination', means that ignoring FoRB-related issues risks undermining the SDGs. On the anniversary of '[Global Goals Week](#)',



this event will introduce and explore the SDGs and FoRB and ask why it is important to consider them together. It will also ask what the implications are if we continue to overlook FoRB in relation to attaining the SDGs. With the connections identified, what is it that we need to do to realise Agenda 2030 where we live?

Thursday, 14 October, 2021 – 1:00pm (GMT+1)

Gender and FoRB: opportunities for synergies and learning

Participants include:

Dr Ahmed Shaheed - UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religions or Belief

Lopa Banerjee - Chief of the Civil Society Section, UN Women

Dr Nazila Ghanea – Associate Professor, International Human Rights Law, Oxford University & author of USCIRF’s Women and Religious Freedom report

Dr Marie Juul Pedersen, Senior Researcher, The Danish Institute for Human Rights

Women make up over half of the world’s population. Realising SDG 5 and all other SDGs necessitates that women’s voices and contribution - from all religious or belief groups - are given full and effective equal opportunity within our societies, economies, policy decision-making, and political discourse. Ahead of [International Rural Woman’s Day](#) (15 October), this event will examine how much progress is being made to overcome the barriers for women and girls to equally participate and make decisions in political, economic and public life to reach their full potentials? What barriers, inequalities or harmful and violent practices exist for women because of their religions or beliefs, including within their communities? How do FoRB and gender considerations intersect and what opportunities are there for maximising both FoRB and gender rights within the SDG framework?

Thursday, 11 November, 2021

Education and FoRB: nurturing future generations for more inclusive societies

Educators hold the key to ensuring that children reach their potential as citizens, respect others, increase their social mobility and avoid discrimination being entrenched. Ahead of UNESCO’s [International Day of Tolerance](#) (16 November) and the 40th anniversary of the [1981 Declaration](#) on the Elimination of Intolerance & Discrimination, this webinar will explore: How do we ensure SDG 4’s ‘inclusive,’ safe and ‘equitable quality’ education, for girls and boys from all religious or belief communities? What work is needed, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to ensure that children fulfil their potential and learn from a young age to respect others? How do we balance this with children’s and parents’ rights to education in line with their beliefs? What are the key challenges for education providers?



Thursday, 9 December, 2021

Rule of Law and the SDGs: the role of religious / non-religious expression

Parliamentarians' and religious and belief leaders' role in upholding the rule of law is critical for nurturing societies in which SDG 16+ can be realised. Religious or belief communities can face many legal and political structural barriers to their full participation in society. Freedom of expression, including of the media, is an important aspect of the rule of law. It includes the right to hold and express views and ideas which sometimes differ to others', including because of different religious or non-religious beliefs. Ahead of [International Human Rights Day](#) (10 December), this webinar will explore: What are the challenges for upholding the rule of law in relation to equally protecting freedom of expression and FoRB alongside all other human rights? What are the dangers of prioritising rights? What national and international guidance exists on restricting expression, including that which incites harm and stigmatises others? What, consequently, are the limits to and responsibilities in relation to our actions and behaviour?

Thursday, 20 January, 2022

Health and FoRB: pandemic, exclusion and marginalisation

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities, including in access to healthcare, that SDG 3 seeks to overcome. Vaccine distribution has been uneven across and within countries. The pandemic has exposed the lack of health and safety protections for religious and other minorities, especially 'key' and 'precarious' workers, marginalised in society. This webinar will take a closer look at the relationship between health and FoRB: How do inequalities effect religious or belief communities' work choices between illness and poverty? What impact has the pandemic had on existing FoRB issues – for example, access to healthcare services for marginalised communities?

Thursday, 24 February 2022

Adapting for climate change: how can FoRB help protect against climate impacts

Climate change not only harms the planet but drives inequality, conflict for resources and mass migration, which trigger and exacerbate FoRB violations. Ahead of the [UN Environment Assembly](#) (28 February - 3 March) and [World Wildlife Day](#) (3 March), this webinar explores: Can there be sustainable growth that avoids resource competition which creates winners and losers? How can diverse faith / non-faith communities, including indigenous communities, thrive if SDG 13's pledge to 'take urgent climate action' is not taken seriously? In what ways can the full and proper exercise of FoRB contribute to the protection of the natural world?