



NEW YORK 2017 – FoRB and Gender Equality: Positive Synergies

An IPPFoRB meeting for female Parliamentarians in conjunction with Trygve Lie Symposium

Approximately three-quarters of world population live in countries with high or very high restrictions or hostilities when it comes to freedom of religion or belief. This situation has consequences both for the majority and minority religious communities, setting religious freedoms issues at the center of social, cultural and political discourse.

In 2017 the Annual Trygve Lie Symposium on Fundamental Freedoms will specifically look at Article 18 – focusing on the freedom of religion or belief, bringing together UN and government officials, experts and civil society representatives to discuss ways to improve the situation by sharing best practices and ways to work together to build inclusive and diverse societies that respect and uphold freedom of religion or belief.

IPPFoRB, an informal network of parliamentarians committed to combatting religious persecution and advancing freedom of religion or belief, will convene, in conjunction with the Symposium, a meeting of female MPs in order to explore the potential synergies between the freedom of religion or belief and women's rights and the role of female MPs in strengthening and promotion of both of these rights.

Religion is seen by some as a barrier to gender equality. Likewise, there are those who believe that promoting equal rights for women is a tool for liberals or westerners to impose their values on religious communities. Women who are members of religious communities, especially minority communities, often face double discrimination. They can be discriminated or persecuted because of their religion and also because of their gender.

Notwithstanding the practical tensions, FoRB and women's rights have vast potential for strengthening each other. As the former UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief Heiner Bielefeldt notes: "In virtually all traditions one can indeed find persons or groups who make use of their freedom of religion or belief as a positive resource for the promotion of equality between men and women." When FoRB is promoted, the position of women is strengthened.

Objectives:

Almost half of the IPPFoRB network members are female parliamentarians representing 46 countries.

Ten of the network female members will meet experts and NGO representatives committed to promoting women's rights and/or FoRB in order to discuss ways in which female MPs can contribute to the promotion of FoRB and women's rights and share best practices of individual, collective and collaborative work aimed at creating synergies between FoRB and equal rights for women.

Possible Outputs:

Establishment of a female sub-group within IPPFoRB

The female MPs will be better equipped and encouraged to further develop a gender-sensitive approach to their FoRB work

Build relationships between MPs and NGOs that might support further collaboration on these issues

Key Points for Discussion:

1. Why do some states succeed in protecting and promoting the respect for both FoRB and women's rights, while other states restrict one of these rights in order to promote another?
2. What are some best practices for the adoption of gender-sensitive approaches to religious issues?
3. What are some best practices for adoption of FoRB sensitive approaches to gender rights issues?
4. What measures can MPs take to prevent negative stereotypes based on religion or gender?
5. Freedom of religion or belief as a norm of reference for addressing conflicts in the field of religious traditions and gender issues
6. MPs as promoters of legislation that is both FoRB and gender sensitive
7. Examples of religious groups using FoRB as a resource for promoting equality between men and women
8. How can MPs and CSOs collaborate in order to promote both of these rights?
9. What role can MPs play in promoting and protecting female members of various religious communities?