



Wilton Park

Provisional programme

Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and the SDG agendas

Wednesday 29 June – Friday 1 July 2022 | WP1776

Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is a human right and a critical component of flourishing societies. The absence of religious freedom weakens social cohesion and increases inequality, resentment, and unrest. Nations can never achieve their fullest potential, and SDGs cannot be reached, when some are excluded from education, healthcare, jobs, political participation and other essentials on account of their innermost beliefs or how they choose to manifest those beliefs. Experts have identified increasing violations to the human right to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) through state violation of, or interference with, this right and through failure of states to sufficiently protect and fulfil this right. Moreover, polarization and discrimination linked to religious identities have brought a rise in social hostility and communal violence throughout the world.

Against this background, seeds of hope have emerged from a new global activism of religious leaders and community representatives, who have called for a multi stakeholder collaboration based on a new narrative of unity and inclusivity. In turn, policy makers around the world increasingly recognise that religion and religious actors can be part of a sustainable solution to global challenges and a strategic resource for diplomacy, peacebuilding, the strengthening of human rights and the advancement of sustainable development and inclusive societies. “Religious engagement” is emerging as one of the most promising fields of strategic and creative thinking on which governments and international organisations are working collaboratively with religious organisations to achieve common goals.¹

¹ Fabio Petito, Fadi Daou and Michael Driessen (2021), eds., *Human Fraternity and Inclusive Citizenship: Interreligious Engagement in the Mediterranean* (Milan, ISPI: Ledizioni, 2021), Open Access at: <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/human-fraternity-and-inclusive-citizenship-interreligious-engagement-mediterranean-30794>

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One of these common goals is the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which have been put forward as a blueprint for global restoration and recovery from COVID -19. This has led to the creation of a global alliance, the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD), to harness the positive impact religion can have on sustainable development and humanitarian assistance and to promote, for example, peaceful and inclusive societies in the spirit of SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and through partnerships with religious actors and others as outlined in SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

However, policy makers and practitioners remain unsure of how to best respond to the global decline of religious freedom and the increased recognition of the value of engaging with religious actors, particularly at the local level, and the potential of this approach as a means to foster lasting peace and contribute to the SDGs. In the context of these growing trends, it is now opportune to identify practical steps to advance FoRB as part of promoting sustainable development and achieving peaceful and inclusive societies.

This Wilton Park event will serve as an opportunity to engage religious actors and other key civil society representatives, academics, and policy makers in a focused and practical dialogue that seeks to explore and clarify the following objectives, and in turn to inform the International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief hosted by the UK Government in July 2022.

Goal and objectives

- Create a space for the active engagement and the network of participants on FoRB and the SDGs
- Identify ways the protection of FoRB and religious engagement can advance the SDG agenda particularly in promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG16)
- Examine the evidence and highlight existing trends on, and challenges to, how local (inter)religious engagement can advance FoRB for all
- Share best practices of government funded international development programming to advance FoRB
- Identify impactful opportunities for collaboration between diverse actors on the FoRB and SDGs nexus and agendas
- Explore linkages between FoRB and the SDGs in the light of the current COVID19 pandemic
- Develop an actionable set of evidence-based, development-specific recommendations for consideration during the International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

In partnership with USAID, the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD), the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), the FoRB & Foreign Policy Initiative, University of Sussex, the Adyan Foundation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

(Speakers invited and themes proposed, * denotes confirmed)

Wednesday 29 June

1430-1530

Participants arrive and check in. Tea and coffee on arrival.

1530-1545

Welcome and introduction

***Alison Hilliard**

Programme Director, Wilton Park

1545-1615

Key-note introduction

***Fiona Bruce**

UK Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief

***Mariah Mercer**

Deputy to the Ambassador-at-Large, Office of International Religious Freedom, US Department of State

1615-1715

1. FoRB for all & SDG 2030: Linkages and policy opportunities

What are the linkages and policy opportunities between Freedom of Religion or Belief and the SDGs? What new challenges and opportunities are there for reaching the goals set out by the SDG 2030 agenda and for achieving FoRB for all? How central is religious engagement and partnership (SDG17) to promoting peaceful and inclusive societies and FoRB? What is the contribution of religious leaders and representatives and interreligious collaboration in building inclusive societies? How does this impact FoRB and the promotion of religious freedom? What are the added opportunities and challenges in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic?

***Fabio Petito**

Senior Lecturer in International Relations and Director of the Freedom of Religion or Belief & Foreign Policy Initiative at the University of Sussex

1715-1745

Tea and coffee

1745-1900

2. The link between FoRB and peaceful and inclusive societies: religious engagement and multifaith collaboration

What examples are there of interreligious engagement helping to promote FoRB and peaceful, inclusive societies from an interreligious, community-based, bottom-up approach? How can we integrate religious engagement meaningfully and equally into civil society outreach? What best practice has been developed and lessons learnt? How is evidence currently being shared, and between whom? Are key actors missing from existing dialogues and coordination structures? How has COVID-19 affected the interreligious work being done that promotes FoRB and peaceful and inclusive societies?

***Elie Al Hindy**

Executive Director, Adyan Foundation for Diversity Solidarity and Human Dignity, Lebanon

***Alissa Qotrunnada Munawaroh**

National Director, Gusdurian Network Indonesia (GNI)

***Sharon Rosen**

Global Director of Religious Engagement, Search for Common Ground

1915

Reception followed by dinner

Thursday 30 June

0800-0900

Breakfast

0900-0915

3. Introduction to day 2: reflections

***Adam Phillips**

Executive Director, Local, Faith and Transformative Partnerships Hub, USAID

0915-1030

4. New policy and programme responses

To respond to the global challenges to FoRB, a new foreign policy orientation has been emerging which emphasizes bottom-up approaches and collaborative strategies with local stakeholders on the ground. As a result, governments have started to fund development interventions designed to redress religious discrimination affecting individuals and members of religious communities, support coexistence beyond sectarian lines and promote inclusivity in religiously heterogeneous communities.

But what constitutes a development project that advances FoRB? How can development interventions based on government partnerships with civil society, including religious actors, and a consideration of interreligious dynamics improve FoRB?

How have governments funded FoRB projects to date? What lessons have been learnt?

And how can policymakers and government practitioners make use of existing research and evidence around the relationship between religious freedom, political instability and socio-economic development? Where do knowledge gaps exist? What are the lessons for lasting development impact of inter-faith peace building and development with faith-based partners in the promotion of religious freedom? How can the evidence be used to address the newly created or exacerbated issues for FoRB due to COVID-19?

***Michael Suhr**

Ambassador and Special Representative for Freedom of Religion or Belief, the Danish Office for Freedom of Religion or Belief in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark

***Jason Klocek**

Assistant Professor of Politics and International Relations/Senior Researcher, USIP, Nottingham

1030-1115

Photograph and tea / coffee

1115-1230

5. Working together to advance FORB: co-operation as a crucial policy tool

Building on lessons learnt, how can governments and international organisations best partner with religious and civil society actors to support, facilitate and encourage collaboration to advance FoRB and build inclusive societies for all? What are the challenges in adopting interreligious engagement as an approach for advancing FoRB and building inclusive citizenship? What institutional barriers and power dynamics prevent cooperation and collaboration? How can women or young people, for example, be included? What are the barriers of framing social cohesion and conflict resolution projects with a FoRB lens? What are the challenges faced by government actors in engaging with FoRB development work?

And what needs to be done to have religious actors be seen by policy makers as partners (SDG17) in building long term strategies to advance FoRB for all and to harness sustainable development, inclusive and peaceful societies?

***Katherine Marshall**

Senior fellow, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs

***Scott Appleby**

Dean of Keough School of Global Affairs, Notre Dame University

1230-1330

Lunch

1330-1430

Free time

1400-1415

Facilitator Briefing in the Common Room

1430-1500

6. Introduction to breakout groups

***Nayla Tabarra**

President Adyan Foundation

***Gretchen Birkle**

Deputy Director, Religious and Ethnic Minorities, Middle East Bureau, USAID

1500-1630

7. Breakout groups on how to work together- key recommendations

Participants to work in smaller groups to form recommendations for building new partnerships:

- How can sustainable collaboration between governments and civil society, with meaningful and equal inclusion of local religious communities, be promoted to advance both FoRB and the SDGs?
- What steps do governments need to take to better be able to champion the inclusion of civil society, including religious actors, as key partners in advancing FoRB and the SDG2030 agenda?
- How can governments better approach the sphere of interreligious collaboration as non-religious actors without it leading to further divisions? What tensions are there and what are some possible solutions?
- What concrete steps can governments, IOs and human rights institutions take to create and support bottom-up mechanisms and dialogues to foster intercultural and interreligious engagement and collaboration to strengthen inclusive and peaceful societies and advance FoRB.

Facilitators:

***Nayla Tabarra**

President Adyan Foundation

***Gretchen Birkle**

Deputy Director, Religious and Ethnic Minorities, Middle East Bureau, USAID

1630-1700

Tea / coffee

1700-1815

8. Feedback and plenary: Creating good practice in this space

1815-1900

Walk and Talk

1900

Reception followed by dinner

Friday 1 July

0800-0900

Breakfast and checkout (key cards will not work after 0900)

0900-0915

9. Introduction to day 3: reflections

***Renata Nelson**

Coordination Officer, KAICIID

***Khushwant Singh**

Head of Secretariat, International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD)

0915-1100

10. Mainstreaming FoRB across the SDGs: alternative approaches to development to promote inclusivity and redressing religious inequality

How can development programmes contribute towards addressing the SDGs while redressing religious inequalities? This session will present programmatic approaches to implementing FoRB sensitive education, health and sanitation while also endeavouring to tackle inequalities and hate speech.

***Mariz Tadros**

Professor of Politics and Development, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, CREID Director, Brighton

***Naumana Suleman**

South Asia Coordinator, Minority Rights Group, London

***Archbishop Angaelos**

Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London, Refcemi, London

***Maryam Kanwer**

Project Manager, Al Khoei Foundation, London

1100-1130

Tea / coffee

1130-12550

11. Towards the Ministerial: next steps and concluding remarks

Conference conclusion exploring next steps and ways forward.

***Fadi Daou**

Cofounder and Senior Policy Advisor, Adyan Foundation

1255-1300

Evaluation survey

1300

Lunch

1400

Participants depart

This is a preview programme and as such may be subject to change.

Enquiries about the programme to: Alison Hilliard, Programme Director

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