

# BELIEF, DIALOGUE AND SECURITY

Fostering dialogue and joint action across religious and belief boundaries





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# GLOSSARY

## **Comprehensive security**

The OSCE model of comprehensive security consists of three complementary dimensions: human, politico-military, and economic and environmental, each of equal importance.

## **The human dimension of security**

This encompasses all aspects of human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy, tolerance, non-discrimination and the rule of law.<sup>1</sup> It recognizes that failure to respect these aspects is as much of a threat to national security as military threats.

## **Dialogue and joint action across religious or belief boundaries**

In this guide, this term includes grass-roots to high-level, formal or informal, state-driven or independently organized dialogue and partnership activities that can be:

- Interreligious: between two or more different religions
- Interfaith: between two or more different faiths (often seen as more inclusive)
- Intra-religious/intra-faith: within a religion/faith
- Interconvictional: between different religious or belief backgrounds and/or convictions

*Note: when this guide refers to dialogue, it is not talking about spiritual or theological dialogue, but dialogue about daily life concerns.*

## **Joint action**

Partnerships between different religious or belief communities that seek actively to address common problems, often as an offshoot of dialogue. These activities may engage religious or belief actors and/or secular actors.

## **Dialogue facilitation**

A process of enabling and improving communication between different parties involved in a dispute or conflict. The primary aim of this process is not to reach a specific agreement, outcome or settlement, although concrete decisions and actions may emerge from dialogue processes, but to foster greater recognition, understanding, empathy and trust between all parties involved.<sup>2</sup>

### **Enabling environment**

The effective protection of the dignity, physical and psychological integrity, liberty and security of each religious or belief actor is a prerequisite for enabling them to engage in dialogue and defend human rights through joint action. This includes states advancing freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief (FoRB) and all other human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

### **Freedom of Thought, Conscience, Religion or Belief (FoRB)**

This is enshrined in Article 18 of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)<sup>3</sup> and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which states: “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Secularism**

A separation between religion and state, meant both to preserve religious or belief entities against political interference and to safeguard the political sphere from religious intrusion. Secularism is not meant to restrict religion, but to provide a legal framework that guarantees the free exercise of religion or belief.<sup>5</sup>

# FOREWORD

From Baku to Brussels, London to Istanbul, or New York to Sarajevo, religious and belief pluralism is a defining characteristic of the OSCE region. This diversity of belief, thought and expression creates a rich culture and opportunities for mutual learning and growth that can benefit the whole of society. At the same time, such change is not comfortable for everyone and must be well managed so that those who might benefit from social fragmentation cannot exploit differences. Pluralistic societies need high levels of tolerance and social trust to be peaceful; this can only happen when the state actively and demonstrably seeks to implement fully its international obligations on freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief and other human rights without distinction. ODIHR's Freedom of Religion or Belief Programme and its Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief offers expert advice and resources and implements projects to assist participating States to this end.

This guide aims to help participating States create an environment where cross-community consultations, dialogues and joint action can flourish. It should also be useful for non-state actors wanting to promote dialogue and joint action across religious or belief boundaries. The guide does not offer a one-size-fits-all model, but offers practical advice on how to create an enabling environment. Fostering greater respect for the fundamental freedom of religion or belief alongside all other human rights and fundamental freedoms is essential to ensuring the security of the OSCE region.

**Matteo Mecacci**  
ODIHR Director





# CHAPTER 1

## THE NEED FOR DIALOGUE AND JOINT ACTION



“ Dialogue and joint action can support states’ efforts to build more cohesive and secure societies. ”



## CHAPTER 1

# THE NEED FOR DIALOGUE AND JOINT ACTION

Religions and beliefs shape the identities and values of individuals and communities. These identities and values can inspire people to find common ground, but they can also divide. Because religious or belief identities cross regional and national boundaries, actions and events around the world and online can cause reactions among local communities that divide society. Division, left unchecked, can foment further prejudice, hatred, violence, insecurity and even atrocity crimes.

States have the primary responsibility to ensure effective respect for, and protection of human rights to prevent incitement and protect people from crimes. Dialogue and joint action across religious and belief boundaries can support states' efforts to build more cohesive and secure societies. They can help de-escalate tensions, improve relations between communities, increase levels of societal trust and understanding, boost the enjoyment of fundamental human rights



and foster societal resilience to polarization and instability.<sup>6</sup> However, this should not be a last-minute activity for states to turn to only when violence with a religion or belief component erupts. Such moves may produce short-term benefits, but states should be providing continuous support for dialogue and joint action initiatives to effect real and sustainable positive change within a society.

There are diverse religions and beliefs across the OSCE. People who are actively engaged in their communities are often well-placed to identify problems affecting their neighbourhoods. Religious and belief actors can be valuable partners — through both high-level and grass-roots activities — in the state’s efforts to secure fundamental rights and comprehensive security, especially in freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief (FoRB).

Respect for FoRB is essential for meaningful dialogue to be possible between religious or belief communities, providing a level playing field for actors from old, new, large, small, known and unknown religions or beliefs. FoRB cannot be disassociated from other rights and, in particular, from the freedoms of expression and association. Human rights flourish where there is respect for individual choice — including in religion or belief — and mutual understanding and communication between different parts of society, alongside a vigorous culture of public debate.

All OSCE participating States have made commitments on respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, FoRB included. They emphasize “the importance of a continued and strengthened interfaith

and intercultural dialogue to promote greater tolerance, respect and understanding”<sup>7</sup> and specifically call on each other to “promote and facilitate open and transparent interfaith and interreligious dialogue and partnerships”.<sup>8</sup>



“ The participating States recognize the universal significance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for which is an essential factor for the peace, justice and well-being necessary to ensure the development of friendly relations and co-operation among themselves as among all States. ”

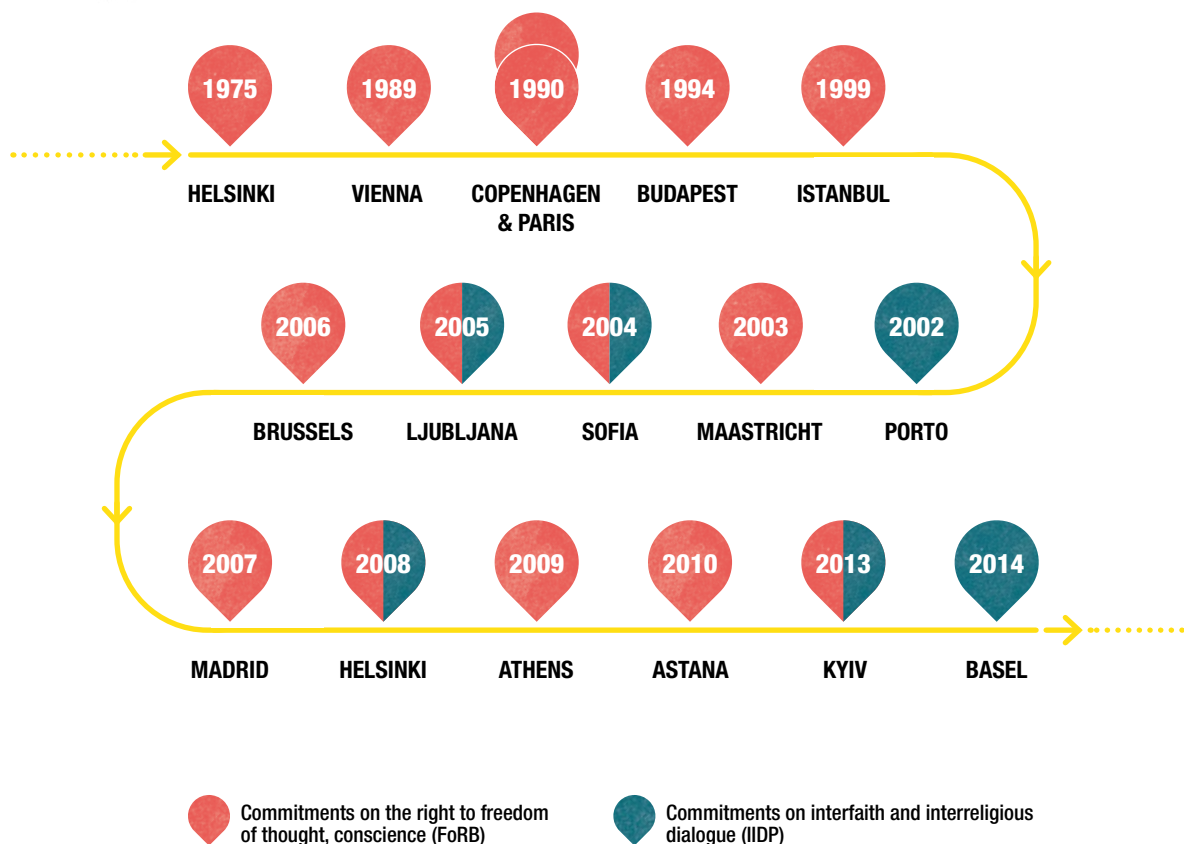
**Helsinki Final Act**<sup>9</sup>

Across the OSCE region, policymakers increasingly recognize that fostering dialogue and joint action across religious or belief boundaries is beneficial for improving respect for FoRB and they adopt a range of approaches to encourage this. Most importantly, states should enable dialogue and joint actions but not lead them. Dialogue and joint actions should never be imposed by the state as a mandatory, top-down process, irrespective of the wishes and needs of participants. Nor should it be used by state actors to push specific agendas, for example, to promote a state’s international image. Trust is vital; this can be hard to build and is easily lost. Community participation should be voluntary and participants should be able to shape the agenda of the dialogues and activities. Moreover, participants should always feel able to speak freely about any concerns without fear of reprisal or needing to navigate complex power dynamics to have their rights protected and upheld.

ODIHR has developed this guide in line with its mandate and in response to calls from participating States to give them guidance and practical tools to help them create an environment that enables fruitful dialogue and joint action across religious and belief boundaries. The guide does not push a ‘one-size-fits-all’ model, instead offering guidance about the questions and factors states should consider when approaching the subject. It discusses how to select initiatives and support them in practice. It includes examples of good practice and interviews with actors engaged in dialogue and joint action initiatives across a broad range of contexts. These demonstrate how very different forms of dialogue and joint action can still foster respect for FoRB and other human rights and fundamental freedoms. Although these case studies may be hard to replicate in different contexts, they offer interesting insights as to how states can support dialogue and joint actions that promote FoRB.



## Path to security



## METHODOLOGY

The guide is the product of extensive online and offline consultation with experts from across the OSCE region, including religious or belief community representatives, practitioners and academics. ODIHR also conducted a survey among participating States on the different ways they have supported or facilitated dialogue initiatives to promote FoRB across religious or belief boundaries. The survey questions and an overview of the findings can be found in [Annexe 2](#) and [Annexe 3](#). ODIHR also consulted its [Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief](#), a 16-person body of independent experts drawn from across the OSCE region.

This guide also builds upon recommendations from ODIHR's 2019 *Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security: Policy Guidance*<sup>10</sup> and upon the 2018 report on *Interreligious engagement strategies*<sup>11</sup> supported by ODIHR and the OSCE's Italian Chairpersonship. It incorporates learning from OSCE's *Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings*,<sup>12</sup> which gave participating States the opportunity to take stock of the implementation of their commitments on dialogue and joint action across religious or belief boundaries.

ODIHR achieved equal participation of women and men in the consultation process as well as intergenerational participation. The guide is the product of a process that has itself benefited from dialogue across religious or belief boundaries, inherently reflecting the importance of respecting everyone's right to freely express their thoughts and perspectives and, in turn, creating meaningful and enriching dialogue that creates connections and builds bridges.

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## CHAPTER 2

# FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE, RELIGION OR BELIEF

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“ It is vital to ensure that everyone has the right to FoRB. ”



## CHAPTER 2

# FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE, RELIGION OR BELIEF

Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief (regularly shortened to religious freedom, freedom of religion or belief, or FoRB) is a fundamental and universal human right. It is guaranteed by Articles 18 of the UDHR and the ICCPR, as well as various regional human rights instruments, and is enshrined in a number of OSCE commitments. A detailed breakdown of the legal scope of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief is further provided in ODIHR's *Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security: Policy Guidance*.





“ Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. ”

**Article 18 (1) of the ICCPR**

It is important to know that:

- **FoRB is for everyone.** Everyone has the same right to FoRB, regardless of whether they are a citizen, a foreign national, incarcerated, a refugee, a migrant or a stateless person. No permission from the state, religious or belief communities, or from anyone else is needed to freely exercise this human right.
- **FoRB protects everyone’s ability to think and decide their own stance** on all matters and to have (or not have) a personal conviction or commitment to a religion or belief.
- **FoRB protects each person’s freedom to choose** to have, not have, adopt or change religion or belief without coercion. This does not mean that everyone has to make a choice, and some people may not exercise their ability to choose.
- **FoRB protects actions motivated by religion or belief** related to worship, observance, practice, teaching,<sup>13</sup> the public sharing of one’s faith or dissemination of information regarding one’s religion or belief,

as well as keeping one's religion or belief to oneself. As such, it is closely connected to the rights of freedom of expression, the right to assembly and association, and the right to privacy. FoRB also protects rituals and ceremonies, customs and conviction-based practices such as dietary observance and restrictions, the choice of wearing of distinctive clothing or head coverings, the display of symbols, and religious holidays and days of rest, amongst others.

- **FoRB protects communal practice**, or the ability of two or more individuals to practice a religion or belief together, in public (whether in organized or ad-hoc ways) or in private, should they wish to do so. FoRB is a human right that belongs to each individual, but, insofar as individuals come together to manifest their religion or belief, it is a collective right as well.
- **FoRB protects the internal autonomy of religious or belief communities** and is integral to the way religious or belief communities conduct their basic affairs, e.g., the right to self-organization; the freedom to choose their religious or belief leaders and teachers; the freedom to establish legal personality, charitable institutions, religious or educational institutions; and the freedom to prepare and distribute religious texts or publications. FoRB also protects the right to solicit and receive voluntary financial contributions, thereby enabling religious or belief communities to manifest these rights independently.<sup>14</sup>
- **FoRB is an integral part of non-discrimination.** All human beings have the right to enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms without discrimination on the basis of protected identity characteristics. Rights may not be infringed upon on the basis of our real or perceived age, 'race'<sup>15</sup> or ethnicity, sex, language, disability status or political opinion, among other similar grounds.<sup>16</sup>

FoRB enables us all to be and to express who we really are, without fear of discrimination. To create a society free of discrimination, it is vital to ensure that everyone has the right to FoRB. This is especially important for communities that regularly face marginalization, hostility or violence.

## 2.1. LIMITATIONS ON FORB

Each state has the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil each person's ability to exercise FoRB. However, in line with international human rights law, most human rights can be limited, but only under very strict conditions. Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief has two components: the forum internum and the forum externum.

- **The forum internum**

An internal component related to our thoughts, convictions and beliefs. **Human thought processes, adopting or changing inner beliefs and conscience cannot be restricted by anybody on any grounds.** This is ‘absolutely protected’ under international law. This means it can never be restricted for any reason. For example, a state cannot lawfully compel someone to change their religion/beliefs, or punish them for their thoughts.

- **The forum externum**

An external component, related to how we manifest our thoughts, convictions and beliefs in our actions. **Freedom to manifest or practice one’s religion or beliefs may be restricted in certain circumstances.** This does not enjoy the same absolute protection. In strictly limited circumstances, the external practice of religion or belief may be limited. Article 18 of the ICCPR, which applies to all OSCE participating States, provides that FoRB’s external manifestations may only be limited on very narrow grounds and in accordance with strict procedure. The burden of justifying any restrictions lies with the state.

The flow chart on the following page illustrates the grounds and procedure for a lawful restriction under Article 18.

## 2.2. GROUNDS FOR LIMITATION

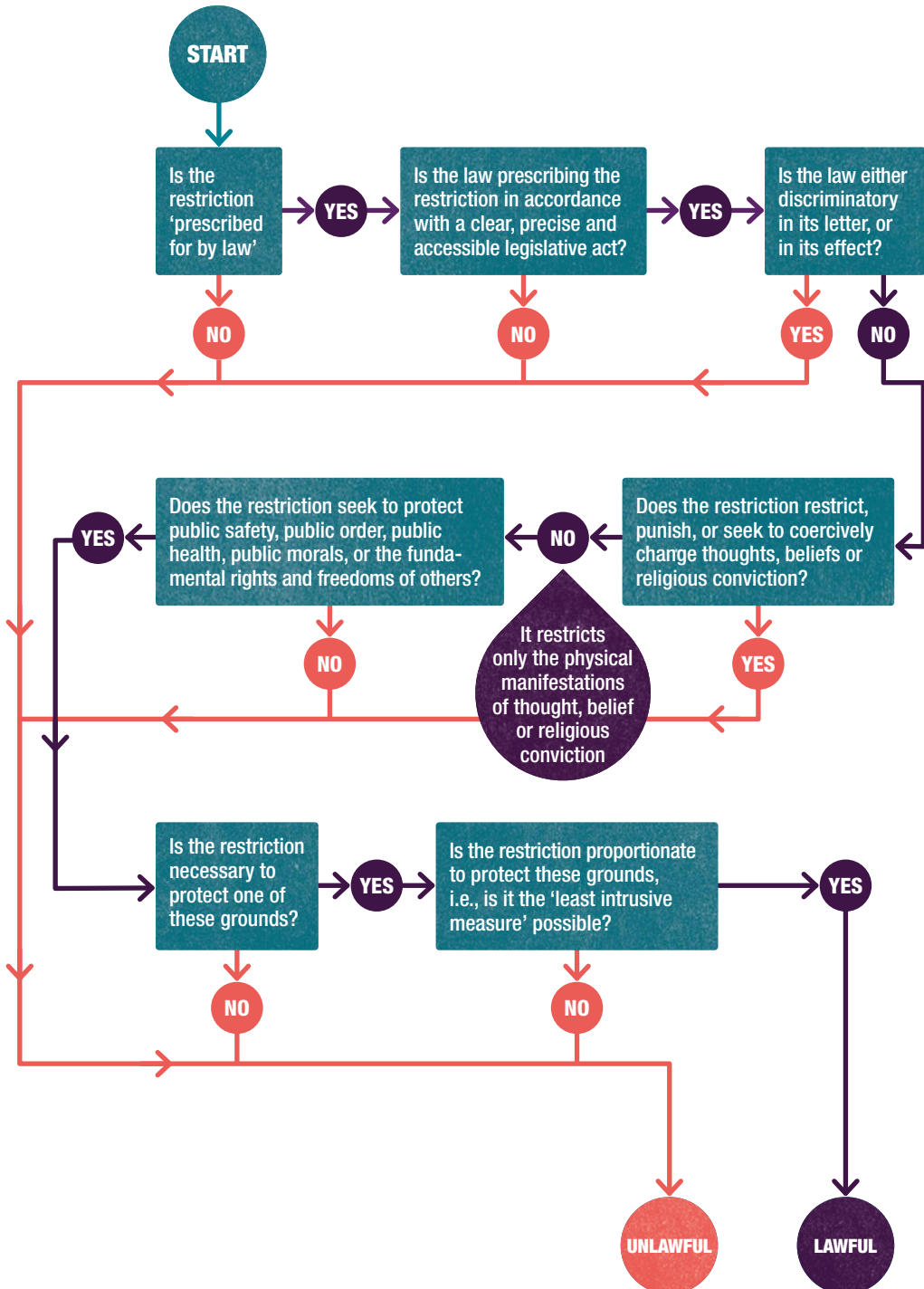
The five grounds for limitation are ‘public safety’, ‘public order’, ‘public health’, ‘public morals’, or the ‘rights and fundamental freedoms of others’, and they are exhaustive. National security is not a valid justification to limit manifestations of FoRB. Even where public safety is invoked as grounds for limitation, it is to be narrowly interpreted, as are each of the other four criteria. A restriction based on ‘morals’, for example, cannot exclusively derive from a single tradition. A public emergency that threatens the life of the nation cannot be a justification for the state to infringe upon FoRB because, under the ICCPR, FoRB is a non-derogable right (like the right to life or freedom from torture). Even in times of public emergency, FoRB can only be limited for the five grounds listed above.

The state must justify the limitation, put in place adequate safeguards and ensure effective remedies against abuse in implementation of the limitations, including any that are inconsistent with international human rights standards.<sup>17</sup>

A limitation is unlawful if it aims to prevent the reasonable exercise of freedom of religion or belief or other rights, if it creates a system whereby exercise of the right is the exception, not the rule, or if the limitation has no objective or reasonable justification.<sup>18</sup>



## Is a restriction on FoRB lawful?<sup>19</sup>





“... any and all limitations must be the exception, not the rule. Moreover, the burden of justification for such restrictions falls on those who wish to impose them, often Governments or State organs. (...) restrictions must also (...) be the least restrictive among all the adequate measures that could possibly be applied and, in any case, without vitiating the right itself.”

**Prof. Ahmed Shaheed, former United Nations Special Rapporteur on FoRB<sup>20</sup>**

The following infographic presents some of the ways in which states limit FoRB beyond what is necessary or proportionate or (in)directly discriminate amongst religious or belief groups, and thereby also undermine dialogue and joint action.



### Examples of disproportionate or discriminatory state restrictions on FoRB

<b>PROHIBITION</b> on the distribution of religious literature	<b>PROHIBITION</b> on the wearing of religious symbols/ clothes	Giving <b>PRIVILEGED</b> positions to state religions	<b>PROHIBITIONS</b> on missionary activity
<b>RESTRICTIVE</b> and burdensome religious registration laws	<b>IMPEDIMENTS</b> to receiving domestic or international funding for religious or belief activity	<b>BLASPHEMY</b> and/or <b>APOSTASY</b> laws	Terrorism or <b>NATIONAL SECURITY</b> laws that disproportionately affect religious or belief communities



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## CHAPTER 3

# DIALOGUE AND JOINT ACTION ACROSS RELIGIOUS OR BELIEF BOUNDARIES

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“ Dialogue provides unique opportunities for joint action partnerships that protect and implement human rights. ”



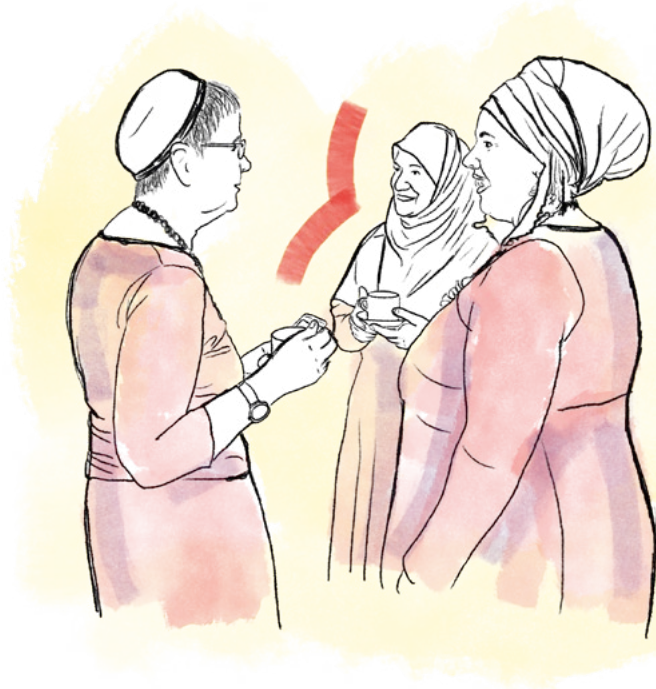
## CHAPTER 3

# DIALOGUE AND JOINT ACTION ACROSS RELIGIOUS OR BELIEF BOUNDARIES

Different terms exist across the OSCE for describing dialogue and joint action across religious or belief boundaries. The exact term used, as well as the structure and participants of a dialogue, will depend on its goal, context and the desired outcomes, as well as theological traditions, history, sociocultural background and philosophical convictions. Different languages also stress different aspects of dialogue and use more or less inclusive terms.<sup>21</sup>

Dialogue and joint action can address concrete problems or aim to improve the theological or social understanding of different traditions, and can target or engage various actors. Importantly, it is not the purpose of dialogue to discuss whose belief is 'truer', nor to convert





individuals/groups to another religion/belief system. This does not mean participants cannot proselytize, but it should not be a goal of the process. Furthermore, the dialogue facilitator should encourage the setting of ground rules (see [Annexe 1](#)). These should include participants' agreement to avoid proselytization during the dialogue.

Joint actions can emerge from formal, structured and high-level dialogue or from informal, spontaneous and ad hoc activities at a grass-roots level. When people of religious and non-religious beliefs have informal encounters with the chance of deep conversations and building stronger relationships, social transformation can happen. Informal dialogue does not have to be organized explicitly along religious, belief, ethnic or cultural lines, and may, for example, take place in informal settings in multicultural and multireligious neighbourhoods, schools or clubs.

Dialogue can help to develop and deliver valuable collaborative initiatives to address practical needs and challenges at all levels (local, national or global), including by shaping policies on issues of common concern through a cross-community lens. Equally, cross-community engagement may not primarily seek to establish intrafaith, interreligious, interfaith or interconvictional dialogue, but may end up doing so while focusing on other issues of mutual concern, such as social/environmental issues. As a participant in the ODIHR consultations noted, this type of religious or belief engagement is “about different beliefs, common values and joint actions;” in other words, choosing to unite to address common needs while keeping our differences, rather than allowing them to divide us.

## TYPES OF DIALOGUE AND JOINT ACTIVITIES

Dialogue can be an end in itself, or be part of a wider project involving social action, or be used to address an issue of concern to those in a community. The broad activities commonly delivered under the umbrella of ‘dialogue’ across religious or belief boundaries include, but are not limited to: knowing the ‘other’; changing hearts and minds; teaching, learning and mediation; and working to resolve issues of common concern. Activities typically include:

- Religious or belief leaders convene to speak collectively as advocates for a specific issue;
- High-level, religious or belief-based bodies/institutions strengthen their understanding of other such bodies/institutions, building trust, mutual respect and better relations between their communities;
- Grass-roots religious/belief-based social action, where participants with religious differences unite to promote and engage in cross-community activities to bring social change (including through creative means such as sports and the arts); and
- Scriptural reasoning processes,<sup>22</sup> rooted in sacred or philosophical texts, which advance understanding of particular contemporary issues from a theological or broader perspective. (Such activities are usually led by individuals well versed in using these approaches, typically with backgrounds in theological scholarship or communal leadership). While this guide is not concerned with this type of dialogue, other initiatives do engage in scriptural reasoning processes to engender joint action.<sup>23</sup>



### **Good practice: The ‘Faith for Rights’ framework and methodology for joint action across religions and beliefs<sup>24</sup>**

The ‘Faith for Rights’ framework provides space for cross-disciplinary reflection and action on the deep and mutually enriching connections between religions, beliefs and human rights. The objective is to foster the development of peaceful societies that uphold human dignity and equality for all and where diversity is not just tolerated but fully respected and celebrated. It stresses that all believers — theistic, non-theistic, atheistic or other believers — should work together to articulate ways in which ‘faith’ can stand up for ‘rights’ effectively and where both can enhance each other.

The Beirut Declaration<sup>25</sup> stresses that “only when we as religious actors assume our respective roles, articulate a shared vision of our responsibilities and transcend preaching to action, only then we will credibly promote mutual

acceptance and fraternity among people of different religions or beliefs and empower them to defeat negative impulses of hatred, viciousness, manipulation, greed, cruelty and related forms of inhumanity.”

The [#Faith4Rights Toolkit](#)<sup>26</sup> translates the framework into practical peer-to-peer learning and capacity-building programmes, containing learning modules for each of the [18 commitments](#) on ‘Faith for Rights’.

Besides the toolkit, several online tools on ‘Faith for Rights’ are available:

- [Religions, Beliefs, and Human Rights: A “Faith for Rights” Approach](#), Gandhi-King Global Academy)<sup>27</sup>
- [Facilitator Guide for Faith for Rights Courses](#), International Center for Law and Religion Studies<sup>28</sup>
- [Faith for Rights Training Package](#), Faith4Rights Academy<sup>29</sup>



“ The ‘Faith for Rights’ framework that was set up by my Office in 2017 engages governments, religious authorities and a wide range of civil society actors in peer-exchanges about concrete efforts on the ground. In Cyprus, for example, several religious leaders who are part of the ‘Faith for Rights’ [commUNITY of practices](#) have advocated for people of all faiths to have unimpeded access to their places of worship; they have also condemned incitement to violence, discrimination or hostility in the name of religion. ”<sup>30</sup>

**Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**

Dialogue provides some unique opportunities for joint action partnerships that protect and implement human rights.<sup>31</sup> Joint actions do not emerge from every dialogue process. Meaningful and impactful dialogue and partnerships need to be deliberately cultivated and allowed to develop over time. They are not linear processes. In some cases, it can be helpful to start with intrafaith discussions, to hear different views and find common ground within the same religion or belief group before moving on to interreligious/interfaith dialogue and joint action. Where joint initiatives emerge, some may yield positive results quickly, others may take longer.

Examples of joint action around FoRB-related issues may include:

### **Peace education**

- Human rights, anti-discrimination and/or interreligious education in schools
- Human rights, anti-discrimination and/or interreligious education in adult education formats
- Educational awareness-raising on religious literacy, diversity and peaceful coexistence
- Workshops for civil society, religious/belief actors and state actors

### **Social cohesion activities in mixed teams or groups**

- Joint public statements
- Joint public events:
  - Sports events
  - Arts activities
  - Community activities e.g., to protect cultural, religious heritage or combat hate crime

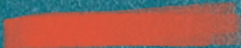
### **Network building**

- Establishment of joint structures and formal and informal exchange formats:
  - Dialogue platforms
  - Interreligious councils
  - Advisory committees
  - Interest groups
  - Advocacy groups for law or policy reform



# CHAPTER 4

## THE ROLE OF THE STATE



“ States need to ensure all processes related to dialogue and joint action projects are transparent. ”



## CHAPTER 4

# THE ROLE OF THE STATE

States have the primary obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. Supporting dialogue and joint action across religious or belief boundaries is one effective way of doing so. As a facilitator, the state should not organize the dialogue or joint action initiatives itself, but create the environment where initiatives can flourish, organized by trusted, non-state actors who will do this work in a human rights-compliant way.

This chapter examines how the state can perform this supportive and enabling role. It looks at how to translate legal instruments and politically-binding commitments into effective policies, practices and processes of change to positively impact peoples' daily lives. At the heart of this human rights-based approach are the principles of Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination and Equality, Empowerment and Legality (PANEL).



- **Participation:** everyone, whether religious or not, is entitled to active participation in decision-making processes affecting the enjoyment of their rights.
- **Accountability:** states are held accountable if they fail to fulfil their obligations towards rights-holders. Effective remedies are in place when breaches of human rights occur.
- **Non-discrimination and equality:** all individuals are entitled to enjoy their rights equally and without discrimination.
- **Empowerment:** everyone can understand, claim and exercise their rights, participating in the development of policies that affect their lives.
- **Legality:** approaches should be in line with the legal rights established in domestic and international laws.<sup>32</sup>

Stressing that the state's role is best as a supporting actor — rather than the driver of dialogue — does not mean that a state cannot take part in dialogue and joint action initiatives if invited to do so. Indeed, some communities may invite states to participate, as valuable interlocutors, to pose questions or better understand state plans on a topic of concern. However, in some contexts, it may be inappropriate for state actors to speak or attend. In some countries, certain individuals or groups may have reason not to trust the state, due to, for example, historical abuses, institutional prejudice or violent incidents where the state has failed to protect them. The same can be true where a state takes too central a role, trying to direct dialogue or joint actions. This can damage the state's reputation as a neutral intermediary and discourage valuable engagement by others.

This can easily happen when a state has an official religion or belief, or unofficially treats one religion or belief preferentially; state-initiated dialogue activities may be perceived as reinforcing a hegemonic position over other communities. If this happens, activities to rebuild trust would be needed before meaningful dialogue could restart.

Therefore, it is generally better for states to focus on offering support, to create the conditions that encourage formal or informal dialogue and to support initiatives that lead to greater tolerance, respect and understanding among communities. These conditions include:

- Respect for human rights in general, and FoRB in particular, within society, as well as when engaging with dialogue and joint action across religious and belief boundaries;
- The state taking a ‘do no harm’ approach when engaging with religious and belief actors and/or supporting their joint action;
- The state acting in an even-handed manner towards religious or belief actors;
- Ensuring the inclusion and participation of the full diversity of religious and belief actors; and
- The state acting transparently and being accountable when engaging with religious or belief actors and/or supporting their joint actions.

The following sections discuss each of these conditions in more detail.

## **4.1. RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

Respect for human rights enables everyone to live dignified lives. Religious or belief actors, and communities more broadly, will have greater levels of trust and engagement with a state if it respects their rights and visibly acts to protect and promote them. It is important for states to ensure that their legislative framework and actions effectively guarantee that human rights obligations are upheld.

Various indicators can point to whether a state is respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights. For example, the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on FoRB, Ahmed Shaheed, proposes a (non-exhaustive) indicator framework to monitor and promote the implementation of human rights enjoyment at a particular time and in a particular context. He splits them into three categories: structural (legal and institutional framework); process (policies, procedures, practices, budgets and capacity) and outcome/performance (data on gaps in the enjoyment of a right, on violations or on improvements).<sup>33</sup> Within this framework, for religious or belief communities, it would be relevant, for instance, that national legislation recognizes bias based on religion or belief as an aggravating circumstance when committing a crime (structural); that training is then provided for law enforcement



and the judiciary on how to recognize and investigate such crimes (process), and that disaggregated data is regularly collected and assessed for further action at various levels of the justice system on religious/belief motivated hate crimes and is relevant for specific communities (outcome/performance).

Other indicators can provide data specifically on the enjoyment of FoRB and may include sociological indicators such as distance between majority and minority groups.<sup>34</sup> Using such indicators helps states identify both whether they have created an enabling environment and where there are gaps or potential areas needing change. Where states create/adapt indicators, this process should include engagement and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders before settling on a final (but not inflexible), context-adapted and meaningful list of indicators.



ODIHR's *Guidelines for Review of Legislation Pertaining to Religion or Belief*<sup>35</sup> can support states in ensuring an adequate structural framework for the respect of FoRB, with recommendations on how states can ensure that their legislation complies with human rights obligations regarding FoRB.

States should also ensure that their staff are sufficiently educated about human rights in order to engage with religious and belief communities on FoRB in a human rights-compliant way. State institutions may need to examine their internal culture and skills gaps, modifying internal structures, processes, behaviours, resource allocation and budgets.



### **Good practice: Religious Track peacebuilding in Cyprus**

The Religious Track of the Cyprus peace process is an initiative that highlights the constructive role of religion, belief and respect for human rights to peacebuilding in a society divided, amongst others, along religious lines.<sup>36</sup> Facilitated by the Swedish Embassy since 2009, following a failed UN-facilitated peace agreement, Sweden offers the 'good offices' of its diplomatic representation for dialogue between various Christian and Muslim denominations. The impetus for discussion topics comes from the participants.

The Religious Track takes a four-pillared approach to peacebuilding: i) promoting awareness and trust between religious leaders and communities, ii) promoting joint action and confidence-building measures, iii) protecting everyone's right

to publicly manifest their religion, and iv) protecting sites and monuments of religious importance in Cyprus. FoRB violations faced by any community on the island are acknowledged and addressed collectively by all. The Religious Track has a strong focus on women's rights, migrant and refugee rights and other cross-cutting issues that are experienced differently on the basis of religion.

The Religious Track has practical outcomes. Participating faith leaders have collaborated to repair and maintain religious sites, facilitate pilgrimages across the UN-administered 'Green Line' of the divided island, and make numerous joint statements on issues including violence against women and girls, terrorism, and a human rights-based approach to the peace talks.<sup>37</sup>



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### **Good practice: The Nordic Ecumenical Network on Freedom of Religion or Belief (NORFORB)**

NORFORB is a network of church organizations, faith-based NGOs and ecumenical development agencies from the Nordic countries who take a human rights-based approach to their work. The intrafaith network began in 2014 as members sought to find common ground on which to conduct FoRB advocacy and launch joint initiatives. However, participants found themselves constantly having to explain FoRB and how it should be integrated into impact assessments. NORFORB organizations realized that no practical, publicly available training materials existed on FoRB and how to implement it in practice. To address this gap, in August 2018, three NORFORB Members — Stefanus Alliance International, the Swedish Mission Council and the Center for Church Based Development — created the FoRB Learning Platform.

Over many years, NORFORB has engaged with international scholars and experts, theistic, non-theistic and atheistic communities, civil society actors and local leaders to create online and hybrid training courses on topics such as FoRB, FoRB and gender equality, and best pedagogical practices for FoRB training. NORFORB ensures that its participants (25 per course) represent a diverse cross-section of religious or belief backgrounds and geographic diversity. Courses run across three continents and are oversubscribed. NORFORB also increasingly conducts training for state officials on the right to FoRB.

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#### **4.1.1. Freedom of expression and FoRB**

Dialogue between religious or belief communities can only happen when freedom of expression and FoRB are already respected. When viewed through the lens of expression, FoRB gives religious or belief actors the choice to participate in, or abstain from dialogue or discussions with other actors without any negative consequences.

Effective dialogue should allow participants to speak openly and honestly, but respectfully. Without this, it can be hard for mutual understanding, learning and growth to take root. For a dialogue to reach across boundaries or address contentious issues, the diversity of opinions must be acknowledged. During a dialogue, there may be as many opinions as there are people present. Opinions even within a community can differ, and some may hold views that are illiberal or in direct contradiction to others present. To maintain genuine dialogue, each participant should have their right to speak freely upheld. This may include things that “offend, shock, or disturb”, as protected under ICCPR Articles 18 and 19, rather than reducing dialogue to a cross-cultural exchange of pleasantries over “tea and samosa”.<sup>38</sup> When providing funding for dialogue initiatives, states should not expect participants to change their religious or belief tenets and principles to accommodate state goals or the goals of those organizing the dialogue.

More generally, states should be alert when expression conveys hatred that results in harm for religious or belief minorities or for dissenting voices within majority communities.<sup>39</sup> Hateful discourse, whether in formal, informal, political or social contexts, can lead to exclusion. Therefore, even when a legal sanction would not be warranted under International Human Rights Law, states should address and react to any expression of hatred and encourage action that leads to better understanding and inclusion, both online and offline.<sup>40</sup> As outlined by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on FoRB in a 2024 report, state-supported “initiatives should aim at encouraging dialogue and addressing the psychological roots of prejudice between communities at the grass-roots level and should be empowered to carry out their activities continuously and not only in times of an uptick in violence”<sup>41</sup>.

In addition to dialogue, states should pre-emptively and proactively address the spread of ‘hate speech’.

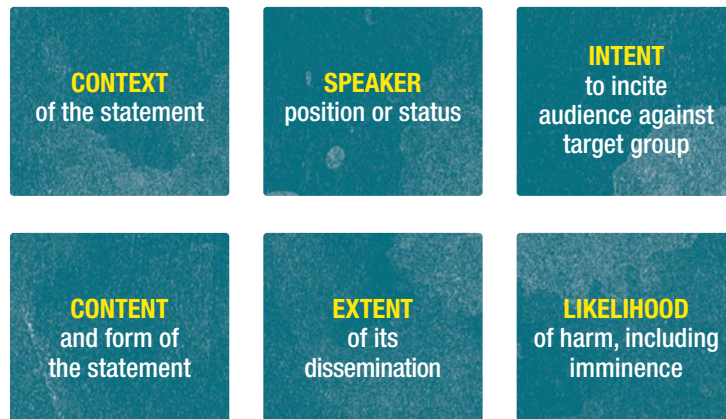
Firstly, not all types of offensive speech need to be criminalized, and states should look at international standards laid out in the Rabat threshold test of incitement to hatred (see below). However, speech that amounts to propaganda for war, or national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence should be prohibited by law. States should equally ensure that legislation is appropriately implemented when such speech occurs and that victims are adequately supported. With due consideration to victim protection, states should generally communicate about any legal sanctions against the perpetrator.



## Rabat Plan of Action

The Rabat Plan of Action<sup>42</sup> brought together scholars, lawyers, religious practitioners, secular and faith-based NGOs, amongst others, to elaborate human rights-based responses to national, racial or religious hatred amounting to incitement. To this day, its ‘6-part threshold test’ remains one of the most authoritative measures of when hate speech may be restricted under International Human Rights Law.

### The 6-part threshold test



The Council of Europe 2022 Recommendation on combating hate speech<sup>43</sup> also outlines a comprehensive approach to addressing hate speech within a human rights framework.

States should support awareness-raising campaigns to educate the public and promote critical thinking skills and media, information and digital literacy throughout educational systems.<sup>44</sup> They should also educate social media users about the harms of online harassment and abuse, including the psychological impacts and chilling effects on targeted or marginalized groups (in this case, religious or belief voices). States should also regulate internet intermediaries and social media companies effectively, on issues ranging from algorithmic model design and development to the effective redress and remedies available for those affected.<sup>45</sup> Depending on context, this can entail the obligation to effectively enforce the EU Digital Services Act at national level.<sup>46</sup> For more information on this topic, please consult the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media’s policy manual, Spotlight on Artificial Intelligence and Freedom of Expression.<sup>47</sup>

#### 4.1.2. Freedom of association and FoRB

The rights to associate and to exercise FoRB in community with others must be guaranteed if religious or belief communities are to gather and begin talking. Under International Human Rights Law, states cannot refuse to accord legal personality status to an association of individuals based on religion or belief, unless it has been proven that the association is engaged in unlawful activities.<sup>48</sup> As a rule, no one should be penalized for associating with people or religious communities that a state does not officially recognize. States should also ensure that laws do not restrict religious or belief communities' ability to meet, or make this cumbersome through, for example, requiring legal registration. Additionally, for those who wish to participate in a consultation or dialogue, involvement should not depend upon such criteria as whether the group is officially registered or has a certain number of followers. See ODIHR's *Guidelines on the Legal Personality of Religious or Belief Communities*<sup>49</sup> for specific recommendations.

FoRB guarantees religious organizations the ability to establish charitable institutions and solicit funding. As underlined in the ODIHR-Venice Commission *Guidelines on Freedom of Association*, associations shall have the freedom to seek, receive and use financial and other resources, whether domestic, foreign or international, for the pursuit of their activities, and this is essential to the existence and operation of any association and an integral part of the right to freedom of association.<sup>50</sup> This freedom [to seek, receive and use financial and other resources] should be subject only to the requirements grounded in law and that are necessary, proportionate and non-discriminatory and generally applicable to customs, foreign exchange, the prevention of corruption, money laundering and the financing of terrorism, as well as those concerning the funding of elections and political parties, to the extent that these requirements are themselves consistent with international human rights standards. Any restrictions on access to resources from abroad (or from foreign or international sources) must be prescribed by law and pursue a legitimate aim in conformity with the specific permissible grounds of limitations set out in the relevant international standards, as well as be necessary in a democratic society and proportionate to the aim pursued.<sup>51</sup>

States are obliged to regulate domestic and international financial flows to guarantee security and combat corruption. Indeed, the United Nations Security Council has imposed obligations on states to combat global funding flows linked to terrorism.<sup>52</sup> However, there is a trend emerging whereby state legislative frameworks and policy responses routinely exceed the requirements of these obligations, and religious or belief community organizations have often found their access to funding cut with little due process or substantiated link to proscribed actors. Some states have introduced very stringent registration, reporting and other requirements targeting certain associations

that receive foreign funding with the stated aim of limiting ‘foreign influence’.<sup>53</sup> To create an enabling environment for the authentic emergence of dialogue and joint action across religious or belief boundaries, states must not unduly restrict access to funding for civil society, including religious or belief communities. Access to varied sources of funding — domestic and international — is vital to facilitate their pursuit of initiatives in a manner guaranteeing their independence. Indeed, many religious or belief groups are international in scope, and communities will want to send money to assist with each other’s activities, including, for example, charitable activities being run by local counterparts in times of need.

#### **4.1.3. Freedom of peaceful assembly and FoRB**

Freedom of peaceful assembly enables individuals to express themselves as part of a collective. Assemblies can act as platforms to advocate for change or to express solidarity. The joint action initiatives that emerge from dialogue processes can, at times, entail religious or belief communities gathering across religious or belief boundaries as a peaceful assembly for a variety of different purposes. As such, assemblies range from groups of individuals gathering in protest over issues of concern, to assemblies with symbolic importance, for example, commemorating events or marking significant religious or belief-related dates. As long as assemblies remain peaceful, it is the state’s duty to facilitate them.<sup>54</sup> It is important to highlight, however, that states cannot interfere with this right simply because they disagree with the views of the religious or belief communities present. They must ensure that the right to peaceful assembly is enjoyed equally by all groups, without discrimination.

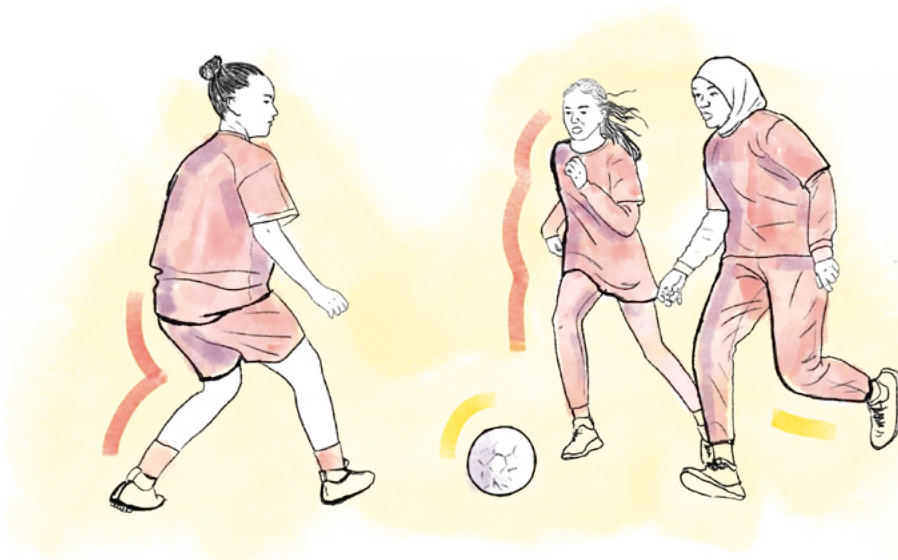


#### 4.1.4. Non-discrimination and FoRB

In line with human rights principles, where states decide to tackle FoRB-related challenges, they should strive for the meaningful inclusion and equal participation of as wide a range of actors as possible in the design of activities related to potential dialogue and joint action processes. This includes people from groups historically marginalized or excluded from such discussions (women, LGBTI, youth, persons with disabilities, indigenous communities, migrants, refugees). It is important that individuals from religious or belief communities, whether theistic, non-theistic or atheistic, are not actively excluded from consultations on matters that concern them, and that states seek to create space for those facing intersectional discrimination.

When hosting consultations, establishing joint advisory committees on a topic, or engaging in dialogue processes, states should consider how conflicts and social tensions are framed, as well as the potential impact of structural discrimination and violence on certain communities. Equally, given their inherent power in comparison to other societal actors, states should be sensitive when framing issues for discussion, as it can lead to power imbalances among the various actors, impacting dialogue processes.

States should also be aware that FoRB-related consultations, joint advisory committees or dialogue aimed at promoting greater tolerance, respect and understanding will be linked to how states generally frame and respond to issues related to intolerance and discrimination, including in their structural and institutional manifestations. State actors



at all levels should systematically make statements and enact policies that break entrenched stereotypes, prejudice and practices, and avoid scapegoating, where one or more religious or belief community would be 'responsible' for various societal ills. Discriminatory public responses risk scapegoating communities as 'automatic suspects', which can lead to wider disengagement with these communities, breaking societal cohesion, enabling the spread of scapegoating, hate speech or even hate crimes. In this atmosphere, different religious or belief actors may well perceive state support for consultations, joint advisory committees and dialogue with suspicion and refrain from participation; they may not view the activity as genuine and meaningful, and/or fear possible repercussions or negative perceptions from their own communities.

States also have international obligations to define hate crimes (criminal offences committed with a bias motivation<sup>55</sup>) as a distinct category of crimes in their national legislation and policy.<sup>56</sup> They should proactively address hate crime, and structural and institutionalized forms of discrimination, by developing a comprehensive system which understands hate, hate crime and its serious impacts including on individuals and communities, as well as the damage caused to wider societal cohesion. States should monitor the phenomenon and collect disaggregated data on hate crimes, also on grounds of religion or belief, and act upon that data to provide security to all. This means putting in place a range of policies and procedures: training law enforcement and the judiciary; supporting victims to access justice; gaining the trust of victims; fighting under-reporting; ensuring the availability of appropriate victim support services; and establishing cooperation between stakeholders for victim support;<sup>57</sup> as well as good communication and cooperation with, in this case, affected religious and belief communities.

States should consult with and recognize the role that religious or belief communities can play in addressing the security-related concerns of their own communities and of others. They should create or facilitate opportunities that encourage, but do not force, the proactive involvement of all communities in multifaith joint action to stem hate speech and hate crime and ensure the security of all communities.

The effects of hate crimes not only affect the individual(s) concerned negatively, but also impact the targeted community. They can cause an increasing sense of isolation from the wider society; community members may become reluctant to manifest their religion or belief publicly, to engage in public discussions on matters related to their identity, or even to participate in broader democratic processes. If there are ineffective or no channels for state, civil society and religious or belief communities to constructively address hate crimes and, more broadly, promote inter-community cohesion, then a sense of grievance and anger can become vectors for wider instability and insecurity in society.





“Anti-Semitism has long-affected Jewish communities and manifests itself in different ways, from conspiracy theories to intolerant discourse. This intolerance can trigger hate crimes, including violent attacks against Jews. Jewish individuals sometimes report fear attending worship services, wearing religious attire or symbols, and may abstain from publicly identifying as Jewish.”<sup>58</sup>



### Good practice: Safe Haven, Ireland

Safe Haven (SH) is a joint action programme run by the Dublin City Interfaith Forum (DCIF) stemming from an increase in hate-related incidents noticed by DCIF members. SH training gives members from a diverse spectrum of faith communities a clear understanding of hate motivated incidents and information on the available recording and reporting mechanisms and on how to support victims directly. The programme uses the Irish Network Against Racism’s iReport platform, as well as reporting directly to An Garda Síochána (Irish Police Service) as a third-party, and to DCIF’s own recording mechanism. The data informs local responses and further victim support. SH also trains frontline staff, including police officers, other service providers and civil society, on recognizing, acknowledging and responding to racism and religious hatred. The programme received initial funding from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and continues to function at more limited capacity, supported by DCIF.



“Hate motivated incidents, whether they contain a criminal component or not, have a significant impact on both individual victims and the communities they identify with. Being ‘message crimes’, members of the targeted group often respond as if it had been done to them. This can harm community relations and create tension, leaving other minority groups feeling vulnerable. An accurate picture of where we stand, and appropriately trained police and other service providers, are critical to an adequate response. Safe Haven has helped on both counts.”

**Adrian Cristea, Executive officer, DCIF**

Specific community organizations can play a vital role working closely with similar organizations from other communities, especially if there are good channels for joint discussion with state agencies. A good example of this is the close cooperation that exists in the UK between TellMAMA, which addresses anti-Muslim hatred, and the Community Security Trust, which addresses anti-Semitism. Both organizations monitor hate incidents against their specific communities and, when divisions are often stoked (especially against the background of the situation in the Middle East), hearing their voices together sends a message of unity.



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### **Good practice: TellMAMA & Community Security Trust (CST), United Kingdom**

Since 2012, the charitable organization TellMAMA, has measured, recorded and analysed UK trends of anti-Muslim incidents. TellMAMA also provides counselling support to victims and advocates in national and international forums for better victim support, justice and accountability for crimes motivated by anti-Muslim bias. It is modelled on another charity, the Community Security Trust (CST), founded in 1994, which conducts research on anti-Semitic incidents, provides advice and support to the UK-based Jewish community and advocates on their behalf with the British government. Both groups participate in wider dialogue and coalition initiatives, including the Community Alliance to Combat Hate (CATCH). This is funded by the Mayor of London's office and brings together different communities and organizations (racial, religious, sexual orientation and gender identity) to address social problems.

TellMAMA and CST maintain regular dialogue. At first, this was largely on methodological and administrative matters as TellMAMA developed its work programme. Today, discussion centres on practical concerns. For example, CST regularly forwards incidents involving anti-Muslim hatred to TellMAMA, and vice versa. This close dialogue and collaboration has brought an additional benefit: as they work from similar methodological playbooks towards the common goal of addressing incidents of religiously-motivated hatred, they can speak with a consistent and congruent position to the British police forces, Crown Prosecution Service and other UK government actors. Given their expertise and grass-roots legitimacy, TellMAMA and CST have developed a relationship with law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies that allows both groups to function more effectively in addressing hate. For example, people who are uncomfortable reporting to the police can report incidents to these organizations. Through the exchange of anonymized statistics, TellMAMA and CST help the UK ensure their policing can properly gauge and, therefore, respond to societal issues.

Because CST and TellMAMA's dialogue and collaboration are rooted in practical, day-to-day considerations with common goals, their interaction continues despite the wider geopolitical currents that threaten other dialogues. Notably, since 7 October 2023 attacks by Hamas on Israel, and the subsequent Israel-Hamas conflict, many religious or belief dialogues have polarized, stalled or ceased altogether. TellMAMA and CST's communication not only continued after 7 October 2023 but increased. While anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents rose dramatically in the UK, neither organization took a public stance on wider geopolitical events. The organizations reported that this made their relationship stronger, increasing their ability to address hate and provide psychosocial support to victims.

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States' responses to domestic events may also affect the viability of dialogue and joint action. For example, the public desecration of religious texts may result in strong emotional responses and/or societal tensions, that can polarize on, e.g., cultural or religious/belief grounds. Determining an appropriate state response may be a fraught exercise, especially if it involves assessing whether an act is protected free speech or amounts to incitement.<sup>59</sup> States should be careful to ensure their public statements and policy responses do not compound harms, delegitimize entire religious or belief communities, nor arbitrarily or disproportionately address the harms and rights violations of different groups.

Public statements should rather decrease tensions, even where a legal response may not be deemed appropriate or is not possible. They should properly account for the unique experience of harms experienced by religious or belief communities. By publicly acknowledging these experiences, a state may reduce tensions, combat perceptions of alienation or exclusion and promote constructive cross-community engagement.

States must understand the key challenges faced by different communities to adequately respond to them. These can include human rights abuses, where the state has a duty to act, even though some abuses may be taboo within communities and more difficult to identify and recognize.



### **Interview: Superintendent Jennifer Pearson**

Superintendent Jennifer Pearson of the West Midlands Police Force (United Kingdom) is also Chair of the West Midlands Police Faith Forum and West Midlands Women in Policing. Early in her career, she served as the first family liaison officer in the UK police, a measure that was part of a larger training package to tackle racism within the police.

In 2021, Jennifer received the Queen's Police Medal for her efforts in supporting survivors of domestic abuse and coordinating the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Building on a 14-month secondment in Thailand supporting the response to the 2004 tsunami, during the pandemic she spearheaded the transformation of an aircraft hangar at Birmingham Airport into a temporary mortuary. She realized the potential impact of the pandemic on religious practices and needs around burial. Therefore, she urgently engaged with all faith groups, established open channels of communication, included minority background police officers in the communication and transparently discussed conditions for storing dead bodies.

“Because we understood and invested in the importance of faith in one of the most difficult moments in life, we gained the trust of communities, which was kept beyond the pandemic.”

In what have become regular interfaith meetings at the mayor's office, which include informal and formal religious or belief leaders and also various associations, they discuss issues that affect communities across Birmingham. At interfaith meetings, participants also discuss international events and conflicts with a religious-identity angle, and how these impact their local communities. Having this understanding helps with hate crime investigation.

Representing Women in Policing, Jennifer's interfaith outreach also led her to engage in the establishment of the first girls' independent advisory group for the police, working, amongst others, with girl children of forced marriages. Recognizing that faith was important to the girls was crucial in gaining their trust and encouraging them to engage.

"The idea is to look at what motivates individuals. As long as your values are about equality, inclusion and respect, police need to reach out to these values, build the connections and see the common ground."

States should pursue educational policies that aim to strengthen the respect, promotion and protection of human rights, and to effectively combat prejudice-based assumptions and concepts incompatible with FoRB. Chiefly through their educational systems and curricula, states have significant power to foster a greater understanding of, and respect for different religions or beliefs, and an appreciation for religious/belief pluralism and diversity.



The ODIHR *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public School*<sup>60</sup> discuss the urgent need to promote the protection of, and respect for FoRB through education, to strengthen peace, understanding and tolerance, and to develop respect for pluralism.



### **Interview: Dr. Nayla Tabbara**

Dr. Nayla Tabbara is the Co-founder and President of *Adyan Foundation* (Lebanon/France) and Co-president of *Religions for Peace*. Throughout her career, mainly in Lebanon, Nayla has worked to include diversity and pluralism in educational programmes and to develop Islamic theology on religious diversity and FoRB. She has received various prestigious awards in recognition of her work.

### **Why did you become engaged in working on multifaith dialogue and partnerships and FoRB?**

"People do not instinctively know how to deal with diversity in a positive manner. Most of us are not aware of how our personal identity is developed in competition with 'others', and how our belonging and communal history affects the way we

deal with ‘others’ and with the world. I have realized that enabling people to understand the dynamics surrounding identity, as well as learning about others and about human rights, are key factors to our living well in diversity. This is fundamental for our societies and is why, at Adyan, we have been working since 2006 to develop programmes and curricula for education on diversity, on active and inclusive citizenship, and on FoRB, from both a human rights and a religious perspective. We have worked, for example with the Ministry of Education in Lebanon, to develop an auxiliary curriculum that promotes learning about diversity, as well as training for educators on inclusive citizenship.”

**What benefits do you think such work brings to states?**

“Our non-formal educational programme brings together students from diverse backgrounds and helps them to believe in their own voices, roles and capacity to work for the common good together with students from other cultural, religion or belief, social and other backgrounds. This helps create a culture of mutual understanding that leads to intercultural and intercommunal solidarity. We have even been asked by partner organizations in Europe to import our educational programmes, which we are now starting to do, contextualizing the best practice of our extracurricular high school programme on active and inclusive citizenship for non-formal education methodology.”

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When people lack information and a certain level of understanding of different religions and beliefs, they can fill the gap with a “mental collection of hearsay, rumours, myths and stereotypes [that] can build over time”,<sup>61</sup> leading to mistrust and, potentially, fear and rejection, which in turn can lead to exclusion, intolerance and hatred.<sup>62</sup> ODIHR’s *Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security: Policy Guidance* discusses how to develop and deliver educational and awareness programmes through collaboration involving the state and other stakeholders, such as civil society organizations, NHRIs, cultural heritage institutions, education professionals, the media and religious or belief communities. These programmes should first raise awareness about the lives, beliefs and experiences of different religious or belief communities, and emphasize the value of religious and belief diversity as a source of mutual enrichment for society. Programmes engaging these diverse stakeholders focus on reducing the negative stereotypes that foster the rise of discrimination, hostility and intolerance in society through promoting a greater understanding and respect for different religions and beliefs. These are necessary to enable the meaningful exchange necessary for mutual learning and the ability to live together in an inclusive way.

## 4.2. DO NO HARM

This approach reminds actors to consider whether planned actions may have harmful impacts in a particular context.<sup>63</sup> Implementing the ‘do no harm’ principle involves seeking to understand, mitigate and avoid the potential harmful consequences of a planned action. It requires, at a minimum, dedicated time and resources to understand thoroughly the local context and the religious and belief actors involved, including their histories of interaction and the relations between them. Sometimes cross-community relations have so deteriorated that the very presence of ‘the other’ can cause tension. Indeed, this could be why the state is considering funding dialogue initiatives to include these groups. In such contexts, it would be beneficial to run a human rights impact assessment exercise before deciding whether and how to tailor support for dialogue initiatives, so as to avoid harm.

Stakeholder mapping and analysis are important in deciding who to invite. Depending on the context and topics for discussion, confidentiality of participation may reassure some participants, who may fear reprisals from their own communities for engaging in dialogue/partnership processes. Providing a clear explanation of the objectives behind bringing everyone together and introducing the topics to be discussed beforehand can also ensure predictability, reduce misunderstandings and facilitate discussion.

Similarly, those with dissenting positions may fear speaking in front of those with mainstream views. Minority actors may be uncomfortable discussing certain topics in the presence of majority actors or in front of another minority. Women or youth may feel uncomfortable discussing their needs with male religious or belief leaders. Moreover, some religious or belief community members may be culturally dominant or have had more access and exposure to state actors and may better understand how to communicate in such environments. Differences are inevitable and should be well understood and, as appropriate, named to prevent any negative dynamics from undermining dialogue processes. They should also be factored into the design and facilitation of a dialogue process. (See [Chapter 6](#)).

Where language is a barrier, interpreters may help participants to feel comfortable opening up. Minorities may not want to engage in a process if forced to speak in the ‘dominant’ language. Therefore, it is important to provide interpreters who will adequately interpret the messages being communicated without personal biases against the minority or other groups.



“ In professing and practicing his or her own religion individually or in community with others, every person shall be entitled to use the language(s) of his or her choice. ”

**Oslo Recommendations Regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities<sup>64</sup>**



“ To promote the integration of society, [OSCE participating States] should acknowledge the diversity in their societies and abstain from any attempts to assimilate minorities against their will. In addition, they are obliged to promote the rights of persons belonging to minorities to effectively participate in public affairs and to maintain their identities by providing adequate opportunities to develop their culture, to use their language and to practice their religion. ”

**The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies<sup>65</sup>**

Adequate means of communication and adaptations should also be ensured for persons with disabilities so they may meaningfully participate. Not removing barriers and providing adaptations to ensure the possibility of meaningful participation can lead to further feelings of exclusion.

To ensure that no harm is done in dialogue or vis-à-vis beneficiaries of joint action projects, participants may need to unlearn prejudicial views, dismantle stereotypes and overcome trauma and/or significant hurt, perhaps directly or indirectly caused by other parties in the process.

In conflict areas where participants may have witnessed or survived atrocities committed by members of another religious or belief background, tensions can be particularly acute. Vicarious trauma can also be experienced by those listening to others recount their experiences, or by hearing regular news of violence being experienced by people from ones' own community, including those who may even live in another country. Additionally, migrant or diaspora communities may have very different experiences of people from a particular religious or belief background from different contexts.

When assessing the situation from a 'do no harm' perspective, it is important to consider contexts of trauma resulting from past conflicts with religious or belief components. Indeed, trauma may affect the way people perceive the motives of others entering into dialogue and partnerships. Therefore, it is critical that civil society actors planning to lead such projects consider a range of factors that might cause re-traumatization, such as discussing specific topics or whether the venue is deemed a safe space. Convenors with relevant professional knowledge, skills and experience should be engaged to conduct the dialogue.

Dialogue conveners in contexts where there are divisions among participants should ideally offer new conceptual frameworks than those used by participants. This should help them overcome their prejudices and fears by transforming perceptions, attitudes and individual relationships with people who are different from themselves. Conceptual frameworks that incorporate elements such as the right to FoRB, conflict transformation and the role of religion or belief in conflict transformation can be useful. It can be helpful for participants to recognize the different types of human rights violations, threats or violence that they, or others in the group, might face. In tense situations, organizers or conveners should ideally include training on mediation and non-violent communication. This can help to create a foundation for discussion that enables participants to better approach and perceive issues in a non-judgemental way. It may also help to uncover factors that can prevent honest discussion and conflict resolution, such as veiled criticism or excessive, disingenuous praise.

Religious or belief engagement, whether it involves the state or not, should be marked by respect for each other's ability to hold different beliefs and a willingness to engage actively. This does not mean religious or belief dialogue should be bland or inoffensive. On the contrary, dialogue will often be impassioned and invoke powerful emotions. This simply means that it should, at a minimum, involve all actors engaging sincerely and in good faith, on an equal footing, and seeking to do no harm.

It is reasonable to assume that not every actor who participates in a religious or belief dialogue will fully understand or support human rights; indeed, some actors might affirm what could be considered to be discriminatory practices. It can be important to engage them in dialogue. Generally, however, the framing of the project should be in line with human rights principles. In determining whether or not a joint action emerging from the dialogue should or should not benefit from state funding, states should examine each project's merit in light of whether or not it takes a human rights-based approach and can refer to the PANEL principles.

### **4.3. EVEN-HANDEDNESS**

A state should enact a robust legal framework in the area of FoRB that accommodates the rights of diverse religious or belief communities. Under International Human Rights Law, the state is an impartial guarantor and this requires cooperation with, and accommodation of diverse religious and belief groups without distinction.<sup>66</sup> It should not, for example, comment on the validity of certain beliefs. Creating a de jure or de facto 'hierarchy of religions' would lead to systematic violations of FoRB.<sup>67</sup> Many states explicitly or implicitly favour one belief system over another — whether as an 'official' religion, with a preferred or favoured status, or as a result of doctrinal secularism.



Irrespective of the religion/belief-state arrangement, states should avoid ‘endorsing’ one religion, belief, interpretation or understanding of a religious tradition over another.



“ Under international law, States serve as the formal guarantors of human rights, including freedom of religion or belief. In order to operate as trustworthy guarantors of freedom of religion or belief for everyone, States should provide an open, inclusive framework in which religious or belief pluralism can unfold freely and without discrimination. This requires overcoming any exclusivist settings. Above all, what must be overcome is an understanding in which the State identifies itself with one particular religion or belief at the expense of an equal and non-discriminatory treatment of followers of other persuasions. Such exclusivist settings do not only occur in States which have formally embraced an official religion or a state religion. ”

Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, 2013<sup>68</sup>



“ In exercising its regulatory power in its relations with the various religions, denominations and beliefs, the State has the duty to remain neutral and impartial, refraining from taking sides in disputes with religious or confessional features [...] When faced with conflicts with religious or belief elements, which could, for example, be ethno-national, territorial, interstate, economic, or cultural in nature, the role of political authorities is to look for solutions according to the law, calling on the religious communities to respect the law and one another. The solution in such circumstances cannot be found in discriminating or denying the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. ”

Strasbourg Principles for inter-religious dialogue within the Council of Europe<sup>69</sup>

This even-handedness is important when states provide support, such as funding dialogue and joint action initiatives that advance human rights for all, administrative support including venues, facilitating travel, or helping to communicate project outcomes. Support could also include an element of state recognition of projects, including prizes for projects that have had a strong positive impact.

States should reflect upon the message(s) they could be perceived to endorse through their support. For example, there are risks of potentially distorting the environment in which religious and belief actors operate. If funding is not planned and allocated in an even-handed manner, states could be seen as giving preferential treatment to certain actors. States should also avoid funding individuals or groups that have engaged in hate speech about other communities.

States can create an enabling environment for association, dialogue and joint action through the practical support of government departments or state-established bodies that are independent of the state that are fully compliant with the Paris Principles,<sup>70</sup> such

as National Human Rights Institutes (NHRIs). All civil servants who engage with religious or belief communities should do so in an impartial manner which treats all communities equally. States should ensure they fund training for state actors that covers human rights, non-violent communication, mediation and religious literacy so that states are well placed to engage sensitively with actors across religious or belief boundaries. Indeed, if civil servants or other state actors lack basic human rights and religious literacy, they may struggle to understand the needs of the communities and fail to communicate with them effectively.



### **Good practice: Council of Religions, Georgia<sup>71</sup>**

In 2005, the Public Defender of Georgia, a National Human Rights Institution, established an independent Council of Religions<sup>72</sup> to serve as an advisory and consultative body on freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief-related issues. The Council's goals are to facilitate greater protection of freedom of religion or belief and other human rights, and to promote multilateral dialogue among religious communities to enhance greater tolerance and inclusion in society. Given its independent status, it also pursues its own initiatives and collaborates with other actors including civil society and the Georgian government. Bringing together 32 religious and belief groups, the Council is currently the largest forum of religious and belief communities in Georgia. Operating on the basis of full equality for all member organizations, decisions are taken by consensus. Communities appoint their own representatives and have ensured broad participation of women and youth leaders.

Through Council engagement with legislative or regulatory processes, it became possible for clergy of all religious communities to visit prisoners of their faith, with no exceptions, and for religious communities to choose from a range of legal personality options, or to operate without state registration. Moreover, proposed constitutional reform provisions were dropped that would have added 'state security' as a legitimate ground to restrict FoRB.

The Council relied on numerous, broad-based stakeholder meetings and consultations with civil society and decision makers from the parliament and the government. The Public Defender included the Council's recommendations for parliament, government and various state agencies in its annual report to parliament. Furthermore, the Public Defender monitored implementation of the recommendations through its annual report.

The activity of Georgia's Council of Religions and the Public Defender illustrates several good practices for cross-community dialogue and joint action. Firstly, it demonstrates that the state is not monolithic and that truly independent public institutions can play a valuable role in mobilizing collaboration. Secondly, it shows

the beneficial impact that human rights-based joint action can have, providing expert input to legal reform processes that enable the state to create an enabling environment for FoRB.

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## 4.4. PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION

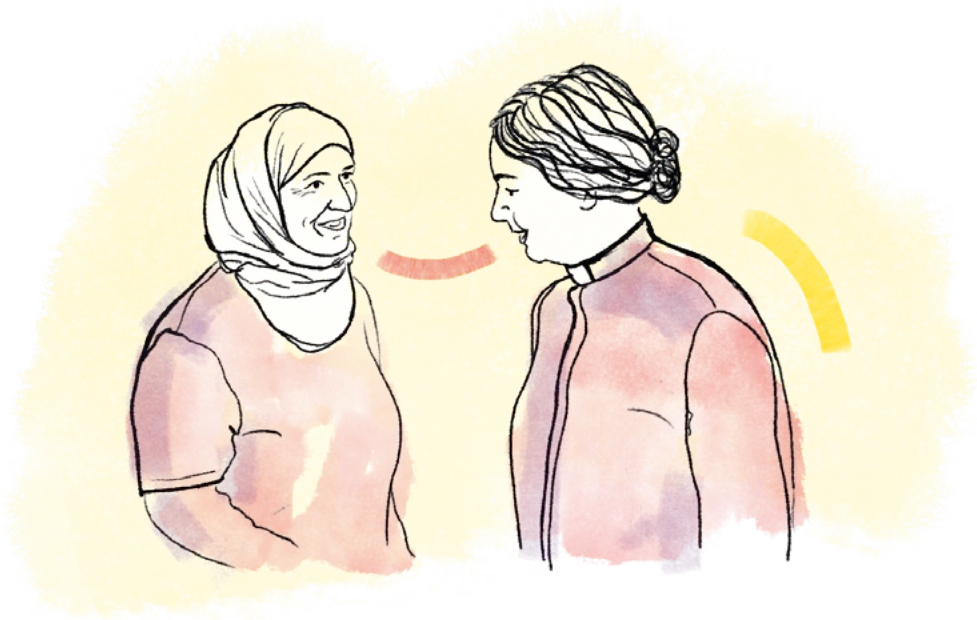
Inclusive and effective dialogue and joint action across religious and belief boundaries must go beyond what is generally considered leadership. This should be evident in how states understand the religious or belief actors they engage with in dialogue processes. The definition of ‘religious leader’ should recognize informal leadership and expertise, and enable all relevant actors to participate (from different racial or ethnic backgrounds, persons with disabilities, women, men and LGBTI communities). State officials who engage with religious or belief groups should know about issues related to community representation; individuals or organizations may claim to represent constituencies they do not, or may be perceived as illegitimate actors by those they claim to represent.

State engagement in supporting dialogue and joint action projects, for example, by consulting religious or belief communities, should aim to include diverse voices from across the religious or belief spectrum. However, depending on the specific context and outcomes envisaged, not every actor needs to be involved in every consultation, advisory committee, or dialogue process. Sometimes, inviting fewer actors may better identify needs or reach common aims. Trust-building between conflicting parties, to encourage their entry into dialogue for example, may require a limited set of actors who can converse ‘off the record’. That said, it is impossible for all actors within a community to fully understand the impact of each challenge being discussed on all community segments. Indeed, some may have institutionally pre-determined positions that render discussion impossible, which is why states should clearly communicate the purpose and goals of the consultation or joint committee and the types of actors they wish to have present.

States, and the organizers of FoRB dialogues, should also keep in mind that some communities, including non-theistic and atheistic ones, may not have representatives, or may not feel comfortable, safe or interested in engaging in consultations, joint committees, dialogues or joint action across religious or belief boundaries and they should not be compelled to do so. At the same time, they should be able to contribute in other ways to issues that affect them or are generally of public interest (e.g.: through public consultations). Some actors may not have the capacity or resources to participate even if they wanted to. Organizers of consultations, joint committees or dialogue should be

aware of such challenges, and efforts should be made to facilitate their participation. Additionally, those who organize such processes should ensure they are not setting the meeting date on inappropriate days/times for potential participants, e.g., religious holidays.

A flexible approach also enables reasonable accommodations to be made to meet the needs of consultation or joint committee participants. At certain times, communities, or certain members of those communities, may be less willing or able to engage. Examples range from specific holidays or rest days to fasting periods when energy levels may vary amongst participants. However, in order to promote inclusion, the needs of, for example, women, youth, people from underprivileged communities, linguistic minorities, migrants, or persons with disabilities should also be accommodated to the largest extent possible. In their communication, organizers can encourage representation to include, for example, at least 40 per cent young people. Principles of equal participation and inclusion must, however, be balanced with the principle of autonomy of religious and belief communities; ultimately, it is their decision who will actually participate, even if a dialogue is supported by the state.



#### 4.4.1. Women

Women can be active members of religious or belief communities. Even where traditional representatives are men, many women work as educators, community leaders or welfare workers. Their skills and social positions bring different perspectives to dialogue and joint action. In conflict scenarios, worldwide, where men have failed women have demonstrated their ability to find common ground and improve their communities effectively.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, when supporting consultations or the establishment of joint committees, states should:

- Ensure religious or belief communities ask women with experience of the topics being discussed to participate;
- Try to address the challenges women from certain communities may have in attending (travel, venue, times of day, childcare considerations, etc.). Be aware that there might be resistance to including women in consultations or joint committees, for example, due to patriarchal rules or traditions on the role of women;
- Consider whether women-only consultations or committees might be appropriate for topics where some women may choose to self-censor in a mixed group (e.g., on domestic violence);



- In mixed consultations, ensure that a respectful space for women is created, that women are addressed with the same respect as men, seated at the table in a similar way to men, and are offered equal speaking time to men;
- Think about local gender norms and customs that can create power imbalances during a consultation or advisory committee meeting;
- Be aware that dialogue processes including women may be seen as a threat to traditional societal/religious structures, and ensure a human rights-based framing and appropriate facilitation;
- Be aware that women who speak about women’s issues may be accused of promoting a ‘feminist agenda’ as a way to diminish their concerns, and ensure facilitation that challenges such prejudice;
- Think about differences in educational levels between men and women, if appropriate, because the resulting power dynamics may need to be mitigated;
- Ensure gender balance among state participants;
- Consider communicating the importance of, and values underpinning, women’s participation at a consultation or joint committee, e.g., education to close equality-related gaps; and
- Mainstream gender equality into consultations and the development of funding priorities/processes supporting FoRB, given that women can, and do experience different FoRB violations to men, or the same violations in different ways.<sup>74</sup>



### **Interview: Dr. Jagbir Jhutti-Johal**

Dr. Jagbir Jhutti-Johal is a professor of Sikh studies at the University of Birmingham (United Kingdom) and a member of ODIHR’s Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief. Together with five other high-profile women from six major faith groups in the UK, she established the Women’s Faith Forum. The organization works to empower women to inform policy. It builds a space where their voices can be heard by policymakers and where they can contribute their experience, knowledge and insights on how to respond to contemporary issues.

#### **What do women’s voices contribute to dialogue?**

“Due to gender roles and assumed responsibilities (grandmother, mother, daughter, sister, etc.), women are often more embedded in their communities than men and more likely to understand the day-to-day issues people face, especially [those of] other women. Women tend to bring different concerns to the table, which sometimes cut across religious or belief lines, such as ‘race’, hate crime, poverty or gender-based concerns that affect mostly women, (e.g., sexual and domestic violence).

“The presence of women and also youth in dialogue enhances community representation, which makes dialogue discussions, outcomes and solutions more relevant/appropriate for the issues communities face. In crisis and conflict situations, women and children are often the main victims, and in specific ways. However, women are also an essential part of the solution. What is more, solutions reached with the meaningful participation of women are more durable. UN Security Council Resolution 1325,<sup>75</sup> adopted in 2000, affirms the importance of women’s participation and the inclusion of gender perspectives in peace negotiations, humanitarian planning, peacekeeping operations and post-conflict peacebuilding and governance.”

**How does dialogue among people of different religious or belief convictions contribute to social cohesion?**

“Dialogue at the grass-roots [level] can happen naturally, when people organize around leisure or volunteering activities open to people of all religious and belief backgrounds. Women tend to join such networks more than men. In these settings, people often share daily experiences, learn from one another, build networks and friendships. Getting to know the different ‘other’, who we might otherwise not interact with, is very powerful in combating ignorance and prejudice, and this is true beyond religion or belief. If times of tension or conflict come, those involved in such networks can more easily provide practical responses, such as educating or cautioning their children against scapegoating or creating division. They will draw from shared relationships and responsibilities to diminish harmful rhetoric or behaviours. Cross-community networks that operate this way — around practical matters that affect everyone — build cohesion across religious and belief boundaries and can guard members against polarization in times of crisis.”

**Who should take part in dialogue across religious or belief boundaries?**

“Many prioritize engaging Abrahamic faiths in dialogue, especially in times of tension. Representatives from Dharmic faiths can feel like second-class dialogue partners when included in tokenistic ways, without adequate recognition and acceptance of their specific experiences and worldviews. Dharmic faiths generally do not proselytize and can also be frustrated when made to feel the ‘outsider’ that needs to be ‘saved’.

“It is really important that dialogues are properly facilitated and that all faith communities present are respected and given a voice. In times of crisis, the voice of a faith community not involved in a conflict can help reduce tensions by pointing out blind-spots or offering a third-way, ‘out-of-the-box’ perspective. But it takes courage. Sometimes, your own community may have certain prejudices related to a conflict — even as an outsider. This is why genuine dialogue at an interfaith table should enable both intra- and interfaith engagement, recognizing that, as faith communities, we each have our own challenges and that, by sharing our experiences, exploring practical responses and supporting one another, we create a safer and more cohesive world.”

#### 4.4.2. LGBTI people

In a 2023 report<sup>76</sup> on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Victor Madrigal-Borloz, the UN's Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, noted that LGBTI people "are often marginalized, stigmatized and excluded from religious communities simply because of who they are." He also emphasized that freedom of religion or belief should not be used to excuse violence or discriminatory treatment of LGBTI people. Dialogue and joint action can then be a tool to create more understanding between religious or belief communities with LGBTI people within or outside of their communities. It can also help to engage religious and belief actors in the fight to help prevent insecurity for LGBTI people.



#### **Good practice: Norway's 2023-2026 Action Plan on Gender and Sexual Diversity<sup>77</sup>**

The Norwegian government set goals in its 2023-2026 Action Plan on Gender and Sexual Diversity to improve the quality of life of LGBTI people in religious communities. In light of some of the challenges LGBTI people can encounter within religious communities, priority areas included increasing knowledge and acceptance, and creating safe meeting spaces for dialogue about gender identity and sexual orientation. The plan included funding for the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities in Norway (STL) to organize a dialogue project bringing together religious communities and representatives from LGBTI organizations. Following the 2022 Oslo Pride attacks,<sup>78</sup> the STL had already decided to place this topic on their agenda.

In 2023, an initial round of dialogue took place over four days, bringing together leaders from different religious traditions and LGBTI people mirroring the same religious backgrounds. For LGBTI participants, explaining terminology around gender identity and sexual orientation helped provide a common baseline of understanding. Outside the main dialogue sessions, participants cooked and ate together, building personal connections.

During a second round of dialogue, discussions addressed more sensitive matters related to freedom of expression and FoRB. One participant described why it was important to address FoRB: *"It is often forgotten that FoRB is for everyone. LGBTI people have this right too. This freedom is often robbed from us and distorted to imply that religious freedom gives some the ability to not accept different gender identities and sexual orientations."* The dialogue continued into 2024 with new local level initiatives.



The 2023 dialogue process led to a shared statement<sup>79</sup> in which participants expressed gratitude for what they learned, mentioned some of the common issues they faced and acknowledged that certain disagreements will remain. Importantly, it stressed the willingness to sit down together around what they agree upon — the importance of being open to learn from each other.

“Together, we have decided to lay more emphasis on what we agree about, and to listen to each other’s lived experiences. This does not mean that religious traditions suddenly change their theology and their views on, for instance, marriage. Nor does it mean that queer people shall stop challenging religious teachings and practices that they find problematic. There shall be space for discussion and disagreement, but there is no reason for these disagreements to dominate to the extent that they make fellowship and respect impossible.”<sup>80</sup>

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#### 4.4.3. Youth

Youth should be encouraged to be actors in today’s societies, helping to shape the direction they will take. In some countries, youth make up a sizeable percentage of the population. Young people can bring far-reaching virtual networks, energy and innovative ideas to dialogue and joint action processes.<sup>81</sup>

Many young people actively engaged in FoRB or FoRB-adjacent activities are at the forefront of efforts for peace and justice and are involved in dialogue, working to foster joint action across a broad range of issues. Examples include youth branches of established organizations such as Religions for Peace, the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), or the G20 Interfaith Forum.

Effective dialogue and joint action processes should:

- Include young people as equal participants, directly challenging any stigmatization of youth as less able to contribute;
- Not invite young people to speak only on youth-related topics, or to contribute to programmes aiming to prevent violent extremism and radicalization.<sup>82</sup> They can feel alienated and ignore both the issues young people may face and the contributions they could make. Where events have ‘youth tracks’ specifically dedicated to young participants, it is worth considering whether this, in fact, excludes youth from the main dialogue and reduces intergenerational learning;
- Consult youth to identify policies and programmes that will not appeal to them, or positively benefit them when they should;
- Consider that young people may feel shy or inadequate when speaking in front of more experienced people or large groups;

- Be aware that older people may not value youth inclusion, and prepare mitigating measures and appropriate dialogue facilitation to ensure young people have the opportunity to speak and be heard;
- Consider supporting youth participation in activities that allow them to experience cultural and religious and belief diversity; and
- Consider supporting projects that empower youth to run their own initiatives and projects that offer two-way, intergenerational education and seek to break down intergenerational mistrust. This can include both strengthening young people’s capacities to engage on FoRB, and equipping older faith actors with training or resources on, for example, online communication or how to meaningfully engage young people.

Importantly, young people have the right to participate in decision-making, including those under 18 years of age, as enshrined in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>83</sup>



### Good practice: Football for Peace (FFP)<sup>84</sup>

Football for Peace is a global sports diplomacy project, which has been endorsed and supported by different state and private actors in diverse country contexts. It aims to benefit local marginalized communities. As its founder, Kashif Siddiqi, noted at the 2016 Humanity Summit at the Vatican, “*Sport is our tool, and peace is our goal.*” Launched in 2013 at the Peace and Sport Forum in Dubai, FFP has been active globally in using people’s passion for football to build mutual understanding and cooperation. Players — united in their diversity, across religious and belief boundaries amongst others — use football to showcase the benefits of pluralism in action. Aside from its peace matches, one of its flagship initiatives is the Young Most Valuable Players programme, which engages youth to complete workshops on topics such as equality, diversity and inclusion (including across religious or belief boundaries), leadership and community action focused on doing good deeds.



### Youth programmes

What to prioritize when engaging religious youth? Dialogue and joint action programmes across religious or belief boundaries, or programmes combating extremist ideologies?

In recent years, some states have prioritized programmes for youth from religious communities that address the risk of their joining violent and extremist ideologies. However, research<sup>85</sup> by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) shows that, generally speaking, where youth do engage in such groups, the primary motivation for young people in joining extremist groups is usually not ideological, but rather

linked, for example, to feelings of vulnerability or looking for a sense of belonging or identity. This research also suggests that religion is often rather a 'protective factor', and that religious youth may be less likely to join groups with violent and extremist ideologies.<sup>86</sup> Youth are generally at the forefront of initiatives to prevent violent extremism, and states might consider supporting programmes that empower youth to engage in dialogue and joint action across religious or belief boundaries rather than programmes that focus on youth as potential violent extremists.



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### **Good practice: The Interreligious Council of Albania**

The Interreligious Council of Albania was established on 22 October 2007 by leaders of four of the largest religious communities in Albania (Muslim Sunni, Christian Orthodox, Christian Catholic and Muslim Bektashi).<sup>87</sup> The Evangelical community joined in 2018. The Council has two key objectives: to develop dialogue and joint action between religious/belief communities in Albania; and to promote interfaith understanding among younger generations, thereby combating misperceptions and disinformation about religion in society.

The Council ensures equal participation among all religious communities represented. Council leadership rotates each year between the leaders of the five religious communities, who also comprise its Presidency Board. The Executive Board includes two representatives from each community and decision-making is a collaborative process. The Council has focused on increasing the inclusion of women and youth. At the time of writing, women constitute a third of the board and a 'Department for Women and Youth' was established to organize dialogue and interfaith study trips across the country. To combat mis/disinformation and the potential spread of hostility, the Council issues statements before elections, during social crises (such as COVID-19) and after trigger events including terrorist attacks or international atrocity crimes (such as the genocidal acts of ISIS<sup>88</sup>). It has also made broader thematic statements on violence against women and gender equality and has produced a documentary entitled "30 years of freedom of religion"<sup>89</sup> to give a positive depiction of religious diversity in Albanian society.

The Council also engages in humanitarian action and, in 2019, provided humanitarian aid to help the government respond to a 6.4 magnitude earthquake. It is also implementing a multi-year project to support ISIS victims and Albanian returnees from Syria with (re)integration into Albanian society. This extends to finding housing, schools for children and employment opportunities for mothers.

In recognition of their efforts to promote interfaith dialogue and reconciliation, the Interreligious Council of Albania has received several prestigious national and international awards.

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#### 4.4.4. Non-religious communities

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##### **Interview: Tamara Vukičević – what can a young atheist bring to the table?**

Tamara Vukičević is a medical doctor currently living in Berlin (Germany) and finishing a research project on climate change anxiety. She is part of Common Word Among the Youth, the Josip Sruk Secularist Foundation, Protagora Association, and a member of ODIHR's Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief. Tamara also recently began the International Secularist project, where she advocates for secularism, FoRB as well as religious minority rights.

##### **How would you describe your experience, as a young atheist, advocating for secularism when engaging in interfaith and interreligious dialogue?**

“Being a young person active on FoRB and an atheist is definitely a double challenge. Often in the FoRB space, it is rare that secularism is explicitly part of the agenda and sometimes I need to fight my way to sit at the table. Financially, I am not backed by a strong religious organization and, just like many other youth members, I often need to rely on small donations from my association or to pay out of my own pocket in order to participate in conferences, seminars and meetings. At times, my inclusion feels tokenistic. People don't always expect atheists or secularists to be present at interreligious discussions and I have heard prejudiced statements about secularists and atheists, usually followed by shocked looks when they realize what I am. Then there is confusion about terms. Atheism, humanism or secularism are not the same, even if they may agree on certain things. People are often surprised that I, as an atheist, want to get married and have a family. They view secularism and atheism as the opposite of ‘traditional’ family values, and some even think we want to promote ‘sin’, which is not the case. I will always defend the right to believe, and I should have the right not to. I feel it would help if more atheist and secularists were at the FoRB table.”

##### **Why should you be at the table in such dialogue?**

“I have a stake in this dialogue. FoRB protects me; the secular and atheist perspectives matter and I can contribute. As a young person, I grew up in the digital/internet era and witnessed how algorithms, echo chambers and online actors are able to propagate online hate speech. This is something where the youth perspective is invaluable since it is a part of our daily lives and we are better equipped to find solutions.”

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#### 4.4.5. Physical and virtual spaces

Spaces for dialogue across religious or belief boundaries should be neutral, and it is important to think about factors such as seating (not creating an impression of power asymmetry or causing offence). Where states facilitate a consultation or joint committee meeting, they should consider the religious or belief implications and requirements of, for

example, catering, symbols and images in a meeting room, or the political, historical or cultural significance of a certain venue. States should also consider the accessibility of the venue for communities with different economic and social backgrounds, and for persons with disabilities.

When organizing consultations online or assessing potential initiatives, states should consider the safety of users, data privacy and storage, language(s) and inclusive terminology, as well as the use of symbols and images (e.g., the background should not include symbols associated with the faith or belief of one participant and not others). Where comments or content appear to incite violence, the facilitator should immediately step in remove the harmful content and/or the participant as appropriate. Equally, with privacy and data protection principles in mind, photos and videorecording should, as a rule, not be permitted. Where the organizers do allow it, written consent should be sought before any meetings are videoed or photographed and the planned use of the materials should be clearly stated.

When hosting consultations or other meetings, states should acknowledge different barriers to participation including for persons with disabilities. These individuals work in different fields and have diverse lives. They are also part of religious and belief communities and have the same right to FoRB as everyone else. Persons with disabilities continue to face significant levels of discrimination and exclusion, based on stereotyping and prejudice; very often seen as needing help, in a way that relates disability to illness. Indeed, in religious or belief dialogue and joint action contexts, people may have certain cultural, religious or belief-infused biases on disabilities, which may affect their interaction with these individuals.



## Standards

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD),<sup>90</sup> adopted in 2006, marks the shift from a medical model of understanding disability to one based on human rights and social inclusion, where it is the environment that adapts to the needs of those with disabilities to ensure their full participation and respect for rights, and not the other way around. One of the Convention's principles is "respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons;" (Article 3.a). The states parties to the CRPD shall also undertake to "Promote actively an environment in which persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in the conduct of public affairs, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others, and encourage their participation in public affairs (...)"<sup>91</sup>

OSCE participating States have committed through the 1991 Moscow document to “take steps to ensure the equal opportunity of such persons to participate fully in the life of their society (...), promote the appropriate participation of such persons in decision-making in fields concerning them (...) [and] to encourage favourable conditions for the access of persons with disabilities to public buildings and services, housing, transport, and cultural and recreational activities”.<sup>92</sup>

Organizers should ensure that people with disabilities can attend, making venues **physically accessible** (including overnight accommodation). There should also be clear, comprehensive accessibility information for venues, including details on parking, restrooms and seating arrangements. Organizers should anticipate when persons with disabilities might need another person to accompany them. If physical attendance is impossible, individuals could be offered online attendance, but online participation should not be the default position.

New technology has transformed how people with diverse needs can participate, be informed and consulted. Beyond online participation, organizers should ensure that all online platforms and materials are digitally accessible. This includes websites, documents and online tools.

Using sign language in meetings helps people with hearing impairments to participate, and easy-to read formats for written materials facilitates the participation of people with intellectual disabilities.<sup>93</sup> For people who cannot use speech to communicate, augmentative and alternative communication methods (AAC) can be used including gestures or speech-generating devices.<sup>94</sup> Staff should be trained on how to support the participation of people with various disabilities effectively.



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### What creates a safe space for dialogue?

- **Neutral venue:** not associated with a particular faith. In some contexts, this means choosing a venue that is not associated with a specific state institution, e.g., a public library or park.
- **Accessible:** enabling access for persons with disabilities, or food choice (religious requirements), or paying for travel or childcare.
- **Free from distractions:** avoiding lots of art work or noise (especially if there are religious sensitivities).
- **Including a space for prayer or meditation.**
- **Work in a circle:** avoid a hierarchical seating arrangement.
- **Breakout rooms/spaces:** for smaller discussions outside the main space.

Use **facilitators** who the group will trust (given their associations) and who have experience in facilitation (including on difficult topics) and expertise.

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Another common barrier for smaller organizations to access state support for organizing dialogue and joint actions is the complexity and time-consuming nature of funding calls (applications). Funding calls issued by a state should not just be aimed at national- or federal-level activities; they must also consider the organizational and administrative capacity of local or municipal grass-roots organizations and adapt the technical requirements accordingly. States should reduce complexity and/or have a focal point for questions from smaller organizations during the application process. States could also consider ring-fencing project funding to target certain groups, e.g., encouraging projects organized by or for women or youth.

#### **4.4.6. Connecting communities to existing domestic and international platforms**

States can also support the inclusion of communities by creating platforms that engage diverse religious or belief communities with other state or non-state actors, connecting actors on issues of common concern and giving them the opportunity to pursue joint strategies. These platforms can build links to individuals that those from religious or belief communities may otherwise not know about or struggle to access, including e.g., civil society organizations, government, parliament, the judiciary, or law enforcement agencies.



#### **Good practice: International Religious Freedom (IRF) Roundtable Coalition**

The International Religious Freedom (IRF) Roundtable Coalition<sup>95</sup> is a US-based<sup>96</sup> civil society initiative established in 2010. The coalition brings together individuals, communities, NGOs and government officials of various religious or belief backgrounds to discuss issues related to FoRB, discrimination and social hostilities. The rationale is that, if differing faith and belief communities can identify and unite on issues of common concern, they can conduct exponentially more impactful advocacy in international forums.

Early on, the coalition concluded that, while the discussions would be grounded in dialogue and shared experience, the roundtables should be oriented towards producing practical action and outcomes. Anyone is welcome to join, contribute, and organize initiatives. Participants draft multifaith letters to respond to FoRB violations worldwide, seeking to inform US domestic and foreign policy.

The US government has responded positively to the coalition, supporting it with larger venues as membership grew and sending government representatives to meetings when invited. Reportedly, state participation has helped shape US policy, for example, by ensuring that Yazidis and other faith minorities were included in the US government's designation of genocide committed by ISIS. Furthermore, the US Government actively sought the coalition's input on amendments to

the International Religious Freedom Act and the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act. The IRF Roundtable Coalition has been cited as a good practice in terms of state-religious/belief engagement by certain US diplomats, raising interest in the model from other countries.

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As the above example shows, dialogue and joint action are not just beneficial nationally. Religious or belief affiliation across national borders and cross-border activities can support peacebuilding where borders are associated with religious or belief division, tensions, border incidents and/or wider conflict. Parties to conflict may also invite civil society representatives, community leaders or religious or belief groups to negotiations. Here, their roles and responsibilities in the process must be clear from the outset. See OSCE's *Mediation and Dialogue Facilitation in the OSCE: Reference Guide*.<sup>97</sup>

More generally, by exporting good practices and helping religious and belief communities create spaces for dialogue in bilateral and multilateral forums, states can enable them to contribute to different processes, including better clarifying and defining international law, disseminating examples of successful joint activities, peacebuilding or tackling other global problems. The *Parliament of World Religions* is one example of a prominent and long-established international body that promotes interreligious harmony and engagement on various contemporary challenges.



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### **Good practice: International Religious Freedom (IRF) Roundtable Coalition**

The *International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFoRB)* is a global network of parliamentarians and legislators committed to combating religious persecution and advancing freedom of religion or belief. The Panel focuses on growing a diverse and collaborative global network and training parliamentarians to support of freedom of religion or belief at home and abroad.

Established in November 2014 in Norway, IPPFoRB is centred on the Oslo Charter for Freedom of Religion or Belief,<sup>98</sup> which was signed by over 20 parliamentarians from around the world at the Nobel Peace Center. With a membership of over 350 current and former parliamentarians and legislators from more than 97 countries, IPPFoRB provides a range of services, including training, organizing high-level events, research, advocacy and networking. IPPFoRB is led by an informal steering committee of parliamentarians and a secretariat of policy advisors.





### Good practice: Inter-Parliamentary Union

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is the global organization of national parliaments. Launched in 1889, today it has 180 member and 15 associate member parliaments. The IPU facilitates parliamentary dialogue and cooperation and empowers parliaments and parliamentarians to promote peace, democracy and sustainable development worldwide. Understanding that religion and belief play a significant role in states and societies, in 2023, the IPU launched the Parliamentary Report on Religion and Belief.<sup>99</sup> This examines how parliaments and parliamentarians engage with issues of religion and belief in their work to build peaceful and inclusive societies. It serves, among others, as an educational tool, an invitation to parliaments to scrutinize their own legislation (and bring it in line with international human rights frameworks) and as an invitation to inter-parliamentary and interfaith dialogue, particularly for promoting and protecting the rule of law, peace and inclusion.

Other organizations exist, set up by 'like-minded' states, such as the Article 18 Alliance,<sup>100</sup> (formerly the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance), which brings together representatives from member states, supported by experts from civil society and intergovernmental organizations, to protect, promote and facilitate freedom of religion or belief. As part of its activities, the Article 18 Alliance has a working group that identifies best practices in religion or belief dialogue and joint action at the grass-roots level for promoting FoRB.

Whilst states may remain the primary actors within the international system, many religious or belief-based organizations contribute actively to international processes, including, e.g., through the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging with Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development or the Istanbul process.



### The Istanbul Process

Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18<sup>101</sup> provides five action points to address intolerance and discrimination on the basis of religion or belief. After adoption in 2011, states established the 'Istanbul Process', a forum for states and other stakeholders to exchange implementation experience and good practices. Although subsequent resolutions do not explicitly call for civil society inclusion, the most successful and productive Istanbul Process meetings have placed a strong emphasis on civil society participation, including by faith-based actors.



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### Good practice: Religions for Peace

Religions for Peace<sup>102</sup> (RfP) is the world's largest multi-religious coalition. Founded in 1970, it brings together representatives of religious institutions dedicated to achieving peace.

The organization is present in almost 100 countries and five regions through its Interreligious Councils (IRCs). RfP aims to bring interfaith, innovative and inclusive responses to global challenges, and to this end engages with governments, civil society and faith-based organizations, creating partnerships. While many local networks are created in times of crisis, RfP looks to build sustainable structures that continue post-crisis.

Dedicated to transforming violent conflict, advancing human development, fostering just and harmonious societies and protecting the environment, RfP creates spaces for people of different faiths living side-by-side to work to these ends. Its Global Women of Faith Network<sup>103</sup> looks to further both women's inclusion and leadership. Its Interfaith Youth Network<sup>104</sup> harnesses the energy, commitment and creativity of young religious leaders while bringing moral urgency and innovative ideas to the organization's work.

RfP advocates for the involvement of religious leaders and their institutions in promoting religious literacy, understanding and engagement on FoRB, as a means of advancing shared well-being, grounded in a respect for human dignity and rights. On FoRB, RfP monitors and implements programmes to address religiously-motivated abuses, harassment and discrimination. At the local level, programmes include empowering local faith leaders to counter FoRB violations and discrimination. RfP has even provided seed grants to interfaith initiatives that aid those displaced by conflict. Internationally, RfP mobilizes large networks of diverse FoRB actors to run global campaigns.



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### Interview: Sharon Rosen

Sharon Rosen is global director of religious engagement at Search for Common Ground<sup>105</sup> (Search), the world's largest non-governmental organization dedicated to peacebuilding. Sharon has vast experience in working on FoRB as well as in designing and implementing programming that builds collaboration across religions to advance peace. She represented Search in co-creating and leading the Universal Code of Conduct on Holy Sites initiative,<sup>106</sup> which has been endorsed by many religious and interfaith organizations and institutions worldwide. Launched in 2011, together with the Oslo Centre for Peace and Human Rights, One World in Dialogue and Religions for Peace (RfP), the Universal Code is a multi-sectoral approach which puts interreligious engagement at its heart in order to protect sacred places and enable access for their adherents.

### **Why do you work on protecting religious/holy sites?**

“I am often asked why I focus on sacred places rather than people. But both are inextricably intertwined, because the sites symbolize people’s deepest religious identities and they are often targeted specifically to hurt those who hold them dear. I will never forget the sorrow of an Aleppo resident when he saw the 11th Century minaret of the Great Umayyad Mosque fall in Syria in 2013. *‘This is the first time I cried’, [he said] ‘My identity has been destroyed.’* People are so profoundly connected to their sacred places that it creates immense trauma when they are attacked. At the same time, because communities have a common interest in protecting their holy sites, this need can help people come together across conflict divides to find solutions and reduce violence.”

### **How can religious/holy sites be better protected?**

“It is important to engage multi-sectorally wherever possible to safeguard holy sites — with national and local government, law enforcement, the judiciary, the media and religious actors. Different contexts offer diverse ways of working collaboratively with formal and informal religious leaders, including women and youth, to safeguard sacred spaces.”

### **Can you give any concrete examples of this work within the OSCE area?**

“In 2010, we began to engage in Bosnia and Herzegovina using a multisectoral approach. The Interreligious Council there greeted our initiative to protect religious sites with enthusiasm and immediately adopted the Universal Code. The Council developed a strategy whereby, if a site was attacked, leaders from different religions would visit the site together, condemn the attack and invite the press. The media would report the attack but also the joint solidarity of the religious leadership. The police were also called to the site and, as a result of this cross-community show of solidarity, were motivated to try harder to catch the culprits. The justice system was also involved and, given the media attention, became more efficient in dealing with subsequent court cases. The municipality repaired the damaged site and, in one case, a pastor of a vandalized church requested a meeting with the perpetrators, resulting in a reconciliation and the vandals themselves repairing the damage.<sup>107</sup> There was a marked reduction in the number of incidents.”

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## **4.5. TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

States need to ensure all processes related to consultations, joint advisory committees, or funding opportunities for dialogue and joint action projects are transparent. Transparency contributes to accountability. In communication on consultations, joint advisory committees or funding opportunities, states should uphold

transparency obligations, where information is openly shared and accessible, for those involved in an initiative and for outsiders. Transparency can influence significantly the efficacy and legitimacy of engagement and cooperation. Communicating consultations, joint advisory committee research or findings, and funding can combat perceptions that they may have been captured by a small group of self-serving individuals or specific communities. In this vein, transparency can promote inclusion and encourage engagement.

States should facilitate ongoing engagement between religious or belief communities and state officials at all levels and ensure that communication channels are always open. The process can be more open by appointing an official contact person, outlining how they can be contacted and how they will respond. Likewise, when the state convenes a consultation, a joint advisory committee, or supports dialogue, using multiple ways of communicating and disseminating information to established and respected multi-faith organizations can help smaller or less well-known actors to engage. In turn, this builds transparency and accountability as more organizations are aware of the processes and can offer feedback.

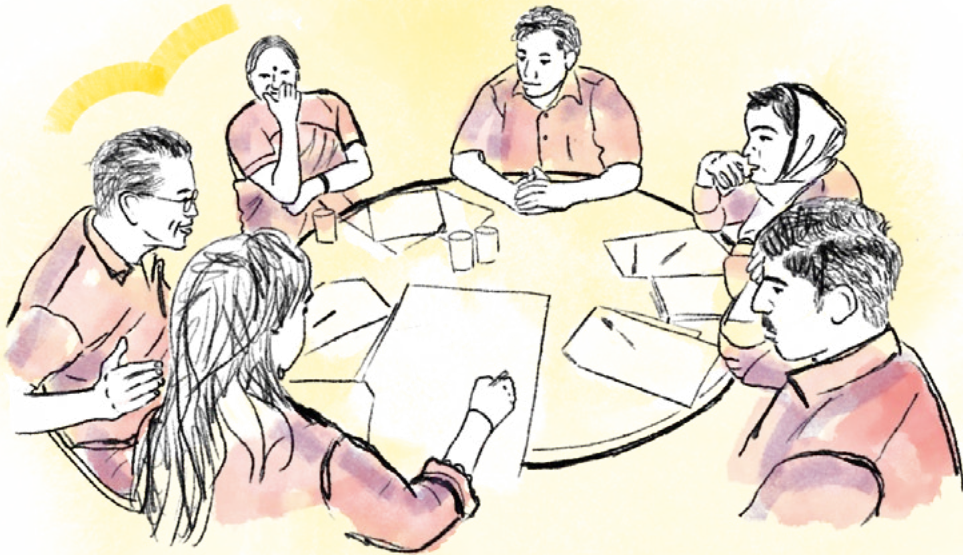
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## **CHAPTER 5**

# **PROJECTS AND FUNDING CALLS**

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**“ Genuine consultation entails creating opportunities to hear and listen to all concerned, allowing everyone to have a say. ”**



## CHAPTER 5

# PROJECTS AND FUNDING CALLS

When deciding to support dialogue and joint action processes on FoRB-related issues, states should identify the problems they are trying to solve and their goals before determining which approaches to take. Next, states should consider the structures, processes and frameworks for interaction that might need to change to adequately address a problem. Then they can identify whether dialogue and joint action projects fit into the proposed solution as part of a wider strategic plan. Dialogue and joint action processes are unlikely to settle bigger issues (e.g., community tensions) quickly; these projects take time to build trust and inter-community relations.

States should consider their position in relation to the identified problem and the expected outcome of dialogue and joint action projects, as well as how much state investment may be needed and the sustainability of its engagement. They should think about how



they are perceived and trusted by other actors and also consider what expectations the projects may raise and whether it has the time and financial resources to meet them.

Moreover, each state should consider creating its own human rights indicators on FoRB: structural indicators (bodies/institutions, customs, laws, traditions, etc.), internal process indicators (policies, procedures, practices, budgets and capacity, including the religious literacy of civil servants, etc.), and outcome/performance indicators (concrete data on how well a state performs in ensuring FoRB is respected for all in a given society). Tracking progress this way can highlight areas for improvement. States should also consider who may be best placed to assist them in the performance measurement process, which stakeholders they should consult and what the most appropriate format for feedback might be.

When appointing representatives to manage support for consultations, to joint advisory committees and to dialogue processes with FoRB actors, states should seek individuals with a strong understanding of human rights, including FoRB, and good religious literacy. They should also allocate resources to train staff working on FoRB. State representatives should make efforts to understand the specific religious and cultural characteristics of the communities involved in a dialogue, as well the dynamics within and among them. Effective engagement with religious or belief communities also requires state representatives to understand the concept of ‘lived religion’, i.e., how people practice and experience religion in their daily lives, and to appreciate the diversity and complexity of some religious communities.

If freely and voluntarily invited, officials might visit places of worship, community events or familiarize themselves with their other practices, to see the communities in action, while taking care not to favour any one community.

The following section offers a series of points to consider when developing projects (or funding calls) to support dialogue and joint action across religious or belief boundaries. Importantly, these questions are meant to serve as guidance. In some cases, less comprehensive approaches from smaller organizations may have a greater potential to bring positive change and should not be denied outright. In such cases, states should rather use these assessment tools to see where smaller organizations may need additional support and enter into discussion with them to encourage and facilitate a levelling up.

## **5.1. THE FUNDING CALL DESIGN PROCESS**

### **5.1.1. Consultations and joint advisory committees**

Before taking decisions on themes, terms of reference, available funding or other practical support for initiatives, states should organize consultations that include religious and belief actors to understand FoRB-related concerns, the potential tensions these initiatives may help to lessen and actors' capacities to implement projects. They may also wish to formalize a consultation process by setting up inclusive advisory committees to offer input on processes, cross-cutting issues of concern or language.

Genuine consultation entails creating opportunities to hear and listen to all concerned, allowing everyone to have a say. The state should not limit its engagement to groups who agree with, or refrain from criticizing the government's position. Consultations should provide learning experiences for everyone involved. Furthermore, where states regularly engage in dialogue with all religious and belief actors in an even-handed way, they will be better placed to understand what issues may be improved or solved through dialogue and to foster such dialogue with the potential for joint positive action.

In addition to pre-call consultations, states should make the draft funding call publicly available for feedback. The more transparent and engaging the process, the more likely wide engagement will be achieved. As a rule, where public funding is committed, regular processes of transparency and accountability should apply.



One exception from full transparency might occur following a ‘do-no-harm’ assessment that judges cross-community tensions to be very high, when states may need to limit the amount of communication early on if it could negatively impact actors’ participation and undermine the dialogue process.

Additionally, while states should be sensitive to post-conflict dialogue with interfaith and interreligious components that can foster reconciliation, they should not support projects involving individuals who have personally engaged in incitement to hostility or open discrimination of other actors.

### **5.1.2. Framing funding calls**

A funding call should contain a list of the specific items to be funded — usually done thematically — and specify potential eligible applicants and the conditions of participating. For example, the funding call may stipulate that funding is available to convene a dialogue for people from different religious and belief backgrounds to develop healthy cross-community relations marked by trust and respect. However, the initiatives may have other priorities or goals, including advancing FoRB or more general human rights promotion, building cohesive communities, peacebuilding or other actions designed to contribute to the betterment of society.

### **5.1.3. Key questions for a thematic approach**

- What thematic outcomes are other departments or teams in associated institutions working towards with their projects (for example, cohesive communities, peacebuilding, or human rights promotion)? Any overlap or lessons to be drawn?
- What are the risks of a given thematic approach, or one which aligns or intersects with other policy priorities? For instance, would religious or belief communities welcome the state’s funding priorities and framings? Would the ‘best’ participants apply and be able to contribute meaningfully?

## **5.2. ASSESSING APPLICATIONS**

The aims and outcomes of any project are usually assessed against pre-established criteria, such as goals, originality, quality, appropriateness, sustainability, coherence, feasibility, clarity, completeness, motivation or diversity. Funding applications that seek to engage communities and actors in dialogue and joint action to promote FoRB and other rights should be assessed against such criteria. States should be clear what the evidence base is

for a proposal (has the application included comprehensive mapping) and how it will be delivered. It is also critical to consider the project risks and potential to do harm.

### **5.2.1. Mapping**

Applications should contain detailed mapping of stakeholders and existing or previous projects related to the issues in the proposal. This should be assessed against the state's own mapping.

### **5.2.2. Key questions to ensure proposals are evidence-based**

How familiar is the applicant with the process of conducting effective dialogue and joint actions? What is their role in the project?

- Has the applicant run consultations or has it created joint advisory committees to understand how those stakeholders perceive the issue the project seeks to address?
- How well does the applicant understand the context as experienced by religious or belief communities? Were intra-community divergence grounds, such as gender, age, etc., considered in the formulation of the proposal? Are there potential barriers (e.g., discrimination or rights violations) that might prevent the applicant from taking part?
- How aware is the applicant of stakeholders working in the area of dialogue and joint action across religious or belief boundaries, or FoRB, and their impact (e.g., parliamentary groups, multinational FoRB/dialogue forums, or of international conflicts/developments with a religious component that have an impact on local communities, civil society organizations, faith-based groups, or local activists)?

### **5.2.3. Project delivery**

Formal and informal dialogue activities should be seen as complementary, and both should be taken into account when designing strategies in this area. The overall goal of an initiative should be towards including the full range of religious or belief communities in society. The dialogue and joint actions should meaningfully engage with the unique lived experiences of those people affected by the challenge the initiative is seeking to remedy. Census data may help, if available. It may then be relevant to consider if an application comes from just one religious or belief community or from a broad coalition or network of groups; whether it includes Abrahamic and/or non-Abrahamic, or theistic and/or non-theistic/atheistic groups.

While states should transparently and objectively set the evaluation criteria for assessing applications, they should not leverage their funding to control the development of dialogue processes; the

applicants — communities, organizations and individuals — should retain ultimate control over their initiatives, including on delivery, participants and goals.

There are some real challenges that applicants should address early on when developing any project. One is that dialogue and joint action activities tend to attract people who have already participated in similar projects. It may be worth including participants not regularly associated with such initiatives, but who have insight on the topic, such as academics or practitioners working on FoRB.

At the same time, dialogue activities do tend to attract those with the education and skills to articulate their ideas; these tend to be more experienced professional people. It is important for states to recognize this in their outreach and for applicants to demonstrate they recognize this dynamic and have considered whether different forms of dialogue could improve accessibility and increase the diversity of the group. This may include forms of dialogue facilitation that proactively seek to engage all, e.g., offering those who cannot attend the opportunity to contribute in writing or ensuring interpretation, sign language, etc.

#### **5.2.4. Key questions related to project delivery**

- Projects are often reliant on participants being able to take part in structured conversations around specific questions. How accessible is this for those taking part in a second (or third) language, or to people with disabilities? What impact might this have on the process? How has the applicant tried to overcome such barriers?
- Has the applicant considered the pushback that could come from (e.g., more secular) organizations to the idea of partnering with actors from different religious or belief communities and vice versa, and what are the mitigation strategies?
- Potential participants can sometimes assume, incorrectly, that they need a high level of scholarly knowledge about religion and belief to participate. This is rarely the case. How will the proposal be designed and promoted to ensure potential participants do not rule themselves out?
- If a project is aimed at a younger audience, how has it been designed to overcome some of the perception issues associated with dialogue and joint action activities across religious or belief boundaries?
- Dialogue and joint actions very often result in knowledge exchange and new ideas. Are there creative solutions better suited to running, recording and disseminating the results than dry reports and written publications? (This may include information in various minority languages, easy-to-read formats and digital accessibility).

- When considering using more creative solutions, has the applicant considered how this may be received by the target audiences? Are there solutions that are more likely to dissuade potential beneficiaries from participating (e.g., conference-type settings and agendas vs. highly participatory settings where everyone is placed on an equal footing and the outcome is co-created), in the understanding that different participants may be comfortable with different approaches?
- What measures are proposed to ensure that spaces being used are safe or neutral for participants?
- Has reasonable accommodation been integrated to account for the specificities of the groups taking part and to lay the groundwork for joint action?

## 5.3. MEASURING IMPACT AND SUCCESS

Before deciding to allocate funding, it must be determined whether the project is geared to bring change through dialogue and joint action across religious and belief boundaries, to foster greater tolerance, respect and understanding. States must ensure that the projects they fund have built adequate evaluation into the project design and can measure successes and challenges. This allows projects to be modified as they are delivered and has a direct impact on their sustainability.

While cost-effectiveness is a legitimate desire for states dealing with funding requests, the results, value and long-term impact of dialogue processes may be neither instantly visible, nor easy to quantify. Some initiatives may resolve immediate practical issues of mutual concern, while others may only yield visible benefits over time. It can also be difficult to establish direct causal links between the activities resulting from dialogue and project outcomes at societal level. However, this does not mean that nothing should be measured; states should be able to assess whether the money has been put to good use. The dialogue and joint action project proposals should include proxy measurements to assess progress using, for example, composite indicators and skills-based or perception surveys.

### 5.3.1. Key questions related to measuring impact and success

- Has the applicant applied a logic model, or offered a concrete understanding of what outcomes the process aims to achieve, and how progress or lack of progress might be assessed?
- Does the project have a clear understanding of the problem it seeks to address?

- Has the project developed a clear statement of its overarching goals? This is irrespective of the purpose, e.g., whether goals are targeted to individual participants, wider communities or broad societal change such as through legal reform.
- Does the project have a clear framework of outcomes that will contribute to these goals?
- Does the project indicate how it intends to achieve its goals?
- What are the key assumptions underpinning this project?
- What risks have been identified that may limit the success of the project and is there a 'Plan B'? Have they run a basic SWOT analysis<sup>108</sup> or PESTLE analysis?<sup>109</sup> For example, applicants might look at factors such as conflicts in other countries with religious or belief identity components that could jeopardise local initiatives where communities vicariously identify with fellow 'believers' overseas.
- How has the applicant integrated monitoring and evaluation into their project design?
- Which qualitative and quantitative indicators have been chosen?
- Is it an ongoing evaluation process that allows the project to be adapted, or is this a one-off activity?
- Can the evaluation measures be applied over the lifetime of the project and serve as benchmarks for future initiatives? (These indicators demonstrate where projects have been successful and applicants may even suggest how they could be improved. Examples could include: the number of dialogues, diversity of participants, number of joint statements issued in a certain period, perception assessments of participants through interviews, or the number of FoRB-related advocacy interventions with a state actor. It is unlikely that any single indicator will be sufficient to understand the project impact properly, but several indicators taken together can help build a more holistic picture).
- Does the applicant make a good case for this project being sustainable and what follow-up is foreseen?



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# CHAPTER 6

## CHECKLIST FOR STATES

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“ Have you considered the skill set, capacity and experience of your team to achieve successful outcomes? ”

# CHAPTER 6

## CHECKLIST FOR STATES

Dialogue and joint action across religious or belief boundaries can occur at various levels. This checklist offers advice for states looking to create an enabling environment to support such initiatives, this includes but is not limited to the following.

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### ASSESSING THE NEED

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#### 01

##### **The problem to be addressed and the desired outcome**

Thinking about the problem you are seeking to address, has a situational analysis been performed to understand the broad context?

- What is the need that you are trying to address?
- Why have you chosen to focus on this particular problem?
- What are the main causes of this problem?
- What is the desired outcome/goal in tackling this particular problem?
- Is this outcome/goal compatible with the promotion of FoRB and other human rights?
- Why/how do you think that dialogue or joint action initiatives will contribute to solving this problem?
- Specifically, what should be different in the future than it is today?
- What are the underlying assumptions informing this potential dialogue initiative?

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#### 02

##### **Prioritization versus legal obligation**

Thinking about the problem you are seeking to address, have the legal implications of a response been considered?

- Is the state legally obliged to respond to the problem in question?
  - If there is no legal obligation to respond, what is the added value of state action in this area?
  - Are there other legal frameworks regulating state engagement with religious or belief actors that will impact any potential initiatives you may have?
  - Are there risks of state engagement in this area?
  - Would some other, non-state actor be better placed to respond?
  - After performing a 'do not harm' assessment for any envisaged state action to address the identified problem, is state engagement the better solution?
  - Is tackling this problem/investment in this area a long-term priority or are priorities likely to change (if so, what does this mean in terms of the possible outcomes?)
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# 03

## Strategic fit

Thinking about the problem you are seeking to address, have you considered how it relates to the state's wider activities, goals and outcomes?

- How does this goal fit within the wider state strategy?
- Are there actions taken by other colleagues/state bodies that would support/undermine this goal?
- Is the state body where you work best placed to achieve this goal?
- How will you communicate on actions in this area to colleagues?
- What concrete steps will you take to meet the goal?
- What other steps will you take and what are the proposed timings?
- Do these steps all fit together as part of a wider strategic framework?
- What are the possible unintended consequences of such an initiative?
- Who stands to benefit or lose from any such initiatives?

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## ASSESSING THE CONTEXT

# 04

## Perception of the state

When considering the design of an initiative, has the way your state is perceived by potential participants from different faith and belief communities been factored in?

- Is the state perceived as a trusted and even-handed (or impartial) actor by those it wishes to engage?
- Is there a preferred state religion/belief?
- How has the state generally acted and responded in the past to uphold the human rights of individuals from religious or belief communities?
- What is the state's track record in upholding human rights for everyone?
- Is there functioning rule of law, and can everyone expect fair and equal treatment without discrimination on any grounds by the state?
- What hurdles/opportunities could you encounter given perceptions of the state?
- Do state actors counter stereotypes/prejudices of religious or belief communities in public statements and other communications, especially on topics that cause polarization or social anxieties; are they silent/disengaged, or on the contrary, do they perpetuate them?
- When communicating and responding to important international or geopolitical events, do states ensure that their diplomatic, humanitarian or legal responses are inclusive and not perceived as discriminatory?

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## 05

### **Initiative and stakeholder mapping**

When considering the design of an initiative, how up-to-date is your understanding of similar activities and the actors in your state?

- Are there other faith-based and/or secular actors and/or processes that already exist to address this problem?
- Have other dialogue or joint action initiatives across religious or belief boundaries been established to address this or other needs in your context or in similar contexts?
- Do you have available census data that offers a breakdown of the country's religious composition?
- Are you aware of the makeup of religious or belief minority communities within your country?

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## 06

### **Framing local disputes and tensions**

When considering the design of an initiative, how are you factoring in the experiences of different faith and belief communities as they relate to your state?

- Have you considered wider challenges that communities may face?
- Have you considered general power imbalances among the relevant religious or belief actors who could be engaged in dialogue?
- Is there an ongoing conflict or social tensions that affect participants?
- How are these tensions framed and what are the potential effects of structural discrimination and violence upon certain communities?
- Does the media in your state play a role in stoking tensions/keeping the peace?
- Would all faith and belief communities agree?
- Is the state (seen as) partial to one group or another, or as an impartial guarantor of everybody's human rights and fundamental freedoms?

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## **INTERNAL READINESS**

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## 07

### **Internal diagnosis and readiness to act**

In preparing to foster greater dialogue or joint action, have you considered the skill set, capacity and experience of your team to achieve successful outcomes?

- Do your team and/or colleagues working in state structures generally engage with religious and belief communities?
- Do you or other colleagues have experience and processes in place to engage with diverse segments of different religious or belief communities?
- If so, how effective are these processes?
- Will there be internal resistance to the idea of engaging with this area of work or with certain actors /communities?
- How diverse is your team and can you benefit from this diversity in your outreach?
- Do you or your team need extra budget, capacity, systems or training on e.g., human rights, non-violent communication, mediation and religious/belief literacy to execute work in this area? Are there any knowledge gaps or areas that require further research?

- Which factors could strengthen your capacity to oversee work that engages with religious and belief communities (and not just on 'religious' issues) and to ensure that it takes a human rights-based approach?
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## 08

### Action Plan

In preparing to offer support to dialogue or joint action projects, have you developed robust documents to clearly articulate the purpose and future direction of the support and established what success will look like?

- Have you determined the actions needed to achieve the goal?
  - Do you know which support you are ready to offer and how you will reach out to religious and belief communities and other civil society actors?
  - Have you considered the risks related to your proposed actions?
  - Have you set a realistic budget? How/when will you measure your success?
  - How will you monitor and evaluate progress towards your strategic objectives by supporting dialogue and joint action initiatives across religious and belief boundaries?
  - Do you have a comprehensive set of indicators in place?
  - Will you incorporate feedback from other actors?
  - How will you incorporate reviews in order to adapt your approach, learn from your experiences and continuously improve?
  - How sustainable is your plan?
- 

## 09

### Preparing clear channels of communication

In preparing to engage with actors to foster greater dialogue or joint action, have you established a process to communicate information about the initiative to diverse stakeholders?

- Are there existing focal points or contact people dealing with religious or belief communities who can transparently coordinate communication from the state and receive and respond to questions from religious or belief communities and/or civil society actors engaged in dialogue and joint action across religious or belief boundaries?
  - Are the contact points even-handed and do they treat all communities equally?
  - Are there language and communication barriers to overcome, or specific types of language to avoid? Is the language gender-sensitive?
  - What feedback loops will help you to assess the responsiveness and even-handedness (perceived and real) of the contact points?
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# 10

## **Preparing suitable venues**

In preparing to host consultations, joint advisory committee meetings, or to support the delivery of dialogue or joint action, have you considered the practical logistics for participants?

- Have you considered if you can provide neutral physical and/or online spaces?
- Have you considered factors such as seating and the use of titles to prevent an impression of power asymmetry or causing offence, as well as accessibility and accommodation for persons with disabilities and other groups with particular needs?
- Have you considered the impact of organizing events in virtual spaces?
- Would this enable different participation?
- Have you considered privacy and data protection and how to create safe spaces in which everyone present can speak freely without fear of reprisals/bullying?

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## **ENGAGING WITH RELIGIOUS OR BELIEF COMMUNITIES**

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# 11

## **Outreach to religious or belief communities and other civil society actors**

Thinking about the actors you need to consult or would like to encourage to engage in state-funded/supported dialogue or joint action to achieve success, do you have a fully articulated approach to reaching out to and engaging with those actors?

- Who could be interested/impacted by state support?
  - Have they had/will they be given a chance to share their perspective, and how will you ensure their voices are heard?
  - Are you limiting engagement to those who agree with, or refrain from criticizing the government's position?
  - Have communities been able to select their own participants/representatives for state-facilitated meetings and had time to find appropriate interlocutors?
  - Have you considered the language used in communications and the implications for who might respond (formal leaders/informal actors, women, youth, majority communities, minorities etc.)? Have you tried to ensure that religious holidays have been accounted for when setting deadlines and made your messaging easily understandable so that the process is as transparent as possible and can have maximum impact?
  - Have you shared the information also through existing networks working on peace-building, human rights and freedom of religion or belief, as well as multifaith networks and civil society networks that may contain religious or belief community representation and religious or belief structures?
  - Are you considering the different ways in which various segments of a population receive information, to ensure it reaches them, including by adapting the communication, or investing extra resources in outreach?
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# 12

## **Inclusive and equal participation in state-supported processes**

Thinking about how inclusion practices (particularly as they relate to religion, age and gender) are mainstreamed in the work of your state, what might the challenges be when interacting with local faith and belief communities and leaders?

- Do you regularly invite religious and belief communities to contribute to discussions and state-driven processes on various issues of concern to them (not just religious issues) together with other societal stakeholders, and elicit contributions on pressing issues for society at large (before processes are underway)?
  - What measures do you take to ensure that processes are inclusive, for example, by ensuring intergenerational and gender equality in representation and the possibility to contribute to discussions and influence the outcome?
  - How can you facilitate the inclusion of voices from communities without formal structures?
  - How do you ensure that everyone feels safe/comfortable to offer their views at in-person, state-facilitated events regardless of whether they represent traditional or newly-established, large or small, theistic, non-theistic or atheistic communities or identify along other grounds, such as 'race'/ethnicity, gender, or at the intersection of multiple identity characteristics?
  - Are consultations, joint advisory committee meetings, or in-person events held on appropriate dates/at good times for a maximum number of stakeholders?
  - Are dialogue facilitators/moderators well trained and aware of the FoRB context/issues and power dynamics in the particular setting they will be facilitating?
  - Do you consider the needs of smaller, less structured groups to be able to apply for and manage funding applications/processes or are your requirements too burdensome?
  - Have you considered the impact of making support available for/to target certain groups, e.g., encouraging projects by/for women or youth and whether or not it would be beneficial?
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# 13

## **Integrating a human rights-based approach in all interaction with religious or belief communities**

Thinking about how human rights approaches are embedded in the work that you do in your state, what might be the challenges when interacting with local faith and belief communities and leaders?

- Do you respect the rights of individuals from each religious or belief community without discrimination?
  - Have you fully integrated a human rights-based approach in the criteria used to assess whether or not to support a dialogue and joint action project or initiative?
  - Do you engage with religious or belief communities in a way that is open to the full diversity of religious or belief actors, theistic, non-theistic and atheistic?
  - Do you check that those claiming to represent a community are, indeed, legitimate representatives of this community?
  - Do you check whether, in post-conflict situations, those being supported to, for example, attend consultations, joint advisory committees, or receive funding or recognition with awards/prizes, have personally engaged in incitement to hostility or open discrimination of other actors?
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# 14

## **Platforms to disseminate good practices and encourage levelling up**

Are you considering how to provide opportunities for new partnerships to form between faith and belief communities in your state through the delivery of a dialogue or joint action?

- Do you offer networking opportunities to like-minded individuals and organizations working on dialogue and joint action activities?
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## CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

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### 15

#### **Ensuring that educational policies actively promote human rights, including respect for FoRB and an appreciation for religious/ belief pluralism and diversity**

To what extent have considerations about how public education in your state informs the ability of faith and belief communities to contribute positively to dialogue or joint action processes been integrated into the design of any planned initiative?

- Do you implement effective educational policies that aim to strengthen the respect, promotion and protection of human rights, while combating prejudice-based assumptions and concepts incompatible with FoRB?
- Do you ensure that your educational systems and curricula, promote greater understanding of and respect for different religions or beliefs, an appreciation for religious/ belief pluralism and diversity, and the importance of upholding the inherent human dignity of each person?

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### 16

#### **Speaking out against hatred and acting to prevent hate crimes**

How have considerations about the impacts of hate crime prevention policies in your state been factored into the design of any planned initiative? In particular, how might those policies inform the ability of faith and belief communities to contribute positively to dialogue or joint actions?

- Do you speak out promptly against any advocacy of hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence on the basis of religion or belief or at the intersection with other grounds?
- Do you publicly recognize the harms suffered by religious or belief communities on account of certain forms of expression that may not reach the threshold of criminal/legal liability, but still send a message of exclusion?
- Does the legal framework adequately cover hate crimes?
- Do you respond robustly to hate crimes when they occur?
- Do you collect disaggregated data on hate crimes and use the data to inform further policy responses?
- Do you provide appropriate support to victims of hate (beyond criminal proceedings for hate crimes or incitement to violence), including psychosocial support or increased funding for grass-roots or community-led action to support victims?

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# 17

## **Ensuring even-handedness, transparency and accountability in supporting dialogue initiatives**

How have considerations as to how your state approaches local tendering processes, particularly as they relate to the experiences of faith and belief communities, been integrated into the design of any planned initiative?

- Within any funding process, are you acting as an impartial guarantor?
- Do civil servants working with religious or belief communities have adequate training, and are they effectively engaging in an impartial manner with religious or belief actors?
- Are religious/belief communities and other stakeholders able to ask questions and obtain relevant answers within reasonable time frames on any support/funding processes?
- Have you ensured full transparency and accountability throughout the design of the funding conditions, administration, evaluation, impact reporting and follow-up?
- Have you included stakeholder evaluation of the support/funding programme you would be implementing?

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# 18

## **Creating visibility for positive initiatives at various levels (including overseas)**

What opportunities and benefits exist for promoting (your state's engagement with local) dialogue and joint actions within different forums (including international forums)?


- Do you communicate positive examples of dialogue and joint action across religious or belief boundaries and issue supportive statements highlighting initiatives where groups work together to tackle concrete problems, within a human rights framework?
- If not, is this something that you could consider and in which forums?
- Have you considered recognition awards for people or organizations involved in leading successful joint action projects?





# CHAPTER 7

## CONCLUSION



“ Dialogue and joint action processes are not a quick fix and should be part of a longer-term strategy. ”

# CHAPTER 7

## CONCLUSION

This guide has shown that states should not lead or manage dialogue and joint action processes across religious or belief boundaries, but that there are several good reasons why they should consider supporting such processes as important building blocks towards peaceful, pluralistic societies. Indeed, the importance of dialogue has also been repeatedly affirmed by OSCE participating States. Human rights standards and OSCE commitments do not come with a step-by-step implementation plan; this one-size-fits-all approach would fail to account for the specificities of different contexts, needs and sensitivities. However, this guide has offered a number of recommendations on how states can play an important role in supporting dialogue and joint action processes that cross religious or belief divides. It has also discussed several factors that a state should consider when determining what to support and how.

Dialogue and joint action processes are not a quick fix and should be part of a longer-term strategy. This guide has stressed how important it is for states to reflect internally and be ready to engage in supporting such initiatives in a strategic and meaningful way. It has also outlined key factors that help to create an enabling environment for dialogue and joint action: the protection, promotion and facilitation of FoRB (amongst other human rights), the ‘do-no-harm’ approach, even-handedness, accessibility and inclusion, and transparency and accountability. Lastly, the guide has offered practical advice on how states can engage in supporting consultations, joint advisory committees and project funding in a way that optimizes the outcomes. Chapter 6 provided a non-exhaustive, practical checklist for states, based on the information presented in this guide. The annexes provide a summary of information received from participating States as part of a survey conducted by ODIHR for the purposes of this publication, as well as guidance for dialogue facilitators.

This guide is part of ODIHR’s work to assist OSCE participating States in promoting, protecting and fulfilling human rights through strengthened democratic institutions, that lead to enhanced security. In addition to this guide, ODIHR invites stakeholders, including officials from OSCE participating States, to consult further resources on ODIHR’s website.



# ANNEXES

# ANNEXE 1

## GUIDANCE FOR DIALOGUE FACILITATORS

A dialogue should always be run by a neutral facilitator who can help navigate difficult discussions and encourage participants towards a certain set of behaviours/principles of dialogue. Dialogues need to build trust or advance cooperation. At times, certain issues raised for discussion are presented as the key concerns but, as discussions evolve, it becomes clear that there are more significant issues, taboos or challenges to be addressed. People may discuss positions, but not reveal their interests or needs. Those leading the dialogue must be ready to consider throughout a dialogue process whether or not to change course or include other actors.

Productive dialogues are often structured around a set of behaviours that trained facilitators can help to foster.

- In a dialogue setting, an individual can never truly represent a whole community; therefore, a facilitator should encourage the use of “I” statements, e.g. ‘I believe ...’, ‘In my experience...’ etc.
- A dialogue should encourage honest exchange, but should remind participants to talk only about things they can comfortably share.
- A dialogue should encourage listening between participants, including enabling participants to pay attention when they may find it difficult to listen. Barriers to good listening include: feelings of bias or prejudice; language differences or accents; noise; worry, fear or anger; lack of attention span; and external distractions. An effective facilitator will accompany participants and develop mechanisms and interventions to ensure that barriers are mitigated and, where possible, overcome.
- The appearance of male gerontocratic social norms, stereotypes and language in dialogue processes (e.g., calls to respect elders when a different opinion is voiced, or dismissing women’s engagement as not being in line with their ‘role’) can alienate young people and women. The facilitator should call these out.
- Facilitators should encourage participants to keep an open mind. Dialogue should not focus on debate as a zero-sum game to determine who is more ‘right’, but should enable mutual learning.

(Participants can face accusations/suspicious from their own communities that they will 'go native' or lose their religious/belief identity, which can prevent wider/deeper engagement).

- A dialogue is more often productive if participants respect each other's feelings. Participants may disagree with each other's views, but a facilitator should encourage and remind them to respect each person and their feelings. When a person's feelings are hurt, facilitators should enable the injured party to explain why the situation was hurtful to them. This provides opportunities for learning.

Facilitators should encourage participants to develop a shared language or 'Working Agreement' detailing how they want to work. This presents an opportunity to establish shared definitions around key terms and to discuss any dialogue goals to ensure equitable engagement by all participants.

# ANNEXE 2

## SURVEY QUESTIONS

- 1.** Which OSCE participating state are you from?
- 2.** Please provide the name, title, institution, and e-mail of the focal point for this survey.
- 3.** Could you please indicate in which of the following areas non-state actors are involved in interfaith and interreligious dialogue and partnership activities:
  - Promoting freedom of religion or belief (e.g., working for the security of places of worship, advocating for legislative change in this area, confidentiality of privileged information shared with community leaders);
  - Promoting human rights other than freedom of religion or belief;
  - Awareness-raising addressing any misrepresentation of religious or belief communities in the media and/or public life;
  - Promoting tolerance and non-discrimination;
  - Promoting cultural life and/or cultural diversity;
  - Provision of social services;
  - Tolerance education;
  - Advocating for changes in legislation and/or policy.
- 4.** Could you please provide a couple of examples of concrete initiatives in these areas?
- 5.** Please could you provide information about activities that promote freedom of religion or belief through interfaith and interreligious activities?
  - Which actors, institutions or organizations facilitates these initiatives?
  - Which actors, institutions or organizations participate in these initiatives (religious and/or secular actors)?
  - What impact do they have?
- 6.** In what ways have interfaith and interreligious initiatives within your country been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 7.** Have new interfaith and interreligious initiatives emerged as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

- 8.** Which activities does the state engage in to support interfaith and interreligious dialogue?
  - Funding interfaith and interreligious dialogue initiatives;
  - Convening or providing dialogue activities for such activities;
  - Capacity building of faith and belief communities;
  - Other;
  - The state is not involved in these activities
- 9.** If the state supports interfaith and interreligious dialogue within the country, how does it do so? (e.g., Which state actors are involved? Is there a department or team appointed to engage in such activities? Is there a focus upon domestic issues or work on cross-border/international activities?)
- 10.** Which challenges and opportunities have been identified in your country as supporting and facilitating interfaith and interreligious dialogue activities? (e.g., Do you have established partners representing the demographic? Do you have confidence in partners? Do you see a broad range of actors engaged in such activities, e.g., women, youth, religious minorities, secular actors, established actors and newer actors? Are such activities spread across the country or located primarily in certain areas? How do you monitor or assess the impact of such initiatives?)
- 11.** For any state-sponsored processes related to IID, how do you ensure broad representation and equal participation between different actors?
- 12.** Do you have any additional information that you would like to share with ODIHR?

# ANNEXE 3

# SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESPONSES

## **Types of state support**

- Across the OSCE area, states support interfaith and interreligious dialogue in various ways.
- Some provide funding or other types of support (e.g., a meeting venue or platform for joint action coalitions) without engaging in the substance and outcome of the dialogue. Others are more engaged in the topics, sometimes as part of a specific state policy or through established state structures at the local and/or the national level.
- When states establish structures bringing together various (usually) religious groups, they tend to be primarily a forum for the state to consult the representatives of religious groups on matters related to religious life.
- In several states there are (usually) governmental structures/officials with a mandate to look at issues related to religious life/communities. They can also convene regular meetings of the representatives of religious groups.
- Depending upon the state-religion arrangement, some states do not provide any type of funding or material support for dialogue but engage with faith and belief actors on a range of matters and use the information to work towards strengthening an enabling environment.
- Some states focus their engagement, support and funding on the main religious groups (with or without an interfaith and interreligious component), while only a few indicated including all.
- Some interreligious or interfaith dialogues also include civil society actors, depending upon context and topic.
- Some states approach interfaith and interreligious exchanges or support for FoRB as part of their intercultural activities.
- Other states reported teaching about various religious traditions within the educational curriculum, or holding consultations in frameworks related to education.



## **Level of engagement**

- Especially when formalized, state engagement with religious and belief actors tends to take place mainly at national level, where the state proactively engages with traditional leadership.
- Some states also engage at the municipal level.

## **Areas of cross-community engagement in dialogue and joint action**

- In some areas of the OSCE, interfaith dialogue and cooperation happens around issues of mutual concern such as property restitution or access to prisoners to provide religious services.
- Engagement with the state, either initiated by the state or the communities themselves, also happens around security issues, addressing hate crime and on training law enforcement. State capacity-building activities in this area can include the participation of several religious groups.
- In some participating States, religious organizations and structures are heavily involved in providing social services, while, in other contexts, religious organizations or structures are involved in interfaith and interreligious dialogue, but not necessarily in providing social services, which is largely the remit of the state.
- Some states also indicated they are active in international peacebuilding through interreligious dialogue.
- Several states noted that religious structures were active during the Covid-19 pandemic, offering outreach and services to all segments of the population, regardless of religious or belief background.
- Several states supported interreligious and/or interfaith initiatives during the pandemic; some witnessed increased participation in religious services, due to the possibility of online participation.
- Participation in religious life as such, and the ability to exercise FoRB fully, also became a topic of discussion during the pandemic.
- In several states, new interfaith initiatives were formed during the pandemic. For example, one state cited an initiative aimed to support the vaccination effort by sharing health information and increasing equitable access, regardless of religious or belief affiliation.

# ENDNOTES

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13. As regards teaching, this also includes parents' or legal guardians' freedom to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions and the evolving capacities of the child. See also, ICCPR, Art. 18 para. 4, and [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), United Nations, General Assembly resolution 44/25, adopted 20 November 1989, Art 14, para. 2.
14. See, for example, Articles 6 (b) and (f), [The 1981 UN General Assembly \(UNGA\) Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance on the basis of Religion or Belief](#); [UN Commission on Human Rights Resolution 2005/40](#), para. 4(e) and [UN Human Rights Committee Resolution 6/37](#), para. 12 (h).
15. The use of the term 'race' in this guide shall not imply endorsement by OSCE/ODIHR of any theory based on the existence of different races. It is a term widely used in international human rights standards, as well as in national legislation.
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17. [Heiner Bielefeldt, Nazila Ghanea and Michael Wiener, Freedom of Religion or Belief: An International Law Commentary](#), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 553-557.
18. For more information on this right, including its intersection with other rights, please see the video series: [Getting \(the right to\) freedom of religion or belief right](#), OSCE/ODIHR, 2022.
19. [General Comment No. 22 \(48\) \(art 18\)](#), United Nations, Human Rights Committee, 1247th meeting (forty-eighth session), 20 July 1993.
20. [Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief](#), United Nations (A/HRC/34/50), General Assembly, Human Rights Council, (thirty-fourth session), 17 January 2017, para. 30.
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26. [#Faith for Rights Toolkit](#), Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 1 January 2020.
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28. [Faith for Rights Facilitator Guide Training Course](#), International Center for Law and Religion Studies (ICLRS).
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30. [Türk calls for measures to address religious hatred, speech by Volker Türk](#), UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, delivered at the 55th session of the Human Rights Council — Panel discussion on countering religious hatred constituting incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, 8 March 2024.
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34. [The Atlas of Religious or Belief Minority Rights project identifies key policy areas and provides indicators to measure progress and data that can help states assess their progress in creating an enabling environment for religious or belief minorities seeking to exercise their rights in certain EU Member States](#).
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36. In 2022, the U.S. government estimated the island population at 1.3 million. According to the 2021 census, the government-controlled area population is 918,100. 2011 census information of the government-controlled area indicates that 89.1% of the population is Orthodox Christian, 2.9% Roman Catholic (Latins), 2% Protestants, 1.8% Muslims, 1% Buddhists, 0.5% Maronite Catholic, and 0.3% Armenian Orthodox, with small populations of Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Baha'is. See [US Report on International Religious Freedom, Section 1: Religious Demography, Cyprus, 2022](#), US Department of State.
37. [Joint Statements, Office of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process \(Under the Auspices of the Embassy of Sweden\)](#).
38. See [Handyside v. The United Kingdom](#) [ECtHR, 1976], para. 49; ICCPR Art. 20 (2); other grounds provided for under Arts. 19(3) and 20(1); Lord Singh of Wimbledon, [Interfaith talks need to go beyond tea and samosas](#), [thetimes.co.uk](#), 22 July 2017.
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40. *Ibid.*, Section IIIB, para. 13.
41. *Ibid.*, Section VB, para. 4.
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- 80.** *Ibid.*
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- 82.** *Ibid.*
- 83.** Working with and for YOUTH: Guidelines for youth mainstreaming, OSCE Mission to Serbia, 2021; and Rachel Forster, Issue Brief: Towards youth leadership on freedom of religion or belief, Search for Common Ground, March 2023.
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- 85.** Faith and Fragile States First Panel: Religious Engagement in Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), United States Institute of Peace, video recording 38:00-39:38, 27 July 2018.
- 86.** *Ibid.*
- 87.** According to Boston University's 2020 World Religion Database, Muslims constitute approximately 59% of the population, Christians 38%, atheists or agnostics 2.5%, and Baha'is 0.6%. In 2017, the World Jewish Congress estimated there were 40-50 Jews (2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Albania, United States Department of State).
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- 91.** *Ibid.*, Art. 29.b.
- 92.** Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, OSCE, 3 October 1991, paras. 41.2, 41.3 and 41.5.
- 93.** [Easy-to-read](#), Inclusion Europe website.
- 94.** [Augmentative and Alternative Communication \(AAC\)](#), American Speech-Language-Hearing Association website.
- 95.** [International Religious Freedom Roundtable website](#).
- 96.** According to the Public Religion Research Institute data for 2022, Americans describe themselves as unaffiliated 26.8%, white mainline Protestant 13.9%, white Evangelical Protestant 13.6%, White Catholic 12.6%, Hispanic Catholic 8.6%, black Protestant 7.7%, Hispanic Protestant 3.5%, other non-white Protestant 2.5%, Jewish 1.9%, New Age 1.6%, Mormon 1.5%, Jehovah's Witness 1.1%, Buddhist 0.7%, Hindu 0.7%, Muslim 0.6%, Unitarian 0.5%, Orthodox Christian 0.5%.
- 97.** OSCE, [Mediation and Dialogue Facilitation in the OSCE](#).
- 98.** The Oslo Charter, International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFoRB), November 2014.
- 99.** [Parliamentary Report on Religion and Belief: Working towards more Peaceful and Inclusive Societies](#), Interparliamentary Union, 2023.
- 100.** [Article 18 Alliance website](#).
- 101.** Resolution 16/18 on Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief (A/HRC/RES/16/18), United Nations, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, 12 April 2011.
- 102.** [Religions for Peace website](#).
- 103.** [Global Women of Faith Network, Religions for Peace website](#).
- 104.** [Interfaith Youth Network, Religions for Peace website](#).
- 105.** [Search for Common Ground website](#).
- 106.** [About the Universal Code on Holy Sites, Search for Common Ground website](#).
- 107.** For more information on the Universal Code and SFCG's engagement in Bosnia/Herzegovina see the second module of this online course created by SFCG and USIP on [Religious Engagement in Peacebuilding — the Common Ground Approach](#).
- 108.** To identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.
- 109.** To account for potential Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, Environmental risk.



