



Multinational Efforts to Promote Freedom of Religion or Belief

Joint Action for the Common Good

New York, Thursday 17th – Saturday 19th September 2015

Violations of freedom of religion or belief are increasing globally with devastating effects on individuals and communities as well as global security and stability. Both international and intra-national strife is spawned by these violations, well documented by institutions such as the Pew Forum or the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. People of all convictions and faiths have been the objects of human rights abuses for merely wanting to live out their beliefs peacefully. Billions of people live in countries where their religious freedoms are restricted through government and/or societal actions. Perpetrators include authoritarian regimes, extremist groups, terrorists and other non-state actors (especially in failed or failing states).

International standards are clear on religious freedom. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides a robust definition of freedom of religion or belief, including the right to have any or no faith, to change one's faith or other personal rights such as the freedom to practice and express religious convictions. The UDHR was forged out of the ashes of World War II and remains incredibly relevant to today's environment plagued by violence and war. Although UN Member States have agreed to these standards, compliance has dramatically declined globally in the past decade.

Meeting these challenges and successfully pushing back against this rising tide of violations goes beyond the capabilities of any one country or organization. Governments and parliaments for the first time have begun working across national boundaries to advocate together for greater respect for freedom of religion or belief. The Oslo meeting of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief in November 2014 launched an inter-parliamentary effort to advance religious freedom for all. Parliamentarians signed the 'Charter for Freedom of Religion or Belief', pledging themselves to uphold international standards and to work to promote the right, thus starting an international and interreligious alliance for parliamentary action. In addition, the Inter-Governmental Contact Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief was publicly launched in Brussels in May 2015, which seeks to network government efforts for greater impact.

The purpose of this meeting on the margins of the UN General Assembly, hosted by the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is to take the parliamentary effort to the level of the United Nations. It will provide a platform to further discuss ways to increase international cooperation to combat persecution and advance religious freedom for all. Case studies and blueprints for action both on the parliamentary as on government level will be reviewed. The meeting will assemble diplomats, UN officials, parliamentarians, civil society and religious groups to participate in an interactive discussion. The event will be the first such meeting of its kind bringing together governments, parliamentarians, international organizations and civil society in the context of the United Nations

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Draft Programme

Thursday, 17th September

6:30 PM

Reception – at the German Mission to the UN

Welcoming Remarks

- Volker Kauder Parliamentary Group Leader of the CDU/CSU
- Baroness Elizabeth Berridge, House of Lords
- Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering, President of the European Parliament ret. and Chairman of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
- Prof. Dr. Ursula Männle, Minister of State for Bavaria ret. and Chairwomen of the Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung

Friday, 18 September

9:00 AM – 9:30 AM

Our Common Challenge: An Overview of Religious Restrictions and Social Hostilities Worldwide

Speakers

- James Bell, Vice President, Global Strategy, Pew Research Centre
- Ambassador Andrew Bennett for Office of Religious Freedom, Canadian Ministry of Foreign

9:30 AM – 10:30 AM

Our Common Security: Developing a Multinational Effort to Deliver Freedom of Religion or Belief for All

Introductory Remarks

- High Representative H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser for United Nations Alliance of Civilizations - UNAOC

Panelists

- Prince Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Ambassador David Saperstein, U.S. State Department for International Religious Freedom

- Ambassador Petter Wille, Norwegian Ambassador-at large for Minorities,
- *Prof. Heiner Bielefeld, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief*

10:30 AM - 10:45 AM

Break

10:45 AM – 11:45 AM

Our Common Responsibility: Enhancing Global Cooperation between Parliamentarians in Defense of the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief for All.

Moderator

- Dr Aykan Erdemir, Member of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey

Panelists

- To be drawn from representatives from the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief.

11:45 AM – 12:45 AM

Our Shared Dignity: Intensifying Multi-religious Cooperation to Advance Freedom of Religion or Belief for All

Moderator

- Dr. William F. Vendley, Secretary General, Religions for Peace

Panelists

- Sheikh Abdallah bin Bayyah, President, Forum for Peace in Muslim Societies, Abu Dhabi
- H.E. John Cardinal Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja, Archdiocese of Abuja, Nigeria
- Rabbi David Rosen, International Director of Interreligious Affairs, American Jewish Committee, United States of America
- Dr. Vinu Aram, Director, Shanti Ashram, India
- Rev. Kosho Niwano, President-Designate, Rissho Kosei-Kai, Japan
- H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel, Vice President of the Conference of European Churches, Belgium
- Ayatollah Seyed Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad, Head, Islamic Studies Department, The Academy of Sciences, Iran

12:45 PM – 1:00 PM

Break and move to lunch at Permanent Mission of Germany to the UN

1.00 PM - 2:30 PM

Keynote Speaker

- Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon of the United Nations (tbc)

Afternoon session continues at Germany Mission to the UN

2:30 PM – 2:40 PM

Break [Parliamentarians move to closed session]

2:45 PM – 3:00 PM

IPP Opening Remarks

3:00 PM - 5:00 PM

From the Oslo Charter to the New York Action Plan

Discussion of IPP activities; growing the IPP network; agreeing a statement to issue

Evening

Reception (Host TBD)

Saturday, 19 September

Morning session at Germany Mission to UN

10:00 AM – 12:00 AM

Implementing the New York Action Plan