



Freedom of Religion or Belief

FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

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THE NCHR INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT

Competence building, dialogue and cooperation

Mission and Objective

The Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief (OC) is responsible for promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). Through competence building, dialogue and cooperation, the OC aims at advancing freedom of religion or belief as a common benefit that is accepted and embraced across all convictions.

Background and Challenges

In many countries of the world a major trend is the increasing importance of religion in politics. Due to the increased politicisation both of religion itself and of belief-based discrimination, in recent years FoRB is facing growing challenges. This situation has adverse effects for religious majorities as well as minorities. Questions of FoRB are linked to a variety of social, cultural and political issues, and are hotly debated all over the world.

FoRB and Human Rights

In the recognition and realisation of the right to FoRB according to international human rights standards, we give special

attention to two factors. First, building knowledge and understanding of International Human Rights. Second, relieving perceived tensions between religious identity and interpretations on the one hand, and international HR standards on the other. In line with our understanding of FoRB as a common good for all, we strive to include all religious and other life stance communities in our work.

Projects and Partners

Our projects deal with freedom of religion or belief in connection with gender, the relationship between freedom of religion and expression, the rights of children and the prevention of violent extremism. We rely on an international network of representatives from religious and other life-stance communities, NGOs, international organisations and research institutes, and our Advisory Council.

The Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (NCHR) is a part of the University of Oslo, Faculty of Law. The NCHR's **International Department (ID)** has an extended network of cooperating partners around the world including academic institutions, UN organs and civil society organisations. Our activities are supported by the Norwegian MFA.

We promote human rights through international competence building, knowledge enhancement and dialogue in the countries we cooperate with. We aim at integrating a gender sensitive approach across our six thematic areas of commitment:

- Human Rights Education
- Rule of Law
- **Freedom of Religion or Belief**
- Business and Human Rights
- Equality and Non-discrimination
- Human Rights Mechanisms

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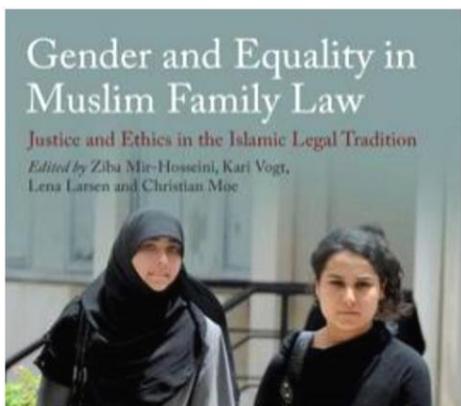
www.jus.uio.no/smr/english/about/id/belief/

Selected Results



Launch of the Oslo Principles

In October 2016, around 60 experts and practitioners in the field of FoRB took part in the conference Politicization of Freedom of Religion or Belief – For Better and Worse, in Oslo, Norway. The conference was hosted by the OC in cooperation with the International Center for Law and Religion Studies, Brigham Young University. Reviewing recent developments in the field, and drawing on nearly two decades of experience since the Oslo Declaration (1998), the conference endorsed seven principles for the promotion of FoRB as a common good for all.

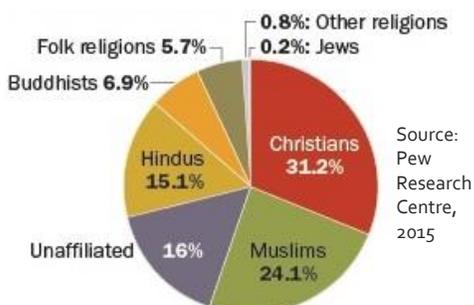


Gender Equality and Muslim Law

In the ground breaking book *Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law*, Muslim contributors discuss women’s rights in Islam. Starting with religious traditions and religious writings, the contributors discuss present family law in Muslim countries, and present arguments to advance gender equality. The book is the fruit of a dialogue between religious leaders, academics and activists over a number of years, initiated and facilitated by the Oslo Coalition.

FAST FACTS

84% of the world’s population identify as religious.



Key Ongoing Projects

Our current projects are aimed at enabling and supporting new FoRB discourses that promote the freedom of religion or belief by combating religious intolerance and extremism. Our approach is to develop solid, rights-based, relevant, and balanced local knowledge that provides the basis for activities involving dialogue and collaboration. Empowerment of local actors is key to our success in promoting FoRB.

New Directions in Islamic Thought

Many Muslims in the world today experience discord between their role as citizens and their religious affiliation. Muslim reformists use religious references to engage constructively with modern challenges like international human rights, but lack support and platforms, and sometimes suffer persecution for their beliefs. The OC studies current trends in Islamic reform and provides a forum where Muslim reform thinkers, academics and activists can develop ideas and strategies for change.

Legitimate Limitations on Freedom of Religion or Belief

The freedom to manifest one’s religion or belief in practice may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. However, authorities often lack a clear understanding of FoRB, and resort to the limitation clauses to define it, leading to arbitrary and discriminatory restrictions. There is a pressing need to clarify the role of limitations on FoRB, to ensure that freedom is the norm, not the exception. We have formed an expert group to study legitimate limitations on FoRB and make recommendations to policy-makers on limiting the scope of their application.

New Directions in Orthodox Christian Thought and Practice

There are major controversies in Orthodox Christian societies over FoRB and other human rights. Current challenges are linked to contested notions of national identity, state–church relations, gender and sexuality, and family and community. The relation between the Church and contemporary challenges of human rights has received limited theological and ecclesiastical attention. By facilitating debate and critical engagement with the Christian tradition in light of modern society, and disseminating scholarly insights from prominent Orthodox scholars and religious leaders on controversial issues, this project aims to widen the scope of the conversation and promote FoRB in Orthodox Christian societies.

The Working Group on Indonesia

Through our partners in Indonesia, we initiate and support projects aimed at increasing tolerance and peaceful coexistence across borders of religion and belief, with focus on FoRB with the integration of gender equality and children's rights. In particular, our activities are aimed at knowledge- and competence-building for educators and religious leaders. By organizing trainings and courses on building tolerance and gender justice in areas of conflict, the dangers of child marriage and Islamic arguments against the practice, and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and human rights, we aim to enhance the enjoyment of FoRB and decrease religious conflicts and discrimination in Indonesia.

Competence Building for Freedom of Religion or Belief

There is a need for increased competence in the area of the human right to FoRB, in particular in form of written material as a basis for courses and studies. Using the OC desk book ‘Facilitating Freedom of Religion or Belief’ (2001) as a resource, this project organises, facilitates and supports courses, seminars and workshops to increase the academic knowledge about FoRB. Target groups are universities, government actors, religious leaders and NGOs.

ICCPR art. 18.1

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.

