

Table of Contents

- ***New UN special rapporteur on FoRB begins work***
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Freedom Declared (07.11.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2g9C4Xx> - On 1 November Dr Ahmed Shaheed tweeted "Today I assume the duties of UN SR on freedom of religion or belief. I look forward to working with all to advance this foundational right."

Up to that date Dr Shaheed had been Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. He is also Lecturer in Human Rights in the School of Law and Human Rights Centre, University of Essex.

Dr Shaheed is an internationally recognised expert on foreign policy, international diplomacy, democratisation and human rights reform especially in Muslim States. He has twice held the Office of Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Maldives, a position he used to promote human rights standards and norms. During his time in government, he played a leading role in the Maldives democratic transition and in its human rights reform process over a period of transition from a thirty-year-old autocracy with widespread human rights abuses, to a Muslim democracy which, in 2010, became a Member of the United Nations Human Rights Council with a record number of votes. In April 2009, the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy in Washington presented him with the "Muslim Democrat of the Year Award," and in 2010, the President of Albania awarded him the "Medal of Gratitude" for his contribution to peace and human rights in the Balkans.

The UN Human Rights Council appointed Dr Shaheed to the office of Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran in June 2011. He produced eight reports, submitted to the UN General Assembly (September 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014) and to the UN Human Rights Council (March 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015).

Dr Shaheed is also a member of the Advisory Committee on Interfaith Dialogue established by the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect. He is the founding Chair of the Geneva-based human rights think-tank, Universal Rights Group.

A UN Special Rapporteur is a title given to individuals working on behalf of the UN within the scope of its "Special Procedures" mechanisms.

The Special Rapporteur has been mandated through Human Rights Council resolution 6/37

– to promote the adoption of measures at the national, regional and international levels to ensure the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief;

– to identify existing and emerging obstacles to the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief and present recommendations on ways and means to overcome such obstacles;

– to continue her/his efforts to examine incidents and governmental actions that are incompatible with the provisions of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of

Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief and to recommend remedial measures as appropriate;

– to continue to apply a gender perspective, *inter alia*, through the identification of gender-specific abuses, in the reporting process, including in information collection and in recommendations.

Working methods

In the discharge of the mandate, the Special Rapporteur:

a) transmits urgent appeals and letters of allegation to States with regard to cases that represent infringements of or impediments to the exercise of the right to freedom of religion and belief.

b) undertakes fact-finding country visits.

c) submits annual reports to the Human Rights Council, and General Assembly, on the activities, trends and methods of work.

Dr Shaheed replaced Professor Heiner Bielefeldt, who was Special Rapporteur for six years (the maximum time one individual can carry out the mandate).

Speaking about the challenges he faces, Dr Shaheed said: "I am keen to address emerging and existing concerns that fall within the scope of the mandate, and to focus on the implementation of international norms and standards, engaging with a wide variety of stakeholders in an open and inclusive manner."

He praised previous mandate holders for "setting out the normative content of the right to freedom of religion or belief, and in identifying and exploring a number of key concerns and challenges."
