

Declaration of Principles for the International Religious Freedom Alliance

U.S. Department of State (05.02.2020) – <http://bit.ly/2SlHLrk>
– *The Alliance is a network of likeminded countries fully committed to advancing freedom of religion or belief around the world.*

The Alliance is predicated on the idea more must be done to protect members of religious minority groups and combat discrimination and persecution based on religion or belief. The Alliance intends to advocate for freedom of religion or belief for all, which includes the right of individuals to hold any belief or none, to change religion or belief and to manifest religion or belief, either alone or in community with others, in worship, observance, practice and teaching. The Alliance is intended to bring together senior government representatives to discuss actions their nations can take together to promote respect for freedom of religion or belief and protect members of religious minority groups worldwide. Alliance members should be committed to the following principles and commitments and be willing to publicly and privately object to abuses, wherever they might occur.

Principles of Action by the Alliance

The Alliance is founded upon the international principle of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), drawn from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on

Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the 1981 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981 UN Declaration), and other documents like the EU Guidelines on FoRB and the OSCE Guidelines on FoRB and Security. Therefore, action to promote freedom of religion or belief is based on the principle that human rights are universal, interdependent and interrelated. The actions of the Alliance are intended to complement existing work to promote freedom of religion or belief within the United Nations and other competent multilateral and regional organizations.

Alliance Commitments

1. Members are committed to upholding their state obligations under international law in general and the ICCPR specifically relating to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief, including the right to hold any faith or belief, or none at all, and the freedom to change faith.
2. Members are committed to pursuing an inclusive approach, including cross-regional engagement.
3. Members are committed to being consultative, coordinated, and voluntary.
4. Members are committed to pursuing internal-external coherence on matters relating to freedom of religion or belief.
5. Members are committed to taking a human rights-based approach to advancing FoRB, and to promoting other human rights indispensable for the full enjoyment of the freedom of religion or belief.

Priority Areas of Action

1. *Reactive Measures*

1. Alliance members are committed to condemning violence (and incitement of violence) against persons based on religion or belief and against religious sites, either by state or by non-state actors, and demanding perpetrators be held to account.
2. Alliance members are committed to challenging persistent violations and abuses of the right to manifest one's religion or belief, including abuses of the rights listed in the 1981 UN Declaration, the use of blasphemy laws and the denial of registration to religious or non-religious groups, and are committed to seeking to persuade states to conform to international obligations and commitments.
3. Alliance members are committed to opposing restrictions on the freedom to change one's religion or belief, or to hold no belief, and to demonstrating solidarity with person or persons victimised by such restrictions.
4. Alliance members are committed to advocating on behalf of individuals who are imprisoned or in other ways persecuted on account of their religion or belief and promoting accountability against perpetrators.
5. Alliance members are committed to rejecting discrimination on account of religion or belief in access to justice, education, housing, or employment, and to promoting measures to address such discrimination.

2. *Proactive Measures*

1. Alliance members are committed to promoting respect for diversity, tolerance and inclusion consistent with the

Istanbul Process.

2. Alliance members are committed to supporting protection for religious or belief sites from violence.
3. Alliance members are committed to supporting and engaging with civil society, including religious and belief communities, and religious leaders, and to promoting cross-boundary and multi-disciplinary networking of those groups and individuals.
4. Alliance members are committed to promoting literacy on freedom of religion or belief and relevant human rights frameworks.
5. Alliance members are committed to promoting freedom of religion or belief together with other human rights, such as freedom of expression.

3. Potential Instruments of Action

1. Regular monitoring, reporting, information-sharing and outreach to impacted individuals and faith communities.
2. Joint or co-ordinated bilateral demarches and public diplomacy.
3. Promotion of interfaith dialogue to solve problems and promote greater inter- and intra-religious understanding.
4. Support for victims, such as through redress, resettlement, or other actions as appropriate.
5. Targeted sanctions against perpetrators as appropriate.
6. Co-ordinated action using multilateral fora (e.g. joint statements, UN country resolutions, and UN mechanisms like the Universal Periodic Review) and support for the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.
7. Cooperating with civil society organizations, religious communities, and parliamentary networks committed to advancing freedom of religion or belief.

8. Training of law enforcement officials, building the capacity of national human rights institutions, and cooperating with civil society.
9. Investment in projects to protect space for civic engagement by assisting human rights defenders and victims of persecution, as well as to build societal resilience (e.g. education on the benefits of diversity and religious tolerance, as well as cross-faith development projects).