



Statement from the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance Ministers' Forum

The 33 members of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (“the Alliance”) declare their intent to accelerate joint efforts to advance freedom of religion or belief (“FoRB”), as enumerated in the Declaration of Principles of the Alliance.

Through the Declaration, Alliance members from different regions, representing diverse political and religious/belief backgrounds, commit to uphold their international obligations related to freedom of religion or belief, including under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and to advocate for other countries to do the same. These rights include the right to hold any faith or belief, or none at all, and the freedom to choose or change religion or belief.

Since the last Ministers' Forum in November 2020, Alliance members, along with friends of and observers to the Alliance, have issued statements on current events impacting freedom of religion or belief. These statements highlighted the missing Yezidi women and children kidnapped by ISIS, urged all parties in Afghanistan to establish an inclusive and human rights-respecting representative government with the meaningful participation of women and members of minority groups, and expressed solidarity with victims of attacks by the Myanmar security forces while condemning their attacks on places of worship. Members have also spoken out and acted upon numerous other freedom of religion or belief issues around the globe throughout the year.

Recognizing that freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief is threatened around the world, the Alliance commits to continue to highlight concerns in public and in private to help ensure the individual right to freedom of religion or belief.

In these efforts, the Alliance established working groups on Education and FoRB, the African Vision for FoRB, Gender and FoRB, Technology and FoRB, Humanitarian Aid, Protecting Religious Sites, and the Abolishment of the Death Penalty for Blasphemy and Apostasy. In addition, the Alliance welcomes and appreciates the support and engagement from civil society, including faith/belief-based organizations, religious/belief communities, and the Alliance Council of Experts.

THEREFORE

We, the members of the Alliance, reiterate that:

- Freedom of religion or belief matters, for every individual, everywhere;
- The right to freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and
- The right to freedom of religion or belief, should be pursued across all areas of foreign policy.

Consequently, we seek to:

Cooperate and support freedom of religion or belief to address global challenges;

Advocate for the rights of individuals to believe or not believe, according to their conscience, and to press for the repeal of laws that are abused to penalize individuals or groups because of their religion or belief, such as blasphemy and apostasy laws;

Respond to mass atrocities targeting religious minority groups and their members with appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian, and political actions;

Support international efforts to promote protection of freedom of religion or belief and safeguard the religious sites in the event of conflicts worldwide;

Counter rising religion or belief-based incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence around the world, both online and offline;

Acknowledge that discrimination and inequalities on the grounds of religion or belief and gender often exist in tandem, and advocate for the use of FoRB to empower people in achieving gender equality;

Advocate for non-discriminatory citizenship rights for all, including for members of religious/belief minority groups, and for protections for their places of worship and related cultural and linguistic heritage;

Assist individuals persecuted on account of their religion or belief and where possible support these individuals through humanitarian, disaster, and refugee assistance;

Increase the number of active and engaged Alliance members, as well as the number and variety of joint statements and actions taken by Alliance members;

Build relationships with key members of civil society at home and abroad, and to establish partnerships with members of all religious or belief communities; and

Promote international and multilateral efforts in the field of freedom of religion or belief, including supporting the work and mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief and supporting the UK hosted 2022 Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief.