

European Parliament
Working Group on
Freedom of Religion or Belief

2013
Annual Report

*Conclusions and Recommendations
regarding the situation of Freedom of
Religion or Belief in the World*

February 2014



**European Parliament Working Group on
Freedom of Religion or Belief**

Report 2013

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFET - European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs

CSW – Christian Solidarity Worldwide

DROI – European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

EEAS – European External Action Service

EIDHR - European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights

EMPL - European Parliament Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

EP – European Parliament

EPWG on FoRB – European Parliament Working Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief

EU – European Union

EUSR – European Union Special Representative for Human Rights

FAC - Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union

FoRB - Freedom of Religion or Belief

HRW – Human Rights Watch

HRWF - Human Rights Without Frontiers

ICCPR - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ICHRI - International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran

LIBE - European Parliament Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

MEP – Member of the European Parliament

NBO – Network of Buddhist Organisations

NGO - Non-governmental organisation

OSCE – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

UDHR - Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UK - United Kingdom

UN – United Nations

US – United States

USCIRF - United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

FOREWORD

As members of the European Parliament Working Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief (EPWG on FoRB) we have two objectives with this report. Firstly, to raise awareness about the deterioration of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in the world and to list countries and developments of particular concern. The second objective of this report was to focus on the role the European Union (EU) can play to promote and protect FoRB and counter rising violations of FoRB.

Toward this, at the end of the report, we have included certain country specific and institutional recommendations that we as members of the EPWG on FoRB believe the EU should implement, to supplement and complement action which the EU is already undertaking.

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INTRODUCTION

The right to freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in many international instruments, such as Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)¹ and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)². Article 18 UDHR provides for the right of everyone to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and clearly states that ‘this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance’.

As a universal human right, freedom of religion or belief safeguards respect for diversity. Its free exercise directly contributes to democracy, development, rule of law, peace and stability.³

In recent years there has been a continued increase in violations committed by government and non-government actors against individuals and groups based on their religion or belief. State violations are normally a result of legislation designed to restrict people from their FoRB rights, and/or from a lack of capacity and accountability to implement the right legislation which is in place. Non-government violations usually occur in the form of socio-cultural hostility in the form of exclusion, or aggressive persecution.

METHODOLOGY

In this report we highlight countries and developments of particular concern. The selection of countries of particular concern was based on the following criteria:

- The severity of FoRB violations
- The frequency of FoRB violations
- The relationship between the EU and the third country concerned

Since the EP Working Group on FoRB did not have the resources for organising missions aimed at primary fact-finding in third countries, we have relied on secondary data and research available. Included were, among other sources, the EU’s Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World in 2012⁴, the Pew Research Centre’s various reports on this topic⁵, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) 2013 Annual Report⁶, United Nations (UN) reports⁷, the United Kingdom All Party Parliamentary Group on International Religious Freedom report⁸ and the Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF) World Report⁹.

¹ <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

² <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

³ http://consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/137585.pdf

⁴ http://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2013/250613_eu_hr_report_2012_en.htm

⁵ <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/06/20/arab-spring-restrictions-on-religion-findings/>

⁶ [http://www.uscirf.gov/images/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/images/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20(2).pdf)

⁷ http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session22/AHRC2251_English.pdf

⁸ <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B28o5BcnVQumNkdzQmhHb0dSM28/edit>

⁹ <http://hrwf.org/images/reports/2013/forbannualreport.pdf>

1. KEY CONCERNS

Based on the research referred to in the introduction it proved possible to cluster the most important violations of freedom of religion or belief into **seven categories**. Furthermore, we have been able to identify key concerns in 25 countries of particular concern. In 15 of these countries the situation is so serious that immediate action by the European Union and its Member States is required. For these countries we have included country specific recommendations at the end of this report.

We highlight the following **25 countries** as **countries of particular concern**: Afghanistan, Burma, China, Cuba, Egypt, Eritrea, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

We consider these **15 countries** as **serious violators of FoRB**: China, Egypt, Eritrea, India, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and Uzbekistan.

1.1 Intimidation, discrimination, violence and lack of state protection

Acts of violence committed by states or non-state actors include cases of torture, execution, rape of women, men or children, inhumane or degrading treatment, kidnapping, disappearances and other atrocities. The Pew Forum reports widespread harassment and intimidation of religious minorities by governments in 86 states¹⁰. This can include displacement or damage to personal or religious property.

The Pew Forum's 2012 report¹¹ outlines crimes, serious malicious acts, and violence motivated by religious hatred and bias in 146 states around the world. Pew reports that in 69 states force or coercion is used to prevent other religious groups from operating in the country at all. In 59 states individuals were forced to leave their homes due to their religious affiliation. While all of these countries present unique contexts, in each case the state failed to protect persecuted individuals. Pew states that in 51 countries the government did not offer the necessary protection against social discrimination and abuses of religious groups.

Christians in Eritrea

It is estimated that between 2,000 and 3,000 Christians have been imprisoned in Eritrea, subjected to inhumane treatment, many facing torture and death due to the government's application of a law officially recognising only a limited number of religious groups. More than a hundred persons have been arrested between January and April 2013 for reasons relating to their religion or belief¹².

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW)¹³ stated that "tens of thousands of Eritreans languish without charge or trial in the country's maze of detention centres without having received — and with no hope of receiving — due process." Thousands of Eritreans flee the country despite a shoot-to-kill border policy.¹⁴ However, many face suffering due to further trafficking and torture by criminal gangs in camps in the Sinai Desert on their way to Europe and Israel¹⁵.

¹⁰ <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2012/09/RisingTideofRestrictions-fullreport.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/09/20/rising-tide-of-restrictions-on-religion-findings/>

¹² http://www.amnesty.nl/sites/default/files/public/1305_rap_eritrea.pdf

¹³ <http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/country.asp?s=gi&urn=Eritrea>

¹⁴ <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/eritrea?page=1>

¹⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/feb/14/egypt-bedouin-kidnap-refugees-israel>

North Korea

North Korea continues to be one of the worst violators of freedom of religion or belief¹⁶: thousands of people are kept in unbearable conditions in labour camps and are subject to arbitrary killings¹⁷. Christians face severe persecution, including public execution¹⁸. Open Doors states that North Korea remains the most difficult country in the world to be a Christian, and that between 50,000 and 70,000 Christians suffer in horrific prison camps¹⁹.

Burma

State violence against non-Buddhist communities continues in Burma. Muslim and Christian communities experience military violence, impunity, persecution, legal restrictions and discrimination, especially Christians in Kachin State and Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State²⁰. Members of the Rohingya minority in Burma are denied citizenship and social benefits²¹. The UN considers the Rohingya to be among the world's most persecuted minorities, experiencing detention, sexual assault and torture²². The inter-communal violence in Rakhine State leads to injuries and death, deportation and forcible transfer²³. Human Rights Watch (HRW) states that "the Burmese government is systematically restricting humanitarian aid and imposing discriminatory policies on Rohingya Muslims in Arakan State"²⁴.

Hindus in Pakistan

Pakistan is home to 2.5 million Hindus²⁵. They face severe and increasing discrimination from Muslim extremist groups, kidnapping, rape, forced conversion and more.²⁶ Hindus in Pakistan are denied access to public resources, employment, housing, business opportunities and protection and due legal process.

Buddhists in India

Buddhist tribes in India (especially Chakma people) face discrimination on a daily basis according to The Network of Buddhist Organisations (NBO) report²⁷. They are denied citizenship or refugee status²⁸, education and employment opportunities, access to health services. They face communal violence and are exposed to arbitrary use of force by local authorities.²⁹ NBO states that the Chakma and Jumma tribes are also persecuted in Bangladesh and are forced off their land by community groups or military forces.

Somalia

¹⁶ <http://www.worldwatchlist.us/world-watch-list-countries/north-korea/>

¹⁷ http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/country.asp?s=id&urn=North_Korea

¹⁸ http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/country.asp?s=id&urn=North_Korea

¹⁹ http://www.oduk.org/resources/country_profiles.php

²⁰ http://www.chro.ca/images/stories/files/PDF/BurmaPolicyBrief_2013.pdf

²¹ <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/rohingya/>

²² <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=45142#.Uj-45oanplw>

²³ http://www.nuigalway.ie/human_rights/documents/ichr_rohingya_report_2010.pdf

²⁴ <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/03/26/burma-rohingya-muslims-face-humanitarian-crisis>

²⁵ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-20582988>

²⁶ <http://www.uscirf.gov/images/Pakistan%20Factsheet%20July%202013%20FINAL.pdf>

²⁷ <http://www.nbo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/NBO-report-to-Parliament-on-Religious-Freedom-March-2013.pdf>

²⁸ <http://www.rnw.nl/english/article/stateless-people-chakmas-arunachal-pradesh>

²⁹ <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/06/20126207955292695.html>

From 2008 to 2012, al-Shabaab extremists controlled central and southern Somalia. They engage in systemic and egregious violations of religious freedom, including stoning, amputation, flogging, and detention. Sufi followers are detained, Sufi mosques are destroyed. Christians are also persecuted; dozens of Christians have been executed in the past five years.³⁰

Nigeria

Nigeria continues to be a country of particular concern for religiously motivated violence³¹. Open Doors reported that “between November 2011 and October 2012, [they] recorded 1,201 killings of Christians worldwide (which gives an average of 100 killings a month), of which 791 happened in Nigeria, with outright slaughters in places like Jos, Abuja, Kaduna and Bauchi.³²” During the year the Islamic extremist militant group Boko Haram murdered hundreds of Christian and Muslim Nigerians alike³³.

Ethnic Fulani Muslims continue to raid Christian villages in Plateau State, killing and displacing thousands of villagers in recent years³⁴. Political groups across central Nigeria continue to exploit increasing ethno-religious violence and grievances. Christians in Northern Nigeria face serious human rights abuses and discrimination; they are marginalised and deprived of their rights³⁵. Impunity and a weak federal state response continue to enable unprecedented levels of ethno-religious violence in Nigeria.

Indonesia

In Indonesia, Shi’as and Ahmadiyah communities face persistent challenges of harassment, intimidation and attacks, forced relocation and denial of food and health services³⁶.

Shiites in Pakistan

Shiites in Pakistan face increasing attacks from Sunni extremists (how is the state complicit? as the title of this sub-section (state-violations) suggests?). It is estimated that 300 people have been killed in two months³⁷. In January during an attack by the Lashkar-e-Jangvi on Shiites more than 90 people have been killed. In February, a bomb attack on a Shiite neighbourhood in the city of Quetta left 89 people dead. In March 2013, 45 people have been killed by a bomb attack on a Shiite mosque in Karachi. The deadly attacks against Shiites in Pakistan have escalated³⁸. They face day-today discrimination, frequently finding themselves victims of unchallenged hate speech and incitement to violence by Sunni preachers.

Mali

³⁰ <http://www.religionnews.com/2013/04/30/u-s-commission-announce15-countries-cited-for-religious-freedom-violations-worlds-15-worst-violators-of-religious-freedom/>

³¹ <http://eclj.org/pdf/nigeria-upr-2013.pdf>

³² http://www.opendoorsuk.org/campaign/documents/Freedom_of_Religion.pdf

³³ <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/us-religious-freedom-report-indicts-nigeria-for-impunity/148190/>

³⁴ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/03/2013330163751283772.html>

³⁵ [http://www.geo.uni-](http://www.geo.uni-tuebingen.de/fileadmin/website/arbeitsbereich/geogr/humangeographie/team/Rothfuss_Publikationen/JOSEPH_ROTHFUSS_2012_Nigeria-Religious-Freedom_pp.73-85.pdf)

[tuebingen.de/fileadmin/website/arbeitsbereich/geogr/humangeographie/team/Rothfuss_Publikationen/JOSEPH_ROTHFUSS_2012_Nigeria-Religious-Freedom_pp.73-85.pdf](http://www.geo.uni-tuebingen.de/fileadmin/website/arbeitsbereich/geogr/humangeographie/team/Rothfuss_Publikationen/JOSEPH_ROTHFUSS_2012_Nigeria-Religious-Freedom_pp.73-85.pdf)

³⁶ <http://amnesty.org/en/news/indonesia-religious-freedom-under-attack-shia-villagers-face-eviction-2013-01-15>

³⁷ <http://world.time.com/2013/03/06/under-attack-who-will-stop-the-killing-of-pakistans-shiites/#ixzz2fgczSU5A>

³⁸ <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/09/05/pakistan-shia-killings-escalate>

In 2012, intimidation, discrimination and outright violence against members of specific religious and belief groups in Mali increased due to the occupation of the northern part of the country by religious extremist groups³⁹. A March 2012 coup d'état led to a breakdown of government in northern Mali, causing regional food insecurity and poor humanitarian conditions⁴⁰. Many Christians, but also traditional Muslims became victims of violence by the extremists. Tuareg separatist rebels and Islamists fighters killed and maimed people and destroyed Sufi sanctuaries for alleged violations of Islamic law. Tens of thousands of Malians have left the region and the country.⁴¹

Several groups of non-state actors that perpetrate severe violations of religious freedom can also be found in *Afghanistan*.

1.2 Denial of freedom to change or leave one's religion or belief

According to Pew Forum⁴², in 39 countries laws prevent individuals from changing or leaving their religion or belief. Members of different religious communities have been detained and persecuted for engaging in non-coercive ways to express their religious or belief views, so called "proselytism". There are numerous cases where converts are accused of "apostasy" and sentenced to death, in spite of the right to conversion. The intimidations with the threat of severe legal penalties affect members of religious communities, many of whom hide their convictions or refrain from exercising their religion or belief.

Religious Conversion

CSW reports cases of the criminalisation of converts ("apostasy") in several states in *India*⁴³. Such anti-conversion laws are in force in Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat states. Similar laws are also introduced in Arunachal Pradesh and Rajasthan, although they are not currently enforced. Gujarat state law requires prior permission for conversion, and the law in Himachal Pradesh requires a person to notify the district magistrate of intention to convert and the magistrate to enquire into the matter. Converts are often subjected to violence and intimidation, especially those who leave the Hindu faith for Islam, Buddhism or Christianity. Release International states that many suffer physical assaults, are forced to pay fines or have their property attacked. Often, accusations are invoked of the persons concerned having tried to convert others by force⁴⁴. One pastor, John Lazarus, who is a Hindu convert to the Christian faith, saw his daughter kidnapped, never to be seen again; his son was stabbed to death by Hindu radicals.

In many Muslim-majority states, conversion from Islam to another religion or to atheism leads to a severe State response. While incidents of official executions are rare, individuals who leave Islam for another religion face imprisonment, intimidation, loss of property, physical abuse, denial of access to education, jobs and civil rights.

In *Jordan*, there are regular cases of Muslim converts to Christianity being taken to civil court and having their marriages annulled, identity cards and civil registry records cancelled and their children taken from them. Converts also face emotional and physical abuse.⁴⁵

³⁹ <http://www.refworld.org/docid/51826edc27.html>

⁴⁰ <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42664.pdf>

⁴¹ <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/resources/worldwatch/mali.php>

⁴² <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/09/20/rising-tide-of-restrictions-on-religion-findings/>

⁴³ <http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/country.asp?s=gi&urn=India>

⁴⁴ <http://www.releaseinternational.org/2013-campaign-india/>

⁴⁵ <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/resources/worldwatch/jordan.php>

In *Iran*, more than 300 Muslim converts to Christianity have been arrested since 2010⁴⁶. Most of them are accused of apostasy, face coercion to return to Islam and threatened with severe punishment, including the death penalty. The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (ICHRH)'s report states that "despite the Iranian government's assertions that it respects the rights of its recognised religious minorities, the Christian community in Iran faces systematic state persecution and discrimination"⁴⁷.

In almost all Muslim-majority countries, converts to other religions experience severe difficulties trying to change the religious status in their civil-registry documents. In *Egypt*, it takes only 24 hours for a convert to Islam to change their records, but it is almost impossible to have records changed from Islam to another religion. Converts are denied the right to manifest their convictions publicly. Furthermore, when a Muslim woman converts to Christianity, she is denied the right to marry a non-Muslim. Converts also routinely face denial of custody and inheritance rights. Open Doors cites a recent case of conversion in a Middle Eastern state: "A grandmother reported her son as an apostate to the security police. Her grandson, aged three, saw his father dragged away and return, traumatised, three months later. The family lived secretly as Christians, and publicly as Muslims. The boy's friends guessed he was a Christian and bullied him at school and in the street. Now a teenager, he is still a secret believer."

Violations of the rights of non-religious believers

In *Indonesia*, atheism is forbidden. Only Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism are allowed. Adherents of other beliefs or atheists are denied legal protection and recognition, and are often persecuted for blasphemy or inciting hatred⁴⁸.

Alexander Aan was given 30 months imprisonment term for declaring his atheistic views on Facebook. He was charged under the blasphemy law for "inciting religious hatred or hostility".⁴⁹

In *Turkey*, open denial of religious beliefs is considered a criminal offense⁵⁰. Fazil Say, a well-known pianist and atheist, was sentenced to a 10-month prison term for insulting Islam and offending Muslims in postings on Twitter⁵¹.

According to the International Humanist and Ethical Union report, in *Afghanistan, Iran, Maldives, Mauritania, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia* and *Sudan* atheists can face death penalty for expressing their non-religious views. In *Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Kuwait* and *Jordan* publication of atheistic views on religion is prohibited or restricted under blasphemy laws⁵².

1.3 Denial of freedom to worship, alone or in community with others

In many countries, the right to manifest one's freedom of religion or belief is unduly restricted. Religious and belief communities face disproportionate bureaucratic requirements, experience legal vulnerability, as well as political, economic and social insecurity.

⁴⁶ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/09/20/us-iran-christians-idUSBRE88J0V020120920>

⁴⁷ http://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Christians_report_Final_for-web.pdf

⁴⁸ <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21567059-ex-muslim-atheists-are-becoming-more-outspoken-tolerance-still-rare-no-god-not>

⁴⁹ <http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=news&id=1237>

⁵⁰ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/freedom-house/in-religious-freedom-deba_b_3140535.html

⁵¹ http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/16/world/middleeast/turkish-pianist-sentenced-for-twitter-postings.html?_r=0

⁵² <http://iheu.org/files/IHEU%20Freedom%20of%20Thought%202012.pdf>

Forum 18 reports⁵³ on the situation in Central Asia, where religious communities are required to register. Any unregistered religious activity is illegal and may be punished with fines and prison terms. Forum 18 has documented a number of violations of freedom of religion or belief by the *Kazakh* government.⁵⁴ The authorities in Kazakhstan closed down the Azerbaijani Fatimai Shia Muslim Mosque in the Almaty Region⁵⁵, the Tautan Molla independent Mosque in the Karaganda [Qaraghandy] Region⁵⁶, and numerous protestant churches.

Church registration in *Tajikistan* is a long and burdensome process. Tajik citizens are forbidden to travel abroad to receive religious education⁵⁷. Similar laws and practices are enforced in *Azerbaijan*, *Uzbekistan* and *Belarus*. In *Russia*, Forum 18 documents a range of different violations – the use of the 2002 Extremism Law against peaceful profession of religion or belief and the ban on certain activities of religious communities.⁵⁸

In *Angola*, the Muslim community encountered difficulties in obtaining the necessary registration as the law requires the collection of 100,000 signatures in order to legalize a religious community⁵⁹.

Christians in Egypt

In *Egypt*, Coptic Christians, the largest religious minority, have been denied permission to open new churches for decades. Many churches have been closed or destroyed since basic repairs, renovation or expansions require permissions from authorities, the vast majority of which are delayed or never granted⁶⁰. These illegal measures often lead to social hostilities, attacks on Christians⁶¹ and church destruction.⁶²

All over the *Middle East*, illegal confiscation and destruction of places of worship by State authorities is commonplace. In *Syria* armed opposition forces purposefully destroy or vandalise religious sites⁶³: rebels burned and looted Christian and Shia places of worship.⁶⁴ In *Sudan* the government demolished St John's Episcopal Church in Khartoum and ordered Christians out of the country.⁶⁵

1.4 Denial of freedom to teach, promote, and publicly express religion or belief

According to Article 18 UDHR everyone has the right to manifest one's religion or belief in teaching and practice⁶⁶. This includes the freedom to produce, store, import and distribute religious literature and materials, to broadcast information of a religious nature, and to publicly debate and discuss one's religion or belief.

⁵³ http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=233

⁵⁴ http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1780

⁵⁵ http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1778

⁵⁶ http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1769

⁵⁷ <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/resources/worldwatch/tajikistan.php>

⁵⁸ http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1722

⁵⁹ http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session22/AHRC2251_English.pdf

⁶⁰ <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/egypt-s-coptic-christians-must-be-protected-sectarian-violence-2013-03-27>

⁶¹ <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/08/21/egypt-mass-attacks-churches>

⁶² <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/08/2013816102257435227.html>

⁶³ <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/01/23/syria-attacks-religious-sites-raise-tensions>

⁶⁴ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/01/201312322462753542.html>

⁶⁵ <https://radiotamazuj.org/en/article/sudan-government-destroys-khartoum-church-and-orders-christians-out>

⁶⁶ <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

However, in many countries citizens cannot freely exercise this right. According to the World Uyghur Congress⁶⁷ in *China*, Hebibullah Ibrahim, a Uyghur Muslim, was given a 10 years prison sentence for “selling illegal religious materials”. In *Libya* foreigners have been detained and mistreated on suspicion of proselytising⁶⁸. Many Egyptian Coptic Christian missionaries working in Libya have been attacked, tortured and imprisoned for promoting their faith⁶⁹. The death of one Copt in custody has been reported. Observers noted the arbitrary nature of arrests of Copts⁷⁰.

In *Uzbekistan*, the import and production of religious literature is controlled by the government. Under the national Administrative Code “illegal production, storage, or import into Uzbekistan with a purpose to distribution of religious materials by physical persons” is banned. Therefore religious literature is often confiscated and citizens face a fine and up to three years imprisonment⁷¹.

1.5 Persecution under blasphemy and anti-defamation laws

Many countries enforce laws penalising expressions deemed blasphemous, defamatory, or insulting to religion or religious symbols, figures or feelings. These laws do not comply with accepted international human rights standards, resulting in restricted freedom of speech and expression. The blasphemy laws in many states lead to increased religious intolerance, discrimination, and violence. Blasphemy laws enforced in *Pakistan, Egypt, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and Bangladesh* allow for imprisonment and capital punishment for regular manifestations of minority religions and beliefs.

In *Pakistan* 17 individuals remain on death row following blasphemy convictions and 20 are sentenced to life imprisonment⁷². Specific cases of convictions for blasphemy, defamation, or insult are also reported in *Egypt, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia*⁷³. In *Egypt*, the number of blasphemy-type cases increased from previous years.

There are numerous cases of blasphemy, defamation of religion, or religious insult also in *India, the Philippines, Kuwait, Tunisia and Turkey*.

1.6 Denial of the right to conscientious objection

The right to freedom of conscience is protected by numerous international treaties. However, grave violations of freedom of conscience continue to take place in many countries.

For example, some religious communities refuse to perform mandatory military service on the ground of conscientious objection. Civilian service options for citizens alongside armed service should be offered, however, in some countries conscientious objectors face long-term imprisonment and are subjected to pressure to conform⁷⁴.

Jehovah’s Witnesses and other individuals who object to compulsory military service on the basis of their religion or belief, are facing imprisonment in numerous countries. There are currently

⁶⁷ http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/ngos/WordUyghurCongress_ChinaPSWG51.pdf

⁶⁸ <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-02-17/libya-detains-four-christians-on-suspicion-of-proselytizing.html>

⁶⁹ <http://www.persecution.org/2013/03/07/mass-arrest-and-torture-of-christians-in-libya/>

⁷⁰ <http://observers.france24.com/content/20130318-libyan-militia-benghazi-torture-christian-copts>

⁷¹ http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862

⁷² [http://www.uscirf.gov/images/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/images/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20(2).pdf)

⁷³ [http://www.uscirf.gov/images/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/images/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20(2).pdf)

⁷⁴ http://commissioner.cws.coe.int/tiki-view_blog_post.php?postId=205

conscientious objectors in prison in *Eritrea*⁷⁵, *Turkmenistan*⁷⁶, and *Azerbaijan*⁷⁷ and, until recently, in *Belarus*⁷⁸ and *Turkey*⁷⁹.

In *Armenia*, over the past decade 274 Jehovah's Witnesses have been convicted for refusing to perform military service⁸⁰. In the past five years 27 Jehovah's Witnesses have been imprisoned in *Turkmenistan*⁸¹.

1.7 State violations: eradication policies

Ahmadi Muslims

In *Pakistan*, the Penal Code prohibits Ahmadi Muslims from calling themselves Muslims. They are not allowed to preach, proselytise, distribute religious literature and meet in public; otherwise they risk imprisonment for up to three years and a fine. Ahmadi Muslims cannot receive legal national documents and therefore enjoy civil, economic and social rights⁸². Ahmadi Muslims face rising persecution and violence⁸³.

Since 1984, more than 200 Ahmadis have been killed in Pakistan on religious grounds⁸⁴. Ahmadis also face increasing official persecution in *Malaysia*, *Saudi Arabia*, and *Indonesia*.

Falun Gong practitioners in China

Falun Gong adherents have been facing a decade-long eradication campaign in *China*. There are numerous examples of inhumane treatment of Falun Gong practitioners, judicial killings, torture in detention, forced labour, prolonged detentions and forced renunciation of their faith⁸⁵. It is reported that over 3,500 Falun Gong adherents died as a result of government persecution. Falun Gong members have also been used in medical experiments⁸⁶. The 2012 USCIRF report⁸⁷ noted that Falun Gong adherents constituted half of the officially recorded 250,000 inmates in Re-education Through Labour (RTL) camps.

Non-Muslims in Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, Christians and other non-Muslims continue to be systematically persecuted⁸⁸. Freedom of religion or belief is not recognised under national law. Therefore, non-Islamic practitioners face significant economic, social, political and religious discrimination, as well as denial of employment and education opportunities. The country's religious police raid private homes and punish any form of proselytism. Non-Muslims are not allowed to be buried in the country.

⁷⁵ <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2012/world-report-2012-eritrea>

⁷⁶ http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1495

⁷⁷ http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1852

⁷⁸ http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1789

⁷⁹ http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1696

⁸⁰ <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66709>

⁸¹ <http://www.freedom-now.org/campaign/jehovahs-witnesses/>

⁸² <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2013/05/20130520147638.html#axzz2TrB1oDVh>

⁸³ <http://www.rferl.org/content/pakistan-ahmadis-persecution-violence/24992861.html>

⁸⁴ <http://blogs.independent.co.uk/2013/09/16/for-pakistans-ahmadis-a-depressing-tale-of-two-gatherings/>

⁸⁵

http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session19/A.HRC.19.61.Add.3_EFSonly.pdf

⁸⁶ <http://www.refworld.org/docid/51826f00f.html>

⁸⁷ [http://www.uscirf.gov/images/Annual%20Report%20of%20USCIRF%202012\(2\).pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/images/Annual%20Report%20of%20USCIRF%202012(2).pdf)

⁸⁸ http://www.opendoorsuk.org/resources/worldwatch/saudi_arabia.php

Baha'is in Iran

The Baha'i community is the most persecuted minority in Iran. Hundreds of Baha'is have been detained, interrogated, arrested and murdered. The UN Special Rapporteur on Iran stated in his annual report to the UN Human Rights Council that since January 2013 at least 110 Baha'is were imprisoned⁸⁹. Under national law Baha'is are denied the right to establish and maintain religious institutions. Baha'is also face discrimination when it comes to access to education and employment. Their places of worship, schools, cemeteries and other properties have been destroyed or confiscated by the Iranian government. Seven Baha'i community leaders serve 20-year sentences – the longest of any current prisoners of conscience⁹⁰.

⁸⁹ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=44889#.UkK5Voanplw>

⁹⁰ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=44889#.UkK5Voanplw>

2. FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF IN EU FOREIGN POLICY

This chapter will analyse how the EU is promoting and protecting freedom of religion or belief through its foreign policy. The chapter will first analyse the actions taken by the EU to promote a more coherent foreign policy amongst member states by creating the European External Action Service (EEAS) in the Treaty of Lisbon. Then it will focus on the EU Strategic Framework Action Plan on Human Rights which was adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) in 2012 and the actions taken by the EU to combat FoRB violations. Finally the chapter analyses the monitoring role played by the European Parliament.

2.1 FoRB and the external relations of the EU

The promotion of human rights and internationally agreed legal principles is an important element of the external policies of the EU. The previous chapter showed that freedom of religion or belief is under attack in many countries of the world and that the overall situation is deteriorating rather than improving. The increasing threat to freedom of religion or belief has gained the attention of many countries in the world. Countries such as the United States, Canada, and EU member states have taken specific actions to promote FoRB. The United States has led the way by creating an Office and an Ambassador for Religious Freedom as well as creating the United States Commission on International Freedom. More recently efforts have been made in Canada and in EU member states⁹¹. Thus, by making the promotion and protection of the freedom of religion or belief a priority, the EU is in good company.

2.2 European External Action Service (EEAS)

The Treaty of Lisbon provided for the creation of the European External Action Service⁹². This Service is responsible for the implementation of EU foreign policy and was created to make EU foreign policy more coherent. The EEAS is headed by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs, currently Baroness Catherine Ashton. She is supported in her work by EU officials in the EEAS headquarters in Brussels and officials in approximately 139 delegations around the world. The EEAS is becoming increasingly active and assertive with regards to the promotion of FoRB, which can be seen in the statements it issues, the organizations it supports and the policy priorities it defines.

2.3 Strategic Framework Action Plan on Human Rights and FoRB

In June 2012, the Foreign Affairs Council adopted a Strategic Framework Action Plan on Human Rights which aimed to make these rights central to EU policy. The action plan was a signal that the EU would prioritise and promote human rights in all its policies, ranging from trade to development cooperation. It was the first time that the EU had adopted such an action plan on human rights and followed on from a joint communication 'Human rights and democracy at the heart of EU external action – towards a more effective approach', adopted by the European Commission in December 2011. Prior to the action plan, the EU had made statements on human rights issues which were either thematic or country specific, as well as producing guidelines on different human rights issues. When the strategic framework action plan was adopted, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs asked the council to appoint a Special Representative for Human Rights (EUSR) to oversee the implementation of the action plan⁹³ and in July 2012, Stavros Lambrinidis was appointed in this position. The duty of the EUSR was to implement key objectives from the Action Plan.

⁹¹ <http://opencanada.org/features/the-think-tank/essays/bringing-religion-into-foreign-policy/>

⁹² <http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/>

⁹³ http://eeas.europa.eu/human_rights/

The strategic Framework Action Plan on Human Rights specifies three ways in which the EU can promote and protect FoRB in its external actions:

- 1) "Develop public EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief building upon existing instruments and documents, recalling key principles and containing clearly defined priorities and tools for the promotion of FoRB worldwide;
- 2) Present EU initiatives at the UN level on freedom of religion or belief, including resolutions at the General Assembly and Human Rights Council; [and]
- 3) Promote initiatives at the level of OSCE and the Council of Europe and contribute to better implementation of commitments in the area of Freedom of Religion or Belief"⁹⁴.

2.4 EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief

In June 2013 the EU Foreign Affairs Council adopted EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief. The FoRB guidelines were drafted and adopted after consultations between EU officials and the European Parliament, religious groups and civil society. In these consultations the newly established European Parliament Working Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief played an important role. Through an intensive dialogue with the EEAS, Members of the EP Working Group were directly involved in the drafting process of the EU Guidelines on FoRB. Many of their suggestions were also included in the European Parliament Recommendation to the Council on the FoRB guidelines. Thanks to the good co-operation with the EEAS, eventually the EP endorsed the guidelines as a good basis for further action of the EEAS.

By adopting the guidelines, the EU committed itself to mainstream these principles in its external policies. The guidelines are an important tool for EU officials to call upon as they try to prevent FoRB violations and promote FoRB in third countries. The guidelines clearly state the universality of FoRB as a human right and list the various thematic issues of concern in the field of FoRB. They also set out actions and measures which the EU can take toward countries that violate FoRB.

The guidelines are also of utmost importance to victims of oppression and persecution based on their belief. The victims should take initiative and voice their security/protection needs, cases of infringement, engage with the support envisaged for them in the guidelines, call on EU missions, visit embassies, EU delegations, and make contacts with diplomats.

2.5 European Parliament monitoring role

The European Parliament has an important monitoring role to make sure that the EU is fulfilling the objectives set out in the Action Plan. The European Parliament can do this by adopting resolutions during its plenary sessions, by holding events and by asking or writing parliamentary questions. Recently, the EP adopted the following resolutions with regard to the promotion and protection of FoRB:

- June, 2013 - European Parliament Recommendation to the Council of 13 June 2013 on the draft EU Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief.
- October, 2013 - on recent cases of violence and persecution against Christians, notably in Maaloula (Syria) and Peshawar (Pakistan) and the case of Pastor Saeed Abedini (Iran).
- December, 2013 - Human rights in the world 2012 and EU policy on the matter.

2.6 European Parliament Working Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief

⁹⁴ EU Strategic Framework Action Plan on Human Rights

The European Parliament Working Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief was officially launched in December 2012. The EPWG on FoRB is a group of like-minded MEPs dedicated to promote and protect FoRB in the EU's external actions. The role of the EPWG is to work with the EU institutions in monitoring FoRB in third countries and to ensure that necessary actions are taken to address serious FoRB violations. MEPs belonging to our group are committed to undertaking parliamentary work in the European Parliament to promote and protect FoRB.

The EPWG on FoRB aims to address issues pertaining to FoRB in a relevant manner, organising open and active discussion of these issues, debates the issue of FoRB in relevant Parliament committees (such as DROI, AFET, LIBE and EMPL) and delegations.

The EPWG on FoRB regularly sends communications to the EEAS concerning individual cases, organises and participates in meetings with representatives of the EU institutions, issues press and other public statements, and engages in an intensive dialogue with civil society, including with representatives of religious and belief organisations. The EPWG has condemned various instances of religious violence, such as the September 2013 bombing of the All Saints Church in Peshawar, Pakistan⁹⁵. The EPWG also maintains regular contacts with the US Commission on International Religious Freedom and the Ambassadors on international religious freedom of the United States and Canada.

During its first year of existence, the EPWG organised and co-hosted many events and delegation meetings in the European Parliament on specific aspects of FoRB:

- In April 2013, EP Vice President Lazlo Surjan, EPWG on FoRB member, and the EPWG on FoRB co-hosted in the European Parliament an event on religious freedom in the world in 2012. During the meeting Human Rights Without Frontiers International presented two reports on freedom of religion or belief in the world in 2012.
- In June 2013, EPWG on FoRB Co-Presidents Peter van Dalen and Dennis de Jong held a meeting with a Pakistani Delegation in the European Parliament. During the meeting, the Most Revd Samuel Robert Azariah, the moderator of the Church of Pakistan, spoke about violations of freedom of religion or belief in Pakistan and discrimination faced by minority communities.
- In July 2013, MEP Laszlo Tokes, member of the EPWG on FoRB, hosted a public hearing on the struggle of "Ethnic Chins in a changing Burma/Myanmar". The event in collaboration with the EPWG on FoRB highlighted the challenges faced by the Ethnic Chins, the majority of whom are Christians.
- In November 2013, Co-President Dennis de Jong and the EPWG on FoRB hosted an informal meeting with former Christian members of the Shura Council (the upper house of the Egyptian Parliament) in the European Parliament.

MEPs also asked numerous parliamentary questions, for example on Bahá'ís in Iran, on the treatment of minority communities in the Pakistan elections, on the unlawful arrest and imprisonment of two Ahmadi Muslims in Saudi Arabia, and on EU measures to support the Nigerian government in combating impunity and promoting freedom of religion and belief in the northern and central states of Nigeria.

⁹⁵ <http://www.religiousfreedom.eu/our-work/press-releases/>

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, we put forward concrete recommendations regarding both institutional and country specific issues related to freedom of religion or belief. The specific developments of concern that have been described in chapter 1 will be dealt with in the various country specific recommendations. Through these concrete recommendations we intend to give the EU at all levels specific guidance in priority setting and actions. The EP Working Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief will actively follow the implementation of its recommendations and use these for its own priority setting for its work in the European Parliament.

3.1 Institutional recommendations

Implementation of the EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of FoRB

- Now that the EU Guidelines have been adopted, much depends on how the EU will implement the guidelines and how delegations will use them. The EEAS will develop a more detailed internal toolkit for embassies in order for EU officials to be able to deal effectively with FoRB violations. **We recommend a continued dialogue between the EEAS and the EPWG on FoRB on the development and the content of such a toolkit.**

Introduction of a 'pôle religions' in the EEAS to deal with all matters relating to religion or belief in the EU's external relations

- **The EEAS should establish a horizontal focal point for religion or belief matters**, not only to deal with initiatives such as the Alliance of Civilizations, but also to cover the wide range of aspects of the role of religion or belief in the EU's external actions. This focal point would also be responsible for monitoring the situation of governmental and societal restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, and could report annually to the European Parliament.

Stronger engagement from the EEAS with religious leaders and organisations in the context of conflict resolution and reconciliation

- Religions can play an important role in conflict resolution. Religious leaders and organisations are not normally well placed to help in ending a conflict. However, religious organisations can be most effective in reconciliatory efforts. They often continue to be so, even when peacekeepers have left the country. Conversely, religions or beliefs can also be part or even the cause of a conflict. However, this does not diminish their role: on the contrary, religious leaders can be of major importance by distancing themselves from the conflict and preventing an escalation of conflicts. **We therefore strongly recommend that the EEAS engages in a permanent dialogue with organisations such as the World Conference of Religions for Peace.** This international NGO established national and regional inter-religious councils as well as a world council. It brings together religious leaders from many different regions and has long-standing experience with conflict resolution and reconciliation efforts.

Introduction of a special FoRB section at EEAS website

- No special page on the EEAS's website has yet been created on freedom of religion or belief, where many other human rights do have specific sections. In order to refer to the EU's efforts in the area of freedom of religion or belief, **the creation of such a special website section should be realised as soon as possible.**

3.2 Country specific recommendations

China

Although discrimination and persecution for religious reasons has lessened somewhat for certain groups, other groups are still under great pressure from the Chinese authorities. The EU must continue to raise the dire situation of Falun Gong practitioners, Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists and members of unregistered churches with the Chinese authorities. The EU and its Member States must emphasize in their interactions with the Chinese authorities that such violations will have to have an impact on relations between the EU and China. In particular, the current negotiations for an EU-China Investment Agreement must include a human rights dimension and any agreement must include a section on sustainable development and human rights. Furthermore, the EU can encourage a normalization of the relationship between China and the Roman Catholic Church.

Egypt

The EPWG on FoRB applauds the EU's strong engagement in Egypt and the current political process. When meeting Egyptian political and social leaders and in particular when pledging large amounts of financial support, the EU must demand an inclusive national political dialogue with representation of all parts of society. The EU and its Member States must also insist that both the Egyptian Constitution and Egyptian legislation guarantee equal rights for all. Religious minorities, such as the Coptic Christians, must receive adequate protection, be allowed to renovate, extend or build places of worship and instances of persecution and attack must be properly investigated and followed up. The EU and its Member States must also urge Egypt to seriously look into alarming reports of forced marriage and conversion, in particular of Coptic Christian women and girls.

Eritrea

The EU and its Member States must point out to Eritrea the consequences of international obligations under conventions it signed, such as the ICCPR, and the contractual obligations regarding human rights under the Cotonou Agreement. The EU Guidelines on FoRB provide ample tools for action. The EPWG on FoRB recommends stepping up pressure on the Eritrean government in particular with regard to prisoners of faith and conscience who often languish in terrible conditions and who must be immediately released. Furthermore Eritrea must recognize religious groups other than the Orthodox, Catholic and Lutheran churches and Sunni Islam, stop persecuting their members and adherents and allow these to freely practice their religion.

India

As the EU is deepening its relations with India and hopes to conclude a Free Trade Agreement, human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, should have a prominent place in talks and negotiations. The EPWG calls on the EEAS, the European Commission and the EU Member States to address the issue of anti-conversion laws, already in place in several Indian states and proposed in some others. The EU must make clear to India that it has an obligation under the ICCPR to abolish these laws. The EU must also demand independent investigations into instances of religious violence and extremism. The EU delegation and Member State embassies must urge the Indian authorities not to hinder the work of local and international organisations with a religious character that adhere to federal and state law and pose no threat of any kind to the country. Restrictions are currently in place, in particular with regards to organisations working among Dalit converts. The European Parliament in its relations with the Indian Lok Sabha should raise the issue of hate speech, in particular by certain Hindu groups and their representatives.

Iran

Now that diplomatic and political relations with Iran are slowly improving, talks between the EU and its Member States and Iran must move beyond the nuclear dossier. Iran is one of the worst offenders of the right to freedom of religion or belief. The EU and its Member States must make clear that the removal of sanctions will require not only giving up nuclear weapons ambitions but also tangible progress on human rights. The EPWG on FoRB urges the EEAS and the EU Member States to make permanent withdrawal of sanctions conditional upon, among others, the following FoRB-related topics: immediate and unconditional release of those imprisoned solely for their faith; abolishment of apostasy laws, or at least a thorough reform in the way they are implemented; and a halt to the persecution of Baha'is.

Iraq

After relative calm for some years, Iraq is experiencing a new peak of violence along sectarian lines. Although people from every ethnic or religious background are being made victim, smaller religious minority groups are particularly vulnerable. Despite this volatility the EU and Iraq have signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. The EU must now make sure that the human rights provisions in this Agreement don't become a dead letter.

North Korea

Although the EU has established diplomatic relations with North Korea in 2001 and many Member States have diplomatic relations as well, meaningful dialogue with the regime is very difficult if not impossible. The EPWG on FoRB therefore recommends the EEAS and Member States to discuss the complete lack of religious freedom and terrible situation of religious groups and individual believers with key regional players, in particular China. The situation in North Korea should be addressed in political and human rights dialogues with this country. The EU should continue to work on a strongly worded annual UN resolution, ensuring a serious engagement from key regional players. Furthermore the EEAS and Member States should consider speaking to South Korea about introducing a religious component in the reconciliation dialogue with the North.

Libya

This country is at a crossroads with the central government not yet in full control of the entire territory. In exchange for development cooperation, technical assistance and other forms of support and cooperation the EU must demand better treatment of religious minorities. In particular Christians, from Libyan origin as well as Egyptian Coptic Christian and Sub-Saharan African Christian migrant workers must receive full rights and better protection. The EPWG calls in particular on Italy as the EU Member State with traditionally the closest relationship to the Libyan government and authorities to use its contacts to promote freedom of religion or belief in the country.

Mali

This country has seen two very violent years. In the wake of the extremist takeover of the north, a country that traditionally has been relatively tolerant of religious diversity, shot up on persecution rankings. The EPWG recommends to the European stakeholders in the Malian pacification and reconstruction efforts, and in particular to France with its big political influence and to the European Commission with its massive aid outlay, to consider the following: every effort must be made to restore the destroyed and damaged Sufi shrines in Timbuktu and elsewhere and to retrieve looted property; instances of religious persecution during the extremist takeover must be investigated and perpetrators, where possible, tried.

Nigeria

Violence against, in particular, Christians and moderate Muslims in Northern and Central Nigeria is sectarian, not state-sponsored, but there are links to political corruption and incompetence. The EPWG recommends to the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) that it follows the example of the UK and US governments and puts Boko Haram on its list of terrorist organizations. The Nigerian government must continue its crackdown on this organization, but its army and police units must receive better training and equipment so as to avoid indiscriminate killings which are followed by resentment and more recruitment into Boko Haram. The EU and its Member States should offer to provide such training and equipment. The Government of Nigeria must furthermore do its utmost to prevent hate speech and incitement to retaliation on both sides of the conflict.

Pakistan

Pakistan's recently approved trade upgrade under the EU's General System of Preferences gives the EU a strong new tool for monitoring and pressurising Pakistan on human rights: the GSP+ monitoring mechanism. The EPWG on FoRB urges the European Commission to effectively use this tool to have Pakistan improve its human rights record. The EPWG furthermore demands that freedom of religion or belief is being monitored intensively under this new trade regime.

Concrete issues are the almost complete impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of terrorist attacks, by those who abuse the country's blasphemy laws by perpetrators of hate speech and by those otherwise persecuting and discriminating religious minorities. The EU must urge the Pakistani authorities to crack down on hate speech in madrassas, mosques and elsewhere. The EU must also put pressure on Pakistan to reform the way the country deals with the blasphemy laws and its frequent abuse with a view to a future repeal of the most dangerous sections including Article 295 (B) and 295 (C) of the Pakistani Penal Code. The EPWG on FoRB invites the EU delegation in Islamabad to use EIDHR funds to support organisations working to reform the current use of the blasphemy laws and assisting victims of abuse of the laws. European and Member States' parliamentarians are asked to speak to their Pakistani counterparts about how blasphemy law provisions are dealt with in the European context.

The EPWG is very concerned about reports that EU humanitarian and development aid is instrumental in the discrimination of religious minorities. During the floods in 2010 and 2011 reports were received of discrimination of religious and ethnic minorities with the distribution by the Pakistani authorities of humanitarian aid provided by the EU. The EPWG expects a thorough investigation into these allegations. Reports also persist of incendiary language and hate speech towards Christian and other minorities in Pakistani schoolbooks financed by the EU. In this regard the EPWG looks forward to seeing the outcome of the study 'External Monitoring of EU Education Sector Programmes in Pakistan', commissioned in March 2013 by EuropeAid.

Saudi Arabia

The EU and its Member States must not shirk back from criticizing Saudi Arabia for its total lack of freedom of religion or believe. The EEAS and the EU Member States must insist on the introduction of internationally recognised standards. Blasphemy and apostasy laws must be abolished and persecution of religious minorities, in particular Ahmadi's immediately halted. The EU's commitment to human rights must be reflected in the language of the cooperation agreements it signs with Saudi Arabia, which is currently not the case.

Syria

In the current violent and deadly chaos any meaningful dialogue with the Syrian regime or the various opposition groups and other militias is nearly impossible. The EPWG on FoRB considers two key avenues for action.

First of all the EU, its Member States, and international partners must put pressure on the various external parties to the conflict to not allow a further descent into sectarian violence. Russia and Iran, admittedly not the easiest powers to talk to, must be urged to prevent Assad from pulling Christian and Druze minorities into his orbit with the aim of tying their fate to his. Turkey, Saudi-Arabia and other supporters of the Sunni opposition must be urged to prevent the groups they support from targeting religious minorities but rather protect them in the areas they control or contest.

Secondly, the EU must have a response scenario for when the current onslaught ends by way of political settlement, victory of one side or the other, or peters out. This scenario has to include a strong religious component. Religious tensions in Syria could make the country descend into Iraq-like chaos and violence, even after the current phase of the war ends. However, moderation, reconciliation and a responsible attitude of religious leaders may have a very positive impact. The EPWG on FoRB commits to supporting preparations for religious reconciliation efforts in the post-war scenario.

Tunisia

The EU has invested a lot of political capital in this Arab Spring country. The EPWG would like to remind the EU and Tunisia of Article 2 of the Association Agreement which puts respect for human rights at the basis of the bilateral relationship. The EPWG supports the efforts by the EU under various agreements and instruments such as the EIDHR to promote democracy and human rights and urges the EEAS to not abandon the 'more for more' principle. The EPWG is concerned about the impact on Tunisian and expat Christians of the steady move towards implementation of more principles from sharia law. The EPWG urges the EEAS and the EU Member State governments to make clear they will not tolerate an erosion of religious freedoms resulting from such legal changes. The Tunisian authorities must also keep emerging extremist (Salafist) movements in check and prevent returning fighters in the Syrian conflict from persecuting or inciting to persecute Christians and moderate Muslims.

Uzbekistan

Despite being party to various international (through the UN system) and regional (OSCE) conventions with strong human rights commitments, Uzbekistan is a serious violator of the right to freedom of religion or belief. The EPWG calls on the EU and its Member States to work with Uzbekistan towards the improvement of this right, using the countries existing human rights commitments.

The EPWG calls on the EU and its Member States to follow up with Uzbekistan on the recommendations, including regarding freedom of religion or belief, it received in its 2013 UN Universal Periodic Review, despite Uzbekistan's rejection of most of these.

The EPWG urges the EEAS, the European Commission and the EU Member States to implement Title VII of the EU-Uzbekistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. This title provides for cooperation in the form of technical assistance programmes for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The EPWG considers that legal provisions must be made for the registration of new parish churches and that legal provisions currently in place prohibiting the printing and distribution of religious material must be abolished.

Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is a universal human right increasingly under attack. Although the EU has expressed a will to prioritise the promotion and protection of this right in its external action, more needs to be done. The European Parliament has played a key role in monitoring and addressing FoRB violations.

This is the first report on FoRB written by Members of the European Parliament. It presents not only examples of deterioration of freedom of religion or belief in third countries, but underlines the role the EU can and should play in mainstreaming FoRB in its foreign policy. The report provides country-specific and institutional recommendations. It is a unique and practical tool in understanding, monitoring and advancing FoRB in EU external policies.

The European Parliament Working Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief (EPWG on FoRB) was launched in December 2012. The EPWG on FoRB is a group of like-minded MEPs dedicated to the promotion and protection of FoRB in the EU's external action. To this effect, the EPWG on FoRB cooperates with the European External Action Service and with counterparts in parliaments around the world. The EPWG on FoRB regularly invites stakeholders, organises debates, drafts parliamentary resolutions and amendments, makes appeals and takes other actions to promote FoRB.

*Contacting the European Parliament Working Group on
Freedom of Religion or Belief*

www.religiousfreedom.eu

Co-chairs are MEPs **Cornelis (Dennis) de Jong** (SP, Netherlands)
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