

*To the leaders of European political groups and candidates
in the 2024 European Parliament elections*

*On behalf of the European Platform Against
Religious Intolerance and Discrimination (EPRID)*



Re: Advancement of Freedom of Religion or Belief in the European Union and Internationally

As the upcoming European Parliament elections draw near, we, members of the European Platform against Religious Intolerance and Discrimination (EPRID), wish to draw your attention to the critical value of the European Union's continued efforts in the advancement and protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), in both its internal and external policies.

Europe has a rich history of upholding human rights and individual freedoms, including the fundamental right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief. We encourage you to make it a priority and part of the EU profile on its external policies that support and protect this essential right. All human rights are indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. Ensuring that individuals of all faiths, or none, can freely practise their beliefs without fear of discrimination or persecution is not only a moral imperative but also a cornerstone of democracy and respect for fundamental freedoms. As candidates and political parties, your commitment to advancing Freedom of Religion or Belief within the EU and in its external relations is thus crucial.

In particular, we believe the following steps and actions need to be taken:

- **European Parliament Intergroup:** Support a renewal of the European Parliament Intergroup with a purpose of promoting and protecting the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion as enshrined in Article 18 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, prioritising the collection of a diverse political coalition of MEPs, and active participation;
- **Advocate for prisoners of conscience and those facing persecution:** Develop and strengthen mechanisms to advocate for the release of individuals detained or imprisoned due to their religious or non-religious beliefs and to provide asylum for those facing persecution;
- **Education and awareness:** Promote educational initiatives that raise awareness about the importance of FoRB and foster interfaith dialogue within European societies, as well as encourage such initiatives in third countries;
- **Support religious and belief minorities:** Develop or increase capacity for programs that provide support, protection, and humanitarian assistance to religious and belief minorities facing persecution or discrimination, both within and outside the EU;
- **Strengthen diplomatic engagement:** Advocate for the EU to increase its diplomatic efforts to promote FoRB globally, including through its bilateral and multilateral relations with countries where FoRB is at risk;
- **Institutional EU reform:** Strengthen the mandate of the Special Envoy for the Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the European Union with adequate resources; and, in

keeping with the European Parliament's call¹, urge the European Commission President and HR/VP to reform the mandate of the Special Envoy, such that it moves from the Commission to the EEAS;

- **Report on violations:** Publish annual reports highlighting violations of FoRB globally, putting pressure on governments to respect this fundamental right.

In conclusion, we believe FoRB to be central to the well-being of our societies, and we look to candidates and political parties competing in the European Parliament elections to champion this cause.

We are eager to engage in further discussions with all those of goodwill to explore concrete policy proposals and initiatives related to FoRB. Together, we can build a Europe that respects and protects fundamental freedoms.

Thank you for your attention, we remain at your disposal should you wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

Members of the European Platform Against Religious Intolerance and Discrimination (EPRID):

Association Internationale pour la Défense de la Liberté Religieuse

Bahá'í International Community

Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Conference of European Churches

European Evangelical Alliance

European Union Office of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Mensen met een Missie

Middle East Concern

Open Doors International

Quê Me: Vietnam Committee on Human Rights/International Buddhist Information Bureau

¹ European Parliament resolution of 28 February 2024 on human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policy on the matter – annual report 2023 ([2023/2118\(INI\)](#)), point 31.