



Permanent Mission
of the Republic of Poland
to the United Nations Office
at Geneva



ADF INTERNATIONAL

“Hard to Believe”: Trends in Restrictions on Religious Conversion

Event on the sidelines of the 52nd Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Organizers:

Permanent Mission of Poland, Permanent Mission of Hungary, ADF International

Co-sponsors*:

Permanent Mission of the Gambia, Permanent Mission of the Sovereign Order of Malta, Geneva Forum of Catholic-inspired NGOs, Jubilee Campaign, World Evangelical Alliance, CAP - Liberté de Conscience

Date and Time:

8 March 2023, 13:15 – 14:15

Venue:

Permanent Mission of the Republic of Poland to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, L'Ancienne-Route 15, Grand-Saconnex

Objective:

To advocate for the protection of freedom of religion or belief in the area of conversion by addressing trends in restrictions on the freedom to convert as well as on the right not to be forced to convert.

Background

Leaving one religion or belief to adopt another, or electing to identify with none, is a deeply personal and life-changing choice that should be respected by everyone. Both the freedom to convert and the right not to be forced to convert (or reconvert) are integral to the *forum internum* dimension of the human right to freedom of religion or belief, enshrined inter alia in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. As such, they enjoy absolute protection under international human rights law. Yet, in some parts of the world, people continue to be discriminated against, persecuted, or even killed for converting or refusing to convert away from a religion.

* The co-sponsors' list is provisional and subject to change.

Changing one's own religion or belief remains prohibited, restricted, or otherwise discouraged across different legal systems. Particularly harmful, in this regard, is the impact of laws criminalizing apostasy or otherwise restricting conversion from one religion to another, especially against the background of increasing social hostility towards religious minorities in relevant countries. Furthermore, state and non-state actors alike continue to engage in, encourage, or condone the use of coercion to convert or reconvert individuals to a religion or belief against their will. Religious conversion can be further undermined by legal restrictions on the right to persuade others to adhere to another religion or belief (or none) by non-coercive means.

Although everyone has an equal right to choose and change their faith, persons belonging to religious minorities, women and children are especially vulnerable to violations of freedom of religion or belief in the area of conversion. This is particularly evident in situations of conflict or insecurity, as well as in the context of marriage and family relations, education, or employment among others.

This event aims to bring together representatives from States, the UN system and civil society, as well as religious leaders and FoRB advocates to address the key trends in restrictions on religious conversion. The goal is to drive further reflection on what role the UN and the international community can play in advocating for and supporting victims, survivors, and persons at risk with regard to this fundamental human right.

Discussion Questions

The following provides a list of thematic questions that will be discussed by panelists:

- What are the main trends in restrictions on religious conversion? Who are the main perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses in this area?
- What are the ways in which restrictions on religious conversion, both in law and practice, drive violence, discrimination and other human rights violations?
- What is the international legal framework governing the human right to freedom of religion in the area of conversion?
- What is the scope of the right to persuade others to convert, and how can its respect be improved?
- How do restrictions on religious conversion specifically affect persons belonging to religious minorities, women, children, as well as their families?
- What are the best practices to protect the right to freedom of religion in the area of conversion and support victims, survivors and persons at-risk?
- What role can States, the UN and civil society and faith actors play in education, prevention and response efforts?

Event Programme

The 1-hour event will consist of a 45-minute panel discussion (opening remarks included), followed by 15-minute Q&A (closing remarks included).

Welcoming Remarks:

- **H.E. Mr. Zbigniew Czech**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Poland to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva.

Opening Statements:

- **Mr. Paweł Radomski**, Special Envoy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Poland;
- **Mr. Márk Aurél Érszegi**, Special Adviser on Religion and Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Hungary.

Panel Discussion:

- **Dr. Nazila Ghanea**, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief;
- **Mrs. Mariam Ibraheem**, Religious Persecution Survivor and Director of Global Mobilization, Tahrir Alnisa Foundation;
- **H.E. Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu**, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva;
- **Mr. Giorgio Mazzoli**, Director of United Nations Advocacy, ADF International (Moderator).

RSVP

Please confirm your attendance via email at broška@adfinternational.org by no later than Tuesday, 7 March 2023.