

**Forum on Minority Rights  
November 27, 2013  
Canadian Intervention  
Item on Inter-faith dialogue**

Thank you, Mr. President.

Canada welcomes the focus on guaranteeing the rights of religious minorities at this year's Minority Forum, a topic that indeed requires the attention of the international community and is a priority for Canada.

The Government of Canada supports interfaith and inter-cultural dialogue initiatives at home and internationally. In Canada, examples of effective initiatives in interfaith dialogue include:

- A public-education initiative in Toronto on diversity at the workplace engaging diversity management professionals and faith leaders in dialogue about the role of faith and culture in the Canadian work environment, where participants had the opportunity to investigate the ways religious traditions and spiritual beliefs shape and inform the workplace.
- The establishment of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation as a centre of expertise and active promoter of anti-racism and equality issues in Canada. In 2011, the CRRF undertook leadership of an initiative to create a nationwide interfaith network that will serve as a forum for discussing inter-religious and ethno-cultural dialogue and harmony.

Freedom of religion is a foreign policy priority for the Government of Canada. On February 19, 2013, the Prime Minister announced the establishment of the Office of Religious Freedom located within Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, appointing Dr. Andrew Bennett as the first Ambassador of Religious Freedom.

Under his leadership, the Office promotes human rights, works to protect all religious communities and promotes Canadian values of pluralism and religious tolerance around the world.

The Office also manages the Religious Freedom Fund, which has an annual budget of \$4.25 million to finance programs overseas aimed at advancing freedom of religion. Projects will focus on a number of issues, among them:

- Awareness related to freedom of religion by providing financial support to organizations for their activities, including interfaith dialogue and education regarding religious tolerance and pluralism.

In Nigeria, the Religious Freedom Fund has approved a two-year, \$553,643 project to promote interfaith dialogue and conflict mediation in Plateau State, where conflict has left thousands dead in recent years. The project will develop a road map to a peaceful resolution; establish local mediation capacity; create dialogue opportunities between community and religious leaders, and; improve the federal government's capacity to support conflict management and resolution. We hope that this project might provide a concrete example of the power of structured and sustained interfaith dialogue, which could potentially be used as a model in other similar situations.

Through the efforts of the Office and our network of missions abroad, Canada will continue to work with international partners to promote and protect freedom of religion and the rights of religious minorities through dedicated activities and initiatives.

Thank you, Mr. President.