

Background

In March 2017, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) launched the “Faith for Rights” framework with an expert workshop in Beirut. This framework provides space for a cross-disciplinary reflection on the deep, and mutually enriching, connections between religions and human rights. The objective is to foster the development of peaceful societies, which uphold human dignity and equality for all and where diversity is not just tolerated but fully respected and celebrated.



In his video message, the High Commissioner stressed that religious leaders are potentially very important human rights actors in view of their considerable influence on the hearts and minds of millions of people. The 2012 Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence already laid out some of religious leaders’ core responsibilities against incitement to hatred. Expanding those responsibilities to the full spectrum of human rights, the faith-based and civil society actors participating at the OHCHR workshop in March 2017 adopted the Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on “Faith for Rights”.

Beirut Declaration

The Beirut Declaration considers that all believers (whether theistic, non-theistic, atheistic or other) should join hands and hearts in articulating ways in which “Faith” can stand up for “Rights” more effectively so that both enhance each other. Individual and communal expression of religions or beliefs thrive and flourish in environments where human rights are protected. Similarly, human rights can benefit from deeply rooted ethical and spiritual foundations provided by religions or beliefs. Rather than focusing on theological and doctrinal divides, the Beirut Declaration favours the identification of common ground among all religions and beliefs to uphold the dignity and equal worth of all human beings.



The Beirut Declaration reaches out to persons belonging to religions and beliefs in all regions of the world, with a view to enhancing cohesive, peaceful and respectful societies on the basis of a common action-oriented platform which is open to all actors that share its objectives.

18 commitments on “Faith for Rights”

Linked to the Beirut Declaration are 18 commitments on “Faith for Rights”, with corresponding follow-up actions. These include the commitments:

- to prevent the use of the notion of “State religion” to discriminate against any individual or group;
- to revisit religious interpretations that appear to perpetuate gender inequality and harmful stereotypes or even condone gender-based violence;
- to stand up for the rights of all persons belonging to minorities;
- to publicly denounce all instances of advocacy of hatred that incites to violence, discrimination or hostility;
- to monitor interpretations, determinations or other religious views that manifestly conflict with universal human rights norms and standards;
- to refrain from oppressing critical voices and to urge States to repeal any existing anti-blasphemy or anti-apostasy laws;
- to refine the curriculums, teaching materials and textbooks; and
- to engage with children and youth who are either victims of or vulnerable to incitement to violence in the name of religion.



Rabat+5 symposium (December 2017)

More than 100 States, national human rights institutions, regional organizations, religious authorities and faith-based civil society actors participated in the Rabat+5 symposium, which was held on 6-7 December 2017 on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the Rabat Plan of Action.

In his opening statement, the High Commissioner urged the various stakeholders to implement and support concrete “Faith for Rights” projects, notably at the grassroots level. During the Rabat+5 symposium, sixteen civil society organizations and OHCHR’s Regional Office for Middle East and North Africa presented their projects and areas of future cooperation on combatting discrimination on the basis of religion and enhancing the role of faith-based actors in the defence of human dignity.

Furthermore, an academic initiative presented the “Faith for Rights” online platform, which will serve as an inventory of relevant actors and projects in order to disseminate the 18 commitments, collect capacity-building approaches and facilitate networking. This should also lead to strengthening the capacities of the existing UN human rights mechanisms by providing them with accurate and up-to-date analysis on early warning signs of incidents leading to violence in the name of religion.



Youth workshop in Tunis (May 2018)

From 2 to 5 May 2018, OHCHR organized a regional workshop in Tunis on the role of youth faith actors in promoting human rights in the Middle East and North Africa region. The participants included young human rights activists, religious actors, women human rights defenders, human rights educators and government officials.



The participants made the following main recommendations for follow-up:

- Youth in the Middle East and North Africa region should be considered as a key partner in promoting tolerance and combatting radicalisation;
- OHCHR should strengthen its support to youth-led projects; and
- OHCHR should also lead the development of capacity-building and training tools, especially for faith-based actors.

More information is available at www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/FaithForRights.aspx

Should you have any questions or wish to add your name as a supporter of the Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments, please send an email to: faith4rights@ohchr.org

The Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on

Faith for Rights