



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.



From theory to action: Parliamentarians against hatred based on religion or belief – Crafting pathways to more peaceful, inclusive and just societies

Online webinar series for parliamentarians organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in co-operation with the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFoRB)

Concept Note

The promotion and protection of human rights are essential for achieving sustainable peace and development. This is affirmed in the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which states that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”. Contained in this Declaration is a clear statement that rights are for all, without distinction, including the right to freedom of religion or belief, as well as the right to freedom of opinion and expression. These rights are enshrined in international law through the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which has been ratified by 174 UN Member States.

Despite this, societies are facing diverse challenges upholding rights and freedoms and promoting peace and inclusion when it comes to the complex issue of hatred based on religion or belief. A number of factors are at play:

- Hatred based on religion or belief drives a wedge between communities and contributes to an increase in distrust and fear – and sometimes acts of violence. It pours oil on the fire of ongoing conflicts, many of which have a religious or belief dimension.
- Hatred on the basis of religion or belief concerns both victims who are targeted because of their religion or belief as well as individuals or groups who use religion or belief as a basis to advocate for or incite to hatred against others.
- Religious literacy and human rights literacy varies, especially as it relates to the limits of the freedoms of religion, belief, opinion and expression, or to accurate understandings of the religions and beliefs of others, as well as erroneous interpretations of one’s own.
- Minorities are often subject to discrimination and are unable to exercise their rights.
- Social media platforms play an influential role in enabling the spread of hatred on the basis of religion or belief, which is often connected with disinformation.
- Determining the appropriate threshold for criminalizing hate speech, in line with international human rights standards, remains subject to various interpretations and applications.
- Hate speech can lead to individuals or communities feeling targeted and can undermine social cohesion, even when it does not cross the threshold of incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.
- Human rights and religious law can be in tension, impacting national legislation and the rule of law.
- Some politicians use hate speech for electoral gains, feeding populist narratives or employing a divide and conquer approach. Politicians, especially women members of parliament, can also be targets of hatred based on their religion or belief.

All of these issues intersect with the mandate of parliamentarians, who wear a number of hats when it comes to navigating hatred based on religion or belief. As representatives of constituencies, parliamentarians channel the voices of many, and as such must have their hand on the pulse. They are influential public figures, with the potential to positively and negatively impact social cohesion through their rhetoric and behaviour. They are also lawmakers, elected to protect and uphold the equal rights of everyone and the rule of law.

In the current climate, where global peace is in decline, division on the basis of religion or belief is on the rise and minority rights are an ever-present issue, parliamentarians are called upon to be responsible leaders and lawmakers and to work towards creating more peaceful, inclusive and just societies.

Objectives of the webinars

The webinar series will bring together international experts and parliamentarians to explore hatred based on religion or belief and its adjacent issues from both a theoretical and practical perspective and to share good practices in countering it.

In addition to outlining the international legal obligations of States, the webinar series will also highlight the grey areas to be navigated, discuss where legislation can uphold rights and where it begins to unduly restrict them, consider alternatives to legislation in countering hatred based on religion or belief, and explore the value of engaging faith-based actors in the upholding of human rights. Participants will be able to hear from MPs and experts in the field, including staff members of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and other international bodies. Following the presentations, participants will have the opportunity to interact with the panellists, identify challenges and share examples of good practices that can inspire others.

The webinar series has been designed to support the human rights literacy of parliamentarians, giving them the tools and confidence to take action when they encounter hatred based on religion or belief. The four webinars also serve as preparation for the second edition of the Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue, which will be organized in Rome, Italy from 19 to 21 June 2025.

Topics, times and date

Each webinar will last 60–90 minutes and will take place in the afternoon (CET/CEST time). Session recordings will be available for those who are unable to attend.

Webinar 1: Understanding and upholding freedom of religion or belief
Thursday, 7 November 2024, 15:30–16:30 CET

Webinar 2: Navigating freedom of expression, freedom of information, cancel culture and hate speech to uphold human rights and foster social cohesion
Thursday, 16 January 2025, 13:30–15:00 CET

Webinar 3: Digital challenges to peace, inclusion and human rights: The role of social media platforms in spreading hate speech and ways to counter it
2025 (tbc)

Webinar 4: When less is more: Alternatives to legislation when combating hatred based on religion or belief
2025 (tbc)

[Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue](#), Rome, Italy
19–21 June 2025

Participants

This event is open to all parliamentarians and parliamentary staff from national parliaments as well as former members of national parliaments belonging to the IPPFoRB network and members of the OHCHR “Faith for Rights” commUNITY of practices.

Languages

The main language of the webinar series will be English. Simultaneous interpretation in French, Spanish and Arabic will be provided.

Registration

Please register by 14 January 2025 on this [web page](#).

Recordings of past webinars can be found on the event page or on the [IPU YouTube channel](#).

Webinar topics

Webinar 1: Understanding and upholding freedom of religion or belief (7 November 2024)

- An introduction to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), including its absolute and non-absolute dimensions
- Responding to common questions and misunderstandings
- Human Rights Council resolution 16/18, Istanbul Process and Rabat Plan of Action
- How parliamentarians can promote FoRB (Rule of law / minority rights)
- Good parliamentary practices in upholding FoRB

Moderation:

Mr. Michael Wiener, OHCHR Indigenous Peoples and Minorities Section

Speakers:

Ms. Nazila Ghanea, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

Ms. Fernanda San Martin Carrasco, Director of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief, former Member of the Chamber of Deputies of the Plurinational Legislative Assembly of Bolivia

Ms. Rashela Mizrahi, Member of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia and network member for IPPFoRB Southeast Europe

Mr. Rogier Huizenga, Manager, Human Rights Programme, Inter-Parliamentary Union
Parliamentarian from the IPPFoRB Network (tbc)

First respondent:

Mr. Amadou Camara, Member of the National Assembly of the Gambia and Chair of its FoRB parliamentary caucus; network member for IPPFoRB Africa

Webinar 2: Navigating freedom of expression, freedom of information, cancel culture and hate speech to uphold human rights and foster social cohesion (16 January 2025)

- International human rights standards around FoE and FoI – their scope and limitations
- Cancel culture and its implications for FoE and social cohesion
- Options for countering hatred on the basis of religion or belief: Rabat Plan of Action and the six-part threshold test
- Good parliamentary practices

Moderation:

Mr. Rogier Huizenga, Manager, Human Rights Programme, Inter-Parliamentary Union

Speakers:

Mr. Raphael Vagliano, Legal Officer at the Center for Law and Democracy

Mr. Ahmed Shaheed, Professor of International Human Rights Law in the School of Law and Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex, former UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

Ms. Carmen Asiain Pereira, Member of the Senate of Uruguay, Member of the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians, network member for IPPFoRB Latin America

Ms. Nusrat Shabaan Hanje, Member of the National Assembly of Tanzania, network member for IPPFoRB Africa

Respondents:

Ms. Nazila Ghanea, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

Mr. Paul Hunt, Professor at the Department of Law at the University of Essex, former Human Rights Commissioner of New Zealand

Webinar 3: Digital challenges to peace, inclusion and human rights: The role of social media platforms in spreading hate speech and ways to counter it

- Hate speech – definitions and spectrum
 - How social media platforms generate and disseminate hate speech (algorithms, misinformation, disinformation)
 - The rise of the new prophets: influencers and oligarchs
 - Deepfakes and AI bots
 - Citizen journalism
 - Options for countering hate speech
 - Good parliamentary practices
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Webinar 4: When less is more: Alternatives to legislation when combating hatred based on religion or belief

- Risks associated with over-legislating
- Parliamentarians in their representative function (speaking out against intolerance, not using religion for political gain, consulting with faith communities, advocating for minority rights)
- Engaging faith-based actors for human rights promotion: Introduction to the “Faith for Rights” Framework and Toolkit
- Parliamentarians and the “Faith for Rights” Framework and Toolkit
- Good parliamentary practices (education, religious literacy, etc.)

Useful resources

Inter-Parliamentary Union

[Freedom of expression for parliaments and their members: Importance and scope of protection](#)

[Marrakesh Communiqué, Outcome document of the Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue: *Working together for our common future*](#)

[Manama Declaration of the 146th IPU Assembly: *Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies: Fighting intolerance*](#)

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

[OHCHR and freedom of expression vs incitement to hatred: the Rabat Plan of Action](#)

[OHCHR and minorities: Combating intolerance against persons based on religion or belief](#)

[OHCHR and the “Faith for Rights” framework](#)

[#Faith4Rights toolkit](#)

[Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief](#)

United Nations

[UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech \(2019\)](#)

[Detailed Guidance on Implementation for United Nations Field Presences \(2020\)](#)

IPPFoRB

[Parliamentarian toolkit to advance freedom of religion or belief](#)

[IPPFoRB publications](#)