

Peer-to-peer learning and action points on “Faith for Rights” (November 2023)



Overview

From 6 to 10 November 2023, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) organized a peer-to-peer learning week (P2PL week) on “Faith for Rights”. This meeting was the fourth edition of an annual gathering of “super-users” of the Faith for Rights [framework](#) and [toolkit](#). The P2PL week in November 2023 included distinct but related workshops among different stakeholders from complementary perspectives, focussing on the interaction between religions, beliefs, gender equality and countering religious hatred.

The exchanges brought together more than 100 diplomats, treaty body members, special rapporteurs, UN entities, religious leaders, grass-roots faith-based actors, regional organizations, national human rights institutions, academics, civil society representatives, minority fellows and staff of Meta’s Oversight Board. The participants shared twenty projects and initiatives linked to the #Faith4Rights toolkit (see [below under V](#)), discussing challenges they faced and lessons learned among the network of facilitators and community of practice for online/offline/hybrid peer-to-peer learning on “Faith for Rights”.

Several hybrid discussions were held with a wide range of additional actors who could not travel to Geneva for the fourth edition of the P2PL week. These included projects by academic institutions and civil society initiatives in Armenia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cyprus, France, Lebanon, Nigeria, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States of America.

Furthermore, a dedicated meeting was held on 9 November 2023 at Villa Moynier among religious leaders and faith-based actors to link the dots between the [Geneva Spiritual Appeal](#), the [Interreligious Platform of Geneva](#) and the “[Faith for Rights](#)” network. These three initiatives provide examples of mutually reinforcing platforms for the enhancement of human rights universality through engaging faith traditions as custodians of shared universal values of equal human dignity, compassion and solidarity.

On 9 November 2023, a [roundtable brainstorming](#) with diplomats focused on addressing religious hatred, in follow-up to the [Rabat Plan of Action](#), the [Beirut Declaration](#) and Human Rights Council resolutions [16/18](#), [52/6](#) and [53/1](#). A frank and constructive exchange of insights and ideas was facilitated by the procedural framing under the Chatham House rule as well as through the safe academic space provided by the Geneva Academy. Several participants appreciated the convening by OHCHR of this broad consultation process and suggested organizing similar annual frank discussions in a safe informal space which serves as a nursery for developing initiatives and projects that enhance the constructive role of faith actors in promoting safe and inclusive societies as well as in managing cultural and religious diversity in a human rights-based manner.

One of the workshops held in Palais Wilson within this fourth edition of this P2PL week discussed follow-up to the Practical Guide published by OHCHR and Equal Rights Trust on [Protecting Minority Rights](#) as well as collaboration with and among the current cohort of OHCHR [Minority Fellows](#). Another thematic focus was on religious symbols in sports, notably the situation of Muslim female basketball players and the *hijabeuses* vis-à-vis the French Football Federation, who were also featured in OHCHR’s 2023 International Art Contest for Minority Artists Working on Intersectionality Themes.

Finally, participants suggested compiling this snapshot of peer-to-peer learning and action points with a view to establishing and sharing experiences among an enlarged “[Faith for Rights](#)” commUNity of practices (see [Annex 1](#)) that could meet in-person on annual basis, with online engagements in between.

Peer-to-peer learning and action points

- I. **Key themes, trends and challenges** to be addressed in the area of faith for rights, as pointed out by the participants, are freedom of expression, political instrumentalization of religion (including the threshold of incitement to hatred) as well as discrimination on the basis of religion, belief and gender issues. The centrality of religion in many situations, including conflict situations and the relationship to ethics should also be considered. A missing priority that needs to be highlighted is the distinct but complementary roles of education, training and media.
- II. **Activities under the United Nations “Faith for Rights” framework** need to be contextualized and adapted to local circumstances, ideally led by local experts and stakeholders. Overall, religious leaders and faith-based actors should ‘own’ the local Faith4Rights activities. The methodology and skills of contextualisation therefore require a dedicated attention.
- III. **The #Faith4Rights toolkit** is a renewable depository of methods that has been useful in engaging with religious actors. The toolkit is a living document that needs to be translated as widely as possible. It should also continue to be updated on a regular basis. Current and new projects and experiences could be footnoted in the toolkit and/or website for the benefit of current and future members of the “[Faith for Rights](#)” commUNITY of practices.
- IV. **Participants shared a wealth of experience** from their initiatives based on the “Faith for Rights” framework and toolkit. Success factors and challenges include the following:
 1. The basis for Faith4Rights activities and its convening power lies in our common humanity. Human dignity is linked to the human being and provides the irrefutable rationale of equal rights for all human beings (rather than for religion as such). Interfaith dialogue should focus on human dignity in a programmatic and practical manner. The dynamics of the “[Faith for Rights](#)” commUNITY of practices can accelerate the achievement of this strategic shift from discussions to actions.
 2. Equality is the centre point of all Faith4Rights initiatives – everyone’s right to the enjoyment of fundamental freedoms and human rights, without any discrimination. However, discrimination is rarely flagrant and always resorts to twisted justifications that create hidden obstacles. A major question for reflection, research and action is how to deconstruct and unpack skilfully hidden discriminatory practices.
 3. It does not suffice for religious or belief communities to be tolerant among each other; they have to practically work together in favour of “faith for rights for all”.
 4. Connection, networking and collaboration is what sets Faith4Rights initiatives apart as multi-faith, pluri-sectoral, inter-disciplinary programs of action.
 5. It is important that initiatives do not only focus on religious freedom (in the sense of “rights for faith”) but that they promote all human rights from a religious perspective (“faith for rights”).
 6. The foundational strength of the “Faith for Rights” framework, and its direct relevance to restore the credibility of human rights universality, lies in the wide definition of “faith-based actors”. According to human rights law standards, this term should have a broad meaning to include all “believers”, which goes beyond the major religions and also encompasses all theistic, non-theistic, atheistic and other believers, as stressed in the Beirut Declaration on “Faith for Rights”. Participants raised questions for further discussion, for example:
 - a) Does “faith” also include “spiritualidad” as a spiritual intelligence/well-being (energy from spiritual practice and shaping motivation and activity)?
 - b) What does it mean to be spiritual or religious?
 - c) Are the terms “religion” and “faith” perceived as western concepts?

- d) Should State-funded religious institutions and leaders be approached in Faith4Rights activities? How?
 - e) What is the role of UN special rapporteurs and treaty body members, as well as OHCHR in combining the virtues of secularism with the requirements of FoRB and “FoRB Plus” (in the sense of the “Faith for Rights” framework)?
7. The space for faith-based actors to champion human rights issues is disproportionately affected by discrimination, human rights violations and atrocity crimes. How can the role of non-governmental faith-based actors be strengthened in such a hostile environment?
 8. On the other hand, engagement by religious actors and communities in favour of promoting and protecting human rights can contribute to conflict prevention and reconciliation (see for instance, Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process). What skills do faith-based actors need to acquire in order to assume such a responsibility, especially that they are often at the heart of conflict zones?
 9. Importance to not forget the achievements that have already been made – several religious groups were included in the drafting processes, that culminated in the UDHR and the Beirut Declaration, and several faith-based actors have played important roles in tension and conflict situations. How can these precedents be better shared and widely inspiring?
 10. Religious leaders have spoken out publicly against disrespect, intolerance and hate speech, including incidents of burning of the Holy Qur’an. How could religious leaders and faith-based actors collaborate, both preventively and in a remedial mode, through awareness-raising, education and joint advocacy for the human rights of all individuals and groups who are subjected to attacks and incitement to religious hatred?
 11. There is no need to redefine or renegotiate human rights. How can faith traditions therefore strengthen human rights universality?
 12. There is a need for communication and sensitization to transmit the values underlying the Faith4Rights framework. For instance, the interaction between religion and discrimination, including on gender grounds, should be explained in faith-based inspirational notes and pedagogical material for children and youth.

V. Participants showcased several academic and civil society initiatives that have been linked to or are using the peer-to-peer learning methodology of the #Faith4Rights toolkit:

1. [Gandhi-King Global Academy online course](#) on “Religions, Beliefs, and Human Rights: A ‘Faith for Rights’ Approach” (United States Institute of Peace, USIP)
2. [“Faith for Rights” Facilitator Guide Training Course](#) (International Center for Law and Religion Studies, ICLRS)
3. [Master on “Religion, Culture and Peace Studies”](#), including courses on Religion & Diplomacy and Countering Hate Speech (University for Peace, UPEACE)
4. [LL.M. and Master in Transitional Justice, Human Rights and the Rule of Law](#), including course on “Religions, Beliefs and Human Rights” (Geneva Academy)
5. [Globethics Academy](#) and related publications (Globethics)
6. [Peer-to-peer Learning Center for Excellence](#): human rights, religion and global dialogue (American University of Paris, AUP)
7. [UN Women Faith and Gender Justice Fellowship](#) (Office of Religious Life, Princeton University)
8. [University Diploma on Religions and Human Rights](#) (Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth, USJ)

9. [Regional Training on Faith for Rights and Non-violence Skills](#) (Academic University College for Non-Violence and Human Rights, AUNOHR)
10. [“Faith for Rights” Declaration and 18 commitments](#), translated into Greek and Turkish (Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, RTCYPP)
11. [Regional workshops on freedom of religion or belief and gender equality](#) in Caucasus/Central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East/North Africa, and South/South-East Asia (Stefanus Alliance)
12. [Competence Building on Religion and Human Rights](#), including in Brazil, Nigeria and Indonesia (Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief)
13. [“Faith for Rights” project in Nigeria](#) (Bellwether International)
14. [Religion and Freedom of Expression](#) (Association International pour la défense de la liberté religieuse)
15. [Beirut Declaration](#) and its [18 commitments on Faith for Rights](#), translated into Spanish (by REDLAD and Otros Cruces)
16. [Identity: Dialoguing with the Other and Myself](#) (Saffron Global Health)
17. [Working Multi-Religiously for Gender Equality](#), reassessing the role of education and knowledge in the digital age (Religions for Peace)
18. [Freedom of Belief Initiative](#) and [A Practical Guide to Monitoring the Gender Dimensions of Freedom of Religion or Belief](#) (IOG/Norwegian Helsinki Committee)
19. [Protecting Minority Rights through Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Legislation](#) (Equal Rights Trust and OHCHR)
20. [Minority Fellowship Programme](#), including for persons belonging to religious or belief minorities (OHCHR)

VI. Ideas for future initiatives:

1. Continue exchanges among the participants of the peer-to-peer week workshops through a [“Faith for Rights” commUNITY of practices](#) along the following activities:
 - a) Establishment of a commUNITY of practices (see below) and organizing annual in-person meetings.
 - b) Monthly or quarterly online information exchanges to be convened by OHCHR for academic/advocacy discussions in specific topical areas of “Faith for Rights”;
 - c) Host roving in-person events upon invitation by academic institutions, e.g. at the American University of Paris;
 - d) Workshop for reflecting on methodologies;
 - e) Joint publication by several participants;
2. Strengthen awareness-raising on the “Faith for Rights” framework, particularly in the education of youth:
 - a) Promote and connect, as much as useful and possible, existing and emerging digital platforms, such as those made available by USIP, ICLRS, USJ, AUNOHR and Globethics;
 - b) Improve education through review and creative additions to school textbooks and religious teaching institutions material (see OSCE Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools) as well as media outlets;
 - c) Introduce and adapt children-friendly well-designed modules of the Faith4Rights toolkit for use in schools;
 - d) Ensure the availability of resources for public schools, inspired by the inter-cultural and inter-religious education program at the municipal level in Chile;
 - e) Design concerted campaigns on TikTok and other social media platforms;

- f) Seize the opportunity of the annual meetings of the “[Faith for Rights](#)” commUNITY of practices to regularly produce podcasts that can generalise the benefit from their exchanges and transmit the knowledge they generate instantly to additional potential users.
3. Support faith-based leaders and actors in addressing current challenges, e.g. through national/regional meetings to provide support, upon request, for faith-based leaders on the UDHR and related challenges:
 - a) Confronting the attempts of de-legitimizing of human rights by some religious actors, particularly towards CEDAW and collaborate in this respect with the [CEDAW Knowledge Hub](#) and [advocacy for synergy of religion and women’s rights](#); for instance, a workshop in Rabat was co-organized by OHCHR and the National Human Rights Council of Morocco on 22-23 November 2023 with religious leaders, women’s rights experts, academics and parliamentarians from the Middle Eastern and North African region, in follow-up to the use of the “Faith for Rights” framework by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) [in dialogues with States parties and concluding observations](#); this pilot project under the CEDAW Knowledge Hub focused on advocacy and peer-to-peer learning on cases where culture, tradition or certain religious interpretations might impede women’s and girls’ equal rights in all spheres.
 - b) Harnessing the positive role that faith-based actors can play in conflict prevention, resolution and follow-up;
 - c) Countering the instrumentalization of religion by political actors through a collective independent voice via the “[Faith for Rights](#)” commUNITY of practices;
 - d) Developing creative information sheets and guidance notes adapted for various religious leaders and faith-based actors on how to counter incitement to religious hatred, in follow-up to the [Rabat Plan of Action](#), the [Beirut Declaration](#) and Human Rights Council resolutions [16/18](#), [52/6](#) and [53/1](#).
4. Increase cooperation among UN human rights mechanisms on the intersection between FoRB and all related human rights:
 - a) Use the existing channels of communication between treaty bodies and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, through the secretariat of OHCHR, to transmit information gathered by the Special Rapporteur on a country situation to a treaty body ahead of a State party review;
 - b) Increase information sharing by the Special Rapporteurs to the UPR process, by transmitting information to groups of States or networks of NGOs;
 - c) Increase cooperation with the geographic Special Procedures mandate holders;
 - d) Each treaty body may consider appointing a thematic focal point on religion and human rights.
5. Need to establish and regularly update, through a dedicated digital space, an institutional memory of the jurisprudence of the treaty bodies and of the Special Procedures mandate holders on faith related matters. This should help achieving a multipurpose desired outcome: avoid conflicting jurisprudence, progressively develop human rights law standards on “FoRB Plus”, in the sense of religions and human rights intersections as well as provide renewable learning material for integration in the #Faith4Rights Toolkit.
6. Foster more regular exchanges between the UN and regional human rights mechanisms, including the African, Inter-American, Asian and European systems on tensions and complementarities between religions and human rights.
7. Strengthen partnerships with academic hubs and input best practices to curricula, which would also help strengthening and further expanding the newly born “Faith for Rights” commUNITY of practices.

Annex 1: Faith for Rights commUNITY of practices

FAITH RIGHTS commUNITY of practices

The participants of the OHCHR peer-to-peer learning week workshops, in its fourth edition held in Geneva, both in-person and virtually, on 6-10 November 2023 decided to establish a network, entitled “Faith for Rights commUNITY of practices”.

Overarching goal:

To ensure continuity and mutual reinforcement among faith-based actors who contribute to the implementation of the United Nations “Faith for Rights” framework and toolkit in situations where human rights and religion or belief have to be bridged and where “faith” can stand up for human rights.

Objectives:

- To strengthen faith-based actors’ ability to promote and protect all human rights for all;
- To enhance joint inter-faith action, beyond mere interreligious dialogue;
- To manage and share the knowledge generated by an expanded group of experts and practitioners on all matters related to the Faith4Rights framework and toolkit;
- To regularly inject such knowledge into the work of relevant regional and international human rights mechanisms, including UN Special Procedures, Treaty Bodies and the Universal Periodic Review, given their engagement with States;
- To learn and collect experiences from practitioners implementing the “Faith for Rights” framework and toolkit (“Faith4Rights super-users”) and make them accessible to other users of the “Faith for Rights” framework;
- To generate and disseminate, both to States and faith-based actors, through relevant mandated reports by both the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, promising practices of civil society organizations, academia and other actors in the area of faith and human rights, and thus, generate and manage knowledge from practitioners on bridging religion and human rights;
- To share such knowledge in direct engagement with States, including at the Istanbul process annual events as well as States reviews under the treaty body monitoring system and the UPR, in order to enhance the optimal implementation of all international human rights norms and standards related to or affected by religion or beliefs;
- To engage directly with UN treaty bodies and Special Procedures mandate holders to draw on the jurisprudence, recommendations and authority of these bodies in support of activities under the “Faith for Rights” framework.

Main activities:

- Support the implementation of activities under the “Faith for Rights” framework and/or using the #Faith4Rights framework in any context globally, where interpretation of religious norms might cause human rights violations or at least hamper or create tension with universally established human rights norms and standards;
- Organize annual meetings for exchange of experiences through P2PL, analysing challenges and benefiting from opportunities in the implementation of activities under the “Faith for Rights” framework in both closed and public settings;

- Analyse trends and setbacks in the protection and promotion of human rights on the basis of or in the name of religion or belief, and compile good examples, to be made available within the “Faith for Rights” commUNITY of practices and beyond with a view to achieving a sustainable cumulative effect of the generated knowledge, lessons and skills;
- Foster regular exchange among the members, with the aim to provide advice to each other in the implementation of activities under the “Faith for Rights” framework in diverse contexts at the international, regional, national and local levels.

Membership:

The commUNITY of practices will be convened by OHCHR and will be managed by civil society organisations themselves, faith-based actors, academia and other practitioners of the “Faith for Rights” framework.

To participate in the commUNITY of practices, faith-based organizations and individual practitioners can submit a request to OHCHR to join and agree to contribute to the community by:

- Respecting and abiding by the “Faith for Rights” framework, notably the five fundamental principles outlined in the Beirut Declaration (UN Doc. [A/HRC/40/58](#), annex I, para. 10) and the 18 commitments (UN Doc. [A/HRC/40/58](#), annex II).
- Accepting to serve as coordinator of the commUNITY of practices for a term of one year (on a rotational basis);
- Organising or at least participating in a peer-to-peer learning session at least once per year;
- Making a symbolic financial donation or an in-kind contribution to the strategic objectives of the commUNITY of practices;
- Participating in the Istanbul Process meeting or submitting information on the implementation of Human Rights Council resolution 16/18;
- Contributing to annual reports and joint initiatives of the commUNITY of practices.

The role of an annual coordinator shall be defined by the community at large, based on self-nominations with the understanding that this responsibility will be equally shared on a rotational basis among all members. Coordinators serve for a term of one year and are responsible to:

- Coordinate with OHCHR representatives, including the UN Faith for Rights staff;
- Help to plan (and seek funding for) the annual peer-to-peer learning session;
- Collate and present an annual report on Faith4Rights learning and applications;
- Facilitate networking and information sharing among the community stakeholders, including through a biannual newsletter;
- Present the activities of the commUNITY of practices at relevant conferences, workshops and meetings, without speaking on behalf of the whole community;
- Prepare and help the next coordinator transition into the role.

The commUNITY of practices shall open its membership, upon recommendation by its members or direct requests by interested stakeholders, with a view to represent the largest possible diversity of religions and beliefs and to integrate diverse actors and activists who implement the “Faith for Rights” framework in various contexts. The commUNITY of practices shall exercise due diligence, with the help of OHCHR, to ensure that new members of the community have not been associated with human rights violations. New members will have to pledge to always observe the principles of integrity and respect as well as the purposes and objectives of the UN Charter. To this effect, the next meeting of the “Faith for Rights” commUNITY of practices will elaborate its rules of procedure and bylaws.

Annex 2: Hyperlinks shared during the Faith4Rights workshops in November 2023

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/faith-for-rights>

<https://faith4rights.iclrs.org>

<https://www.usip.org/academy/catalog/religions-beliefs-and-human-rights-faith-rights-approach>

<https://www.religiustrack.com/faith-for-rights.html>

https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Religion/CEDAW_Excerpts.pdf

https://www.humanrights.dk/sites/humanrights.dk/files/media/document/_%2019_02922-22%20freedom_of_religion_or_belief_gender_equality_and_the_sustainable_development_%20fd%20487747_1_1.PDF

<https://www.stefanus.no/english/women-and-forb/>

<https://inancozgurlugugirisimi.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/iog-gender-guide-en.pdf>

<https://www.saffronglobalhealth.com>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/identity-dialogue/id1673081440>

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15570274.2022.2065804>

<https://www.bellwetherngo.org/>

<https://clims.ch/index.php>

<https://www.article19.org/resources/hate-speech-explained-a-toolkit/>

<https://www.oversightboard.com/news/543066014298093-oversight-board-announces-seven-strategic-priorities/>

<https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Facebooks-Corporate-Human-Rights-Policy.pdf>

<https://oversightboard.com/decision/FB-QBJDASCV/>

<https://www.oversightboard.com/decision/IG-I9DP23IB>

<https://oversightboard.com/news/228158946731169-q2-2023-transparency-report-board-s-recommendations-lead-to-key-changes-in-meta-s-cross-check-program/>

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/publications/policy-and-methodological-publications/protecting-minority-rights-practical-guide>

Petition #BasketPourToutes in French, English and Arabic:

- [Change.org/BasketPourToutes](https://change.org/BasketPourToutes)
- [Change.org/BasketForAll](https://change.org/BasketForAll)
- <https://www.change.org/p/non-%C3%A0-l-article-9-3-oui-au-basket-pour-toutes-03f932fe-71a4-417f-beda-1c7d2533f6e6>