



The European Platform on Religious Intolerance and Discrimination

EPRID is a network of civil society organisations, religious bodies and individuals operating at EU level and focusing on religious intolerance and discrimination.



Following a presidential decree of 2006, in 2008 almost half of the evangelical churches in Algeria were ordered to close. Photo: Open Doors

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in teaching, practice, worship and observance.” Article 18, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations, 1948

Millions of people worldwide are victims of intolerance and discrimination because of their faith or belief...

Persecution in Iran

In Iran, seven leaders of the Bahá'í Community have been imprisoned since spring 2008. Arbitrary arrests and raids, confiscation of property, incitement to hatred, denial of access to education and systematic marginalisation of the Bahá'í community as well as other religious minority groups continue to take place.



Iran street scene. Photo: CSW

Blasphemy in Pakistan

According to one of Pakistan's three blasphemy laws, any person who 'defiles' the name of the Prophet Mohammed is punishable by life imprisonment or death. Non-Muslim religious minorities are not the only ones being paralysed by these laws – the freedom of thought and freedom of expression of Muslim intellectuals, dissidents and writers are also at risk.

Violence in India

Although India has a record of harmony and unity, in Orissa state 50,000 Christians had to flee their properties in August 2008 when massive violence broke out leaving 70 people dead and hundreds wounded. Early in 2002, violence erupted in the Indian state of Gujarat. That time, Muslims were the victims.



Victims of religiously-motivated violence in Orissa. Photo: Benny Manser/CSW



“The level of tolerance for freedom of religion or belief as well as for freedom of expression is rapidly decreasing. In my experience, both freedoms are central in promoting an environment for greater liberty and creativity.”

Asma Jahangir, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

Repression in Eritrea

Eritrea is one of the most repressive and secretive countries in the world, where religious freedom and other fundamental rights are consistently disregarded. In a move to control religious communities, the government banned all religious activity not affiliated to Sunni Islam and the Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran and Orthodox denominations in 2002. Currently, around 3000 Christian detainees are held in appalling prison conditions, while an unknown number of Muslims have “disappeared” or been extra-judicially executed.



Seventh Day Adventist church, Eritrea. Photo: Open Doors

Discrimination in Europe

Public authorities are reported as the most and second most important perpetrators of discrimination on grounds of religion or belief by Equality Bodies in Belgium, France, Lithuania, Northern Ireland, Sweden and Romania. In Romania, private individuals are the most common perpetrator and in Belgium private businesses, such as advertising companies and the media are given a first position, similarly to Sweden.

European Policy Evaluation Consortium, Study on discrimination (Annexes), 2008, p. 55

According to Flash Eurobarometer from February 2008, 11% of Europeans have been personally or closely affected by discrimination based on their religion or belief, making it the 5th most widespread ground of discrimination in Europe.



"When Jacques Derrida died [in November 2004] I was called by a reporter who wanted to know what would succeed high theory and the triumvirate of race, gender, and class as the center of intellectual energy in the academy. I answered like a shot: religion."

Stanley Fish (a prominent academic)

"Freedom of religion is not simply a human right, but it is a litmus test for other rights. If things go wrong in a country in terms of religious freedom, oftentimes other rights aren't at their best either. I even find that one cannot speak of real freedom of religion when religion has to be limited to the private sphere."

Mario Mauro (MEP, Member of the Bureau)

Why Freedom of Religion or Belief matters

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion, which guarantees the right to hold and manifest religious and non-religious beliefs alike, is one of the pinnacle principles of all modern democracies. Over the past decades, more citizens and leaders seem to understand the role and importance of religion and belief issues in national and international affairs.

As recent research has shown, respect for freedom of religion or belief not only contributes to citizens' social wellbeing, but also has a positive impact on stability, democracy and religious tolerance in a given society. Thus, promoting freedom of religion or belief is not only a moral or legal obligation, but also a strategic choice to be considered by policymakers.

As European societies face new challenges, such as cultural and religious diversity, discrimination and the relationship between secularism and freedom of religion or belief, it is vital that the EU addresses religious intolerance and discrimination in a timely and relevant manner, both in its internal and external policies. We want not only to spur dialogue, but also promote peace and mutual tolerance between individuals of all convictions.



What is Freedom of Religion or Belief?

Following the atrocities of World War II, Article 18 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion."

European Convention on Human Rights' (1950) Article 9 provides a right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This includes the freedom to change a religion or belief, and to manifest a religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance, subject to certain restrictions that are "in accordance with law" and "necessary in a democratic society." The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU likewise affirms citizens' "freedom of thought, conscience and religion" (Article 10).

Who is EPRID?

EPRID involves organisations and individuals from various backgrounds, including Bahá'í, Buddhist and Christian (across denominations).

All emails can be addressed to info@eprid.eu, and more information about our organisational principles can be found on www.eprid.eu.

