

## WHY IS FORB IMPORTANT?

*This information sheet is part of a larger series which also includes the ‘[What is FoRB?](#)’, which explains more about this right, its scope and what it means in practice as well as the ‘[Using Parliamentary Mechanisms to Advocate for FoRB](#)’.*

The right to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), according to Article 18 of the [Universal Declaration on Human Rights](#), is:

**“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.”**

By 2008, around 95% of all countries globally had made [Constitutional promises to protect FoRB](#). Almost every African nation protects FoRB within the human rights provisions of their constitutions.

**All African nations** have agreed that this human right is important and signed International and African agreements, including the [Banjul Charter](#) and [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), to say so.

**FoRB is an African right for African people** that helps ensure the **self-determination** and **dignity of every person**, regardless of their religion, beliefs, ethnicity, gender, age or socioeconomic status.

FoRB is a nationally and internationally recognised human right that **protects against and addresses discrimination**, violence and inequalities experienced by people because of their thought, conscience, religion or belief.

In fact, we all have our own religious or non-religious beliefs that form an **inescapable part of our identity, meaning and purpose**.

FoRB helps everyone to realise their full potential by being able to authentically follow their conscience, without coercion or compulsion.

Although nearly every country globally has pledged to support FoRB, there remain widespread FoRB violations:

- Laws, policies and government actions **restricting the ability people to enjoy FoRB** increased from 2007 to 2017.
- 34 African countries criminalise ‘apostasy’ and/or ‘blasphemy’ and 29 **criminalise ‘hate speech’** which can restrict the rights to FoRB and to expression.
- The UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB’s 160+ Communications with States since 2015 show that:
  - There is widespread State use of “extra-legal measures that violate FoRB and stigmatise religious or belief groups”;
  - “Minority belief communities globally experience significant discrimination and exclusion which is often entrenched over generations” and limits their ability to take part fully in public life.

For the majority of people around the world, religion or belief matters.

**An estimated 84% of us globally identify with a religion, according to the U.S. Pew Research Center (2017).**

Consequently, when FoRB is compromised through coercion, discrimination or violence, human flourishing is compromised.

**FoRB is important for achieving all human rights.**

FoRB is interconnected and interdependent with all human rights. Upholding FoRB is inherently impossible without the right to freedom of expression, association, assembly, for example.

FoRB violations may also involve violations of child, gender or ethnicity rights, and economic, social or cultural rights—including equal access to education, healthcare, housing, water and food.

**Peace and prosperity are negatively impacted where FoRB rights are not protected:**

- There is an evident link between FoRB and peace around the world. The Institute for Economics & Peace's [Global Peace Index](#) reveals that 64% of countries with 'very high' FoRB-related social hostilities are within the top 10% of the world's least peaceful countries (according to [Pew Research Center](#)).
- Restrictions or conflict involving religion or belief also create conditions that disrupt and prevent local and foreign [investment and business operations](#), which undermine achieving Sustainable Development Goals.
- 92% countries with "high/very high" societal FoRB hostilities (according to Pew Research Center) fall within the bottom 20% of countries in Legatum Institute's [Global Prosperity Index](#).

**FoRB is a critical tool for sustaining safe and peaceful societies that meet the Sustainable Development Goals.**

FoRB is "central to the ability of people to live together" ([Obama 2009](#)). It gives a path, that can be rooted in every faith and tradition, to tackle religious/belief discrimination and conflict. This helps reduce the number of refugees and displaced people.

Our thoughts, conscience, religion or beliefs shape our actions. Taking violent action because of our religion or beliefs—to gain or maintain power over others—is a FoRB violation.

## Peace & Prosperity

Even with other socio-economic factors driving violence, FoRB dynamics are reflected in many of the conflicts we see across Africa and the world today – for example in Tigray, Ethiopia and in Northern Nigeria and around the Chad Basin.

Despite these examples, FoRB dynamics are often overlooked in tackling conflict. FoRB is an important part of:

- Addressing the 1.6 billion people who now live in **fragile or conflict-affected contexts** ([UNDP](#)) and the 79.5 million people (and increasing) who were, as a result, forcibly **displaced** by the end of 2019 ([UNHCR 2020](#)).
- Reducing **humanitarian needs** – ‘80% of which are driven by conflict’ ([World Bank Research](#) shows that there is a strong **correlation** within countries between **high levels of FoRB abuses** by State actors and violent acts of terror (in the [Global Terrorism Index](#)).
- Developing **effective counterterrorism measures** without undermining their objectives by “[perpetuating, validating and normalising discrimination, hostility and violence](#)” towards certain religious communities which also builds grievances. There is a strong correlation between high levels of State FoRB abuses and violent terrorism ([Pew](#) & [Global Terrorism Index](#)).

**For all these reasons, FoRB is a human right that we cannot neglect.** FoRB is vital to building more peaceful societies and tackling inequalities that undermine countries’ sustainable development.

## Resources

Report: The safeguarding of freedom of religion or belief for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, October 2020, UN Rapporteur on FoRB, at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/ReportFoRBandSDGs.aspx>

Research: The Changing Global Religious Landscape (2017) – visit the website for latest data at <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/global-terrorism-index/#/>

Research: Promises, Practices and Consequences of Religious Freedom: A Global Overview, by Roger Finke and Dane Mataic (2019), available at <https://ir.stthomas.edu/cqi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1447&context=ustlj>

Research: Global Trends, Forced Displacement in 2019, The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), at <https://www.unhcr.org/5ee200e37.pdf>

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