

## 50 messages for presentations on FORB

The following table can help you reflect on and choose messages for sessions that you plan. Choose the messages suited to your context and your audience's existing knowledge level and role.

TOPIC	POSSIBLE MESSAGE
<b>Who is protected?</b>	Just like all other human rights, FORB protects people, not religions or beliefs in themselves.
	FORB protects people who identify with, believe in or practice old religions, new religions, religions that are traditional in a country and religions that are not traditional in that country. It also protects people with serious non-religious beliefs about fundamental questions, like atheists, humanists and pacifists. Freedom of religion or belief even protects people who don't care about religion or belief at all.
<b>What is protected?</b>	FORB is guaranteed by Article 18 of the United Nations International <u>Covenant on Civil and Political Rights</u>
	The heart of FORB is the freedom to have, choose, change or leave a religion or belief and the freedom to practice or manifest a religion or belief.
	FORB also provides the right to protection from coercion and discrimination in matters of religion or belief, the right for parents to bring up children in accordance with their beliefs, the right to conscientious objection to military service.
<b>General points</b>	Freedom of religion or belief is in everyone's interests. Violations of freedom of religion or belief threaten peace, stability, economic development and people's access to other human rights such as health, education, employment, the freedom of expression and association. If these things are important to us then FORB is important too.
	People of all religions and beliefs are affected by violations of the right to different degrees and in different ways in different places. Somewhere every group faces intolerance, discrimination and persecution.
	There are three types of problem for FORB - government restrictions on religion, government favouritism of one or more groups over others and social hostilities. These three problems tend to reinforce one another and contribute to a vicious cycle of discrimination and violence.
<b>The right to have or change religion/belief</b>	The right to freely have, keep, change or leave your religion or belief is an absolute right which means that, according to international law, this right may never be limited by anyone, anywhere.
	Many people are denied this absolute right and punished or attacked for their religion or beliefs, by governments, by family members or by groups in their community.
	In many countries, religious identity, national identity and the identity of the state are seen as closely intertwined. This can lead to religious minorities and people who leave the majority religion, including atheists, being seen as disloyal to the nation or a threat to national security.
	Government restrictions can include bans on particular religions or beliefs (eg Falun gong in China, Pentecostals and Shia Islam in Eritrea) or bans on leaving the majority religion (eg Pakistan, Saudi Arabia). Punishments can include the death penalty, imprisonment, loss of employment or the annulment of marriage and loss of child custody.

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	<p>Social hostilities include hate crimes where individuals are attacked because of their religious identity or beliefs, mob violence, forced conversion or terror attacks.</p> <p>There are significant problems in many Muslim majority countries (eg Egypt) but not all (eg Sierra Leone). Problems are not limited to countries with Muslim majorities (eg forced conversion of Muslims to Christianity in Central African Republic, legislation requiring converts to seek government permission in parts of India).</p> <p>Converts, atheists, dissenters and people who criticize religious ideas, or the relationship between religion and the state are particularly vulnerable to violations.</p> <p>The freedom to change religion or belief is very controversial at the international level.</p>
<p><b>The right to manifest religion or belief</b></p>	<p>Everyone has the right to manifest their beliefs in teaching, practice, worship and observance. To manifest means to express faith or beliefs in words and actions. International human rights law gives people the right to manifest publicly or privately, alone or together with others.</p> <p>This right may be limited in some circumstances (see limitations below).</p> <p>Both individuals and communities have rights. However, religious and belief communities do NOT have human rights over their members, (rights to demand allegiance/practice) but rights in relation to the state. One of the most important rights for communities is the right to gain a legal identity if they want to, so that they can hold bank accounts, employ people, own buildings and run institutions.</p> <p>UN experts have provided plenty of examples of activities that are protected by FORB, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To come together for worship, celebrate festivals and observe days of rest.</li> <li>• Wear religious clothing and follow special diets.</li> <li>• To have places of worship, cemeteries and to display religious symbols.</li> <li>• To play a role in society, for example by forming charitable organisations.</li> <li>• To talk about and teach religion or belief, and train or appoint leaders.</li> <li>• To write, publish and spread literature about your beliefs</li> <li>• To collect voluntary donations</li> <li>• and communicate about faith issues at the national and international levels.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What about when people/governments use their religion/beliefs/power to do bad things to others?</b></p>	<p>See <a href="#">ICCPR</a> article 5.</p> <p>Article 5 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights bans the use of one right to destroy other rights. So freedom of religion or belief does not give the state, any person or group permission to repress people, incite violence or carry out violent acts. Of course, a lot of governments and groups do use force or repression. But freedom of religion or belief doesn't give them the right to do so. On the contrary, it exists to protect those affected by repression and violence.</p>

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<b>Legitimate limitations to manifestations of religion or belief</b>	<p>See <a href="#">ICCPR</a> article 18 para 3. The right to have or change your religion or belief is absolute and may never be limited. Sometimes limitations to the manifestation of religion or belief ARE necessary.</p>
	<p>The right to manifest religion or belief may ONLY be limited when the following criteria are fulfilled: The limitation has to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provided for in law (so that it is not arbitrary)</li> <li>• necessary to protect other people – that is to protect public health, safety, order or morals, or the rights and freedoms of others</li> <li>• non-discriminatory (it should apply to everyone)</li> <li>• proportionate to the problem it seeks to address</li> </ul> <p>These rules are really important. Without them, governments could limit any and every group or practice that they do not happen to like. Limitations are meant to be a last resort, not a tool for state control.</p>
	<p>An example of a legitimate limitation to manifestation of freedom of religion or belief is the ban on Female Genital Mutilation which some Christians and Muslims claim is a part of their religious practice. Another example is providing blood transfusions to seriously injured Jehovah’s Witness children against the wishes of their parents. Here the child’s right to life is protected rather than the parents FORB.</p>
<b>Illegitimate limitations</b>	<p>Often governments ignore the above rules for limitations and limit a far greater range of activities. For example, bans on un-registered worship and limitations to the right to register (eg Kazakhstan), bans on talking about religion to others, censorship (eg Russia), raids and deportations eg Saudi Arabia), blocking access to places of worship (eg Vietnam), bans on or requirements to wear religious clothing (eg Iran, France), and bans on religious slaughter (eg Sweden).</p>
	<p>Social hostilities in the form of hate speech, hate crimes and targeted attacks on places of worship limit people’s ability to manifest their religion by creating risk and fear.</p>
<b>Discrimination</b>	<p>See <a href="#">ICCPR</a> Article 2. Discrimination is when some people are not treated as well as others because of who they are. One of the main rules within international human rights law is that states are not allowed to discriminate on any grounds, including those of religion or belief. The state may not discriminate and is required to act in an efficient way to prevent and stop discrimination in society.</p>
	<p>Discrimination is probably the most commonly experienced violation of freedom of religion or belief and affects every religious and belief group.</p>
	<p>Discrimination can take lots of forms, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- State favouritism of one religion over others, for example discrimination in the allocation of state funding to different groups.</li> <li>- Denial of rights, for example when some groups are denied the right to legal identity or to build places of worship.</li> </ul>
	<p>Discrimination on the basis of religion or belief doesn’t only affect religious activities. It can affect every area of life including marriage, child custody or access to employment, housing, welfare services or justice.</p>
<p>In many countries, a person’s religion is stated on their ID card. This makes minorities vulnerable to discrimination every time they have to show their ID.</p>	

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	<p>Often people are discriminated against for more than one reason, for example on the basis of both religion, and ethnicity, gender or class. In human rights language, this is called intersectional discrimination. This makes some groups even more vulnerable to violations of freedom of religion or belief, for example women, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, the LGBT community, migrants and refugees.</p>
<p><b>Coercion</b></p>	<p>See <a href="#">ICCPR</a> article 18 para 2. Coercion is when someone uses force or intimidation to make you do something. A core dimension of freedom of religion or belief is that everyone has the right to have or to change their religion or belief. Another way of putting this is that religion or belief and their expression are voluntary. This means that no one, not the state, religious leaders, family members or any other person or group, has the right to force their beliefs or practices on others. States are barred from coercing people and have a duty to protect people from threats or violence that they face from others in society.</p> <hr/> <p>Around the world, we see examples of coercion in the form of threats, violence or punishments such as fines or imprisonment. Coercion can also be more subtle, like offering jobs in exchange for conversion, or stopping people’s access to health and education if they leave or refuse to adopt a religion or belief.</p> <hr/> <p>Coercion can come from the state or from violent nationalist or extremist groups who coerce people to change their religion or beliefs or from the family/community.</p> <hr/> <p>Although the ban on coercion formally applies to people’s ability to have, adopt or change their religion or belief, many people also experience both state and societal coercion in relation to the practice of religion. For example, some countries legally require women to wear religious clothing, while others ban women from doing so. Women can face harassment from people outside their faith community if they wear religious clothing and from people within their own faith community if they do not.</p> <hr/> <p>In many countries, people whose religious ideas or practices differ from state ideology or from the social norm are affected by coercion. Minorities, atheists, converts or people with religions considered ‘foreign’ to the context are often affected. And within religious groups, people considered to be heretics, blasphemers or considered to be failing to practice their religion properly can be affected by coercion to change their beliefs and practices, coercion that comes from the state, their family or community.</p> <hr/> <p>Discrimination and coercion are often connected, for example, Baha’is in Iran are banned from going to university and from employment in the civil service. This discriminatory law is coercive. When a student or employee is discovered to be a Baha’i they face the choice between converting to Islam, and losing their position.</p>

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<b>Children and Parents</b>	<p>See article 18 <a href="#">ICCPR</a> and article 14 <a href="#">Convention on the Rights of the Child</a>.            Parents and legal guardians have the right to give their children religious and moral education, and to organise family life in accordance with their beliefs.            Children have the right to freedom of religion or belief, for example the right to be part of the life of a religious or belief community and participate in religious festivals or worship.            The practice of a religion or belief may not harm the physical or mental health or development of a child.</p> <hr/> <p>As children mature their own wishes regarding religious belief, education and practice should increasingly be taken into account by parents and schools.</p> <hr/> <p>Examples of violations include states that forbid children from practicing religion (eg Tajikistan), and states that force majority religious instruction on minority children (eg children to Alevi, Baha'i and atheists in Turkey). Religiously profiled schools that require students from a different faith (minority or majority) to participate in confessional their religious instruction also violate the rights of children and parents.</p>
<b>Conscientious objection</b>	<p>See <a href="#">General Comment 22</a>.            Freedom of thought and conscience are protected by article 18 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, alongside religion and belief, so the right to conscientious objection is part of freedom of religion or belief. Conscientious objection means refusing to do something you are required to do, because doing it would violate your conscience or religious belief.</p> <hr/> <p>Examples of things people claim a right to refuse to do include compulsory military service, taking oaths, receiving blood transfusions or participating in some medical procedures.</p> <hr/> <p>The right to conscientious objection to military service is protected in international human rights law. Many countries recognize this right, but some imprison conscientious objectors.</p> <hr/> <p>Many states also recognise other forms of conscientious objection at the national level such as the right of health care staff not to participate in abortions. However, these rights are controversial and international law on the topic is not fully developed.</p>
<b>FORB does NOT protect the following</b>	<p>Religious/belief leaders may not control the lives of members or materially/physically punish them for not following religious norms.</p> <hr/> <p>Husbands and male relatives may not control the religious beliefs and practices of women in the family. Women have the same rights and freedoms as men.</p> <hr/> <p>FORB does not give anyone the right to incite hatred and violence or to violate other people's rights in any other way.</p> <hr/> <p>FORB does not protect religions or beliefs from criticism.</p> <hr/> <p>FORB does not mean that the public sphere should be free from religious expression. On the contrary, it protects the right to manifest both in public and in private. Religious and non-religious beliefs and practices may be visible and expressed in public.</p>
<b>My own points</b>	