



Saara the student journalist 2 h

FORB, OTHER RIGHTS AND DEVELOPEMENT

ROLE-PLAY
GROUP EXERCISE

About the exercise

THEMES

Freedom of religion or belief (FORB), freedom of expression, blasphemy laws.

TARGET AUDIENCE

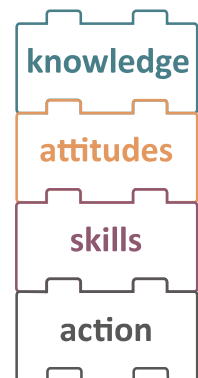
Best suited to civil society organisations, human rights defenders and decisionmakers/ public officials in contexts with blasphemy legislation. Requires a good understanding of human rights and FORB among participants, as this exercise explores complex issues.

PURPOSE

To help participants develop their analytical and problem-solving skills on complex issues.

DESCRIPTION

Participants work together in four groups to address challenging questions arising from a fictional case study and to develop codes of conduct for different sectors of society.



Instructions

RESOURCES AND ADVANCE PREPARATION

- Print one copy of the scenario [handout](#) 'Saara the student journalist' for each participant.
- Write the group discussion questions (1-4) on separate flipchart sheets, creating one set of four sheets for each of the four groups.
- Marker pens for each group.
- Browse through the recommendations given in the following United Nations documents. '[The Rabat plan of action on the prohibition of incitement](#)' and the '[Action plan for religious leaders and actors to prevent incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes](#)'. This will help you support participants as they work with their codes of conduct.

Find the scenario on [page 273](#). Find the scenario handout and the UN documents referred to at www.forb-learning.org/exercises/student-journalist.

HOW TO INTRODUCE THE EXERCISE 5 MIN

Distribute a copy of the scenario to each participant and read it aloud to the group.

Explain that the participants are going to work together in small groups to discuss how to handle these complex issues. Divide the participants into four groups and ask each group to appoint a spokesperson.

HOW TO RUN THE EXERCISE 1 H 45 MIN

- **GROUP DISCUSSION** (30 MIN)

Give each group marker pens and the four pre-prepared flipchart sheets with questions 1 to 4 written up. Ask them to record their answers on the flipchart sheets.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What risks and vulnerabilities did the blasphemy law contribute to in this scenario? How did the blasphemy law interrelate to other problems in Saraa's society.
2. How do blasphemy laws create risks in your context? What do those risks look like?
3. Should any of the speech/expression illustrated in this case be limited by law? Why/why not?
4. In your context, what advantages or disadvantages would there be to having 'hate speech' laws that restrict incitement to violence, as compared to blasphemy laws?

- **PLENARY FEEDBACK** (20 MIN)

Ask the spokesperson for group 1 to share their answer to the first question. Ask the other groups if they agree or disagree or have anything to add. If any group disagrees, ask them to explain their reasoning. Continue with question 2 to the group 2 spokesperson and so on.

Round off the feedback session with some general comments such as the following: It can seem logical and moral to ban offensive speech and behaviour, in order to protect social harmony. It is, however, impossible to define what is offensive. Some people are offended by the mere existence of ideas other than their own. According to international law, the speech that should be banned is hate speech that incites discrimination, hatred and violence. Laws on blasphemy, apostasy and 'protecting social harmony' are usually much broader than this. They tend to:

- be vague making it hard to know what is considered illegal.
- define offence from a majority perspective (in practice if not in theory).
- be open to abuse and false accusations – it's hard to prove you didn't say something.
- encourage violence by supporting the idea that we should punish people who peacefully express beliefs that the majority don't like.
- result in people who peacefully express their beliefs being blamed for social tensions. People who react to peaceful expression with hatred and violence should bear that responsibility.

- **ROLE-PLAY DISCUSSION** (25 MIN)

Ask participants to return to their groups and explain that they are now going to do a role-play exercise in which they will imagine that they live and work in Saara's city. Give each group a role:

Group 1 is a group of local politicians and a national member of parliament for Saara's city.

Group 2 is the interfaith council of the city – a group of faith leaders.

Group 3 is an informal network of journalists and media outlets in the city.

Group 4 is the board of the education department, that employs school and university staff in the city.

TIP! In some contexts, this might be challenging to facilitate. Build your confidence as a facilitator by reviewing our '[Tips for facilitators](#)' on page 282 and '[Responding to tricky questions](#)' on page 286.

TIP! This exercise is long and requires concentration. Why not schedule a break or introduce an energiser at this point. Find inspiration in the '[Icebreakers and energisers](#)' section on page 10.

Tell everyone that their group has gathered together in the light of what has happened to Saara, because they are concerned by the impact blasphemy accusations, hate speech and violence are having on the community. They are concerned that politicians, faith leaders, journalists and educational institutions are, at times, contributing to the problems.

Each group has decided to develop a code of conduct for their own sector – a list of dos and don'ts for politicians, faith leaders, journalists or schools/universities.

Ask the groups to spend 20 minutes writing their code of conduct on a flipchart sheet. They should appoint a note-taker and a rapporteur.

• **PRESENTATIONS AND FEEDBACK** (30 MIN)

Invite each group to present their conclusions. After each presentation invite the other groups to share their thoughts. Which suggestions would be most important or effective? Are there any dos or don'ts they would want to add to the list. Are any of the ideas presented problematic?

HOW TO CONCLUDE THE EXERCISE 10 MIN

Thank participants for their engagement in this process. Invite them to share their reflections – how did they find this exercise?

Thank them for their thoughts and conclude with the following points:

- In this exercise we have reflected on problematic aspects of blasphemy laws and explored how such legislation can interplay with other problems in society such as corruption and intolerance.
- We have also brainstormed codes of conduct for the kind of faith leaders, politicians, teachers and journalists we would like to see in our communities.
- It might be helpful to know that the United Nations has developed a few tools relating to this that might be useful. The [Rabat Plan of Action](#) sets out the role and responsibilities of States and other actors in countering hate speech, and there is a [United Nations Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors](#) to prevent incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes. (Provide copies of these if relevant to your audience).

Finish the exercise by inviting participants to spend a few minutes in silence trying to think of ONE thing they or their organisation could do to contribute to such codes of conduct or action plans being developed, disseminated or put into practice.

Source

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