



UNIVERSAL RIGHTS GROUP



Protecting Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Religion or Belief for All:

Enhancing Efforts to Consolidate and Implement HRC Resolution 16/18

Tuesday, 10 March 2015, 16:30 – 18:00

Room XXII, Palais des Nations, UN in Geneva

Challenges to the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief, as well as rising religious intolerance and discrimination, increasingly threaten the ability of people around the world to enjoy their basic human rights.

Recent events starkly demonstrate the urgent need for the international community to comprehensively address this issue. All people, in all countries, of all faiths or none, are affected; the attacks against Charlie Hebdo and a Kosher Supermarket in Paris and the murders in Copenhagen; the murder of Muslim students in North Carolina; the anti-Muslim marches in Germany; the flogging of Raif Badawi in Saudi Arabia; the on-going persecution of Muslims and other religious minorities in Burma/Myanmar and in Sri Lanka; the mass executions of Coptic Christian migrant workers in Libya... The list goes on.

In the face of violent attacks such as these, the universality of human rights is often questioned. However, as Human Rights Council resolution 16/18 and the Rabat Plan of Action make clear, the promotion and protection of all human rights, in particular freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief, is the only way to effectively counter intolerance and discrimination and prevent associated violence.

In spite of the international community agreeing on a “road map” of action in resolution 16/18 and the Rabat Plan of Action, the increased attacks and threats against human rights defenders around the world demonstrate that protection for rights on the ground is backsliding, and the space for civil society to freely operate to work against this trend is shrinking.

Blasphemy laws and broad or vague criminal prohibitions on expression deemed unwelcome by governments, or provisions on “incitement to hatred”, are applied to silence minority groups and dissident voices. Minority representatives are denied the platforms to speak out and be heard, further exacerbating tensions. Violence against these groups is often incited by influential public figures with total impunity. Human rights defenders and journalists who attempt to inform the public and question social, religious or political taboos, are also at serious risk.

Join us during the 28th Session of the Human Rights Council to discuss:

- What global and local challenges do we face in protecting and promoting the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of religion or belief, and non-discrimination?
- What more must States and other stakeholders do to translate 16/18 and the Rabat Plan of Action into legal and policy changes on the ground, to counter the backsliding in rights protection?
- What must the UN do to consolidate the consensus of 16/18 and support its implementation?

Panelists **Heiner Bielefeldt**, Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of religion or belief, UN
Ibn Abdur Rehman, Secretary-General, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Pakistan
Wai Wai Nu, Director, Women Peace Network Arakan, Burma/Myanmar
Michelle Yesudas, Lawyer, Lawyers for Liberty, Malaysia
Brian Dooley, Director, Human Rights Defenders Program, Human Rights First
Christophe Deloire, Secretary-General, Reporters Without Borders

Moderator **Andrew Smith**, Legal Officer, ARTICLE 19

Introductory remarks by **Nicolas Agostini**, Representative to the UN, FIDH