

**Panel discussion on**  
***“Gender Justice and Religion:  
Women as Agents of Positive Change”***

**27 November 2013, 1:00 to 3:00 PM**  
**Room XXII Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland**

This discussion aims to examine the role of women in fostering intercommunity tolerance and dialogue while considering the specific challenges that women belonging to religious minorities face, both within and outside of their religious communities. Women belonging to religious minorities face additional obstacles to achieving equality. They not only struggle to overcome the disadvantages resulting from being part of a minority group, but also the restrictions faced simply by the fact of being women and stereotypical views that relegate them primarily to roles as housewives and mothers. There is a need to address the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that women from religious minorities face.

The engagement of women in gender justice is critical in order to challenge patriarchal structures that should not be legitimized by religion. Women’s engagement in intra-religious dialogue is crucial, especially when it comes to gender issues. Moving away from simple rhetoric and towards joint action, women can demonstrate the potential for dialogue, as well as the positive role that can be played by religions, which is often underestimated and sometimes even neglected by religious leaders. Religions are not static. Theology should adapt according to the need to find new answers to new questions in evolving circumstances. Women have increasingly become aware of the need to challenge religious arguments that restrict their rights *“for their own good”* or *“for their protection”*. Women have realized the empowerment gained by becoming actively involved and stepping away from a “victim” perspective. Furthering this discussion should entail approaching religion as part of the solution rather than the problem.

**This panel discussion shall:**

- Promote gender justice from a human rights and religious freedom’s perspective
- Present examples of good practices and opportunities for future activities
- Give more visibility to women’s activities
- Enable participants to expand their network

**Speakers**

- **Ms Carla Amina Baghajati**, Chair/Facilitator
- **Ms Rita Izsák**, Independent Expert on minority issues, Co-facilitator
- **Prof. Heiner Bielefeldt**, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief
- **Rabbi Nava Hefetz**, Director of Education at Rabbis for Human Rights
- **Ms Sophia Khan**, Executive Director of Social Action Forum Against Repression
- **Ms María Concepción Medina González**, member of the Latin American Consortium for Freedom of Religion
- **Fr Rif’at Bader**, Director of the Catholic Center for Studies and Media