

## 18 Commitments on “Faith for Rights”

We, faith-based and civil society actors working in the field of human rights and gathered in Beirut on 28-29 March 2017, express the deep conviction that our respective religions and beliefs share a common commitment to **upholding the dignity and the equal worth of all human beings**. Shared human values and equal dignity are therefore common roots of our cultures. Faith and rights should be mutually reinforcing spheres. Individual and communal expression of religions or beliefs thrive and flourish in environments where human rights, based on the equal worth of all individuals, are protected. Similarly, human rights can benefit from deeply rooted ethical and spiritual foundations provided by religions or beliefs.

The **present declaration on “Faith for Rights” reaches out to persons belonging to religions and beliefs in all regions** of the world, with a view to enhancing cohesive, peaceful and respectful societies on the basis of a common action-oriented platform agreed by all concerned and open to all actors that share its objectives. We value that our declaration on Faith for Rights, like its founding precedent the Rabat Plan of Action, were both conceived and conducted under the auspices and with the support of the United Nations that represents all peoples of the world, and enriched by UN human rights mechanisms such as Special Rapporteurs and Treaty Body members.

The 2012 **Rabat Plan of Action**<sup>1</sup> articulates three specific core responsibilities of religious leaders: (a) Religious leaders should refrain from using messages of intolerance or expressions which may incite violence, hostility or discrimination; (b) Religious leaders also have a crucial role to play in speaking out firmly and promptly against intolerance, discriminatory stereotyping and instances of hate speech; and (c) Religious leaders should be clear that violence can never be tolerated as a response to incitement to hatred (e.g. violence cannot be justified by prior provocation).

In order to give concrete effect to the above three core responsibilities articulated by the Rabat Plan of Action, which has repeatedly been positively invoked by States, we formulate the following chart of **18 commitments on “Faith for Rights”**,<sup>2</sup> including corresponding follow-up actions:

- I. Our most fundamental responsibility is to **stand up and act for everyone’s right to free choices** and particularly for everyone’s freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief. We affirm our commitment to the universal norms<sup>3</sup> and standards<sup>4</sup>, including Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which does not permit any limitations whatsoever on the freedom of thought and conscience or on the freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief of one’s choice. These freedoms, unconditionally protected by universal norms, are also sacred and inalienable entitlements according to religious teachings.
  - *“There shall be no compulsion in religion.” (Qu’ran 2:256);*
  - *“The Truth is from your Lord; so let he or she who please believe and let he or she who please disbelieve” (Qu’ran 18:29);*
  - *“But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...” (Joshua 24:15)*
  - *“No one shall coerce another; no one shall exploit another. Everyone, each individual, has the inalienable birth right to seek and pursue happiness and self-fulfilment. Love and persuasion is the only law of social coherence.” (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 74)*
  - *“When freedom of conscience, liberty of thought and right of speech prevail—that is to say, when every man according to his own idealization may give expression to his beliefs—development and growth are inevitable.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá)*
  - *“People should aim to treat each other as they would like to be treated themselves – with tolerance, consideration and compassion.” (Golden Rule)<sup>5</sup>*
- II. We see the present declaration on “Faith for Rights” as a **common minimum standard for believers (whether theistic, non-theistic, atheistic or other)**, based on our conviction that interpretations of religion or belief should add to the level of protection of human dignity that human-made laws provide for.
- III. As religions are necessarily subject to human interpretations, we commit to **promote constructive engagement on the understanding of religious texts**. Consequently, critical thinking and debate on religious matters should not only be tolerated but rather encouraged as a requirement for

enlightened religious interpretations in a globalized world composed of increasingly multi-cultural and multi-religious societies that are constantly facing evolving challenges.

- IV. We pledge to **support and promote equal treatment** in all areas and manifestations of religion or belief and to denounce all forms of discriminatory practices. We commit to **prevent the use of the notion of “State religion” to discriminate against any individual or group** and we consider any such interpretation as contrary to the oneness of humanity and equal dignity of humankind. Similarly, we commit to prevent the use of “doctrinal secularism” from reducing the space for religious or belief pluralism in practice.
- *“Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism.’” (Acts 10:34)*
- V. We pledge to **ensure non-discrimination and gender equality** in implementing this declaration on “Faith for Rights”. We specifically commit to revisit, each within our respective areas of competence, those religious understandings and interpretations that appear to perpetuate gender inequality and harmful stereotypes or even condone gender-based violence. We pledge to ensure justice and equal worth of everyone as well as to affirm the right of all women, girls and boys not to be subjected to any form of discrimination and violence, including harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, child and/or forced marriages and crimes committed in the name of so-called honour.
- *“A man should respect his wife more than he respects himself and love her as much as he loves himself.” (Talmud, Yebamot, 62,b)*
  - *“Never will I allow to be lost the work of any one among you, whether male or female; for you are of one another.” (Qu’ran 3, 195)*
  - *“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another.” (Quran 49:13)*
  - *“In the image of God He created him male and female. He created them.” (Genesis 1, 27)*
  - *“The best among you is he who is best to his wife” (Hadith)*
  - *“It is a woman who is a friend and partner for life. It is woman who keeps the race going. How may we think low of her of whom are born the greatest. From a woman a woman is born: none may exist without a woman.” (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 473)*
  - *“The world of humanity is possessed of two wings - the male and the female. So long as these two wings are not equivalent in strength the bird will not fly. Until womankind reaches the same degree as man, until she enjoys the same arena of activity, extraordinary attainment for humanity will not be realized” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá)*
  - *“A comprehensive, holistic and effective approach to capacity-building should aim to engage influential leaders, such as traditional and religious leaders [...]” (Joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices, CEDAW/C/GC/31-CRC/C/GC/18, para. 70)*
- VI. We pledge to **stand up for the rights of all persons belonging to minorities** within our respective areas of action and to defend their freedom of religion or belief as well as their right to participate equally and effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life, as recognized by international human rights law, as a minimum standard of solidarity among all believers.
- VII. We pledge to **publicly denounce all instances of advocacy of hatred that incites to violence, discrimination or hostility**, including those that lead to atrocity crimes. We bear a direct responsibility to denounce such advocacy, particularly when it is conducted in the name of religion or belief.
- *“Now this is the command: Do to the doer to make him do.” (Ancient Egyptian Middle Kingdom);*
  - *“Repay injury with justice and kindness with kindness.” (Confucius)*
  - *“What is hateful to you, don’t do to your friend.” (Talmud, Shabat, 31,a)*
  - *“Whatever words we utter should be chosen with care for people will hear them and be influenced by them for good or ill.” (Buddha)*
  - *“By self-control and by making dharma (right conduct) your main focus, treat others as you treat yourself.” (Mahābhārata)*
  - *“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your kinsfolk. Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18)*
  - *“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 7:12)*
  - *“Ascribe not to any soul that which thou wouldst not have ascribed to thee, and say not that which thou doest not.” (Bahá’u’lláh)*

- VIII. We therefore pledge to establish, each within our respective spheres, policies and methodologies to **monitor interpretations, determinations or other religious views that manifestly conflict with universal human rights norms and standards**, regardless of whether they are pronounced by formal institutions or by self-appointed individuals. We intend to assume this responsibility in a disciplined objective manner only within our own respective areas of competence in an introspective manner, without judging the faith or beliefs of others.
- *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Bible, Matthew 7:1-2)*
  - *“Habituate your heart to mercy for the subjects and to affection and kindness for them... since they are of two kinds, either your brother in religion or one like you in creation... So, extend to them your forgiveness and pardon, in the same way as you would like Allah to extend His forgiveness and pardon to you”—(Letter from Caliph Ali to Malik Ashtar, Governor of Egypt)*
  - *“The essential purpose of the religion of God is to establish unity among mankind. The divine Manifestations were Founders of the means of fellowship and love. They did not come to create discord, strife and hatred in the world. The religion of God is the cause of love, but if it is made to be the source of enmity and bloodshed, surely its absence is preferable to its existence; for then it becomes satanic, detrimental and an obstacle to the human world.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá)*
- IX. We also pledge to refrain from, advocate against and jointly **condemn any judgemental public determination by any actor who in the name of religion aims at disqualifying the religion or belief of another individual** or community in a manner that would expose them to violence in the name of religion or deprivation of their human rights.
- X. We pledge **not to give credence to exclusionary interpretations claiming religious grounds** in a manner that would instrumentalize religions, beliefs or their followers to incite hatred and violence, for example for electoral purposes or political gains.
- XI. We equally commit **not to oppress critical voices** and views on matters of religion or belief, however wrong or offensive they may be perceived, in the name of the “sanctity” of the subject matter and we urge States that still have anti-blasphemy or anti-apostasy laws to repeal them, since such laws have a stifling impact on the enjoyment of freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief as well as on healthy dialogue and debate about religious issues.
- XII. We commit to further **refine the curriculums, teaching materials and textbooks** wherever some religious interpretations, or the way they are presented, may give rise to the perception of condoning violence or discrimination. In this context, we pledge to promote respect for pluralism and diversity in the field of religion or belief as well as the right not to receive religious instruction that is inconsistent with one’s conviction. We also commit to **defend the academic freedom and freedom of expression**, in line with Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, within the religious discourse in order to promote that religious thinking is capable of confronting new challenges as well as facilitating free and creative thinking. We commit to support efforts in the area of religious reforms in educational and institutional areas.
- *“The only possible basis for a sound morality is mutual tolerance and respect.” (A.J. Ayer)*
- XIII. We pledge to build on experiences and lessons learned in **engaging with children and youth**, who are either victims of or vulnerable to incitement to violence in the name of religion, in order to design methodologies and adapted tools and narratives to enable religious communities to deal with this phenomenon effectively, with particular attention to the important role of parents and families in detecting and addressing early signs of vulnerability of children and youth to violence in the name of religion.
- *“Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.” (1 Timothy 4:12)*
- XIV. We pledge to promote, within our respective spheres of influence, the imperative necessity of ensuring **respect in all humanitarian assistance activities** of the *Principles of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Response Programmes*,<sup>6</sup>

especially that aid is given regardless of the recipients' creed and without adverse distinction of any kind and that aid will not be used to further a particular religious standpoint.

- XV. We pledge **neither to coerce people nor to exploit persons in vulnerable situations** into converting from their religion or belief, while fully respecting everyone's freedom to have, adopt or change a religion or belief and the right to manifest it through teaching, practice, worship and observance, either individually or in community with others and in public or private.
- XVI. We commit to **leverage the spiritual and moral weight of religions and beliefs** with the aim of strengthening the protection of universal human rights and developing preventative strategies that we adapt to our local contexts, benefitting from the potential support of relevant United Nations entities.
- *"Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12, 31)*
  - *"But love your enemies, do good to them and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great" (Luke 6, 35)*
  - *"The God-conscious being is always unstained, like the sun, which gives its comfort and warmth to all. The God-conscious being looks upon all alike, like the wind, which blows equally upon the king and the poor beggar." (Guru Granth Sahib p. 272)*
  - *"The religion of God and His divine law are the most potent instruments and the surest of all means for the dawning of the light of unity amongst men. The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquility of peoples, and the peace of all who dwell on earth are among the principles and ordinances of God."(Bahá'u'lláh)*
- XVII. We commit to support each other at the implementation level of this declaration through **exchange of practices**, mutual capacity enhancement and regular activities of skills updating for religious and spiritual preachers, teachers and instructors, notably in areas of communication, religious or belief minorities, inter-community mediation, conflict resolution, early detection of communal tensions and remedial techniques. In this vain, we shall explore means of developing sustained **partnerships with specialised academic institutions** so as to promote interdisciplinary research on specific questions related to faith and rights and to benefit from their outcomes that could feed into the programs and tools of our coalition on Faith for Rights.
- XVIII. We pledge to **use technological means more creatively and consistently** in order to disseminate this declaration and subsequent Faith for Rights messages to enhance cohesive societies enriched by diversity, including in the area of religions and beliefs. We will also consider means to produce empowering capacity-building and outreach tools and make them available in different languages for use at the local level.

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<sup>1</sup> See UN Doc. A/HRC/22/17/Add.4, annex, appendix, para. 36.

<sup>2</sup> See Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: “(1) Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. (2) No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice. (3) Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. (4) The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.”

<sup>3</sup> These include the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948); Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951); International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979); Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984); Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990); Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006); and International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (2006).

<sup>4</sup> These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981); Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992); Principles of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Response Programmes (1994); UNESCO Declaration on Principles of Tolerance (1995); Final Document of the International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation to Freedom of Religion or Belief, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination (2001); Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools (2007); United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007); The Hague Statement on “Faith in Human Rights” (2008); Camden Principles on Freedom of Expression and Equality (2009); Human Rights Council resolution 16/18 on Combating Intolerance, Negative Stereotyping and Stigmatization of, and Discrimination, Incitement to Violence and Violence against, Persons Based on Religion or Belief (and Istanbul Process, 2011); Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence (2012); Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes (2014); Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2015); as well as the Fez Declaration on preventing incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes (2015).

<sup>5</sup> All quotations from religious or belief texts were offered by participants of the Beirut workshop in relation to their own religion or belief and are merely intended to be illustrative and non-exhaustive.

<sup>6</sup> See [www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-1067.pdf](http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-1067.pdf).