

Mandate of the Special Envoy for the promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the European Union

Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is a fundamental right which is one of the founding values of the European Union and to which everyone is entitled, everywhere. FoRB is enshrined in international human rights law by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 18) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The EU is committed to promote human rights and engage with stakeholders to this end at home and abroad. Human rights including FoRB are challenged in many parts of the world. In this context, the implementation of the "EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief"¹ adopted by the Council in 2013 remains a key priority.

In promoting FoRB, the EU is guided by the universality, indivisibility, inter-relatedness and interdependence of all human rights, whether civil, political, economic, social or cultural. In particular, promoting FoRB is closely connected with freedom of expression.

The persistent persecution of individuals and minorities on religious, belief and ethnic grounds makes promoting FoRB all the more essential. The European External Action Service (EEAS), including through its network of EU Delegations, engages on a daily basis with partner countries to promote FoRB. To reinforce this action, the European Commission has decided to appoint Mairead McGuinness as Special Envoy for the promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the EU.

The Special Envoy reports to Commissioner Magnus Brunner, who is in charge of leading the Commission's dialogue with churches and religious associations or communities, and with philosophical and non-confessional organisations.

The Special Envoy is tasked with the following duties:

- Establish a dialogue with national authorities and other stakeholders (including faith-based organisations) of third countries to promote FoRB.
- Provide as appropriate support for intercultural and interreligious dialogue processes, including encouraging dialogue between representatives of different faiths and the setting up of joint initiatives.
- Provide support, where relevant, to measures that aim at addressing extremism based on religion or belief in third countries.
- In cooperation with authorities from third countries, promote religious diversity and tolerance within educational programmes and curricula.

The Special Envoy coordinates her activities closely with the EU Special Representative on Human Rights. The Special Envoy ensures a close coordination of her activities with the European Commission services, the EEAS, EU Delegations, in particular ahead of missions to third countries, as well as with other Commission services. The Envoy engages with the Council and European Parliament on FoRB issues.

¹http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/137585.pdf

The Special Envoy engages with the United Nations, in particular the UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB, the "International Contact Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief", as well as her counterparts in EU Member States and third countries. The Envoy also engages, where appropriate, with regional organisations.

The Special Envoy also engages, as appropriate, in dialogue with churches, religious associations or communities, non-confessional and philosophical organisations and other relevant stakeholders conducted under Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty.

The Special Envoy supports the efforts of civil society, including churches, faith-based and religious organisations, as well as non-confessional organisations (representing people holding non-theistic and atheistic beliefs). This support may include promoting the visibility of local organisations, including participating in events or meetings, consulting various stakeholders, and providing information and raising awareness about the EU's support in this field.