



Government
of Canada

Gouvernement
du Canada

[Home](#) → [Canada and the world](#) → [Canada's efforts to address global issues](#)

→ [Canada's efforts to promote international human rights, inclusive governance and democracy](#)

→ Freedom of religion or belief

Freedom of religion or belief

Freedom of religion or belief, including the ability to worship in peace and security, is a universal human right. It is enshrined in both the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, among other key human rights documents. Discrimination against religious and belief communities, as with all forms of discrimination, causes suffering, spreads division, and contributes to a climate of fear, intolerance, and stigmatization.

The promotion and protection of human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, is an important part of Canada's constructive engagement in the world. Canada's multi-cultural and multi-faith experience is reflective of Canadian efforts to champion inclusive and accountable governance, pluralism, and respect for diversity in all spheres of society. Efforts to advance freedom of religion or belief internationally focus primarily on:

1. advocating on behalf of persecuted religious and belief communities under threat;
2. opposing religious hatred, discrimination and xenophobia; and
3. supporting dialogue among different religious groups where religious issues are principal factors of tension between communities

Recognizing the universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated nature of human rights, Global Affairs Canada continuously looks to broaden its approach to advancing freedom of religion or belief and engage with non-traditional partners. For example, freedom of religion or belief is often referred to as a "gateway" to other freedoms, including freedom of expression, and freedom of peaceful assembly and association, then freedom of religion or belief in its true meaning must be seen as empowering women to decide for themselves what they believe and how they wish to live.

Canada has made the promotion of pluralism and inclusion, and the recognition of and respect for diversity a priority, both at home and abroad, and works with partners to enhance the international promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief.

High Level Forums on combating discrimination

On Tuesday January 17, representatives from government, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, academia, and the private sector gathered at a High Level Forum at the United Nations to discuss ways to combat anti-Muslim discrimination and hatred. Efforts to combat anti-Muslim

discrimination and hatred have taken on particular urgency due to growing populism, rising xenophobia, and increasing violent extremism. [Read more](#).

On September 7, 2016, Canada similarly co-hosted a High Level Forum on Global Antisemitism at the United Nations which considered the different factors that are leading to the rise of antisemitism in many parts of the world and the need for effective and proactive responses by governments, civil society and the private sector in addressing this challenge.

Multilateral engagement

International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) is a multilateral body composed of 31 member countries devoted to Holocaust education, remembrance and research, based on the *Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust* of 2000. The Chair of IHRA rotates annually between member states. As a full member of IHRA, Canada was its chair from March 2013 to February 2014.

As a proud member of IHRA, Canada strongly supports the [working definition on antisemitism and illustrative examples](#) which were adopted by consensus in May 2016. The non-legally binding working definition of antisemitism is as follows:

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

International Contact Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief

On June 15, 2015, Canada launched the [International Contact Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief](#), bringing together a diverse, cross-regional group of over twenty countries to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief around the world. By mobilizing a diverse group of countries committed to freedom of religion or belief outside of their traditional blocs, and allowing for frank discussion and the pursuit of areas for action, the ICG provides Canada and international partners with a useful platform to help address the growing repression of the individual right to believe and worship freely.

Since its inception, ICG participants have engaged in a number of cooperative actions, including: jointly lobbying governments to promote best practices to make progress on freedom of religion or belief, including those impacting minority populations; encouraging the reform of restrictive laws; and collaborating with a range of non-governmental partners, including religious organizations, civil society, and academia.

Domestic engagement

As a multicultural, multi-faith and multi-ethnic society, with a vibrant Indigenous community and heritage, linguistic duality, and long history of immigration and integration, Global Affairs Canada relies on domestic voices and expertise to champion freedom of religion or belief internationally. Global Affairs Canada's Office of Human Rights, Freedoms and Inclusion serves as the focal point for engagement with faith and belief communities to consult on issues of particular concern and to hear from Canadians their views on opportunities to advance freedom of religion or belief and human rights more broadly.

For example, on October 31, 2016, the Minister of Foreign Affairs hosted a roundtable in Ottawa which brought together representatives of a diverse cross-section of Canadian faith and belief communities and civil society organizations, aimed leveraging their insights on the state of, and opportunities to advance, freedom of religion or belief globally. Participants were drawn from a variety of traditions, including Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Bahá'í, Sikh, Buddhist, and Secular Humanists, alongside organizations such as Amnesty International and the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

News

[Freedom of religion or belief news](#)

Related links

- [Meeting of the International Contact Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief in Geneva on March 6, 2019](#)
- [Meeting of the International Contact Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief in New York on October 23, 2018](#)
- [Meeting of the International Contact Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief in Washington D.C. on July 27, 2018](#)
- [Meeting of the International Contact Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief in Geneva on March 6, 2018](#)
- [Meeting of the International Contact Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief in Geneva on March 7, 2017](#)

Date Modified:

2019-04-04