



## **Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting**

# **FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF: THE ROLE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS IN ADVANCING THIS HUMAN RIGHT FOR ALL**

**9-10 November 2020  
(online)**

## **FINAL REPORT**



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## **I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The third Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting (SHDM) of 2020, organized online by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) and the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship on 9-10 November, provided a forum to explore the current state of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in the OSCE region, the opportunities that exist to advance it for the benefit of all, and the challenges that impede the realization of this aim, including the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic. It offered an opportunity to assess the consequences of the rapid digitization of many spheres of life and its impact on the enjoyment of this right and consider the role of civil society actors, including religious or belief communities in advancing the right to FoRB for all in the OSCE region.

308 participants registered for the meeting, including 113 representatives from 49 OSCE participating States, 23 participants from OSCE institutions, executive structures, and missions/field operations, 12 representatives of 4 international organizations, 4 representatives of national human rights institutions from 3 participating States, and 156 representatives of 135 non-governmental and other organizations.

The meeting was organized around three working sessions:

- The State of Freedom of Religion or Belief in the OSCE Region: Challenges and Opportunities;
- The Role of Digital Technologies in Advancing the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief: Challenges and Opportunities;
- The Role of Civil Society in Advancing the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief for All.

## **II. SYNOPSIS OF THE SESSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This section summarizes the discussions which took place during the opening session and the three thematic sessions and presents recommendations made by participants. The recommendations were directed towards a variety of actors, including the OSCE participating States, the OSCE institutions and executive structures, and religious or belief communities. These recommendations have no official status, as they are not based on consensus among the 57 OSCE participating States. Further, the inclusion of a recommendation in this report does not suggest that it reflects the views or policies of the OSCE. Nevertheless, these recommendations serve as useful indicators of how participating States are meeting their commitments pertaining to FoRB, as well as their views on follow-up activities in this area.

## OPENING SESSION

**Ms. Inid Milo**, Head of the 2020 Albanian OSCE Chairmanship Task Force and **Ms. Katarzyna Gardapkhadze**, First Deputy Director of the OSCE/ODIHR delivered opening remarks. **Dr. Ahmed Shaheed**, United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief delivered the keynote speech.

**Ms. Milo** welcomed all participants on behalf of the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship noting that the meeting provided a valuable opportunity for OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions and executive structures, international organizations, civil society organizations, and religious or belief communities to address the challenges and opportunities pertaining to the implementation of OSCE commitments in the sphere of FoRB.

Ms. Milo further focused on the key themes of the meeting, noting that digital tools can facilitate the communicative aspect of the right to FoRB. However, she also stressed that it is important to address ways in which new technologies and tools can be employed to restrict this human right.

She further explicated that while the primary responsibility for the implementation of human dimension commitments, including those pertaining to FoRB, rests with the participating States, it is vital to recognize that national human rights institutions, religious or belief communities, civil society actors, including youth, academia and media also play a key role in advancing the right to FoRB for all. She concluded by praising the unique nature of OSCE human dimension meetings as inclusive platforms for sharing good practices and dialogue.

In her remarks, **Ms. Gardapkhadze** welcomed the participants on behalf of OSCE/ODIHR and thanked the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship for co-organizing the meeting. She noted that the meeting constitutes the fourth SHDM dedicated to the topic of the right to FoRB in the last five years which points to the longstanding recognition that the right to FoRB is fundamental to the OSCE's concept of security, guiding mutual relations among OSCE participating States. She also stressed that OSCE participating States have long recognized that the right to FoRB and all other human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent, interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

Ms. Gardapkhadze highlighted certain progress in relation to the implementation of OSCE commitments pertaining to FoRB, such as, for example, the introduction of domestic legislation which is more congruent with international human rights standards, the emergence of state initiatives, institutional activities, policies and programmes focusing on FoRB and the formation of roundtables and local coalitions to advance this human right for all and address intolerance and discrimination on grounds of religion or belief.

However, she also pointed out that the manifold and long-standing interferences with the exercise of this right are now further compounded by the introduction of legal and other measures which are founded on or make reference to undefined and vague concepts of "extremism" and are enacted in the name of national security. They are also aggravated by the various emergency regimes introduced to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ms. Gardapkhadze highlighted OSCE/ODIHR's report on OSCE Human Dimension Commitments and State Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, which points out that certain States used the pandemic and ensuing states of emergency, unjustifiably, as a pretext to roll back democratic standards and erode fundamental freedoms.

Ms. Gardapkhadze praised the meeting for providing, for the first time, a platform for analyzing the impact of technology on the enjoyment of the right to FoRB and other related human rights, both from the perspective of policies and practice. She further reminded participants that the protection of the right to FoRB is a large undertaking where civil society actors have an essential role to play in searching for solutions to issues pertaining to FoRB for all in the OSCE region.

The First Deputy Director concluded her remarks by referencing the underlying theme of adaptability, creativity and innovation that underpinned the meeting's focus and called on OSCE participating States to make use of OSCE/ODIHR's expertise and assistance when implementing their human dimension commitments in the sphere of FoRB and tolerance and non-discrimination.

**Dr. Shaheed**, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, opened his keynote speech by commending certain OSCE participating States for contributing to the advancement of the right to FoRB, including by repealing anti-blasphemy laws and appointing or re-appointing Special Envoys for FoRB. He extended his praise to OSCE/ODIHR for providing practical assistance and advice to both States and civil society in advancing human rights-based and gender-sensitive approaches to FoRB.

Dr. Shaheed also warned against negative trends across the OSCE region, including the recent attempts by some states to rollback reproductive rights and protections for LGBT+ persons in the name of religion or belief, the construction of certain religious or belief minorities as a security threat, as well as the resurgence of nationalism seeking to impose monolithic identities and ways of being which intensify intolerance and discrimination.

Dr. Shaheed further stressed the prodigious impact of digital technology on human rights. He highlighted that, if abused, digital technology can enable the repression of the right to FoRB, as certain states use technology to censor expression, block access to information, and monitor online activity and association. In their most egregious form, such methods enable States to effectively and efficiently control religious or belief communities.

The UN Special Rapporteur further elucidated that digital technologies have facilitated the spread of hostility and intolerance based on religion or belief by enabling the dissemination of unchecked propaganda and incitement on social media networks. He stressed that "networks of hatred", operated by a few individuals and groups, can have a disproportionate footprint due to the anonymity and automation of the digital space, while content filtering tools, government and media company policies and practice have a difficult time counteracting these fast paced trends. Dr Shaheed also pointed out that State and private company responses to online hate should meet the human rights law requirements of legality, necessity and proportionality.

The keynote speaker also highlighted the positive aspects of technology and its ability to foster vibrant grass roots networks which benefit from improved capacity for cross-communal exchange of information and good practices. As the world adapts to the

pandemic, digital technologies also continue to facilitate the continuation of rituals, religious expression and gatherings in ways that have been a lifeline for many.

Dr. Shaheed called for civil society, including faith-based actors, to play a fundamental role to overcome the challenges to FoRB that the digital transformation has wrought. Civil society actors should be the frontline responders to counter the dissemination of hate online, promote counter speech, advocate for tolerance and equality, engage in outreach and education and hold states to account. In this regard, digital media companies should involve civil society, and the communities who are most affected by religious and racial hatred in identifying the most effective tools to address the harm caused on digital media platforms.

Moreover, Dr. Shaheed drew attention to the digital divide, which disproportionately affects those in the developing world, women and people living in rural areas. He said that narrowing such a divide must be considered a top human rights priority.

Dr. Shaheed concluded his remarks by highlighting the often-overlooked role of faith-based actors in enacting positive change. He also underlined the importance of the Beirut Declaration on “Faith for Rights” which affirms that religious or belief convictions can be one of the fundamental sources of protection for human dignity and human rights.

## **SESSION I: The State of Freedom of Religion or Belief in the OSCE Region: Challenges and Opportunities**

*Introducers:*

**Prof. Elizabeth Clark**, Associate Director of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies

**Dr. Dmytro Vovk**, Member of the OSCE/ODIHR Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief

*Moderator:* Mr. Pavel Chacuk, Deputy Head, Human Rights Department, OSCE/ODIHR

In her remarks, **Prof. Clark** focused on the opportunities and progress in the field of FoRB in the OSCE region. She noted that religious or belief communities are particularly well placed to assist with the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, as they can advocate for the vulnerable, care for the poor, combat the negative health effects of loneliness, and call for the patience, empathy, and hope needed to combat the fatigue and despair triggered by the pandemic.

Prof. Clark highlighted that religious or belief communities, state authorities and humanitarian organizations need to build partnerships to ensure that the institutional framework for dialogue is in place and that these actions help those most in need, are inclusive of women and minorities, and respectful of the autonomy of religious or belief communities.

She noted that certain religious leaders have advocated for greater health protections than those mandated by states and that certain states have ensured that health regulations

affecting religious or belief communities are not blanket bans, but are prescribed by law, necessary for the achievement of the legitimate aim of protecting public health, and also proportionate and non-discriminatory.

Prof. Clark also highlighted a number of good practice examples which have recently emerged across the region, such as the development of a series of informal roundtables on FoRB which allow all interested parties to regularly gather to discuss persecution, engage in joint advocacy and coordinate civil society action across ideological and religious differences. In addition, over 20 OSCE participating States came together in the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance to share resources and information on FoRB issues, bringing together senior government representatives to discuss actions their nations can take together to promote respect for FoRB and protect members of religious or belief minority groups worldwide.

Prof. Clark concluded by stating that the current challenges are too vast to be solved just by international organizations, states, civil society organizations, or religious or belief organizations alone. She noted that all actors need to join forces, imagine common ground, and work together to increase social cohesion.

Conversely, **Dr. Vovk** dedicated his intervention to the challenges that all actors involved in the promotion of the right to FoRB are currently facing, most notably ensuring the protection of the right to FoRB, while protecting public health. Whereas certain states have approached this issue in a proportionate and nuanced manner, others imposed undue or discriminatory restrictions.

Dr. Vovk signaled that some religious or belief communities have refused to follow public health directives and have, at times, engaged in the dissemination of conspiracy theories and disinformation. He noted that effective cooperation and communication between governments and religious or belief communities was needed to address such issues. He also noted that pre-existing challenges to the realization of the right to FoRB have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

ODIHR's Panel of Experts Member further observed the discrepancy among religious or belief communities in relation to their ability or willingness to adapt to the new digital reality. Certain communities do not accept the possibility of online spiritual life and opt for so-called "home religion" until places of worship reopen. Others are concerned about possible infringements of the right to privacy and the protection of their personal data.

In the discussion that followed, certain participants called on OSCE participating States to implement their OSCE commitments pertaining to FoRB. A number of them brought up the importance of respecting the autonomy of religious or belief communities. OSCE participating States were further called on to make use of the expertise ODIHR provides in the area of FoRB. Several participants pointed to the explicit link between the respect for the right to FoRB and related human rights and security. They also reaffirmed that human rights are interdependent, interrelated and mutually reinforcing, rejecting attempts to impose a hierarchy among them or to use FoRB as a pretext to impose undue restrictions on other human rights.

Participants repeatedly highlighted the disproportionate impact that the measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 have had on the ability of individuals and religious or belief

communities to manifest their religion or belief. In this respect, OSCE/ODIHR's report *OSCE Human Dimension Commitments and State Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic* was praised as timely and important.

A number of participants raised concerns about the use of anti-extremism laws and measures to suppress legitimate religious or belief activities. Several participants also emphasized the role of the digital space as a breeding ground for intolerance and hate speech.

The following recommendations for action on human dimension issues were made in Session I:

*Recommendations for the OSCE participating states:*

- OSCE participating States should acknowledge that religious or belief organizations are uniquely positioned to address the defining challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, and cooperate with them and other humanitarian organizations to guarantee the full enjoyment of human rights for all;
- OSCE participating States should ensure that an institutional framework is in place for dialogue with religious or belief communities, in a way that is inclusive for minorities, women and youth, and respectful of the autonomy of religious or belief organizations;
- OSCE participating States should collaborate with religious or belief organizations to tackle the issues surrounding the development, testing and distribution of future COVID-19 vaccines;
- OSCE participating States should fully implement all OSCE human dimension commitments, including those pertaining to the right to FoRB for all;
- OSCE participating States should recommit to the idea that all human rights are interdependent, interrelated and mutually reinforcing, and recognize the basic principle that the right to FoRB ends where discrimination begins;
- OSCE participating states should refrain from instrumentalizing the right to FoRB to unduly limit other human rights or to justify undue interferences with the rights to equality and non-discrimination of all people;
- OSCE participating States should reject the association of terrorism with any religion or nationality;
- OSCE participating States should make full use of OSCE/ODIHR's expert advice and assistance on matters pertaining to the right to FoRB for all;
- OSCE participating States should respect the autonomy of religious or belief communities;
- OSCE participating States should be mindful of the disproportionate impact that measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 can have on religious or belief communities;

- OSCE participating States should ensure that newly imposed restrictions to combat the pandemic are non-discriminatory and tailored to the specific needs of religious or belief communities;
- OSCE participating States should address the incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence, including in the digital sphere, and co-operate with technology companies, civil society and the media in this regard;
- OSCE participating States should consider the appointment of a Special Envoy with the specific mandate to promote the right to FoRB;
- OSCE participating States should refrain from using anti-extremism laws to repress legitimate religious or belief activities;
- OSCE participating States should follow up on the 2014 Basel Ministerial Declaration on Enhancing Efforts to Combat Anti-Semitism, which encourages participating States to elaborate Ministerial Council Declarations on enhancing efforts to combat intolerance and discrimination, including against Muslims, Christians and members of other religions.

*Recommendations for the OSCE institutions and field operations:*

- OSCE institutions and field operations should work on addressing the needs of all religious or belief communities;
- OSCE/ODIHR should develop further guidelines on the security needs of Christians, modeled after the *2020 Practical Guide on Understanding Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes - Addressing the Security Needs of Muslim Communities*;
- OSCE/ODIHR's work to address human dimension issues should be grounded in the indivisibility of the human rights framework, recognizing that human rights are interdependent, interrelated and mutually reinforcing;
- OSCE/ODIHR should provide assistance to OSCE participating States in their efforts to bring their laws and practice in line with OSCE human dimension commitments.

*Recommendations for civil society, international organizations and other actors:*

- Religious or belief communities should collaborate with state authorities and with other humanitarian organization, to ensure a multi-stakeholder response to the public health crisis that is inclusive of minorities, women and youth;

## **SESSION II: The Role of Digital Technologies in Advancing the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief: Challenges and Opportunities**

*Introducers:*

**Dr. Margherita Galassini**, Researcher at the Center for Religious Studies of Fondazione Bruno Kessler

**Ms. Lydia El-Khoury**, Project Manager Textgain

**Ms. Keisi Seferi**, Special Representative of the Chairperson-in Office on Youth and Security

*Moderator:* Ms. Andrea Huber, Head, Human Rights Department, OSCE/ODIHR

**Dr. Galassini** set out to establish the link between religion and digital innovation, two fields often perceived distinct and separate, but which in fact overlap and influence each other in profound and meaningful ways. She stressed that religious or belief actors can play an important role in innovation processes in the field of digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI).

She also pointed out that many religious or belief communities increasingly rely on digital tools and platforms, both to engage with individuals from their own communities and with broader audiences. There are currently instances of AI-assisted translation services being used to provide real-time captions and translations for prayers and scriptures, which allow religious or belief communities to become more inclusive and to open up to new members, by bridging the language gap and overcoming obstacles to the participation of persons with disabilities. There are instances of robots being built for teaching prayers and for performing religious rites and instances of AI-powered chatbots that provide instant spiritual guidance to believers.

Dr. Galassini further noted three different areas in which the perspective of religious actors can play an important role for the development and regulation of AI technologies, namely research, skills and the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms.

She called for multi- and interdisciplinary research networks that take a transversal approach to societal challenges and opportunities by pooling expertise in the fields of humanities, social sciences, engineering and science. Dr. Galassini called for an alliance between literacy on religion, for AI developers, and literacy on AI, for religious or belief communities. Their successful engagement in digital education can help bridge the digital divide, enhancing the participation of women, minorities and people in situations of vulnerability in the AI-led transformation of society.

Dr. Galassini also stressed that religious actors and religious or belief communities can act as watchdogs for the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of believers and non-believers. She noted that religious or belief communities should be actively engaged in consultation processes on the development of regulatory frameworks for AI, so as to ensure that the use of this technology does not infringe upon human rights, such as the right to freedom of religion or belief, the right to privacy and personal data protection, and the right to non-discrimination.

**Ms. El-Khour**i highlighted how mainstream social media and alt-tech platforms have often become breeding grounds for hate. She noted that social media companies have only recently started to take action in response to these disturbing trends. However, the cooperation between social media companies, civil society, technology developers, law enforcement and policy makers is not yet strong.

She also underscored that machine learning and neurolinguistic programming techniques are becoming more important in analyzing online data, however automatic techniques can make mistakes or even increase human prejudices. It is, therefore, important that human supervision is always ensured.

Ms. El-Khour*i* also underlined the important role of civil society and their engagement to counteract these negative trends such as providing training in understanding terms of service of various platforms with a view to reporting hate speech; cooperating with technology companies on creating positive counter spaces and counter narratives; alerting authorities and social media companies to potentially dangerous hashtags or groups on social media; and training which instills critical thinking, media literacy and educates on toxic narratives, tropes and hidden meanings.

**Ms. Seferi** emphasized the importance of youth in the peace and security agenda, and their right to participate in decision making, noting that they make up 30% of the population of the OSCE. As religious or belief communities face increased intolerance and hate during the pandemic, education must play an important role in promoting tolerance and respectful co-existence between different religious or belief communities, and between believers and non-believers. She noted that since the start of the pandemic, young people have been instrumental in the digitization of the life of religious or belief communities.

More broadly, digital technologies have had many positive impacts on FoRB, easing participation in spite of geographical or pandemic-related barriers, and helping expand community life, through apps oriented towards celebrating religious festivities, or dating people within your religious community. Nonetheless, Ms. Seferi acknowledged that digital technologies also present challenges to FoRB, including digital surveillance, discriminating practices, misinformation and hate speech.

In the ensuing discussions, participants noted that the right to FoRB does not include the right to have a religion or belief which is immune from criticism or even ridicule. In this respect, blasphemy laws, still present throughout the OSCE region, were criticized. The important role that the media plays in shaping public debate, and its responsibility to provide balanced information, was underlined.

Many participants agreed that digital technologies have had a positive impact on the exercise of the right to FoRB, although some underlined the importance of attending places of worship. Therefore, participants called for OSCE participating States not to introduce blanket bans on in-person gatherings in places of worship, when sanitary norms and public health directives can be followed.

The following recommendations for action on Human Dimension issues were made in Session II:

*Recommendations for the OSCE participating states:*

- OSCE participating States should work together with social media companies, civil society, technology developers, law enforcement and policy makers to promote tools to counter discrimination against religious and belief communities;
- OSCE participating states should engage religious or belief actors in consultation processes regarding AI to protect human rights;
- OSCE participating States should encourage collaboration between civil society and technology companies to create counter narratives, encourage standardization of terms of service for different social media platforms, and form programmes to improve cooperation between authorities and social media companies;
- OSCE participating States should include religious or belief communities in public discussions of pertinent legislative initiatives;
- OSCE participating States should repeal all anti-blaspemy laws;
- OSCE participating States should ensure effective remedies for human rights violations stemming from efforts to prevent violent extremism and radicalization which leads to terrorism (VERLT).

*Recommendations for the OSCE institutions and field operations:*

- OSCE/ODIHR and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) should develop guidance on the right to FoRB and addressing intolerance and discrimination on grounds of religion or belief for media professionals;
- The OSCE should provide assistance to OSCE participating States on ensuring the protection of the right to privacy and data protection online;
- OSCE/ODIHR and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) should monitor the violations of the right to FoRB in all regions of Ukraine.

*Recommendations for civil society, international organizations and other actors:*

- Civil society, international organizations and other actors should train religious or belief organizations to promote critical thinking and media literacy;
- Religious and belief actors should play a key role in the policy area of digital innovation, in its development, regulation and compliance with human rights;
- Internet service providers and social networks should develop non-discrimination standards;

- Social media companies, civil society, technology developers, law enforcement and policy makers need to work together to promote tools to counter discrimination against religious and belief communities.

### **SESSION III: The Role of Civil Society in Advancing the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief for All**

*Introducers:*

**Dr. Lena Larsen**, Director, Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief

**Mr. Emir Kovacevic**, Director of the Law office based in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Member of the OSCE/ODIHR Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief

*Moderator:* Dr. Kishan Manocha, Head, Tolerance and Non-discrimination Department, OSCE/ODIHR

In her remarks, Introducer **Dr. Lena Larsen** presented background information about the institution that she leads, the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief, which was established in 1999 as a follow-up to a conference devoted to marking the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Three institutions founded the coalition: the Norwegian Church, the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities, and the Norwegian Center for Human Rights at the University of Oslo. The mission of the coalition is to promote FoRB as a common good for everyone in every society.

**Dr. Larsen** explained that the activities of the coalition are aimed at facilitating discursive space for scholars, religious leaders, civil servants, experts, and activists in the exploration of contemporary FoRB-related topics. This has included the creation of platforms such as the New Directions in Islamic Thought and New directions in Orthodox Christian Thought. In the framework of these initiatives, the coalition has reached out to experts, organized seminars and produced relevant publications. Furthermore, the coalition published scientific research and resource materials for FoRB practitioners, supported the development of academic courses on religion and human rights, and supported education for religious leaders. It has also focused on equality before the law and women's and children's rights within its several projects.

Dr. Larsen elaborated on the lessons learned from all these activities, noting that tailor made approaches were necessary and that real change depended on addressing the root causes of state-imposed limitations on FoRB. She stressed the importance of including a gender perspective, the need for ongoing, meaningful, and sustained dialogue and cooperation among and between religious leaders, and the indispensable role of independent academia without a personal agenda in efforts to advance FoRB for all. The introducer also warned against using FoRB to legitimize discrimination on other grounds.

Dr. Larsen underlined that the FoRB was as important as other human rights, and no individual should have been subject to harmful practices or discrimination.

In his speech, the second introducer **Mr. Kovacevic** emphasized the universal applicability of the right to FoRB, which was universal to all people, both believers and non-believers. He also discussed the history and activities of the Interreligious Council (IRC) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The IRC, he noted, was founded in 1997 thanks to the joint engagement of religious leaders from the Islamic Community, Serbian Orthodox Church, Catholic Church, and the Jewish community. The goal of the IRC is to raise awareness of the importance of inter-religious dialogue in countering discrimination and intolerance based on religion or belief and advancing FoRB for everyone and promoting relationships between the State, churches, and religious communities.

The successes of the IRC, as presented by Mr. Kovacevic, included the adoption of the 2004 Law on Freedom of Religion and the Legal Status of Religious Communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which the IRC helped to draft and present for public consultation. Other initiatives which required close cooperation between the State and the IRC included the following: working on the elaboration of anti-discrimination laws, the establishment and maintenance of a central register for registration of all churches and religious communities issued by the Ministry of Justice of Bosnia and Herzegovina and ensuring respect for FoRB in the armed forces.

Moreover, as Mr. Kovacevic explained, the IRC has been working since 2011 on a project devoted to the monitoring of attacks on religious property, including places of worship, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The project activities include reporting incidents, offering moral support and solidarity to targeted communities, condemning them jointly, and providing annual reports and recommendations on the issue.

Mr. Kovacevic presented a successful initiative involving the civil society in advancing FoRB, implemented in collaboration with the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The project resulted in establishment of 31 anti-hate coalitions, involving more than 280 organizations and activists. In 2016 and 2017, these coalitions conducted over 300 activities in local communities, engaging in activities to raise awareness of offensive graffiti in local communities as well as removing it.

During the ensuing discussion, participants commented that mutual respect and understanding among and between different religious or belief communities was essential to creating and sustaining conditions of peaceful coexistence among individuals and communities of different religions or beliefs in the OSCE region. They also noted that the role of the OSCE participating States was not only to promote and facilitate inter-faith and inter-religious dialogue, but also to create spaces for dialogue and discussion between religious or belief communities and state authorities in order to advance issues of public concern. Participants also pointed out the importance of ensuring that the perspectives of the religious minorities are captured in this dialogue and engagement work.

At the same time, participants emphasized the important role that civil society plays in advancing FoRB for all. Particular attention was paid to the negative impact on the exercise of FoRB of measures taken by OSCE participating States in recent months to counter the threat from COVID-19. Participants expressed the hope that the prolonged public health crisis would not result in further limitations to FoRB.

A number of participants spoke about ongoing problems with exercising the right to FoRB in their respective countries, such as attacks against religious buildings, including places of worship, in certain participating States.

The following recommendations for action on Human Dimension issues were made in Session III:

*Recommendations for the OSCE participating states:*

- OSCE participating States should support and strengthen inter-faith and inter-religious dialogue, and dialogue between religious or belief communities and States to better address the challenges to advancing FoRB for all, as well as civil society coalitions to address all forms of intolerance and discrimination;
- OSCE participating States should create clear response mechanisms to address violations of FoRB;
- OSCE participating States should take an active role in protecting religious buildings, places of worship and holy sites;
- OSCE participating States should take into consideration the perspectives of the religious or belief communities when framing legislation and policies on issues that have an ethical dimension.

*Recommendations for the OSCE institutions and field operations:*

- OSCE participating States should create clear response mechanisms to address violations of FoRB;
- OSCE/ODIHR should continue creating tools to address manifestations of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief;
- OSCE/ODIHR should support participating States in ensuring that FoRB is respected and taken into consideration when framing responses to the ongoing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

ANNEX I: AGENDA



**Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting**

**Freedom of Religion or Belief: The Role of Digital Technologies and Civil Society  
Actors in Advancing This Human Right for All**

**9-10 November 2020  
(Online)**

**AGENDA**

**Day 1**

15.00 – 16.00

**OPENING SESSION**

*Opening remarks:*

**Ms. Inid Milo**, Head of the 2020 Albanian OSCE  
Chairmanship Task Force

**Ms. Katarzyna Gardapkhadze**, First Deputy Director,  
OSCE/ODIHR

*Introductory address:*

**Dr. Ahmed Shaheed**, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of  
Religion or Belief

16.00 – 18.00

**SESSION I: The State of Freedom of Religion or Belief in the  
OSCE region: Challenges and Opportunities**

*Introducers:*

**Prof. Elizabeth Clark**, Associate Director of the  
International Center for Law and Religion Studies

**Dr. Dmytro Vovk**, Member of the OSCE/ODIHR Panel of  
Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief

*Moderator:* Mr. Pavel Chacuk, Deputy Head, Human Rights  
Department, OSCE/ODIHR

## **Day 2**

[9.00 – 10.00 Side event]

10.30 – 12.30 **SESSION II: The Role of Digital Technologies in Advancing the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief: Challenges and Opportunities**

*Introducers:*

**Dr. Margherita Galassini**, Researcher at the Center for Religious Studies of Fondazione Bruno Kessler

**Ms. Lydia El-Khoury**, Project Manager at Textgain

**Ms. Keisi Seferi**, Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office on Youth and Security

*Moderator:* Ms. Andrea Huber, Head, Human Rights Department, OSCE/ODIHR

14.30 – 16.30 **SESSION III: The Role of Civil Society in Advancing the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief for All**

*Introducers:*

**Dr. Lena Larsen**, Director, Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief

**Mr. Emir Kovacevic**, Director of the Law office based in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Member of the OSCE/ODIHR Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief

*Moderator:* Dr. Kishan Manocha, Head, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, OSCE/ODIHR

16.30 – 17.30 **CLOSING SESSION**

*Rapports from the working sessions  
Comments from the floor*

*Closing remarks:*

**Ms. Katarzyna Gardapkhadze**, First Deputy Director, OSCE/ODIHR

**Ms. Erida Dobrushhi**, Minister Plenipotentiary, Deputy Permanent Representative, 2020 Albanian Chairmanship

## **ANNEX II: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION: Speakers, introducers and moderators**

*Opening remarks:*

**Ms. Inid Milo**, Head of the 2020 Albanian OSCE Chairmanship Task Force

Inid Milo is a career diplomat from the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, currently Head of the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship 2020 Task Force since April 2019.

After finishing her Master degree (Mag.phil) at the University of Vienna in October 2002, Ms. Inid Milo joined first the administration of the Council of Ministers of Albania, the Department on Information Policy and Politics for about 14 months until February 2004. She joined the diplomatic service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania in May 2004, as a Desk Officer for OSCE matters.

Her first appointment was as a Second Secretary at the Albanian Embassy in Berlin, Germany in March 2006. Then she served in several other positions. She became a First Secretary at the Albanian Permanent Mission in UN -Geneva between February 2009 and June 2012. In July 2012, Ms Milo was appointed First Secretary at the Albanian Permanent Delegation to NATO where she served as a Political Councillor until March 2014. In April 2014 Ms. Milo was appointed as a Councillor/Number two at the Albanian Embassy in Berlin, until January 2018.

In February 2018 she moved to Tirana where she became NATO Director and Security Policies at the Albanian Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs until April 2019 when she assumed her current position.

**Ms. Katarzyna Gardapkhadze**, First Deputy Director, OSCE/ODIHR

Katarzyna Gardapkhadze has been the First Deputy Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) since 2016. Before that, she served as the Head of ODIHR's Human Rights Department.

Katarzyna has 25 years of experience in public service, international non-profits and multilateral organizations in Europe, North America, South Caucasus and Central Asia. Before joining the OSCE, she was director of Save the Children based in Tbilisi, Georgia. Earlier, she contributed her expertise to various initiatives, from the Eurasia Foundation's South Caucasus media support programme and USAID-funded Georgia youth peace project to community strengthening work with the United Nations Mission in Kosovo.

Educated in social sciences, Katarzyna is a leadership, strategic management and organizational development expert. A graduate of Stanford Leadership Academy for Development, and a certified trainer (Institute for Leadership & Management), Katarzyna is strongly committed to responsible leadership rooted in ethical values, centered around human potential and driven by sustainable social impact.

*Introductory address:*

**Dr. Ahmed Shaheed**, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief

Dr. Ahmed Shaheed is the current UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief and a member of the UN Advisory Committee on Interfaith Dialogue at the UN Office of Genocide Prevention. Prior to Dr. Shaheed's current mandate, he was the first UN Special Rapporteur on Iran since 2002, a post which he held for five years. Dr. Shaheed is a career diplomat, having served as the Foreign Minister of the Maldives twice, overseeing the Maldives' efforts to meet its obligations under international human rights law between 2003 and 2011. He is a senior lecturer of International Law and Deputy Director of the Human Rights Centre at Essex University.

*Session 1:*

**Prof. Elizabeth Clark**, Associate Director of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies

Elizabeth A. Clark is Associate Director of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies at Brigham Young University. Professor Clark has written over 40 chapters and articles and edited several books on comparative and U.S. law and religion issues and religion in post-Communist Europe. In her work with the Center, she has spoken at and organized over 100 academic conferences throughout the world. She has also testified before the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom on religious freedom issues, taken part in drafting legal analyses of pending legislation affecting religious freedom in over a dozen countries, and has written *amicus* briefs on religious freedom issues for the U.S. Supreme Court. In addition to her work at the BYU International Center for Law and Religion Studies, Professor Clark has taught Professional Responsibility and co-taught classes on Comparative Law, Comparative Constitutional Law, International Human Rights, and European Union law at the J. Reuben Clark School of Law at Brigham Young University. Professor Clark is fluent in Russian and Czech and has a reading knowledge of French and German.

**Dr. Dmytro Vovk**, Member of the OSCE/ODIHR Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief

Dr. Dmytro Vovk teaches law and runs the Center for the Rule of Law and Religion Studies at Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University in Kharkiv, Ukraine. He works as an expert on the rule of law and religious freedom for the UNFPA, OSCE/ODIHR, and the USAID, and is an academic adviser to the Constitutional Court of Ukraine. In 2019, Vovk was appointed a member of the OSCE/ODIHR Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief. He also co-edits the blog "Talk About: Law and Religion."

Dr. Vovk was a Kennan-Fulbright Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in the US (2017), and a Visiting Scholar at the International Center for Law and Religion Studies, BYU Law School (2018-19).

**Mr. Pavel Chacuk**, Deputy Head, Human Rights Department, OSCE/ODIHR (moderator)

Pavel Chacuk is a human rights expert and trainer with experience in working with civil society, National human rights institutions and governments throughout the OSCE area. Mr. Chacuk started his human rights career in the end of nineties, as a trainer in a Belarusian NGO where he trained teachers and university staff in human rights and legal education approaches. He also taught human rights at the State University of Grodna, one of the largest universities in Belarus. For many years he has been providing expert advice, developing capacity building initiatives and participating in human rights monitoring missions. Mr. Chacuk also worked as an expert adviser at the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions, focusing on the role of NHRIs in (post-) conflict situations. Pavel worked many years at ODIHR as Human Rights Adviser. He is currently ODIHR's Acting Deputy Head of the Human Rights Department.

*Session II:*

**Dr. Margherita Galassini**, Researcher at the Center for Religious Studies of Fondazione Bruno Kessler

Dr. Margherita Galassini is a researcher at the Center for Religious Studies of Fondazione Bruno Kessler in Trento where she conducts research on the interactions between religion and innovation, in particular in the fields of digital technology and artificial intelligence. She is a member of the G20 Interfaith Forum Working Group on Religion, Technology, Innovation and Infrastructure (chaired by Prof. Marco Ventura). Prior to joining Fondazione Bruno Kessler, Dr. Galassini was a Junior Visiting Scholar at Nuffield College, University of Oxford, and a trainee at Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome. She holds a PhD in Political Theory from LUISS Guido Carli, Rome, an MRes in European Studies and an MSc in Philosophy and Public Policy from the London School of Economics and Political Science, and a BA in Philosophy and Politics from the University of Southampton.

**Ms. Lydia El-Khouri**, Project Manager at Textgain

Lydia El-Khouri is a programme manager at Textgain - AI for good ([www.textgain.com/aiforgood](http://www.textgain.com/aiforgood)). Textgain is a language technology spin-off company from the University of Antwerp, that develops AI for addressing societal challenges, such as online hate speech, disinformation, radicalization, and extremism. Lydia is currently implementing the EC funded project Detect Then Act (<https://dtct.eu>). Lydia has over 20 years' experience in field of Diversity, Advocacy and Freedom of Expression, before joining Textgain to work on the synergy of these with AI.

**Ms. Keisi Seferi**, Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office on Youth and Security

Keisi Seferi has been the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Youth and Security since June 2020. She graduated in Public Health from the University of Tirana in 2017 with excellent academic standing. During her studies, Ms.

Seferi was a member of the Student Senate and later, President of the Student Senate promoting youth leadership and civic activism. She holds a master's degree in Health Management from the same University. She has also attended various training courses on the role of young women and gender equality; children rights; leadership and youth employment challenges; community service of young people, including at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

Since 2013, Ms. Seferi has served the Albanian Prime Minister's Office. She has been engaged in the consultative process of drafting the Albanian National Plan on Youth 2015-2020.

**Ms. Andrea Huber**, Head, Human Rights Department, OSCE/ODIHR (moderator)

Andrea Huber is ODIHR's Head of the Human Rights Department. Before joining ODIHR as Deputy Chief of the Rule of Law Unit in 2017, Ms. Huber held the position of Policy Director at Penal Reform International, an international NGO specializing in criminal justice. Previously, as Deputy Director for Europe and Central Asia of Amnesty International she led research and campaign activities on Europe and Central Asia of Amnesty International's International Secretariat. Ms. Huber is a graduate of Vienna Law School.

Session III:

**Dr. Lena Larsen**, Director, Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief

Dr. Lena Larsen is an historian of religion and she is the director of the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief at the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, University of Oslo (since 1999). She obtained her PhD in 2011 with a thesis published as *How Muftis Think. Islamic Legal Thought and Muslim Women in Western Europe* (Brill, 2018). She has co-chaired the Oslo Coalition project *New Directions in Islamic Thought* since 2003, and she is co-editor of its previous publications *New Directions in Islamic Thought and Practice* (2009) and *Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law* (2013), as well as *Freedom of Expression in Islam. Challenging Blasphemy and Apostasy Laws* (forthcoming 2020). She was also an associate editor of *Facilitating Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Deskbook* (2004). She is a member of the advisory committee at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, for a continuing education program for religious leaders with a foreign background.

**Mr. Emir Kovacevic**, Director of the Law office based in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Member of the OSCE/ODIHR Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief

Emir Kovačević is a lawyer. He has his own law office in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1999. He was actively engaged in the work of the Inter-religious Council in BiH on behalf of the Islamic Community from 1999 until 2019. As a coordinator of the legal expert group of Interreligious Council he worked on the drafting new Law on the Legal status of churches and religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Anti-discrimination Law. He is a deputy president of the Commission for religious freedom in the Islamic Community in Bosnia and

Herzegovina. In June 2017 he received a diploma master in law science. He is a member of the OSCE/ODHIR Panel of experts on freedom of religion or belief.

He is author of the two books, *Freedom of religion in judgments of the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg* which was published in 2013 and *Freedom of religion at the workplace in USA* published in 2015.

He is editor of the book *The right to freedom of religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 1998 Publisher: WCRP 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, USA. Also, he has published more than 20 articles on the topic of freedom of religion or belief.

**Dr. Kishan Manocha**, Head, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, OSCE/ODIHR (moderator)

Dr. Kishan Manocha is the Head of the Tolerance and Non-discrimination Department of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, where he served as Senior Adviser on Freedom of Religion or Belief before that.

He has served as Director of the Office of Public Affairs of the Bahá'í community of the United Kingdom. He holds degrees in medicine and law from the Universities of London and Cambridge respectively. He has extensive experience in religious freedom and minority rights issues in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia as a consultant to international and non-governmental organizations.

He first trained in psychiatry, completing a Research Fellowship in Forensic Psychiatry, before studying law. He specialized in international criminal and human rights law for his LLM and practiced as a barrister in a number of international criminal law cases before the English courts. He has worked at the Special Court for Sierra Leone and has been a Visiting Research Fellow at the Carr Center for Human Rights at Harvard as well as a Fellow of the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies at Concordia University. He has lectured at universities in the United Kingdom and Pakistan and is a Research Fellow at the Religious Freedom and Business Foundation, a Professional Associate at the Centre for Law and Religion at Cardiff University, and a member of the Advisory Council of the Centre for Religion and Global Affairs.

*Closing remarks:*

**Ms. Katarzyna Gardapkhadze**, First Deputy Director, OSCE/ODIHR (see above)

**Ms. Erida Dobrush**i, Minister Plenipotentiary, Deputy Permanent Representative, 2020 Albanian Chairmanship

Ms. Erida Dobrush was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary and Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Albania to the OSCE and other International Organizations in Vienna in November 2019. Since January 2020, she serves as Chairperson of the OSCE Preparatory Committee under the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship.

Prior to this assignment, Ms. Dobrushy has worked as senior expert in international programs, supporting good governance and democracy in Albania (April 2014-November 2019). She has extensive experience in elections management and has served as Director of Elections Infrastructure and Logistics of the Central Election Commission in Albania (December 2002 – April 2014). For several years, she has been part of civil society organizations and think tanks (1998-2002).

Ms. Dobrushy holds a BA degree in Social Sciences from the University of Tirana (1998), MSc in Politics and Administration from the University of Bologna (2002) and MA Degree in Administrative Law from the University of Tirana (2014).