

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

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“Tolerance and non-discrimination I, including combating anti-Semitism, combating intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief, including against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions”

Statement of Francesco Di Lillo, Director

European Union Office of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints^{1 2}

Madame Moderator,

We are nearing the end of 2018 and by now, we have seen several reports addressing the status of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in the world: the report of the U.N. Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief in March; the United State Commission on International Religious Freedom’s report in April; the U.S. State Department’s report at the end of May; the annual report by the European Parliament’s Intergroup on Freedom of religion or belief & Religious tolerance, just last week. The general picture is quite grim: vulnerable groups are still targeted, persecuted, harassed, deprived of their most basic rights

¹ The European Union Office of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Brussels works with and fosters dialogue among EU stakeholders, including opinion leaders, academics, religious and political leaders engaged in freedom of religion or belief, humanitarian assistance, volunteerism and youth. It is also a member of the European Platform on Religious Intolerance and Discrimination (EPRID), a network of civil society organisations, including religious and non-religious associations, that aims to contribute to the collective promotion and protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief in the world as defined by Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

² The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a Christian faith with a worldwide membership of over 16 million, the majority of which reside outside the United States. Its publications are published in 188 languages. The Church provides relief and development projects for humanitarian purposes in 189 countries.

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and freedoms. Victims of such violations are both believers and non-believers. Some reports, however, present signs of hope: more and more individuals and organizations around the world are engaging in promoting and safeguarding freedom of religion, a God-given right; and violations are more likely to be reported and addressed. Freedom of religion protects not only individuals but also the religious organizations that make faith communities possible.³ “We do not believe that human law has a right to interfere in prescribing rules of worship” or to “dictate forms for public or private devotion.”⁴

FoRB violations, however, are not perpetrated just by state actors or violent groups. Often, dominant faith groups or state religions are those who directly or indirectly encourage religious discrimination. There is a paradox to religious freedom — a genuine gain arising from an apparent loss. The dilemma goes something like this: If you want your religious beliefs to be protected, you must protect religious beliefs that fundamentally differ from your own. This does not require an endorsement of those beliefs, but it does require a certain respect for them. Competing claims of truth and belief don’t easily coexist. However, “religious freedom for me but not for thee” cannot work, especially in a world as diverse as ours. Centuries of sectarian conflict have shown that such attitudes degrade the freedom of both. The way to ensure one’s own freedom is to ensure freedom for everyone.⁵ As Jan Figel, European Commission’s Special Envoy for the promotion of FoRB outside the European Union, recently put it, religious leaders need to embrace and apply the principles of “religious social responsibility.”

As a global church, and because of its history, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a special commitment to religious freedom. For nearly 200 years Mormon leaders have taught the importance of religious freedom for everyone: “We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.”⁶

³ “Religious Freedom,” <https://www.lds.org/topics/religious-freedom?lang=eng&old=true>

⁴ Doctrine & Covenants 134:4

⁵ See W. Cole Durham, “The Doctrine of Religious Freedom,” BYU devotional address (3 April 2001).

⁶ 11th Article of Faith, The Articles of Faith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/pgp/a-of-f/1?lang=eng>

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It is our hope and prayer that participating States, civil society, religious leaders and all people of goodwill will embrace these principles, protect religious freedom for all and work together towards a more tolerant society.

Thank you.