

Press release

Frederiksberg, Denmark

January 20th, 2016

The Danish Inter-parliamentarian network on Freedom of Religion or Belief

Across the political spectrum seven members of the Danish parliament have established an inter-parliamentarian network on Freedom of Religion or Belief. Starting in December 2015, the objective of the network is primarily to strengthen freedom of religion or belief in Danish foreign- and development policies.

The bleak background is that today more people are fleeing due to their convictions. Reports surface about Muslims discriminated against by Buddhist groups in Myanmar, and widespread persecution is witnessed of Christians in Iraq and Syria by Islamic State and in Nigeria by Boko Haram. At the same time, Christian militias persecute Muslims in the Central African Republic.

In global perspective, it is ambiguous who is persecutor and who is persecuted. However, it is evident that the general trend for freedom of religion or belief is negative. In 27% of the world's 193 countries, high or very high restrictions on freedom of religion or belief existed in 2013. In these countries, 63% of the world's population lives. If social coercion from individuals and groups on religious minorities are added, the number rises to 77% of the world's population living in context of violation of freedom of religion or belief. Thus, the lack of freedom of religion or belief is a massive and complex problem.

In relation with other human rights, freedom of religion or belief has been characterized as the "orphaned right" due to neglect and lack of advocates. The parliamentarians behind this network intent to lift freedom of religion and belief up to the same level as other human rights both nationally in Denmark and internationally in Danish foreign and development policies.

Freedom of religion or belief as presented in United Nation Human Rights Declaration article 18 is a recognition that everybody can think and belief as he or she please. This right also entails the right to change ones belief or not to have a belief. In other words, freedom of religion or belief is a cornerstone in a democratic society.

Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs
Kristian Jensen on freedom of
religion or belief (our
translations):

*"Denmark must strengthen its
efforts for persecuted minorities"*
(Press release September 4th 2015
um.dk)

*"Denmark must be in the forefront
of the international fight for
religious freedom"* (Christian Daily
September 1st 2015).

Changing national governments have struggled with the challenge to promote this very central right in its foreign and development policies. The purpose of the network is to bring together parliamentarians across the political spectrum with scientists and researchers and civil society organizations in a common informed dialogue on how freedom of religion or belief can be strengthened and how similar efforts is tackled in other national and international forums.

Founding members of the network: Daniel Toft Jakobsen (Danish Social Democrats), Mette Bock (Liberal Alliance), Christian Juhl (The Red-Green Alliance), Ulla Sandbeck (The Alternative), Yildiz Akdogan (Danish Social Democrats), Mette Hjermand Dencker (The Danish People's Party), Christina Egelund (Liberal Alliance).

Contact for more information: Chair: Daniel Toft Jakobsen, MP for Danish Social Democrats email: sdatj@ft.dk, phone: +45 61624451.

Who is behind? The Danish Inter-parliamentarian Network for Freedom of Religion or Belief, founded in cooperation between the Members of Parliament listed above, Danish Institute for Human Rights and Danish Mission Council.

Danish Institute for Human Rights is a self-governing state institution with a mandate to promote and protect human rights and equality in Denmark and abroad. With a point of departure in freedom of religion or belief as a fundamental human right the Danish Institute have developed a number of recommendations to the Danish Government

Danish Mission Council is an umbrella organization for 32 Danish mission organizations working with Christian mission understood as Christian witness, new fellowships and work to change the world. A number of organizations are working directly with persecuted Christians and other minorities in different countries.

Daniel Toft Jakobsen, chair for the Danish network on Freedom of Religion or Belief for parliamentarians: "A lot of people around the world experience harassment, discrimination and even persecution based on their religion or belief. Many of the world's conflicts are closely related to lack of freedom of religion or belief. With this network we intend to renew the focus on these relations."

Daniel Toft Jakobsen, chair the network on Freedom of Religion or Belief for Danish parliamentarians: "I am very happy about the number of parties already represented in the network. Freedom of Religion or Belief for Christians, Muslims, atheists and everybody else is fortunately something we can agree on across the political spectrum in Denmark."