

The Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief: Perspectives from the Global South

CFP for Thematic Issue

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The Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is a niche but pivotal - and controversial - topic in the global policy and human rights landscape. For a long time thought of as “the forgotten right” or “the orphaned right,” since the late 1980s, focus on FoRB has slowly but surely increased (Petersen 2021). FoRB now receives a significant amount of attention and funding from national governments and intergovernmental institutions. The US, for example, has an entire office devoted to the promotion of this one right. Numerous other countries and political bodies, including the UK, the Netherlands, Denmark, the EU, and Norway, have established Special Envoys on FoRB. The International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA) was established in 2020. Significant controversies have also arisen with this increased focus on FoRB, including a growing perception that the right to FoRB is somehow in conflict with the rights of women and the rights of LGBTQI people. The push to promote FoRB is also often associated with both the PCVE agenda and activism to protect the rights of Christians, and as such, is viewed by some actors with a degree of scepticism (Gruell and Wilson 2018).

Much of the impetus for this increased focus on the right to FoRB seems to be coming from the Global North. As a result, the majority of research that has been carried out on FoRB in recent years has tended to focus on how Global North countries are pursuing their FoRB policy agenda. Little to no attention has been devoted to how such policies land in the Global South, and even less to how Global South countries themselves seek to uphold this right and the problems and challenges they encounter when doing so.

This special issue will address this significant research gap. It will bring together a range of voices and perspectives, specifically focused on understanding the right to FoRB within and from the Global South. By investigating how FoRB is articulated in different localities, this special issue also aims to develop a theoretical framework to understand the specificities and local grammars of FoRB emerging from the Global South. For this special issue, we understand “Global South” as the regions and peoples of the world typically restricted to the margins of global political power and activity (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Daley 2018). Often, such marginalisation and exclusion occur as a result of neo- or post- colonial relationships. Geographically, this includes Latin America, Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Middle East, though we recognise other groups of people may be within traditional “Global North” countries yet form part of the Global South (Indigenous Australians, for example). Consequently, we seek contributions exploring the socio-political conflicts and controversies surrounding how the right to FoRB is understood, promoted, implemented, and upheld in these marginalised contexts.

This thematic issue stems from an ongoing research project called “Reimagining Religion, Security, and Social Transformation” (2023-2026) as part of the Joint Initiative for Strategic Religious Action (JISRA). JISRA aims to co-create a strategy to advance the right to FoRB in seven countries - Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria and Uganda (with supporting lobby and advocacy in Europe and the USA) JISRA is an international interfaith consortium consisting of Mensen met een Missie, Faith to Action Network, Tearfund (UK and

Netherlands), and Search for Common Ground. JISRA is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (within the policy framework “Power of Voices”).

Contribution axis

Building on the above elements, contributors to this thematic issue are invited to engage in the following questions:

1. Who are the privileged actor/s who define, redefine, or conceptualize FoRB in policy and practice? How are these FoRB definitions and conceptualizations internalized, reproduced, and transformed in the Global South?
2. How and when do we see FoRB relevant in the Global South? How do local communities understand and express this relevance in their lives? How do communities embody and perform FoRB in their everyday lives?
3. How are FoRB interventions viewed in the Global South? What challenges do FoRB interventions face or envisage in the Global South? How do policymakers, donor communities, or the aid sector understand and interpret FoRB? Do these interpretations converge, diverge, or even contradict local interpretations on FoRB?
4. How can localization of FoRB facilitate creative initiatives, bifurcations, resilience, or non-violent resistance?
5. How is FoRB deployed and/or politicised as a form of resistance to Global North pressure and influence, e.g. with regard to supposed conflicts between FoRB and gender or minority rights?
6. What are the different meanings attached to the language of the right to FoRB across different Global South contexts? How do diverse actors navigate the multiple meanings the language of this right can carry?
7. What are the politics of vernacularization? What (potential) problems does it resolve or create?

We also welcome any other relevant topic on the right to FoRB in the Global South.

Deadlines

June 15, 2024: Abstract submission

Please send an extended abstract of no more than 500 words outlining the article and the arguments. We also ask for the contributor’s full name, current affiliation, current mailing address, and email address.

June 30, 2024: Selection of abstracts

Mid July: Zoom mini-conferences (dates to be confirmed) with contributors to talk about their focus areas and the main argument of the individual articles. The main idea is to help contributors, share perspectives, and create internal consistency.

October 30, 2024: draft articles of no more than 10,000 words (including all references and footnotes) are submitted to the editors.

November 30, 2024: A reviewed and edited manuscript will be returned to the contributors by the editors.

February 10, 2025: contributors submit their final chapters.

February 21, 2025: Submission to the Journal

April-May 2025: Policy workshop to be held (venue and date to be announced). During the workshop, we intend to launch the special thematic of the journal.

Selected authors will be invited to take part in a policy workshop entitled “*Religious Engagement and Human Rights in the Global South*” to present their research and offer recommendations for policymakers.

The articles should:

- Be 8000 to 10,000 words, including references;
- Provide an authoritative overview of the state of the art on scholarship on the theme of the article;
- Set the agenda for the further development of scholarship on the specific area of the article;
- Highlight research gaps on issues that have been neglected;
- A combination of insightful theoretical approaches/ up-to-date empirical research.

For any queries or to submit your abstract, please contact Dr. Fathima Badurdeen Azmiya (f.a.badurdeen@rug.nl), Dr. Manoela Carpenedo (m.carpenedo.rodrigues@rug.nl), or Prof. Erin Wilson (e.k.wilson@rug.nl).