

## UPF Statement on International Religious Freedom Day, October 27, 2022

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UPF International - On the occasion of International Religious Freedom Day, October 27, UPF wishes to affirm once again the essential importance of universal human rights and religious freedom at a time when many believers, of both major religions and minority religions, face persecution, intolerance, discrimination, and violence in many countries around the world.

While it is widely acknowledged that freedoms of religion, belief, conscience and speech are fundamental rights that derive necessarily from recognition of the dignity of each human being, it is unfortunately the case that violations of religious freedom are carried out at times by governments and at other times by the general public, even in countries where freedom of religion is enshrined in law.

There are billions of religious believers around the world who identify themselves in diverse ways as Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Sikhs, Jains, Shintoists, and followers of many other faiths, including indigenous traditions and many smaller or newer religions. These same believers are also citizens in good standing in their nations, persons who are entitled to human security and the protections of the rule of law and the rights enumerated in national constitutions.

Freedom of religion is recognized in the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which was adopted on December 16, 1966, by 173 member states of the United Nations General Assembly. Article 18 (1) of the ICCPR states: "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching."

The human right to religious freedom is stated clearly in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was accepted by the United Nations on December 10, 1948. Article 18 of the UDHR affirms that "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in

public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

On November 25, 1981, the United Nations passed the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. This resolution elaborated on the "freedom of thought, conscience and religion" included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Human Rights Council of the United Nations (UNHRC) appoints a Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief to identify violations of religious freedom and to recommend the correction of such violations.

Many national constitutions - including the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution - affirm religious freedom as a fundamental right of all citizens, a right which is to be protected as necessary for human dignity, good governance and rule of law.

International Religious Freedom Day (October 27) commemorates the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act that made promoting and defending international religious freedom a specific focus of U.S. foreign policy. Even though the Act applies to the U.S. only, the day is observed around the world.

UPF, along with others around the world, seeks a world where prejudice, bigotry, hate and violence toward believers have no place, where believers who may be vulnerable to victimization by powerful forces are protected.

We therefore encourage all peoples, all multilateral organizations, and all governments:

to uplift and protect the right to religious freedom of each and every individual;

to educate religious believers in all religions to practice tolerance and mutual respect toward the believers of other religious traditions;

to call upon both persons and governments that may be secular or areligious to respect and affirm the rights of each individual to follow their conscience in matters of faith and belief;

to reject the persecution of religious believers, including members of minority traditions or new religious movements;

to avoid the use of any language or terminology, by governments, the media or the general public, that demeans, mocks, ridicules, disrespects or slanders the beliefs of the members of a particular religion;

to educate the youth in our homes, our classrooms and in our places of worship to be respectful of people of all faiths;

to appeal to governments to live up to their constitutions and laws in protecting their citizens from prejudice, discrimination, and violence that arise because of difference in religious beliefs.

In conclusion, we call on all people throughout the world to uphold the right to religious freedom and to stand firm against all forms of religious intolerance, prejudice, slander and hate.

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*Note: The content expressed above was included in the Declaration on the Universal Value of Religious Freedom, a resolution that was affirmed on August 12, 2022, in Seoul, South Korea, at the Summit 2022 and Leadership Conference sponsored by the Universal Peace Federation.*