

UNGA 73

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**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion
or Belief, Mr. Ahmed Shaheed October 22, 2018**

**Intervention by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic Baltic Group
(Estonia, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and
Sweden)**

Thank you Mr. President,

On behalf of the Nordic-Baltic group, Denmark would like to thank the Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed for organizing this interactive dialogue.

The negative global trend in Freedom of Religion or Belief and the increasing number of persons persecuted for religious reasons is a cause for concern. We appreciate this opportunity to share views on how to reverse the trend and instead make common progress toward the full realization of Freedom of Religion or Belief globally.

Let me first wholeheartedly congratulate Nadia Murad and Denis Mukwege on winning the Nobel Peace Prize. Out of the abyss of life under ISIS, Nadia is standing up for all persecuted religious minorities and for the thousands of women and children who are victims of murders, massacres, rape and torture because of their religion and gender. We must return Nadia's courage by honoring her call to hold the perpetrators accountable.

Dr. Shaheed, we commend you for your report A/73/45410 on the important topic of the interrelationship between Freedom of Religion or Belief and violent extremism. We fully agree with its conclusion that upholding and protecting Freedom of Religion or Belief is an indispensable component in any comprehensive strategy countering terrorism and violent extremism.

We also fully support the view that the human right of Freedom of Religion or Belief as enshrined in the UDHR and ICCPR, should not only be seen as an aim in itself but also as a means to achieving justice and peace within and among nations.

To promote Freedom of Religion or Belief, our approach should be broad and firmly based on the universal Human Rights in particular Article 18 in the UDHR and Article 18 ICCPR. And on the Vienna Declaration principle, that all human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated. Freedom of Religion or Belief is an individual right, not that of religions. Freedom of Religion or Belief does not in any way go against women's full enjoyment of human right and gender equality. On the contrary, we believe that the relationship between two sets of rights, albeit complex, is mutually reinforcing. We want to pursue this, because we believe that gender equality, a paramount goal in itself, is also an important key to the full realization of Freedom of Religion.

One important dimension is, that women are often in a particularly vulnerable situation when religious minorities suffer persecution As Nadia's example sadly illustrates.

In many places, women are restricted in their ability to contribute to the ongoing interpretations of their respective religions and to practice their religion in consistency with their own conscience. We believe that this limits the ability of women to fully exercise their freedom of religion or belief. It can also lead to other human rights violations. Such as is the case with not only the harmful practices of female genital mutilation and child early and forced marriages, but also so-called honor killings, forced conversions, the lack of access to divorce and justice in cases of sexual abuse or rape, and the loss of custody of children in cases of male initiated divorce etc.

If there is no equality in the enjoyment of human rights, there are no human rights.

In less than two months, we will celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We see this as an occasion to reconfirm the universality of the Human Rights as a fundamental concept embraced by countries in Global South as well as Global North.

Thank you.