

UN Human Rights Council: 31st Session (February 29-March 24, 2016)
Item 3: ID with Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief
Speaker: Michael De Dora, Main Representative

The Relationship Between the Freedoms of Religion or Belief and Expression

Mr. Vice President,

We applaud the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief for focusing his final annual report to the Council on the relationship between the freedoms of religion or belief and expression.¹ We would like to draw out several important points from this report.

First, we view these rights as belonging to the same family — one rooted in the conscience.² Freedom of religion or belief protects the internal liberty of each individual to hold opinions as they choose, and to manifest those beliefs in one's behavior — through worship, dress, and community. Freedom of expression extends these rights by protecting the liberty of each individual to promote and defend one's religion or belief, and exchange ideas with others. Seen together, the freedoms of religion or belief and expression provide for a shared set of rights across the religious and non-religious spectrum.

In this view, then, the same set of rights which protects the atheist who wishes to live free of religion and criticize theological propositions, also protects the Muslim who seeks to live devoutly and pray in peace.³

Second, we also support interfaith and intercultural efforts to strengthen the freedoms of religion or belief and expression. But, as the special rapporteur notes, these efforts must be broad and inclusive, inviting both religious *and* non-religious minorities.

Third, we urge states to pay heed to the special rapporteur's call for the repeal of laws which criminalize blasphemy and require citizens to state their religious affiliation on their identification documents, both of which violate international human rights norms.⁴

Lastly, given the global rise in extremism, we urge member states to note the SR's point that "The best antidote to intolerant propaganda is a culture of critical public discourse with broad participation."

¹ http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/A-HRC-31-18_en.pdf

² As Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights States, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

³ After the massacre at *Charlie Hebdo*, there was an unfortunate spate of attacks on mosques and Muslim-owned businesses. See: <https://www.rt.com/news/221995-france-anti-muslim-incidents/>

⁴ CFI has long called for these reforms. See: <http://bit.ly/1QHdMmp> and <http://bit.ly/1USOI2Z>
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