

**LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND: A SERIES OF BRIEFING PAPERS ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS. BRIEFING PAPER # 4<sup>1</sup>**

## FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

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**The right to freedom of religion or belief is linked in important ways to the achievement of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This includes SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment. The links are, however, often misunderstood or neglected, with a common view that freedom of religion or belief entails limitations on women's rights. To achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, their right to freedom of religion or belief must be assured, for example in addressing discriminatory assumptions and practices in family law and in social practices that involve violence against women and restrictions of equal rights. Parliamentarians and religious/belief leaders can play important roles in this. This paper provides a brief introduction to the relationship between freedom of religion or belief and women's rights, identifying key areas of concern, and suggesting concrete actions that parliamentarians and religious/belief leaders can take to address them.**

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### **THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF<sup>2</sup>**

The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion – commonly known as the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) – is a human right. It endows all individuals with the right to have, adopt, change or leave a religion or belief; to manifest and practice this religion or belief, alone or in community with others; and to be free from coercion and discrimination on the grounds of their religion or belief. It also protects the right not to have or practice a religion or belief. And it protects the right of parents to raise their children in conformity with their own beliefs.

The right to have, adopt, change or leave a religion or belief can never be limited or restricted. The right to manifest and practice a religion or belief, however, can be limited in certain circumstances, most importantly when religious or belief manifestations or practices violate the rights and freedoms of others. Limitations must always be prescribed by law, necessary, and proportionate.

As such, the legal responsibility to uphold the right to FoRB lies with the State. Non-state actors with power to affect the lives of rights-holders may, however, be said to have a moral responsibility to contribute to the respect, protection

and promotion of FoRB and other human rights. This includes e.g. religious/belief leaders, politicians and other non-state actors who hold powerful positions in society or otherwise enjoy strong authority and social influence.<sup>3</sup>

### **RIGHTS RELATED TO FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF IN THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS\***

**Article 2:** Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

**Article 18:** 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. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions

**Article 26:** All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

**Article 27:** In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

\* For a full overview of human rights standards related to FoRB, see the website of the OHCHR: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/freedomreligion/pages/standards.aspx>

**FoRB is a universal right.** It is a right of all individuals, regardless of citizenship status and what religion or belief they adhere to, or if they do not adhere to any religion or belief. Religious/belief minorities and indigenous peoples are often vulnerable to FoRB violations, but violations also affect other groups and individuals, such as converts, atheists, women, sexual orientation and gender identity minorities, refugees, and children.

**FoRB entails both collective and individual rights.** While due attention should be given to respect the autonomy of religious/belief communities, individuals always have the right to interpret and practice their religion or belief as they want, including to criticise or leave their religion or belief, even when this challenges the mainstream orthodoxy of religious/belief authorities.

FoRB is closely intertwined, interrelated and mutually interdependent with other human rights. To enjoy FoRB fully, several other rights must also be protected – and the other way around. FoRB is also related to other human rights in the sense that discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief rarely concerns only restrictions of religious practices and manifestations, but also entails violations of other rights.

**FoRB is important in the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals.** If we want to improve the lives and prospects of everyone, ‘leaving no one behind’, we must ensure due attention to those who are subject to discrimination, marginalisation and inequality on the grounds of their religion or belief (or lack thereof).

## RIGHT-SIZING FoRB

Discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief is not only about FoRB. For instance, if people are being excluded from job markets, discriminated against in the health care system, or persecuted on grounds of their religious or belief identity, a range of other rights are typically also being violated, and the violation of FoRB is not necessarily the most pressing concern for these people. Also, marginalisation, discrimination or persecution of people with a particular religious identity is not necessarily religiously motivated. Even hostility that seems to have a clear religious motivation is rarely *only* religiously motivated. Conflicts are complex and multifaceted, and the role of religion is intertwined with many other factors, including economic, political, cultural, social, and historical ones. It is vital not to underestimate the role of religion in marginalisation, discrimination and persecution, but also not to overestimate its role.<sup>4</sup>

## SDG 5: GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Women's empowerment and gender equality lie at the heart of Agenda 2030. SDG 5 aims to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. The goal consists in nine targets, including targets to end all forms of gender discrimination, eliminate gender-based violence and harmful practices, recognise unpaid domestic work, ensure public participation and equal opportunities, ensure sexual and reproductive health rights, and assure equal rights to economic resources. But gender-specific targets are also incorporated in other goals, e.g. to eliminate gender disparity in education (SDG 4.5), ensure women's access to adequate sanitation (SDG 6.2), equal pay for work of equal value, (SDG 8.5), and safe and affordable transport for women (SDG 11.2).<sup>5</sup>

### SELECTED SDG 5 TARGETS

**Target 5.2** Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

**Target 5.3** Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

**Target 5.5** Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

**Target 5.6** Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

Women's rights are human rights. The 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which has been ratified by 189 states, guarantees all women and girls the right to be free from "[a]ny distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."<sup>6</sup>

## FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF AND GENDER EQUALITY

The right to FoRB has often been understood to involve contradictions with women's rights. Those working for the promotion of FoRB and those working for gender equality have rarely worked together – in fact, they sometimes work

against one another. Large parts of the women’s rights movement have paid little attention to religion as anything other than a source of harmful practices, discrimination and patriarchy – as something women should be protected from. As such, they see FoRB as an inherent obstacle to achieving gender equality. Advocates of FoRB, on the other side, have often overlooked or sidelined women’s rights in their promotion of FoRB. Some have seen struggles for gender equality as a threat to the protection of religious values and practices.

Underlying this (mis)perception of a clash between FoRB and rights related to gender equality is a common understanding of FoRB as a right that protects religion – and typically conservative, patriarchal religion. But from a human rights perspective, FoRB is not about protection of religion as such – it is about protecting individuals’ right to have and practice a religion or belief, alone or in community with others. This obviously includes women’s right to interpret and practice their religion the way they believe is true, even when this challenges mainstream religious traditions and norms. Furthermore, FoRB does not protect religious manifestations and practices that violate other people’s rights and freedoms, including those related to gender equality.<sup>7</sup>

### REFLECTION: WOMEN’S RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

*The terminology in most international human rights documents is masculine, using the terms ‘he’, ‘his’ and ‘him’ to describe rightsholders. Below we have changed the terminology in ICCPR’s article 18 to a feminine terminology. Does this make you think differently about FoRB and its rights-holders?*

Every woman 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 her choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest her religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. No woman shall be subject to coercion which would impair her freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of her choice.

### CHALLENGES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FoRB AND GENDER EQUALITY

That there is no *inherent* contradiction between FoRB and women’s rights does not mean that the relationship between the two is always straight-forward. There can be tensions between the two sets of rights in concrete, specific instances, with fulfilment of one right implying restrictions on another. In practice, most challenges seem to involve violations of *both* FoRB and women’s rights rather than a clash between the two. Research highlights a correlation between countries with high restrictions on religion and low protection of women’s rights.<sup>8</sup> The following

presents pertinent challenges in the relationship between FoRB and women's rights:

**Discriminatory family laws:** An estimated 2.5 billion women and girls live in countries with gender discriminatory laws.<sup>9</sup> Denominational family laws, or personal status laws, present a particular challenge, both to women's rights and to FoRB. In various countries, especially those with an official State religion, family law is based on religion and may be directly and formally administered by a religious court. Different religious communities follow specific laws, administered by their own courts, and conforming to their own religious traditions.

Denominational family laws typically involve gender discrimination in relation to e.g. custody, marriage, divorce, inheritance, and property, granting women different and lesser rights than men. At the same time, they also discriminate on the grounds of religion/belief, insofar as women are accorded different rights, depending on their religious/belief identity. Denominational family laws may also violate the right to be free from coercion, e.g. in cases where women's right to marriage or custody of their children is predicated on them converting to another religion.

### RELIGIOUSLY BASED RESERVATIONS TO CEDAW

While most countries in the world have ratified the Convention for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), more than 40 countries have expressed reservations to parts of the convention. Several of these reservations are religiously justified. Most are reservations to Article 2 which concerns gender equality in national legislation, and Article 16 which concerns discrimination against women in matters relating to marriage and family relations, often regulated under personal status law, or family law. Reservations to these articles are considered by CEDAW to be 'incompatible with the object and purpose of the convention' and should not be permitted. They have consequences for individuals' enjoyment of a range of human rights, including their right to non-discrimination on the grounds of their gender, but also their right to FoRB and to non-discrimination on the grounds of their religion/belief.

**Gender-based violence:** Gender-based violence is often closely intertwined with patriarchal religious norms. Conceptions of women's inferiority, purity and fragility may contribute to legitimising gender-based violence as a necessary means to sustain the patriarchal order. In some contexts, this is also reflected in laws and policies that diminish the seriousness of gender-based violence, by, for example, placing a higher burden of proof on victims of gender-based violence, reducing the value of women's testimony and allowing perpetrators of violence to invoke

‘honour’ or to marry the victim to escape criminal responsibility or minimise punishment.<sup>10</sup> Regardless of whether religion is invoked as a justification, FoRB does not protect any form of gender-based violence, nor laws that diminish the seriousness of such violence.

In situations of religiously related conflicts or oppression of religious/belief minorities or indigenous peoples, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence. Such violence may be employed as part of a strategy to eliminate or ‘contaminate’ a community, or as a tool for retaliation and revenge. It can include rape, forced sterilisation or forced marriage. Religious taboos and stigma around gender and sexuality often mean that victims of gender-based violence are met with silence, denial or suspicion. Even when gender-based violence is part of systematic oppression of religious/belief minorities, women have experienced lack of recognition of their suffering by their own community, leaving them doubly victimised.

**Harmful practices:** In some contexts, traditions and practices that harm the rights of women and girls are justified with reference to religious or cultural beliefs. This can include for example female genital mutilation, menstruation huts, forced conversion child or early marriages and harmful widowhood practices. Such practices are not protected by FoRB. In fact, States are obliged to eliminate all harmful practices, and repeal laws that diminish the seriousness of such practices.<sup>11</sup> As noted by the UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB, “the principle of institutional autonomy does not extend to State deference to harmful discriminatory gender norms. Nor does it oblige them to defer from intervening to prevent harmful practices because said practices are informed by a ‘religious ethos.’”<sup>12</sup>

When intervening to stop harmful practices in a particular religious or belief community, it is important that these practices are not used as a justification for banning or restricting *all* religious practices of this community, which would amount to a disproportionate restriction on their right to FoRB.<sup>13</sup> As noted by Minority Rights Group International: “Often what is needed is informed dialogue on how to reform certain specific practices without restricting or denigrating a culture or religion as a whole.”<sup>14</sup>

## FAITH FOR RIGHTS, COMMITMENT V<sup>15</sup>

*We pledge to ensure non-discrimination and gender equality in implementing this declaration on “Faith for Rights”. We specifically commit to revisit, each within our respective areas of competence, those religious understandings and interpretations that appear to perpetuate gender inequality and harmful stereotypes or even condone gender-based violence. We pledge to ensure justice and equal worth of everyone as well as to affirm the right of all women, girls and boys not to be subjected to any form of discrimination and violence, including harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, child and/or forced marriages and crimes committed in the name of so-called honour.*

**Women’s participation and leadership in religious institutions:** Religious institutions are powerful actors in many contexts, not only at community level but also at regional and national levels, contributing to and influencing decision-making processes in political, economic and public life, whether formally or informally. In most religious traditions, women do not participate in religious institutions on an equal footing with men, and the possibilities for holding religious leadership positions are limited, if they exist at all. This means that women have fewer opportunities to influence decision-making internally in the institution, and in political, economic and public life more broadly.

FoRB protects the autonomy of religious institutions, meaning that, in general, the State should not interfere with the internal organisation or practices of the institution. This also means that religious institutions are exempt from complying with requirements as to gender equality and non-discrimination, as long as they do not “inordinately discriminate against others on the basis of gender.”<sup>16</sup> At the same time, however, FoRB protects the right of internal dissidents to present alternative interpretations of religious texts and traditions, including feminist or gender-sensitive ones; and in cases where this leads to coercive or violent reactions from the community, the State is obliged to provide protection to dissidents.<sup>17</sup>

**Access to sexual and reproductive health:** In many contexts, women’s access to sexual and reproductive health services is severely restricted, e.g. in the form of criminal and other legal restrictions on abortion; restrictions on access to contraception and family planning, including required consent from a legal guardian; and restrictions on provision of sexual and reproductive education and information.<sup>18</sup> Religion often plays an important role in justifying such restrictions, whether explicitly or implicitly. However, FoRB does not protect religious practices that violate the rights and freedoms of others, including rights related to sexual and reproductive health. FoRB cannot, for instance, be invoked to deny women access to contraceptives or to condition their access to contraceptives on their husband’s consent.



There are, however, grey areas and dilemmas that are not easily resolved. The issue of abortion is particularly contentious. Restrictions on women's access to abortion services do not *per se* constitute a violation of human rights. According to international human rights standards, States may adopt measures designed to regulate voluntary terminations of pregnancy. However, such measures must not result in violation of the right to life of a pregnant woman or girl, or any other human rights. Some argue that restrictions on access to abortion constitute a violation of women's right to FoRB, insofar as it restricts them from exercising their conscience to make their own reproductive health decisions.<sup>19</sup> Others use FoRB as an argument for restrictive abortion laws and for 'conscientious objection' clauses that guarantee medical staff the right to refuse participation in abortion-related services in contexts where abortion is a legal right.

While the human rights framework does accommodate conscientious objection, there are limits. For example, conscience cannot justify a refusal to perform a life-saving abortion when no other suitable alternatives exist for a woman to obtain the abortion.<sup>20</sup> Also, in contexts where the vast majority of medical staff refuse to carry out abortions, conscientious objection effectively hinders some women from enjoying their legally guaranteed access to such health services. The UN Human Rights Committee has called upon States to remove barriers to safe and legal abortion, including 'barriers caused as a result of the exercise of conscientious objection by individual medical providers;' a statement which has been reiterated by the UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB.<sup>21</sup>

## RELIGION AND GENDER EQUALITY

When addressing challenges related to FoRB and women's rights, a nuanced understanding of the role(s) of religion is needed. Religious doctrines, traditions and norms can be (mis)used to encourage and justify gender discrimination and violations of women's rights. But religion can also be a positive source of motivation and mobilisation in struggles for gender equality and non-discrimination.

Religion is often an important factor in facilitating – or countering – gender discrimination, but not always the most important factor. Discrimination is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, including religious as well as economic, political, cultural, social and historical factors. Responses to discrimination need to be equally multifaceted. Religious actors and discourses can often play an important role, but they cannot stand alone.

When analysing and addressing challenges related to FoRB and gender equality, it is imperative to bear in mind this complexity and openly explore the different roles that religion can play in relation to struggles for gender equality, rather than presume an inherently positive or negative role of religion in this.

## HOW TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FoRB AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS? SUGGESTED ACTIONS FOR RELIGIOUS/BELIEF LEADERS AND PARLIAMENTARIANS

Paying attention to FoRB is necessary to achieve full gender equality and contribute to the empowerment of all women and girls. A lack of attention to, or unwillingness to engage with, the overlaps and intersections between FoRB and women's rights can result in an incomplete understanding of the challenges at hand in working towards SDG 5.

This, in turn, leads to inadequate responses to these challenges, and lost opportunities for synergies, learning and cooperation. Ultimately, this will disadvantage the very people that these rights are meant to protect, including women and girls in religious minorities, as well as religious feminists, female atheists and the many others who experience violations of their human rights on the basis of both their gender and their religious or belief identity.

Religious/belief leaders, parliamentarians and other moral duty-bearers can play important roles in contributing to the respect, protection and promotion of both FoRB and women's rights.

**Parliamentarians** are responsible for proposing, scrutinising and eventually adopting laws; and for overseeing and passing budgets. They also have a duty to represent their constituents, ensuring that their perspectives, experiences and needs are taken into consideration and promoting citizen participation in political processes.<sup>22</sup> In all of this, they can contribute to raising awareness of discrimination on the grounds of gender and religion/belief and point to ways in which this can be overcome. They can:

- Encourage collection and analysis of disaggregated data on religion and gender in national statistics. Data on the gendered aspects of FoRB violations as well as on the religious/belief aspects of gender discrimination is essential in order to identify inequalities and discrimination, to design adequate responses, and to track progress and set-backs over time.
- Review and encourage reform of laws that discriminate on the basis of religion and/or gender. Particular attention should be paid to religiously justified personal status and family laws which often involve gender discrimination alongside discrimination against minorities in relation to e.g. custody, marriage, divorce, inheritance, and property.
- Advocate for gender-sensitive budgeting and analyse the budget to identify potential bias or under-prioritisation of specific groups, including women in religious/belief minorities

- Facilitate inclusive consultations with those who are marginalised and discriminated against, including religious minority women, religious feminists and others who are victims of discrimination and inequality on the grounds of their gender and their religion or belief, making sure that their perspectives and experiences are heard and taken into account.

**Religious/belief leaders** often enjoy popular support, legitimacy and authority. Many have large networks and relations and have extensive knowledge of the local context in which they work. They can thus play key roles in raising awareness and support for FoRB and women's rights. As noted by the former UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB, Abdelfattah Amor, "[e]nlightened religious officials have an important role to play in informing women of their rights, especially when such rights, which have been established by religious precepts, are misunderstood, infringed or manipulated by conflicting patriarchal traditions or customs."<sup>23</sup> Religious/belief leaders can:

- Revisit those religious/belief understandings and interpretations that appear to perpetuate gender inequality and harmful stereotypes or even condone gender-based violence and harmful practices, and promote understandings and interpretations that encourage gender equality and non-discrimination<sup>24</sup>
- Engage in awareness-raising and education among constituents to address societal norms and practices that discriminate on the basis of religion and/or gender, ideally in cooperation with media, politicians, justice sector actors, scholars, teachers, artists and others who contribute to shaping and disseminating norms and practices around religion and gender.
- Support gender equality advocates within their own religious/belief community. All over the world, people of faith work in different ways to promote gender equality from a religious stand-point. They are often stigmatised, excluded and attacked, whether by governmental authorities or by those in their own religious community who find their gender-sensitive religious interpretations 'heretic', 'blasphemous' or otherwise unacceptable.
- Engage in dialogue and cooperation with secular women's rights advocates, directing attention to areas of convergence and possible synergies, as well as to areas in which there is – real or perceived – tension, including e.g. issues related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, with the aim to provide concrete guidance on how to overcome such tensions.

## ABOUT THE PAPER

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The information contained in this paper represents the views and opinions of the author and does not necessarily represent the views and opinions of any of the above-mentioned entities or persons.

## NOTES

- 1 The series include six papers: Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Sustainable Development Goals (paper #1), Freedom of Religion or Belief and Health (#2), Freedom of Religion or Belief and Education (#3), Freedom of Religion or Belief and Women's Rights (#4), Freedom of Religion or Belief and Climate Change (#5), and Freedom of Religion or Belief and Freedom of Expression (#6). All briefs build in part on the author's report *Promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief and Gender Equality in the Context of the Sustainable Development Goals: Reflections from the 2019 Expert Consultation Process*, Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2020
- 2 See also Marie Juul Petersen and Katherine Marshall, *The International Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief. Sketching the Contours of a Common Framework*, Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2019
- 3 A number of declarations, resolutions and action plans point to the roles and responsibilities of religious actors as moral duty-bearers, including e.g. the *UN Declaration on Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (1981)*, the *Rabat Plan of Action on the Prohibition of Advocacy of National, Racial or Religious Hatred that Constitutes Incitement to Discrimination, Hostility or Violence (2012)*, and the *Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes (2017)*.
- 4 Marie Juul Petersen and Katherine Marshall, *The International Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief*, Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2019, p. 24
- 5 This brief focuses on gender equality primarily in the sense of women's and girls' rights. However, gender equality also encompasses men's and boys' right to equality and non-discrimination. Furthermore, gender equality also includes the rights of sexual orientation and gender identity minorities. For more information on this issue, see the work of UN Independent Expert on Protection Against Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SexualOrientationGender/Pages/Index.aspx>.
- 6 UN, *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women*, 1979, article 1.
- 7 See also Nazila Ghanea, *Women and Religious Freedom: Synergies and Opportunities*, US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2017 and Marie Juul Petersen, *Promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief and Gender Equality in the Context of the Sustainable Development Goals*, Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2020
- 8 Brian Grim and Jo-Ann Lyon, *Religion Holds Women Back. Or does it?* Blog post, World Economic Forum, 2015
- 9 UN Women, *Equality in Law for Women and Girls by 2030. A Multistakeholder Strategy for Accelerated Action*, 2019, p. 10
- 10 UN Women, *Equality in Law for Women and Girls by 2030. A Multistakeholder Strategy for Accelerated Action*, 2019, p. 8
- 11 See e.g. OHCHR's info sheet: [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/SexualHealth/INFO\\_Harm\\_Pract\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/SexualHealth/INFO_Harm_Pract_WEB.pdf)
- 12 Ahmed Shaheed, *Report of the Special Rapporteur, A/HRC/42/48*, 2020, par. 47; *Human Rights Committee, General Comment no. 18*, 1989, par. 7
- 13 Corinne Lennox, Addressing health inequalities in the post-2015 development framework, *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2013, 2014*, p. 17

- 14 Corinne Lennox, Addressing health inequalities in the post-2015 development framework, *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2013, 2014*, p. 17
- 15 OHCHR, *Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on 'Faith for Rights', 2017, Commitment V*
- 16 Ahmed Shaheed, *Gender-based violence and discrimination in the name of religion or belief*. Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, A/HRC/43/48, 2020, para. 48
- 17 Heiner Bielefeldt, *Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, UN General Assembly, A/68/290*, para. 60
- 18 See *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, article 12.2; Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, articles 5, 10, 11 12.1 and 16; and Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment no. 14, E/C.12/2000/4*, 2000. See also Anand Grover, *Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health* (main focus: criminalisation of sexual and reproductive health), A/66/254, 2011, paragraph 48.
- 19 See e.g. Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice website, [www.rcrc.org](http://www.rcrc.org)
- 20 Human Rights Watch, *International Human Rights Law and Abortion*, HRW, 2005
- 21 Human Rights Committee, General comment no. 36 (2018), CCPR/C/GC/36, para. 8; Ahmed Shaheed, *Report of the Special Rapporteur, A/HRC/42/48*, 2020, par. 44
- 22 Kevin Deveaux and Charmaine Rodrigues (2017) *Parliament's role in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals*, UNDP, GOPAC and Islamic Development Bank. The following recommendations are inspired by, and adjusted from, this publication.
- 23 Abdelfattah Amor, *Study on freedom of religion or belief and the status of women in the light of religion and traditions, Report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief to the Commission on Human Rights*, E/CN.4/2002/73/Add.2, 2002
- 24 OHCHR, *Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments on 'Faith for Rights', 2017, Commitment V*