



international association for

**religious freedom**  
belief with integrity

**Agenda Item 4: Promotion and protection of the identity of religious minorities**

Oral Statement by the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF)  
6<sup>th</sup> Session Forum on Minority Issues, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2013

Thank you Madam President.

I am speaking on behalf of the South Asia Coordinating Council of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), an international organization of over 70 member associations of religious and faith based organizations working for freedom of religion or beliefs in over 30 countries.

My intervention on this agenda item focuses on effective human rights education and training programs to ensure the promotion and protection of the identity of religious minorities. The South Asia Coordinating Council's key activities includes grassroots program promoting interfaith and inter-religious dialogue through human rights education workshop and seminars in South Asia countries, especially in India and Pakistan.

India and Pakistan are multi-religious and multicultural societies, and human rights education programs are delivered within context of such diversities, targeting key issues related to religious intolerance and discrimination against religious minorities, including acts of desecration of places of worship, destruction of property, religious riots, religious fundamentalism, restrictions on conversion and gender based violence. Human rights education is essential to help develop a culture of tolerance among people, especially the younger generation and raise awareness of the fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief.

***Human Rights Education (HRE) Programs***

The primary aim of these HRE training are to empower people, with particular focus on youth and women, to ensure that they are aware of their rights, and are able to mobilize, form groups and identify local opportunities to promote or claim their fundamental human rights. Over the past 12 months, the IARF activities in the South Asia Region, have taken the form of 36 Human Rights Education sessions, training over 1500 participants, which include students, youth, government representative, religious leaders and women. The HRE trainings also served as grass roots consultation meetings which resulted in the submission of IARF Joint UPR Submission both for India and Pakistan and likewise, prepared our partners in India during the latest visit of the UN Special Rapportuer on Violence against Women.

### ***World Program for Human Rights Education***

The IARF also supports the World Program for Human Rights Education coordinated by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and would like to reiterate the joint statement by 21 civil society organisations in the Human Rights Council's 21<sup>st</sup> session in 2012, urging all governments to 'devote themselves to the effective implementation of human rights education, by making the best use of national focal points, strategies and plans or actions' to fulfil this accountability. And, affirming that both non-formal and formal trainings are relevant to peoples both young to elderly, empowering them to enjoy and exercise their rights to respect and uphold the rights of others.

### ***Recommendations***

The IARF welcomes the draft recommendations on education and training and awareness, part E and F, in particular, draft recommendations 37, 41 and 44.

- The IARF urges all governments to integrate a minority rights component into their human rights education, to ensure minority issues are integrated, fully reflected in and mainstreamed into national education frameworks and curriculum.
- The IARF strongly believes training initiatives should include components on minority rights, non-discrimination and equality, freedom of religion or belief, good practices and methodologies, and governments should ensure delivery of such training to public institutions, public and law enforcement officials.
- Finally, the IARF strongly encourages all governments to develop and implement inclusive and targeted education policies that are minority-sensitive, but that also provide access to high-quality learning environments for all persons belonging to religious minorities.