



Information Sheet

April 2022

The United States launched the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA) to promote and protect international religious freedom on February 5, 2020 with 27 initial member states. The IRFBA is a network of likeminded states working in coordination to advance freedom of religion or belief around the world.

The IRFBA has two core functions:

- 1) to enhance global advocacy to protect the right of freedom of religion or belief for all and to promote accountability for those who violate freedom of religion or belief; and
- 2) to serve as a platform to better coordinate the efforts of governments, parliamentarians, and civil society in advancing this right.

The IRFBA provides an opportunity to pursue joint action on a voluntary basis in areas of shared interest. IRFBA members must fully commit to the Declaration of Principles (<https://www.state.gov/declaration-of-principles-for-the-international-religious-freedomalliance/>). With limits on religious freedom at an all-time high, affecting more than 80 percent of the world's population, this global problem requires a global solution. Since the launch, eight additional states have joined the IRFBA, bringing the total to 35 member states.

The IRFBA is intended to bring together senior government officials to discuss actions their nations can take together to promote protecting members of religious minority groups and combating discrimination and persecution based on religion or belief.

Advocating for freedom of religion or belief for all, which includes the right of individuals to hold any belief or none, to change religion or belief, and to manifest religion or belief, either alone or in community with others, in worship, observance, practice and teaching, is the guiding principle of the IRFBA.

Since its founding, the IRFBA has identified several thematic areas of work. These have included:

- Responding to Mass Atrocities
- Confronting Blasphemy/Apostasy Laws
- Technology Abetting Religious Freedom Abuses
- Protecting and Preserving Religious Heritage Sites
- Equal Citizenship and Teaching Respect for Diversity

- Gender Equality and Freedom of Religion or Belief
- Sustainable Development Goals and Freedom of Religion or Belief
- Foster Reconciliation and Preventive Processes
- Coordinated Humanitarian Action
- Education and Freedom of Religion or Belief

The IRFBA strives for regional, religious, and political diversity, which demonstrates the universal importance of religious freedom.

IRFBA Leadership and Structure

The United States, through the U.S. Department of State's Office of International Religious Freedom, serves as the IRFBA's Secretariat (IRFA_Secretariat@state.gov) and manages the workflow and meeting schedule of the IRFBA. As of January 2022, Fiona Bruce MP, the UK Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief serves as Chair. Ambassador Jos Douma, the Special Envoy for Religion and Belief of the Netherlands, serves as Vice Chair. Other Steering Committee members are Rashad Hussain, United States Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Joao Lucas Almeida, Director of the Department of Human Rights and Citizenship, Brazilian Foreign Ministry, and Robert Rehak, Special Envoy for Holocaust, Interfaith Dialogue and Freedom of Religion or Belief, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. The IRFBA has initiated a network of civil society experts on freedom of religion or belief, known as the Council of Experts, to advise the IRFBA on developments and possible areas for government action.

IRFBA Participation Categories

Members: Members are states that have joined the IRFBA. Members will be invited to participate at the Minister-level during the annual Ministers' Forum. In the monthly calls, Members help develop the agenda and propose initiatives for other members to consider joining and contributing to, such as statements, events, and tweets.

Observers: Observers are organizations, institutions, or entities that have expertise and are actively advancing freedom of religion or belief globally. They can actively participate in monthly calls and events organized by the IRFBA.

Friends: Friends are states or organizations that are considering joining or becoming observers to meetings. They can attend the monthly meetings and ask questions to further understand the nature and work of the IRFBA. This category is intended to be temporary.

Current Members:

Albania, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, Estonia, The Gambia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, Togo, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Current Observers:

UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Sovereign Order of Malta

Current Friends:

Canada, Japan, South Korea, Sweden