



## **International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance Terms of Reference**

The purpose of this document is to outline the structure and operations of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, doing business as the Article 18 Alliance (hereinafter “Alliance”) and complements the Declaration of Principles of the Alliance.<sup>1</sup> The Alliance was launched in Washington, D.C. on February 5, 2020 with 27 members.

This document reflects the shared understanding that the Alliance should allow for strategic cooperation among Members and interested stakeholders with a view to ensuring promotion of respect for and protection of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) as articulated in the Declaration of Principles.

These Terms of Reference are for the use of Alliance participants and members of the public.

### **A. Objectives**

The Alliance is a voluntary network of states working together to promote respect for and protect freedom of religion or belief for all.

The objective of the Alliance is to advance the right to freedom of religion or belief in both member and non-member states through common action or coordinated action among a sub-group of members, and in the spirit of partnership, cooperation and continual improvement. The Alliance addresses persecution, violence and discrimination against persons on the basis of religion or belief. Advocating for the right to freedom of religion or belief for all individuals, which includes the freedom of thought and conscience, 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 Alliance. Action to promote respect for FoRB is based on the principle that human rights are universal, interdependent, interrelated and indivisible. The actions of members of the Alliance are

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.state.gov/declaration-of-principles-for-the-international-religious-freedom-alliance/>

intended to complement and build upon existing work to promote respect for FoRB within the UN and other competent multilateral and regional organizations.

The Alliance 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 persecution, violence, and discrimination based on religion or belief.

## **B. Structure**

To encourage open input from governments, civil society, and related institutions the Alliance consists of three types of participatory categories. The categories of state participation are “Members” and “Friends.” International organizations, institutions, individuals, or entities may participate as “Observers.” The criteria and joining process for each of these categories is annexed to these Terms of Reference.<sup>2</sup>

Within the leadership structure, the Alliance “Chair” and two “Vice Chairs” within the “Steering Committee” (SC) represent the overall membership.

A Secretariat leads the logistical administration of the Alliance, including the coordination of all Alliance participants and related activities. “Working groups” or other subgroups therein may be formed by Members of the Alliance in coordination with the Steering Committee and Chair to assist in the advancement of Alliance initiatives and priorities.

The Alliance intends to actively pursue non-governmental cooperation and input through a “Council of Experts” (CoE), in addition to other forms of input, such as “deep dive” information discussions.

### **Roles and expectations, defined:**

#### *Members*

1. Members are the states that have joined the Alliance and are represented by a national government official.
2. Members are invited to participate at Ministerial level during the annual Ministers’ Forum.
3. In plenary meetings—meetings of all Alliance members—members help develop the agenda and propose initiatives for collective action among as broad a group of

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<sup>2</sup> Participation in the Alliance does not infer Alliance member recognition of state or entity sovereignty.

participants as possible, such as statements or events. Other Members can choose to join such initiatives on an opt-in basis. The Alliance does not need to operate as a consensus group, since the Alliance does not take action as a body.

4. Members discuss challenges to FoRB and share experiences, strategies, ideas and best practices on how to overcome them, both in Member and non-Member states. To encourage active Member participation:
  - a. A “Members Committee” (MC) is to serve as dedicated feedback mechanism or “voice” of Members of the Alliance during plenary meetings of the Alliance.
  - b. The MC meets prior to the each Alliance plenary meeting and committee membership rotates with each meeting.
  - c. At each plenary meeting of the Alliance, the MC will identify and encourage 10% of Alliance membership to present administrative or religious freedom policy concerns of individual Members, or that of wider Alliance membership.

#### *Friends*

1. Friends are states that have an interest in becoming a Member.
2. Friends can attend and participate in the Member plenary meetings.
3. States may hold Alliance Friend status for one calendar year.
4. At the discretion of the Alliance Chair, and in consultation with the SC, an extension of one or more additional consecutive calendar year(s) may be granted.

#### *Observers*

1. Observers are relevant organizations, institutions, individuals or entities that have expertise in advancing the right to freedom of religion or belief globally and that, upon invitation by the Chair, actively participate in events organized by the Alliance.

#### *Chair*

1. The Alliance and its functions therein, including the Secretariat, are led by a Chair.
2. Any Member state can propose a nominee for the next Chair. All Chair nominees must have served on the Steering Committee before being nominated as Chair. In consultation with the proposed Member State Representative, the Steering Committee will present all nominees to the Plenary.
3. In the event there is a sole nominee, the Members will have one month to review the nomination and vote at the next plenary. If one-third of the members present at the plenary vote against the nominee, the nomination will fail.

4. In the event that more than one Alliance Member is nominated, the Secretariat conducts a vote of all Members. The Member that receives a simple majority of those voting becomes Chair.
  - a) In the event of a tie, additional rounds of voting by Alliance membership are to be held until a winner is determined through simple majority of voting Members in first instance.
5. The Chair serves for a period of one year. The Chair is expected to:
  - a) lead all general (plenary) meetings of the Alliance, SC and CoE;
    - i) The Chair is to convene Members of the Alliance (plenary)—whether in person or virtual—no less than every 8 weeks of each calendar year;
  - b) represent the Alliance externally, where applicable;
  - c) approve the agenda and topics for meetings;
  - d) propose and managing program(s) of work;
  - e) manage the Secretariat;
  - f) galvanize awareness and support for Alliance activities;
  - g) recruit new participants in the Alliance and all subgroups therein per applicable procedures outlined within Alliance Terms of Reference;
  - h) remove Alliance participants per procedures outlined within Alliance Membership Annex;
6. In the event that no Alliance Member wishes to serve as the next Chair, the term of the sitting Chair may be renewed, in consultation with the membership, for one year.

#### *Steering Committee (SC)*

1. The SC serves as the Alliance's oversight mechanism. SC leadership, complemented by Member-led initiatives, drives the activities of the Alliance.
2. The SC includes at least the Chair, and (2) Vice Chairs, and as appropriate, the host of the next Alliance Ministerial or other regular gathering.
  - a. Vice Chairs are appointed by the incoming Chair for a period of one year in consultation with the membership.
  - b. Vice Chairs assume acting leadership of the Alliance in the absence of a Chair.
  - c. Vice Chairs maintain appropriate levels of support and leadership over all Alliance activities.
  - d. The host of the next Alliance Ministerial or other regular gathering is invited to attend the SC meetings, as appropriate.

#### *Council of Experts (CoE)*

1. Scope of Council of Experts members:
  - a. CoE members are members of civil society or academia who have a proven commitment to advancing freedom of religion or belief and are willing to provide their expertise to Alliance Member countries and the Alliance as a whole.
  - b. The CoE is a body of expertise, it is not a body for issue advocacy.
  - c. Individual expertise is given to a specific line of effort, which could include providing toolkits, briefings, and informational and strategic materials useful to government bodies.
  - d. CoE members can provide advice when consulted in periodic virtual and in-person meetings with government bodies and Working Groups.
  - e. CoE members can raise issues of emerging concern to the Chair and Secretariat via email.
2. CoE members can be nominated (1) by two current CoE member co-sponsors, who identify the line of effort or Working Group (in consultation with the Working Group Member) the nominated individual would serve on, or (2) by Member representatives, who identify a line of effort or Working Group interest the nominated individual would serve on. Members and Experts should consider regional, religious, gender, age, and ethnic diversity when considering nominees.
3. All nominations are sent to the Secretariat and Chair for consideration. The Chair, along with the Steering Committee, provides a recommendation to the Government members in one of three tranches with one-month for any member to object to the nominee. Any member objecting should provide written reasoning. Objection by one-third of members present at the next plenary results in a failed nomination. Nominations close on March 1, August 1, and December 1 for review.
4. CoE members and nominee requirements:
  - a. Be a representative of multilateral and/or civil society organization
  - b. Show commitment to advancing freedom of religion or belief
  - c. Endorse the Declaration of Principles of the Alliance
5. The subject matter expertise provided by members of the CoE is given through (1) being an expert on a government-Chaired Working Group (up to 6 per working group) or (2) working on an established line of effort for the Steering Committee.
  - a. A CoE member or nominee should have experience in the topic of the Working Group they are working on. The government Chair of the Working Group will be consulted about all nominees/members to the Working Group they Chair.
  - b. CoE members advance clear lines of effort to ensure Working Groups effectively serve member needs, this may include providing or creating toolkits, briefings, and informational and strategic materials useful to governments.
6. CoE membership is on 2-year renewable terms. Each renewed term will go through the Steering Committee for recommendation and to the Alliance members during the same period of review for nominations. Terms begin on April 1, September 1, or January 1.

## *Secretariat*

1. The Secretariat provides administrative functions for the Alliance, acting in the Alliance's best interest by promoting transparency, longevity, and actionable implementation of Alliance priorities.
2. The Secretariat provides the necessary administrative and logistical support to the Chair, and at the direction of the Chair and the SC.
3. The Secretariat reports to the Chair directly. Working under the Chair, expectations of the Secretariat include:
  - a. Developing, facilitating, and managing the sharing of information and documents by Alliance Members and, as appropriate, other relevant stakeholders;
  - b. Assisting the Chair in planning and organizing an annual Ministerial and other activities;
  - c. Communicating regularly with the Chair, and planning and organizing the necessary follow-up to meetings of the Alliance and subgroups therein;
  - d. Assisting in agenda setting and selection of discussion topics for Alliance meetings, including the facilitation and schedule of MC meetings for the year ahead;
  - e. Drafting, issuing and circulating statements of encouragement or concern for Members of the Alliance;
  - f. Reviewing and circulating the reports of Member-led thematic initiatives;
  - g. Issuing invitations to non-Members and other stakeholders to participate in relevant meeting(s) of the Alliance and subgroups therein;
  - h. Reporting annually on Alliance activities and accomplishments to the public, to include updating and maintaining any website or social media communications related to the Alliance.
4. The Secretariat functions are embedded within the United States Department of State's Office of International Religious Freedom.

### **C. Stakeholder Relationships**

1. The Alliance values the expertise and work of international organizations, relevant Special Rapporteurs, civil society organizations, practitioners, and other relevant stakeholders working to promote the freedom of religion or belief.
2. The Alliance, including through the Chair and Secretariat, liaises with relevant stakeholders to promote complementarity and transparency. It seeks to support and promote global efforts in the field of international religious freedom in a credible and balanced manner.

3. Developing a close and mutually reinforcing relationship with relevant stakeholders is a priority for the Alliance. To this end, the Alliance, including its Chair and Secretariat, actively pursues cooperation with relevant actors from the UN system, civil society and existing regional, sub-regional and other multilateral bodies involved in the advancement of FoRB.

#### **D. Working Methods**

1. All Alliance participants, including those Members leading thematic initiatives make every effort to operate by consensus, working in the spirit of trust, solidarity, and transparency.
2. A commitment by Alliance participants to the principle that the Alliance should complement existing work to promote FoRB within the UN and other competent multilateral and regional organizations.
3. A commitment by Alliance participants to Member-led initiatives on an opt-in basis and information sharing as a guiding principle of the Alliance's annual activities.
4. Alliance Terms of Reference and the utility of the IRBA are to be evaluated no less than every 5 years and no more than every two years, to further develop Alliance structure and procedures, as appropriate.
5. To extent practicable, activities of the Alliance operate under Chatham House Rule.

#### **E. Finances**

1. Any financial contributions to the Alliance are made on a voluntary basis.

#### **F. Changes to the Terms of Reference**

1. Terms of Reference additions or edits should be proposed and agreed to in the Steering Committee. Then, the Chair will announce the proposed changes with one month for any member state to provide written objections with reasoning. If one-third of the members present at the next plenary object, the changes will not take effect. After one month without objections, the changes will go into effect.

#### **Annex: Alliance Membership Criteria**