



MUSLIMS FOR
PROGRESSIVE VALUES

A Climate of Tolerance and Human Rights for All

*Transcript of speech from Human Rights Council side event “**From the Political to the Personal: (Mis)understandings of the Freedom of Religion and Belief and Freedom of Expression Across the World**” by Vice Minister of the Foreign Ministry of the the Netherlands, Ms. Yoka Brandt, on June 24, 2019.*

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure to be here with you in this building, the beating heart of the UN’s global work to promote human rights.

I would like to thank Mrs Ani Zonneveld of the NGO *Muslims for Progressive Values* for initiating this side-event on the opening day of this Human Rights Council session, and I congratulate her on convening such an eminent panel.

Ani, your leadership inspires many people around the world and I am honoured to say a few opening words at this side event. Unfortunately, I have to apologize at the outset that I cannot stay the entire time. My colleagues will fill me in later about what has been exchanged on this vital topic,

Ladies and gentlemen,

In 2014, the Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life concluded that religious violence around the world was on a six year high.

Numbers that are more recent show that these numbers have spiked.

Religious intolerance is not confined to any one part of the world, or to any one group of people.

Everywhere, people deal with different forms of religious intolerance.



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It ranges from power struggles between Sunni and Shia Muslims in the Middle East, to outbreaks of violence between Christians and Muslims in Africa, and the persecution of Rohingya people in Myanmar.

In other instances, the increase of religious intolerance is more subtle. Government restrictions on religion are on the rise globally – **generally favouring a dominant religion** or ideological doctrine.

And yet, every State here has adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, by which we made commitments:

Each of us is born free to practise any religion, to convert to another religion, or to have no religion at all.

This means that no state, no group, no individual can deny these rights or take them away.

But how can we make sure that everyone has the right to choose his or her own religious or ideological identity? How can we best combat religious intolerance around the world?

When it comes to my own country, the Netherlands, I can tell you our country is founded on the principles of freedom of religion and belief. These principles cannot be taken for granted and also in my country, freedom of religion and belief is at times under pressure. It needs active engagement and constant alertness to ensure these freedoms.

Because we witness rising religious intolerance all over the world - as well as within our own communities - my government has made *more resources available* to promote and protect human rights internationally and increase its diplomatic efforts to help promote and protect the freedom of religion or belief for everyone.



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Ladies and men,

Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18 on combatting religious intolerance adopted in April 2011 is rightly regarded as a landmark achievement of the Human Rights Council's **first decade**.

Through this resolution, together with the EU's **resolution on freedom of religion or belief**, we pledged to combat religious intolerance, and protect the freedom of religion or belief for all. While also protecting freedom of expression.

Moreover, we all expressed our commitment to tolerance and inclusivity, by agreeing to an operational **action plan**. And we all agreed to meet regularly under the umbrella of the so called **Istanbul Process** to discuss progress and exchange best practices

That is why I am very proud that the Kingdom of the Netherlands will be hosting the next session of the Istanbul Process^[1] on the 18th and 19th of November this year.

Building on the successful sixth meeting of the Istanbul process in Singapore in 2016, we aim to shape the seventh meeting as an inclusive and implementation-oriented exchange of best practices and lessons learned, focusing on practitioners and other faith-based actors. At the seventh meeting in the Netherlands we hope to focus discussing policies and projects that work. The Istanbul process provides us the opportunity to learn from each other and exchange best practices at the practitioner level.

^[1] The Istanbul Process is a series of inter-governmental meetings, initiated in 2011, to promote and guide implementation of resolution 16/18. Resolution 16/18 commits States to addressing religious intolerance through promoting the interrelated and mutually reinforcing rights to freedom of expression, freedom of religion or belief, and non-discrimination.



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To have a successful outcome, we need to work collaboratively and transparently, and so we are very open to suggestions from other states and from civil society.

By hosting the next meeting in the Netherlands, we are committed to give the Process renewed energy and to help ensure its continuity.

As this is such a crucial dialogue and process that belongs to us all, we look forward to working with all of you in making this seventh meeting a success.

We all need to make a change in thinking and acting.

So that, around the world, we can promote and create a real climate of religious tolerance in which everyone is able to practise and express their religions or beliefs without fear.

Thank you.