



EU-Bahrain Conference “Broadening the Tent: Freedom of Religion and Belief” 30-31 May – 1 June 2022 – Gulf Hotel, Manama

Concept Note

The emergence of the Human Rights framework has been a long and painful process, punctuated by tragic milestones made of revolutions and massacres, specifically around religious issues. The emerging awareness about freedoms, back in the 17-18th centuries of the common era, has been rooted in the need to assert and guarantee freedom of religion, at the core of what would become philosophical liberalism. The right to have a religion different from that of the majority, to change from religion and not face persecution and death sentences, was brought forward by key philosophers of the Enlightenment. But they quickly figured out that this Tent needed to be enlarged to incorporate related freedoms.

Freedom of Belief (and Thought) imposed itself very quickly. And one can say that freedoms of religion and of belief as well as thought are the only absolute freedoms. All other freedoms face certain limitations, or their expression can be restricted for some specific grounds of higher interest (such as health, security, protection of the individual against themselves), but no one can limit or even forbid individuals to think and believe whatever they wish, in their inner selves. Same goes for religion: this freedom is considered to be limitless when it comes to beliefs, world views about life, death and destiny even if some individual and collective religious concrete practices might face some restrictions in specific circumstances. Freedom of expression has later been correlated to these founding freedoms as it has been understood that religion is not only a matter of individual beliefs and practices, but is intrinsically linked to life in and with a community, which requires to be nurtured by discourses, theology, exchanges, pastoral care and transmission of knowledge, which requires a certain level of freedom of expression.

Although the growing secularisation of political and civic spaces in Western societies have led many people to forget the centrality of FORB in the development of the architecture of Fundamental rights and civil liberties, it is not by coincidence that EU institutions put such an emphasis on their promotion and defence, both within Europe and on the global stage.

This is where the organic and original experience of the Kingdom of Bahrain in enshrining religious freedom as key feature of its society, culture and way of life, and, increasingly, of its regional and global public diplomacy, finds a great common ground for concerted efforts with the EU. As said above, freedom of religion is fundamental, but freedom of religion concerns only those who have a religion. It leaves growing numbers of people with thoughts and beliefs out of protection in increasingly complex societies, where everybody is exposed to and influenced, to a certain degree, by multiple (a)religious, spiritual and philosophical world views. This massive anthropological shift is resulting, among others, from broadening access to higher education, arts and literatures, international travels and social media, and even more so in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic which has brought so many people to recast the meaning of their lives.

The limits of the Tent need to encompass freedom of belief (and thought), to ensure that people are protected whatever their beliefs, including the facts of not holding beliefs, of changing beliefs on the way, of holding minority beliefs within one’s own religious community, etc. Non-religious or a-religious



forms of spirituality are blossoming, next to forms of agnosticism and atheism, while new forms and practices within traditional religions are emerging and modifying the mainstream, maybe at higher speed than in the past centuries or millenaries. The deepening of **FOR** to **FORB** seems to become naturally embraced by the Kingdom of Bahrain, putting the Kingdom on the central stage of this conversation among the GCC where such notions tend to be left aside or, not to say outrightly discarded, against the tide of a massive trend on the global stage. A trend that is, however, still facing considerable setbacks in various places where FORB is being challenged or even curtailed, whereas it has not even yet been granted to people in some countries.

It is by no means an easy journey for any society. The Kingdom of Bahrain's specific tradition of openness and tolerance towards religious diversity, rooted in a context radically different from the EU's, could provide a wonderful opportunity for mutual exchange and support in showing how societies coming from different historical, religious and philosophical backgrounds, come to parallel conclusions and efforts to broaden the Tent of FORB – reminding that the core protection they guarantee is granted to individuals, not to the religions or belief systems per se, which, by themselves, are abstractions that cannot be hurt, violated or tortured – contrary to human beings.

The three-day meeting will bring together Bahraini and European policy and decision makers as well as civil society representatives from faith/belief-based sectors to a structured dialogue to better understand their respective journeys regarding FORB, how they practically encompass and work with diversity of religions and beliefs and how both societies could cooperate to reinforce the respect of FORB at the regional and global levels.

Expected outcomes

Through concrete networking activities, visits and structured dialogue, participants are expected to:

- Better understand the EU's and Kingdom of Bahrain's respective histories and perspectives on FORB;
- Establish links with relevant actors on both sides, among one's own cluster of activity and across clusters (policy making; decision making; civil society action; advocacy);
- Explore potential venues for further activities and cooperation in the framework of the EU-GCC dialogue or other frameworks, including at State and civil society level;
- Experience first-hand a practical inter-convictional experience in policy making on promoting and strengthening FORB at regional level.



Draft Agenda

Monday 30 May 2022	Agenda items
18:00-18:30	Registration and Welcome Drink
18:30-19:45	<p>Under The Royal Patronage of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa -King of The Kingdom of Bahrain-</p> <p>Official Opening of “This Is Bahrain” Exhibition: Meet and greet Bahrain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Greeting and introduction to the “Market place” concept by H.E. Betsy Mathieson, Chairperson, “THIS IS BAHRAIN” and First Deputy Chair, King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence – Greeting by Marie-Jo Char, Team Leader, Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation and Outreach Project.
	<p>Official Opening Gala Dinner</p> <p>Welcome words by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – H.E. Betsy Mathieson, Chairperson, “THIS IS BAHRAIN” and First Deputy Chair, King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence – H.E. Faeqa Saeed Al Saleh, Minister of Health, Kingdom of Bahrain – H.E. Jérôme Cauchard, French Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain – H.E. Patrick Simonnet, EU Ambassador to Bahrain

Tuesday 31 May 2022	Agenda Items
09:00-09:30	Registration and Welcome Coffee
09:30-09:50	<p>Welcome and Opening Statement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – H.E. Abdulatif Rashid Al Zayani, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Bahrain – H.E. Dr. Sheikh Khalid Bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence – H.E. Patrick Simonnet, EU Ambassador to Bahrain
09:50-10:00	<p>Welcome and Objectives of the Conference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – H.E. Miss Betsy Bennett Mathieson, Chairperson, “THIS IS BAHRAIN” and First Deputy Chair, King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence – Marie-Jo Char, Team Leader, Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation and Outreach Project



10:00-10:45	<p>Keynote Addresses: Setting up the conversation – The importance of FORB as well as perspectives from Bahrain and the EU</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Prof. Dr. Elizabeta Kitanovic, CEC, Brussels Faculty of Protestant Theology: “All beliefs or none: Implications of FORB today” – H.E. Abdullah bin Faisal Al Doseri, Bahrain Ambassador to the EU: “How does Bahrain support FORB? What is Bahrain’s perspective on FORB and FORB’s relevance to Bahrain?” – Ambassador Jean-Christophe Peaucelle, Advisor for Religious Affairs at the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs: “Secularism and freedom of religion or belief. The French experience” – Mr. Raphaël Warolin, Policy Officer, EEAS FORB, “Developments in the area of FORB in the EU” (online contribution) <p>Moderator: Dr. Elena Dini, Senior Programme Manager, John Paul II Centre for Interreligious Dialogue</p>
10:45-11:00	Questions & Answers
11:00-11:30 (Parallel session)	Press point: high level representatives in the VIP room
11:00-11:30	Coffee Break
11:30-13:30	<p>“Fishbowl conversation”: Broadening FORB in Bahrain and the EU: challenges and ways forward”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mr. José Ramón Bauza, MEP, Member of the Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula – Mr. Eitan Bergman, Executive Director of European Union of Jewish Students (EJUS) – H.E. Dr. Mohammed Al Khozai, Historian, Member of Shura Council – H.E. Mrs Hala Ramzi, Member of Shura Council, Leading Member of Bahraini Christian Community <p>Moderator: Dr. Michaël Privot, Advisor on Religious affairs</p>
13:30-14:30	Networking Lunch / Buffet
	End of day – free visits and appointments with “Market place” contacts



Wednesday 1 June 2022	Agenda Items
09:00-09:15 (starts 15' earlier than in booklet)	<p>Registration and Welcome Coffee</p> <p><i>“This Is Bahrain” Exhibition Remains Open on 31 May and 1 June, 2022, from 9:00 to 15:00 for Delegates to visit to Network, arrange Meetings.</i></p>
09:15-09:25	<p>Welcome words, Short feedback of Day 1 & Presentation of the day</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Dr. Michaël Privot, Advisor on Religious affairs
09:25-10:00	<p>Delineating policy strategies: expected future developments in the area of FORB, in the EU and the Kingdom of Bahrain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – H.E. Dr. Arwa Hasan Al Sayed, Chief of the Human Rights Affair Sector, Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Prof. Dr. Tudor Parfitt, Chair of the Project Aladdin Academic Committee – Dr. Vincent Depaigne, Legal Officer, European Commission (DG JUST) <p>Moderator: Prof. Dr. Makram Abbès, Director of Centre Français de Recherche de la Péninsule Arabique (CEFREPA)</p>
10:00-10:15	<p>Questions & Answers</p>
10:15-11:45	<p>Break out parallel sessions</p> <p>Session 1: Faith-based civil society & decision makers: how to build effective alliances in support of FORB?</p> <p><i>Resource Persons:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A) Mr Najim Kaldoun, Director of Roots vzw (Belgium) B) Mrs Shahnaz Jaber, Member of Bahai Community, Member of the Board of Trustees, King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence <p>Moderator: Tarafa Baghajati, Austrian Muslim Initiative</p> <p>Session 2: FORB in the cyberspace: confronting online hate speech and promoting peaceful coexistence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A) Mr. Krish Raval, OBE, Founder and Director of ‘Faith in Leadership’ B) Mr. Mohamed Jamal Al Kooheji, Cyber Security Specialist <p>Moderator: Eric Roux, President of the European Interreligious Forum for Religious Freedom</p> <p>Session 3: Establishing FORB at home: watchdogs, monitoring mechanism and means of redress</p> <p><i>Resource Persons:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A) H.E. Mr Ali Al Aradi, Member of Shura Council, Member of Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee B) Mr. Willy Fautré, President of Human Rights Without Frontiers



	<p>Moderator: Mrs Rawan Ali Al Asfoor, Ministry of Interior, Bahrain</p> <p>Session 4: Taking stance for FORB as a religious leader – Challenges and mitigation measures</p> <p><i>Resource Persons:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A) Rabbi Moshe Lewin B) Sheikh Salah Al Jowder, Religious Leader, Member of Board of Trustees King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence C) Mr Soman Baby, President of Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) Bahrain D) H.E. Prof. Dr. Mohammed Bajrafil <p>Moderator: Abdessamad El Yazidi, Managing Director, Abraham Forum MENA Countries</p> <p>Session 5: FORB in national and international youth work: building bridges between Bahrain and the EU</p> <p><i>Resource Persons:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A) Professor Alessandro Saggiaro, Professor of King Hamad Chair, La Sapienza University, Rome B) Mr. Steven Edwards, Chairperson of Ecumenical Youth Council Europe (EYCE) C) Mrs Latifa Al Awadhi, Graduate of King Hamad Faith in Leadership Fellows Programme <p>Moderator: Prof. Michel Younès, Professor at Catholic University of Lyon (tbc)</p> <p><i>Transversal issues: gender equality, youth, antidiscrimination & equality</i></p>
10:15-11:45	Coffee break – open buffet
11:45-12:15	<p>Plenary session – Feedback / personal take on the conversation</p> <p>The note taker of each group will present the major outcomes of their breakout session (next steps, recommendations, ways forward)</p>
12:15-12:45	<p>Conclusions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mr. Eamon Gilmore, EU Special Representative for Human Rights (online contribution) – H.E. Dr. Sheikh Khalid Bin Khalifa Al Khalifa, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence
12:45-13:00	<p>Outcomes and Next steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – H.E. Betsy Mathieson, Chairperson, “THIS IS BAHRAIN” and First Deputy Chair, King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence – H.E. Patrick Simonnet, EU Ambassador to Bahrain
13.00-14.00	Networking Lunch / Buffet
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Simultaneous Interpretation Arabic-English



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**On 31 May 2022 Afternoon Guided-Tour of Religious Sites in Bahrain.
Bus departs Gulf Hotel at 16.00 hours returns approximately 19.00 hours
Sign-up sheet will be available.**

Visits to old Manama, the capital city, where you will experience the living history of The Kingdom of Bahrain's Religious Freedom. Hosted by renowned Historian and Author, Mr Yousef Salahuddin and Bahrain Academic and Author, Dr. Nader Khadem.

Visits to include:

- The first Hindu Temple, established in Bahrain in 1817
- Bahrain's Synagogue, first in the Region, established in 1935
- Sacred Heart Church, the first Catholic Church in the region, established on Christmas Eve, 1940
- Al Fateh Grand Mosque, one of the largest Mosques in the world, at over 6,500 square meters and able to accommodate 7,000 worshippers
- A wonderful insight into the diversity of the ancient worship traditions of the Shia community visiting two famous Mataams
- Mataam Al Qassab, a Bahraini Shia Mattam
- Mattam Al Ajam, a Persian Shia Mataam
- Our Lady of Arabia Cathedral, the largest Catholic Cathedral ever built on the Arabian Peninsula, opened in December 2021