

**PRESS RELEASE**  
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## Learning Platform to Promote Freedom of Religion or Belief to be Launched at the UN

**79% of the world's population live in a country where their religion or belief can put them at risk. Government restrictions and social hostilities based on religious identity or conviction are on the rise globally. The Freedom of Religion or Belief (FORB) Learning Platform offers tools to help reverse this trend.**

- Our experience from working with affected communities is that viable change can take place when both those affected and those in power begin to build a social, political and legal culture of freedom of religion or belief for all, from the grassroots up and the top down, says Katherine Cash, one of the driving forces behind the learning platform which has been initiated with financial support from the Swedish government agency SIDA.

The FORB Learning Platform provides short films, study materials and ideas for group trainings to help individuals, communities and decision-makers learn, reflect upon and promote freedom of religion or belief for all. These core resources have been developed in dialogue with specialists and with reference people from a range of religious and belief backgrounds.

Trainings already conducted with civil society organisations in Asia, the Middle East and Europe have inspired civil society actors to train others, promote the right and claim it, through local and international mechanisms.

- The Learning Platform will no doubt empower us in claiming our right to freedom of religion or belief, through much needed norm clarification, says the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed – one of the platform's expert advisors.

- Peace, stability and development depend on human rights, not least our ability to live together, accepting rights for all, despite our deepest differences, says Katherine Cash.

**The FORB Learning Platform will be launched** at a high-level event in connection to the 37<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva on March 6<sup>th</sup>. This event highlights the impact of film on promoting freedom of religion or belief, and brings together experts on the issue including the UN Special Rapporteur on FORB and the EU Special Envoy for the promotion of FORB outside the EU.

## Initiators of the FORB Learning Platform

The Freedom of Religion or Belief Learning Platform is an initiative of the Nordic Ecumenical Network on International Freedom of Religion or Belief (NORFORB). It has been developed with the input and advice from both secular and different faith based organisation, as well as international experts. As of today the platform has been embraced by over 30 associate partners that seek to promote the human right to freedom of religion or belief for all, as given in Articles 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

**Katherine Cash** is the [Swedish Mission Council](#)'s advisor on Freedom of Religion or Belief and part of NORFORB's steering group.

## Links for more information

- Visit the [FoRB Learning Platform](#)
- Full list of [NORFORB members](#)
- Research on global restrictions on religion come from the [Pew Research Forum](#)

## Interviews

Interviews with representatives of NORFORB can be arranged by contacting [Matilda Pearson](#), telephone: +46 76 501 18 45.

## Photograph by Anders Nicander

Give credit to the photographer Anders Nicander if you want to use our *photo of a Mandaean baptism in Stockholm*. Mandaean are a religious minority group that particularly revere John the Baptist, practicing regular baptism. Of tradition the group lives in the region around Iran and Iraq but many have fled violence in the region to begin new lives elsewhere.