



Member of the European Parliament

4th November 2014

Dear High Representative/ Vice President Federica Mogherini,

Firstly, we congratulate you on your appointment as High Representative/Vice President.

We very much welcome the fact that during your hearing in the European Parliament you mentioned Freedom of Religion or Belief as one of the three human rights you will prioritise. This is also the objective of the European Parliament Working Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief (EPWG on FoRB), which we set up almost two years ago and aims at contributing to the promotion and protection of this fundamental human right in the EU's external relations. The EPWG on FoRB is composed of MEPs from almost all political groups in the European Parliament.

Freedom of religion or belief is recognised as a universal human right by all major international human rights conventions in particular article 18 of the UDHR and the ICCPR. In recent years this right has come under intense pressure through the actions of governments or social hostility or both. Religious and non-religious communities are faced with continued oppression and discrimination. Pew Forum, a U.S. think tank, concludes in a report in January this year that no less than three quarters of the world's population lives in countries with high or very high restrictions on religion, with this proportion trending upwards.

It is imperative that we do more to fight religious or belief persecution in the world. Therefore we ask that you consider, at the start of your mandate, what steps can be taken to protect and assist religious or belief groups in third countries and how best a role the EU can play. In our annual report, which we presented earlier this year in the European Parliament, we listed institutional as well as country specific recommendations that the EU could implement to best position itself to promote FoRB in third countries. For your information, we have enclosed a copy of this report.

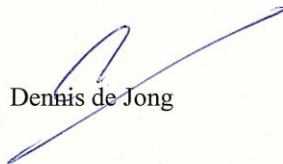
In addition to those recommendations, we list some recommendations that could assist you in promoting FoRB:

- The European Union adopted guidelines on freedom of religion or belief in 2013 which was a significant commitment. However, for the guidelines to be effective the EU needs to find more political will to carry out some of actions available to the EU as listed in the guidelines.
- If the EU wants to be a leading actor then there needs to be better policy cohesion. An example of this is ensuring that trade agreements and development partnerships are given to countries that respect human rights and that human rights conditionality clauses in these agreements do not remain a dead letter.

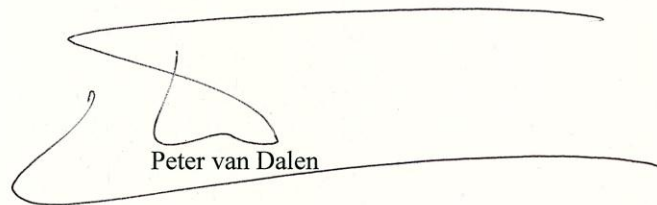
- Leading donors should spend more funds to fighting religious or belief persecution. This is money well spent as religious or belief freedom encompasses several other rights, such as the freedom of assembly and freedom of speech.
- Policymakers should engage, rather than eschew, religious leaders. Religious leaders may play a useful role in reconciliatory processes, as well as in development, in particular in the fight against corruption.

We hope that the activities of the EPWG will help you in fulfilling your important mandate. We would appreciate it, if you could find time to engage with us directly, and would agree to a meeting with a delegation of the EPWG, either in Brussels or in Strasbourg.

Yours sincerely,



Dennis de Jong



Peter van Dalen