

## Members of the European Parliament in defence of freedom of religion and belief as a human right

### An appeal for concerted action to stop persecution of religious minorities around the world

Universal human rights include the right to freedom of religion and belief. It was included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and is further enshrined in various national constitutions and international agreements. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion are all distinct rights protected by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union adopted in the year 2000. Anyone is thereby free publicly to profess their religion or world view, as well as to change them or indeed profess no religion at all.

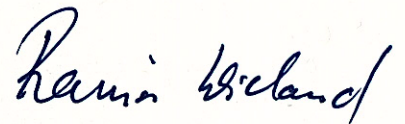
Recent years have seen a rise in the number of people persecuted for their religious beliefs. This can be seen most starkly in the violent conflicts in Syria and Iraq, where Yazidis, Christians, Shias and moderate Sunnis are being killed and forced to flee at the hands of terrorists belonging to the so-called "Islamic State". There are also the attacks by the Salafist Boko Haram militia in Nigeria, discrimination against Tibetan Buddhists and Muslim Uighurs in China, and the repeated waves of persecution of Coptic Orthodox Christians in Egypt. No less than three-quarters of the world's population live in countries where freedom to practise religion is under threat. Most vulnerable are religious minorities facing state repression or social hostilities.

Over the last few years the European Union has stepped up its efforts to promote freedom of religion and belief worldwide. In June 2013 EU foreign ministers adopted guidelines on freedom of religion and belief with particular emphasis on protection from violence, religious hatred and discrimination. The European Parliament has for several years been calling for better protection for freedom of religion and freedom of conscience.

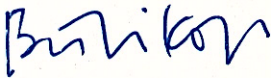
On the basis of this and other resolutions we, Members of the European Parliament adhering to various faiths and philosophies of life, shall build on the work already done by continuing to insist on ever better protection for freedom of religion and belief, including the right to change religion or profess no religion at all, as a human right. The right to freedom of religion and belief applies to all religions equally. All forms of religious persecution must be stamped out. Freedom to practise religion must not be a marginal right to be ditched in extremis. Every country is responsible for ensuring that the right to freedom of religion and belief is guaranteed for all the people on its territory.



Arne Lietz MEP



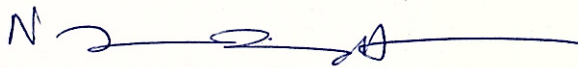
Rainer Wieland MEP  
Vice-President



Reinhard Bütikofer MEP



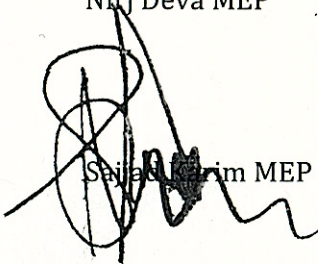
Udo Bullmann MEP



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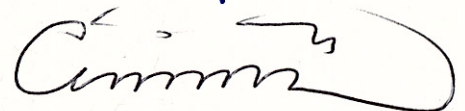
Michael Gahler MEP



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