



Freedom of Religion

All citizens should be free to follow their conscience in matters of religious faith. Freedom of religion includes the right to worship alone or with others, in public or private, and to participate in religious observance, practice, and teaching without fear of persecution from government or other groups in society.

✚ All people have the right to worship or assemble in connection with a religion or belief, and to establish and maintain places for these purposes.

✚ Like other fundamental human rights, religious freedom is not created or granted by the state, but all states should protect it. Democracies include language pertaining to protection of religious freedom in their constitutions.

✚ Although many democracies may choose to recognize an official separation of church and state, the values of government and religion are not in fundamental conflict.

✚ Democracies generally do not create governmental agencies or other official bodies to regulate religious affairs, although they may require houses of worship and religious groups to register for administrative or tax purposes.

✚ Governments that protect religious freedom for all their citizens are more likely to protect other rights necessary for religious freedom, such as free speech and assembly.

✚ Genuine democracies recognize that individual religious differences must be respected and that a key role of government is to protect religious choice, even in cases

where the state sanctions a particular religious faith. Democracies also:

- Do not determine the content of religious publications, education, or sermons.
- Respect the right of parents to direct the religious education of their children.
- Prohibit incitement of religious-based violence against others.
- Protect members of ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities.
- Allow people to observe days of rest associated with their faith and to celebrate holy days in accordance with their beliefs.
- Allow interfaith movements to flourish, as members of different faiths seek common ground on various issues and cooperate to solve challenges facing the entire population.
- Provide the freedom for government and religious officials, nongovernmental organizations, and journalists to investigate reports of religious persecution.
- Respect the right of religious organizations to freely participate and contribute to civil society — to operate faith-based schools, run hospitals and care for the aged, and create other programs and activities that benefit the society.