

## **Online conference: How society cares for the dead - a matter of freedom of religion or belief & human dignity**

Appropriate care for the dead is linked to respect for freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in particular: Religions and religious communities offer places for mourning and remembrance of the deceased. They have rituals such as burial practices and memorial services, commemorative dates, and related ideas and concepts that provide an interpretative framework for understanding death and its meaning. In addition, most religious communities offer supportive relationships that accompany and support the bereaved (e.g. through pastoral care or charitable work). Unfortunately, however, these important aspects of religious life are compromised or even deliberately violated in a variety of contexts around the world. Using examples from different country contexts, this online conference provides a systematic overview of the various forms of challenges and violations and explains their far-reaching implications for the bereaved relatives and the affected society as a whole. Following the analysis, possible solutions will be discussed.

### **PART I (14:30 – 17:00h CET)**

#### **Welcome addresses (10 min)**

- Dr. Jörg Lüer, Secretary General of the German Commission for Justice and Peace
- Rev. Dirk Bingener, President of the Pontifical Mission Society missio Aachen
- Rev. Prof. Dr. Thomas Schwartz, CEO of Renovabis

#### **Thematic introduction (10 min)**

- Overview: Challenges and violations experienced in relation to freedom of religion or belief, death, and the honouring of the deceased  
*Dr. Bernd Hirschberger, German Commission for Justice and Peace*

#### **Keynote (15 min)**

- The report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief on freedom of religion or belief in relation to death and the honouring of the deceased  
*Prof. Dr. Nazila Ghanea, United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief*

#### **Q&A / Discussion (15 min)**

#### **Spotlights (5x10 min)**

- Iran: Persecution of the Bahá'ís beyond death  
*Jascha Noltenius, Bahá'í community of Germany*
- Germany: Challenges concerning burial legislation and vandalism in a religiously pluralistic society  
*Prof. Dr. Ansgar Hense, Institute for Church–State Relations of the Dioceses in Germany*

- Azerbaijan: Destruction of Christian graves and cemeteries in Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhchivan in the course of the conflict with Armenia  
*Dr. phil. Tessa Hofmann, Armenologist and genocide scholar, honorary founding member of the "Working Group on Recognition – Against Genocide, for International Understanding"*
- The need for a religiously sensitive approach with regard to deceased refugees  
*Francesca Saccomandi, Observatory on Migration, Mediterranean Hope*
- Sri Lanka: Forced cremations during the COVID-19 pandemic and the implications of this obligation for religious minorities  
*Prof. Shirley Lal Wijesinghe, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka*

### **Q&A / Discussion (20 min)**

### **First conclusions (10 min)**

**[Open Zoom room during the break for conversations with the spotlight contributors]**

## **PART II (18:00 – 20:00h CET)**

### **Input of the Government Commissioner for Freedom of Religion or Belief (15 min)**

*Thomas Rachel, MdB, German Federal Government Commissioner for Freedom of Religion or Belief*

### **Impulse questions (10 min)**

*Teresa Dreiß, Martin Lenz, Dr. Bernd Hirschberger*

### **Panel discussion: Options for action: What contributions can be made by politics and civil society? (60 minutes, including questions from the audience)**

- *Prof. Dr. Nazila Ghanea, United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief*
- *Thomas Rachel, MdB, German Federal Government Commissioner for Freedom of Religion or Belief*
- *Lamya Kaddor, MdB, Spokesperson of the Alliance 90/The Greens parliamentary group for religious affairs*
- *Prof. Dr. Michelle Becka, German Commission for Justice and Peace*

Moderation: *Prof. Dr. Andreas Lob-Hüdepohl*

### **Conclusions and farewell (10 min)**