

LEGAL RATIONALE

Declaration of Intent on Preventing the Political Abuse of Religion



Strengthening the international legal framework through prevention and cooperation

Ministerial and institutional briefing

Prepared by BPUR International for International Partnership

Why the international legal framework must be strengthened

International law firmly recognises freedom of religion or belief, equality and non-discrimination. Yet, in addressing the political abuse of religion, relevant standards remain broad, fragmented and often aspirational, without clearly defined preventive measures, safeguards or effective remedies.

This gap has serious consequences. Inconsistent standards leave governments without a common basis for prevention, victims without equal protection and international responses often address only the costly consequences. The political abuse of religion remains a persistent driver of human rights violations, contributing to discrimination, exclusion, instability and conflict while weakening equality and social cohesion.

Strengthening the international legal framework does not question faith or its important role in society. It establishes a clearer distinction between legitimate religious expression and political or ideological abuse that violates human rights. This protects people, respects constitutional diversity and safeguards the moral integrity of religion.

As a non-binding founding charter, the Declaration establishes a practical roadmap for strengthening the international legal toolkit through effective preventive standards, improved implementation and international cooperation.

The International Partnership provides the permanent platform through which governments, institutions and stakeholders can turn these principles into sustained action. Any future international legal instrument would remain government-led and proceed only where sufficient international consensus exists.

What the Declaration adds

The Declaration supports practical standards addressing four connected forms of abuse:

- ☐ Political abuse of religion that undermines equality.
- ☐ Religious discrimination in rights and duties.
- ☐ Religious exclusion in public law and governance.
- ☐ Unlawful restrictions on freedom of religion or belief.

Legal character and safeguards

The Declaration expresses the shared intentions of the participants and serves as the founding charter of the International Partnership. It provides a voluntary, non-binding basis for cooperation, fully respecting existing rights and obligations under international law.

The participants affirm respect for national constitutional systems, the sovereign choices of States and the positive role of religion in public life. Their cooperation embraces all religions, beliefs, nations and cultures.

The participants seek to protect people, uphold equality before the law and advance freedom of religion or belief, while safeguarding the moral integrity of religion from political or ideological abuse.

Progressive legal pathway

The Partnership will first develop cooperation, practical standards and implementation experience. Participating governments will guide this process, including the development of future international instruments and a possible new international treaty where they determine that shared conviction and sufficient international consensus exist.