INTER-AMERICAN FORUM OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND COLLABORATION ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

“Towards the Respect for All Religious Beliefs in Public Decisions”

EVENT MEMORY
15th February 2019
CHALLENGES ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM’S PARTICIPANTS IMPACT PRESENTATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

The Conciencia Nacional por la Libertad Religiosa Foundation, in conjunction with other related institutions involved in the promotion and defense of religious freedom and human rights, hosted the “Inter-American Forum of Inter-Religion of Collaboration and Dialogue for Religious” at the Senate of the Mexican Republic, on the 15th of February 2019.

During this event a network of collaboration was created among leading authorities and key players in the decision-making process on subjects with regard to Religious Freedom and Humans Rights throughout the Americas.

It opened a platform for dialogs to further the goal of guaranteeing rights relevant to the respect for freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, as well as to identify the social and political challenges religions face today when practicing their faith in public life.

Leading figures with expertise on Human Rights joined hand to discuss topics with regard to Religious Freedom, and its importance within Public Policies, as well as various challenges in the modern world.

Public Servants, Religious Leader, Academics, Legal Professionals, and Civil Societies throughout Americas participated in this event, as well as representatives from 26 Inter-religious Councils currently located within the Mexican Republic.

“This Inter-American Forum of Inter-religious dialogue and Collaboration for Religious Freedom seeks to put into action proposals that allow us to progress and in fortify a system of human rights for all.”

Senator Kenia López Rabadán President of the Human Rights Committee of the Senate of the Republic
People from academic, legal, and religious sectors that participated in the event are active promoters of peace, tolerance, justice, and religious collaboration in their respective countries through the promotion of moral values within public education and religious freedom as a way to reconstruct the social fabric.

Similarly, this event allowed dialog between members of various religions, who are interested in finding solutions for common social problems, such as discrimination religious intolerance.

Hundreds of participants from all over the continent, among them religious leaders, public servants, legislators, academics, human right defenders, civil society, and college students, came together to tackle the subject of “Inter-religion Collaboration” and define its role in social life.

A series of shows and panels were given to both foreign and domestic guests, who discussed relevant topics during the sessions and on how these topics are being manifested in their respective communities.

The Forum offered an opportunity to promote common interest of human right institutions, legislators, and religious clergies as a basic human right through collective actions, such as the inclusion of religious freedom in public policies, as well as respect and religious tolerance for peaceful coexistence.

This important event offered a Forum dedicated to ensure certainty and the indisputable importance of religious freedom as a tool to strengthen mutual understanding between those who practice religion and those who don’t. It brought together religious leaders and public servants to further the practice of religious tolerance.

The first panel that took place involved public servants from different countries who brought forward their experiences, achievements, and scopes of work to ensure the elemental right to practice religion is protected through legislative actions that promote religious tolerance and reduce discrimination.

During the second panel specialists tackled the subject of religious freedom from an academic point view through historic context of the legislature, human right tools that countries of the continent abide to, and the challenges faced to ensure free and complete religious practices with human dignity and respect toward human rights.

HISTORICAL MEETING

ACHIEVEMENTS

1. Promote and defend human rights, religious freedom, equality, social inclusiveness, and representation in public policies.

2. Open a channel of dialogue and collaboration between public servants and religious leaders.

3. Acknowledge religious tolerance and respect for diversity as a fundamental element to bring about peace and justice within society.

PROPOSALS

- Create true synergy with cooperation between civil society, government, and religious community.
- Establish collaboration at continental level in order to overcome the challenges against Religious Freedom.
- Coordinate and propose programs and strategies for peace and equality.

ACTIONS

- Strengthen religious freedom within secular state through respect and tolerance toward religious differences.
- Guarantee moral and ethical education since childhood.
- Do not impose conscientious objection as to ensure free development of religious conscience.

INTERAMERICAN VOICES
FORUM

INTERRELIGIOUS COLLABORATION, ESSENTIAL PIECE FOR THE RESPECT OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

Senators, Public Officials and Religious Leaders shared with the attending public the particular vision they have about the relationship that Religious Freedom holds within Public Policies and in all spaces of society.

The development of Human Rights for the defense of Religious Freedom was a subject of recognition when understanding its relevance with respect to other freedoms such as Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Conscience.

It was concluded that it is the responsibility of the governments of the Americas to guarantee the full enjoyment of religious convictions and their recognition in social life.

“By the mean of public policies implemented by the Federal Executive Power, we should aim to educate children on the basis of human rights and specifically religious tolerance as an essential element to bring back peace and justice in our society”.

Diana Álvarez Maury MS
Sub-secretary of Democratic Development, Social Inclusion, and Religious Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior. (Mexico)

“Religious freedom is multi-dimensional and goes beyond sectarian freedom. Its free exercise combines internal and external circumstances of the people, involving expressions at individual and collective levels, as well as private and public levels”.

Elder Quentin L. Cook
Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (USA)

“It’s the duty of states and the governments to care for all sectors without discrimination. It’s also a right for all sectors, including the minorities, to be cared for and not being discriminated by policies generated by the state”.

Rev. Chrystopher James Grundy
Secretary United Religions USA

“I would like to invite you to overcome the fear and barriers that is religious illiteracy; so as not to neglect others and be ready for a learning experience beyond our world view”.

Senator Kenia López Rabadán
Chairwoman of the Human Rights Committee of the Senate of Mexican Republic.

“TOWARDS THE RESPECT FOR ALL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IN PUBLIC DECISIONS”

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Religious freedom is essential for justice, and is expressed through peace.
Present during the first panel meeting were public servants relevant to religious affairs from various countries of the continent. They discussed the representation of religious freedom in public policies in their countries, broadening the panorama of attendees with regard to different proposals to further human rights of religious freedom in the agendas of public servants.

They outlined the scopes of encouraging education in moral values and ethics, human dignity and acknowledgement of conscientious objection as integral strategies so that religious freedom would be realized within three essential elements: legislative effort, civil society and religious communities.

PARTICIPANTS

We had the participation of Jorge Lee Galindo Lic, Assistant Director of General Directorate of Religious Affairs of Sub-secretariat of Interior of Mexico; Maria Esperanza Adrianzen Olivos PhD, Director of Inter-faith Affairs of de General Directorate of Justice and Worship of Justice Ministry of Peru; Lorena Ríos Cuellar Lic, Director of Religious Affairs of Interior Ministry (Colombia); Gregory Mitchel, President of Round Table of Religious Freedom of the US.

The panel was hosted by Carlos Alberto Peréz Cuevas, World Vice-president of GOPAC: Global Organization of Parliaments against Corruption.
During the second panel meeting we had the participation of scholars and defenders of religious freedom from the US, Mexico, and the rest of Latin America, who expounded on such topics as threats from anti-religious culture in a society, the development of new civil rights, cases of conscientious objection, and the values associated with Religious Freedom.

They discussed the dynamics of protection of Religious Freedom from the perspective of culture, values and conflict resolution through dialogue that confirm the importance of freedom of thought, conscience and religion in the everyday life.

The participations of Gary B. Doxey PhD, Regional Director for Latin America of International Center for Law and Religious Studies; Javier Saldaña Serrano PhD, Law Research Institute of National Autonomous University of Mexico; Alberto Patiño Reyes PhD, Latin-American Consortium for Religious Freedom; and Charles Schultz PhD, President of Social Redemption Foundation.

The panel was hosted by Rubi Barocio Castells PhD of the Organization Impulso 18.
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IMPACT

The participants at the Forum shared with us their impressions and comments about this event:

“It re-opens the subject of religious freedom in Mexico, after over 10 years when this was last visited by the legislators.”

Muhammad Ruiz Al Meksiki

“It’s important to have this kind of forum that helps us to better understand the situation of religions with our government institutions.”

Martin Murillo Garcia

“Interesting topics that covered current problems our country is facing, as well as offering perspectives from our brother nations.”

Samuel A. Gonzalez Ruiz

“Setting the country on a path of historic importance, that can only be achieved through dialog, mutual understanding, respect, and tolerance. XXI Century shall be a century of human rights and religious freedom.”

P. Oscar Vilas Olvera, C.O.

“We need to organize more of this kind of event that encourages unity and harmony among different religious traditions, and to defend rights for freedom in religious beliefs and practices.”

Luis Alfonso Sierra Valenzuela

“The inclusion of religions contributes greatly to religious tolerance and regeneration of social fabric.”

Isaias Oscegua Cervantes

“We went above my expectation, excellent speakers and panelists from different places with different backgrounds.”

Daniel Manzo Peñonori

“A complete overview to understand the importance of religious freedom.”

Gaspar Aguirre Meneses

“Perfect event to bring forth the national debate about the topic of religious freedom…”

Luis Raúl Hidalgo López

“Knowledgeable speaker on the topic of religious freedom that allowed us to understand the aspects of religious freedom in other countries.”

Gibrán Alberto Pérez González

“Perfect event to bring forth the national debate about the topic of religious freedom…”

Luis Raúl Hidalgo López

The presentations given by the participating in the “Inter-American Forum of Inter-religion Dialog and Collaboration for Religious Freedom” were of great interest and importance in their representation of religious freedom as the basis of a society that is tolerant and respectful toward all religious beliefs and practices.

The following speeches reflect the collective wish of our participants to further a culture of respect towards the thoughts and beliefs of the different religions in the Americas.

“My aim is that the various religions join hands, in order to defend the faith and religious freedom so as to protect who profess different religious beliefs, including those who profess none.”

Elder Quentin L. Cook
Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (USA).
TOWARDS THE RESPECT FOR ALL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IN PUBLIC DECISIONS

Part of the tasks that I've been trusted with by the President of the Republic, Andrés Manuel López Obrador Lic, is my leadership role in the soon-to-be active Sub-secretariat of Democracy Development, Social Inclusion, and Religious Affairs of Secretary of Interior, to handle the relationship between the Executive Power of the government, the churches, congregations, and other religious organizations and institutions. This relationship should be noted by the promotion and defense of human rights, religious freedom, equality, social inclusion, and participatory democracy, which are the essential elements that enable healthy and sound coexistence within a culture of peace and legality.

This government is working to a new goal, a redefinition of relationship with churches, congregations, and religious organizations, since our task is not limited to processing church and religious organizations registry request; nor are we limited to the task of conflict resolution between these.

Instead, we have the conviction that we should promote and coordinate collaborative strategies with all these groups, so as to encourage, facilitate, and follow up on mechanisms of consensus, tools, programs, strategies, actions, and agreements that help with social inclusion and cohesion, prevent delinquency at social level, and rebuild the social fabric within a culture of peace.

We seek to strengthen the inclusion and equality through strategies and actions that help to prevent and eliminate discrimination or vulnerability suffered by certain social groups, in full compliance with human rights. The advent of Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 redefined the very meaning of tolerance, previously understood as absence of coercion; now a democratic state that respects human rights can and should do everything within its power to acknowledge, ensure, and promote these rights.

The basic human right of religious freedom, enshrined in the article 24 of Carta Magna means that the freedom of each individual to profess a religion and a religious belief is up to one's own conscience; this freedom is closely linked to the identity and sense of belonging of any human being.

Tolerance is a concept that is intrinsic to respect, acceptance, and consideration for differences even these are not in common. The dialog is the starting point for those who think and believe differently, to eventually reach an agreement that allows a healthy coexistence. A tolerant individual is committed to defend others to profess their beliefs, but this does not imply that one needs to give up on one's own beliefs; instead, this is a joint effort of mutual respect and will for dialog.

The principle of religious tolerance in our country has had a history that is not foreign to the consolidation of Mexican nation state. The first instance of religious tolerance came in the form of Law of Worship of December 4, 1860; explicitly outlining legal protection for the free exercise of Catholic worship was as well as other established religions in the country. The constitutional assembly of 1917 established the supremacy of the state of the churches to the extent of de-recognizing them as legal entities. This tension between the two parties was finally lessened by the constitutional reform of 1992 and gave rise to the Law of Religious Association and Public Worship, among others.

There's a series of rights in our country that are fully acknowledged in our constitution. These have evolved to further increase their scopes to respect all citizens; nevertheless, religious freedom remains one of the areas of opportunity that need attention.

The Secretariat of Interior has the responsibility of guiding the relationship between the nation state and the churches or religious congregations.

It must maintain a position of objectivity in face of the differences in beliefs and religions. This means that none of the parties should seek to obtain a position of privilege to be conferred legally within the cultural, moral, and political lives of Mexican society. This objectivity is not synonymous with neutrality, understood as inaction with respect to the guarantee of religious freedom or a passive attitude in situations relevant to religious beliefs. Instead, it implies active intervention through competent legal mechanisms to ensure the right to choose any religious belief or have none at all.

Or legal framework has been strengthened to prevent and stop acts of religious intolerance present in our country, as we're always striving to uphold public order and rights to third parties.

In this democratic Mexico that fully respects basic human rights of its habitants, there should be no place for conflicts stemming from religious beliefs; herein lies the importance in maintaining a culture of dialog, tolerance, and respect between belief. When encountering others, we shall discover that differences should not be a point of argument, separation, or conflict; instead, it should be seen as an opportunity to reflect upon oneself and enrich oneself with what others might offer; the other parties should not be seen as a limit, but as an opportunity.

From government's point of view, religious conflicts in our communities should not be seen from an exclusively legalist perspective, but should always take into consideration the assurance of free exercise of faith by encouraging dialogs and collaboration in a respectful and cordial environment, especially among indigenous communities, which have their own world views, practices, and customs. To this end, state and local authorities are being trained about the legal framework as well as constitutional precepts regarding religious matters.

The transformation of the country involves more than just the government; instead, every citizen should work to this end so these relationships could be cordial and respectful.

I'll like spread the message of Pope Francis with regard to brotherhood between religions, of caring for the human family, and to maintain an inter-religion relationship based upon education and justice; to condemn without reservation all forms of violence, reiterating that this can't be justified in the name of religion or individualism. It's entirely possible to maintain one's identity without compromising it to please others; that the basic rights are always respected as a whole it should be treated like a co-
that generate proper conditions for its legislative measures and public policies. The state should ensure through legal means the protection of religious freedom is a human right that religious doctrines in its territory; respecting the rights of people of a given religion or none, in accepting, modifying, or rejecting, religious beliefs, not necessarily following them, but respecting them without attaching any negative connotations. Let’s ask if we’re capable of dialogs in face of differences without losing our inner peace.

I’d like to invite you to join me to encourage and practice self-critical conscience and truly question ourselves our level of tolerance. Let’s ask if we’re capable of listening to others, of respecting their points of view, their beliefs; not necessarily following them, but respecting them without attaching any negative connotations. Let’s ask if we’re capable of dialogs in face of differences without losing our inner peace.

I’d like to call upon you to exercise full tolerance in the form of harmonious coexistence in face of differences; a pluralist coexistence where we nourish each other with our differences. The flower of tolerance is the celebration of diversity and this Forum is a prime example of it.

This is an issue of collective commitment. The Secretariat of Interior, by the mean of this Sub-secretariat, aims to make religious freedom as an essential value of a pluralist, free, and fair society under the aegis of peaceful coexistence and common wellbeing. It’s precisely because of this that we acknowledge religious freedom with the end of defending its practice individually and collectively. Mexico is, and always has been, a multi-cultural nation; therefore the goal of this should always be to encourage tolerance toward diversity, with the end of consolidating it has one of our most important values in our democratic system.

The secular state should not act as an outside political force on existing religious doctrines in its territory; religious freedom is a human right that the state should ensure through legislative measures and public policies that generate proper conditions for its exercise.

The afore-mentioned points compel us to reflect over the challenges and trials for Mexican nation state to propose legislative initiatives that help to ensure the full exercise of religious freedom in our country. And we should also bear in mind this right be understood that no belief, way of life and religion can act as a position of legal privilege. Its free exercise must count on the tolerance in our modern democracy, integrated within pluralism and multiculturalism.

This means that religious freedom must refer to the autonomy of each person in having or not, in accepting, modifying, or rejecting, religious beliefs, as well as the right to express one’s affiliation to a given religion or none without facing discrimination.

The two visions, under constant tension, were able to evolve at the internal public right institutions. Broadening the exercise of religious freedom has merged path, further the modern state of the constitution of the US, we set as our new interpretation of it. This new interpretation was derived from a constitutional reform for human rights in 2011, in that the nation state of Mexico, by the mean of its Congress, adopted on behalf of the Mexican people.

This great reform allowed us to transit from a grantor state to one that acknowledges rights that are intrinsic to each human being. It incorporated the “pro-people” principle that established obligations for government authorities to promote, respect, protect, and ensure human rights under the principles of universality, inalienability, indivisibility, and progressiveness.

Ever since the founding of the nation state of Mexico, the notion of secular state focused all its effort in achieving separation of church and state. Inspired by the example of the French constitution of the US, we set as our in avoiding to have an official religion, limiting the power of the church and religious congregations, as well as that of their leadership. At the same time it developed along the example of French constitution, which assured that nobody should be persecuted because of one’s own opinion, including religious inclinations, providing its expression does not disturb public order as specified by laws.

With passing of time both approaches have merged path, further broadening the exercise of religious freedom, often through the effort of internal public right institutions.

The two visions, under constant tension, were able to evolve at the beginning of XXI Century. The positive Mexican right and the international public right system were able to conceive religious freedom as an intervention of the state to achieve its own objective, having the goal of avoiding conducts that may harm religious freedom, while enact actions that enable said freedom to its full extent.

In the modern secular state it must be understood that no belief, way of life and religion can act as a position of legal privilege. Its free exercise must count on the tolerance in our modern democracy, integrated within pluralism and multiculturalism.

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children could receive religious and moral education in agreement with their parents’ convictions, both privately and publically.

And this is the very first challenge that Mexican nation state is facing in its endeavor to broaden these rights by the mean of “pro-people” principle, with the goal being its inclusion and application in our national laws.

A second challenge is framed by the national and international contexts we’re live in during the second decade of XXI Century. Our country has transformed; we have stopped being a nation with a dominant religion; instead, we should acknowledge ourselves as a society with multiple religions.

These issues have brought new challenges to the nation state of Mexico, such that legislative power must take into account the religious diversity. On one hand this motivates us to encourage religious freedom in our society, and on the other hand it also compels us to uphold tolerance.

Today, religious intolerance is one of the reasons along with agriculture conflicts and insecurity that result in internal forced migrations within our country. It’s no surprise that the Secretariat of Interior has pointed out that in states such as Chiapas, Guerrero, Hidalgo, and Oaxaca, religion is among one of the most common reasons for heightened conflicts.

In our country, religious freedom is safeguarded by the Constitution and international treaties, as well as by Law of Religious Association and Public Worship.

Said law establishes the right for freedom of beliefs, that nobody should be discriminated for exercising one’s religious expression. However, the reality is that we’re seeing a growth in discrimination, particularly among social network, that unfortunately often lead to physical actions.

**Dear friends:**

We should be called upon to reflect on what kind of society are we and kind of society do we want to pass on to future generations. It’s abundantly clear that the nation state of Mexico, with its plurality in religious thoughts that make up its social fabric, should demand legal order that ensure its full exercise for every citizen. It must be fully engaged from the perspective of the new constitutional paradigm based on the principle of human rights.

The Mexican nation state should not wait for indications from international bodies over human right affairs to take action.

One more challenge is to make free exercise of religion both at individual and collective level into reality. It’s not enough to simply have religious freedom in our laws, constitution, and international treaties. Peace should always be backed by justice; therefore, we can’t simply step aside, as safeguarding human rights is the responsibility of all three branches of the government.

It’s of utmost importance to consider as top national priority to incorporate into our educational system an education that upholds the right of religious freedom. As for public policies enacted by the federal government, we should seek to educate children about human rights, religious tolerance, and respect for diversity, for these are the fundamental elements of peace and justice in our society.

Last April, during the inauguration of the 3rd International Conference for Peace and Education, on the subject of discrimination and extremism that affect life and liberty, and the practice of religious freedom and freedom of conscience, UN reaffirmed that parents and guardians can and should encourage their children to receive moral and religious education.

It also pointed out the importance of every citizen in knowing the various religions in order to teach tolerance and to not discriminate as well as reduce their vulnerability. It also defended religion’s role in contributing to security and peace in the societies; therefore, it asked us the people to take de defense of religious freedom seriously.

Henceforth, the unfolding of this Inter-American Forum of Inter-religious Dialog and Collaboration for Religious Freedom should be the ideal occasion to bring forth the proposals that allow us to progress at consolidating of a system for human rights that is strong and solid for all, especially for the next generation that we the current generation are nurturing.

Wish you success in all your undertakings, and of course, I’ll be more than glad to hear about your goals and achievements.
This Forum represents for us a great advancement, since it’s precisely here where we can find this great diversity of thoughts that allow us achieve ends of peace, tolerance, and freedom. Our country, during pre-Columbian time, was polytheist; we had different beliefs about nature. Upon Spanish conquest we saw wholesale conversion and for nearly 300 years, there was but one religion as a way for us to find peace. With the independence of our country, which was initiated by clerics, saw rallying cries around Catholicism, in addition to happiness, freedom, and democracy.

But the religious freedom was slow to come by, as Mexico reached the era of Reform Laws. However, 150 years after the reform, much of Mexico still have serious problems of intolerance with regard to difference in ideas.

I had the opportunity to live near the ground zero of afore-mentioned problems, Chiapas. When it comes to the issue of religious intolerance, believe me, it has been (and still is) tough for our Chiapanec brothers.

Lack of information, public policies, and public education, which failed to instill tolerance and peace since childhood, these children will waste years not being able to contribute to a social fabric of peace.

These people will become grown men and women, and thinking differently will result in certain decisions to be taken in the community assembly, particularly in Natives communities. This might result in forced migration, as people often refuse to or are prevented from participating in community events. There’re entire communities that follow certain religions and have henceforth become minorities in their own lands; and quiet often they’re expelled from these lands, thus generating conflicts, lasting hatred, and worst of all, human loss.

Therefore, we at this Forum believe it’s of critical importance to be able to strengthen our social, political, or legal systems. We’re on the verge of debating on a new constitutional reform that focuses on education, and it’s important that tolerance and peace are enhanced throughout this education system. We’ll achieve nothing relying solely on public policies enacted by local, state, and federal governments or the congress. Instead, we should set out for a long-term mission that allows us live in true freedom, believing in what we our hearts desire.

It’s important to bring forth these messages to more nations and to encourage tolerance, dialog, and social peace through the education system.

We all have the right to ask the fundamental questions about who we are, what are our origin and end, and what the ultimate meaning of our lives is. We all have the right to look for the answers of these questions, and once these are found, to base upon our individual and collective behavior, as well as private and public behavior, without other impositions than the right of conscience, publically or privately, its teaching, practice, worship, and observance.

Religious freedom is multi-faceted and goes beyond freedom of worship. Its free exercise combines internal and external circumstances of the people, involving expressions at individual and collective levels, as well as private and public levels. Its dimensions include freedom of conscience in religious matters; afore-mentioned freedom of worship; freedom to spread the creeds, ideals, or opinions of the religion; the right of religious training of church members or congregation; the right to a religious education, of one’s offspring, as well as the society that surrounds us; the right of religious affiliation; and the right of conscientious objection. As stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, religious freedom includes “the freedom to change religion or belief, as well as the freedom to express [the] religion or […] belief, both individual and collective, publically or privately, its teaching, practice, worship, and observance”.

Freedom of thought, of conscience, and of religion are a necessary part, a requirement, of human liberty and meaning of religion.

The ability of self-determination and the “structural tension of the whole person […] toward the ultimate and definitive meaning for life” make religious freedom a granter of central importance for all, since it “keeps the most profound and radical core of each human being”; that is, where one seeks and finds the fundamental answers in life. The conscience is the “most secret and sacred core of man”, the place questions are being asked that giving meaning to life individually and collectively, that are relevant to our origin, the ultimate meaning of our labor, our world view, our legacy, and our end.

Given the anthropological importance of these questions, it’s critically important that the quest for the answers should take place in a climate that’s free of coercion or violence of any kind. Nation states and governments; societies and market forces; formal and informal institutions; individual and community players should only promote different beliefs based on thought, speech, and action to be accepted by the individual, that give strength of truth itself, and by the evidence it brings to each individual.

We all have the right to seek the truth that shape our individual and collective identity, as well as our interactions with other, without other impositions than the conscience. To this end, the secularity of the state is a requirement for the development of pluralistic societies. This represents a challenge for us, as we thrive for this right to be inclusive for a constructive and sustainable end. To this end, the secularity of the state is a requirement for the exercise of religious freedom. The state should not prefer a given religion, belief, or world view at the detriment of each person’s right to search for the ultimate meaning of life.
As such, religious freedom can be viewed as a ‘parameter of other basic rights’.

The basis of religious freedom rests in the life of civil society and its cultural wealth; in the heart of the matter of possible improvement is the social drive toward new ways of participation of individual actors and private and public institution that not only allow religious participation, but also encourage participation of believers in the public debates over affairs that concern us all.

Currently, our secular culture and practices have excluded many beliefs for being ‘dogmas’, when the very nature of democracy is the inclusiveness of all. This is especially important given that almost one fifth of the country and the solution of its difficulties.

Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, it’s the civil society that religious freedom offers the greatest opportunities. These are based on the belief that the different churches and religious groups play an indispensable and irreplaceable role in the social life of the country and the solution of its difficulties.

This meeting is therefore relevant for sharing experiences, challenges, and possible solutions between major players in the promotion of religious freedom, such as: the churches, religious associations, and public authorities, to benefit men and women of our country, who are the prime of this basic human right.
to leave Missouri under attack from serious mob violence and an exter-
mination order from the governor of the state.”

Joseph Smith, the founding pro-
phet of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was later mur-
dered by a mob in 1844, and Church members subsequently fled wes-
tward across the Great Plains. Both Catholics and Latter-day Saints thriv-
e in the United States today. The Catholic Church is the largest deno-
nination in the United States with over 74 million members. The La-
ter-day Saint Church is the fourth largest with somewhat less than 7
million members living in the Uni-
ited States and a total of 16 million worldwide. There are over a million
members in Mexico.

Notwithstanding these early aber-
rations that resulted in persecution,
many of the founding fathers in the United States were committed to
religious freedom. James Madison clearly favored religious pluralism.
He stated, “In a free government the
security for religious rights consist in
a multiplicity of sects.”

The two most important religious
freedom priorities in today’s world

The two most important religious
freedom priorities in today’s world are,
first, that individual believers
should be able to worship and ex-
press faith openly without fear of re-
taliation or ostracism; to live openly
according to religious beliefs; to be
free from discrimination in a parti-
cular occupation or profession be-
cause of religious beliefs; and to be
free from religious discrimination in
employment, housing, or traditional
places of public accommodation,
such as hotels, restaurants, and pu-

clic transportation. This includes the
basic premise of democracy that no
one should be punished or disqua-
ified based on the religious beliefs
that he or she holds, whether in em-
ployment, in national life, or when
advocating in the public square.

The second priority is to protect
the autonomy of religious organi-
izations and their right to teach and
function according to their doctri-
nes and beliefs. This includes the
freedom of a church to form a legal
entity; to own and use property, in-
cluding schools, hospitals, and edu-
cational institutions; to establish its
discipline; to govern its ecclesiastic
affairs, including employment; to set
requirements for church members;
to conduct worship and adminis-
ter its sacraments and ordinances ac-
cording to its doctrine; and to speak
out publica on moral issues.

These two priorities may be pro-
tected in a variety of ways. As mem-
bers of The Church of Jesus Christ of
Latter-day Saints,

1. We follow Jesus Christ’s tea-
chings and example, and claim
for everyone the God-given
and constitutional right to live
their faith according to the dic-
tates of their own conscience.

2. We acknowledge that the
same freedom of conscience
must apply to men and women
everywhere to follow the re-
igious faith of their choice or
to follow none at all, if they so
choose.

3. We believe that laws ought to
be framed to achieve a balan-
ce in protecting the freedoms of
all people while allowing respectful coexistence of those
with differing values.

4. We reject persecution of any
kind, including persecution ba-
sed on race, ethnicity, religious
belief, economic circums-
ances, and differences in gender
or sexual orientation.

Full equity for all

The Church of Jesus Christ of Lat-
ter-day Saints also asserts that those
who want their rights protected must
be willing to protect the rights of ev-
erone else. We call this “fairness for
all.” Our doctrinal commitment to be
compassionate requires us to support
the basic rights of all and to treat ev-
erone with civility and respect.

We must support the religious free-
don of persons and institutions of all
faiths as well as the freedom of those
with no faith. One basic statement
that demonstrates the Church’s com-
mittance to freedom of religion for all
is our Eleventh Article of Faith, which
declares:

“We claim the privilege of
worshipping Almighty God ac-
cording to the dictates of our
own conscience, and allow all
men the same privilege, let
them worship how, where, or
what they may.”

There’s also a wonderful state-
ment by the Prophet Joseph Smith,
who passionately asserted his com-
mittance to civil and religious li-

ternity when he said:

“I am bold to declare before
Heaven that I am just as ready
to die in defending the rights of
a Presbyterian, a Baptist, or a
good man of any other deno-

mination, or the same princi-
ple which would trample upon
the rights of the Latter-day Saints
would trample upon the

eights of the Roman Catholics,
or of any other denomination
who may be unpopular and too
weak to defend themselves. It
is love of liberty which inspires
my soul—civil and religious li-
ternity to the whole of the hu-
man race.”

Leaders and believers from all faith
traditions must be part of a coalition
of faiths that succor, act as a sanc-
tuary, and promulgate religious free-
dom across the world.

One of the most pressing challen-
ges we face is the question of how
to protect freedom of religion and con-
science in the face of new global trends
against time-honored local values, like
strong religious beliefs, united tradi-
tional families, and parental rights to
teach standards of morality, including
sexual conduct, to their children. We
need workable solutions that protect
our freedom to live our faith and teach
our values in an atmosphere of respect
for the rights and dignity of others.
There is a growing chorus of those who do not respect accountability to God and feel perfectly comfortable in demanding that religions eliminate any doctrines that do not support their views. This chorus of voices was lamented many years ago by a modern apostle of Jesus Christ, Elder Neal A. Maxwell. He said:

"How can a society set priorities if there are no basic standards? Are we to make our calculations using only the arithmetic of appetite? . . . Decrease the belief in God, and you increase the claim that those who wish to play at being God by being society’s supervisors. Such "supervisors" deny the existence of divine standards, but are very serious about imposing their own standards on society."

President Dallin H. Oaks, who is a champion of religious liberty, and in our first presidency, has pointed out the following:

In summary, here are a few of the essential questions that are of particular significance to all people who feel accountable to God:

- Will religious organizations continue to have the freedom to define and perform marriages solely between a man and a woman?
- Will laws barring discrimination, which we, in our fairness for all, of people of certain gender, have proper religious exceptions and protections so that religious organizations and people of faith can act in accordance with those deeply held beliefs regarding marriage, family, and sexual identity without retaliation?
- Will religious schools be permitted to have religious requirements for faculty, staff, and students?
- Will religious believers be excluded from certain professions because of their beliefs, expressions, or actions regarding sensitive social issues?
- With the decline in religiosity generally and religious exercise increasingly being limited to the home and places of worship, or will it continue to have a positive role to play in the public life of this great nation?
- Will religion come to be seen as dangerous—as something the law must protect people from—rather than as a great good for individuals, society, and the state?

The need for constant vigilance

These and related questions highlight some of the challenges that religious organizations and individual believers will likely confront in the years to come. Constant vigilance will be necessary to preserve the great treasure of religious liberty for believers and for society at large.

How do we accomplish this? How do we defend the great treasure of religious liberty more than we have in the past? I am not just talking about defending religious liberty legally. In addition to legal and educational defenses, we need to win the hearts and minds of the people of Mexico and across the world. We cannot do that when we are silent about issues that impact religious liberty. The voices of people of faith need to be heard and amplified. When this is done, it creates a pause in the discourse and allows people to evaluate where they stand on a particular matter.

Silence allows the rhythm of negativity to continue uninterrupted and unchallenged. It erodes the confidence of people of faith.

My point is really quite simple. When allegations are made that are detrimental and often false to either faith or religious liberty, the members of that faith and their friends of other faiths, who feel accountable to God, need to defend them in a positive, statesmanlike manner. We need to defend divinely inspired freedoms. Too many do not make their positive views known when their engagement is sorely needed.

Some are concerned that they should speak up only if they can make a clear defense of their faith. To the extent that religious liberty and the religious freedoms that allow people to play at being God are new, ordinary citizens and Members of Congress must do the work of speaking out. I would suggest that for people of your capability and training, your individual initiative to defend religious liberty is essential. It can take many forms. It may be as simple as posting something in defense of your faith or the faith of your friends. Please do this on your own volition, understanding that you will not always get things exactly right but also understanding that the far bigger mistake would be to sit silently by. We will not always win against every attack that is made on faith and religious liberty, but there should not be a vacuum of positive voices. Our responses should be civil and respectful, but, at the same time, firm.

The responsibility of living well

We can do a better job of educating our responsible friends about the essential value of religious liberty and its importance in protecting our shared values. The unalienable human rights enshrined in various constitutions are enshrined in various constitutions are unalienable only insofar as these rights are bestowed by a Divine Creator. It is the accountability to a Divine Creator that is the foundation for assisting those in need, respecting fellow citizens, and allowing us to be good citizens, neighbors, and friends in all we do. As we do so, ordinary citizens and government officials alike will be more inclined to see the value of religion and to respect the basic principles that allow us to freely live our beliefs. There is no better demonstration of the great benefits associated with religious liberty than for devoted members of various faiths who feel accountable to God to model principles of integrity, morality, service, and love. As others see the goodness of individuals and families goodness that is founded in strong faith and character—they will be much more likely to speak up in defense of the religious freedoms that allow us to be who we are.

I conclude by reiterating my plea that all religions and men and women of goodwill everywhere join together to defend religious freedom, a most important and God-given right. I express my gratitude for the powerful impact that you have in protecting religious freedom and upholding faith and righteousness.
Toward the Respect for All Religious Beliefs in Public Decisions

Archbishop with Filalitos Antonio Castro Herrera
Secretary of Greek Orthodox Holy Archdiocese in Mexico and Exarchate of Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople in Central America, the Caribbean, Colombia, and Venezuela

The Greek Orthodox Holy Archdiocese in Mexico and Exarchate of Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople in Central America, the Caribbean, Colombia, and Venezuela, presided by His Eminence the Archbishop Athenagoras, congratulate and exult this transcendental initiative for the religious sector, the Inter-American Forum for Religious Freedom.

We can’t continue this session without remembering the words of Catholic theologian and scholar of religions, Hans Küng: “There’ll be peace between nations without peace between religions; there’ll be no peace between religions without dialogue”. Inter-religion dialogue must be more than just an act of physical rapprochement between different religions; rather, it implies a process that brings us to know each other, and to allow us to understand each other in order to overcome past prejudices that in the past and even today have divided us, even generating violence and warfare. The conflicts, persecutions, discriminations, and other negativities that involve various religious beliefs and creeds.

Instead, we should engage the issues to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. I would like expound on this topic with regard to some aspects that I believe are necessary so that we could overcome the fears that pushes us to judge and criticize other religions, sects, and creeds, and build walls and barriers in front of those who form parts of other religious denominations and philosophies.

• The first aspect is religious illiteracy: it’s necessary to overcome this aspect, since focusing our existence only on what we believe in while ignoring by our sides there’re people who practice other forms and practices of faith. This is akin of being blind in face of plurality of the religious sector in every country of the world.

• Another aspect of equal importance is being ready for a learning process that is not limited to our world of faith, but that of constructing a comprehensive analysis of the beliefs of those around us, in order to facilitate understanding, knowledge, acceptance, and acknowledgement.

• In this analysis it’s necessary to free ourselves of prejudices with the goal of enriching our knowledge about religious diversity, which allows us to find virtues among other religions, instead of just looking for defect.

• One important aspect that I would like to mention is that there must be a rule in the inter-religion dialogue: The rule of “Do not wish upon others what we do not wish upon ourselves”.

• This also implies finding common grounds that move us to act together in face of social problems inherent to all societies, which we must face jointly to reach solutions in a synergy that involves various religious instead of deepening, prolonging, and increasing the problems.

• Nothing is truth if it’s not your truth… said a great thinker and religious speaker of our time. Therefore it’s necessary not to live by suppositions; instead, we should verify all information, assuring what is being spread is the truth.

• It’s not unusual what’s new to us might produce fear. Due to their unknown history, they produce fear, uneasiness, worry, and uncertainty; however, this can be overcome with experience of personal relations, which allows us to know the reality and not fiction of others and their religious beliefs and creeds.

• The inter-religion dialog does not seek to form a single mega-church or religion; rather, the understanding, building, acknowledgement, and acceptance of religious diversity that identifies humanity whether we like it or not. It’s not a moment to preach, since there should be no debate our seeking trouble on doctrines; rather, it’s synergy on good coexistence, survival, and existence of our humanity that is so divided and torn up.

• We live in a common house, the planet Earth. We can’t escape from it; therefore like it or not, we have accepted there’re things and spaces that are shared among us all… the air we breathe, the water that quench our thirst, and the bread that satiate our hunger. The misery and poverty that hurt us all; the diseases and pandemic, among many other realities that do not discriminate between this religious creed and others: all these demand answers. It’s because of these that today more than ever our survival is at risk, that we demand synergy, unity in diversity in face of these challenges.

• When faced with these serious challenges and problems that threaten our own kind, instead of deepening, prolonging, and increasing the problems.

• Similarly, another aspect that we should take into consideration is the duty of the nation state to be irreligious, to distance public policies on religious freedom, involving even the Ministry of Interior of that noble nation in achieving the consensus and synergy between the state and religious sectors. Mexico’s achievement is by no mean less remarkable: Here we’ve seen the launch of projects such as Interreligion Council, among other initiatives from the nation state as well as religious sectors… It has not been an easy journey; it’s an arduous task, and a sensitive subject. But the worst effort would be the one not realized.

Dear brothers, it’s human nature that when we see others being hurt elicits the feeling of oneness and everybody else being hurt, it’s therefore necessary to tear down walls and build bridges, tear down walls of intolerance, persecution, ignorance, and indifference in the field of religion and all other realms of our society… convey ourselves to understand; to listen and recognize the other. Build bridges of knowledge, mutual understanding and focus, so we could all join effort to provide solutions, instead of generating conflicts that destroy and divide our society, which is essential for and is shared by all. Let’s understand this: we can’t leave this place, we’re staying here in our common home from the day we’re born until our death; our children will stay here, and so will yours. For them we have to behave responsibly overcoming our fear while thriving for unity as humanity following the dogma of dogmas, which is love, and practice the golden rule: Wish upon others what we wish upon ourselves.

We congratulate and exult this Forum on religious freedom that in itself is an important step in this process of understanding; similarly we’re happy similar proceeding in Colombia, where the participation of all creeds and sects in the most inclusive manner, has build and developed public policies for religious freedom, involving even the Ministry of Interior of that noble nation of in achieving the consensus and synergy between the state and religious sectors… It has not been an easy journey; it’s an arduous task, and a sensitive subject. But the worst effort would be the one not realized.

I’d like wrap up my speech with a biblical passage: “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? The good Samaritan asked not the confession of whom has attacked and mistreated Him, only cared for Him.”
The first amendment of the United States Constitution prevents the government from making laws which respect establishment of religion, prohibit the free exercise of religion or breach the freedom of speech, the freedom of the press, the right of peacefully assembly or the right to petition the government for redress of grievances.

As faith leaders it is our job to encourage, uplift, empower, stand together. Unity is the rainbow by which God uses to bring us together. Number 18 in the way to happiness by the late L. Ron Hubbard: “Respect the religious beliefs of others, religious tolerance does not mean one cannot express his own beliefs.”

American produce anti-religious media programming spreading around the world and undermining the US led global effort to advance religious freedom for all people by attacking, ridiculing, belittling religion, religious values and specific faiths, it’s its fueling social hostilities, religious violence and government restrictions on religion. The US has always set an example of religious freedom to the world, one which believers, the world over, have come to rely on.

They know America is with them in supporting their right to believe what they choose, but that image and mission is being threatened and undermined by media programming that attacks, ridicules and belittles religion, religious values and faith itself, which in turn puts houses of worship at risk.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance published a finding that hate speech in its many forms of expression, spread, incite, promote or justify hatred, violence and discrimination against a person or group of persons for a variety of reasons. Here we have a short list of the recent violence that follows as a consequence of the antireligious climate that media creates. There are many more, but we’ll just name a few.

On January 26th, 2019; twin blast at a Roman Catholic Cathedral in Jolo, Philippines, killed 20 people and wounded over 100 others. Media vilifying the Catholic religion abound on our network, A&E Networks published their intent to target the Jehovah witnesses starting December 2017, beginning in March 2018 and continuing through December 2018. Five Jehovah Witnesses Kingdom Hall were burned with one gun with 35 rounds. The Church of Scientology was targeted by A&E with three sessions of hate programming, which was disseminated through Israel, the UK, Germany, Taiwan and other countries. On January 3rd 2019, a 24 year old staff member of a Sidney Church of Scientology was stabbed to death by Chinese national who frequented a website devoted to promoting hate from that TV show. This followed by other acts of violence including a woman driving her car to the front doors of a Scientology Church in Texas, a man throwing a hammer into the window of another at the Churches’ Leader, repeatedly threatened with murder. All corporates were arrested and charged with felonies and each was inspired by the lies and hate spouted by one A&E show host.

It is our goal that a round table be established for all faiths among all people. We look forward to working with you and focusing our strength and energy here in Mexico City, Mexico.

There’s a quote I’d like to give you: “Rivers, ponds, lakes and streams, they have different names but all contain water. Religions have different names but all contain truth.” Quoted by the late Muhammad Ali.

“I have decided to stick with love, hate it’s too great a burden to bear” by the late Doctor Martin Luther King Jr.

I close with this. United we stand but divided we fall, if we spent as much time lifting each other up, as we spent as much time putting each other down, if we spent as much time lifting up the truth as we spent as much time putting down the dirt, if we spent as much time lifting up the world, holding up a banner of peace, love and unity, what a great world this would be. And I close by saying, let freedom reign.
I would like to mention some key points on the subject. I think that the status of Mexico in this issue has gone from less to more, we have improved a lot, however the law that governs us is exceeded, it deserves to be reformed and, if I may say, we should make a new law; not reform some articles, there is a need to consider the possibility of having a new law.

A few days ago, 27 years of the constitutional reform that gave origin to this law were celebrated, for those who are not Mexicans, you should understand that the churches were not recognized by the government, by the state, and that 1992 constitutional reform and then in July the law took into account the recognition of the churches by obtaining a register to convert them into religious associations.

It is true that freedom of worship comes first and from there we have progressed little by little but we have not reached the full religious freedom in fact in which some issues we have not advanced much such as the participation of cult ministers in politics, and it is said that they are considered “second class citizens”; we have not advanced in issues for churches or religious associations to have concessions for mass media; We have difficulty because of the history of our country, there are elements in which we are working.

What I have seen in this sense is that the most difficult thing to have about this concept of freedom of religion, freedom of belief is not, and sorry to say, is not in a forum like these, I truly believe and agree that this event is historical and must be held as the history of our country; what is difficult is to bring these ideas to the fields where there are truly displaced people, where there are water service cuts because of the very concrete problems of indigenous communities. It is delicate because the very constitution of our republic marks the recognition of this form of government and organization of the indigenous communities but always within the framework of human rights. That last part is usually ignored and is limited to saying that due to the uses and customs of the people, there is no other religion than this. Those are rules that in assemblies are voted and those who are against them “are out”. We have many displaced for religious reasons, it is a reality. I still listen and read notes where it is said that it is not true, the reality is that it is. It is not that we want to cover with a finger in something that we have problems in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Hidalgo, in other states it has occurred but not as usually as in these.

The question is: how are we going to work on public policies to bring religious freedom to reality? Clarifying that it is not a religious issue, it is a matter of liberties, of rights; that is the main element.

What this government have instructed is to work on the subject, first, recognizing that it exists; second, addressing it not only from the legal perspective because there are violations of the constitution and the law, but to understand the culture of the people. There are those who have this difficulty because Oaxaca is not the same as Chiapas. These are circumstances that are occurring and must be analyzed case by case.

Oaxaca, for example, has 570 municipalities, if you compare how many municipalities or mayors of the states have, they will never reach that number. Of those 570 municipalities, 417 are governed by uses and customs that is why there is a complexity of entry, now, when a citizen decides for his conviction and conscience not to be more of this majority religion in the community, this promotes a problem and questions arise about convictions and traditions and it is criticized different thinking. We have to work from the understanding that “the other” is not a limit, it is an opportunity to dialogue, to understand each other.

Public policies have been only as attention and knowledge of what happens and has been taken to the corresponding state that serves them. Then the external experiences that I lived were about allegations of violation of religious freedom in various states. These states took the case and after two months they said “it is not a religious problem, it is a social problem, a political problem and even a family problem” and the file is closed and is not investigated again. People claim that they are expelled, victims of intolerance, they are denied health services, social programs are limited.

What we want to do now is to work with the states, but with diverse actors that can help understand what is happening, actors such as academics, anthropologists, NGOs, Interreligious Councils of the states, to try to unblock this situation; But each case is particular, we need to understand this situation, understand that what happened to “this church in such a place” is not the same as what happened to “this believer in another place.”

Yes, there are violations of rights, but the question is: how are we going to understand each other with these actors in order to truly have that opportunity for dialogue, respect, and understanding? That is the challenge.

We heard what happened in other countries, I hope that in Mexico it does not result in that war for religious beliefs, that is why this historic moment should be the starting point to try and bring to the states and the municipalities the work of what Religious Freedom is.

Finally, I want to say that there is a work plan that we are generating in the direction of religious matters to work constantly, perhaps a couple of times a year with those responsible for religious affairs of the states, bringing them to the federal level, to the Secretariat of Governance where we can train in legal affairs and try to understand this subject.

There are those who say “why don’t we better refer to Freedom of Religion” or “Freedom of Belief” because as Religious Freedom we refer to the subject of the secular state, etc; But that’s not the case, what I want to say is that, working with the states, we can do a lot about it.

I love the idea of having Colombia, Peru and other actors to hear experiences; Now I had the opportunity to meet Lorena by email through a mutual friend. And we are going to work together to understand each other.

I invite you to reflect, this topic is exciting but we need to know how to land it.

“TOWARDS THE RESPECT FOR ALL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IN PUBLIC DECISIONS”
Religious Liberty, as Lee said, is a very exciting subject. Who is not passionate about this topic can not work it. The people who are involved with this issue must know what the state is and what religious denominations are about. We then began with a question: how to strengthen state guarantees regarding religious freedom? They are already within jurisprudence and standards; states and legislators make the issue rules but how to land them? How to do it in the day to day life of a person who embraces a religious confession that most satisfies his spirituality can really make it effective. How the rules that are supposed to facilitate the state’s relationship with religious entities are seen as a slaming because a public official does not understand it.

The effort that we have tried to make in the direction of interconfessional Affairs I must say that the Ministry of Justice and the Human Rights, this area is in the Directorate of Justice. Last year it has just changed to the General Directorate of Justice and Religious Freedom, it was previously called the General Directorate of Justice and Religious Affairs.

Much earlier, we have a confessional history and in that we identify with most Latin American countries, a history of entrenched confessional states. We can not leave the historical context in which we are but we also have to see the legal space and the advances that have taken place in that space. We also have a business address for the Catholic Church. We work the relations of the state with the non-Catholic confessions, as it appears in our norm; but the church has already within, the government itself, and what we did was to illustrate to the lawyers, they simply told them that they would not remove the religious symbols that the school is accustomed to; and the members from the school they do not collabo there is a phrase that I usually mention in front of religious leaders “everyone wants to be head and not tail”, and for that reason they do not collabo there is a phrase that I usually mention in front of religious leaders “everyone wants to be head and not tail”, they simply told them that they would not remove the religious symbols that the school is accustomed to; and the members from the school they do not collaborate with each other many times for wanting to have more proximity to power; Sometimes actions are generated in favor of one or the other depending on their proximity to power. We try to make things even.

Last year we held another interreligious fair where many faith communities participated, we had 15 different religious confessions that have just been presented and registered with us; For example, the Hare Krishna, the Vaisna, the Brahama, it was very novel to have them, for the first time we were able to make an alliance with a religious confession and we tried to influence the public officials who had to secretly generate these spaces, since This is a fundamental right.

That is what religious freedom is all about, working for the desegregatization, fighting against discrimination, generating not only positive toleran only positive tolerance but a true pluralism. From the recognition of the diversity that builds, that helps the other grow and our societies will grow as well as we see that the other grows."

Difficult. We have in Peru the religious courses college, which are dictated by professors that necessarily have to be authorized by the organization that verifies that the religion of that appears according to the agreement that the Peruvian state has, an agreement signed in 1979. By reference, we can not avoid speaking of the historical and legal context, since in the international instruments that go from 1945, 50, of which Peru is a case but how they at 2.50, we are two non-Catholic lawyers are going to swear in the illustrious Law School of Lima and the person who receives all the information receives a letter in which they say that they will not swear with the religious symbols that the school is accustomed to; and the members from the school they do not collaborate with each other many times for wanting to have more proximity to power; Sometimes actions are generated in favor of one or the other depending on their proximity to power. We try to make things even.

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Towards the respect for all religious beliefs in public decisions
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I came from working strongly in the defense of Religious Freedom and of cults as a lawyer in my country before assuming 4 years and a half this space in government and today I have the privilege of being with two pioneers, I am part of that second generation, here there are two pioneers of first generation; there is Dr. Beatriz Cuellar de Ríos who was president and secretary of the political movement that allowed to integrate Religious and Religious Freedom as a law in the Political Constitution, and the first law of Religious Freedom and the only one that we have in the country; and Dr. Charles Schultz, who has been an extraordinary consultant and senator of the republic and an outspoken advocate of Religious Freedom. And I did not want to go without giving them that recognition because I have the privilege of being in Mexico, a nation different from my nation but with the privilege of being a second generation of pioneers who have made it possible for me today to be reaping the benefits and promoting themes that you had to open a very difficult gap at the time three decades ago in my country.

Like the same experience that Mexico and Peru have revered; my country three decades ago had a constitutional change; We went from a confessional state to a non-denominational state. We have a constitutional article that is Article 19 that guarantees religious freedom and worship to all citizens of the country and we also have a statutory law that develops Article 19, which is Law 133 of 1994; a law 25 years ago that, as expressed by Mr. Lee, remained in the 90s in a reality where it was first sought to guarantee freedom but unfortunately does not allow visibility and guarantee in the terms said by the master President of the Mexican Episcopalian Conference: “the multidimensionality” of Religious Freedom and Religious.

That is also part of the challenges we have as government of Colombia from the Executive and the Legislative to be able to have a norm that truly reflects this third millennium, of this XXI century, in front of the work that the Church is doing.

I want to share a comprehensive public policy that we just issued a year ago in my country but had three elements that I consider strategic to share as good practices in the very development of their territories and the policies that you have been developing.

Academic partners, when we asked ourselves the epistemological current to create the basis of this Public Policy, we chose the policy of recognition; because the elements that we found when we translated into the relationship with the different churches, confessions and denominations in my country; We found that although there was a religious identity and there was a work of contribution in the construction of the social fabric and the community, it was a theme that was kept there in the places of worship, in the temples, in the spaces and the programs of the entities, organizations and confessions.

So, the first thing we did was, being clear that we are a confessional state but that we recognize the importance of the cooperation of such a strategic sector as the churches and confessions, we begin to generate “spaces and bridges of trust and relationship” to begin to dialogue the different churches and confessions present in my country.

We have a public registry today of ninety religious entities that are registered and present throughout the national territory but as with my colleagues and colleagues, we have a public registry but we did not have that relationship with the leader, the community, the programs and the activities of a religious leader of the different confessions and denominations in my country.

That point was fundamental to be respected the other through tolerance, recognize and respect the other through tolerance actions, but also generating spaces where we will cooperate towards a common goal.

We started that process, it was not easy, fortunately in that same dynamic in my country there were exercises of interreligious dialogue but not with the State where we will all sit down on the table; Since 2014, a Government Minister has allowed us to start making a conversation from the State to all the leaders, confessions and organizations of the country. This dialogue was so interesting that, as Esperanza said, it was extraordinary for us that certain communities, spiritualities and other organizations will begin to recognize them from the State institutions. Of those seven thousand and three hundred we had many years ago Bahai communities, Krishna communities, Buddhists, historical and evangelical Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Muslims; We began to recognize not only how they were concentrated in the country, but also, the great programs that related to the construction of culture, education and reconstruction of the social fabric, as well as areas that they were promoting, but each one in isolation. We started to generate meeting spaces not only to put talents on the table for the common good but also to start breaking down barriers between themselves. That point was fundamental to be able to advance.

Another strategic point for us was that, since the Ministry of the Interior only registers the religious entities but does not have tools beyond to touch issues of Religious Freedom and Religious. The opportunity to build the Development Plan of the previous government was given. And why do we strategically touch the Development Policy?
We started to go from department to department, knocking on the door of governors, mayors and, above all, generating confidence so that the churches and confessions of the territories would attend our calls and we will work hand in hand.

That was interesting since going to the territory, for example, I went in three years, three times for each territory that was the plan of action that I proposed: During the first trip I received many questions about whether “it was easy to be regarding the religious religious” and no, it’s harder because you have to break paradigms; and in that first exercise we had a 60% participation, in the second it was generated and it was in the third that we started to consolidate some transitory working tables in front of the Religious Freedom and of Religious; and we had strategic lines in which we worked and we tackled the collection of inputs on problems that last the churches and confessions in the territories were having.

A fundamental axis for religious freedom and worship in which not only touched my freedom of belief but also the material exercise of places of worship, tax recognition, the recognition of educational titles, the pension system, the needs that all religions suffer. We also had a second axis where we talked about education as the institutes, the theological training spaces were guaranteeing the accreditation of the formation of leaders and ministers of worship, but also how the right of parents to have their children receive a timely education, was respected.

We had tables on public participation in which the first thing the cult leaders told us was that they did not do “electoral politics” which first raised the problem of “how does a religious leader or community understand a public policy?” and they could understand their dogmatic readings as a “manual of laws” and believed that they did not need legal guidance; but when urban problems or other problems came they told me “But how?” And I told them that the right to Religious Freedom must be understood because I can not abstract from the political and social system in which I live because the church is part of the political and social system, and if I move away, everything will happen around and I’m not going to know how to act. That was very important because it is as if the right to participation were forbidden from the language of churches and confessions and we must motivate that process, that participation, and in this way we built transitory tables that gave us the inputs of what today is the First Comprehensive Policy on Religious Freedom and Worship, adopted by the President of the Republic the previous year.

Today my country, which are thirty-two territories (which by political distribution are called “departments”), last Monday we signed the public policy number 15, and this Monday is the 16th territory to have public policy on Religious Freedom. What means that we have managed to generate spaces from the government to consolidate the territorial theme.

And a third that I value very much, much spaces like today, we started to dialogue with countries of South America and we have met in Lima, Argentina and Bogota looking for common tools as countries to effectively guarantee Religious Freedom; and as a Colombian government we have left a very important axis in the implementation of integral public policy, which is the international interreligious cooperation. First, because when we started in that dialogue we found that there was a lot of mutual interest in interreligious cooperation accompanying the exercise of religious entities, as they are called in my country; second, there is an international academy also supporting the issue; third we understood that the contribution that these entities are making in the construction of the social fabric and above all in the scope of sustainable development, had to be made visible.

We are the only public policy in Latin America for Religious Freedom that dared to establish itself before a norm of this nature that religious communities contribute to the achievement of the objectives of sustainable development. We did an exercise in a territory of the country called “El Valle del Cauca” where 80 religious entities participated and we did an exercise so that they shared the actions they have been doing to benefit the sustainable development objectives; as part of the government, I had to validate the process and it was interesting to see the 80 representatives of these churches and confessions when we showed them their contributions to health, malnutrition, women's rights, rotation and rights of children, to the environment and the development of the communities, they could not believe that they were coadjuvants of all that. When we looked at the outcome of the sustainable development objectives from the religious sector they noticed its impact on other state policies and their scope.

For me, as a woman of faith, that day was so important to see the break of paradigms since only with the faces of the leaders understood that they said “We are here and why have we lost so much time?” I tell them that this axis, that of international cooperation, became our challenge; we have already started in our action plan 2018-2022, with President Iván Duque the whole process of making visible the contribution that you, with your programs,
are making in the construction of the social fabric and sustainable social development and that have to go beyond the initiatives that they be achieved at the inter-American level with multilateral organizations because, faith is based on values that are so necessary in these times within society in our countries that I dare to tell my religious leaders “How is it possible that you are who have the moral authority on these issues, so absent in making decisions? When the voice and the contribution that you are making is what will help to cement so many values that are needed, regardless of the religious contexts, for a better society. And their visions as entities, they arrange it. You can not be light hiding under the table, you have to be light coming out, accompanying, offering and generating the provision of social services and not expecting other organizations that do not have any identity, like the one you have, are taking center stage of specific calls that you have to make as religious leaders.

So, Conciencia Nacional, México, Perú, Colombia and allies, we are all willing to go hand in hand in common purposes; All of us have been summoned to these common purposes, they also “hit us harder” because they criticize us more, they stigmatize us more, because we have a clarity of working with everything and for all without losing the values due to being working for a cause as is Religious Freedom and Worship in the World.

I want to lay out a vision that we’re working on in Washington. A lot of what I’ve heard this morning, even on this panel, you’re all doing that to variant degrees.

We’re doing that in Washington and I wanted to start, to come here and connect with you all, but here is the vision that we’re building on, because I want to bring this to you and have you bring your experiences to Washington too. I work in partnership with the state department, the US State Department, with the Secretary of State Michael, with the Ambassador at large for the International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback, it has an International Religious Freedom Team, and we’re building a global movement or global alliance to advance religious freedom for everyone, everywhere. In the center piece of that there’s three components to the vision:

It’s what they call a Ministerial to advance Religious Freedom every July or so, that’s just a big meeting of Government Ministers and civil society organizations and faith communities. So this global alliance is made of those three elements, governments, civil society organizations and faith communities.

Imagine those networks gathering in Washington D.C. once a year, you all should be there.

Gregory Mitchell
President of Round Table of Religious Freedom of the US

My name is Greg Mitchell, I’m from the United States of America, I came up in National Politics in The United States, I was a Chief of Staff to a US Congressman 20 years ago, if you can believe that.

Since then I’ve had my government relations and I’ve been working on the International Religious Freedom since 2009 or so, so about ten years I’ve been working on international Religious Freedoms as one of my main issues that I work on. For the last 8 years, I’ve been running this International Religious Freedom round table, which I’ll tell you about.

I’m here from Washington, I just want to lay out a vision that we’re working on in Washington. A lot of what I’ve heard this morning, even on this panel, you’re all doing that to variant degrees.

We’re doing that in Washington and I wanted to start, to come here and connect with you all, but here is the vision that we’re building on, because I want to bring this to you and have you bring your experiences to Washington too. I work in partnership with the state department, the US State Department, with the Secretary of State Michael, with the Ambassador at large for the International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback, it has an International Religious Freedom Team, and we’re building a global movement or global alliance to advance religious freedom for everyone, everywhere. In the center piece of that there’s three components to the vision:

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Imagine those networks gathering in Washington D.C. once a year, you all should be there.

From what they’re building here, that’s the gathering place each year. Now, in between the annual meeting there are urging governments to organize regional religious freedom conferences and they are urging civil society organizations and faith communities, the NGOs, to organize multi-faith round tables, religious freedom round tables, policy round tables, similar to what you all have done, what you’ve been doing in the Departments. I wanted to let you know that.

So they want to do this annually and in between each Ministerial the cycle will grow, the more regional conferences you have, the more round tables that get set up and operating, which I’m going to tell you what the model is, the more this global movement will built, the more actors around the world that will get involved, in one effort, in one coordinated effort to advance religious freedom for everyone.

Just real quick, this is my second trip now this year to help build this global network of religious freedom round tables, multi-faith round tables. I was in Nigeria last month, I’m here in Mexico today, to see if I can start working with you all here in coordination. I’m going to South Korea in about a week and a half to have a first meeting there, going to Taiwan a week after I get back from South Korea, also I’m going to go to Belgium, Kurdistan, which is a region in Northern Iraq. We got Hungary and Kazakhstan too, that’s just to name a few, those are the first countries where there is interest. So we can see that there is interest, so you can see that there is interest in countries all over the world to become part of this global network. So again, I’m here hoping we can connect with you and like you said become part of the same team. I’m on the same page and start working together and start helping each other. That’s from Washington and everybody on this global network we’re building all over the world and hopefully Latin America.

Last week a lot of people were in
Washington for the National Prayer Breakfast, I met with representatives who were in town from Guatemala and they started a new group called “Estamos Unidos” and they’re in 22 countries and one of their areas of focus is religious freedom and they love to partner with the International Religious Freedom Round Table to set up this round tables in all 22 countries in Latin America starting with Guatemala, Colombia and then Argentina. So I’m very happy to be here to make this connections and we can all start working together and the State Department, the Secretary State and Ambassador Brownback would like to bring more Latin American participation into the ministerial every summer, so that’s one of their goals for this July. Increase diversity of countries by bringing more African and Latin American countries to Washington in July. That sets the table.

I want to just tell you about this international religious freedom round table model, to see how it might be applied here, it’s a practical model.

We already hear some practical models that go down to the ground in your countries but this is how we do it, this is how we... It’s a safe space, the International Religious Freedom Round Table is not incorporated, so what is this? It’s just a safe space where representatives of all faiths get together, every year for seven years, everybody has been doing this for over eight years, so it’s continuous and it’s ongoing so it’s not just one event and everybody goes home and we never talk again. For the first 7 years or so we were getting together every two or three months, every year for seven years, everybody is there; representatives of all faiths and representatives of government, you have the State Department, you have Congress, and we have representatives of all faiths including faiths that were in conflict with each other, before they started gathering on a regular basis. So representatives of faiths that would never be in the same room together before we started doing this, because hopefully they like each other, around disagreements, they couldn’t get in the same room. They started coming to this table...

Each meeting we talked about specific religious freedom situations in the world, we’re at home, so it’s internal or external, but you throw a specific problem on the table and then you have a discussion with all the faiths and discussions to see if you can find the areas of agreement, a common cause and multi-faith consensus, and then out of those discussions, everything is there, he called me and everyone on that table, are you going to speak on that issue, everybody is free to propose a multi-faith advocacy initiative and invite everyone else to opt in, and work together so what it is, it’s an equal citizenship model, that’s inclusive because it’s multi-faith and it includes non-believers and believers, new and old traditional, non-traditional, everything. Again, equal citizenship, so everybody has a chance to participate and contribute so... and then everybody does work together to solve these specific problems.

Now each coalition builds to handle each specific problem of different size but each one is multi-faith and what we’ve seen happen over the 8 years is working together in this fashion. Not only talking together about problems, but working together. I’ve seen with my own eyes the levels of, because way beyond tolerance, it’s much stronger than tolerance, it starts with mutual understanding and respect that builds to mutual trust and reliance, again, among faiths that couldn’t stand each other and wouldn’t talk to each other before, now they’re working together, they’re friends, they go to meetings at the white house together, they go to meetings to the State Department together, they go to meeting in four embassies together asking foreign government to improve their religions laws together, side by side, shoulder to shoulder.

It’s a model that we could bring here and hopefully more each other, around the world will start adapting the model and replicating this model and customizing it for their specific local context but becoming part of this network and working with us.

We’ve had over 250 organizations represented at this round table for the last 8 years and real quick. Ambassador Brownback, who is the current religious freedom ambassador in the US. He just got confirmed his ambassador a year ago, like I said, we were meeting every two or three months a year, he called me and everything on that table, can you organize, weekly meetings for me? As long as he’s in Washington, every Tuesday at 11 o’clock I put out the notice and we get 100 to 140 representatives, of all the different civil society organizations and faith communities coming together with the State Department, with the Ambassador, and Embassies of other governments are also there at the table, but we’re having these every Tuesday at 11 as long as he’s in town so we’re meeting on a weekly basis. This dialog is ongoing, it doesn’t stop. It’s a wonderful model, it’s much better and much stronger than just one meeting, one conference a year or something like that so I wanted to bring that to your country here.

The practical effects, again, just to wrap up here, the last thing relationships are built, creating mutual-bearers, we’re on the same page, so we can have more impact on religious policies, in order to advance religious freedom for everyone, everywhere, thank you.

Let’s all go all in and have a full, strong show of force from Latin America because you guys are doing tremendous things and they need to know about what you’re doing, they need to know about it, because they can start to help spread the word. But we just want to help you and have you help us and again, hopefully we can all work on the same team and on the same side, because this is a regular basis, we’ve been doing this for eight years, everybody is here; representatives of all faiths and representatives of government, you have the State Department, you have Congress.

We are going to Northern Iraq to put this in. The big challenges there other than Isis is unity, fragmentation and infighting among the communities, among the citizens.

We think that this model can actually help us solve the challenges, those internal challenges, so that the international development programs and humanitarian programs can actually start to take hope and succeed in rebuilding at that zone, and restore and maintain religious diversity. So with that, I just want to offer and invite everyone here to become part of this multi-faith religious freedom policy, round table network, plug in in what we’re doing with the government in the US and there was 48 governments in that ministerial last July and I saw the scene I was there, I saw the sign for Colombia, Peru and Argentina but they didn’t have strong participation, we want...
I would like to thank this opportunity to share some of the thoughts concerning religious freedom and human dignity. I shall begin by reminding us a little bit of history. After the devastating conflict that was WWII, the issue of human rights has gained center-stage prominence. The debate over human rights bases itself on the idea that all humans are equal in term of dignity; which means we all have the same intrinsic value for the simple fact of being members of the human race. By having all the inherent dignitiy, we all deserve certain fundamental rights that no State should be able to infringe upon.

It’s not surprising that this idea goes total against the now defeated Nazi ideology, who believed in its own ra.

For the six decades since the adoption of the Declaration, the founding value of respect toward dignity for all human beings is being forgot-

eral part of the program. Among other

The declaration acknowledged that “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world…” (Preamble) Declaring that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (Article 1)

This can be seen with regard to one of the most fundamental rights: that of religious freedom. Many today would often advocate new civil rights that go against traditional values taught by the religion. Instead of respecting religious freedom as a fundamental right, they often link it with hatred and prejudice. They see it as an obstacle against progress, going as far as insisting that religions should be restricted by the State, and the ethical values instilled by the religion have no place in public discourse due to their religious origin.

I would like to share an example. In 2016, the US Commission on Civil Rights issued a report concluding that religious freedom, despite legal protection, infringes upon civil rights with regard to non-discrimination. The report was to amend US federal laws to forbid using religious freedom as a means of discrimination. The President of the Commission criticized religious freedom, stating that it’s only a pretext for discrimination. The report says ‘religious freedom’ means nothing other than hypocrisy, if and when used as code words for discrimination, intolerance, racism, sexism, homophobia, islamophobia, Christian supremacy, or any kind of intolerance”.

I would like to give another worrisome example from our inter-American region. The Organization of American States approved in 2013 the Inter-American Convention against all forms of Discrimination and Intolerance. That Convention is a prime example of what I’m talking about, that it pushes one right without recognizing that this advocacy may infringe upon the rights of others.

It’s worth mentioning that under no circumstance should we approve intolerance or discrimination in any of its form. Nevertheless, the Convention as it was written is not capable of balancing adequately the goal of fighting against unfair discrimination, and safeguarding fundamental human rights of freedom of press, of conscience, and of religion. The Convention adopted an extremely open definition of “tolerance”. It forces participating States to penalize and censor discourses or activities that may fit that definition; this means anything that implies discrepancy or opposition to the opinion of a third party, without the need to verify perjury to other rights, and by the mere fact that the opinion being expressed was labeled by third parties as intolerant.

This flaw was the reason why the Canadian delegation withdrew from the project of the convention. It should be noted that in general Canada is an active defender of new civil rights that the Convention is trying to protect. Nevertheless, Canada had withdrawn on the ground that the precepts of the Convention were against the rights to freedom of expression, as well as conscience and religion (Permanent Mission in Canada, Explanatory note of the mission to the negotiation commission about its withdrawal from the negotiation process, OEA/Ser. G/CJCP/GT/RD/IN/21/10, 1, Nov. 30, 2010).

Personally, I would like to see a new beginning for this project, since it’s of utmost importance to fight against discrimination and intolerance. But as the way it was written, the Inter-American Convention against all forms of Discrimination and Intolerance actually puts at risk the very foundation of a pluralistic, democratic, and free society. Its ratification by the members of OAS is pending, and there’s only one ratification left for it enter effect, which is quite worrisome. Hopefully, the governments of Latin America can recognize the problem and press the restart button before it’s too late.

This brings us back to human dignity to suggest a path toward a solution for such problems.

During the last couple of years, a group of scholars, lawyers, and judges who are experts on human rights and religious freedom have developed a project to reaffirm, revive, and remember the value of human dignity as founding principle of human rights. In December of last year, on the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a great number of these experts met at Punta del Este in Uruguay. They put the final touches on their document and signed it. They named it “Declaration of Punta del Este about human dignity for all and in all places”. The document can be found at the webpage: dignityforall.org. The webpage has a lot of additional information related to the principle of human dignity.

The precepts of the Declaration are a formula to support the human rights system as an inter-dependent, integral part of the program. Among other
things, focusing on respect for human dignity for all and in all places offers the following benefits in the discourse over religious freedom and human rights:

- Highlights what we have in common. Respecting the inherent and equal dignity for all is an ideal that can be found in almost all religious traditions and secular philosophies. It's based on beliefs that we are created upon the image of God, the brotherhood of all humanity, love for each other, and the grand value of souls in the view of God.

- Provide focus to build a bridge among different visions over the meaning and content of all human rights. Respect for human dignity for all and at all places is a priceless criterion that evaluates the extent of laws, public policies, and government actions are in compliance with the standards of the matter of human rights.

- It functions as a corrective facility for schools positions that demand derechos para unos, pero no para otros. Coadyuva a mitigar la distorsión, el rechazo y el reconocimiento selectivo de la dignidad humana. Sirve para armonizar y reivindicar los derechos mutuamente.

- Helping to tune down the hostility associated with the controversies over human rights and to encourage constructive dialog. Helps to find common ground of understandings; it’s an antidote against identity politics that highlights our differences.

- Respect for human dignity for all and in all places reminds us that we should work toward the elimination of the most serious violations of human rights against individuals and groups, including genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, religious persecution, human trafficking, and other atrocities.

In the end, respect to human dignity for all and in all places is a value that is of religious as well as secular origin. God set in motion the adoption of all human rights. However, in these days of polarized politics, we have forgotten that human dignity is universal reciprocal. From time to time, we see activists advocating one right or another in particular, as if that's the only right that matters. But in reality, respecting human dignity for all and in all places takes us again to our shared humanity and restores the fundamental balance that's needed to maintain the system of rights. Within that balance, fundamental rights are protected, including religious freedom. Respecting human dignity for all and in all places is an ancient concept, but I'm confident that it's also a new model to defend freedom.

There is however, an even greater limit of said right in the form of Article 3 of the Constitution with regard to education and religious freedom, that given the way it's implemented, has practically resulted in a social stratification among Mexicans, essentially dividing the Mexican people into first and second class citizens when it comes to religious rights.

As we understood, the Article 3, Fraction VI, does not forbid private institutions, in any subject or form, and even though it specifies such activities should comply with the rule of the law (not Constitution), nowhere does it explicitly indicate that private education needs to comply with secular criteria, as is the case of public education. Hence, the education offered by private institutions is not restrained by the limiting factors that apply to public school systems. What's the logical outcome of said difference? The answer is obvious: private schools are free to include religious or moral education in their curricula as they see fit; whereas public schools have to adhere to secular criteria as per Article 3 of the Constitution.

In theory, nothing should really stop the kind of religious and moral teachings that private schools to be applied to other students, provided these are in keeping with parents’ or legal guardians’ religious conviction. This is fully backed by Article 12.4 of the Pact of San José, Costa Rica: “The parents and the guardians have the right to allow their children or
wards to receive religious and moral education in keeping with their own religious conviction”.

This brings up an issue of particular importance, as parents from households with enough financial resources can afford to send their children to private schools where such religious and moral education can be taught; these parents can therefore fully exercise their religious freedom as per international treaties. On the other hand, parents or guardians who do not count with such financial resources can only afford to send their children or wards to public schools (as is the case with the vast majority of Mexican families); this erodes their basic human right, as they’re forced to accept the State-enforced secularity of the teaching that their children shall receive.

2.2. Article 5 of the Constitution after 1992

The current Article 5 still presents considerable limitations on religious freedom. In the original text of the Constitution, the State has the authority to stop the execution of contracts or agreements that limit personal freedom if these were based on religious vows. Today, the Article 5 no longer explicitly indicates religious vows as ground for State intervention; however, it uses other words that could potentially apply to religious motives, such as “for any other cause”.

Given the new wording of the Article we might be misled to believe that religious vows no longer have to face political intervention; but this is not the case, as the clause of “for any other cause” has implicitly reintroduced said limits on religious freedom, as pointed out by Raúl González Schmal.

In this regard, we should not forget what has been explicitly stated in Article 18 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 that from the very first paragraph 1) it clearly states: “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his own, and freedom, either individually or in community with others, and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching”. It also states on the second paragraph 2) “No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice”.

2.3. Article 24 of the Constitution after 1992

A critical observation of this article can be drawn from the third paragraph, which indicates that the religious activities such as public worship that normally take place in temples, and also outside of temples under extraordinary circumstances, is subject to laws and regulations. The applicable law for this is the law of Religious Association and Public Worship, which demands in its Article 22 that involved parties should notify the authority at least 15 days before said activities, stating their location, time, and motive. Nevertheless, the very same law reserves the power to forbid said activities out of safety, health protection, morality, peace and order, and protection of rights of third parties.

Clearly, it’s important to notify relevant authorities about said activities, which is acceptable. The problem lies with the wide discretionary power the authorities have in forbidding said public activities. This is because of the expressions used by the law are so vague and non-specific that they’re opening the gate to arbitrary enforcement.

In that respect, the Article 18 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights points out that no one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and that includes the right to exercise it publically.

2.4. Article 27 of the Constitution after 1992

The Article 27 of the Constitution saw changes in fractions II and III. The former forbids religious associations and churches from having the legal power to acquire, possess, and manage real estates. The current text of the Constitution now acknowledges the legal power of religious associations to acquire, possess, and manage properties which are indispensable for their functions.

Some critical comments are called for. The first part of Fraction II, Article 27, states that it’s indispensable for churches and religious congregations to become legal persons in order to have the legal power to acquire or manage properties, it must form a religious association (RA) as indicated by the Article 130 of the Constitution. This means if it’s does not form a RA, it may not become a legal person to acquire, possess, or manage properties.

The limitations are very clear, the authority of the State as entity in granting legal person status to churches as RA. A second point also stood out: churches and other religious congregations that do not wish to register as RA simply won’t have legal person status, at least for the effect indicated by law that applies to RA. But there’s more: what properties are the considered by the government to be indispensable for the RA to fulfill its function?

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief of 1981, states in its article 6 that includes a) “In accordance with article 1 of the present Declaration, and subject to the provisions of article 1, paragraph 3, the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief shall include, inter alia, the following freedoms: a) To worship or assemble in connection with a religion or belief, and to establish and maintain places for these purposes”.

As we can see, there’s a contradiction between Article 27 Fraction III of the Constitution and what’s indicated by the international document, for while the former leaves it to the will of the State authority to determine which are the indispensable real estates for RA to fulfill its function, the latter acknowledges that in order to fully exercise religious freedom also includes the right to “establish and maintain places for these purposes”. How many? As needed.

“I believe the signing of these international documents will eventually convert Mexico from an anti-clergy nation to a nation that grants protection to religious freedom.”
The Article 130 of the Constitution is particularly restrictive in all of its content. For example, the last part of the first paragraph and the first part of the second one indicate: “… Churches and other congregations are subject to the law. It corresponds exclusively to the congress of the union, the legislation of matters with regard to public worship, churches, and religious congregations…”

The afore-mentioned article is particularly insensitive toward human rights, since none of the international documents that protect these rights grants the State the power interfere directly by its legislation over public worship; much less the establishment, organization, and functioning of churches or religious congregations as indicated by this Mexican document.

One more restraint can be found in section c) of Article 130 of the Constitution that states explicitly: “Mexicans can exercise the ministry for any kind of worship. Mexicans as well as foreigners should comply with the requirements indicated by the law”.

This part of the Constitution leaves us with an important issue, since even though the text of the Constitution does not clearly state how should the character of ministry of worship be acquired within the RA, it nevertheless does explicitly assume the authority on who can exercise said ministry.

The section d) of Article 130 states that: “In terms of regulatory law, the ministers of worship can’t assume public offices. As citizens, they have the right to vote, but not the right to receive votes”.

Let’s assume that a minister of worship wishes to assume public office without giving up religious ministry; can it be done? Of course not. Faceted with this situation, the first thing we need to reflect upon is to identify the reason to justify such restraint on the right for a minister of worship to assume public. It seems there’s no justification for said restraints can be found within any international human rights document. As a matter of fact, Pact of San José, Costa Rica of 1969, its article 12 section 2 states the following: “No one shall be subject to restrictions that might impair his freedom to maintain or to change his religion or beliefs”.

Now let’s take a closer look at the topic of voting and receiving votes. This rule is in clear violation of human rights of political nature, for even though now worship ministers have the right to vote (prior to 1992 they enjoyed no such right), they could not receive votes before spending a given period of time (5 years) after leaving the position as worship ministers. This is of grave concern; as if one needs to serve time to regain the fundamental human rights. This blatantly contradicts the most elemental notion of human rights, as we’ve told since time immemorial that these rights should not be acquired gradually over time. We have said right for the simple fact of being humans, not because we’ve waited for 5 years.

There’s also a clear case of violation of human rights in section d) of Article 130 of the Constitution, for one part of it states that ministers of worship “…Neither can they during public meeting, worship or religious preaching, nor in religious publications, oppose the laws of the nation and its institutions, nor deprecate in any form patriotic symbols”.

It’s my opinion that ministers of worship should have the right to criticize such laws that allow abortion, eutanasia, and homosexual marriages, and assisted pregnancy, etc. due to serious differences of said laws with their religious ideals. Such restriction, as clearly indicated by the international documents. The person involved… in any other… whether a minister of worship or not, is exercising a profession and expressing religious freedom by defending a religious ideal.

The last two comments worth mentioning about Article 130 of the Constitution touch upon certain aspects of civil characteristics that are in violation of religious freedom. The first being the restriction for ministers of worship to receive inheritance; according to the mentioned part that ministers of worship: “shall not be able to inherit through will from persons whom the ministers have guided or helped spiritually, without family kinship of 4th degree or less”. With this condition imposed upon ministers of worship they’re again limited on their power to exercise one of the most fundamental rights: the right for inheritance.

The second aspect is related to the civil status of the people, which shall be the exclusive concern of the administrative authorities under the terms established by laws.

As can be seen with relative ease, despite the progress we’ve had in the Constitution of 1992 with regard to religious freedom, we can still observe a strong anticlerical spirit. But this shall be overcome as we acquire more knowledge and commit ourselves to the international documents that Mexico has signed; can we do it?
Challenges that Religious Freedom faces in Ibero-America

Central thesis: Repeated legal and general debates have been held throughout Ibero-America about religious and conscientious exceptions in face of general and apparently impartial regulatory demands, with results that are rarely in favor of religious and conscientious freedom.

Case presentation

Peru:

The N° 29635, Law of Religious Freedom (henceforth referred to as the Law) as published in “El Peruano” December 21, 2010; it should be noted that the Law had its first set of regulations in effect only for 5 years. The current set of regulations date to July 19, 2016.

According to Article 4 of the Law which states:

“Conscientious objection is the opposition by an individual against carrying out a legal duty, based on that individual’s religious or moral beliefs.

In this case the acknowledgement of said right is bound to the existence of a specific and proven taboo from the perspective of the religious entity that he or she belongs to.

The Article 8 of the regulations defines conscientious objection for the effect of legal acknowledgement. It seems to us that the only ground for conscientious objection is based on religious reasons. Thus, the objector can only invoke the conflict between conscience and law, if he or she refuses to comply due to religious reasons that are backed by a religious entity that he or she belongs to. Certainly, the pre-condition imposed by the regulator for the conscientious objection to proceed is the existence of a religious criteria that is incompatible with the legal order, that by principle should be fulfilled by the objector. Nevertheless, this can’t be any religious criteria, but one that is sanctioned by a religious entity.

Based on the aforementioned, we can ask the following questions: Can non-religious moral beliefs invoke conscientious objection to exempt one from complying with a legal order? What’s the treatment an objector shall receive if the group he or she belongs to does not fall within the definition of religious entity? Is there a place for ideological or ethical beliefs? Is the Law applicable where the majority religion does not object to it, but the minority religion does?

In an attempt to answer the above questions, we’ve taken note of a relevant argument. The Constitution does not regulate explicitly conscientious objection. There’s only two references, the first one in Article 2.3—already mentioned above—that acknowledges every individual is entitled to “religious and conscientious freedom, individually or collectively”. The second one being Article 14 that states “religious education is imparted with respect to freedom of conscience”.

The aforementioned criteria may be used to establish a possible Constitutional acknowledgement of said institution. At any rate, omission from the Constitution does not prevent the existence of a religious entity as a legal person.

The law makes the rights incurred by the legislature quite evident when trying to regulate the content of this very right. There’s no doubt that the conscientious objection can be quite restrictive due to two important reasons. On one hand, it only acknowledges conscientious objection on religious ground, neglecting other important motives that may also give rise to conflicts of conscience, such as ethic and ideology, etc. On the other hand, it only acknowledges conscientious objection to religious criteria that is incompatible with the legal order, that by principle should be fulfilled by the objector. Nevertheless, this can’t be any religious criteria, but one that is sanctioned by a religious entity.

The Constitutional Court of Peru has not developed a consistent criterion—in the line with the law—to solve cases of conscientious objection. For example, the Constitutional Court denied the right of an Adventist student objector at National University at San Agustin to not take exams on Saturdays. For her and her religion, the time period between Friday sunset and Saturday sunset is reserved for worship of God, and should not carry out any other activity in said period, including taking exams. Below is a brief description of the case.

It was an appeal for legal protection to said institution, requesting to assign the entry exam date of programs at a pre-university center to a day of the week other than Saturday. In February 2011, the compliant enrolled in the competitive admission process of said center, with the intention of applying to the Professional School of Human Medicine. Having paid 520.00 soles, the compliant believed the exam would take place on Sunday, as it normally does. The compliant knowing that the exams would take place on Saturdays, she requested to take the exam on a different date; however, her request was denied under the argument that it would prevent the institution from measuring her academic competency under equal terms, while risking leaking the content of the exam to her fellow students. As a result, she had to quit assisting classes. Then she found out that the normal entry exam date would take place on Sunday, which prompted her to request a refund of her enrollment fee. The request was promptly denied, for she had not requested a refund for over a month of time since enrollment, despite not having assisted in the classes. At any rates, the Constitutional Court found a supposed conflict between conscience and law. Despite of this, it was not treated as such: “upon reviewing under-derlying doctrine of the conscientious objection, this Court concludes that it is about conflicts generated by the exams programmed on certain days, which are days of rest according to the religion of an individual, that require her to abstain from work or other similar activities, is not strictly a case of conscientious objection. It lacked the legal duty prerequisite to object […] since the person was not legally required to take the exam. According to Peruvian legislature, an important aspect of religious freedom is the celebration of religious festivities. But said celebration must go beyond mere participation, and should include such specific acts as worship. Together with this act is labor non-participation and additionally, non-assistance of classes. Therefore, with regard to academic undertaking, this act requires the collaboration of education authori- ties. Nevertheless, there’s one limiting factor about this objection: that it must not interfere with the normal activities of said academic institution.

Despite this, the Constitutional Court stated in the last paragraph of its decision that the student was right, since “[the] state educational entities should thrive to hold its admission tests on dates that do not come into conflict with religious days of rest of participants. In the final part of the decision it upheld the University at San Agustin to not neglect—in future cases— such issues.

“Little favor does it offer to conscientious objection when this is tied to conditions. There should be half-baked respect. This should not be cut short.”

TOWARDS THE RESPECT FOR ALL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IN PUBLIC DECISIONS

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To sum up, Peruvian legislature is no stranger to conflicts between conscience and law. Taking this into consideration, the management of cases that involve religious objection must go through the Constitutional Court. Thus, the proceeding of this case shows the general condition and trend of this right in this Andean nation.

**Ecuador:**

Constitution of October 20, 2008 (left)

**PREAMBLE**

We the sovereign people of Ecuador

**ACKNOWLEDGING** our millenarian root, forged by women and men of different origins,

**CELEBRATING** the nature, Pachamama, which we are part of and is vital to our existence,

**INVOCATING** the name of God and acknowledging our diversity in religion and spirituality,

**APEALING** to the wisdoms of all cultures that enrich us as a society,

**AS HEIRS to the social struggles of liberation in face of all forms of domination and colonialism,**

And a deep commitment to the present and future,

Art. 66. - It’s acknowledged and guaranteed to the people:

1. The right of inalienability to life. There shall be no death penalty.

2. The right to a dignified life, that ensures health, food and nutrition, drinking water, housing, environmental sanitation, education, job, employment, rest and recreation, physical culture, clothing, social security and other necessary social services.

3. The right to personal integrity, which includes:
   a) Physical, psychological, moral, and sexual integrity.
   b) A life free from violence, both privately and publically. The State shall adopt necessary measures to prevent, eliminate, and sanction all forms of violence, especially the ones imposed upon women, children, teenagers, seniors, handicapped individuals, and all persons under situations of vulnerability; same measures will be taken against violence, slavery, and sexual exploitation.
   c) The prohibition of torture, forced disappearance, and cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatments and punishments.
   d) The prohibition of use of genetic material and scientific experiments that violate human rights.

4. The right to formal and material equality, and freedom from discrimination.

5. The right of free personality development, without restraint other than the rights of others.

6. The right to express himself freely and in all its forms and manifestations.

7. The right for all individuals who have been wronged by unproven or inaccurate information emitted by social media, to mandatory correspondence, correction, reply, or response, immediately and free of charge, within the same space or time.

8. The right to practice, speak of, change, profess publicly and privately, one’s religion or beliefs, and to spread it individually or collectively, with restrictions applied to protect the rights of others.

The State shall protect voluntary religious practices, as well expression by those who do not profess any religion, while fomenting an environment of diversity and tolerance.

9. The right to make free, informed, voluntary, ad responsible decisions over one’s sexuality, sex life, and sexual orientation. The State shall facilitate access to the necessary means to ensure these decisions are made safely.

10. The right to make free, responsible, and informed decisions over one’s reproductive life and health and to decide when and how many children one shall have.

11. The right to keep one’s beliefs to oneself. Under no circumstance should anyone force a person to divulge or use without the authorization of that person or his legal representatives, personal or third party information about his religious beliefs or affiliation, or political stances; this also applies to information with regard to his sex life and health, with the exception of medical services.

12. The right to conscientious objection should not undermine other rights, nor should it harm others or the nature.

All people have the right to refuse to use violence or serve in the military.

Chile:

Conscientious objection is not explicitly recognized in the Constitution. The Chilean doctrine claims that the case can be made based on Article 19.6 of the Constitution (Betzábe Arauya Peschke, Conscientious objection in the positive right of Chile, Santiago, Libromar, 2017).

The Constitution ensures that all people:

1º. - The right to life, physical and psychological integrity of the person. The law protects life to be born.

Death penalty can only be established for crimes covered by law that has been approved by qualified quorum.

All forms of illegitimate deprivation of freedom are forbidden.

2º. – Equality before the law. There are no privileged individuals or groups in Chile. There are no slaves in Chile, and anyone who steps on its soil shall be freed. Men and women are equal before law.

Neither laws nor authorities can impose arbitrary differences;

3º. - The law provides equal protection to the exercise of one’s rights.

All people have the right to legal defense in the way indicated by law, and no authority or person can deprive, restrict, or disrupt of this intervention if it’s required. As for armed forces and law enforcement personnel, this right shall be regulated by relevant administrative and regulations of their respective services.

The law shall decide the means to provide legal advises and defense for those who can’t procure said defense on their own. The law shall define the cases and establish the way in which the natural person victims shall have access to free legal advises and defense, to the effect of exercising the penal action acknowledged by this Constitution and the laws.

All people charged of crimes have the inalienable right to be assisted by a defense lawyer provided by the State if they can’t name one within the time frame established by law.

Nobody shall be judged by a special commission, but by a court specified by the law that has been established prior to the act.

All sentences given by a judicial institution should be based on a prior process that has been applied legally. It’s the responsibility of the legislature to always guarantee a rational, fair procedure and investigation.

The law can’t presume by default the penal responsibility.

No crime shall be punished by other penalties than that indicated by a law that has been enacted prior to the act,
No law can determine penalties if the crime being prosecuted is not explicitly written in it; however, a new law is more favorable to the effected.

4º. - Respect and protect the private life and honor of the person and his or her family, as well as protecting his or her personal information. The treatment and protection of this information shall be carried out in the way and conditions determined by law;

5º. - In violability of home for any kind of private communication. Private home can only be entered, and communication and documents intercepted, opened, and recorded under circumstances and in ways determined by law;

6º. - The freedom of conscience, the expression of all beliefs and the free exercise of all forms of worship that do not go against morality, good customs, or public order.

Religious bodies can build and maintain temples and dependencies under safe and hygienic conditions established by law.

Churches, religious bodies and institutions of any denomination shall have the rights given and acknowledged by laws currently in effect, with regard to properties. Temples and dependencies, used exclusively for the service of religious worship, are exempt from all kinds of contributions;

Toward the end of 2017 the Chilean Congress approved the decriminalization of abortion (Ley 21030) under three circumstances:

13. The woman is in life-threatening condition, that the interruption of pregnancy would avert such a danger to her life.

14. The embryo or fetus suffers from a congenital disease, either acquired or genetic, that is incompatible with extra-uterine life incompatible, making it certainly lethal.

15. As a result of rape, provided this is to take place no more than two weeks into pregnancy. If the subject involved is a girl of no more than 14 years of age, the termination of pregnancy can be carried out provided the pregnancy has elapsed less than 14 weeks.

Article 119 The surgeon being requested to terminate the pregnancy due to the aforesaid reasons stated in Article 119 can abstain from carrying it out if this has expressed his or her conscientious objection to the director of the medical establishment in writing and prior to involvement. This same right is also enjoyed by the rest of the personnel who will play a role within the operating room during the medical intervention. In this case, the medical establishment shall have the obligation to reassign other medical personnel immediately, regardless of protest of the patient. If the healthcare establishment does not count with other medical professionals that has not expressed conscientious objection, this must come to a decision immediately so the procedure can be carried out by someone who has not expressed said objection. The Ministry of Health shall defer to the necessary protocols for the determination of conscientious objection. Said protocols must ensure the patients who require medical termination of their pregnancies receive medical attention in compliance with aforesaid articles.

Conscientious objection is a personal matter and can be invoked by an institution. If the medical professional who expressed conscientious objection is required for the termination of the pregnancy, he or she shall have the obligation of notifying the director of healthcare establishment immediately that the woman need to be deferred. In case the woman needs immediately medical attention, invoking the condition 1) of first section of Article 119, that whoever expressed conscientious objection shall not be allowed to excuse him or herself from terminating the pregnancy when there’re no other surgeons to perform the procedure."

The discussion focused on the possibility of the clinics in to exercise the right of conscientious objection in principle.

Because of this, on January 2018 the government of Chile established a protocol for the expression of conscientious objection in face of abortion, demanding medical establishments that are not participants to the National System of Health Services through some agreement (discrimination against private clinics with principles of conscience) to be able to invoke conscientious objection as allowed by mentioned law.

On March 2018, the new Chilean administration issued this requirement, which lead to the General Comptroller of the Republic of Chile issuing a judgment on May 9 of last year, declaring such suppression to be illegal.

As such, on June 29, 2018, the Ministry of Health reformulated the original Protocol as per Decree N° 67.

It shall be stated that conscientious objection is a personal matter and may also be invoked by an institution (Art. 1). Among conscientious objectors at personal level is the surgeon that’s needed for the abortion procedure, as well as the rest of the personnel that play a role in operating room during the medical intervention. Nevertheless, when the woman is in life-threatening condition in that the termination of pregnancy would avert such danger to her life, then whoever expressed conscientious objection shall not be allowed to excuse him or herself from terminating the pregnancy when there’re no other surgeons to perform the procedure. “(Art. 2)

As for institutional conscientious objection, the Article 14 of the protocol states that no public health institution can invoke said objection. As for private practices, this can only be done when the obstetrics and gynecology departments are not part of any agreement with the Ministry of Health. “(Art. 14) Overall, if the woman is under life-threatening risk, the establishment can’t excuse itself from partaking in abortion (Art. 15).

This is the method the executive power tried to reach an agreement that allows Chilean healthcare institutions to express and practice their beliefs.
Colombia:

Article 18: It guarantees the freedom of conscience. Nobody shall be subjected to punishment because of his or her beliefs or creeds, or compelled to reveal, or forced to act against his or her conscience (Constitution of 1991)

Starting with ruling C-355 of 2006; The Constitutional Court of Colombia decriminalized abortion using the euphemism of voluntary termination of pregnancy:

- When the pregnancy put the woman’s health—physical or mental— or life at risk.
- When the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest.
- When the fetus suffers from deformities that are incompatible with life outside of the womb.

Since the issuance of ruling C-355 of 2006, the Constitutional Court of Colombia pointed out that conscientious objection can only be exercised by natural persons and not by legal persons or the State (by denying institutional conscientious objection). An institution can’t use conscientious objection as its internal policy to refuse abortion, nor can it force its medical personnel to declare themselves as conscientious objector.

Under said ruling, it’s not too clear whether the authorities of legal persons can be considered conscientious objectors based on the ethical ideals of their founders.

The ruling T-209 of 2008 of the Constitutional Court makes it evident that conscientious objection is applicable in medical issues, provided this does not effecting patients’ rights. For example, in case of euthanasia or voluntary termination of pregnancy, under these circumstances conscientious objection is only applicable to natural persons and not legal persons.

The Constitutional Court started to use the term right to conscientious objection in ruling T-388 of 2009 in two different fields: for one, in face of mandatory military service; the other being the voluntary termination of pregnancy.

In neither case can conscientious objection be used as excuse to refuse service. If a physician refuses to provide service due to conscientious reason, the objecting physician must seek out another physician to provide said service. If the objector is the only physician available that can terminate the pregnancy, the physician is required to carry out the procedure to protect the right to abortion. (Conscientious objection is not an absolute right. Healthcare professional must attend pregnancy termination requests in a timely manner in compliance with ruling C-355 of 2006, and it’s his or her duty to refer the pregnant woman immediately to a health-care professional that can perform said procedure).

Ruling T 585 of 2010: “the acknowledgement of VTP (voluntary termination of pregnancy) —under the three decriminalized circumstance— as fundamental right protected by the Constitution of 1991

Under ruling SU108 of 2016 the Court upholds conscientious objection as a fundamental right that must be acknowledged without demanding the existence of a legal standard that regulates; nevertheless, the Congress of the Republic is required to legislate laws in that respect.

Overall the Constitutional Court declared in more than 13 rulings that clearly state women have an unambiguous right to terminate their pregnancy under circumstances that have been decriminalized in Colombia. This means that women can demand healthcare institutions to provide the service in safe and dignified conditions without discrimination.

The jurisprudence after 2006 about the issue of abortion not only retained existing rulings, but also has seen development and consequences. It was thus confirmed, by the mean of jurisprudence of the three circumstances, that abortion is a fundamental right.

Mexico:

Comments on the reform of Article 24 of the Constitution

With regard to the conscience clause of physicians and nurses within the general healthcare law, as well as the contestation due to the constitutional controversy presented by the National Human Right Committees against that legal reform.

Concluding comment

Conscientious objection has no real power. This means that in the conscience of the objector, he or she rejects abortion and everything associated with it; it would be counter-productive, however, if he or she is forced by law to require to refer the woman to another physician that does not show such objection. Which means, I don’t kill, but I’m required to send someone else to kill: this is an intolerable.

To objecting physicians, they’re forced in such a way, to register on a list, with burdensome requirements, such as the case in Chile, and are exposed by the State for all to see, since said registr is public, when one’s belief should be personal. And when everybody knows they’re objectors, these physicians would have great difficulties in obtaining employment after being so stigmatized.

The same applies to other healthcare personnel (nurses, EMT, etc). All light are on the objector as the main figure of freedom of conscience, who is even penalized for refusing to do what’s being asked. Then what matters is to perform abortion at all cost.

Consensus does not justify the morally intolerable.

Little favor does it offer to conscientious objection when this is tied to conditions. There should be half-baked respect. This should not be cut short. It’s necessary to fully protect the objection by not participating in treatments prior and after the abortion.

I repeat: the objection can’t be taken at half value; it’s yes or no. If the law offers a half-baked acknowledgement, then it’s not a real objection.

The conscientious objection, more than just a “limit on the right” as some would like to consider, is in reality a bulwark of justice.

In the context of Ibero-America, conscientious objection is under siege, by the permissive laws. They say abortion is a women’s right, as stated by the Constitutional Court of Colombia. That does not force a woman to abort, but it does force he physicians to carry out the abortion if the woman says so, under the guise that this is a right, and the physician can’t deny said right”.

“TOWARDS THE RESPECT FOR ALL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IN PUBLIC DECISIONS” INTER-AMERICAN FORUM OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND COLLABORATION ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
Religious Freedom is based on love, security, sustainable human development with equity, justice and is based on coexistence and peace. With these postulates, the 1974 summit was held in Seoul, South Korea. That’s where I come from and despite the hours and fatigue, we are not exhausted by the passion for Religious Freedom in the world. That is what makes me tell you our experience, we had a non-denominational constitution attached to a single creed with 500 years of hegemony and now we passed in 1991 to a new constitution that was based on a state of law where the State focused on dignity of all human beings. It introduced important changes, such as: the resolution of conflict regarding norms and values, which had not been resolved before. In the last Constitution the principle of “Dura lex sed si” or “Hard is the Law but it is the Law” prevailed; and so the reality was another, the imperative of the law did not know reality.

Also introduced a major change from a system of legislated rights to one of judicial law, what does this mean? It means that the Colombian Congress turned its back on the reality of the country and the changes were not introduced, then that Constitution foresaw the failures in social matters and gave the Constitutional Court the opportunity for them to incorporate the catalog of new positive rights. Rights that the system of legislative order did not introduce. We found many sentences like the C-027 of 1993, because this sentence is a group of jurists considered that if the new Constitution left the confessional State and we were already in a non-denominational state that posed all separation of church and state then the Catholic agreed should not exist and they demanded it. But the Court, in its wisdom, said that the agreement was maintained, it complied with the Constitution of 91 and made one of the great achievements we have obtained that is the incorporation into the catalog of positive rights all the benefits that the Colombian State had given it. Vatican State through the Catholic agreement, Law 20 of the Republic of 1974.

Then we will find that through this sentence we will be able to speak of new rights of all the churches and not of one in particular by virtue of the constitutional norm that establishes that “All the churches are equal before the Law”. But there is something else, in Article 93 we did something that was an imperative that in Colombia we had not done but that is common in the inter-American countries, in international treaties they are signed but not enforced in front of our nations, but this solves Colombian domestic law international treaties on Human Rights and gives them the status of “prevalent”; it equates them to the same level of Children’s Rights and that is very important because many of these rights are incorporated by international instruments, especially that “we are all born equal” and with inalienable rights such as the right to life, to the freedom, justice, property, among others.

In this context, our work was to make the theoretical statements practical truths since in the constitutional texts there are statements that had to be analyzed that although our Constitution recognized first, second and third generation rights; in reality they did not apply. It was not being fulfilled in the daily life of our communities and there comes the conflict that is more acute to the conflicts that exist between harmony vs community rights, which generates conflicts and that is why Religious Freedom is an important catalyst in the solution of those conflicts.

That is why I mention the presence of Dr. Beatriz Cuellar de Ríos, as my friend Lorena, our Director of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior said, who, among other things, obtained that status to be recognized as an important division within the Ministry of the Interior, it was the fight we did with her. Dr. Lorena has received this post and I must give testimony that she has done very well and we are proud that this work we have done in recent years is collected as we have done with public policies that have come down to practical reality, the effectiveness of these theoretical statements.

We issued a Statutory Law (Law 133), because another of the changes brought by the 1991 Constitution is that all Human Rights issues can only be regulated by Statutory Law and that requires a special procedure in the congress, which gives stability and legal security so that the times of political conflicts do not generate legal instability. That brought us as a consequence that a law was issued that introduced good things but also introduced setbacks. We in that law that the Constitutional Court has expressed that is “the material expression of the Constitution of 1991”, for something extremely valuable to understand this law that many say was brought from Spain; we have to understand that our Constitution has a DNA that makes it different to all the constitutions of other countries despite the similarities; this DNA is what identifies us with the Constitution of 91 because it is a Constitution that defines its character as an Aconfessional State, because it recognizes that “the presence of God is an essential presence to find a just economic, political, social and cultural order” that separates it from the Lay State because in this there is separation of church and state but the recognition of Religious Freedom and of beliefs in general remains in the individual sphere and in the personal sovereignty of each individual.

What does that mean? Here it is not only in the individual sovereignty, in the Aconfessional State, which I consider to be the one that best responds to the needs and challenges of Religious Freedom because, in addition to proposing separation, it is recognizing that the presence of superior values in religious beliefs unite in the spirit of humanity that we all conform.

The presence of these values must not only be in the individuality but also in the sphere of the collective, because we disclose those values, and they must also be in the sphere of the public. I dare to say then that the presence of superior values can not be foreign to public policies, more in nations based on values that were incorporated by the international doctrine of Human Rights of the Judeo-Christian tradition."

"I dare to say then that the presence of superior values can not be foreign to public policies, they must be immersed in public policies, more in nations based on values that were incorporated by the international doctrine of Human Rights of the Judeo-Christian tradition."
Thus, the right to dignity, for example, can not be interpreted in the same way as an academic or those who call themselves atheists would interpret it; it can not be interpreted equally of those who believe that human existential reality is only one-dimensional, that it is only from the material side.

What we have to understand is that, in the sacred books (all), obviously we are going to find that the existential reality is three-dimensional, there is a spirit, a soul and a body. So the proposals that I bring are for the welfare of that being, if we seek their happiness, their freedom, their integrity, the values that are common to humanity, then I must make my approach from an integral way as I conceive the human being.

Obviously I understand that whoever conceives it two-dimensionally will do it from his own thought and way of believing and whoever does it from a one-dimensional vision will do it in the same way.

In practical realities we must understand that if Religious Freedom seeks the happiness of the human being, we must understand that this freedom has 3 axes for everything, both those who share a faith (whatever it is) and those who share ideologies; to unite to build common goods in humanity. My proposal for the religious sector is to transmit the principles and values that identify them with their creed as it happens in the same way with ideologies.

From the educational point of view, Religious Freedom has a field of education as a fundamental part in the integral human development and obviously in the field of social entrepreneurship, in the development of our achievements, in human activity we always remember the poor and we try to make religious activity interpret the postulates of love, sustainable human development with equity, coexistence and peace.