



## **Ján Figel'**

Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom  
of religion or belief outside the European Union

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### **Work plan of the Special Envoy on freedom of Religion or Belief**

In May 2016 the President of the European Commission appointed Jan Figel as first Special Envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Beliefs (FoRB) outside the European Union. His mandate has been renewed for one additional year, till May 2018. The Special Envoy will continue to serve as Special Advisor in the Cabinet of the Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven Mimica. He will continue to closely collaborate with DG DEVCO which fully supports his work.

The overall framework and objectives defined in his initial mandate remain valid. The Special Envoy will contribute to reinforcing an effective, visible and strategic EU engagement in the area of FoRB within its Human Rights and international cooperation policies and more broadly foreign policies. On the basis of results achieved and lessons learned, this work plan provides a flexible framework to guide action and reinforce synergies with other initiatives and programmes.

Activities foreseen in this work plan, under the condition of the mandate being renewed, may be implemented beyond May 2018. If the prolongation is confirmed, the work plan will be updated accordingly. This document is for internal use. An adapted version will be posted on the web and circulated to stakeholders.

Many international observers' sources highlight that FoRB is increasingly under threat in many countries. Violations are on the rise including various forms of discrimination and violence. A wave of intolerance for diversity of religions and beliefs is spreading in countries traditionally pluralistic and peaceful. The Special Envoy will continue to raise awareness and engage with state and non-state actors including religious communities themselves to address violations of this fundamental right. He will step up his action to foster respect for diversity of religions and beliefs and to encourage prevention. Main areas of engagement are : support to education for cultural and religious pluralism, support for interreligious dialogue and cooperation and actions to counter incitement to hatred and violence The Special Envoy will

continue his dialogue with civil society and religious actors at the European and the international level and whenever possible at country level.

In the second year, his action will be further integrated into DEVCO work as well as in the broader "EU system". Collaboration with the EEAS, including with EU delegations and with DGNEAR will be reinforced. Whenever possible, his activities will be part of a "corporate EU effort" to reinforce our response in the area of FoRB in line with full implementation of EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief adopted by the Council in 2013. The objective is to take full advantage of the "specific value added" of the Special Envoy. The objectives of the country missions will be jointly defined as part of medium-term engagement. Where relevant, synergies between the political and the operational dimensions will be pursued, including aspects relating to development cooperation. DEVCO services will be closely associated in this respect.

The Special Envoy will also enhance collaboration also with other Commission services, such as DG JUST, FPI and DG EAC as well as with the EP. Coordination will be actively pursued with Art. 17 work stream.

### **1) Structured support in "core countries"**

Over the period October 2016 – November 2017, the Special Envoy has visited Jordan, Iraq, UAE, Sudan and Senegal. Missions in Pakistan and Egypt were prepared, postponed by governments and still in the pipeline, showing that visits in very challenging countries are not easy to implement. He participated in international events and made contacts in other countries, such as India and Morocco.

The Special Envoy will follow and monitor the situation in a number of countries where FoRB is under pressure. He will also engage in countries where promotion and prevention are of strategic importance or good practices deserve encouragement and support. The "tableau de bord" in annex presents an "open list" of countries responding to these criteria.

His action will focus on a number of "core countries" including i) countries where FoRB is violated or challenged, following indications found in the EU Human Rights and Democracy Strategies (HRDCS), as well as by EEAS, EP and other sources; ii) countries who are or may become allies in promoting respect for diversity of religion or belief and countries offering positive and inspiring situations; iii) countries exposed to growing violent religious extremism and where prevention is key. "Core countries" are listed below.

Depending on the context, the Special Envoy will engage through : "remote support and dialogue" with HoD/Delegation staff and, where meaningful, with country stakeholders (for example via Video Conference); fully fledged country missions including meeting with ministries, senior government officials and other public authorities, religious actors, civil society and academia; visits on invitation by religious organisations/CSOs/academia, notably where conditions for a fully-fledged visits are not met; messaging, joint demarches/actions; meetings in Brussels and participation in regional events. At headquarters level, a light but "structured collaboration" will be organized, including regular meetings with geo-desks and

thematic focal points in DG DEVCO, DG NEAR and in the EEAS. He will continue to collaborate closely with the EP given his key role in policy making in HR and FoRB related areas.

<b>Open List of "Core Countries"</b>		
<b>Asia</b>	<b>Africa</b>	<b>Neighbourhood and Enlargement</b>
Bangladesh	Eritrea	Algeria
Bahrein	Nigeria	Egypt
China	Sudan	Jordan
Indonesia	Senegal	Morocco
India		OPT
Iraq		Bosnia
Iran		
Myanmar		
Nepal		
Pakistan		
Vietnam		

Work will concentrate on Asia, where many countries present difficult or very difficult situations.

- The Special Envoy will engage in "remote support/dialogue" with a number of EUDs in "core countries"
- "Country missions" are foreseen in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Another country would be selected for the period January-April 2018 semester 2018 (Nepal will be considered given rising tension on HR and FoRB and the importance of EC development cooperation).
- Opportunities will be pursued for visits on invitation or participation in events in: Iran, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines. Iran is a country of high interest and a visit will be planned if and when conditions turn out to be favourable.
- The SE will continue to follow the situation in Iraq, visited in February 2017. A second visit will be considered.

The Special Envoy will continue to monitor the situation and engage where relevant in the Middle East and Neighbourhood which has been a priority in 2017. In agreement with DGNEAR, the following is foreseen:

- The Special Envoy will engage in "remote support/dialogue" with a number of EUD in "core countries"
- A mission to Egypt, scheduled in April 2017 and postponed by the partner government, is foreseen in first semester 2018.
- A mission to Lebanon will also be considered.

- The Special Envoy will continue to invest in dialogue and contacts with stakeholders in Jordan and Morocco.
- Interesting contacts have been made with EUD in Bosnia and a mission is in the pipeline.

In South Saharan Africa, EU Human Rights Country Strategies signal FoRB under pressure in Nigeria. However, the situation is deteriorating in many other countries notably in the Horn of Africa, West and Central Africa and the Sahel. In agreement with DG DEVCO, activities foreseen include:

- The Special Envoy will engage in "remote support/dialogue" with selected EUDs in "core countries"
- The Special Envoy remains also available for a mission to CAR (prepared and cancelled in 2017 because of a sudden rise of tension).
- A second visit to Sudan following the successful one in March 2017 could be envisaged.

## **2) International processes and initiatives**

The Special Envoy will continue to participate in selected UN processes and events in the area of FoRB, including enhanced collaboration with the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of religion or belief, Mr. Ahmed Shaheed.

He will continue to collaborate with the International Contact Group (ICG) on FoRB , an informal group of like- minded organizations that seeks ways to work together through joint demarches (as done in Pakistan, Vietnam, Eritrea). He will also liaise with the International Parliamentarians Platform on Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPP).

He will back the implementation of the main international initiatives such as the "Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred" , the "Marrakech Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majorities Communities" of January 2016 and the recent Faith for Rights initiative<sup>1</sup> launched in 2017 and supported by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

## **3) Thematic areas of engagement**

Respect for diversity of religions or beliefs and interreligious dialogue remain a focal area of engagement. More and qualified religious literacy and education are essential long term remedies to religious intolerance. More and better dialogue is essential today. The Special Envoy will focus on:

- **The promotion of FoRB through support programmes in the area of education.** In cooperation with DEVCO/DGNEAR and with EUDs, opportunities will be screened to scale up political and, where relevant, technical/operational support for the promotion of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/21451/BeirutDeclarationonFaithforRights.pdf>

FoRB and religious literacy in schools and in "education-related activities" (such as revision of curricula and textbooks) through dialogue ad hoc initiatives, research, technical cooperation, etc. Initiatives in the broader area of youth may also be supported.

- Engagement with the **media and the creative sector**. Following the first Lorenzo Natali Media Prize on FoRB awarded in 2017, engagement with the media and also with actors of the creative /cultural sectors will be pursued with a view to providing incentives and support to stimulate their action in spreading positive messages, breaking religious stereotypes, educating on different religions and beliefs and contributing to respect/trust building.

A **gender sensitive approach** will be promoted throughout all his work with particular attention to activities fostering the role of women as key actors in the FoRB agenda.

#### **4) Dialogue and cooperation with religious and interreligious actors, with Civil Society and academia**

The Special Envoy will further develop his dialogue with religious actors representing all faiths as well with organisations active in interreligious dialogue. He will continue to cooperate with the Holy See at global level as well as relating to specific countries. Cooperation will be continued and possibly strengthened with civil society organisations promoting FoRB outside Europe, which are essential partners in his work. Academia has a key role to play to promote religious literacy at all levels and support informed and knowledge-based interreligious cooperation and dialogue.

#### **5) Coordination within the EU system**

The Special Envoy will maintain close contacts with DEVCO services. High-level engagement and coordination with EEAS/DG DEVCO/DG NEAR - at director/DG level - will be promoted, when relevant with the participation of CABs. Coordination with the Special Representative on Human Rights and other Special Representatives will also be pursued.

The Special Envoy will regularly communicate and collaborate with COHOM. He will enhance its collaboration with the European Parliament, notably with AFET, DROI, as well as with the EP Intergroup on FoRB and Religious Tolerance.

## Annex: "Tableau de bord"

This table is "dynamic" and is meant to support planning and management of activities. It presents "countries of interest" from a FoRB perspective. "Core countries" are highlighted in bold on which the Special Envoy foresees to focus his attention. The table is indicative and will be progressively updated and filled up with inputs by services and EUD.

### Asia

	Possible Remote support /dialogue	Mission	Participation in events	Funding on FoRB and potential to scale up*	Support to FoRB in Education*	Comments
<b>Bangladesh</b>	x	x				
Bahrein	no					
<b>China</b>	?					
<b>Indonesia</b>	x		x			
<b>India</b>	x	On invitation	x			
<b>Iraq</b>	no					
<b>Iran</b>	no	On invitation				
Kirgizstan	no					
Maldives	no					
Malaysia	no					
<b>Myanmar</b>	When possible	When possible	x			
<b>Nepal</b>	x	To be considered				
<b>Pakistan</b>	x	10-15 dec				
Saudi Arabia	no					
Shri Lanka	no		x			
Turkmenistan	no					
<b>Vietnam</b>	x					

\*to be filled up by DEVCO + EUD where relevant

## Africa

	Possible Remote support /dialogue	mission	Participation in event	Funding and potential to scale up*	Support to FoRB in Education *	Comments
CAR	no	?				
Eritrea	x					
Nigeria	x	x				
Senegal	no	x	x			
Sudan	x					
South Sudan	no					
Swaziland	x					

\*to be filled up by DEVCO + EUD where relevant

## Neighbourhood and Enlargement

	Possible Remote support /dialogue	Possible mission	Other type of visit/event	Funding and potential to scale up*	Support to FoRB in education*	Comments
Algeria	x					
Egypt	x	x				
Israel	no					
Lebanon	x	x				
Jordan	x					
Morocco	x					
OPT	x					
Tunisia	x					
Armenia						
Bosnia		x				
Georgia						

\*to be filled up by DG NEAR + EUD where relevant