

## The Importance of RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



On February 19, 2013, Canada's Prime Minister the Right Honourable Stephen Harper announced the establishment of the Office of Religious Freedom within Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada. Its mandate is to promote and defend freedom of religion in the world as a key foreign policy priority of the Government of Canada. The Office of Religious Freedom does not have a domestic mandate, but rather seeks to advance Canada's long-standing respect and defense of freedom of religion that stands at the core of the fundamental rights and freedoms we enjoy as citizens. In advancing freedom of religion throughout the world as a foreign policy goal the Office of Religious Freedom will draw upon the Canadian experience of pluralism that is grounded in our multicultural and multifaith society. Promoting and defending freedom of religion is a core element of Canada's principled foreign policy based on respect for freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Through this Office, Canada is speaking out and taking action against egregious violations of freedom of religion and denouncing violence against human rights defenders and attacks on places of worship around the world. Freedom of religion can be violated through government restrictions that deny religious freedom to one or more faith communities or through social hostilities that target one or more religious communities in a society. In some countries where freedom of religion is not respected government restrictions exist alongside social hostilities. Religious intolerance and discrimination is rising around the world and recent studies have shown that one-third of countries have high or very high restrictions on freedom of religion. As some of these countries are very populous, nearly 75 per cent of the world's population live in countries with high restrictions on freedom of religion<sup>1</sup>.

### Mandate of the ORF

The Office of Religious Freedom builds on Canada's past and current diplomatic efforts to promote and protect human rights around the world, including defending freedom of religion. Specifically, the Office focuses on advocacy, analysis, policy development and programming relating to protecting and advocating on behalf of religious communities under threat no matter which faith they profess. The Office opposes religious hatred and intolerance and promotes the value of pluralism and inclusive democratic development abroad. Activities are centred on countries or situations where there is evidence of violations of the right to freedom of religion, violations that could include violence, hatred, and systemic discrimination.

Through the efforts of the Office and our network of embassies and high commissions abroad, Canada will work with and seek out international partners to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief through dedicated activities and initiatives.

### The RELIGIOUS FREEDOM Fund

The Religious Freedom Fund is a principal vehicle through which the Office of Religious accomplishes its mandate of promoting and defending freedom of religion in the world. This \$4.25 million per year fund finances projects outside Canada to assist religious communities that are facing intolerance or persecution in a particular country or region of the world. More specifically, the Fund is aimed at projects that will accomplish the following:

- Raise awareness about issues related to freedom of religion by providing financial support to multilateral organizations for their activities, including interreligious dialogue and education on religious tolerance, freedom of religion, and pluralism;
- Conduct research on freedom of religion or belief that provides governments and decision-makers the world over with sources of information and analysis related to freedom of religion;
- Provide support for projects designed to support dialogue among different religious groups leading to clearly identified outcomes in countries where religious issues are principal factors of conflict between communities; and/or,
- Provide legal and legislative or related forms of support on issues of freedom of religion in order to build capacities and help defend communities that are targeted because of their faith.

Possible activities can include:

- Awareness projects that help integrate issues of tolerance and education on freedom of religion.
- The Fund may support multilateral organizations that work directly or indirectly on freedom of religion and/or on tolerance and dialogue among different religious groups.
- Research on freedom of religion to support government engagement in the area of religious tolerance and pluralism.
- The Fund may support academics or research groups that study freedom of religion and develop tools to help the government understand freedom of religion and discrimination against religious communities.
- Legal support or specialized services to support freedom of religion and respect for pluralism on behalf of persecuted groups or individuals.

The following types of organizations are eligible for Religious Freedom Fund grants and contributions:

- Non-governmental, community, religious, academic and not-for-profit organizations based in foreign countries;
- International, intergovernmental, multilateral and regional organizations; and
- Canadian non-governmental, community, religious, academic and not-for-profit organizations operating abroad.

Please note: The Fund only finances projects that take place abroad. Canada-based activities are not eligible.



## Key Resources and Contact Information

- Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada:  
[www.international.gc.ca](http://www.international.gc.ca)
- The Office of Religious Freedom:  
[www.international.gc.ca/religious\\_freedom-liberte\\_de\\_religion/index.aspx?lang=eng](http://www.international.gc.ca/religious_freedom-liberte_de_religion/index.aspx?lang=eng)
- Ambassador Bennett's statements, speeches, and outreach:  
[www.international.gc.ca/religious\\_freedom-liberte\\_de\\_religion/media-room\\_salle-presse.aspx](http://www.international.gc.ca/religious_freedom-liberte_de_religion/media-room_salle-presse.aspx)
- For more information on how to apply to the Religious Freedom Fund (RFF):  
[www.international.gc.ca/religious\\_freedom-liberte\\_de\\_religion/fund\\_fond.aspx](http://www.international.gc.ca/religious_freedom-liberte_de_religion/fund_fond.aspx)
- To contact the Office of Religious Freedom:  
[www.international.gc.ca/departement-ministere/form\\_contact-formulaire\\_contacter.aspx?lang=eng](http://www.international.gc.ca/departement-ministere/form_contact-formulaire_contacter.aspx?lang=eng)

<sup>1</sup> Rising Tide of Restrictions on Religion. Washington: Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, September 2012.

## The Ambassador for RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



Dr. Andrew P. W. Bennett, was named on February 19, 2013 by Prime Minister Stephen Harper as Canada's first Ambassador for Religious Freedom. Ambassador Bennett heads the Office of Religious Freedom. He is Ottawa-based.

Ambassador Bennett is a public servant and academic with an extensive educational background in history, political science, and religious studies including a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Edinburgh in 2002. In addition, he is in the process of completing a theology degree in Eastern Christian Studies at the Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky Institute of Eastern Christian Studies at Saint Paul University in Ottawa.

Ambassador Bennett has worked for the Privy Council Office, Export Development Canada and Natural Resources Canada in a wide variety of analytical, research and corporate roles. He has also held roles as Professor and Dean at Augustine College in Ottawa, as a Scholar Expert with Oxford Analytica and as a Researcher with the University of Edinburgh's Institute on Governance.

Ambassador Bennett is a leader in his community, including with the Shepherds of Good Hope mission in Ottawa. He is also a religious leader in his capacity as Subdeacon and Cantor with Holy Cross Eastern Catholic Chaplaincy and St. John the Baptist Ukrainian-Catholic Shrine, both in Ottawa.