

VCHR urges EU to increase efforts to protect Freedom of Religion or Belief

PARIS, 24 June 2019 (VCHR) – The **Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR)**, member of the **European Platform against Intolerance and Discrimination (EPRID)** today joins EPRID to commemorate **EU Day on Freedom of Religion or Belief** (24 June). The organisations urge the EU and its member states to take more concrete, urgent action to defend and protect the right of all people to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.

“Across the world, freedom of religion or belief is under threat”, said Võ Văn Ái, President of VCHR.

“In Vietnam, the Communist Party imposes draconian controls on all religious activities, and people face discrimination, harassments and imprisonment because of their religious convictions or beliefs. The EU, one of Vietnam’s largest trading partners, is currently finalising a landmark EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA). The European Parliament should not ratify EVFTA unless it includes concrete mechanisms to ensure the protection of human rights and freedom of religion or belief.”

In June 2013, the EU adopted [Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief](#) which set out how it intends to advance this fundamental right in foreign policy. According to research by the Pew Research Centre, around 80% of the world’s population suffer discrimination, oppression or violence because of their religion or belief. No religion or belief group, including theists, non-theists and atheists, are exempt from violations of this right.



EPRID Statement on EU FoRB Day

“Cultural and religious diversity is, now more than ever, colouring our lives and our societies. On this European Day of Freedom of Religion or Belief, the European Platform against Religious Intolerance and Discrimination (EPRID) calls on all governments to embrace, respect and protect this diversity. Respect for diversity is the cornerstone of a cohesive and harmonious society.

“The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is an essential element for social cohesion. It is crucial that European institutions and other relevant actors recognise the spiritual and moral dimensions of human life and place them at the very heart of EU policies and practices.

“Freedom of Religion or Belief includes all religions, faiths and philosophies of life, theistic as well as non-theistic and atheistic. On this day, EPRID stresses the need to protect this fundamental freedom. This can include legal, practical or other legitimate and necessary measures. Advancing this freedom protects our societies against divisive forces that advance false claims of national,

cultural, or religious superiority.

“The European Day on Freedom of Religion or Belief marks the [adoption](#) of the EU Guidelines on the protection and promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief. EPRID stands in solidarity with all defenders of Freedom of Religion or Belief and with all victims of violations of this precious human right. The platform calls on all people, regardless of their position in society, to do their utmost to make freedom of thought, conscience and religion a reality, to defend and protect the victims, and to support all those who put their safety and security on the line to protect this fundamental human right.”

EPRID is a network of civil society organisations, religious bodies and individuals operating at EU level to advance FoRB for everybody. EPRID members include Association Internationale pour la Défense de la Liberté Religieuse, Bahá'í International Community, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Conference of European Churches, European Evangelical Alliance, European Union Office of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Open Doors International, Quê Me: Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR), International Buddhist Information Bureau (UBCV)