



project to help parliamentarians and faith leaders across the world

As part of the Freedom of Religion or Belief Leadership Network (FoRBLN) the Church will work alongside 10 other partners supporting parliamentarians and belief leaders in eight countries across Africa and Asia to respond to FoRB challenges in their countries and the wider regions.

The £5.6 million project will run until autumn 2023.

They will be offered training on FoRB and related human rights issues, such as gender, health and education so that they can propose initiatives for their own context backed up by technical assistance and other expertise.

It follows growing awareness that violations of freedom of religion or belief take place in most different spheres of society and that these violations are sadly intensifying and for the most part remain hidden from sight.

The announcement on the United Nations Day of Human Rights (December 10) recognises that the right to freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in Article 18 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights



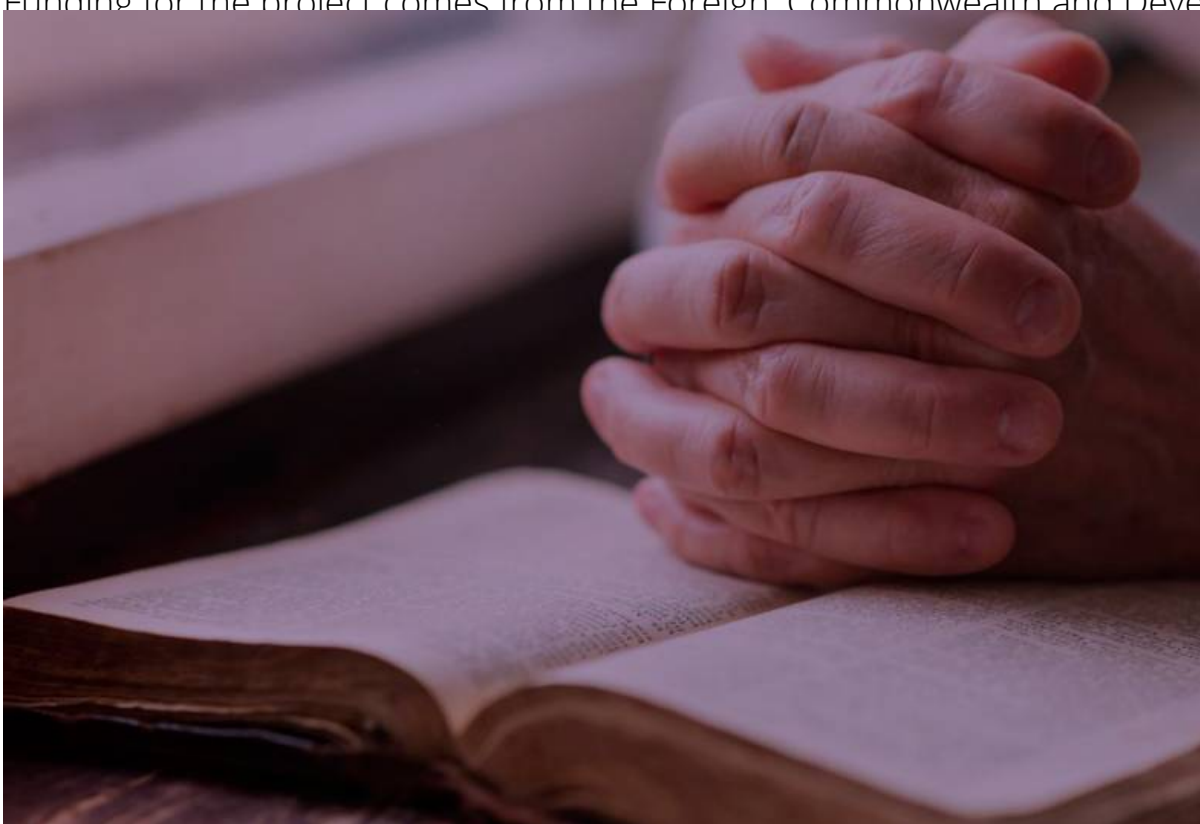
The project is being co-ordinated by the Centre for Social Cohesion (CSC) at Oxford University, which will lead on the research component, while the Church of England will lead on day-to-day operational delivery of the project.

Dr Charles Reed, the Church of England's International Affairs Adviser, who will be operations director for the project said: "At a time when freedom of religion is increasingly contested as a human right, and when the human rights system itself is under strain, we shouldn't forget that everyone, everywhere has this right by virtue of being human."

"Over the next three years, we will work with parliamentarians and belief leaders from 8 countries in strengthening their commitment to freedom of religion or belief as a human right - one that is on par with other rights and one squarely rooted within the broader human rights system."

"Parliamentarians and belief leaders have considerable untapped potential to make a positive impact on the human rights landscape whether by reforming discriminatory legislation or by using their influence over the hearts and minds of millions of people."

Funding for the project comes from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development' Office's UK Aid Connect Fund which brings together challenges that deliver real change to the lives of people living in poverty.



The Bishop of Leeds, Nick Baines, the Church of England's lead bishop for international affairs, said: "According to a study published by the Pew Forum in June 2018 around 83 per cent of the world's population live in countries with high or very high levels of restrictions on religion or belief.

"Sadly, this situation has worsened in recent months as a result of the global health pandemic.

"I'm encouraged that the Church of England is responding to this challenge by working with others to resource and equip parliamentarians and faith and belief leaders to defend such a basic human right – a right that touches on the very essence of what it means to be human."

More information

- [UK Aid Connect](#) is a Grant Fund from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office launched in July 2017.
- The Consortium members are:
 - The [Centre for the Study of Social Cohesion](#) (CSSC) at the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography at the University of Oxford
 - The Church of England
 - [African Centre for Parliamentary Affairs](#) (ACEPA)
 - [Danish Institute for Human Rights](#) (DIHR)
 - [Drik Picture Library and Gallery](#)
 - [International Commission of Jurists](#) (ICJ)
 - [International Panel of Parliamentarians for FoRB](#) (IPPFoRB)
 - [Jinnah Institute](#)
 - [Nordic Ecumenical Network on FoRB](#) (NORFoRB)
 - [Pak Mission Society](#) (PMS)
 - [Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa](#) (PROCMURA)
- The [Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflict](#) (CRIC), based at Oxford, is also offering strategic advice.