

## SEMINAR

### **The right to freedom of religion or belief in a shrinking space for civil society: Challenges and strategies**

*6. December 2018 from 13:00-15:00 Room Pro D, Christiansborg.*

Civil society is under threat in many parts of the world. Human rights defenders, development NGOs, faith-based organisations, independent media, and other civil society actors are met with increasing pressure, restrictions, and outright repression. In 2017, 46 journalists<sup>1</sup> and 321 human rights defenders were killed<sup>2</sup>. In several countries, legislation and authorities severely restricts or suppresses the actions and expressions of civil society organisations, in particular those that engage in the promotion of democracy and human right. Access to funding for civil society organisations has diminished, and in several countries, civil society organisations have been restricted in, or prohibited from, receiving foreign funding.

This global trend towards a 'closing space for civil society' has obvious consequences for the enjoyment of core human rights such as the right to freedom of expression, assembly and association. But the right to freedom of religion or belief is also at risk. Anti-blasphemy laws are often used as a tool to silence critical voices and dissidents.

Freedom of religion or belief is essential to ensuring a pluralist and diverse civil society in which everybody is free to believe what they want, to take part in an open and democratic debate about their beliefs and to engage in social activism motivated by these beliefs. Strategies to reclaim the space for civil society thus needs to take freedom of religion or belief into account. But how do we promote and protect the right to freedom of religion or belief in the context of a shrinking space for civil society? And can strategies for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief contribute to a strengthening of civil society more generally? These are some of the questions that this seminar will discuss, based on concrete case studies from Zimbabwe and Vietnam.

#### **PROGRAM:**

Welcome

Daniel Toft Jakobsen, Formand for tværpolitisk netværk for tros- og religionsfrihed.

Opening remarks Special Representative for Freedom of religion or belief, Ambassador Michael Suhr. Office for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Why is freedom of religion and belief key to ensuring a pluralist and vibrant civil society?

Jonas Adelin Jørgensen, General secretary Danish Mission Council

Strategies to reclaim space for civil society: A case from Zimbabwe

Jørgen Thomsen DCA

Strategies to reclaim space for civil society: A case from Vietnam

Vo Tran Nhat, Executive Secretary. Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR)

Q&A panel discussion

Chaired by Filip Buff Pedersen

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<sup>1</sup>[https://cpj.org/data/killed/2017/?status=Killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&type%5B%5D=Journalist&start\\_year=2017&end\\_year=2017&group\\_by=location](https://cpj.org/data/killed/2017/?status=Killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&type%5B%5D=Journalist&start_year=2017&end_year=2017&group_by=location)

<sup>2</sup><https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/resource-publication/annual-report-human-rights-defenders-risk-2017>

Sign up with Filip Buff Pedersen [fbp@dmr.org](mailto:fbp@dmr.org) no later than December 5<sup>th</sup>  
Organised by Globalt Fokus, Tværpolitisk Netværk for Tros- og religionsfrihed, Institut for  
Menneskerettigheder, Dansk Missionsråd og Dansk Missionsråds Udviklingsafdeling.

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.” Article 18 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)