



REPRÉSENTATION PERMANENTE
DE LA FRANCE AUPRÈS DE
L'ORGANISATION POUR
LA SÉCURITÉ ET
LA COOPÉRATION
EN EUROPE

*Liberté
Égalité
Fraternité*

**Plenary Session II: Fundamental Freedoms I of the Warsaw Human Dimension
Conference (WHDC)
Freedom of religion or belief; Freedom of assembly and association; Human rights
defenders; Freedom of movement**

Warsaw, 28th September 2022

**France's Statement
H.E Jean-Christophe Peaucelle, Ambassador, Special Counselor for Religious Affairs**

Excellences, Ambassadors,

Distinguished participants,

First of all, I wish to address special thanks to the OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office, the Polish Presidency and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights for convening this non-standard conference in Warsaw and to advance for today's session some of the most essential fundamental rights: freedom of religion or belief, the right to peaceful assembly and the freedom of association, and the liberty of movement.

These freedoms are deeply intertwined, mutually reinforcing, and thus, equally important to France. **That is the reason why France is deeply committed to protect and promote fundamental freedoms, notably freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief, at home and abroad.**

Freedom of religion or belief is at the core of our Constitution, that says that the “*French Republic shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion, and shall respect all beliefs*”. This includes the right to believe or not to believe, to have or not to have a religion, to change religion, to manifest one's religion or belief, individually or in community with others, in public or in private, through worship and observance, practice and teaching.

For the sake of equality of citizens, the French State is secular, which means that the State, and the civil servants, shall not take sides for or against a specific religion or belief.

In France, everyone is free to believe in what he wants, or not to believe, and will be treated equally. All the believers and non-believers are equal and free to profess and practice any religion or belief, within the sole limits imposed by the law for the sake of public order. **As such, France's understanding of the Freedom of Religion or Belief is not original nor exceptional: it is strictly abiding by the article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights.**

We have the exact same commitment at home that we have abroad: we think that everyone, everywhere, shall have the right to believe in what he wants or not to believe, to change his religion or his belief, without being discriminated. We are convinced that freedom of religion or belief and other fundamental rights are mutually reinforcing and therefore, we promote them through a comprehensive, holistic and universal approach.

Thus, France refuses the instrumentalization of religion by preachers of hate and violence. We are determined to fight extremism and religious communalism that call for violence, hatred of others and rejection of our values and that, by claiming to impose a unique vision of religion, take believers hostage. At the same time, France supports and encourages interreligious dialogue, which is a valuable tool in the service of civil peace and harmony between peoples. Such a dialogue allows the diffusion of a counter-discourse to the radical messages of incitement to hatred, to promote a better knowledge of the religious phenomenon of the various religions and beliefs, to fight against ignorance, prejudice and stereotypes which are sources in order to fight against intolerance. If interreligious dialogue is the responsibility of religious authorities, believers and representatives of different spiritual, philosophical and humanistic currents, it is the duty of the State to facilitate its implementation.

In addition, we will take part this afternoon to a side-event devoted to the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus, and the role of its authorities in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, entitled "Internal Repression and Transnational Aggression. Belarus". The rights and activities of civil society organisations and human rights defenders are especially challenged in times of crisis or armed conflict. France reaffirms its commitment to the promotion and defense of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of association and freedom of religion or belief that are fundamental elements of any vibrant, pluralistic and participatory democracy.

We are glad to see so many governments, religious leaders, and civil society representatives gathered here to foster mutual understanding and promote human rights. I wish you all fruitful discussions.

I thank you very much.