

# URG Policy Platform: *From Religious Dialogue to Human Rights, Particularly Women and Children's Rights*

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## Background

Debates on the relationship between religion and human rights at international, regional and local levels often display a remarkable degree of misunderstanding and obfuscation. This lack of clarity has on many occasions led to the claim that certain tenets of major global religions are inherently incompatible with universal human rights. Those who make this claim often retain significant influence over policy-making. They argue that the specificities of different religions, together with different societal norms, mean that human rights should be viewed through a lens of 'traditional values' or 'local customs'. These views have been espoused at the United Nations in Geneva in statements of members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and in the context of Russia's initiative on 'human rights and traditional values'.

The goal of the *Universal Rights Group's* Policy Platform is to dispel the myth of incompatibility between religion and human rights by bringing together religious and community leaders, human rights defenders, academics and government representatives in a forum for constructive inter-religious dialogue. The Platform will address the historical and theological basis for assertions that certain religious tenants are incompatible with universal norms, deconstruct these assertions through robust argument and analysis, and discuss the role of religion in the legal and political international human rights framework, especially as it relates to the promotion and protection of women and children's rights.



## Structure and Participation

The Policy Platform will take place on **Wednesday 18 February 2015** at the Global Ethic Institute, University of Tübingen, in collaboration with the Center for Islamic Theology, Eugen Biser Foundation, Hanns Seidel Foundation, Baden Württemberg Foundation and the Weltethos-Institute. It will be a closed event for a select group of up to 20 prominent experts on religion and human rights. The invitees will include representatives from the world's major religions, delegates from states and the OIC, academics specialising in religious dialogue and human rights, senior officials from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and relevant United Nations Special Rapporteurs. These participants will be carefully selected to ensure an equitable gender and regional balance.

The event will be divided into morning and afternoon sessions, each lasting approximately 3 hours. The morning session will focus on theoretical issues, and the afternoon session on legal and political issues. Each session will begin with a series of short presentations by a panel of experts, and then move to a general debate among all participants. There will be a break for refreshments at a session's halfway point, and a 1½ hour lunch break between the two.

# Programme

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## Tuesday, 17 February

### Afternoon

Arrival of participants

**20:00**

### Informal dinner

Venue: Restaurant Mauganeschtle  
Hotel am Schloss  
Burgsteige 18

## Wednesday, 18 February

**9:00 – 10:00**

### Introduction

Welcome and Introductory Remarks – Prof. Dr. Claus Dierksmeier, Global Ethic Institute and Prof. Dr. Erdal Toprakyan, Center of Islamic Theology, University of Tübingen

Introductory Remarks – Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, President, Universal Rights Group

Introductory Remarks – Dr. Ibrahim Salama, Director of the Human Rights Treaty Division, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

**10:00 – 10:15**

### Coffee Break

**10:15 – 12:30**

### **The relationship between religion and human rights and its impact on the human rights of vulnerable groups, including women and children**

Discussion of the philosophical and theological connection between the tenants of the world's major religions and universal human rights norms, particularly those related to the rights of women, children and disabled persons. The discussion will focus on challenging claims of incompatibility and the "traditional values" narrative, and rejecting discriminatory practices such as biases in inheritance law, early child marriage etc.

**Speakers:**

**Prof. Peter Antes**, Hannover University

**Dr. Stephan Schlenz**, Global Ethics Institute

**Rabbi Nava Hefetz**, Rabbis for Human Rights

**Prof. Mouez Khalfaoui**, Center for Islamic Theology

**Dr. Nazila Ghanea**, University of Oxford (Moderator)

**12:30 – 14:00**

**Lunch**

Venue: Restaurant Museum  
WihelmstraBe 3

**14:00 – 17:30**

**“Religion and Human Rights in International Law and Relations”**

Discussion of the interaction between religious tenants and the international mechanisms for the protection of human rights, particularly women and children’s rights, with a focus on the future direction of the work of the Human Rights Council, on how to address discriminatory practices based on religion, to promote freedom of religion and how to tackle religion based reservations to major human rights treaties.

**Speakers:**

**Prof. Heiner Bielefeldt**, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief

**Dr. Nazila Ghanea**, University of Oxford

**Dr. Ibrahim Salama**, Director of the Human Rights Treaty Division, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

**Prof. Peter Antes**, Hannover University (Moderator)

**17:30 – 18:00**

**Concluding Remarks**

**19:00 – 20:00**

**Public Panel Discussion – “Religion and Human Rights” (German)**

**20:30 – 22:00**

**Participants Dinner:**

Venue: Restaurant Casino  
Wöhrdstr. 25

**Thursday, 19 February**

Departure of participants

**Outcome**

The immediate outcome of the Policy Platform will be a summary report outlining the direction and conclusions of the discussion. In the longer term, the material from the Platform will form the basis for a full *Universal Rights Group* policy report on the inherent compatibility between religion and universal human rights norms, and the importance of leveraging that compatibility to protect the rights of vulnerable groups, especially women and children.