

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM SUMMIT 24

MARCH 22-24 | NEW DELHI



Dates and Location: Friday, 22 March – Sunday, 24 March in New Delhi

Theme:

Protecting India's Constitutional Vision on Freedom of Religion or Belief

Objective

India's commitment to the freedom of religion or belief is deeply rooted in its Constitution, which recognizes the importance of protecting and promoting this fundamental right. The preamble of the Indian Constitution declares India as a secular nation, indicating the nation's objective of ensuring equal treatment of all religions and faiths. The Constitutional vision seeks to establish a society where religious diversity is respected, and citizens have the freedom to follow their chosen beliefs without fear of discrimination or persecution.

This Religious Freedom Summit focuses on the constitutional vision of religious liberty emphasizing the nation's commitment to a pluralistic and inclusive society where all can freely live their faith.

Religious Freedom Summit 2024

Amidst the growing emphasis on pluralism within our nation, we cordially invite you to participate in to participate in the **ADF India Religious Freedom Summit 2024** being organized in **New Delhi** from **Friday, 22 March to Sunday, 24 March 2024** by ADF India and allied partners.

During the Summit, we will engage in meaningful discussions about the divergent perspectives prevailing in our society. Our primary objective is to explore ways to combat communal intolerance and defend the fundamental principles of freedom of conscience, speech, expression, and equality.

The Religious Freedom Summit 2024 will bring together **50 distinguished leaders** including persons from legal fraternity, eminent scholars, bureaucrats, activists, and mission & church leaders from across the country.

The Summit will include expert-led panel sessions, insightful discussions, exchanging experiences, and strategies to collaborate on matters pertaining to freedom of religious liberty.



Session Overview



Understanding and unpacking Article 25



Contemporary challenges to religious freedom in India

Increase in religious freedom violations and Anti-Conversion laws



Dalit Christians in India

Two decades of struggle



Educational rights (Article 29)

Right of religious minorities



Building effective alliances

Karnataka case study



Large scale violence and its impact on Christians



Role of media in promoting religious freedom

Background

The Constitution of India was adopted on January 26, 1950, following a comprehensive process of deliberation by the Constituent Assembly. Given India's history of diverse religious traditions, the framers of the Constitution deemed it essential to include specific provisions to safeguard the right to freedom of religion. These provisions are found in Article 25 to 28 of Part III (Fundamental Rights) of the Constitution.

Religious freedom is a fundamental human right that encompasses the freedom to have, adopt, or change one's religion or belief system, as well as the freedom to manifest that religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching. It is a crucial aspect of individual liberty and is protected by various international human rights instruments and national laws around the world. The notion of religious freedom recognizes the inherent dignity and autonomy of every individual, allowing them to pursue their own spiritual and philosophical journey. It respects the diversity of human beliefs, acknowledging that people have different religious, spiritual, and philosophical convictions. By safeguarding religious freedom, societies promote pluralism, tolerance, and respect for human rights and dignity.

India's secular democracy ensures that the government remains impartial and does not favour any particular religion. This secures religious freedom for all citizens, regardless of their faith, promoting a spirit of inclusivity and diversity. The Constitution recognizes the significance of an individual's conscience and belief. It grants every citizen the right to profess, practice, and propagate their religion of choice. The framers of the Constitution sought to establish a nation where different religious communities could live together in harmony and mutual respect. The constitutional vision fosters an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding among various religious groups, contributing to social cohesion and national unity.



India is a diverse country with a multitude of religious beliefs and practices. The constitutional guarantee of religious freedom embraces this diversity, fostering an atmosphere where people of different faiths can coexist peacefully.

Our history of religious pluralism has led to the recognition of the vulnerability of minority communities. The Constitution ensures the protection of the rights and interests of religious and cultural minorities, safeguarding them from discrimination and ensuring their full participation in society. The Constitution mandates that the state maintains a neutral stance on religious matters. This means that the government cannot interfere in the religious practices of any community and must treat all religious groups equally under the law. By upholding the freedom of religion, the Constitution plays a crucial role in promoting social cohesion and preventing religious tensions or conflicts. It encourages dialogue and understanding among different religious communities.

Freedom of religion is not just a constitutional provision but also a fundamental human right. It ensures that every individual can express their beliefs without fear of persecution, thereby preserving their dignity and human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a milestone document in the history of human rights and was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948. It sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected.

“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

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood”

ARTICLE 1, UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Promoting and safeguarding religious freedom requires continuous efforts at the international, national, and local levels. Governments, civil society organizations, religious institutions, and individuals all have a role to play in ensuring that this fundamental human right is respected and protected for all. By embracing religious freedom, societies create an inclusive and respectful environment that upholds the dignity and rights of every individual, regardless of their religious or philosophical beliefs.

Despite the constitutional guarantee, instances of discrimination and violence against religious minorities have occurred in India. Such incidents challenge the ideals of the Constitution and goes against the very grain of the Indian constitution which lays emphasis on the values of secularism, peaceful coexistence and equality before law for all religions. The values of religious tolerance are found not only in the Constitution



but throughout the history of India through the edicts from the ruling classes like King Ashoka and Akbar and many others. The right to freedom of conscience and the right to practice, profess and propagate the religion of one's choice is a fundamental right guaranteed to every Indian according to the Constitution of India, in line with the various international covenants.

The freedom of religion or belief is a cornerstone of India's constitutional vision, reflecting the nation's commitment to a pluralistic and inclusive society. The Constitution establishes a framework where all citizens can freely practice their religious beliefs without fear or discrimination. However, challenges and concerns exist, necessitating ongoing efforts to address religious intolerance, promote interfaith dialogue, and maintain a delicate balance between religious freedom and other constitutional principles. By cherishing and safeguarding this fundamental right, India can uphold its democratic values and continue its journey towards a harmonious and progressive society.

Founded in 2012, ADF India is an alliance-building legal advocacy organisation dedicated to safeguarding fundamental freedoms and upholding the inherent dignity of all individuals in our nation.

Come and join us as we unite to address these pressing issues and work towards fostering a more inclusive and harmonious society. Your presence and insights are invaluable in shaping a better future for our country.

Be a catalyst in creating a lasting impact on the community.