

Programme for Supporting Journalists to Promote Freedom of Religion

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Bangladesh is a land of multi-religious people with a long history of their peaceful coexistence. The country is known as one of the secular states of the world. The freedom of religion is well covered in Bangladesh Constitution, whether the people are of majority or minority groups. The constitution says, "The state religion of the Republic is Islam, but the State shall ensure equal status and equal right in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other religions (Part I, Article 2A). It also said (in Part III, Article 41); (1) Subject to law, public order and morality – (a) every citizen has the right to profess, practise or propagate any religion; (b) every

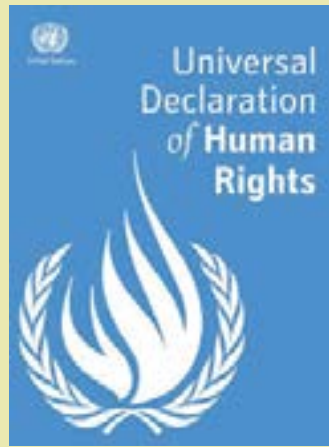
religious community or denomination has the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions. (2) No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction, or to take part in or to attend any religious ceremony or worship, if that instruction, ceremony or worship relates to a religion other than his own".



It is also well link to Article 18 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where it said; "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."

But, in the last couple of years, a number of incidents of intolerance over religion took place in different parts of the country, indicating that Bangladesh's image as

country of religious harmony is at stake. And those incidents include: Killing of religious leaders and foreign nationals, kidnapping and arson attacks on minorities. Vested quarters and criminals are responsible for such heinous crimes. They are also systematically trying to create unrest in society, aiming to grab the land and assets of minority communities.



It's a high time to stand against the troublemakers and make people more aware about their rights. Under the circumstances, there is a need for a greater unity and action of citizens and stakeholders, where the journalists have a big role to play. News Network believes journalists are the frontline players to promote religious freedom, human rights and tolerance. Accordingly, the organisation with support from the High Commission of Canada in Bangladesh has undertaken a project to improve the professional ability of journalists to promote freedom of religion.

The project, 'Programme for Supporting Journalists to Promote Freedom of Religion,' has its focus on the jour-

nalists, working from outside capital city Dhaka both for the print and electronic media. Its activities are aimed at sensitising and training up the journalists to deliver better reports on religious issues and arrange interaction meetings with media gatekeepers (editor, executive editors and news editors) to discuss the issues and publish quality items with respect to freedom of religion and human rights with a view to raising awareness among the people.

This project is expected to be a trend-setting one and first of its kind in Bangladesh, which will have multiple impacts on society. The government, pressure groups and the organisations defending human rights will be highly benefited from its outputs. More importantly, it has the potential to be replicated or expanded elsewhere in the country or other developing countries, where freedom of religion often faces challenges.

**STAND UP
FOR
RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM**

News Network envisions a stable nation, where citizens are aware of their rights, enjoy freedom of expression, live with dignity and enjoy gender equality and where the media are free.

OUR AGENDA

- To promote of freedom of expression, freedom of media, human rights and gender equality
- Work for developing the professional capacity of journalists
- Encourage young women to take up journalism as a profession
- Promoting investigative journalism and right to information
- Sensitise media people on crucial social issues including Right to the Information Act, democracy, good governance, transparency and access to justice
- Motivate children and youths to build themselves as good citizens
- Promote secularism, tolerance and peace in society, and rights of ethnic and indigenous people
- Organise dialogues, seminars, workshops and discussion meetings on issues of national importance.



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