

Organization:	Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers and its host Finn Church Aid (FCA)
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The [Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers](https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/)<sup>1</sup> hosted by the [Finn Church Aid](https://www.kirkonulkomaanapu.fi/en/),<sup>2</sup> brings together diverse religious and traditional actors from different localities and countries to collaborate on research, advocacy, skill, and capacity building within the context of the following three thematic areas: peace support, inclusivity, and prevention of violent extremism, with the protection of human rights at the center. Moreover, the normative guidelines of the Network are based on UN resolutions, such as UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace, and security, UNSCR 2242 reinforcing 1325, and UNSCR 2250 emphasizing the role of youth in decision making.

**Response to Key Questions**

1. Mapping lived experiences of indigenous peoples:
  1. Are there laws, policies and practices that discriminate against indigenous peoples in enjoying their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies, use and control of ceremonial objects including through repatriation, religious and cultural sites, contrary to a human right-based approach? They may include but are not limited to undue restrictions on the above; forced assimilation, forced conversion, and forced removal of children; discriminatory and compulsory registration requirements; restrictions on the freedoms of association and movement; or restrictions on parents teaching their children. Are there reports of impunity for these practices?
    - i. In the Network’s work in Bangladesh, while the government punishes statements or acts made with a ‘deliberate and malicious’ intent to insult religious sentiments with fines or up to two years in prison through its criminal code, the code does not further define this prohibited intent. The only interpretation by the Court has been insulting the Prophet Muhammed. The code allows the Government to confiscate any copies of in-person or online publications which creates enmity and hatred among the citizens or denigrates religious beliefs. Yet, with this small implementation of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/>  
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.kirkonulkomaanapu.fi/en/>

interpretation, intents against indigenous communities and their spirituality are thus, not covered. This also creates a chilling effect on civil society, including indigenous communities, which offer different interpretations or beliefs to that of the majority population. Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers and World Faiths Development Dialogue. "Bangladesh Country Profile on Freedom of Religion or Belief. 2019. <https://live-peacemakersnetwork.pantheonsite.io/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Bangladesh-Country-Profile-on-Freedom-of-Religion-or-Belief.pdf>.

- ii. The Network has found that in Indonesia, the Ministry of Religious Affairs extends official recognition to six religious groups: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. Whereas religious organizations other than those six recognized must obtain a legal charter as a civil society organization from the Ministry of Home Affairs. Indigenous religious groups must register with the Ministry of Education and Culture as aliran kepercayaan to obtain official, legal status. Both ministries consult with the MRA before granting legal status to religious organizations. By law, all religious groups must officially register with the government. An area of concern and contention is how members of non-recognized groups can fulfill the mandatory statement of religious identity on their official identity cards. These laws and processes thus produce discrimination and can further lead to violence and harm. Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers and World Faiths Development Dialogue. "Indonesia Country Profile on Freedom of Religion or Belief. 2019. <https://live-peacemakersnetwork.pantheonsite.io/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Indonesia-Country-Profile-on-Freedom-of-Religion-or-Belief.pdf>.

2. Is there any data or trends regarding other obstacles that indigenous peoples have faced based on their actual or perceived religion or spirituality? If not, why is this data not available? If so, provide details. This may include experiences of violence, hostility or discrimination (e.g. in education, employment, healthcare, housing, justice system, personal laws). How have historical injustices against indigenous peoples and external forces, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, exacerbated these challenges?

- i. In the Network's work in Bangladesh, we found have that among indigenous peoples, the practice of traditional forms of spirituality, sometimes called animism, is common though data are poor; they often exist in combination with one of the major religious traditions. The Network found many challenges associated with integrating spirituality into FoRB. Indigenous peoples may feel disadvantaged because broad concepts of spirituality often do not easily fit into the usual patterns of addressing religious freedom. Ceremonies are so deeply interwoven into daily life that the distinction between religious and non-religious aspects may be inapplicable in practice. Religious loyalties may be less clear-cut than in

mainstream religions and may combine elements of different religions. An inclusive application of FoRB for indigenous spirituality is challenging. Individuals may find it difficult even to articulate specific needs, which they traditionally simply took for granted as part of their everyday life. Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers and World Faiths Development Dialogue. “Bangladesh Country Profile on Freedom of Religion or Belief. 2019. <https://live-peacemakersnetwork.pantheonsite.io/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Bangladesh-Country-Profile-on-Freedom-of-Religion-or-Belief.pdf>

3. Where such experiences are complex and intersectional, how do factors such as gender, sexual orientation, age, or disability or other status shape them? This may include but is not limited to violence and discrimination against Indigenous women, girls and LGBT+ persons in the name of a religion or belief system.
  - i. From the Network’s work in Somalia, clan-based decision-making processes are dominated by male elders, who have excluded active participation of a significant part of the population, including women, youth, and marginalized groups, such as minority and traditionally marginalized clans. A particular challenge to women’s participation is the perception among clans that females do not have the right to represent their clan after marriage, as their clan-related identity changes with marriage. Finn Church Aid. “Promoting Inclusive Local Governance in Somalia: Looking Back - Looking Ahead.” 2021. [https://www.kirkonulkomaanapu.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Somalia\\_LG\\_www.pdf](https://www.kirkonulkomaanapu.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Somalia_LG_www.pdf).
4. Are there any key trends or incidents of State-sponsored violence against indigenous peoples (e.g. genocidal activities, mass internment, reproductive control, forced displacement or other imposition without free, prior and informed consent, and killings)?
  - i. The Network has documented minority communities, including indigenous communities in South Asia face intense resistance, including discrimination, racism, incarceration, and state-supported religious extremism and violence. Young peacebuilders have reported receiving antagonistic responses from dominant actors in the majority and even been called traitors. (See Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. “Peace My Heart: Amplifying Youth-Led Peacebuilding in South Asia.” 2021. <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Amplifying-Youth-Led-Peacebuilding-in-South-Asia.pdf>.
  - ii. The Network has documented land grabbing, forceful conversion, rape, abduction, killing, and displacement of the Chittagong Hill Tracts region of Eastern Bangladesh. The influx of Rohingya in the Cox’s Bazar region has also affected the religious demography of the camp region. Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. 2021. “Religious Minorities and Freedom of Religion or Belief in South and Southeast Asia.” <https://peacemakersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Minority->

[Rights-and-Freedom-of-Religion-or-Belief-in-South-and-Southeast-Asia.pdf](#).

- iii. The Network has also documented socio-political discrimination and violence that includes restricting access to public education, biased curriculum and poorer teaching and learning materials, discriminatory enrollment practices, harassment and bullying at classrooms in South and South East Asia. Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. 2021. "Education and Freedom of Religion or Belief in South and Southeast Asia." <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Education-and-Freedom-of-Religion-or-Belief-in-South-and-Southeast-Asia.pdf>.
5. Is there any data or trends related to the propagation of hate and hate crimes against indigenous peoples, whether online or offline, and the impact for their human rights? Examples may include: (a) specific acts of or incitement to violence or discrimination by individuals or political, vigilante, or paramilitary groups that target indigenous peoples; and (b) spreading of prejudice and negative stereotyping of indigenous peoples, including by the media, politicians, academics, and other public figures.
  - i. The Network has found that sometimes indigenous elders recognize peacebuilding as a body of ideas sent by foreign powers to undermine the culture and upend political authority. This is exacerbated when indigenous actors are young or live in rural communities. The Network has documented indigenous peacebuilders in Bangladesh being beaten by people of his own community because of the ideas he was sharing as a peacebuilder. The Network has found that current discussions of peacebuilding, including FoRB, have not yet connected with older indigenous practices which may historically exist in most cultures/communities. More emphasis needs to be placed on re-framing the work of youth-led initiatives within local indigenous processes. (See Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. "Peace My Heart: Amplifying Youth-Led Peacebuilding in South Asia." 2021. <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Amplifying-Youth-Led-Peacebuilding-in-South-Asia.pdf>).
  - ii. Through the Network's EU-funded Awareness with Human Action 'AHA' project, the Network engaged women, youth and community leaders, including traditional women, youth and leaders, in their response efforts of the COVID-19 pandemic, through preventing conflict and building social cohesion in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and broader South Asia. Through a collaborative approach, the project sought to increase outreach for initiatives that promote awareness of COVID-19 and construct narratives that reduce discrimination, hate speech, and stigmatization against specific communities. The project demonstrated disparity in online reach to women in online messages, as well as broader disparity in access

to technology and useful information for the broader population. COVID-19 caused an increase in violence against women and persecution of minority ethnic and religious groups, including indigenous groups.

2. Good practices:

1. Are there any examples of good practice – whether at the international, national or local level – where State and non-State actors (including indigenous individuals, groups and organizations, the UN human rights system, international organizations, civil society organizations, religion or belief leaders and influencers) have taken effective measures to protect and promote freedom of religion or belief of indigenous peoples, including efforts to prevent, mitigate and respond to violations of the right and to revitalize their traditions and customs? Are there any positive measures to ensure effective participation of indigenous peoples in cultural, religious, social and public life, including but not limited to where indigenous peoples have organized themselves to this end and to bring an end to discrimination in all its forms.

- i. The Network has seen success in local indigenous peacebuilders gaining good support and trust with first starting to partner with local government authorities and scaling programming to nearby communities. (See Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. “Peace My Heart: Amplifying Youth-Led Peacebuilding in South Asia.” 2021.

<https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Amplifying-Youth-Led-Peacebuilding-in-South-Asia.pdf>.

- ii. The Network has seen success from universities incorporating strong thematic focuses on indigenous groups within broader peacebuilding and FoRB efforts. (See Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. “Peace My Heart: Amplifying Youth-Led Peacebuilding in South Asia.” 2021.

<https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Amplifying-Youth-Led-Peacebuilding-in-South-Asia.pdf>.

- iii. The Network emphasizes linking peacebuilding and broader FoRB work to existing indigenous mechanisms for conflict resolution. This is critical. (See Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. “Peace My Heart: Amplifying Youth-Led Peacebuilding in South Asia.” 2021.

<https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Amplifying-Youth-Led-Peacebuilding-in-South-Asia.pdf>.

1. Another example the Network supported was with the Xeer traditional mechanism, which is a conflict management tool based on dialogue and non-violence. Finn Church Aid. “Promoting Inclusive Local Governance in Somalia: Looking Back - Looking Ahead.” 2021. [https://www.kirkonulkomaanapu.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Somalia\\_LG\\_www.pdf](https://www.kirkonulkomaanapu.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Somalia_LG_www.pdf).

2. Another example the Network supported was through building off of the Xeer mechanism, in utilizing peace circles as part of Somali rituals. The Network developed peace circle process training manuals to enhance the concept of the Somali cultural heritage to build the capacity of Somali peace mothers and peacebuilders. The peace circles started at local level and formed into district level – eventually tying to the national-level reconciliation efforts. Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers and Finn Church Aid. “Peace Circle Process Training: A Context-Specific Manual for Somalia.” (see attachment).
- iv. The Network has peer supported and organized successful debates with various stakeholders, including highly esteemed, feared traditional and religious leaders regarding women’s rights and participation in Somalia. This includes connecting elders to national-level peace dialogues to offer their indigenous peace mediation expertise. Finn Church Aid. “Promoting Inclusive Local Governance in Somalia: Looking Back - Looking Ahead.” 2021. [https://www.kirkonulkomaanapu.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Somalia\\_LG\\_www.pdf](https://www.kirkonulkomaanapu.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Somalia_LG_www.pdf).
2. Are there any measures from international organizations, National Human Rights Institutions, civil society or others to (i) monitor and analyze practices or policies that unduly affect freedom of religion or belief of indigenous peoples; (ii) mitigate such practices and policies; and (iii) support indigenous peoples whose rights have been violated?
  - i. The Network, in collaboration with the UN Special Adviser’s Office on the Prevention of Genocide and Responsibility to Protect is currently in the process of developing a UN Plan of Action for Traditional Actors to Prevent Atrocity Crimes. A two-day consultation was organized in June 2022 in Abuja, Nigeria, which brought together for the first time in the history of the UN different ethnic, indigenous, clan communities, and representatives of traditional societies and people, gathered to discuss their roles and responsibilities to prevent atrocity crimes, including mediating in situations at risk of these crimes. The outcomes included a draft Plan of Action for Traditional Leaders and Actors to Prevent Atrocity Crimes, which includes five recommendations:
    1. Strengthen and support traditional discussion resolution mechanisms to prevent atrocity crimes, including by utilizing peace mediation in situations at risk of these crimes.
    2. Develop strategic communication and messaging for alternative or counter-narratives targeting actors of incitement of violence.

3. Engaging and strengthening intra and inter community dialogue and activities to foster social cohesion.
4. Building and/or revising education, adult education curriculum, and providing capacity-building and capacity-sharing opportunities.
5. Strengthen engagement and the decentralization process with political leaders to increase the capacities of traditional leaders.

The Network and the UN Special Adviser's Office on the Prevention of Genocide is working to organize five regional consultations to put the document in context and explore regional diversities, expertise, and solutions. Information from the global forum and the regional consultations will then result in the following three outcomes:

1. The development of a plan of action and commitment by participants to mediate in situations at risk of atrocity crimes and implement preventive measures identified during the process.
2. The creation of a lasting global network of traditional leaders and actors with skills and competencies to mediate in situations at risk of atrocity crimes who will act as agents and multipliers of peace in their local communities, including through facilitation of intercommunal dialogue.
3. Input for the development of a capacity-building module for traditional leaders to mediate in situations at risk of atrocity crimes, focusing on inter-communal dialogue, building intercommunal relations, accountability, and reconciliation.

Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. "Peacemakers Network and United Nations Convened Traditional Leaders and Actors to Create a New Plan of Action to Prevent Atrocity Crimes." 2022. <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/traditionalpoa/>.

### **Additional Resources:**

Network Member: Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs  
 Arsheim, Helge. "Indigenous Religious Freedom: Between Individual and Communal Human Rights." Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs. October 23, 2020. <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/indigenous-religious-freedom-between-individual-and-communal-human-rights>.

The Network has recommended the Pakistan government support research on factors, including indigenous PVE initiatives, that foster resilience, pluralism, diversity, and acceptance – this includes FoRB. (See Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. "The Status of Youth-

Led PVE Efforts in Pakistan: Country Level Policy Brief.” 2021.  
[https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Policy20Brief\\_Pakistan.pdf](https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Policy20Brief_Pakistan.pdf).)