

The traffic lights exercise

Length		15 minutes to 45 minutes
Difficulty		Beginner to advanced (depending on statements used)
Group size		Small to very large
Aim	To get people thinking about and discussing their understanding of/attitude towards freedom of religion or belief at the beginning of a training event.	
Description	A twist on the 'agree-disagree' style exercise that can be used with small to large, auditorium sized groups.	
Resources needed	A post-it sized square of yellow, green and red paper (the traffic lights) for each participant Roving microphone for large groups.	
Source	SMC	

Tips for facilitators

This is a useful introductory exercise to explore participant's attitudes towards and/or knowledge about FoRB. When used to explore participant's knowledge of freedom of religion or belief, the exercise usually leads to a realization that they don't understand the right very well, which often sparks interest in learning more and provides an opportunity to share information.

Outline and instructions

Choose a number of statements that are relevant to your context from the statement lists below, or develop your own. Allow 5-15 minutes per question depending on the degree of controversy/ complexity involved. To save time, place a green, yellow and red squared of paper on each seat before participants enter the room.

Read out a statement and ask all participants then hold up one of their pieces of paper - green if they agree with the statement, red if they disagree and yellow if they think on the one hand they agree but on the other hand they don't.

Ask particular participants that are holding up different colours to explain why they agreed or disagreed with the statement. Sum up the different opinions shared and reflect upon them briefly, sharing relevant information about what freedom of religion or belief actually means according to international human rights.

Suggested statements for exploring attitudes

1. *Blasphemy should not be a criminal offence – it's a moral matter.*
Note: See note to statement 3 under the knowledge statements below.
This statement connects to Film 8 Limitations.
2. *People from minority groups or with non-traditional views, should have the same rights as people who follow the traditional or majority religions.*
Note: This statement is in accordance with the right to FORB. If people do not agree with it encourage discussion about the suffering caused by legal and societal discrimination and ask what rights they would want to have if they were in a minority.
This statement connects to Films 5 Discrimination, 8 Limitations, and 3 Manifest.
3. *Religions that are bad should be banned.*
Note: Regardless of what religious or non-religious beliefs you hold, somewhere in the world there is a place where majority public opinion or the state think your beliefs are bad/dangerous. Discuss who gets to decide what is 'bad' and how much power the state should have over citizens' beliefs. Connect the discussion to knowledge about FORB: the right to hold beliefs is absolute and the importance of limitations being in line with international law. Religious and belief practices are only permitted if they are given in law, necessary to protect public order, health, morals or the rights and freedoms of other people and are non-discriminatory and proportionate to the problem they address.
Connects to Films 8 Limitations, 2 Have or Change and 3 Manifest.
4. *Everyone should be allowed to change their religion.*
Note: This is in accordance with the human right to FORB.
This statement connects to Film 2 Have or change
5. *Christians should be allowed to propagate Christianity without restrictions.*
Note: The right to tell people about what you believe is part of both the freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief, but coercion is of course banned. In practice, restrictions on the right to tell others usually target minorities making them vulnerable to arbitrary accusations, violence and criminal procedures. This often connects to hostility towards the right to change religion.
This statement connects to Film 8 Limitations.
6. *Muslims should be allowed to propagate Islam without restrictions.*
See note under statement 5 above.

7. *Religion is a dangerous force in society – it needs to be controlled*
This statement connects to films 2 Have or change, 3 Manifest and 8 Limitations.
8. *Atheism is a dangerous force in society – it needs to be controlled*
This statement connects to films 2 Have or change, 3 Manifest and 8 Limitations.
9. *My religion or belief holds the absolute truth so I can't believe in freedom of religion or belief.* Note: Agreeing with freedom of religion or belief does not mean compromising on truth claims, it means accepting that other people have the right to hold different truth claims and practice their beliefs, even if I don't agree with them.
10. *Freedom of religion or belief is not as important as other human rights OR Freedom of religion or belief is a special interest for religious people!*
Note: Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief (ICCPR article 18) is what gives each person the right to decide for themselves what they believe and live their lives on the basis of their beliefs instead of being forced to hold or follow the beliefs of others. So it is fundamental pre-condition for the enjoyment of many other rights including women's rights. Violations of freedom of religion or belief and discrimination on the basis of religion or belief affect every area of life and many other human rights including rights to education, employment, housing, justice, private life, marriage rights and child custody rights. Freedom of religion or belief is not just about what happens in places of worship – although this is important too!
This statement connects to all the films, but particularly to film 1 Introduction and 2 Have or change.

Suggested statements for exploring participant's knowledge

1. *Freedom of religion or belief protects all religions.*
FALSE: Freedom of religion or belief does not protect religions in and of themselves – it protects people. People have the right to believe and practice in accordance with their conscience. There are also collective rights for communities of believers. Religious ideas themselves don't have rights.
Connects to film 1. Introduction.
2. *FoRB gives everyone the right to leave their religion or belief whenever they want, without repercussions.*
TRUE. Connects to film 2 Have or change.
3. *FoRB gives you the right to protection from offensive statements related to religion or belief.* FALSE: Freedom of speech is essential to freedom of religion or belief. When one person states what they believe to be true – for example 'Jesus is the son of God' or 'There is no God' - they are by definition implying that some other people's beliefs are not true. Obviously beliefs can be expressed peacefully or violently. Violence and

incitement to violence are not permitted. But some people find the peaceful expression of beliefs other than their own offensive. Without the right to say what we believe, regardless of if others find it offensive, we cannot have freedom of religion or belief. Blasphemy laws tend to be implemented in a highly discriminatory manner – protecting majority communities from offense while increasing the vulnerability of minorities. In some countries accusations of blasphemy can lead to imprisonment or even the death penalty. Connects to film 8 on limitations.

4. *FoRB gives religious leaders/institutions the right to determine the family laws applied to their members.*
 FALSE: Freedom of religion or belief gives believers the right to follow their religion and participate in the life of the belief community. It does not give religious authorities the right to force followers to retain their beliefs or to practice them in particular ways in their daily lives. If religiously based laws violate for example women's rights, imposing them on people regardless of whether individuals want to follow them or not, is a violation both of women's rights in general and women's right to freedom of religion or belief.
5. *FoRB gives women the right not to obey their husbands in matters of religion.*
 TRUE: wives have the same rights as their husbands to choose their religion and how they want to practice it. Human rights do not discriminate between men and women.
6. *States have a duty to stop private employers from discriminating on the basis of religion.*
 TRUE. Connects to film 5 Discrimination
7. *FoRB gives religious leaders the right to require their members to practice their religion in a particular way – e.g. to wear religious clothing, fast, pray, attend worship*
 FALSE: Connects to Film 3 manifestations and Film 4 Coercion.
8. *FoRB bans coercion in the choice and practice of religion.*
 TRUE. Connects to Film 2 Have or change and Film 4 Coercion.
9. *States are allowed to limit which religions may be followed in the country if allowing them would cause social tensions.*
 FALSE: the right to have a religion or belief may never be limited. Blanket bans on all forms of practice public and/or private practice of a religion are NOT permitted. Limitations must be non-discriminatory and necessary to protect public health, safety, order, morals or the rights and freedoms of others.
 Connects to Film 3 Manifest and Film 8 Limitations.
10. *FoRB gives us the right to tell others about our faith in non-coercive ways.*
 TRUE – this is protected both by freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression.