



President of the European Commission, Ursula VON DER LEYEN  
Rue de la Loi 200  
1040 Brussels

17 September 2019

**The continuation of the mandate of the Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion outside the EU**

Dear President von der Leyen,

I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment as the President of the European Commission and to applaud your commitment to human rights and the rule of law.

Freedom of religion or belief is an essential, universal human right that protects the basic ability of any human being to think and act according to her core beliefs. However, serious challenges continue to undermine and threaten the ability of people to enjoy this right in many parts of the world for reasons including anti-conversion and blasphemy laws and the threat of physical attacks targeting people because of their religion or belief.

To respond to these challenges, the EU must have a strong and united response. The creation in 2016 of the mandate of the Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU was a significant positive step in this direction. The designation of a Special Envoy communicates the message that promoting freedom of religion or belief is a central goal of EU foreign policy. Moreover, with appropriate resources, the Special Envoy could ensure that EU policy relating to freedom of religion or belief is as effective and coordinated as possible. This is particularly essential at a time when many EU Member States, third countries and multilateral organizations have similarly appointed high-level officials on freedom of religion or belief.

At a time when the right to freedom of religion or belief is under great threat in many places around the world, I express my sincere hope that you will renew the mandate of the Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU and provide it with appropriate resources to accomplish these important objectives.

I stand together with my fellow bureau members representing civil society groups that advocate for the protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief for many different religious groups in various parts of the world. We express our hope that the EU will continue to make the promotion of freedom of religion or belief worldwide a priority in its foreign policy through, among other things, maintaining and strengthening the Special Envoy position.

With kind regards,

Kelsey Zorzi  
President  
NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief (New York)

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