

IDLO: USE LAW TO PROTECT THREATENED 'FREEDOM OF RELIGION' HUMAN RIGHT

ROME, November 8, 2016 – Religious minorities are under threat as unscrupulous political leaders exploit people's fears for short term electoral gains in some western countries, said Irene Khan, Director-General of the International Development Law Organization (IDLO), ahead of a conference on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy.

"In some parts of the world, innocent civilians are being persecuted, attacked and slaughtered in the name of religion," she added.

"Women are denied the right to equality under religious laws in some countries, while in others in the name of secularism they are not allowed to practice their religious customs, including how they dress," noted Ms. Khan.

"Freedom of religion is not a zero sum game where one person's win is another person's loss," emphasized Ms. Khan. "We must all work together to build more resilient and secure societies based on tolerance, compassion and mutual respect for all."

To mark the conference, IDLO is launching a report *Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Law: Current Dilemmas and Lessons Learned*, which highlights the risks to freedom of religion in both religious and secular societies from a range of factors, and underlines the importance of the rule of the law and the principles of equality and equal protection in finding solutions that are effective, fair and sustainable.

"Freedom of religion is a fundamental human right and respecting it is key to building secure, stable and prosperous societies," asserted Ms. Khan.

The conference will bring together religious leaders, civil society and government officials to discuss IDLO's report and to explore political, social and human rights dimensions surrounding the promotion and protection of freedom of religion.

For media wishing to obtain an advance copy of the report (under embargo until 9:00 CET on November 8, 2016) or arrange an interview, please contact Judit Arenas on +39 06 4040 3200 or +1 646 506 5996 or at jarenas@idlo.int

For further information about IDLO, visit <http://www.idlo.int>

You can also follow on Twitter: @IDLO | @IreneKhan | #freedomofreligion

Note to Editors

The International Development Law Organization (IDLO) is the only intergovernmental organization exclusively devoted to promoting the rule of law. IDLO works to enable governments and empower people to reform laws and strengthen institutions to promote peace, justice, sustainable development and economic opportunity. Its programs, research and policy advocacy cover the spectrum of rule of law from peace and institution building to social development and economic recovery in countries emerging from conflict and striving towards democracy.

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