



## **Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom**

### Statement on Blasphemy and Apostasy Laws

As representatives of the international community, we stand together in support of the interconnected freedoms of thought, conscience, religion or belief, and expression. We stand in firm opposition to laws that, inconsistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, impede the freedom of individuals to choose a faith, practice a faith, change their religion, not have a religion, tell others about their beliefs and practices, or openly debate and discuss aspects of faith or belief.

Numerous countries maintain laws criminalizing blasphemy, apostasy, or speech that might “defame” or “insult” religious sentiments. Such laws are often used as a pretext to justify vigilantism or mob violence in the name of religion, or as a pretext to pursue retribution related to personal grievances. We see governments using such laws to wrongfully imprison and punish individuals whose views on matters of religion or belief may differ from official narratives or the views of majority populations.

We call on governments that utilize these laws to free any individuals imprisoned on such grounds, and to repeal blasphemy, apostasy, and other laws that impede the exercise of freedoms of expression and religion or belief, in a manner inconsistent with international law. We remain committed to working with partners to combat problems like sectarianism, discrimination, and violence based on religious intolerance in ways that respect fundamental freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief and freedom of expression.

**Co-Signatories:** Albania, Armenia, Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Georgia, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Marshall Islands, Moldova, North Macedonia, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America