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## 'Freedom of Religion in Divided Societies of Asia: Understanding the Law, Politics and Rights'



### AGENDA

*10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> September 2018*  
*International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo*

Freedom of religion is highly contested in Asia, particularly in countries with long-standing ethnic and religious divisions. Often, constitutional privileging of the dominant religion is accompanied by judicial interpretations, laws and policies that restrict religious beliefs and practices in ways that reinforce majority-minority animosities. This is complicated by insecurities about the survival of minority communities, driven by various social, economic and political concerns. In addition, the rise of religious extremism and radical mobilization are major challenges developing Asian countries face, despite significant economic growth.

This workshop seeks to unpack the evolving landscape of religious freedom and conflict, to map flashpoints and patterns, to identify emerging patterns of radicalization, and to explore the political, legal and societal responses to these issues in selected Asian countries.

*10 September*

**9.30 Introduction** - Mario Gomez, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, and Vincenza Nazzari, Equitas (International Centre for Human Rights Education)

**Opening Remarks** - David McKinnon, the High Commissioner for Canada in Sri Lanka

**Religious Diversity and Tolerance: The Politics of Reform**

**(9.50 – 11 a.m.)**

Radhika Coomaraswamy, Member of the United Nations' Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar – 'The Challenges to Freedom of Religion in South and South-East Asia'

Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, Centre for Policy Alternatives – 'Freedom of Religion and the Politics of Reform'

**Religious Diversity and Tolerance: The Politics of Reform**

**(11.30 – 1.00 p.m.)**

Farah Haniffa, Lecturer, University of Colombo

Matthew Nelson, Reader, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London

Musdah Mulia, Chairperson, Indonesian Conference for Religion and Peace (ICRP)

**LUNCH: 1.00 – 2.30 p.m.**

**Religious Syncretism, and the Protection of Minorities and Vulnerable Groups**

**(2.30 – 4.00 p.m.)**

Hasini Haputhanthri, Fellow, ICES

Henri Tiphange, Executive Director, People's Watch, India

Andrew Khoo, Lawyer and Co-Chair of the Human Rights Committee of the Malaysian Bar Council

**Religious Freedom, Inclusivity, and the Challenge of Ethno-nationalism**  
(4.30 – 6.00 p.m.)

Gehan Gunatilleke, Doctoral Candidate, University of Oxford

Dian Shah, Assistant Professor, National University of Singapore

***11 September***

**Promoting Freedom of Religion and Reconciliation in Challenging Contexts**  
(9.30 – 11.30 a.m.)

M. Sumanthiran, President's Counsel & Member of Parliament, Tamil National Alliance

Aung Myo Min, Executive Director, Equality Myanmar

Shreen Saroor, Women's Action Network and Mannar Women's Development Federation

**Religious Freedom in Fragile Environments: Grassroots Insights**  
(12.00 – 2.00 p.m.)

Samson Salamat, Founding Director, Centre for Human Rights Education, Pakistan

Ruki Fernando, INFORM, Sri Lanka

Omaid Sharifi, Co-Founder and President of ArtLords, Afghanistan

**Workshop Concluding Comments:**

Dian Shah, National University of Singapore

***LUNCH: 2.00 p.m. – 3 p.m.***