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Contact: Patrice Pederson
Email: patrice@firstfreedom.org
Phone: +1-801-358-1102

Global Youth Leaders Unite This Thanksgiving to Champion Freedom of Belief

“Even in a world divided by conflict, these Fellows are proof that peace is still possible,” said Patrice Pederson, President of the First Freedom Foundation.

[Salt Lake City, Utah] –While Americans give thanks for their religious liberty, young leaders from around the world are working to bring that right to everyone, everywhere. The First Freedom Foundation’s FoRB Fellowship, a first-of-its-kind initiative, brings together 36 young advocates from 30 countries to confront one of the world’s most pressing human rights challenges: the fight for freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). Made possible by an anonymous donation through Operation Kids, the Fellowship equips participants with the skills, connections, and experiences necessary to champion humanity’s first freedom.

Stories of Empathy Across Divides

The Fellowship has already sparked extraordinary moments of connection. During last week’s Zoom meeting, a Hindu Fellow from Bangladesh listened sympathetically as a Christian from India described how a Hindu priest tried to kill her aunt. A secular humanist from Zimbabwe spoke next, sharing his fear of persecution from Christians for advocating religious freedom in his country, followed by a Falun Gong practitioner who recounted narrowly escaping an apparent kidnapping attempt by China’s militantly secular regime.

“What’s remarkable is the Fellows’ instinct for empathy,” Pederson said. “When someone who has seen their best friend be murdered by a mob of Muslims can listen without blame or defensiveness as a Muslim recounts their own experience with persecution, it’s truly inspiring. It really puts my family’s contentious conversations over Thanksgiving dinner into perspective!”



Global Youth Summit: A Catalyst for Change

As part of their Fellowship experience, the Fellows are organizing the **Global Youth Summit 2.0**, a virtual event to be held this **Saturday, November 30th**. The summit offers a platform for young leaders worldwide to connect, collaborate, and develop actionable plans for advancing religious freedom.

Event Details

- **Date:** Saturday, November 30
- **Format:** Fully Virtual
- **Registration:** Visit forbsfuture.org to sign up and learn more.

Last year's summit drew over 530 participants from 77 countries, fostering moments of profound connection. One unforgettable moment came from a young man in Nigeria, who was determined to join the entire 25-hour event. When the power went out—a tactic he said was used to suppress Christian-majority regions—his phone battery dwindled. With his voice trembling, he shared how much it meant to know people around the world cared about the genocide facing his community. Moments later, his phone died, cutting him off mid-sentence.

“This is the spirit of the summit,” Pederson said. “It’s about solidarity and solutions. Americans enjoy freedoms that many around the world can only dream of. This privilege gives us a unique power—and a responsibility—to stand with those who don’t.

The Global Youth Summit 2.0 is open to all, with participants under 40 encouraged to lead discussions in the ultra-participative Open Space format. It’s a space for fresh ideas, shared purpose, and practical action toward advancing religious liberty.

A United Future

Religious restrictions affect billions globally, yet efforts to address it have often been fragmented, with communities advocating in isolation. The FoRB Fellowship aims to change this by uniting diverse voices—Christians, Muslims, Hindus, atheists, and others—to create a powerful global movement advocating for freedom of belief as a universal human right.

Looking ahead, the Foundation hopes to secure additional funding to expand its efforts, including plans for a docu-series chronicling the Fellows’ journeys. This series would showcase how individuals from historically antagonistic communities can collaborate, form friendships, and advocate for shared goals.

Suvra Dev Kar, the aforementioned Hindu from Bangladesh, summarized the impact of the program beautifully: “This fellowship is a beacon of hope, where young voices come together to build a world where freedom of religion and belief is not just a right, but a source of strength, fostering peace, respect, and boundless possibility for all.

About the First Freedom Foundation

The First Freedom Foundation is dedicated to promoting the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief. Through initiatives like the FoRB Fellowship and the Global Youth Summit, the Foundation supports emerging leaders as they work to advance religious freedom in their own communities and beyond.

For More Information About the Fellows: <https://firstfreedom.org/meet-the-fellows/>

More Quotes from Fellows:

“In unity, we find not just strength, but the courage to dream bigger and rise higher together.”

- Dr. Swati Chakraborty, Hindu from India living in Canada

‘It’s been an incredible experience connecting with everyone and witnessing their loving spirit, even in the face of very heartbreaking struggles. I’m especially inspired by those advocating in regions where persecution and violence are constant threats right outside their doors. Their strength and passion for FoRB show that, no matter how much hate and oppression exist, the human spirit is resilient, and our capacity for love and freedom is greater, and it does not waver. Because of this, I know change is possible. Our communities have endured the worst of humanity, but here, together, we’re working to build bridges and amplify voices to ensure one day that everyone can experience the best of it.”

- Ashuriena Abraham, a Christian from Iraq living in the United States

"Diversity brings people together and promotes understanding, harmony, peace, and unity."

- Mohammad Ayatulla Rahaman, a Muslim in Nepal

“Joining this fellowship has been a transformative experience. The diversity of perspectives and experiences has challenged my assumptions and expanded my understanding of the world. I'm grateful for the opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals and to grow both personally and intellectually.”

- Radwan Al Omar, a Muslim from Lebanon

“The FoRB Fellowship has been a truly eye-opening experience for me. Connecting with people from diverse backgrounds and gaining practical skills in social media, event planning, and advocacy has equipped me to be a better young advocate for Freedom of Religion and Belief. Coming from a region deeply affected by religious intolerance and violent extremism, I’m confident that the knowledge, strategies, and resources that I am gaining will help me contribute to changing the status quo and fostering unity in my community and the whole world.

What inspires me most is the sense of family we’ve built as fellows, everyone is valued, and working together on tasks has been incredibly motivating.”

- Madubi Robert, a Christian from Kenya