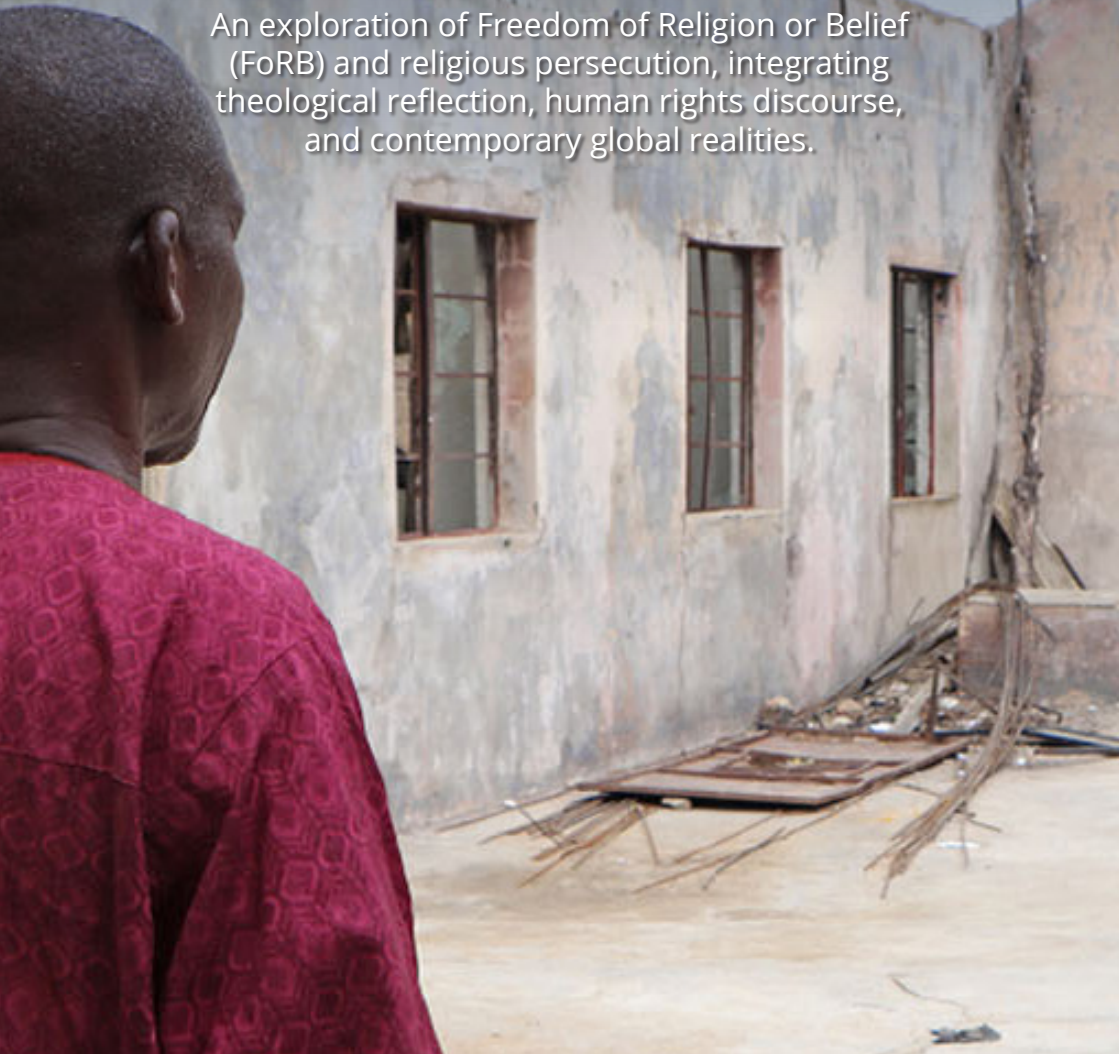


ACADEMIC PROSPECTUS

# A Multidisciplinary Course on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FORB)

An exploration of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and religious persecution, integrating theological reflection, human rights discourse, and contemporary global realities.



## Course Description

This course introduces students to the realities, tensions, and significance of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FORB) in both local and international contexts, while also exploring theological perspectives on religious persecution.

FORB is a fundamental human right: the freedom of every person to organise life according to conscience and belief. It is essential not only for individual dignity, but also for healthy communities and just societies. Yet this freedom is often contested by political power, social pressure, religious dominance, and cultural norms.

Religious communities frequently advocate for freedom of belief, while also living with the reality of persecution and suffering. This course engages these themes at the intersection of:

- Human rights
- Religious studies
- Missiology
- Christian theology

The course is designed to be academically rigorous, practically relevant, and contextually grounded, with particular attention to Christian Higher Education contexts in Africa.

## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Analyse contemporary challenges related to FORB and religious persecution
- Prepare a balanced response to a FORB-related issue using relevant legal, theological, and social concepts
- Write and present a clear, well-argued essay to peers
- Defend a reasoned position in respectful academic discussion

## Attitudinal Formation

This course also seeks to shape students' convictions and character. By the end of the course, students should be motivated to:

- Defend the right of every person to live according to their beliefs and conscience
- Promote a society marked by dignity, justice, and respect for human rights
- Respond with compassion toward people suffering because of their beliefs

***“Each human being is a person, possessed of a nature endowed with intelligence and free will. As such, he or she has rights and duties which together flow as a direct consequence of his or her nature. These rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and therefore altogether inalienable”.***

POPE JOHN PAUL XXIII

## Learning Approach

The course follows a six-block learning path, combining:

- Teaching sessions
- Preparatory readings
- Guided seminars
- Case discussions
- Contextual reflection

Students are encouraged to connect course content to their own communities, ministry settings, and national contexts.

## Learning Path

The course is structured in **six integrated blocks**, combining teaching, reading, and seminar discussion. Each block builds toward a well-rounded understanding of FORB and religious persecution in theory and practice.

## Block 1

### THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FORB

This opening block introduces FORB through a Christian theological lens and establishes the biblical and theological foundations for engaging human rights.

Students will explore:

- Human dignity, conscience, and freedom in Scripture
- The image of God and human responsibility
- The relationship between Christian discipleship and religious freedom
- Theological questions around human rights and their origins

## Block 2

### FORB IN A HUMAN RIGHTS CONTEXT

This block situates FORB within wider human rights discourse, introducing legal, political, and philosophical perspectives and the major international and regional frameworks.

Students will explore:

- What human rights are and why they matter
- Key human rights instruments (UDHR, ICCPR, ACHPR)
- The scope and protection of FORB
- Tensions between FORB and other rights
- Core distinctions such as forum internum and forum externum

## **Block 3**

### **FORB LIMITATIONS AND VIOLATIONS**

This block helps students distinguish between lawful limitations of religious freedom and clear violations, and equips them to analyse real-world situations critically.

Students will explore:

- When and how FORB may be legitimately limited
- Forms and patterns of FORB violations globally
- Key actors involved in violations (state, social, religious, cultural)
- Monitoring mechanisms and reporting organisations
- How to assess case studies and country profiles

## **Block 4**

### **INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE DIMENSIONS OF FORB**

This block examines the personal and communal dimensions of religious freedom, with particular attention to contested issues in law and society.

Students will explore:

- The collective dimension of FORB (communities, worship, institutions)
- The right to adopt, change, or leave a religion
- Religious propagation, persuasion, and coercion
- Conscientious objection in public life (e.g. military, healthcare)

## **Block 5**

### **FORB IN FOCUS – CONTEMPORARY ISSUES**

This block applies FORB to pressing social realities, especially where religious identity overlaps with vulnerability, exclusion, or discrimination.

Students will explore:

- FORB and ethnicity
- FORB and gender
- FORB and children's rights
- FORB and asylum seekers/refugees
- The implications of FORB for justice and social protection in African contexts

## **Block 6**

### **THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION**

The final block focuses on Christian theological reflection on suffering, persecution, and martyrdom, using the Bad Urach Statement as a key text for study and discussion.

Students will explore:

- Suffering, persecution, and martyrdom for Christ
- The “already / not yet” tension in Christian theology
- Religious persecution in the New Testament church
- Biblical and theological perspectives on witness under pressure
- Christian unity and mission in contexts of suffering

## **Teaching & Learning Format**

This course is designed for interactive, critical, and context-sensitive learning. Sessions combine:

- Lectures / guided teaching
- Text-based discussion
- Seminars and debates
- Case study analysis
- Student presentations
- Contextual application

Students are expected to engage both academic theory and real-world realities, especially within African contexts.

## **Assessment and Participation**

Students will demonstrate learning through a combination of:

- **Written Work**  
A short analytical essay (or equivalent written assignment) in which the student develops a balanced response to a FORB or religious persecution issue, using course concepts and sources.
- **Presentation**  
A presentation to peers (individual or group-based) applying course learning to a specific issue, case, or context.
- **Discussion**  
Active and informed participation in seminars, including the ability to defend a position respectfully and thoughtfully.

## **Who This Course Is For**

This course is suitable for:

- Theology and ministry students
- Christian higher education faculty
- Church leaders and pastors
- Human rights practitioners
- Mission workers
- Students interested in religion, law, and public life

It is especially valuable for those seeking to navigate the relationship between faith, freedom, justice, and witness in complex societies.

## Key Resources

The course draws on a carefully selected set of theological, legal, and interdisciplinary texts. Core resources include:

- Heiner Bielefeldt, *Sources of Solidarity* (2022), pp. 1–58
- Heiner Bielefeldt & Michael Wiener, *Religious Freedom under Scrutiny* (2020), pp. 13–84
- Malcolm D. Evans, “Historical Analysis of FORB...” in *Facilitating Freedom of Religion or Belief* (2004), pp. 1–17
- Jonathan Fox, “Religious Freedom” in *An Introduction to Religion and Politics* (2018), pp. 182–194
- Tore Lindholm, “Philosophical and Religious Justifications of FORB” in *Facilitating Freedom of Religion or Belief* (2004), pp. 19–61
- Glenn M. Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross* (2004), pp. 42–75
- Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, “Introduction” in *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (2018), pp. 1–12
- *The Bad Urach Statement* (WEA, 2012), pp. 17–87

## Recommended Reading

A full list of readings for each block, including articles, legal documents, and supporting media, is provided in the separate Literature List document.

## Current Delivery Locations

This course is currently being offered at the following institutions:

- Africa International University (AIU), Kenya
- Université de l’Alliance Chrétienne d’Abidjan (UACA), Ivory Coast
- Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de Bangui (FATEB), Central African Republic

## Contact us

Please visit our website to initiate a discussion regarding partnership and support for offering this course in your institution or network.



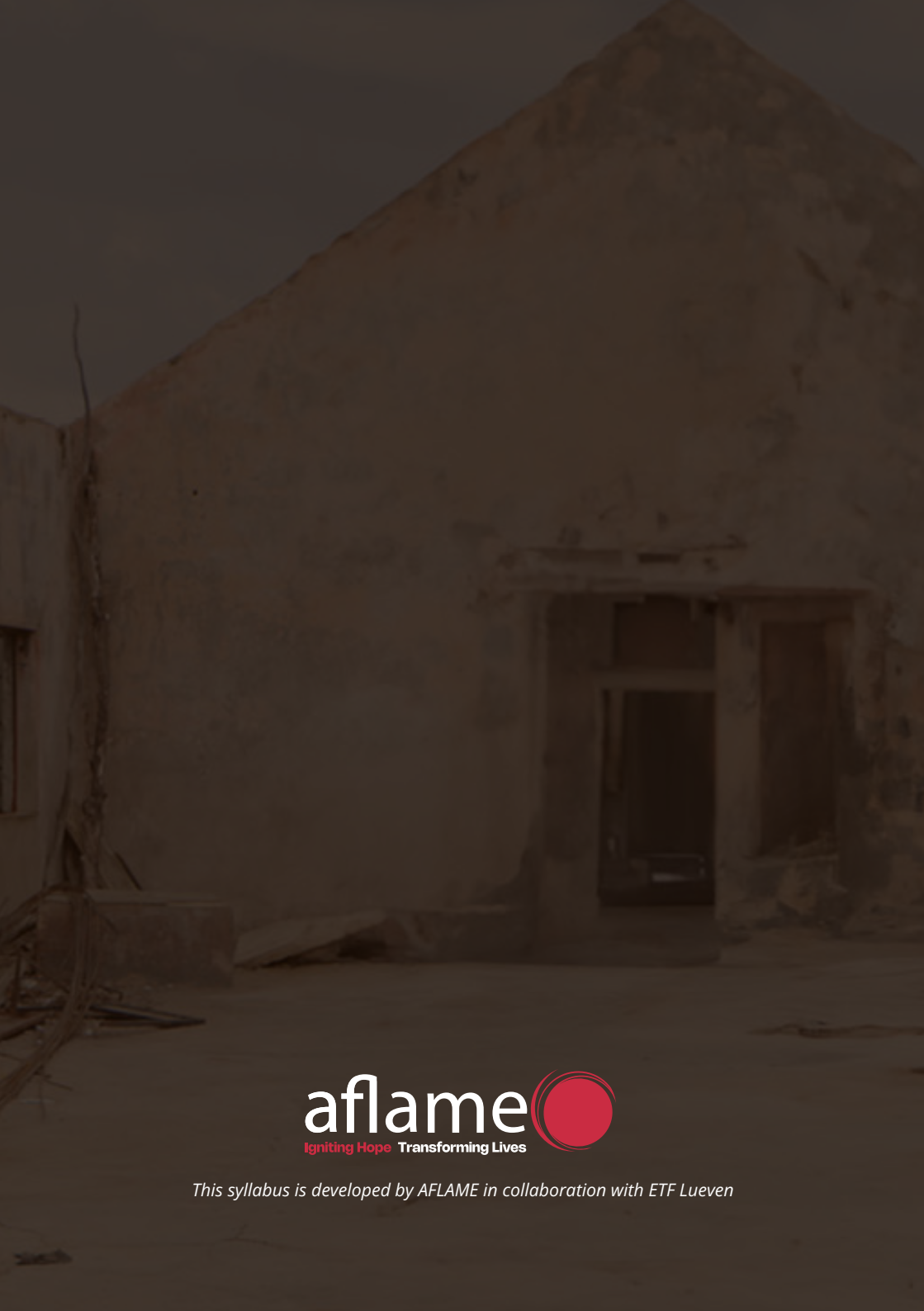
[servafrika.org/academic-courses](https://servafrika.org/academic-courses)

## Add your voice

Visit the link below to sign the **AriseAfrica petition** to ensure that Christians and other vulnerable individuals in Sub-Saharan Africa are treated with dignity and respect



[servafrika.org/petition](https://servafrika.org/petition)



**aflame**   
**Igniting Hope Transforming Lives**

*This syllabus is developed by AFLAME in collaboration with ETF Lueven*