Jan Figel, Special Envoy for the promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief

Overview of country visits: main meetings and activities

October 2016 – March 2019

Jordan: 16 – 19 October 2016

Ján Figel met the Minister of Education, the Minister of Islamic Affairs, the Minister of Culture, senior officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He met the Grand Mufti of Amman and the Middle East Council of Churches. He met with Prince Ghazi. He had an in-depth exchange with various institutions and CSOs active in interfaith dialogue and in promoting education to tolerance. He met a group of parliamentarians of the newly elected parliament (Islamic Action Front and Christian members).

Iraq: 5 – 9 February 2017

The Special Envoy met national political authorities in Baghdad, provincial political and top religious authorities in Najaf and in Erbil. He spoke with the Council of Representatives, the chair of the Council of Representatives' Committee for Human Rights and members of the committee, the Chairman of the Committee on Endowments and Religious Affairs. Meetings took place with other representatives from the political and diplomatic community, i.e. the chair of the Council of Representatives' Committee for Education, National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) Chief Advisor Mohammed Salman, the UN Special Representative for Iraq and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

Sudan: 14 – 17 March 2017

The Special Envoy took part in a seminar gathering COAFR members and national representatives, met the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Religious Endowments and Guidance, members of the National Assembly, representatives of religious, political and civil organizations and a group of renown Islamic thinkers. He gave a lecture at the Ahfad University for Women. He visited the National Human Rights Commission, the Council of Islamic Fiqh, the Nour Mosque, a Coptic Church community in Khartoum and joined a Sufi ceremony in Omdurman. The SE also met informally with the State Minister of Investment and the Chief Justice of Sudan. He was allowed to visit the well-known HR defender Dr. Ibrahim Mudawi in detention.

Senegal: 13 – 15 November 2017

The Special Envoy was invited to deliver a speech in the “Dakar International Forum on Peace and Security in Africa”. He met with representatives of the two main Sufi brotherhoods in Senegal (Tijaniyya and Mouridiyyah) and of the Christian community, CSO and EU Head of Missions.
First visit to Pakistan: 10 -15 December 2017

Jan Figel visited Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi. In Islamabad he met several officials including: Foreign Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Interior Secretary; the Secretary of Religious Affairs; the Chairman of the High Education Commission; the Special Advisor on Law; the Minister of HR; the Secretary Religious Affairs. In Lahore he met the Minister for HR Punjab, Chief Secretary and his team. In Karachi he met with Minister for Health and Religious affairs, and the Special Assistant to Chief Minister on Minorities Affairs. Among religious actors and HR organisations he met: the Chairman of the NCHR, the Chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology, the Archbishop Shaw of Lahore, the Archbishop Coutts of Karachi. He also met with many several civil society organisations active in education and in HR, as well as with well-known HR activists as Mrs. Janahngir (former UN SR on FoRB) and organisations implementing EU funded projects. Ján Figel spoke in the closing ceremony of the "HR and Cinematography Festival" celebrating the HR day. He held a lecture on “Dignity for all and everywhere” in department of Islamic Studies of the University of Lahore, and in the Alliance Francaise in Karachi. A meeting was organised with Heads of Missions of MS.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: 19 - 21 March 2018

Ján Figel visited Sarajevo on the invitation of the Islamic Community (IC). He spoke in the Roundtable on "Religions and Secularity: new challenges" organised by the IC. The Special Envoy also met minister of civil affairs. He visited the Faculty of Islamic Studies (FIN), an internationally respected institution responsible for training imams in Bosnia and in the diaspora. He also met the teachers and students of the first edition of the "Joint Master in Interreligious Studies and Peacebuilding", jointly conceived and implemented by the FIN, the Catholic Theological Faculty and the Orthodox Theological Faculty of St Basil.

Second informal visit to Jordan: 21 – 25 April 2018

Following good contacts made in 2016, the Special Envoy participated at the First Annual Middle East Conference on the Rule of Law and Religion and had bilateral meetings with Prince Ghazi, Prince Hassan, Minister of Islamic Affairs, Grand Mufti and Apostolic Nuncio.

Second visit to Pakistan: 2 – 5 May 2018

Following the first mission in Pakistan, a "Citizens Roundtable on Charting Pathways to Pluralism" was organised. Given the diversity of participants and quality of interventions, this can be seen as an unprecedented initiative in the EU–Pakistan cooperation. Pakistani participants included scholars and representatives of religious organisations, with constructive presence of Chairman of the
Council of Islamic Ideology, representatives of the National Assembly (Members of parliament representing Minorities), representatives of the HR ministry, actors from CSOs and Faith Based Organisations, and the cultural sector. To note the presence of the National Coordinator, National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) and of the National Security Adviser of Pakistan.

Nigeria: 20 – 23 May 2018

Ján Figel’ was invited by the "African Consortium For Law and Religion" to deliver a keynote speech in the opening of the Sixth ACLARS Conference on “Law, Religion and Human Flourishing” (Abuja). The EUD organised meetings with CSOs, religious leaders, experts in the area of herders-farmers conflict, education and PVE/de-radicalization and with Member States. A meeting took place with the Ministry of Interior including a first friendly exchange with the Minister of Interior.

Lebanon: 17 – 18 September 2018

In the absence of a Government, the Special Envoy met religious authorities, the caretaker Minister of Human Rights, Political Director at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, academia and students, civil society organisations. He delivered a speech on “Human dignity: a privileged path toward religious freedom. Learning from and building on Charles Malik’s unique heritage” in the University of Saint Joseph.

Burkina Faso: 24 – 27 October 2018

Ján Figel met the President of Burkina Faso, the Ministers of Education, Justice, Youth, Territorial Administration and Decentralization, the President of the National Assembly, the Mooro Nagaba King of Mossi. He met Religious leaders and organisations, civil society as well as artists shared their opinions on the fragility of "living together" and the new challenges that insecurity and terrorism generates across the country. He visited Franco-Arab schools and Koranic schools.

Malaysia: 12 – 13 November 2018

Special Envoy delivered a keynote address on “Universality of Human Rights and religious freedom” at the EU-UN joint event held at the occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He witnessed the signature of EU-funded project "Promoting the Accession of Remaining International Human Rights Treaties in Malaysia" implemented by the Malaysian National Human Rights Commission (SUHAKAM) and engaged with various stakeholders in order to understand the new political context and the new government’s policies in the area of FoRB in Malaysia. He met with the Minister in charge of National Unity and Social Wellbeing; Commissioners at Malaysia’s National Human Rights Commission (SUHAKAM); Representatives of the Malaysian
Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism; The Mufti of the State of Perlis and religious leaders and representatives of the civil society.

Egypt: 25 – 29 November 2018

The Special Envoy met with Minister of Awqaf, Pope Tawadros II, Assistant Foreign Minister in charge of Human Rights, the Head of Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Deputy Head of the Coptic Catholic Church, and the Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of the Holy See. A visit of Al Azhar took place with the Deputy of the Grand Imam. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised a lunch talk with various CSOs and intellectuals.

India: 7 – 9 February 2019

After having attended conferences organised by the South Asia Consortium for Religion and Law Studies in Bangalore and Mumbai from 4 to 7 February 2019, Ján Figel extended his visit to New Delhi where he held bilateral meetings with the Secretary, Ministry of State for Minority Affairs and with the Chairperson of the National Commission for Minorities. Ján Figel visited places of worship such as the Jain Temple, the Akshardam Hindu Temple and the Sikh temple Bangla Sahib Gurudwara. He met with representatives of a number of religions and denominations including Hindu, Muslim, Catholic, Evangelical, Buddhist, Sikh and Jain faiths and with a representative of a Humanist organisation (IHEU). He met a delegation of the Zoroastrians and representatives of the office of the Dalai Lama.

Israel and Palestine: 25 – 29 February 2019

Ján Figel met representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel working on religious issues. Special Envoy met with diverse religious representatives among which the Grand Imam of Jerusalem, the Chief Rabbi, the Rector of the Latin Patriarchal Seminary; a member from the Pontifical Biblical Institute; the Franciscan Custos of the Holy Land; the Armenian Chief Patriarchate, and the Latin Chief Patriarchate. He visited the Baha’i International Centre in Haifa. In Ramallah, meetings were organised with the Palestinian Ambassador to the Holy See and the Assistant Minister on European Affairs. In Bethlehem, Ján Figel met with the Advisor to President on Christian Affairs. He met with Israeli and Palestinian civil society organisations and thinkers.