

Policy Brief

International Pressure in Promoting FoRB: Envisioning Collaboration among Local Advocates and the International Community on FoRB Advocacy in Indonesia



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This policy brief is an outcome of the 2023 research grant
program of SHAPE-SEA, developed as part of its commitment
to advancing evidence-based policy and practice in the region.

“The European Parliament ... express grave concern at the incidents of violence against religious minorities, particularly Ahmadi Muslims, Christians, Baha’is and Buddhists; is concerned that violations of religious freedom undermine the human rights guaranteed in the Indonesian Constitution, including the prohibition of discrimination and freedom of expression, opinion and peaceful assembly”. The European Parliament resolution of 7 July 2011 on Indonesia, which addressed attacks on minorities, exemplifies international pressure on FoRB issues. Since then, similar statements have been issued by various international actors in response to Indonesia’s ongoing FoRB violations.

International pressure, a widely used advocacy strategy, refers to efforts by external actors to impose costs on governments that violate FoRB in order to encourage policies that ensure its protection (Petersen and Marshall, 2019; see also Alvian, 2023). This policy brief examines how local advocates perceive and utilize such pressure in FoRB advocacy, drawing on two cases that attracted international attention—the 2011 Cikeusik Ahmadiyah killings and the 2021 Indonesian penal code reform—based on interviews with local FoRB advocates.

Recommendations



Local FoRB advocates generally view international pressure positively, recognizing it both as an extension of their own agency and as evidence that existing mechanisms are functioning effectively. However, **their approaches differ**: some actively seek and amplify such pressure, while others treat it as supplementary support. These variations reflect each organization’s distinct strategy, shaped by its infrastructure, capacities, orientation, and scope of work.



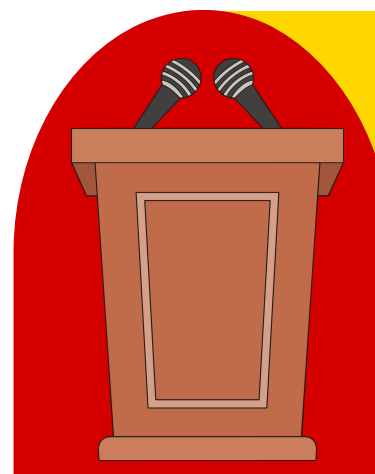
Strengthening the capacity of domestic NGOs

- International pressure arises from both formal mechanisms (UPR, ICCPR) and informal channels (lobbying, diplomatic briefings).
- Strengthening domestic public education and broader local voices helps influence policymakers and reduces risks of being labelled as foreign proxies (interview with ICJR, 24 June 2024).



Strengthening domestic solidarity on amplified issues

- Effective advocacy comes from leveraging complementary strengths across NGOs within a coordinated coalition.
- Example: Yayasan Satu Keadilan supports affected communities, while KontraS targets state accountability through security sector reform—working toward a shared goal.



Facilitating forums of international and regional networks

- Coordinated forums enhance advocacy through knowledge exchange, strategy alignment, and coalition-building (interview with PUSAD Paramadina, 3 June 2024; interview with CRCS, 5 July 2024; interview with Wahid Institute, 20 June 2024).
- Expanding these forums to include more diverse and under-resourced NGOs can strengthen overall advocacy capacity.

Evaluating International Pressure



International pressure is primarily understood as **reputational pressure** used to hold the government accountable. Local advocates mainly rely on **UN mechanisms**, such as UPR and ICCPR reporting, to amplify their advocacy.

How local advocates mobilise international pressure:

- Diplomatic briefings with embassies
- Lobbying stakeholders in Geneva
- Submitting evidence through advocacy networks
- Providing locally grounded information to international actors



International pressure is a **key amplifier** when domestic advocacy is insufficient. It helps raise visibility and **increase political costs** for maintaining problematic policies.

International pressure can strengthen advocacy, but it also carries risks for affected communities. Approaches such as naming and shaming may provoke backlash and increase vulnerability on the ground.



Not all forms of pressure share the same intent. Pressure from the UN or neutral human rights groups differs from that of exclusive religious organizations. Advocacy that is **broad, impartial, and consistent** is more credible and grounded in human rights rather than particular interests (interview with CRCS, 5 July 2024). While international pressure can add value, it should not replace domestic strategies, especially since it is often mobilized only in “populist” cases (interview with KontraS, 22 July 2024). A **broad-based domestic coalition should therefore remain central** to advancing FoRB advocacy.

National NGOs with strong regional and international networks can expand advocacy by **linking domestic issues** to global human rights platforms. Their capacity enables **direct engagement with international actors**, including lobbying in Geneva (interview with YLBHI, 10 June 2024). These organizations also play key roles in reporting processes, such as submissions to the UPR and ICCPR reviews, effectively bridging domestic advocacy with international mechanisms.



Organizational orientation and scope significantly shape how actors engage with international pressure. For organizations involved in litigation and legal reform, **maintaining legal credibility is paramount**. These actors often adopt a **positivist approach**, grounding their arguments in domestic law, court practices, and legal precedents while deliberately distancing themselves from international pressure narratives. This strategy is particularly important in sensitive cases, where overt references to international pressure may provoke public backlash or reinforce perceptions of foreign interference (interview with ICJR, 24 June 2024).

Example:

- 2019 Indonesian Penal Code reform advocacy relied on domestic legal reasoning.
- International frameworks (e.g., ICCPR) were used only as analytical references.
- Explicit mentions of international pressure were deliberately omitted (interview with ICJR, 24 June 2024).