

World Evangelical Alliance

Geneva Report 2005

**A perspective on global
religious freedom: challenges
facing Christian Communities**



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A perspective on global religious freedom: challenges facing Christian Communities

World Evangelical Alliance

Introduction

The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) is honoured to participate in the work of the 61st UN Commission on Human Rights. The WEA is a network giving worldwide identity and voice to more than 335 million Christians from 121 nations and over 100 international organisations. It maintains a wide network of about 2.000 members of parliament in 60 countries. Our organisation seeks to promote integrity and justice at every level of society – individual, family, community and culture.

The WEA strongly supports and stresses the right of every person to hold and practice their own religious convictions – or not to have any.

We estimate that there are more than 200 million Christians in the world today who are denied from exercising their full human rights as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, simply because they are Christians. They are victims of disinformation, discrimination and persecution.

The WEA is deeply concerned about the dire state of religious freedom in many countries around the world. We remind the Commission that religious freedom is guaranteed in the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Article 1 of the UN Charter states that the purposes of the United Nations are:

„To achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion (3)“.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ensures all people the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This includes

„...Freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.“

Article 2 entitles all people the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration,

„without distinction of any kinds, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.“

Article 18 of The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ensures religious freedom for all people as it states:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of one's choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest one's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.
2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair her freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.
3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are

necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

4. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

Furthermore, Article 2 prevents discrimination on the basis of religion:

Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status (1).

Article 26 ensures equal recognition before the law:

All persons are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or her opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Article 27 protects the rights of minority groups:

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.

Clearly, the value and necessity of protecting religious freedom has been affirmed in many international human rights treaties and declarations. Yet for many religious individuals and groups worldwide, their religious freedom is under attack. There is an urgent need to uphold the right to religious freedom for all people, regardless of faith, creed, language, ethnic and social origin or gender.

The WEA consistently supports the Commission's efforts to ensure that human rights and religious freedom become recognized and practiced by member states. We encourage members of the Commission to uphold vigorously religious freedom as a universal standard.

Road to Persecution

Persecution usually passes through three phases. The first is disinformation. Through printed articles, radio, television and other means, Christians are unjustly portrayed. The enduring

poor public opinion commonly leads to discrimination, relegating Christians to a „second-class“ citizenship with poorer legal, social, political and economic standing than the majority in the country. The third stage is persecution. Following the first two conditions, various degrees of persecution arise from the state, the police, military, extreme organisations, mobs, paramilitary groups, or religious zealots. Not to be misinterpreted as a definition of persecution, this three-stage development seeks to help persecution be easily recognized, even in the formative stages, so that timely, firm and appropriate action can be taken the moment there is any sign of disinformation.

Thematic Issues

The persecution of Christians goes hand-in-hand with some important and disturbing trends taking place around the world:

Religious Nationalism

We note with great concern the alarming trend to linking nationalism to a particular religion. Clearly if one religion is linked with national identity, religious minorities are excluded. This is a major source of Christian persecution and an enemy of religious freedom.

Countries influenced by Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism have all recently seen their share of this form of religious intolerance in various expressions. In

some cases, we see it with the face of government sponsored religious nationalism, and in others, with that of non-government factions engaged in extremist activities, often with the tacit approval of their governments. In its various expressions, the use of political might to enforce religious conformity continues to be a disturbing trend around the world.

One frightening and increasingly common tool of this form of intolerance is the application of national religious law to control and restrict citizens' freedom. Christian minority groups continue to be targeted, and suffer discrimination and persecution because of this growing trend. Laws such as Pakistan's „blasphemy laws,“ Sri Lanka's, Saudi Arabia's and United Arab Emirates' „anti-conversion“ laws, and Saudi Arabia and Iran's wide-reaching „Sharia law“ criminalize the beliefs and activities of Christians and other religious minorities, leading to widespread and often violent persecution of minorities in those countries.

State Registration of Religious Groups

We also note with particular concern the number of countries whose governments have set up a registration process for religious groups. Registration systems provide possible venues for governments to utilize excessive power and can be used to violate human rights norms set out in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18

of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Many Christian groups face rigorous challenges or are simply denied governmental approval and therefore are forced to operate illegally at the mercy of the government officials. Christian groups who successfully attain recognition are required to submit to the authority of the government in all aspects of the organisation – literature, leadership approval, activities, financial acquisition and spending and much more. So long as religious organisations and practices are not practised in a coercive manner, there is no reason for them to be monitored or regulated by the government.

As incidents of persecution by religious intolerance against minority groups continue to increase around the world, we strongly urge the members of the Commission to monitor these laws and the development of religious intolerance.

We further urge the members of the Commission to take measures to actively protect and promote religious freedom.

Countries of particular concern

Burma / Myanmar

Religious intolerance persists under Burma's authoritarian military regime. In 1997, the UN Special Rapporteur for Burma reported, „there is essenti-

ally no freedom of thought, opinion, expression or association in Myanmar.“ One credible source claimed, „There is essentially no law at all in Burma.“ Government restrictions on speech, press, assembly and movement make it difficult to obtain timely and accurate information on human rights in the country, including freedom of religion.

Within Burma, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) monitors all religious activities by means of a government registration system in which all groups must attain governmental approval in order to operate legally. Permanent residents must carry identification cards displaying personal information, including religious belief. For religious minority groups, such as Christians and Muslims, the display of this information often leads to incidents of persecution by police and immigration authorities. Human rights monitors report religious persecution in the forms of rape, forced relocation, forced labour, forced conversion to Buddhism, forced conscription of child soldiers, use as human minesweepers, torture, extrajudicial killings, destruction of facilities, as well as confiscation of crops and livestock.

In Burma, there are severe restrictions on the basic rights and the religious practices of religious minorities. In some regions, Muslims and Christians are prohibited from residing or purchasing property. Many Muslims and Christians have been dismissed from their jobs for not abiding with Buddhist practices. Religious literature of non-Buddhist-

minorities cannot be printed or distributed; Christian sermons are reportedly censored and clergy are prohibited from proselytizing. Numerous reports describe the desecration and demolition of hundreds of mosques, churches and meeting places. Christians and Muslim graveyards have been turned into football fields, military residential quarters and public rest rooms. One Christian businessman witnessed the demolition of an orphanage he built and operated with governmental approval.

Despite calling for a new round of peace talks to address ongoing civil unrest, Burma's regime has increased its military offensives against the Karen and Karenni ethnic groups, both of which are predominantly Christian groups. In January 2005, it was reported that a Light Infantry Battalion destroyed a 50-foot cross in Matupi Township in southern Chin State. Witnesses confirm this was not the first time the military had destroyed Christian crosses, a symbol of Christian faith within the communities. The act was regarded as a part of the Burmese military's campaign against ethnic and religious minorities living in the country's remote areas, which often includes bribery and forcible conversions to Buddhism.

We appreciate that the Commission has passed a Resolution condemning human rights violations in Burma/Myanmar. We urge the Commission to specifically condemn violations of religious freedom.

China

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continues to contradict their Constitutional and their signature on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as government sponsored persecution increases throughout the country. According to article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China,

„Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No state organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion...“

Fearing any organisation that may threaten their authority, the CCP restrains religious practice to government-sanctioned organisations and registered places of worship. Organisations that do not register with the government are considered illegal, though many groups are denied authorisation and are thus forced to operate illegally. Government officials monitor and judge the legitimacy of all religious activity and teachings of registered groups. The CCP often requires leaders of registered religious groups to publicly endorse the government's actions and policies or publicly denounce unregistered groups. Though the level of religious intolerance varies from region to region, religious minorities tend to be perceived

as „cultish“ and for simply engaging in their religious practices risk facing intimidation, harassment, torture, „re-education“ in labour camps and in some cases, death.

Across the country, authorities continue to raid and even destroy houses of worship, including temples, sanctuaries, „house churches“ and mosques. In some areas, children are not permitted to attend even the legal religious services. Bibles are often confiscated during raids on „house churches.“ People are beaten to death, arrested for distributing religious literature, detained for unlicensed, yet peaceful, preaching. Women are forced to sign documentations falsely accusing church leaders of sexual crimes. Unregistered religious leaders preaching beliefs outside the bounds of officially approved doctrines or who are especially charismatic are often severely harassed. There is a widely ignored, yet growing need for enhanced training for clergy and greater access to religious texts. „Re-education-through-labour“ camps are widely used as a means of punishing religious minorities who refuse to recant their beliefs. Punishment such as fines, job loss, detentions, and school expulsion are all common forms of religious persecution.

Torture of religious minorities in Chinese prisons and detention centres is common. Photographs from a detention centre in Qing Feng and police stations in Kongzhuang and Wen Shu town document the daily torture endured by detained Chinese Christians. The

photographs depict Christian detainees enduring inhumane physical abuse at the hands of guards; including kneeling on bricks for hours at a time, electrocution of their mouths with electric prods, and forcing excessive amounts of water into prisoner's stomachs.

Prisoners also endure horrific psychological torture. In one documented case in a Chinese prison, a woman was physically tortured while being forced to listen to the screams of her son being tortured in the neighbouring stall.

Eritrea

Religious intolerance continues in Eritrea as Christians are victimized, oppressed and persecuted because of their religious beliefs. On 21 May 2002, the ruling party, the Popular Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), issued a law ordering the closure of all religious organisations and churches not belonging to Orthodox, Lutheran or Roman Catholic churches. It is now illegal for Muslims or Christians of non-registered churches to meet peacefully anywhere, including their own private homes. This is in direct contravention of Eritrea's Constitutional assurances of religious freedom for all citizens. According to Article 19:

„Every person shall have the rights of freedom of thought, conscience and belief...the freedom to practice any religion and to manifest such practice. All persons shall have the right to assemble and to demonstrate together with others peaceably.“

Article 17 says the following:

„Every person who is arrested and detained in custody shall be brought before the court within forty-eight (48) hours of his arrest, being entitled to a fair and public hearing by the court of law, being presumed innocent, and not being punished unless found guilty by a court.“

Eritrea is signatory of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter of Human and People Rights, all of which contain provisions for freedom of religion. In recent years, there has been an increasing volume of reports coming out of Eritrea documenting persecution on the basis of religion.

Although the Eritrean government denies accounts of persecution, credible sources assert that, „the situation over the last year has become worse, not better, for the Eritrean Christians. Hundreds of Christians remain behind bars and are being persecuted simply for peacefully following their faith.“ In the first three weeks of 2005, there were over 200 separate accounts of Christian being arrested in Eritrea. Increased hostility is also evident towards students, journalists and even ruling party members who have questioned governmental actions. Accounts of persecution are also rapidly increasing within the armed forces, where soldiers have reportedly

been executed simply for possessing a Bible.

In the past few months, Eritrean security forces have raided dozens of homes, arresting hundreds of Christians, including children, simply for having ties to Christian thought and practice. Christian wedding ceremonies are regularly invaded by police arresting any young or elderly attending guest or wedding party member who claims to be a Protestant. Once detained, some endure „military punishment“ while others are forced to sign a documentation promising to abstain from future Christian practice.

For those imprisoned for their religious beliefs, the conditions of their detention are inhumane and unsanitary. Imprisoned Christians are often held in shipping containers in extreme temperatures for months at a time and are exposed to malaria and other illnesses. They are denied legal counsel and contact with family members; they are often secretly relocated without notice to family members.

Iran

Religious freedom in Iran continues to be virtually non-existent for Christians and other minority groups, particularly the Bahai. The Iranian Constitution declares Islam as the official national religion, while guaranteeing a few recognized religious minorities, including Christians, the freedom to practice their religion. Despite these provisions, these rights are frequently

withheld. Numerous accounts come out of Iran describing Christians facing harassment, intimidation and imprisonment because of their religious beliefs. The violation of religious freedom specifically contradicts Iran's international obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Non-Islamic minorities live in constant fear of arbitrary abuse or arrest; many are even afraid to emerge from their homes. Authorities are known to confiscate property, drive families from their homes and farmlands, and deny harvesting rights to farmers. Non-Muslim women who violate Islamic laws or customs are subject to monetary fines, harassment, and even flogging or death. Non-Islamic holy sites and places of worship, as well as homes of non-Islamic minorities are commonly destroyed or occupied in attempts to restrain Christians from proselytizing. In some areas, non-Muslim business owners are required to indicate their religious affiliation in their business entranceway. Members of evangelical Christian congregations have been required to carry membership cards, photocopies of which must be provided to the authorities. Apostasy in Iran, specifically conversion from Islam, is punishable by death.

Video footage offers documentation of some of the forms of torture that the Iranian government inflicts on its own citizens. This documentation includes footage of a fully conscious prisoner hearing his sentence read aloud and

then having his eyes torn from their sockets by an official. Stoning also continues to be a relatively common state-sanctioned practice against non-Muslim religious minorities, and especially in apostasy cases.

North Korea

Under one of the most repressive regimes in the world, North Koreans have been stripped of their human rights to expression, thought, and religion. The Government's ideology, known as „Juche“ enforces total veneration of Kim Jong II, the „Great Leader“ of the country. Individuals or groups refusing to acknowledge him as are regarded as opposing the State's interests and are subject to severe persecution. In particular, Kim Jong II views Christianity as one of his greatest threats. This violation directly contradicts North Korea's signature on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The secretive regime ruling North Korea does not allow independent religious freedom monitoring. As a result, most information on persecution comes from Christians who have fled the country, as well as some from international human rights and religious advocacy groups that perform interviews and gather defector accounts. Visitors to the country report that the few churches that exist and function publicly are strictly controlled by the government; religious activity appears staged and sermons preach political content supporting the governing regime.

The government's continuing perception of religious groups as threats to the regime leads to tightened control and increased persecution of religious groups. And although it is true all religions are forbidden, the state propaganda against Christians is overwhelming and non-believers are led to believe Christians are mad and disgusting. Members of underground Christian churches are often arrested and subjected to harsh punishment including imprisonment, forced labour, prolonged detention without charge, torture, or even immediate execution.

Prison conditions in North Korea are harsh; sanitation is poor, starvation is common, access to basic necessities is scarce and forced labour is common. Routine punishment includes severe beatings, sexual assault, verbal abuse, sleep deprivation, water torture and execution. One routine execution of Christians is for the individual to be dragged through a crowd with a stone in their mouth to prevent them from crying out. They are bound to a pole or crucifix with their bodies outstretched, then shot by an expert marksmen through the head, heart and stomach.

Christian prisoners are also subjected to inhumane chemical and biological experiments. Whole families are shoved into gas chambers to suffocate to death as scientists observe from a glass window above. Christians who refuse to renounce their faith or accept the State's ideologies have molten steel poured on their skin. It is said that „there is no more serious crime in North Korea than being a Christian.“

We appreciate that the Commission has passed a Resolution condemning human rights violations in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We further appreciate the work of the Special Rapporteur. We urge the Commission to continue to press the DPRK to respect human rights, specifically, freedom of religion and allow provision of humanitarian assistance.

Sri Lanka

Violence against Sri Lanka's Christian community continues to increase as religious freedom deteriorates. The Sri Lankan Constitution affords Buddhism the position of the state's, 'foremost religion', while ensuring every person the 'freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice' in Article 10. Sri Lanka agreed to protect religious freedom to its people by signing the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. However, Sri Lankan Parliament continues to consider legislation and constitutional amendments that would essentially criminalize conversion from Buddhism to any other religion, stripping Sri Lankans of their right to freedom of conscience, belief and religion.

The Anti-Conversion Bill, presented by the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) Party to Sri Lanka's parliament in July 2004, had as its stated aim, to promote Buddhism within Sri Lanka. The constitutionality of the bill was challenged in Supreme Court, which found two

sections of the proposed legislation to be unconstitutional. If enacted, the legislation would have contradicted the freedom of religion guaranteed in Article 10 of the Constitution.

The JHU is currently redrafting the bill in hopes of tabling it in the near future, while simultaneously working on a constitutional amendment that would enshrine Buddhism as the state religion, once again outlawing conversions from Buddhism in Sri Lanka. These bills, and others like it, intend to prohibit the conversion of a person from one religion to another. They propose penalties, including fines or jail sentences, for anyone convicted of conversion or assisting in conversion. Even if these proposed bills do not pass, the Minister of Buddha Sasana (Buddhist Affairs) is expected to table a Government bill, with Cabinet support, which would effectively ban all religious conversions.

As efforts continue on the diplomatic front, 2004 saw a steady increase in violence against Sri Lankan Christians. Incidents included vandalism and demolition of churches and offices, verbal harassment, sexual assaults, and physical violence towards men, women and children. The Christian community is justifiably fearful that these and any other anti-conversion legislation will be used to justify further violence against them.

Sudan

In 2004, reports confirmed that religious freedom continued to suffer in

the Sudan. The Government of Sudan regards Islam as the official state religion. Institutions and policies are inspired by Islamic (Shari'a) law and doctrines. Despite Constitutional promises to the contrary, restrictions continue to be placed on non-Muslim minorities and Muslim sects not affiliated with the ruling Islamic party. Human rights violations in Sudan are often rooted in ethnicity, race and religion. One of the most disturbing forms of religious oppression and injustice is Sudan's apostasy law. The government of Sudan considers Islamisation of its population to be an important state objective; as a result, the conversion from a non-Muslim faith to Islam is legal, while conversion from Islam to any other religion is potentially punishable by death.

Oppression of non-Muslim minorities touches all aspects of daily life. Formal religious conversions to Islam and accompanying documentation are commonly needed for non-Muslims to secure employment and attain equal access to food, housing, and social support services. While Muslim widows often receive assistance and benefits, non-Muslim widows receive none; it is reported that many non-Muslim women without sufficient family support will convert in order to qualify for these benefits.

The WEA fully supports the discussions by the government of Sudan (GoS) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) regarding the peace agreement, the Naivasha Protocol. We urge the international

community to take all reasonable steps to encouraging all interested groups in Sudan to work towards a just and lasting peace where the human rights of all Sudanese people are respected.

Turkmenistan

The constitution of Turkmenistan ensures the right of all citizens to define and express their attitude towards religion, individually and jointly with others, and to engage in religious activity. Turkmenistan made a commitment to preserving religious freedom by signing to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Despite these promises, the government of Turkmenistan continues to withhold its citizens' right to religious freedom.

Turkmenistan has no official state religion, but the majority of the population is Sunni Muslim, and the Turkmen identity is linked to Islam. The government's law on religious organisations requires religious groups to register with the government in order to continue operating. However, the requirements for registration are impossible for most religious groups to meet; only Sunni Muslim Groups and Russian Orthodox Churches have been able to register to date. All other religious activities and groups are considered illegal. Government raids on unregistered churches and activities are common and lead to the confiscation of religious literature and materials, the coercion of participants to abandon their religious beliefs, threats of eviction and loss of

employment, and the imposition of fines, detention, arrest and even torture.

Members of these religious minority groups are prevented from raising their children in accordance with their religious beliefs. Children are often publicly humiliated and expelled from schools for holding religious beliefs. School directors and teachers face the possibility of losing their jobs if they fail to comply with Government orders to harass children from religious minority groups.

Government officials place harsh restraints on religious activities of even registered, non-Muslim congregations. Government officials are known to raid peaceful gatherings, confiscating copies of Christian literature, including Bibles. Ethnic Turkmen who convert to faiths other than Islam have been subjected to official harassment and mistreatment and, in some cases, social isolation. In one community it was reported that ethnic Turkmen members converted from Islam. Government officials responded harshly and disconnected the community's gas, electricity and water supplies.

Christian prisoners within state-run detention centres often face discrimination and persecution. Numerous reports describe guards threatening Christian prisoners with execution in order to coerce them to abandon their faith and convert to Islam.

We appreciate that the Commission has passed a Resolution condemning human rights violations in Turkmenis-

tan. We urge the Commission to continue to condemn violations of human rights in Turkmenistan and specifically condemn violations of religious freedom.

Vietnam

In 2004, several policy developments were announced by Vietnamese authorities regarding religion. On 18 June 2004 Vietnam published the long-awaited Ordinance on Religion. Upon receiving it, many religious leaders strongly opposed it. In summary the critiques complained that is only granted freedom to ask permission for a myriad of large and small religious matters, with no obligation on the part of the government to respond.

Many of Vietnam's house churches remain unable to register. A recent Decree (22) requires religious organisations to be in operation in Vietnam for 20 years prior to the issuance of the Ordinance on Religion (18 June 2004) in order to be eligible to register. The house church movement in Vietnam and the large movement to Christian faith by minorities in the Northwest provinces date from 1988 or 1989. So a huge segment of Protestant believers in Vietnam are still not even eligible to apply for legal status.

Official ideological opposition to religion in Vietnam remains systemic. The terminology and tone of many government documents on religion indicates a continuing suspicion of religion, especially Christianity, as being unpatriotic.

The State acts as an official arbiter of defining „good, legitimate religion.“ Vietnam’s leaders still do not understand the „freedom of religion“ its constitution proclaims.

The large number of Montagnard Christians and churches in the Central Highlands continue to suffer harassment and persecution. This is well documented by Human Rights Watch and others. Of the many hundreds of churches the government forcibly disbanded in 2002 and 2003, only 36 are now officially recognized. The situation is far from „normalized,“ as the government claims. Many Christians are among those imprisoned and hiding because of participation in peaceful demonstration for religious freedom and rights to ancestral lands in April 2004.

Vietnam has received much negative publicity over its terrible handling of the „Mennonite six“- six Vietnamese Mennonite church workers arrested in 2004 and jointly tried and convicted on 12 November 2004 for „resisting persons doing official duty“. The General Secretary of the Vietnam Mennonite Church, the Rev. Nguyen Hong Quang received a three years sentence and the others lesser ones. An appeal to the People’s Supreme Court was granted for the Rev. Quang and Evangelist Thach on 2 February 2005, but was cancelled at the last moment without explanation.

Of particular concern is the lone woman among them, 21-year-old Le Thi Hong Lien. Due to the extreme beatings she has experienced in prison, Lien has completely mentally disinteg-

rated. Since her arrest in July 2004, Lien has been broken under torture. Prison officials have refused the families pleas to have her receive a proper medical check-up and care.

A further 19 Mennonites were arrested on 27 February 2005 in Ho Chi Min City.

Notes of Affirmation

Sudan

On 26 May and 5 June 2004, two positive steps towards peace were taken with the signing of the Naivasha Protocols and the Nairobi Declaration. Among many points included in these protocols, the method for a just application of Islamic law throughout Sudan was outlined and settled; however, it has yet to be implemented. The WEA encourages the prompt and complete implementation of these agreements, so that the benefits of peace and equality may begin to be extended to all the people of Sudan.

Pakistan

The WEA would like to encourage individuals opposing Pakistan’s anti-blasphemy laws. The law sentences people to life in prison for speaking against the Koran and condemns people to death if found guilty of insulting Mohammed upon the oral testimony of only four Muslim witnesses. Since its

implementation in 1986, over four thousand people have been accused of such blasphemy - including many Christians. Last year, the Religious Affairs minister, Ejaz ul Haq, admitted that the law has been „abused“ as the Pakistani criminal code is often called into play to settle personal, emotional accounts. President Musharraf has also openly criticized the anti-blasphemy law. In 2004, the law was revised, but only at the technical and procedural level. Yet despite these various criticisms of the law, threats from Islamic militant groups have prevented the abolition of this law. The WEA supports the continued efforts of individuals and organisations to have this law abolished in the near future.

religious freedom, and the attention that continues to be shown. The WEA was pleased to see the following resolutions from the 60th Commission: „Combating defamation of „religions“, „Elimination of all forms of religious „intolerance“, and „Rights“ of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and „linguistic“ minorities. We fully support the work of the Special Rapporteur on Religious Freedom and strongly urge the Commission to continue to appoint a special Rapporteur and ensure that he or she is funded sufficiently to fulfil the mandate of the office.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the World Evangelical Alliance wishes to stress again the importance of respecting religious freedom. Where there is no freedom of religion, other fundamental rights are always trampled as well. We fully agree with Norway's Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik, a former advisor to the WEA Religious Liberty Commission, when he says, „Religious freedom and belief is one of the fundamental human rights. Actually, it is more than that...without freedom to worship, there can be no real political freedom - no freedom of thought or freedom of conscience.“ They exist symbiotically.

The WEA appreciates greatly the work of the UN Commission in highlighting



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Zielsetzung

- Gebetsanliegen und Informationen erforschen, sammeln und versenden
- Den Weltweiten Gebetstags für verfolgte Christen (November) zu organisieren
- Jährlich ein Jahrbuch (idea-Dokumentation) zur Christenverfolgung, sowie weitere Bücher herauszugeben
- Rechtliche und anwaltliche Vertretung für verfolgte Christen zu ermöglichen
- Presse, Politiker und Kirchenführer auf die Probleme verfolgter Christen aufmerksam zu machen
- Referenten für Gemeinden zur Arbeit des AKREF und zu Fragen der Christenverfolgung, Menschenrechte und Religionsfreiheit zu vermitteln
- Bei Briefaktionen und Unterschriftenlisten zu beraten



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