

# WEF Report to the U.N.

## FOREWORD

We live in a world of rapid change. As one ingenious person has put it, "The future is no longer what it was." Conflicts in the world used to be primarily between countries; today they tend to be within them. Many of these conflicts clearly have religious dimensions, posing new challenges for religious liberty around the world. It is surprising to many people that in our modern world over 200 million Christians lack their full human rights as described in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, simply because of their beliefs. This is the background against which the present report has been drafted and which has necessitated it. The World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) represents more than 150 million Protestant Christians in 114 countries, but also strongly supports and stresses the right of every person to have and practice his or her own religious convictions, or not to have any.

Although the primary purpose of this report is to analyze current trends affecting religious liberty for Christians, it also suggests viable and constructive ways forward for all countries and all religions. Christians are the focus of this report because at present they form by far the largest group of people world-wide who suffer directly because of their religious convictions. We sincerely hope that similar reports will be drawn up focusing on other religions, so that together with this report they will give an overall, balanced view of the realities of our time. Only then can we develop a vision of a future with greater religious freedom for everyone.

Religious liberty is not an optional addition to basic human rights. A person's reason for existing and what he or she believes concerning time and eternity form the very core of all other human rights. It is inseparable from freedom of opinion and expression, freedom to travel and relocate, and freedom of association.

This report has been prepared by the World Evangelical Fellowship's Religious Liberty Commission in cooperation with its legal counsel, Samuel E. Ericsson, President of Advocates International in Washington D.C., Advocates' Staff Counsel, Johanna Blom, along with Advocates' and WEF's Liaison to the United Nations, Ambassador Slavi Pachovski. WEF's E-mail Conference Moderator, Mark Albrecht, assisted in writing the reports on those countries which are examples of disinformation, discrimination, or persecution.

We invite your comments and feedback concerning religious liberty in a world in which we are all called to live together.

Geneva, Switzerland

March 2001  
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## The Geneva Report 2001

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### A Perspective on Global Religious Freedom Challenges Facing the Christian Community

#### A Long-standing Universal Principle of Human Rights and Religious Freedom

Human rights and religious freedom are now at the center of discourse in international affairs. The notion that certain rights are inherent to the human experience is reflected in the universal principle most often referred to as "the Golden Rule," that is present in various forms in every society and religion. Some of the major religious traditions articulate this principle as follows:

##### Buddhism

Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. (Udana-Varga 5:18)

##### Christianity

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:12)

##### Confucianism

Surely it is the maxim of loving-kindness: Do not unto others what you would not have done unto you. (Analects 15:23)

##### Hinduism

This is the sum of duty: Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you. (Mahabharata 5:1517)

##### Islam

No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself. (Sunnah)

##### Judaism

What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow man. That is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary. (Talmud, Shabbat 31a)

##### Taoism

Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain and your neighbor's loss as your own loss. (T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien)

The Golden Rule is applied to religious freedom when the powerful and dominant religious and philosophical traditions, government leaders, and the elite in a society ask how they would want to be treated if they were the powerless and minority faith. All minority groups, whether they are religious, ethnic, political, racial or gender-based, want equal and fair treatment before the law, and every group is a minority somewhere in the world. The temptation facing those in power is to seek preferential treatment for themselves at the expense of those who have little or no power. The Golden Rule counsels the powerful to be sensitive to the powerless by treating them with the same care and respect that they seek for themselves in their country and in places where they are themselves the powerless.

At the beginning of the new millennium, religion remains a deeply relevant and central aspect of human life and behavior despite the view of some skeptics who echo Nietzsche's timeworn claim that "God is dead". Yet of the world's six billion inhabitants only 3% (150 million) identify themselves as atheists. With varying degrees of commitment, two billion Christians, 1.2 billion Muslims, 786 million Hindus, and 362 million Buddhists, not to mention adherents of hundreds of smaller religions, affirm the relevance and importance of a spiritual dimension in life and society. In fact, the trend over the past few decades has been an increase in religious commitment and activity in the face of growing secularization.

Religious freedom is the "linchpin" or litmus test for all other human rights because where there is no freedom of religion other fundamental rights are always missing. Some of the rights most often compromised where religious freedom is lacking are freedom of speech and press, freedom of association and movement, equality before the law, the right to life, liberty and security of person, freedom from torture and other cruel and inhuman treatment or punishment, and the right to work. Recently, Norway's former Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik stated:

"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 - nor freedom of thought and freedom of conscience. These are interrelated."

For people with deeply held religious beliefs, religion is the essence of their very being. It defines the terms of their existence and determines the values they bring to bear daily in relationships and decisions. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides, perhaps, the best summation of the scope of religious freedom in the international arena:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right 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.

The World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) believes that its communities must not only seek to protect their own constituents, but should also assist others who suffer for their beliefs. It recognizes that the first act of violence recorded in the Christian Scriptures, the killing by Cain of his brother Abel, was the ill fruit of religious intolerance. Cain refused to accept Abel's mode of worship and therefore chose to kill him. WEF believes that in the religious freedom arena we are indeed "our brother's keeper" and should proactively speak on behalf of others who suffer persecution.

At the same time WEF believes that it is necessary to pay particular attention to the suffering faced by Christians globally due to its sheer magnitude. No doubt, many people would find it surprising, even unbelievable, that at the beginning of the 21st Century the largest faith group being persecuted is the Christian faith. It has been estimated that over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied fundamental human rights solely because of their faith. Moreover, persecution of Christians often serves as an indicator of the status of religious freedom for other minorities, since where Christians are persecuted other religions tend also to suffer. Discrimination and persecution have been found to follow a distinct pattern regardless of who is being persecuted. Thus, although the focus and examples used in this report relate primarily to the Christian community, the same analysis could be applied to other faiths.

### The Slippery Slope from Intolerance to Persecution

With respect to religious freedom, the ideal society seeks to reach a place where all faith traditions enjoy "equal justice under law." Even though religious tolerance is clearly preferred over intolerance, the notion of "tolerance" suggests that those in dominance simply tolerate or allow other faiths to exist on a more-or-less equal footing. Tolerance is not synonymous with freedom but infers a top-down mindset rather than one of equality. It is our hope that those nations where tolerance is embraced would continue to move towards full and complete equality before the law for all faiths.

The Pattern: There is a discernible pattern in the societal evolution leading down the slope from tolerance to intolerance and eventual persecution of minorities. The first slippery step is disinformation that often leads to the second step, discrimination, which can finally end in a slide into persecution. At each step, the role of the state and its agencies may be passive or active.

Step 1: Passive disinformation: Passive disinformation occurs when a minority group is slandered, vilified or unfairly attacked through the private, or not state-operated, media. The attacked group rarely has access to make an adequate response to these attacks and its opportunities for redress may be limited. However, using the press, public advocacy, or taking court action for slander, defamation, or libel in the most severe cases should be considered. It is not the state's role to serve proactively as an "accuracy in media" or ex-

officio "public relations" agency. Nevertheless, the state can ensure the adequacy and effectiveness of libel laws and make sure that minorities have access to the courts to take advantage of these safeguards. Passive disinformation takes place to varying degrees in all countries. In fact, as Mr. Justice Robert Jackson, Chief American Prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials, stated in *United States v. Ballard*:

"The price of freedom of religion or of speech or of the press is that we must put up with, and even pay for, a good deal of rubbish."

However, state officials can assume responsibility by being open advocates for tolerance and reconciliation and by encouraging their citizens to treat people of all beliefs with dignity and respect.

**Step 2: Active disinformation:** Active disinformation occurs when the state uses its agencies, particularly the state-run media, to poison the well of public opinion against a minority faith. In so doing, the state creates a nearly insurmountable barrier for a minority faith that has few options to reply. While the state may be limited in how to respond to "passive disinformation," that is not true where state agencies are the active wrongdoers. The state has control over its own public media agencies, ministries and their employees and should correct abuses when they occur. For an example of active disinformation, see the discussion of France in the Appendix.

**Step 3: Passive discrimination:** Disinformation prepares the ground of public opinion for the next stage: discrimination. Here again the state may be a passive or active party. The state passively discriminates against minority faiths when it turns a blind eye to discrimination taking place against unpopular religious groups by private actors. Whenever the private sector in a society treats minorities as second-class citizens, as in employment, education, or access to public accommodations, the state's refusal to act will be viewed by the discriminators as tacit approval. The state, its officials and agents should not stand passively by while citizens' constitutional rights are being trampled on by wrongdoers. Instead, the state should use its legal and judicial tools to address the problem. For an example of a country trying to come to terms with a history of passive discrimination, see the discussion of Greece in the Appendix.

**Step 4: Active discrimination:** The state is engaged in active discrimination when it adopts policies and practices, through legislation or rules and regulations, that effectively deny members of minority religions opportunities to practice their faith with the same freedom as that enjoyed by the dominant or accepted faiths. The state should proactively root out the offending laws, regulations or official conduct and take appropriate remedial steps. For an example of active discrimination, see the entries on Nigeria and Egypt in the Appendix.

**Step 5: Passive persecution:** When the state has discriminated actively or passively against minority faith groups, the ground is fertile for persecution to take root and produce its evil fruit. Persecution carried out by private actors,

such as religious extremists or fanatics acting singly or as a mob, can range from the destruction of property to torture and murder. Where the state stands by and does nothing to stop the law-breakers, the state becomes an accomplice to the perpetrated evil. A primary function of the state is to protect its citizens from lawlessness and when it fails to do so, it also falls short of the acceptable international standards of governance. For some examples of passive persecution, see the discussions of Egypt, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka in the Appendix.

Step 6: Active persecution: The slide toward persecution hits bottom when the state and its agencies become active participants in destroying or confiscating property, arresting or incarcerating religious minorities, torturing or executing believers because of their faith tradition. At this point, the offending state not only violates the long-standing universal principle of human behavior as seen in the Golden Rule, but is in direct violation of international standards as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Charter and elsewhere. A discussion of active persecution in Afghanistan, Laos, Maldives, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan, and Yemen follows in the Appendix.

### The Role of Law in Protecting Religious Human Rights

Law is the primary tool a state has to achieve its goals, to define and protect the rights of its citizens, and to balance competing interests among its constituents. As such, law can either be an instrument of oppression and persecution or of emancipation and liberation. In an open and free society, everything is permissible unless the law provides a clear prohibition. This is based on the principle that the primary purpose of the state is to protect its citizens from internal and external threats and to balance the rights of one citizen with those of others. In this view the state exists to protect its citizens from harm and to facilitate their activities. In a closed and totalitarian society nothing is permissible unless it is specifically permitted by the state. In such societies the state seeks solely to protect and promote its own interests and those of the ruling elite and their colleagues. The state only permits activities consistent with furthering its own interests. The role of citizens is to serve the state and its elite.

When a state is governed in accordance with the rule of law and good governance, the legitimacy and authority of the state derive from this fact. These principles are mutually reinforcing. When citizens know what the law is and that the law is based on sound principles of justice and consistently enforced, the people have faith in its authority and those that govern. When people have faith in the legal system, the need for the state to impose its authority is diminished. On the other hand, where the rule of law is weak or nonexistent, the state must impose its authority through other means, including "legitimized violence" such as persecution.

## International Law

International law sets the standards for the community of nations to evaluate the conduct of states among themselves. Increasingly international law is concerned not only with the behavior of states among themselves, but also with the actions of states toward their own citizens. The Charter of the United Nations is the most concrete, tangible expression of international law. The tendency to focus on the use of international law as an instrument for the protection of individuals has its roots in the Charter, which declares that one of the aims of the United Nations is to promote "respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion". As the premier multilateral convention among states and the legal framework for the United Nations, the Charter is binding on member states.

Since the Charter's adoption in 1945, the United Nations has proceeded to make several declarations and treaties that define and strengthen the guarantees set forth in the Charter. Foremost of these documents is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948. The Declaration states the principles agreed to by the international community in defining certain universal, inalienable and fundamental human rights. Article 18 specifically addresses the freedom of religion, but must be read in tandem with other provisions bearing on this basic right.

The Declaration is taking on the status of customary international law that will make it binding on all states and require that domestic laws conform to it. Other treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, reaffirm the goals of the Declaration. The Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1981 reaffirms the principles and rights enunciated in the earlier documents and in the Charter.

## Constitutional Developments

A nation's constitution serves as the basic structure for all other law and the social order of the state. It establishes the various governing entities, determines the limits of their authority and jurisdiction, and provides the framework for legislative, executive, judicial and enforcement activity. It declares the values and principles upon which the legal order of the state is established. As such, the constitution serves as a powerful advocacy tool for guaranteeing religious freedom, justice and equality.

Over the past decade, the major trend globally in constitutional law impacting religious freedom has been a shift from totalitarian and authoritarian regimes toward free and open democratic societies. This shift has been especially encouraging in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Although the

transition has not been smooth in any country, there has been significant improvement in many former communist nations, particularly in Albania, Bulgaria, Mongolia, Poland and Romania.

### Legislative and Regulatory Developments

Implementation of constitutional rights and religious freedom takes time. Defining and refining the structural relationships set forth in a constitution impacting religious institutions, communities, and individuals on the one hand and the role of the state and other agencies in society on the other hand calls on the legislative branch to get involved. Legislative models for "church-state" relations range from a strict separation approach to a state-church model. Some legislative models have focused on a simple notification type law while others propose elaborate protocols and agreements governing the distribution of state funds, religious education and maintenance of church properties.

In addition to legislation defining the rights and responsibilities of individuals and religious communities, the executive branch, its ministries, and agencies are engaged in developing rules and regulations that deal with the nuts and bolts of government relations with religious bodies. Foremost among the issues that have engaged virtually every country in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has been developing a practical, fair, and cost-efficient registration process for religious bodies. Here again, some nations have made more progress than others. An ongoing issue in some countries has been the effort by the state to be more accommodating to the dominant traditions than to minority faiths, particularly some Protestant communities.

### Judicial Developments

The judicial sphere is where the implications of developments in the other areas become evident. The judiciary interprets the laws and regulations and balances competing interests in concrete cases that come before it. It is possible to have great progress in the legislative sphere while the overall state of human rights deteriorates because of regressive tendencies in the judiciary. This can also take place in administrative tribunals such as human rights commissions, which may or may not be subject to appeal to the regular court system. There are two ways in which cases can come before the courts: the state can prosecute individuals, as it does in enforcing legislation, or individuals can sue the state or other individuals for violating their rights. When the state prosecutes individuals it may be doing so to uphold laws that are in violation of human rights, in spite of any protective legislation or constitutionally guaranteed rights, or to protect the human rights of a victim. Where the judiciary is truly independent and committed to seeking justice and upholding human rights, there is always need for vigilance, but little reason for concern. Where the independence of the judiciary is compromised, however, there is room for great concern. There are several factors that can

compromise the independence of a judiciary. For example, where a judiciary is appointed at the will of the ruling authorities it may have an interest in pursuing the advantage of the state regardless of the merits of the case. Where a judiciary is not given proper regard or compensated appropriately, it can be vulnerable to bribery. In certain circumstances the independence of the judiciary can be compromised by intimidation from groups in society. In many areas of the world, especially in countries emerging from the former Soviet Union, there has been great progress toward an independent judiciary. However, a worrisome trend over the past decade has been an increase in intimidation of judges trying people in cases where their religious rights are in question.

## Enforcement

Just as legislation needs to go from abstract principles to concrete rights in individual cases through judicial review and application, court decisions are only as good as their enforcement by the appropriate authorities. It is the enforcement of human rights and human rights law that determines the practical impact of the legal framework on individuals.

Enforcement measures impact religious freedom in many ways and on many levels. The most obvious example is arbitrary arrest and detention. The state might prosecute individuals for violating laws that restrict religion. It can also arrest people on unrelated charges to avoid the publicity that would arise if religious rights were attacked directly. In other circumstances, a person might be tortured in jail after having been sentenced through the state's legal procedures to a prison term for violating religious regulations. An individual or local authorities could be found guilty of violating a person's human rights but the sentence never be carried out because local officials are sympathetic or corrupt. On the other hand, local authorities guilty of abusing their authority and violating human rights might never even be prosecuted. Sometimes local groups or individuals take the enforcement of laws on religion into their own hands, torturing or murdering people who have been suspected or accused and later acquitted of breaking laws that violate their right to religious freedom.

## Recommendations

It is unrealistic to expect any country to change overnight from a situation where abuse of human rights has been the rule to one where religious freedom is fully embraced and nurtured. Our hope in publishing this report is to encourage countries to begin to take steps to move "up the slope" towards tolerance and religious freedom and away from disinformation, discrimination and persecution. When it comes to religious freedom, there is no country in the world today that is free from problems. Thus, the recommendations put forth in this report apply to all nations. It is incumbent upon every state to affirmatively guarantee respect for religious freedom and all human rights

within its borders and also to remain vigilant in holding other states accountable to the broader international community of nations.

### 1) Advancing Religious Freedom at Home

The primary responsibility of each state is to ensure proper safeguards for the protection of religious freedom and related human rights to its own citizens. Thus, each state should:

- \*Cease passive or active disinformation, discrimination or persecution of members of any faith tradition;
- \*Review, repeal or revise legislation impacting religious freedom to ensure that they meet international standards;
- \*Focus on the need for openness and transparency of its legislative, judicial, and law enforcement system;
- \*Evaluate enforcement policies and practices to make sure they conform to international standards;
- \*Provide training for the police and the judiciary focusing on religious freedom;
- \*Encourage dialogue between dominant religious institutions and minority traditions in order to reduce tensions and increase understanding;
- \*Establish communication liaison with religious groups operating within the nation;
- \*Encourage and facilitate dialogue with non-governmental organizations on religious freedom;
- \*Educate citizens about the importance of freedom, human rights, tolerance, and respect for other religions.

### 2) Advancing Religious Freedom Internationally.

There are practical measures that nations can take to help promote religious liberty globally:

- \*Work multilaterally to strengthen international religious freedom laws;
- \*Establish a special rapporteur or commission to monitor the development of religious liberty in other countries in the region and globally;
- \*Issue instructions to diplomatic posts to give more attention to religious freedom issues;

\*Train diplomats in religious liberty issues to increase their awareness of the problems and enable them to be more effective and creative in finding solutions;

\*Take into account the increasing role of religion in internal conflicts by asking their ambassadors and ministries of foreign affairs to report on developments regarding religious rights in other countries;

\*Inform international trade delegations of the positive role they can play in raising religious liberty constructive measures; and,

\*Maintain a liaison with international non-governmental organizations specializing in monitoring religious liberty and human rights organizations.

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## Appendix

### Country Summaries

As noted above, the goal of all states in the matter of religious rights should be freedom. Every state should work to ensure that all religions, regardless of size or belief, face a level playing field and that all of the rights and freedoms described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are available equally to everyone. The purpose of this report is to assist states in this task by offering an analysis of the issues and trends surrounding violations of religious freedom in the world today. We wish to provide a practical framework for understanding how and why violations of religious liberty occur and some tools to begin addressing these violations.

In this section we have included brief overviews of the situation in selected countries. These country reports are not intended to be exhaustive or comprehensive, but to draw attention to specific concerns and illustrate the preceding analysis. Many countries where persecution or discrimination of varying degrees is common have not been included in this report. This is not intended to reflect a lack of concern on the part of WEF for what is happening in these countries. For an in-depth analysis of the situation in a particular country, we would refer the reader to one of many excellent sources that detail the full extent of violations of religious human rights throughout the world. The Helsinki Commission, the Oslo-based Forum 18, and the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom are all examples of excellent resources in this area. In particular, for a perspective on the situation in China, Sudan, and Russia, we would refer the reader to the Staff Memorandum, Religious Freedom in Sudan, China, and Russia, issued with the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom's Annual Report dated May 1, 2000.

## Examples of Improvement

The following are examples of states where rule of law is taking root in a constructive way. They are using positive changes in their constitutional and legal frameworks to move toward the rule of law in human rights generally and in religious liberty specifically. Each has made great strides but needs to remain vigilant in the implementation of rule of law on these crucial issues.

### Albania

Albania provides an excellent example of a nation with a long Muslim tradition that has made tremendous improvement in the past decade on human rights generally and religious liberty specifically. No nation in Europe had a worse record from 1960 until 1990 on these issues during a time when Albania was a totally closed society. In 1967, under its dictator Enver Hoja (1948-85), Albania became the first European nation in history to declare "atheism" as its official religion. The state destroyed virtually all churches and mosques and killed or incarcerated almost all clergy.

After Hoja's death in 1985, Albania began to move away from the worst forms of active persecution. After the introduction of democracy in 1991, Albania opened its doors to the outside world and permitted all faith traditions to rebuild within its borders. In 1996, the Helsinki Commission co-sponsored a conference on the "Rights of Religious Minorities" with all major traditions participating, including the Muslim, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant. The co-chairman of the conference was Professor Rexhep Meidani, who became Albania's President in July, 1997.

On November 22, 1998 Albania adopted a new Constitution by referendum which contains multiple references to and protections of religious freedom.

The Preamble to the Constitution provides:

We, the people of Albania, proud and aware of our history, with responsibility for the future, and with faith in God and/or other universal values, establish this Constitution.

In March, 2000, President Meidani issued a statement entitled, Finding Common Ground, where he stated:

Albania has established a "level playing field" for fundamental human rights enjoyed by everyone regardless of the religious or ethnic traditions. Current Albanian leaders recognize a universal principle common to the world's major religions and philosophies often referred to as "the Golden Rule," "the Good

Neighbor Rule" or the "Royal Law." We believe that all leaders, including religious institutions, who are truly interested in building a civil society should focus on what brings people together rather than what drives them apart. It can begin with teaching the Golden Rule at every opportunity.

In February 2001 the Council of Ministries' Committee on the Cults convened an international panel to discuss alternatives to structure relations between the government and religious communities. The goal is to ensure a level playing field and the implementation into law of the universal principle of the Golden Rule.

## Bulgaria

Bulgaria provides an example of a nation with a dominant Eastern Orthodox tradition making significant progress in human rights generally and religious liberty in particular. During the 45-year communist regime, Bulgaria was often referred to as the "16th Soviet Republic" because of its harsh allegiance to the Marxist-Leninist dogma that religion is "the opiate of the masses."

The return to normalcy began after the "silent revolution" in November 1989, when the communist regime was removed. In 1991 the National Assembly of Bulgaria adopted a new Constitution where, along with other basic human rights, the freedom of religion is guaranteed. Church properties that were nationalized under the communist regime have been returned and restrictions on religious activities have been lifted. These positive changes impact not only the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, but virtually all other faith traditions as well. The atmosphere created by these newly acquired freedoms has generated certain tensions between traditional and "nontraditional" faiths.

Taking these issues into account, the Bulgarian National Assembly has taken some constructive steps recently including proposing a new law on how religious groups relate to the government. The Chairman of the Human Rights and Denomination Committee of the National Assembly, Ivan Sungarsky, wrote about the law in November, 2000, stating:

It establishes a new liberal regime of registration of religious organizations. All faiths are declared to be equal. The recognition of the Eastern Orthodox religion as the traditional faith of the Bulgarian people does not give the Bulgarian Orthodox Church any special status or monopoly, but is simply a well-deserved acknowledgment of its historic merits.

The new law provides safeguards against using religion for political purposes. We seek to apply the well-known Golden Rule: "Do to others what you would want them to do to you."

It is expected that the National Assembly will pass the law in 2001.

## Mongolia

Mongolia is an excellent example of a former communist nation with a Buddhist tradition making great progress in human rights generally and religious freedom specifically. In its region, no nation has made more progress since the demise of communism than Mongolia. Mongolia has a long history of religious tolerance. Even Genghis Khan, who reportedly believed in one God, was tolerant of all faiths he conquered. Likewise, the mother of Kublai Khan was a Christian and Genghis Khan's grandson, Monk Khan, asked the Pope to send 100 monks to Mongolia.

During the 65-year communist regime, the government sought to banish all forms of religious worship, including the execution of 100,000 Buddhist monks in the 1930's. With the opening of the country following the 1990 democratic changes, religious groups began to arrive to provide humanitarian assistance and open new churches. The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally respects this right in practice.

A law regulating the relationship between church and state was passed in 1993 and amended in 1995. While the Ministry of Justice is responsible for the registration of religious communities, local assemblies have the authority to approve applications at the local level. In 1998, at a seminar on the "Rights of Religious Minorities," many of the keynote speakers reaffirmed the importance of the Golden Rule, as expressed by Buddha, "Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful."

Some religious groups have encountered harassment by local officials during the registration process. At the national level, however, efforts have been focused on guaranteeing a "level playing field" for all faith traditions.

## The Global Problem of Passive Disinformation

As discussed in the analysis above, passive disinformation takes place to varying degrees in all countries. In this light all states fall under Jesus' admonition to the religious leaders of his time who had caught a woman engaged in adultery. When they leveled their accusations against her and asked him what should be done about her, Jesus said: "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." It is incumbent upon the political, religious, and other leaders of every country to encourage tolerance and respect for minorities and to foster an atmosphere in which the dissemination of lies, disinformation, and incitement against religious minorities is unacceptable. Freedom and tolerance require constant vigilance and responsibility.

## Example of Active Disinformation

## France

Religious liberty advocates in Europe and the U.S. are concerned about a proposed French law to imprison religious "proselytizers, sects and cults" for up to two years for "mental manipulation" of the public. The bill aims to limit the spread of what French officials have called 173 "dangerous sects" in France. These include Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientologists, among many others. Power is given to the state to dissolve religious groups and impose sentences of up to 5 years and fines of up to 500,000 French Francs. The bill, which now awaits Senate approval, aims to stamp out dangerous sects and cults in France, but it never defines them adequately. Representatives of many religious groups in France have expressed concern that if this bill is passed it will encourage discrimination on the basis of religious faith.

"This is something that we are going to have to watch closely," a senior U.S. State Department official said last year. "In a worst-case scenario, it could turn out to be a nasty piece of legislation." In July French Justice Minister Elisabeth Guigou defended the bill by calling it "a significant advance giving a democratic state the legal tool to efficiently fight groups abusing its core values." The push in Western Europe to form "sect commissions" and legislate against sects began after the 1994 and 1995 suicides and murders by Solar Temple members in Canada, Switzerland and France. France, Germany, Austria and Belgium set up commissions to list sects, which in Belgium include even the YWCA. But France is the first to propose making so-called religious "mind control" a crime. No mechanism for dialogue with the government seems to exist, nor does there appear to be a possibility of being removed from the lists.

The final disposition of this bill is particularly important because of the precedent that France, as a founding member of the European Union, will set for states in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, who are still in the process of formulating legislation which regulates religious groups and defines religious freedom.

## Example of Passive Discrimination

### Greece

For over 60 years, Greece has required that religion be indicated on national identity cards. As a result, evangelical Protestants and other religious minorities commonly face discrimination in employment and elsewhere in the private sector. In recent months, however, the Prime Minister has taken steps to remove the religion entry from the state identity cards. This would help greatly in alleviating this type of discrimination. Furthermore, in a recent case in Thessalonica, the prosecutor called on the presiding judge to support modernization of Greek law to harmonize it with the decisions of the European Court on Human Rights.

## Example of Active Discrimination

### Nigeria

Sharia, the Islamic legal code, is being introduced in many of Nigeria's northern states. This law seeks to regulate the lives of the people living in these states irrespective of their religious faith, in accordance with the injunctions of the Muslim holy book, the Koran.

During February and May 2000, there was serious fighting over this issue in clashes between Muslims and Christians in Kaduna, the capital city of northern Nigeria's Kaduna state. About 875 Christians were killed in Kaduna alone during the religious conflicts, according to the Nigerian Bible Society. In addition, they said 800 churches were burned or demolished.

Last year the Christian community said repeatedly that the government of Nigeria must address the issue of Sharia, since it is detrimental to the peaceful co-existence of the different religions in the country. The Christians insist that implementation of Sharia in most northern states is aimed at the gradual Islamization of the whole country. In spite of the high casualty figures, the Kaduna state government still plans to fully implement the Islamic legal system.

On 15 February 2001, the Sharia bill was signed into law in Bauchi state. Muslim legislators said that "only the Muslim Ummah (community) will be affected by the Islamic law."

However, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) said the claim that Christians will not be affected by Sharia, or that it is only meant for Muslims, is a farce. They said Sharia has been applied to Christians even more than to Muslims in the other states in northern Nigeria that have adopted it.

The campaign by northern Nigerian states to establish Islamic law has brought new Muslim-Christian conflicts to a country already plagued by religious, ethnic, economic and political problems. The population is evenly divided between Christians and Muslims, but the desire for Islamic law in the predominantly Muslim north threatens to forever dash any hope of national unity.

## Examples of Passive Persecution

### Egypt

Violence and mayhem between Christians and Muslims erupted between December 31, 1999, and January 2, 2000, leaving 21 Christians dead and 260 of their homes and businesses destroyed or looted in El-Kosheh and surrounding villages in southern Egypt. The only Muslim victim was shot dead accidentally by a fellow Muslim.

On February 5, 2001, the Egyptian judge hearing the widely publicized case delivered his verdict. Instead of convicting the Muslim murder suspects accused of killing the 21 Christians in the massacre, the judge pointedly accused the local Coptic Christian clergy of responsibility for the three-day rampage.

In his opening statement, Judge Mohammed Affify accused three priests in the predominantly Christian village of failing to put a stop to the rioting. The story was buried in the back pages of Egyptian newspapers, and reaction from the Coptic community was predictably angry.

The local Coptic Bishop Wissa denounced the blanket acquittal of all the murder suspects as an open incitement to more killings and injustice. All the murderers were acquitted. That means Muslims are encouraged to kill Christians. They are being told, "Go ahead. Kill Coptic Christians," he said. "This verdict means that the life of Christians has no value."

Egypt's ancient Christian minority is officially accorded religious freedom, but in reality often suffers such discrimination, and its rights are frequently neglected by the courts. Complaints of official disinformation and discrimination include omission of the country's Christian history in school curricula and bias in employment, including government positions.

## India

India is the world's largest democracy and guarantees religious freedom in its Constitution. In March 1998 the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party mustered enough votes in the national elections to put together a ruling coalition, led by PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Since then there has been a rapid escalation of persecution against both Christians and Muslims in India, which is at least 80% Hindu. This discrimination has taken the form of both passive persecution and active disinformation.

From 1964 to 1996 (data prior to 1964 is not available) there were only 38 reported instances of Hindu violence against Christians. Even in 1997, not more than 15 instances were reported. However, since March 1998 when the BJP came to power, nearly 300 attacks against Christians have been reported. Several go unreported as Christians are afraid of going to the police for fear of repercussions. Threats, intimidation and abuse by Hindu radicals are now a regular feature against Christians, and some of the violence has been quite bad: Missionaries have been stripped naked and paraded through the streets, even burned alive, nuns have been gang-raped, churches have

been razed to the ground and the Bible and other religious literature have been burned. The perpetrators are rarely apprehended or punished, as local police tend to ignore such incidents.

The BJP is one of a number of offshoots of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), an organization that espouses a return to Hindu values and cultural norms. Members of the BJP, the RSS, and other affiliated organizations have been repeatedly implicated in incidents of violence and discrimination against Christians and Muslims. Apart from the increase in their numbers, the area of incidence of such attacks is also suggestive: most of the attacks have occurred in states ruled by either the BJP or its allies - Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana. That in none of these states governments gave adequate protection to the victims perhaps accounts for the increase in their incidence. Most BJP leaders, including Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and Home Minister L.K. Advani, also are RSS members.

The RSS is still trying to overturn the nation's founding secular values, which were drafted in the 1950 Constitution, and guarantee "the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion." The RSS believes that all non-Hindu Indians should ultimately be converted back to Hinduism and reintegrated into the Hindu nation, thus purifying India from "foreign contaminants".

The two following examples, which took place this year, are typical of the pattern: 1) On February 25 a fundamentalist Hindu mob attacked a church in the eastern Indian state of Tripura as Christians were attending the Sunday service, forcing the pastor to stop the service. Fundamentalist Hindus are adamant that they will not allow anyone to worship in the Krishnanagar Baptist Church. 2) Members of the radical Hindu group the Bajrang Dal beat two Christian workers, David Massey and Simon Sakria, for more than two hours on January 4 for showing a "Jesus" film in Jehra, a remote village on the Rajasthan-Gujarat border in western India.

Indian Muslims have also been victimized. The BJP has backed the construction of a new Hindu temple on the site of a Muslim mosque in Ayodhya that was destroyed by a Hindu mob in 1992. Some 3,000 people were killed in nation-wide riots that followed the destruction of the 16<sup>th</sup> century mosque.

## Pakistan

Pakistan is an interesting example of "passive persecution." This is seen in two ways. First, acts of discrimination and violence are routinely perpetrated against Pakistan's Christian minority, but are rarely addressed or taken seriously by the police or the courts. Second, Pakistan has an anti-blasphemy law, which refers only to blasphemy against Islam or the prophet Muhammad, as Pakistan describes itself as an "Islamic republic." No accurate estimate of the number of religious detainees exists; however, the government has

arrested and detained numerous Christians for their religious beliefs and practices under the blasphemy laws.

Arrested in October 1996, 33-year-old Ayub Masih is the longest-jailed of several Christian prisoners currently facing blasphemy charges. After receiving the death sentence in April 1998, his judgment has since been suspended, pending the appeal of his case before the Multan High Court. Masih was convicted and sentenced to hang; the anti-blasphemy law carries a mandatory death penalty. According to Masih's lawyer, his client was convicted for allegedly telling a Muslim neighbor, "If you want to know the truth about Islam, then read Salman Rushdie." (Rushdie is the famous author of the controversial "Satanic Verses," a book that many Muslims find erroneous and insulting.) The prosecution had relied on the accuser's verbal testimony alone, without providing any circumstantial evidence to prove the allegation. This is quite typical; most of those held on blasphemy charges are held (sometimes for years) only on the word of their accusers.

Being in custody poses a great threat to the detainee because of the grim conditions and hostility from other inmates. In the past seven years, five accused people have died while under custody. In a letter from prison, Ayub Masih wrote "I am sick with various diseases and have not been allowed any medicines...Being a prisoner charged with blasphemy, I have been kept alone in a darkened cell where there is no light, no toilet, and no fan to cool me from the heat. I have to tell other prisoners I am here for theft or I would be beaten for being a Christian. I have been tortured many times."

According to the Pakistani Bishops' Conference of the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), "religious minorities constitute a greater than expected proportion of the prison population and Christian minorities are frequent targets of the blasphemy laws. Prison conditions are extremely poor and constitute a threat to the life and health of prisoners." According to the NCJP, non-Muslim prisoners do not enjoy the same facilities as Muslim inmates.

There are hopeful signs of change. The current ruler, General Pervez Musharraf, abandoned his predecessor's proposal to implement Sharia law through a constitutional amendment. In February 2000 Musharraf created a minority affairs office and appointed a Christian to fill the position.

## Sri Lanka

The island nation of Sri Lanka is another good example of passive persecution. About 70% of the population is Sinhalese Buddhist, the dominant ethnic group in the country. Although the constitution gives Buddhism the foremost position, it also provides for the right of members of other faiths to practice their religion freely, and generally the government respects this right. However, there are a number of Buddhist extremist movements, such as the Sinhala Urumaya, a nationalist group that believes

that Sri Lanka should be a purely Sinhala Buddhist state. The Maha Sangha, a group of senior Buddhist monks who serve as informal advisors to the government also wish to uphold the primacy of Buddhism in the nation.

Buddhist extremists are fighting on two fronts. First, at the national level, they are seeking to draw up a new constitution that would outlaw conversions to other religions. Second, at the village level, Buddhist priests often incite mobs to attack newly-formed churches, claiming the Christians have unethically converted Buddhists. However, many pastors stressed they enjoyed cordial relations with local Buddhist clergy, and that the extremists were a minority.

Christians, especially evangelical Protestants, have been the frequent targets of violent attacks, and little is done to curb the militants who commit the crimes. The most recent example occurred on February 18. One Christian was seriously injured and 35 more were hospitalized when an estimated 100 Buddhist extremists attacked members of the Sanasum Sevana Christian Church in Nurwarawatte, 220 km from the capital. Masked men had smashed up the church property in the early morning hours, and the pastor was holding a prayer meeting amid the devastation when the mob attacked, wielding machetes. Local sources claimed mobs prevented church members from visiting the injured in the hospital, and that the extremists have issued death and rape threats to the believers if they continue to hold services.

A newly built Roman Catholic church in Hulandawa, in southern Sri Lanka, was damaged by eight explosions on the morning of January 22 by eight charges of dynamite. This is the third church to be built in the town. The previous two were destroyed by unknown assailants. A Protestant pastor in Colombo said, "Some Christian groups are too aggressive, of course, but the Buddhist backlash is primarily about their religious monopoly over the Sinhalese people being challenged." About 40 evangelical Protestant churches were attacked and many destroyed in the last four years, with a lesser number of attacks on Catholics.

## Examples of Active Persecution

### Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a good example of aggressive and active persecution. It is currently governed by the Taliban militia, who have recently created an international outrage by their highly-publicized destruction of the 1,700 year-old Buddha sculptures in Bamiyan, as well as all non-Muslim religious artifacts in the Kabul museum. The Taliban's supreme leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, has declared that all non-Islamic shrines must be destroyed because "Allah almighty is the only real shrine, and all false symbols should be smashed."

However, it is not only ancient relics that the Taliban government intends to destroy. In a national radio address on 8 January, 2001, Mullah Omar warned

that his regime will apply the death penalty to any Muslim who converts to another faith. Omar declared that any Afghan caught professing Christianity or Judaism in particular would be executed, as required by their strict interpretation of Sunni Islamic law. Radio listeners were ordered to report any reported conversions among their acquaintances to the authorities. In an effort to justify their position, the Taliban leader made reference to a global campaign against Islam being mounted by the followers of other faiths. "It is seen that enemies of the sacred religion of Islam are making efforts throughout the world to eliminate this pure religion," he said.

A large Sikh and Hindu community worships at several temples in Kabul, the capital, and a lone Jewish rabbi still lives in the city though most Jews left when the former Soviet Union invaded in 1979. It is also believed that there are as many as 1,000 Christians who have converted from Islam over the last two decades, but they have been driven underground and little is known about them. The Taliban also persecutes other Muslims. The Taliban militia was involved in the persecution and murder of Afghan Shi'a Muslims, most notably during the massacres of thousands of people in the Mazar-i-Sharif in August 1998.

The Taliban movement, which controls roughly 90 percent of Afghanistan's territory, is composed largely of Pushtun tribesmen who practice Sunni Islam. They have perpetrated widespread violations of human rights and humanitarian law through years of armed conflict and aggressive imposition of their interpretation of Islamic Shari'a law. It would appear that the situation there is worsening.

## Laos

The southeast Asian nation of Laos is a prime example of aggressive, active persecution. In the last several years, Protestants in Laos have been targeted with particular severity. In 1999, the secretive communist regime declared Christianity "the number one enemy of the state." The Laotian government appears to believe that Protestant Christianity is an "imperialist foreign religion" that is backed by political interests in the West, particularly the United States.

In August 2000, the World Evangelical Fellowship obtained several copies of the official form being used by Lao Communist authorities to force Christian converts to renounce Christianity and swear allegiance to the state. The penalty for refusal is an indeterminate time of harsh imprisonment under extremely difficult and squalid conditions. In August there were about 60 Christian prisoners in Laos.

Officials told the believers that being a Christian is illegal because "Christianity is a lying religion, it violates Lao custom and the Bible teaches deception." They also accused Christians of being enemies of the state and warned them that it was a serious violation of the law if they did not sign forms recanting

their faith. Christians in Luang Prabang province have said that they cannot visit friends or travel freely because the secret police often follow them. "Even when we are in our homes, they are trying to find something against us. If they see us traveling around anywhere, they will arrest us," one man said. Christians in Laos are usually arrested on the pretext of some unspecified illegal acts rather than for their faith, although some are detained for "illegal religious activity."

According to WEF's Southeast Asia correspondent, a substantial minority of Laos' Hmong hill people are Christians. The Laotian army is trying to contain a rebel insurgency by some Hmong separatists, and it would appear that the government has found a convenient scapegoat in the Christian faith of many Hmong, identifying their beliefs with Western plots to undermine Laos. Diplomats familiar with the situation said that the mounting death toll among the Laotian army in the outlying mountains was beginning to create a siege mentality among the communist rulers.

## Maldives

Freedom of religion is significantly restricted on this island nation in the Indian Ocean, which is a popular tourist destination. The 1997 Constitution designates Islam as the official state religion and the practice of other religions is prohibited by law. Active persecution of Christian nationals occurred with a sudden crackdown on 18 June, 1998. Maldivian security police arrested about 50 nationals who were suspected of gathering for Christian Bible studies or listening to Christian radio programming in their native Dhivehi language which was broadcast from the Seychelles. At the same time, police conducted unannounced searches of foreign workers' homes, confiscating passports, computers, books, personal correspondence, photos and other possessions. In the next several weeks 24 foreign Christians from six Western nations were forced to sign statements and expelled for life from the Maldives without any official charges. Their possessions were not returned, and the diplomatic inquiries by the embassies involved were ignored.

On the 21 June, the national newspaper, *Haveeru*, ran a story titled "Police Arrest People Engaged in Spreading Christianity," which said that "Police have arrested a group of locals and foreigners who were discovered to be involved in spreading Christianity...Literature on Christianity, in both foreign and Dhivehi languages, was discovered at the homes of the [Western] missionaries."

In the weeks that followed, all known national Christians and those suspected of having Christian beliefs or associations were held captive in the political prison of Dhoonidhoo, a tiny island close to the capital of Male. They were forced to renounce Christianity and embrace Islam. Most quickly recanted, but several women resisted the authorities for several weeks, before they eventually broke under both physical and psychological pressure. Christian broadcasts in Dhivehi still continue from the Seychelles, and it is believed that

there still are a number of "secret believers" in the Maldives, but they have been forced underground and have no contact with foreigners.

The Government observes Shari'a (Islamic law), and the president is the "supreme authority to propagate the tenets of Islam." In this case, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom took personal charge of the situation to insure that the country had been swept clean of any nationals who professed the Christian faith. In a speech on National Day (3 July, 2000) Gayoom reiterated that no religion should be allowed in his country other than Islam. He claimed that his country had been able to sustain its sovereignty only because of its adherence to the principles of Islam, and that if other religions were to be practiced in the Maldives, the country would no longer be able to retain its independence and sovereignty.

### Saudi Arabia

The Saudi kingdom has long been guilty of active persecution of all non-Muslim religious expression and is well-known for its policy of prohibiting all forms of religious worship - even in private - among its many expatriate workers. Christians working in Saudi are often harassed or imprisoned for holding prayer meetings or small worship services in private homes or apartments. Sometimes those arrested are held without charge for months and eventually deported. Asian workers are usually targeted.

A typical example follows: On December 8, 2000, 12 Filipino Christians were meeting for lunch in a house in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Without warning, Saudi police, led by a Muslim cleric, raided the Filipinos' residence, demanding to see everyone's documents. Six of the Christians were then taken into custody. Three were released shortly, but three of them remained in prison, and no one was allowed to see them, according to the Philippine embassy. They were released on the 1st of March, but were not deported. It is believed they are being followed so that other Christians can be identified. While no charge was formally brought against the three detainees, it is believed that they were arrested for "illegal religious activities," as two of the three who were released earlier said they were forced to sign Arabic documents stating they would never again meet with other Christians in this manner.

On 26 March, 2000, Amnesty International released a harsh report on Saudi Arabia's human rights record, noting that it has received and published graphic accounts of mistreatment, discrimination against religious minorities. "People who are arrested in Saudi Arabia for whatever reason find themselves trapped in a criminal justice system that provides them with no information about their fate, allows them no prompt contact with their families or a doctor, and offers them no hope of contacting a lawyer," the report said. In a later response (10 May), Saudi Justice Minister Abdullah bin Mohammad al-Sheikh said only that "We all know that those who instigate those doubts are the enemies of God, the enemies of religion and the enemies of all humanity. Their hearts are full of hatred."

Despite the fact that Saudi oil money is frequently used to build mosques and promote other Islamic projects around the world, Saudi Arabia refuses to allow churches of any kind to exist. After a very large mosque was built by the Saudis in Rome in 1995, the pope said that the Vatican encouraged such signs of religious pluralism, then added, "It is unfortunately necessary to point out that in some Islamic countries, similar signs of religious freedom are lacking."

## Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan provides several examples as evidence that it is engaged in active persecution. This Central Asian nation continues to intimidate its tiny Protestant church and other religious minorities. Turkmenistan is a former Soviet republic that is nominally Muslim, but has changed little since 1991.

During the past two years, all foreign Christians known to be involved in religious work in the country have been expelled. One Protestant church and two Hare Krishna temples have been destroyed and members of the Baptist, Pentecostal, Seventh-day Adventist and Baha'i faiths have been subjected to police raids and large fines.

In one case last November, police officers were investigating a routine auto accident involving four Protestant men and found a box of Christian videos dubbed in the Turkmen language in the car. They were arrested and taken to the police station where they were subjected to repeated beatings, electric shocks, partial suffocation and other forms of torture for three days while under interrogation. On November 24, the four were excused from prison terms in exchange for an extremely heavy fine - the confiscation of everything they owned. They were also forced to state in writing that this was a "voluntary" donation and a "gift to the president of Turkmenistan."

One of the men, a pastor named Shokhrat Piriyeu, had previously been labeled a "criminal" for his Christian activities. In a September 24, 1999 press attack in "Adalet," an prominent newspaper in the capital, he was named as being one of several religious minority leaders "involved in such criminal activities as illegal delivery and distribution of imported religious books and videos and conducting regular meetings in private flats."

Turkmenistan has the most repressive religious policy of any of the Central Asian republics. Only the Russian Orthodox Church and government-sanctioned Sunni Islam have been permitted to obtain official registration. All other unregistered minority faiths have been treated as criminals and subject to the whims of security police.

## Yemen

On July 5, 2000, a court in Yemen sentenced a Somali refugee to death for converting from Islam to Christianity, giving him seven days to recant. The Yemen Constitution declares Islam to be the state religion, with Islamic law the source of all legislation. The government forbids conversion from Islam or proselytizing by non-Muslims, and the prescribed punishment for apostasy is execution. The man, Mohammed Omer Haji, 27, married with an infant son, was not a citizen of Yemen, but came to Yemen from his native Somalia in 1994, and had converted to the Christian faith in 1998. He was formally registered as a refugee with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Aden.

Haji said police officials gave him no reason for his arrest except his Christian faith. They slapped and hit him, he said, declaring, "We arrested you because you are a Christian." Apostasy, or converting from Islam to Christianity, was the only charge filed against him. Throughout the following weeks, Haji said he was threatened and beaten "very badly" every night, with police officers warning him they would kill him if he did not return to Islam. The officials interrogated him repeatedly about any other Somali Christians he knew, he said. "They were beating and punishing me every night, [so] I was not able even to stand and walk and even to talk," he stated. "I know this is very difficult for him," his lawyer said. "He says that he is a true Christian, that he believes in Christ. But this is against the constitution and criminal laws of Yemen. And the judge cannot understand this situation."

Religious rights groups began publicizing the case, and the pressure became too intense for Yemen's government. At a hearing on 9 July, the prosecutor noted that "the Muslim laws of sharia acknowledge the freedom of joining a religion." Quoting the Koranic text stating that "there is no compulsion in religion," the prosecutor said this "actually means that anybody can join any faith..." The prosecutor concluded by calling for Haji's deportation outside the borders of the Republic of Yemen. Haji and his family were granted asylum in New Zealand and flew out of Yemen on the 24th of August. It is thought that there are perhaps 20-25 Christian converts in Yemen, but they must meet underground and with great caution due to the constant surveillance of Yemeni society by plainclothes security police.