

**Weekly Report of
Studies in Inter-Religious Relations in Plural Societies (SRP) Programme**

Religious Conflict

1. Saudi Arabia: Mass Execution Largest Since 1980

The government of Saudi Arabia authorities carried out the largest mass execution in the country since 1980, putting 47 men to death on January 2, 2016. According to the state's news agency, all of the men were convicted on terrorism charges, and most were members of Al Qaeda. Among those executed were at least four Saudi Shia men, including Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a prominent Shia cleric sentenced to death in 2014 after a Saudi court convicted him on a host of vague charges apparently based largely on his peaceful criticism of Saudi officials.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, Execution, Terrorism, Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, Al Qaeda

2. Iran Arrests 9 Christians on Christmas Day for Celebrating Jesus Christ

The government of Iran reportedly arrested a group of nine Christians on Christmas Day for celebrating their faith at an in-house church in the city of Shiraz. It was reported that plain-clothed agents of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security raided the church on Christmas Day and confiscated personal items along with arresting the nine Christians. Earlier another Iranian Christian was arrested with his personal belongings, including his Christmas tree, confiscated.

Keywords: Iran, Christians, Christmas, Arrested

Religious Controversies

1. Sikh group wants law to ban racial, religious jokes

The Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) has demanded for a law to put an end to jokes on racial, religious and regional lines in the country. The community wants the law to be formulated on the pattern of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes Act in force in the country as well as the anti-bullying law in various European countries so as to stop people from cracking jokes that show the community in poor light.

Keywords: Sikh, Law, Ban, Jokes

2. Somalia and Brunei ban Christmas celebrations

Somalia has issued a ban on Christmas celebrations in the Muslim-majority country after the Southeast Asian sultanate of Brunei announced a similar prohibition earlier this month with the threat of five years in jail. Sheikh Mohamed Khayrow, director general of Somalia's religious affairs ministry, said on Tuesday that Christmas and New Year celebrations threatened the country's Muslim faith.

Keywords: Somalia, Brunei, Christmas Ban

Secularism, Religious Freedom and New Religious Movements

1. IDF to permit non-religious burial with full military honors

The legal adviser to the Defense Ministry attorney Ahaz Ben-Ari has given instructions to permit nonreligious military burial should parents of fallen IDF soldiers request it. Until now, the families of fallen soldiers could request a nonreligious burial, but such requests were subject to the approval of the IDF rabbinate and could only be carried out in civilian cemeteries without a military service or honors.

Keywords: Israel, IDF, Non-religious, Burial, Military

Peace, Reconciliation and Interfaith Dialogue

2. Egypt's imams and priests confront sectarianism together

In Cairo, 150 imams and priests gathered for the third consecutive year to deepen religious unity. Each year the Exchange brought together around 70 imams and priests from across the country. Four trainings of three days each had them live and eat together as they were encouraged towards a gradual but escalating partnership.

Keywords: Egypt, Imams, Priests, Exchange, Interfaith

3. Turkey-Israel dialogue works 'miracle' for Istanbul's Jews

Turkey's Jews marked a milestone Dec. 13 with a public celebration of the Hanukkah holiday, said to be the first in the republic's history after decades of Hanukkahs marked behind closed doors in synagogues or homes. Members of the tiny community took to the streets for the ceremony, as the tradition requires, lighting thousands of candles at Istanbul's Ortakoy Square.

Keywords: Turkey, Jews, Hannukah