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

### Religious Conflict

#### 1. Indonesia's Aceh province tears down churches after religious violence

Tensions remain high among the ethnically and religiously diverse population in Indonesia's Aceh province. On Monday, authorities of the conservative province began tearing down several small Christian churches after hardline Muslims demanded their closure, citing a lack of building permits, and following religious violence.

Keywords: Indonesia, Aceh, Muslim, Church

#### 2. Palestinian Day of Rage turns deadly as tension gives way to violence

Tensions between Israelis and Palestinians further intensified as Hamas and Islamic Jihad called for Friday's Day of Rage in Gaza to show solidarity with Palestinian protesters, clashing with Israeli forces in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The incident led to the death of five Palestinians, with more than 100 others injured.

Keywords: Palestine, Israel, Violence, West Bank

### Religious Controversies

#### 1. Special Report: Battling for India's soul, state by state

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist group, wants minority Muslims and Christians to accept that India is a nation of Hindus, and is pushing some of them to convert. The group's strategy: To spread its Hindu-first ideology to all corners of India by propelling the ruling party of PM Modi to power in as many states as possible.

Keywords: Hindu nationalism, RSS, Narendra Modi, BJP, Elections

#### 2. Indian ruling party official urges Muslims to give up eating beef

After the widespread condemnation of the lynching of a Muslim man thought to have consumed beef, head of an Indian state belonging to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party has urged the country's minority Muslims to stop eating beef out of respect for the sentiments of Hindus.

Keywords: India, Beef, Muslim, Cow, BJP

### Secularism, Religious Freedom and New Religious Movements

#### 1. Driven Underground Years Ago, Japan's 'Hidden Christians' Maintain Faith

A religious group in Japan, known as “hidden Christians”, has remained closeted long after the threat of persecution had lifted. To escape persecution, the covert Christians got rid of all visible signs of Christianity and incorporated into it elements of Buddhism, Shintoism and ancestor worship as cover. Today they keep covert partly out of respect from their ancestral traditions, and partly because secrecy has become a part of their faith.

Keywords: Japan, Hidden Christians, Persecution, Religion

## **2. Kong Hee and City Harvest Church leaders found guilty: What next?**

Kong Hee, founder of the City Harvest Church in Singapore and five other church members, who were accused of financial misdeeds in 2012, were found guilty of funnelling \$24 million in church building funds into bogus bond investments. Yet, Mr. Kong is believed to be innocent by most church members and many other international figures. The high-profile criminal trial has raised public concern over the issue of religious freedom in Singapore.

Keywords: Singapore, Church, Religious Freedom, Financial Misappropriation

# **Peace, Reconciliation and Interfaith Dialogue**

## **1. General Secretary affirms churches’ commitment to justice and peace in the Middle East**

General Secretary of the World Council of Churches has emphasized the church’s accountability to the justice and peace in the Middle East under the circumstance that many Christians in the region face severe challenges. The organization aims to reinforce and maintain cultural and religious diversity in this region.

Keywords: Middle East, Christianity, Justice, Peace, Diversity, WCC

# **2014 International Religious Freedom Report**

## **1. US report: Islamic authorities encroaching on non-Muslim lives**

The 2014 International Religious Freedom Report prepared by the US commission on international religious freedom noted that the actions by Malaysia’s Islamic authorities have increasingly affected non-Muslims. This is especially in terms of dealing with the relationship between sharia and civil law; which remains unresolved in the legal system.

Keywords: Religious Freedom, Report, US, Malaysia, Islam, non-Muslims, Sharia

## **2. Vietnam slams US’s religious freedom report as not objective**

The U.S. report, citing two dozen specific cases, has criticized Vietnamese authorities, particularly at the local level, for limiting the activities of unregistered religious groups. In response, Vietnam slammed the report for not being objective and erroneous while insisting that Vietnamese people’s religious rights were ensured.

Keywords: US, Religious Freedom, Report, Vietnam

## **3. India witnessed religiously motivated killings, riots and forced conversion: US report on International Religious Freedom 2014**

The U.S. report condemned some Indian government officials for making discriminatory statements against religious minorities. There noted that there were reports of religiously motivated killings, arrests, coerced religious conversions, religiously motivated riots and actions restricting the right of individuals to change religious beliefs

Keywords: US, Religious Freedom, Report, India, Riots, Conversion