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

Religious Conflict

1. Afghan president condemns slayings of minority Shiites

Seven members of an ethnic Shiite minority had been kidnapped and killed in southeastern Afghanistan, with the act attributed to a Taliban faction affiliated to the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS). The killings highlighted the spread of the ideology advocated by ISIS into Afghanistan's Zabul province, even contributing to the split of the Taliban into multiple factions.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Zabul, Taliban, Hazara, ISIS

2. Beirut bombing: Lebanese authorities arrest 11 people, mostly Syrians, over twin bombings

The Lebanon Internal Security Services had arrested 11 people, mostly Syrians and the rest Lebanese, in connection with the bombings in Beirut that killed 44 people. The attackers had intended to attack a hospital but tight security at the hospital made them change their target to a densely populated area instead. Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah warned his followers against attacking ordinary Syrians in the aftermath, believing the attacks to be an attempt to sow discord between the Sunnis and the Shiites.

Keywords: Lebanon, Beirut, Islam, Shiite, Sunni, Hezbollah, ISIS

3. Paris attacks: French police launch raids as military strikes Isis in Syria

The French Police conducted raids in different parts of the country and arrested at least nine people associated with the terror attacks in Paris, which had killed 129 people. During the same period, the French military dropped 20 bombs in ISIS' de-facto state, destroying several ISIS military establishments.

Keywords: France, Paris attacks, Islam, ISIS

Religious Controversies

1. Muslim man claims he was fired from Bed Bath & Beyond because of his beard

A department manager at a retailer in New York claimed that his service was terminated because he was growing his beard as part of his religious practices for Islam. He claimed that he had been taunted and called a “terrorist” by his colleagues and had his work schedule altered to “justify” his termination.

Keywords: New York, Islamophobia

2. Don't 'scapegoat' Syrian refugees, Catholic bishops and evangelicals say

The United States (US) Conference of Catholic Bishops and the National Association of Evangelicals, two of the most influential religious groups in the US, have urged the government not to halt the re-settlement of Syrian refugees in the US after the Paris attacks. These comments were made after several politicians and governors urged the government to deny entry to Muslim Syrian refugees and accept only Christians.

Keywords: United States, Islam, Christianity, Syrian refugees, Paris attacks

Secularism, Religious Freedom and New Religious Movements

1. China accused of trying to 'co-opt and emasculate' Christianity

China's Institute of World Religions, a state-controlled entity, is organising a conference this week for religious affairs officials, academics and members of China's official church to “explore” the future of Christianity in China. While several “underground” followers of Christianity believe the conference aims to “control” Christianity in China, academics believe that the conference is more likely to seek ways to “align” the faith with state agenda rather than to persecute it.

Keywords: China, Christianity, Religious freedom

Peace, Reconciliation and Interfaith Dialogue

1. No religion to blame for violence: Faith groups

Leaders of the various religions in Singapore condemned the terrorist attacks in Paris and reiterated that such acts cannot be justified by any religion. They also reminded that religious harmony should not be taken for granted and believers of different faiths need to continue to build bonds with each other to deepen mutual trust.

Keywords: Singapore, Paris attacks, religious harmony

2. Move to engage wider public on religious harmony

SRP seeks to engage wider public on religious harmony through a series of events to help them understand how respective religious resources that could promote respect and acceptance of those of other faiths could be applied to strengthen inter-religious relations in pluralistic societies.

Keywords: Singapore, SRP, inter-religious relations, religious harmony, pluralism