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

### Religious Conflict

#### 1. Muslims hailed for protecting Christians during terror attack on Kenyan bus

Kenya has experienced a wave of attacks by al-Shabaab since the government sent troops to Somalia to fight extremists in 2011. On December 21, a bus, with 60 passengers on board, was attacked near Papa City by members of al-Shabaab, during which some of the Muslim passengers gave non-Muslims headscarves to conceal their identities. Several non-Muslims managed to survive the attack thanks to the donated scarves.

Keyword: Kenya, Al-Shabaab, Extremist, Violent Attack

### Religious Controversies

#### 1. All schools shut down in Augusta County, Virginia, over Islam homework

All schools were shut down in Augusta County after a teacher handed out an assignment asking students to copy Arabic calligraphy of *Shahada*. Some of parents saw the homework as an attempt to convert their children to Islam. Despite statements being issued to deny such allegations and reassure the local communities, angry phone calls and emails still flooded the school.

Keyword: The United States, School Assignment, Anti-Islam Sentiment

#### 2. Pigs' heads dumped outside Islamic school

Local police treated the incident of dumping two pigs' heads outside an Islamic school in Lancashire, last week, as a hate crime. To reassure the local public, police ran extra patrols in the area and carried out house-to-house inquiries. The incident aroused concerns among the local community.

Keyword: England, Islamic School, Hate Crime

# **Secularism, Religious Freedom and New Religious Movements**

## **1. 4 Christians Arrested In Sudan for Their Faith**

Four Christians, including two leaders of the Sudan Church of Christ, a Christian activist from an Evangelical church and a converted local Muslim man, were arrested in December by Sudanese authorities. To date, charges have yet to be filed against them. This new wave of arrests follows a devastating year for Christians in Sudan, with three church buildings demolished in October alone.

Keyword: Sudan, Christian, Arrest

## **Peace, Reconciliation and Interfaith Dialogue**

### **1. Religious Leaders Stand Up for Peace amid Anti-Muslim Attacks**

An interfaith pilgrimage of Christians, Jews, and Muslims was held in Washington, D.C. amid growing sentiments against Muslims and the resettlement of Muslim refugees. A group of religious leaders marched with community members, promoting unity and condemning extremism. Recently, several events were held around the U.S. by different religious groups to declare their stand against Islamophobia and in support of refugees.

Keyword: The United States, Interfaith Pilgrimage, Islamophobia, Refugee

### **2. Can religious Muslim-Jewish dialogue make a difference?**

The International Symposia on Cultural Diplomacy 2015 was held in December, gathering attendees from different religious and academic backgrounds. Lecturers highlighted the role of religions and the role of religious leaders in the wake of the European refugee crisis. There is a vision that world leaders should recognise the role of religion in promoting dialogue and improving mutual understanding.

Keyword: ICD, Refugee Crisis, Interfaith Dialogue

### **3. Celebrating the Diversity: Hindus to hold conference for interfaith harmony**

A conference, involving people from all religious backgrounds, members from civil societies and political party workers, is to be held on December 24 in Pakistan to pay respects to Prophet Muhammed. The conference is organised by the community of Pakistani Hindus in Peshawar, aiming at promoting the interfaith harmony. Additionally, this event also gained support from the local government.

Keyword: Pakistani Hindus, Interfaith, Harmony, Prophet Mohammed