

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

Religious Conflict

1. Myanmar president sued in U.S. over alleged abuses of Rohingya Muslims

Muslim rights activists have filed a lawsuit in a Federal court in the United States, against Myanmar's President Thein Sein, accusing him and several ministers of human rights abuses against minority Rohingyas. The President and his officials have been accused of subjecting the minority Rohingya Muslim population to genocide, inhuman and degrading treatment, among other things.

With the elections round the corner, Myanmar recently passed two controversial bills that will have a serious impact on religious freedoms in the country, especially those of Muslims.

[Source: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/02/us-myanmar-lawsuit-idUSKCN0RW1V420151002>
<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/myanmar-approves/2064264.html>]

Religious Controversies

1. Islamophobia: Key to Political Gains

Ahead of elections, the conservative government has raised objections to Muslim women's right to wear a veil pushing it from third to first place in opinion polls. Even though the courts have upheld Muslim women's right to cover their faces during their citizenship ceremony, not once but twice, the issue suggests that Islamophobia is being used by parties for political gains.

[Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/05/not-just-america-canadian-politicians-islamophobia-gains-polls>
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/01/zunera-ishaq-veil-canada-election-conservatives>]

2. Cairo University bans lecturers from wearing niqab

Egypt's Cairo University has barred lecturers from wearing the niqab (full Islamic face-veil) in class. The decision, according to the university's president, is aimed at "improving communication" between lecturers and students. In the past also there has been a huge public debate over the right to wear a niqab even though it is only worn by a small minority of women.

[Source: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/africa/21389-cairo-university-bans-lecturers-from-wearing-niqab>]

3. Hindu Extremists Order All Christian Missionaries to Leave Nepal as Tensions Rise

A group of Hindu extremists have reportedly warned all foreign Christian missionaries to leave Nepal, a newly declared secular country, following a series of church attacks in recent weeks. They have blamed Christians are being blamed for "corrupting the country," while a new Constitution bans people from converting others to their faith.

[Source: <http://www.christianpost.com/news/hindu-extremists-order-all-christian-missionaries-to-leave-nepal-as-tensions-rise-146557/#QfGzBFULxBcolreI.99>]

4. Apex court rules Selangor religious law not against freedom of expression

The federal court in Malaysia ruled that the Article guaranteeing freedom of expression should be read along together with Articles 3 (1) which states that Islam is the religion of the Federation. It furthered stated that texts that were in violation of Islamic canons cannot claim protection under the freedom of expression law. This decision came in response to a petition by ZI Publications and its director Mohd. Ezra Mohd. challenging the validity of section 16 of the Sharia Criminal Enactment.

[Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/apex-court-rules-selangor-religious-law-not-against-freedom-of-expression#sthash.Ghpj0hgW.dpuf>]

5. Christian, Muslim Refugees Separate Housing in Germany: Religion Segregation at Camps Encouraged By Police Union Leader

Amid backlash over Germany's policy to accept a large number of refugees and clashes erupting among them at refugee camps, the deputy head of the police trade union has said the country should separate those seeking asylum by religion. German authorities have not been segregating refugees officially based on ethnic or religious backgrounds. In some German states, however, refugees of similar ethnicities are frequently housed together, the Independent reported.

[Source: <http://www.ibtimes.com/christian-muslim-refugees-separate-housing-germany-religion-segregation-camps-2118973>]

6. Muslim Radicals Set Churches on Fire, Threaten to Eradicate Christianity in Tanzania

Muslim extremists burned down three churches in Tanzania last week and issued threats to the area's Christians, a leading persecution monitoring group has reported. The destruction of the churches has left about 850 Christians without their places of worship.

[Source: <http://www.christianpost.com/news/muslim-extremists-set-churches-on-fire-threaten-to-eradicate-christianity-in-tanzania-146470/#i0su90KqgvfxAGHv.99>]

Secularism, Religious Freedom and New Religious Movements

1. Uzbekistan Religious Freedom: Appalling

In Uzbekistan, religious activity and freedom was strictly controlled by the government under the Soviet rule and has continued after even after independence. The country's law prohibits any religious text to be read outside of the buildings of registered religious groups. Moreover, anyone below 18 years is banned from attending prayers in a mosque. If caught, the parents will face a fine of about \$750, which is equal to 15 months' salary at the country's minimum wage.

[Source: <http://www.onislam.net/english/politics/asia/494567-uzbekistan-religious-freedom-appalling.html>]

2. Sikhs to be allowed to wear turbans in the workplace

The U.K Government has announced that turban-wearing Sikhs now have the right to choose not to wear head protection and will be exempt from legal requirements to wear a safety helmet in the majority of workplaces. The move has been welcomed by the Sikh Council in the U.K.

[Source: <http://www.lawandreligionuk.com/2015/10/01/sikhs-to-be-allowed-to-wear-turbans-in-the-workplace/>]

Peace, Reconciliation and Interfaith Dialogue

1. Christians and Muslims forge plan to work closer together in Nigeria

Christian and Muslim groups have met in Switzerland to plan how to work together at a new inter-religious center working for healing and reconciliation in Nigeria set to launch in March 2016. While Christians and Muslims cohabited peacefully for many years in the country, the introduction of Sharia, an Islamic code of conduct, from 2000 in a number of northern states triggered communal tensions.

[Source: <http://www.ecumenicalnews.com/article/christians-and-muslims-forge-plan-to-work-closer-together-in-nigeria-34292>]

2. European churches call for unified political response to current migrant crisis

As Europe attempts to deal with the surge of people fleeing from violence in the Middle East, Christian leaders across the continent are pleading for humane treatment for migrants. They have been asking the member states to welcome to asylum seekers, especially families with children and unaccompanied minors.

[Source: <http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2015/10/european-churches-call-for-unified-political-response-to-current-migrant-crisis.aspx>]

3. Pakistan: 23 unreported 'blasphemy' cases in 2 years

The All Pakistan Ulema Council (APUC) claims that since 2013 it has intervened in 23 incidents involving Christians accused of blasphemy, preventing them from becoming major incidents. Post 2013, when more than a 100 Christian families were targeted in Lahore, a large meeting of Christian and Muslim leaders was convened and Christians were assured that misuse of blasphemy laws would not continue

[Source: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2015/09/4032430/>]

4. Humanity over religion: Muslim man performs last rites of Hindu friend

A Muslim man Razzak Khan Tikari performed the last rites of his Hindu friend Santosh Singh in Madhya Pradesh's Baitul district, breaking barriers of religion that divide humanity. Post his friend's death Razzak assumed responsibility and cremated his friend according to Hindu rituals. When quizzed about it by a newspaper he responded by saying that, "Religion should not become a barrier in friendship."

[Source: <http://www.firstpost.com/living/humanity-over-religion-muslim-man-performs-last-rites-of-hindu-friend-2449316.html>]