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

Religious Conflict

1. US set to arm Christian anti-extremist militias in Iraq

Christian anti-Islamic State forces in Iraq are set to benefit from a defence spending bill headed for authorisation by the US Congress and Senate, in the wake of a recent determination by US lawmakers, which considers Islamic State's treatment of Christians and other minorities as genocide. The new bill specifically refers to Christians as a group that should be supported. And this move is seen as a "huge step forward" by A Demand for Action.

Keywords: US, Iraq, Congress bill, Genocide, Christian militias

Religious Controversies

1. 40,000 non-Muslim migrants harassed in German centers over their religion – activists

According to a survey conducted by human rights groups, up to 40,000 Christian and other non-Muslim refugees, currently residing in migrant centers in Germany, are being discriminated against and harassed by other asylum seekers, because of their religion. The survey also showed that 42 percent of them experienced insults, 37 percent claimed to have received physical injuries, and 32 percent received death threats.

Keywords: Germany, Migrants centre, Non-Muslim, Harassment

Secularism, Religious Freedom and New Religious Movements

1. Tajikistan Islamist leaders face life in prison

The exiled leader of the banned Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan has voiced concern over the fate of sixteen leaders, who are facing life imprisonment or 30 years in prison for an alleged conspiracy to overthrow the government. He doubted the independence of the courts, accusing the condemnation of being politically motivated.

Keywords: Tajikistan, Islamic Renaissance Party, Opposition, Life imprisonment

2. Kazakhstan: Punished for worship meetings; UN appeals

A Baptist was fined in Akmola Region for refusing a fine for hosting a religious worship, and remains on the exit blacklist. Two Atyrau Protestants face prosecution for meeting in a cafe after their church service. Additionally, nearly 50 Jehovah's Witnesses from Kazakhstan await United Nations' response to complaints over fines.

Keywords: Kazakhstan, Jehovah's Witnesses, Missionary activity, Religious meeting

3. US: Lawmakers Introduce Bill Making It Illegal to Ban Any Alien Based on 'Religious Litmus Tests'

A group of Democratic lawmakers, joined by religious leaders of various faiths, have announced a bill that would make it illegal to deny entry to the United States of any alien on the basis of religion. When announcing the initiative, lawmakers and religious figures frequently linked the bill to the GOP presidential candidate, Donald Trump's call for a temporary ban on the entry of Muslims last December.

Keywords: US, Democratic Party, GOP, Muslim ban, Donald Trump

Peace, Reconciliation and Interfaith Dialogue

1. Iran, Azerbaijan 'Interfaith Dialogue' planned in Baku

An interfaith dialogue is to be organised by the Iranian Cultural Centre in Baku and the Islamic Culture and Relations Organisation (ICRO), with participation of both Iranian and Azerbaijani scholars. During the coordinating meeting, the Iranian side underlined that Iran respects the rights of all religious minorities and promotes the peaceful coexistence of them, while the Azerbaijanis stressed the necessity of boosting mutual cooperation in religious and cultural fields.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, Iran, Interfaith dialogue, Religious minorities

2. BBC's religion boss: we need more coverage for Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs

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Aaqil Ahmed, head of religion and ethics at the BBC, requires a more diversified religious output in his report answering criticism that non-Christian faiths were under-represented on the programme. During the interview with the Sunday Times, a BBC spokesman also mentioned the intention to do more shows around Christianity and other faiths as well.

Keywords: UK, BBC, Religious coverage, Diversified output

3. Church of England looks to help Yazidis gain recognition as an official religion

Senior leaders of the Yazidi community have met with the Church of England leaders who have agreed to help them gain official recognition as a religion. As a persecuted religious group after the proliferation of the Islamic State in 2014, more protection and support from the international community is required. The Church of England has initiated works on better understanding the Yazidi faith, trying to bring it back as “part of the family of faiths in the world”.

Keywords: UK, Church of England, Yazidi community, The Islamic State, Iraq, Religious persecution