

WEA religious liberty press release: Iran - Apostasy law

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February 18, 2009: [The World Evangelical Alliance] strongly condemns the systematic and ongoing violations of religious freedom, including prolonged detention, torture, and executions based primarily or entirely upon the religion of the accused, especially for religious minorities such as Protestant Christians.

WEA notes that the constitution of Iran formally recognizes Christians as protected religious minorities who may worship freely and have autonomy over their own matters of personal status. Nevertheless, the primacy of Islam and Islamic laws, in particular the recent Apostasy law, adversely affects the rights and status of Christian minorities, who are already subject to severe forms of discrimination.

WEA acknowledges that Christians in Iran, in particular Evangelicals, continue to be subject to harassment, arrests, close surveillance, and imprisonment. WEA also recalls that the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad reportedly has called for an end to the development of Christianity in Iran, and that over the past few years, there have been several incidents of Iranian authorities raiding church services, detaining worshippers and church leaders, and harassing and threatening church members.

WEA expresses concern over the recent penal code revision, and opposes the death penalty as a matter of law and policy. This law clearly violates the Islamic Republic of Iran's commitments under the international human rights conventions, by codifying serious punishments, including the death penalty on converts from Islam. Therefore, it is considered in itself a clear violation of Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which reads: "Every human being has the inherent right to life" an important and binding international document which Iran has ratified in 1975 without any pre-conditions, in addition to Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which reads: "Everyone has the right to life", and Article 18 of the same declaration which reads: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion."

WEA hereby expresses its deep and grave concerns and apprehension of the implications of the Penal Code, which sets out a mandatory death sentence for apostasy, in addition to other severe limitations and restrictions on freedom of religion and belief.

Therefore, WEA calls upon the Iranian authorities, both in government and parliament, to address the substantive concerns highlighted in this letter, and to fully respect its human rights obligations, in law and in practice.

WEA calls for abolishment of the death penalty carried out in the absence of respect for internationally recognized safeguards.

WEA calls on all democratic governments at the highest levels, to vigorously speak out publicly about the deteriorating conditions for freedom of religion or belief in Iran, and draw attention to the need for the international community to hold authorities accountable in specific cases where severe violations have occurred or will occur especially in respect to the recently passed Apostasy law that legalizes the death penalty for apostates.

WEA calls on the UN Human Rights Council to monitor carefully and call for with the recommendations of the representatives of those special mechanisms that have already visited Iran, particularly those of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief (1995).

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The World Evangelical Alliance is made up of 128 national evangelical alliances located in 7 regions and 104 associate member organizations. The vision of WEA is to extend the Kingdom of God by making disciples of all nations and by Christ-centered transformation within society. WEA exists to foster Christian unity, to provide an identity, voice and platform for the 420 million evangelical Christians worldwide.

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