

Schwäbisch Gmünd Call for Religious Freedom

Drafted within the context of the congress “Remember the Martyrs - Persecution of Christians Today” which took place at Schwäbisch Gmünd in Germany from 22-25 November 2009 with more than 200 individuals and 11 organisations from Germany and beyond in attendance.

Introduction

We wish to make our voice heard.

The signatories of this document – private individuals and representatives of organisations – are well acquainted with current issues concerning human rights and religious freedom.

This is the first large-scale meeting of its kind attended by the undersigned, commissioned by their respective German-based and internationally active organisations and Christian agencies. The special weight and importance of this appeal therefore lies in the newly found unanimity among such a variety of organisations, Christian agencies and individuals engaged in advocacy. More than any other forum, the participants in this congress have special insight into the human rights situation and in particular into religious freedom issues of individuals, as well as into the restriction of the activities of Christian churches internationally. In the course of the congress, various specific cases were reported by the organisations present and by some individuals affected.

The participants of the congress unanimously agree on the following: The protection of religious freedom is essential for living together in human dignity and peaceful co-existence of nations. Granting freedom of religion and conscience will contribute to the easing of tensions in the “clash of cultures”.

Affirmations

1. We explicitly welcome the fact that the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, in its “Report of the Federal Government on its Human Rights Policy in the Context of Foreign Relations

and other Areas of National Policy” (Bericht der Bundesregierung über die Menschenrechtspolitik in den auswärtigen Beziehungen und in anderen Politikbereichen) expresses its essential appreciation of the themes of human rights and religious freedom.

2. We explicitly welcome the fact that the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany maintains the office of a “Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Aid” (Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für Menschenrechtspolitik und Humanitäre Hilfe) and we wish to express our hope that the tasks and authority of the Commissioner will be maintained and even expanded.
3. We have taken note of the resolution of the Bundestag (Lower House of the German Parliament) dated 31 January 2007 concerning ”Solidarity with persecuted Christians and other persecuted religious minorities”, which is the only document of this kind worldwide, and we do warmly welcome its content.
4. Furthermore we wish to explicitly express our appreciation of the fact that the Federal Government plays an active role in the Resolution on the “Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief”, which is being introduced by the European Union into the United Nations General Assembly and its Human Rights Council since 2004.
5. We have taken note and wish to express our appreciation of the fact that the Federal Government of Germany is involved in advocating elementary human rights in many places within the international context: minority rights, human rights for all in general and religious freedom for adherents of all religions, among others for Christians. We welcome the fact that this is specifically mentioned as a goal of government in the new coalition agreement of the 17th Legislature and we would appreciate continued and increased efforts on the part of the German government in this regard.

Positions

6. We, the undersigned Christians, herewith publicly proclaim our solidarity with Christians of all countries, languages and cultures, particularly with Christians and Christian churches which are

experiencing various forms of religious intolerance or discrimination.

7. We respect the various cultures which have developed among the different religions and nations of the earth. We are convinced that religious freedom of individual citizens as well as the unrestricted liberty to change one's religious adherence, is an essential prerequisite for living together in human dignity and for the peaceful co-existence of nations and peoples.

Appeals

8. We appeal to the Federal Government to further strengthen their efforts to protect human rights within the international context. In view of the fact that Christians are the most severely persecuted religious group globally, we appreciate if more of a focus is placed on human rights violations against Christians. Moreover, a change of religious adherence from other religions to Christianity as any other change of religious adherence should be possible without any danger anywhere in the world.
9. We appeal to the German Government, within the framework of its reports on the human rights situation, to additionally document and investigate in all countries the legal framework and the violations of the legal right to change religious adherence. We are firmly convinced: some specific issues requiring urgent action in order to protect elementary human rights will thus become evident. The organisations participating in this congress herewith declare their willingness to contribute information and documentation to the reports, if necessary.
10. We appeal to the Federal Government of Germany to investigate whether it would not be more conducive to split in two the "Report of the Federal Government on Human Rights Policy in the Context of Foreign Relations and other Areas of National Policy", as is being done in other countries (for example in the USA which annually publishes both an "International Religious Freedom Report" and "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices"). One report should deal with the question of human rights in general and a further report should deal with religious freedom. Both matters are so important and complex and are characterized by issues requiring different actions that it seems to

be expedient to investigate and document them in two separate reports.

Schwäbisch Gmünd, 23 November 2009

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Authorized translation by the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF)