



YEPP Resolution: Protection of Religious Freedom

Recognizing:

- The values of religious freedom are universal, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- The vast majority of the world's population has some religious belief or identification. The right to believe or not to believe, without fear of government interference or restriction, is a basic human right. It provides an essential foundation for a society based on human dignity, robust civil society, and sustainable democracy. This principle holds a central place in the European culture, values, and history. It is also a global concern, articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Governments and civil society must work in tandem to respect the rights of every person in matters of conscience and to ensure respect for religious freedom and tolerance. Governments have a duty to provide a legal framework in which all individuals can practice their faith openly and participate fully and equally in public life.
- Freedom of religion and conscience is a source of stability for all countries.
- Restrictions of religious freedom significantly contribute to the growth of dangerous fundamentalism.
- Restrictions of religious freedom contributes to create ethnic tensions and impede the process of reconciliation, even in areas with a long time history of religious communities coexistence.
- Pakistan's blasphemy laws, which carry the death sentence for insulting Islam, are seen as a pretext for violence against moderate Muslims and non-Muslims. The killing of Salman Taseer - on January 4, 2011 - the prominent governor of Punjab Province, was another grim reminder of the risks that Pakistani leaders take to oppose religious extremists. He recently took up a campaign to repeal Pakistan's contentious blasphemy laws, which were passed under General Zia as a way to promote Islam and unite the country. The laws have been misused to convict minority Pakistanis as the Islamic forces unleashed by the general have gathered strength. The laws prescribe a mandatory death sentence for anyone convicted of insulting Islam. Mr. Taseer's death will serve as a chilling warning to any politician who speaks out against the religious parties and their agenda and will certainly end immediate attempts to amend the blasphemy laws, politicians said. During 2010, in Pakistan 29 Christians have been killed.
- The episodes of violence during the last months, are tragic confirmation that the phenomenon of religious intolerance, especially against Christians, has taken on an intensity and far too serious and worrying dimensions.

- In Egypt, the Egyptian Coptic community has been beset by violence in recent months. A suicide bomber killed 21 Coptic Christians and injured nearly 100 others by outside a church in Alexandria on New Year's Eve. One year ago, almost in the same period - on January 6 - a gunman Muslim killed seven people following a Christmas mass in the town of Nag Hammadi, on the Eve of Coptic Christmas 2010. In November, Egyptian police fatally shot two young Coptic Orthodox Christian men who were demonstrating for the right to build a new church.
- In northern Nigeria, attacks on two churches by Muslim sect members killed 6 people, and a staggering approximate 2,000 Christians lost their lives in riots caused by Muslim extremists the area. In central Nigeria, a region violently divided between Christians and Muslims, on Christmas Eve a Muslim sect attacked churches with deadly explosives bombings, killed 32 people and injured at least 74.
- In the Philippines, which has the largest Catholic population in Asia, eleven people were injured by a bombing during Christmas Mass in a police chapel. The attack took place on Jolo island, a stronghold of al-Qaida linked militants.
- In Iraq, Christians have faced repeated violence by militants intent on driving them out of the country. At Our Lady of Salvation church in Baghdad, bits of dried flesh and blood remained stuck on the ceiling, grim reminders of the Oct. 31 attack during Mass that killed 68 people.
- In North Korea a group of 23 Christians has been discovered in May 2010 by the police. Bibles and other Christian literature have been found and possession of Christian materials is a crime punishable by death. Three people were publicly executed, and the others disappeared within the infamous Yodok Prison camp. In this country it is forbidden to build churches or to worship in homes.
- According to United State report year, 2010, 75% of religiously-motivated violence in the world was against Christians.
- Addressing the issue of Christians' religious freedom in the world is not simply to defend the interests of a category. Religious freedom is an objective factor of the recognition of human rights. The violence against Christians in the world represents a wound and a challenge to dignity. Addressing the religious freedom of Christians means, first of all, dealing with a major emergency of our time.
- The European Union can not remain indifferent to what has been happening over recent months. The succession of attacks is yet another sign of the urgent need for the governments of countries that do not respect the religious freedom to adopt effective measures for the protection of religious minorities, despite the difficulties and dangers.

Acknowledging that:

- Religious freedom can be restricted in a variety of ways, from the overt to the subtle. The five categories below provide an analytic framework for recognizing the range of limitations on religious freedom.
 - 1) Authoritarian governments. The most severe abuses take place under authoritarian governments. Such governments seek to control all religious thought and expression as part of a more comprehensive determination to control all aspects of political and civic life. These governments regard some religious groups as enemies of the state because they hold religious beliefs that may challenge loyalty to the

rulers. Some governments cite concerns about political security as a basis to repress peaceful religious practice.

2) Hostility toward non-traditional and minority religious groups. Serious abuses occur when there is state hostility toward non-traditional and minority religious groups. While not exerting full control over these groups, some governments intimidate and harass religious communities and tolerate societal abuses against them. In severe cases governments may demand that adherents renounce their faith or force them to relocate or flee the country. This report takes careful note of the relationships between religious identity and ethnicity, especially in cases in which a government dominated by a majority ethnic or religious group suppressed the religious expression of minority groups. This report includes a number of instances in which governments were hostile to a religious group because of the group's real or perceived political ideology or affiliation.

3) Failure to address societal intolerance. Some states fail to address forces of intolerance against certain religious groups. In these countries laws may discourage religious discrimination or persecution, but officials fail to prevent attacks, harassment, or other harmful acts against certain individuals or religious groups. Protecting religious freedom requires more than having good laws and policies in place. Governments also have the responsibility to work at all levels to prevent abuses, to bring those who commit crimes of violence or who engage in discrimination contrary to the law to justice, to provide redress to victims when appropriate, and to foster an environment of respect and tolerance for all people.

4) Institutionalized bias. Governments sometimes restrict religious freedom by enacting discriminatory legislation or by taking concrete action that favour one or more religions over others. These circumstances often result from historical dominance by a particular religious group, and can result in institutionalized bias against new or historically repressed religious communities. This report also highlights instances in which government adopts a particular interpretation of a religion resulting in restrictions on adherents of that religion that follow a different interpretation.

5) Illegitimacy. Some governments discriminate against specific groups asserting they are illegitimate and dangerous to individuals or societal order. They describe such groups as "cults" or "sects," thereby perpetuating the stigmatization of the groups and encouraging or implicitly condoning acts of violence against them. This practice is relatively common even in countries where religious freedom is otherwise respected.

- In addition to these country-by-country concerns, the wide spectrum of efforts to challenge the right to religious freedom extends to multilateral, regional, and global fora. For instance, over the past decade a number of states with majority or significant Muslim populations have worked through the United Nations (UN) to advance the concept of "defamation of religions" by introducing annual resolutions on this subject at the UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly.

YEPP calls on:

- the European Union to immediately take concrete action in defence of religious freedom in particular Christians in the world, in reciprocity with established practices in the EU member states.
- The European Union to reconsider providing contributions and granting aid to those governments which do not respect the right to religious freedom and do not concretely protect religious minorities.

- EU and its member states to multiply incentives in the world to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

Adopted by the YEPP Council in Caserta on February 5, 2011.