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## **European Parliament takes action to promote religious freedom**

EPP (05.10.2010) - HRWF (07.10.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Religious freedom must be incorporated into the European External Policies of the EU, by adding to Agreements with Third Countries a binding clause on the respect of freedom of religion. This is the main demand of a Written Declaration presented today by Mario Mauro MEP (EPP Group) and Konrad Szymanski MEP (ECR Group). The initiative was launched today on the occasion of a conference on 'Persecution of Christians', which was organised by the two Groups and COMECE (Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conferences in the EU).

Violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief take place all over the world and it affects an estimated 100 million Christians every year. According to Open Doors International, in 2010, the top ten list of countries where Christians are most persecuted because of their faith consists of North-Korea, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Maldives, Afghanistan, Yemen, Mauritania, Laos, and Uzbekistan.

The conference gave the floor to major witnesses of Christian persecution over the world: Mgr Eduard Hiiboro Kussala, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Tombura, Yambio in South Sudan, Mgr Louis Sako, Chaldean Archbishop of Kirkuk, Iraq, Dr T.M. Joseph, Principal of the Newman College in Thodupuzha, India and Kok Ksor, President of the Montagnard Foundation (Vietnam).

Konrad Szymański MEP (ECR Group) recalled that: "75% of deaths linked to religion-based hate crimes affect people of the Christian faith, which makes Christians the most persecuted religious group in the world. Europe cannot remain indifferent. The EU must take co-responsibility for protecting religious freedom all over the world. Today, the mass suffering of Christians is still a crime that remains forgotten. We are here to remind the politicians of their responsibilities in this matter."

Mario Mauro MEP (EPP Group) stressed that: "Religious freedom is the condition through which all our other freedoms pass: freedom to express and profess the religion in which we believe means to escape the abuse of power. This is the reason why we need to insist on the defence of this principle and this is also why we initiated the Written Declaration in the defence of freedom of religion".

Othmar Karas MEP, Vice-Chairman of the EPP Group responsible for interreligious activities, emphasised that: "Non-discrimination is universal. Freedom of religion and

non-discrimination go hand in hand. Religions are an important part of the European identity and therefore interreligious dialogue is crucial for political and European consciousness."

On the occasion of this conference, the COMECE Secretariat presented its 'Memorandum on Religious Freedom'. The text entails 11 recommendations addressed to the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council and the European External Action Service of the EU so as to contribute, within their respective responsibilities, to the furtherance of religious freedom in the external relations of the EU. The Memorandum recalls that "the right to religious freedom is so closely linked to the other fundamental rights that respect for religious freedom is like a 'test' for the observance of fundamental rights."

The Written Declaration initiated by the MEPs Mario Mauro and Konrad Szymański is foreseen to be submitted to the Plenary in the next few weeks. It will require the signatures of 380 MEPs within 3 months to be adopted.

Download the COMECE 'Memorandum on religious freedom' at <http://www.comece.eu/>

Hearing on 'Religious Persecution and Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions' ([www.eppgroup.eu/Press/peve10/eve034\\_en.asp](http://www.eppgroup.eu/Press/peve10/eve034_en.asp))

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## **Religious Persecution: press invitation to a seminar**

EPP Press Release (30.09.2010) / HRWF (30.09.2010) - [www.hrwf.net](http://www.hrwf.net) - On 5 October in the European Parliament guests from Sudan, India, Vietnam and Iraq will discuss the topic of persecution of Christians around the world. There will be expert reports presented by organisations from Germany, the Netherlands and the USA.

The Conference, entitled 'Persecution against Christians', is being organised by the EPP Group and ECR Group in the European Parliament on the initiative of Mario Mauro MEP, Head of the Italian Delegation (PdL) of the EPP Group, and Konrad Szymański MEP of the ECR Group.

The conference will take place on Tuesday 5 October 2010 in Room A5G-2, European Parliament, Brussels.

At least 75% of religious persecution is directed at people of the Christian faith. Each year 170,000 Christians suffer because of their beliefs. The total number of faithful who are discriminated amounts to 100 million.

Speakers include Joseph Daul MEP, Chairman of the EPP Group, Othmar Karas MEP, Vice-Chairman of the EPP Group responsible for interreligious dialogue, Michał Tomasz Kamiński, Chairman of the ECR Group, and Konrad Szymański MEP, Member of the ECR Group Bureau.

During the conference there will be a presentation of the report on Religious Freedom by Father Piotr Mazurkiewicz, Secretary-General of the Commission of Bishops' Conferences of the European Community, COMECE.

In two sessions, participants will debate on reports on religious persecution in the world by Berthold Pelster, Kirche in Not, Germany, Arie de Pater, Advocacy Director, Open Doors International, the Netherlands, and Dr Brian J. Grim, Senior Researcher, PEW Forum on Religion & Public Life, USA.

Mgr Louis Sako, Archbishop of Kirkuk, Iraq, Mgr Edward Hiiboro Kussala, Bishop of Tomvura-Yambio, Sudan, Dr TM Joseph, Principal of the Newman College, India and Mr Kok Ksor, President of the Montagnard Foundation, Vietnam, will give testimonies by witnesses of religious persecution.

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## **USCIRF eleventh annual report on religious freedom in the world released**

USCIRF (29.04.2010) / HRWF (03.05.2010) - website: [www.hrwf.net](http://www.hrwf.net) - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today announced its 2010 recommendations to Congress, the White House, and the State Department that 13 nations-Burma, China, North Korea, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam-be named "countries of particular concern," or CPCs.

"Over the past few months USCIRF has visited a number of human rights 'hot spots' where freedom of religion is obstructed and related human rights are trampled," said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair. "This year's report offers new and important policy solutions to improve conditions where foreign policy, national security, and international standards for the protection of freedom of religion can and should intersect. The report's conclusion is clear-the Administration must do more!"

USCIRF's 2010 Annual Report documents serious abuses of freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief around the world. The report provides policy prescriptions for each nation on the CPC list.

The 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) requires that the United States designate as CPCs those countries whose governments have engaged in or tolerated systematic and egregious violations of the universal right to freedom of religion or belief.

Further, USCIRF announced that the following countries are on the 2010 USCIRF Watch List: Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Laos, Russia, Somalia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Venezuela.

While not rising to the statutory level set forth in IRFA requiring designation as a "country of particular concern," watch list countries require close monitoring due to the nature and extent of violations of religious freedom engaged in or tolerated by the governments.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

See full report at <http://www.uscirtf.gov/images/annual%20report%202010.pdf>

To interview a USCIRF Commissioner contact Tom Carter, Communications Director at 202-538-2044 or [tcarter@uscirtf.gov](mailto:tcarter@uscirtf.gov).

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress.

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## **Libya joins the Jihad against Switzerland**

BY Olivier Guitta

The Weekly Standard (17.04.2010) / HRWF (22.04.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) - Normally placid, neutral Switzerland has been going through a rough couple of years. First there was financial scandal, when Swiss banking giant UBS was caught helping U.S. clients evade taxes. Then came intense international pressure to overturn the country's banking secrecy laws. It didn't help when Swiss voters last November endorsed a ban on minarets, drawing international criticism, notably from Muslims. Two months ago, none other than Libya's Muammar Qaddafi joined the notorious Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood and fanner of flames during the Danish cartoon controversy, in calling for jihad against Zionism, foreign aggression, and Switzerland.

Speaking in the Libyan city of Benghazi, Qaddafi declared:

Switzerland is an infidel and sinful country, which destroys mosques. Jihad with all possible means should be declared against it. They portrayed the Prophet Muhammad in their newspapers in the most abominable way. Boycott Switzerland, its products, its planes, its ships, and its embassies. Boycott the sinful infidel community, which attacks the mosques of Allah. Any Muslim anywhere in the world who deals with Switzerland is an infidel against Islam, Muhammad, Allah, and the Koran.

It can be argued this was merely the latest twist in the tit-for-tat going on between Libya and Switzerland since the arrest of Qaddafi's son Hannibal and his wife for alleged physical mistreatment of two servants at a luxury hotel in Geneva in July 2008. After two nights in jail, the Qaddafis were released on nearly \$500,000 bail and allowed to leave the country.

Tripoli retaliated by arbitrarily arresting two Swiss citizens, canceling all visas to Swiss nationals, shutting down Swiss multinationals on its soil, reducing the number of flights to Switzerland, and ceasing oil deliveries there. Nearly a year later, after the Swiss foreign minister visited Tripoli in a conciliatory gesture, Libya turned up the heat, withdrawing almost \$5 billion from Swiss banks. Before the incident, Libya had been Switzerland's largest African trading partner; in a year, Swiss exports to Libya plunged 70 percent.

Qaddafi's pique, however, was still not assuaged. He used the G8 summit in Italy in July 2009 to attack Switzerland as a "mafia and not a state" and accuse it of "financing international terrorism." The following month, Swiss president Hans-Rudolf Merz apologized to Libya for "the unjustified and unnecessary arrest of Libyan diplomats by the Geneva police." But Merz too failed to appease Qaddafi, who suggested at the U.N. General Assembly in September that Switzerland be dismantled and its territory given to Italy, France, and Germany.

And on it went. This past February, Switzerland barred 188 top Libyan officials including Qaddafi from entering the Schengen zone, the passport-free grouping of 25 European

states. The next day Qaddafi canceled all entry visas for Europeans except Britons. And on February 25 he issued his summons to jihad.

In the West, reaction was muted. The head of the U.N. mission in Geneva called Qaddafi's declaration "inadmissible." A spokesman for the EU's foreign affairs czar described it as "unfortunate." And by the end of March, at a summit of the Arab League (held coincidentally in Libya), Spanish foreign minister Miguel Angel Moratinos, representing the EU, announced that the ban on the 188 Libyan officials had been lifted and expressed his regret for any inconvenience. He made no mention of the Swiss hostage still held by Tripoli.

In the United States, Qaddafi's rant was viewed largely as a joke. Asked about it, State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley likened it to a previous Qaddafi speech involving "lots of words and lots of papers flying all over the place, not necessarily a lot of sense." Libya instantly demanded an apology, threatening to cancel contracts with American oil companies. And since U.S.-Libya trade is now worth \$4.5 billion, up from just \$60 million in 2004, Libya got its way. TV stations in Muslim lands proceeded to broadcast Washington's apology nonstop and hailed Qaddafi as a hero for making the West bow down.

The fact that Libya has currency reserves of over \$100 billion gives it leverage not only over the EU and the United States but over large international players like Russia and China as well. So it is that Libya gets a free pass at the U.N., just as, earlier, it collected \$5 billion in reparations from Italy for colonial rule.

Many experts refuse to take Qaddafi seriously and see Libya as isolated on the international scene. But not all. The French scholar and analyst of Islam Malek Chebel challenges the wisdom of tolerating Libya's bad behavior.

In particular, he said, "One cannot let this call to jihad spread without doing anything. One cannot measure the damage that such a call can do in the Muslim world, and also in Europe. This is irresponsible." The West was seen as siding with Libya rather than with Switzerland. Libya, naturally, was applauded by the 17 countries of the Arab League, which accused Bern of being "racist."

Another worrisome sign: In late March, Libya freed over 200 members of the al Qaeda-linked Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, whose goal is to install an Islamist regime in Libya. It is not a stretch to speculate that these experienced terror operatives, despite their supposed rehabilitation, could be used to target Switzerland or its interests abroad. In fact, in light of Qaddafi's history of terrorism in the 1980s, the threat against Switzerland should not be taken lightly.

By failing to condemn Libya's call to jihad, the West hands a cheap moral victory to Muslim extremists. An image from the Arab League summit sums it up nicely: Italian premier Berlusconi kissing Qaddafi's hand.

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## **Jews, Muslims worry body scanners violate religious laws**

By Omar Sacirbey

Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life/ Religion News Service (03.03.2010) / HRWF (08.03.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) - Canadian lawyer Kerry Gearin is planning to fly to Washington, D.C., this summer for a conference on

Islamic family law, but the full-body scanners being deployed in some U.S. airports make her wonder if she'll be forced to leave her modesty at home.

"When I saw the pictures, I thought, it's too much information," said Gearin, a former atheist who said she "reverted" to Islam a few years ago.

Concerns about the grainy body images produced by the scanners prompted the 18-member Fiqh Council of North America to issue a fatwa, or religious edict, which said the scanners violate Islamic law.

Muslims, the fatwa said, should instead request a pat-down.

"It is a violation of clear Islamic teachings that men or women be seen naked by other men and women. Islam highly emphasizes 'haya' (modesty) and considers it part of faith," the edict said.

But it's not just Muslims who are concerned.

Agudath Israel, an Orthodox Jewish umbrella group, has told lawmakers that scanners should only be used on passengers who had failed metal detectors. In a letter to Congress, the group called full-body imaging "offensive, demeaning, and far short of acceptable norms of modesty" within Judaism and other faiths.

Even Pope Benedict XVI has weighed in, however obliquely, telling Italian airport workers on Feb. 20 that "the primacy of the person and attention to his needs" must always be respected, although some said

Benedict could well have been calling for improved customer service.

The scanners -- revived after a Nigerian Muslim attempted to blow up a Delta flight on Christmas Day in Detroit -- are the latest clash between religious sensitivity and national security. Some religious groups say the scanners are forcing an uncomfortable choice between the two.

The scanners, which are produced for the Transportation Security Administration by New York's L-3 Communications and Rapiscan in Torrance, Calif., can detect items -- guns or small containers, for example -- or explosives hidden under clothing. The images are basically grainy outlines of the human body, but also clearly show the outlines of breasts, buttocks, and sexual organs.

To minimize passenger discomfort, screeners who view the images work in separate booths away from screening lines, and don't see the passengers they scrutinize. All images are immediately deleted, and the machines have no ability to store images.

TSA officials say customers who still have qualms can request a personal pat-down -- an option that Gearin, the Canadian lawyer, plans to take -- although a 2007 pilot program found that 98 percent of passengers preferred scanners to pat-downs, a TSA spokeswoman said.

"TSA is committed to treating all passengers with respect and dignity during the screening process," said Sarah Horowitz, a TSA spokeswoman. There are now 40 scanning machines in 19 airports, though that number is expected to grow to 450 machines across an unknown number of airports by the end of 2010.

Leading Muslim groups, including the Council on American-Islamic Relations, endorsed the fatwa against body scanners, but the issue has put Muslims in a tight spot -- wanting

to cooperate with security and combat terrorism, but also wanting to respect Islamic custom at a time when Muslims are already under intense scrutiny.

Ihsan Bagby, an Islamic studies professor at the University of Kentucky who sits on the Fiqh Council, said the offer of pat-downs "showed some sensitivity" on the part of TSA. "People had seen the pictures, and became concerned," Bagby said.

Rabbi Steven Weil, CEO of the Orthodox Union, said the scanners violate Jewish laws on modesty, or tzniut. While Islamic interpretations discourage exposure to either male or female eyes, it is not a violation of Jewish law for men or women to be seen exposed by the same gender, meaning Jews can walk through scanners if men are screened by men and women screened by women.

"You have two competing values. You have the need for security and safety, and the need for human dignity and modesty," said Weil, who flies up to four times per week.

Concerns are also shared among some fundamentalist Christians who would have similar concerns, for example, about immodest bathing suits and mixed-gender swimming. On one Pentecostal listserv thread that considered the topic, all but one person expressed worries.

"Christian morality goes to intent, not legalism," wrote one commenter, likening the experience to visiting the doctor. "The motive of the scanner is not to be titillated by the view of the body, but to provide safety and security." Buddhism and Hinduism, however, seem to have fewer problems with the scanners.

"Everything in Buddhism is a matter of intent. If the screening is done to oppress and in a way that is insensitive, then it's bad," said Andrew Olendzki, executive director of the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies in Massachusetts. "But if it's done to protect, and done respectfully, then it's OK."

Modesty is also important in Hindu tradition, but it does not trump a serious security threat, said Suhag Shukla, managing director of the Hindu American Foundation.

"Hindu tradition is replete with examples of sacrificing for the greater good," she said.

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## **Christmas and New Year violence against Christian minorities in Asia, Africa and the Arab world**

BF Email News (13.01.2010) / HRWF (14.01.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) - Anti-Christian persecution is often focused on Christian festivals, and the last few weeks have seen attacks in at least eight countries, both around the Western Christmas Day on 25 December and the Eastern Christmas Day on 7 January. Tension was particularly high this season in Shia contexts (e.g. Iran and parts of Iraq) because the main Shia festival of Ashura, which moves with the Islamic calendar each year, almost coincided with Christmas, falling around 27 December.

The Western New Year on 1 January is also a frequent focus of anti-Christian violence, as it is believed by many in other parts of the world to be a Christian festival.

The following overview includes only reported incidents that were apparently timed deliberately to coincide with Christmas or New Year events. At least six Christians were killed in Egypt and three in Iraq.

December 16 Iraq: Two car bombs were detonated near churches in Mosul causing extensive damage, wounding nearby schoolchildren and killing at least three Christians. The minister of one of the churches said Words cannot describe what has happened ... but we will pray in the streets, in homes, in shops. God is everywhere, not just in churches.

December 17 Iran: A meeting of 70 converts from Islam to celebrate Christmas and New Year was raided by 15 police officers, and two leaders were arrested.

December 18 Indonesia: A new church building in Bekasi Regency, near the capital Jakarta, which was almost finished and scheduled to be ready by Christmas, was attacked by a mob of motorcyclists (men, women and children) who came armed with kerosene. Despite the damage, police and government authorities urged the church minister not to cancel the planned Christmas service.

December 23(?) Iraq: On or before this date Christians in Basra were warned by Shia Muslims that they were not to celebrate Christmas in any way apart from attending church. This was owing to the main Shia celebration during the Islamic month of Muharram, which in 2009 began on 18 December, with the climax celebration around 27 December.

December 23 Iraq: Two churches were damaged in separate bomb attacks in Mosul, killing at least three people. Iraqi Christians saw the December bombings as timed to coincide with the Christmas season. A senior church leader later said in his Christmas service, My dear people, your attendance to the church is the best gift you provide to our new born Child at Christmas regarding the dangerous situation of our city Mosul.

December 24-25 Pakistan: A massive government security operation protected Christians attending Christmas services. In some areas, other Christmas celebrations were scaled down or cancelled on police advice because of security concerns. Intimidating text messages had been circulating threatening Christians with a special gift at Christmas, which led to the increased security precautions.

December 25 Iraq: A mob of armed Shabaks (a Kurdish minority group) attacked the Christian-majority town of Bartilla, near Mosul in northern Iraq. They took over the entry check-point for more than five hours and tore down Christmas decorations in the shops. They also tried to enter a church in the middle of the market to perform the Ashura self-flagellation ritual inside the building. The church was successfully defended by its security guards, but four Christians including a policeman received gunshot wounds.

December 25 Zimbabwe: A cathedral in Harare and three churches were raided by police. Police burst into a communion service in the cathedral, beat up worshippers and forced them out of the building.

December 25 China: Police arrested several elderly Christians in Korla City, Xinjiang province, as they gathered to celebrate Christmas. A 71-year-old woman was thrown roughly against a police car. In another incident, police raided the home of an ailing Christian woman who is confined to her bed. They seized Bibles and other Christian literature and publicly burned them in a bonfire outside her home.

December 26 Algeria: Christians arrived for a Christmas service in the city of Tizi-Ouzou to find the entrance to their church blocked by a group of approximately 20 Muslims. The group had congregated to protest against the new church building in their neighbourhood and shouted, This land is the land of Islam! Go pray somewhere else."

January 2 Algeria: A group of Muslims stormed a service at the same Tizi-Ouzou church that was the focus of protests on 26 December. They punched the pastor and knocked to

the ground a church member who was trying to capture the events on camera. Later that evening the church was broken into. Contents were vandalised and set on fire.

January 6 Egypt: Six Christian worshippers and a security guard were killed by three gunmen during a Christmas Eve service in the town of Nag Hamadi. This attack followed threats to the bishop who was leading the service, apparently because of his protests about the large-scale anti-Christian violence in the neighbouring town of Farshoot in November. The violence was triggered by a report that a Christian man had sexually abused a Muslim girl.

January 7 Iran: Christian leader Keyvan Rajabi was arrested because he had led Christmas and New Year services at his church in Iran.

January 8 Egypt: Further anti-Christian violence broke out in the town of Bahgoura, near to Nag Hamadi and Farshoot, where a Muslim mob armed with swords and gas cylinders looted and torched Christian-owned homes, shops and cars. One woman died after being overcome by fumes when her home was set alight. Residents from the village also report that water and electricity were disconnected during the fires, and when the fire brigade arrived, 90 minutes after being called, the vehicles that came had empty tanks.

In addition at least eight Christian churches and a Christian school in Malaysia have been attacked by firebombs during the period 8 January to 11 January. One church was partly gutted, but thankfully the remaining buildings suffered little damage. The anti-Christian violence was apparently a response to a controversial ruling on 31 December by a Malaysian judge, which determined that a Malaysian Christian newspaper had the right to use the word Allah when referring to God. Allah is the word for God in the Malaysian national language. The government will appeal against the ruling.

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