



Sigmund-Neumann-Institut für Freiheits- und Demokratieforschung e.V. Dresden

| Sigmund Neumann Institute for the Research on Freedom, Liberty and Democracy | Centre de Recherche Sigmund-Neumann sur la Liberté et la Démocratie | Instituto Sigmund Neumann para investigación de la Democracia y la Libertad | Instytut im. Sigmunda Neumanna do Badań nad Wolnością i Demokracją | Institut Sigmunda Neumanna pro výzkum svobody a demokracie | Інститут ім. Зіґмунда Нойманна по изучению вопросов свободы и демократии | Інститут досліджень питань свободи та демократизації ім. Зіґмунда Нойманна |

Programme

Strasbourg, 20-21 November, 2019

Limitations of religious freedom by privileged state religions (ecclesiae) – particularly in authoritarian states but also in democracies

The situation regarding religious freedom worsened across many parts of the world in 2018/19. This is the finding in the 2018 annual report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. The intention of the report is to make the US State Department aware of the “CPC – countries of particular concern”. Unlike the previous year’s report, the list has not changed. According to the report, the most serious violations of religious freedom occur in 16 states: China, Eritrea, Iran, Myanmar, North Korea, Saudi-Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, Tadjikistan, Uzbekistan, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Syria and Vietnam. Violations of religious freedom are serious in a further twelve countries, but not so severe that they require listing on the CPC list – specifically in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Bahrain, Cuba, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Laos, Malaysia, Iraq and in Turkey. In addition, the Commission once again classified the terrorist organisations “Islamic State” (Syria, Iraq), Taliban (Afghanistan) and al-Shabaab (Somalia) as “EPC – entities of particular concern”. This year, they also added to this list the Shiite Houthi Movement (Yemen) and the radical Islamic militant group Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (Syria), which is closely aligned to the terror network Al-Quaeda.

In 2018, the imprisonment of Christians increased significantly in **Iran**. While 2017 saw the arrest of 16 Christians, the number rose to 171 in 2018. Generally speaking, the Iranian government treats imprisoned Christians as enemies of the state. Even their lawyers are at risk of being placed under arrest. Officially, Iran recognises Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians as minority religions in their own country and permits them to exercise their faith “within the legal framework”. According to the Commission, private church services in so-called home churches, private celebrations of Christmas and international travel to attend Christian conferences, however, are punishable with imprisonment. Protestant congregations, in particular, faced persecution, as they hold their services of worship in Persian and seek to convert people of different faiths to Christianity. Pastors of home churches are frequently accused of committing crimes against national security and encouraging others to change their religion.

According to the report, **Russia** further reinforced its “repressive attitude” towards religious communities. Anti-terror laws that came into force in 2016 were officially enacted to combat extremism. However, their rather vague wording makes it possible for the state to prosecute religious activities. Among the Christian congregations, the Jehovah’s Witnesses have been hit particularly hard to date by this ruling. In 2017, they were the first religious community in Russia to be banned on the basis of the anti-terror laws. As a consequence of the law, authorities confiscated church property to the value of over 80 million Euro in 2018. By the end of 2018, some 23 Jehovah’s Witnesses had been imprisoned and 27 had been placed under house arrest. A further 41 had been banned from leaving their city, and preliminary proceedings had been initiated against 121 Jehovah’s Witnesses. With the government granting preferential treatment to the Russian Orthodox Church at the end of the Soviet Union, the hostile attitude towards other Christian communities increased. This has only increased under President Vladimir Putin. Likewise, in the Russian occupied territories of the Crimea and in Eastern Ukraine, Christian congregations have been systematically intimidated and church buildings have been expropriated.

In the primarily Muslim country of **Indonesia**, which in the past has been known for its religious tolerance, attacks instigated by government bodies on religious minorities have decreased significantly, according to the report. Nevertheless, there have been increasing numbers of attacks by radical Islamic groups. In total, an increasing rate of radicalisation has been noted in Indonesia. In 2018, the government enacted a number of laws and legal guidelines that substantially limit freedom of religion. Furthermore, there are little or no attempts to oppose or counter radical groups and individuals that discriminate against and carry out violent attacks on members of particular faiths. At the end of 2018, the government initiated the development of a law that would determine how schools and religious institutions should teach religion, in order to counteract radicalisation in this area. According to a study, some 60 percent of Muslim teachers of religion held negative views regarding other religious communities. Some had even banned their students from having any contact with minorities such as Christians and Jews. Religious minorities are very apprehensive that the proposed law is likely to make it very difficult in future to gain permission to conduct activities such as Sunday schools and Bible studies.

There are not only problems in Africa, Asia and Near East. The forthcoming meeting we will deal with the topic Religious Freedom in Europe and North America, primarily.

19 November

Arrival at Château de Pourtalès, 161 Rue Mélanie, 67000 Strasbourg, France,
Tel. +33 3 88 45 84 64
and registration

20 November

8:00-9:00: Breakfast

9:00 – 9:30

Birte WASSENBERG (Professeur en Histoire contemporaine Institut d'études politiques (IEP) Université de Strasbourg: The Council of Europe's efforts for the protection of human rights and inter-religious dialogue

9:30 – 10:45: *Panel I*

Max WÖRNHARD (Bern): How to respect Human Rights

James T. RICHARDSON (Nevada): Congressional Efforts to Defend and Extend Religious Freedom in the U.S. and the Law of Unintended Consequences

10:45 – 11:00: Coffee break

11:00 – 12:30: *Panel II*

Derek DAVIS (Dallas): Back-door Christian establishments in the USA

Eileen BARKER (London): We're Happy to Talk, But Dialogue ...? Establishment parlance and courteous discrimination

12:45 – 13:45: lunch

14:00 – 16:00: *Panel III*

Patricia DUVAL (Paris): Privileges which can be granted by the States to certain religions under international human rights law and participation of privileged religions in the fight against religious minorities.

Anders JARLERT (Lund): The religious scene after the end of the Swedish State Church since 2000: Intransparency and Confusion

16:00 – 16:30: Coffee break

16:30 – 18:00 *Panel IV*

Ilkka HUHTA (Joensuu): A comparative analysis on discussions of religious Freedom in Finland and Poland, 1880-1918

Willy FAUTRE (Brussels): FORB issues in Bulgaria

19:00 Dinner

21. November

8:00 – 9:00: Breakfast

9:30 – 10:45: *Panel V*

Régis DERICQUEBOURG (Paris): A new target of French anti-cultists: the fight against the so-called "Dérives thérapeutiques sectaires"

Gerhard BESIÉ (Dresden): Framing – a new term for a traditional procedure to discriminate against (religious) minorities

10:45 – 11:00: Coffee break

11:00 – 12:30: *Panel VI*

Volodymyr KRAVCHENKO (Alberta): Post-Soviet Ukraine: national church vs religious freedom?

Wolfram SLUPINA (Selters): Jehovah's Witnesses Facing Criminal Charges in Russia

12:45 – 13:45: lunch

14:00 – 16:00: *Panel VII*

Jolene CHU (Warwick): "Only Jehovah's Witnesses Are Not Accused": The Practice and Consequences of Apolitical Christianity in Rwanda Before and During the Genocide

Tim MÜLLER (Mannheim): "Your human rights, your fundamental freedoms are in danger!" Arguments for religious freedom, then and now--the case of Jehovah's Witnesses

19:00 Dinner

Simone LIEBSTER, Testimony of a Holocaust Survivor (moderated by Jolene CHU)