

# **Solidarity and Action**

**Christians facing discrimination and threats  
throughout the world**

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## Introduction

In many parts of the world, Christians are threatened with discrimination, marginalization, and oppression, a matter that has been receiving increased global attention. The dire situation of Iraqi refugees constitutes one clear example of how adherents to a Christian confession can become the targets of threats and violence.

The Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches (FSPC) is concerned with the fate of these Christians, and calls upon its members to provide them with their help and support. The FSPC, as an organization, relies on its voice particularly at the political level and in its international relations. In its efforts toward interchurch solidarity and assistance, the Federation follows Paul in that “if one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). This edition to the FSPC Impulse series on solidarity with Christians who are threatened or disadvantaged is interlinked with the Federation’s diverse efforts involving human rights, interreligious dialogue, and international and intercultural understanding. Article 18 of the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been a guiding light in these efforts, as the article invokes the freedom of conscience and religion, and thus protects faith and religious allegiance of all. The FSPC is connected with other Christian churches and confessions at the international level through its membership and integration into the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC), and particularly with the Protestant churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE).

Forms of violence against individuals, groups, or institutions due to their religious affiliation are as complex as the rhetoric used to motivate this violence, and require an exacting analysis. For one thing, threats to Christian churches and their membership must be viewed

in the respective ethnic, historical, political, and socioeconomical contexts and exigencies. For another, one must not make sweeping generalizations when it comes to specific situations. Each case must instead be viewed within its legal and cultural context.

The FSPC Council has submitted a report to the FSPC Assembly on Christian minorities in Islamic states. We have seen that many of the observations made at that time – particularly in regard to the diversity of individual situations and the ensuing opportunities to act – have lost nothing of their significance and necessity today. This paper thus serves to build on the 2000 report.

With this document, the FSPC seeks to:

- inform its member churches on its analysis of the situations;
- provide a foundation for its own position;
- inform its member churches of the practical consequences of this position; and to
- show its member churches what options there are to act and to call on them to use these options as a means of solidarity.

# 1 Situational analysis

## 1.1 Freedom of religion as a universal human right

The FSPC underscores that any form of intimidation or use of violence for religious reasons, and any form of discrimination or disregard for the personality and rights to one's liberty all go against human dignity and human rights. Human rights, by definition, are valid for all, regardless of the individuals in question, their gender, ethnicity, lifestyle, religion or philosophy. Religious freedom does not only refer to the freedoms of conscience and belief but also includes the public demonstration and practice of religion and the freedom to convert. This protection is to be granted to everyone – regardless of their religion and where in the world they live and confess their faith. When churches support each other, they follow the Christian concepts of sister- and brotherhood and that of inter-church assistance. For our churches, this means that they need to be committed in their efforts to stand in solidarity with their sister churches that are now faced with danger.

Within this context, the FSPC extends its support to all people who are faced with inhumane treatment or have to live under conditions that lack human dignity. Its particular responsibility for other Christian churches and confessions derives, moreover, from the intersection of a commitment to human rights and its identity as a Christian church. The shared focus of all of the world's Christians on the kindness of their Lord, his unconditional love of others, and his solidarity with the weakest members of society, all form the foundation for this connection and commitment. The FSPC does not, however, demand humane treatment in human dignity only from those who would use violence against people of Christian faith. It also holds to these standards the conduct of Christian churches and confessions within their communities and in their treatment of people with other convictions and beliefs. The FSPC thus distances itself from any fundamental-biblicistic tendencies that would lay claims

to an exclusive path to salvation as the basis of their support. The Federation rejects any attempts to translate absolute claims concerning one's own religion into a justification for the denial of respect to people of other faiths. The FSPC, furthermore, continues to stress that regardless of the perceived need for action, the political and sociocultural environments of endangered Christians faced with discrimination must be taken into account before any reaction is pursued. One must avoid any unmindful action that would lead to a solely superficial solution and could even worsen the situation of those affected. Each situation should be examined individually as the FSPC indeed attempts in selected contexts (see 1.2.4, below).

## **1.2 Topics and examples**

### **1.2.1 Definition of terms**

The FSPC speaks of “endangered Christians faced with discrimination” to describe this problem as a whole. It is indeed the case that Christians number increasingly among the victims of state and religious violence, including some cases of systematic or even state-organized persecution of Christian and other dissenting religious groups. The FSPC is, however, aware that the aggressive measures and acts of violence within the framework of these current events do not solely target Christian churches and communities. The situations of this kind are often linked to a general disregard for human rights in the regions in question. There is indeed a very fine line between religiously accented rhetoric and the explicitly religious legitimation of violence. In the rarest of cases, this reflects disputes that are truly religious in nature. Religious confrontations indeed often serve as vehicles for ideological attempts to paint other groups of people as enemies, whether in political, ethnic, military, or economic conflicts. In return, political instruments are often misused to discriminate against Christian or other religious or secular groups, often with their civil rights being curtailed or legal recourse closed off.

### **1.2.2 The churches' historical experience**

Throughout their history, Christian churches have both experienced discrimination and external threats, and have perpetrated discrimination against and threatened other confessions and religions. While tolerance is central to the very being of Christianity, intolerance has also been a part of its history. This, however, undoubtedly applies to all religions. Religions are often at risk of being used for political reasons. Upholding human rights without exception can even constitute a challenge within Christian church families.

This history entails a double responsibility for us today. First, we need to look self-critically at our own discriminatory structures and work to avoid them well into the future. Secondly, we are called to recognize any threat to religious minorities in general, and of our sister churches in particular, and to act against such threats with all the means at our disposal.

There are a number of countries today that discriminate against or oppress religious groups more or less openly, even though they are obliged to uphold and implement human rights by dint of their United Nations membership. This is particularly the case with North Korea, which clearly subordinates its constitutionally protected freedom of belief to an absolute allegiance to the state and the presidential cult of personality. Numerous organizations agree on their assessment of the massive denial of human rights, including the freedom of religion, in North Korea (including the U.S. State Department, Open Doors, the International Coalition for Religious Freedom, Aid to the Church in Need, see Appendix B). Other countries that are featured prominently in reports such as these include Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea.

### **1.2.3 Current political developments**

Over the past several years, various geopolitical events and regional developments have turned into catalysts for frictions that have ex-

acerbated the pressures placed on religious minorities. This has included the Iraq War, the political instability of the Middle East as a whole, terrorist attacks in the United States, Europe, and Asia, but also the allies' "War against Terror" and the global media coverage of certain situations (such as the cartoon and head scarf controversies). The related changes of culture and perception have further fanned the conflict. Religious aspects of the conflict have also emerged in connection with the irrefutable deficits of justice in the global economic system and with rampant poverty world-wide. The debates and events in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 have also shown how strongly fundamentalist and intolerant tendencies have gained strength in all religions, and how these elements have increased their efforts at attaining political influence.

The following examples have been selected in accordance with the inquiries that the FSPC has received most frequently from its member churches and partners with regard to the situations in specific countries. These concrete cases should raise our awareness of the important nuances and distinctions among these situations. The examples add clarity to the fundamental connection between inter-church aid and Christian solidarity with a commitment to human rights. The following is indeed a selection of examples and is by no means comprehensive.

#### 1.2.4 Examples

The state of Orissa, **India**, has been one such center of religious conflict. Even though there are strong indications that Maoist rebels in the state have murdered an important Hindu leader, fundamentalist Hindus have blamed the Christian minority instead. According to different sources, up to 200 Christians have been killed, Christian nuns raped, and some 4000 houses and 150 churches destroyed. Approximately 50,000 Christians fled the violent attacks to other parts of the country. One of the reasons for the violence is that the Christians under attack are Dalits (so-called "Untouchables"), who had

close contact with other cultures as itinerant workers and servants during the colonial period. The Dalits broke out of their underprivileged situation by converting to Christianity (often en masse), and have since had access to education and even achieved a modest level of prosperity, a development that has since led to frictions with the Hindu majority. International protests against the outbreaks of violence and the appeals of church organizations have, however, led to a reaction at the national level. The general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Samuel Kobia, appeared before Manmohan Singh, who responded with a promise that the government would do all it can to protect this “part of their national heritage”. The number of refugees has since fallen to roughly 10,000. It, however, remains unclear whether the situation has been resolved on a more permanent basis.

From the point of view of the FSPC, this means that the conflict must be viewed in its ethnic and cultural contexts, i.e. that the Christians are the former members of the lowest caste of society there. The message of the Gospel is “equality of all”. This implicitly calls into question the traditional caste system and power structures. These sociocultural tensions lead to a disregard for religious freedom and to a threat for the Christian minority. The Christians can be helped by protecting their rights and moving forward with peace initiatives in the area.

In **Iraq**, it is Mosul and the Ninawa Province that have been particularly affected by such frictions, against the background of aspirations of ethnic autonomy, the balance of power between Arabs and Kurds, and the failed attempts of Christians to attain appropriate representation in the provincial parliament. Christian demonstrators took to the streets of Mosul following a vote on a law, setting off a wave of violence in which at least 16 Christians were killed, with thousands forced to leave the city. Many Christians fled to the province’s villages, as it is rarely possible for Iraqi refugees to reach

other parts of the country. Instead, they would need to leave the country, but Syria and Jordan are both well over capacity in terms of receiving new refugees. Egypt and Lebanon, moreover, offer little in the way of protection. Numerous European (and especially Scandinavian) countries have therefore increased their contingencies for Iraqi refugees considerably. Of some two million Iraqi refugees since 2003, around 200,000 are of Christian background. These can, however, also come from a variety of denominations (Orthodox, Chaldean, Catholic, Oriental Orthodox, Protestant). In the view of some Muslims, the Iraq War has been run by “Christian” nations, and is thus to be interpreted as a crusade against Islam. The threat against Christians in Iraq must therefore be viewed in light of a war that has been conducted by the United States and its allies for a number of years. The situation is further exacerbated by the activities of evangelically motivated missionaries who often lack the necessary sensitivity for other religions.

From the point of view of the FSPC, this means that there is a complex ethnic and multireligious background to this conflict. Following decades of dictatorship, the war has been destroying the entire infrastructure of the state and society, and has let loose a variety of movements vying for legal power. The Christian communities, in the region, are a) caught between a variety of ethnic and religious interests, and are b) equated ideologically with those responsible for the war. These tensions have led to a great threat to the Christian communities.

In **Egypt**, Coptic Christians make up between ten and twenty percent of the population, according to differing estimates. Although these Christians are normally able to live in peaceful coexistence with the Muslim majority, there have been a number of recent outbreaks of violence. Muslim brotherhoods have played a significant role in this: In May 2008, four Christians were murdered in Cairo, and the Monastery of Saint Fana in Minya Province was attacked

by 70 Islamists with automatic weapons, with several monks kidnapped. In November 2008, Muslims used violence in an attempt to prevent a Christian parish house from being dedicated. Although President Hosni Mubarak has spoken out on behalf of the Coptic Christians, they are in fact treated as second-class citizens by the authorities and before the law. They rarely have access to public-sector jobs, and are underrepresented in public offices, the police, army, universities, and the political world (only 6 of 440 members of parliament are Christians). Conversion from Islam to Christianity is tied to great difficulties, while conversion to Islam is made quite uncomplicated. Following attacks such as the one described above, help in fact comes much more slowly and less concertedly for Christian Egyptians than does assistance for Muslim Egyptians. This type of attack is also often made to sound virtually harmless in official reports.

From the point of view of the FSPC, this means that these events are to be seen within their individual sociocultural and religiopolitical contexts. The laws of the land are based, to a great extent, on Islamic Law or Sharia. The government is intent on attaining recognition from its Arab partner countries, and the downgrading of Christians is part of this societal consensus. These Christians can, however, be helped, for example, by respecting their civil equality, and by lodging protests against their discrimination with the political authorities.

The example of **Turkey** shows that serious forms of discrimination against minorities can be encountered in Europe as well. The country's negotiations to enter the EU have indeed often been problematic and difficult because its legal system permits discrimination against groups and minorities (such as Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code on "the denigration of Turkishness"). There have been, time and again, state-tolerated attacks on religious minorities, including the Muslim Alevi community, which champions tolerance,

as well as Christians. In February 2009, the Turkish government again refused to reopen the Orthodox seminary in Halki, which was closed down by the Turkish authorities in 1971 – despite the European Union’s call to do so. The government rejected this move as “unconstitutional”. The Mor Gabriel monastery in Tur Abdin, one of the world’s oldest monasteries still in use and a spiritual symbol of the Syrian-Orthodox Church, is indeed faced with a double threat: While neighboring Muslim villages have threatened the monastery with violence, the Turkish government has itself threatened to seize the property and turn it into a museum. The stubborn refusal of the government to recognize the genocide perpetrated against Armenian and Syrian-Orthodox Christians in 1915 adds further fuel to this precarious situation.

From the point of view of the FSPC, this means that the situation in Turkey must be viewed in its ethnic, multireligious, and nationalistic context. The state law permits human rights to go unrespected and thus paves the way for Islamist attacks. In the process, religious minorities come under severe pressure; and communities, including Christians, find themselves threatened with state and religious intolerance. These Christians can be helped if their rights are protected and if other churches are committed to pleading their case before the political decision-makers in charge.

### **1.2.5 Conversion**

In many countries in which Christians are faced with discrimination or threats, the state either tolerates or even participates in denying many converts’ rights – through to complete social ostracism. This is indeed not only the case in cases of conversion to Christianity but to other religions as well that are not conform with the state religion or the societal mainstream.

It was within the context of these situations that, in addition to the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the Interna-

tional Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) was created in 1966, which has also been ratified by nearly every country in the world, and which, as an international treaty, has the character of a universal basic law. Article 18 explicitly mentions the “freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of [one’s] choice”, even if religious conversion is not expressly stipulated. The U.N. Human Rights Committee, which is responsible for enforcement of the covenant, indeed found in 1993 that Article 18.2 of the ICCPR prohibits any form of coercion, threat of physical force, or penal sanctions for those who would change their religion. This was also extended to include indirect sanctions such as restricting access to education, medical care, employment, or political rights. An optional ICCPR protocol, ratified by over 100 states to date, provides a further means for individuals to file complaints.

News of massive violations of this agreement in international law and of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been emerging more and more from countries with Islamic majorities or legal systems. In these countries, leaving Islam for another religion is considered apostasy, i.e. as a desertion of faith in general. Some Islamic countries in fact have a specific “apostasy law”.

**Iran** is now especially undergoing a fundamental radicalization of such a law. According to the new Article 225 of the penal code, which the Iranian parliament passed with a vast majority in its first reading, leaving Islam is to be punished, as a rule, by death. In the past, Iran has executed several people who had converted from Islam to another religion (usually Christianity). By ratifying this law, Iran would join Sudan and Malaysia as the third country to impose the death penalty for apostasy.

Apostates are, by contrast, faced with indirect sanctions in many Muslim countries, as the example of **Egypt** (above) has illustrated.

The example of **India**, however, shows that converts to Islam can also be targeted as well. In the state of Gujarat, for example, Hindu converts to Islam have, in the past, been the victims of discrimination and veritable witch hunts, with hundreds being killed.

From the point of view of the FSPC, this means that we, as the church, must be extremely clear in our rejection of any punishment of or discrimination against converts and those who wish to convert. We must denounce these practices as inhumane and in violation of international law, and submit our firm protest to the authorities of these countries.

## **2 Actions taken by the FSPC**

### **2.1 The FSPC position**

The FSPC advocates unconditional respect for religious freedom (freedom of confession, faith, worship, and conversion) regardless of what religions are involved. The Federation is particularly concerned about the violence and discrimination against, and the political repression of Christian communities in a range of countries, which has become known to the public over the past several months. This position is anchored both in the values based on messages of the Gospel, such as love for one's neighbors and enemies, and tolerance; but also in the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights, which protects the dignity and liberty of each individual, including the rights of dissenters and minorities.

The FSPC expresses its sympathy and solidarity with the victims of discrimination and persecution. It calls upon all people – adherents to different religions along with the politicians and state authorities of the respective countries – to work toward respect for human rights including the freedom of religion.

The FSPC is dedicated to the protection of human rights in general, the observance of religious freedom in particular, and the guarantee of religious freedom for its sister churches in peace and with respect – all within the framework of its partnerships in Switzerland and abroad, within Swiss society, and in connection with policy makers. The FSPC also calls upon Christian churches and confessions to meet adherents of other religions and confessions in the biblical spirit of love and respect for one's fellows. The FSPC encourages its member churches to pray for all those who are discriminated against, oppressed, or met with brutality due to their faith.

The FSPC aspires to work toward such concrete changes by taking specific measures. In these efforts, it makes use of its international

contacts, its network with other church associations, and its political mandate as the representative of the churches. The FSPC plans to put its limited resources to use in selected regions of the world (thus far including China and the Middle East).

## **2.2 The FSPC's areas of activity**

The FSPC pursues various avenues of activity in translating its position into reality. This includes

- **its contact with the Swiss government**, and the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs in particular: Regular discussions provide an opportunity for advocacy and intervention with regard to the relevant authorities. In specific cases (such as the ongoing tightening of the Iranian apostasy law) the FSPC submits its views to the Swiss government or, in an appropriate form, to the embassies of the countries in question.
- **consultations, expert discussions, and conferences** with various partner institutions and human rights organizations: These provide a platform for a broad exchange of information, common action, and division of labor. The FSPC now seeks to expand its exchange with agencies and mission organizations such as Swiss Interchurch Aid (HEKS/EPER) and mission 21. These goals are consistent with the expansion of interchurch assistance, church solidarity, reconciliation, and interreligious dialogue in each field of endeavor. The FSPC also pursues a dialogue with organizations such as amnesty international (ai), Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT), the society for threatened peoples, the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR), and Christian Solidarity International (CSI). Discussions deal with specific cases (e.g. Tur Abdin, Turkey), the observation of acute situations of conflict (e.g. Mosul, Iraq), mutual advisement, and/or agreements on political intervention (e.g. the situation in Egypt).

- an **intensification of ecumenical cooperation**, such as coordinated efforts with the Swiss Bishops' Conference, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Conference of European Churches (CEC), the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), and other church networks: This provides an opportunity to reach a wider audience and to be more effective in the public arena. The FSPC plans to intensify its contacts, in particular with the WCC, in the areas of interreligious understanding, efforts toward peace and justice, and public witness. The Federation will advise the various bodies of the WCC of their responsibility to provide strong advocacy with regard to these types of threatening situations, and to engage governmental agencies, as has already occurred with regard to the problems in the Indian state of Orissa. The FSPC is particularly interested in entering into closer cooperation with the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA).
- **visits to** and invitations by representatives of individual churches. This provides an opportunity to bear a direct and living witness to our solidarity and to discuss the evaluation of immediate measures to be applied to specific cases as well as more long-term and comprehensive measures to support peace, interreligious dialogue, and legal assistance. The FSPC is now discussing, for example, the possibility of a trip to the Middle East, together with its individual member churches.
- **raising public awareness:** The FSPC's communications network, including Christian media in Switzerland and partner organizations at the international level (WCC, WARC, CPCE), provide the opportunity to enhance reporting on the situation of Christians under threat, and thus raise the awareness of the Christian public.

### 3 Recommendations for action on the part of the FSPC member churches

The FSPC views specific options for action that can be taken by its member churches such as:

- diverse **demonstrations of solidarity** with minority churches, including **visits and invitations** by members of endangered sister churches as well as the consideration of **donations** in specific cases. Each sign of solidarity and boosting awareness from outside for one's own difficult context can be an important source of strength and encouragement for people under threat.<sup>1</sup>
- the creative examination of the potential establishment of **regular liturgical action** devoted to this issue over a clearly defined period each year, possible including the use of liturgical material prepared for this particular purpose.
- providing the FSPC with **information**. If a member church becomes privy to information on cases involving infringements of the right to religious freedom, well documented and up-to-date information is necessary for the FSPC to be able to act, to intervene with the Swiss government or to encourage its international partner organizations to act.

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1 Individual member churches have indeed already undertaken their own actions. The Evangelical Church of Canton Thurgau, for example, has worked together with the Assyrian Democratic Organization (ADO) to support Assyrian Christians in the Middle East, particularly with regard to the Turkish government's ongoing attempt to appropriate the Mor Gabriel monastery. The Evangelical Reformed Church of Canton Zurich is currently looking into ways to support the Christian minority in Iraq. Churches can also participate in the initiatives of other churches such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria's work for Mosul, Iraq and Tur Abdin, Turkey.

- carrying out and encouraging **calls for prayer** in this context, as has previously been the case. One recent example for this was the letter of the agency DM – échange et mission to its partner church the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM) following the departure of the country’s Protestant president from office, and the connected intimidation of leading FJKM figures.
- pledging **support for the projects** of mission organizations and agencies. The mission organizations and agencies of the FSPC member churches, Swiss Interchurch Aid (HEKS/EPER), BFA, mission 21, and DM – échange et mission, support reconciliation projects in different ways, including a increasing number of inter-religious projects. While these groups have not yet explored this area fully, projects so far have included:

*Swiss Interchurch Aid (HEKS/EPER):*

A Middle Eastern regional program, development of approaches to supporting peace, and the EAPPI Project (no. 605.306) in particular; <http://www.heks.ch/de/weltweit/mittlerer-osten/> (in German or French).

*mission 21:*

The “Religion in Freedom and Dignity” Project, featuring:  
 Interreligious cooperation for peace in Indonesia (no. 225.1007);  
 Integrated rural development in northern Nigerian communities (no.162.1030)

mission 21 is also currently developing the following projects:

- Support for peace and understanding in majority-Muslim northern Nigeria;
- Working to protect endangered human rights and culture in West Papua.

<http://www.mission-21.org/english/20-projekte/>

*Bread for All (BFA):*

BFA has developed instruments to address religious factors in developmental work (conflict-sensitive approach), and has emphasized the need to raise the awareness for these factors on the part of those responsible for programs in the Global North and South.

# APPENDIX

## A. Networking – other actors

The following reactions have recently come from international Christian organizations:

The *World Council of Churches (WCC)* expressed its concern with regard to the intolerance and violence that Christian minorities face in India, in a statement issued by its executive committee on 26 September 2008. In the statement, the WCC urged the Indian government to take immediate steps, and encouraged church leaders to continue their dialogue with representatives of other religions. General Secretary Kobia spoke personally with the Indian prime minister in October (see above).

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/executive-committee/luebeck-september-2008/26-09-08-statement-on-violence-and-intolerance-in-india.html>

The *World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC)* expressed its concern over the situation faced by the Christians of Iraq in a 12 October 2008 statement and called for prayers for the entire Iraqi population.

[http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news\\_id=1624&part\\_id=0&navi=6](http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news_id=1624&part_id=0&navi=6)

The *Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches (FMEEC)* issued a “call to prayer in solidarity with the Christians in Iraq” on 6 November 2008, combined with an appeal to the political decision-makers there.

<http://www.leuenberg.net/daten/File/Upload/doc-8667-2.pdf>

The *Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)* supported this call with its statement of 7 November 2008, describing solidarity and intercession for Christians all over the world as a matter of course for the Protestants in Europe. The CPCE's contacts with the churches of the Middle East have intensified further since the Amman Declaration of 2006, which was modeled on the Leuenberg Agreement.

<http://www.leuenberg.net/daten/File/Upload/doc-8667-1.pdf>

*DM – échange et mission* also followed the call of the FMEEC in Actu 39 published on 17 November 2008, announcing the launch of an aid program of Action chretienne en Orient (ACO), in which DM will participate.

<http://www.dmr.ch/echange/mission/dmr/actu-2.html> (in French)

The *Union of Protestant Churches of Alsace and Lorraine (UEPAL)* released its own statement on 18 November 2008 as well, expressing the Union's deep shock and dismay, and its strong condemnation of any infringements on religious freedom – no matter what the religions involved. The statement explicitly connects religious freedom and universal human rights in a call to prayer in solidarity and sympathy.

<http://www.epal.fr/assemblee-union/au-novembre2008/o81118-contre-les-violences.pdf> (French)

At its 5 November 2008 synod, the *Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)* asked its Council to intervene with the German government with regard to the refugee problem on the EU's external borders, and called for prayer on behalf of persecuted Christians. An EKD delegation travelled to Turkey in March 2009 and visited sites including the perfectly maintained Halki seminary. Bishop Wolfgang Huber,

the EKD council chair, called for religious freedom to be protected more rigorously. A report on the visit has been made available.

[http://www.ekd.de/english/4250-edi\\_090316\\_ekd\\_delegation\\_visits\\_turkey.html](http://www.ekd.de/english/4250-edi_090316_ekd_delegation_visits_turkey.html)

[http://www.ekd.de/synode2008/beschluesse/beschluss\\_fluechtlinge\\_eu\\_aussengrenzen.html](http://www.ekd.de/synode2008/beschluesse/beschluss_fluechtlinge_eu_aussengrenzen.html) (in German)

On 27 November 2008, the *Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)* welcomed the EU's decision to accept refugees from Iraq who were particularly at risk, including those persecuted due to their faith. The CCME pointed out that the quota of 10,000 refugees established in regular EU admittance programs could be increased as well.

<http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/Refugee%20Resettlement%20%20Iraqi.pdf>

The *Conference of European Churches (CEC)* is active in Turkey to support respect for religious freedom and against the disappropriation of the Mor Gabriel monastery (see above). On 19 December 2008, the CEC expressed its deep concern and invited “political leaders to do everything in their power to protect the continued existence of the monastery.”

<http://www.cec-kek.org/content/pr-cqo871e.shtml>

## **B. Further sources and information**

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Paris 10 December 1948:  
<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

Article 18 of the Declaration (see above) declares that:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), New York 16 December 1966:  
[http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a\\_ccpr.htm](http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_ccpr.htm)

Article 18 of the Covenant (see above) declares that:

“1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.

3. Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

4. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.”

## NGOs

- *Institute on Religion and Public Policy*, an international interreligious non-profit organization for the protection of religious freedom: <http://religionandpolicy.org>
- *International Coalition for Religious Freedom (ICRF)*, a non-profit organization for the protection of religious freedom for all: <http://www.religiousfreedom.com/>
- *Reporters without Borders*, annual report and freedom index, with corresponding statistics on religious freedom: <http://www.rsf.org/>

## Official sources of information

- *U.S. State Department*, country reports, comprehensive annual reports on the state of religious freedom throughout the world, as submitted to the U.S. Congress:

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/rpt/>

Summary of the 2008 annual report: <http://2001-2009.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108351.htm>

- The EU's 2008 human rights report also touches on the matter of religious freedom. The European Parliament responded to this and passed its own resolution on the analysis of the situation of human rights in the EU:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/08/st14/st14146-re02.en08.pdf>

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004\\_2009/documents/pr/759/759005/759005en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/pr/759/759005/759005en.pdf)

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2009-0019+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>

- The Council of Europe (Venice Commission) also adopted a report on the relationship between religious freedom and freedom of the press:  
[http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2008/CDL-AD\(2008\)026-e.pdf](http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2008/CDL-AD(2008)026-e.pdf).
- Relevant information on all countries are updated every two weeks in the World Factbook provided on the CIA homepage:  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

#### Church/Christian sources

- *Aid to the Church in Need*, global Catholic aid agency; [http://kirche-in-not.org/index\\_s.html](http://kirche-in-not.org/index_s.html)
- *Open Doors*, index of countries with the most severe rates of discrimination: <http://www.opendoors.ch/>
- The *Seventh Day Adventist Church* features a Religious Freedom World Report on its website. While focusing in particular on the situation of its own membership, the report's country studies also bear out the trends found in the other reports mentioned here: <http://parl.gc.adventist.org/>
- *International Society for Human Rights (ISHR)*, "Martyrer 2007" (in German) <http://www.igfm.de/Christenverfolgung-Jeder-zehnte-Christ-aus-Glaubensgruenden-dis.991.o.html>

## Other

- NZZ-Artikel, Mai 2008; Plädoyer für die Anerkennung von Religionsflüchtlingen und für eine erweiterte Religionsfreiheit; (in German)  
[http://www.nzz.ch/nachrichten/kultur/aktuell/verfolgte\\_christen\\_1.727504.html](http://www.nzz.ch/nachrichten/kultur/aktuell/verfolgte_christen_1.727504.html)
- Interpellation vom Nationalrat Heiner Studer 2000 zum Thema und die entsprechende ausführliche Antwort des Bundesrates; (in German)  
<http://www.bk.admin.ch/dokumentation/00492/00495/index.html>
- Jahrbuch Menschenrechte 2009: Schwerpunkt: Religionsfreiheit; Hg.: Heiner Bielefeldt, Volkmar Deile, Brigitte Hamm, Franz-Josef Hutter, Sabine Kurtenbach, Hannes Tretter; Böhlau Verlag Wien - Köln - Weimar, 2009. (in German)

## FSPC Impulses

- 1 In Dialogue with Muslims – Transparency and Openness are Indispensable, 2007, 11 pp.\* *Auch auf Deutsch erhältlich.*
- 2 Grundwerte – Zehn Einheiten für die Erwachsenenbildung, 2007, 50 pp., CHF 9.–.
- 3 «Wo das Wort ist, da ist Kirche» – Ein reformiertes Wort im ökumenischen Kontext, 2007, 18 pp.\*
- 4 «Wohnung Gottes oder Zweckgebäude» – Ein Beitrag zur Frage der Kirchenumnutzung aus evangelischer Perspektive, 2007, 35 pp., CHF 6.–.
- 5 Faire Spitzenlöhne? – Für mehr Masshaltung und Mitbestimmung, 2007, 50 pp., CHF 6.–.
- 6 Rediscovering Calvin – The churches on the 500th anniversary of the birth of the Reformer John Calvin, 2009, 15 pp.\*
- 7 Solidarity and action – Christians facing discrimination and threats throughout the world, 2009, 27 pp., CHF 6.–.

\* These brochures are provided free of charge.

*Toutes les brochures sont aussi disponibles en français.*

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