



Universal Periodic Review 46th session - Stakeholders' Report

Yemen: Religious Freedom and Status of the Christian Church

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Submission by:

The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) is a network of churches in over 140 nations that have each formed an evangelical alliance and over 100 international organizations joining together to give a world-wide identity, voice, and platform to more than 600 million evangelical Christians worldwide.

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The issue of religious freedom in Yemen presents a complex challenge due to the constitutional and legal framework that hinders religious pluralism. Article (2) of the Yemeni constitution designates Islam as the state religion and Arabic as the official language. Additionally, Islamic law is declared as the basis for all legislation according to Article (3).

Yemen is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Blasphemy is punishable by fines or imprisonment. The Penal Code of 1994 enforces severe apostasy penalties, including the death penalty. Article (259) of this code stipulates that anyone who renounces Islam faces death after a three-day repentance period, with a thirty-day grace period. Consequently, the liberty to hold beliefs or publicly renounce them without constraints does not exist. The result of this framework is the absence of genuine religious freedom in Yemen.

For Yemenis, embracing the Christian faith in Yemen exposes individuals to persecution, as they can be charged with apostasy and coerced into returning to Islam or facing death. Consequently, Christianity is practised under strict limitations in Yemen. Yemeni Christians are denied the freedom to express their faith or conduct religious ceremonies openly. The construction of Christian places of worship is prohibited, as is the formal establishment by Christian churches of educational, developmental, and charitable institutions.

Over recent years, we have documented religiously driven abuse, physical and psychological torture, and even fatalities among Yemeni Christians. Some have been detained, while others fled the country.

The war that engulfed Yemen in 2015 exacerbated the plight of Christians. This period saw an escalation of religious persecution and violence from extremist groups. Prosecutions and security pressures intensified as well.

Yemeni Christians constantly fear for their lives and futures. They reside under de facto authorities that disregard religious freedoms and pluralism. These circumstances contradict universal human rights principles, international humanitarian law, and relevant covenants and agreements.

Recommendations to the government of Yemen

- Acknowledge the challenges Yemeni Christians face and respect their rights as integral members of Yemeni society.
- Repeal apostasy laws and enshrine in legislation the right to freedom of religion or belief.
- Integrate the protection of religious minorities and the right to freedom of religion in political settlements and peace agreements.

Establishing modern constitutional and legal frameworks in Yemen, in line with international obligations and humanitarian laws, is essential for safeguarding religious freedom.