



Oral Statement

Human Rights Council 61st Session

Item 3: Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

3 March 2026

Delivered by Janet Epp Buckingham

Mr. President,

The World Evangelical Alliance welcomes the Special Rapporteur's important report on how freedom of religion or belief relates to death and honouring the deceased.

At moments of profound vulnerability, the ability to bury loved ones according to deeply held religious convictions is integral to human dignity. Denial of funeral rites consistent with one's faith, or obstruction, intimidation, or coercion in carrying them out, constitutes a serious violation of freedom of religion or belief and contradicts international human rights law.

We commend the Special Rapporteur for examining diverse religious traditions and national contexts. In our submission, we raised concerns about developments in India, where some families have reportedly been compelled to transport bodies long distances, leave loved ones unburied for extended periods, or undergo coerced re-conversion rituals before burial could proceed. In certain instances, violence, police inaction, and even exhumations have compounded the suffering of grieving families.

We strongly urge States to implement the report's recommendations: to consult religious communities in shaping burial policies, ensure equitable access to burial space for all faith groups, and protect families from violence and intimidation during funeral rites.

Thank you.