

## **Consultation on Defending Religious Freedom: A Legal Perspective Colombo, Sri Lanka**

Persecution against the church in the South Asian region has continuously increased over the past few years. According to the World Watch List for the period of 2017/2018, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are within the top 50 countries where persecution against Christians is highest.<sup>1</sup> One of the main reasons behind this has been the rise of religious nationalism in the region. For instance, India and Nepal have witnessed the spread of the Hindutva ideology by extremist groups such as the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) and its affiliates and Sri Lanka has seen the rise of the Buddhist nationalist ideology by groups such as the *Bodu Bala Sena* (BBS).

In addition to persecution perpetrated by extremist groups, the religious freedom of Christians in the South Asian region has also been constrained as a result of government restrictions. These include laws requiring compulsory registration of churches, blasphemy laws and anti-conversion laws, which have been imposed discriminatorily against Christians and churches in this region. A Pew Research study on government restrictions in 2015 shows that legal restrictions imposed by governments have also been used as a tool by extremist groups to persecute Christians.

Particularly there has also been an emerging trend within this region that requires religious places of worship or religious organisations to register with the State, in order to be given legal recognition or to access certain legal rights. Such laws and practices are common, for example, in countries such as Sri Lanka, India, Bhutan and Nepal. These laws are used by extremist groups or the State, who take advantage of legal restrictions and registration processes to further persecute Christians, who are minority populations in these countries.

Considering the common trends in legal restrictions across the South Asian region, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) and the Barnabas Fund will be conducting a consultation for religious freedom advocates and lawyers in South Asia to discuss, create awareness and strategise on the below topics within the region:

1. Legislative provisions promoting and restricting religious freedom
2. Relevant case law & Judicial trends
3. Common trends and challenges
4. Political trends and culture
5. Best practices & Strategies
6. Advocacy initiatives & way forward

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/WWL2018-BookletNew.pdf>

## Conference Details

**A. Venue:** Renuka Hotel, 328 Galle Road, Colombo 03, Sri Lanka.

**B. Dates:** 17th July to 20th July 2018

**B. Accommodations:** We will provide accommodations for each participant. Check in on 17<sup>th</sup> July after 12.00 p.m. Check out 20<sup>th</sup> July 12.00 p.m.

**C. Airfare:**

Do you need an airfare subsidy? Yes  No

Please note that there are a limited number of travel subsidies available for this consultation. If you wish to apply for a travel subsidy, kindly inform us at your earliest, as the subsidies will be granted on a first-come first-served basis.

**D. Cancellation Policy:**

Full payment must be made upon any cancellation made after 15<sup>th</sup> June 2018. Submitting an application for this conference constitutes an agreement with the cancellation policy.

**E. Please note recommended participants should either be lawyers / those working in the area of religious freedom advocacy**

*Should you have any questions or need assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us:*

Mike Gabriel: [wearlc@worlddea.org](mailto:wearlc@worlddea.org) / Yamini Ravindran: [legal@nceasl.org](mailto:legal@nceasl.org)