



SIGNING AWAY OUR RIGHTS: A GLOBAL ATTACK ON CHRISTIANS

Hate Speech and Anti-Conversion Laws a Disturbing Trend

HATE SPEECH AND ANTI-CONVERSION LAWS ARE CROPPING UP AROUND THE GLOBE IN WHAT, ON THE SURFACE, SEEMS TO BE AN EFFORT TO PROTECT RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS. IN REALITY, THESE LAWS ARE GENERALLY AIMED AT PRESERVING THE RIGHTS OF ONLY ONE RELIGION AND RESTRICTING AND EVEN CRIMINALIZING THE EXPRESSION OF OTHERS.

There are several freedoms that Americans hold especially dear: freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and freedom of conscience. The reason these freedoms are so important to us is that our forefathers experienced what it was like to not have them, and many fled their countries because of it. So we have codified these freedoms in our law, specifically in the Bill of Rights to the US Constitution, to ensure that the government would never limit "the free exercise of religion" or abridge "the freedom of speech."

These are not just freedoms suited for Americans, but they are freedoms the whole world should enjoy. Even the UN was able to agree that "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion," including the "freedom to change his religion or belief." Despite the fact that nearly every country, in joining the UN, has expressed its agreement with these principles, there is a growing movement throughout the Muslim world and in some other countries that seeks to deny these fundamental human rights.

Sri Lanka Bill

It may be surprising to note that the most recent example of this trend is the largely Buddhist country of Sri Lanka. Seen in the West as a tolerant, meditative religion, Buddhism is the driving force in Sri Lanka's introduction of a bill that would make it illegal to distribute religious literature or condemn any other religion, and would prohibit faith-based charities from operating openly.

The bill, titled, "Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion," was written by a political party in Sri Lanka made up entirely of Buddhist monks (the JHU) and was first debated in 2004. At that time, ICC and other like-minded organizations successfully lobbied the US government to intervene, and the Sri Lankan parliament assured US officials that the bill would "never see the light of day." Sadly, the bill is back and may already be law by the time you read this article.

India Anti-Conversion Laws

The bill being considered in Sri Lanka is based on several similar laws already in place in another unlikely country: India. India touts itself as the largest secular democracy in the world, but is in the middle of an internal struggle with Hindu extremists who want to make India a Hindu-only nation. Driven by an ideology called 'Hindutva,' they are outraged at the centuries of colonial rule by Muslim and British empires and feel that Islam and Christianity have been imposed on the country by force.

What is especially frustrating for the Hindu radicals is that the outcastes are freely choosing to believe the liberating message of the gospel. As a result, the dominant position that higher classes have always held is being challenged by the poorest of the poor who refuse to be held down any longer.

This has led Hindu extremists to try to outlaw conversions. There are five states that have passed anti-conversion laws and several others considering similar measures. The laws are called "Freedom of Religion" laws, and state that their goal is only to make "fraudulent" conversions illegal. However, their overly broad definitions of what is fraudulent include the offer of spiritual benefit, which is in fact the whole point of conversion, thus making any evangelistic or missionary efforts illegal.

In addition, we have noticed there is an upsurge in violence against Christians after anti-conversion laws are adopted, showing that the laws embolden persecutors.

Apostasy and Blasphemy Laws in Muslim Countries

The laws in India and Sri Lanka, however, pale in comparison to apostasy laws that carry the death penalty for Muslims who convert to another religion. There are at least eight Muslim countries that prescribe the death penalty for apostasy, and many more where apostasy is such a stain on a family's honor that Muslim fathers are even willing to torture and kill their own children for the offense. Many Muslim countries also have laws against blasphemy that prohibit anyone from speaking critically of the Koran or Muhammad.

While we in the West are often too cavalier about conversion or blasphemy, these laws in the Muslim world, Sri Lanka, and India are clear violations of our human responsibility to love God with all our mind. We believe that God created people with the ability to freely choose to follow or reject Him. Contravening this responsibility of free will and rational inquiry, blasphemy and anti-conversion laws attack the inherent dignity of humanity made in the image of God.

Hate Speech Prohibition in UN from Muslims

Muslim countries are also seeking to make their blasphemy laws binding on the entire world through a resolution in the United Nations. The resolution is called, "Combating Defamation of Religions," and was first introduced in 2005 by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), a coalition of Muslim countries. The text of the resolution seems to establish protections for all religions, but includes specific references to the "need" to protect Islam from being associated with violence and terrorism.



This resolution amounts to nothing less than an international blasphemy law designed to protect Islam. Despite its cleverly-disguised goals in appearing to protect all religions, it makes no reference to Christianity or any other religion in need of protection from defamation.

The effort to pass this resolution and make international law more binding on UN member countries ought to make us vigilant in protecting the liberties we still have.

Now is the time for Christians to preach the gospel more urgently than ever. Let us not despise the freedoms we have and neglect to realize that they are gifts that God has given us so that we can more faithfully live and spread His truth.

"We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work." - John 9:4