

# IMPACT

In the public arena

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EEA's Socio-Political Team, working together with EEA's members.

Issue 13 – July 2010

## Religious Liberty – working together across Europe

Since 2004, EEA has convened the annual European Religious Liberty Forum, together with Advocates Europe. This is "the" meeting place for Christian NGOs, lawyers, researchers, journalists and politicians concerned about religious liberty trends in Europe. Regular NGOs attending include ADF, CSW, CSI, ECLJ, European Baptist Federation, Forum 18, Jubilee Campaign, Open Doors, Norwegian Mission to the East, as well as many national Evangelical Alliances, along with the European and World Evangelical Alliances and Advocates Europe.

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The Christian religious liberty community of Europe was delighted to be hosted by the Turkish Evangelical Alliance again when they returned to Istanbul for their annual Forum in April. Other Alliances represented were from Austria, Finland, Portugal, Spain and the UK. They were joined by political influencers, lawyers, researchers and journalists from 10 other nations. Discussion topics included the most problematic countries of the region, equality legislation and attitudes and developments at the European Court of Human Rights. This last session was suggested after the recent *Lautsi v. Italy* case where a secular parent had complained that her child's beliefs were oppressed by the presence of crucifixes on the walls of State school classrooms. The Court supported the parent and condemned Italy.

It was important to discuss the Lautsi case at the Forum in order to explore the legitimate differences of response to the verdict. Perhaps most of the religious liberty community believed that the Court had overstretched its jurisdiction, that secularism was being imposed upon a nation. However, Evangelicals from Spain and Portugal, and indeed in Italy, had sympathy with the mother, that the crucifix, in their context, was a symbol of centuries of religious oppression upon faith minorities. Nevertheless, they also agreed that the Court's decision had been a dangerous legal step. Court experts at the European Religious Liberty Forum gave evidence to show that the Court's decisions are becoming increasingly arbitrary, causing growing concern among governments and human rights advocates alike. Even the President of the Court is worried.

PLEASE PRAY that the European Court of Human Rights stabilises. A strong, independent, non-ideological, consistently fair Court is a vital safeguard for us all.

UPDATE At the end of June, a hearing took place in the "Grand Chamber" of the European Court of Human Rights, because Italy was not satisfied with the Lautsi Court ruling. Italy was supported by 79 parliamentarians and 14 Member States, and the hearing was organised by our friends from ECLJ. Grégor Pupinck, from ECLJ, called it an "extraordinary" meeting, with serious discussions about secularism and pluralism in Europe and its effects on religious freedom.

THANK GOD for this exceptional opportunity to promote protection for religious liberty in the most important judicial institution of Europe.

The European Religious Liberty Forum is convened annually by EEA and Advocates Europe. Contact Julia Doxat-Purser if you are interested.

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### CREDITS

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## FREEDOM NEWS

Despite volcanic ash, the European Freedom Network (EFN) continues to grow in numbers and effectiveness as it links Christians working on human trafficking and prostitution. An envisioning, networking and training visit took place to Bulgaria, in conjunction with the Bulgarian Evangelical Alliance. Another visit was to Ukraine where the beginnings of a network can be seen. Most encouraging was the openness of the Ukrainian Ministry of Education. They use Christian materials in Ukrainian schools to help young people avoid the perils of trafficking. They are keen to receive more Christian input;

EFN has now created an Advocacy group to bring together the wisdom and experience of lawyers, political influencers (like Evangelical Alliances) and grassroots projects. We are identifying advocacy targets—where laws and/or practice are so bad, they must be changed, or so good that they should be shared.

Would you like to improve the situation regarding trafficking and/or prostitution in your country? More prosecutions? More care for the victims? More warnings against the dangers? Evangelical Alliances may well be the best organisations to influence governments. Please contact Julia Doxat-Purser if you would like to explore possibilities. ■

## THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S, AND EVERYTHING IN IT.

Although some question the seriousness of global warming, all Evangelical Christians understand the biblical command to care for God's earth. The fact that creation care is advocated in the secular world in the framework of a naturalist worldview should not intimidate Christians or discourage them from becoming involved in the issue. However, our perception of the problem of Creation Care should be done through a different prism. As Christians, we must see creation care as a core part of honouring Christ in the way we live every aspect of our lives. A sign of our love for Him is to treasure His gift to us. And creation itself bears witness to Christ (Romans 1:20). By caring for it, we are able to point people to the Creator. In this and future Impact editions therefore, we will endeavour to point to good ideas and resources, to help us care.

How can I  
How can we  
produce less  
pollution or  
rubbish



Pray and reflect biblically. Recycle. Look for products with less packaging. Exchange / pass on toys, books, clothes, CDs, DVDs, baby equipment etc. Use / set up schemes like <http://www.freecycle.org> where you pass on unwanted goods and can request items. Try EA UK's Simplify scheme, living more simply for a month. [www.eauk.org/simplify/](http://www.eauk.org/simplify/)



### Books that may help you

- *Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living* (Nick Spencer and Robert White), SPCK (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge) 2007
- *Creation in Crisis: Christian Perspectives on Sustainability* (Robert White), SPCK 2009

## A historic move for Evangelicals in France

On 15 June, a historic step was taken by French Evangelicals. That day, about 200 leaders of evangelical churches and ministries gathered in Paris to found the CNEF (National Council of Evangelicals in France), which will be the one institution representing Evangelicalism in France. With its four missions (uniting, resourcing, representing and building projects), the CNEF is the joint 'baby' of the two major evangelical structures in France, namely the Federation of Evangelicals in France, and the French Evangelical Alliance. Today, the CNEF is inheriting the missions and structures of those two bodies (including membership in the EEA), that will be expanded, and it is attracting many more Evangelicals, with more than 70% of Evangelicals from all denominations in France already represented.

The coming into existence of the CNEF was saluted as a major, historic breakthrough by many at its Founding Assembly on 15 June, including Gordon Showell-Rogers (Associate Director for the World Evangelical Alliance and former General Secretary of the EEA), and world-renowned French theologian Henri Blocher.

Evangelicals are a growing movement in France. The whole constituency grew eightfold in the last 60 years, with 2,000 churches in the Hexagon today, and one new church starting there every 10 days. The founding of the CNEF was noticed by several major mainstream and religious newspapers that week, with prominent articles. The CNEF will give better representativeness and transparency to about 500,000 Evangelicals in the nation.



## THE EQUAL TREATMENT DIRECTIVE IS AT AN IMPORTANT JUNCTURE

In July this year, the Equal Treatment Directive will 'celebrate' (is that the right word?) two years of being an official 'Proposal' of the European Commission. For two years, a lot has been said and done about this, including by the EEA.

The news we had in May was not good at all. To our great dismay, we heard that the Member States decided to erase the clauses for protection of freedom of speech, thought, conscience and religion or belief, which the EEA in particular managed to get added to the text. This being said, the negotiations are not over yet, and we are now considering using a tougher strategy.

Decision-making processes in Brussels are sometimes very slow. In fact, Member States are in greater disagreement about the Directive than they have ever been! So, as strange as it may sound, it seems that we should hope and pray that political disagreement would grow. Why is that, you may ask? Well, from our conversations we have understood that the current disagreement over the ETD text is really opening the way for a more fundamental revision of the Directive. Where Member States did not want to hear about rejecting or re-arranging the ETD (in a way that would be more just in our perspective) one year ago, they are now more open to a serious re-write of the whole directive.

### EQUAL TREATMENT DIRECTIVE : LET US PRAY

There are contradicting forces at work concerning the Directive, notwithstanding the fact that it was initially a good policy initiative. We are glad to have contributed to the slowing down of the decision-making process, but others are pushing for a quick decision, be it some Member States or civil society, including, sadly, Amnesty International.

So, let us pray

- That Member States would be more and more open to a fundamental revision of the Directive
- That a decision would be taken shortly in favour of the rights of disabled persons in Europe
- For productive collaboration, and Christ-like and winsome advocacy and lobbying by Christian organisations
- For specific Member States:
  - **Belgium**, so that its comprehensive anti-discrimination approach, one of the best in Europe according to us, would contribute to more helpful negotiations (please note that Belgium will take EU Presidency from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2010, and will therefore lead the discussions for the coming 6 months)
  - **Netherlands**, for a positive influence of the Parliament Committee on Social Affairs concerning the ETD; that the result of the recent Parliament elections would not damage the positive momentum
  - **Germany**, so that the position of the Government's Coalition Agreement concerning the ETD, which has been a good thing for us, be maintained, despite recent changes in German politics
  - **UK, Poland and France**, so that they would be influenced by balanced approaches and resist the temptation of not treating this issue as important, or favouring national interests over fundamental rights
  - **Czech Republic, Italy and Ireland**, to stand firm and keep their position balanced, and to be good negotiators
  - **Bulgaria, Slovakia and Romania**, to be wise, and outspoken against the Directive if needed
  - **Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Denmark and Finland**, for more openness to arguments of the EEA and the like.

## RESOURCES

EEA members can access and contribute to a growing number of socio-political resources on the EEA Intranet.

- **The Lausanne Global Conversation** is bringing together Christians from more than 100 countries in an interactive website focused on the issues at the cutting edge of missions and world evangelization. [www.lausanne.org/conversation](http://www.lausanne.org/conversation) There are 2 discussion links of particular socio-political interest: Truth & Secularity, and Urban Mission

- **International Institute for Religious Freedom – IIRF** <http://www.iirf.eu/>

On the website of WEA's own religious freedom institute, you'll find a large number of religious liberty articles and publications, including the 2009 report from the Turkish Evangelical Alliance.

- **Christians in Politics Portal** <http://www.christianpoliticalportal.org/>

This website is designed to stimulate political debate among Christians. You'll find excellent articles and can submit or recommend your own. The group behind the initiative includes friends from ChristenUnie and CARE.