



*Human Rights Council – 35th session
Item 4 – General Debate*

Speaker: Albert Hengelaar

Thursday 15 June 2017

Mr. President,

The World Evangelical Alliance and Jubilee Campaign bring Malaysia to your attention. The country is often admired for its modern Muslim-majority that upholds democratic values of human rights. Unfortunately, recent developments on top of deep-rooted institutional discrimination challenge this image.

In Malaysia, the freedom to change one's religious beliefs is greatly restricted. Muslims are not allowed to change their religion without going through a sharia court. Requests are often denied. Furthermore, state Sharia enactments regularly inhibit freedom of expression for non-Muslim minorities. These enactments make it an offence to persuade or influence a Muslim to be inclined towards any other religion.

In a statement addressing blasphemy laws in Indonesia, three special procedures mandate holders affirmed that "Criminal laws that penalize blasphemy represent an unlawful restriction on freedom of expression, and disproportionately target persons belonging to religious minorities."¹ We see these unlawful restrictions infecting Malaysia. We request UN Special Procedures to make a similar statement toward Malaysia. We urge the country to maintain its reputation as a country of tolerance and diversity.

This is a litmus test for SDG16: Public institutions should refrain from registering a person's religious faith.

Thank you Mr. President

¹ "Blasphemy law has no place in a tolerant nation like Indonesia – UN rights experts", 22 May 2017, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21646&LangID=E>