



*Human Rights Council – 36th session
Item 3 – General Debate*

Speaker: Albert Hengelaar

Monday 18 September 2017

Mr. President,

The World Evangelical Alliance draws attention to the wellbeing of minorities in nations at every Human Rights Council. The treatment of minorities by the authorities is the litmus test for Sustainable Development Goal No. 16.

In Nepal we see a struggle going on with regards to minorities. The new constitution restricts religious freedom in Article 26 (3). Later we saw a ruling on Christian relief workers in the end favourable to minority rights. But now a new law criminalizes religious conversion and offending religious feelings. The wording of Clause 158 of section 9 of the Bill, which criminalises the ‘hurting of religious sentiment’, is similar to the blasphemy laws in Pakistan, which make it a criminal offence to insult another’s religion.

It is our hope that Nepal in the end will live up to its pretension of being a secular state, where people are free citizens who determine their own choices and not subjects that are policed about their conscience. To tie down the human spirit to majority perception has evidently never sustained a stable constituency. It is a fearful path back into history. Nepal could be a regional leader if it would embrace diversity.

We thank you Mr. President.