

*Human Rights Council – 36<sup>th</sup> session  
Item 4 – General Debate*

*Speaker: Albert Hengelaar*

*19 September 2017*

Mr. President,

The World Evangelical Alliance spends special attention to events in South Asia. Some 15 % of the world's population is living there and countries in the region often have considerable minority communities. For prevention it is important to pay attention to minority rights. India has for a number of years been asked in various human rights processes to review State laws that are creating obstacles for members of the majority religion to change their beliefs and adhere to another faith. These laws, sometimes labelled as “anti-conversion” laws, are in place in 6 Indian States.<sup>1</sup>

We would like to express our disappointment at India's lack of willingness to demonstrate a sincere commitment towards respect of pluralism, minorities' rights and freedom of conscience by not accepting those recommendations. This is an early warning of instability.

And what is worse, last month, a 7<sup>th</sup> Indian State passed an anti-conversion law, when the Legislative Assembly of Jharkhand adopted the “Jharkhand Freedom of Religion Bill.” Section 5 of the law makes it mandatory for a person wanting to change his / her faith, to ask prior authorization from the District Magistrate. Here the human conscience is policed.

We ask India to take a clear position in favor of pluralism, tolerance and freedom of conscience for all, by repealing those laws.

We thank you Mr. President.

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<sup>1</sup> Arunachal Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat