

SUMMARY OF THE 2010 REPORT ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE WORLD

The 2010 Report on Religious Freedom in the World consists of 194 single country reports organised in alphabetical order to facilitate consultation. In this summary we have preferred to outline an overall picture that is instead organised by geographical areas to provide a more homogeneous overview of the problems present in individual countries since often, but not always, geographical proximity also involves cultural similarities.

THE AMERICAS

In the **north** of the continent there have been no reports of significant problems during the period analysed by this report. In **Argentina** a draft law on religious freedom addressed at putting all religions on the same level, with the exception of acquired rights, is still being debated. In **Bolivia** the new constitution approved in January 2009, declares all religions to be of equal standing, also establishing “the State’s independence from religion.” The introduction declares the re-founding of the nation “with the power of our Pachamama (Mother Earth in the Inca cults) and thanks to God.” A hostile attitude towards the Catholic Church is present in many government statements. In **Brazil** the murder of many Catholic priests worries the episcopate, which has denounced the wave of attacks on members of the clergy. The many laws being debated concerning so-called civil rights (abortion, homosexual marriage, etc) provide opportunities for conflict between the political authorities and the Catholic hierarchy. In August 2009 in **Colombia** a Consultative Interreligious Committee was created by the Ministry of the Interior to address problems that may arise in this field. The murder of five priests was reported in the areas controlled by FARC guerrillas. The situation in **Cuba**, unchanged as far as repressive legislation and administrative practices concerning religion are concerned, has provided signals of openness, for example with the authorisation to hold previously forbidden religious services and the annulment of the prohibition to perform acts of worship in prisons. In spite of such signals, there persists great uncertainty regarding the evolution of this regime. In **Honduras** the Catholic Church has been involved in the controversy that followed the deposition of President Manuel Zelaya, an event that caused hostile acts against members of the clergy. In **Mexico** strong controversy concerning a proposal to change the constitution, accentuating the state’s secular characteristics, arose from anti-Catholic statements made by some of the supporters of such change. Two priests and two Catholic seminarists as well as some members of the Mormon community in Juárez were murdered by gangs of drug-traffickers who disapproved of the educational work done by religious communities for the young. In **Nicaragua** the Sandinista government has multiplied its attacks on the Catholic hierarchy, accused of being hostile to the government, also resorting to slander campaigns. In **Peru** there has been controversy over the government’s draft law on religious freedom. In particular it has been opposed by the Catholic Church, with complaints about the fact that this law does not acknowledge the historical and cultural links between Catholicism and the nation. Further controversy arose from a permissive law on abortion and the use of the so-called “day-after pill.” On August 15th 2009, the government of **Venezuela** promulgated a law on education that contained no reference whatsoever to religious instruction. Effectively the state assumes also doctrinal control over education establishing severe sanctions if principles “contrary to national sovereignty” are taught. This wording is considered ambiguous by opponents and is open to arbitrary interpretation. Intense propaganda hostile to representatives of the Catholic Church is implemented also using newspapers close to the government. Hostile acts against members of the clergy and the profanation of religious images have not been punished by the public authorities. Admission to the country of Protestant missionaries has also been greatly restricted.

AFRICA

It is necessary to distinguish at least three areas on the African continent. An Islamic area mainly coinciding with countries overlooking the Mediterranean and that extends to the Near East; a central area, and the southern part of the continent. These areas present different problems due to different religious, political and ethnic conditions that characterize them.

North Africa and the Middle East

The group of countries with a Muslim majority present problems caused by religion, coinciding with politics as well as with legislation in most of them, as well as with the widespread mentality among the majority of the inhabitants. The consequence results in citizens with full rights being only those who profess the dominant religion, while religious minorities are, in the best of cases, tolerated or considered a danger to social stability.

Even the political regimes with secular constitutions, such as **Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Syria**, are under pressure from Islamist groups that at times produce restrictive legislation, previously not established, such as in Algeria, where the administration increasingly refuses to provide visas for priests and religious personnel applying to enter the country, and violent social intolerance is spreading.

Morocco, Egypt and Jordan can be included in the group of countries provided with legislation of Muslim inspiration, but that are quite tolerant. In spite of this, Evangelical groups and Moroccans who have converted to Christianity are now experiencing problems. In Egypt instead, the Islamic majority is hostile to the Coptic Christians. There have been many violent episodes resulting in deaths, often with late intervention by police forces. The **Lebanon** is a separate case both due to the nature of its constitution and because of the presence of many Christians. The problems in this country fundamentally derive from both the presence of armed extremist organisations that have created a state within the state, and from pressure applied by neighbouring countries that make the Lebanon a land of conflict between the various political elements in the area. In **Israel** difficulties arise from the particular situation experienced by the country. Christians are affected by the mistrust authorities show towards their communities, mainly of Arab origin, with consequences affecting visa policies that cause problems for foreign religious personnel wishing to enter the country and problems in freedom of movement that effectively separates Christian communities in the Occupied Territories from those resident in Israel. There is instead a dramatic rise in the problems, at times reaching levels of explicit persecution, experienced by Christians in Hamas-controlled **Gaza**.

In **Bahrain, Qatar and Oman**, the presence of a formally Islamic constitution does not prevent the existence and activities of Christian communities, which, albeit subject to administrative restrictions, enjoy a degree of freedom of action. **Kuwait** and the **United Arab Emirates**, countries that have diplomatic relations at an ambassadorial level with the Holy See, can be taken as an example of how coexistence is possible, albeit respecting their cultural and religious distinctiveness. **Saudi Arabia** and **Yemen** remain instead the Gulf countries in which strict Islamist legislation, which includes for example the death sentence for so-called apostasy, prevents all religious manifestations and practices, even in private, in spite of the presence in Saudi Arabia of about one million Christian immigrant workers.

In **Iraq** the life of the very ancient Christian communities now risking extinction is becoming increasingly dramatic, subject to systematic terrorist attacks openly aimed at eliminating the presence of Christians in the country. In **Iran**, Shiite Islam in its most extreme version, guaranteed by the religious authorities, remains the state religion. This leads to discrimination and violence against all other religions and even against Sunni Islam; obtaining permission to build a Sunni mosque can at times seem as difficult as building a church. Among all the religious minorities, the Islamic state recognises only three, Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians. Other minorities, Sunnis, Baha'is, Ahmadis etc are effectively persecuted. Buddhists and Hindus are not officially recognised but have not been subject to violence although they live in total juridical insecurity.

Central and Southern Africa

With a few exceptions, the situation as far as religious freedom is concerned in the rest of Africa does not present particular problems. Generally speaking, the conflicts that result in tragic situations for the civilian populations especially in Central Africa, do not arise due to religious problems but rather because of economic, ethnic and political causes.

In **Botswana** recently, difficulties have increased for foreign missionaries due to new regulations which not only cause problems, but at times make it almost impossible for new missionaries to enter the country. In the **Comoros Islands**, on May 17th 2009, a constitutional referendum was approved by a vast majority, which, among other provisions, declared Islam to be the state religion. According to the Penal Code, proselytism carried out for religions that are not Islam is a crime punishable with imprisonment and a fine. Even the simple distribution of Bibles or other Christian religious books is considered proselytism. Foreigners accused of proselytism are deported. All those who convert are also punished. In **Eritrea** the only four religious institutions recognised by the state are the Eritrean Orthodox Coptic Church, the Eritrean Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Catholic Church and Islam. The state interferes significantly in the internal lives of the four denominations allowed and effectively has managed to regiment Orthodox Copts, Lutherans and Muslims, managing to place men loyal to the regime at the top of their hierarchies. The government continues to persecute, arrest and detain, without formalizing charges and without trial, those who belong to religious groups that are not officially recognised. It has been calculated that there are currently about 2,200 prisoners of conscience for religious reasons, arrested both individually and collectively during prayer meetings (especially whenever more than five people have gathered). These prisoners include at least 40 leaders and pastors of Pentecostal churches. **Ethiopia**, although it has exemplary legislation as far as religious freedom is concerned, unfortunately presents episodes of social intolerance especially in areas in which there is a Muslim majority, with many cases of violence inflicted on the Christian minority. In **Kenya** the debate on constitutional reform continues, and although it is wanted by all, it gives rise to serious conflicts. One of the most controversial points concerns the jurisdiction of Islamic Courts. Muslims wish their jurisdiction to be extended to the whole country and for Islamic Law to become exclusive, eliminating the possibility of appeals to the High Court. Christians oppose this kind of change, asking for a separation between the state and religion and, however, believing that the state cannot abdicate from having final jurisdiction over such matters. **Mauritania** is an Islamic Republic and the constitution describes Islam as the state's and its citizens' only religion. The publication and distribution of non-Islamic material, such as for example the Bible, is forbidden as is the possession of non-Islamic religious books for private use. In the Republic of **Nigeria** conflict continues resulting from the fact that twelve of the 36 states in the Nigerian federation (northern states Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe, Zamfara) have started to apply the principles of Shari'a not only to Family Law but also to criminal law. This has implied the introduction of punishment consisting of floggings, amputations and death by stoning.

To implement the application of Shari'a law in everyday life, at least four states (Zamfara, Niger, Kaduna e Kano) have create the Hisbah, the religious police force that in a number of cases has been accused of abuse. The most widespread acts of religious intolerance and discrimination are those therefore lamented by the various Christian communities present in Nigeria's most Islamized states (which almost always coincide with the twelve states that have introduced the Shari'a into their legislation). These acts include false accusations of blasphemy against Islam following which Christian students and teachers have been obliged to leave the schools they attended or taught in; the lack of authorisations to build Christian places of worship and cemeteries and the demolition of churches considered to be illegal; kidnappings and forced conversions of adolescents, especially girls, that end in marriages with Muslim men; discrimination against Christians in state employment and in providing public services; intimidations and death threats made to Muslims who have converted to Christianity; trials of Christians in Shari'a courts in spite of their exemption established by the law; the imposing of Islamic dress codes on Christian students in state schools;

the manipulation of criteria used for enrolling students in state schools and universities to privilege the enrolment of only Muslims. Serious clashes resulting in deaths and injuries have taken place in many areas, caused by Islamist sects (Boko Haram, Kala-Kato) as has happened in the state of Bauchi and in Jos. **Rwanda** still suffers the consequences of the 1994 massacres with a sequel of hatred, revenge and never-ending court cases. **Somalia** has been without a central government capable of exercising power over the entire national territory since 1991. On April 18th 2009, Somalia's parliament approved legislation for the application of Shari'a throughout the country. The practice of religions that differ from Islam results in intolerant reactions all over the country, and conversions are discouraged by forms of ostracism and social alienation. Christian, Catholic and Protestant Evangelical worshipping activities are held in private homes. Throughout the entire Somali territory there no longer exist Christian places of worship open to the public. During 2008, six Muslims who had converted to Christianity were assassinated while another twenty-one were killed in the course of 2009. Many other cases of violence and persecution against Christians have been reported. In the **Republic of South Africa** cases involving violence, in particular the murder of four Catholic priests in 2009, are to be blamed more on the growing atmosphere of violence that is spreading, especially in the suburbs of large cities, than on religious reasons. In the **Sudan** the north and the south of the country effectively have totally different situations and legislation. In the 16 provinces of the north, Islamic Law is applied harshly on all residents with no respect whatsoever for non-Muslim minorities. In the south instead, legislation guarantees the laicity of the state and allows religious freedom for all groups present on the territory. In **Uganda** there are no problems afflicting the coexistence of various religions present in the country. There do remain problems deriving from the long civil war carried out by sectarian armies such as the "Lord's Resistance Army" (LRA), with issues concerning the reinstatement of refugees and the rehabilitation of "child soldiers." In **Zimbabwe**, the complex political situation has resulted in the government creating a pro-government National Anglican Church as well as an attempt to reduce to silence with acts of violence and intimidation the legitimate Anglican Communion of Zimbabwe.

ASIA

Central and Southern Asia

The central Asian states, known as the "stans", **Kazakhstan**, **Kyrgyzstan**, **Tajikistan**, **Turkmenistan** and **Uzbekistan**, present problems of varying degrees of seriousness, not only from the point of view of religious freedom, but also in their respect for human rights.

In spite of international pressure, the government of **Afghanistan** does not seem capable of putting into practice basic policies that respect fundamental principles guaranteeing religious freedom. The burden of tradition, the conditioning by radical Islamist fundamentalist factions and the war in many provinces, have given rise to a very difficult situation, not only for religious freedom, but also respect for basic human rights. In **Bangladesh** Islam is the state religion. In spite of freedom of worship being formally guaranteed, there have been cases of persecution and discrimination based on religious affiliation and against ethnic minorities. In most of the cases, the police did not intervene to defend the minorities against abuses by Muslims. Christians and Hindus have been victims of violence. The Islamic Republic of **Pakistan** formally declared itself a secular country. The constitution approved after it separated from India and various central government laws, including recent ones, reaffirm the principle of equality before the law, "without distinction to race or creed." It is, in fact, as proved by reports, just a facade. The law against blasphemy in fact has caused victims among not only non-Muslims and the Ahmadi minority, fundamentally amidst the total indifference of the government. From 1986 to 2010 at least 993 people have been accused for having profaned the Koran or defamed the Prophet Mohammed. Among these 479 were Muslim, 120 Christians, 340 Ahmadi, 14 Hindus and 10 from other religions. The law is basically an excuse for attacks, personal vendettas or extra-judicial killings; 33 in all, done by individuals or by enraged

mobs. Beginning in 2008 and in spite of political upheavals that have not been resolved, **Bhutan** and **Nepal** have made great progress in religious freedom legislation. Both have renounced religious state definitions, one as Buddhist and the other as Hindu and, albeit respecting cultural identity, have aligned themselves to international judicial standards of religious freedom and conscience. The long civil war in **Sri Lanka**, that saw thousands killed, 100,000 from 1983 according to various sources, officially ended on May 18th, 2009. Wounds remain to be healed, refugees need to be reintegrated and national reconciliation needs to take place. **India** continues to see a strong upsurge of religious and ethnically inspired violence and 2009 proved this yet again. While the government in New Delhi studies new legal and police methods to stem the phenomenon with significant commitment, the victims of violence complain about the absence of institutions and the enduring insecurity at the local level. The case of Orissa is the most glaring. A positive step was the victory of the United Progressive Alliance, UPA, the coalition led by Sonia Ghandi's Congress Party and Manmonah Singh Congress and the collapse of the nationalist Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the BJP, and of the left-wing Third front in the 2009 elections. In six states at the local level, there are still "anti-conversion" laws, a result of the ultra-nationalist Hindu policies. The central government, with its secular tradition, rejects the so-called "hindutva" (Hindu) ideology, that places Hinduism and its cultural and religious norms over all other faiths in the country. In spite of this, the "hindutva" ideology continues to influence the political agendas of a number of states and local governments. Furthermore, there was no drop in anti-Christian violence in 2009. Karnataka, Orissa and Tamil Nadu remain sadly noted for their violence against minority communities. Forced reconversion to Hinduism, physical attacks and killings of non-Hindu community members have been denounced. The situation in the **Maldives Islands** remains serious. The 2008 constitution, like the 1999 constitution before it, defines Islam as the state's religion and prohibits citizens from practicing any other religion. Foreigners are not allowed any public demonstration of religious faith that is not Islamic. Conversion to any other religion other than Islam is severely prohibited. All legislation, including civil law, is subordinate to Koranic law. Teaching Islam in school is compulsory.

East Asia

The regimes of the next group of countries, aside from their physical proximity to one another, share an ideological base. These are countries where religious freedom is limited not because of an intolerant religious majority, but because they are all regimes inspired to the communist school of thought. In **China**, religious freedom effectively continues to be repressed. The restrictions were accentuated in 2008 during the Olympics and continued into 2009. It appears the government is determined to exercise complete control over all religious activities, albeit exalting their autonomy in the name of patriotism and intervening heavily in their internal affairs. Arrests have continued over the past year and unofficial and underground communities have been eliminated. There was an attempt to unite all Protestant Christian denominations and Buddhist school, exalting "democratic" leadership, but submitting them to complete control by patriotic associations. A proposed law on religious freedom, tabled for about 20 years, is still blocked. The government continues to prefer the use of regulations at the local and provincial level, leaving interpretation up to the individual, without having to submit to a national law or a constitutional right. Numerous episodes of administrative repression and arrests were reported for all the religions present in the People's Republic. The arbitrary behaviour of the authorities and total control over social and cultural life remains the norm that keeps the country from harmonious and humanly sustainable development. There was a degree of openness when Catholic bishops were ordained this past year with legal authorisation. The neighbouring **Democratic People's Republic of Korea** is one of those countries where the condition of the people is most inhuman. Religious freedom is non-existent in all aspects and information about what is going on in the country is scarce and hard to come by. The state has declared itself officially atheist and any form of religious expression is repressed and results in

arrests and detentions in concentration camps. While it is a communist country, **Vietnam**, has a far more pragmatic approach. It must take into account the presence of a large and brave Catholic community that reacts to being bullied and that can count on a large and vociferous community outside of the country. **Laos**, governed by the People's Revolutionary Party, since the Nineties has begun to apply policies opening up economically to the outside and then stopped these policies because of fear of importing ideas that might threaten the regime. The government alternates between periods of openness and restriction, especially with regards to religion. Christians are the most watched community because they are feared as being host to ideas deemed "western." The situation for the Hmong ethnic group remains very serious and it is subject to continuous discrimination and repression. In 2009 **Myanmar** – formerly Burma – continued to see systematic repression of religious freedom and human rights. Violence and repression have not spared any community. After the protests by Buddhist priests in 2007, repression against monasteries and religious leaders has continued unabated as it has against ethnic minorities, such as the Karen who are mostly Christian, and the Rohingya, who are Muslims. The military government has blocked building permits as well as certificates for the ownership of land belonging to religious organizations to build churches or places of worship. The decision has forced many of the faithful and the ministers to meet in alternative locations, among which are private homes.

In **Cambodia** Buddhism is recognized as the state religion, as it is in **Thailand**, and both countries have guaranteed full respect for religious freedom for all inhabitants. In **Malaysia** the implementing of Islamic law for Muslims and Anglo-Saxon-based law for non-Muslims has caused tensions, such as the controversy concerning the use of the Arab word "Allah" when referring to God, which brought about intimidations, arrests and the confiscation of Bibles. Muslims who convert to other religions are subject to an Islamic tribunal. In the largest Muslim country in the world, **Indonesia**, there have been reports of cases of violence against Christians and Muslim groups, such as the Ahmadis, considered "heretics" from orthodox Islam. In spite of constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, some national and provincial laws, like the blasphemy law and building permits, needed to build churches, have become pretexts to launch attacks against minorities. Extremist groups and the more radical Muslims have not been able to garner public support, as was shown in the June 2009 parliamentary elections, which gave the incumbent president a crushing victory. However, pressure from the Islamic fringe has influenced the executive's public and political agenda, directing the actions of judges, magistrates and politicians. Influence has been exercised through private lobbying, street demonstrations, threats and popular revolt in which hundreds, if not thousands, have taken part. Indonesia is home to a considerable number of moderate Muslims, intellectuals and religious leaders, who consider the growth of religious fanaticism intolerable, connected to the campaign of Islamisation wanted by extremist groups.

Brunei's state religion is Salafite Islam and there are severe restrictions on all other religions. Proselytizing religions other than Islam is forbidden and importing any religious material is prohibited. Articles and images of other faiths are censured in the press. Non-Salafite groups must register and name all members of their faith. Belonging to an unregistered group is punishable, even with a jail sentence. Authorization must be obtained for any gathering of five or more people, religious or otherwise. Using private homes for religious purposes is forbidden. In **East Timor**, an overwhelmingly Catholic country, respect for religious freedom for all is guaranteed by law and in practice. As far as the **Philippines** are concerned, there would be no problems if it were not for unresolved problems in Mindanao, an island with a Muslim majority where a guerrilla war has been fighting for decades with the objective of creating an independent Islamic state. The minority Christian community there pays a high price and in 2009 was still subject to attacks and kidnappings. Another problem, often intertwined with religious extremism, is posed by the powerful Muslim clans and their private armies. The island's climate of anarchy and the continuous traffic in arms, has allowed political leaders to raise private armies to maintain their positions of power in the provinces under their control.

EUROPE AND EURASIA

The countries that belong to Western Europe are experiencing similar situations deriving from problems caused by Islamic immigration, and, in some cases, caused by the spreading of a secularist mentality that is manifested in anti-Christian attitudes, even at the level of European institutions.

In **Spain** religious freedom is guaranteed but the secularism present in some political circles is now resulting in laws that place it at risk such as, for example, the subject of the presence of religious symbols in public buildings and locations, lessons on “Education on Citizenship, the Law on Cults approved by the Catalan parliament and laws on conscientious objection. In **Belgium** there were even searches of the seat of the Belgian Episcopal Conference and the Cathedral of Malines, within the framework of investigations of crimes linked to paedophilia. In **France** the aggressive secularism of recent years appears to be weakening and problems linked to the presence of a large Islamic community have been reported. In **Germany** the attitude of cultural opposition to the principles expressed by Christian communities, in particular the Catholic Church, on subjects such as the family, sexual morals, the defence of human life, mainly reported by the press and the media, often results in an attitude of preconceived hostility against Christianity and provokes those with tendential extremists attitudes to assume violent ones against religious symbols and buildings. The presence of a large Muslim community with different ethnic and religious origins also creates problems in regulating relations between the state and Muslims. The same considerations apply for **Italy**, where a bitter debate resulted in a sentence from the European Court for Human Rights concerning the exhibiting of the Crucifix in schoolrooms which was then appealed by the Italian government. In **Holland** and in the **United Kingdom** the development of a multicultural, multiethnic and multid denominational society has led to contradictions in a model of coexistence that seems to be implemented mainly to the disadvantage of the majority of Christian citizens and is causing powerful reactions concerning identity. In **Greece** there do not seem to be such tensions. Problems reported derive from the non-orthodox Christian communities complaining at times of administrative obstacles or legal restrictions applied to their religious practices. In **Cyprus** the division into two regions, due to Turkish occupation in 1974, has caused immense damage to the country’s religious and artistic heritage, in addition to the “colonisation” of former Greek territories with the settling of 160,000 Turks coming from the continent.

In European countries that until 1989 were subject to the communist regime, there are still legal obstructions and behaviours deriving from a mentality that is hostile to the religious phenomenon per se. In **Serbia**, for example, even though the constitution establishes full religious freedom, in practice the law restricts it by discriminating between communities and denying some groups legal status.

The law in fact is in some cases arbitrarily interpreted and applied by local representatives of institutions. There continues instead to be progress made in the restitution by the government of property confiscated from religious communities in the course of 1945, or the years that followed. Tension between the various religious communities remains high in **Kosovo**, especially after the country’s declaration of independence in February 2008. The real origin of the conflict usually lies in ethnic problems, but the religious element is so closely intertwined that it simply exasperates the situation making it difficult to distinguish between the reasons for the tension. In the **Slovak Republic** a request is still pending with the Constitutional Court regards to the constitutionality of an amendment made to the law on the registration of religious groups that increased the number of requisites needed to obtain it. In **Hungary** the government is instead working actively, according to religious communities, to facilitate the restitution of property confiscated from them during the communist regime as it is guaranteeing all religious groups equal opportunities to re-obtain control over their assets. At the end of October 2009, 2,576 properties had been returned to their owners and \$342 million had been paid in compensation. In **Romania** the government continues to treat in clearly different ways groups that are legally recognised and those that are not. Requisites for

registration and obtaining a legal status continue to pose problems for the smaller communities. A number of international organisations, non-governmental organisations and minority religious groups have criticized the law on religious freedom currently in force, since it allegedly “institutionalises” this discrimination. There are only eighteen officially recognised religious communities although an official register does not yet exist. There still remains the problem concerning the Greek Orthodox Church recovering property seized in 1948 under the communist regime and transferred to the Romanian Orthodox Church which is refusing to return it. The Greek Orthodox Church was the only one that suffered such confiscations during that period. In **Bulgaria** although the Constitution acknowledges the right to religious freedom, laws on this subject remain rather ambiguous and therefore often lead local authorities to make arbitrary decisions concerning the situations of religious groups, especially those that are not registered. In March 2009 the socialist government approved a draft bill aimed at reforming primary and secondary education which includes a rule that would like to forbid having religious symbols in schools. This would range from the Christian Cross to headwear for Muslims. There are still complaints from the larger religious denominations (Orthodox, Catholics, Muslims, Jews and many Protestant groups) concerning the difficulties encountered in regaining possession of their many properties confiscated during the previous regime. The difficult relations between the political authorities in **Belarus** and religious groups in the country are deeply rooted in the country’s history in which the Soviet cultural legacy still survives. Although the constitution recognises the right to religious freedom, legislation on this subject effectively restricts significantly its concrete implementation. The work of foreign missionaries encounters administrative obstacles above all in obtaining residency permits, and religious propaganda activities are subject to strict controls and restrictions by security forces. Political prisoners and those detained for reasons of conscience are often denied the right to worship. For reasons that are apparently bureaucratic ones, those belonging to religious communities disliked by those in power, are often subject to monetary sanctions and fines. The cult of the martyrs of the Soviet period, whose memory is kept alive above all within the Orthodox communities, is also discouraged. In the **Ukraine** political clashes in the country have not for the moment resulted in significant changes as far as the free exercising of religious freedom is concerned. In April 2009, the Ministry of Defence set up together with the larger religious organisations, a Council for Pastoral Support, aimed at encouraging religious support in the Armed Forces. Another important result was obtained when changes to the Penal Code came into force. The rights established for detainees now include the right to greater freedom to practice their religion. In **Russia** there have been positive developments between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church. Diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the Russian Federation have been raised to the ambassadorial level by Russia and to that of an apostolic nunciature by the Holy See. Abuses by the local authorities have been reported by Protestant groups. In **Armenia** a debated draft law on freedom of conscience and religious organisations, approved at a first reading held on March 19th 2009 by the Armenian parliament, has caused negative reactions from many international organisations. Provisions contained in the draft law envisage restrictions to public freedom of expression of one’s faith and strict sanctions that are also penal, including a two-year prison sentence, against so-called “improper proselytism”, as well as a series of administrative obligations, such as compulsory registration for those intending to perform activities of worship. **Azerbaijan**, a country in which until now the atmosphere had been tolerant and balanced, caused concern in the past year due to a possible deterioration in respect for religious freedom. New elements introduced into legislation, obstacles encountered in the registration process, mistrustful attitudes and at times even violent ones from local officials and the police regards to Azeri converted to non-traditional religions, the frequent confiscation of religious material all give rise to concern. Finally, in **Turkey** the situation regarding Christians remains unchanged from the 2008 Report, while the year dedicated to St. Paul (June 2008 to June 2009), which led one to believe the situation was improving, saw an increase in acts of violence. It is still not possible for Turks to openly convert to Christianity, because of discrimination against converts. The Commission of

Religious Freedom of the European Union held a meeting in Venice in March 2010 and adopted a resolution asking Turkey to legally recognize religious minorities, which they do not currently do, particularly for the Latin Church, and to firmly oppose the discrimination they are subject to. The legal problems of the Orthodox Church and the Muslim Alawite community have not been resolved.