

## **Human Rights Without Frontiers Int.**

**Ave Winston Churchill 11/33. 1180 Brussels. Belgium**

**Phone: 32 2 3456145 – Fax: 32 2 3437491**

**Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) – Website: <http://www.hrwf.net>**

---

## **Freedom of religion and belief**

**60<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights**

### **Statement**

Willy Fautré, [w.fautre@hrwf.net](mailto:w.fautre@hrwf.net)

When the right to freedom of religion or belief is mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind is the right of individuals to act in accordance with conscientious beliefs, to worship (or not to worship) freely, to create religious associations and to be able to enjoy life in society without discrimination of such beliefs.

This fundamental right is recognised by all the member states of the United Nations but in a number of them, it is far from being respected. I will select five countries among many others that can be found on the website of *Human Rights Without Frontiers Int.* <http://www.hrwf.net>.  
an associate member of the *International Helsinki Federation*.

In **Armenia**, sixteen conscientious objectors are now serving sentences, with ten more awaiting trial. Moreover, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe complained in a report published on January 12, 2004 that Armenia still refuses to give a legal status to Jehovah's Witnesses.

In **Uzbekistan**, freedom of peaceful assembly has frequently been violated although it is guaranteed by the Constitution. In 2003 and 2004, people attending peaceful religious meetings in private homes were on several occasions taken to the police station where administrative penalties were imposed on them.

In **Turkey**, a law has been prohibiting any activity of foreign clerics for 70 years. As a result, the Catholic and Evangelical Churches in Germany can only send religious ministers to fulfil the religious needs of Christians in Turkey under cover of embassy staff. Religious teaching is obstructed or made impossible. Christian foundations cannot purchase or sell any land. Two places of worship of Jehovah's Witnesses have been closed in Mersin.

In **Eritrea**, more than 300 Evangelicals are currently in prison. 51 of them were arrested in Asmara, the capital city, on February 16, 2004. In 2002, Eritrea's 12 independent Pentecostal and charismatic churches were closed by government order. Their 20,000 or more members continue to gather secretly in small groups in private homes.

In **Egypt**, Muslims who have converted to another religion cannot by law change their religious identity while Christians who have converted to Islam are allowed to change their identity papers. A number of Muslims who have become Christians were arrested in 2003 and are still detained on the basis of that discriminatory practice.

**Iraq** is another country that also merits our attention. In the whole array of human rights, the right of religious freedom will be the primary benchmark for the democratization of the country. Iraq is a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society. Religious tolerance and the protection of the rights of all religious communities should be considered a prerequisite for the establishment of the rule of law and democracy. The current period of insecurity and instability should not be exploited by the different religious groups to assert single-handedly their vision of state and constitution.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.