



MEDIA RELEASE

Open Doors - Free to Believe Campaign plays part in demise of Defamations of Religions concept

Open Doors', International Campaign Helped To Make A Change

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sydney NSW (6 April, 2011) In late March 2011 the UN Human Rights Council adopted an important resolution tabled by Pakistan on behalf of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. Open Doors welcomes this resolution changes as an important step forward due to the influence of the Free to Believe campaign.

Open Doors is a ministry that serves persecuted Christians worldwide, acknowledges the leadership of the Pakistani and the American delegation in Geneva in drafting the current resolution.

The resolution "Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence, and violence against persons based on religion or belief" is widely seen as an attempt to abandon the Defamation of Religions concept.

The current resolution reaffirms both the right to freedom of religion or belief, including the right to adopt a religion of one's choice, and the right to freedom of opinion and expression. While it condemns any advocacy of religious hatred, it recognizes that the open public debate of ideas can be among the best protections against religious intolerance.

Previous UN resolutions on Defamation of Religions, tabled both in the General Assembly and in the Human Rights Council, tried to defend majority religions and to protect religions from any critical comment.

The Defamation of Religions resolutions, although not legally binding, provided international legitimacy for national laws that punish blasphemy or otherwise ban criticism of a religion. That is why Open Doors organised the Free to Believe campaign last year. Through this campaign, more than 428.000 people from over 70 different countries, stood up for Freedom of Religion or Belief. Further, Open Doors actively lobbied for a consensus text, both in New York and in Geneva. All permanent missions have been approached and encouraged to vote - **For** Freedom of Religion and Belief and **Against** Defamation of Religions.

Many religious minorities are suffering from blasphemy laws. In Pakistan, Qamar David, a Christian serving a life sentence in Karachi Central Jail on accusations of blasphemy, died last week amid suspicions that he was murdered. Maher El-Gohari felt compelled to leave Egypt after his conversion from Islam to Christianity.

During the current regular session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, several delegations referred to Salmaan Taseer and Shahbaz Bhatti from Pakistan. Open Doors applauds their courageous stand for the religious minorities in their country. Both Taseer and Bhatti tried to amend the blasphemy laws and paid with their lives.

Nigel Rooke, CEO of Open Doors Australia, added: "The most disturbing issues with the past defamation resolutions at the UN have been addressed in this new resolution. Open Doors warmly welcomes this effort of the Human Rights Council to address both freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief in a more balanced and constructive way."

For more information or to set up an interview, contact Roz Trestrail, Communications and Marketing Manager

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