

Ukraine-Turkey: Turkish secret services kidnappings in Odessa?

Human Rights Without Frontiers urges the Ukrainian authorities to confirm or deny this human rights violation perpetrated on their territory

HRWF (18.07.2018) – The well-known and reliable Odessablog has just released an article about two kidnapping cases allegedly perpetrated by the Turkish secret services under the title “Not such a Turkish Delight in Odessa” (17 July, <https://odessablog.wordpress.com>):

“It is no secret that foreign agencies work in Odessa Oblast.

The most obvious that would come to mind is that of the Russian Federation, but as a reader moves closer to Europe then the Romanian SIE is active, as is Mossad, and of course Turkey across the Black Sea also has a great interest in Odessa too.

To be fair there are numerous agencies active in Odessa as a reader would expect from a city that is a transport hub on internationally recognised trading routes (as well as internationally recognised smuggling routes – be it people, guns, drugs and counterfeit).

Odessa is a destination, it is a hub and it is a source of legitimate and criminal trade. It is cosmopolitan and it is mercantile.

What self-respecting foreign agency with particular regional interests wouldn't be active in Odessa?

Most go about their work quietly – albeit perhaps not as invisibly as they might think.

However, it appears that Turkey recently made some rather obvious and perhaps illicit renditions of two of its citizens.

If true this would not be the first time Turkey (or other agencies – Mossad allegedly spirited away a Turk with Islamic links from Odessa train station some years ago) has tried and/or succeeded in renditioning their citizens from Odessa back to Turkey.

In 2008 several Kurds were either successfully renditioned or attempts were made by Turkey to “reclaim them” against their will.

The latest incidents allegedly occurred on 12th and 15th July 2018 – the first in Odessa and the second in Mykolaiv.

It is claimed that both individuals were FETO supporters (Güllist). That may or may not be the case, for rumours are rumours and who starts them and for what reason requires some thought.

Either way extrajudicial renditions are just that regardless.

On 12th July it is claimed that the Turkish Milli Istihbarat Teskilatı (MIT) abducted Turkish businessman Salikh Zeki Yigit from his restaurant in Odessa city centre, held him at the Turkish Consulate in Odessa overnight, and the following day spirited him back to Turkey (by plane to Istanbul and then on to Mersin).

The second individual was a Turkish blogger (married to, and father of Ukrainians) Yusuf Inan in Mykolaiv. Mr Inan was apparently subject to extradition proceedings, but it appears that the MIT could not wait.

Both men had residency status in Ukraine. Both were renditioned to Turkey during the last week if some very solid rumour be believed.

Whether a tacit blind eye was turned or whether the matter

will be raised privately having drawn Ukrainian ire is speculative – particularly in light of recent Turkish statements thanking Ukraine for its “cooperation” regarding the return of “refugees”.

What is not speculative at the time of writing is that there has thus far been no public statement from any Ukrainian institution or ministry – either to confirm or deny either incident.

Would a reader therefore draw inference that if these illegal renditions took place (and it appears that they have), in the absence of any official comment whatsoever, that Kyiv was aware?

The answer has to be – probably.

If so, and of course there is plausible deniability, it will be something of a human rights image problem at the very least in numerous private diplomatic conversations – albeit insufficient to cause any significant policy changes toward Ukraine (or Turkey). No doubt the Human Rights NGOs that read the blog (and there are certainly some in Brussels that do) will take note.

Whether there are any more Turks in Ukraine on the MIT rendition list – time will perhaps tell, and perhaps fairly soon.”

Local and national Ukrainian authorities cannot keep silent about the allegation of such an egregious human rights violation perpetrated on their territory. If the accusation is confirmed, they should take a public position about this act committed by a foreign power on the Ukrainian soil.

UKRAINE: The editor-in-chief of “Unsolved crimes” newspaper attacked in Odessa

See <http://zlochiny.com/en/k2/jr/item/407-the-editor-in-chief-of-unsolved-crimes-newspaper-has-been-attacked.html> video at

Журналистские расследования (13.07.2018) – On July 13, 2018 at about 10 AM. At this time, there was an attack on Constantine Slobodyanyuk, the editor-in-chief of the “Unsolved crimes” newspaper on Nekrasova street 1, where the day before there had been a conflict between representatives of the municipal guard and employees of the “Redut” law company. According to the informant from the network of the Department of Municipal Security, the representatives of the municipal guard were to return the next day and dismantle parking posts, which were illegal in their view.

Everything happened in about 10 minutes. Three cars belonging to the municipal guard arrived at Nekrasova street in the parking lot. All in all there were about 15 people who got out of the cars. All of them were dressed in a uniform with chevrons labeled “Municipal Guard”. At the same time, from the direction of the main department of architecture and from the opposite side along Nekrasova street, two more groups of 10-12 people in civilian clothes began approaching the parking lot. Without showing any documents the representatives of the municipal enterprise “Municipal Guard” began dismantling the parking lot posts. At this time at the parking lot there were two of my colleagues from “Obshestvennyi Priboi” newspaper. They were interviewing employees of the “Redut” law company. As a matter of fact, within a few minutes the representatives of the municipal security began using special means in the form of tear gas. Afterwards, they began kicking the employees

of the “Redut” law company right in front my eyes. At that moment I attempted to stop the illegal actions of persons whom I didn’t know, having introduced myself as a journalist. After a few seconds, from two sides, the employees of the municipal enterprise “Municipal Guard” used tear gas against me, followed by several strikes with clubs on my head to the temple area; they threw me on the ground and inflicted several more strikes; by that time I didn’t see anything and practically couldn’t hear anything.

In response to this offense, a criminal investigation has been opened under Part 2 of Art. 345-1 (threat or violence against a journalist) of the Criminal Code of Ukraine. It is also worth noting that during the conflict, there were two other journalists of “Obshestvennyi Priboi” newspaper – Vitaly Tkachenko and Miroslav Bekchiv – who were injured by the municipal authorities. One of them is in the hospital with a closed skull fracture, face burns and traces of strangulation. It should be reminded that the municipal enterprise “Municipal Protection” is under the immediate supervision of the director of the Department of Municipal Security – a retired police colonel Viktor Kuznetsov. Wherein, superintending officer of the municipal enterprise “Municipal Protection” is another official from Odessa Andrei Kotlyar, who is the deputy head of city chairman Gennadyi Trukhanov.

EU annual report on human rights and democracy: Freedom

of religion or belief

EU (01.07.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2uEaKJR> – The EU is determined to continue promoting freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) as a right to be exercised by everyone everywhere, based on the principles of equality, non-discrimination and universality.

In 2017, the EU continued strengthening the implementation of the Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief and carrying out the commitments under action the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019. Their implementation remained a key priority for EU action, which was strengthened through the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019.

During 2017 the EU regularly raised FoRB at different levels of political dialogue, including in 15 of its human rights dialogues and in consultations with partner countries. The EU also reacted with public statements condemning restrictions to freedom of religion in Russia and Indonesia, but also used private démarches to raise restrictions of FoRB in several partner countries.

The EUSR Stavros Lambrinidis continued to be actively engaged in the issue of FoRB and the promotion of EU Guidelines in his official visits, in his meetings with government officials in third countries, and at the UN. He has also placed special emphasis on the implementation of the UN Rabat Plan of Action that includes positive elements for addressing 'hate speech' and for countering violence perpetrated in the name of religion, most recently in 2017 during the Madrid Conference on ethnic and religious violence in the Middle East in May 2017, and the High-Level Forum on Combating Anti-Muslim Discrimination and Hatred, held in New York on 17 January. This forum mobilised a broad spectrum of faith-based civil society to discuss concrete and innovative ways of combating

anti-muslim discrimination. He also continued engaging with the UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB and met with international organisations, and with a number of representatives of religious or belief groups.

The European External Action Service's (EEAS) stepped up its efforts to raise awareness of the Guidelines and FoRB-related issues among its staff and representatives of the EU Member States by organising various training sessions and workshops: most recently the EEAS training module on Religion and Foreign Policy, Brussels, 13 and 14 June 2017, and the Human Rights and Democratisation training on 19 June 2017. The EEAS also runs broader training modules on Political Islam, Islam in Politics with focus, inter alia, on minority rights within a Muslim majority setting, with the most recent session taking place on 18 October 2017.

In the course of 2017 the EEAS Task Force on religion and culture hosted a number of discussions on the place of religion in society. The EEAS also participated in and co-chaired the Transatlantic Policy Network on Religion and Diplomacy (TPNRD). A number of concrete initiatives combining FoRB and the wider agenda of diversity and tolerance have grown out of this network, building on and giving further momentum to already existing work and dialogues with the OSCE, UN and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

BAN OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES ACTIVITIES IN RUSSIA

On 17 July 2017 the Russian Supreme Court upheld its previous decision to liquidate all legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) in Russia, terminate their activity and confiscate their property, alleging extremist activity. The decision confirms the ban on the peaceful worship of Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country.

The EU undertook a number of actions in support of the Jehova's Witnesses and urged the Russian authorities to ensure

freedom of religion. The EU Delegation to Russia met with representatives of JW in Moscow on 4 April and 13 July 2017 and kept in close contact with them. European External Action Service officials have also met with representatives of the JW in Brussels. EU and Member States' diplomats attended several sessions of the Supreme Court hearing including the hearing of the appeal on 17 July 2017.

On 24 April 2017 the HR/VP Mogherini raised this issue, as well as other human rights concerns, when she met with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov in Moscow. The EU issued statements condemning the harassment and persecution against Jehovah's Witnesses at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Permanent Council meetings of 30 March, 27 April and 20 July 2017 as well as in the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers on 5 April 2017.

The EU will continue urging the Russian authorities to ensure that JW, along with other religious groups, are able to peacefully enjoy freedom of assembly without interference, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation, Russia's international commitments and international human rights standards.

On the Commission side, the work of Mr. Jan Figel, Special Envoy (SE) for the promotion of FoRB outside the EU, has played an important role in raising awareness of FoRB and support for the implementation of the EU Guidelines on it. The Guidelines provide the backbone for the SE's action at various levels, notably support to EU Delegations and country stakeholders implementing the policy, engagement in international processes and dialogue with civil society and religious actors. This is illustrated by his country visits, notably in Iraq, Sudan, Senegal and Pakistan, as well as in increased visibility for FoRB in the development cooperation scene: for example, a special thematic prize of the Lorenzo Natali Media Prize was awarded on FoRB during the European Development Days . The Media Prize is an award granted by the

European Commission to journalists from all over the world for their outstanding works on development.

Regarding implementation, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights has been mobilised for FoRB-related activities in all regions of the world with at least 45 specific FoRB projects, accounting for at least EUR 17 million in the period 2007-17. Moreover, the 2017 global call for proposals published in September 2017 also addresses freedom of religion or belief, in particular, the contribution of civil society to the implementation of the 2013

EU Guidelines. These include, inter alia, the promotion of dialogue, and an emphasis on the role of religious and other leaders in these processes (indicative amount EUR 5 million) . The projects will be selected in 2018.

The Commission's call for proposals with the title: 'Intercultural Dialogue and Culture' was published in March 2017. This programme envisages cooperation with partner countries on intercultural dialogue for peaceful inter-community relations 'using intercultural dialogue as a tool to increase understanding and tolerance'. One of the specific objectives of the call is to enhance cultural pluralism and intercultural understanding, including aspects relating to religion or belief. Selected projects will be contracted by the end of 2017.

The EU continued to work to ensure that FoRB remains prominent on the UN agenda, and the EU was the lead sponsor of a Resolution on FoRB both in the Human Rights Council (HRC) and the UN General Assembly (third committee). In November 2017, the EU FoRB resolution to the UNGA 72 was adopted by consensus with 78 cosponsors – three more than in 2016. The FoRB resolution identifies obstacles to the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief and presents recommendations on ways to overcome these obstacles. It also calls upon states to protect, respect and promote the right to freedom of

religion or belief.

During the March 2017 HRC the FoRB resolution was also adopted by consensus with minor technical updates, as a result of parallel negotiations with the OIC on the Resolution 'Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons based on religion or belief' .

In the margins of the Human Rights Council's 34th session in March 2017, the EU, in cooperation with the Special Rapporteur and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights organised an event on FoRB entitled 'Towards an agenda for implementation'. The panel offered the opportunity to take stock of the progress made to advance the enjoyment of the freedom of religion or belief, and to identify a way forward to boost the enjoyment of this fundamental freedom.

EUROPEAN COURT OF JUSTICE RULING ON DOOR TO DOOR PREACHING AND GDPR

Personal data protection and door-to-door preaching: Jehovah's Witnesses v. Finland

Judgment of the Court Grand Chamber in Case C-25/17
(<https://bit.ly/2utVBuF>)

A religious community, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, is a controller, jointly with its members who engage in preaching, for the processing of personal data carried out by the latter in the context of door-to-door preaching

The processing of personal data carried out in the context of such activity must respect the rules of EU law on the protection of personal data

Press release 103/18 (10.07.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2JfTD6e> – On 17 September 2013, the Tietosuojavaltuutettu (Finnish Data Protection Supervisor) prohibited the Jehovan todistajat – uskonnollinen yhdyskunta (Jehovah's Witnesses religious community, Finland) from collecting or processing personal data in the course of door-to-door preaching by its members unless the requirements of Finnish legislation relating to the processing of personal data are observed.

The members of the Jehovah's Witnesses Community take notes in the course of their door-to-door preaching about visits to persons who are unknown to themselves or that Community. The data collected may consist of the name and addresses of persons contacted, together with information on their religious beliefs and their family circumstances. Those data are collected as a memory aid and in order to be retrieved for any subsequent visit without the knowledge or consent of the persons concerned. The Jehovah's Witnesses Community and its congregations organise and coordinate the door-to-door preaching by their members, in particular by creating maps from which areas are allocated between the members who engage in preaching and by keeping records about preachers and the number of the Community's publications distributed by them. Furthermore, the congregations of the Jehovah's Witnesses Community maintain a list of persons who have requested not to receive visits from preachers and the personal data on that list are used by members of that community.

The reference for preliminary ruling from the Korkein hallinto-oikeus (Supreme Administrative Court, Finland) asks essentially whether that community is required to observe the rules of EU Law on the protection of personal data (*) on account of the fact that its members, when they carry out door-to-door preaching, may take notes re-transcribing the

content of their discussions and, in particular, the religious views of the persons whom they have visited.

In today's judgment, the Court of Justice considers, first of all, that door-to-door preaching by members of the Jehovah's Witnesses Community is not covered by the exceptions laid down by EU Law on the protection of personal data. In particular, that activity is not a purely personal or household activity to which that law does not apply. The fact that door-to-door preaching is protected by the fundamental right of freedom of conscience and religion enshrined in Article 10(1) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, does not confer an exclusively personal or household character on that activity because it extends beyond the private sphere of a member of a religious community who is a preacher.

Next, the Court states, however, that the rules of EU Law on the protection of personal data apply to the manual processing of personal data only where the data processed form part of a filing system or are intended to form part of a filing system. In the present case, since the processing of personal data is carried out otherwise than by automatic means, the question arises as to whether the data processed form part of, or are intended to form part of, such a filing system. In that regard, the Court finds that the concept of a 'filing system' covers a set of personal data collected in the course of door-to-door preaching, consisting of the names and addresses and other information concerning the persons contacted, if those data are structured according to specific criteria which, in practice, enable them to be easily retrieved for subsequent use. In order for such a set of data to fall within that concept, it is not necessary that they include data sheets, specific lists or other search methods.

The processing of personal data carried out in connection with door-to-door preaching must therefore comply with the rules of EU law on the protection of personal data.

As regards the question as to who may be regarded as a controller of the processing of personal data, the Court states that the concept of 'controller of the processing of personal data' may concern several actors taking part in that processing, with each of them then being subject to the rules of EU law on the protection of personal data. Those actors may be involved at different stages of that processing of personal data and to different degrees, so that the level of responsibility of each of them must be assessed with regard to all the relevant circumstances of the particular case. The Court also states that no provision of EU Law supports a finding that the determination of the purpose and means of processing must be carried out by the use of written guidelines or instructions from the controller. However, a natural or legal person who exerts influence over the processing of personal data, for his own purposes, and who participates, as a result, in the determination of the purposes and means of that processing, may be regarded as a controller of the processing of personal data.

Furthermore, the joint responsibility of several actors for the same processing, under that provision, does not require each of them to have access to the personal data concerned.

In the present case, it appears that the Jehovah's Witnesses Community, by organising, coordinating and encouraging the preaching activities of its members participates, jointly with its members who engage in preaching, in determining the purposes and means of processing of personal data of the persons contacted, which is, however, for the Finnish court to verify with regard to all of the circumstances of the case. That finding cannot be called into question by the principle of organisational autonomy of religious communities guaranteed by Article 17 TFEU.

The Court concludes that EU law on the protection of personal data supports a finding that a religious community is a controller, jointly with its members who engage in preaching,

of the processing of personal data carried out by the latter in the context of door-to-door preaching organised, coordinated and encouraged by that community, without it being necessary that the community has access to those data, or to establish that that community has given its members written guidelines or instructions in relation to the data processing.

(*) Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 1995 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (OJ 1995 L 281, p. 31) read in the light of Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

NOTE: A reference for a preliminary ruling allows the courts and tribunals of the Member States, in disputes which have been brought before them, to refer questions to the Court of Justice about the interpretation of European Union law or the validity of a European Union act. The Court of Justice does not decide the dispute itself. It is for the national court or tribunal to dispose of the case in accordance with the Court's decision, which is similarly binding on other national courts or tribunals before which a similar issue is raised.

RUSSIA: 22 Jehovah's Witnesses behind bars/ First female JW locked up

JW Headquarters / Russia Religion News (10.07.2018) – <https://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/180706a.html> – On 6

July 2018, 46-year-old Sergei Poliakov and his wife, Anastasia, who are suspected of professing the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses, were sent to an Omsk SIZO (pretrial detention). They were arrested during searches conducted on 4 July 2018 in the homes of local residents.

The Poliakov couple were incommunicado for two days and the door to their apartment was found to be broken down. Simultaneous searches were conducted in at least four residences of Omsk. Beginning at 7:00 a.m., searches continued until 15:00 and were conducted in houses, parcels of land, business structures, and in citizens' parked cars. All sorts of electronic devices and data storage were seized. During a search, witnesses actively helped law enforcement personnel, prompted, and even tried to question believers. The operation was conducted by Denis Loginovsky, an investigator of the Azov Investigation Department of the Russian Investigative Committee for Omsk oblast.

It is still not known which articles the criminal case will be based on. However law enforcement agencies in various regions of Russia mistakenly take the shared religious confession of citizens as participation in an extremist organization. The attention of prominent public figures of Russia and also of the Council for Human Rights under the Russian president has already been called to this problem. (tr. by PDS, posted 9 July 2018)

IRAN : Over 130 religious Leaders condemn Iran regime

The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Rowan Williams, has

led over 50 British bishops and nearly 80 US church leaders to condemn the Iranian Regime for its human rights abuses and mistreatment of religious minorities in a statement released today.

Mohabat News (27.06.2018) – <http://mohabatnews.com/en/?p=4027> – The statement called on the international community to pay more attention to the plight of the Iranian people, particularly religious minorities, who have long suffered at the hands of the dictatorship.

The Rt Rev. John Pritchard, former Bishop of Oxford and one of the signatories of the statement, said: “Today, we announce the initiative by Dr. Rowan Williams and supported by more than 50 bishops in the UK along with 78 US church leaders, which highlights the plight of the Iranian people and the religious minorities in Iran, particularly the Christians, calling on the international community to act to defend their rights in the face of government harassment and persecution.” The Iranian Regime has been condemned a massive 64 times for its human rights record by the United Nations and many more times by various international human rights organizations. While the majority of those targeted by the Regime are Shiite Muslims, who make up the majority of Iran’s population, religious minorities are targets specifically for their faith. Worse still, the situation is not getting better.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres told the United Nations Human Rights Council in February: “No improvement was observed concerning the situation of religious and ethnic minorities, who remain subject to restrictions. [I] remain concerned by reports of persistent human rights violations of and discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities.”

While, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom’s 2018 report revealed that religious freedom in Iran has continued to deteriorate, with many Christian converts and house church leaders given least 10 years in prison, and many

religious reformers facing “prolonged detention and possible execution”.

This abuse of human rights is justified by the Regime under their warped version of Islam, but is not recognised by any true believer.

Indeed, Maryam Rajavi, who leads the Iranian opposition and will be the keynote speaker at their June 30 gathering in Paris, states that Islam does not approve of any form of compulsion, coercion and forcible prohibition, including the use of flogging and terror, imposing the compulsory veil, and especially imposing the rule of a government under the name of God and Islam.

The statement reported that the nationwide anti-regime uprising in Iran showed that the Iranian people want democracy in their country and the religious leaders agreed that the West should support that.

The statement read: “We call on all countries to take into consideration the deplorable situation of human rights in Iran, particularly the painful situation of religious minorities, in navigating their relations with Iran. We urge them to base any improvement of relations with Iran on a cessation of oppression of minorities and on a halt to executions in Iran. The time has come for us to listen to the Iranian people’s demand for freedom, including religious freedom.”

This statement is the latest in a series of public condemnations of the Iranian Regime for its human rights abuses and of support for the Iranian opposition and their Free Iran rally.

Countering extremism in Indonesia and beyond

Religious Freedom Institute (<https://bit.ly/2KP2a10>) – Between May 8 and May 14, 2018 Indonesia was hit by a wave of ISIS terrorist attacks, including bombings carried out by families—fathers, mothers, and children together. The principal targets were churches and police stations, including the headquarters of the paramilitary Police Mobile Brigade (which is also where Ahok, the former Governor of Jakarta and a Christian, is serving a sentence for blasphemy). In the wave of attacks, thirteen terrorists and fourteen others were killed, and more than 40 were injured.

The Indonesian government's security forces responded strongly. There were some early arrests and then, on May 31, in a series of raids, anti-terrorist squads arrested 41 terror suspects and killed 4 others. These raids came less than a week after the May 25 passage of a new anti-terrorism law that criminalized overseas terror attacks and allowed for longer detention of suspects. The bill had been languishing in parliament for two years amid controversies over how strict it should be and how to define terrorism, but this the wave of deadly suicide attacks persuaded lawmakers the bill should be passed.

But a much more low-key event may signal broader changes in how Indonesia is approaching its effort to combat extremism.

On May 31, Indonesian President Joko Widodo appointed Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf (Pak Yahya) as a member of the Presidential Advisory Council. Pak Yahya is from one of Indonesia's most distinguished Muslim families, is the Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the world's largest Muslim organization, and is the head of Gerkan Pemuda Ansor (ANSOR), NU's young-adult wing, which

has some 5 million members. He is also among the Muslim world's most incisive and outspoken reformers.

NU has long been engaged in ideological combat with Islamist extremism. In May 2017, Ansor called together more than 300 international religious scholars to consider the "obsolete tenets of classical Islamic law" that call for "perpetual conflict with those who do not embrace or submit to Islam." This gathering issued the Ansor "Declaration on Humanitarian Islam," that built on the May 16, 2016, NU-hosted International Summit of Moderate Islamic Leaders (ISOMIL).

The "Declaration on Humanitarian Islam," is far more self-critical than declarations that have come from the Middle East. It argues that there are elements within classical Islam that are problematic and need to be changed. At the press conference announcing the Declaration, Ansor Chairman Yaqut Qoumas stated "It is false and counterproductive to claim that the actions of al-Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram and other such groups have nothing to do with Islam, or merely represent a perversion of Islamic teachings. They are, in fact, outgrowths of Wahhabism and other fundamentalist streams of Sunni Islam."

Pak Yahya reemphasized these themes and expressed them in an even more radical fashion in a July 18, 2017, address to the Council of the European Union Terrorism Working Party, many of whose members would have accused the speaker of Islamophobia if he had been anyone else. He stressed:

"Western politicians should stop pretending that extremism and terrorism have nothing to do with Islam. There is a clear relationship between fundamentalism, terrorism, and the basic assumptions of Islamic orthodoxy. So long as we lack consensus regarding this matter, we cannot gain victory over fundamentalist violence within Islam."

"Within the classical tradition, the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is assumed to be one of segregation

and enmity.”

“Why, no matter how many [terrorists] we kill or put in jail, new recruits are always coming to join them? Here is the fact: the problem lies within Islam itself. Jihadist doctrine, goals and strategy can be readily traced to specific elements of orthodox, authoritative Islam and its historic practice, including those portions of fiqh-classical Islamic law or shari‘ah-that enjoin Islamic supremacy.”

While NU as a whole has not endorsed the “Declaration on Humanitarian Islam,” Pak Yahya told me they are discussing it and he has suffered little criticism for his statements. The arguments that he and Anzor are making are radical, and crucial in the battle with extremism. And they are gaining increasing attention in Indonesia and around the world.

On May 17, 2018, Pak Yahya met with Vice President Pence for the second time. And the fact that Indonesian President Jokowi has now appointed him to his Advisory Council sends a strong signal about Jokowi’s own attitudes.

Paul Marshall is Wilson Professor of Religious Freedom at Baylor University, Senior Fellow of the Religious Freedom Institute and member of the South and Southeast Asia (SSEA) Action Team, and Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute’s Center for Religious Freedom

Iraqi archbishop tells USAID delegation to hurry up aid

delivery

World Watch Monitor (04.07.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2IUhM26> – An Iraqi Catholic archbishop has said he and other bishops are “delighted” that the US aid arm is to make good on a pledge to send aid directly to non-Muslim communities recovering from ISIS’s occupation of their towns and villages, but warned “time is running [out]”.

Archbishop Bashar Warda of Erbil, in Kurdistan, addressed his warning to a visiting delegation from the agency, USAID, led by its administrator, Mark Green.

“The time should be now and the help should be immediate and effective,” [Archbishop Warda told the US-based Catholic News Service \(CNS\)](#) after the visit.

Some eight months after it was [announced by Vice President Mike Pence](#), USAID is providing US\$10 million to two umbrella organisations, Catholic Relief Services and Heartland Alliance, to help Christians and Yazidis rebuild their homes and communities after Islamic State’s occupation of the Nineveh Plains region, which ended with the Battle of Mosul in 2017. An additional \$25m of aid has also been pledged.

Last month Pence [ordered Green to fly to Iraq](#) to assess why aid was being held up after Archbishop Warda, who has been caring for tens of thousands of displaced Christian families since 2014, [told US-based Fox News](#) that much of the pledged aid had not materialised.

Green said on Twitter today (4 July) that he would be presenting President Donald Trump and Pence “with a plan for expediting the delivery of assistance to the most vulnerable communities”. He said USAID was supporting “the safe and dignified return of persecuted religious and ethnic communities in northern Iraq”.

Archbishop Warda told CNS this week that the delegation visited Qaraqosh and other devastated towns which had had large Christian populations before ISIS seized control of the region in 2014. He told CNS the delegation’s message was that “the American government and the Americans do care about the fate of the Christians, Yazidis and the minorities and want to help”.

On 1 July, a high-level US delegation met the prime minister of the semiautonomous Kurdish region, Nechirvan Barzani, who told them that the return of Iraq’s religious and ethnic minorities to their homes would require the help of the international community.

Barzani also suggested that a confidence-building process be launched to encourage Christians and other minorities not to leave Iraq or the Kurdistan Region.

Yesterday [the delegation met the Iraqi Prime Minister](#), Haider Al-Abadi, and according to his Facebook page discussed “cooperation between Iraq and USAID, economic support, the return of displaced persons, the protection of minorities, and the training of local police”.

As well as Green, the US delegation included the US Ambassador to Iraq, Douglas Silliman; the US Consul General in Erbil, Ken Gross; the US Special Envoy for International Religious Freedom, Ambassador Sam Brownback; the co-chairman of the bipartisan Religious Minorities in the Middle East Caucus, Congressman Jeff Fortenberry; and religious freedom advocate and retired congressman Frank Wolf.

Before USAID officials' visit, Pence spoke to Al-Abadi by telephone and, according to the White House, the pair "conveyed their shared commitment to protecting victims of religious persecution at the hands of ISIS, and discussed USAID administrator Mark Green's upcoming visit to Iraq in support of this effort".

IS cells continue to carry out insurgent attacks, bombings, ambushes and kidnappings, [Kurdistan 24 reported](#) last week.

According to the UN's refugee agency, 2.1 million Iraqis are displaced within Iraq and, of those, more than 360,000 are living in "informal settlements" such as abandoned buildings. But church leaders fear that if Christians are unable to return to their homes and start rebuilding their lives in safety, they will seek asylum abroad, further diminishing the Christian presence in Iraq and damaging the country's fragile religious diversity. The number of Christians in Iraq has fallen from 1.4m in 1987 to an estimated 2-300,000 today, accelerated by war, instability and targeted sectarian violence.

More than 100,000 Iraqis – including many Christians – fled

Mosul and the Nineveh Plains for Kurdistan in the summer of 2014, after ISIS seized control of large swathes of Iraq and threatened non-Sunni Muslims with death if they did not leave. According to the church committees in the Nineveh Plains, some 8,744 Christian families have returned to nine villages in the area. In addition, 82 Christian families have returned to Mosul.

The Chaldean Catholic patriarch, Cardinal Louis Raphael I Sako, has said about one-third of the Christian families who fled IS have returned home but that infrastructure and security remain inadequate, CNS reported.

Warda said many actors had a role to play in ensuring Christians remained in Iraq. He told CNS that “concerned governments and parties need to bring a dialogue of life, that existed before, back again” to Iraq’s rich cultural mosaic.

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KYRGYZSTAN: Church of Muslim converts told to close

World Watch Monitor (04.07.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2KJkUD0> – A church in Kyrgyzstan that is home to many former Muslims has been ordered to cease its Sunday worship.

A local source told World Watch Monitor that services at the church, which is led by a convert from Islam, have been interrupted twice in the last few months by a group of people consisting of local officials, representatives of the Prosecutor's office and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, assistants to the local imam and former colleagues from the school at which the pastor used to teach.

World Watch Monitor cannot name the town in which the incident took place, for security reasons.

On both occasions, members of the group demanded that the service be stopped and told them: "You will not be able to live and carry out your ministry here." The church members tried to settle the conflict, World Watch Monitor was told, but the group continued to issue threats and insults.

The church members then started filming them with their mobile phones, after which the group left the building hiding their faces but saying to the congregation: "We will come here again

and again to disturb and persecute you in every possible way," the source said.

The church has for more than a decade been led by Pastor Miran*. The leadership of the school where he worked threatened to fire him after they learned of his conversion and his role as a church leader. He was also accused of child abuse by the school and jailed for six months. The source said that no lawyer would defend him at his trial because they were afraid of falling foul of the security services, no witnesses were present in court, and the charge against him was not proven. The source said the church felt the allegation was only levelled against him because of his conversion.

Since his release, Pastor Miran, a father of five, has been unable to find paid work. According to the World Watch Monitor's source, local Muslims say of him: "If Miran could betray his 'native pure Islam', maybe he could do other bad things too."

Details about cases such as Pastor Miran's remain vague due to the sensitive security situation facing those involved and the potential for repercussions against them.

Background

The vast majority of Kyrgyzstan's estimated 300,000 Christians belong to the Russian Orthodox Church and there is a small but growing number of Christian converts from a Muslim background. Converts face pressure from family, friends and the wider community. The Kyrgyz constitution officially guarantees

freedom of religion, but proposed new laws impose stringent registration rules, and all religious literature must be approved.

Kyrgyzstan dropped off the Open Doors World Watch List of the 50 countries in which it is most difficult to live as a Christian for the first time in five years in 2015. This was said to be due to an increase in problems in other countries, rather than improvements in religious freedom.

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CHINA: Like a Lamb to the Slaughter: Will the United States Send This Woman to Her

Death?

An Open Letter to President Trump



Dear President Trump:

We are NGOs, some of them with ECOSOC consultative status, active in the defense of human rights and religious liberty, with a special experience and concerns for China, and write to ask for your urgent intervention in a question, literally, of life and death.

It regards an asylum seeker of a Chinese Christian new religious movement, [The Church of Almighty God](#), who is

detained in Detroit, Michigan, and threatened with immediate deportation back to China, where she will be arrested and will be at serious risk of being executed.

The Church of Almighty God is a group [listed as xie jiao](#) (“heterodox teaching,” often wrongly translated as “evil cult”) and banned in China. Being active in it is a crime under Article 300 of the [Chinese Criminal Code](#), punished with a jail penalty from three to seven years “or more,” but being a leader of it exposes to much harsher punishment. The Chinese government has spread for several years [fake news](#) about The Church of Almighty God, accusing it of [crimes it has never committed](#).

Ms. Demei Zou was born on August 14, 1976. She was the leader of The Church of Almighty God in four provinces of China. Because of the severe persecution, somebody in the position of Ms. Zou normally destroys all identification documents and operates under aliases. Her role, however, became known to the police. Illegally, her Church obtained a copy of her “Registration as Fugitive,” a document that reputable scholars believe to be genuine. It accuses Ms. Zou to be indeed the leader of The Church of Almighty God in the provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou, Chongqing, and Sichuan. It also accuses Ms. Zou of being involved in “stealing and transporting Chinese military secrets abroad,” an absurd accusation for those who know her Church, but one involving the death penalty.

Ms. Zou fled from China to South Korea by using the passport of another person with her photograph pasted on it. From South Korea, she moved to America and arrived at Detroit, Michigan on January 24, 2017. There, her passport was identified as false, and she was arrested. She had her initial master

calendar hearing on April 11, 2017, and another one on April 24, 2017. The Court heard testimonies from Ms. Zou and three additional witnesses – two are members of the Church who have been granted asylum in the US on the grounds of religious persecution – at her individual merits hearings on June 13, July 18, and August 29, 2017. She received her notice of losing the case in December of 2017. She took her case to the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), but again, BIA upheld the Immigration Judge's adverse decision. She appealed on June 15, 2018. But, according to the account she provided to her co-religionists, immigration officers advised her that she would be deported to China and in fact made attempts to put her on a plane to Beijing last week, attempts she physically resisted.

Ms. Zou does not speak English. Although the Immigration Court in Detroit also cited the fake news about The Church of Almighty God it found on the Internet (although they have disappeared even from Wikipedia, and [foreign decisions in parallel refugee cases](#) expose them as mere Chinese propaganda), the main problems were Ms. Zou's difficulties in proving her identity, her identity documents having been destroyed, and in telling their story in a way understandable to the authorities, although her co-religionists testified of knowing her and about her role in the Church. We understand that American courts claim they cannot be sure the woman in jail in Detroit is really Ms. Zou, since she has no identity documents. But several co-religionists who escaped to the United States are prepared to swear that she is indeed Ms. Zou.

We trust that the appeal will clarify the misunderstandings, vast documentation about The Church of Almighty God and its persecution based on serious scholarly studies will be introduced, and well-known scholars familiar with the issue

will be allowed to testify. In the meantime, deportation of Ms. Zou to China should be stopped. There are documented cases of members of The Church of Almighty God who returned to China from foreign countries and were arrested and even tortured, or “disappeared” there. For Ms. Zou, who has already been accused of involvement in espionage and identified as a key leader of the Church, the risk of the death penalty is very high.

It is inconceivable that the United States, a country whose commitment to human rights and religious liberty is well-known and has been solemnly reiterated under your Presidency, would render Ms. Zou to the persecutors of her Church and to the executioner, and immediate action is needed to prevent such a tragic occurrence.

July 4, 2018

Yours faithfully,

CAP-LC Coordination des associations et des particuliers pour la liberté de conscience

CESNUR – Center for Studies on New Religions

EIFRF European Inter-Religious Forum for Religious Freedom

FOB – European Federation for Freedom of Belief

FOREF – Forum for Religious Freedom Europe

HRWF – Human Rights Without Frontiers

LIREC – Center for Studies on Freedom of Belief, Religion and

Conscience

ORLIR – International Observatory of Religious Freedom of Refugees

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