

BRUNEI: Country to punish adultery and gay sex with death by stoning

By Austin Ramzy

NY Times (28.03.2019) – <https://nyti.ms/2YyfHSs>– When Brunei announced in 2013 that it was bringing in harsh Islamic laws that included punishments of death by stoning for adultery and gay sex, the move was met with international protest. Some investments by the country's sovereign wealth fund, including the Beverly Hills Hotel, were targets of boycotts and calls for divestment.

Following the outcry, Brunei, a sultanate of about 430,000 on the island of Borneo, delayed carrying out the harshest provisions of its Shariah law.

Now, it is quietly going ahead with them.

Beginning on April 3, statutes allowing stoning and amputation will go into effect, according to an announcement posted by the country's attorney general last year that has only recently received notice.

That has set off a renewed outcry from human rights groups.

“Brunei’s Penal Code is a deeply flawed piece of legislation containing a range of provisions that violate human rights,” Rachel Chhoa-Howard, a researcher for Amnesty International, said in a statement. “As well as imposing cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments, it blatantly restricts the rights to freedom of expression, religion and belief, and codifies discrimination against women and girls.”

Brunei has had the death penalty on the books since it was a British protectorate, but in practice executions are not typically carried out.

Homosexuality is already illegal in Brunei, with a punishment of up to 10 years in prison, but the new laws allow for penalties including whipping and stoning. The new laws also introduce amputation of hands or feet as a punishment for robbery.

“To legalize such cruel and inhuman penalties is appalling of itself,” Ms. Chhoa-Howard said. “Some of the potential ‘offenses’ should not even be deemed crimes at all, including consensual sex between adults of the same gender.”

Brunei is ruled by a sultan, Hassanal Bolkiah, who lives in a 1,788-room palace and whose wealth amounts to tens of billions of dollars thanks to Brunei’s oil riches. In recent decades he has advocated a conservative vision of Islam that has clashed with the more moderate strains generally practiced in the region, and with the royal family’s own luxurious lifestyle.

A long-running feud between the sultan and his brother, Prince Jefri Bolkiah, unfolded in courtrooms around the world after the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s and brought attention to the prince's reputation for extravagance, including cars, mansions, mistresses and erotic statues.

Under the laws about to come into effect, a person can be convicted of adultery or having gay sex only if there are multiple Muslim witnesses. The law will apply to Muslims and non-Muslims alike, although some offenses, such as apostasy, apply specifically to Muslims, who make up about two-thirds of Brunei's population.

In an update to its travel advice for Brunei, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs said the new Shariah code "applies to Muslims, non-Muslim and foreigners even when on Brunei registered aircraft and vessels." It recommended that travelers "exercise normal safety precautions" when visiting the sultanate.

If you want to be regularly informed about different violations of human rights in the world, [click here](#) for a free subscription to our newsletters!

Also:

HRWF database of news and information on over 70 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/womens-rights-gender-equality/>

List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various faiths in 20 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>

WORLD: A right for all: Freedom of religion or belief in ASEAN

APPG (27.09.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2xvPgCZ> – A new report from USCIRF emphasises the strategic importance of robust U.S. engagement on these issues with ASEAN as a collective and the 10 individual Member States: Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The countries of Southeast Asia—bound together in the regional bloc known as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—are vastly diverse in their geographic size, governing systems, economies, and cultural and societal heterogeneity.

Also, each country is different in its degree of adherence to international human rights standards and its protection (or denial) of the freedoms therein, including the universal freedom of religion or belief.

In ASEAN's 50th year, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) presents A Right for All: Freedom of Religion or Belief in ASEAN. The report documents ASEAN's and the Member States' approaches to this fundamental right, underscores the religious freedom-related challenges in the region that transcend country borders, and emphasizes the strategic importance of robust U.S. engagement on these issues.

ASEAN's approach to human rights often has been diminished by two competing interests: the Member States' desire to integrate as a bloc and their deeply embedded reliance on

independence and non-interference in one another's affairs. In an increasingly interdependent, interconnected community such as ASEAN, it is vital that governments and societies recognize—both within and across their borders—when the right to freedom of religion or belief is being abused and take steps to protect individuals and groups whose rights are violated.

ASEAN and the individual Member States have an inconsistent record protecting and promoting human rights, and even more so with respect to freedom of religion or belief. Often, ASEAN countries have lacked cohesion and a strong will to act in response to serious violations within their own borders and among the other members of the bloc.

Key findings about freedom of religion or belief in the 10 Member States include:

Brunei: The identification of the state and the public sphere with Islam in the person of the sultan sometimes challenges the religious freedom of non-Muslims or heterodox Muslim residents, whose communities may be banned or ruled by Shari'ah despite their affiliation.

Burma: While the year 2016 marked a historic and peaceful transition of government in Burma, outright impunity for abuses committed by the military and some non-state actors and the depth of the humanitarian crisis for displaced persons continue to drive the ill treatment of religious and ethnic groups.

Cambodia: Cambodia has few internal challenges with freedom of religion or belief, but could do more to uphold its human rights commitments, particularly under the Refugee Convention.

Indonesia: The Indonesian government often intervenes when religious freedom abuses arise, particularly if they involve violence. Non-Muslims and non-Sunni Muslims, however, endure ongoing difficulties obtaining official permission to build

houses of worship, experience vandalism at houses of worship, and are subject to discrimination as well as sometimes violent protests that interfere with their ability to practice their faith.

Laos: In some areas of Laos, local authorities harass and discriminate against religious and ethnic minorities, and pervasive government control and onerous regulations impede freedom of religion or belief.

Malaysia: Malaysia's entrenched system of government advantages the ruling party and the Sunni Muslim Malay majority at the expense of religious and ethnic minorities, often through government-directed crackdowns on religious activity, expression, or dissent.

Philippines: With the strong influence of the Catholic Church, as well as the needs of other religious groups, the Philippines grapples with the separation of church and state, and also with the violence that continues to dominate relations with Muslims on the island of Mindanao.

Singapore: Singapore's history of intercommunal violence informs its current policies, which prioritize harmony between the country's major religions, sometimes at a cost to freedom of expression and the rights of smaller religious communities.

Thailand: The primacy of Buddhism is most problematic to freedom of religion or belief in the largely Malay Muslim southern provinces, where ongoing Buddhist-Muslim tensions contribute to a growing sense of nationwide religious-based nationalism.

Vietnam: Vietnam has made progress to improve religious freedom conditions, but severe violations continue, especially against ethnic minority communities in rural areas of some provinces.

Challenges

The 10 Member States experience a number of common and crosscutting challenges that underscore how violations of freedom of religion or belief occur across borders and within the context of broader and related regional trends. ASEAN should acknowledge and work to address the following problems: protection gaps for refugees, asylum seekers, trafficked persons, and those internally displaced; the use of anti-extremism and antiterrorism laws as a means to limit religious communities' legitimate activities, stifle peaceful dissent, and imprison people; the use of nationalistic sentiment by individuals and groups who manipulate religion to the detriment of other religious and ethnic groups; arrests, detentions, and imprisonments based on religious belief, practice, or activities; and the existence and implementation of blasphemy laws that are used to incite or inspire violence, generally by members of a majority religious group against those from a religious minority community.

Conclusion

ASEAN and the individual Member States must understand that the global community of nations is grounded in the premise that everyone observe a rules-based international order, which includes the responsibility to uphold freedom of religion or belief and related human rights. This means ASEAN and the Member States should take steps to:

adhere to international human rights instruments; welcome visits by international human rights monitors; ensure unfettered access by aid workers, independent media, and other international stakeholders to vulnerable populations and conflict areas; repeal blasphemy and related laws; release prisoners of conscience; and strengthen interfaith relationships.

.....

If you want to be regularly informed about different

violations of human rights in the world, [click here](#) for a free subscription to our newsletters!

Also:

HRWF database of news and information on over 70 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/forb/>

List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various faiths in 20 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>