

# Berita NECF



## Editorial

### In the Eye of the Storm

A storm is brewing, and to many, it's not just a storm in a teacup. Paul's warning to the Ephesian elders that "from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30) appears to have come true.

In recent days, controversies about a new gay church and at least one other church with "deviant" doctrines have been given coverage in the press. Christian leaders are naturally concerned, especially when arguments in support of unbiblical positions seem to be articulated convincingly and are gaining ground among the flock.

The most immediate and common reaction is to consider calling for a ban. After all, Christians are called to be "salt and light" and it falls upon us to preserve public morality. In the past, Christians have stood up for what is right and successfully influenced laws on morality in many areas.

But at the same time, the issue is larger than just morality. It's about religious freedom too. Freedom of religion cannot be limited to freedom to choose one of the major religions, but also to choose the specific branch of a religion. Malaysian Christians are a minority in a multiracial

and multireligious country. In the face of Islamization and Islamic domination, we have been calling for freedom of religion. Demanding a ban on churches we don't approve of may have future repercussions as the precedent may turn against us. The same principle may be used to ban some of our Christian activities especially those of independent churches. Do we want this to happen?

Perhaps the best way to resolve this tension is to recognize the different avenues of approach. A national Christian body dealing direct with the federal government may need to maintain her focus on religious liberty because this issue, in the context of present-day Malaysia, is the most wide-ranging and precedent-setting. Churches and individual Christians may, however, in their own spheres of influence call for necessary action to be taken in the cause of morality. (The action must be appropriate and sensitive, not provocative or antagonistic.) In fact, grassroot action is sometimes the most effective because they are more personal.

It is important, however, to remember that morality cannot be legislated. The best way to protect the flock is through discipleship and sound biblical teaching. This

is the time-tested way. The best way to convince non-believers of our position is through convincing testimony. People, however much they may seem to want their own ways, actually want to live in ways that work. God's moral laws have outlined the best ways and it is up to the Christians to live this out and prove it. The most effective approach then is to live a righteous life, articulate our stand with sensitivity and show grace to those who fall or disagree with us.

The Church has weathered many storms but we know that God is the captain of His ship (sheep?). He is in control. Let us look to Him to find peace in the eye of the storm that we may calmly and effectively negotiate our way in the swirling tempest.

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## Chairman's Message

# Why Call It Church?

By Rev. Eu Hong Seng

**T**he Church of Jesus Christ has come under attack again. Indeed these are perilous times.

Of late, we have seen so much that saddens and sickens. The Pope has referred to non-Catholic churches as “defective” and lesser than the true church.<sup>1</sup> A local assembly in Kuala Lumpur has got its members focusing on their “shapes” instead of “spirituality”. And just as we thought that things couldn’t get worse, they did - a self-professed homosexual wanted to start a “gay church” in our country, and it attracted much publicity in our local newspapers.

We need to get back to basics. What is a church? A group of people gathering together for a meeting with Bibles in hand, listening to a preacher does not automatically constitute a church. A group for practicing homosexuals, led by practicing homosexuals - I definitely would not call it a “church”. A “homosexual church” is a theological oxymoron.

The apostle Peter clearly teaches (1 Pet. 2:9) that the Church of Jesus Christ is a living temple, a h-o-l-y nation. Holiness is an essential attribute. The call to holiness includes leaving behind all lifestyles involving sex outside of marriage. Normalizing homosexuality redefines the notion and theology of sin and makes a mockery of Christ’s atoning death for sinners. It renders meaningless the biblical doctrines of repentance, holiness and sanctification. It makes a farce of the church as salt and light to the sinful world.

I would not dignify a homosexual set-up by calling it a “church”. I think there will be less agitation if the community of churches do likewise.

Let us be simple concerning evil. Churches have been unanimous for nearly 2,000 years, and Judaism before that, as well as the overwhelming majority of churches today, that God’s context for sex is the publicly-pledged lifelong union of a man and a woman, i.e. marriage. The Church has not been wrong in this. Homosexuality is sin. This is the Church’s historical scriptural position. God clearly condemns men who burn with passion with men (Rom. 1:27).

The prophet Isaiah reminds us, “Woe to those who call evil good...” (Isa. 5:20) So often people bend backwards to be polite. But we need to make a strong stand against those who try to reinterpret Scripture to support homosexuality. We must not bow to pressure of accusations of exclusivity, narrow-mindedness or supposed infringement of human rights, but instead be clear and hold firm to Scripture’s teaching.

The Church of Jesus Christ consists of all persons who have been *regenerated* by the Holy Spirit and made new creatures in Christ. It comprises sinners drawn by the grace of God who are able to testify, “that is what I *was*; but I have been washed...”

Anything less is not a church.

<sup>1</sup>Statement made in Italy on July 10, 2007

# The Woman God Uses

**C**an God use women? The answer from the half-day seminar themed “The Woman God Uses”, organized by the NECF Women’s Commission on July 14, 2007, was a resounding “Yes!” The seminar was held at S. S. Gospel Centre and attended by 130 women from 40 churches.

During the seminar, renowned Bible teacher Margaret Jacobs who is also Chairperson of the Women’s Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), outlined four characteristics of women whom God could use to transform the community and world.

She began with “Women of Faith”. We live in a world of increasing population pressure, cross-border movements and cultural mixes, a world of complex technological and medical advances, a world in a perpetual state of flux and merger. All these pose a severe challenge to morality and the traditional way of life. Yet, Jesus has

declared: “I have overcome the world.” (Jn. 16:33) We too, are to overcome the world (1 John 5:4). But in order to do this, Margaret said, women need to exercise authoritative faith in the redemptive work of Calvary. Faith is an action word, not a “couch potato”. Only by exercising authoritative faith can we begin to see miracles of transformation.

Since faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), women must be “Women of the Word”, the second characteristic of an agent of transformation. Women are urged to diligently study the Word and read it in the presence of the Author. God is raising up women today like Hulda in the Old Testament to speak His Word with such authority that it pierces the hearts of the unrighteous and brings healing to the hurting. We have no power to declare the “Thus says the Lord...” and to give a word in season unless we know the Word of God.

The third key is “Women of Prayer”. The role of women as intercessors cannot be underestimated. But before they can bear the burdens of people they pray for, there must be repentance in the areas of their lives that may displease God.

Finally, “Woman with a Message”. There is a renewed call today from the Lord of the Harvest to proclaim the message of hope. Margaret dealt with the following: Who is to proclaim the message? What is the message? How is it to be delivered? What is the time frame to deliver the message? Can a result be expected?

The seminar truly impacted the listeners if the response to the altar call was anything to go by. It was a beautiful scene, women praying for and ministering to women. Many more prayed quietly in their seats that God would use them as agents of transformation in the respective spheres where He has placed them.

## The Three L’s Plus One L Book Launch

On July 11, 2007, “Living and Leading with Limitations” was born. Of course, the book was written earlier i.e. during the three-month break after Rev. Wong Kim Kong’s heart bypass operation. It was a welcome break which he utilized to record down God’s goodness to him.

The book launch was held at the Grand Ballroom of Hilton Hotel, Petaling Jaya. The 20 dinner tables were sponsored by Y. B. Datuk Dr. Maximus Ongkili, Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department. Besides the mouth-watering Chinese dinner, there was a multimedia presentation on Rev.



*Rev. Wong giving away free copies of his book to Mr. Lee Chee Loi from Malaysian CARE*

Wong’s life and his book, followed by his speech and the Minister’s speech before the official ribbon cutting.

Rev. Wong in his speech gave credit to those who had helped him in life and in the writing of the book. He said that in a moment of inspiration he got the idea of the three L’s i.e. living, leading and limitations used in the title

of the book. He jokingly said that he hoped nobody would add another L, calling it a lousy book! Datuk Maximus kept his speech short and sweet but made the interesting assertion that it’s not a lousy book, but a lasting book.

Rev. Wong then gave away 210 books (7 packets) each to three social work organizations – Malaysian CARE, Harvest Centre and a disabled group – for them to distribute. The books were sponsored by a Christian brother.

It is hoped that Rev. Wong’s book will touch many, both Christians and non-Christians. The book is available at all leading Christian bookstores at RM28 each.



# July 30, 2007 – The Big Day

After months of anticipation, the Big Day finally arrived! The NECF 25th Anniversary Banquet at Menara PGRM, Cheras was a smashing success by conventional standards. Despite a slow start, all 130 tables were taken up. The atmosphere was electric. As a picture speaks a thousand words, here's a pictorial report.



was followed by a multimedia presentation about NECF shown on the big screen.

**7** Candle blowing and cake cutting – NECF's birthday cake, of course. On stage were Council Members and staff.

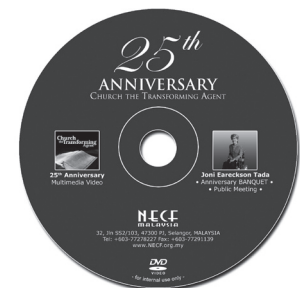
**8** Dr. Chan Ah Kee of EFC Gospel Centre prayed for NECF and gave thanks for the food

**9** Dinner is served

**10** Juwita Suweto sang for us – and this was decided only after she turned up at the event!

**11** Joni Eareckson Tada – of course, she's the one we were dying to hear. (A summary of her message is found on pages 5-6.) Joni closed with a beautiful and touching song.

**12** Former NECF Chairman Rev. Datuk Prince Guneratnam gave the Benediction. But before that, he took the opportunity to ask if anyone wanted to accept Christ that night. And some responded! He truly has a shepherd's heart!



The NECF 25th Anniversary DVD is now available! It contains the NECF Multimedia and Joni Eareckson's messages, and is priced at RM15.00 per copy. Orders can be placed on [www.necf.org.my](http://www.necf.org.my). Please call NECF for more information.

**1** NECF staff all dressed up and making final preparations for the event – Ann Low (left) and Sally Tan (right) in the foreground, Kathryn Tan in the background

**2** The menu (yummy...)

**3** Celine Khoo, wife of Council Member Dr. Khoo Kay Hup, was the emcee

**4** Worship led by Elena Koshy of City Revival Church

**5** Welcome address by Rev. Wong Kim Kong – the message on his face was “NECF means business”

**6** Chairman's address by Rev. Eu Hong Seng. This

# Joni Eareckson Tada Speaks to Malaysian Christians

Joni Eareckson was the Special Guest at NECF's 25th Anniversary Celebrations. She spoke at the Anniversary Banquet, the National Pastors & Leaders Consultation on Nation Building and at a public meeting at Full Gospel Tabernacle, Subang Jaya. This is a summary of Joni's message given during the Anniversary Banquet.

**A**nniversaries are milestones, signposts and memorials that mark the way. In 1 Samuel 7:12, Samuel raised an Ebenezer, a stone of remembrance and said to the people, "Thus far the Lord has helped us." Friends, today is not NECF's anniversary only. July 30th, 2007 is also a most remarkable day for me personally. It was on this day exactly 40 years ago that I dove into the bay and broke my neck. I am so honoured and blessed that I should be celebrating the anniversary of God's graciousness in my life through this disability with your anniversary.

Is the anniversary of breaking my neck something amazing to celebrate? People don't quite understand that and I don't blame them. But when I look back on the milestones, memorials and signposts which brought me to the point where I can smile, not in spite of my problems, but because of my problems, I think of where it all began. More than 40 years ago, as a 14-year-old child I opened my heart to Jesus Christ. I heard that Jesus was the source of that abundant life. But back then, when I was a teenager, the abundant life meant good grades in school, a wonderful boyfriend, no fights with



my sister, and my parents would get off my back about doing chores. Being a Christian was all about me and all the good things that God was going to do for me. After 3 years when I was ready to graduate from high school, I was miserable because I was disobedient, everything was me-centred. And I remember praying a prayer right before my high school graduation in 1967, "Lord God, I am making a mess of my life. I don't want to confess my sins on Sunday morning but go right back to what I was doing before. Oh God, I don't want to live that way. Would You do something in my life to jerk my heart right side up, to get me seriously following you as my Lord because God I don't want to be a hypocrite. Please do something in my life." Two months later, on July 30th, 1967, a young 17-year-old girl went

swimming, took a dive and crushed her head against a sandbar, snapping her neck, crushing her vertebra, leaving her paralyzed without the use of her hands or legs.

As I lay in that hospital bed day after day, week after week, month after month, I began to wonder, why did God rescue me? I would flip the Bible this way and that (with a stick in my mouth) desperately hoping to find answers. I knew there were answers in the Bible somewhere. I just wasn't certain where to find them. I would lay there and think that when I took that dive, God must have been off somewhere, listening to the prayers of more obedient Christians. Maybe He got fed-up with me because I was a hypocrite. Maybe He was off somewhere, tending to the prayers of other people



Lord God, I am making a mess of my life. I don't want to confess my sins on Sunday morning but go right back to what I was doing before...

who had cancer, or muscular dystrophy, or maybe He was in the Middle East somewhere fulfilling prophecy. But He wasn't on that raft. I pictured that it was Satan who snuggled behind me, put his foot in the small of my back and gave a hard shove, and off I went into the water breaking my neck. And just at that point, God turned around and "Oh! Would you look at what happened to Joni?" He was caught off-guard. Satan has floundered His plans for my life! From that point on, God had to grab a mop and a bucket, hammer and nail and glue and come after me and try desperately to work all this out together for my good. That's the view of a very immature 17-year-old Christian.

I found a friend, a young man called Steve. He had heard that I was a young quadriplegic looking for insights in the Bible. So he helped me get deep into the Word of God. The very first question I challenged him with was: "How can this be God's Will?" He answered my question by reading 1 Cor. 1:20. He said, "Joni, I am not sure if I can answer all your questions but just listen to this. 'For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'yes' in Christ.'" He then paraphrased it. "Joni, no matter how many questions you have, they are answered in Jesus Christ." "Look", he said, "think of Jesus. Was it God's Will for Jesus to go to the cross?" I thought long and hard about that. Well, of course it was. Every Sunday school kid knows that it was God's Will for Jesus to have died on the cross. How else would any of us be saved? But then Steve pressed me further on that. "How can the Father allow such an awful thing to happen to His Son? If we can find answers for His life, then they will suf-

fice for yours." He flipped to Act 4:28 where "they did what God's power and Will had decided beforehand should happen". And then he told me, "Joni, God specializes in aborting devilish schemes always to serve His own ends and accomplish His own purposes. And the world's worst murder becomes the world's only salvation."



*Joni with husband Ken Tada*

The Devil's mind was probably to shipwreck my faith. God's motive was to turn this headstrong, stubborn young girl into a young woman who has learned to lean on Jesus each and every day. When I wake up in the morning after 40 years of quadriplegia, I would say, "Oh God, I am so tired, my bones are aching, I just don't know if I can face this, and all I can think of is how I will feel when I get my head back on the pillow this evening. Oh God, I have no strength but You do, I have no abilities but You do, I have no resources for this day but You do. I can't do this thing called quadriplegia but I can do all things though You as You strengthen me. So God show up big time in my life today because I need You desperately." Suffering is like a sheepdog that snaps at my heels and

drives me to the cross each day and every morning when I am not naturally inclined to go.

I often have people come up to me wanting to pray for my physical healing. And I never refused a prayer. But if you want to pray for me to get out of this wheelchair, I would tell you this: "Really I would love to walk, but there's something I would love more, much more. Would you ask God to heal me of my pride? Would you ask Him to miraculously remove my self-centredness, my stubbornness, my laziness in prayer, my slothfulness in reading the Word? Would you please ask Him to miraculously change that?" Because friends, there are more important things in life than walking or having the use of your hands. And as Christians we should want to be holy as He is holy. When you die to sin, that's when you become alive to God. Absolutely alive. His joy spills and splashes over heaven's walls, filling your heart with so much peace and power and perspective. And you learn to see the preciousness of your pain because it pushes you deeper into the inner sanctum of inner fellowship with Him. And it is there you enjoy a more intimate fragrance of union with your Lord and Saviour. I am grateful for this wheelchair. Friends, of all things to waste on earth, do not waste your sufferings.

So many souls are trapped in darkness and despair around us. There is so much misery, spiritual and physical, in this world. You and I have the answers, the hope and the Gospel. I am so glad that in the next 25 years NECF's focus won't be just on nation building but soul winning. And it begins with prayer and going out into the alleys, highways and byways and finding those who do not know Jesus and bringing them in. So tonight I raise my Ebenezer on this anniversary of crossing the Jordan and believe that God will do pleasing things tomorrow. I challenge you to raise the Ebenezer tonight as well.

# Beginning from Vistana, into all the world

**V**istana Hotel Kuala Lumpur became the “happening hotel” on July 31, 2007 and again on August 27-29, 2007.

On July 31, NECF conducted the National Pastors & Leaders Consultation on Nation Building. Over 200 participants attended from all over the country. The Consultation was part of NECF’s 25th Anniversary programme.

The event started off with three plenary sessions – “Nation Building – Its Biblical Mandate” by Rev. Eu Hong Seng, “Building Hope into Social Structures” by Joni Eareckson, and “Nation Building – The Malaysian Church Agenda – Strategies & Plans” by Rev. Wong Kim Kong. In the afternoon, participants were divided into smaller discussion groups spanning seven specific areas i.e. Personal, Family, Church, Community, Marketplace,

Government and Global. They brainstormed areas of concern and ways to make a difference before coming together again to give their reports. This Consultation was just a preliminary one. Next year, further sessions would be held to give flesh to the ideas presented.

On August 27-29, 2007, delegates from eight Southeast Asian countries converged for a three-day Transform Southeast Asia Summit. In the same track as for the earlier Consultation, these key Christian leaders came together to share ideas on how the Church and Christians could be agents of transformation in the various countries. The delegates hailed from Brunei (2 persons), Cambodia (3), Indonesia (9), Myanmar (2), Philippines (8), Singapore (7), Thailand (7) and Malaysia (4, excluding Council and staff of NECF).

Dr. Luis Bush, the International Facilitator of Transform World Connec-

tions based in Singapore, was the key speaker. He took two sessions on “Mission as Transformation (Inspirational, Vision, The Word)” and “Various Transformation Models: e.g. Norway, Korea, Mizoram”.

Other major sessions were taken by Dr. David Lim from the Philippines, Rev. Wong Kim Kong, Bishop Moses Tay from Singapore, Dr. Iman Santoso from Indonesia and Rev. Eu Hong Seng who gave the closing message. In addition, delegates shared on the work being done and the great needs that still existed in their respective countries. There was also a group discussion session on how the same forum could be utilized for future networking and resource sharing.

NECF Malaysia hosted the Summit and managed to get it sponsored. All delegates were given free 2-night stay at the hotel and food, yummy food. They were impressed with Malaysian hospitality and went away inspired and recharged to continue to give their best to God and their nations.

## Praying for the Nation at 50

**J**ust as God’s mercy is new every morning, it is fresh every year. This year too, NECF organized the staple prayer events that have become known among the Malaysian churches. During the 40-day Fast & Prayer project from July 22 to August 30, Christians and churches prayed for our nation. This was followed by a string of Prayer Conferences at the end of August. (The Chinese Prayer Conference, however, was held earlier in July.) Speakers at the National Prayer Conference (English) on Aug 29-Sept 1 were Dr. Luis Bush and Lai Kheng-Pousson. The theme for the entire prayer



*Dr. Luis Bush speaking at the Prayer Conference*



*Besides the Klang Valley, Merdeka Prayer Rallies were held in many cities and towns. Here's the Rally organized by the Johor Bahru Pastors' Fellowship which was attended by about 800 Christians.*



*Merdeka Prayer Rally held at Petaling Jaya Evangelical Free Church*

affair was “Church – the Transforming Agent”. The response was, as usual, encouraging. Of special note was the 40-day Fast & Prayer booklet (available in 4 languages) which received much positive feedback. We thank the Lord that the informative content has opened the eyes of Malaysian Christians to the issues around them and the historical roots, and has enabled

them to pray intelligently and effectively. The Merdeka Prayer Rally on August 31 drew over a thousand people. Savings from the Fast can be sent to NECF. We shall be devoting this year’s collection to the task of crime prevention as a testimony of our love and concern for Malaysia. Let’s pray to God to bless our nation even more abundantly from our 50th birthday forward.

# Seeking God's Kingdom in Malaysia

by Leong Tien Fock, Ph.D.  
Member of NECF Research Commission

**T**he Federal Constitution makes it very clear that Malaysia is a secular state. But how can Malaysia be considered a secular state when Islam is the official religion? Furthermore, most of the political leaders are Muslims. And in Islam, a Muslim must be a Muslim not only in the mosque and in his home. He needs to be a Muslim in whatever occupation he is in, whether in the government or in the marketplace. Even the Bible teaches the same thing about Christians and the Christian faith.

We need to distinguish between the adjectives “secular” and “secularist”. The “secular” refers to the non-religious, not anti-religious. A Science or Geography textbook written by a devout Muslim or Christian is still a secular book. But “secularist” comes from “secularism”, the belief that only the non-religious exists or matters. That means God and eternity do not exist or matter. A secularist book is one that teaches, or is based on the assumption, that there is no God and the here-and-now is all that matters.

Though we can often distinguish the secular from the religious, the two cannot be separated. When we say we have a “secular job” it means our work is non-religious in nature. We may be an engineer or a nurse. However, why we work and how we carry out our work is always influenced by whether we believe God exists and eternity matters.

Hence the secular is always shaped by a belief system that has eternal consequence. If this belief system is not religious in nature, then it is secularist.



So Paul could exhort Christians that whatever they do, even something as secular as eating or drinking, they should do it to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). This admonishment to live out their faith in every aspect of their life actually helps to ensure that they truly believe in the Gospel.

Therefore, though Malaysia is overall a religious nation it can still be considered a secular state, but certainly not a secularist state. We must not confuse the two terms. What then is a secular state? The meaning of a term needs to be understood in the context in which it occurs. Malaysia is a secular state according to how the term is used in the Federal Constitution itself, and not according to any other definition. The entire constitution defines and explains

in what sense Malaysia is a secular state. And it provides for, and limits accordingly, the official role of Islam.

In other words, regardless of any personal religious faith, the work of every minister of the cabinet, every member of the parliament and every judge of the civil court, is secular. Each of them can practise his religious faith, or lack of it, in his respective work in a way that does not violate anything expressed or embodied in the constitution that he has sworn to uphold.

And the Federal Constitution explicitly gives room for Christians to practise as well as propagate their faith. It also implicitly gives room for Christians to practice the full extent of their faith. We are referring to the freedom to



obey Christ's command to "seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). This command is about seeking God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10). This means the Malaysian Church is to make an impact in every aspect of Malaysian society. It is by the grace of God that in His providence the constitution allows us to do this legally in a Muslim-dominant nation.

One reason Muslims consider their religion superior to all others is that they see Islam as a "complete religion". This means Islam shapes every aspect of human life, from the spiritual, moral and even physical, to the social, economic, political as well as judicial. In this light, when Muslims look at the Christian faith as practised throughout the world, the apparent inferiority of Christianity in this regard is glaringly obvious to them.

A recent *Christianity Today* article laments that even when seeking "to help the church be the church" evangelicals tend to depend on means "rooted more in modern social psychology than in the Bible's spiritual realities". This gives the impression that Christianity lacks its own resources to address concerns even within the Church, let alone contribute to issues facing society and the nation.

But this is not the case. Paul says that because "all Scripture is inspired" God's people "may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). And we also have the extensive writings of the Church fathers and the Reformers to help us apply Biblical teaching to issues both within the Church and in the world.

One reason evangelicals have been "getting by" without depending on these Christian resources is the Church's lack of involvement in the world. For otherwise we will soon recognize that we cannot be depending

on the resources of the world to solve the problems in the world, which, like problems in the Church, are often spiritually rooted. We will be forced to return to what God has endowed the Church with in order to do all that He has entrusted us to do.

And thanks be to God that evangelicals worldwide are awakening to the realization of how far short they have fallen in praying for, as well as seeking, God's kingdom to come, wherever He has placed them. We also thank God that this realization is turning into action.

Because of the presence of the indwelling Spirit, who gave us the inspired Scripture, one thing that characterizes the evangelical Church is repeated renewals in the different aspects of the Christian faith. In light of the opportunities and challenges facing the Malaysian Church outlined above, we look forward to a renewal in terms of fulfilling the Church's calling to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

## The Debate

We have never, never been secular because secular by the Western definition means a separation of Islamic principles in the way we govern the country. Islam is the official religion and we are an Islamic state. - **DPM Najib Tun Razak** ([malaysiakini.com](http://malaysiakini.com), Jul 17)

I would say we are a Muslim nation whereby Muslims are in control, but not in the legal way. - **Constitutional law expert Prof. Dr. Shad Saleem Faruqi** (*The Sun*, July 18)

Why do we have to fit either brand? We have our own identity and political structure. - **MP Shahrir Samad** (*The Straits Times*, Singapore, July 18)

This is not only a denial of the fundamental citizenship rights of non-Muslim Malaysians, but also of Muslim Malaysians, the majority of whom would want Malaysia to steer away from extremist Islamist policies. - **MP Lim Kit Siang** (*The Straits Times*, Singapore, July 18)

Notwithstanding the constitutional and theoretical debates, Malaysia has been an Islamic state in practice ever since Independence. The only "changes" that have occurred are in the attitude of those who cannot accept what has already been happening for a long time. - **ABIM President, Yusri Mohamad** ([malaysiakini.com](http://malaysiakini.com), July 21)

We consider ourselves an Islamic state regardless of whether it is written in the Federal Constitution or not. The reality is (that) we practise Islamic teachings in the administration of this country. - **Tun Dr. Mahathir** ([malaysiakini.com](http://malaysiakini.com), July 24)

For all intents and purposes, I think Malaysia was not meant to be an Islamic state. - **Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Tan Sri Bernard Dompok** ([malaysiakini.com](http://malaysiakini.com), Aug 2)

In the spirit of collective responsibility, he (Dompok) should not have said that. Malaysia has always been an Islamic state. - **ABIM President, Yusri Mohamad** (*The Straits Times*, Singapore, Aug 3)

We are not a secular state. We are also not a theocratic state like Iran and Pakistan which PAS wants us to be, but we are a government that is based on parliamentary democracy. - **PM Abdullah Badawi** (*Bernama*, Aug 4)

Officially we are not an Islamic state, neither are we a secular state. But by definition, as recognized by most international societies, Malaysia is an Islamic state. - **Tun Dr. Mahathir** (*The Associated Press*, Aug 7)

# CFM Statement

A constitutional democracy, not an Islamic state

Issued by Paul Tan Chee Ing

July 20, 2007

The Christian Federation of Malaysia wishes to express its concern at the following remarks of Najib Abdul Razak in response to questions from reporters: "Islam is the official religion and Malaysia is an Islamic state, an Islamic state that respects the rights of the non-Muslims and we protect them."

As he is the deputy prime minister of the country and for all Malaysians, he should not have made those remarks. The use of the term 'Islamic state' is unacceptable to Malaysians of other faiths, on three grounds.

Firstly, the term 'Islamic state' is not used in our Federal Constitution to describe the country. By citing Article 3(1) of our Federal Constitution to infer that Malaysia was meant to be an Islamic state runs contrary to the original intention of the Constitution. The Constitution does not provide for a theocratic state.

Secondly, it was never the intention of the social contract entered into at the independence of Malaysia that Malaysia would be an Islamic state. The Constitution was structured to guarantee the right of all religious communities to co-exist and relate with each other on an equal basis as citizens of one and a united country.

Thirdly, to-date, the non-Muslim coalition parties that make up the Barisan National government had never consented nor officially endorsed the use of the term 'Islamic state' to describe the country. The deputy prime minister's statement must therefore be viewed as lacking official endorsement by the government of the day.

We appeal to the deputy prime minister to retract his aforesaid remarks and to the government to refrain from the use of the term 'Islamic State' in the description of Malaysia and instead to vigorously advocate the description of Malaysia as a secular constitutional democracy.

*Bishop Dr. Paul Tan Chee Ing is Chairman of the Christian Federation of Malaysia.*

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## Religion & the Federal System – A Comment

by Lim Heng Seng

Member of NECF Religious Liberty Commission

Malaysia is a federation of states. A federal system of government carefully defines the powers of the Federation and its component states. In Malaysia, these are divided into various matters set out in three lists, viz. the Federal list, the State list and the Concurrent list.

### The Distribution of Powers

Under the Federal list, the greater part of the powers of governance is vested in the Federal Government. This includes authority over external affairs, defence, internal security, criminal and civil law, administration

of justice, education, medicine and health, transport and communications, labour and industrial relations, finance and tax, newspapers, publications and broadcasting. The authority of the states set out in the State List (List II) is limited to, among others, land, municipal matters, state public works, public health, drainage, irrigation and the religion of Islam.

With regard to Islam, the component states have powers over Islamic law and personal and family law of persons professing Islam. The range of Islamic matters includes *wakaf*, religious revenue, mosques, the

creation and punishment of offences by Muslims against the precepts of Islam. The states can establish *syariah* courts with jurisdiction only over Muslims and only in matters stated in the State List.

It is important to note that the Federal Government is not vested with any specific role or authority on matters of religion. Islam is fundamentally a state, not a federal, matter. Unlike the powers vested in the states, federal involvement in Islam is constitutionally limited. But because Islam is the official religion of the country, the Federal Government can

# Syariah is not to be the basis upon which the rights, duties and status of the peoples of the nation, non-Muslim citizens in particular, are recognized, honoured and protected.

incur expenditure on Islamic education and educational institutions. Islamic rites and rituals can be performed in official functions, at the state and federal levels.

In the distribution of powers between the federal centre and the component states, the lion's share of powers is given to the Federal Government as is the case of sources of revenue. Federal funding of and involvement in the Islamic matters through Islamization policies can only distort the fundamental underpinnings and foundation of a secular federal central government. The component states' involvement with limited powers and territorial reach, confined to their respective state boundaries and funds, would in contrast be less overwhelming in terms of impact on administration and the populace. However, the Federal Government has the corresponding powers over the same Islamic matters in the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya and Labuan.

## The Supremacy of the Federal Constitution

There can be little doubt that from the very conception of a Malaysian nation, it was agreed that Malaysia is to be a secular state. She is not to be a theocratic state. In the context of the preliminary provisions of the Malaysian Constitution declaring Islam as the religion of the Federation, she is not to be an Islamic State.

It is not intended that Islam will be the fundamental basis for governance. While Islamic ceremonies and rituals may be used for official purposes, Islamic norms, system and laws are not intended to be the ground rules

on which Malaysia and its peoples are to be organized and governed. Islamic law is not the grundnorm against which all other laws stand to be judged as valid or otherwise. Neither are the policies and conduct of the government, ministers and its officers to be legitimated by reference to Islamic norms. *Syariah* is not to be the basis upon which the rights, duties and status of the peoples of the nation, non-Muslim citizens in particular, are recognized, honoured and protected.

Rather, the government of this nation is to be guided by the Constitution in the execution of its duties of good governance. It is the Constitution which the citizens of this nation will invoke in its interaction with the state, its organs and its officials. It is the Constitution which all members of the Malaysian Parliament, the Prime Minister and his Cabinet, the Chief Justice and his judges are obliged to pledge to "preserve, protect and defend" before exercising the functions of their office.

## The Assertion of Religious Role in Public Sphere

In the early post-Merdeka years and thereafter, the administration under the leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman and his successors appeared to have been scrupulous about maintaining the essential secular character of the Federation. Activities in the promotion of Islam by the government were generally confined to the permitted areas set out in the Constitution or were carried out in the non-governmental sphere. That changed with the resurgence of Islam in the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian revolution. In 1982, the UMNO-dominated government announced the

policy of inculcating Islamic values in the administration.

Over the past three decades religion has played an increasingly significant role in politics, law and government. Albeit qualified by the special position of Islam and the limited role of the state with regard to Islam, the foundational and fundamental constitutional provisions pertaining to the secular character of the nation are unambiguous. Notwithstanding this, there are claims and increasing pressures to assert for Islam a role and position beyond what was envisaged and solemnly agreed upon at the two pivotal points of our nation's history, i.e. at Merdeka and upon the formation of Malaysia.

The ruling government's policies and programmes are viewed with concern as Islamization initiatives extending beyond the limits envisaged by our founding fathers. There is growing disquiet over the way in which certain quarters have attempted to embark on a programme of "gradualist Illumination" of Malaysian society, its governance, its legal order, its institutions and its way of life. It bears an uneasy resemblance to certain features of an Islamic State premised on Islam as a political ideology.

PAS' political objective of establishing an Islamic state was countered in the pre-Merdeka constitutional drafting deliberations by the then Alliance formula declaring Islam the religion of the Federation. Today, Pas is countered by the UMNO-dominated Barisan Nasional with Islam Hadhari.



# Religious Liberty after 50 years of Independence

**O**n August 11, the Religious Liberty Commission of NECF Malaysia held a one-day Consultation on the above topic. The event was supposed to be low-key but received overwhelming response. The Consultation took an entire day from 8.30 a.m. to 9.00 p.m.

Lee Min Choon, Chairman of the Commission was Moderator for the morning session. In his opening remarks, he voiced the concern that Malaysia is on a slippery slope when it comes to religious liberty. He urged that we always aim for the maximum liberty as set down in the international instruments and not be “nice guys” just because we are Christians or live in Malaysia. He encouraged all Christians to participate in this joint struggle.

Lim Heng Seng, the first speaker, also a lawyer, gave an overview of the pertinent issues. He agreed with Min Choon that we are on a slippery slope. He regretted that issues which would be easily resolved in earlier days by simple reference to the Federal Constitution had become so controversial in the present.

Dr. Ng Kam Weng from Kairos Research Centre presented a paper which explored the philosophical grounding of the issue. He underlined that we must shift the terms of politics from one based on race and religion to one based on human rights and equal citizenship in a modern pluralistic democracy.

Tommy Thomas in “Significance & Relevance of International Instruments on Religious Liberty for Malaysia” said we must not depend



*Rev. Wong Kim Kong and Mr. Lee Min Choon during the opening*

**...we always aim for the maximum liberty as set down in the international instruments and not be “nice guys” just because we are Christians or live in Malaysia.**

entirely on law and lawyers! He divulged that real judges are rarely interested in international instruments. This is made worse by the fact that the US and the UK who were key players in the drafting the instruments had turned out to be such bad examples. An alternative to legal recourse is to show our power through the ballot box. He advised that we make this clear to the politicians come the next General Elections.

Datuk Dr. Cyrus Das in “Constitutional Supremacy and the Lina Joy Decision” said this was his first time addressing the issue in public since the judgement. (He was Lina’s counsel.) He said that it is unthinkable that a person can be denied such basic rights as choice of religion, marriage partner etc. which are necessary to a normal life. Regrettably, the majority of Muslim judges tend to take an entirely different approach and line of argument. Lina Joy’s case effectively means that a mere unwritten

departmental policy (of the National Registration Department) can have greater power than Article 11 of the Federal Constitution!

In the afternoon and evening, six other speakers made their point. The final speaker, Daniel Ho, Senior Pastor of Damansara Utama Methodist Church closed the event with the Church’s response. His key points were: 1) We cannot take our religious freedom or Article 11 for granted. 2) We must know our fundamental rights or liberties as Christians and as the Church, 3) We must be willing and prepared to stand up for our religious liberty, 4) To do this, we need to know the role and relationship between Christian citizenship and the State, 5) It would be helpful to know what Christians and the Church did historically and in the recent past on this issue, and ultimately 6) We need to know where to draw the line – are we motivated by fear of man or faith in God? Many were touched and felt that it was a fitting close to the discussion.

# Mission Field At Our Doorstep

According to the Ministry of Human Resources, there are currently 2.5 million registered foreign workers in Malaysia. The number is expected to grow to 5 million by 2010. Even then, these figures do not include the unregistered/undocumented migrant workers.

These migrant workers come mainly from Indonesia, Nepal, India, Vietnam and Bangladesh but also from Myanmar, Pakistan, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Thailand and other countries. Their presence has evoked different emotions among the Malaysian public. Some are fearful, others are indifferent. How should Christians respond?

We praise the Lord that many churches realize the great opportunities for evangelism at their doorstep and have started programmes specially tailored to reach out to these migrant workers.

Of special note is the O2F or Outreach to Foreign Workers Network under the auspices of the Malaysian Centre for Global Ministry. The O2F was birthed from the need to network together in reaching out to these workers as the task and opportunity was way beyond the ability of any individual local church. The networking has resulted in increased cooperation and commitment of local churches and agencies in establishing migrant church groups, compiling resources, leadership training, retreats, raising up of indigenous workers, and link-ups with churches in their home countries for continued discipleship.



Andrew Ng, Chairperson of O2F Network has this to say: "Malaysia has become an ideal place for international mission. Many of these workers come from difficult-access countries, especially from the 10/40 window. The many challenges that these workers face such as long working hours, harsh living conditions, and at times unfavourable hosts have made their hearts to be fertile soil for the Gospel to be preached to them." Raj, who works among the migrants in Klang says: "We work among the migrants in many ways. One of the things we do is teach them English. Language is one of the biggest hindrances when they work here. We also teach them computers. We provide free medical services for them every 2nd and 4th Sundays. We do friendship evangelism through football and other activities through which we are reaching out to them and gaining their confidence."

There are too many testimonies to report but here are several heart-warming ones in the words of the migrants themselves: "I grew closer to God in Malaysia." "I came to earn money but found eternal life." "I accepted Jesus in Malaysia and it changed my life." It makes us really thank God for bringing the mission field to our doorstep.

But it doesn't stop there. Andrew continues: "We not only lead them to Christ, we also disciple them and train them up in leadership. Many of them have gone back to their countries and witnessed to their families and their villages, and even planted churches. Some of these migrants are now pastoring churches or have become evangelists in their own areas."

The question is how we can do more. Irene works among the Myanmarese workers says: "Every little bit counts. Every little action that we do helps them to go a long way and that is definitely doing the work that Jesus wants to do." If each of us contributes a little, together we can reach out to many more.

Here's a good place to start. This November 11 is the "Day of Prayer for Migrant Workers" initiated by the O2F. The O2F would like to encourage you, church leaders and churches to participate in this ministry among the foreign workers in Malaysia by dedicating a special day to praying for the migrant workers. Let's pray that the Gospel will reach the 2.5 million migrant workers from over 20 nations. Pray that God will open their eyes to realize their spiritual need and also protect them from all forms of social threat.

For further information about the O2F Network, please visit [www.mcgm.net.my](http://www.mcgm.net.my) or send an e-mail to [migrants@goconx.com](mailto:migrants@goconx.com). Those very interested are encouraged to contact Andrew Ng directly at [andrewng.teongsiew@gmail.com](mailto:andrewng.teongsiew@gmail.com).





Kedah, the “rice bowl” of Malaysia, produces one third of total rice production in the country. Under the recently launched Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER) project, padi estates will be set up and irrigation system will be improved to boost Kedah’s economic development. NCER is intended to eradicate hardcore poverty and to give the rural and farming community a higher standard of living.

## History in Brief

Kedah has an extensive historical and archaeological park. Evidence of a Hindu-Buddhist period dating back to 300 AD can be found in the temple sites of the Bujang Valley and Merbok Estuary. Other literary findings and ancient shards suggest the rapid expansion of Islam in the 15th century.

The Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa indicates that Kedah sultanate began with the 9th ruler, Phra Ong Mahawangsa, a Hindu raja, who converted to Islam and changed his name to Sultan Muzaffar Shah (1160-1179). Since then there have been 27 Sultans who ruled Kedah.

In 1818, forced by the Siamese, Kedah “reluctantly” invaded Perak and forced the latter to send its *Bunga Emas* (tribute). Kedah’s subsequent rebellion cost the state its sovereignty and the sultan went into exile in Pulau Pinang. The pro-Siamese British government intervened only after severe criticism and strong protests. The long war (1829-38) between Kedah and Siam finally ended.

Sultan Hamid Halim Shah, who reigned Kedah for 61 years (1882-1943), is referred to as the “Father of

## Kedah



Modern Kedah”. A forward-looking Sultan, he reformed the administration and successfully facilitated development in the region. When he fell seriously ill in 1896, his son took control of the government and subsequently led to financial crisis in the early 1900s. This drove Kedah to approach Siam for a loan with the condition of accepting an adviser.<sup>1</sup>

When the Bangkok Treaty was signed in 1909, the suzerainty of Kedah was transferred to Britain. George Maxwell was appointed the 1st British Adviser. The state administration improved since. Despite, the Malay Council attained a reputation for independence. After an agreement in 1923, the British affirmed the Sultan’s power and the place of Malay as the official language.

During World War II, Kedah (along with Kelantan) was first to be invaded by Japan. Alor Star was captured on 12th December 1941. Japan returned Kedah to Siam in recognition of its cooperation during the invasion. The state was renamed *Saiburi*.

When the war ended, Kedah was given back to the British government who had to contend with the threats from Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Army to take possession of Kedah towns and villages. Meanwhile, the Malayan Communist Party (CPM) started to

### Kedah, Darul Aman, “Abode of Peace”

**Capital:** Alor Star (Royal Capital: Anak Bukit)

**(Royal Capital:** Kuala Kangsar)

**Sultan:** Tuanku Alhaj Abdul Halim Mu’adzam Shah

**Chief Minister:** Dato’ Seri Mahdzir Khalid

take control of some districts.

Prior to the independence talks with the British government, Tunku Abdul Rahman, the then Malaya’s Chief Minister, met with CPM leaders in Baling, in December 1955. It was an attempt to persuade the communists to lay down their arms. Although the talks failed, a concession was made that CPM would do so if “the Alliance government had self-determination in internal security and national defence”. This concession was reportedly given great publicity and “strengthened Tunku’s hand in the negotiations with the British in January 1956”.

Tunku Abdul Rahman was one of 45 children of Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Shah of Kedah.

Kedah is also the home state of Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the former prime minister of Malaysia.

## Islamization & Religious Freedom

Kedah was greatly affected by the culture of Hindu Majapahit. The linguistic traces remain. The “Kedah Annals” record how on conversion to Islam the Malays destroyed all the idols they were accustomed to worship, together with the idols handed down from their ancestors.

### Apostasy

While the Administration of Muslim Law Enactment 1962 does not provide provision for converting out, the Syariah Criminal Code Enactment 1988 does not provide any punishment for apostasy either.

There were at least two applications for apostasy in Kedah. The first was simply an oral application. The other



was a written application by Abdul Rahman Sigamani bin Abdullah (also known as Sigamani a/l Ramalingam), a convert who had renounced Islam and had not been practicing the religion. He made a deed poll and statutory declaration on 10th August 2002. An application for conversion out of Islam was sent to the Registrar of *syariah* court in Alor Setar on 18th August. Because there is no provision for Muslims to convert out of Islam in the state enactment, the matter was not brought forward. Sigamani's attempt to officially renounce Islam and return to his original religion, Hinduism, encountered an impasse.

In the landmark case of *Soon Singh v. PERKIM Kedah* in 1999, the Federal Court affirmed the *syariah* court's power to decide whether a person had converted out of Islam or not. It held that, although there is no stipulation on apostasy in the state enactment, there are expressed provisions giving *syariah* courts the jurisdiction to deal with conversion to Islam. Therefore, matters concerning apostasy "could be read as necessarily implied in and falling within the jurisdiction of the *syariah* courts".

Generally, applications to renounce Islam are rejected on the grounds that there is no provision under the *syariah* laws to hear such applications.

### Religious Intolerance

In May 2006, the Ganggai Muthu Karumariamman temple in an estate in Kulim was torched. In October, an elderly American couple was traumatised when the Islamic Religious Affairs officers stormed into their home one morning, accusing them of committing *khahvat* (close proximity). At the UMNO general assembly, Kedah politician Datuk Badruddin Amiruldin warned against those who questioned the rights of Malays and religion. Warning a book on the May 13 race riots, he said the "hornets will strike and destroy the country" if their nest were disturbed (NST, 2006-10-3).

In December, Kedah joined three other states in issuing a *fatwa* (decree) to ban the activities of Rufaqa Corporation Sdn. Bhd. Menteri Besar Dato' Seri Mahdzir Khalid said any effort to revive Al-Arqam (deemed Islamic deviant sect), including through Rufaqa Corporation, would be illegal. The impact of political conflicts between UMNO and PAS to "out-Islam" each other cannot be overlooked in this Malay heartland.

### Social Ills Crime

In 2006, Kedah recorded the highest number of missing children in the country, the 2nd highest number of drug addicts, and 3rd highest crime rate index for rape.

### Poverty

Poverty continues to be a harsh reality for many rural households. The ethnic Malays are, by and large, poorer than their urban counterparts in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor.

### Corruption

Kedah's poor financial standing in state reserves has been a concern for many years. This may be the result of slipshod administration, ineffective management and the lack of good stewardship.

The Auditor-General's Report 2005 indicates that RM40 million allocated between 2003 and 2005 were used, among others, to put up billboards on the premier and deputy premier's visits, to buy pin labels for dignitaries as well as hats and clothes for the state assembly's march, to pay for the carpets and "timber blinds" in the Menteri Besar's office, and filming equipment for *ntv7* crews. These expenses were said to have occurred on the orders of the Menteri Besar.

The Menteri Besar has recently vowed to make sure the "projects under the RM3.4 billion set aside for rural development programmes will be carried

out promptly". In any case, the state's fund management still leaves a lot to be desired.

### The Church

Though a tiny community (less than 1% of the population), the Lord has this to say: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Like the Apostle Paul, the Kedahan Church will rather boast in her infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon her (2 Cor. 12:9).

### Pray

1. State governments and local councils: capable men and women of integrity, trustworthy and respect the rule of law, uphold religious freedom for all.
2. Good governance, wise management & good stewardship of state funds for public interests.
3. NCER project & poverty eradication:
  - a. Effective strategies and measures;
  - b. Efficient, just and transparent implementation;
  - c. Commitment and effective partnership among the government, business sector and the NGOs in creating job opportunities and improving people's living standard and quality of life;
  - d. State government's commitment in expanding an agricultural-based economy.
4. Against the spirit of religious overzealousness and extremism.
5. The people:
  - a. Change of mindset and enlightenment of heart;
  - b. Eyes to see, ears to hear and heart to receive the TRUTH.
6. Church: spiritual revival; the strengthening of Christian faith; unity; and continue to be salt & light.

<sup>1</sup> Under the 1902 Anglo-Siamese Declaration, Siam agreed to appoint residents or advisers of British nationality to the Malay states.

# Looking Out Looking Up

**AFGHANISTAN** On July 19, 23 Korean Christian aid workers (mostly nurses and teachers) were kidnapped south of Kabul and held hostage by Islamic militants. Subsequently two of the men were murdered and two seriously ill women were released as “a gesture of good will”.

The remaining 19 Korean Christians were later released as a result of negotiations between Korean officials and pro-Taliban militants. To secure their lives the Korean government agreed to withdraw all its troops from Afghanistan by the end of this year (210 non-combatants engaged purely in reconstruction), withdraw all Korean NGOs and ban Korean Christians going to Afghanistan for missionary work. Due to the Taliban's Islamic terrorism, Afghani will now lose the dedicated service of hundreds of Korean soldiers and humanitarian workers who were there simply to improve the lives of Afghani men, women and children.

Pray that our Almighty God will demolish the strongholds of Islamic repression in Afghanistan.

**SERBIA** Ethnic tensions between Albanians (mostly Muslim) and Serbs (mostly Serbian Orthodox) continue to rise as talks about the province's future falter. In July allegations of corruption involving the UN special envoy for Kosovo, Marti Ahtisaari, and the Albanian mafia became public. The allegations arose from a UN-sponsored investigation and the Kosovo Liberation Army has since been threatening the UN not to interfere. In mid-August authorities uncovered a massive cache of 93 kilos of explosives in two houses in the vicinity of Pec, 80 km west of Pristina. Two Kosovo Albanians were arrested. Also in mid-August, a group of well-armed prison guards at Kosovo's top-security Dubrava prison aided the breakout of seven inmates. The escapees included the



Saudi-born convicted murderer and terrorist Ramadan Shyti as well as two commanders and other members of the Albanian National Army.

On August 22, the Serbian church and graveyard in Novake, Kosovo, was reduced to ashes. During the Kosovo war Novake was violently “cleansed” of its 90 Serb families. In March 2004 Novake's 65 families who returned were attacked in a Muslim pogrom and again forced to flee. Twenty-five traumatized families along with their vandalized church and graveyard were all that remained. Now their church and graveyard are gone. Arson is suspected but has not been confirmed.

Pray to God to intervene and bring peace to this country.

**ERITREA** Pastor Leule Gebreab of Asmara's Apostolic Church “disappeared” on August 12. For weeks nobody has been able to learn anything of his whereabouts and he is believed to have been arrested. On August 19, 10 members of the Full Gospel Church were arrested as they worshipped in a house in Asmara. Some 2,000 Eritrean Protestants are presently suffering for their faith under appalling conditions in prison. Recently a group of 10 single Christian women who had been in prison for some 18 months were separated from other prisoners and taken to Weaa Military Training Centre. Compass Direct reports the women were then ordered to recant their faith and were tortured when they refused. On

Wednesday, September 5, Nigsti Haile (33) was tortured to death. She is the fourth Christian to die in custody due to torture.

The March 3, 2007 editorial on Shabait.com, the mouthpiece of the Ministry of Information of the State of Eritrea, condemned the US for criticizing Eritrea's religious rights. The editorial accused the US of promoting religious liberty only to generate internal division that could be exploited for US political-imperialistic gain. Many third-world, human rights abusing dictators such as Eritrea's President Isaias Afewerki commonly and willfully embrace the misconception that Protestant Christianity is an appendage of the US government and serves US economic and geo-strategic interests. However, the reality is Eritrea's Protestant Christians love their country and only want to worship the Lord and bless their nation.

Pray that even amidst their suffering, Eritrea's Christian prisoners may experience the presence and love of Christ and be strengthened and enabled by the Spirit of God to both endure suffering and radiate grace. Pray that Christian solidarity, empathy and brotherly love will take root in the Eritrean Church across denominational lines so that spiritual unity may be a fruit of this persecution. Pray that God will awaken more European leaders to the great need for religious liberty advocacy in countries like Eritrea where anti-Americanism and suspicion thwarts US advocacy efforts.