

HRC 27 - Agenda Item 6 – UPR - Bhutan

**NGO: Jubilee Campaign
Speaker: Matthew Jones**

**Title: The situation of human rights in Bhutan
Date: September 2014**

Thank you Mr President.

Jubilee Campaign together with Christian Solidarity Worldwide welcomes Bhutan's positive participation in its Universal Periodic Review.

In the spirit of its engagement, we urge Bhutan to ratify key international human rights treaties including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights.

Mr President. Although Bhutan acknowledges the religious diversity within the country and protects the right to freedom of religion or belief in a limited form, there are several areas of legislation and practice which give rise to human rights concerns.

Bhutan should amend the overly restrictive measures against compelling others to change their religion in article 7 of the Constitution, article 5 of the Religious Organizations Act, and section 463A of the Penal Code. Any limitations on the right to freedom of religion or belief should be consistent with those provided for in international law, specifically the ICCPR. Bhutan should take into account commentary by the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief on the issue of conversion.

Bhutan should also ensure the equal treatment of all religious communities existing in the country. In particular, Bhutan should clarify the eligibility of non-Buddhist and non-Hindu groups to obtain registration under the Religious Organizations Act of Bhutan, and should seek to expedite the registration of all peaceful religious groups in the country which seek this status, providing adequate support to any groups seeking assistance in the process of registration. Equally, Bhutan should seek to tackle injustices relating to burial rights.

Finally, in line with the requests of many states during its two reviews, Bhutan should extend an invitation to the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief. In doing so Bhutan would provide evidence of addressing concerns raised by Member States, and further a process of dialogue and interaction which would be to the benefit of Bhutan and all of its people.

We wish Bhutan all the very best in its endeavours.

Thank you.