



Human Rights Council 39<sup>th</sup> session

Agenda item 6: Universal Periodic Review

Adoption of UPR outcome of Cuba

Speaker: Michael Mutzner

Date: 20 September 2018

Thank you, Mr. President.

While several civil society reports urged the UPR Working Group to address freedom of religion or belief in Cuba, it was a disappointment that no recommendations challenged Cuba to improve in this area. Three recommendations from India<sup>1</sup>, Mozambique<sup>2</sup> and the United Arab Emirates<sup>3</sup> merely asked Cuba to “continue” current policies. Cuba declared during the UPR that no restrictions and no barriers were standing in the way of religious associations to exercise their right freely.

Our report has shown a very different picture. The case of the protestant evangelical churches is telling: while a small minority among them is favored and protected by the State, the large majority are repressed and meet illegally in private house churches. Thus, in 2015, 2’000 places of worship of a single Church union were threatened with demolition and several places were indeed destroyed.

We ask Cuba to fully guarantee freedom of religion or belief for all and to regularize the situation of religious communities forced to gather clandestinely, by authorizing them to have appropriate places of worship.

Mr. President, while Cuba is in the process of drafting its new Constitution, we want to stress that the chosen terminology should guarantee freedom of religion or belief based on internationally agreed standard. This includes the right to manifest beliefs individually or collectively and also, the right to change one’s beliefs. Freedom of conscience and the possibility to object to participation in the obligatory military service should also be clearly stated.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> A/HRC/39/16 §24.176

<sup>2</sup> A/HRC/39/16 §24.191

<sup>3</sup> A/HRC/39/16 §24.207