



Universal Periodic Review
31st Session of the Working Group on UPR
**Malaysia: Freedom of Religion or Belief, and the Safety of
the Christian Minority**

29 March 2018

Submission by:

World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), an NGO with special consultative status since 1997. WEA is a network of churches in 129 nations that have each formed an evangelical alliance and over 100 international organizations joining together to give a world-wide identity, voice, and platform to more than 600 million evangelical Christians worldwide. WEA was founded in 1846 in London. www.worldevangelicals.org

1. This report will highlight 3 areas of concern for human rights in Malaysia. The first concern is the refusal by the federal government to recognize the right of Christians to use the term ‘Allah’. Second, we are gravely concerned by the abduction of Pastor Raymond Koh since February 2017. And third, we cannot but note the rising hostility and demonization of Christians as a threat to national security.
2. We note with deep concern that following Malaysia’s 2013 UPR, the government did not accept the recommendations to revise Malaysia’s legislative framework in order to ensure freedom of religion or belief for all (Italy); or the recommendation to take measures to ensure that all persons, including Muslims, can freely exercise their right to freedom of religion and belief, without interference by the state and including the right to change their religion (Austria); or the recommendation to continue efforts and engage in a structured interfaith dialogue, including religious minorities (Austria). The government of Malaysia did accept the recommendation to strengthen mutual respect and tolerance and different cultures among religions (China).

The use of the word “Allah”

3. In 2007, the government banned the weekly Herald Malaysia newspaper from using the word “Allah” in its Malay-language editions saying that the use of the Arabic word may offend the local Muslims. A legal battle ended in 2015 when Malaysia’s highest court rejected the challenge from the Catholic Church seeking to overturn a ban on non-Muslims using the word “Allah” to refer to God.
4. In Malaysia, Bumiputera Christians have long used the word in their practice of the Christian faith. “We feel there has been a miscarriage of justice. It is insidious. It is tantamount to an act of language and culture genocide,” says Archbishop Datuk Bolly Lapok, the head of the Anglican Church in Southeast Asia. The ruling has led to Bibles being seized and hymn books being taken and desecrated.
5. The outcome of this case was deemed crucial as it may have bearings on other cases involving the word “Allah”. At time of writing of this report (March 2018), two court cases, the Jill Ireland case and the Sidang Injil Borneo (SIB) case, are challenging Malaysian authorities’ denial of the use of the word “Allah” by Christians.
6. The denial of the use of the word “Allah” is an interference in the content of the faith of Christians, who constitute 9% of Malaysia’s population. It is a violation of the Freedom of Religion or Belief and an infringement on the constitutional rights of minorities to practice their religion. It has no parallel in any other Muslim-majority state. It is equally questionable due to the fact that a number of overseas Islamic scholars have refuted the fact that Allah is solely a word used by Muslims to refer to God.
7. **Recommendation: We urge the Malaysian government to lift the ban on the use of the word “Allah” by Malaysian Christians, in recognition of their longstanding use of this name for God. Under the Federal constitution, the believers have the right to determine how they practice their faith, and this should include the right to use “Allah”.**

The Abduction of Pastor Raymond Koh

8. On the morning of 13 February 2017, Pastor Raymond Koh was abducted. A widely circulated CCTV clip showed that while he was exiting the highway in the suburb of Kelana Jaya, he was met by a convoy of black SUVs and motorcycles. His car was forced off the road by this convoy of vehicles. There was then a flurry of activity, and it was the last time that he was seen.
9. It has been more than a year since Pastor Raymond Koh was abducted. He and his captors’ whereabouts are still unknown.

10. On October 19, 2017 the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) held an inquiry over Pastor Raymond Koh's disappearance. That inquiry was halted on January 16, 2018 after a suspect who attempted to extort the family was charged in court in connection with the case. The suspect has since pleaded not guilty of being involved with pastor Raymond Koh's disappearance and is now out on a RM 5,000 (USD 1,250) bail awaiting trial.
11. This disappearance raises a serious concern over the protection and safety of every religious worker in the country. If this can happen to Pastor Raymond, it can happen to anyone else.
12. **Recommendation: We urge the government of Malaysia to ensure the wellbeing and safety of all religious workers and the freedom to carry out their duties free from intimidation or threat. We also urge the government to give urgent and equal attention to the investigation of Pastor Raymond Koh's abduction, abductors and of his whereabouts.**

Rising Hostility Against Christians

13. Finally, our report seeks to highlight the rising hostility against Christians.
14. In June 2017, the head of a Muslim NGO wrote in an essay published on a mainstream news online portal, "In Malaysia, the dangerous movement that is evangelicalism must be kept in check as it threatens religious harmony in Malaysia."¹ He went on to say that the Malaysian government needs to consider introducing anti-evangelicalism laws such as the Yarovaya Act in Russia, to ensure that the attempts made by evangelicals to dominate the Christian narrative do not occur.
15. Politician from the PAS party said "Christians have infiltrated a major political party in the country to carry out their Christianisation agenda,"² and urged Muslims to protect their community and country from Christian evangelists today, claiming it is obligatory in Islam to defend one's faith and combat elements that "threaten the Islamic way of life".³ There were even false and inciting accusations that Christians are involved in terrorism or radical activities.
16. **Recommendations: We call on the Government of Malaysia to stem the dangerous propaganda of radical religious groups and parties that sow discord and incite hatred against Christians. We also call on the Government of Malaysia to pursue and cultivate respect and accord amongst the majority religious group towards the rest of the minority religious groups, especially with the Christian community.**

¹ Azril: Why I said Christian evangelicalism should be banned, 21 June 2017, <https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/s/5665/> [Accessed 13 March 2018]

² *Christianisation infiltrating politics, danger to Islam, says Nik Abduh*, 18 June 2017 <https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/s/5405/> [Accessed 16 March 2018]

³ *Defend country from 'cunning' Christian evangelists, PAS man tells*, 6 June 2017 <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/defend-country-from-cunning-christian-evangelists-pas-man-tells-muslims#0m0ThwAbK11CjYOI.97> [Accessed 16 March 2018]