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PAKISTAN & NIGERIA Global protest as Pakistan and Nigeria seek new treaty to stop criticism of religion

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is making an urgent appeal to the Colombian government to guarantee the safety of civilians and civil society leaders in a significant coca cultivation area in the region of southern Cordoba.

100 NGOs including Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) have signed a statement decrying the ongoing “Combating Defamation of Religion” agenda at the United Nations amid fears that a new, legally-binding international treaty limiting the criticism of religion may become a reality.

The NGOs, which include Christian, Muslim and Jewish organizations as well as humanist and secular groups from around the world, argue that “unlike traditional defamation laws, which punish false statements of fact that harm individual persons, measures prohibiting the ‘defamation of religions’ punish the peaceful criticism of ideas”.

Pakistan and Nigeria have declared in a UN meeting that they are seeking a new legally-binding treaty that would enforce limits on freedom of expression with regard to religion, signifying a bold new development according to the Washington DC-based Becket Fund.

Such calls will be strengthened as the UN General Assembly looks set to pass another controversial resolution next month entitled “Combating the Defamation of Religion”, its fifth in five years.

Tina Lambert, CSW’s Advocacy Director said: “In seeking to protect ‘religion’ from defamation it is clear that existing international human rights protections will be undermined, specifically freedom of religion and belief and freedom of expression. A legally-binding treaty would enable states to justify dubious domestic legislation such as the blasphemy law in Pakistan as a ‘human rights’ requirement. For the sake of those who already suffer unjustly under such legislation and for the protection of our existing international human rights framework, it is vital that member states act to prevent such a treaty or optional protocol being established.”

Notes to editors:

- The complete statement and its signatories can be viewed at www.whatisdefamationofreligion.com
- The most recent “Combating the Defamation of Religion” resolution was passed by the UN Human Rights Council in March 2009.

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