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AFGHANISTAN Recent anti-Christian outcry highlights “institutionalized danger” to converts

CSW is gravely concerned that the ongoing rise in threats to the lives of Christians in Afghanistan is evidence of the “institutionalized danger” to converts. Recent weeks have seen calls from high-level leaders within the country for the immediate arrest and execution of converts to Christianity. According to sources in the region, over twenty Afghan Christians had been arrested as of last week. Non-Christians known to be associated with Westerners are also being targeted for interrogation.

The current situation was triggered in late May when a private television station aired photos of Afghans being baptized. Since that time, protest groups in four provinces have called for the execution of apostates, President Karzai has ordered a full investigation into the matter, two Christian humanitarian aid organizations have been suspended and at least thirteen other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are under scrutiny.

Afghanistan is one of ten Muslim-majority countries officially declared as Islamic nations. In matters with which the Afghan Constitution does not deal explicitly, Islamic Shari’a Law applies. This includes the question of apostasy, for which the death sentence is prescribed. Afghanistan has however ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which protects the individual’s “freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice”.

CSW’s Chief Executive, Mervyn Thomas, said, “Christian converts in Afghanistan have long faced extreme obstacles and threats but recent events have brought to light the institutionalized nature of the danger. Groups continue to flee the country and an urgent plea for help from Afghan Christians in Delhi has been circulated among Christians around the world. We call upon the international political community to act for the security of Afghan Christians and to urge the Government of Afghanistan to adhere to their obligations under international law.”