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## NEPAL CSW urges new prime minister to finalize new constitution and guarantee freedom of faith

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Following the election on February 3<sup>rd</sup> of a new Prime Minister of Nepal, Mr. Jhala Nath Khanal, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has reiterated its call for the timely completion of a new constitution before the May 28 deadline, which should enshrine protections for human rights, including freedom of religion of belief.

Since the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and the election of the Constituent Assembly in 2008, Nepal's political parties have made little progress in key elements of the constitution, vital to establish the new democratic secular republic.

The Constituent Assembly was charged with creating “a political system that fully complies with universally accepted fundamental human rights”. CSW has argued in a briefing that current constitutional proposals would restrict the right to freedom of religion or belief beyond any limitations permissible under international law, including a proposal to ban any person from converting another. CSW recommended that the new constitution should protect freedom of religion in manner consistent with Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and should also include the right to burial grounds and the creation of a statutory, multi-faith commission.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, “The election of a new Prime Minister is a positive step for Nepal, which we hope will give momentum to the constitution-drafting process. The new constitution is essential for Nepal to complete its transition to secular democracy, and it must enshrine the human rights enshrined by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Nepal is a state party. In particular, the Constituent Assembly should avoid enshrining the proposed stringent restrictions on conversion, which are entirely inconsistent with international standards on freedom of religion”.

### ***Notes to Editors:***

1. CSW's concerns about the new constitutional proposals in Nepal are set out in a briefing, '[Nepal: Religious freedom and the new constitution](#)' (2nd edition, September 2010).