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NEPAL | No agreement on full constitution expected before end of month deadline

The Constituent Assembly of Nepal has yet to reach agreement on a number of core issues concerning the new constitution, with the deadline looming at the end of this month. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is again urging that due attention is paid to protecting the fundamental human rights of Nepali citizens, including the right to freedom of religion or belief.

It is possible that a skeletal draft will be produced as a basis for further development by the May 27 deadline.

CSW has stated in a [briefing](#) that Nepal's transition from Hindu kingdom to secular democracy means that the Constituent Assembly must "consider carefully and sensitively how to promote a healthy culture of religious pluralism within the framework of rights in the new constitution".

However, the proposals on religious freedom for the new constitution would include restrictions on religious conversions, which are inconsistent with the international human rights framework and leave little space for interpreting conversions as a positive choice.

On October 7, 2011, two UN Special Rapporteurs sent a [letter](#) to the Government of Nepal, requesting an explanation of how the religious freedom proposals are compatible with international human rights standards. The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Frank La Rue, highlighted concerns that had been raised about the religious freedom proposals and reiterated earlier commentary from the UN on anti-conversion measures.

CSW's South Asia Team Leader David Griffiths said, "The Constituent Assembly is working under considerable public pressure to finalize the new constitution, but they must give due attention to protecting human rights in a manner consistent with the international human rights framework. We encourage the international community to continue supporting their efforts, but we also urge the Government of Nepal to engage with the letter sent by the Special Rapporteurs and address the concerns they highlighted."

Notes to editors:

1. The Constituent Assembly, established in 2008, was tasked with creating "a political system that fully complies with universally accepted fundamental human rights", and its original deadline of May 2010 has been extended four times. The Supreme Court has issued a controversial ruling that it cannot be extended again, although some have questioned the competence of the court to issue such a ruling.