

Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

REFERENCE: UA
JOR 3/2014:

13 November 2014

Excellency,

I have the honour to address you in my capacity as Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 22/20.

In this connection, I would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information I have received concerning the deportation of Reverend **Jody Patrick Miller** and his assistant, Mr. **Maged Wefki Gergis Hanna** of Grace Church in Amman.

According to the information received:

In 2003, Reverend Jody Patrick Miller (a US citizen) was appointed as the Pastor of Grace Church in the Mahatta area of Amman, which is affiliated to the Free Evangelical Church. Mr. Maged Wefki Gergis Hanna (an Egyptian citizen) is the assistant to Reverend Miller. Both Reverend Miller and Mr. Hanna have had residency in Jordan since 1998 and 2001 respectively under the sponsorship of Free Evangelical Church.

The Jordanian General Intelligence Department (GID) has been closely monitoring the Grace Church due to its extensive humanitarian work in recent years with Iraqi and Syrian refugees. Currently, the Church provides monthly food, blankets and household items to about 150 families, regardless of their religious affiliations. This has raised suspicion inside the GID, especially when many Muslims have gone to the Church centre for assistance. As a result, the GID has increased its scrutiny of the Church's activities.

In September 2014, two GID officers paid a cordial visit to the Church. Reverend Miller gave one of the officers a bible when the officer saw it in the Church and

requested for it. The US Embassy informed Reverend Miller on 23 October 2014 regarding a complaint received from the GID alleging that he had been distributing bibles and “harming national unity”.

On 4 November 2014, the GID summoned Reverend Miller for an interview. However, no interview took place. Instead, he was informed that he was to be deported from Jordan immediately without being given an official explanation for this decision. Reverend Miller was allegedly transferred to a GID detention facility blindfolded and handcuffed. He was held in a cell together with about 30 people while his wife made travel arrangements for him. As soon as his travel was arranged by 6 November 2014, Reverend Miller was escorted by the GID to the airport. He has returned to the US since then. In the meantime, his wife has remained in Jordan to arrange the rest of their personal effects.

On 9 November 2014, a GID officer attended the Church and confiscated Mr. Hanna's passport. The officer, without providing any official explanation, informed Mr. Hanna that he was scheduled for an arrest and deportation. Mr. Hanna in the meantime has been summoned to the office of the GID on 13 November 2014.

Concern is expressed at the allegations of the arrest and deportation of Reverend Miller and Mr. Hanna who are church personnel of Grace Church. Concerns are also expressed at the interference of the Church's autonomy and restriction of its charity or humanitarian work.

We would like to appeal to your Excellency's Government to seek clarification concerning the grounds for the arrest and deportation of Reverend Miller and Mr. Hanna. We would like to remind your Excellency's Government that the obligation to respect, promote and protect the freedom of religion or belief as enshrined in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which your Excellency's Government ratified on 28 May 1975.

The 1981 Declaration in Article 6(b) also provides that the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief includes the freedom, “To establish and maintain appropriate charitable or humanitarian institutions” and Article 6(d) “To write, issue and disseminate relevant publications in these areas.”

The full texts of the human rights instruments and standards recalled above are available on www.ohchr.org or can be provided upon request.

In view of the urgency of the matter, we would appreciate a response on the initial steps taken by your Excellency's Government to safeguard the rights of Reverend Miller and Mr. Hanna as church personnel in compliance with international instruments.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and any comment you may have on the above mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide in details the reasons and legal grounds for the decision of the Government to arrest and deport both Reverend Miller and Mr. Hanna.
3. Please explain why the work of Grace Church has been under the scrutiny of the Jordanian General Intelligence Department (GID).
4. Please explain how the actions of the authorities are compatible with international human rights standards in terms of the protection of freedom of religion or belief as mentioned above. Please state the measures taken to ensure that the freedom of religion or belief of different religious institutions or establishments is protected in Jordan.

While awaiting a reply, I urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person responsible of the alleged violations.

Your Excellency's Government's response will be made available in a report to be presented to the Human Rights Council for its consideration.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Heiner Bielefeldt
Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief