

**Mandates of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights; the Special Rapporteur on minority issues; the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls**

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(Please use this reference in your reply)

3 October 2025

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights; Special Rapporteur on minority issues; Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 55/5, 52/5, 58/5, 59/5 and 59/14.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning **the Constitutional Amendment (Declaration of Papua New Guinea as a Christian Country) Law** which was passed by the Papua New Guinea Parliament on 12 March 2025. We are concerned that provisions of the law could give rise to human rights restrictions in light of Papua New Guinea's obligations under international human rights law.

According to the information received:

On 12 March 2025, the Parliament of Papua New Guinea passed the "Constitutional Amendment (Declaration of Papua New Guinea as a Christian Country)" Law ("the Law"). A draft of the Law had previously been developed in September 2023, and subsequently published in the official gazette on 27 October 2023.

The law, which at the time of writing has not been published on the Parliament's official website, reportedly amends the Preamble of the Papua New Guinea Constitution to begin with the phrase:

"We, the people of Papua New Guinea [...] acknowledge and declare God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as our Creator and the Sustainer of the entire universe and the source of our Powers and Authorities, delegated to the people and all persons within the geographical jurisdiction of Papua New Guinea."

The Law also reportedly changes the fifth "Goal" among the preambular National Goals and Directive Principles, which refer to "Papua New Guinean Ways", by adding "Christian Principles" to the Papua New Guinean "forms of social, political, and economic organization" through which development is to be primarily achieved. In the same sub-section, the amendment reportedly calls for active steps to be taken toward the improvement of the "Christian" "cultural, social economic, and ethical quality" of traditional villages and communities.

With regard to the preambular sub-section on Basic Social Obligations, the law reportedly adds respect, observance, and protection of “Christian Principles” to the basic obligations that all persons in the country have to themselves, their descendants, each other, and the nation.

The law further reportedly amends Subsection (1) of Section 1 of the Constitution, referring to Papua New Guinea as “independent and Christian”, and adding the Holy Bible to the list of National Symbols under Section 3 of the Constitution.

We express concern that the above amendments, if confirmed, may lead to restrictions of human rights which run counter to Papua New Guinea’s obligations under international human rights law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to which Papua New Guinea acceded on 21 July 2008. In particular, these allegations raise concerns under article 18 of the ICCPR, which protects freedom of religion or belief; article 26, which guarantees equal protection of the law without discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, and article 27 which guarantees the rights of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities to, inter alia, profess or practice their own religion, as well as article 15 of the ICESCR, which guarantees the right of everyone to take part in cultural life.

We are concerned that the Constitutional Amendment Law may lead to restrictions in relation to freedom of religion or belief, the rights to equality and non-discrimination, and the right for all to freely participate in cultural life on equal footing as guaranteed by international human rights treaties.

As asserted by the Human Rights Committee in its general comment No. 22 (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4), article 18 of the ICCPR “protects theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief”. The Human Rights Committee “views with concern any tendency to discriminate against any religion or belief for any reason” and insists on the guarantee of equality and non-discrimination for all. Coercion in relation to religion or belief is prohibited, even where they draw from policies or practices that restrict “access to education, medical care, employment or the rights” guaranteed by international human rights treaties. Irrespective of the majority religion or belief affiliation, or the State’s treatment of a set of beliefs “as official ideology in constitutions, statutes, proclamations of ruling parties, etc., or in actual practice”, the Human Rights Committee insists that this shall not result in “any impairment of the enjoyment of any of the rights under the Covenant, ... nor in any discrimination against adherents to other religions or non-believers”.

Arenas where challenges have arisen in other contexts include where the mainstreaming of religious laws within the State’s legislative, executive, and judicial activities impact personal status laws, the treatment of those belonging to other religions and beliefs, and the enjoyment of human rights by all on an equal basis, including sexual and reproductive rights and the rights of LGBTI persons. For example, States that enforce an official religion, impose very high levels of restrictions on freedom of religion or belief and discriminate against persons belonging to religious minorities, women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons (A/HRC/37/49

paras. 55, 76-77). Particular vigilance is required to guarantee that there is no resulting discrimination against persons belonging to religious minorities, converts, ‘apostates’, those who do not hold a religion, and women and girls’ rights as guaranteed under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), to which Papua New Guinea acceded on 12 January 1995. Concerns have included the adoption of discriminatory laws or failure to respect international human rights law and standards (A/HRC/38/46, para. 25) in relation to child marriage and female genital mutilation (ibid, para. 26), restrictions or bans on abortion and access to contraceptives (A/HRC/47/38, para. 33), and restrictions on education in schools (A/HRC/56/51, para. 15).

Similarly, thematic reports of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls have raised concern over the “persistence of a global discriminatory cultural construction of gender, often tied to religion, and the continued reliance of States on cultural justifications for adopting discriminatory laws or for failing to respect international human rights law and standards” (A/HRC/38/46, para. 25). The Working Group found that under religious justifications, States have restricted or banned abortion and access to contraceptives (A/HRC/47/38, para. 33); opposed comprehensive, scientifically based sexuality education in schools (A/HRC/56/51, para. 15); refused to eliminate harmful, discriminatory laws and practices, including child marriage and female genital mutilation (A/HRC/38/46, para. 26); and failed to protect women human rights defenders, including those working on rights contested by fundamentalist groups (A/HRC/38/46, para. 42, A/HRC/38/46, para. 48). The Working Group has further warned that “the [gender] backlash has been propelled by some Governments, which have challenged the universality of human rights, using religious and cultural justifications.” In that regard, the experts have emphasized that “arguments framed in terms of cultural diversity and freedom of religion cannot be invoked to justify denials of rights and discrimination against women and girls” (A/HRC/56/51, para. 16) and “women’s human rights are fundamental rights that cannot be subordinated to cultural, religious or political considerations” (A/HRC/47/38, para. 85).

The right for everyone to take part in cultural life, recognized in article 15 of the ICESCR, also includes the right of minorities and of persons belonging to minorities to take part in the cultural life of society, and also to conserve, promote and develop their own culture. This right entails the obligation of States parties to recognize, respect and protect minority cultures as an essential component of the identity of the States themselves. Consequently, minorities have the right to their cultural diversity, traditions, customs, religion, forms of education, languages, communication media (press, radio, television, Internet) and other manifestations of their cultural identity and membership” (general comment 21, para. 32). In that context, the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights also highlighted in her thematic work the specific situation of artistic expression and creativity and warned against the use of moral and religious arguments to limit that freedom, recalling that is not compatible with international human rights law for a restriction of artistic expression to be enshrined in traditional, religious and other such customary law (A/HRC/23/34, paras. 32 and 47).

In light of the above comments, which the Special Procedures wish to share for consideration, we respectfully encourage your Excellency’s Government to review or reconsider the law to ensure that it complies with Papua New Guinea’s obligations under international human rights law.

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/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned observations.
2. Please explain how the provisions highlighted above are compatible with international human rights standards regarding the right to freedom of religion or belief, and the enjoyment of all human rights by all on an equal basis, including as guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
3. Please provide information on measures which your Excellency's Government has taken, or is planning to take, to ensure compliance of the law with Papua New Guinea's obligations under international human rights law, including the obligation to respect cultural and religious diversity.
4. Please provide information on measures undertaken to facilitate a meaningful dialogue on the Constitutional Amendment Law with all stakeholders, including religious or belief groups and religious or belief minorities, particularly non-Christians, in the country in order to continually assess and ensure that the Amendments is not resulting in any impairment or restriction of any of their rights.

This communication, as a comment on pending or recently adopted legislation, regulations or policies, and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) after 48 hours. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

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

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Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights

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Special Rapporteur on minority issues

Nazila Ghanea  
Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

Graeme Reid  
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Claudia Flores  
Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls