

## **Report on activities February to March 2025**

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Thank you for your ongoing financial support and your prayers.

The last two months have been a whirlwind of activity! By God's grace, it has gone well. I did have COVID in March but it was during a week that I did not have to be at the UN.

The first week of February, I travelled to Washington, DC, for the International Religious Freedom Summit. I participated on a panel on religious freedom issues in Canada. I wrote a brief reflection on the IRF Summit for our WEA Global Advocacy newsletter and attach it as a separate document.

Mid-February, I presented at a conference at Giessen University in Germany on religious freedom in the context of secularism. It is a Christian university so it was a friendly crowd. They will be publishing a book from the conference proceedings and I have already started turning my talk into an academic paper.

We are just coming to the end of a very busy Human Rights Council session. I have attached a separate report on this session.

I noted in my last update that we planned to hold a side event on March 5 on church registration and the problems it poses for churches in many countries, with speakers coming from Sri Lanka, Serbia and Türkiye. It went very well. We had good attendance and a great deal of positive feedback. We also had several meetings with special envoys on freedom of religion or belief as well as the Special Rapporteurs for freedom of religion or belief and for minorities.

Thank you for your prayers and support.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Janet Epp Buckingham". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

## Newsletter

### IRF Summit – Janet Epp Buckingham

The IRF Summit is held in Washington, DC on an annual basis. This was the first time I participated, and I did so because I was invited to speak on a panel on secularism. My talk focused on how the law has restricted religious freedom in Canada. It was a strategic time to be in Washington as it is the early days of the Trump administration. But the WEA does not advocate to the US government so this was more of an opportunity to learn from American religious freedom advocates what their hopes are and to connect from the over 1500 people from around the world who are committed to advancing religious freedom.

I had many opportunities to meet with old friends and new. Representatives of national evangelical alliances from at least four countries were there. A few take aways:

- The Trump administration will likely be committed to advancing religious freedom but more likely on a bilateral basis rather than through the UN.
- Religious freedom can best be advanced through building relationships.
- There is important work being done in many countries and regions that has potential to reduce the amount of persecution faced by Christians. It is being done on a collaborative basis with many organizations participating.
- Evangelical Christians need to build bridges with their governments on a local and national level.
- Advocacy at the UN continues to be important. I met a few advocates that I also see at the UN in Geneva. We need to work at all levels.

My best experience was hosting a lunch for several people engaged in religious freedom in Nepal, including a leader from Nepal. It was great to strategize about how to work together to enhance what each of us is doing.



## **WEA Geneva Report on HRC58**

April 2025

The March session of the Human Rights Council is the most important and busy session for the WEA Geneva office as it is the session where both the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief and the Special Rapporteur for minorities report. This March session, the Geneva Office held a side event, made two written statements, four oral statements and co-sponsored two oral statements made by other organizations. In addition, the Geneva Office Director moderated a side event sponsored by another group.

**Side event:** Registration and Legal Status of Places of Worship: Impact on Minority Groups

The WEA Geneva Office hosted a side event at the Palais des Nations on March 5 focusing on requirements for registration or discrimination in registration or legal status that make it difficult or impossible for churches to hold legal worship services. We brought speakers from our national alliances in Sri Lanka, Türkiye and Serbia to speak to these issues. As well, Susan Kerr from the OSCE and Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Nazila Ghanea, spoke about the broader issues. The event was well attended with delegates from at least 13 countries present. The event can be viewed online [here](#).

WEA Geneva Office Director, Janet Epp Buckingham, also moderated a side event on Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Prohibition of Torture in Pakistan, Eritrea, Nicaragua and Sudan. It is available online [here](#).

### **Written statements**

NGOs have the opportunity to submit written statements to the Human Rights Council in advance of a session. These statements become part of the official record of the proceedings of the HRC. The WEA has not made a written statement to the HRC since 2018 but this mechanism provides opportunities to raise issues that might not otherwise be on the HRC agenda.

The Geneva Office made two written statements prior to the HRC58 session. The first is on India, raising concerns about violence against Christians. It is available [here](#). The second is on Eritrea, focusing attention on the leaders of the Eritrea national evangelical alliance that have been imprisoned for over 20 years. It is available [here](#).

### **Oral statements**

There are always several opportunities for NGOs to make oral statements during the HRC sessions. NGOs register in advance but there are always more requests than slots available. The Geneva office made four oral statements during this session. Oral statements can be made by video or in person.

The first statement was on Eritrea and is available online [here](#). It was by video and was during session with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea.

The second statement focused on freedom from coercion in changing from one religion to another and is available online [here](#). It was during the session with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

The third statement was during a session on issues that the HRC should address and focused on humanitarian assistance in armed conflict. It is available online [here](#).

The fourth statement was during the adoption of the UPR report on Portugal and highlighted issues of religious discrimination. It is available online [here](#).

Janet Epp Buckingham, with the support of the WEA Women's Commission also did a video statement on the plight of women in Afghanistan as we were 14 with 10 available slots on a session with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan. It was not shown at that session but is available online [here](#).

In addition to our own oral statements, the WEA co-sponsored (added our names to) two oral statements made by other organizations. The first was on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), made by Caritas, calling for humanitarian assistance for civilians in the conflict zone. It was made in a session with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The second was on religious identity issues faced by religious minorities in many countries. It was made in a session with the Special Rapporteur on minorities. It is available online [here](#).

#### Media

Some of our work was covered by the media.

The Geneva Times | 5 March 2025 | [Global Crackdown on Religious Freedom through Registration Laws Silencing Minorities](#)

Evangelical Focus | 13 March 2025 | [Christians denounce impact of mandatory church registrations in countries like Serbia and Turkey](#)

Christian Daily | 27 March 2025 | [In UN report, evangelicals highlight social instability in Portugal, express concern that new law could criminalize religious views](#)

Evangelical Focus | 28 March 2025 | [Evangelicals in Portugal denounce that the gender self-determination law restricts religious freedom](#)