

Forced Religious Conversion Becomes an International Human Rights Problem

the Italian Center for Studies on New Religions

SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA , December 1, 2019 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On 19 November, the Italian Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR) and the Belgian Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF) hosted a seminar on human rights entitled "Intolerance and Discrimination Against New Religious Movements: An International Problem" in Seoul, South Korea..

The seminar was devoted to the protection of the rights of religious minorities with a special focus on forced conversion cases in Korea. Forced conversion, also known as "deprogramming", is a violation of human rights. Proponents of forced conversion kidnap and detain members of religious groups labeled as "cults" in an effort to compel them to abandon their faith.



Panelists gave a presentation regarding the forced conversion that violates human rights

More than 80 participants including legal experts, journalists, and civil society representatives reviewed the current situation of forced conversion and discussed solutions to defend the freedom of faith and human rights that have become the norm of the international community.

Massimo Introvigne, Managing Director of CESNUR as well as an Italian sociologist, stressed how, "Korean deprogrammers are specialized pastors from mainstream churches, most of them Presbyterian. The protests that commemorate the victims from forced conversion were mentioned in the 2019 U.S. State Department Report on Religious Freedom. The report cited examples of how forced conversions violated religious freedom in 2018. However, there were new cases of deprogramming even after their death," he criticized.

Regarding the multi-dimensional strategy to solve such phenomenon, Willy Fautré, Founder and Director of HRWF stated several suggestions; pointing at the responsibility of the leadership of the Presbyterian Church which tolerates, endorses, and maybe encourages such a practice; developing advocacy at the United Nations and in organizations defending freedom of religion or belief; prosecuting those who encourage people to perpetrate an act of abduction and confinement.

In an open letter, signed by 15 international NGOs including CAP-LC and HRWF, to the South Korean President Moon Jae In on July 24th, it said, "South Korea may well be the last democratic country in the world where deprogramming is still tolerated" and asked the President to "investigate in-depth accusations of forcible deprogramming, put a stop to this obnoxious practice, and hold those responsible fully accountable."

As an elected member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, South Korea vowed “to participate in international efforts to respond to human rights crises around the world.” Seminar participants urged the Korean government to respond to the issue of forced conversion which is still threatening the human rights of its people.

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