Framework of communication needed to protect against human rights violations of individuals who exercise their right to religious freedom in minority religions

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The right to religious freedom is generally believed to be the solution to religious intolerance and discrimination and to ensure world peace amongst world citizens. On an international level, the United Nations, through the appointment of a special rapporteur for freedom of religion and belief, has introduced a tool to monitor violations of this right. This tool is known as 'the framework of communications' and is focused mainly on the relationship between governments and religions. Unfortunately, religion is not excluded from the violation of human rights within its own ranks. This article pointed out that however pure the intention of freedom of religion, no real measures are in place to address violations of human rights in minority religions. Therefore, a tool is needed to investigate and address alleged violations within minority religions.

Introduction

Religious freedom is a term loaded with promise. It signifies an end to discrimination, religious supremacy, abuse and violence that has often typified religion through the ages. The phrase further signifies religious tolerance and a respect for the differences in religion. It points to an uninterrupted participation in religion not prescribed or predetermined by government or any other person or institution. It is a freedom – a freedom afforded to each world citizen that enables him or her to choose their own religion and to act according to their own belief and conviction. Discrimination against any religion goes against the international provisions of freedom of religion or belief; stigmatising and blacklisting religions or distinguishing between acceptable religions and 'sects' or 'cults'[1] is a violation of religious rights standards in terms of most international covenants.

Although the intention behind the right to freedom of religion or belief is to ensure tolerance and acceptance amongst different religions and to create universal peace, the application of this right in coexistence with other rights is problematic. Firstly, how does the right to freedom of religion or belief relate to other rights in the light of the notion of interdependency of human rights and with particular reference to minority religions? Secondly, the specific right affords the freedom for expression of religion but does it take into account the invisible underlying psychological and spiritual dynamics of religion that might contribute to the violation of other rights? Individuals in some minority religions find themselves in a situation where membership and the expression of their belief mean the surrender of their other rights such as freedom of association, freedom of expression and freedom of movement. One such case involves a religious organisation known as Church Team Ministries International (CTMI). Parents of children belonging to this organisation allege that the practices and teachings of this organisation have not only brought about radical behaviour change but also alienated the children from their family and friends.

Religious freedom is upheld on a horisontal level by international treaties, covenants and conventions for human, political, cultural, civil and other rights and alleged violations of this right can be reported via the framework of communication[2] introduced by the Special Rapporteur

1.The term 'cult' has different meanings. For evangelical Christians and counter-cult movements, a cult refers to any religious group that accepts most, but not all, of the key historical Christian doctrines. Fundamentalist Christians refer to a cult as any religion that deviates from the historical Protestant Christian beliefs. Anti-cult movements attempt to raise public consciousness about what they see as dangerous and authoritarian mind control and destructive cults that make use of excessive psychological techniques to attract and control members. Popular media usage of the term refers to a small, evil religious group often with a single charismatic leader that engages in brainwashing and other mind control techniques, believes that the end of the world is imminent and collects large amounts of weapons in preparation for massive war (Robinson 2011).

2.The framework of communication refers to a system whereby violations of freedom of religion can be communicated in a structured way to the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, a position which has been mandated by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

on freedom of religion or belief in 2005. This article aims at pointing out the need for an extension of the said framework that will also include the monitoring and protecting of other individual human rights[3] for those in harmful minority religions.[4]

Religious freedom and human rights

Human rights are viewed as the instrument through which a truly peaceful coexistence can be ensured amongst human beings. The international treaties, covenants and conventions on human rights contain statements and provisions which High Contacting Parties to the European Convention are obliged to respect. Freedom of religion or belief is protected by a number of international human rights instruments that are applicable to all High Contacting Parties to the European Convention. One of which is Article 18 of *The universal declaration of human rights*, which proclaims the following:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes the freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. (United Nations 1948)

The United Nations (UN) organs adopted two international covenants aimed at giving effect to the content of *The universal declaration on human rights*, namely the *International covenant on civil and political rights* (ICCPR) and the *International covenant on economic, social and cultural rights* (ICESCR). Whilst the ICESCR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 1966, Art. 13) simply provides that no religion should be discriminated against, Article 18 of the ICCPR provides a more detailed definition of religious freedom:

> 2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice ...
> 4. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of the children in conformity with their own convictions. (OHCHR 1966b)

3. Other human rights refer to the rights afforded by the Bill of Rights such as the rights to freedom of association, freedom of expression, freedom of movement and residence, freedom and security of the person and freedom to education, to mention a few (see Republic of South Africa 1996).

4. In this article, the term 'harmful minority religions' is used interchangeably with 'new religious movements' and refers to Christian religious groups with an authoritarian leader or leadership, who are believed to suppress the rational thought of their followers and use unethical recruitment and coercive techniques in order to obtain the desired attitudes and behaviours in followers. In this way, members are isolated from conventional society and former relationships. Following World War II, many new religions emerged in Japan in the wake of the explosion of religious innovation. The term 'new religion' is a direct translation of the word *shinshukyo*, which sociologists in Japan use to refer to this phenomenon. This term was later adopted by scholars to replace the word 'cult', which was subsequently used indiscriminately by lay critics to disparage faiths in which the doctrines were believed to be unusual and heretical (Introvigne 2001:1). In everyday life, religions regarded by the majority culture as spurious or unorthodox are referred to as 'new religious movements' or 'minority religions'. It is agreed that these terms are more objective appellations for religions or religious groups (Dillon & Richardson 1994; Pfeifer 1992). Thus, sociologists use the term 'new religious movements' when referring to non-mainstream religions, whilst psychologists and anti-cult movements use the term to describe benign alternative religious groups, reserving the use of 'cult' for groups – whether religious, psychotherapeutic or commercial – which they believe to be extremely manipulative and exploitive. Although there is no clear set of criteria describing a group as a new religious movement, the use of the term usually implies that the group is both of recent origin and differs from existing religions.

Analysing the provisions for freedom of religion

Considering the different international treaties, covenants and conventions on religious freedom,[5] two dimensions of the right to freedom of religion or belief can be distinguished, namely *forum internum* and *forum externum*. The first of these refers to the freedom to believe whatever people want. No limitations are linked to this dimension of religious freedom. This was emphasised by the present Special Rapporteur on religious freedom or belief, Mr Heiner Bielefeldt (2010), when he stated that, 'This component *forum internum* of freedom of religion or belief enjoys particularly strong protection under international human rights law as an absolute guarantee which under no circumstances may be infringed upon'. As seen from the quotation of Article 18 of the ICCPR above, the right to freedom of religion also 'include[s] the freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief of his choice …' Also the right to change or replace one's religion is further emphasised by the UN Human Rights Committee in its General Comment 22 (OHCHR 1993) on the scope and interpretation of Article 18.

According to Amicarelli (2009:5), the other dimension of the right to freedom of religion, *forum externum*, refers to the exteriorisation or expression of personal religious thoughts and can be subject to limitations by the public authorities. The limitations are clearly defined by the European Convention on Human Rights (Council of Europe 1966, Art. 9.2) as those which are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public society for the protection of public order, health or morals or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Proselytism and the actual decision of an individual to convert to a new faith are considered manifestations of religion or belief which are encompassed within the right to freedom of religion or belief under international human rights law. In the case of *Kokkinakis v. Greece*, the European Court of Human Rights (1993) found that:

> According to article 9, freedom to manifest [one's] religion ... includes in principle the right to try to convince one's neighbour, for example, through teaching, failing which, moreover, freedom to changes [one's] religion or belief, enshrined in Article 9, would be likely to remain a dead letter. (paras 48–49)

Although these rights may be restricted by the state if it can identify concrete and pressing social interests to override religious freedom, there is a very strong presumption under international law in favour of proselytism and in favour of allowing the individual the freedom to adopt a religion of his her choice (Amicarelli 2009:9). Similarly, another aspect of the expression of religion is the liberty that parents enjoy and, when applicable, legal guardians, to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

5. Such as Article 18 of *The universal declaration of human rights* (UN 1948) and the ICCPR (OHCHR 1966b), which I have already discussed, along with the *Declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief* (OHCHR 2005) and *General comment no. 22: The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 18)* (OHCHR 1993).

Stigmatising and blacklisting religions is a violation of religious rights standards, as is distinguishing between acceptable religions and 'sects' or 'cults'. It is impermissible and arbitrary for secular governments to confer benefits on groups it classifies as 'religions', whilst denying benefits and enacting oppressive measures against groups it classifies as 'sects' or 'cults'. Discrimination against the right to freedom of religion or belief for any reason, including the fact that they are newly established, or represent religious minorities that may be the subject of hostility on the part of a predominant religious community, is frowned upon by the international community (OHCHR 2005, comm. 22.2).

The scope of the right to freedom of religion or belief

The right to freedom of religion or belief is not an absolute or unlimited, or even superior, right and it needs to function in harmony with other human rights. The right to freedom of religion or belief does not provide any grounds for exclusion of, or justification for the violation of other rights. According to the Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 60/251 A/HRC/2/3 20 September (UN General Assembly 2006, paras 31–41, the scope of the right to freedom of religion can be summarised in the following way:

- The right to freedom of religion, like other rights, remains primarily an individual right.
- As such, the right to freedom of religion or belief, as enshrined in relevant international legal standards, does not include the right to have a religion or belief that is free from criticism or ridicule.
- Criticism, derogatory statements, insults or ridicule of one religion that may actually negatively affect an individual's right to freedom of religion or belief can only be determined objectively and, in particular, by examining whether the different aspects of the manifestation of one's right to freedom of religion are accordingly negatively affected.
- The right to freedom of religion is exercised within the composite of human rights. In this regard most international human rights conventions provide that in the exercise of their human rights, individuals have to respect the rights of others. However, the coexistence of rights does not only imply that rights should be seen in a restrictive manner because of the existence of other rights; it also implies the fundamental notion of interdependency of human rights. Thus the exercising of one right should not lead to the exclusion of another.
- The right to freedom of expression can be restricted legitimately in the case of advocacy that incites acts of violence or discrimination against individuals on the basis of their religion. Defamation of religions may offend people and hurt their religious feelings but does not necessarily, or at least directly, result in a violation of their rights, including their right to freedom of religion. Freedom of religion primarily confers a right to act in accordance with one's religion but does not bestow a right for believers to have their religion itself protected from all adverse comments. However, there is an exception to this in Islamic countries.
- Neither may coercion by means of a threat of physical force nor penal sanctions be used in order to ensure adherence to religious belief and practices. Nor may these be used to compel believers or non-believers to recant their religion or belief or to convert. Policies or practices having the same intention or effect, such as those restricting access to education, medical care employment or other rights guaranteed by other provisions of the Covenant, are similarly inconsistent with Article 18.2 (OHCHR 1993:Comment 22.5).

Application of right to freedom of religion to harmful minority religions

It is clear from the abovementioned provisions that harmful minority religions function within the boundaries of the broad provisions for religious freedom as follows:

- As harmful minority groups they enjoy the freedom to gather and to act as a religion 1993, comm. 22.1).
- Harmful minority religions may not be discriminated against, including those that are newly established, or represent religious minorities (OHCHR 1993, comm. 22.2).
- The freedom of these groups to manifest their religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching encompasses a broad range of acts.[6]
- Despite the underlying harmful psychological and emotional dynamics, parents or legal guardians in harmful minority religions have the liberty to ensure that their children receive a religious and moral education in conformity with their own convictions, as set forth in Article 18.4 and related to the guarantees of the freedom to teach a religion or belief in Article 18.1 (OHCHR 1993, comm. 22.6). However, this should be done in line with Article 5.5 of the framework of communications: 'Practices of religion or belief in which a child is brought up must not be injurious to his physical or mental health or to his full development ...' (OHCHR 2006).
- Should a harmful culture or practice in minority religions need to be limited, this limitation must be established by law and must not be applied in a manner that would vitiate the rights guaranteed in Article 18. General Comment 22.7 of the OHCHR (1993) states that restrictions may not be imposed for discriminatory purposes or applied in a discriminatory manner. The Committee observes that the concept of morals derives from many social, philosophical and religious traditions; consequently, limitations on the freedom to manifest a religion or belief for the purpose of protecting morals must be based on principles not

6.'The concept of worship extends to ritual and ceremonial acts giving direct expression to belief, as well as various practices integral to such acts, including the building of places of worship, the use of ritual formulae and objects, the display of symbols, and the observance of holidays and days of rest. The observance and practice of religion or belief may include not only ceremonial acts but also such customs as the observance of dietary regulations, the wearing of distinctive clothing or head coverings, participation in rituals associated with certain stages of life, and the use of a particular language customarily spoken by a group, the freedom to choose their religious leaders, priests and teachers, the freedom to establish seminaries or religious schools and the freedom to prepare and distribute religious texts or publications' (OHCHR 1993, comm. 22.4).

deriving exclusively from a 'single tradition'. However, this principle is not applied in Islamic countries, which are dictated by Islamic tradition.

Therefore, with these points in mind, it becomes clear that the right to function as a religion does not necessarily condone or justify practices or policies within religion that are harmful to its members.

Challenges to minority religions, with particular reference to those considered to be harmful minority religions

The UN acknowledges challenges with regard to the implementation of the right to freedom and religion or belief in the case of minority groups. It became evident from the UN General Assembly (2006, para 44) that the concept of a new religious movement is in need of further clarification in order to address (all aspects) of the issue of freedom of religion. It is therefore important to look objectively at the phenomenon of 'sects' and new religious movements, generally referred to as 'minority religions', in order to avoid two pitfalls, namely the infringement on the right to freedom of religion or the exploitation of freedom of religion and belief for purposes other than those for which it has been recognised.

Both the above-mentioned pitfalls are relevant to these minority religions. The first one has specific reference to the obligation of governments or authorities to ensure that minority religions are afforded this right. The second pitfall is of particular interest to this article. As a result of the underlying culture and dynamics at work in harmful minority religions, members are subtly induced to renounce their other human rights believing that it is a requirement for wholehearted commitment. Unfortunately, this kind of expression of religion (*forum externum*) is harmful to the members not only in the context of their existence as human beings but also with regards to relationships. In most cases it leads to the destruction of family structures, relationships and the ability to associate freely. Furthermore, it leads to the adoption of an 'ideal' identity presented by the group that leads to 'robotic' behaviour and creates a dependence on the group that ultimately results in unhealthy control over members. In extreme cases, this kind of unhealthy control even leads to suicides.

The provision designed to protect the right of individuals to freedom of religion or belief unfortunately created the opportunity for the violation of other individual rights within this right, as exercised by harmful minority religions. The general intention of the right of religious freedom is misused and may disguise the violation of other rights. It is important to note that the UN's General Comment 22.5 on Article 18.2 (OHCHR 1993) bars the use of threat of physical force or penal sanctions to compel believers or non-believers to recant their religious beliefs or to convert. This also means that a religion may not in any form, subtly or through physical threat or through policies or practices, force or move members to renounce their other human rights in service of the particular religion, or restrict their access to education or medical care, friends and family.

It is essential to determine whether the policies or practices of minority religions are harmless or harmful. The criteria for the distinction between these categories should be whether the practices, policies and cultures in the makeup of minority religions contribute to the violation of other rights. Furthermore, these religions can be harmful to the extent that they need limitation in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Although any regulatory mechanism in terms of religion is mostly rejected, it is an essential condition in the context of *The universal declaration of human rights* (UN 1948) as a whole. A regulatory mechanism in the form of some framework of communication will serve as a preventative measure that is more beneficial than a cure sought through a legal process. This is even more necessary in light of the fact that the freedom to exercise the religion of one's choice does not unequivocally ensure that the expression of the particular belief necessarily allows for the exercising of any other rights. It seems that harmful religions view the right to freedom of religion or belief as superior to, and even superseding, all other human rights!

United Nations framework for communication

A framework for communications was announced by Asma Jahangir, the present UN Special Rapporteur[7] on freedom of religion and belief (UN General Assembly 2006). According to her, she has, on a number of occasions, indicated that one of the main focuses of her activities is the protection of the right of individuals to freedom of religion or belief. The primary instruments upon which the Special Rapporteur's activities are based are Article 18 of *The universal declaration of human rights* (UN 1948), Article 18 of the ICCPR (OHCHR 1966b) and the *Declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief* (OHCHR 2005). The Special Rapporteur is also guided by relevant resolutions of the Human Rights Council and other organs of the UN and also takes into account relevant human rights instruments and jurisprudence at regional levels. Accordingly, the use of communications to engage with governments on allegations of violations of individual's rights is vitally important. The aforementioned framework therefore enables the Special Rapporteur to determine which elements, if any, of the mandate on freedom of religion or belief are raised by each allegation and to send more specific, tailored communications to concerned governments. In particular, it allows her to alert the government concerned of the particular international standards on the specific issue or issues and to ask pertinent questions about compliance (UN General Assembly 2006:1).

7.The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief is an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council. The mandate holder has been invited to identify existing and emerging obstacles to the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief and present recommendations on ways and means to overcome such obstacles.

Success in addressing violation of rights of individuals within religions

It is clear from the UN General Assembly (2009b) report that allegations of the violation of human rights are to be addressed. This report discusses early warning signs of discrimination and violence on grounds of, or in the name of religion or belief. Also addressed are general patterns and issues of concern, discrimination and violence on grounds of religion or belief, discrimination and violence in the name of religion or belief. The report concludes firstly; with recommendations on how governments can ensure that the right of religious freedom is applied but further also clarifies the role of the state, religious leaders, civil society and the international community and human rights mechanisms in this regard. Religious leaders and civil society as a whole are encouraged to play an important role in supporting and encouraging religious tolerance. Earlier in 2009, another UN General Assembly (2009a) report pointed out the efforts that are being made to address violations of the right to religion or belief. In this report, a number of governments were requested to respond to allegations of the violation of the right to freedom of religion or belief. Unfortunately, this report mainly indicates violations of religious rights on the side of governments. It includes banning of activities, policing activities, capturing of believers and even instances of believers being killed. This reporting and communication system is based on the framework for communication discussed above.

Defect in the framework of communication

Unfortunately, no indication can be found in this report (UN General Assembly 2009b) based on the framework of communication that violations of other individual rights within religions are addressed. Are the other human rights less important than the right to freedom of religion or are they perhaps overlooked? Or, does membership to a religion justify the automatic renouncing of other basic rights, or does this right perhaps supersede all other rights? The answer to each of these questions should be 'no', in the light of the notion that all rights are equal. The need to address this issue is thus indispensable, seeing that the violation of other rights within harmful minority religions is evident.

Analysis of the violation of rights in harmful religious groups

The responses of experts about violations of citizens' rights in harmful religious groups make the following evident (Chebanenko, Usenko & Shchekaturov 2009):

- **Interference with the right to know.** Prospective members are usually not exposed to the full truth about the *modus operandi* and aims of the group.
- **The free expression of religious thoughts and belief is affected.** This is evident when these groups make use of, for example, social pressure, psychological contagion, and suggestion techniques. The new member who has entered the organisation is strictly controlled (in terms of their consciousness, emotions, behaviour and social links) without being aware of it.
- **Infringement on the right to secular education.** It is widely known that, in many cases, cult members popularise their religion in educational establishments. They get permission from government because they cloak this active propaganda as 'lectures about healthy lifestyle, anti-drug education, preparation for future family life, and advanced ways for psychic and spiritual self-perfection'.
- **Violation of parents' rights to take part in the ethical education of their children and to take responsibility for them.** This applies to teenagers who become involved with these organisations and also to the members' children, whose parents obediently set in motion all the pedagogic directions of their leaders, even if those directions are senseless or amoral.
- **Violation of property rights.** There are many examples of persons' property, cars and money being donated to the organisations' funds. People often work free of charge during the building or the reconstruction of places of worship, or in the leaders' houses, or in the organisations' manufacturing endeavours.
- **Violation of freedom of movement and travel.** The person is held in the community's territory either by force or through subtle intimidation.
- **Intimidation of members to give up all their rights for the sake of a better cause.** This may take place, for example, where a member becomes dependent on the leader of some strictly structured organisation and he or she 'voluntarily' gives up all rights.
- **Infringement of individuals' civil security.** This may take place, for example, where cult members might strive to infiltrate state organs of power for the specific purpose of lobbying for decisions that will profit them.

The abovementioned analysis of the violation of other rights under the banner of religious freedom clearly indicates that the intention to protect the right to freedom of religion or belief in order to protect against spiritual and emotional abuse unfortunately creates an opportunity for the violation of other rights, which is why the extension of the UN-sanctioned framework of communication is vital.

Case study of members belonging to Church Team Ministries International

In the absence of a framework for communication to address the violation of other rights within religion, communities will start to take action. This was evident in the case of Church Team Ministries International (CTMI)[8] and, more particularly, the reaction against the Grace Gospel Church (GGC) by the Concerned Parent Group (CPG). The CPG formed as a result of parents who were concerned about the teachings and practices of a local partner church of CTMI, the GGC, which operated in the Hillcrest and Kloof suburbs near Durban in South Africa. Pastors in this area also became aware that the group was targeting the youth in

8.The Grace Gospel Church (GGC) is a partner church of Church Team Ministries International (CTMI), an international Christian group with head offices in Mauritius. CTMI was founded by Miki Hardy. Basil O'Connell-Jones heads the congregation of the GGC that meets at Pinetown Boys' High School in KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa (John 2009:1).

their congregations. Parents, on the other hand, realised that their children started to distant themselves from their own families and had a change in their attitude towards churches in which they were raised. Their commitment to the group resulted in some young people abandoning their studies and careers. Attempts were made by the elders from one church to meet with CTMI leaders in order to discuss their hurt and confusion. Unfortunately, the meeting did not bear any positive fruit and the concerns of the parents were waived by the CTMI leader, who said bluntly: 'Jesus did not come to bring peace in families but a sword' (Concerned Parents Group 2011). As a result of a lack in communication with the religious group and its leaders, a few affected parents decided to begin meeting regularly as a support group to share experiences and pray for one another and their children. The group became known as the Concerned Parents Group. Even ex-members of CTMI who had a hurtful experience in one way or another have since joined the CPG (CPG 2011).

The purpose of the CPG is to confront the leadership of CTMI about the hurt they experience because of the teachings and practices of CTMI. Many attempts to discuss issues of concern with the leadership have amounted to nothing, which has caused the CPG to turn to other avenues to inform and warn the community about the harmful culture, dynamics and practices of the CTMI. As such, the CPG created a Webpage by means of which to reach the community and other interested parties (see http://www.ctmiconcernedparents.com/).

Parents' experiences of the practices and culture of Church Team Ministries International

Members of the CPG found that their loved ones became distant and separated from their family and friends the more they become dependent on the church. This dependence and separation seemed to take the following forms, as indicated in a letter written by the CPG (2009:2–3) to the leadership of CTMI:

- The children felt an uneasiness and lack of freedom to visit their parents out of fear that this could jeopardise their relationship with God and with the leader and other members of the group.
- Studies and careers planned and agreed to between parents and children were rejected for the 'given life' in GGC or Mauritian houses.
- Assistance and support to families were replaced by service and total commitment to the leader and church.
- At times the church stood in the way of parents caring for their own children. A young man with cancer left his own home and stayed with members of the church because he felt uncomfortable when members of the GGC visited him in his family home. The family appealed for a discussion on this issue. The family was deeply grieved and made a humble and impassioned plea to take care of their son as his health deteriorated. This was denied. The son died in the care of the church.
- The church was involved in matchmaking. Parents who were members of the church were totally opposed to the hasty legal union of their daughter and the pastor's son. Arrangements were made at great speed without their involvement – apparently because the transaction would facilitate a visa for Mauritius. The parents were invited to the event via a cell phone text message sent to all church members (CPG 2009:3). The Goddard parents also learned that their daughter was getting married without their consent or blessing. The father of the daughter flew to Mauritius to object to the marriage but was too late (Goddard 2009:1).
- Those who questioned or stood up against the leadership were ostracised. The church would close ranks against them and eventually denigrate them publicly in a defensive and aggressive fashion with demands of repentance.

The conditioned behaviour that was taking place in GGC seemed to destroy relationships and change loving family relationships into uneasy, complex relationships, eventually resulting in alienation. Furthermore, the violation of other rights seems evident from the above. The freedom to associate, freedom to education and freedom of expression were all violated based on the abovementioned.

Actions taken by the Concerned Parents Group

The CPG aimed to oppose the harmful practices of the GGC, as well as inform and warn the community. Through their efforts, they achieved the following in opposing that particular group (Brown 2011:1):

- Exposure of the particular group's extensive lies and manipulation in a two-hour interview with *Carte Blanche* (M-Net 2010), a local television programme.
- Expulsion of the CTMI from Assagay, Westville and Pinedean Hotel venues simply through raising the management's awareness.
- One member was hunted down by the CIA after he had disappeared – the story was exposed in various newspapers.
- Letters were sent to Trinity Broadcasting Network and contributors to *JOY* magazine informing them about the activities of CTMI.
- Letters were also sent to churches where recruitment was taking place.
- Letters were sent to churches in Bulawayo and Harare in Zimbabwe prior to a 'leader's conference' held there.
- A 'spy' was sent to local pastor's fellowship meeting to do follow-up analysis, warnings and a report.
- A further article was published in the *Weekend Witness* (Packree 2010).
- Letters were written to an Alice Springs church and a Perth radio station during a CTMI recruitment campaign in Australia. The radio station conducted independent research and apologised for interviewing the spokesperson of the group.
- CPG launched a case for libel against a pastoral therapist.
- CPG offered assistance and advice to those involved in a sexual abuse case against an elder of the church.
- CPG exposed the awful treatment of the son of a victim

in a meeting with the leader, where the son attempted to clarify issues with CTMI.
- A CPG group was formed to meet regularly in Mauritius.
- A letter was addressed to a radio station in Mauritius which was giving airtime to CTMI.
- CPG encouraged testimonies of CPG family members and others who had left CTMI and found help from CPG.
- CPG launched a campaign to flood *JOY* magazine with objections to its publishing of articles of the particular group.

Conclusion

From the above it has become evident that the right to the freedom of religion, however pure its intention, does not necessarily protect individuals against the violation of other rights in the case of harmful minority religions. The efforts put in place by international conventions and covenants to address discrimination against religion and the violation of the right to religious freedom are mostly focused on the relationships between authorities and religion. The violation of other rights within the ambit of religion seems to be overlooked.

The following are aspects protected by international instruments that are violated in the case of harmful minor religions, in particular:

- **The freedom to change religion.** The culture and the dynamics of these groups do not permit this. Fear is instilled through the practices and belief systems that salvation will be lost if a member should change religion.
- **The practices of a religion may not violate the other rights of the particular individual or the rights of other people.** In the case study above the right of the individuals to associate freely with their families was violated. So was the right of the families to associate freely with the members of the GGC.
- **The practices of a religion may not restrict the individual from access to education.** In the abovementioned case study the study plans of many members were severely affected.
- **The rights of children.** Although parents or legal guardians enjoy the freedom to teach their children the doctrine of their choice it may not be injurious to the children's physical or mental health or to their full development. What free choices will a child have after years of exposure to a damaging culture and practices?

Although the international community frowns upon any violation of, or discrimination against, any religion, even if it is a minority religion, no religion has been bestowed with a right to be protected against adverse comment. Pressure groups such as the CPG found a method to address the harm that they were experiencing from a particular group that was operating under the protection of religious freedom. Yet, the danger of pressure groups such as the CPG is that if they 'pursue' harmful minority religions in an improper manner for any length of time, they are almost providing the minority religion with 'evidence' of unfair persecution. This may even strengthen their indoctrination efforts and the loyalty of their adherents and increase the unhealthy control they have over their members. As so-called 'persons of authority', their leaders may even be enticed to exploit vulnerable members even more. Thus, an attempt to rectify the situation can result in causing more harm.

Violations and concerns of this nature can be addressed more effectively if the existing framework of communication is extended also to include the investigation (by non-governmental organisations) of allegations of the violations of other human rights within the religion. If religious leaders are found guilty, they must be reminded that they are held accountable for the well-being of their adherents. They must understand that rights coexist and are interdependent of each other. In other words, they are all equally important and may therefore be limited by each other. However, the challenge in addressing these violations lies in determining what dynamics may be at work to make members think that they are participating and joining such groups. Because these members will often deny the violation of any right, it is important also to understand how they perceive the culture and practices of the religious group to which they belong. A further need that is for a channel through which family and loved can communicate allegations of the violation of the rights of their loved ones.

It is clear from the above discussion that there is a need for the existing framework of communication to be extended to investigate and address allegations of the violation of other individual human rights within minority religions. The instruments presently in place focus on the obligations of states to ensure freedom to believe (in absolute terms) and freedom to manifest one's belief (subject to some limitations). The rights of individuals in religious communities are not protected as such. State interference in internal affairs of religious institutions and communities could be counterproductive and would amount to state absolutism.

The very foundation of human rights is based on the inherent dignity of all human beings. Human dignity is neither an ascribed societal status nor a privilege granted by governments; it is not derived from social agreements or dependant on membership. It is the birth right of all members of the human family. For this reason it deserves unconditional recognition. Therefore, the UN's framework of communication must engage with religious leaders on allegations of the violation of other individual rights within the ambit of their expression of religion or belief. An investigation to gain a better understanding of the circumstances, culture and dynamics of some minority religions that contribute to their members' surrender of other basic human rights should also be conducted. The answer lies in critical dialogue amongst all parties, instead of state intervention.

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