



IJCSL NEWSLETTER

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ANTI-TERRORISM LEGISLATION

CANADA—

- **EMINENT JURISTS HOLD HEARINGS ON CANADA'S COUNTER-TERRORISM MEASURES**

The Eminent Jurists Panel on Terrorism, Counter-terrorism and Human Rights held public hearings in Toronto and Ottawa on 24-25 April 2007 to assess the impact on human rights of Canada's counter-terrorism laws, policies and practices, according to a [press release](#) of [International Commission of Jurists](#). The Panel noted that there has been a vigorous debate in Canada in the media, Parliament and civil society on the measures taken by the Canadian Government to combat terrorism, and that the definition of terrorism may have implications for important human freedoms, such as association, expression, and religion. The Panel is an independent group of experts appointed by the [International Commission of Jurists](#) (ICJ) in October 2005.

- **COMMONS COMMITTEE TABLES ITS FINAL REPORT REVIEWING THE ANTI-TERRORISM ACT**

The House of Commons [Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security](#) has tabled its final [report](#) reviewing the [Anti-Terrorism Act](#) and associated measures. The report recommends the creation of a special panel of lawyers to bring more accountability to secret hearings for suspected terrorists. According to a news article published by [CANADA.COM](#) on 28 March 2007, the report says that such a security-cleared panel would have the power to challenge evidence in confidential hearings involving suspected terrorists and other alleged security threats. The report notes that shortcoming in Anti-terrorism Act means people or organizations such as charities may not know the full extent of the case against them when accused of terrorist ties under the provisions of the Act. The Anti-terrorism Act allows the government to brand individuals and organizations as terrorists, imposing stiff penalties against anyone who participates in their activities or assists members of such groups.

EGYPT—ANTI-TERRORISM LAW COULD BE APPLIED TO REPORTERS COVERING NEWS ON “TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS”

A planned anti-terrorism law could be applied to reporters covering news on banned groups, according to reports about statements of the Speaker of the Parliament. A news article published by [DAWN](#) on 25 April 2007 reports that the term “banned groups” was widely seen as a veiled reference to the Muslim Brotherhood, which, despite its control of roughly a fifth of the national assembly, has been officially banned since the 1950s. The reported government comments rattled journalists and rights activists who expressed serious concerns about equating terrorist acts with simply reporting on them in the press, an idea that runs contrary to rights and freedoms guaranteed in the constitution.



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SRI LANKA—GOVERNMENT EXPLOITS ANTI TERROR LEGISLATION TO SILENCE MEDIA, CLAIMS HRW

The government is exploiting anti-terror legislation to restrict journalists who expose human rights abuses, official corruption, or who question the government's handling of the separatist war with the rebel [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam](#) (LTTE), claims [HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH](#) (HRW) in a [press release](#) on 12 April 2007. Identifying specific incidents, HRW has condemned the government actions, including the arrest of media executives, detention of journalists, freezing of newspaper's assets, and instructions to media institutions requesting that "news gathered should be subjected to clarification and confirmation."

SWITZERLAND—GOVERNMENT READY TO INTRODUCE PLANS TO DEAL WITH TERRORISM

The government has decided to push ahead with its controversial anti-terrorism plan giving the federal police wider powers, according to a news article published by [SWISSINFO](#) on 4 April 2007. The proposed legislation will allow the Swiss secret services to carry out communications surveillance – correspondence, telephone and email – and observe private areas such as hotel rooms, if necessary by installing bugging devices. Even within the government, the plan has widely been criticized fearing the measures would be too intrusive on civil liberties grounds. The proposal will soon be discussed in the Parliament.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

CHILE—

- **CONSTITUTIONAL TRIBUNAL TO DECIDE FIRST ACCESS TO INFORMATION CASE**

The [Constitutional Tribunal of Chile](#) will hear its first freedom of information case. An [Open Society Justice Initiative press release](#) reported on 23 April 2007 that the Valparaiso Court of Appeals has asked the [Constitutional Tribunal of Chile](#) to decide in *Casas Cordero and Others v. National Customs Service*, whether a provision that grants Chilean public authorities broad discretion to deny requests for access to state-held information whose disclosure may "significantly affect the rights or interests of third parties" violates the [constitutional](#) right of access to information. The constitutional case arose out of a series of requests filed by a Chilean company with Chile's Customs Department for information regarding certain business practices of its competitors which could reveal alleged irregularities. The case gives the [Chilean Tribunal](#) an opportunity to elaborate on some of the key principles enunciated in the [Inter-American Court of Human Rights](#) landmark judgment in *Claude Reyes v. Chile*, (for previous coverage, see [IJCSL Newsletter Volume 3 Issue 12 November 2006](#)) which was the first international ruling to recognize the right of access as a basic human right.



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- **SUPREME COURT EASES RESTRICTIONS ON PRESS IN COURTROOMS**

The Supreme Court of Chile has rescinded the decree it issued on 26 March 2007 restricting the movements of journalists within courthouses and their ability to conduct interviews while there. A news article published by [REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS](#) on 2 April 2007 reports that the court in its ruling of 26 March limited the media's access to courtrooms and ruled that the press should "respect the privacy of magistrates, prosecutors, clerks, judges and secretaries while moving around court buildings and associated car parks," and required journalists to desist from approaching court officials without their consent and disturbing them with camera flashes or lighting or video recordings. Journalists and other stakeholders had strongly criticized the decision as an "attack on the right to inform the public." In the wake of this criticism the Supreme Court rescinded the decree.

NIGERIA—PRESIDENT DISREGARDS FREEDOM OF INFORMATION BILL

In the aftermath of presidential elections in [Nigeria](#), President [Olusegun Obasanjo](#) failed to sign into law the [Freedom of Information Bill](#). A news article posted by [ALL AFRICA](#) on 25 April 2007 reports that the bill has been with the Parliament since 1999 and was finally passed by both houses of the National Assembly in February 2007 (for previous coverage see [IJCSL Newsletter Volume 4 Issue 4 March 2007](#)). President Obasanjo had 30 days to sign into law the FOI Bill, which was sent to the President for his assent on 23 March 2007. Now the bill will be returned to the [National Assembly](#) and will require two-thirds majority of each chamber of the National Assembly to pass it again for it to become Law without the assent of the President. It is feared that National Assembly may not be able to reconsider the bill, and the process of passing the law may need to be started afresh.

UNITED KINGDOM—GOVERNMENT OPENS FURTHER CONSULTATION ON FOI FEES

The consultation on proposals to amend fee regulations on Freedom of Information requests has opened for a second period with a [supplementary paper](#), according to [Department for Constitutional Affairs press release](#) on 29 March 2007. This supplementary paper seeks further comments on the draft Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2007, which it is proposed will revoke the [2004 Regulations](#) of the same name. The paper invites views on the principle of amending the 2004 Regulations and also any further views on the draft Regulations themselves as set out in the [consultation paper of 14 December 2006](#), in particular, regarding the identified problem of requests which are disproportionately burdensome on public authority resources. The new consultation period runs until 21 June 2007.



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FISCAL MATTERS

CANADA—CRA RELEASES GUIDELINES FOR APPLYING NEW NON-COMPLIANCE SANCTIONS AGAINST CHARITIES

The Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) has released [Guidelines for Applying the New Sanctions](#) for non-compliance by charities. According to a CRA [press release](#) on 5 April 2007, the purpose of the sanctions is to encourage compliance with the requirements of the Income Tax Act (the Act). This document describes the types of non-compliance and the sanctions specified in the legislation.

RUSSIA—PRIME MINISTER SIGNS DECREE EXTENDING DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION OF ACCOUNTS OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Forum 18 has reported that under a 10 April 2007 decree signed by Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov, a single, new form for religious organizations will permit them to comply with the information reporting requirements of the January 2006 NGO Law. Forum 18 also reported that the decree extends the deadline for the submission of their accounts to 1 June 2007. Forum 18's stories about the new form and what it requires can be found on its [website](#).

UNITED KINGDOM—ASB EXPOSURE DRAFT ON ACCOUNTING FOR HERITAGE ASSETS MIGHT COST CHARITIES MILLIONS

A recent exposure draft entitled "[Accounting for Heritage Assets](#)" requiring entities to report collections of heritage assets at fair market valuation in their annual accounts, has raised serious concerns among charities, according to a news article published by [THIRD SECTOR](#) on 11 April 2007. Charities claim it would cost them millions of pounds to comply with the latest proposals from the [Accounting Standards Board](#) for the valuation of "heritage assets" such as buildings, land and paintings. Heritage assets are currently valued only if recently acquired. The strength of concern expressed by some of the most affected charities may result in a significant revision of the standard before it is published. ASB is an operating body of the [Financial Reporting Council](#) (FRC) -- the UK's independent regulator for corporate reporting and governance.

UNITED STATES—KATRINA TAX BREAKS RESULT IN BILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN CHARITABLE DONATIONS

The U.S. Treasury Department estimates that a tax break that was part of a relief package to aid victims of Hurricane Katrina spurred \$11 billion in charitable donations, more than triple the amount originally projected. A news article published by [NEW YORK TIMES](#) on 21 April 2007 also says that charities are trying to persuade Congress to make the incentive permanent, but the high cost of the provision may complicate that effort.



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FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

AZERBAIJAN—GOVERNMENT TO SUBMIT AMENDED BILL ON FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY TO VENICE COMMISSION.

The Azerbaijan government will submit an amended variant of the draft law on freedom of peaceful assembly to the Venice Commission in April, according to a news article published by [AZERI PRESS AGENCY](#) on 5 April 2007. The Venice Commission, together with the Government of Azerbaijan will analyze the official version of the bill in regard to its compliance with European standards. Representatives of both constituents are expected to meet in June after the Commission sends its opinion on the bill to the government. Prior coverage of this attempt to write a new law on freedom of assembly can be found in the [January 2007](#) and [November 2006](#) issues of the Newsletter.

EGYPT—AUTHORITIES ORDER CLOSURE OF CENTER FOR TRADE UNION AND WORKERS' SERVICES

The government [decision to shut down the Center for Trade Union and Workers' Services](#) (CTUWS) is a serious blow to Egyptian civil society and workers' rights, said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at New York based Human Rights Watch in a [press release](#) on 27 April 2007. Plainclothes security officers had surrounded the CTUWS headquarters since 23 April 2007, when representatives of other Egyptian civil society groups had begun a sit-in there to [express solidarity](#) with the organization. Condemning the closure order and attacks on CTUWS, HRW has [expressed grave concerns](#) claiming the Egyptian crackdown on labor organizations threatens rights to free association, and expression. The [International Trade Union Confederation](#) (ITUC) has also expressed its support for the Center and urged the President allow the CTUWS to operate freely.

RUSSIA—

• MOSCOW CITY COUNCIL PASSES NEW RESTRICTIONS ON PUBLIC GATHERINGS

The City Duma has passed a new law prohibiting rallies and demonstrations in Moscow, according to a news article published by [RUSSIA-INFOCENTER](#) on 10 April 2007. The law bans rallies and demonstrations near a monument or historical building, gatherings of more than two people per square meter and indoor gathering where the number of participants exceeds the number of seats. The law also requires political parties to prove they are legally registered every time they want to rally, reports [THE MOSCOW TIMES](#). The law will come into force 10 days after the Mayor signs it



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- **LEGISLATION IMPOSING NEW RESTRICTIONS ON EXTREMISM PASSED IN STATE DUMA**

The lower house of Russia's Parliament has passed legislation imposing new restrictions on extremism, reports [RFE/RL](#) on 18 April 2007. The amendments to Russia's Criminal Code provide for up to three years' imprisonment for politically or ideologically motivated vandalism. The amendments also provide stiff fines for those selling or manufacturing products with Nazi symbols. The changes came days after police violently broke up opposition demonstrations recently held in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

- **LAW ENFORCEMENT TAKES TOUGH ACTIONS AGAINST PROTEST RALLIES**

Russian police detained hundreds of people in Moscow on 14 April 2007 as they dispersed an attempt by President Vladimir Putin's opponents to hold "a march of the discontented" near the Kremlin, according to a news article published by [REUTERS](#). The government is defending this tough action against opposition rallies, saying they had to stop "ultra-radicals" from violating law and order. The international community has raised serious concerns about these events calling them "heavy-handed ... and an emerging pattern of use of excessive force." Despite police tough actions, the radical opposition vowed to hold new protests.

THAILAND—LAW TO REGULATE PUBLIC GATHERINGS UNDER CONSIDERATION

The government is considering a new law to restrict demonstrations and rallies in public places. A news article published by [THAISNEWS](#) on 27 March 2007 reports that the government is studying relevant domestic and foreign laws in this respect. The government is, however, open to talks and healthy discussions with all stakeholders to find a workable and most appropriate regime for its own country.

UGANDA—CODE OF CONDUCT FOR DEMONSTRATORS URGED

The [Uganda Human Rights Commission](#) has urged the government create a code of conduct for demonstrators, reports [NEW VISION ONLINE](#) on 20 April 2007. Expressing concern on the way the police disperses assemblies, the commission's chairperson, Margaret Ssekagya, noted that the use of force should be regulated without compromising the right to assemble.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

AFGHANISTAN—PROPOSED MEDIA LAW SAID TO REDUCE PRESS FREEDOM

Afghanistan's Parliament is set to pass a new media law considerably reducing freedom of the press, according to a news article published by [AL JAZEERA](#) on 24 April 2007. The proposed new legislation will bring both private and state media under greater government control. Under the proposed changes, an oversight committee will scrutinize the press for "un-Islamic" content, complaints concerning media content will be referred directly to the Supreme Court, control of content will



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be guided through clauses which include prohibitions that prevent publicity of any other religion than Islam. Prior coverage of the proposed media law can be found in the [February 2007](#) issue of the Newsletter.

AMERICAS—2006 ANNUAL REPORT ON WESTERN HEMISPHERE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION RELEASED

The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) of the OAS has released its 2006 annual report on the state of freedom of expression in the Western Hemisphere, according to a news article published by [EL UNIVERSAL](#) on 10 April 2007. The report calls upon authorities to “abstain from using state power to punish or reward media outlets and journalists with respect to their political opinions,” and shows concern about the “concentration and monopolies as to the ownership of the media, either in state hands or individuals or corporations,” alleging that this “undermines pluralism, a key element of freedom of expression.”

BAHRAIN—PARLIAMENT APPROVES ENFORCING A LAW REQUIRING THAT SHOP SIGNS HAVE ARABIC AS THE MAIN LANGUAGE

The Parliament has approved the enforcement of a law requiring shop signs to have Arabic as their main language, reported [GULF DAILY NEWS](#) on 25 April 2007. The proposal was presented to the government during the last term. The Cabinet’s Legal Affairs Directorate is currently revising the law for submission to the Parliament soon.

BOLIVIA—CREATION OF MEDIA OMBUDSMAN PROPOSED

A proposal to establish an office of media ombudsman has been proposed in the Assembly, reported [LA RAZÓN](#) on 23 April 2007. The ombudsman will be entrusted with the responsibility of addressing the grievances of those harmed by the media including publications, notes of press, news articles or any other journalistic sort. The proposal has sparked debate amongst government officials and media stakeholders.

GLOBAL—IPI PUBLISHES WORLD PRESS FREEDOM REVIEW 2006

The [International Press Institute](#) (IPI) has published [World Press Freedom Review 2006](#). The annual IPI World Press Freedom Review examines the state of the media in over 180 countries, territories and administered areas, documenting press freedom violations and major media developments all over the world. Divided into specific regions, each report provides a comprehensive overview of the year's events and may be contrasted with the events of previous years.

IRAN—AUTHORITIES CRACK DOWN ON UNDER GROUND MUSIC BANDS

Authorities in Iran have reportedly detained at least six members of underground music bands recently and shut down their studios, according to a news article published by [RFE/RL](#) on 23 April 2007. Western music is widely banned in Iran, and censors keep a close watch on the domestic arts scene. Some unsanctioned Iranian acts have developed their own underground styles of rock, hip hop, and other music that authorities deem to be un-Islamic.



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IRAQ—GOVERNMENT VOWS TO SUPPORT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri Al Maliki, has vowed to support the freedom of expression in Iraq, according to a news article published by [ALSUMARIA](#) on 6 April 2007. He is reported to have said that the new Constitution of Iraq will guarantee freedom of journalism and expression.

IRELAND—BEGGING LAW STRUCK DOWN

The High Court has struck down a law preventing begging. A young Dublin man charged with begging on Parliament Street in the city more than three years ago challenged Section 3 of the nineteenth century Vagrancy Act, according to a news article published by [RTE NEWS](#) on 15 March 2007. The court found the section unconstitutional because it interfered with the constitutional right of freedom of expression and freedom to communicate with other people. Section 3 of the Vagrancy (Ireland) Act of 1847 made begging in a public place an offence.

LIBYA—JOURNALISTS CALL FOR FREE PRESS

Libyan Journalists and writers inside the country issued a statement on 2 April 2007, urging the Libyan government to allow private and free press. According to a news update published by [YOUR MAILING LIST PROVIDER](#), the statement has gained support from intellectuals, media representatives, and other stakeholders. This is the first time in thirty years that a call for freedom of speech has come out publicly and collectively.

MOROCCO—AMENDMENTS TO PRESS LAW UNDER DISCUSSION

Moroccan officials and members of the press are discussing amendments to the country's press law that would keep in place tough criminal penalties and facilitate new restrictions on the news media. According to a 6 April 2007 [press release](#) of [Committee to Protect Journalists](#), the new draft law also stipulates the creation of a National Press Council whose 15 members would be appointed by the king together with media representatives. The drafting of the amendments continues and the draft is open to improvement.

MOZAMBIQUE—BILL OUTLAWING PUBLIC BROADCAST OF TRIALS PASSES FIRST READING IN PARLIAMENT

A bill outlawing the public broadcast of trials passed its first reading in the Parliament. According to a news article published by [ALLAFRICA](#) on 27 April 2007, this is a blanket ban on cameras and microphones in courtrooms. Under the existing system, judges make their own minds up as to whether trials may be broadcast. The new bill takes away judges' discretion and bans all trial broadcasts.

POLAND—MEDIA WATCHDOG WARNS OF NEGATIVE IMPACT OF NEW SCREENING LAW

The new screening law requiring people in public positions, including university professors, teachers, and journalists, to be screened for past collaboration with the secret services has met serious concerns and criticism from media stakeholders. A



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news article posted by [HOUSTON CHRONICLE](#) on 12 April 2007, reports that the Polish media claims that by including journalists in this process, the government has created a powerful tool that allows it to determine who may practice as a journalist. Warning of the negative impact of new screening law, the Polish media watchdog further alleged the law “usurps” the right of publishers and broadcasters to make independent employment decisions, “making the government a de facto employer whose decisions may impact upon content, because the exclusion of journalists will deny the public access to certain views and opinions.” The new screening law entered into force on 15 March 2007.

SOUTH KOREA—BILL BANNING CANDLELIGHT VIGILS SUBMITTED IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The opposition [Grand National Party](#) has submitted a bill for a revision of the election law to the National Assembly to forbid candlelight vigils during the election campaign period and to change the wording of the third provision of article 103 in the election law. Under the current law, holding group gatherings such as rallies or outdoor activities to intentionally influence the results of elections during campaign seasons is banned. The [GNP](#) aims to add “candlelight vigils” to the list of prohibited group gatherings. According to a news editorial published by [DONGA.COM](#) on 18 April 2007, a comprehensive ban on candlelight vigils could violate the freedom of assembly and association guaranteed by the national [Constitution](#).

TAJIKISTAN—NEW DRESS CODE FOR TEENS INTRODUCED

Tajik education authorities have introduced a new dress code for young people banning Islamic head scarves and barring girls from wearing revealing Western clothing, reports [TELEGRAPH.CO.UK](#). The education minister, Abdudjabor Rakhmonov, has urged the students to wear more traditional Tajik dress. Tajikistan is constitutionally a secular country, but more than 90 per cent of the population is Muslim.

TUNISIA—IFEX REPORT REVEALS SERIOUS DETERIORATION OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The Tunisian government has failed to make progress in improving freedom of expression conditions over the past year. The IFEX Tunisia Monitoring Group (TMG) has found in its fourth major report, “[Freedom of Expression in Tunisia: The Siege Holds](#).” An IFEX [press release](#) of 10 April 2007, described the group’s fact-finding mission in March 2007 and said that it revealed serious deterioration of freedom of expression with respect to the harassment of journalists and dissidents, threats to the independence of the judiciary, blocking of books and websites, and restrictions on independent organizations.



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FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

BULGARIA—PUPILS WANT RELIGION CLASS IN SCHOOL

A survey conducted by the country's Education Ministry reveals that Bulgarian students and parents want an optional class on religion to be taught in schools. According to a news article published by [SOFIA NEWS AGENCY](#) on 4 April 2007, the respondents to the survey underscored the importance of the class to better help check juvenile delinquency, aggression, and drug use.

GERMANY—MUSLIM UMBRELLA GROUP CALLS FOR SAME LEGAL PRIVILEGES AS OTHER RELIGIONS

An umbrella group set up by Muslims in Germany has called for Islam to be granted many of the same legal privileges as the principal Christian churches and Judaism, reported [EUX.TV](#) on 12 April 2007. Germany has more than 3.2 million residents of Muslim heritage in an overall population of 82 million. Their mosques are owned by incorporated societies with no especial religious status under German law.

INDIA—

- **BJP DISREGARDS SECULAR ELECTION LAW**

The pro-Hindu [Bharatiya Janata Party](#) (BJP), which led India's coalition government between 1998 and 2004 has defied India's [election law](#) by distributing inflammatory anti-Muslim material while soliciting votes in this month's elections to the legislature of Uttar Pradesh. According to a news article published by [INTER PRESS SERVICE NEWS AGENCY](#), the material includes a CD that vilifies Muslims and seeks votes for the BJP by claiming it is the sole guardian of the interests of the Hindus, and hence of India. India's statutory [Election Commission](#) has objected to the CD.

- **HIGH COURT SUSPENDS MUSLIM MINORITY RULING**

The High Court in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh has suspended a ruling which said Muslims could no longer be treated as a religious minority. [BBC](#) reported on 6 April 2007, that the ruling was based on figures from censuses in 1951 and 2001 showing that Muslims were no longer a minority in Uttar Pradesh. The state government appealed. Now two other High Court judges have said the judgment should not be implemented. Groups classified as minorities enjoy various privileges including the right to run community educational centers and subsidies and financial assistance.

IRAN—CRACKDOWN AGAINST WOMEN NOT ADHERING TO STRICT ISLAMIC DRESS CODE LAUNCHED

Iranian police have launched a tough crackdown in the streets of major cities against women accused of not adhering to the strict Islamic dress code. According to a news article published by [CBS NEWS](#) on 24 April 2007, anti-vice police — many of them women — have been stopping women in the streets of the capital and other cities if



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they deem their dress is “un-Islamic.” Ever since President Ahmadinejad won the presidency in the 2005 elections, Iranians have feared a return to the prohibitions on “un-Islamic” dress, music, male and female mixing and the other restrictions from the revolution’s heyday. A report in [RFE/RL for 30 April 2007](#) suggests that the ban on such dress is a permanent one.

KENYA—BILL REGULATING RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS INTRODUCED

The Minister of Constitutional affairs Martha Karua has proposed a bill to regulate the operations and practices of religious organizations, according to a news article posted by [ALLAFRICA](#) on 16 April 2007. The bill is designed to increase the accountability of churches. The Catholic Church has not made any comments on the proposed bill yet and says that it will wait to see what regulation means under the bill. But it agrees with concerns raised about some churches that are not in the mainstream.

PAKISTAN—STAGE PLAY RIDICULING THE VEIL BANNED

After Islamist women lawmakers raised the issue in the lower house of the Parliament, Pakistani authorities have banned a stage play for ridiculing the [Burqa](#) (the veil traditionally worn by Muslim women), reports [MIDDLE EAST TIMES](#) on 26 April 2007. The lawmakers alleged the play was against the “Koranic injunctions on the veil, hurt the feelings of Muslim women, and violated the country's constitution, which says that nobody is allowed to hurt sentiments of the followers of any religion.”

RUSSIA—

• SURVEY OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN RUSSIA RELEASED

Forum 18 News service released a [Survey of religious freedom in Russia](#) on 26 April 2007. The survey identifies State support of “traditional religions” such as the Russian Orthodox Church; blocking foreign religious workers; acquiring or retaining worship buildings as major problems for minority religious communities.

• “RELIGIOUS” GROUP USING SWASTIKA SYMBOL BANNED

A court in South Russian Kuban Region has liquidated a Christian “religious” group named “Orthodox Slavic Commonwealth Age of Ra of the Scythian Branch of Rassenia the Ancient Russian Church of Orthodox Old Believers — Inglings” that used the swastika and Nazi salute as part of the cult, according to a news article published by [MOSNEWS](#) on 10 April 2007. The group was banned under the Russian law that prohibits any use of Nazi symbols.

• ECHR RULES AGAINST RUSSIA FOR DENYING REGISTRATION TO CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY

The [European Court of Human Rights](#) has ruled against Russia for repeatedly refusing to recognize Moscow’s Church of Scientology as a legally valid religious association. In the case [Church of Scientology Moscow v. Russia](#), the Court ruled on 5 April 2007, that the Russian Justice Ministry wrongly denied the re-registration of the church and the decision of the Moscow courts had no legal



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basis. The European Court further noted that the Moscow authorities had not acted in good faith and had neglected their duty to be neutral and impartial towards church's religious community. The court ordered Russia pay the church 10000 euros (USD 13,422) in damages and 15000 euros (USD 20,133) for costs and expenses. Under a 1997 law, religious groups recognized as a legal entity in Russia had to re-register to keep their status. The church applied 11 times for re-registration but was turned down for various administrative reasons.

SERBIA—GOVERNMENT TO DENY RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES LEGAL STATUS

On 7 May 2007, any religious community that was registered by Serbia or a previous state before the Law came into force, which has not submitted a new registration application will, under the new Law, lose its legal status. According to [FORUM 18 NEWS SERVICE](#), religious communities in Serbia are still having their applications for legal status arbitrarily refused or stalled by the Religion Ministry. The communities are worried about their legal status as the date is approaching fast. The new law on religion came into force last year.

TURKEY—RECENT DEMONSTRATIONS BETRAY SIGNIFICANT CONCERN THAT SECULARISM MAY BE LOST AS RESULT OF NEXT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

[RFE/RL](#) and other media outlets have reported on the massive demonstrations held in Turkey's main cities on 29 April 2007 and the fact that they are aiming to prevent the election of Abdullah Gul as President. Up to 1 million people rallied in Istanbul on 29 April 2007, and they waved Turkish flags and carried portraits of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Supporters of Turkey's secular establishment, led by the powerful military, do not want the next head of state to come from the ruling AK Party, which has roots in political Islam. They accused the government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of planning an Islamist state and demanded the AK Party withdraw its presidential candidate.

UNITED KINGDOM—

• FOLLOWING ECHR RULING , SCIENTOLOGY MAY RECEIVE OFFICIAL RECOGNITION

Scientology could be officially recognized as a religion in the UK following a ruling in the European Court of Human Rights in which the court held that the Russian government should be forced to recognize the Church as a religious organization, according to a news article published by [THE ARGUS](#) on 11 April 2007. The court ruled that the Church of Scientology had been “discriminated against as a religious minority” and “was restricted in exercising the full range of its religious activities.” The group was partly refused charitable status in 1999 on the grounds that it was not “established to promote the moral or spiritual welfare or the improvement of the community.” If the decision is thought to apply to all states parties to the Council of Europe, it could mean the Charity Commission will be required to recognize the controversial Church of Scientology as a bona fide religious group and would give it access to a series of tax breaks and potentially hundreds of thousands of pounds in taxpayers' money through Gift Aid.



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- **LIMITING EU BAN ON INCITEMENT TO RELIGIOUS HATRED PROPOSED**

Britain has narrowed the scope of a European Union-wide ban on incitement to religious hatred in a proposed anti-racism law, according to a news article published by [REUTERS](#) on 17 April 2007. Reuters reports that the British move means EU justice ministers are likely to agree on anti-racism legislation that will be significantly watered down from original proposals put forward six years ago. The new legislation requires EU states to punish incitement to hatred against religion only if it is a pretext to incite hatred against a group or person because of national or ethnic origin, race or color.

- **CHARITY COMMISSION TO SET UP FAITH AND SOCIAL COHESION UNIT**

The [Charity Commission](#) is establishing a Faith and Social Cohesion Unit to work with and support faith charities, strengthening their governance and accountability. This will be funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government, according to Charity Commission [press release](#) on 5 April 2007. The Unit will initially work primarily with Muslim charities and communities

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

CHINA—

- **GOVERNMENT TO INCLUDE NGOS WITH FOREIGN INTERESTS IN ITS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS**

The soon to be revised “Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations” will cover eligible non-governmental organizations with foreign interests, according to a news article published by [JINHUA TIMES](#) on 13 March 2007. Such organizations, like their domestic counterparts, need to receive the approval of their sponsoring institutions. The 1998 regulations had no rules for foreign NGOs in China and the regulatory agencies adopted an attitude of “no contact, no recognition, and no revocation.” Currently, there are about 10,000 such NGOs in China.

- **CPPCC MEMBER DEMANDS REFORM OF DUAL REGULATORY SYSTEM FOR SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS**

Wang Ming, member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) has submitted “Suggestions on the Reform of the Dual Regulatory System for Social Organizations.” According to a news article published by [CHINA LAW DIGEST](#) on 13 March 2007, the proposal was made during the National People’s Congress and CPPCC Conference. Wang Ming proposed a multi-administrative system, including record filing, registration and approval, and acknowledgment based on public interest to replace the current dual regulatory system. The dual system refers to the supervisory power exercised by registration in both the civil affairs department of the Chinese government and the



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agencies of the sponsoring organization. Only designated CCP and government bureaus and mass organizations may sponsor non-governmental organizations.

PAKISTAN—BAN ON CHARITY GROUP LIFTED

The [Sindh High Court](#) declared ban on a militant-linked charity group illegal and allowed it to reopen its sealed offices across the country. A news article published by [ISLAMIC REPUBLIC NEWS AGENCY](#) on 26 April 2007 reports that the ruling came out of a case in which the government had banned the Al-Rashid Trust in February and sealed its 28 offices, reportedly on the instructions from the United Nations. Lawyers for Al-Rashid Trust referred to a court verdict against the freezing of the Trust's accounts and said that the Security Council's decisions are not applicable to the people of Pakistan. The Al-Rashid Trust has been accused of providing money to militant groups.

SCOTLAND—NEW CHARITIES REGULATIONS COME INTO EFFECT

The [Charities References in Documents \(Scotland\) Regulations 2007](#) came into effect on 1 April 2007, according to an Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator [press release](#). The regulations specify how charities must refer to themselves in printed material.

UNITED KINGDOM—

• CHARITIES REGISTRATION RULES CHANGED

The rules about when charities must register with the Commission have changed, according to [Charity Commission News Issue 26](#). From 23 April 2007, charities with an annual income of £5,000 or less no longer are required to register with the Charity Commission.

• SUPPLEMENT ON CAMPAIGNING AND POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF CHARITIES ISSUED

In the light of concerns that there may be unnecessary caution about what charities are allowed to do, the Charity Commission has produced a Question and Answer [supplement to its guidance on campaigning](#), reports the Commission. In 2004 the Charity Commission published [revised guidance](#) on the legal and regulatory framework for charities wishing to engage in campaigning and political activities. In this guidance Commission sought to emphasize the freedoms and flexibilities available to charities in this area of their work. The recent supplement published in April 2007 further clarifies this aspect of the regulatory framework.

MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS

AMERICAS—ARTICLE 19 ANALYZES DRAFT INTER-AMERICAN CONVENTION AGAINST RACISM AND ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AND INTOLERANCE

Article 19 has released a [Memorandum](#) analyzing the Preliminary [Draft Inter-](#)



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[American Convention Against Racism and all Forms of Discrimination and Intolerance](#). According to Article 19's [press release](#) on 10 April 2007, while warmly welcoming this initiative to address the serious problems of racism in the Americas, the Memorandum also points to the vastly overbroad regime for dealing with racist speech in the draft Convention.

ARAB WORLD—AL-MUSTAQBAL AL-ARABI ANALYZES CHALLENGES FACED BY CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

The [April 2007 issue of Al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi](#) of Beirut-based [Center for Arab Unity Studies](#) has been published. It includes analysis of the challenges faced by civil society organizations in the Arab world and of how Arab thinkers can circumvent perceived contradictions between Islam and democratic forms of government.

CUBA—CIVIL SOCIETY AND RIGHTS GROUPS SIGNS STATEMENT OF UNITY TO WORK TOWARD DEMOCRACY

Most of Cuba's leading opposition groups including civil society and other rights groups signed a statement of unity to work toward democracy. According to a news article published by [STRATFOR](#), the statement signed on 16 April 2007 calls for the release of political prisoners and for nonviolent action to achieve the group's common goals. Signers included representatives from the Christian Liberation Movement, the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, and the Assembly to Promote Civil Society.

EUROPE—PACE URGES EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS TO INSTITUTE A POLICY OF “ZERO TOLERANCE” TOWARDS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

The [Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly](#) (PACE) has demanded that European governments institute a policy of “zero tolerance” towards human rights violations in Europe and take action on the worst violations, according to a Council of Europe [press release](#) on 18 April 2007. In a recommendation and resolution adopted at the end of a special [debate](#) on human rights and democracy on the continent, the parliamentarians denounced “the gap between standards on paper and the reality on the ground” as regards both human rights and democracy. The all-day debate brought together – for the first time – leading figures from the global human rights community and showcased the Council’s own range of monitoring mechanisms. [Special file on the debate](#) and [summary of speeches](#) is available on [Council of Europe website](#).

UZBEKISTAN—

• AUTHORITIES SHUT DOWN ACTIVITIES OF HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Uzbek authorities have forced [Human Rights Watch](#) to shut down its activities in Uzbekistan. According to a news article posted by [RFE/RL](#) on 16 April 2007, the Uzbek Ministry notified the director of HRW office in Tashkent that she was denied work accreditation because she had “exceeded her authority” and “worked outside the office charter.” Without accredited staff, the group cannot legally work in Uzbekistan. It is, however, [reported](#) that her work accreditation has been extended for three months.



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- **EU MEETS OFFICIALS ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION**

A European Union delegation met in Uzbekistan with Uzbek officials about the human rights situation in the country, according to a news article published by [RFE/RL](#) on 3 April 2007. The talks come ahead of an EU decision over prolonging sanctions against Uzbekistan following Tashkent's refusal to allow independent investigation of the violent events in Andijon two years ago. On the basis of the present talks, the EU will decide in May whether to renew, strengthen, or lift the limited sanctions imposed on Uzbekistan in the wake of Andijon.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

GLOBAL—

- **2007 CIVICUS WORLD ASSEMBLY**

This year's World Assembly will take place on 23-27 May 2007 in Glasgow, Scotland. The overall theme for [the 2007 CIVICUS World Assembly](#) is "Acting Together for a Just World." This theme is being explored through a central focus theme "Accountability: Delivering Results." This year's assembly will bring together representatives of inter governmental bodies like the United Nations, the World Bank, government representatives, business, media and of course civil activists from all walks of life.

- **OIDP ANNOUNCES "BEST PRACTICE IN CITIZEN PARTICIPATION" DISTINCTION AWARD**

The [International Observatory of Participatory Democracy](#) (OIDP) has announced "[Best Practice in Citizen Participation](#)" distinction award. The distinction provides incentive for those who wish to initiate innovative experiences at the local level and disseminate those practices that facilitate the participation and involvement of citizens in elaborating and implementing public policies. Applications for the award may be presented by using the candidacy form available on the [Observatory's web site](#).

UNITED KINGDOM—

- **"WORKSHOP ON AID, SECURITY AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE POST-911 CONTEXT"**

A two-day workshop will be held to explore how the increasing convergence of security and development objectives since September 11, 2001, affects civil societies across a range of political contexts. The "[Workshop On Aid, Security And Civil Society In The Post-911 Context](#)" will be held at Goodenough College, Mecklenburgh Square, London from 27th – 29th June 2007.



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- **CHARITIES ACT 2006 – REGIONAL EVENTS**

The [Office of the Third Sector](#) and the [Charity Commission](#) are jointly running a series of free [regional events](#) to raise awareness of the Charities Act 2006 and its implementation.

UNITED STATES—THE FUTURE OF THE FREEDOM OF RELIGION: A DIALOGUE

The [Interdisciplinary Program in Law and Religion: The Catholic University of America](#) is co-sponsoring one-day seminar entitled “The Future of the Freedom of Religion: A Dialogue,” on 17 May 2007, at the Offices of Sidley Austin LLP, 1501 K Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20005.

RESOURCES

BANGLADESH—APC INTERNET RIGHTS CHARTER NOW AVAILABLE IN BANGLA

Voice, a local rights-based research and advocacy organization, has published APC Internet Rights Charter in the Bangla language, reports [BANGLADESH ICT POLICY MONITOR NETWORK](#) on 23 April 2007.

CENTRAL ASIA—POCKETBOOK ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Article 19 has [released](#) the “Central Asian Pocketbook on Freedom of Expression” on 29 March 2007. The pocket book, available both in [English](#) and [Russian](#), offers a bird’s eye view of the international law of freedom of expression for journalists, lawyers and activists in Central Asia and beyond

GLOBAL—

- **“UN-CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT: YEAR IN REVIEW 2006” PUBLISHED**

[UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service](#) (NGLS) has published the [UN-Civil Society Engagement: Year in Review 2006](#). The Year in Review 2006 gives a snapshot of civil society engagement in the policy and normative work of the UN and reviews the various consultations, forums, policy dialogues, hearings, CSO advisory committees, that have taken place throughout the year 2006.

- **CCSL PUBLISHES NEW WORKING PAPER EXAMINING THE CAUSES OF THE BACKLASH AGAINST CIVIL SOCIETY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE WAR ON TERROR**

[Centre for Civil Society Law](#) has published the Civil Society Working Paper 26 entitled [“The Backlash against Civil Society in the Wake of the Long War on Terror.”](#) The paper [abstract](#) was updated on 17 April 2007.



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NIGERIA—BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE STATE OF POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES RELEASED

Freedom House has released [background information on the state of political rights and civil liberties in Nigeria](#), according to Freedom House press release on 23 April. The report is issued in the wake of Nigeria's elections in April 2007.

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