

Action Plan

Around 40 representatives of the National Council of Churches in India, Catholic Bishops Conference of India and Evangelical Fellowship of India Council of Churches met together on March 15, 2017 at the Delhi Bible Institute, New Delhi as part of a National Conference organized by the National United Christian Forum. Discussions were held on three important topics which the Christian communities are currently facing, that is, the Uniform Civil Code, the National Education Policy & the Juvenile Justice Act. It was decided to make a joint response about these concerns to the Government and to the Churches.

UNIFORM CIVIL CODE (UCC)

Key Messages from the Presentations

- Pluralism is a core value of India and enshrined in our constitution and we are called to speak out in support of it
- Human rights have religious or moral principles from which they spring.
- The notion of a Uniform Civil Code is antithetical to the very concept of India which is a country of diversity of language, culture and customs.
- Gender equality and reform in the personal laws is a separate matter and must be dealt with due consultation with the concerned religious communities

Recommendations to the Churches

1. The Church must seek to introspect how the rights of women, young people and vulnerable communities can be protected within the church and urgent efforts must be undertaken to reduce the disparity experienced by certain sections of the Christian community.
2. The Church should call for a national consultation on personal laws to examine how certain laws and policies perpetuate discrimination or fail to protect the fundamental rights of members of the community.
3. The Church should invite Christian lawmakers and parliamentarians (and if possible from other minority groups as well) to a consultation and impress upon them the views of the Church (and other minority bodies) so that the concerns could be highlighted when the matter is being discussed in the parliament and laws are being framed.

Recommendations to the Government

1. The Uniform Civil Code is a much larger legislative field and should not be restricted to personal laws. Rather the legislature should examine how existing all laws and policies ensure equality of all citizens in line with Article 14 of the Constitution.
2. Changes or amendments to the directive principles can be evolved to better reflect the context in which they framed.
3. The issue of gender inequality should be addressed through increased consultation with the religious communities.

NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL POLICY (NEP)

Key Concerns from the Presentation and Discussions

- The Preamble glorifies the ancient Gurukul system of education, and goes on to invoke luminaries such as Charaka and susruta, Aryabhata, Bhaskaracharya, Chanakya and others in recent history. One senses in such articulation an implicit justification for the implementation of a “hinduised” system of education
- The Preamble makes no reference to the enormous contribution made to education by the Christian Community in India over the past 200 years. The contribution has been made not only through English medium and vernacular language education, but it has also cultivated values of love, compassion, justice, integrity and peace.
- The push for internationalization of education, which also raises concerns of educational equity. For the majority of the Indian population such education would not be affordable. It would again bring in a class divide. Such schemes would again commercialize education. The government should aspire to offer the free quality education to all; it would become a game changer for the Indian education system.
- The earlier national policies of 1968 and 1986/ 92 had recommended a 6 % of GDP as the norm for the national outlay on education. The present draft is still aspiring to achieve this target of 6 % GDP investment. In the present context, the investment should be at least 8% of GDP if not more. It may also be noted that one of the reasons why the earlier policies on education failed was because of lack of adequate financial investment in education.
- The draft with its emphasis on governance and administration through a hierarchy of offices at state division, district, block and schools gives rise to the fear of the imposition of a centralized system of education which takes away the freedom of individual schools. Already the appointment of Principals in Minority schools is coming under greater scrutiny regarding their qualification, experience and age. So also the Income Tax Department, post demonetizing period, is scrutinizing the money transactions in Minority institutions with greater intensity. Further aggressive moves against Minorities and Minority rights affecting our institutions can be expected now after the U.P. election results.
- In response to the overwhelming number of suggestions and responses regarding the NEP forwarded to the Government, the Education Minister has stated that he was withdrawing the draft NEP 2016, and that he would appoint a bigger drafting committee of Educationists and draw up a new NEP considering the present draft only as part of the inputs received. The appointment of a new drafting committee to draft the next draft NEP again is consisting of five persons: (Govardhan Mehta, M.A. Mushelkar, Ram Takwala, ArunNigavekar, Talat Asiz). The consultation of Educationists promised by the MHRD is not anywhere in sight.

Recommendations to the Churches

1. The Church must continue service to the nation by providing quality of education and necessary action taken to stamp out any “black” (commercialized) education
2. We need to introspect and address issues to ensure transparency in the way our institutions are administered and services rendered, so that we are able to fulfil the teaching and healing ministry as Christians, more effectively and convincingly.

3. All efforts should be made by the Church to teach and defend Constitutional values, to approach with caution the adulation of Technology and the push towards privatized commercial education as implied in the draft NEP, and to promote critical thinking.
4. More vigilance and timely action, if need be legal, is the need of the hour as increasing interference in the ministries of the Church and infringement of our Constitutional Minority Rights are in the offing.

Recommendations to the Government

1. The Government must ensure value-based quality education for all.
2. The Government would also have to be sensitive to the pluralistic multi-cultural, multi-religious context of the country, before imposing any centralized system.
3. The Government should resist the corporate forces which are ever seeking to commercialize education.
4. While use of updated technology is needed in education, over emphasis on the use of technology will leave many children out of its ambit resulting in a huge digital divide.
5. For a more robust and wholesome NEP, it is imperative that a wider consultation is necessary with major education providers who have consistently served the nation.
6. The NEP drafting committee should have representatives from the Christian Community that has excelled in educative mission for centuries.

JUVENILE JUSTICE ACT (JJA)

Key Messages from the Presentation

1. The recent amendments call for more stringent monitoring of agencies providing care and protection to children.
2. Many of the agencies have shut down, due to inadequate awareness of procedures and lack of resources to implement the very detailed guidelines provided in the act and subsequent policies or notifications.
3. The government has thus restricted the vital support being provided to some of the most vulnerable sections of society, children who are destitute, homeless and suffering from physical and mental disabilities.

Recommendations to the Churches

1. Conduct awareness meetings and training to help agencies providing care to children to develop a better understanding of the law and procedures.
2. Maintain the highest standards of care for the children in their guardianship and supervision.

Recommendations to Government

1. Call for a wider consultation with agencies and institutions providing care and security to vulnerable children to develop better and more appropriate standards of care.

2. Facilitate adequate funding to non government agencies for them to continue to provide the vital service of protecting vulnerable children.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CHURCHES

1. The opinions and views of units within NCCI, CBCI and EFICC on the UCC, NEP and JJA be widely circulated and shared interchangeably in order to get more inputs.
2. The response of Churches to political issues is imperative. Therefore the NUCF should put this on its agenda and knowledgeable experts be invited to its meetings.
3. Law and Policy Committee panels be constituted at the level of the NUCF
4. Churches should step in and help CMCs in Vellore and Ludhiana in their effort to assert their constitutional right to administer their institutions on their own.
5. The MOU of the NUCF be disseminated among all NCCI units