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Annual tech conference highlights need for connectivity, engaging content

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Proposed code seeks to ban conversion; a need to raise awareness among Christian community

9 Jun 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
Elizabeth Lechleitner/ANN

A proposed civil code forbidding religious conversion in Nepal belies the country's attempts to build a society based on respect for human rights, religious liberty advocates say.
The code would prohibit efforts to "convert a person or abet him to change his religion" in the southern Asian nation. Specifically, it seeks to forbid conversion with or without "inducements" and bans preaching "a different religion or faith." If passed, the code promises steep fines and imprisonment for offenders.

Following ten years of civil war, Nepal in 2006 abolished its longstanding monarchy -- with Hinduism as the state religion -- in favor of establishing a federal democratic republic.

Currently, the Nepalese government is embroiled in a protracted process of drafting a new constitution expected to guarantee religious freedom, reports indicate. The country's interim constitution prohibits proselytizing, according to the U.S. State Department's 2010 International Religious Freedom Report.

The wording and intent of the newly proposed code, however, echo Nepal's constitution during its Hindu monarchy. Then, the country protected citizens' right to practice religion handed down "from ancient times," but banned not only proselytism, but also religious conversion, the Religious Freedom World Report said. The report is a publication of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty.

Having failed to meet their initial May 28 deadline, Nepal's government is now expected to submit a draft of its new constitution in three months, news reports indicate.

"Nepal has a responsibility to protect the freedom of its citizens, including the freedom to have a religion, to have no religion, to change religions and to share and teach religion. This is a basic human right and Nepal cannot build a democratic society while ignoring human rights," said John Graz, secretary-general of the International Religious Liberty Association.

Religious freedom proponents should express their opposition to the code while it's still a proposal, Graz added.

Nepal's small Christian community, which is not represented in the Hindu majority country's parliament, was unaware of the proposed code until questioned about it, the Christian Post reported.

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**Communication director urges greater commitment to social media, Web platform design**

*Annual tech conference highlights need for connectivity, engaging content*

7 Jun 2011, Montego Bay, Jamaica
Ansel Oliver/ANN

A greater commitment to the design of Web technology and use of social media will yield more effective results in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the denomination's Communication director said at a technology conference last week.
Williams Costa Jr. urged the church to increase its financial commitment to the design of information-sharing through the Web, as well as for administrators to further embrace the two-way communication that is offered by social media, which has become an industry standard.

"It's better for leaders to be prepared for interaction," Costa said on June 3 at the Global Internet Evangelism Network forum, an annual world conference designed to enhance the church's use of technology.

"If you want to be heard you need to hear. Corporations are listening because it's the essence of communication today," said Costa, the forum's organizer.

This year's event drew nearly 100 participants from six continents to Montego Bay, Jamaica, June 1 to 5. Most presentations and discussions centered around connectivity and information-sharing and less on Web technology as an end to itself. Many focused heavily on content-sharing through Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Several participants acknowledged that the discussion on social media has progressed: instead of questioning its use, more Adventist administrators are increasingly incorporating social media into ministry. Doing so may increase vulnerability, but also honesty and relevance, they said.

In Central Jamaica, the administrative conference is using Facebook as a key communication forum among members and church leaders -- this despite administrators being against the idea at first. Now the group has 1,000 members, many of whom offered suggestions that were later incorporated into the conference's strategic plan.

"Members appreciate being consulted," said Kemar Douglas, Communication director for the Adventist Church in Central Jamaica.

Some attendees said administrators slow to incorporate technology are often part of a generation gap between technology users. One participant said a challenge is sometimes just educating church leaders that technology doesn't necessarily detract from interactive relationships.

"Understand, the virtual environment is a real environment," said Arnolfo Ardilla, a media producer from Venezuela.
One speaker put the onus on forum participants in leading change. "I think it's up to us to develop examples [for administrators] of how social media can benefit the church," said Bryan Collick, an employee of Twitter, based in San Francisco.

The forum delivered overviews of technologies blended with ministry. One presenter, John Beckett, director of the Office of Global Software and Internet, offered training for netAdventist, the world church's website management platform.

Some had hoped to see demonstrations of even newer emerging technology. "Facebook and Twitter aren't really new," said Chris McConnell, associate Communication director for the church in the Mid-Western United States.

Still, the church is using standard social media effectively in some regions. In Spain, Communication Director Pedro Torres has converged all church initiatives into Facebook, where people can share content across ministries with one click. In England, Kirsten Oster-Lundqvist, a pastor at the Newbold College Church, said Facebook often lends itself to personal discussions with teens who otherwise might feel uncomfortable talking with a pastor about some issues. Other churches, including Forrest Lake in Apopka, Florida, United States, have already invested to create a substantial online presence.

But at the same time, the church is lagging in some regions of the world. Catherine Nyameino, Communication director for the Nairobi-based East Africa Union Mission, said it's often a challenge to obtain funding approval for even basic technology needs, such as a new camera.

"We have pockets of hope in some areas of the world where work via technology is happening, but it needs to be more widespread," said Nigel Coke, Communication director for the Adventist Church in Jamaica. "Hopefully this forum can be the one that brings it about," he said.

Costa, the church's Communication leader, said the church would examine the possibility of holding more local forums in addition to the annual conference.

This year's site was chosen for its central location in the Americas. Jamaica is also home to roughly 250,000 Adventist Church members.

The next four annual meetings are scheduled for 2012 in Hong Kong, 2013 in Athens, 2014 in Bangalore, India, and 2015 in Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

The forum also marked the presentation of the 2011 Adventist netAwards, which recognize contributions to the denomination's online ministry. This year's recipients were:
Elinor Wilson, 91, widow of former Adventist president, passes away

Mother of current church president was teacher, shared 68-year marriage

10 Jun 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
Mark A. Kellner, Adventist Review

Elinor Esther Neumann Wilson, 91, the wife and mother of world leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, passed to her rest on the morning of June 8, 2011, at a care facility in in Dayton, Maryland. [AR file photos]

Elinor Esther Neumann Wilson, 91, the wife and mother of world leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, passed to her rest on the morning of June 8 at a care facility in in Dayton, Maryland.

Her passing came almost six months to the day from the December 14, 2010 death of her husband of 68 years, Neal C. Wilson, who had led the General Conference, the movement's top administrative body, for 11 years. Their son, Ted N. C. Wilson, was elected the 20th president of the General Conference on June 25, 2010.

"My mother was an extremely loyal, careful, and encouraging person," Ted Wilson wrote in the June 2011 issue of Adventist World magazine. "She showed me a personal love for Jesus as a Savior and a friend and instilled in others a simple trust in the teachings of the Word and what it means to be a Seventh-day Adventist Christian."

Mrs. Wilson was born January 21, 1920, and grew up in Chicago, Illinois. Her parents, Joseph Neumann from Budapest, Hungary, and Theresa Wehrderich from Velgersdorf, Austria, separately immigrated to the United States and met in the Chicago's German-speaking community. When Elinor was very young, her mother became a Seventh-day Adventist through evangelistic meetings in the German language and joined the German Seventh-day Adventist Church in Chicago.

Elinor's father was a barber, and her mother worked at a number of jobs at the same time, including stretching
curtains and seamstress work, to put her children through Seventh-day Adventist schools. Elinor's mother died at age 42 when Elinor was still in college.

Elinor Neumann first attended what was then Emmanuel Missionary College, known today as Andrews University. She then moved to Pacific Union College, and met Neal Wilson. Immediately after the two were married in 1942, they prepared for missionary service, first ministering in Wyoming, and then undertaking Arabic language classes at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, located at the time in Washington, D.C.

The Wilsons departed for Egypt in 1944 in the midst of World War II. The young couple employed just about every mode of transportation available to journey through Africa in order to reach Cairo, Egypt -- it was impossible to proceed through the Mediterranean Sea during those turbulent days.

During her years in Egypt, Wilson began teaching in an elementary school, a career that continued when the family moved to Maryland. Wilson taught second graders at John Nevins Andrews School for many years, leaving that work to support her husband in his extensive ministry travels.

Neal Wilson was named president of the church's North American Division in 1966. He served in that post until his appointment as world church president in 1979.

Unlike her ebullient, outgoing husband, Elinor Wilson "was not necessarily a public person," her son wrote, "except that she was a second-grade teacher who loved to inculcate beautiful spiritual truths in her young scholars. She knew how to do that and did it very well."

She is survived a brother, Dr. Richard Dunbar, of Loma Linda, CA; her children Shirley Wilson-Anderson and Ted Wilson; grandchildren Emilie Wilson DeVasher, Elizabeth Wilson Wright, Catherine Wilson Renck, Jonathan Anderson; and great-grandchildren Lauren Wright, Matthew Wright, Henry DeVasher, Charlotte Renck, and Maryanne Wright. Two siblings preceded her in death: Sue Miklos and John Neumann, Jr.
A small graveside service is planned for the week of June 13, the family said. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Elinor Wilson's memory to the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, Adventist Heritage Ministry, Adventist World Radio or Christian Record Services for the Blind.