Hungarian court strikes down controversial religious law

Law of Churches won't go into effect in January

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Thank-you for reading Adventist News Network. Look for the next ANN news bulletin the first week of January, 2012. We wish you a safe and happy holiday season. -- ANN staff
A controversial Law of Churches, which was set to deregister all but 14 “historic” religions in Hungary, was struck down today by the country’s Constitutional Court.

The law, which was scheduled to go into effect January 1, 2012, would have forced more than 300 minority faiths, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Hungary, to undertake an arduous process of reapplying to parliament for a return of their legal status.

The International Religious Liberty Association has spoken out against the law since it was passed in July this year. Last week, Dwayne Leslie, director of legislative affairs for the IRLA, and Ganoune Diop, the organization’s representative to the United Nations, met with Hungary’s ambassador to the United States, Gyorgy Szapary, to express their concerns. In November, Diop and IRLA Secretary General, John Graz, met with Hungary’s ambassador to the United Nations in New York to discuss the new law.

“This is a high day for the cause of religious freedom in Hungary,” Graz said. “We are very pleased that the Constitutional Court has ruled so decisively against this law, which would have dealt a significant blow to Hungary’s reputation as a country that promotes and protects the religious freedom of all its citizens.”

The law, which was passed by a two-thirds majority of Hungary’s parliament, was described by the government as a means to root out fraudulent organizations operating behind the protection of religion. Religious liberty advocates around the world, however, decried the law as one that would have caused hardship for many smaller faith groups.

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South America to send four pastors to Middle East

Homer Trecartin, president of the newly formed
Middle East Union, addresses the South American Division’s Year End Meeting last month on the needs of the region. Officers in South America then decided to devote four of their own Inter-Division Employee budgets to the region.

Greater Middle East Union, an action that symbolizes how the division is now giving in addition to receiving assistance.

Church officials said the move is a milestone, after the region has received help for more than a century.

“They’ve turned the corner,” said Homer Trecartin, president of the Greater Middle East Union and former world church undersecretary. “Many years ago people from other parts of the world risked their lives and some gave their lives to help the people of South America. Now they feel it’s their time to do the same for other parts of the world starting with four of their best pastors.”

The South American Division will loan four incoming Inter-Division Employee budgets to fund the pastors serving in the Middle East. The division will reassess the program after three years.

The denomination established the Greater Middle East Union last month, with officers calling the region a “world priority.”

Trecartin said he hopes other world divisions will follow South America’s lead. That division’s commitment, he said, will also strengthen the church in its own territory.

“They know that when those workers go to other parts of the world and they return home they will bring back a different world view,” he said. “The church in South America will be stronger and they’ll help prepare leaders for the world church.”

South American Division Executive Secretary Magdiel Perez Schulz said administrators are still deciding on the four pastors from among nine candidates. Schulz said each candidate speaks good English and in addition to theological training has professional experience in administrative leadership, music or cross-cultural ministry.

Schulz said each of the four pastors will be requested to send a short report and photos every few weeks, which will then be emailed to each of the division’s 3,900 pastors. He said he hopes this will inspire the division to provide for support for the Middle East, including additional volunteers and supplies.

“We are very happy that we can help the world church in this way,” Schulz said.

The Greater Middle East Union headquarters is located in Beirut, Lebanon.

The man with the plan
In between dozens of international speaking engagements, Gilbert Cangy spent his first year as the Seventh-day Adventist world church’s Youth Ministries director getting all parties to the table to dialogue about the plan.

That plan? "It's about finding ways in which we can move our young people from simply being church members to being fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ," he says.

In his office at the denomination's headquarters, Cangy says his focus now is on youth discipleship. The department is producing two resources to assist youth in developing their own spirituality.

In January, the General Conference Youth Ministries website will make available Discipleship In Action, a 26-week curriculum guide that can be used individually or in small groups, as well as a youth-oriented seven-week daily Bible study guide.

In an interview, he repeatedly says that youth are responsible for their own faith development.

His role

Cangy puts his position in perspective: the local church is only a back-up structure to the home -- the "primary seminary," he calls it. The denomination, then, is most effective in contributing to disciple-making in the local congregation.

"We realize that a youth congress takes place every two or three years and a youth rally a few times a year. But the reality is young people are in the local churches 48 weeks out of the year. That's where the focus needs to be in terms of their spiritual nurture."

Cangy uses the words "responsibility" and "reality" many times over the course of the interview. He talks about working with local leaders and dialoguing to partner with supporting and independent youth ministries. He hopes for a "rapprochement" -- a French word meaning to come together -- between the church and other youth ministries originally formed to parallel the church with little or no consultation.

While he maintains contact with youth -- he's soon off to Germany to speak at a youth convention and Thailand thereafter -- his primary audience, he says, is "13 guys:" the youth directors in each of the denomination's world administrative regions. After his election last year, he flew to each of their offices and met with them, asking about their views and goals. Their plans are his plans and vice-versa, he says.

"I believe [in] a more consultative process of leadership. I know these days you can bypass everyone"
and that technology will take you to the iPhone of a young person, but I choose to work through the system [the church has] in place. My role is to look at the big picture and consider where we are in terms of our time, generation, culture, to look at the needs of the church globally."

Cangy, 55 years old, is originally from the Seychelles, a French-speaking nation of islands in the Western Indian Ocean. He came to the Adventist Church headquarters via Australia, where he worked as a local youth leader and Youth director at the South Pacific Division headquarters, located near Sydney.

Last year he sat as a delegate in a chair on the floor of General Conference Session with a sense "holy discontent" after what he thought was God's leading the previous year to accept a position as a local church senior pastor. He had served in youth leadership for 16 years. A well-known independent youth leader had recently told him he possessed leadership skills. Then a tap on the shoulder changed his life. The Nominating Committee chair wanted to see him.

Cangy soon found himself being asked by Adventist Church President Ted N. C. Wilson if he as Youth director could offer balance between established contemporary youth ministry and supporting organizations. His past shaped his answer.

His journey

"Faith is a journey," he says, another phrase he uses several times during the interview. His own journey has taken him across oceans, over countries and through varying mindsets.

Born to missionary parents and raised in neighboring Mauritius, Cangy left the church at age 17 and "embraced culture," as he puts it. He played bass guitar in a soul band and later joined the merchant navy with hopes of making big money.

"It didn't take long to come to terms with the fact that money isn't what life is all about," Cangy says. It was 1979 and he was 21 years old. In his shipboard cabin heading across the Indian Ocean toward Capetown, he asked God if he was real and could do something for him.

"That's when my picture of God changed," he says. "My picture of God used to be a God that I feared and had to give account to one day. That's not a very attractive picture. I now have no fear because he stands for me. He's a God of grace."

Cangy then came back to the church with a vengeance, hoping to redeem lost time. At a Youth For Christ rally, he confronted a musician about the band's drums and guitars, saying they promoted an ungodly lifestyle. He remembers the band member saying, "'I've never had your experience. It's your problem, not mine. You are associating these with another lifestyle, and I have always associated these with my worship of God.'"

That came like a punch to Cangy's stomach, forcing him, he says, to reassess his views on packaging the gospel. Today, he prefers French hymns -- they formed his childhood experiences of God. But he says he understands they won't speak to everyone.

"I think we need to embrace that there is a huge diversity out there in the expression of our principles," he says.

Bringing people together
Independent and supporting youth ministries have increasingly sprung up in recent decades. Cangy's goal is to embrace them and work together, or at least dialogue more. Some, he says, are not interested in cooperating and have lost confidence in leadership. Those then are more interested in setting alternative expressions of Adventism and see themselves as the "reformers" of the movement, Cangy says.

"There's nothing wrong with expressing our Adventism in a more conservative way," he says. "The Seventh-day church is a global movement that is unified by a unique message that is expressed and communicated through its rich cultural diversity. At the end of the day we are conveying the same message but we are packaging it differently. We must learn to take the route of mutual affirmation."

Still, the reality is that there is a lot of tension, he says.

"Within the more right-wing tendencies, there is an unhealthy view of the last days that promotes the anti-gospel notion of sinless perfectionism," Cangy says. "There is no doubt that endemic to the gospel message is a call to transformation and character development through Christ, but that you will one day stand alone without sin before Jesus comes and stuff like that, [that's] very dangerous."

One of the largest supporting organizations is now known as Generation of Youth for Christ -- Wilson was keynote speaker at its convention last year. It formed about a decade ago as a ministry to Adventists at public university campuses. Cangy's take is that one of its budding groups in the U.S. state of Michigan aligned themselves with a mentor who felt that established youth ministry had lost its way. "He kind of rode on this enthusiasm to launch something that was going to run parallel. There was no intention to consult or cooperate. I don't think those young people intended that."

Later in the interview, GYC president Justin McNeilus calls. Cangy says "hey" and tells him he'll call back later. He hangs up and says, "I talk to Justin a lot because he is of a different spirit. I can see with him a desire for cooperation. He and I talk all the time. It's about unity."

Cangy even brought McNeilus and leaders of other supporting youth ministries to the world Youth department advisory earlier this year.

"My dream is to bring every entity to the table. Let's talk. Let's do this together. Whether it's GYC or Maranatha or whoever, anyone who wants to contribute to the extending of the kingdom of God."

Ultimately it's up to young people if they choose to embrace faith or not, Cangy says. And he believes it's up to older generations to inspire and empower them.

"The strength of our church is our young people. Let's give them the mission of the church understanding that they might do things differently because we live in a world that is changing rapidly."

In India, new orphanage on horizon for Adventist supporting ministry
Less than half of India’s children get an education. Many are orphans who live in extreme poverty in the country’s slums. One Seventh-day Adventist supporting ministry in the region is investing in these children’s futures.

Asian Aid is building a new orphanage for seventy orphans currently living in a cramped home on the outskirts of Bobbili, India. Sunrise Orphanage, slated to open early next year, can house more than twice as many underprivileged children.

Sunrise’s 12-acre plot means the orphanage can grow some of its own food and sell crops for income. Each child will plant a vegetable plot to learn gardening skills and the value of industry, a press release from the ministry said.

Established in Australia forty years ago, Asian Aid now operates an American office, based out of Collegedale, Tennessee, in addition to its headquarters in Wauchope, New South Wales. The ministry operates more than one hundred schools and orphanages in India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Through sponsorships, Asian Aid sends 8,500 children to Adventist schools in the region.

“We’re not only giving them an education, but introducing them to Jesus,” says Asian Aid CEO Jim Rennie. “Sponsorship is really a daily missionary activity. If someone wants to know that they’re making a difference in the mission field every day, they can.”

Basic sponsorships cover a child’s tuition at a local Adventist school, with higher sponsorship levels providing shelter and food as well.

Orphans in India are often abandoned and ostracized by society, Rennie says. In one recent instance, current Sunrise Orphanage staff awoke to find a child tied to a post in the yard.

“She went from being a little girl who was petrified to another of the bright, cheerful kids at Sunrise who’ve got a very loving, spiritual couple to look after them. To see the difference in that little girl was very exciting,” Rennie says.

Asian Aid’s ministry is not limited to sponsorships. The ministry also oversees numerous development projects, such as providing clean water sources, literacy and vocational training for adults and medical care for underserved populations, including Nepalese women and leper communities. Asian Aid also
provides shelter for women who have escaped human trafficking.

“We can’t solve all of these problems, but we have a responsibility as part of our mission outreach to help those in need. I think we give a very direct vehicle to help those in need,” Rennie says.

To learn more about the ministry, visit AsianAid.org.

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