

## **WEA Welcomes Malaysian High Court's Decision to Lift the Ban on Non-Muslims Using the Word "Allah"**

*The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) welcomes the recent decision by the Malaysian High Court that recognized as unconstitutional and invalid a 1986 government directive that banned non-Muslims from using of the word "Allah." WEA Secretary General Bp Dr Thomas Schirmmacher described it as "a step in the right direction towards affirming religious freedom for all Malaysians and evidence that the constitutional system of separation of powers functions well."*

The March 10 ruling came in response to a case in 2008, in which the government confiscated CD's from Jill Ireland upon her return from Indonesia because they contained Christian material and had the word "Allah" written on them. Some thirteen years after the incident and following a lengthy legal process, the court now concluded that the government's action violated Ireland's constitutional rights to refer to the Christian God as "Allah," which is the generic word for "God" in Malay language used by people of different faiths.

The court's most recent decision may also have implications for a similar case going back to 2007, in which the government banned the weekly *Herald Malaysia*, a Roman Catholic newspaper, from using the word "Allah" in its Malay-language editions saying that the use of the Arabic word may offend the local Muslims. In 2015, the High Court rejected the challenge from the Catholic Church seeking to overturn a ban on non-Muslims using the word "Allah" to refer to God. That ruling has led to the denial of the use of the word "Allah" by local Christians, who constitute 9% of Malaysia's population.

Welcoming the Malaysian High Court's decision of March 2021, Schirmmacher said:

"The High Court demonstrated a fair and independent approach, and we hope that this decision will be upheld and effectively implemented by the Malaysian government."

The WEA has previously raised the issue at the United Nations through the Universal Periodic Review mechanism at the Human Rights Council in 2018, urging the Malaysian government "to lift the ban on the use of the word 'Allah' by Malaysian Christians, in recognition of their longstanding use of this name for God."

No other Muslim-majority nation restricts religious minorities from using the word "Allah", which is of the same linguistic origin as the Hebrew words for God "El" and "Elohim." There is also clear evidence that the word "Allah" had been used by Christians, Jews and pagan believers in Arabia centuries before Islam was established. In Malaysia itself, it has been used for more than four-hundred years by non-Muslims and has never been a source of confusion or offense to Muslims.