

# **Bulgarian parliament set to severely restrict religious liberty**

November 10, 2018

Baptist World Alliance leaders appealed to Bulgaria's prime minister after the nation's parliament gave initial approval to a law significantly restricting religious freedom.

The Bulgarian parliament approved the legislation on first reading in early October, setting a Nov. 16 deadline for receiving public comment before a final vote.

In a Nov. 8 letter to Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, BWA General Secretary Elijah Brown and European Baptist Federation General Secretary Anthony Peck expressed serious concern about amendments to Bulgaria's Law on Religious Communities, combined into what Bulgarian lawmakers termed the "joint law." Brown and Peck asked that the law "be withdrawn prior to second reading."

"We write to express our concern that the implementation of this law could lead to unintended restrictions on religious freedom and the direct persecution of churches and individuals of faith," the letter stated.

The legislation grants Eastern Orthodox and Muslims believers the exclusive right to train clergy and operate religious schools; restricts religious activity only to designated buildings; gives legal religious status only to groups with more than 300 adherents; places limitations on preaching and teaching; restricts missionary activity; and limits foreign donations to religious groups.

“These efforts to interfere with theological education, restrict missionary and worship activity, and control international donations in fact wrongly extends government power into the internal life of Bulgarian religious communities,” the letter stated.

“No state, we believe, should be in a position to control the training and activities of ecclesiastic ministers, nor should a state favor one faith expression over another. The Bulgarian constitution rightly guarantees freedom of religion; we urge that this principle be adhered to as the right of all the Bulgarian people.”

In a [Facebook post](#), Brown urged Baptists internationally to pray for a reversal and write the Bulgarian embassy in their own countries.