

# BWA protests new Bolivian law

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WASHINGTON—The Baptist World Alliance joined other Christian groups in protesting a new law in Bolivia that could make proselytizing illegal and put those who do it at risk of prosecution and imprisonment.

In a letter to legislators in Bolivia, BWA General Secretary Elijah Brown expressed concerns “that the ambiguity of these laws could lead to unintended restrictions on religious freedom and to the direct persecution of churches and individuals of faith.”



Elijah Brown

Brown noted his concerns were not only for Baptists “but for all who might find themselves unable to live according to the dictates of their conscience.”

In a translation by *Evangelical Focus*, a Europe-based news and opinion website, the offending law declares: “Whoever recruits, transports, deprives of freedom or hosts people with the aim of recruiting them to take

part in armed conflicts or religious or worship organizations will be penalized seven to 12 years of imprisonment.”

Religious liberty advocates fear the law could ban public preaching and punish the mere act of inviting someone to a Christian or other religious event.

*Evangelical Focus* asserts the new law collides with the country’s constitution. Article 4 of the Bolivian constitution reads: “The state respects and guarantees the freedom of religion and spiritual beliefs, according to their worldviews. The state is independent of religion.”

In his letter, Brown expressed hope “that freedom of religion and expression will be strengthened” and said Baptists are praying “for the ongoing wellbeing of the country.”

He also made the BWA available to Bolivian government and other authorities for further dialogue on the issue.

The BWA has two member organizations in Bolivia, the Baptist Convention of Bolivia and the Bolivian Baptist Union, with about 50,000 members in more than 300 churches.