Two church aid groups deny Afghan charges of proselytizing: Church World Service and a Norwegian aid group

News in the [June 29, 2010](#) issue

Afghan officials have ordered two international church-backed humanitarian groups to suspend operations while they investigate allegations of illegal proselytizing, which the groups strongly deny.

Afghanistan has suspended the activities of Norwegian Church Aid and U.S.-based Church World Service pending an investigation into allegations they were preaching Christianity, which is prohibited in the Islamic state.

"Norwegian Church Aid does not proselytize in any of the countries in which it works. This policy is also enforced in Afghanistan," NCA said on its Web site. "Norwegian Church Aid has been working in Afghanistan since 1979 and has since 1995 mainly implemented its programs through Afghan organizations."

Church World Service, the affiliated humanitarian arm of the National Council of Churches, also denied the allegations about proselytizing, which can carry a maximum sentence of death.

"Our work is entirely humanitarian— meaning we are impartial, neutral and independent," CWS programs director Maurice Bloem said in a statement on the group's Web site. "We have never and will never engage in any religious proselytism. Such activities are contrary to our mandate as a humanitarian organization, and we fully respect the religion of the communities we serve."

The Geneva-based ACT Alliance, an umbrella group of 100 churches and related humanitarian organizations, counts both groups as members and said June 1 that the suspension was expected to last only a few days.

"A local TV station has for a long period criticized NCA for proselytizing," ACT said in a statement. "The government has ordered the investigation to clarify what the church-based organizations are doing."

NCA general secretary Atle Sommer feldt said he looked forward to the investigation, which is being undertaken by a government commission. –*Ecumenical News International, Religion News Service*