

# Non-Muslim religions harassed in Malaysia: Dispute over use of "Allah"

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Places of worship belonging to religious minorities in Malaysia are continuing to be targeted in a dispute over the use of "Allah" by non-Islamic faiths. The new general secretary of the World Council of Churches has expressed "deep concern" about the situation in the Muslim-majority country.

In Geneva, the WCC's Olav Fykse Tveit urged "immediate action by both the [Malaysian] government and civil society to resolve the conflict in order to avoid renewed hostilities and escalation of violence in society." Tveit noted that "Christians in majority Muslim countries all over the world . . . have used the word 'Allah' for God for centuries."

The attacks against Christian churches followed a court decision that opened the way for Christians and other non-Muslims to use the word "Allah" in their religious publications and prayers. The decision outraged some Muslims. At least 10 churches are reported to have been attacked.

In recent incidents, St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church in Johor, southern Malaysia, was splashed with red paint January 14, and stone throwers attacked a Sikh temple in a Kuala Lumpur suburb the previous day. -*Ecumenical News International*