

Liberia debates amendment declaring country to be a Christian nation

by [E Julu Swen](#) in the [September 30, 2015](#) issue

Christian leaders in Liberia—including the nation’s president, who is a United Methodist—are speaking against a proposal to amend the nation’s constitution to declare Liberia a Christian state.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said the efforts would create “division among the citizens based on religious belief.” She made her comments when she submitted the report of the Constitution Review Committee to the national legislature on August 18, five months after the committee met in Gbarnga and approved the proposal to make Liberia a Christian country.

In an eight-page letter to the Liberian Senate, Sirleaf said the founders of the republic did not put into the Liberian Constitution a declaration of Christianity as the nation’s religion. She added that Article 14 of the constitution correctly separates religion and state and holds specifically and unequivocally that the republic shall establish no religion.

“The constitution has always allowed freedom of religion and worship without seeking to describe or prescribe one religion as the official religion,” she said.

Sirleaf’s letter is expected to be discussed by the national legislature as part of its efforts to hold a referendum on amending the Liberian constitution. Though the national legislature is dominated by Christians, many Christians, including United Methodist bishop John G. Innis, have opposed the proposal to make Liberia a Christian state.

Innis had said that constitutional provisions were not needed to practice the Christian faith and expand the United Methodist Church in Liberia.

“Our Lord Jesus Christ did not force people to follow him, so Christians should not advocate for legislation that will create conflict for our nation,” he said.

The Liberia Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention opposes the constitutional amendment also, writing in an April statement that it goes against the

Baptist principles of religious liberty, Baptist News Global reported. Liberian Baptists “have no room for sectarian arrogance within the country’s diverse Christian persuasions and in a progressively more pluralistic world,” the statement said. The Baptist leaders further wrote that they see their stance as rooted in Jesus’ command to treat others as one would want to be treated.

Catholic Christians and Muslim leaders have also expressed opposition to the proposal, according to news reports. Liberia is 12.2 percent Muslim, according to the *CIA World Factbook*.

Earlier, the Constitution Review Committee presented Sirleaf, who is a member of First United Methodist Church in Monrovia, with its final report on all the recommendations from the National Constitution Conference on August 17.

The supporters of the changes to the Liberian constitution said they were simply trying to restore language that was originally in the preamble to the 1847 constitution, which stated that the nation was built on a Christian foundation. They say that language was removed in 1986 when the constitution was amended.

“We are not asking for a statute legislating Christianity,” said Sen. Jewel Howard Taylor. —United Methodist News Service