

Carter says faith still used against women

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The abuse of women is “the most pervasive and unaddressed human rights violation on Earth” and too often justified in the name of religion, former president Jimmy Carter said at a June 27–29 conference at the Carter Center in Atlanta.

Carter, a lifelong Baptist who withdrew from the Southern Baptist Convention over the issue of women’s equality, said the subordination of women is directly contrary to the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

“I think it’s good for me to be reminded and for you to be reminded of the incompatibility between religious practices on the one hand as espoused by religious leaders that try to convince their own fellow worshipers that women are inferior in the eyes of God,” Carter told 60 human rights defenders, religious leaders and scholars from 15 countries gathered for the conference “Mobilizing Faith for Women.”

“In some cases there are even more gross abuses of religious scripts, religious texts, in the Qur’an and Bible—the Old Testament and the New Testament, as a matter of fact,” Carter said. “Those singular verses can be extracted and distorted to justify the ascendance or the dominance of men.”

Carter read paragraphs from the UN declaration regarding the equal treatment of men and women that every country is sworn to uphold. “They don’t do it, and quite often the excuse for not doing it is because religious leaders say that women are inferior,” he said.

“With many great religions—Protestant, Catholic, Islamic and others—there is an ordination by men that women are not fit to serve God on an equal basis,” Carter said. “They are precluded from being priests. They are precluded from being pastors. They are precluded from being chaplains, and men are considered to be worthy of holding those positions in the service of God.”

The ex-president said he still teaches the Bible every Sunday in his hometown church, Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Georgia. “In my church we have a man pastor and a woman pastor,” Carter said. “We have six deacons, half of whom are women. My wife is perhaps the most famous Baptist deacon in the world.”

“But in the Southern Baptist Convention, there’s a policy that women cannot be pastors and cannot be deacons and cannot be chaplains,” Carter said.

Responding to Carter’s remarks, Fulata Lusungu Moyo, an executive for the World Council of Churches’ Women in Church and Society, said some women have taken the lead in reading scriptures in their communities to raise issues such as trafficking of women and girls.

Moyo cited the biblical book of Ruth for an example of women in desperate, vulnerable situations being forced to turn their bodies into commodities through human trafficking and sexual slavery. —ABP, added sources