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Mormons, U.S. officials seek way around Swiss missionary restriction

By Kelly Marshall Smoot

CNN (16.12.2010) / HRWF (20.12.2010) – www.hrwf.net - Because of changes in Swiss immigration and labor laws, the Mormon church and other religious groups soon will be unable to send any non-European missionaries to Switzerland.

But Mormon leaders and some U.S. government officials are hoping to find a way around that change in policy.

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints officials issued a statement on Tuesday saying Mormons have "a long history in Switzerland dating back to 1850. We hope a solution can be found that allows missionaries, regardless of their country of origin to serve the Swiss people."

A group of 13 Mormon members of Congress, including Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid drafted a letter in August asking Swiss officials to reconsider their decision, especially as it applies to Mormon missionaries.

"We earnestly petition the Swiss government to reconsider this decision and to work with us and the LDS Church to find a solution which would permit LDS missionaries to continue to perform their missionary service in Switzerland as they have done since 1850," states the letter from Sens. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho; Orrin Hatch, R-Utah; Robert Bennett, R-Utah; and Reid, D-Nevada; and nine members of the House of Representatives.

The Swiss ambassador in Washington, Urs Ziswiler, said in response to the letter that the ban is the result of a 2002 change in Swiss immigration and labor laws that makes it easier for European nationals to find work in Switzerland and harder for everyone else, including missionaries.

Since 2008, missionary work in Switzerland is "considered as being for gainful employment," Ziswiler said, even though LDS missionaries are not paid for their time or service.

Norbert Baerlocher, the spokesman for the Swiss Embassy, on Thursday explained that the law does not apply just to the Latter-day Saints, but to any religious group that wants to send non-European missionaries or religious caregivers to work in Switzerland. Swiss courts decided that missionary work is "almost always linked to money, and therefore you have to have a working permit."

Baerlocher said the number of permits is decided by the Federal Council of Switzerland and that the number of permits can vary depending on the economic situation inside Switzerland. If the nation has high unemployment, it might reduce the number of

permits, but can increase the number to meet the demand for labor during an economic boom.

Though not part of the European Union, Switzerland has made bilateral agreements with the EU that allow freedom of movement for Swiss and EU citizens. Immigration rules will keep out non-European missionaries, but churches can send as many missionaries as they want, as long as they are Swiss or from the EU, Baerlocher said.

According to church records, Switzerland is home to almost 8,000 Mormons and the Bern Switzerland Temple, the oldest LDS temple outside North America, which was completed in 1955. There are 100 Mormon missionaries currently serving in the Switzerland Geneva Mission and 171 missionaries in the Alpine-German Speaking Mission, though not all of them work in Switzerland because the mission boundaries overlap several different countries in the area.

The church was only able to send 80 non-European missionaries to Switzerland this year, it is limited to 50 in 2011, and none will be allowed into the country starting in 2012.

See <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2010/12/16/mormons-u-s-officials-look-for-way-around-swiss-missionary-restriction/>

Muslims want own cemeteries in all cantons

WRS worldradio.ch (19.03.2010) / HRWF (22.03.2010) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Swiss Muslim groups are calling for all cantons to create cemeteries reserved for Muslims.

The president of the Coordination of Islamic Organizations of Switzerland says he's preparing for a legal case involving freedom of religion.

This comes after the Koniz, a suburb of Bern, rejected the idea of creating a separate burial ground for Muslims, which Farhad Afshar says clearly violated freedom of religion.

Afshar says Muslims cannot simply be buried, explaining that they must be able to rest in dignity in accordance with their religion.

Islamic law says Muslims cannot be buried with individuals of other faiths.
