

## Valley View University breaches freedom of religion

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THE COMMONWEALTH Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) has become aware of infringements on the rights to freedom of religion and association by the Valley View University.

A press release issued by the CHRI noted that newspaper articles wrote that some students who attend Valley View are protesting against the running of the University along the beliefs of the Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA) Church. One article has suggested that students are forced to attend Saturday worship, are forbidden to wear jewellery except for wedding rings and banned from listening to secular music. It was also claimed that it is compulsory for students to attend instruction on God's principles every evening and also to attend daily morning devotions. The article further suggested that students were not told that the University would be run in such a manner, and that the churches themselves have not applied to run faith-based teachings and practices.

A follow-up article quoted a defence of the protests by the Valley View University Students Association (VVUSA). They argued that the rules of the University were made clear to students before they enrolled and that they were not meant to push the students to accept the beliefs of the SDA Church.

However, the VVUSA have confirmed that Saturday worship, evening "instruction in the principles of God's kingdom", and morning devotions, are compulsory, as is the dress code forbidding any jewellery that is not a wedding ring.

The concept of academic and religious freedom is well established in Ghana, and is protected under Chapter 5 of the 1992 Constitution.

CHRI believes that the actions of the people running the University and the University's regulations violate clauses in both the Constitution and the Education Act 1961.

Article 21(c) of the Constitution states that everyone is free to "practice any religion and to manifest such practice." For example, Christians have the right to wear a cross, Muslim women have the right to wear a headdress, Jews have the right to wear a yarmulke, etc. That Valley View University forbids all forms of jewelry means that Christians, for instance, cannot manifest their religion by wearing a cross. The rules adopted by Valley View University also appear to conflict with Article 41(d) of the Constitution. As one of the Directive Principle of State Policy, the article states that it is the duty of every Ghanaian citizen "to respect the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of others". Therefore the restrictions place upon Valley View students' religious rights and fundamental freedoms clearly contradict the guiding principles of the Constitution. The Education Act 1961 section 22 states that schools cannot force students to attend any religious worship, teachings, or observances.

The school's regulation that requires students to attend Saturday worship and daily devotions contravenes this Act.

CHRI finds this breach of basic human rights at Valley View University distressing. Students should be allowed to freely exercise the religious rights guaranteed to them by Ghanaian law. A university is supposed to be a universal centre of learning so students can acquire the knowledge and skills needed for the national development of Ghana. This function is clearly hindered where such institutions are used by religious organisations to impose their views. CHRI is now monitoring the situation closely and is calling on the National Accreditation Board and Valley View University to amend any regulations that infringe on students' religious rights as provided for under Ghanaian law, the release added.