

# RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2018

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Aid to the Church in Need  
ACN UNITED STATES

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The full **Religious Freedom in the World** report can be found at [www.religion-freedom-report.org](http://www.religion-freedom-report.org)



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## FOREWORD

By Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga

Archbishop of Bangui, Central African Republic

Here, in the Central African Republic, religious freedom is not a concept; it is a question of survival. The idea is not whether one is more or less comfortable with the ideological foundations underpinning religious freedom; rather, the issue is how to avoid a bloodbath!

Here, in Bangui, where the forces of destruction are well established, we do not have any choice. Either we succeed in restoring peace or we will disappear. And it is important to note that such a peace can only be founded on a genuine religious peace. In a multi-faith context, this is only possible if religious freedom is understood, accepted and upheld.

Be it in this country, where we have first-hand experience about the issues at stake or in other crisis-stricken parts of the world, it makes no sense to claim that the religious dimension is the one and only cause of the chaos. The reality is complex and modern crises are most often a consequence of multiple inter-connected factors.

Again and again, we see how political, economic and religious factors are all bound up with one another. On the whole, one unfortunately finds that the religious aspects of a crisis are exploited for the sake of political interest or, alternatively, economic gain, and very often, both at the same time.

This instrumentalization of religion is very effective because religious feelings appeal to what lies deepest within us and undoubtedly religion has the capacity to arouse passionate emotions. Nowadays, the media in the West like to highlight these impulses in order to denigrate religion as a whole, and that is why we must always try to balance things out. This does not imply that religion is never

a factor of tension or a serious cause of conflict but genuine discernment is required.

Within the Central African Republic, there was no religious tension before the current conflict erupted and which today has caused our country to descend into a situation of permanent violence. The resulting chaos allows protagonists of violence not only to despoil our nation's wealth but also to pursue long-term political goals, thereby manipulating religious clashes for personal gain.



Cardinal Dieudonné Nzapalainga with Kobine Layama, chair of the Islamic Community of the Central African Republic.

Working with other faith leaders, we have spared no effort to resolve – in so far as we can – these religious tensions and conflicts. We are taking risks; we are exposing ourselves to a great deal of criticism. However, this permanent search for inter-religious dialogue and reconciliation is unquestionably the last defense against the ultimate implosion of our country.

With this in mind, this *Religious Freedom in the World* report produced by Aid to the Church in Need is published at a time when

it is sorely needed. This report is a validation of the importance of what we are doing here in my country. In addition, this report is a powerful encouragement in the midst of so many sources of frustration and disappointment. Finally, this Report is an invaluable tool demonstrating the vital need to bring about peace.

Religious freedom in its fullness eliminates the risk of religious instrumentalization. It can also unite us by encouraging us to respect one another's differences and thereby put a stop to the political and economic manipulation to which we are subjected. A huge thank you to ACN for the service you are rendering to us by publishing this report.

## AT-A-GLANCE FINDINGS

Period under review: June 2016 to June 2018 (inclusive)

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- In the period under review, the situation for minority faith groups deteriorated in 18 of the 38 countries – almost half – found to have significant religious freedom violations. Especially serious decline was noted in China and India. In many of the others – including North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Eritrea – the situation was already so bad, it could scarcely get any worse.
  - Worsening intolerance towards religious minorities meant that for the first time two new countries – Russia and Kyrgyzstan – were placed in the ‘Discrimination’ category.
  - Compared to two years ago, more countries with significant religious freedom violations showed signs of deteriorating conditions for faith minorities – 18 countries, up four on the figure for 2016.
  - An increase in religious freedom violations from state actors – authoritarian regimes – resulted in more countries showing a decline in religious liberty compared with 2016.
  - Conversely, a sharp decline in Al Shabaab militant violence meant that Tanzania and Kenya – ranked as ‘Persecution’ countries in 2016 – were re-categorized ‘Unclassified’ in 2018. While fewer Islamist religious freedom violations were noted in some countries, the position manifestly worsened in many others.
- Aggressive nationalism, hostile to religious minorities, has worsened to the degree that the phenomenon can be called ultra-nationalism. Violent and systematic intimidation of religious minority groups has led to them being branded as disloyal aliens and threatening to the state.
- There is increasing evidence of a curtain of indifference behind which vulnerable



- faith communities suffer, their plight ignored by a religiously illiterate West.
4. In the eyes of Western governments and the media, religious freedom is slipping down the human rights priority rankings, being eclipsed by issues of gender, sexuality and race.
  5. There has been a rapid and unexpected resettlement of some minority faith groups in parts of the Middle East formerly occupied by Daesh (ISIS) and other hyper-extremist groups.
  6. Most Western governments have failed to provide urgently needed assistance to minority faith groups, especially displaced communities wishing to return home.
  7. The success of military campaigns against Daesh and other hyper-extremists has concealed the spread of militant Islamist movements in regions of Africa, the Middle East and Asia.
  8. Conflict between Sunni and Shia Islam has fueled extremist groups including Daesh.
  9. Fresh evidence shows the extent of sexual abuse of women by extremist groups and individuals in Africa, the Middle East and parts of the Indian subcontinent.
  10. There has been an upsurge in extremist attacks in Europe and elsewhere in the West, motivated in part by religious hatred. The attacks suggest that the threat of militant extremism is now becoming universal, imminent and ever-present. As such, this threat can be called neighbourhood terrorism.
  11. Islamophobia in the West has increased, in part as a result of the ongoing migrant crisis.
  12. There is evidence of worsening anti-Semitism leading to a rise in the number of Jewish migrants to Israel.



## BACKGROUND

### NOT ONLY A RELIGIOUS ISSUE

By Marc Fromager, National Director, ACN (France)

This report, which examines religious freedom, seeks to assess evidence relating to the practice and expression of faith within a given country and to provide a view regarding the prospects for its development going forward.

Two problems must be avoided in failing accurately to reflect religious factors in an analysis of conflict, either by exaggerating the part it plays or by failing to acknowledge it sufficiently. In reality, religion is but one of many factors in play, many of which are inextricably linked.

In no particular order, a list of the factors involved would include: the weight of history, the impact of geography or the climate, political circumstances – both historic and contemporary, the demographic features, the socio-economic situation, culture, education levels and finally religion.

If we wanted to group these various elements together for the sake of clarity, we could probably assume that most of these causes could be broadly related to three fundamental areas: politics, economy and religion. The latter is often not considered in a systematic manner, except in a report like this where it is the main object of study.

Two recent crises help illustrate the complexity of such situations, namely the war in Syria and the exodus of the Rohingyas. Generally portrayed as a civil war, the Syrian crisis entails an international geopolitical dimension (Saudi-Iranian conflict and then Russian-American confrontation), an economic component (Qatari gas and Syrian oil) and a religious element (hostile fighting between Sunnis and Shias against the backdrop of the expulsion of religious minorities).

As far as the Rohingyas are concerned, the usual presentation of the situation oversimplifies the conflict by presenting it as poor, innocent Muslim victims persecuted by evil Burmese Buddhists. Without seeking to lessen the suffering of nearly half a million refugees or demean the countless victims, the fact remains that, when one examines the nature of this conflict, it is clear that it is not purely religious.

Again, we come across political factors: the desire for the secession by a tribal part within Burmese territory against a background of demographic changes (the Rohingyas are believed by many Burmese and the government to be mostly of Bengali origin) and economic causes (the discovery of a large hydrocarbon deposit offshore from this region, and the will to defy sizable Chinese investments).

These two illustrations show there is a religious factor but it cannot adequately account for the root cause of either crisis. Taking into account this complexity highlights the importance of promoting religious freedom. This can help reduce the possible instrumentalization of religion, and thereby eliminate one of the factors contributing to the crisis.





# MAIN FINDINGS

By John Pontifex, Editor-in-Chief, *Religious Freedom in the World 2018* report

*They put a knife to my throat and a gun to my head. They called me a kaffir [unbeliever]. They said they were going to kill me. I was placed in solitary confinement and over the weeks that followed, I lost more than half my body weight.*<sup>1</sup>

In an interview with Aid to the Church in Need given in early 2018, Antoine, a father-of-three, described what happened when he was seized by Islamist extremists in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo. When the militants discovered he was Christian, they demanded he convert on pain of death. He was incarcerated, tortured and denied food. He woke up every day fearing it might be his last.

Such was the price that Antoine paid for the denial of religious freedom. And yet, he was lucky. One day, he seized his opportunity to make his escape. While all his captors were at prayer, he silently made his way to the prison's main door and found the chain loose. He slipped out, scaled a high wall and ran for his life. Later that same day, he was reunited with his wife, Georgette, and three young daughters.

This personal account, along with innumerable other examples, is the *raison d'être* for this report. For so many other people, the experience of persecution has a far different outcome. For simply belonging to the wrong religion, countless numbers of people have been killed; many others have disappeared and still more have been imprisoned indefinitely.

So many incidents of this nature, motivated by religious hatred, show the degree to which religious freedom in the world today is "an orphaned right."<sup>2</sup>

Given this, it is arguably more important than ever to arrive at a clear and workable definition of religious freedom and its ramifications for governments, the legal authorities and society as a whole. This Aid to the Church in Need *Religious Freedom in the World 2018* report recognizes the core tenets of religious liberty as contained in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship or observance.<sup>3</sup>

Examining the two-year period up to and including June 2018, this report assesses the religious situation of every country in the world. Recognizing that religious liberty cannot be adequately assessed in isolation, the country reports examine the often intricate relationship between matters of religion and other related factors – for example politics, economy, education (see **Backgrounder – Not only a religious issue**). 196 nations have been examined with a special focus in each case on the place of religious freedom in constitutional and other statutory documents, incidents of note and finally a projection of likely trends. From these reports, the countries have been categorized (see **the table which appears on pages 36-39**). The table focuses on countries where violations against religious freedom go beyond comparatively mild forms of intolerance to represent a fundamental breach of human rights.

The countries where these grave violations occur have been placed into two categories – 'Discrimination' and 'Persecution.' (For a full definition of both categories, visit [www.religion-freedom-report.org](http://www.religion-freedom-report.org)). In these cases of discrimination and persecution, the victims typically have little or no recourse to law.

In essence, 'Discrimination' ordinarily involves an institutionalisation of intolerance, normally carried out by the state or its representatives at different levels, with the law and local custom entrenching the mistreatment of certain groups, including faith-based communities.

Whereas the 'Discrimination' category usually identifies the state as the oppressor, the 'Persecution' alternative also includes terrorist groups and non-state actors, as the focus here is on active campaigns of violence and subjugation, including murder, false detention, and forced exile as well as damage to and expropriation of property. Indeed, the state itself can often be a victim, as seen

1 John Pontifex, 'The suicide bomber saved by Our Lady,' *Catholic Herald*, March 8, 2018, <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/w0080000007c4dwww.catholicherald.co.uk/magazine-post/the-suicide-bomber-saved-by-our-lady/>

2 'Article 18: an orphaned right' – A report of the All Party Parliamentary Group on International Religious Freedom, June 2013

3 United Nations – 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights' – <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html> (accessed June 23, 2018)



Image: Burhaan Knu/Hindustan Times/Getty Images

## CASE STUDY INDIA

### MUSLIM FARMER KILLED BY RADICAL HINDU “COW VIGILANTES”

**April 2017:** Pehlu Khan, a Muslim dairy farmer, died after being attacked by “cow vigilantes” in Alwar, Rajasthan State. Mr. Khan and his colleagues were stopped by around 200 vigilantes when transporting dairy cattle they had just bought back to their village. The cow is sacred in Hindu tradition and protected by India’s constitution. Vigilantes have harassed, assaulted or killed individuals suspected of slaughtering cows.

Shortly before his death, Mr. Khan made a statement to police identifying the six people responsible for assaulting him, but all criminal charges against them – including murder – were dropped. Although authorities failed to make headway in the murder case, 11 Muslim men attacked with Mr. Khan were arrested in connection with offenses under Rajasthan’s cow protection law.

Protests were organized in New Delhi and elsewhere in response to the growing violence targeting Muslims and low-caste *dalits* by Hindu vigilantes. Attacks against religious minorities, particularly against Christians, drastically increased following the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)’s landslide victory in the March 2017 elections.

The leaders of the BJP have advocated the Hindutva ideology which sees India as an essentially Hindu nation. Speaking after Mr. Khan’s death, politician Rahul Gandhi said this “new vision for India that Narendra Modi... is propagating... is a vision where only one idea will prevail.” However, Prime Minister Modi called for action against cow vigilante groups in August 2017.

At least 10 Muslims were murdered in 2017 by radical Hindu “cow vigilantes.”

Sources: *LiveMint*, Thursday April 6, 2017; *Times of India*, April 25, 2017; *Business Standard (India)*, Feb. 1, 2018; USCIRF 2018 report

for example in Nigeria. Hence, 'Persecution' is a worse-offending category, as the religious freedom violations in question are more serious, and, by their nature, also tend to include forms of discrimination as a by-product.

Examining every country worldwide in turn, this report found evidence of significant religious freedom violations in 38 nations (19.3 percent). These 38 countries were examined in more detail with the following conclusions drawn: First, 21 (55 percent) were placed in the top 'Persecution' category and the remaining 17 (45 percent) in the less serious 'Discrimination' category. This means that, worldwide, 11 percent of countries were ranked at the level of 'Persecution' and 9 percent at the level of 'Discrimination.' Second, the situation concerning religious freedom deteriorated in 18 of the 38 (47.5 percent) countries, split roughly evenly between the 'Persecution' and 'Discrimination' categories. Third, that 18 of the 38 countries – 47.5 percent – showed no obvious sign of change between 2016 and 2018. Fourth, religious freedom conditions improved in only two of the countries (5 percent). These countries were Iraq and Syria, both top offenders in 2016. Significantly, the religious freedom situation in Russia and Kyrgyzstan deteriorated to such an extent in the two years since mid-2016 that they entered the 'Discrimination' category for the first time in 2018. By contrast, a sharp decline in militant Islamist violence in Tanzania (Zanzibar) and Kenya meant that in 2018 they dropped two categories, being ranked 'Unclassified.'

While, in numerous respects, these 2018 findings were comparable to those recorded in 2016, there is one significant difference: namely, a marked increase in the number of countries with significant religious freedom violations where the situation has clearly worsened. 2018 recorded 18 countries where the situation had declined, up four on the previous reporting period. This represented a marked deterioration. It reflected a general pattern, which shows an increasing threat to religious liberty from state actors. Examples here include Burma (Myanmar), China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Turkey. Although the threat from Islamist and other non-state actors has declined since 2016 in countries such as Syria, Iraq, Tanzania and Kenya, in many other countries the threat from Islamism was notable but not necessarily sufficient – yet – to warrant a categorization indicating change for the worse. The evidence suggested the threat in this area was likely to increase going forward into the next decade. This same projection can more

definitively be made with regard to state actors – authoritarian regimes – which, since 2016, have caused a setback for religious freedom in numerous countries, including those with both regional and global influence.

Among those countries which saw the sharpest decline in religious freedom during the period in question, India is particularly significant as it is the world's second most populous<sup>4</sup> country with one of the world's fastest-growing economies.<sup>5</sup> Report after report has highlighted egregious acts of violence, each with a clearly-established motive involving religious hatred. One such example comes from Madhya Pradesh state in central India. Describing "an atmosphere of hostility against us,"<sup>6</sup> Archbishop Anthony Chirayath of Sagar told how fanatic nationalists physically threatened families in his diocese and ordered them to leave. In his November 2017 interview, the archbishop said Hindu extremists beat up eight priests and burned their vehicle outside a police station in Satna. Human rights watchdog Persecution Relief documented 736 attacks against Christians in 2017, compared with 358 in 2016.<sup>7</sup> (See **opposite Case Study – INDIA: Muslim farmer killed by radical Hindu "Cow Vigilantes"**).

This violence against Christians, Muslims and other minorities – many of whom belong to low-caste communities – reveals **the emergence of a particularly aggressive form of nationalism evident both in India and other countries around the world. The nationalism in question not only identifies a threat to the nation-state from law-abiding minority groups but carries out acts of aggression calculated to force them to forsake their distinctive identity or leave the country. Such a threat can be termed ultra-nationalism.** Amid heightened concerns about alleged evangelization among Hindu communities, minorities are accused of being – as one Indian MP put it – "a threat to the unity of the country."<sup>8</sup> Such claims are indicative of a nationalist mindset which identifies the nation-state exclusively with Hinduism.

Hard-line Hindu nationalist groups are routinely held responsible for the attacks, which are described as "part of an unprecedented trend to portray [minority faith groups] as acting against the state and national ethos."<sup>9</sup> Concerns have repeatedly been raised with regard to Indian security forces' "complicity"<sup>10</sup> in the violence, or at the very least their failure to act. Religious freedom observatories have noted that the sharp increase in attacks on religious minorities in India have coincided with the rise to power of the Bharatiya Janata

4 According to statistics in *the Yearbook of International Religious Demography 2017* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), India's population was more than 1.326 billion in 2016

5 Kiran Stacy and James Kyngne, 'India regains title of world's fastest-growing economy,' *Financial Times*, Feb. 28, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/cb5a4668-1c84-11e8-956a-43db76e69936> (accessed June 24, 2018)

6 "Hindu radicals want to eliminate us. Help us," says the bishop of Sagar,' *AsiaNews.it*, Nov. 16, 2017, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/%26ldquo%3BHindu-radicals-want-to-eliminate-us.-Help-us%2C%26rdquo%3B-says-the-bishop-of-Sagar-42340.html> (accessed June 24, 2018)

7 'Attacks on Christians in India double in one year,' *CathNews*, Feb. 21, 2018, <http://www.cathnews.com/cathnews/31392-attacks-on-christians-in-india-double-in-one-year> (accessed June 24, 2018)

8 Shilpa Shaji, 'History of attacks on Christians by the Right Wing in India,' *NewsClick.in*, April 23, 2018, <https://www.newsclick.in/history-attacks-christians-right-wing-india> (accessed June 24, 2018)

9 Saji Thomas, 'Hindu attacks on Christians double in India,' *UCANews*, Feb. 20, 2018, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/hindu-attacks-onchristians-double-in-india/81570> (accessed June 24, 2018)

10 'Police Complicit in Hindu Extremist Attack on Christians in Tamil Nadu, Sources say,' *Morning Star News*, Dec. 19, 2017, <https://morningstarnews.org/2017/12/police-complicit-hindu-extremist-attack-christians-tamil-nadu-india-sources-say/> (accessed June 24, 2018)

Party, with the violence against them now “routine.”<sup>11</sup> The BJP has close ideological and organizational links to Hindu nationalist groups, including the ultra-nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).<sup>12</sup> The BJP’s Narendra Modi led the party to victory in the 2014 elections, becoming Prime Minister. Bishop Thomas Paulsamy told Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need: “The BJP supports the fundamentalists. [Prime Minister Modi] does not want the constitution to apply, but rather the religious principles and values of Hinduism.”<sup>13</sup>

This nationalism and its impact on minority faith groups is not confined to India. Indeed, one of the key findings of this *Religious Freedom in the World 2018* report is that developments in India are typical of a **rise in religious ultra-nationalism across some of the world’s leading nations, each with the common denominator that faith minorities are under attack**. These religious groups are portrayed as aliens of the state, a potential, if not existing, threat to the so-called national culture, with loyalties to other countries. If such nationalism goes unchecked, the concern is that it could lead to a growing pressure – perhaps a full-scale campaign of violence – to force such minority groups to flee unless they renounce their faith.<sup>14</sup>

Not that this form of nationalism invariably identifies with one particular faith at the expense of others. In China, all faith groups are at risk if they try to loosen the bonds of the increasingly authoritarian hand of the party leadership. Over the past two years, President Xi Jinping’s regime has taken renewed steps to crack down on faith groups perceived as resistant to the dominance of the Chinese communist authorities.

In north-west China’s Xinjiang province, Chen Quanguo, appointed party boss in 2016, was accused of presiding over a massive clampdown on the Uighurs, the largest Muslim group in the country. It was reported that the government was building thousands of re-education camps,<sup>15</sup> and

that 100,000 Uighurs were being “indefinitely detained in overcrowded re-education camps on China’s western border.”<sup>16</sup> Other reports suggested the figure was far higher. One prisoner reported that he was not allowed to eat until he had thanked President Xi and the Communist Party. With reports that “repression of religious activity has intensified,” in October 2017 at the five-yearly Chinese Communist Party Conference, President Xi gave a keynote address in which he declared that all religions must be “Chinese-oriented.”<sup>17</sup> He said that the regime would not tolerate separatism under the guise of religion. Evidence of a determination to enforce this approach came in January 2018 when the Government introduced new “Regulations on Religious Affairs,” which are seen as heavily restricting faith groups, confining their activities to specific locations and blocking access to different forms of online presence.<sup>18</sup> By the end of 2017, reports were coming in of Christians in some parts of the country being offered money to take down Christmas images of the infant Jesus and replace them with portraits of President Xi.<sup>19</sup> In April 2018, the Bible was banned from sale online<sup>20</sup> and two state-controlled Protestant bodies announced they would be pursuing a new “secularized” version of the Bible compatible with “Sinicization” and socialism.<sup>21</sup>

Turning to Russia, we see another dimension of religious ultra-nationalism at work. Evidence produced for this report concludes that “the situation of religious freedom has dramatically worsened in the last two years.”<sup>22</sup> Of core concern are laws, known as the Yarovaya Package, enacted in July 2016. Introduced as part of anti-terrorism legislation, the laws increased restrictions on acts of proselytism, including preaching and dissemination of religious material.<sup>23</sup> Significantly, the main faith expressions closely identified with Russian culture and history were exempt. In the wake of the Yarovaya Package, police carried out raids on private homes and places of worship belonging to religious minorities. On April 24, 2017, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation banned the Administrative Center of the

11 Shilpa Shaji, ‘History of attacks on Christians by the Right Wing in India,’ *NewsClick.in*, April 23, 2018, <https://www.newsclick.in/history-attacks-christians-right-wing-india> (accessed June 24, 2018)

12 ‘Indian Christians faced almost as many attacks in first half of 2017 as all of 2016,’ *World Watch Monitor*, Aug. 8, 2017, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/08/hinduisation-of-india-leads-to-more-anti-christian-violence/> (accessed June 24, 2018)

13 Murcatha O Flaherty, ‘India: Christians protest amid surge in attacks by Hindu extremists,’ *Aid to the Church in Need (UK) News*, June 5, 2018, <https://acnuk.org/news/india-christians-protest-amid-surge-in-attacks-by-hindu-extremists/> (accessed June 24, 2018)

14 Dharm Jagran Samiti, Head of Uttah Pradesh state, speaking after Modi won the 2014 elections in India stated: “Our target is to make India a Hindu Rashtra [nation] by 2021. The Muslims and Christians don’t have any right to stay here. So they would either be converted to Hinduism or [be] forced to run away from here.” quoted by Shilpa Shaji in ‘History of attacks on Christians by the Right Wing in India,’ *op.cit.*, April 23, 2018, <https://www.newsclick.in/history-attacks-christians-right-wing-india> (accessed June 24, 2018)

15 ‘Apartheid with Chinese characteristics,’ *The Economist*, June 2, 2018, pp. 21-26

16 ‘Thousand of Uighar Muslims detained in Chinese “re-education” camps,’ *The Telegraph*, Jan. 26, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/01/26/thousand-uighur-muslims-detained-chinese-re-education-camps/> (accessed June 24, 2018)

17 ‘China’s president seeks more control over religion,’ *The Catholic World Report*, Oct. 25, 2017, <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2017/10/25/chinas-president-seeks-more-control-over-religion/> (accessed June 24, 2018)

18 ‘China’s new religion regulations expected to increase pressure on Christians,’ *World Watch Monitor*, Feb. 1, 2018, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/02/chinas-new-religion-regulations-expected-increase-pressure-christians/> (accessed June 24, 2018)

19 JB Cachila, ‘China’s Christians are being told to take down their pictures of Jesus and replace them with President Xi instead,’ *Christian Today*, Nov. 15, 2017, <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/chinas-christians-are-being-told-to-take-down-their-pictures-of-jesus-and-replace-them-with-president-xi-instead/118698.htm> (accessed June 24, 2018)

20 ‘Beijing bans online Bible sales,’ *AsiaNews.it*, April 5, 2018, <http://asianews.it/news-en/Beijing-bans-online-Bible-sales-43540.html> (accessed June 24, 2018)

21 ‘Protestant plan focuses on Sinicization of Christianity,’ *UCANews*, April 20, 2018, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/protestant-plan-focuses-on-sinicization-of-christianity/82098> (accessed June 24, 2018)

22 Ben Rogers, China country entry – *Religious Freedom in the World 2018* report, Aid to the Church in Need, November 2018

23 Mike Eckel, ‘Russia’s “Yarovaya Law” Imposes Harsh New Restrictions on Religious Groups,’ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 11, 2016

24 Victoria Arnold, ‘RUSSIA: Jehovah’s Witnesses banned, property confiscated,’

Jehovah's Witnesses and all 395 of their local centers on grounds of "extremism."<sup>24</sup>

The phenomenon of rising ultra-nationalism and the negative fall-out for religious minorities is pervasive, as the following examples illustrate. In Turkey, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's nationalist agenda has asserted Sunni Islam. Formerly, the regime pledged to uphold the rights of minorities but a changing approach quickly gathered momentum in response to the failed July 2016 coup. Although the government's clampdown focused on political dissidents, minority faith groups came under renewed pressure. The government directly blamed the Gulen Muslim movement. Alevi Muslims suffered threats of violence and incidents in which their mosques were "repurposed" as Sunni ones.<sup>25</sup> The regime also closed two Shia Jaferi television stations for allegedly spreading "terrorist propaganda."<sup>26</sup> Christian groups said President Erdogan's brand of religious nationalism "leaves [them with] little space"<sup>27</sup>. Other Christians reported increasing signs of pressure, claiming they are portrayed as "the enemy"<sup>28</sup> by state media organizations.

Egregious violations of religious freedom resulting from ultra-nationalism were found in other countries too. The most serious concerned North Korea, where religious freedom is comprehensively denied by the state, which perceives faith groups to be a threat to "the personality cult"<sup>29</sup> of the Kim dynasty and the regime. In Pakistan, intensifying opposition to proposed changes to the country's controversial Blasphemy Laws, which threaten minority groups in particular, was justified by extremists determined to turn the country into a fully-fledged Islamic state. In May 2018, Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister of the Interior, narrowly escaped death when he was shot at, reportedly by Abid Hussain. The incident had happened just after Mr. Iqbal – noted for his defense of the rights of minority faith groups – visited a Christian community in his constituency in Narowal, Punjab Province. Explaining his motives, Abid

Hussain said he had acted to defend the Blasphemy Laws.<sup>30</sup> In Tajikistan, government suspicion towards so-called foreign religious influences resulted in oppressive measures, targeting Muslim communities in particular. In August 2017, a change to the law required Tajiki women to wear national garments and follow national culture. That month alone, 8,000 Muslim women were stopped for wearing an Islamic veil. Many were sent text messages telling them not to wear the veil.<sup>31</sup> In an effort to limit foreign influence, imams trained abroad were replaced in November 2017 with more "amenable" clerics.<sup>32</sup>

During the period under review, a major military offensive against the Rohingya Muslims by the nationalist regime in Burma (Myanmar) was headline news. Starting in September 2017 and continuing for nine more months, nearly 700,000 people fled Burma for neighboring Bangladesh, joining the 200,000 already there.<sup>33</sup> This mass exodus followed "major military offensives"<sup>34</sup> in 2016 and 2017, with 354 villages reportedly burnt down within four months.<sup>35</sup> (See **Case Study – BURMA (MYANMAR): Rohingya flee violence, rape and discrimination en masse on pages 14 and 15**). The crisis was described as a "text book ethnic cleansing" by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.<sup>36</sup> This came as reports clearly demonstrated that, although ethnic and political factors were at work, religious hatred played a strong part in the violence against a people present in Burma for centuries.

One significant difference marks the Rohingya case out from other cases of ultra-nationalism covered earlier. While the Rohingyas received considerable – and proportionate – media attention and international government concern, the aforementioned instances failed to generate similar levels of engagement from news organizations. Although the cases in question were very different, the frequency and severity of attacks in India and the climate of renewed clampdown on minorities in China and Russia peaked dramatically, but were under-reported. When a video circulated online showing an influential Hindu nationalist

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28 *Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, United Nations Human Rights Council, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/CoIDPRK/Pages/ReportoftheCommissionofInquiryDPRK.aspx> (accessed June 9, 2018)

29 'Gunman shoots Pakistan minister over blasphemy law,' *World Watch*

*Monitor*, May 9, 2018, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/gunman-shoots-pakistan-minister-over-blasphemy-law/> (accessed July 6, 2018)

30 'You've Got Veil: Millions Of Text Messages Remind Tajiks To Obey New Dress Code,' *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, Sept. 6, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-text-messages-remind-obey-new-dress-code-hijab/28720266.html> (accessed Feb. 6, 2018)

31 'Dushanbe cracks down on extremism, dismisses foreign-trained imams,' *AsiaNews*, Nov. 8, 2017, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Dushanbe-cracks-down-on-extremism,-dismisses-foreign-trained-imams-42270.html> (accessed Feb. 25, 2018).

32 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 'Burma,' *International Religious Freedom Report for 2017*, US State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper> (accessed June 25, 2018)

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## CASE STUDY BURMA (MYANMAR)

### ROHINGYA FLEE VIOLENCE, RAPE AND DISCRIMINATION EN MASSE

**October 2017:** More than half a million Rohingya fled from northern Rakhine state across the Burma (Myanmar) border into Bangladesh over a three-month period, according to the UNHCR. The Rohingya are predominantly Muslim, although there are some Hindu adherents.

Reports state that authorities launched a counter-offensive after insurgents from the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army attacked more than 30 police stations in northern Rakhine in August. Many Rohingya elders condemned the group's violent tactics. Burmese official sources state that almost 400 insurgents and 13 members of the security forces died. In response, troops are alleged to have raped and killed civilians as well as having burnt down villages.

Burma's constitution accords a "special position" to Buddhism while recognizing other religions including Islam and Hinduism. The constitution adds that: "The abuse of religion for political purposes is forbidden." But the Rohingya are not a recognized minority – and the official Burmese military view is that Rohingya are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh or their descendants.



Studies by human rights watchdogs have outlined that the extent of discriminatory treatment against Rohingya in Burma include denial of citizenship and marriage restrictions. It can take up to two years to obtain approval and any couple attempting to marry without approval can be arrested. Upon marrying, the Rohingya are required to sign a document stating they will not have more than two children. Many Rohingya do not have land rights and routinely endure forced labor – working one day a week on military or government projects. Buddhists in the region are usually not required to do this. Rohingya are also unable to travel freely; those trying to leave the country have been subjected to harassment and beatings by Burmese security forces, but then allowed to leave, and told never to return.

**Sources:** Reuters, Sept. 7 & 22, 2017; *All You Can Do is Pray: Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Burma's Arakan State* (Human Rights Watch, 2013); Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic, Yale Law School, *Persecution of the Rohingya Muslims: Is Genocide occurring in Myanmar's Rakhine State? A Legal Analysis* (Fortify Rights, October 2015); *Al Jazeera*, April 18, 2018



## CASE STUDY IRAQ

### DEFEAT OF EXTREMISTS HERALDS TOWN'S REHABILITATION

**June 2018:** When Qaraqosh, the last Christian majority town in Iraq, fell to Daesh (ISIS) in 2014, many feared there was no future for the country's Christians. However, by June 2018, not only had the militant extremists been forced out, but new figures showed that nearly half of the town's inhabitants had now returned.

The statistics, produced by Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need in conjunction with the Nineveh Reconstruction Committee, supported by local Church communities, revealed that 25,650 Christians were back in Qaraqosh.

The figures also showed that, of the 6,826 damaged homes in Qaraqosh, 2,187 had been restored with help from ACN and other organizations – more than a third.

The return of families peaked in August 2017 with parents anxious to secure school places for their children.

The restoration of Qaraqosh's schools did not suffer the same fate experienced by those in nearby villages. Stephen Rasche, from the Chaldean Catholic Archdiocese of Erbil, told a hearing at the US House of Representatives that so-called "completed" schools in the Christian-majority towns of Teleskov and Batnaya were unusable. They only received "one thin coat of paint on the exterior surface walls, with freshly stencilled UNICEF logos every 30 feet."

Highlighting steps towards the rehabilitation of Qaraqosh and elsewhere, ACN Middle East projects coordinator Father Andrzej Halemba nonetheless underlined the challenges ahead: "Along with the material construction of homes and churches, there is a fundamental issue which must be repaired in these lands: coexistence. In order for this to happen, Christian and Muslims must work together to make Iraq a united nation, which is capable of rising out of the ashes brought about by Daesh."

Sources: Aid to the Church in Need (UK) News, Aug. 21, 2017; *Washington Free Beacon*, Oct. 4, 2017; *Hope on the Horizon: Can Iraq's Christians go home?* ACN (UK) benefactor report (March 2017); additional information from Nineveh Reconstruction Committee (<https://www.nrciraq.org/>)



leader telling Christians to leave or face being “expelled by force,”<sup>37</sup> a leading Catholic publication described it as “the most overlooked story of the week,” noting how the film also records the radical cleric and 20 supporters stamping on images of Pope Francis.<sup>38</sup> The impact of this apparent international indifference cannot be over-estimated, since the disengagement actively contributes to the problem, with few if any steps being taken to hold the governments in question to account. These incidents point to the emergence of a cultural divide; on the one hand, in the West, there is an ignorance and a lack of concern about religious freedom violations, and on the other, in Asia and other parts of the world, questions of religion are central and paramount. So marked is this divide that we can conclude that **there is a barrier of indifference, a cultural curtain, behind which the suffering of entire communities of religious minority groups goes largely unnoticed. Hence, with notable exceptions, religious illiteracy and apathy blinds the West to the surge in ultra-nationalist violence, which is being perpetrated against minority faith groups.** This blinkered indifference does not extend to racial, cultural, or gender matters, only to religion. This report calls for the suffering of ignored religious minorities to be recognized and action taken to defend their rights.

During the period under review, there were however glimmers of hope. By mid-2018, events were unfolding in northern Iraq that two years earlier were almost certainly beyond the hopes of even the most optimistic members of the religious minorities concerned. As of June 2018, reports showed that 25,650 Christians had returned to the town of Qaraqosh in the Nineveh Plains.<sup>39</sup> This represented almost 50 percent of the total number of people living in Qaraqosh in 2014, when they fled Daesh (ISIS) forces surging out of nearby Mosul, Iraq’s second city. **(See opposite Case Study – IRAQ: Defeat of extremists heralds town’s rehabilitation).** At the start of the period under review – mid-2016 – there was no immediate sign that the Daesh occupation of the region was about to end and months later, when they were ejected, the devastation they left behind meant that the appetite to return was virtually non-existent among the communities displaced to Erbil, northern Iraq’s semi-autonomous Kurdish capital.<sup>40</sup> While the rate of return was particularly marked in Qaraqosh, as compared with many similarly affected neighboring towns and villages, the former’s significance as the largest Christian-majority town in Iraq cannot be overstated. In any case, nearby Yazidi and Christian towns and

villages including Bartela, Karamles and Teleskof had all seen considerable numbers of displaced people return, eagerly taking up residence in homes newly repaired and rebuilt by Church organizations and a very few sympathetic foreign governments.<sup>41</sup> This work of rehabilitation has mainly been done by charities and Church organizations. Had they not provided this assistance, the Christian community in the region could have vanished. **Western governments, to whom appeals for urgent assistance were made, badly let down the communities concerned.** Christians and Yazidis were recognized as victims of genocide – self-evidently deserving of help – and events have shown that there were eminently viable means of doing so.

The rapid roll-back of territory seized by Daesh – not only in Iraq but also Syria – was mirrored by similar losses felt by other hyper-extremist<sup>42</sup> groups including Boko Haram, based in northern Nigeria. Not only had Boko Haram lost most of its territory, but it had also conceded defeat – in large part – in its homeland, Maiduguri, in the north-east of the country.

Taken as a whole, the reclamation of almost all territory held by hyper-extremist groups represented a victory for religious freedom. News media gave due scope to this development of international significance, as witnessed by coverage of the liberation of Marawi in the Philippines from Daesh in October 2017. **(See Case Study – PHILIPPINES: Priest and cathedral staff abducted on pages 18 and 19).** That said, this *Religious Freedom in the World 2018* report finds that **news organizations have overlooked the growth of religious violence carried out by other militant Islamist groups, which to some extent at least filled the vacuum left by the hyper-extremists.** This was certainly the case in Egypt, where Coptic Christians continued to come under attack from extremists. **(See Case Study – EGYPT: Extremists kill 29 Coptic Christian pilgrims on pages 20 and 21).** In Nigeria, militant Islamist Fulani herdsmen ransacked Christian communities in the country’s Middle Belt, massacring people, destroying their livelihood and leaving countless people in fear of their lives. Central to the Fulani violence were the herdsmen’s desperate efforts to “confiscate...arable land”<sup>43</sup> to graze their cattle; ethnic issues separating them from the Christians and other groups also undoubtedly played a part. However, the nature of the violence – including attacks on Christians at prayer – underlined the growing significance of religious motives. **(See Case Study – NIGERIA: Catholics murdered by militants during Mass on page 22).** Again, a core finding of this report

36 Linda Lowry, ‘Hindu leader demands all Christians leave India in publicised video,’ *Open Doors*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/hindu-leader-demands-all-christians-leave-india-in-publicized-video/> (accessed June 1, 2018)

37 *Catholic Herald*, June 15, 2018, p. 6

38 Rev’d Dr Andrzej Halemba, ‘Church properties interim report’ – ACN Nineveh Plains projects update, *Aid to the Church in Need*, June 9, 2018

39 John Pontifex, ‘Iraqi Christians start journey home to their ancient homeland,’ *The Times*, Oct. 7, 2017, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/iraqi-christians-start-journey-home-to-their-ancient-heartland-d3wlm62xj> (accessed June 25, 2018)

40 ‘Nineveh Plains Reconstruction Process,’ Nineveh Reconstruction Committee (NRC), <https://www.nrciraq.org/reconstruction-process/> (accessed June 25, 2018)

41 *Religious Freedom in the World [2016] Executive Summary* (Sutton: Aid to the Church in Need), p. 15ff

42 Murcatha O Flaherty and John Pontifex, ‘Fears of ‘jihadist crusade’ deepen after Christians are shot dead,’ *Aid to the Church in Need (UK) News*, April 13, 2018, <https://acnuk.org/news/64284/> (accessed July 11, 2018)



## CASE STUDY PHILIPPINES

### PRIEST AND CATHEDRAL STAFF ABDUCTED

**May 2017:** Father Teresito ‘Chito’ Soganob, the Vicar General of Marawi, and staff from the city’s St. Mary’s Cathedral were kidnapped by militant Islamist extremists.

St. Mary’s was severely damaged by the extremists who filmed themselves desecrating the building.

Father Soganob’s capture came at the start of the siege of Marawi, which continued until October 2017. Maute militants, affiliated with Daesh (ISIS), played a leading role in a conflict that involved other jihadists.

During his four-month captivity, Father Soganob witnessed the beheading of another Christian captive. The militants also forced the priest and other hostages to convert to Islam as well as to transport arms during the siege. After the release of both Father Soganob and others kidnapped at that time, Bishop Edwin de la Peña of Marawi said theirs was not a “full conversion” as it had been done under duress.

By the time the Maute occupation ended, the death toll included 974 militants, 168 government personnel and 87 civilians. Thousands of families had been displaced in the longest urban battle in the Philippines since the Second World War.

Bishop de la Peña said Maute’s siege of Marawi had divided the local Muslim community; some Muslims defied the extremists by sheltering Christians. In the wake of the violence, the bishop stated that the Church’s priority was to rebuild trust in the city. Steps to repair relations between different faith communities include providing emergency aid for displaced people, university students visiting IDPs to provide support and a new rehabilitation center helping Christians and Muslims kidnapped by extremists.

**Sources:** *Aid to the Church in Need (UK) News*, April 19, 2018; *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 4, 2017; *Asia News*, Jan. 13, 2018

**Image (left):** Father Soganob being interviewed by journalists after he was rescued by government soldiers



Family and friends grieve for the Coptic Christian pilgrims killed by Daesh in Minya Province



## CASE STUDY EGYPT

### EXTREMISTS KILL 29 COPTIC CHRISTIAN PILGRIMS

**May 2017:** Islamist militants shot dead 29 Coptic Christians – including children – when they refused to convert to Islam. The pilgrims had been traveling to the monastery of St. Samuel the Confessor, in Maghagha in Egypt’s Minya Province, when their vehicles were stopped by masked gunmen. The extremists ordered the pilgrims off the vehicles one by one and insisted that they renounce their faith.

Mina Habib, aged 10, described seeing Islamist gunmen kill his father and many of the passengers in the truck they were travelling in. He said: “They asked my father for identification and then told him to recite the Muslim profession of faith. He refused, saying he was Christian. They shot him and everyone else with us ...” Mina and his brother do not know why they were not killed, even though many other children among the pilgrim group were shot dead.

Daesh (ISIS) claimed responsibility for the massacre. Mina told news agency Reuters that around 15 gunmen carried out the slaughter. He said: “They had Egyptian accents like us and they were all masked except for two of them... They looked like us and did not have beards.”

Attacks by militant Islamist groups in Egypt have not been restricted to Christians. On Friday, November 24, 2017, at least 235 people were killed when about 25 militants detonated explosives and sprayed gunfire at a crowded Sufi mosque near Egypt’s Sinai coast during prayers. No group formally claimed responsibility, but a militant was seen holding a Daesh flag during the attack.

Sources: *The National* (UAE), May 26, 2017; *Reuters*, June 20, 2017



## CASE STUDY NIGERIA

### CATHOLICS MURDERED BY MILITANTS DURING MASS

**April 2018:** Two priests and 17 parishioners were killed when militant Islamist Fulani herdsmen stormed a church during Mass in Makurdi Diocese, part of Nigeria's Middle Belt.

Father Joseph Gor and Father Felix Tyolaha were among those who died when the Fulani struck during early morning Mass at St Ignatius's Church, Ukpok-Mbalon, in Benue State.

Amid an upsurge in Fulani attacks, Governor of Benue Samuel Ortom said, during a funeral for victims on May 22, that 492 people had been killed in that state alone.

Assessments of the violence have highlighted ethnic differences between Christians and the Fulanis and disputes concerning the grazing of the herdsmen's cattle but religion seems to have become an increasingly important factor.

Father Alexander Yeyock, parish priest of St. John's Church, Asso, gave an interview after a Fulani attack in Easter Week 2018 left two of his faithful dead: "The attack has two dimensions. The first is to Islamize the Christian community... The second dimension is that Fulani herdsmen want to confiscate our arable land for grazing purposes."

Bishop Wilfred Chikpa Anagbe of Makurdi told ACN: "There is a clear agenda, a plan to Islamize all the areas that are currently predominantly Christian in the... Middle Belt."

The Nigerian bishops issued a strongly worded statement condemning the attacks and once again called on the federal government to protect lives.

Sources: *Aid to the Church in Need (UK) News*, April 13, 2018, May 21, 2018; Governor Samuel Ortom's funeral speech from *Daily Post* (Nigeria), May 22, 2018; Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, April 26, 2018

is the failure of the international community to recognize the scale of the problem, which is compounded by the inaction of the authorities in the countries concerned. So serious was the problem that Nigeria's bishops called on the country's President to "consider stepping aside" while "security agencies deliberately turn a blind eye to the cries... of armless citizens who remain sitting ducks in their homes... and even in their sacred places of worship."<sup>44</sup> One bishop warned the international community: "Please don't make the same mistake as was made with the genocide in Rwanda."<sup>45</sup>

Events in Nigeria during the period under review showed evidence not only of renewed Islamist violence but also of concerted efforts to spread extremism, by aggressive means. In Somalia, Al-Shabaab Islamists gained a foothold, imposing severe human rights violations in areas under their control, including stoning.<sup>46</sup> In Niger, numerous Wahhabist centers have emerged.<sup>47</sup> Nigeria's violent hotspot – the Middle Belt – is predominantly Christian, and human rights observers suggested that the militant action there is intended to achieve the imposition of Wahhabi-style Islam. Church leaders suggested that the attackers were "jihadists imported hiding under the guise of herdsmen and sponsored by people from certain quarters to achieve an [Islamist] agenda."<sup>48</sup> As evidence, commentators pointed to the swift upgrade in weaponry from bows and arrows to AK-47s and other high-tech arsenal. The Christian Association of Nigeria's advisory chairman, the Very Reverend Otuekong Ukot, went further, implicating parts of government in the violence and saying the extremists wanted to Islamize the whole of Nigeria by 2025. He said the massacres in the Middle Belt showed the militants had "now pushed into other parts of Nigeria to meet their target."<sup>49</sup>

Elsewhere in Africa, the attempted expansion of Islamism may not have been aggressive but it was no less ambitious. Reports showed a variety of initiatives aimed at an Islamist take-over, bribing people to convert and join the extremist cause, offering people free courses in Wahhabism and other radical movements, and the mass building of mosques, irrespective of demand for them. In Madagascar, a predominantly Christian country, Cardinal Désiré Tzarahazana of Toamasina highlighted a radical shift in the nation. He warned how "extremist Islam" was being imported into Madagascar, claiming that radical groups were "buying people,"

and citing plans to build more than 2,600 mosques in the country. The cardinal, who is also President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Madagascar, made clear that this was not a home-grown shift towards Islamism but the work of radical groups from abroad. In an interview with Aid to the Church in Need, he said: "The rise of Islamism is palpable. You can see it everywhere. It is an invasion, with money from the Gulf States and from Pakistan – they buy people."<sup>50</sup>

An important finding revealed by research into militant Islam showed the degree to which women are subjected to violence as part of a process of forced conversion. Under Daesh (ISIS) and other hyper-extremist groups, there was a systematic attempt to change population demographics; Daesh set about forcing non-Muslim women to convert and marry with a view to raising more children according to their vision of Islam. In other less extreme cases, research showed periodic cases of Muslim men having children with women whom they had kidnapped, forcibly converted and then married. In this latter scenario, the motives, by contrast, were not necessarily purely religious. (See **Backgrounders – Sexual violence and forced conversion of women – i) Nigeria, Syria and Iraq and ii) Egypt and Pakistan on pages 24 and 26**).

This *Religious Freedom in the World 2018* report found that the militancy of certain sections of the Muslim community is by no means only a threat to people who do not follow Islam. Evidence clearly demonstrated that the tension and violence was part of a growing conflict within Islam in which expansion and domination pitted Sunnis against Shias. Indeed, one academic said the clash is "the most deadly and unsolvable conflict in the Middle East and it is between Muslims."<sup>51</sup> To what extent the conflict stems from questions of religious dogma is open to debate. Many have pointed to economic and political exploitation and concluded that "It has not been theological differences that has led to the recent bloodshed..."<sup>52</sup> That said, the expanding power struggle between the Sunni and Shia power blocs – and their international allies – is undoubtedly intensifying the clash. (See **Case Study – AFGHANISTAN: Shia Muslims bombed by Sunni extremists on page 25**).

43 Murcatha O Flaherty and John Pontifex, 'NIGERIA: Bishops – President should resign for inaction over "killing fields and mass graveyard"; *ACN (UK) News*, April 30, 2018, <https://acnuk.org/news/bishops-president-should-resign-for-inaction-over-nigerias-killing-fields-and-mass-graveyard/> (accessed June 25, 2018)

44 Murcatha O Flaherty, 'Bishop – Threat of genocide against Christians,' *ACN (UK) News*, June 28, 2018, <https://acnuk.org/news/nigeria-bishop-threat-of-genocide-against-christians/> (accessed July 6, 2018)

45 'Somalia's al Shabaab stones woman to death for cheating on husband,' *Reuters*, Oct. 26, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-violence/somalias-al-shabaab-stones-woman-to-death-for-cheating-on-husband-idUSKBN1CV302> (accessed May 12, 2018); 'Somali woman "with 11 husbands" stoned to death by al-Shabab,' *BBC*, May 9, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-44055536> (accessed May 12, 2018)

46 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 'Niger,' *International Religious Freedom Report for 2016*, US State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper> (accessed on March 31, 2018)

47 'Fulani Herdsmen Are Imported Jihadists Sponsored To Islamize Nigeria – Bishop Oyedepo Warns,' *NaijaGists.com*, July 27, 2017, <https://naijagists.com/fulani-herdsmen-imported-jihadists-sponsored-islamize-nigeria-bishop-oyedepo-warns/> (accessed July 7, 2018)

48 Emeka Okafor, 'We Have Uncovered Plans to Islamize Nigeria By 2025 – CAN,' *Independent [Nigeria]*, May 8, 2018, <https://independent.ng/we-have-uncovered-plans-to-islamize-nigeria-by-2025-can/> (accessed July 7, 2018)

49 Murcatha O Flaherty and Amélie de la Hougue, 'New Cardinal highlights threat of "extremist Islam" from abroad,' *ACN (UK) News*, June 15, 2018, <https://acnuk.org/news/madagascar-new-cardinal-highlights-threat-of-extremist-islam-from-abroad/> (accessed June 25, 2018)

50 Dr Mordechai Kedar, 'The Most Deadly Middle East Conflict is Shia vs Sunni,' *Arutz Sheva*, Nov. 21, 2013, [www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/14132](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/14132) (accessed July 7, 2018)

51 John McHugo, 'Don't blame the faith: it's the politics,' *The Tablet*, July 7, 2018, pp. 4-6

## BACKGROUND

# SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND FORCED CONVERSION OF WOMEN – i) Nigeria, Syria and Iraq

By Marta Petrosillo, Head of Communications, ACN (Italy)

Militant Islamist groups in Africa and the Middle East have often used rape as a weapon of war. Systematic sexual violence can be a powerful tool when one group tries to oppress another.

Many jihadists rape non-Muslim women and force them to convert. Forcibly converting a woman of another religious group means that her children will be raised in the extremist Islam of the jihadists and that the aggressor's sexual enslavement of women also prevents births within the woman's religious group.<sup>1</sup>

Forced pregnancies and conversions are also a means to secure 'the next generation of jihadists.' In December 2014, Daesh (ISIS) released a pamphlet, which explained to its followers that it is "permissible" to have sexual intercourse with, beat and trade non-Muslim slaves, including young girls.<sup>2</sup> This provides an explanation of what was done to thousands of women from Yazidi and other minority religious backgrounds under the so-called Caliphate established by Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

In northern Nigeria, Daesh-linked group Boko Haram has employed the abduction of Christian women as part of its effort to force the Christians to leave the north. A Boko Haram spokesman stated: "**We are going to put into action new efforts to strike fear into the Christians of the power of Islam by kidnapping their women.**"<sup>3</sup> According to Amnesty International's Makmid Kamara those seized by Daesh suffered "horrific abuses" including rape.<sup>4</sup>

The best-known case is the kidnapping of 276 female students, mostly Christians, who were seized from the Government Secondary School in the town of Chibok in Borno State, on the night of April 14-15, 2014. Many non-Muslim students were forced to convert to Islam and marry Boko Haram members. On May 5 that same year, Boko Haram released a video showing some of the girls wearing Islamic dress. In the following years several girls managed to escape while others were freed following negotiations: more than 100 have now been freed, 82 were released in May 2017 in exchange for five Boko Haram fighters. According to the UN: "The girls report they have been subjected to rape – frequently in the form of forced 'marriages' – beatings, intimidation and starvation during their captivity. Many returned pregnant or with babies as a result of rape."<sup>5</sup>



1 Cf. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, section 2

2 Hala jabber, 'Isis issues guide to raping child slaves,' *Sunday Times*, Dec. 14, 2014, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/isis-issues-guide-to-raping-child-slaves-zdq0mf95scb> (accessed Aug. 1, 2018)

3 'Boko Haram threatens to kidnap Christian women in Nigeria,' Barnabas Fund, March 9, 2012, <https://www.barnabasfund.org/en/news/BokoHaramthreatenstokidnapChristianwomeninNigeria> (accessed July 31, 2018)

4 'Nigeria: Chibok anniversary a chilling reminder of Boko Haram's ongoing scourge of abductions,' Amnesty International, April 13, 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/04/nigeria-chibok-anniversary-a-chilling-reminder-of-boko-harams-ongoing-scourge-of-abductions/> (accessed Aug. 1, 2018)

5 'Girls held by Boko Haram need support to rebuild shattered lives,' UNICEF Nigeria Media Center, Oct. 18, 2016, [https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/media\\_10782.html](https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/media_10782.html) (accessed July 31, 2018)





Image: Massoud Hossaini/AP Photo/Shutterstock

## CASE STUDY AFGHANISTAN

### SHIA MUSLIMS BOMBED BY SUNNI EXTREMISTS

**April 2018:** A Daesh (ISIS) suicide bomber targeted Shia Muslims who gathered at a voter registration center in the capital, Kabul, killing at least 57 people and wounding more than 100 others. The dead included 22 women and eight children. A family of six were also killed that day when their vehicle struck a roadside bomb near another voting center in Baghlan's Pul-e-Khumri City.

A UN statement condemning the attack in Kabul confirmed that a number of violent incidents occurred at registration centers and that the bomb exploded in a heavily Shia-populated Dasht-e-Barchi neighbourhood in the west of the city. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani tweeted: "I condemn the heinous terrorist attacks in Kabul and Pul-e-Khumri."

The bomb blast was the latest in a long line of attacks by Sunni militants on Afghanistan's Shia. In late December 2017, at least 41 people were killed and more than 80 were wounded in a suicide bomb attack on a Shia Center in Kabul.

Attacks targeting the Shia Muslim community are not restricted to Afghanistan or even the Middle East. In Quetta, Pakistan, where there has been a series of attacks by Sunni militants on Shia, unidentified assailants killed five members of the Hazara Shia Muslim community. The shooting took place in October 2017. Ongoing attacks have seen the community retreat to two heavily protected enclaves on the outskirts of the city.

**Sources:** *US News*, April 22, 2018; *ABC 7NY News*, April 22, 2018; *Al Jazeera*, April 22, 2018, Oct. 9, 2017; *BBC News* (web), Dec. 28, 2017; *New English Review*, May 11, 2018; *UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan*, April 22, 2018; *Telegraph*, April 22, 2018; *France 24*, April 22, 2018

## BACKGROUND

# SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND FORCED CONVERSION OF WOMEN – ii) Egypt and Pakistan

By Marta Petrosillo, Head of Communications, ACN (Italy)

The abduction and forced conversion of women from religious minorities – frequently accompanied by rape and other sexual violence – is a major problem in a number of countries of particular concern as regards human rights violations, especially Pakistan and Egypt. These abductions do not follow a set pattern. Some are opportunistic, while others are carried out by organized groups. A significant proportion are not necessarily motivated exclusively by religious faith but a combination of factors, including, in some cases, financial incentives.

Local NGOs in Pakistan estimated that at least 1,000 Christian and Hindu women are kidnapped and forced to convert to Islam and marry their attacker every year. In Egypt at least 550 Christian women aged 14 to 40 disappeared between 2011 and 2014<sup>6</sup> – and girls are still abducted regularly.

### Pakistan

According to the Human Rights Council of Pakistan and the Movement for Solidarity and Peace in Pakistan, the abductions of women are on the rise. Often, authorities tell parents the girl has converted and married of her own free will. Many families don't report the crime, or withdraw the case, following threats against other female members of the family.

In late December 2017, three gunmen abducted a 14-year-old Hindu girl from her home in Thar village, Sindh province. Her father was told that his daughter had freely converted to Islam and married local man Naseer Lunjo – the family insists she was pressured.<sup>7</sup>

Such abductions are part of a wider pattern of sexual violence against religious-minority women: more powerless before courts than Muslim women, they are a soft target as rapists know prosecution is unlikely. If a woman cannot prove sex happened against her will, she can be accused of adultery and face arrest, flogging or even stoning to death.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, many women are frightened to report sexual violence committed against them or their loved ones.

### Egypt

Abductions and forced marriages of Coptic Christian women have been happening since the 1970s and every month cases are still reported – at least seven were abducted in April 2018.<sup>9</sup> In September 2017, a man who previously worked for a kidnapping network revealed that they receive c. €2,500 (US\$3,000) from extremist organizations for each girl.<sup>10</sup>

When families go to the police to report that their daughters or wives are missing they often meet resistance. Police can refuse to help, sometimes telling families that the kidnapped woman left and converted of her own free will – as in the April 2018 case of Christine Lamie.

<sup>6</sup> Figures from *Foundation of the Victims of Abduction and Forced Disappearance (FVAFD)*

<sup>7</sup> 'Teenage Hindu girl abducted, forcibly converted in Pakistan: Report,' *Indian Express*, Dec. 21, 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/pakistan/teenage-hindu-girl-abducted-forcibly-converted-in-pakistan-report-4993480/> (accessed June 4, 2018)

<sup>8</sup> See 'Pakistan village "court" sentences woman to death for adultery for saying she was raped,' *Independent*, Tuesday May 30, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/pakistan-village-court-sentence-woman-death-adultery-rape-punjab-sexual-assault-rajapur-a7762801.html> (accessed June 4, 2018)

<sup>9</sup> 'Egypt's disappearing Coptic women and girls,' *World Watch Monitor*, May 1, 2018, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/05/egypts-disappearing-coptic-women-and-girls/> (accessed June 4, 2018)

<sup>10</sup> 'Egypt: ex-kidnapper admits "they get paid for every Coptic Christian girl they bring in",' *World Watch Monitor*, May 1, 2018, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/09/egypt-ex-kidnapper-admits-get-paid-every-copt-christian-girl-bring/> (accessed June 4, 2018)

The threat of militant Islam during the period under review extended far beyond Asia and Africa. The period saw an upsurge of terrorist attacks in the West, notably in Europe. The threat was more pervasive than appearances suggest because of the degree to which extremist militants were successfully stopped in their tracks by police and security services.<sup>53</sup> These attacks, be they in Manchester, Berlin, Barcelona, Paris and elsewhere, demonstrated that the threat posed by extremism has now become universal, imminent and ever-present. While the motives of such attacks included political concerns – apparent revenge for the West’s military action in Syria and elsewhere – they often had a specifically religious dimension, with perpetrators expressing contempt for liberal western society and the principle of religious freedom in general. In some cases, it emerged that the perpetrators were targeting Christianity. Investigations into incidents linked to the Las Ramblas extremist attack in Barcelona in August 2017, revealed that the Islamists had planned to attack the iconic Sagrada Familia Basilica. (See **Case Study – SPAIN: Islamist drives van into crowds, killing 15 people on pages 28 and 29**). Many of the attacks were carried out by people based in the West, radicalized online and heavily influenced by networks, which recruited people on the fringes of society. Many of them lived not far from where they carried out their atrocities. Taken as a whole, then, **the period under review saw the emergence of a new phenomenon which can be described as “neighborhood terrorism.”** Some of the attacks were by militants returning to the West in large numbers following the defeat of Daesh in Iraq and Syria. Research by global security analysts at the Soufan Center estimated that, by October 2017, as many as 425 British Daesh (ISIS) members had returned to the UK alone.<sup>54</sup>

The attacks in the West and elsewhere showed another feature of neighborhood terrorism, namely a rise in religiously-motivated violence and discrimination against Islam. On Sunday January 29, 2017, gunmen entered Quebec City Islamic Cultural Center during Evening Prayers and opened fire, killing six people and injuring 18 others in what Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called a “terrorist

attack.”<sup>55</sup> Less than six months later, Darren Osborne targeted London’s Finsbury Park Mosque, reportedly shouting: “I want to kill all Muslims.”<sup>56</sup> In March 2018, Paul Moore, 21, was found guilty of attempted murder in Leicester, UK; driving his car, he mounted a curb and deliberately knocked over a headscarf-clad Muslim woman, causing serious injuries, before returning to carry out a second attack.<sup>57</sup> The *European Islamophobia Report 2017* reported an increase in attacks against Muslims, concluding that: “Islamophobia has become an acute problem.”

Essential to the problem was unease in the West about the influx of Muslims, especially into Europe, and the comparatively high birth rate among Muslim communities.<sup>58</sup> (See **Backgrounder – Crisis within Islam on page 32**). Although many European countries were open to Muslim migrants, a Chatham House Survey released in February 2017 showed that on average 55 percent of respondents from 10 European states said that “all further migration from mainly Muslim countries should be stopped.”<sup>59</sup> In Germany, attacks on refugees, mainly Muslims, reportedly increased from 1,031 in 2015 to more than 3,500 a year later.<sup>60</sup> Taken as a whole, the rise in neighborhood terrorism threatens to fracture societies along religious lines, potentially creating a culture of suspicion and distrust. Quite apart from the violence was a growth in concerns about discrimination against Muslims, with research in the US showing that as many as 75 percent of Muslims felt that there was “a lot of discrimination” against them in the country.<sup>61</sup>

An important aspect of the concern about growing militant Islam in the West was evidence linking Muslim immigrants to a rise in anti-Semitism. In France, whose Jewish community of about 500,000 is the largest in Europe, there has been a well-documented spike in attacks (see **Case Study – FRANCE: Jewish woman thrown from third-floor window on pages 30 and 31**) and violence carried out against Jewish cultural and religious centers. In April 2018, *Le Figaro* published a “manifesto” by 300 French dignitaries – many of them Jewish – denouncing a “new anti-Semitism” marked by “Islamist radicalization.”<sup>62</sup> Amid reports of a wave of migration of French Jews

52 In December 2017, British MI5 director general Andrew Parker told the UK government that while five terrorist attacks had been carried out on British soil within the previous 12 months, another nine had been prevented. Anushka Asthana, ‘Nine terrorist attacks prevented in UK last year, says MI5 boss,’ *The Guardian*, Dec. 5, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/dec/05/nine-terrorist-attacks-prevented-in-uk-in-last-year-says-mi5-boss> (accessed June 24, 2018)

53 Kitty Donaldson, ‘MI5 Chief Warns of Threat to UK from Russia, Islamic State,’ *Bloomberg*, May 14, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-13/u-k-s-mi5-to-say-european-alliances-never-more-crucial-than-now> (accessed June 24, 2018)

54 Ashifa Kassam and Jamiles Lartey, ‘Quebec City mosque shooting: six dead as Trudeau condemns “terrorist attack”,’ *The Guardian*, Jan. 30, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/30/quebec-mosque-shooting-canada-deaths> (accessed July 7, 2018)

55 Bonnie Malkin et al., ‘Finsbury Park mosque attack: suspect named as Darren Osborne, 47-year-old who lives in Cardiff – as it happened,’ *The Guardian*, June 20, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/live/2017/jun/19/north-london-van-incident-finsbury-park-casualties-collides-pedestrians-live-updates> (accessed June 24, 2018)

56 Hanna Yusuf, ‘Mother who was run over twice by attacker: “I thought I had died”,’ *BBC News*, March 27, 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-43544115> (accessed July 12, 2018)

57 Michael Lipka, ‘Muslims and Islam: Key findings in the US and around the world,’ *Pew Research Center*, Aug. 9, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/09/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/> (accessed July 11, 2018)

58 ‘What Do Europeans Think About Muslim Immigration?’ *Chatham House*, Feb. 7, 2017, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/what-do-europeans-think-about-muslim-immigration#> (accessed July 11, 2018)

59 ‘Report reveals increase in anti-Muslim sentiment across Germany,’ *Daily Sabah*, Oct. 24, 2017, <https://www.dailysabah.com/islamophobia/2017/10/25/report-reveals-increase-in-anti-muslim-sentiment-across-germany> (accessed July 7, 2018)

60 Katayoun Kishi, ‘Assaults Against Muslims in US Surpass 2001 Level,’ *Pew Research Center*, Nov. 15, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/15/assaults-against-muslims-in-u-s-surpass-2001-level/> (accessed Feb. 21, 2018)

61 ‘“Contre le nouvel antisemitisme”: des centaines de personnalités signent une tribune,’ *Le Figaro*, April 22, 2018, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2018/04/22/01016-20180422ARTFIG00027-contre-le-nouvel-antisemitisme-des-centaines-de-personnalites-signent-une-tribune.php> (accessed June 24, 2018)

62 ‘The New Antisemite,’ April 22, 2018, <http://antisemitism-europe.blogspot.com/2018/04/france-300-personalities-denounce-quiet.html> (accessed June 24, 2018)

## CASE STUDY SPAIN

### ISLAMIST DRIVES VAN INTO CROWDS, KILLING 15 PEOPLE

**August 2017:** Militant Islamist Younes Abouyaaqoub drove a van at high speed into crowds walking along Las Ramblas in Barcelona, killing 15 people and injuring more than 120 others. The 22-year-old Moroccan zig-zagged through the pedestrian area with the apparent aim of causing maximum carnage. Daesh (ISIS) claimed responsibility.

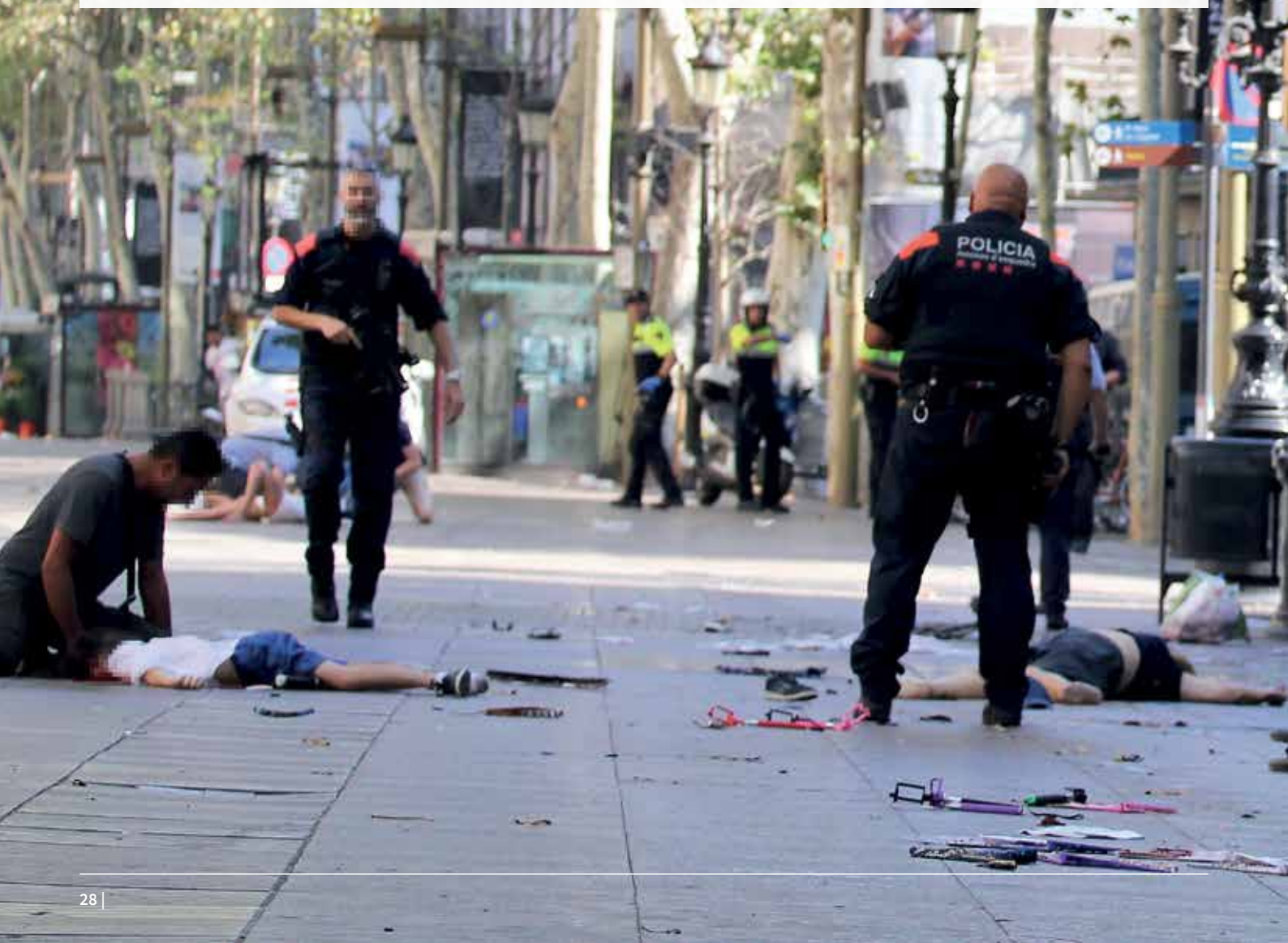
Abouyaaqoub initially evaded capture but police traced his whereabouts. Within three days, he was shot dead near the town of Subirats, 50 km (30 miles) outside Barcelona. At the time, he was wearing a fake suicide belt and was heard shouting “Allahu Akbar” (popularly translated from the Arabic as ‘God is the greatest’).

That week saw other violent incidents in the area. The day before the Las Ramblas attack, a house in Alcanar, Tarragona, was destroyed in an explosion. According to police, the homemade incendiary device was intended for an attack on Gaudi’s iconic Sagrada Familia Basilica in Barcelona. The day after the Las Ramblas atrocity, a car ploughed into a police vehicle on the seafront in Cambrils, also in Tarragona. One of the attackers stabbed a woman. Police killed five suspected terrorists. Spanish authorities linked these events to a terrorist cell of 12 members, led by militant Imam Abdelbaki Es Satty.

Spain’s 2016 National Security report stated that not just in Barcelona but elsewhere in Catalonia “the process of radicalization has occurred more quickly and [the] Islamic community is characterised as the most radical, with more links with other extremists in Europe.”

After the attacks, up to 1,000 Muslims marched down Las Ramblas with a banner stating “Muslims against terrorism.” Barcelona’s chief rabbi, Meir Bar-Hen, described Spain as a “hub of Islamist terror for all of Europe.” He suggested Jews should migrate to Israel because “Europe is lost.”

Sources: *Gencat.cat*, Aug. 30, 2017; *Guardian*, Aug. 22, 2017; *Independent*, Aug. 20, 2017; *Sky News*, Aug. 18, 2017; *Telegraph*, Aug. 21, 2017; *La Vanguardia*, Aug. 21, 2017; *Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional 2016*





## CASE STUDY FRANCE



Image: Plume Heters Tammenbaum / Hans Lucas



Image: Confederation of the Jews of France and Friends of Israel

A procession held in remembrance of Sarah Halimi, April 2017

to Israel over recent years, the manifesto's signatories condemned what they described as a "quiet ethnic purging" driven by rising Islamist fundamentalism especially in working class neighborhoods.<sup>63</sup>

Against this backdrop, there is some evidence to suggest a small but potentially significant shift away from traditional religious faith and practice among comparatively recent arrivals to the West from the developing world. This affected a number of different faith groups; in March 2018, the Pew Research Center published research which showed that "23 percent of Americans raised as Muslims no longer identify with their faith." Importantly, however, "most of them are silent about their faithlessness," fearing possible social exclusion, especially from family.<sup>64</sup> The evidence also seemed to suggest that the shift away from traditional Muslim practice was to be found not just in parts of the West but also in some Islamic countries too. The Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain stated in March 2018 that, while 3.3 million copies of Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* had

been sold since 2006, "the unofficial Arabic pdf alone has been downloaded 13 million times."<sup>65</sup> The council stressed that people in Arabic-speaking and other Muslim countries were reluctant to abandon their faith publicly, or even question it. This was in reaction to what the council described as "the authoritarianism of religious rule... and the unrelenting violence" as well as apostasy, which is technically punishable by death in Islam.<sup>66</sup>

In summary, the period under review saw some important steps forward for religious freedom, which could scarcely have been predicted at the time of the last report, two years ago. Chief among these are developments arising from the massive losses suffered by Daesh (ISIS) and certain other extremist groups, in Iraq and Syria, north-east Nigeria and elsewhere. Not only has this brought an end to the Islamists' extreme religious freedom violations but also it has heralded, in some cases at least, the return of minority faith groups cruelly forced out by the extremists. However, while Islamist extremism has been pushed back in some

63 'The number of ex-Muslims in America is rising,' *The Economist*, May 17, 2018, <http://media.economist.com/news/united-states/21738904-yet-even-land-free-apostasy-isnt-easy-number-ex-muslims-america> (accessed June 24, 2018)

64 'Demand for atheism rises in countries under Islamic rule,' *Ex-Muslim*, March 27, 2018, <https://www.ex-muslim.org.uk/2018/03/demand-for-atheism-rises-in-countries-under-islamic-rule/> (accessed June 24, 2018)

65 Ibid

## JEWISH WOMAN THROWN FROM THIRD-FLOOR WINDOW

**April 2017:** Dr. Sarah Halimi, a 65-year-old Jewish grandmother, was beaten and thrown out of a window of her third-floor home in Paris. A Muslim male of Malian descent, who also lived in the block of flats, was charged with her murder. At time of writing, his trial is still pending. Neighbors – including Muslims – stated that they heard the man shouting religious slogans in Arabic during the killing, including sections of the Qur’an.

Concerns were expressed that the French authorities and media were reluctant to mention the religious dimension of the crime. The protesters – Jewish groups, prominent intellectuals and some political figures – were particularly angered by the absence of an anti-Semitic element to the charge against the assailant. Dr. Halimi’s attacker had pleaded temporary insanity: he had been smoking cannabis heavily before the attack and psychiatrists have been divided as to whether he was fit to stand trial. Ten months after the attack, the courts formally reclassified Dr. Halimi’s death as “murder with anti-Semitism as an aggravating factor.”

The extent of anti-Semitism in France is highlighted by the fact that, less than a month after the judge confirmed that Sarah Halimi’s murder was motivated by anti-Semitism in late February 2018, 85-year-old grandmother and Holocaust survivor Mireille Knoll was repeatedly stabbed in her home by two men. Her body was later burnt.

France is home to Western Europe’s biggest Jewish population and many in the 400,000-strong community have complained for years of a rise in anti-Semitic hate crimes. In the face of such attacks, recent years have seen a sharp rise in emigration of Jews, with many going to Israel.

The death of Dr. Halimi prompted renewed media comment, highlighting surveys pointing to a rise of anti-Semitism, especially among radicalised sections of the Muslim community.

Sources: *Jewish Chronicle*, Aug. 24, 2017, July 12, 2018; *Telegraph*, Feb. 28, 2018; *Jerusalem Post*, June 26, 2018

regions, in others it has expanded, with devastating consequences for parts of Africa, including Nigeria’s Middle Belt and Somalia, with Wahhabi Islam being exported to Madagascar. Militant Islamism was one of a number of factors which prompted a sharp downturn in religious freedom between 2016 and 2018, not least in Europe, which fell victim to neighbourhood terrorism. Nationalism – especially from governments – became increasingly aggressive, with profoundly disturbing consequences for minority faith groups. This development, which can be termed ultra-nationalism, is especially significant because it is now dominant in China, Russia and India, world powers with growing influence around the world. Other governments are increasingly ultra-nationalist in their hostility to minority groups, notably the regime in Burma whose violence against the Rohingya Muslims has shocked human rights observers the world over. **This publicity is the exception to the prevailing trend; a cultural curtain has fallen, behind which religious minorities suffer as the religiously illiterate West turns a blind eye.** In Europe and elsewhere in the West, little has

been done to convert words of concern into an agenda to defend and uphold religious liberty. And it is hardly as if the countries where faith communities suffer are oblivious to religious freedom. As the country reports prepared for this *Religious Freedom in the World 2018* report make clear time and again, the most egregious victimization of law-abiding faith groups takes place in nations whose articulation of the principles of religious freedom is both eloquent and ambitious. While few question the value of religious liberty in the West, it would appear to have lost ground to other rights – notably race, gender and sexuality – the advance of which are arguably perceived as hindered by religion. And yet, in a world popularized as a global village, where cultural exchange has expanded massively through huge media and technological change, mass migration and social mobility, prospects for peace and community cohesion will inevitably be held back by continuing religious illiteracy and apathy. For it remains the case that for the majority of people in the world, religion is a crucial, and often pre-eminent, driving force. The West ignores this at its peril.

## BACKGROUND

# CRISIS WITHIN ISLAM

By Marc Fromager, National Director, ACN France

Surveys show that many people in the West have an ambivalent attitude to Islam mixed with ignorance and fear.<sup>1</sup> Islam regularly features in media headlines, more often than not in a negative way with numerous reports of violence involving extremists. Coupled with this are concerns within some sections of society about the growing visibility of Muslims in the West. This relates both to the distinctive dress of Muslims and to the community's expanding numbers – in marked contrast to the aging population of other sections of western society.

All this creates an impression of Islam's growing numerical strength in the West, especially Europe. This comes amid predictions that Muslims are on course to become the majority population in certain cities and regions. Muslims make up 13 percent of the population in Rotterdam but 70 percent of the city's youth have migrant origins, many of them in Muslim countries including Turkey and Morocco.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile demographic surveys predict that, within two generations, Muslims across Europe as a whole will have doubled to become more than 10 percent of the population.<sup>3</sup> Extremist groups have openly declared their aim, as one Australian jihadi put it, to “lead the armies of jihad that will conquer Europe and America.”<sup>4</sup> In September 2016, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, Archbishop of Vienna, gave a homily in his cathedral, posing the question: “Will there now be [another] attempt at an Islamic conquest of Europe? Many Muslims think so and long for it and say: This Europe is at an end.”<sup>5</sup>

And yet, in spite of all this apparent confidence about expansion, there is – to some extent concealed from view – a growing crisis within Islam. First of all, there is the division, not to say open war, between the two main branches within Islam – the Sunnis and the Shia. The tensions in large part stem from the sectarian divides between Saudi Arabia, the

proponent of Wahhabi Sunni Islam and the transformation of Iran into a Shia power in 1979, changes that “revived a centuries-old sectarian rivalry over the true interpretation of Islam.”<sup>6</sup> Even within these two major groups, there is conflict, notably concerning geographic areas of influence. Incidents of conflict between Al Nusra and Daesh (ISIS) – both Sunni groups – in Syria are well documented.<sup>7</sup> Events in the Middle East, Indonesia, Pakistan and other regions of Asia indicate a radicalization within parts of the Muslim world. This would not be problematic in itself – after all, Muslims have the right to practice their faith as they deem appropriate – except that such radicalization is often accompanied by intolerance towards others. In areas where radicalized Muslims are (for the moment) a minority, there is a rejection of integration<sup>8</sup> and in other areas, where they are more predominant, there is active discrimination towards minorities which is often threatening.<sup>9</sup>

That said, the origins of this radicalization point to signs of weakness; on the one hand, there are the external factors – the dependence on money from the Gulf,<sup>10</sup> which is accompanied by a Wahhabization of a number of Sunni communities. Saudi Arabia, the main proponent of Wahhabism, came in for criticism when it responded to the European refugee crisis in 2015 “by offering to build 200 mosques in Germany... one mosque for every 100 refugees who entered Germany.”<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, there are the internal factors, the cultural and philosophical clash with modernity and the impact of globalization where Western values and norms are being spread, especially through social media.

Finally, evidence points to some Muslims leaving Islam – either to embrace atheism<sup>12</sup> or towards Christianity, with reports indicating that the number of secret converts is on the rise,<sup>13</sup> including in countries such as Sweden.<sup>14</sup>

- 1 Harry Farley, 'Islam and the West: "Worrying" report reveals Britons' attitudes to Muslims,' *Christian Today*, Aug. 30, 2017, <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/islam-and-the-west-worrying-report-reveals-britons-attitudes-to-muslims/112717.htm> (accessed July 31, 2018)
- 2 'Rotterdam, Netherlands – Intercultural City,' *Council of Europe*, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/rotterdam>
- 3 'Muslim population in Europe to reach 10% by 2050, new forecast shows – Pew Research study...,' *The Guardian*, April 2, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/02/muslim-population-growth-christians-religion-pew> (accessed July 31, 2018)
- 4 "They are all enemies, their hearts are black": Australian Islamic extremist delivers hate speech calling for "armies of jihad" to conquer Europe and America so "the word of Allah will reign supreme" *Daily Mail*, April 14, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3538989/Australian-Muslim-extremist-Islam-al-Wahwah-leads-Hizb-ut-Tahrir-calls-armies-jihad-conquer-Europe-America.html> (accessed July 31, 2018)
- 5 'Cardinal Schonborn warns of "Islamic conquest of Europe",' *Catholic News Agency*, Sept. 14, 2016, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/cardinal-schonborn-warns-of-islamic-conquest-of-europe-59849> (accessed July 31, 2018)
- 6 'The Sunni-Shia Divide,' *Council on Foreign Relations*, <https://www.cfr.org/interactives/sunni-shia-divide#/sunni-shia-divide> (accessed July 31, 2018)
- 7 'Daesh suicide bomber blows himself up in al-Nusra Front Command Center in Syria,' *Sputnik International*, March 5, 2017, <https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201703051051283235-daesh-nusra-fight-syria/> (accessed July 31, 2018)
- 8 "According to Dr Ahmed Ibrahim Khadr, the first loyalty of radicals is to Islam while the first loyalty for moderates, regardless of their religion, is to the state. Radicals reject the idea of religious equality because Allah's true religion is Islam; moderates

accept it." Raymond Ibrahim, "Radical" vs. "Moderate" Islam: A Muslim view,' *Gladstone Institute*, May 25, 2016, <https://www.gladstoneinstitute.org/8101/radical-moderate-islam>

- 9 "A new and very sad phenomenon is the persecution of Christians and other religious minorities in Muslim-majority countries, which has greatly increased since the rise of the extremist groups." Shaykh Umar Al-Qadri, 'Tackling Islamist extremism,' *Dialogue Islam*, April 2, 2016, <https://dialogueireland.wordpress.com/2016/04/02/tackling-islamist-extremism-by-shaykh-umar-al-qadri-in-the-irish-catholic/> (accessed July 31, 2018)
- 10 Taj Hargey, 'First Person – Dr Taj Hargey: We must seize agenda back,' *The Oxford Times*, May 30, 2013, [http://www.oxfordtimes.co.uk/news/opinions/first\\_person/10453482.First\\_person\\_\\_\\_Dr\\_Taj\\_Hargey\\_\\_We\\_must\\_seize\\_agenda\\_back/](http://www.oxfordtimes.co.uk/news/opinions/first_person/10453482.First_person___Dr_Taj_Hargey__We_must_seize_agenda_back/)
- 11 Adam Withnall, 'Saudi Arabia offers Germany 200 mosques – one for every 100 refugees who arrived last weekend,' *The Independent*, Sept. 11, 2015, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/saudi-arabia-offers-germany-200-mosques-one-for-every-100-refugees-who-arrived-last-weekend-10495082.html> (accessed July 31, 2018)
- 12 'Losing their religion: the hidden crisis of faith among Britain's young Muslims,' *The Guardian* May 15, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2015/may/17/losing-their-religion-british-ex-muslims-non-believers-hidden-crisis-faith> (accessed July 31, 2018)
- 13 'Muslims turning to Christ – a global phenomenon,' *Premier Christianity*, June 2016, <https://www.premierchristianity.com/Past-Issues/2016/June-2016/Muslims-turning-to-Christ-a-global-phenomenon> (accessed July 31, 2018)
- 14 Hollie McKay, 'Christian convert from Iran converting Muslims in Sweden,' *Fox News*, Jan. 17, 2018, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2018/01/17/christian-convert-from-iran-converting-muslims-in-sweden.html> (accessed July 31, 2018)





## CASE STUDY MEXICO

### CLERGY TARGETED BY CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS

**September 2016:** Family members and parishioners gathered at Our Lady of the Assumption Church in Paso Blanco, Veracruz State, Mexico for the funeral Mass of murdered priest Father Jose Alfredo Suarez de la Cruz. He was one of two priests whom authorities found bound and riddled with bullets on a roadside in Veracruz State.

Thousands of innocent Mexicans have been killed within the last five years, including at least 23 priests. The root of the problem has been organized crime including drug cartels and gangs which deal in stolen fuel. Catholic priests have been targeted, as the Church has been an outspoken critic of the criminals and corrupt officials who support them. Father Sergio Omar of the Catholic Multimedia Center (CCM) in Mexico said: “Killing a priest... symbolizes a demonstration of power by the criminal organizations.”

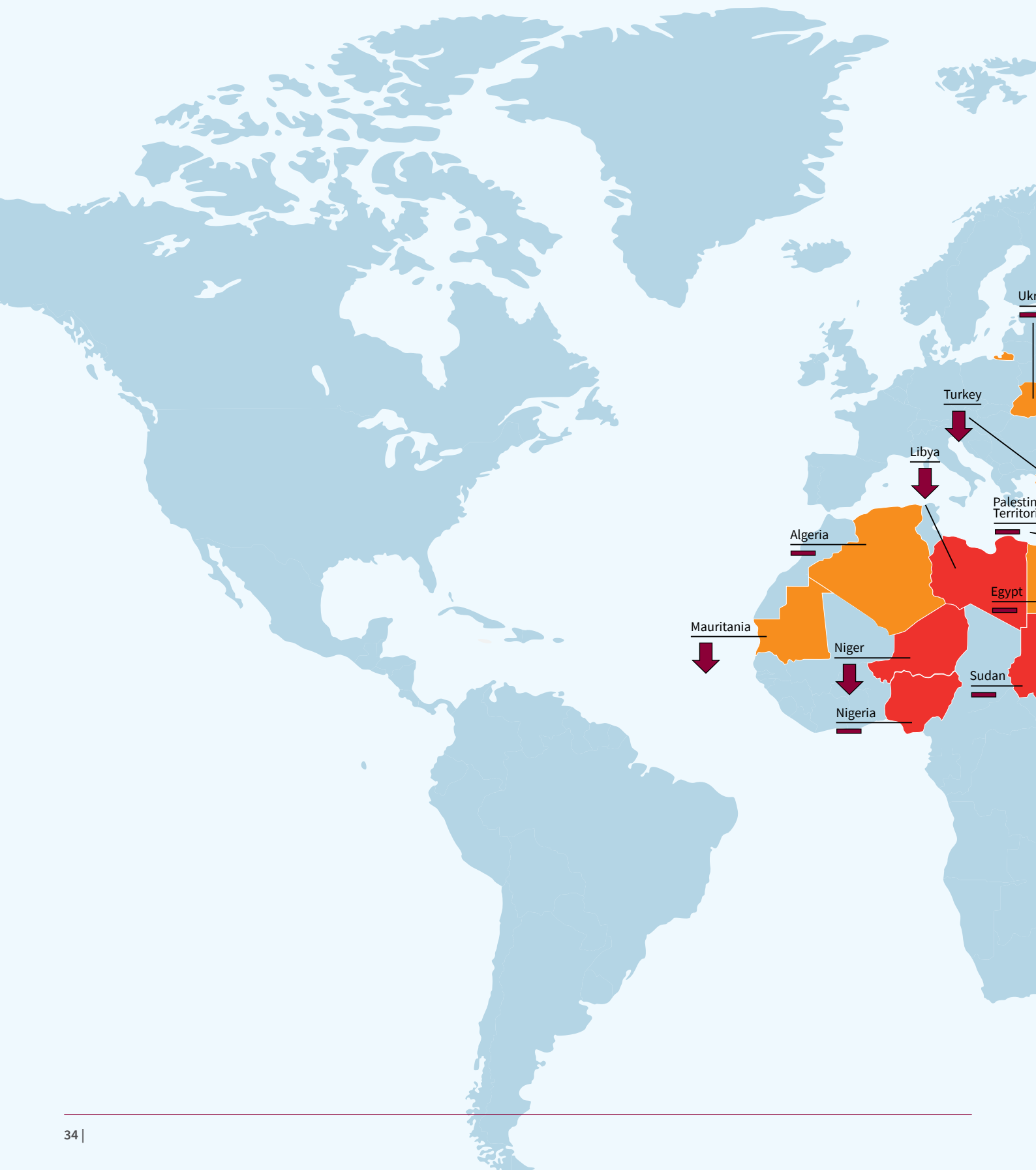
Media organizations in Mexico, including the CCM, state that drug cartels have formed alliances with some politicians and judges as well as members of the police and security forces, which “causes decay in society from top to bottom.”

Mexico is the most dangerous country in Latin America for priests – suffering kidnapping, shootings, beatings, knife and bomb attacks against the Church, including Mexico City’s cathedral. The CCM noted 884 cases of clergy being threatened or blackmailed in 2017 alone. The center added that 51 priests have been killed within the last 30 years, calculating that torture was involved in 80 percent of cases where priests were murdered.

*Sources:* *Aid to the Church in Need (UK) News*, April 25, 2018; *Catholic Herald*, April 20, 2018; *Catholic News Agency*, Aug. 11, 2017; *USA Today*, April 24, 2018; Interview with the Catholic Multimedia Center, Mexico

## COUNTRIES WITH SIGNIFICANT VIOLATIONS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

This map indicates those countries where there is a significant level of discrimination or persecution according to the analysis in the *Religious Freedom in the World* report. For more details, please see the table on the following pages.



Nature of persecution/discrimination

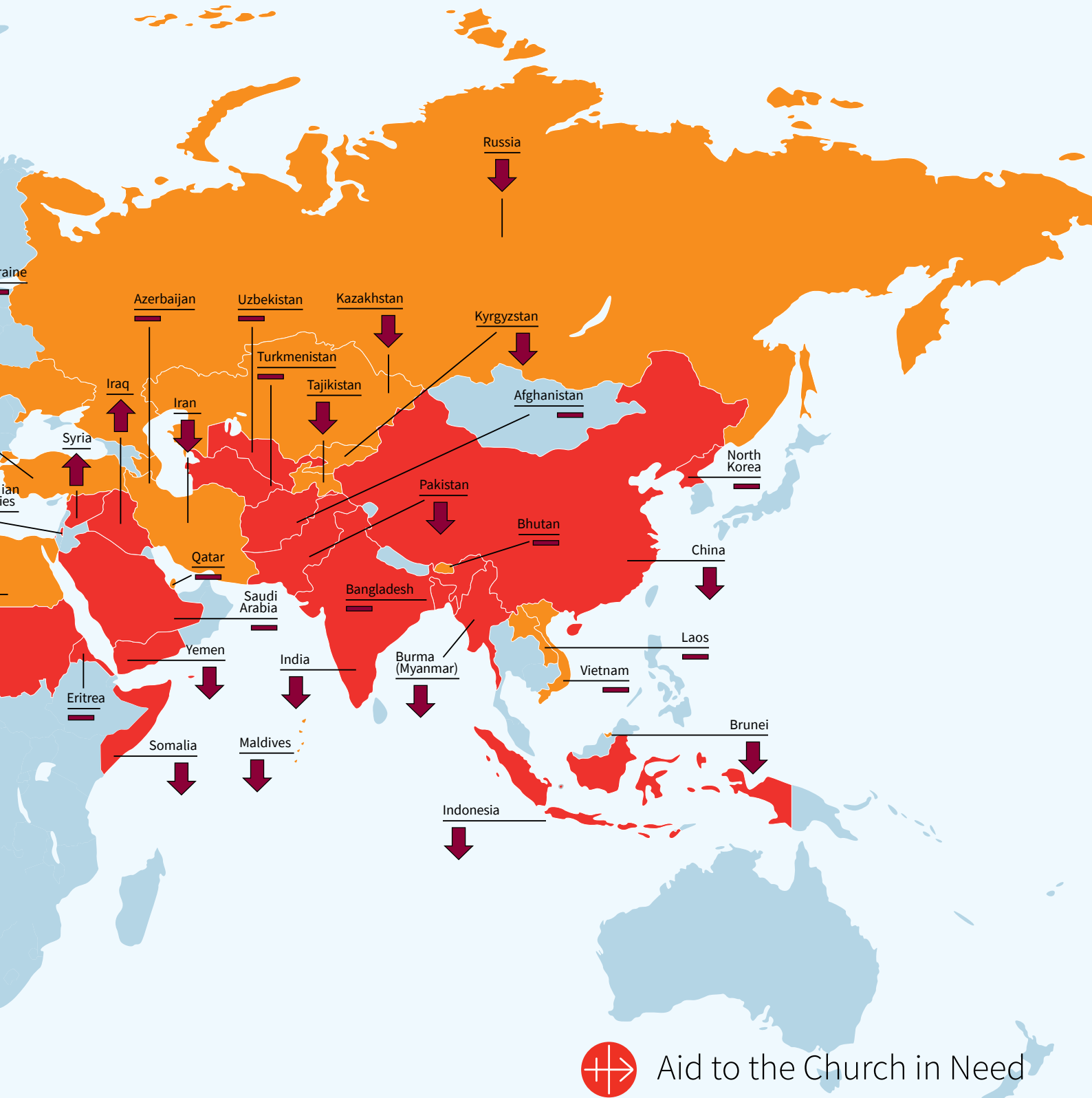
■ = Persecution

■ = Discrimination

↑ = Situation improved



















— = Situation unchanged

↓ = Situation worsened



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## COUNTRIES WITH SIGNIFICANT VIOLATIONS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Country	Category	Compared to June 2016	Predominant violator	Key indicators
<b>Afghanistan</b>			Non-State	Blasphemy punishable by death. Conversion from Islam illegal. No public churches. Christians and Bahais are among groups practising secretly. Extremists attacked Shia mosques and neighbourhoods. Between Jan 2016 and Nov 2017, 51 attacks on religious groups according to UN – 870 civilian casualties.
<b>Algeria</b>			State	Proselytizing by non-Muslims is punishable by a fine and up to 5 years in prison. In 2017 a Christian convert from Islam accused of insulting Islam and imprisoned. Ahmadi Muslims are victims of a Gov't crackdown.
<b>Azerbaijan</b>			State	Laws changed in May 2017 to allow authorized nationals and foreign citizens to lead Islamic ceremonies. State increased restrictions on non-authorized faith groups. In 2016, 26 bookshops and homes inspected and unauthorized religious literature seized. Fines for unauthorized religious meetings.
<b>Bangladesh</b>			Non-state	Islamist violence against prominent figures – Attack in a coffee shop by Islamists killed 22 people in July 2016. In period under review, 40 people murdered, including 18 foreigners intellectuals, academics and publishers, labelled as atheists.
<b>Bhutan</b>			State	All “foreign” (i.e. non-Buddhist) proselytism forbidden. Non-Buddhist religious personnel not allowed in the country. Non-Buddhist religions must be practised privately. Christians perceived as threat to “Bhutanese national identity.”
<b>Brunei</b>			State	Steps taken towards approving highly restrictive new Shari'a Penal Code. Propagation of faith under than Islam is punishable by a custodial sentence. Christmas celebrations banned since 2015. The Gov't has banned outright Ahmadiyya Islam, Bahai and the Jehovah's Witnesses.
<b>Burma (Myanmar)</b>			State	688,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh to escape Army violence. From Aug. to Nov. 2017, 354 Rohingya villages burnt down by military. Gov't ban on non-authorized Buddhist monks. At least 21 villages described as “Muslim-free zones.” 66 churches destroyed since 2011.
<b>China</b>			State	Increased oppression of religious activity throughout country. “Regulations on Religious Affairs,” introduced in April 2018, heavily restrict religious online activity. Bible banned from sale online in April 2018. Jan 2018 reports stated that 100,000+ Uighur Muslims held in “re-education” camps.
<b>Egypt</b>			State, Non-State	Situation has stabilized with President's call for an anti-extremist reform of Islam. Gov't does not recognise conversion from Islam and 'religion' entry on ID card cannot be changed. Laws and policies discriminate against non-Muslims. Deep-rooted social intolerance of Christians.























**KEY:**























- = Persecution
- = Discrimination
- = Unclassified

- = Situation improved
- = Situation unchanged
- = Situation worsened

This table indicates those countries where there are, or have recently been, significant levels of discrimination or persecution according to the analysis in the *Religious Freedom in the World* report. For more details, please see [www.religion-freedom-report.org](http://www.religion-freedom-report.org)

Country	Category	Compared to June 2016	Predominant violator	Key indicators
Eritrea	<span style="color: red;">●</span>		State	Lack of reliable information coming out of country. Gov't continues to tightly control religious institutions. Harassment of non-registered groups continues including raids and incarceration of suspects. In 2017 Gov't took control of numerous Muslim and Orthodox Christian religious schools.
India	<span style="color: red;">●</span>		State, Non-State	Between 2016 and 2017 attacks on Christians almost doubled to 736. Religious freedom in India on "downward trend" according to religious freedom observers. Gov't figures from Feb. 18 highlight worsening religious violence. Out of 29 states, six have anti-conversion laws.
Indonesia	<span style="color: red;">●</span>		State, Non-State	Three churches in Surabaya attacked on May 13, 2018, killing 13 people. Persecution of Shia and Ahmadiyya Muslims. When a Buddhist asked for a mosque's loud speakers to be turned down in 2017, a Buddhist temple was torched. Pastors fled Aceh Singkil following death threats.
Iran	<span style="color: orange;">●</span>		State	Non-Muslims banned from judiciary and police. Islamic dress compulsory for non-Muslim women. Sentencing against worshippers in house churches has increased. Increased pressure on Bahai – increase in number of Bahai-owned shops closed. Dozens of Sufis detained. Gov't propagates anti-Semitism.
Iraq	<span style="color: red;">●</span>		Non-State	Christians and others returning to homelands after Daesh (ISIS) pushed back. Gov't respects freedom of worship but minorities not well protected. Kurdistan Gov't 2016 law upholds religious freedom and draft constitution recognizes rights of non-Muslims.
Kazakhstan	<span style="color: orange;">●</span>		State	New laws have increased religious freedom restrictions, affecting religious education, proselytism and confiscation of unapproved religious material: children cannot attend religious services.
Kyrgyzstan	<span style="color: orange;">●</span>		State	<b>Change of categorization. Kyrgyzstan was categorized 'Unclassified' in 2016 report.</b> Increasingly authoritarian political climate has made it more difficult for religious groups. Proposed new laws intended to clamp down on registration of new faith groups and increase censorship of faith literature.
Laos	<span style="color: orange;">●</span>		State	Gov't interferes in religious activities, creating difficulties especially for non-registered faith groups particularly Protestants. Religious conversions especially problematic in regions dominated by Animists. Physical and legal attacks on leaders of non-traditional religions.
Libya	<span style="color: red;">●</span>		State	Although religious freedom is guaranteed in constitution, in practice religious liberty is getting worse. <i>De facto</i> ban on proselytism. Daesh (ISIS) has expanded its territory. Regular attacks on Christians, including rape and forced labor. Upsurge in killings of religious minorities.

Country	Category	Compared to June 2016	Predominant violator	Key indicators
Maldives			State, Non-State	Citizenship reserved for Muslims only. Education required to "inculcate obedience to Islam." Non-Muslim evangelization banned. Impossible to convert to a religion other than Islam. No Christian place of worship; ban on import of Bibles. Attacks on people accused of promoting "atheism."
Mauritania			State, Non-State	Citizenship reserved for Muslims only. Renunciation of Islam carries the death penalty. Gov't has introduced mandatory death penalty for blasphemy and apostasy. Wahhabism spreading and weak central government, leaving people with no prospects except to join Wahhabist groups.
Niger			Non-State	Islamist organizations gaining increasing foothold. Many Wahhabist centers have emerged. Extremist groups destabilizing country and making life difficult for religious minorities. Boko Haram eventually took city of Bosso. Economic difficulties forcing (young) people into arms of extremist groups.
Nigeria			Non-State	With Boko Haram pushed back, situation of minority faith groups improving in north-east. However, violence by Fulani militants in Central Belt has terrorized Christians. April 2018 attack on church during Mass resulted in death of two priests and 17 parishioners.
North Korea			State	Probably the world's worst country for religious freedom. Systematic denial of every religious liberty precept. 25 percent of Christians thought to be in prison camps. Christians given especially harsh treatment. The situation is so bad, it could get scarcely get worse.
Pakistan			State, Non-State	In 2018 Catholic Bishops' Conference President described "an alarming increase in violent... intolerance and extremism." Gov't struggling to contain extremist groups targeting minority groups. In 2017 anti-Blasphemy laws extended to cover electronic communications. Increase in minorities wanting to leave country.
Palestinian Territories			Non-State	In 2018, local Church sources stated that Christians in Gaza have fallen by 75 percent from 4,500 to 1,000 within six years. Gaza Christians face new challenges from Daesh (ISIS) militants who have entered the strip.
Qatar			State	Law criminalizes non-Islamic proselytism. Approval of plans for an Evangelical Church and conferences on role of Christians in society suggests situation is improving. However it remains a highly conservative country with religious freedom constraints at a state and social level.
Russia			State	<b>Change of categorization. Russia was categorised 'Unclassified' in 2016.</b> 2016 Yarovaya Law increased restrictions on unauthorized religious groups, forbidding preaching and dissemination of materials. Raids, fines, and arrests. Greek Catholic Churches in Crimea forced to leave. April 2017: Jehovah's Witnesses HQ and all 395 local centers banned.
Saudi Arabia			State	Signs of openness mask systematic oppression of religious minorities. Conversion from Islam punishable by death. Importing and distributing non-Islamic religious materials forbidden. Ban on non-Islamic places of worship. March 2018: Crown Prince visited met Coptic Orthodox Pope in Egypt cathedral.
Somalia			Non-State	Severe religious freedom violations in areas where Al-Shabaab have gained foothold. People stoned to death. Dec 2017 video called on extremists to "hunt down non-believers and hunt down churches." Rise in attacks by extremist groups – Oct. 2017 Mogadishu attack, nearly 600 dead.

Country	Category	Compared to June 2016	Predominant violator	Key indicators
Sudan			State	Increase in penalties for blasphemy. Continuing discrimination and oppression of religious groups, notably targeting of members of churches in Nuba mountains. Gov't announced plans to demolish 25 churches.
Syria			State, Non-State	Extremist groups, responsible for targeting faith groups, have lost most of their territory. Human rights abuses common to both Gov't-held and rebel-held areas but worse religious freedom violations occurred in the latter. In May 2017 Daesh (ISIS) killed 52 people in Ismaili villages.
Tajikistan			State	Law on extremism used by Gov't to justify oppression of unauthorized Islam. 8,000+ Muslim women stopped for wearing the veil. In May 2016 religious political parties were banned. Repression of all forms of dissent has increased, drastically weakening freedom of expression.
Turkey			State	Hard-line Islam, intolerant of non-Muslim groups, growing in societal influence. Turkish Gov't refuses to recognize new Armenian Apostolic Archbishop. Increased hate speech against Protestant groups over Christmas 2016/7. Turkey moving towards authoritarianism which bodes ill for religious freedom.
Turkmenistan			State	2016 religion law tightened restrictions for faith groups seeking state recognition; the law allows registered groups to open clergy training colleges. Frequent raids on churches, with threats, beatings, fines, arrests and confiscations. Many churches and mosques demolished in recent years.
Ukraine			State, Non-State	Separatists in Luhansk, Donetsk and Crimea harassed non-Orthodox Christian groups. Vandalism of Holocaust memorials, synagogues and Jewish cemeteries. Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses. June 2016 separatist authorities adopted new laws banning creation of "sects." New law in Luhansk banned "non-traditional" groups.
Uzbekistan			State	April 2018: New penalties for violations of religious freedom law – including eight-year prison terms. "Countless" raids by authorities. 185 police raids on Jehovah Witnesses between Sept 2016 and July 2017. Police tortured 15 believers. Thousands of Muslims, who practise unauthorized religion, imprisoned.
Vietnam			State	Severe restrictions on evangelization. Land disputes between police and religious organizations. March 2018: attackers beat up 24 Hmongs – recent Christian converts. Harassment of religious organizations and attacks on clergy and faithful suggest Gov't unlikely to improve approach to religious freedom.
Yemen			State, Non-State	Proselytism forbidden. Conversion from Islam to another religion banned. Yemen a base for Islamist groups. UN warned of "recent escalation" of persecution of Bahais. Priest kidnapped from home for the elderly and held for 14 months. Houthis consider Jewish community an "enemy."
Kenya			Non-State	<b>Change of categorization. Kenya was in 'Persecution' category in 2016 report.</b> Sharp decline in attacks by Al Shabaab because of government security crackdown. Moved out of persecution category.
Tanzania			Non-State	<b>Change of categorization. Tanzania was in 'Persecution' category in 2016 report.</b> Decline in activity by militant Islamist groups with no serious incidents in the period under review. Other incidents, including judicial actions taken against Pentecostal pastors, seem to have had political motives. Religious freedom prospects have improved.

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