Persecuted and Forgotten? A report on Christians oppressed for their faith 2017–19

A snapshot of a deepening crisis

George J. Marlin, Chairman
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AT-A-GLANCE FINDINGS

1. Persecution of Christians in core Middle East countries such as Syria and Iraq has declined greatly following a period of genocide earlier in the decade.

3. The international community, while showing unprecedented concern regarding persecution, is running out of time if it wants to save Christianity in many parts of the Middle East. Measures taken to date may not be enough to secure the future of the Church’s presence there.

4. From Nigeria in West Africa to Madagascar in the east, Christians in parts of Africa are threatened by Islamists seeking to eliminate the Church – either by use of force or by dishonest means, including bribing people to convert.

5. Persecution against Christians has worsened the most in South and East Asia. This is now the regional hot spot for persecution.

6. Church attacks in Sri Lanka and the Philippines show that there is now an unholy trinity of threats facing Christians in South and East Asia: Islamic extremism, populist nationalism and authoritarian regimes.

7. An increasing unity of purpose between religio-nationalist groups and government represents a growing – and largely unrecognized – threat to Christians and other minorities in India, Sri Lanka, Burma (Mynamar) and other core countries in South and East Asia.

8. Around the world, Christians are a favored target for violent militant extremists who operate without boundaries and who attack local Christians as a legitimate alternative to a direct strike on the West.


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Attacks on Christians and others increased as country continues to destabilize.

Central African Republic
WORSE
Attacks on Christians and others increased as country continues to destabilize.
See p. 24.

Iraq
BETTER
Still difficulties, but Christians have been able to return home following fall of Daesh (ISIS).
See p. 29.

Pakistan
WORSE
Christians still suffer violent persecution and discrimination often linked to blasphemy laws.
See p. 22.

India
WORSE
Attacks on Christians – including killing of converts and sexual violence – have risen.
See p. 21.

Burma (Myanmar)
WORSE
Members of mostly Christian Kachin ethnic group have suffered rape, torture, and death.
See p. 23.

Sri Lanka
WORSE
Easter 2019 bombings were the worst attacks on Christians in years.
See p. 25.

Egypt
NO CHANGE
Despite fall of President al-Bashir, Churches continue to endure oppression and discrimination.
See p. 35.

Sudan
NO CHANGE
Christians still suffer violent persecution and discrimination often linked to blasphemy laws.
See p. 32.

Pakistan
NO CHANGE
Attacks on Christians – including killing of converts and sexual violence – have risen.
See p. 28.

India
NO CHANGE
Protests against churches being built, kidnapping of women, and bombing attempts continue.
See p. 27.

North Korea
NO CHANGE
Easter 2019 bombings were the worst attacks on Christians in years.
See p. 34.

Philippines
WORSE
Still widely considered to be the world’s most dangerous place to be a Christian.
See p. 31.

China
WORSE
New Church attacks and more government antagonism mean declining religious liberty.
See p. 33.

Nigeria
NO CHANGE
Still widely considered to be the world’s most dangerous place to be a Christian.
See p. 23.

Burma (Myanmar)
WORSE
Restrictive new legislation has circumscribed religious activities. Communist Party now directly oversees religion.
FOREWORD

By Cardinal Joseph Coutts
Archbishop of Karachi, Pakistan

It is an established fact that the most persecuted religion in the world today is Christianity, even though many people are not aware of this. For many years, ACN, with branches in many countries, has been working to make the voice of these voiceless Christians heard. Equally important is ACN’s campaign of prayer and support for suffering Christians throughout the world.

Having been associated with ACN and seen their good work over more than two decades, I feel honored to write this foreword to the 2017-19 edition of Persecuted and Forgotten?

Persecution of a religion can take many forms. It could be like the direct brutal attacks carried out by Daesh (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria against Christians and Yazidis, or it could take on more subtle forms such as discrimination, threats, extortion, kidnapping and forced conversion, denying of rights or curtailing of freedom.

In the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, where Christians are a tiny minority in a large population of over 200 million, we have faced all of the above over the years. In difficult times we have also found strength from the encouragement and support received from ACN.

No doubt, the constitution of our country gives us freedom to practice our religion, and there are many churches as well as Christian schools, hospitals and charitable institutions in Pakistan that serve all the people without distinction. However, although the Church, through its many institutions, plays a significant role in the development of the country, there remain deep-rooted prejudices and negative perceptions of non-Muslims in our society. These can easily be brought to the fore by hate-mongering elements or when clerics misuse the loudspeakers of a mosque to incite hatred.

This is what happened in 1997 when a large mob, fuelled by a rumor that the holy Qur’an had been desecrated by a Christian, was incited to attack a big Christian village called Shantinagar (Peace-ville). Fortunately, the Christians fled to save their lives, leaving the mob to destroy churches and houses.

In recent years there has been a growing intolerance in society, aggravated by the growth of militant and extremist Islamic groups such as the Taliban and others affiliated to Al Qaeda and Daesh. In 2001 we had the traumatic experience of two young extremists, armed with automatic weapons, bursting into a church in Bahawalpur and killing 15 worshippers and wounding dozens of others. This was the first time we had such an attack on a church. The government and the majority population condemned such a brutal attack; profound sorrow and sympathy was shown by our Muslim brethren. But other such attacks were to follow, even on the mosques of some Muslim sects. The worst to date was the attack of a suicide bomber on the Sunday congregation as people were leaving All Saints’ Church in Peshawar in 2013. Up to 150 churchgoers were killed and almost twice that number wounded.

Since then there have been nearly a dozen other attacks with mercifully fewer casualties, thanks to armed police guards provided by our government. The government provides armed police protection, whenever we request it for Church services or gatherings. But militant groups have become difficult to control, thus leaving us in a state of constant tension, knowing at the back of our minds that somewhere at some time there is going to be another attack – where or when is anybody’s guess.

Yes, we do have the freedom to believe and to practice our faith, but we have to be ready to face the wrath of those elements in our country who have a different mind-set. The words of Jesus to his disciples are there to remind us what His followers should expect: “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20).

We unite our sufferings with those who suffer more than us and find inspiration in the words of the Apostle Paul: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body” (2 Cor. 4:8-10).

+ Joseph Cardinal Coutts
Archbishop of Karachi
PERSECUTED AND FORGOTTEN?
Main Findings
A Report on Christians oppressed for their Faith 2017-19

“They did evil things to us. They beat us and raped us. The worst of all was girls aged nine who were raped.”

These are the words of Rita Habib, a Christian woman from Iraq’s Nineveh Plains.

Ms. Habib described how Daesh (ISIS) extremists kidnapped her in Qaraqosh, a mainly Christian town. Initially, she was held in nearby Mosul, before being transferred to Syria. There she was repeatedly bought and sold in Daesh’s sex slave market.

Her account of persecution (See case study ‘Rita Habib – Daesh (ISIS) captive returns home to Qaraqosh, Iraq’ on p.10) is one of many received by Aid to the Church in Need, the Catholic charity for Christians who suffer for their faith.

In March 2019, the Aid to the Church in Need team carried out a fact-finding trip to Syria in February 2019 revealed that in many parts of the country extreme poverty had supplanted persecution as the main problem facing Christians. Hence, in spite of the growing wealth of information on the subject, the extent of the crisis facing Christians persecuted for their faith remains little known and understood. While statistical research has offered considerable insight into the topic of Christian persecution, some data has not stood up to scrutiny and is unable to demonstrate that the violence in question is religiously motivated.

This evaluation does not set out to be comprehensive. ACN’s essentially qualitative assessment is unable to provide statistics to facilitate a full comparative analysis. In addition, state oppression is entirely different by nature from sporadic acts of violence – and conditions of persecution are not uniform across any one particular country.

This 2019 edition of Persecuted and Forgotten? examines key developments in 12 countries of core concern for Christians suffering human rights abuses. Covering a 25-month period from July 2017 to July 2019 (inclusive), the report draws on fact-finding trips carried out by Aid to the Church in Need staff to countries noted for persecution against Christians, for example northern Nigeria, Pakistan, Syria and other parts of the world which cannot be revealed because of security concerns.

In June 2018, the Pew Research Center stated that over the course of 2016 Christians suffered harassment in 144 countries. By this calculation, Christians emerge as the world’s ‘most widely targeted’ faith group, slightly ahead of Islam.

In January 2019, Open Doors estimated in its World Watch List for 2018 that 73 countries with 245 million Christians “showed extreme, very high or high levels of persecution.” This was up from 56 countries with 215 million Christians in 2017. The same survey showed that every day on average 11 Christians are killed for their faith in the 50 worst-offending countries.

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Chief among the report’s findings is that in core countries of the Middle East, the persecution of Christians lessened during 2017-19 after a period of genocide. During the period under review, Islamist violence steeply declined in Iraq and Syria – with some signs of improvement in Egypt too. An Aid to the Church in Need trip to Syria in February 2019 revealed that in many parts of the country extreme poverty had supplanted persecution as the main problem facing Christians.

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That said, studies consistently show that Christians suffer significantly high levels of persecution and intolerance. In June 2018, the Pew Research Center stated that over the course of 2016 Christians suffered harassment in 144 countries.

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CASE STUDY

RITA HABIB

Daesh (ISIS) captive returns home to Qaraqosh, Iraq

APRIL 2018

Rita Habib - one of the Christian women abducted from Qaraqosh by Daesh (ISIS) and forced into sex slavery - was finally reunited with her father. Ms Habib was transferred from Qaraqosh – the last Christian-majority town in Iraq before falling to the Islamists - to Mosul, before being moved to Syria some months later. She described the misery she faced: “I was bought and sold four times. They did evil things to us. They beat us and raped us... The worst of all was girls aged nine who were raped.” She was rescued by members of the Shi’ite Foundation who posed as jihadists at a Daesh slave auction and bought her for $200,000. She said: “I am very happy that after three years I reunited with my father. It is a joyous moment because he is the only family I have left.”

Only seven of the women abducted from Qaraqosh have returned – the estimated numbers of those seized when the town fell range from 45 to 100s. Women abducted from Qaraqosh have returned – the estimated numbers of those seized when the town fell range from 45 to 100s. 

In Syria and Iraq, the main reason why persecution against Christians has declined is the military defeat of Daesh (ISIS), declared in 2017. Daesh continued to claim responsibility for attacks, including a bomb blast outside a church in Qamishli in July 2019, but such violence was much reduced compared to the previous reporting period when Daesh still controlled major parts of both countries, such as Mosul, Iraq’s second city.

More compelling evidence of genocide against Christians and minorities came to light as the extremists were pushed back.

The period under review showed the effects of the genocide continued to play out long after the perpetrators had left. In terms of the numbers of Christians migrating, the devastating impact on the economy, the psychological trauma and the break-up of ancient communities of the genocide reached its zenith in the period between 2017 and 2019. Reports showed that Iraq’s Christian population continued to decline.

Christians numbered 1.5 million before 2003 and yet by summer 2019, Christians in Iraq were “well below” 150,000 and perhaps even “below 120,000.”

This means that, within a generation, Iraq’s Christian population has shrunk by more than 90 percent. In large parts of the country, many towns and villages in the former Christian-majority Nineveh Plains have been abandoned, and there is little sign of refugee Christians returning to Iraq; indeed, families continued to leave. In July 2019, Father Amanuel Klobo, who said he was the only priest staying in Mosul, claimed that two years after Daesh were ousted from the city, there were at most 40 Christians living there. And yet, in early 2014, just before Daesh seized Mosul, there were at least 6,000 Christians living there, down from 35,000 in 2003.

This means that within 16 years Christians have declined by nearly 99 percent in Mosul, a city where Christianity dates back almost 2,000 years. More and more, the survival of Christianity in Iraq depends on Erbil and the Nineveh Plains, where Aid to the Church in Need and others have helped internally displaced Christians return to their ancient homelands following the defeat of Daesh. By June 2019, 9,130 Christian families were back in Nineveh, 46 percent of the total in 2014, before Daesh invaded.

However, there persisted the “threat” of Shabak Shi’a militia groups hostile to Christians. In the former Christian-majority town of Bartela, where the security is overseen by a Shia-backed militia, parish priest Father Benham Benoka reported a “coupet boycott” of Christian-run shops. He described how Shia’s shrines had been erected in front of ancient Christian sites and said that loudspeakers broadcasting Muslim prayers had been strategically placed in Christian areas. Father Benoka described ongoing pressure “to force [the Christians] from our lands.”

Senior clergy in Iraq are increasingly raising concerns about the existential threat to the survival of the Church, especially in the event of another edition of ISIS, “another wave of persecution,” with reports of Daesh fighters going “underground” and coming back across the border into Iraq.

In an interview with ACN, Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Bashar Warda of Erbil said: “With each successive cycle, the number of Christians falls away, till today we are at the point of extinction.” They were there to be another Daesh-style assault on the country it had not been possible to save.

However, if security can be guaranteed there is every indication that Christianity could survive in Nineveh and Erbil.

In Syria in mid-2017, Christians were estimated at below 500,000 – down from 1.5 million before the conflict began in 2011. In 2018, at the start of the civil war, Christians numbered 180,000. As such, they were one of the largest


15 Meeting with Archbishop Bashar Warda of Erbil, Armenthy (Facebook page), May 21, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/jeromehanten/photos/a.135306371501320/1275737720142615/?type=3&theater

16 Meeting with Archbishop Bashar Warda of Erbil, Armenthy (Facebook page), May 21, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/jeromehanten/photos/a.135306371501320/1275737720142615/?type=3&theater


CASE STUDY

Attack on St Ignatius’s Church, Nigeria

Father Joseph Gor and Father Felix Tyolaha were among 19 Catholics who died after gunmen opened fire at a 5:30am funeral service in St Ignatius’s Church. Around 30 terrorists entered the church in Mbalom in Nigeria’s Middle Belt on April 24, 2018. Nine-year-old altar server Oryiman Akule said: “As soon as the priest started the Mass, he sighted some people with guns running towards the church and alerted people but, almost at the same time, they began to shoot… We ran and hid in one building.” Following the church attack, assailants shot at local residents. More than 50 homes were torched as people retreated, and food barns were set ablaze. Authorities believed Islamist Fulani herdsmen were responsible. Father Gor, one of the priests killed, had been warning about the ongoing threat posed by Fulani extremists.

Sources:
Christian communities not just in Syria but across the region. Maronite Archbishop Joseph Tobji of Aleppo told ACN that, after at least seven years of war, Christians in the city and district had fallen to 32,000. Sources in the city close to Aid to the Church in Need said that by July 2019 Christians in Aleppo had dwindled to 29,000, declining by 3,000 within the last year alone. This means that Christians in Aleppo, once one of the most significant centres for the Church in the whole of the Middle East, have declined more than 80 percent within just eight years. No recovery is in sight, only further reductions in the numbers of the faithful. Archbishop Tobji said 40 percent of the Christians left in his diocese were “older people,” likely to need care homes. ACN trips to Syria revealed that many young men want to flee the country to escape military service. Archbishop Tobji described ongoing emigration of Christians as “our bleeding wound,” saying people want to escape Syria’s deepening economic crisis. ACN visits to the region did not reveal that some Syrian Christians are determined to stay in the country, returning to cities such as Homs, but, in general terms, military victory over Daesh has failed to stem the flow of Christians fleeing Syria. ACN interviews with Christian refugees in neighboring Lebanon and Jordan show the faithful have little appetite to return. Although moderate Muslims did indicate a wish for Christians to stay, ACN reports highlight a growing marginalization of Christians in society, with increasing discrimination in the workplace and in public. Syria has at least twice as many Christians as Iraq. As such, Syria’s Christians have more influence at a time when the country’s all-important new post-war constitution is due to be drawn up.

Numbering 10 million, Christians in Egypt, by contrast, have proved better able to weather the storms of jihadi violence. Unlike in Iraq and Syria, there were numerous egregious jihadi violent attacks on the Copts during the reporting period. In November 2018, seven people were killed and 19 injured when Islamists ambushed three buses carrying Christian pilgrims. That said, the severity of attacks on Christians declined sharply in 2018-19 compared to previous years, a period which included the April 2017 Palm Sunday attacks at St Mark’s Cathedral, Alexandria, and Mar Girgis Church, Tanta. In a statement for this report, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop Angaelos of London stated: “[In Egypt], we have thankfully not seen the mass bombings or shootings that were prevalent before, but we are continuing to experience attacks in the villages and isolated areas at a smaller scale, but with equally brutal outcomes.” With militant Islamists describing Copts as their “favourite prey,” President Al-Sisi vowed to act, later stating that “2018 saw the lowest number of terrorist attacks compared to the past five years.” In November 2018, there were reports that the state had given authorization for about 30 “slow but significant move,” with a further 3,740 churches still awaiting registration. Archbishop Angaelos contrasted the state’s “positive work” to combat violence and discrimination against Christians in urban areas with rural parts of Egypt, where he said mob attacks on Christians were still “a regular occurrence.” He added: “Local police in certain villages have been found to not address situations sufficiently and are at times complicit in terms of just standing by and letting the violence happen.”

Looking at the region as a whole, although the scale of violence against Christians is much reduced, evidence suggests that the retreating Daesh Islamists have left behind a legacy of increased hostility towards Christians among sections of the local community. Church leaders described how the militias have kindled a caliphate mentality, which brands Christians as unwelcome outsiders in spite of the fact that their presence in the region pre-dates the coming of Islam. Describing ongoing Islamist violence in Egypt, Coptic Archbishop Angaelos of London said: “These continuing attacks have become inspired by the caliphate model that has been witnessed across the region.” Chaldean Catholic Patriarch Louis Raphael I Salo of Baghdad, leader of Iraq’s largest Christian community, said: “The ideology of ISIS is so strong, even among simple people, because of the speech in the mosques… Fundamentalism is the biggest challenge today.” Especially with reference to Iraq, it is no exaggeration to say that Daesh may have lost the battle for military supremacy in the Middle East but in parts of the region they are on course for victory in achieving wipe-out of the much-hated “worshippers of the cross” – the Christians.

AFRICA

Across Africa, jihadist violence against Christians remained at critical levels. In July 2019 in Burkina Faso, Bishop Laurent Birfuoré Daibi of Dori said Islamists had killed four Christians and had threatened to murder others too if they refused to convert. In Niger, Bishop Ambouzite Ouedraogo of Maradi told ACN in June 2019 that Islamist fundamentalists attack Christians “time and again” and Sister Catherine Kingbo from the same diocese said this threat had changed the country beyond all recognition in the last 15 years.
The situation for Christians has deteriorated most in South and East Asia: this is now the regional hot spot for persecution, taking over that dubious honour from the Middle East.

Well ahead of the period under review, North Korea had emerged as the worst place in the world to be a Christian. Here, where “Christians are routinely imprisoned in labour camps” and with frequent reports of physical and psychological torture, the situation continued to be so bad it could scarcely get any worse, with reports of up to 70,000 Christians in camps. 63

Two of the most serious attacks against Christians carried out by Islamist militancy in the reporting period took place in South and East Asia. During Sunday Mass on January 27, 2019 two bombs exploded at the Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Jolo, Philippines, with 20 people killed and more than 100 injured. 64 (See case study ‘Bombing of Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Philippines’ on p. 16). Islamist group Abu Sayyaf was implicated in the attacks and Daesh (ISIS) claimed responsibility. 65 Daesh also said it was behind violence in Sri Lanka 66 on April 21, 2019 when 258 people were killed. 67 (cont’d on p.20)

Asia Bibi’s daughter Eisham Ashiq, during her 2018 visit to the UK.

MAY 2019

After a long battle for justice Asia Bibi left her native Pakistan to travel to Canada to be reunited with her family. Arrested on charges of blasphemy in 2009, she was found guilty in November 2010, becoming the first woman to be sentenced to death by hanging for the crime. She continually protested her innocence. Yet justice was continually delayed. Her appeal hearing was postponed five times, until the Lahore High Court upheld her death sentence in October 2014. But four years later, an appeal to the Supreme Court of Pakistan overturned the guilty verdict. Her daughter, Eisham Ashiq told Aid to the Church in Need: “This is the most wonderful moment. I am grateful to God for listening to our prayers.” But even then her nightmare was not over, as mass protests led the government to allow the verdict to be appealed. However, the Supreme Court finally upheld her acquittal in January 2019. Speaking about her final release, Father Emmanuel Yousaf, National Director of Pakistan’s Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, told Aid to the Church in Need: “For almost 10 years now, this is the day all of us have been waiting for when the family can at last be reunited.”

and more than 500 were injured in attacks on three churches packed with Christians celebrating Easter Sunday. The co-ordinated attacks, in Nagombo, Batticaloa and Colombo, were, by far the worst atrocities against Christians during the period in question in terms of the number of people wounded and killed. Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, Archbishop of Colombo, described the legation as an "alarming increase in incidents of violence based on faith and the discriminatory attitudes of police and administration." A massive breakdown came with the Supreme Court’s October 2018 acquittal of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman on death row for alleged blasphemy, who called her time in prison as "a First Class ticket for blasphemy in Pakistan is freed" on p. 18 but the government’s apparent failure to tackle a growing climate of intolerance towards minorities saw the US State Department report, titled ‘Violations of Religious Freedom in Pakistan 2018’, written into force on February 1, 2018, in effect outlawed "unauthorised" religious teachings and insisted religious groups should not be allowed to minister in the country where in 1986 the government’s blasphemy act was overturned, culminating in her departure to Canada in May 2018.

RESPONSE FROM INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Initiatives by the international community in response to the persecution of Christians emerged as a major theme during the reporting period. This came at a time of increased public awareness of the topic. There was massive international media coverage about Asia Bibi, the Pakistani Christian woman in whose case the government’s blasphemy conviction was overturned, culminating in her departure to Canada in May 2018. The EU appointed a Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union in May 2016. Two years later, in the UK, Foreign Office Minister Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon was appointed the Prime Minister’s Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief. He was tasked with “demonstrating the UK’s commitment to religious freedom by promoting inter-faith respect and dialogue internationally.”

However, there was mounting concern that the West has largely been "blind to this issue" of Christian persecution and that initiatives by the international community have yet to bring demonstrable change for many of the Christians suffering persecution. The period under review saw increasing calls for the international community to aid persecuted Christians – an appeal of this kind was made by Archbishop Bashar Warda of Erbil, in Kurdistan, Iraq, when he met UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt in London in May 2019. However, Hungary was chief among the few countries in the West that provided direct aid for suffering Christians in Iraq. In July 2018, US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo hosted the first annual Ministerial to "advance religious freedom around the world." The meeting in Washington DC had launched a "Genocide Recovery and Persecution Response Initiative." However, in spite of a US pledge of $300 million to help rebuild Christian and other minority faith communities in Iraq’s Nineveh Plains, criticism persisted that the US Agency for International Development (USAID) "has been very slow in getting aid out of the door." Although the Church did not receive funding directly from USAID,
there was significant US funding for Christian areas of Iraq, primarily for civil infrastructure. By summer 2019, hopes were high that the US would back a $13M training and livelihoods program in Iraq, with the funds being routed through the local Church. If successful, the scheme has the potential to become the first of several significant US projects regularly supporting Church groups from 2020 onwards.94

In the UK reports emerged in November 2018 that the British government was not willing to offer asylum to Asia Bibi in the UK following her acquittal by Pakistan’s Supreme Court.95 The court’s decision coincided with a visit by Asia Bibi’s family, organized by Aid to the Church in Need, who had said the UK was a preferred asylum destination. At a time of growing disquiet about the UK’s perceived failure to act in such a high profile case, on December 26, 2018 Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt announced a review into the persecution of Christians. Unprecedented in its scope, the independent report led by the Bishop of Truro was tasked with assessing the UK’s relationship with the Christian community that has shown unprecedented engagement with the topic of persecution of Christians. However, whatever good may come out of initiatives such as those mentioned above will take time to materialise. Facing continued violent attacks, forced exodus and possible extinction, Christians more than ever do not have time to wait. Be it in Iraq or Syria elsewhere, future historians may say that it was yet another case of too little, too late.

CONCLUSION

In December 2018, HRH The Prince of Wales told a packed congregation in London’s Westminster Abbey: “[I have met] many Christians who, with such inspiring faith and courage, are battling oppression and persecution.”96 In his address, given during a service dedicated to Christians in the Middle East, he highlighted the need to foster inter-faith cooperation. He said: “Extremism and division are by no means inevitable.

Although there has been a decline in violence against Christians in some parts of the world, the past two years have failed to deliver the long-awaited break through moment when religious hatred gives way to tolerance. Nor is it likely any time soon. The rise of authoritarian regimes and populist nationalism bodes ill for Christians in countries as diverse as India, Burma (Myanmar) and China, where Christianity is seen as not only alien but as an agent of unwanted Western influence. In parts of Africa, Islamist violence is putting huge pressure on Christians. In Iraq and Syria, Christians are voting with their feet by continuing to emigrate; each person who leaves makes it harder for those left behind. If Pope Francis goes to Iraq in 2020, as announced in June 2019,97 what remnant of the Christian community will he find there? Whatever challenges the future holds, Aid to the Church in Need remains committed to helping Christians not only to survive persecution but also to give witness to their faith. The desecration of hope against all the odds is the greatest source of inspiration for all those dedicated to helping them.

In summary, over the past two years the international community has shown unprecedented engagement with the topic of persecution of Christians. However, whatever good may come out of initiatives such as those mentioned above will take time to materialise. Facing continued violent attacks, forced exodus and possible extinction, Christians more than ever do not have time to wait. Be it in Iraq or Syria elsewhere, future historians may say that it was yet another case of too little, too late.

94 ACN sources in Iraq.
96 Boris Johnson, the ACN initiative to engage civil society in standing in recommended UK Government support for #RedWednesday, Council to protect Christians in the Middle East and other (Recommendation 8), and use its position on the UN Security imposing sanctions against countries guilty of persecution to date and making recommendations. Among the 21 recommendations listed when the report was completed in July 2019 were that the UK government should consider imposing sanctions against countries guilty of persecution (Recommendation 8), and use its position on the UN Security Council to protect Christians in the Middle East and other persecution hot spots (Recommendation 20). The review also recommended UK Government support for #RedWednesday, the ACN initiative to engage civil society in standing in solidarity with persecuted Christians (Recommendation 19).
97 Boris Johnson98 and Jeremy Hunt,99 the then candidates to succeed Theresa May as Prime Minister, both signalled their commitment to act on the report’s recommendations.
The massacre of more than 110 people, mostly Christians—including two priests and a pastor—at a Church-run displacement camp1 highlighted the scale of the internal conflict afflicting the country. The attack in late 2018 was one of many acts of violence by ex-Séléka militia, which carried out attacks along sectarian lines. Muslim communities had also suffered, with reports of a “violent wave of ethnic cleansing”2 in the west of the country. Anti-balaka militia groups, formed to fight the ex-Séléka, were themselves implicated in civilian attacks. Bishop Juan José Aguirre Muñoz of Bangassou told ACN that foreign mercenaries entering CAR to raid its natural resources had further destabilized the situation.3 A February 2019 peace deal between the government and 14 armed groups has already come under strain— with one former Séléka faction pulling out in March.4

At least 19 people including Father Albert Baba were killed and about 120 injured in an attack during Mass on May 1st at Our Lady of Fatima’s Church, Bangui. Parish priest Father Moses Oti said attackers “outnumbered the police and the police retreated. Then the attackers started shooting at the church and throwing hand grenades at the people.”5

101 Christians and 11 Muslims were killed when an ex-Séléka group called the Union for Peace attacked a Church-run IDP camp in Alindao. Among those killed in the massacre on the November 15th were Pastor Gabriel Singa and two priests, Father Mada Blaise and Father Célestin Ngoumango. The camp, which sheltered over 26,000 people, was totally destroyed. Bishop Cyr-Nestor Yapaupa of Alindao said: “The old people and the handicapped were simply burned alive, if they were not already shot dead or beheaded... The attackers simply fired indiscriminately on the people.”6 UN troops allegedly colluded with militants.7

The body of 77-year-old Sister Ines Nieves Sancho was found beheaded and mutilated in Nola, south-west CAR near the border with Chad. During the night of May 19th-20th, assailants entered her home and, dragging her to the workshop where she held sewing lessons for local girls, slit her throat. Ex-Séléka militants, calling themselves 3R, were blamed for the attack.8

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CHINA

Difficulties for believers have increased as the new 2018 Regulations on Religious Affairs limit many religious activities to registered sites and introduce further restrictions.1 On March 21, 2018 oversight of religious affairs was transferred from the State Administration of Religious Affairs to the United Front Work Department, an agency of the Chinese Communist Party.2 There are fears that China’s new “social credit system” – designed to reward good citizenship and punish bad – will be used to discriminate against Christians.3 Education is used as a tool of social conditioning: in some regions pupils were reportedly required to sign a statement saying they will “promote atheism, and oppose belief in God.”4 In other areas problems continue. Chinese clergy are still subject to arbitrary arrest and building restrictions are increasingly used as a pretext for church demolitions. Despite the September 2017 agreement between the Vatican and China, the Catholic Church’s status continues to be complex: two underground bishops were formally replaced by bishops from the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association; and even after the agreement, state agents destroyed Marian shrines in Shaxi and Guizhou.5

NOVEMBER 2018


APRIL 2018

The Bible was banned from sale online6 ahead of a new version compatible with Sincicism and socialism.7

FEBRUARY 2019

At 8PM on the evening of Sunday the 24th, 44 members of the Early Rain Covenant Church – including 11 children – were taken into custody in Chengdu city. Two members, “Tang Chunliang and his wife were hit in the face by a plainclothes police officer at the police station.” One officer savagely beat the pastor’s mother, grabbing her hair and kicking her, while another held her down. Most members were released in the early hours of Monday between 2PM and 8PM. 11 were placed in administrative detention. In December 2018 local authorities had formally closed the church, arresting Pastor Wang Yi and 160 Christians, for “inciting subversion of state power.”8

MARCH 2019

Chinese officials in Guangzhou city introduced cash rewards for those who inform on underground churches and other “unofficial” places of worship. Those with useful information will receive 100 yuan ($14), which could rise to 10,000 yuan – about two months’ average salary – for those who help identify and arrest ministers and members from unofficial religious groups.9

EGYPT

The number of major bomb attacks on churches in Egypt has fallen compared to the previous three years when explosions struck at the heart of the Coptic Christian community, killing and maiming Mass-goers at the country’s most important cathedrals in Cairo and Alexandria.1 That said, several egregious attacks did take place, including the November 2018 attack on a bus carrying Christian pilgrims.2 The decline in violent acts suggested progress was being made due to President al-Sisi’s stated determination to deal with Daesh (ISIS), which claimed responsibility for many of the attacks. In January 2019, a bomb plot was foiled when Imam Saad Aikar reacted promptly to mosque-gos’ reports of suspicious activity near the Virgin Mary and Abu Sethin Church, Nasr City.3 More than a week earlier, a police officer was killed defusing a bomb near a church in another of Cairo’s suburbs.4 Meanwhile, protests against the construction of church buildings continues to occur – a problem which has apparently worsened since the government made it easier to secure legal approval for church buildings.5 Coptic Christian women and girls continue to be abducted for forced conversion and marriage.

DECEMBER 2017

Nine people were confirmed dead when at least two gunmen attacked Mar Mina Coptic church in the Helwan district, south of Cairo. Those killed included members of the congregation and a police officer involved in a shootout. A number of others were injured, many of them guards protecting the church. Government security said one of the terrorists “was going to blow himself up using a suicide belt.”6 Afterwards, explosives experts dismantled two improvised explosive devices found near the church.

NOVEMBER 2018

Seven people were killed and 19 were wounded when Muslim extremists ambushed three buses carrying Christian pilgrims going to a remote monastery south of Cairo. According to the Coptic Orthodox Church, all but one of those killed were members of the same family. Among the dead were a boy aged 15 and a 12-year-old girl. Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack, which it said was revenge against the Egyptian authorities for jailing “our chaste sisters.”

JANUARY 2019

Police closed down the only church in Manshiaa Zafarana village, Minya, leaving 1,000 Copts without a place of worship. Muslim residents surrounded the building and demanded that it be shut, using what the Archdiocese of Minya described as “offensive and inflammatory” language. Reportedly, police were conciliatory to protestors and closed the building. The church building had been turned into a mosque a few years earlier on January 7, 2019, just hours after Christmas Mass. Police ejected the protestors.


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COUNTRY PROFILE

INDIA

During the period under examination, attacks on Christians were reported in 24 of India’s 29 states. According to one calculation, there were 440 anti-Christian incidents in 2017, 477 in 2018 and 117 in the first quarter of 2019.1 Attacks include the killing of converts2 and sexual violence, such as the gang rape of five women working for a Christian NGO in Jharkhand.3 More than 100 churches closed in 2018, because of extremist attacks or intervention by authorities.4 According to one study, not only has communal violence remained high, but the failure of authorities to address attacks on religious minorities has engendered a climate of impunity.5 “(G)roups and organizations wishing to promote cultural and religious nationalism are becoming bolder,” said Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas of the Indian Catholic Bishops’ Conference.6 Census data showing the Indian Catholic Bishops’ Conference.7 Census data showing the number of Hindus has fallen below 80 percent speak convincingly to what Yashpal Behl calls “a fundamental change” in religious identity and religious nationalism among nationalists who believe forced conversions are changing India.8 Nine of India’s 29 states have laws “restricting religious conversions. ”9

SEPTEMBER 2018

An elderly Christian woman was beaten in Veppur village, Tamil Nadu, on the festival of Ganesh Chaturthi (September 13th).10 Four worshippers from a group carrying a statue of Ganesha stopped her, saying that, by walking on the road, she had made it impure and defiled the festival. They hurled stones at Christians who tried to rescue her – 10 suffered minor injuries. One resident said: “They tell us, ‘We belong to (Hindu extremist group) RSS, and you are Christians. We cannot both walk on the same road...’”11

A 40-strong mob attacked Philadelphia Church, Karkeli village, near Chhattisgarh State’s capital, Raipur, on February 3rd.12 Worshippers were beaten with sticks – 35 required hospital treatment. Politicians were accused of inciting villagers to attack the church. According to reports, Hindus cut Christians off from the village’s water supply, banned them from burying their dead, and refused to give them jobs after they declined to participate in Hindu practices. Police investigating the attack allegedly told Christians they would be driven out of the town or killed.12

MAY 2019

Local officials sent 50 workers to demolish a Church-run school and hostel for tribal children near Licchapatra village, Odisha State. Headmaster Vipin Kumar Pusuru said: “When we protected peacefully, they beat us.” Problems started after a leader of the local Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) group alleged the school was evangelizing the children – a clam Pusuru denies. Demolition was ordered after authorities “lost” the papers relating to the school’s land allotment application. 100 of the school’s 250 pupils lived in the hostel, with 12 children left homeless by the hostel’s destruction taken into care.13

IRAQ

Christians slowly returned to their towns and villages on the Nineveh Plains following Daesh (ISIS)’s attempt to eliminate Christianity. During an October 2018 visit to the UK organized by ACN, Chaldean Archbishop Habib Naibali said Iraq’s Christians had endured systematic violence designed to eradicate them: “If this is not genocide, then what is genocide?”14 His sentiments were echoed by Chaldean Patriarch Louis Raphael I Sako.15 As of June 2019, just over 46 percent of families who fled had returned – but Churches lamented an apparent lack of both domestic and international aid to rebuild. Father Salar Kajo, of the Churches’ Nineveh Reconstruction Committee, said: “After a year of rebuilding, the only channel of aid has been through the Church,” adding that the Hungarian government provided direct aid.16 The process of return has been complicated by security problems, with accusations of aggression, including land grabs by militias allegedly protecting Christian settlements.17 Widespread problems confront the country’s Christian communities, including additional taxes levied on Christian-majority areas in the Kurdish autonomous region,18 lack of support for those who suffered sexual violence,19 accounts of at least 350 Christian-owned properties being illegally seized,20 and the sporadic killings of Christians and members of other minorities.21


DECEMBER 2017

MP Joseph Silewa complained of Christians in Qaraqosh and Bartella being harassed - by members of the Shabak’s (Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces) (PMF) 39th Brigade. The Kurdistan Regional Government’s Director General of Christian Affairs confirmed that there had been harassment and abuse by the PMF and other militia groups following the liberation of the Nineveh Plains from Daesh.1

MARCH 2018

Dr. Hisham Shafii was stabbed to death along with his wife and elderly mother in their home in Baghdad. Father Biyo Qasha feared these events were part a plan to force Christians from their homes.2

JANUARY 2019

The Ministry of Education’s new curriculum was condemned by Chaldean Patriarch Louis Raphael I Sako. He said: “I read inaccurate, inappropriate and offensive statements that incite hate and division, which are far from the values of tolerance and the principles of citizenship and coexistence.” For example, the textbooks for children aged 4-11 say unveiled women are “sick.”3

APRIL 2019

A gun attack on a Palm Sunday procession in Bartella forced Christians to abandon the traditional ceremonial start to Holy Week. Cars drove alongside the procession while those inside opened fire. Fewer than a third of 8,100 Christian families that left Bartella have returned, and the Shabak’s militia, which controls the town’s security, have reportedly harassed Christians, including firing guns in front of St George’s Church for more than an hour and threatening its priest, Father Behnam Benoka.4
NIGERIA

“There is a clear agenda – to Islamize all of the areas that are currently predominantly Christian.” This analysis, given by Bishop Wilfred Maalbe of Mukuri, came amid reports suggesting that over the period under review there was an upsurge in the number and severity of attacks against Christians in the Middle Belt region. Although the context of this violence was complex, with ethnic rivalries, climate change and an increasingly desperate search for fresh pastures each playing a part, militant Islamic Fulani herdsmen were held responsible for the attacks, clearly displaying virulent religious hatred. Such was evident from the violence, which included an April 2018 gun attack at a village church in Benue State that left 13 people dead, including two priests. Reports for that year indicated “a rise” in attacks both by the Fulani and by militant Islamic group Boko Haram, active especially in north-east Nigeria. The following year, clergy were reporting that attacks against Christians were “growing in ferocity and frequency” – with Fulani attacks now outnumbering those by Boko Haram. By then, there was declining confidence that the government of Muhammadu Buhari, re-elected President in February 2019, was winning the battle against militant Islamic insurgence, with bishops calling for him to “consider stepping aside.”

FEBRUARY 2018

Islamic militants kidnapped about 110 students from a college in Dapchi, Yobe State, in north-east Nigeria on February 19, 2018, releasing all of them within one month, except one, 14-year-old Leah Sharibu, the only Christian among them. After their release, some of the girls said Leah had been held back because she had refused to abandon her Christian faith. At the time of writing, more than 18 months after she was kidnapped, Leah Sharibu is still held captive.

MARCH 2019

According to reports, more than 280 people were killed in a state of attack on predominantly Christian settlements across Kaduna State by Fulani herdsmen. Sexual assaults and mutilations were also reported. This included the deaths of at least 120 members of the Adara ethnic group in Kajuru, apparently killed in the reprisal attacks that followed state governor El-Rufai’s TV announcement that if Fulani had been killed by Adara, El-Rufai later claimed the Fulani death toll had risen to 130. His claims were widely questioned.

APRIL 2019

Boko Haram militants went from door to door on the evening of April 29, 2019, killing up to 25 people in a largely Christian community in Kuda, near Madagali, in Adamawa State, north-east Nigeria. The last day, as survivors began burying their dead, the Islamist militants “were spotted approaching for a second attack,” prompting local people to flee. Following the attack, more Christians fled Kuda.

NORTH KOREA

North Korea is widely considered the most dangerous place to be a Christian, with reportedly the world’s worst record regarding religious freedom. Citizens must show devotion to the ruling Kim family and the state, and are “subjected to more severe deprivation.” North Korean defectors reported atrocities including a prisoner’s newborn baby being fed to guard dogs, the execution of starving prisoners digging for edible plants, and forced abortions.

FEBRUARY 2019

A defector in Seoul spoke about a fellow inmate, Hyun, who told guards about her faith, insisting on using her baptismal name during questioning in 2004. “She told [the interrogators], ‘I’m a child of God and I’m not scared to die. So if you want to kill me, go, ahead and kill me.’” The defector described seeing Hyun returning from interrogation with severe bruises on her forehead and bleeding from her nose. Guards later took her away and she was not seen again.

DECEMBER 2017

A report by the International Bar Association’s War Crimes Committee stated that “Christians are heavily persecuted and receive especially harsh treatment in prison camps,” noting that they have been “tortured and killed” for religious affiliation, attending Christian meetings, or reading the Bible and are “subjected to more severe deprivation.”

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PAKISTAN

Christians are subject to violent persecution and discrimination, much of it directly linked to Pakistan’s notorious blasphemy laws, which are widely abused. There are 224 Christian victims of the blasphemy laws since they were passed in 1986. The most notorious case was that of Asia Bibi who, after 2 years in custody including many years on death row, was finally acquitted by the Supreme Court in October 2018. She eventually left Pakistan in May 2019 to start a new life with her family in Canada. With guilty blasphemy verdicts carrying the death penalty and radical Islamists gaining more political power in the region, Christians are living in fear for their lives. Conversions to Christianity from Islam in particular carry tremendous risk. Attacks on churches have occurred in some places.

Christians also suffer from institutionalized discrimination. Jobs considered low, dirty and belittling are often held by Christians – for example, Christian workers make up a very high proportion of the sewerage and street cleaning workforce despite comprising only 1.5 percent of the population. Many Christians are exceptionally poor and some are victims of bonded labor. However, middle class Christians also face marginalization and persecution. In the Punjab region Christian and Hindu girls continue to be abducted and forced into marriage.

APRIL 2018
Two Christians were killed and five injured when gunmen shot at worshippers leaving a church in Eso Nagri, Quetta. This was the third attack on the community attributed to Daesh (ISIS) and the second within a fortnight, after a Christian family was shot dead on Easter Monday on Shahzaman Road. In the earlier Daesh attack, at least nine members of Bethel Memorial Methodist Church were killed in a suicide bombing a week before Christmas 2017.

OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2018
Violent protests paralyzed towns across Pakistan after the Supreme Court acquitted Asian Bibi. Protestors blocked major roadways, forcing the closure of businesses and schools. Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan, which organized the mass demonstration, said both Asia Bibi and the judges who heard the case should be killed. The government agreed to an appeal with protest leaders allowing an appeal in the Supreme Court and for legal proceedings to be initiated to stop Asia Bibi traveling abroad. The appeal was rejected in January 2019 and Asia Bibi left the country four months later.

JUNE 2019
On Sunday the 9th, 15-year-old Christian girl Maria was abducted from her home in Sheikhupura by five Muslim men and raped. Authorities refused to investigate the crime. The child’s father, Jalal Masih, filed a police report, accusing a local businessman and four others. Several witnesses saw the girl abducted at gunpoint. Mr. Masih said: “We made contact the next day (and the kidnapper) threatened to return her dead body if we informed the police.”

PHILIPPINES

The killing of 22 Sunday Massgoers and the maiming of more than 100 others in Jolo’s Catholic cathedral in January 2019 removed all doubt about the continuing threat posed by Islamist militants. Fear was still high following on from the siege of Marawi by Islamist extremists, who were finally defeated in October 2017 after a five month siege. Much of Marawi City was damaged including the Catholic cathedral. Vicar General Father Teresito Soganub and 15 other Christians were kidnapped. Over that time, more than 1,000 people died and 400,000 were displaced.

President Rodrigo Duterte has been antagonistic to the Catholic Church throughout his time in office, calling Catholic clergy “sons of bitches” for criticizing his shoot-to-kill drugs policy. Various Catholic organizations have been targeted by government agencies. The Catholic Media Network radio broadcaster had its licence renewal blocked in Congress. A number of priests have been shot by unknown assailants. Such attacks may have been provoked by opposition to their activism in upholding the Church’s social teaching. For example, Father Marcelito Paez was killed after helping to get a political prisoner released.

JUNE 2018


APRIL 2018
71-year-old Sister Patricia Fox was arrested and detained by the Immigration Bureau. The Australian nun, who had worked in the country for 27 years, was arrested for “illegal political activities.” Although released the next day, she was ordered to leave the country within 30 days. Redemptorist Priest Oliver Castor saw the move as the government trying to “stop the Church’s work with the poor.”

DECEMBER 2018
President Rodrigo Duterte verbally attacked Catholic bishops saying: “These bishops that you gave here, kill them. They are useless fools. All they do is criticize.” The remarks followed further Church opposition to the president’s war on drugs in which more than 20,000 have been killed since its launch in 2016.

JANUARY 2019
Two bombs exploded during Sunday Mass in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Jolo on January 27th, killing at least 22 people and wounding more than 100 others. Responsibility was claimed by Daesh (ISIS) affiliated Islamist group Abu Sayyaf. They had been excluded from negotiations with the government which had led to the previous week’s referendum, which created the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.
Following the end of the civil war in 2009, attacks on both Christians and Muslims have risen—largely carried out by Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists. However, during the period under review there have also been increasing attacks on churches by Hindu extremist groups in Eastern Province.1 Ninety attacks on Christians were recorded in 2017,2 with 67 between January and September 2018 alone.3 Discrimination against Christians included assaults on churches, denial of burial in public cemeteries,4 and refusals to enroll Christian children in school.5 Some of the most notorious attacks occurred after the beginning of the Sinhalese New Year. On Palm Sunday 2019—which coincided with New Year itself—a nationalist mob surrounded the Methodist Church in Anuradhapura and made “murderous threats” to Bishop Asiri Perera and his congregation, pelting the building with stones and firecrackers.6 But by far the worst attack occurred a week later when Islamist extremists targeted Christian Churches with bomb attacks on Easter Sunday.

SRI LANKA

JUNE 2017
Government minister Wiwiyadasa Rajapaks said he would debar human rights lawyer Lakshan Dias unless he retracted his claim that 156 anti-Christian incidents occurred from 2015 to June 2017. Mr. Dias made the statement on a TV talk show on June 14th. Mr. Rajapaks said: “He is a traitor... He is eagerly waiting to grab an opportunity to create unrest in the country.” Dias received a police summons in response to a complaint.7

July 2018
50-60 villagers carrying sticks and rocks surrounded Harvest Mission Church in Kiran, Batticaloa District during their Sunday service. Among the attackers were members of local government agency Karakalathalpa Grama Niladhari. The mob said that they would attack the congregation if they did not halt their religious activities within 15 minutes. The attackers left after the pastor stopped the service.8

APRIL 2019
More than 300 people, including at least 45 children, were killed and more than 500 people injured in bomb attacks on three churches and hotels across Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday. Explosions hit St Anthony’s Church, Kotha, Katuwaiyita Church, Katana, and Zion Church, Batticaloa. Islam group Daesh-ISIS affiliates claimed responsibility for the attacks.9

SUDAN

In May 2019 an announcement was made by the Transitional Military Council that Shari'a law would continue in Sudan. This provoked fear among Christians, who were hoping for an end to the violent persecution perpetrated by the now-deposed Omar al Bashir Shari'a law was enshrined in Sudan’s 2011 constitution. This followed South Sudan’s independence, with Christians facing poverty, war and genocide. The harshest oppression has been in the Nuba Mountains, where Christians have endured ethnic cleansing as Arab-Sudanese try to eradicate black Sudanese with indiscriminate military attacks on Christian villages, churches, hospitals and schools. Moreover, since 2014, the conflict in South Sudan has pushed hundreds of thousands of refugees into Sudan. In October 2017, Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need reported that Christian children in Sudan’s refugee camps were being forced to say Islamic prayers to receive food rations. A source, who asked not to be named, said: “Children are conditioned to say Islamic prayers before [being] given food. This is not right.”10

FEBRUARY 2019
On Sunday 11th, Sudanese authorities “demolished” the Presbyterian Evangelical Church in Al Haj Youssif, Khartoum North.1 Police evacuated the site, and books, chairs and other materials found inside were confiscated. Church leaders said a Muslim “who claims ownership of the Church property has forged documents showing ownership.” A court case is ongoing, contesting the scheduled demolition. Church authorities claimed the Church had owned the property since 1959 and that a judge confirmed its ownership only the year before.12

OCTOBER 2018
Sudanese security raided a Christian house church in Nyala city, South Darfur and “subjected the converts from Islam in the group to a day and night of beating and torture.”13 The African Center for Justice and Peace Studies said the accused were later released after recanting their faith. The pastor was released on bail the following day, charged with apostasy after refusing to renounce Christianity. These found guilty of apostasy are liable for the death penalty.14

MARCH 2019
More than 70 churches have been attacked, with 32 of them burnt down, in Sudan’s Nuba Mountains over the last 12 months, according to the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART).1 HART claimed the churches were attacked by Sudanese government forces as part of its struggle against the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement—North (SPLM-N). General Jagot Mukwer, SPLM-N deputy chair, said: “The government is killing its own people.”

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ACN supports more than 5,000 projects in around 140 countries each year, helping Christians live out their Faith wherever they are persecuted, oppressed or in pastoral need.