RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
IN THE WORLD
REPORT 2021

Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN INTERNATIONAL

Introduction

By Dr. Thomas Heine-Geldern

> *"In a world where various forms of modern tyranny seek to suppress religious freedom, or try to reduce it to a subculture without right to a voice in the public square, or to use religion as a pretext for hatred and brutality, it is imperative that the followers of the various religions join their voices in calling for peace, tolerance, and respect for the dignity and rights of others."* [1]
>
> Pope Francis

On 28th May 2019, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution establishing 22nd August as the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief. The proposal had been tabled by Poland with the support the United States, Canada, Brazil, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Nigeria and Pakistan. This resolution was a clear message and mandate – and every 22nd August a reminder – that acts of violence based on religion cannot and will not be tolerated by the UN, its member states or civil society.

In addition to the 28th May 2019 UN resolution and the 23rd September 2019 Global Call to Protect Religious Freedom – the first ever UN event on religious freedom hosted by a US president – there has been a flurry of national initiatives. These include the USA-initiated International Religious Freedom Alliance, the creation of a Secretary of State for Christian Persecution in Hungary and, perhaps of greatest note, the growing number of nations instituting or reactivating Ambassadors for Religious Freedom and Belief, such as Denmark, the Netherlands, the USA, Norway, Finland, Poland, Germany and the United Kingdom, among others.

By implication, the protection of those suffering violence based on religion is also a recognition of the fundamental human right to religious freedom, an acceptance of the sociological reality of religion in society, and an acknowledgement of the positive cultural role of religion. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in response to the anti-Christian violence in Iraq, "the right to religious freedom is rooted in the very dignity of the human person whose transcendent nature must not be ignored or overlooked."[2]

Regrettably, however, despite the – albeit important – UN initiatives, and the staffing of religious freedom ambassadorships, to date the international community's response to violence based on religion, and religious persecution in general, can be categorised as too little too late. Although it is impossible to know exact numbers, our research suggests that two thirds of the world's population live in countries where violations of religious freedoms occur in one form or another, with Christians being the most persecuted group. Is this a surprise? No, the situation has grown over the centuries, from the roots of intolerance, to produce discrimination and persecution.

Aid to the Church in Need's (ACN) *Religious Freedom in the World Report* is ACN's principal research project, and has evolved considerably over the years, from being a small booklet to becoming a publication of approximately 800 pages, produced by a world-wide team. This evolution is due to the fact that today discrimination and persecution on the grounds of religious belief is a growing global phenomenon. Behind the violent conflicts, whether in Syria, Yemen, Nigeria, the Central African Republic or Mozambique – to mention only a few countries – are those in the shadows who, manipulating the deepest convictions of humanity, have instrumentalised religion in the search for power.

Our engagement with this topic reflects our mission. This report is not only a means through which to better fulfil our service to the suffering Church, but also a way to give a voice to our project partners – those who have been tragically marked by the consequences of persecution. It is now 22 years since our Italian office first started publishing the *Religious Freedom in the World Report*, in 1999. Regrettably, this year will not be the last in which the report is needed.

Contents

Foreword

by Father Emmanuel Yousaf

National Director of the National Commission for Justice and Peace, Pakistan

Over more than 45 years as a priest in Pakistan, I have struggled on behalf of our community against persecution and discrimination.

When Christians working in the fields and brick kilns have not received their due portion of wheat or rice, I have approached the landlords and kiln owners asking them to give just wages and put an end to this injustice. When I discovered that boys and girls in my parish were not receiving the education they deserve, I set up schools and hostels. I have worked in rural communities in which Christians were not respected due to their faith, and were banned from shops, restaurants and cafes; in such places, our faithful were not allowed to touch glasses or other eating implements used by the majority community. And we have supported girls from minority faith backgrounds who are particularly at risk. These are children who, despite the fact that they are only minors, are kidnapped, forced to convert and marry – and they also suffer rape and other abuse. The plight of these girls shows that living as a religious minority in Pakistan is becoming increasingly problematic.

And, although there have been some improvements, amendments to the blasphemy laws in the 1980s are exploited by extremists who misuse the legislation to terrorise minority faith communities. These poor and marginalised families live in fear of being accused of blasphemy, a crime which is punishable by execution or life imprisonment. I have been involved in many cases, not least that of Asia Bibi, who was on death row for nearly a decade before justice finally won through.

The case of Salamat Masih and his two uncles will stay with me forever. Salamat was accused of writing blasphemous comments about the Muslim Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The two uncles were also accused. Never mind that Salamat was only 12 and illiterate, never mind that the offending script was calligraphy and used religious language normally only used by Muslim clergy. In spite of this, the three were charged, but before anything could happen Salamat and his uncles were shot by three men brandishing automatic rifles. One uncle, Manzoor Masih, died of his injuries; the other uncle, Rehmat Masih, and Salamat himself were severely injured, but survived by the grace of God. Worse was to come when Salamat and

his surviving uncle were sentenced to death. I worked ceaselessly with the family lawyer to overturn the sentence. Eventually, we succeeded. Sadly, the judge who acquitted them also was murdered in cold blood by the extremists. In the decades since then, we have worked hard to help rebuild the lives of Salamat, his surviving uncle, their relatives and 40 families from their village who fled on the night that the accusations were first made. I am grateful to Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) for its help to families in dire straits and its support for our advocacy for those falsely accused.

I am also grateful to ACN for its work in the field of religious liberty. Indeed, this *Religious Freedom in the World Report* could not be more timely. The more the world knows about acts of religious hatred and neglect, the more the world will be able to do something about them. In a complex and hurting world, the best safeguard against knee-jerk responses as well as ineffectual virtue-signalling is clear and comprehensive reportage, complemented by insightful and balanced analysis. This is what ACN's report is committed to providing. It follows cases of religious freedom abuses long after the TV cameras have gone and the story has moved on. The charity is to be commended for its thoroughgoing defence of religious freedom – a foundational human right which is no less important today than in years gone by.
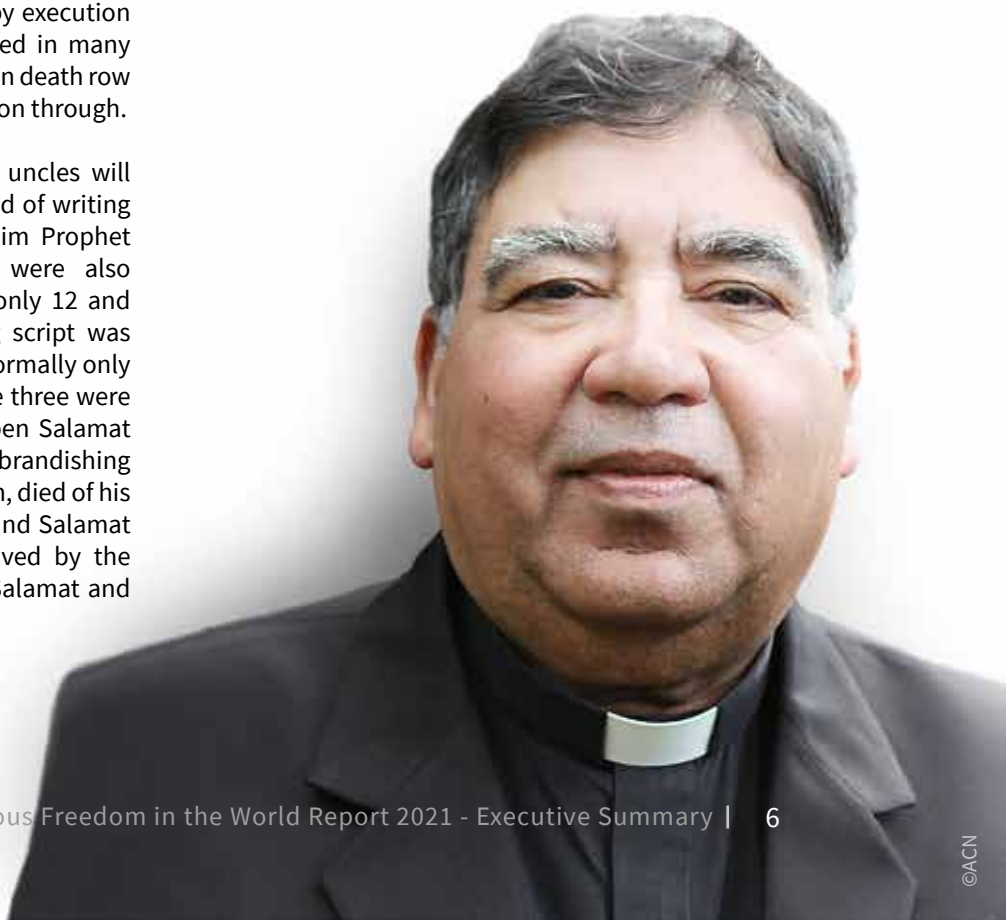
Main Findings

Religious freedom is violated in almost one third of the world's countries (31.6 percent), where two thirds of the world's population lives. 62 countries out of a total of 196 face very severe violations of religious freedom. The number of people living in these countries is close to 5.2 billion, as the worst offenders include some of the most populous nations in the world (China, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nigeria). Aid to the Church in Need's classifications are as follows:

a) **The Red category,** which denotes the existence of persecution, includes 26 countries which are home to 3.9 billion people or just over half (51 percent) of the world's population. This classification includes 12 African countries and two countries where investigations of possible genocide are ongoing, namely China and Myanmar (Burma).

b) **The Orange category**, which denotes the existence of discrimination, includes 36 countries, home to 1.24 billion people. Slight improvements are identified in nine countries, while the situation in 20 countries is worsening.

c) **The "under observation" classification** includes countries where newly emerging factors of concern have been observed which have the potential to cause a fundamental breakdown in freedom of religion. The Regional Analysis maps identify these countries with the symbol of a magnifying glass.

d) **In all classifications, hate crimes occur** in the form of attacks with a bias against religious people and property.

e) The remainder of the countries are not classified, but that does not necessarily mean all is perfect in matters concerning the fundamental right to freedom of religion.

During the period under review, there has been a significant increase in the severity of religiously-motivated persecution and oppression which is the principal category of concern.

1. **Transnational jihadist networks spreading across the Equator aspire to be transcontinental "caliphates".** So-called Islamic State and Al-Qaeda, with ideological and material patronage from the Middle East, affiliate with, and further radicalise, local armed militias to establish "caliphate provinces" along the Equator; a crescent of jihadist violence stretches from Mali to Mozambique in Sub-Saharan Africa, to the Comoros in the Indian Ocean, and to the Philippines in the South China Sea.

2. **A** "**cyber-caliphate", expanding globally, is now an established tool of online recruitment and radicalisation in the West.** Islamist terrorists employ sophisticated digital technologies to recruit, radicalise and attack. Counter-terrorism units, although not able to neutralise the online terrorist communications, were nonetheless able to foil attacks in several Western countries.
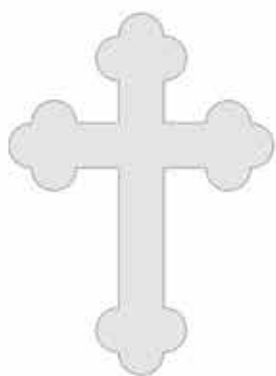
3. **Religious minorities blamed for the pandemic.** Pre-existing societal prejudices against religious minorities in countries like China, Niger, Turkey, Egypt and Pakistan led to increased discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic through, for example, a denial of access to food and medical aid.

4. **Authoritarian governments and fundamentalist groups have stepped up religious persecution.** Groundswell movements of majoritarian religious nationalism – manipulated by governments and by co-opted religious leaders – led to the rise of majoritarian ethno-religious supremacy in Hindu-majority and Buddhist-majority countries in Asia. These movements have further oppressed religious minorities, reducing them to the status of *de facto* second-class citizens.

5. **Sexual violence used as a weapon against religious minorities.** Crimes against girls and women abducted, raped, and obliged to change their faith in forced conversions, were recorded in a growing number of countries. The increasing number of these violations, which are often committed with impunity, fuel concerns that they form part of a fundamentalist strategy to hasten the disappearance of certain religious groups in the long run.

6. **Repressive surveillance technologies increasingly target faith groups.** 626 million AI-enhanced surveillance cameras and smartphone scanners at key pedestrian checkpoints, producing data which is cross-referenced by analytical platforms and coupled with an integrated social credit system, will ensure that religious leaders and the faithful adhere to the edicts of the Chinese Communist Party.

7. **30.4 million Muslims in China and Myanmar (including Uyghur and Rohingya Muslims) face severe persecution**, and the international community has only just begun to apply international law to stop it.

8. **The West has jettisoned tools that reduce radicalisation.** Even though governments recognise that teaching world religions in schools reduces radicalisation, and increases interreligious understanding among young people, a growing number of countries have discontinued religious education classes.

9. **Polite persecution.** The term reflects the rise of new "rights" or cultural norms which, as Pope Francis states, consign religions "to the quiet obscurity of the individual's conscience or relegates them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques." These new cultural norms, enshrined in law, result in an individual's rights to freedom of conscience and religion coming into a profound conflict with the legal obligation to comply with these laws.

10. **Interreligious dialogue** – **a new impetus from the Vatican.** Pope Francis co-signed the declaration on "Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together" with the Grand Imam Ahamad Al-Tayyib of Al-Azar, the leader of the Sunni Muslim world. The Pope celebrated the first ever papal Mass on the Arabian peninsula. At the end of the period of review, the Pope was due to visit Iraq, his first to a Shia majority country, to deepen interreligious dialogue.

"A Precious Asset": the right to freedom of religion or belief

By Dr. Heiner Bielefeldt

Freedom of religion or belief is a "precious asset". This way of referring to the fundamental right, which first occurred in the historic Kokkinakis case (1993)[3], has become standard usage in judgements of the European Court of Human Rights. The Court has indicated that religious freedom, apart from its obvious significance for the followers of various religions, is indispensable for shaping respectful coexistence in a modern democracy. It is neither a luxury nor a privilege. To quote the Court, freedom of religion or belief is "one of the foundations of a democratic society".[4]

Notwithstanding the European Court of Human Rights' appreciation of the importance of the right, freedom of religion or belief has once again become a contested issue, not least in Europe. In recent years, new questions have arisen. While some of them concern practical issues about how best to implement this human right, other questions betray a certain skepticism concerning the ongoing relevance of freedom of religion or belief in a modern secular society. Does freedom of religion or belief privilege certain religious worldviews? What is its scope, and where are its limits? Do we actually need a human right that specifically deals with issues of religion and belief? Would it not be sufficient to guarantee everyone's freedom to express their various opinions, standpoints and convictions, including religious ones? What is the relationship of this right with other human rights? What is the role of freedom of religion or belief within broader anti-discrimination agendas? These are far-reaching questions.

Freedom of religion or belief enjoys the elevated status of an inalienable human right. It is enshrined in international and regional human rights instruments. It also fully incorporates all the principles which jointly define other human rights: universalism, freedom and equality. The main purpose of human rights is to institutionalise respect for everyone's human dignity. In the face of widespread misunderstandings of the right, it is worth emphasizing that freedom of religion or belief does not protect religions or belief systems in themselves, nor is it the direct projection of religious views or values into the framework of human rights. Instead, *qua* its nature as a human right, freedom of religion or belief protects human beings against all forms of coercion, intimidation and discrimination, in the vast area of their religious or belief-related convictions and practices. Right holders are human beings, as individuals and in community with others. This consistent focus on human beings – their dignity, freedom and equality – constitutes the common denominator which connects freedom of religion or belief to all other human rights.

Within the broader network of human rights, freedom of religion or belief at the same time has a unique role to play. It gives recognition to a crucial dimension of our humanness, namely, the fact that we human beings adopt and cherish profound, identity-shaping convictions, which can permeate all aspects of our lives, in private as well as in public. To quote the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance, "religion or belief, for anyone who professes either, is one of the fundamental elements of his conception of life". In spite of overlaps with freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of religion or belief thus has its own distinct characteristics. This makes it an indispensable human right and warrants a critical defence of the right against contemporary tendencies to marginalise and trivialise it. Moreover, freedom of religion or belief protects a broad variety of practical manifestations of people's existential convictions, such as the freedom to worship together with others, to display one's religious identity visibly, to observe religious rules, to educate one's own children in conformity with one's convictions, to build an infrastructure ranging from kindergartens to graveyards and many other practices. Without appreciating the specific role of freedom of religion or belief, human rights would fail to do justice to the human condition; indeed, they would cease to be fully humane.

The fact that the various human rights share the same general purpose, namely, to protect the dignity of all human beings, does not preclude occasional conflicts arising from the exercise of the different rights. Dealing with tensions arising between different human rights is actually a normal part of human rights practice. It would therefore be a grave misunderstanding to see religious freedom as an obstacle to broader human rights agendas, for example in the area of non-discrimination. Not only is freedom of religion or belief indispensable for an appropriate understanding of human rights in general, it also contributes to an adequately complex understanding of non-discrimination agendas. If it sometimes adds an element of "complication", the main reason is that human beings are

actually "complicated" beings. As humans, we have manifold needs, wishes, vulnerabilities, identities and creative options. The possibility of cherishing existential convictions which permeate our innermost being and shape our perceptions and priorities is part of what makes us human. Just as human rights would be unthinkable without religious freedom, non-discrimination agendas would be incomplete without accommodating the significance of religious views and practices.

Freedom of religion or belief, furthermore, plays an important role in the ongoing debates about the secular nature of the modern state. Secularity has become a defining feature of modern democracies. To a large extent, it also characterizes modern society. Upon a closer view, however, it turns out that the term secularity harbours very different meanings. Maintaining the secular nature of a constitution can represent the ongoing task of keeping the public space open for religious and non-religious diversity in society. Yet secularity can also be a proxy for post-religious and anti-religious worldviews, which may permeate public institutions and public life. The line between these open and restrictive forms of secularity may be thin, and no one knows where exactly it runs; yet it does exist. Respect

for freedom of religion or belief provides a solid basis for cherishing an open and inclusive understanding of secular democratic constitutions. It furthermore reminds us that secularity can only make sense when it is in the service of respect for people's freedom in private and in public. This is an important task.

The realisation of freedom of religion or belief in our increasingly pluralistic modern societies has become a difficult task. Given the inexhaustible diversity of belief systems, religious and moral convictions, and individual and communitarian practices, freedom of religion or belief has become subject to many far-reaching questions which warrant a thorough public debate. At any rate, people continue to search for an ultimate meaning in life, to cherish their existential convictions, to worship together with others and to raise their children in conformity with the values they hold in high esteem. Living together in a pluralistic and democratic society requires a culture of respect, which would not flourish without freedom of religion or belief. The right to freedom of religion or belief certainly continues to be "one of the foundations of a democratic society", as the European Court of Human Rights reminds us. Indeed, it is a precious asset.

Global Analysis

By Dr. Marcela Szymanski

While the loss of fundamental rights such as religious freedom can occur suddenly, for example through conflict and war, in many cases it is not an overnight event; it is often a process of erosion that occurs over years. Like individual tiles of a roof being blown away one by one – or a few at a time – by increasingly strong winds, the observer ultimately recognises that there is no longer any cover, and he or she is exposed to the winds. These winds take the form of authoritarian governments, transnational terrorist networks, or fundamentalist religious leaders goading lynch mobs.

The reasons for the erosion of the right to religious freedom are manifest, but it can also occur as a result of the friction created by the introduction of new laws and regulations that, having identified religion as part of the problem, gradually force religious identities out of the public space. The state, as the guardian of the law, is obliged to enable the individual to "manifest his religion or belief in public or private"[5], keeping the public sphere open for all religions, and for those without religion. Without these state protections, however, the inalienable human right becomes vulnerable, and risks disappearing.

Based on our evaluation of the country reports and regional analyses, a map highlights where the protections to religious freedom are almost all gone (countries in red); where these protections are under threat (countries in orange); and – with a new classification, "under observation" – where newly emerging factors of concern have been observed potentially endangering the individual's right to freedom of religion.

Hindsight, regrettably, confirms the aforementioned observations. Signs of religious freedom violations observed in our 2018 report accelerated and expanded to the current situation, where systematic and egregious attacks are coming from governments, whether China or North Korea, as well as international terror groups, such as Boko Haram or the so-called Islamic State and other fundamentalist groups. These problems have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. States have used the insecurity to increase control over their citizens, and non-state actors have taken advantage of the confusion to recruit, expand and provoke wider humanitarian crises.

The two-year period under review, however, has also revealed significant progress especially in interreligious dialogue, as well as the increasingly important role of religious leaders in the mediation and resolution of hostilities and war.

Extreme persecution (Map: countries marked in red)

Close to four billion people live in the 26 countries classified as suffering the most intense violations of religious freedom. They comprise just over half (51 percent) of the world's population.

Almost half of these countries are in Africa. In Sub-Saharan Africa, populations have historically been divided between farmers and nomadic cattle herders, occasionally experiencing outbreaks of violence resulting from long-simmering ethnic and resource-based conflicts – more recently exacerbated by climate change, growing poverty and attacks by armed criminal gangs. Notwithstanding these, for the most part, communities and different faith groups have lived together in relative peace. Within the last decade, however, violence has erupted across the region with unimaginable ferocity.

This paroxysm of conflict released the pent-up frustration of generations upon generations of disenfranchised youthful populations who have suffered poverty, corruption and poor educational and work opportunities. These frustrations, in turn, provided fuel for the rise of armed groups including Islamist militants, both local, and more recently foreign – transnational jihadist groups engaged in a targeted, systematic persecution of all those, Muslims and Christians alike, who do not accept the extreme Islamist ideology. Over the last two years, jihadist groups have consolidated their presence in Sub-Saharan Africa and the region has become a haven for over two dozen actively operating – and increasingly cooperating – groups in 14 countries, including affiliates of the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda. The development of these affiliates has occurred within an alarmingly short timeframe, and the pattern is familiar. Attacks by local criminal gangs, spurred on by Salafi jihadist preachers, progress from the sporadic and arbitrary to the ideological and targeted. In certain cases, a gang's efforts culminate in a sinister distinction – "affiliation" as a province of a so-called caliphate of a transnational Islamist network **(see the Africa Backgrounder)**.

Millions have fled the conflict regions, either as internally displaced persons or as refugees into neighbouring countries. Serious human rights violations have been reported, with women and children often the victims. Millions of people in Sub-Saharan Africa face destitution, with the forced abandonment of fields and traditional small businesses. Starvation then ensues

as armed groups impede access to humanitarian aid; women and children are enslaved, and the men are forcibly recruited into the ranks of the extremists. As evidenced in the country reports, in nations like Burkina Faso, according to the World Health Organization, by the end of 2020 more than 60 percent of the territory was not accessible to humanitarian aid workers.

Governments are either unable or, in some cases apparently, unwilling to address the issue. Considerably better equipped than the local armed forces, the jihadist militias fund their activities through kidnapping, pillaging, and the illicit trafficking of humans, precious minerals and drugs. Only recently have multi-national task forces been established to help the local governments **(see the Regional Analysis and Africa Backgrounder)**.

While religious freedom in Africa suffers from intercommunal and jihadist violence, in Asia the persecution of religious groups stems mainly from Marxist dictatorships. In China and North Korea, which are the worst offenders in the red category, religious freedom is non-existent, as are the majority of human rights.

In North Korea, no fundamental human rights are acknowledged and the regime targets any group that challenges the personality cult of Kim Jong-un's rule – although the treatment of Christians is particularly severe. In this regard, the regime can be defined as "exterminationist".

Of China's population of 1.4 billion, almost 900 million self-identify as adherents of some form of spirituality or religion, and state control is relentless. Mass surveillance, including artificial intelligence-refined technology, a social credit system that rewards and punishes individual behaviour, and brutal crackdowns on religious and ethnic groups, enforce the state supremacy. As the Regional Analysis reveals, "the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has one the most pervasive and effective state-run engines of religious control currently in operation anywhere in the world." This is particularly evident through mass internment and coercive "re-education programs" affecting more than a million, mostly Muslim, ethnic Uyghurs in Xinjiang Province **(see the China Backgrounder)**. Although there are approximately 30 million Muslims in China, including some 13 million Uyghurs adhering to a Sunni branch of Islam **(see the Fact Box on Branches of Islam)**, rather than trying to protect fellow believers, some Sunni Muslim nations instead cooperate with the Chinese authorities by deporting back Uyghurs seeking refuge. Out of all UN member countries, only the United States and Canada have described China's actions as genocide.

Myanmar (Burma) has also, over the period under review, lurched towards the worst crime against humanity, namely genocide. Ongoing assaults against Christians and Hindus in Kachin State have been cast into the shadows by a massive, multi-phased attack by the military and other armed groups against the mostly Muslim Rohingya population in Rakhine State. Systematically driven into neighbouring Bangladesh, an estimated one million Rohingyas are sheltering in camps and are subject to sickness, squalor, sexual abuse and murder. In contrast to China, the government of Myanmar has been ordered by the International Court of Justice to implement measures to prevent genocide, while an investigation proceeds.

Alongside religious restrictions imposed by Marxist dictatorships and military regimes, a grave challenge to religious freedom in Asia comes from increasing groundswell movements of ethno-religious nationalism. Perhaps the most explicit example of this is India, home to a nearly 1.4 billion majority Hindu population, though with significant populations of religious minorities including Muslims and Christians. With an underperforming economic sector and a need to bolster votes, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (or BJP) projects an increasingly nationalist vision intended to resonate with the majority population, namely that India is inherently Hindu. India is not alone. The trend affects billions in this continent, predominantly in democratic or semi-democratic contexts favouring the rise of the majoritarian religious nationalism in Muslim-majority Pakistan, Hindu-majority Nepal, and Buddhist-majority Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, and Bhutan **(see the Mainland Asia Regional Analysis and the Backgrounder on Ethno-Religious Nationalism)**.

Common to all of the countries indicated in red, but most evident in Pakistan, is the profound impact on the most vulnerable – women and girls of the "wrong religion" who are abducted, raped, and obliged to change their faith in so-called forced conversions. As minorities and thus *de facto* second-class citizens, they stand little to no chance of obtaining justice and redress, despite the fact that they are victims of crimes punishable under common law. The rights of these girls and women are so comprehensively denied that they become slaves – sex workers and manual labourers **(see the Pakistan Case Study and the country reports on Nigeria and India)**.

Severe cases of violation (Map: countries marked in orange)

1.24 billion people live in the 36 countries where full religious freedom is neither enjoyed, nor constitutionally guaranteed. These countries include 16 percent of all the people in the world.

Countries where conditions worsened, entering the classification of 'orange' during the period under review, are predominantly those which have passed laws which provide for unequal treatment of religious groups. Illusions of newfound freedoms in the aftermath of the Arab Spring revolts in North Africa and

the Levant countries (in 2010-2012) faded as governments increasingly applied already restrictive laws to assert their power, control the dominant ideology and tighten their grip on religious leaders. Nations such as Algeria, Tunisia and Turkey function as "hybrid pseudo-democracies" which allow for electoral processes, but strictly control who is eligible to run for office, how long they may remain in office and the ability to modify re-election laws to their benefit **(see the Middle East and North Africa Regional Analysis)**.

During the period under review, President Erdogan put aside Ataturk's laicism and introduced a neo-Ottoman foreign policy positioning Turkey as a global Sunni power. As exemplified by the conversion of the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul into a mosque, Islam is promoted in every aspect of public life. Internationally, Erdogan has pursued military interventions in Libya, Syria, northern Iraq, and in the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Turkey has also sought influence, and impacted religious freedom, in Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo and Cyprus **(see the corresponding country reports and Middle East and North Africa Regional Analysis)**.

In over a dozen countries which enjoy normal, even friendly, relations with the West, being a non-Muslim now carries a higher risk than in the previous period reviewed. States in the Middle East, South and Central Asia, and the former Soviet countries and neighbouring nations, have passed laws aimed at preventing the expansion of what they consider foreign religions, and also barring "non-traditional Islam". Freedom of worship is guaranteed but not full religious freedom.

For example, in some states, apostasy from the state or majoritarian religion is punishable – sometimes by death. In countries where conversion from the majority religion is not forbidden by law, it is effectively forbidden as a consequence of strong societal pressures. In many of these countries, proselytism of people belonging to the state religion is illegal. As the Middle East and North Africa Regional Analysis attests: laws against blasphemy silence minority faith groups; societal tolerance towards Christians continues to be low; and, as numerous incidents in Upper Egypt confirm, violence can erupt any time.

A positive development in the period under review is the rapprochement between Christians and Muslims led by Pope Francis. Following his meeting with the Grand Imam Ahamad Al-Tayyib of Al-Azar, the leader of the Sunni Muslim world, in 2019, the two religious leaders met again in 2020 in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to co-sign the Abu Dhabi Declaration on Human Fraternity. This papal visit to the UAE was marked by the first ever celebration of a papal Mass on the Arabian Peninsula. The 2021 visit of Pope Francis to Iraq – his first to a Shia majority country – will hopefully deepen interreligious dialogue and help highlight the dire situation of religious minorities in Iraq and beyond **(see the corresponding country reports and Middle East and North Africa Regional Analysis)**.

The COVID-19 pandemic upended traditional practices around the world in areas such as health care, governance, and the economy, often with profound implications for human rights including that of religious free-

dom. As the COVID-19 Backgrounder reveals, in less developed areas of the world, the illness not only revealed underlying societal weaknesses, but exacerbated existing fragilities resulting from poverty, corruption, and vulnerable state structures. Terrorist groups and Islamist extremists, for example in Africa, took advantage of the government distraction to increase their violent attacks, entrench territorial gains and recruit new members. Pre-existing societal prejudices against minority religious communities also led to increased discrimination, for example in Pakistan where Muslim charities denied Christians and members of minority faith groups access to food and medical aid. In the West, emergency measures taken in response to the pandemic impacted freedom of assembly and religious freedom, prompting criticism and debate **(see the Backgrounder on COVID-19)**.

Countries under observation (Map: marked on Regional Analysis maps)

A new category has been introduced in this report, countries "under observation", where newly emerging factors have been observed which provoke concerns about negative impacts on freedom of religion.

This category is most tangibly illustrated through an increase in hate crimes, with a religious bias, against people and property. These range from vandalism of places of worship and religious symbols including mosques, synagogues, statues and cemeteries, to violent crimes against faith leaders and religious believers **(see the OSCE Regional Analysis)**. A United Nations

initiative to protect places of worship launched in September 2019 had no effect on violent demonstrations in Latin America where protestors in anti-government demonstrations attacked and destroyed religious symbols and property **(see the Chile Case Study)**.

In what Pope Francis has defined as "polite persecution", we observe the rise of new "rights", new cultural norms created according to evolving values, which consign religions "to the quiet obscurity of the individual's conscience or relegates them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques." For example, in the West, the right to conscientious objection on religious grounds for health care professionals in relation to issues concerning abortion and euthanasia is no longer meaningfully protected in law. Graduates from particular confessional universities are increasingly denied access to certain professions. Provisions for the right of religious groups to run their own schools according to their own ethos are also in jeopardy in several countries. These new rights, enshrined in law, result in an individual's rights to freedom of conscience and religion coming into a profound conflict with the legal obligation to comply with these laws **(see the Backgrounders on "Polite Persecution" and "A Precious Asset": the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief)**. This dissonance has already had, and will continue to have, a strong impact on over 84 percent of the world's population, who, according to the Pew Research Center[6], describe themselves as adhering to a religion or belief.

Pope Francis at an interreligious meeting in the Plain of Ur, the ‚birthplace' of Abraham on 6th March 2021 in Iraq.

Fr. AmeerJajeOP©ACN

Africa: a continent at risk from transnational jihadism

By Mark von Riedemann

The question facing Africa is not whether the continent is the next battleground against Islamist militants, but rather when will sufficient lives be lost and families displaced to move the international community to action? Already the numbers are in the hundreds of thousands, and millions, respectively.

Sub-Saharan Africa is ripe for the infiltration of Islamist ideologies. On account of generations of poverty, corruption, pre-existing intercommunal violence between herders and farmers over land rights (exacerbated by the consequences of climate change) and weak state structures, this area has become a breeding ground for marginalised and frustrated young men. This in turn has become a recruitment opportunity for extremists who prey on them with promises of wealth, power, and the ousting of corrupt authorities. This is bound all the more closely to the core of the human person by a profound manipulation of religion. Battle-hardened Islamist extremists have moved south from the plains of Iraq and Syria to link up with local criminal groups in the Sub-Saharan countries of Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, northern Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and Mozambique (see country reports).

The violence is horrific. Boys are forced into the ranks as child soldiers, rape is used as a weapon of war, and there are mass beheadings of men – Muslims and Christians alike – who dare refuse to join the jihadists. Research by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project reveals that the number of people killed by armed groups in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, and Mali from January to mid-April 2020 more than doubled compared to the same period in 2019[7]; and in Burkina Faso, as of February 2020, 765,000 people had been displaced by terrorist groups, up from 65,000 in the 12 previous months.[8]

The militants, in many cases profit-driven mercenaries or local fighters pursuing local interests, incited by preachers adhering to an ideology of Salafi Jihadism, target state authorities, the military and the police, as well as civilians – including village leaders, teachers (who are threatened because of the secular curriculum), Muslim and Christian leaders, and the faithful. The financial resources of these armed terrorist groups are derived principally from looting, extortion, human and drug trafficking, and kidnapping.

Although Muslims and Christians are equally victims to extremist violence, with the growing Islamist radicalisation Christians tend increasingly to become

Ugandan soldiers of the African Union Mission liberating Kurtunwaarey from the terrorist group Al Shabaab, in Somalia on 31st August 2014.

[©AMISOM / Tobin Jones(CC0 1.0)]

a specific target for the terrorists, eliminating the characteristic social and religious pluralism and harmony of the region.
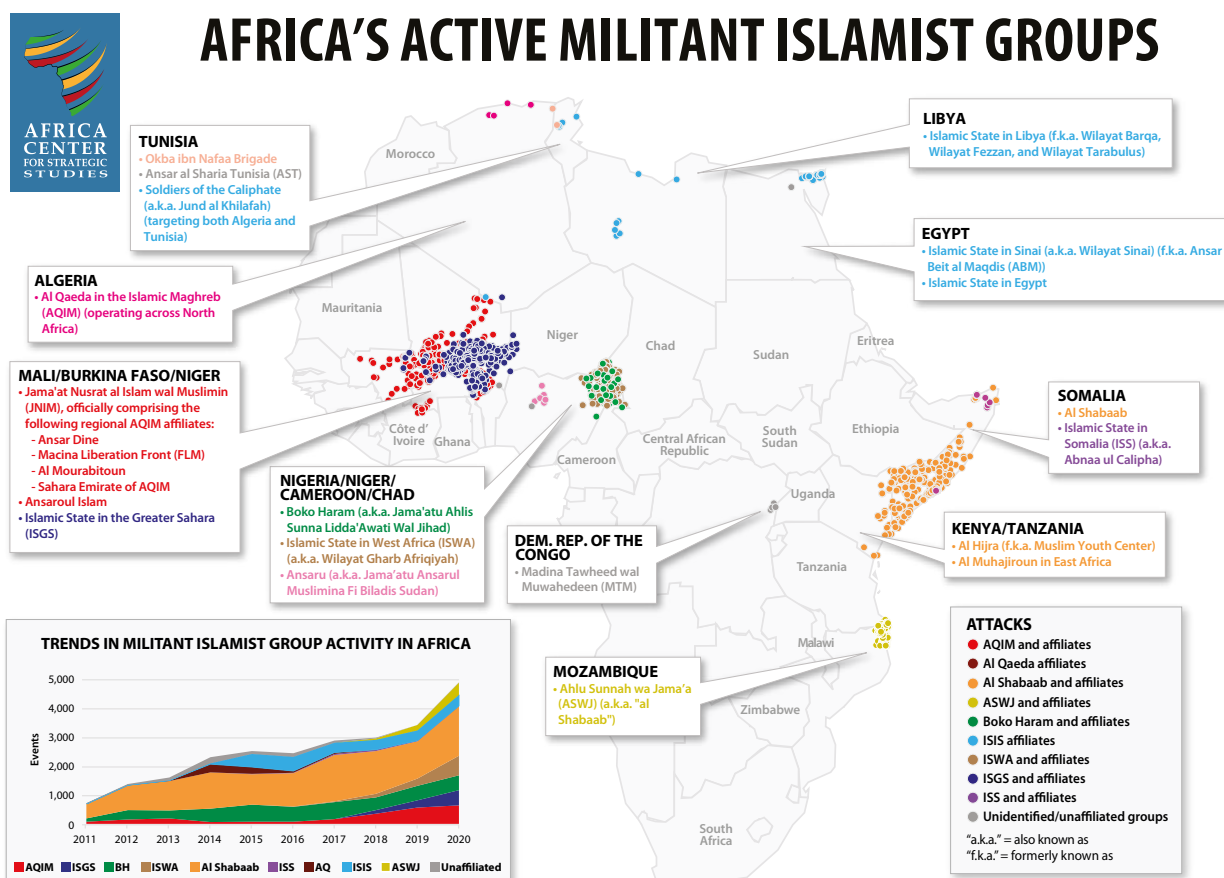
According to the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, the threat from militant Islamist groups in Africa is not monolithic but comprises a constantly shifting mix of roughly two dozen groups actively operating – and increasingly cooperating – in 14 countries.[9] The most active Islamist groups in Sub-Saharan Africa include: the Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), which is a coalition of Islamist affiliates such as the Front de Libération du Macina (FLM) and Al-Qaeda (AQIM); Boko Haram; Ansaroul Islam; the Katiba Salaheddine; the Jihad al-Islamiyya; Al-Shabaab in Somalia; and the transnational Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), West Africa (ISWA), Central Africa (ISCA) and Somalia (ISS).[10]

New to this sinister club is Mozambique. The jihadist group Ahlu-Sunnah Wa-Jama (ASWJ) aligned with the Islamic State, has launched an insurgency in the majority Muslim province of Cabo Delgado and taken control of the port of Mocimboa da Praia, which possesses key infrastructure for the processing of the enormous natural gas reserves discovered off Mozambique's northern coast.[11] From Mozambique, jihadists proclaim that they have established Islamic State "provinces of the Caliphate" in Comoros, northern Madagascar, and across the Indian Ocean to Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines (see the country reports).

The Danish Institute for International Studies notes: "It is widely agreed upon amongst scholars of transnational jihadism that its two leading organizations, al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, rarely start new conflicts. Instead, they tap into local grievances, establish linkages with marginalized groups in the society, and in the long run, transform what may initially have been an ethnically, or politically motivated conflict, into a religiously framed, armed struggle."[12]

In a 24th February 2020 interview with Aid to the Church in Need, Professor Olivier Hanne – a French Islamologist and author of "Jihad in the Sahel" – was asked how the situation in the region was likely to develop. He stated: "I fear that over the next five years the territorial expansion of the armed terrorist groups will continue. Drug trafficking will become more organized and increase. After having extended their grip on the Muslim Sahara, the next target will be the places where Christians and Muslims live alongside one another … in the next five years these African states will need the support of the West if they are to avoid catastrophe."[13]

AFRICA'S ACTIVE MILITANT ISLAMIST GROUPS

TUNISIA
• Okba ibn Nafaa Brigade
• Ansar al Sharia Tunisia (AST)
• Soldiers of the Caliphate (a.k.a. Jund al Khilafah) (targeting both Algeria and Tunisia)

LIBYA
• Islamic State in Libya (f.k.a. Wilayat Barqa, Wilayat Fezzan, and Wilayat Tarabulus)

EGYPT
• Islamic State in Sinai (a.k.a. Wilayat Sinai) (f.k.a. Ansar Beit al Maqdis (ABM))
• Islamic State in Egypt

ALGERIA
• Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) (operating across North Africa)

MALI/BURKINA FASO/NIGER
• Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), officially comprising the following regional AQIM affiliates:
  - Ansar Dine
  - Macina Liberation Front (FLM)
  - Al Mourabitoun
  - Sahara Emirate of AQIM
• Ansaroul Islam
• Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)

NIGERIA/NIGER/CAMEROON/CHAD
• Boko Haram (a.k.a. Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad)
• Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA) (a.k.a. Wilayat Gharb Afriqiyah)
• Ansaru (a.k.a. Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan)

DEM. REP. OF THE CONGO
• Madina Tawheed wal Muwahedeen (MTM)

SOMALIA
• Al Shabaab
• Islamic State in Somalia (ISS) (a.k.a. Abnaa ul Calipha)

KENYA/TANZANIA
• Al Hijra (f.k.a. Muslim Youth Center)
• Al Muhajiroun in East Africa

MOZAMBIQUE
• Ahlu Sunnah wa Jama'a (ASWJ) (a.k.a. "al Shabaab")

ATTACKS
● AQIM and affiliates
● Al Qaeda affiliates
● Al Shabaab and affiliates
● ASWJ and affiliates
● Boko Haram and affiliates
● ISIS affiliates
● ISWA and affiliates
● ISGS and affiliates
● ISS and affiliates
● Unidentified/unaffiliated groups

"a.k.a." = also known as
"f.k.a." = formerly known as

TRENDS IN MILITANT ISLAMIST GROUP ACTIVITY IN AFRICA

Legend: AQIM, ISGS, BH, ISWA, Al Shabaab, ISS, AQ, ISIS, ASWJ, Unaffiliated

Y-axis: Events (0–5,000)
X-axis: 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020

Updated: February 2021
Note: Compiled by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, this graphic shows violent events involving the listed groups over the 12-month period ending December 31, 2020. Data on attacks or fatalities does not attempt to distinguish the perpetrators of the events. Group listings are intended for informational purposes only and should not be considered official designations. Due to the fluid nature of many groups, the listed affiliations may change.
Sources: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); Daniel Byman; HumAngle; Thomas Joscelyn; SITE Intelligence Group; The Soufan Group; Stanford University's Mapping Militants Project; Stratfor; Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium (TRAC); and Aaron Y. Zelin.

Nigeria: the mass abduction of school-children

On 11th December 2020, Boko Haram fighters raided the Government Science Secondary School in Kankara, kidnapping over 300 male students.[14] The terror organization claimed responsibility for the attack citing Boko Haram's opposition to Western-style education. On 18th December, the Nigerian military freed the abducted students. The governor of Nigeria's Katsina State, Aminu Masarithe, claimed that no ransom had been paid.[15]

On 17th February 2021, gunmen wearing military uniforms entered the Government Science College, at Kagara, in the Rafi Local Government Area of Niger State, and kidnapped 27 people, including students, teachers, and their family members.[16] They were released on 27th February.

On 26th February 2021, approximately 300 girls were kidnapped from a government-run boarding school in the town of Jangebe. According to local sources, "they came on about 20 motorcycles and they marched the abducted girls into the forest."[17] The girls were released on 2nd March. The Governor of Zamfara State, Bello Matawalle, denied paying a ransom, but later President Buhari "admitted state governments had paid kidnappers 'with money and vehicles' in the past and urged them to review the policy."[18]

The most recent attack, the third mass abduction of students in three months, brings the total number of people kidnapped to more than 600 since December 2020.[19] State authorities claim jihadi motivation is not considered as a principal element in the kidnappings. According to statements, the attacks on schools in the northwest "have been carried out by 'bandits', a loose term for kidnappers, armed robbers, cattle rustlers, Fulani herdsmen and other armed militia",[20] principally for financial gain. Yet some observers note that the escalation in mass abductions indicates a cooperation between Boko Haram and Fulani militants and that, in fact, these have attacks have a profound religious component.[21] The Sultan of Sokoto stated: "Make no mistake, the abduction is a classic example of the philosophical foundation of Boko Haram – that western education is forbidden. That's why their targets are always on boarding schools, especially science schools, considered atheistic in pedagogy."[22]

One of 300 schoolgirls kidnapped in northwest Nigeria is reunited with her family in Jangabe, in Zamfara state on 3rd March 2021.

©AP Photo/Sunday Alamba

Mauritania ↓
Gambia 🔍
Guinea Conakry 🔍
Liberia 🔍
Burkina Faso ↓
Ivory Coast 🔍
Togo 🔍
Central African Republic 🔍
Cameroon ↓
Mali ↓
Niger ↓
Chad ↓
Nigeria ↓
Sudan ↑
Eritrea ↓
Djibouti ↓
Somalia ↓
Ethiopia ↓
South Sudan 🔍
Kenya 🔍
Uganda 🔍
Rwanda 🔍
Tanzania ↓
Comoros ↓
Madagascar ↓
Mauritius ↓
Democratic Republic of Congo ↓
Mozambique ↓
South Africa 🔍

REGIONAL ANALYSIS

East and West Africa

By Dr. Miriam Diez-Bosch and Dr. Oscar Mateos

The countries of East and West Africa, lying primarily in the Sub-Saharan region, are home to a complex mosaic of ethnic, religious and linguistic groups, and a predominantly youthful population. While the region has considerable human and natural resources, problems of poverty, corruption, and a lack of educational and employment opportunities for young people, results in frustration and social instability. This is readily exploited by local and transnational criminal and jihadist groups. Although there have been severe religious freedom violations committed by jihadist armed groups, positive steps have been taken by local governments and, to a lesser extent, members of other religions, to tackle religious discrimination and promote interfaith dialogue. The Catholic Church, furthermore, has become an important political actor participating in conflict resolution efforts.

Jihadism in the region

In many countries, attacks by armed groups are often arbitrary, profit-oriented, rooted in cycles of intercommunal violence, and indifferent to the religious identity of their victims, with attacks being made on Muslims and Christians alike. Increasingly, however, as the country reports indicate, a number of countries are being profoundly affected by Islamist extremism, predominantly in the regions of West Africa and the Horn of

Africa. During the period under review, several jihadist groups continued to be active including: Boko Haram, Islamic State (IS - Daesh), Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), and Al-Shabaab.

Boko Haram has carried out attacks principally around Lake Chad, which borders the countries of Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon. This terrorist group has been responsible for atrocities perpetrated against security forces and civilians, which include killings, kidnappings and looting, and the burning of entire villages. Boko Haram has expanded its activities in northern Cameroon, in one instance killing 18 and injuring 11 civilians taking shelter in a displacement camp in the Far North region.[23] In Niger, the terrorists targeted Christians, forcing them to leave the area or face death (see country report). Some countries in the Lake Chad region have deployed a Multinational Joint Task Force to combat Boko Haram, but the terrorist organisation has proved resilient.

Other important armed extremist groups operating in this region are affiliates of the transnational Islamist group Islamic State (IS) and JNIM, a coalition of individual Islamist extremist entities including the transnational Al-Qaeda (AQ), known locally as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). In Mali and Niger, IS militants operate under the title of the Islamic State in the Great-

er Sahara (ISGS). Both JNIM and ISGS groups, committed to overthrowing the state and implementing Islamic law, carry out ambushes and attacks against soldiers and civilians, and even peacekeepers (in the case of Mali).[24] Understanding the jihadist violence is made more complex as a result of it being intertwined with intercommunal violence where ethnic groups, for example in Mali, have been accused of sheltering jihadists and attacked for so doing (see country report).

The IS terrorist group recently established itself in the Democratic Republic of Congo, claiming its first attack in Beni in 2019, and declaring that the country was the Central African province of the Islamic State (ISCAP).[25] Local Islamist armed groups have also pledged alliance to IS in northern Mozambique. As the Mozambique country report indicates, recent years have seen an increase in attacks in this area since local militias emerged at the end of 2017. The jihadists have committed savage acts of violence, killing soldiers, beheading dozens of civilians on several occasions – often men and boys who refuse to join their ranks – abducting women and children, and looting and burning villages.

In the Horn of Africa, Al-Shabaab has terrorized the population in Somalia, killing civilians and soldiers, and attacking government buildings and hotels. Of particular note was the brutal murder of the Mayor of Mogadishu by an Al-Shabaab female suicide bomber in 2019.[26] Militants have also seized Christians accused of proselytizing and kidnapped children for ransom or recruitment as child soldiers. The lack of religious freedom in the country has forced Christians to worship in secret fearing that, if they were identified, they could be abducted or killed. Al-Shabaab has also carried out terrorist strikes on and around the Kenya-Somalia border, seeking to identify and kill non-Muslims.[27]

In addition to the aforementioned jihadist groups, authorities in Mali, Niger, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique, have reported the presence of smaller locally-based armed groups. These militants often have links to criminal gangs and their motivation is as much the profits generated from illegal resource exploitation as Islamist extremism. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, approximately 134 different armed groups are active including the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). These Islamist militants attack targets mainly in the Kivu province where state and non-state actors compete for so-called "blood minerals", the spoils of mining for precious minerals and heavy metals.[28] In Mozambique, the native Ahlu-Sunnah Wa-Jama (ASWJ) insurgency, located in the northern Cabo Delgado province, threatens billion dollar international investments in natural gas projects. ASWJ pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in 2019, declaring its intent to establish a "caliphate" in the country.[29]

Discrimination on the basis of religion

Apart from the issues of severe violence related to Islamist extremism, in the period under review the country reports revealed cases of discrimination against, as well as persecution of, religious groups.

Incidents of discrimination were recorded in Senegal, Malawi and Liberia, where Muslim women were not allowed to wear the veil in schools or workplaces (see country reports). However, there have also been cases in which authorities have taken measures to address concerns. In South Africa, for example, the school schedule was adapted to accommodate Eid, and Muslim women are now allowed to wear the veil in the military.[30]

More worrying trends concerning persecution were recorded, including attacks by state and non-state actors targeting places of worship and religious leaders. Incidents were reported in Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Niger, Ethiopia and Sudan (see the country reports). In the latter, Sudanese authorities confiscated Church properties and security forces entered mosques during protests, violating the sanctity of places of worship.[31]

Although less frequent, cases of violent persecution have been recorded, notably retaliation by Muslims against Christian converts in Djibouti, Liberia and Uganda. These incidents have been particularly grave in Uganda where mobs beat and killed their victims because they had converted.[32]

The Catholic Church as a political actor

During the period under review, in a number of countries the Catholic Church has played an important diplomatic and pastoral role in the political arena. Bishops have publicly intervened, making statements to the media or to the government regarding electoral processes, publicly criticising corruption, and denouncing violence by security forces, protestors, and armed extremist groups. Most importantly, however, in some countries the Church has played an active role in electoral observation, mediation, and conflict resolution.

In Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burundi (see the country reports), the Catholic Church supported democratic processes by deploying thousands of observers to prevent electoral intimidation and fraud. It found irregularities in each country, even questioning the election result in the Democratic Republic of Congo where the Church asserted the electoral process was marred by fraud and that the winner was Martin Fayulu, rather than Felix Tshisekedi, as claimed by the authorities.[33]

The most active role that the Catholic Church has played politically has been its encouragement, support and mediation in peace talks. In the case of South Sudan's 2013-2020 civil war, the Sudanese Council of Churches consistently called for forgiveness and reconciliation, while serving as a hub for coordinating peacebuilding events. The Catholic Saint Egidio community mediated successful ceasefire agreements on two occasions.[34] Finally, in April 2019, Pope Francis invited the warring leaders of South Sudan to his residence for a two-day retreat in order to dialogue. The meeting, which made global headlines as the Pope was photographed kneeling to kiss the feet of President Kiir, provided a major impetus for the recommencement, and successful conclusion, of the peace process.[35] Demonstrating the positive role of religion in the field of negotiation and peace-building, both parties to the conflict thanked the local Church and the Pope for their involvement.

In Cameroon too, the Catholic Church has continued to play a significant mediating role in the Cameroonian Civil War that broke out in 2016 between the Francophone and Anglophone communities. Peace talks that took place in July 2020 were held in the home of the Archbishop of Yaoundé.[36] To date, according to Human Rights Watch, the violence has claimed the lives of more than 3,500 people.[37] The hostilities are still ongoing, but the Catholic hierarchy continues to condemn the violence calling for dialogue between the parties.

Sign of positive coexistence between religious groups

Despite the number of disturbing incidents reported throughout the region, there are countries in which there are good interreligious relations and efforts to promote religious tolerance. In Burundi, for instance, the Catholic Church invited and hosted 47 religious leaders from a broad range of confessional backgrounds to participate in a workshop to increase the capacity of all religious communities to engage in conflict resolution and to live a peaceful coexistence.[38] Additionally, as an example of peaceful coexistence, despite the disruptive presence of jihadists in Kenya, Catholic leaders collected donations for Muslims during the Christmas season and Muslim leaders did the same for Christians during religious celebrations such as Eid.[39]

The impact of COVID-19 on religious freedom

As a result of social distancing regulations imposed to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus, places of worship remained closed for several months, including during Holy Week for Christians and Ramadan for Muslims, in the majority of the countries in the region.

The closure of places of worship has, in a few countries, been met with protests. In Comoros and Niger, worshippers gathered in mosques to protest against the closure, as until then no cases of the virus had been reported. In Mozambique and Gabon, tensions arose when the governments extended the closures of places of worship, despite reopening markets, schools and hotels (see the country reports).

In Liberia, Guinea Bissau and Zambia, there were periods when religious leaders decided to keep churches and mosques closed, despite government permission to reopen them. As the country reports for Mali and Senegal indicate, mosques reopened for Ramadan celebrations, but church leaders decided not to reopen places of worship as a result of the high number of recorded COVID-19 cases.

Situations that require special attention

As revealed in the country reports, jihadist groups further consolidated their presence, with the unstable Sahel region becoming a haven for the Islamic State and armed groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda. The impact of this fundamentalist presence is made more complex by intercommunal violence and ethno-political conflicts, with worrying consequences for religious groups. Specifically, the religious affiliation of believers is often used as a marker with which to categorise them as belonging to one particular group or another in the conflict, thus making them vulnerable to attacks, even though religion *per se* is not the main reason for the violence.

The multinational military missions deployed in West Africa have not been successful in fighting against Boko Haram, which pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in 2015.[40] Furthermore, jihadists have also secured and established a presence in other areas: the Islamic State has declared six so-called "provinces of the caliphate" in Africa[41], and escalated its attacks in the northern region of Mozambique over the last two years.[42] Similarly, Somalia has witnessed violent attacks from Al-Shabaab and it remains to be seen how seriously circumstances will deteriorate with the end of the AMISOM mission in December 2020.[43]

Finally, a positive development occurred during the period under review with the change of regime in Sudan. The fall of Omar Al-Bashir, followed by the steps taken by the transitional government to promote religious coexistence, in clear contrast to the previous Islamist regime, ushered in a new era of religious freedom in the country. One of these steps was a public apology from the Minister of Religious Affairs and Endowments, Nasredin Mufreh, to Sudanese Christians "for the oppression and harm inflicted on your bodies, the destruction of your temples, the theft of your property, and the unjust arrest and prosecution of your servants and confiscation of church buildings."[44]

Mozambique: an uncontrolled cycle of violence

In early November 2020, fifteen boys and five adults were decapitated with machetes by Islamic State (IS) insurgents during an initiation rite for teenage boys. Following the attack in the small farming village of 24 de Marco in Muidumbe district, the jihadists brought the victim's bodies to a football pitch in the village of Muatide.[45] Later, a further 30 youths and adults in the same district were beheaded by jihadists in a similar assault, and their bodies were also brought to Muatide "in a gruesome display intended to strike fear into the local community".[46]

These massacres followed on the heels of an earlier mass attack in April 2020, in which an estimated 52 men were killed in the village of Xitaxi in Muidumbe district, after refusing to join the ranks of the jihadists.[47] In a statement to the public broadcaster TVM, police spokesman Orlando Mudumane explained: "The criminals tried to recruit young people to join their ranks, but there was resistance. This provoked the anger of the criminals, who indiscriminately killed, cruelly and diabolically, 52 young people."[48]

These examples highlight an intensifying trend of extreme violence and killing in Mozambique's northern Cabo Delgado province, in which it is calculated that over the last three years the fundamentalist group Ahlu-Sunnah Wa-Jama (locally known as Al Shabaab), affiliated with IS, has killed more than 2,500 civilians and displaced over 570,000 people.[49]

The rise of Islamist extremism in northern Mozambique is a complex and multi-causal phenomenon. Factors enabling the rapid spread and recruitment capacity of the jihadist networks include: poverty and corruption; weak state structures; a lack of education and employment opportunities; the arrival of transnational criminal networks benefitting from the illicit trade in timber, gems, gold or drugs; frustration among the local population at their exclusion from mineral profits; grievances generated by repressive actions committed by security forces; a lack of land rights; and fundamentalist influences from countries such as Saudi Arabia and Somalia. These roots, spurring the rise of groups like Al Shabaab, reflect a similar pattern and dynamic of Islamist radicalisation and extreme violence to those seen in regions such as the Lake Chad Basin, the Sahel and Somalia.

Despite the fact that all actors recognise the need to prioritise responses to the socio-economic roots of the conflict, the reaction so far has been deeply militarised, contributing to a further spiral of violence. For Luis Fernando Lisboa, the former Catholic Bishop of Pemba, the capital of Cabo Delgado, the only sustainable answer to counter violent extremism in the province is social justice.

Survivors of the Muidumbe massacre, who fled 300 km on foot to get to a Pemba refugee settlement, where they are cared for by Caritas. Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, December 2020.

©ACN/Vitjoen

Nepal ↓

China ↓

Bhutan 🔍

North Korea ↓

Bangladesh ↓

India ↓

Vietnam ↓

Myanmar ↓

Laos —

Cambodia 🔍

Thailand ↓
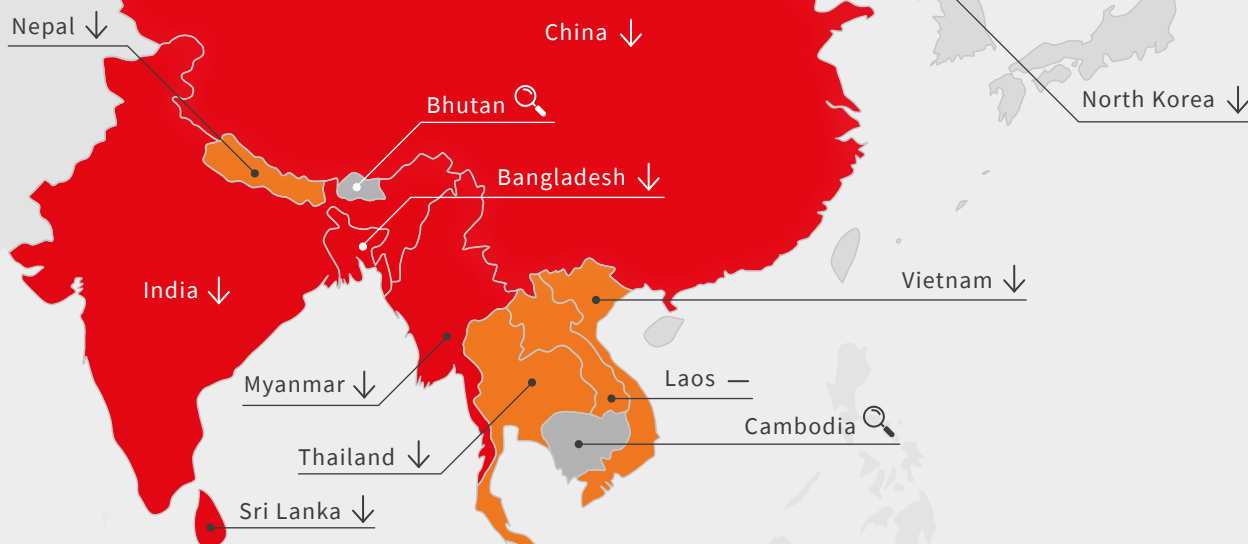
Sri Lanka ↓

REGIONAL ANALYSIS

Mainland Asia

Mainland Asia includes East Asia, the Korean Peninsula, mainland Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent, as well as those large islands – Japan, Taiwan, and Sri Lanka – in close proximity to Asia's coastlands. On the one hand, this highly populous and strategic region contains countries such as China, North Korea, and Myanmar that currently experience some of the world's worst violations of religious freedom. On the other hand, several nations, particularly Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, boast robust and stable protections of religious freedom, with firm constitutional and cultural support.

Several countries in Mainland Asia continue to be governed by Marxist one-party dictatorships. The largest of these, China, with a population of 1.4 billion people, has the dubious distinction of having fine-tuned one of the most pervasive and effective state-run engines of religious control currently in operation anywhere in the world. According to the latest Pew Research Center report on global religious restrictions, released in November 2020, China scores 9.3 out of a possible 10 on Pew's Government Restrictions Index (GRI), the highest score in the study.[50] Combining mass surveillance, a social credit system that scrutinizes and sanctions individual behaviour, and brutal crackdowns on religious and ethnic groups suspected

of disloyalty, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is in a class of its own when it comes to the suffocation of religious freedom. Furthermore, as revealed in the China country report, it has become only more brutal since Xi Jinping became China's president in 2013, as demonstrated by the mass internment of more than a million primarily Muslim ethnic Uyghurs in Xinjiang Province and their subjection to coercive "de-radicalization" programs since 2017.[51]

Other regimes in Mainland Asia with similar Marxist-style ideologies and mechanisms of religious control are North Korea, Vietnam and Laos. As the country reports evidence, North Korea practises an exterminationist policy towards religion that is even more severe than that of the CCP. Vietnam and Laos, on the other hand, continue to implement modest and incremental reforms that give religious communities registered with the state somewhat greater freedom to own property and pursue religious activities. Unregistered groups, however, especially independent Buddhists in Vietnam and Evangelical Protestants in Laos, continue to face serious harassment and discrimination, particularly at the local level.

Alongside religious restrictions imposed from the "top down" by Marxist dictatorships, a grave

challenge to religious freedom in Mainland Asia comes from "bottom-up" movements of ethno-religious nationalism. Whereas methodical state-sponsored religious control is generally only possible in autocratic contexts like Communist-ruled China and North Korea, the fire of ethno-religious nationalism tends to burn most destructively where it enjoys the oxygen of democratic contestation and popular mobilization. In Mainland Asia, the democratic or semi-democratic contexts favouring the rise of majoritarian religious nationalism include Hindu-majority India and Nepal, and Buddhist-majority Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand, and, in a milder form, Bhutan (see country reports).

With a population of nearly 1.4 billion, India is both the world's largest democracy and the country with the world's largest and most virulent movement of religious nationalism. Since the 1990s, India's electoral politics have become more competitive, and a growing number of Indians have found themselves drawn to the Hindu nationalist message that India's culture and national identity are essentially Hindu. India's Hindu-nationalist political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), won outright majorities in consecutive parliamentary elections in 2014 and 2019. Energized by these victories, the BJP has doubled down on its cultural-nationalist agenda in ways that have undermined religious freedom and other basic civil liberties, and targeted Muslims and Christians on such issues as cow slaughter and religious conversion, often by means of local enactments.[52] The result, according to Pew's November 2020 study of Global Religious Restrictions, is that "India had the highest levels of social hostilities – not just among the most populous countries, but among all 198 countries in the study". India scores 9.6 out of a possible 10 on Pew's Social Hostilities Index (SHI).[53] Hindu-majority Nepal also recently adopted a constitution and a penal code that forbids proselytism and marginalizes non-Hindu communities and organizations, which suggests that exclusivist religious nationalism is becoming a pattern in Mainland Asia.[54]

In addition, numerous Buddhist-majority countries, particularly Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand, have witnessed the ascendancy of extremist ethno-religious leaders and organizations spewing similar anti-minority hatred (see country reports). These include Myanmar's 969 Movement and the Buddha Dhamma Parahita Foundation, and Sri Lanka's Bodu Bala Sena. Such groups have spurred more intense attacks on Muslim minorities in both Myanmar and Sri Lanka, with by far the most egregious being the multi-phase genocide against the mostly Muslim Rohingya in Myanmar's Rakhine State in 2016-2017.[55] Christians and Hindus have also suffered targeted attacks in Kachin State.[56] Meanwhile, in Sri Lanka, as the country report shows, decisive victories in both presidential and parliamentary elections of the Sri Lanka Podujana

Party, in 2019 and 2020, have meant that a political party aligned with Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism and hostile to religious minorities has consolidated its grip on power in the island nation.

Another threat to religious freedom in Mainland Asia is transnational Islamist extremism. By far the worst single act of religious violence perpetrated against the Christian community in Mainland Asia in recent years was the Islamist-terrorist suicide attack in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday, 21st April 2019, in which three churches and three hotels in Colombo were targeted, killing 267 people and injuring some 500.[57] A steady rise in anti-Muslim rhetoric and violence on the part of Buddhist extremists in Sri Lanka, ever since the end of the civil war in 2009, appears to have played a role in radicalizing those responsible for the attack.[58] In turn, the Islamist terrorist attack itself played a powerful role in fuelling extremist Buddhist nationalism, paving the way for the massive electoral victories by Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists in late 2019 and mid-2020.[59]

Recent events in Sri Lanka illustrate how the main threats to religious freedom in Mainland Asia – religious autocratic governance, nationalism, and Islamist extremism – are not only dangerous in themselves, but moreover amplify each other in a destructive cycle. In China, too, the assault on the Uyghurs combines a strong element of ethnic-Han-Chinese nationalism and a desire to strike back after a string of terrorist attacks by Uyghur radicals on the ethnic Chinese population in Xinjiang between 2009 and 2016.[60] As authoritarianism, ethnic and religious nationalism, and jihadism all show strong signs that they will continue to rise, as well as reinforce each other throughout Mainland Asia, this vicious cycle is likely to grow worse in the coming years, with dire consequences for religious freedom.

A window into the soul: China's threat to religious freedom

No regime in history has been more successful in making George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984* a reality than the People's Republic of China. Indeed, the apparatus of repression constructed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in recent years is so fine-tuned, pervasive, and technologically sophisticated that it makes "Big Brother" appear amateurish.

Though first introduced in China's restive Xinjiang province as a means of policing its mostly Muslim Uyghur population, elements of the CCP's surveillance state are rapidly being introduced across the entire nation of 1.4 billion. One aspect, "Sharp Eyes", is the proliferation of highly sophisticated security cameras and data scanners. Unlike traditional CCTV cameras, the new devices are capable of giving police high-resolution images of individual faces. In Urumqi, Xinjiang's regional capital, police installed more than 18,000 facial-recognition cameras covering about 3,500 of the city's residential complexes[61], and the country as a whole was anticipated to have installed some 626 million security cameras mounted in public and private areas by the end of 2020.[62] Meanwhile, scanners installed throughout the country at key pedestrian checkpoints scoop up data from smartphones, unbeknownst to those passing through.

Using special apps on their smartphones, police can then upload the vast data they collect to shared analytical platforms, such as the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP) currently operational in Xinjiang.[63] The platforms collate and cross-tabulate the collected information, flagging individuals who meet with known "malcontents", use apps such as WhatsApp that employ encryption, or engage in an unusually high degree of religious activity.

Indeed, the impact on religious freedom is already being felt. Faith groups perceived as a direct challenge to a jealous atheist system are, and will increasingly be, watched. The most egregious violation of religious freedom is that perpetrated against the Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang state. As part of a "Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism" programme, approximately one million[64] out of a total population of 13 million Turkic Muslims[65] are imprisoned in "re-education camps" and subject to "mass arbitrary detention, torture, and mistreatment".[66] Those on the outside are exposed to an enforced collection of biometric data, tracking via omnipresent cameras augmented with AI-enabled facial recognition, and software which

records, translates and transcribes voice messages – tools which enable targeted government repression.[67] As stated in a 2018 Human Rights Watch report: "Inside, people are punished for peacefully practicing religion; outside, the government's religious restrictions are so stringent that it has effectively outlawed Islam."[68]

The surveillance-for-repression technologies target Christians as well. Reports indicate that at the end of 2020, "more than 200 facial recognition cameras were installed in churches and temples in one Jiangxi Province county": 50 of these were in the state registered Three-Self churches, and nearly 50 were in 16 Buddhist and Taoist places of worship.[69] Churches that refuse, such as the Zion Church, one of Beijing's largest unregistered house churches, have been closed.[70]

Another element of China's surveillance state is a "social credit" system. While there is presently no single integrated nationwide social credit system, several major municipalities (including Beijing) have instituted schemes whereby individuals accumulate reputational points based on their "good" and "bad" behaviours.[71] Bad behaviours can include visiting houses of worship too frequently or failing to help the police identify religious dissidents such as Falun Gong members. Low social credit scores can make it impossible for individuals to purchase train or airline tickets, or secure places for their children in desirable schools. The CCP apparently aspires to impose an integrated social credit system on the entire country.

The social credit concept has been extended to include religious leaders. On 9th February 2021, the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) launched a database, applicable to all faith groups, called the Administrative Measures for Religious Personnel, containing information on clergy, monks, priests and bishops. The system "will record 'rewards', 'punishments' received, including 'the revocation' of their ministry and 'other information'".[72] These faith leaders will "have the obligation to 'support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, support the socialist system', 'resist illegal religious activities and religious extremism and resist infiltration of foreign forces that use religion'".[73]

Samuel Brownback, the U.S. ambassador for International Religious Freedom, warned that China's methods represent "the future of religious oppression",

A video showing facial recognition software in use at the headquarters of the artificial intelligence company Megvii in Beijing, China.

adding that eventually, religious minorities are "going to be oppressed by a system where they can't live and work in the society and continue to practice their faith."[74]

Three features of China's high-tech Leviathan are particularly troubling: (1) rapidly developing technology means that it is inevitable that the system will become even more sophisticated and comprehensive; (2) China is actively exporting elements of its surveillance state to other countries, such as its neighbours in Central Asia[75]; and (3) the system is designed to reward "good" behaviour as well as punish "bad" behaviour.

Of all the aforementioned features, however, possibly the third is the most dangerous since it creates strong incentives for Chinese citizens to cooperate with the regime's surveillance state, and even to love it, much as Orwell's fictional character Winston Smith came in the end to love Big Brother. Perhaps the only thing worse than a hated dictatorship, is one that enjoys widespread acceptance, legitimacy, and even affection. As Mark Warner, Democratic vice-chair of the US Senate intelligence committee stated: "Communist party leaders are developing a model of technological governance that … would make Orwell blush."[76]

Philippines 🔍

Brunei ↓

Malaysia ↓

Maldives ↓

Singapore ↓

Indonesia ↑

Maritime Asia

Maritime Asia consists of the Malay Peninsula, the Malay Archipelago, Australia, New Zealand, and the numerous small island nations of the Indo-Pacific Region. A significant contributor to conflict and instability in this strategic territory is religious persecution, and by far the most important driver of this persecution is militant Islamism, whether acting in alliance with a state power or operating through non-state actors and movements.

Although evident across the region, the countries in Maritime Asia exhibiting the most extreme religious repression on account of Islamist ideology are Malaysia and the Maldives (see the country reports). While militant Islamism rarely assumes a violent form in Malaysia, both the federal and state governments impose a rigid Islamic orthodoxy through a system of religious regulation that is among the most far-reaching in the world. An electoral democracy, Malaysia practices an ethno-religious majoritarianism that radically constrains the basic religious freedoms of the Muslim ethnic Malay majority, as well as the mostly Buddhist, Hindu, Christian Chinese and Indian ethnic minorities. Members of the Malay Muslim majority essentially have no religious freedom as the government defines and coercively imposes the kind of Islam they must believe and practice – a particular school of Sunni Islam – making it extremely difficult to convert out of this form of Islam. At the same time, the government ruthlessly enforces a variety of restrictions on the country's religious and ethnic minorities. Non-Muslims may not refer to God as "Allah" in their publications[77], and proselytism directed at Malay Muslims by non-Muslims is strictly forbidden

and punishable by law. In February 2020, the collapse of a short-lived reform government and a return to hard-line governance diminished any prospect for improvement in the country's religious freedom conditions. In this climate, former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad took to Twitter in October 2020 to call on the world's Muslims to "kill millions of French people" in revenge for the publication of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammed in the French magazine, Charlie Hebdo.[78]

The small archipelagic nation of the Maldives, located south of India in the Indian Ocean, is in the grip of both state-imposed Islamic orthodoxy and non-state Islamist extremism. One of the most religiously repressive countries in the world, the Maldives formally mandates that Maldivian citizens must adhere to Sunni Islam and bans any public expression of non-Muslim faith, even by visitors. As the country report reveals, although the nation has made some strides towards democracy and the rule of law since the end of a 30-year dictatorship in 2008, it has largely failed to curb a dangerous rise in jihadist extremism in recent years. Islamists have worked to roll back democratic reforms, and even succeeded in pressuring the Government to shut down the Maldives' most influential human rights NGO in late 2019.[79]

The dire consequences of Islamism for religious freedom are also visible in several other countries in Maritime Asia. In Indonesia, by far the region's most populous country and the world's largest Muslim nation, militant Islamists associated with groups such as the Front for the Defence of Islam,

opposed to Indonesia's official Pancasila ideology of religious tolerance, continued to work with some local government officials to shut down houses of worship operated by religious minority communities. Most dramatically, they joined forces with business and political elites[80] to bring down the Christian and ethnic-Chinese governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, known by his nickname "Ahok," in 2017. After suffering an electoral defeat and serving a two-year sentence for blasphemy, Ahok was released only in January 2019.[81] In the Catholic-majority Philippines, too, non-state Islamism is fuelling the violent militancy of Abu Sayyaf on the country's large, Muslim-majority southern island of Mindanao. Meanwhile, the tiny sultanate of Brunei Darussalam has also taken steps during the reporting period to implement a more uncompromising Islamic ideology. In April 2019, Brunei implemented a Sharia Penal Code[82] criminalizing the defamation of the Prophet Mohammad, apostasy, and even proselytizing by non-Muslims among other non-Muslims, and prescribing such punishments as whipping, and death by stoning (see country reports).

At least in some important respects, however, Indonesia departs from the pattern of a deepening Islamisation and radicalisation that prevails today in many Muslim-majority countries, whether in Maritime Asia, Mainland Asia, or elsewhere. Displays of Islamist activity in Indonesia have been matched – especially in the last three years – by a number of positive legal, political, and religious trends. For example, a widely hailed ruling by the Constitutional Court in 2017 extended religious freedom protections and state resources to indigenous spiritual traditions outside the country's six officially recognized religions.[83] Also, as the country report indicates, the wave of Islamist mobilization that brought down Ahok failed to prevent the election of the country's moderate president, Joko Widodo, in Indonesia's April 2019 elections. Indeed, the display of Islamist power in the Ahok affair prompted Indonesian political and religious leaders to bolster the country's political and cultural traditions of religious tolerance. For example, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the country's largest civil society movement and the world's largest Muslim organization with some 90 million members, is pursuing a national and global campaign to re-contextualise elements of Islamic orthodoxy that have encouraged jihadist extremism and religious intolerance towards non-Muslims. NU even hosted American Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Jakarta in late October 2020 and expressed a shared commitment to religious freedom and inalienable human rights.[84]

It is also encouraging that many of Maritime Asia's countries are among the most religiously free and peaceful in the world. These include: the large island nations of Australia and New Zealand; the majority-Christian nations of Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste; and the Pacific micro-states of Vanuatu, Samoa, Kiribati, Tonga, Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, Palau, Tuvalu, Nauru, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands (see the country reports). Despite this general picture, these countries have not been without serious challenges, the most notable being the terrorist attack by a white-supremacist Australian national on two mosques during Friday prayers in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019, killing 51 people and injuring 40.[85] Additionally, in Australia, Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste, and the Marshall Islands, the country reports reveal discrimination against Muslim minorities. Australia in particular faces ongoing criticism both for its lack of openness to individuals from around Asia seeking refuge from religious persecution, and for its failure to provide adequate facilities to asylum-seekers.[86]

Ethno-religious nationalism: manipulating a search for a common identity

background

Along with communist totalitarianism and Islamism, religious nationalism is among the greatest threats to religious freedom and peaceful religious co-existence in our world today. Religious minorities in numerous countries – such as India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Myanmar, Malaysia, Bhutan, and Nepal, among others – increasingly face severe marginalisation and active persecution by many of their own fellow citizens, with the rise of religious majoritarian populist movements (see the country reports).

In a world ever-more shaped by a spiritually empty global consumerist culture, many people are thirsty for richer and deeper forms of identity and community. Ethno-religious nationalism is one attempt to provide robust forms of belonging in a world of enormous flux. It proposes that individual identity in part derives from, and is elevated by, the belonging to a great nation defined by a unique confluence of religion, race, language and territory. Such movements appear to be seeing their biggest growth in Asia. As the country reports indicate, ethno-religious nationalist movements are burgeoning in Buddhist-majority Myanmar and Sri Lanka, as well as mainly Malay-Muslim Malaysia and Bengali-Muslim Bangladesh.

The party of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – which swept back into power with a landslide victory in the 2019 parliamentary elections – crafted a renewed appeal to a decades-old movement of Hindu nationalism. Hindu nationalism is the world's largest movement of religious nationalism, and is centered on an essentially ethno-religious identity that enjoys its most fervent support in the conservative "cow belt" of central and northern India. As in many countries with strong movements of religious nationalism, the institutional bulwark of Hindu nationalism is a network of non-state actors that enjoys growing resonance and influence among the Indian populace. In a strong indicator of its growing mass appeal, the BJP with its Hindutva philosophy – which promotes the creation of a powerful Hindu state – won nearly 40% of the vote in 2019.[87]

If the accelerating trend toward virulent ethno-religious nationalism is not stopped or slowed, catastrophic consequences are inevitable. The many

Asian countries (but also other populist governments in the world) that are in the grip of ethno-religious nationalism are experiencing a combination of democratic backsliding and growing religious repression. For example, as indicated in the country reports, democracies such as India, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka, that have been the most profoundly shaped by ethno-religious nationalism, are increasingly becoming "hybrid" autocratic-democratic regimes combining regular elections with severe restrictions on basic constitutional rights such as religious freedom. Pakistan is another example. Long in the clutch of a weaponised religious-nationalist identity, and for some time firmly within the orbit of China, Pakistan is a textbook case of a religiously majoritarian "electoral autocracy".

What we may now be witnessing is what South Asia scholar Farahnaz Ispahani terms the "Pakistanization" of Asia,[88] in which exclusivist majoritarian identities join forces with increasingly authoritarian states to permanently make religious minorities second-class citizens, if not disenfranchising or destroying them entirely. What remains uncertain is how many more countries will decide that this kind of regime represents an attractive and workable political model. But what is clear is that a combination of ethno-religious nationalism and authoritarian governance is profoundly incompatible with a robust religious freedom for all citizens, regardless of creed, caste, or race.

A protest in Kolkata, India, on 18th January 2020, against the Citizenship Amendment Act, which was passed in India's Parliament in December 2019

© Avishek Das/SOPA Images via ZUMA Wire

Morocco ↑
Lebanon ⌕
Pakistan ↑
Afghanistan ↓
Iraq ↑
Tunisia ↓
Turkey ↓
Israel ⌕
Syria ↑
Iran ↓
Palestine and Gaza ↑
Jordan ↓
Bahrain —
Algeria ↓
Kuwait ↓
Qatar —
Libya ↓
Egypt ↑
Saudi Arabia ↓
United Arab Emirates ↓
Oman ↓
Yemen ↓
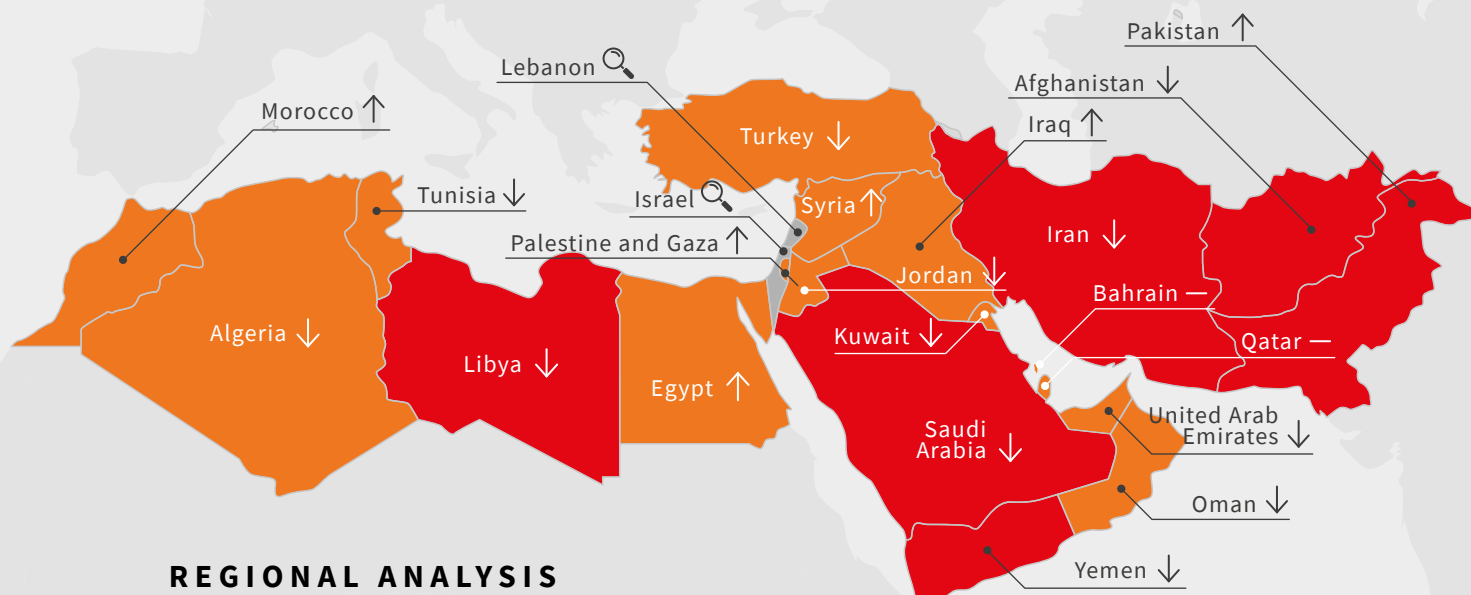
REGIONAL ANALYSIS

Middle East and North Africa

By Oliver Maksan

The Middle East-North Africa (MENA), Afghanistan and Pakistan area, stretching from Iran in southwest Asia to Morocco in northwest Africa[89] is a transcontinental region home to over 6 percent of the world's population[90] encompassing a variety of cultural and ethnic groups. The birthplace of the world's great monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, these countries – where religion and politics are often intertwined – include more than 20 percent of the world's Muslims[91] and 60 percent of world's oil reserves.[92] It is thus a region of potent global political and religious influence.

Several countries in this area have experienced positive political and societal changes during the period under review, but have stopped short of furthering the promotion and protection of human rights. The legal and societal environment shows a reluctance to change, as discriminatory laws and practices, mainly against non-Muslims, continue.

At best, freedom of worship is guaranteed, but not full religious freedom. As the country reports show, systematic persecution of religious minorities is limited to only a few countries, like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan, but in most countries conversion from Islam is either forbidden by law, or effectively forbidden as a consequence of strong societal pressures. Proselytism in many of these countries is illegal. Laws against blasphemy are used to silence minority faith groups such as Christians, as well as atheists and critics of Islam. Societal tolerance towards Christians continues

to be low, and, as numerous incidents in Upper Egypt attest, violence can erupt any time.[93]

Despite the enormous efforts of international state and non-state (mainly Christian) donors, the number of Christians in Iraq will probably never recover from the blow dealt by Daesh (Islamic State) jihadists in 2014. The same tragedy confronts Syria where, out of the original ten percent Christian population of 2011, only two percent remains today, according to the Apostolic Nuncio.[94]

As the economic and political circumstances that led to the Arab Spring have not been substantially addressed, political instability will continue and occasionally flare up, adding to the insecurities of religious minorities.

In the period under review, a number of major trends can be identified.

Daesh weakened but not destroyed

Heinous crimes committed by jihadist groups like Daesh were less numerous – at least on a large scale – and seem to have peaked before the period under review. Armed Islamist fanaticism remains a major military concern, for example in Libya and parts of Syria, while the territorial defeat of Daesh in Syria and Iraq, and the killing of its self-proclaimed Caliph Abu Bakr al Baghdadi by US special forces in 2019[95], did not bring an end to the terrorist organization as such.[96] As evidenced in the country reports, having partially

moved forces to (mainly sub-Saharan) Africa and Asia, Daesh remains relatively dormant in the MENA region, only sporadically terrorising Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The end of its territorial expansion brought an end to the direct and unparalleled terror the organisation exerted over the people of all backgrounds during its period of power.

Muslim introspection

The brutality of Daesh, professionally displayed on social media, and other extremist groups resulted in a profound self-criticism within the Muslim community. For example, the Secretary General of the Saudi-based Muslim World League Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, when asked in 2019 about what spurs Islamophobia in the world, said simply: "We, Muslims".[97] Egypt's President Sisi also repeatedly called for a true reform of Islam.[98] Unfortunately, the reformist discourses of leaders like Sisi are tainted by their own bleak human rights records. The top-down approach also limits these efforts because they are perceived as politically motivated, and as such lack credibility among adherents of political Islam.

Rift within Sunni Islam deepens

A widening divide is increasingly evident within the Sunni Islam-majority countries concerning support, or lack thereof, for the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). The ousting from power of Mohammed Morsi and the MB in Egypt in 2013, bankrolled in large part by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)[99], marked the beginning of this divide. The anti-MB movement seeks to contain and eventually eliminate the selectively political dimension of Islam. The pro-MB movement is represented by the regional patrons of Turkey and Qatar. Turkey especially has changed its position concerning the political role of Islam. As the country report reveals, President Erdogan, with his neo-Ottoman foreign policy, put aside Ataturk's laicism and seeks to position Turkey as a Sunni power. This has resulted in military interventions in Libya, Syria and in the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, where Erdogan aligns himself, when expedient, with jihadists and mercenaries.[100] The transformation of the Hagia Sophia from a museum into a mosque is the most telling and symbolic example of the shifting nature of the Turkish State, as Islam is made more prominent. As the country reports reveal, in many other mostly Muslim countries there is an opposite trend, as authorities seek to establish closer links with minorities.

Government gestures toward religious minorities

Some governments undertook efforts publicly to demonstrate a renewed sensitivity with regard to religious minorities, and the need to maintain religious pluralism. In Iraq, the government took strides by nominating Christians to high public offices and designating Christmas as a national public holiday.[101] In Egypt, the granting of permission to build churches, implemented at the end of 2020, gave Christians a new confidence.[102] The UAE evidenced their support by funding the reconstruction of Christian heritage sites in Iraq destroyed by Daesh.[103] Although these grand gestures have been followed by more timid actions, nonetheless they instilled hope among the non-Muslim populations of an increased recognition of their place within society. The first public Mass ever celebrated by a Pope on the Arabic peninsula, in 2019 by Pope Francis, is an important example of this change.[104]

Post-sectarian tendencies

As the Iraq and Lebanon country reports indicate, protests in 2019 and 2020 revealed that populations in the region increasingly seek good governance on a non-sectarian basis. A significant indicator of this trend were the 2019-2020 united Sunni, Shia and Christian demonstrations in Iraq, against a dysfunctional government. Following the demonstrations, Shia Prime Minister Mustafa Al Khadimi made public overtures to the Christian community. He visited the Nineveh Plains (where Shabak militias have been terrorising Christians), and publicly called on Christians to stay in, or return to, their homeland stating: "Christians represent one of the most authentic components of Iraq, and it saddens us to see them leave the country".[105] In January 2021, a national Commission for the restitution of Christian property was created.[106]

Lebanon's 2019-2020 anti-government protests united citizens of all faiths and were seen by many as a revolt against the corrupt, sectarian system of the country.[107] The political impasse that continues to persist, even after the Beirut blast in August 2020 and the subsequent international appeals for reform, reveals how deeply ingrained sectarianism is.

An improved Catholic-Muslim dialogue

Pope Francis has dedicated significant efforts to improving the relationship of the Catholic Church with the Arab, mostly Sunni, Muslim world. The chill following Pope Benedict XVI's 2006 Regensburg address – which was interpreted as a criticism of Islam as inherently violent – was felt for the duration of his pontificate.[108] A suspension of the institutionalised dialogue between Rome and the Al-Azhar University arose after a 2011 appeal by Pope Benedict for the protection of Christians in Egypt.[109] A new chapter was opened when Pope Francis assumed office in 2013. He forged a personal relationship with the Grand Imam of Egypt's Al-Azhar University, Ahmed Al-Tayeb, culminating in the Abu Dhabi declaration signed in February 2019 entitled "Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together". The document, although only a first step, is nonetheless a milestone in Catholic-

Muslim dialogue and calls upon "all concerned to stop using religions to incite hatred, violence, extremism and blind fanaticism and to refrain from using the name of God to justify acts of murder, exile, terrorism and oppression."[110] The anticipated 2021 visit of Pope Francis to Iraq – his first to a Shia majority country – will hopefully deepen interreligious dialogue and help highlight the dire situation of Christians and other minorities in Iraq and beyond.

Emergence of a Sunni-Israeli coalition

The historical enmity between Sunni and Shia regional powers was further entrenched with the advent of an anti-Iranian alliance in 2020. This alliance included Sunni states such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and the Jewish State of Israel. On the other side of the divide are Iranian proxies in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen.[111] The fact that the Jewish state of Israel openly partnered in an alliance with Sunni states, with Israeli Prime minister Netanyahu even visiting Saudi Arabia,[112] is remarkable and a significant shift in a decades-old policy. The Abraham Accords[113] brokered by the Trump administration between Israel and the Muslim states including the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco, are a consequence and not the cause of that development. The anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish discourse and resentment in the countries which are members of the alliance could conceivably diminish. On the other hand, the new alliance could exacerbate an already vitriolic anti-Semitic discourse in the Islamic Republic of Iran and its regional allies.

Pakistan: glimmers of hope in a dark landscape

Freedom of religion in this Islamic republic experienced important changes. Despite the many dire violations of this right and an increase in blasphemy cases, the period under review was nonetheless marked by some successes in the courts in favour of freedom of religion for those – including representatives of non-Muslim minorities, such as Asia Bibi – accused of blasphemy.[114] Action by the judiciary and by the federal government had a positive impact on the provinces and vice versa. This dynamic is encouraging, if it can be sustained.

Muslim students praying at the Yogyakarta University Mosque, Indonesia, March 2014.

©ACN/Wolnik

Is there one Islam? A fact box on branches of Islam

The notion of an "Arab world" as a synonym for all countries with a Muslim majority may lead to confusion. Islam, like other religions, has different branches. The two main branches of Islam are: Sunnism, which is followed by 70% of Muslims,[115] the name of which is derived from *Sunna* (or "tradition"), and which recognises the four Righteously Guided Caliphs[116] as legitimate successors of Muhammad; and Shi'ism,[117] the name of which comes from a contraction of *Shī'atu 'Alī* (or "the followers of Ali") who was the nephew and son-in-law of Muhammad and is believed to be his natural and designated successor. Saudi Arabia and Iran present themselves at the head of Sunni and Shia Islam respectively. They follow a lunar calendar, called *Hijrī,* that starts in 622.

It might seem obvious that Muslims are those who follow the teachings of Islam, and consider Muhammad as God's Messenger, to whom the divine message was revealed – a message which was recorded in the Quran[118] in Arabic. However, not all Muslims can read in Arabic and the teaching is accordingly adapted. Although Islam was born in the Arabian Peninsula, and Allah's message is considered to have been revealed in Arabic, most Muslims do not speak Arabic as their mother tongue, and are therefore not considered as Arabs. The five countries with the largest Muslim populations are not Arab countries. The Muslim populations of Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nigeria add up to 864 million, or approximately 48 percent of the estimated total world Muslim population of 1.8 billion.[119]

In Sunni Islam, there are four Islamic legal schools:[120] Mâlikî,[121] Hanafî,[122] Hanbalî[123] and Shâfi'î[124]. The main currents of Shi'ism are the Twelvers[125] and the Alawis[126] (called Alevis, in Turkey). There are other branches of Islam, such as the Ahmadis,[127] Druzes[128] and Ibadis,[129] as well as approaches like Sufism,[130] which are accepted to greater or lesser degrees by mainstream Islam.

The main pan-Islamic organisations are: the Organisation of Islamic Countries,[131] based in Jeddah and composed of 57 countries[132]; ICESCO,[133] composed of 54 countries and based in Rabat; the Muslim World League[134], a pan-Islamic NGO based in Mecca; and the League of Arab States.

The "Arab World" is a term referring to countries where Arabic is the main or official language. The League of Arab States has 22 members,[135] all of which consider themselves "Arab countries".

Although the term Arabs[136] described initially the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula, today it tends to represent people who live in Arab countries, speak Arabic and share an Arabic culture. Although there is a very strong will for homogenisation within these countries, some linguistic, religious and cultural minorities have managed to remain in the territory. Some object to being called "Arabs". These communities include the Berbers, Nubians, Copts, "Phoenicians", and Kurds, all of whom claim non-Arabic linguistic, cultural and religious origins or backgrounds.

Some of the religious minorities in majority Muslim countries, mainly Christians, are indigenous. Jews have almost disappeared from these countries.[137] Yezidis, Baha'is, or other Muslim minorities, enjoy varying levels of freedom within Muslim countries.

backgrounder

Pakistan: sexual violence and forced conversion

On 30th November 2020, a 24-year-old Christian woman in Pakistan was killed after refusing a Muslim man's advances. Sonia Bibi was on her way to work when she was reportedly shot in the head at a bus stop in Rawalpindi. Police launched a manhunt for the alleged killer, Muhammad Shehzad.[138]

Sonia's father, Allah Rakha Masih, said that for the past four or five months Shehzad had followed and harassed Sonia and continued doing so after she had refused to marry him. Shehzad was accused of threatening to kill her if she resisted his demands and it was alleged that he had pressured her to convert. The parents of Shehzad even went to Sonia Bibi's family home to convince her parents to let him marry her, but to no avail. Allah Rakha Masih said the family had been Christians for generations, adding that his daughter "was a true Christian and strong in her faith and she was killed for following her Christian faith".[139]

The Movement for Solidarity and Peace calculates that in Pakistan up to 1,000 young Christian and Hindu girls and young women aged between 12 and 25 are abducted by Muslim men every year.[140] The research, which suggests that Christians make up 70 percent of these cases, found that the scale of the problem "is likely to be much greater as a number of the cases are never reported and do not progress through the law enforcement and legal systems".[141] Many of the girls suffer rape, forced prostitution, human trafficking and domestic abuse.

Even though there are instances in which the families succeed in freeing the girls through the courts, frequently the courts find in favour of the abductor. This happened in the case of Maira Shahbaz, the 14-year-old whose marriage to Mohamad Nakash Tariq was upheld by Lahore High Court in August 2020, in spite of evidence showing the girl to be underage.

In November 2020, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan ordered an investigation into the forced conversion of women and girls from the country's religious minority communities.

case study

Sonia Bibi, 24, was shot dead at the Fazaia Colony bus stop in Rawalpindi, close to the capital, Islamabad on 30th November 2020

©ACN/Sajid Christopher

Russia 🔍

Uzbekistan ↑

Belarus 🔍

Turkmenistan ↓

Ukraine 🔍

Kazakhstan —

Azerbaijan ↓

Tajikistan ↓

Kyrgyzstan ↓

REGIONAL ANALYSIS

OSCE Countries

By Ellen Kryger Fantini, J.D.

The countries which are members of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) are often divided into those countries "East of Vienna" and those "West of Vienna". It has also been described as an organisation that stretches "from Vancouver to Vladivostok", a phrase which denotes not only the geographic spread of the participating states, but also the wide range of ethnicities, religions, and political structures.

The OSCE is comprised of 57 countries and more than a billion people, from the USA, Canada, Europe, Russia, to the Baltics, the Balkans, former Soviet Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. The participating states include some of the world's most powerful or influential countries: the USA, Russia, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Turkey. Other countries in the region are among the poorest or least powerful, including Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

While all of the countries have some form of constitutional protection for religious freedom, the actual application of – and societal respect for – these protections varies widely.

COVID-19 pandemic

In 2020, a remarkable phenomenon was observed relating to the COVID-19 pandemic regulations and their impact on religious freedom across the OSCE region. Many countries in Europe, as well as the USA and Canada, imposed measures to prohibit or severely restrict public worship including during Holy Week, Yom Kippur, and Ramadan. In the USA, Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito stated that the pandemic had led to "previously unimaginable" limits on liberty, particularly religious freedom: "we have never before seen restrictions as severe, extensive, and prolonged as those experienced for most of 2020."[142]

In some countries, these restrictions on religious practice were perceived as unequal and thus discriminatory. Despite increased regulations on worship activities, other gatherings were permitted including political rallies, public demonstrations and the re-opening of retail businesses. An example was Nevada Governor Sisolak's directive capping religious services attendance to a maximum of 50 persons, regardless of the size of the church and its social distancing measures, while retail establishments, restaurants and casinos were allowed to reopen at 50 percent capacity.[143]

Of more profound concern, however, was the fact that that many Western governments appeared to be ranking the practice of religion as lower in a "hierarchy of rights" than freedom of expression. In the USA, the Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell noted that lawmakers in several states and large cities prohibited or severely limited religious services while permitting public protests. He stated: "freedom of speech, assembly and religion 'have the same constitutional pedigree,' and thus should be treated the same."[144] Numerous lawsuits were filed in the USA on behalf of faith communities who claimed health restrictions imposed "unjust burdens on religion *not felt* by secular entities".[145]

In early June 2020, while Madrid and Barcelona were still under COVID-19 restrictions which limited places of worship to 30 percent capacity and indoor funerals to a maximum of ten people, thousands were allowed to gather in authorised anti-racism marches.[146]

In the Canadian province of Quebec, Catholic bishops requested that restrictions set on occupancy in churches be at least equal to those set for other indoor spaces such as theatres and concert halls. The Archbishop of Quebec and Primate of Canada also expressed his frustration over the lack of equitable treatment of faith communities (see the country report).

In many countries across the OSCE region, edicts restricting public worship were imposed despite the objections of religious communities. In November 2020, England's most senior faith leaders issued a joint letter to the government in which they "strongly disagree[d] with the decision to suspend public worship."[147] The Archbishop of Westminster and President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales said he had "not yet seen any evidence" to justify the ban on services.[148] The chair of the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board, said the ban on communal prayer in places of worship was "disheartening" and that the Muslim community was seeking "limited communal prayer in mosques which is effectively individuals praying in unison following social distancing measures."[149] He noted that the "fundamental difference between mosques and some other places of worship is that mosques are first and foremost used for communal prayer."[150]

In Greece, in January 2021, the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church said it "does not accept" a one-week restriction on in-person services and directed priests to ignore the government's lockdown orders, to allow worshipers to attend services for the Feast of the Epiphany.[151] And in Cyprus, the Bishop of Morphou Neophytos held a public Mass to celebrate Palm Sunday in violation of government regulations (see the country report).

Religious freedom across the region

Across the remainder of the OSCE countries, the country reports revealed a broad spectrum of religious freedom violations, from serious human rights and religious freedom abuses to discrimination against specific religious groups.

In Central Asia, Turkmenistan remained among the world's worst violators of religious freedom and, over the reporting period, showed no signs of improvement. During the same period, however, the U.S. State Department upgraded Uzbekistan from a "Country of Particular Concern" to a country on its "Special Watch List", due to the many steps the country had taken towards greater protection of religious freedom.[152] *The Economist* named Uzbekistan its 2019 "Country of the Year" because "no other country travelled as far" in terms of reforms.[153] Other countries in this region, while still classified as having medium to very serious levels of religious freedom violations, showed some signs of hope for improvement in the future.

In the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, concerns remained amongst the authorities over what they perceive as a growth in "non-traditional Islam". As the country reports from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan indicate, this resulted in stricter regulations aimed at preventing the expansion of more extreme forms of Islam and consequent jihadism. Some civil rights groups, however, expressed the concern that jihadism was a pretext for the state to further control non-mainstream forms of Islam.

In the Caucasus, the re-ignition of the historic conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia at the end of 2020 diminished the region's general stability and prompted new alliances. Azerbaijan counted on, and received, the support of Turkey in the war[154], and only a Russia-brokered ceasefire was able to stop the escalation of the conflict.

Turkey straddles south-eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia, and the country report revealed ominous signs for religious freedom. Over the two-year period, evidence of growing societal and political-religious tensions were observed including: the political decision to re-convert the Hagia Sophia and the Byzantine Church in Chora into mosques[155]; anti-Christian attacks and rhetoric; and a lack of rights or recogni-

tion for religious minorities, or atheists and agnostics. Turkey's influence was observed in the diminution of religious freedom in neighbouring regions. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Azerbaijan, not to mention the northern part of the island of Cyprus, bore the weight of Turkey's expansionist interests (see the country reports).

Religious freedom in Russia is still under pressure from overly broad laws and policies that target "non-traditional" religious minorities in the name of combatting "extremism". As the country report shows, in the application of those laws violations of religious freedom occurred, including the criminalisation of missionary activities and collective prayer (even in private homes), widespread surveillance of groups and individuals, and punishments including fines or imprisonment. Some religious groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses are still considered "extremist organizations" and subjected to judicial processes which are closed to scrutiny. There was discrimination against Protestants (including Baptists, Lutherans and Pentecostals), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Ukrainian Reformed Orthodox Church, and certain Muslim communities.

In Ukraine, specifically in the Russian occupied territory of Crimea, as well as the Luhansk and Donetsk territories, religious groups including the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses continued to experience very serious human rights and religious freedom abuses. Violations included detention and imprisonment, confiscation of property, physical violence, as well as the prohibition of gatherings, services and the possession or dissemination of religious literature (see the country report).

In the Balkan Peninsula of south-eastern Europe, the country reports showed that, while some states remained stable or saw improvements, in others, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, fundamental rights including religious freedom remained precarious, due to deep societal fractures, ethnic and religious tensions, and political instability. In Kosovo, a growing trend of fundamentalist political and religious influence, as well as financial support from foreign Muslim states such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey[156], combined with the country's self-proclaimed status as a "protector of Islam in the Balkans", threatens to convert the European-oriented, tolerant Muslim society into a haven for extremism.

While most nations remained stable overall, resurgent or increasing anti-Semitism is a troubling trend in some western European states, as well as in the USA and Canada. Additionally, many of these countries suffered high profile attacks on and vandalism of places of worship, including churches, synagogues, and mosques. Several governments have enacted, or considered enacting, legislation directly to address "religious extremism" or "separatism" (see the country reports).

In his address to the OSCE in December 2020, Archbishop Paul R. Gallagher expressed the Holy See's "grave concern for the rising number of terrorist attacks, hate crimes and other manifestations of intolerance targeting persons, places of worship, cemeteries and religious sites across the OSCE area and beyond."[157] "The fact that many of these acts of violence have been perpetrated against believers when they gather to pray in their places of worship make them particularly heinous: havens of peace and serenity quickly become execution chambers, as defenceless children, women and men lose their lives simply for gathering to practice their religion",[158] Gallagher said.

As recorded in a number of reports, in many countries of the European Union, and in Canada, the obligation to comply with new cultural norms enshrined as law – such as hate speech laws, the removal of public religious symbols or signs, and equality legislation – is coming into profound conflict with the right to freedom of conscience and religion.

"Polite Persecution": persecution disguised as progress

By Ellen Kryger-Fantini, J.D.

In an April 2016 homily, Pope Francis stated there are two types of Christian persecution. The first is explicit violence against Christians, such as the targeted Easter Sunday church bombings in Sri Lanka in 2019. The second form is what Pope Francis referred to as "polite persecution … disguised as culture, disguised as modernity, disguised as progress". The message, he said, is: "if you don't do this, you will be punished: you'll lose your job and many other things, or you'll be set aside".[159]

The first type, violent persecution perpetrated against believers of many faiths, is well documented in this report and elsewhere. The second type, "polite persecution", also exists in developing and developed nations and affects many faith groups. Its manifestations include interference with freedom of conscience, expression, and association, as well as denial of access to justice, certain jobs, education programs, and legal services; all this is often done in the name of "new" or conflicting rights. In 2018, Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Vatican's Secretary for Relations with States, expressed concern over "a radically individualistic interpretation of certain rights and the affirmation of 'new rights'".[160]

For example, in several countries in the OSCE region, the right to conscientious objection on religious grounds for health care professionals and pharmacists is no longer meaningfully protected in law. In October 2019, a multi-faith declaration against euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, signed by Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim, and Jewish representatives, was presented to Pope Francis. The aim of the declaration was to "present the positions of the monotheistic faiths concerning 'the values and practices relevant to the dying patient'", and to affirm that "no health care provider should be coerced or pressured to either directly or indirectly assist in the deliberate and intentional death of a patient through assisted suicide or any form of euthanasia, especially when it is against the religious beliefs of the provider." Instead, as the declaration sets out, conscientious objection "should be respected".[161]

Provisions for the right of religious groups to run their own schools according to their own ethos are also in jeopardy in several countries.[162] Furthermore, graduates from particular confessional universities are increasingly denied access to certain professions.[163] Parents from various faiths continue to protest against policies which require their children to be taught particular subjects, such as sexual education, that conflict with the tenets of their religions.[164]

Perhaps one of the most worrying legal developments, however, is "equality" or hate crime legislation. These laws often criminalise acts which are represented as contributing to "stirring up hatred". For example, the expression – even in private settings – of beliefs consistent with religion and the moral teaching of various faiths, including Judaism, Islam, and Christianity could be deemed as "stirring up hatred".[165] Widening the definition of "hate" poses a serious threat to the meaningful exercise of the fundamental right to religious freedom and to freedom of expression.

The failure to understand the proper role of religion, and its practice by individuals in the public square, "continues to feed into sentiments and manifestations of intolerance and discrimination against Christians, what might well be termed 'the last acceptable prejudice' in many societies", said Archbishop Gallagher.[166]

As Pope Francis states, this reductionist approach to the understanding of religious freedom seeks to consign religions to the "quiet obscurity of the individual's conscience or relegates them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques". This represents a radical interpretation of the meaning of "secularity" on the part of a government, whose duty is to keep the public square open to all religions and none.

Protests by a Catholic religious order, the Little Sisters of the Poor, that minister to the sick and the dying, against compulsory coverage of contraceptive services (including abortion-inducing drugs) in the employer-provided health care insurance.

Mexico 🔍

Cuba ↑

Haiti 🔍

Guatemala 🔍

Nicaragua ↓

Venezuela ↓

Honduras 🔍

Chile 🔍

REGIONAL ANALYSIS

Latin America and the Caribbean

By Paulina Eyzaguirre

Latin America and the Caribbean comprise 33 countries with a population estimated at more than 657 million, with an average age of 31 years.[167] These nations share similar historic and cultural heritages, with just under 60 percent of the population identifying as Catholic.[168] Democracy predominates across most of the region and half of the countries (17) held elections between 2018 and 2020. Several Latin American countries, however, are mired in socio-political crises made worse by violence, an absence of the rule of law, drug trafficking, corruption and, to make matters worse, the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, there is significant migration from the region, principally to the USA, by those seeking a better life.

The predominance of Christianity in Latin America and the Caribbean is no guarantee that religious freedom is upheld. During the period under review, Afro-Brazilian religious groups reported incidents of religious intolerance, while in Argentina the

Jewish community was a target of intolerance and persecution (see the country reports). The Christian majority, however, is still the faith group most affected by hate crimes in the form of attacks against religious leaders[169], places of worship, cemeteries, monuments and religious images. These attacks are responses to Christianity's[170] defence of the oppressed, as well as its public opposition to actions by state and non-state actors.

Hostility towards religious organisations

As revealed in the country reports, the greatest violations of religious freedom occurred in nations with questionable records of respect for human rights and democracy, including Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela. These governments expressed hostility and aggression towards Christian Churches – both Catholic and non-Catholic – when religious leaders denounced corruption, and social and political

policies understood to be detrimental to the common good. Concretely, hostility by the state was evidenced through the use of force including: disrupting religious celebrations; intimidating the faithful with belligerent police deployments around churches and during processions; the conspicuous absence of police protection when mobs attacked and vandalized places of worship; threats to religious leaders and the faithful; cancelled visas for foreign national church personnel; and opaque registration processes for religious groups.

The absence of the rule of law, and the resulting impact on religious freedom, was most evident in Mexico where violence was committed against civilians by criminal gangs involved in organised crime, including: drug trafficking, human trafficking, corruption, and extortion. Injury and death were inflicted not only on the victims of these crimes, but also on those who, inspired by their religious beliefs, sought to protect the human rights of those oppressed. As indicated in the Mexico country report, priests continued to be abducted and murdered for performing their pastoral responsibilities, seeking to protect their communities or speaking out against the actions of organised criminals. For example, in the state of Chiapas, the Catholic Church reported telephone death threats against a priest, his relatives and his congregation by suspected members of the trafficking group, the Cártel de Jalisco Nueva Generación. They demanded that the Church recognise that they are in charge of the territory, in exchange for keeping the peace.[171]

During the period under review, eight priests were murdered in five countries: Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Mexico and Peru. Investigations are still ongoing (see the country reports).

Increasing attacks against places of worship, religious images and symbols

Attacks against places of worship, monuments, and religious symbols were reported in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Venezuela (see the country reports). The motivation of the vandals was mostly ideological, but an important common denominator was the attitude of the governments which, in most cases, chose to let the attacks occur during public demonstrations and then chose not to prosecute the perpetrators.[172] Graffiti on buildings, cars and monuments carried slogans in favour of abortion, homosexual marriage, gay pride, as well as denouncing violence against women and clerical sexual abuse.[173]

Acceleration of secularisation

In several countries there was a growing debate about the role of secularism, what a secular state means, and the space given to religious freedom in the public sphere. In this social discourse, certain groups presented the right to religious freedom as contrary to the secular nature of government. This was countered by arguments that secularisation did not deliver governments from the obligation to guarantee the right of the individual to believe, or not, and to order his or her public life in accordance with those beliefs. The authoritative voice of the Catholic Church was in some ways silenced in these debates as a result of the loss of credibility after the sexual abuse scandals, and the hesitant and belated recognition of and restitution to victims.

Migration

Over 4.8 million migrants have fled Venezuela alone since the start of the political and economic crisis in 2015.[174] Likewise, although in lower numbers, migrant caravans increasingly left comparable crises in countries such as Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Haiti (see the country reports). Mexico experienced significant internal displacement as villagers fled the violence of organized crime. Neighbouring nations also faced the challenge of integrating those migrants, with their diverse religious backgrounds, into what were previously more or less homogenous societies. As the country report for Chile reveals, for example, the number of religious groups in that country doubled in a few years, as consequence of migration from Haiti.[175]

COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the region. Country reports indicate that restrictions imposed on the populations were generally respected, with religious leaders cooperating with governments to persuade the faithful to follow the measures. Indeed, in some cases, religious authorities were perceived as tougher than the health authorities and were criticised for this. The case of Uruguay is noteworthy because, instead of unilaterally imposing restrictions, the authorities reached out to the various religious communities to coordinate a unified approach.[176] Religious communities also contributed to the effort to contain the pandemic by offering health facilities such as hospitals and clinics, as well as buildings to provide shelter and meals for the homeless.

Positive aspects

In six countries – Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Honduras, Jamaica and Colombia – the right to religious freedom received additional protections from higher court rulings (see the country reports). In recognition of the positive role of faith in times of crisis, in several nations, including a number in the Caribbean, traditional popular religious events went ahead, albeit with some restrictions due to the pandemic.

Chile: the burning of the churches

On 18th October 2020, two churches were looted and burned in Santiago – the landmark St. Francis Borja Church, and the Church of the Asunción. A group of hooded protestors shouted, "Let it fall, let it fall", while the dome of the Asunción Church, known as the "parish of the artists", was consumed by fire.[177]

The attacks on the historic churches occurred on the first anniversary of widespread anti-government protests. Known as Estallido Social (or Social Outbreak), the demonstrations erupted initially on 7th October 2019 when students opposed an increase in Metro Santiago subway fares. The protests, however, soon developed to encompass a broader critique of social and economic arrangements.[178] At their height, more than one million people took to the streets.[179]

Although initially peaceful, the demonstrations degenerated into violence, with riots and widespread acts of vandalism targeting government infrastructure, notably the destruction of Metro Santiago subway stations. There were 30 deaths and over 3,000 people were injured in the unrest. On 19th October 2019, Chile's President Sebastián Piñera announced a state of emergency and deployed the military throughout the capital.[180]

The initial social discontent lasted for over three months, later diminishing to sporadic protests across Chile. It was during these demonstrations, between October 2019 and October 2020, that looting and the destruction of churches were reported. In total 59 churches, 53 Catholic and six Evangelical, were vandalised in eight cities across the country.[181]

The violence included arson, looting, desecration of the Blessed Sacrament, disruption of religious services and damage to church doors and gates. There were incidents in which church pews and religious statues were used to build barricades and stones were thrown through stained-glass windows.[182]

Although the Chilean authorities condemned the acts, despite Church appeals for an investigation – in some cases the perpetrators were known[183] – a comprehensive official inquiry has not been opened.[184]

Protestors set fire to the pulpit of the San Francisco de Borja church one year after the start of anti-government protests in Santiago, Chile, on 18th October 2020.

©Picture Alliance/AP Photo/Esteban Felix

case study

COVID-19: the impact on religious freedom world-wide

By Maria Lozano

> *"The need to halt the spread of the virus has also had implications for a number of fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom, restricting public worship and the educational and charitable activities of faith communities. It must be recognized, however, that religion is a fundamental aspect of the human person and of society, and cannot be eliminated. Even as we seek ways to protect human lives from the spread of the virus, we cannot view the spiritual and moral dimension of the human person as less important than physical health."[185]*

Pope Francis

No event in modern history has affected the lives of the world's population so significantly and universally as the COVID-19 pandemic. Regardless of race, colour or creed, the pandemic tore at the fabric of public health institutions and upended previous practices in the global economy, and in government, often with profound implications for human rights, including that of religious freedom. The impact of the illness has not only revealed underlying societal weaknesses, but in many areas of the world exacerbated existing fragilities resulting from poverty, corruption, and insecure state structures.

Several African governments, overwhelmed by the challenges posed by the raging pandemic, redeployed military and security forces to support the healthcare needs of the general population.[186] Particularly in the early months, terrorist groups and jihadists took advantage of the government distraction to increase their violent attacks and entrench territorial gains.[187] The pandemic was also used by extremist groups to recruit new members. Numerous Al-Qaeda, Daesh (Islamic State) and Boko Haram[188] internet-based propaganda publications described COVID-19 as a punishment from God for the "decadent West", promised immunity against the virus and assured a place in paradise for jihadists.[189] Across the Sahel region[190] – including Mali and Burkina Faso[191], Niger and Nigeria – as well as in the Cabo Delgado region of northern Mozambique, Islamists regrouped, rearmed and reinforced existing structures and alliances or created new ones.

States too took advantage of the confusion. Particularly authoritarian regimes, for example China, used the epidemic to place greater restrictions on the practice of religion and shut down websites streaming religious services.[192]

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted not only in a global health crisis, but also a world-wide economic recession. Fear and uncertainty about the infection, and frustration at the repeated lockdowns, triggered social unrest and prompted vitriolic attacks, especially on social media, on scapegoats whether racial or religious. Conspiracy theories proliferated online claiming that Jews caused the outbreak[193], in India allegations were made against Muslim minorities[194], while in several countries – such as China[195], Niger[196], Turkey[197] and Egypt – the pandemic was blamed on Christians.[198] Pre-existing societal prejudices against religious communities also led to increased discrimination through a denial of access to food and medical aid – for example, in Pakistan, Muslim charities "denied food aid and emergency kits to Christians and members of minority communities".[199]

On the other hand, the pandemic inspired positive examples where religious groups supported each other. In Cameroon, thousands of Muslims joined Christians for Christmas Day prayers for an end to the pandemic and for peace.[200] In Bangladesh, where due to infection fears minority faith groups were unable to offer the last rites to family members, an Islamic charity buried not only Muslim but also Hindu and Christian victims of COVID-19.[201] In Cyprus, where border restrictions prevented Christians and Muslims from visiting their respective religious sites, several Turkish Cypriot Muslims prayed at the Tomb of the Apostle Barnabas, the Patron of Cyprus, as a gesture of goodwill and respect to Christians who were unable to visit.[202] Finally, as an example of a positive state response, the communist government in Cuba allowed a broadcast of the Way of the Cross with Pope Francis and the Easter liturgies, for the first time on national television.[203]

Government reaction to the medical emergency profoundly affected fundamental human rights, including freedom of assembly and religious freedom, provoking debates as to the implications of the political decisions taken. It is difficult to assess to what extent the right to religious freedom was threatened universally because each country, and in some cases each region, responded differently to the global event.

It is evident that the world confronted an unpredictable emergency and world leaders were called upon to take extraordinary measures, improvising with untested legislation as the situation deteriorated. However, within this framework, it is also clear that there were cases of abuse and attacks on religious freedom, in part by means of disproportionate application of restrictions to religious activities, as compared with commercial activities, but also through aggressive police and military tactics in addressing breaches of restrictions related to religious practices.

Examples of disproportionate restrictions on religious practice were in evidence in some states in the USA[204] and in Spain[205], where attendance at religious services was very restricted while places of business or recreation were allowed to welcome customers in greater numbers. Furthermore, despite court appeals addressing the contradictions, in some cases the regulations were not changed and no reasons were given for the decisions (see the country reports). In terms of aggressive security responses, incidents arose when limits on attendance at religious ceremonies or places of worship were not clear, and the legal ambiguity created a practical uncertainty, resulting in excessive reactions by the security forces.

The COVID-19 pandemic opened an important debate around the world about fundamental rights, including the right to religious freedom, the implications of legislative overreach, and whether, in some cases, aggressively secular governments are adequately able to discern the importance of these rights.

Holy Apostles Catholic Church, London, UK, November 2020

Global Trends in Religious Freedom

Persecution, hate crimes and religiously-motivated violence.	**Discrimination, hate crimes and religiously-motivated violence.**	↑ Improved since 2018 ↓ Worsened since 2018 — No change since 2018

Name of Country in English	Category / Trend	Main Driver of Persecution / Discrimination
Afghanistan	↓	Islamist Extremism
Bangladesh	↓	Authoritarian Government
Burkina Faso	↓	Islamist Extremism
Cameroon	↓	Islamist Extremism
Chad	↓	Islamist Extremism
China	↓	Authoritarian Government
Comoros	↓	Authoritarian Government and Islamist Extremism
Democratic Republic of Congo	↓	Islamist Extremism
Eritrea	↓	Authoritarian Government
India	↓	Ethno-religious nationalism
Iran	↓	Authoritarian Government
North Korea	↓	Authoritarian Government
Libya	↓	Authoritarian Government and Islamist Extremism
Malaysia	↓	Authoritarian Government and Islamist Extremism
Maldives	↓	Authoritarian Government and Islamist Extremism
Mali	↓	Islamist Extremism
Mozambique	↓	Islamist Extremism
Myanmar	↓	Authoritarian Government
Niger	↓	Islamist Extremism
Nigeria	↓	Islamist Extremism
Pakistan	↑	Authoritarian Government and Ethno-religious nationalism
Saudi Arabia	↓	Authoritarian Government
Somalia	↓	Islamist Extremism
Sri Lanka	↓	Ethno-religious nationalism
Turkmenistan	↓	Authoritarian Government
Yemen	↓	Authoritarian Government and Islamist Extremism
Algeria	↓	Authoritarian Government
Azerbaijan	↓	Authoritarian Government
Bahrain	—	Authoritarian Government
Brunei	↓	Authoritarian Government
Cuba	↑	Authoritarian Government
Djibouti	↓	Authoritarian Government
Egypt	↑	Authoritarian Government and Islamist Extremism
Ethiopia	↓	Authoritarian Government and Islamist Extremism
Indonesia	↑	Islamist Extremism
Iraq	↑	Islamist Extremism
Jordan	↓	Authoritarian Government and Islamist Extremism
Kazakhstan	—	Authoritarian Government
Kuwait	↓	Authoritarian Government
Kyrgyzstan	↓	Authoritarian Government
Laos	—	Authoritarian Government

Name of Country in English		Category / Trend	Main Driver of Persecution / Discrimination
Madagascar	↓	Islamist Extremism	
Mauritania	↓	Islamist Extremism	
Mauritius	↓	Islamist Extremism	
Morocco	↑	Authoritarian Government and Islamist Extremism	
Nepal	↓	Ethno-religious nationalism	
Nicaragua	↓	Authoritarian Government	
Oman	↓	Authoritarian Government	
Palestine and Gaza	↑	Authoritarian Government	
Qatar	—	Authoritarian Government	
Singapore	↓	Authoritarian Government	
Sudan	↑	Authoritarian Government	
Syria	↑	Islamist Extremism	
Tajikistan	↓	Authoritarian Government	
Tanzania	↓	Authoritarian Government and Islamist Extremism	
Thailand	↓	Authoritarian Government	
Tunisia	↓	Authoritarian Government	
Turkey	↓	Authoritarian Government	
United Arab Emirates	↓	Authoritarian Government	
Uzbekistan	↑	Authoritarian Government	
Venezuela	↓	Authoritarian Government	
Vietnam	↓	Authoritarian Government	

Countries "under observation": Countries where newly emerging factors of concern have been observed, with the potential to cause a fundamental breakdown in freedom of religion. These include legal measures against aspects of religious freedom, increasing cases of hate crimes and occasional religiously-motivated violence. (Map: marked with a magnifying glass on Regional Analysis maps)

EAST AND WEST AFRICA
Central African Republic
Gambia
Guinea Conakry
Ivory Coast
Kenya
Liberia
Rwanda
South Africa
South Sudan
Togo
Uganda

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
Chile
Guatemala
Haiti
Honduras
Mexico

MAINLAND ASIA
Bhutan
Cambodia

MARITIME ASIA
Philippines

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
Israel
Lebanon

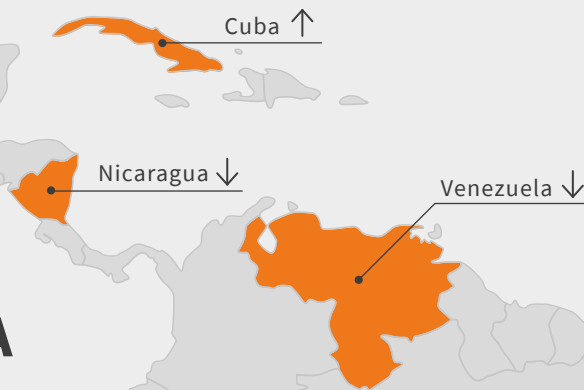**OSCE COUNTRIES**
Belarus
Russia
Ukraine

All other countries are non-classified

EXPLANATORY NOTES

The period under review: August 2018 to November 2020 (inclusive). To read the individual country reports please refer to https://acninternational.org/religiousfreedomreport. In assessing the scale of oppression of religious groups, the Editorial Committee and Regional Editors considered factors described in the Methodology and Definitions section. ACN acknowledges that the qualitative nature of the categorisation means that there is necessarily a subjective element in such an analysis.
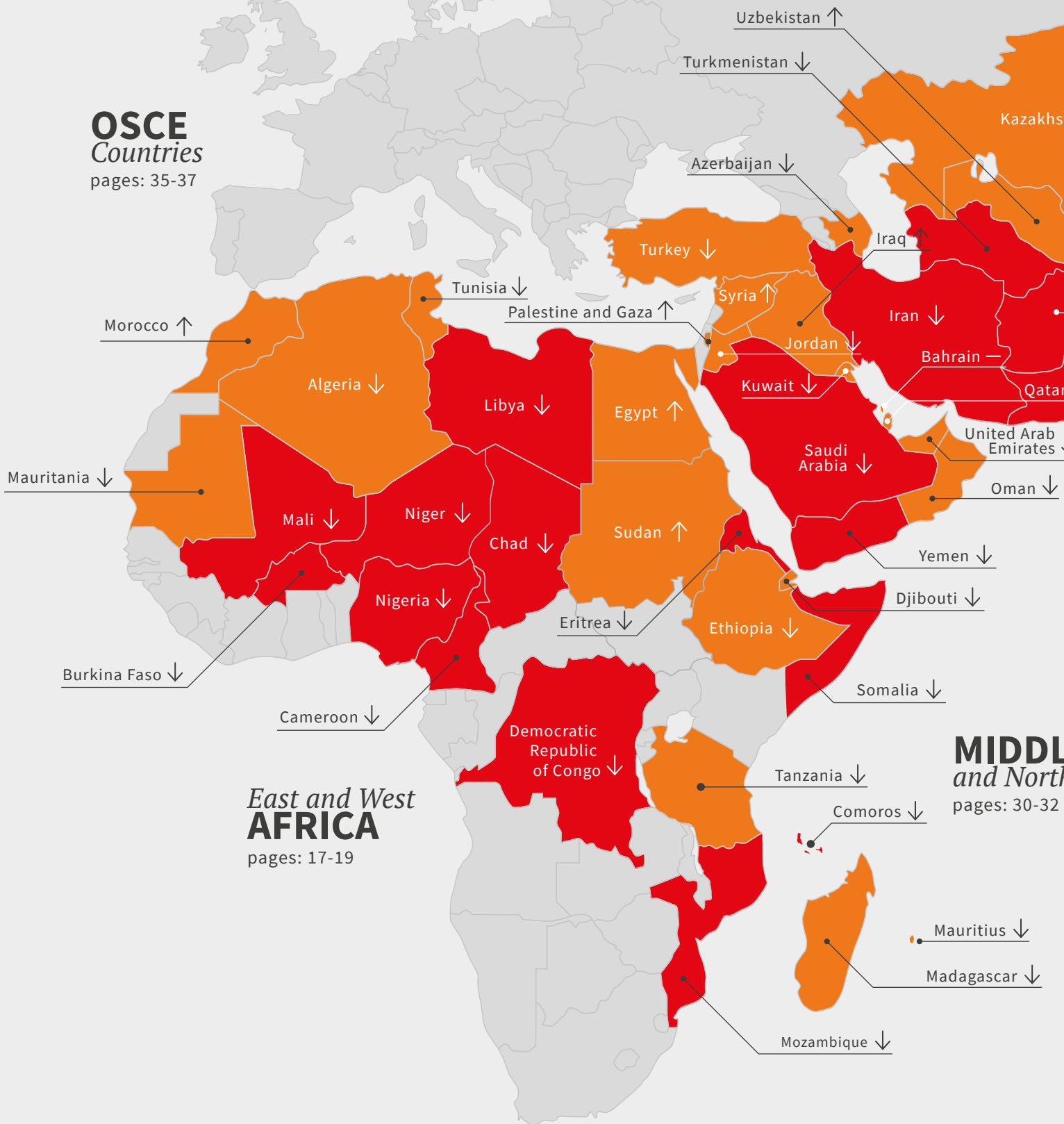
Countries with Significant Violations
of **Religious Freedom**

Cuba ↑

Nicaragua ↓

Venezuela ↓

LATIN AMERICA
and Caribbean
pages: 40-41

Uzbekistan ↑
Turkmenistan ↓
Azerbaijan ↓
Kazakhs
Turkey ↓
Iraq
Tunisia ↓
Morocco ↑
Syria ↑
Palestine and Gaza ↑
Iran ↓
Jordan ↓
Bahrain —
Kuwait ↓
Algeria ↓
Libya ↓
Egypt ↑
Qatar
Mauritania ↓
Saudi
Arabia ↓
United Arab
Emirates
Mali ↓
Niger ↓
Chad ↓
Sudan ↑
Oman ↓
Nigeria ↓
Yemen ↓
Burkina Faso ↓
Eritrea ↓
Ethiopia ↓
Djibouti ↓
Cameroon ↓
Somalia ↓
Democratic
Republic
of Congo ↓

Tanzania ↓
Comoros ↓

Mauritius ↓
Madagascar ↓
Mozambique ↓

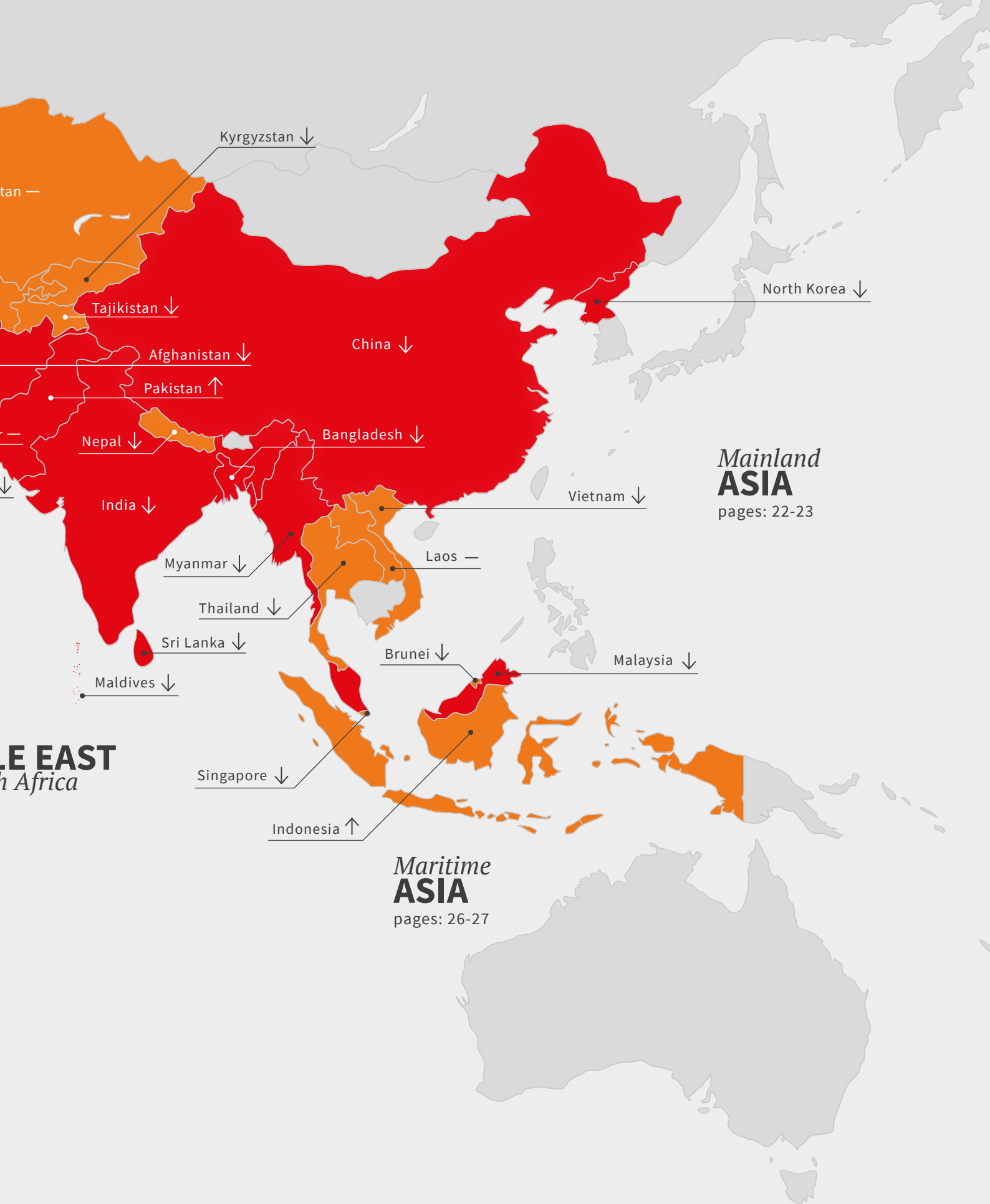|	
🟥	Persecution, hate crimes and religiously-motivated violence.
🟧	Discrimination, hate crimes and religiously-motivated violence.
↑	Improved since 2018
↓	Worsened since 2018
—	No change since 2018

Kyrgyzstan ↓

North Korea ↓

Tajikistan ↓

China ↓

Afghanistan ↓

Pakistan ↑

Nepal ↓

Bangladesh ↓

Mainland
ASIA
pages: 22-23

Vietnam ↓

India ↓

Myanmar ↓

Laos —

Thailand ↓

Sri Lanka ↓

Brunei ↓

Malaysia ↓

Maldives ↓

LE EAST
h Africa

Singapore ↓

Indonesia ↑

Maritime
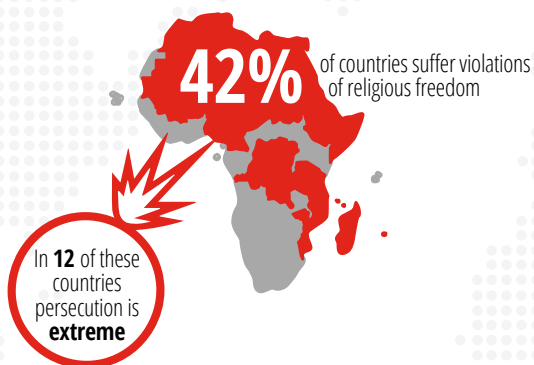**ASIA**
pages: 26-27

Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN INTERNATIONAL

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN 196 COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD

IN **62 COUNTRIES** THERE ARE VIOLATIONS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM (31.6%)

36
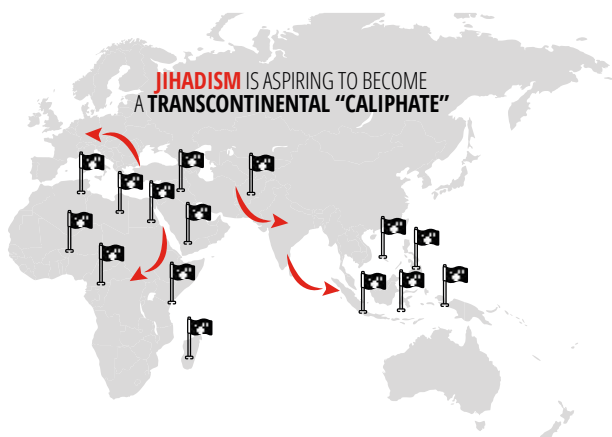countries suffer **discrimination** (18.6%)

26
countries suffer **persecution** (13%)

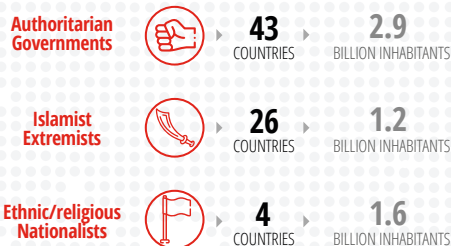**1 in every 3 countries** in the world suffer violations of religious freedom

67% of the world's population - 5.2 billion - **live** in countries* where **grave violations** of freedom religious occur

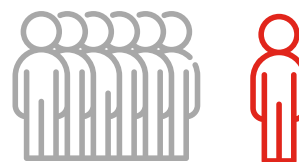** In many of them religious minorities are the most targeted*

VIOLATIONS IN 23 OF 54 AFRICAN COUNTRIES
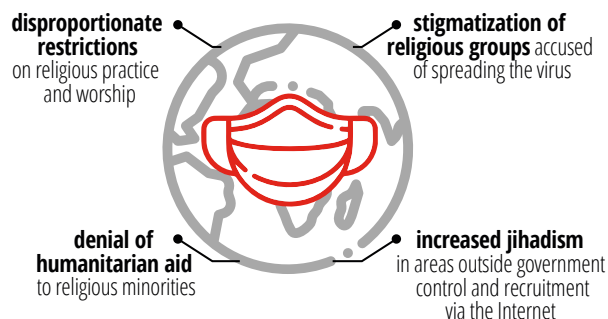
42% of countries suffer violations of religious freedom

In **12** of these countries persecution is **extreme**

WHO IS VIOLATING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM?*

	COUNTRIES	BILLION INHABITANTS
Authoritarian Governments	**43**	**2.9**
Islamist Extremists	**26**	**1.2**
Ethnic/religious Nationalists	**4**	**1.6**

* Some of these countries are included in more than one group

In **30 countries** people have been **killed in acts of religious hatred** since the middle of 2018

Changing or renouncing your religion can have **grave legal and/or social consequences** in

21% of countries

42 COUNTRIES

JIHADISM IS ASPIRING TO BECOME A **TRANSCONTINENTAL "CALIPHATE"**

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

disproportionate restrictions on religious practice and worship

stigmatization of religious groups accused of spreading the virus

denial of humanitarian aid to religious minorities

increased jihadism in areas outside government control and recruitment via the Internet

SOURCES

1 "Meeting for Religious Liberty, Address of the Holy Father", 26th September 2015;
http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150926_usa-liberta-religiosa.html
2 "Religious Freedom, the Path to Peace", Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of The World Day Of Peace, 1st January 2011; http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20101208_xliv-world-day-peace.html
3 "Guide on Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights", Updated 31st August 2020; https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Guide_Art_9_ENG.pdf
4 Ibid.
5 "Universal Declaration of Human Rights", United Nations, 1948; https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/
6 "Religion: why faith is becoming more and more popular", The Guardian, 27th August 2018; https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/27/religion-why-is-faith-growing-and-what-happens-next
7 "How transnational jihadist groups are exploiting local conflict dynamics in Western Africa", Danish Institute for International Studies, 10th May 2020; https://www.diis.dk/en/research/how-transnational-jihadist-groups-are-exploiting-local-conflict-dynamics-in-western-africa
8 "Threat from African Militant Islamist Groups Expanding, Diversifying", Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 18th January 2020; https://africacenter.org/spotlight/threat-from-african-militant-islamist-groups-expanding-diversifying/
9 Ibid.
10 "The Conflict Between Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in the Sahel, A Year On", by Héni Nsaibia, Italian Institute for International Political Studies, 3rd March 2021; https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/conflict-between-al-qaeda-and-islamic-state-sahel-year-29305
11 "Civilians reel as violence spins out of control in Mozambique", by T. Bowker, Al Jazeera, 11th November 2020; https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/11/we-want-the-war-to-stop-attacks-spread-in-mozambique (accessed on 20th November 2020).
12 "How transnational jihadist groups are exploiting local conflict dynamics in Western Africa", Danish Institute for International Studies, 10th May 2020; https://www.diis.dk/en/research/how-transnational-jihadist-groups-are-exploiting-local-conflict-dynamics-in-western-africa.
13 "In Africa's Sahel, 'places where Christians and Muslims live alongside one another are next target' for Islamist terror", ACN News, 27th February 2020; https://www.churchinneed.org/in-africas-sahel-places-where-christians-and-muslims-live-alongside-one-another-are-next-target-for-islamist-terror/
14 "Nigeria's Katsina school abduction: Boko Haram says it took the students", BBC News, 15th December 2020; https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55295701
15 "Nigeria school abduction: Hundreds of girls released by gunmen", BBC News, 3rd March 2021; https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56249626
16 "Gunmen Attack School, Abduct Students, Others In Niger", Live TV News, 17th February 2021; https://www.channelstv.com/2021/02/17/gunmen-attack-niger-school-kill-one-student-abduct-others/
17 "Hundreds of schoolgirls abducted in Nigeria, government official says", CNN, 17th February 2021; https://edition.cnn.com/2021/02/26/africa/schoolgirls-abducted-nigeria-intl/index.html
18 "Nigeria school abduction: Hundreds of girls released by gunmen" op., cit.
19 "Nigeria's school abductions: Why children are being targeted", BBC News, 2nd March 2021; https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56212645
20 Ibid.
21 "More Nigerian Schoolgirls Kidnapped while a Christian Pastor Pleads for His Life", Family Research Council, 1st March 2021; https://frcblog.com/2021/03/more-nigerian-schoolgirls-kidnapped-while-a-christian-pastor-pleads-his-life/
22 Ibid.
23 "UNHCR outraged by attack on camp hosting displaced people in Cameroon, at least 18 people killed", UNHCR Briefing, 4th August 2020; https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2020/8/5f291a704/unhcr-outraged-attack-camp-hosting-displaced-people-cameroon-18-people.html
24 "20 peacekeepers wounded in Mali attack: UN", EWN, 10th February 2021; https://ewn.co.za/2021/02/10/20-peacekeepers-wounded-in-mali-attack-un
25 "Islamic State claims its first Congo attack", Reuters, 18th April 2019; https://www.reuters.com/article/us-congo-security-idUSKCN1RU2KD (accessed 2nd January 2020).
26 "Mayor of Mogadishu dies as result of al-Shabaab attack", The Guardian, 1st August 2019; https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/01/mayor-of-mogadishu-dies-as-result-of-al-shabaab-attack-somalia
27 "Kenya Looks to Secure Border as Al-Shabab Launches Deadly Attacks", VOA News, 16th January 2020; https://www.voanews.com/africa/kenya-looks-secure-border-al-shabab-launches-deadly-attacks
28 "Kivu, Africa's Great Lakes battleground", News24, 6th October 2018; https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/kivu-africas-great-lakes-battleground-20181005
29 "U.S. counterterrorism chief says Mozambique militants are Islamic State affiliate", Reuters, 9th December 2020; https://jp.reuters.com/article/ozatp-us-mozambique-insurgency-usa-idAFKBN28J0QL-OZATP
30 "Muslim army major at centre of hijab case wins interim relief," Times Live, 7th August 2019; https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-08-07-muslim-army-major-at-centre-of-hijab-case-wins-interim-relief/ (accessed 23rd October 2020).
31 "Sudan's clerics voice outrage at violation of mosques", Radio Dabanga, 17th February 2019; https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-s-clerics-voice-outrage-at-violation-of-mosques (accessed 9th November 2020).
32 "Christian man in Uganda loses family to attack on home," International Christian Concern, 3rd October 2019; https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/03/christian-man-in-uganda-loses-family-attack-home/ (accessed 6th November 2020).
33 "Islamic State Stepping Up Attacks in Mozambique", VOA News, 26th February 2020; https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/islamic-state-stepping-attacks-mozambique
34 "South Sudan leaders: 'How can we not bring peace if the Pope pushes us to do so?'", Vatican News, 14th January 2020; https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2020-01/south-sudan-rome-declaration-pope-saint-egidio.html (accessed 10th November 2020).
35 "Pope kisses feet of South Sudan leaders, urging them to keep the peace", Reuters, 11th April 2019; https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pope-southsudan-idUSKCN1RN27G (accessed 11th November 2020).
36 "Peace talks between the government and separatists in the bishop's residence: the Church promotes dialogue and reconciliation," Agenzia Fides, 20th July 2020; http://www.fides.org/en/news/68392-AFRICA_CAMEROON_Peace_talks_between_government_and_separatists_in_the_bishop_s_residence_the_Church_promotes_dialogue_and_reconciliation (accessed 29th October 2020).
37 "Cameroon: Survivors of Military Assault Await Justice", Human Rights Watch, 26th February 2021; https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/26/cameroon-survivors-military-assault-await-justice
38 Office of International Religious Freedom, "Burundi," 2018 International Religious Freedom Report, U.S. Department of State; https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/burundi/ (accessed 20th October 2020).
39 "Kenya Catholics seek donations for Muslims during Christmas season", CatholicPhilly, 17th December 2019; https://catholicphilly.com/2019/12/news/world-news/kenya-catholics-seek-donations-for-muslims-during-christmas-season/
40 "Nigeria's Boko Haram pledges allegiance to Islamic State", BBC News, 7th March 2015; https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31784538
41 "Outlasting the Caliphate: The Evolution of the Islamic State Threat in Africa", Combatting Terrorism Center, December 2020; https://ctc.usma.edu/outlasting-the-caliphate-the-evolution-of-the-islamic-state-threat-in-africa/
42 "Regional conflicts add to Somalia's security concerns", Institute for Security Studies, 17th December 2020; https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/regional-conflicts-add-somalia-s-security-concerns
43 "'Why now?' Dismay as US considers troop pullout from Somalia", AP News, 26th November 2020; https://apnews.com/article/islamic-state-group-elections-africa-somalia-kenya-6fad3fe2b14858274daf34a29a78dbe7
44 "Christmas message: minister apologizes to Sudan's Christians for their suffering", Radio Dabanga, 26th December 2019; https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/christmas-message-minister-apologises-to-sudan-s-christians-for-their-suffering (accessed 9th November 2020).
45 "By the Numbers: Cabo Delgado, October 2017-November 2020", 10th November 2020, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); https://acleddata.com/2020/11/10/cabo-ligado-weekly-2-8-november-2020/
46 "With Village Beheadings, Islamic State Intensifies Attacks in Mozambique", The New York Times, 11th November 2020; https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/11/

world/middleeast/Mozambique-ISIS-beheading.html

47 "Mozambique villagers 'massacred' by Islamists", BBC News, 22nd April 2020; https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52381507 (accessed 12th January 2020).

48 "Dozens killed in Mozambique for refusing to join terrorists", DW News, 22nd April 2020; https://www.dw.com/en/dozens-killed-in-mozambique-for-refusing--to-join-terrorists/a-53211140

49 "Mozambique Insurgents Attack in Total's LNG Concession Area", Bloomberg News, 2nd January 2021; https://www.bloomberg.com/news/artic-les/2021-01-02/mozambique-insurgents-attack-within-total-s-lng-concession-area

50 "In 2018, Government Restrictions on Religion Reach Highest Level Globally in More Than a Decade", Pew Research Center, 10th November 2020; https://www.pewforum.org/2020/11/10/in-2018-government-restrictions-on-religion-reach-highest-level-globally-in-more-than-a-decade/

51 "China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang", Council on Foreign Relations, 1st March 2021, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-repression-uyghurs-xin-jiang

52 "India: Vigilante 'cow protection' groups attack minorities", Human Rights Watch, 18th February 2019; https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/02/18/india-vigilante--cow-protection-groups-attack-minorities

53 "Government restrictions on religion around the world reached new record in 2018", Pew Research Center, 10th November 2020; https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/11/10/government-restrictions-on-religion-around-the-world-reached-new-record-in-2018/

54 "Nepalese party wants to refound the Hindu state. Concern for Christian", AsiaNews, 28th February 2019; http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Nepalese-party--wants-to-refound-the-Hindu-state.-Concern-for-Christians-46377.html

55 "Genocide Against the Burmese Rohingya", Hearing of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 16th July 2020; https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/geno-cide-against-burmese-rohingya

56 "Burmese military bombs village and kills seven civilians", Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 9th April 2020, https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/04/09/press/4614/article.htm

57 "Sri Lanka attacks: What we know about the Easter bombings," BBC News, 28th April 2019; https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48010697 (accessed 30th October 2020).

58 "Buddhist Militancy Rises Again in Sri Lanka", by Alan Keenan, International Crisis Group, 7th March 2018; https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/sri-lan-ka/buddhist-militancy-rises-again-sri-lanka

59 "Buddhist nationalists claim victory in Sri Lankan election", AP News, 27th November 2019; https://apnews.com/article/bf051a4b2673484f8460131a7500b0ec

60 "Five dead after 'terror attack,' explosion in China's Xinjiang", Radio Free Asia, 29th December 2016; https://www.refworld.org/docid/58f9ca3013.html

61 "A Surveillance Net Blankets China's Cities, Giving Police Vast Powers", by Paul Mozur and Aaron Krolik, The New York Times, 17th December 2019; https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/17/technology/china-surveillance.html (last accessed on 8th January 2021).

62 "China's Smart Cities Development", Research Report Prepared on Behalf of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, SOSi, January 2020; https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/China_Smart_Cities_Development.pdf

63 "Data Leviathan: China's Burgeoning Surveillance State", by Kenneth Roth and Maya Wang, Human Rights Watch, 16th August 2019; https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/08/16/data-leviathan-chinas-burgeoning-surveillance-state (last accessed on 8th January 2021).

64 "Night Images Reveal Many New Detention Sites in China's Xinjiang Region", New York Times, 24th September 2020; https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/24/world/asia/china-muslims-xinjiang-detention.html

65 "We must keep up pressure on China over abuse of Turkic Muslims", The Age, 20th July 2019; https://www.theage.com.au/world/asia/we-must-keep-up--pressure-on-china-over-abuse-of-turkic-muslims-20190719-p528w8.html (last accessed on 8th January 2021).

66 "Eradicating Ideological Viruses, China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims", Human Rights Watch, 9th September 2018; https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs (last accessed on 8th January 2021).

67 "We must keep up pressure on China over abuse of Turkic Muslims", Sydney Morning Herald, 20th July 2019; https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/we-must--keep-up-pressure-on-china-over-abuse-of-turkic-muslims-20190719-p528w8.html

68 "Eradicating Ideological Viruses, China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims", op. cit.

69 "Facial Recognition Cameras Installed in State-Run Religious Venues" by Yang Luguang, Bitter Winter, 24th October 2020; https://bitterwinter.org/facial-reco-gnition-cameras-installed-in-state-run-religious-venues (last accessed on 8th January 2021).

70 "China: Draft Regulations Limit Sharing Religious Information Online", 13th September 2018; https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/09/13/press/4069/article.htm

71 Ibid.

72 "The 'Big Brother' of religions: Beijing's new database", by Wang Zhicheng, Asia News, 10th February 2021; http://www.asianews.it/news-en/The-'Big-Brother'-of-religions:-Beijing%E2%80%99s-new-database-52311.html (last accessed on 8th January 2021).

73 Ibid

74 "China's use of technology for religious oppression a 'threat to all of us,' warns Brownback", The Christian Post, 25th August 2020; https://www.christianpost.com/news/chinas-use-of-technology-for-religious-oppression-a-threat-to-all-of-us-warns-brownback.html (last accessed on 8th January 2021).

75 "China's Surveillance State Has Eyes on Central Asia", by Bradley Jardine, Foreign Policy, 15th November 2019; https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/15/huawei--xinjiang-kazakhstan-uzbekistan-china-surveillance-state-eyes-central-asia/; (last accessed on 8th January 2021)

76 "From AI to facial recognition: how China is setting the rules in new tech", by James Kynge and Nian Liu, Financial Times, 7th October, 2020; https://www.ft.com/content/188d86df-6e82-47eb-a134-2e1e45c777b6 (last accessed on 8th January 2021).

77 "Freedom of religion after the Catholic Herald", Kairos Research Center, September 2014; http://www.krisispraxis.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Free-dom-of-Religion-after-the-Catholic-Herald.pdf (accessed 19th October 2020).

78 "Muslims 'have the right to kill millions of French people', Malaysia's former PM says after church terror attack in Nice - as Scott Morrison slams 'abhorrent' comments", Daily Mail, 29th October 2020; https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8893671/Muslims-right-kill-millions-French-people-Malaysias-former-PM--says.html

79 "Maldives: NGO closure shows repression hasn't gone away", Amnesty International, 5th November 2019; https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/11/maldives-ngo-closure-shows-repression-hasnt-gone-away/

80 "Why hundreds of thousands of Muslims rallied against the Jakarta governor", The Conversation, 9th November 2016; https://theconversation.com/why-hun-dreds-of-thousands-of-muslims-rallied-against-the-jakarta-governor-68351

81 "Ahok: Former Jakarta governor released early from prison", BBC News, 24th January 2019; https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-46982779

82 "Brunei | Enforcement of Syariah Laws in Brunei Darussalam", ZICO Law, 7th June 2019; https://www.zicolaw.com/resources/alerts/brunei-enforcement-of--syariah-laws-in-brunei-darussalam/

83 "Indonesian court rules in favor of religious freedom", Christian Science Monitor, 7th November 2017; https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Paci-fic/2017/1107/Indonesian-court-rules-in-favor-of-religious-freedom

84 "Pompeo Says China 'Gravest Threat to Future of Religious Freedom'", VOA, 29th October 2020; https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/pompeo-says-chi-na-gravest-threat-future-religious-freedom

85 "Christchurch shootings leave 50 people dead after attacks on mosques, as it happened", ABC News, 15th March 2019; https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-03-15/christchurch-shooting-multiple-fatalities-mosque-new-zealand/10904416

86 "Australia's offshore detention is unlawful, says international criminal court prosecutor", The Guardian, 15th February 2020; https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/feb/15/australias-offshore-detention-is-unlawful-says-international-criminal-court-prosecutor

87 "India election results 2019: Narendra Modi secures landslide win", BBC News, 23rd May 2019; https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-48347081

88 "Referring to concerns about the 'Pakistanization' of the region of South Asia", Dr. Farahnaz Ispahani, 18th July 2019; https://twitter.com/RFInstitute/sta-tus/1151639626442035201

89 "Cultural Diversity In Mena Countries", Researchomatic; https://www.researchomatic.com/cultural-diversity-in-mena-countries-181087.html#buytopicstep

90 "MENA Countries 2021", World Population Review; https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/mena-countries

91 "What Percent of Muslims live in Arab countries?", Answers; https://www.answers.com/Q/What_Percent_of_Muslims_live_in_Arab_countries

92 "Middle East and North Africa (MENA)", Investopia; https://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/middle-east-and-north-africa-mena.asp

93 "Copts persuaded to drop charges against mob who attacked their church", World Watch Monitor, 30th May 2018; https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/05/copts-persuaded-to-drop-charges-against-mob-who-attacked-their-church/

94 "Cardinal Zenari: Christians represent only 2% of the Syrian population", Agenzia Fides, 28th January 2019; http://www.fides.org/en/news/65459-ASIA_SY-

RIA_Cardinal_Zenari_Christians_represent_only_2_of_the_Syrian_population

95 "Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi: IS leader 'dead after US raid' in Syria", BBC News, 28th October 2019; https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-50200339

96 "Suspected ISIS attack targets Kakai Kurds near Iraq-Iran border, by Lawk Ghafuri", Rudaw, 14th June 2020; https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/kaki-kurds-isis-attack14062020 (accessed 27th September 2020).

97 "Zwischen den Mühlsteinen", by Oliver Maksan, Die Tagespost, 25th December 2019; https://www.die-tagespost.de/aktuelles/forum/forumweihnachten2019/Zwischen-den-Muehlsteinen;art4962,204010 (accessed 7th January 2021)

98 "Egyptian President Sisi Calls for Reform of Islam", Institute for Contemporary Affairs, 15th February 2015; https://jcpa.org/article/sisi-calls-for-reform-of-islam/

99 "Why Saudi Arabia is taking a risk by backing the Egyptian coup", The Guardian, 20th August 2013; https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/20/saudi-arabia-coup-egypt

100 "France accuses Turkey of sending Syrian jihadists to Nagorno-Karabakh", Reuters, 1st October 2020; https://www.reuters.com/article/us-armenia-azerbaijan-putin-macron-idUSKBN26L3SB

101 "Iraqi parliament formally declares Christmas a national holiday", Crux, 18th December 2020; https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-middle-east/2020/12/iraqi-parliament-formally-declares-christmas-a-national-holiday/

102 "Egypt's Sisi opens mega-mosque and Middle East's largest cathedral in New Capital," Reuters, 6th January 2019; https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-religion-idUSKCN1P00L9

103 "UAE to rebuild Iraqi churches destroyed by Daesh", Gulf News, 10th October 2019; https://gulfnews.com/uae/uae-to-rebuild-iraqi-churches-destroyed-by-daesh-1.67042805

104 "Pope Francis's mass in the United Arab Emirates was historic — and complicated", Vox, 5th February 2019; https://www.vox.com/2019/2/5/18211956/pope-francis-mass-united-arab-emirates-arab

105 "New Prime Minister al Kadhimi visits Mosul and the Nineveh Plain: 'Christians, one of the most authentic members of the Country'", Agenzia Fides, 12th June 2020; http://www.fides.org/en/news/68118-ASIA_IRAQ_New_Prime_Minister_al_Kadhimi_visits_Mosul_and_the_Nineveh_Plain_Christians_one_of_the_most_authentic_members_of_the_Country

106 "Shiite leader Muqtada al Sadr creates a Committee for the return of illegal expropriations from Christian property owners", Agenzia Fides, 4th January 2021; http://www.fides.org/en/news/69329-ASIA_IRAQ_Shiite_leader_Muqtada_al_Sadr_creates_a_Committee_for_the_return_of_illegal_expropriations_from_Christian_property_owners (accessed 8 th January 2021)

107 "Lebanon has suffered from sectarianism too long", by Sune Haugbolle, Foreign policy, 1st November 2019; https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/01/lebanon-has-suffered-from-sectarianism-for-too-long/ (accessed 7th January 2021)

108 "Regensburg Redux: Was Pope Benedict XVI right about Islam?", by David Gibson, The Washington Post, 10th September 2014; https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/regensburg-redux-was-pope-benedict-xvi-right-about-islam-analysis/2014/09/10/d14f0080-391c-11e4-a023-1d61f7f31a05_story.html (accessed 10th January 2021)

109 "Vatican to restart stalled talks with Egypt's Al-Azhar University", Catholic News Service, 4th December 2013; https://ecumenism.net/2013/12/vatican-to-restart-stalled-talks-with-egypts-al-azhar-university.htm

110 "A Document On Human Fraternity For World Peace And Living Together", Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 4th February 2019; http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html

111 "Israel in talks with Saudi, UAE, Bahrain for defense alliance against Iran", Jerusalem Post, 1st March 2021; https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/israel-saudi-arabia-uae-bahrain-talking-defense-alliance-660588

112 "Netanyahu and mossad chief may have visited Saudi Arabia alongside Pompeo", by Lahav Harkov, Jerusalem Post, 23rd November 2020; https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/netanyahu-mossad-chief-may-have-visited-saudi-arabia-alongside-pompeo-649959 (accessed 7th January 2021)

113 "Iran and the Palestinians Lose Out in the Abraham Accords", The Atlantic, 16th September 2020; https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/09/winners-losers/616364/

114 "Pakistan blasphemy case: Asia Bibi freed from jail", BBC News, 8th November 2018; https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-46130189

115 'Sunni Islam', Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sunni (accessed 5th January 2021); Frederick Mathewson Denny, 'Sunni Islam', Oxford Bibliographies, 19th May 2017; https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0084.xml?rskey=YdPcN1&result=1&q=sunni#firstMatch

116 'Caliph Islamic title', by Asma Afsaruddin, Britannica; https://www.britannica.com/topic/caliph (accessed 5th January 2021); 'Caliph and Caliphate', by James E. Sowerwine, Oxford Bibliographies, 10th May 2017; https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0013.xml?rskey=4mGh8q&result=2&q=caliphs#firstMatch

117 'Shi'i Islam', by Andrew J. Newman, Britannica; https://www.britannica.com/topic/Shii (accessed 5th January 2021); Andrew A. Newman, 'Shi`i Islam', Oxford Bibliographies, 19th May 2017; https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0076.xml?rskey=9io4Tv&result=3&q=shia#firstMatch

118 'Qur'an', by Andrew Rippin, Oxford Bibliographies, 29th September 2014; https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0066.xml?rskey=lgo84R&result=1&q=quran#firstMatch

119 World Religion Database, Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, eds., Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2021.

120 'Islamic Law', by Allan Christelow, Oxford Bibliographies, 27th February 2019; https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199846733/obo-9780199846733-0042.xml?rskey=W6Jhpq&result=2&q=maliki#firstMatch

121 'Mālikī Islamic law', Britannica; https://www.britannica.com/topic/Maliki-school; Delfina Serrano, 'Mālikīs', Oxford Bibliographies, 30th July 2014; https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0220.xml?rskey=W6Jhpq&result=1&q=maliki#firstMatch

122 Ḥanafī school Islamic law', Britannica; https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hanafiyah; 'The Hanafi School', by Christie S. Warren, Oxford Bibliographies, 28th May 2013; https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0082.xml?rskey=g5KiQW&result=1&q=hanafi#firstMatch

123 'Ḥanbalī school Islamic law' by Ahmed El Shamsy, Britannica; https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hanabilah; Livnat Holtzman, 'Ḥanbalīs', Oxford Bibliographies, 10th March 2015; https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0210.xml?rskey=0JDVGZ&result=1&q=hanbali#firstMatch

124 'Shāfi'ī Islamic law', Britannica; https://www.britannica.com/topic/Shafiiyah; 'Shafi'is', by Ahmed el Shamsy, Oxford Bibliographies, 19th May 2017; https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0148.xml?rskey=YcG2oV&result=2&q=shafii#firstMatch

125 'Twelver Shi'a', by Andrew A. Newman, Oxford Bibliographies, 25th May 2011; https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0077.xml

126 'Alawis', by Stephan Prochazka, Oxford Bibliographies, 28th May 2013; https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0175.xml?rskey=VqwGma&result=2&q=alevis#firstMatch

127 'The Ahmadiyyah Movement', by Yohanan Friedmann, Oxford Bibliographies, 19th May 2017; https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0004.xml?rskey=cgg1qh&result=1&q=ahmadis#firstMatch

128 'Druze', by Hussam Timani, Oxford Bibliographies, 24th July 2018; https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0104.xml?rskey=Y0RTby&result=2&q=druzes#firstMatch

129 'Ibadiyya', by Martin Custers, Oxford Bibliographies, 24th July 2018; https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0112.xml?rskey=3taibq&result=1&q=ibadism#firstMatch

130 'Sufism', by Marcia Hermansen, Oxford Bibliographies,19th May 2017; https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0081.xml?rskey=t4PZYn&result=1&q=sufism#firstMatch

131 'Organization of the Islamic Cooperation Islamic organization'; https://www.oic-oci.org/home/?lan=en, Britannica; https://www.britannica.com/topic/Organization-of-the-Islamic-Cooperation

132 'Organization of the Islamic Cooperation Islamic organization'; https://www.oic-oci.org/states/?lan=en

133 'ICESCO', Kaiicid Dialogue Centre, https://www.kaiciid.org/who-we-are/our-partners/icesco

134 'The Muslim World League'; https://themwl.org/en

135 'The Arab League', Council on Foreign Relations; https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/arab-league

136 'Arab people', Britannica; https://www.britannica.com/topic/Arab

137 See ACN reports on Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq.

138 "Pakistan Christian woman murdered for refusing to convert and marry", by John Pontifex, ACN News 4th December 2020; (Aid to the Church in Need | PAKISTAN: Christian woman murdered for refusing to convert and marry (acnuk.org)

139 "Muslim man shoots Christian woman dead for refusing to marry him", by Nasir Sayeed, CLAAS, 7th December 2020; (Muslim man shoots Christian woman dead for refusing to marry him - Supporting Persecuted Christians In Pakistan | Blasphemy Law (claas.org.uk)

140 "Christian aid group applauds investigation into forced conversions, marriages in Pakistan", Catholic News Agency, 3rd December 2020; Christian aid group applauds investigation into forced conversions, marriages in Pakistan (catholicnewsagency.com)

141 "Forced Marriages & Forced Conversions In the Christian Community of Pakistan", Movement for Solidarity and Peace, April 2014; https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/msp/pages/162/attachments/original/1396724215/MSP_Report_-_Forced_Marriages_and_Conversions_of_Christian_Women_in_Pakistan.pdf?1396724215

142 "U.S. Justice Alito says pandemic has led to 'unimaginable' curbs on liberty", Reuters, 13th November 2020; https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-supremecourt-idUSKBN27T0LD

143 "Nevada to Loosen Cap on Conventions, Concerts and Churches", Associated Press, 29th September 2020; https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/nevada/articles/2020-09-29/nevada-to-loosen-cap-on-conventions-concerts-and-churches

144 "McConnell blasts Bowser for restricting church services but allowing protests", by Niels Lesniewski, Roll Call, 9th June 2020; https://www.rollcall.com/2020/06/09/mcconnell-blasts-bowser-for-restricting-church-services-while-allowing-protests-during-covid-19-pandemic/

145 "Covid-19 and Religious Liberty", Becket Law; https://www.becketlaw.org/covid-19-religious-worship/

146 "Spain: Authorities ease COVID-19 restrictions in Madrid and Barcelona from June 8 /update 29", GardaWorld, 6th June 2020; https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/348531/spain-authorities-ease-covid-19-restrictions-in-madrid-and-barcelona-from-june-8-update-29; "Coronavirus deescalation plan: Everything you need to know about the changes in Spain on Monday", by Pablo Linde, El Pais, 17th May 2020; https://english.elpais.com/spanish_news/2020-05-17/coronavirus-deescalation-plan-everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-changes-in-spain-on-monday.html

147 "Archbishops join interfaith call to PM to allow public worship", The Church of England, 3rd November 2020; https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/archbishops-join-interfaith-call-pm-allow-public-worship

148 "Catholic bishops fight for public Masses as England prepares for second lockdown", Catholic News Agency, 2nd November 2020; https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/bishops-fight-for-public-masses-as-england-prepares-for-second-lockdown-28946

149 "Catholic church leader criticises Covid worship restrictions in England", The Guardian, 1st November 2020; https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/01/catholic-church-leader-criticises-covid-worship-restrictions-england

150 Ibid.

151 "Greek Orthodox Church Tells Priests to Defy Lockdown Measures", by Jesse O'Neill, New York Post, 4th January 2021; https://nypost.com/2021/01/04/greek-orthodox-church-tells-priests-to-defy-lockdown-measures/

152 "Uzbekistan", 2020 Annual Report, United States Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF); https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Uzbekistan.pdf

153 "Which nation improved the most in 2019?" The Economist, 21st December 2019; https://www.economist.com/leaders/2019/12/21/which-nation-improved-the-most-in-2019

154 "Turkey to send soldiers to Azerbaijan", Atalayar, 17th November 2020; https://atalayar.com/en/content/turkey-send-soldiers-azerbaijan

155 "After Hagia Sophia, Turkey converts historic Chora church into mosque", The Jerusalem Post, 24th August 2020; https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/after-hagia-sophia-turkey-converts-historic-chora-church-in-to-mosque-639703

156 "The influence of external actors in the Western Balkans", Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2018; https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=194afc-48-b3be-e3bc-d1da-02771a223f73&groupId=252038

157 "Statement of the Holy See at the 27th Ministerial Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe", Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, 3rd December 2020; https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hWGNg5Y_SxxSn92OQo9KL_zopB4jVxo-/view

158 Ibid.

159 "Two kinds of persecution", Pope Francis, Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, 12th April 2016; http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2016/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20160412_two-kinds-of-persecution.html (accessed 25th January 2021).

160 "Celebrating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights", Archbishop Paul Gallagher, Intervention of the Secretary for Relations with States at the Council of Europe for the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, 10th September 2018; https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/09/11/180911d.html (accessed 1st March 2021).

161 "Joint declaration against assisted suicide presented to Pope Francis", by Carol Glatz, The Catholic Register, 3rd November 2019; https://www.catholicregister.org/item/30612-joint-declaration-against-assisted-suicide-presented-to-pope-francis (accessed 3rd March 2021).

162 "President Biden Has Promised to Pass the Equality Act—Here's How That Threatens Your Freedoms", Alliance Defending Freedom, 18th February 2021; https://www.adflegal.org/blog/president-biden-has-promised-pass-equality-act-heres-how-threatens-your-freedoms (accessed 1st March 2021).

163 "Trinity Western University Community Covenant Agreement", Trinity Western University; https://www.twu.ca/sites/default/files/community_covenant_june_25_2019.pdf, (accessed 21st April 2020).

164 "Ontario Teachers' Perceptions of the Controversial Update to Sexual Health and Human Development", Canadian Journal of Education, Canadian Society for the Study of Education, 2019; file:///C:/Users/kink560/AppData/Local/Temp/3527-Article%20Text-14239-1-10-20190324.pdf

165 "Scotland: Church leaders urge withdrawal of controversial section of Hate Crime Bill to allow 'adequate consideration'", Independent Catholic News, 12th February 2021; https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/41533 (accessed 1st March 2021).

166 Archbishop Paul Gallagher, Intervention of the Secretary for Relations with States at the 25th Ministerial Council of the OSCE in Milan, 7th December 2018; https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/12/07/181207d.html (accessed 1st March 2021).

167 "Latin America and the Caribbean Population", Worldometer; https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/latin-america-and-the-caribbean-population

168 "Religion affiliation in Latin America as of 2018, by type", Statista, November 2018; https://www.statista.com/statistics/996386/latin-america-religion-affiliation-share-type/

169 "Christians in Latin America are numerous, but still vulnerable", CRUX, 31st December 2015; https://cruxnow.com/faith/2015/12/christians-in-latin-america-are-numerous-but-still-vulnerable/

170 Predominantly, but not exclusively, the Catholic Church.

171 "Iglesia católica denuncia amenazas del CJNG contra sacerdotes," televisa.news, 24th April 2020; https://noticieros.televisa.com/ultimas-noticias/amenazas-cjng-sacerdotes-iglesia-catolica-chiapas/

172 "Feministas pintan y atacan iglesia en Colombia durante marcha del 8M", ACI Prensa, 9th March 2020; https://www.aciprensa.com/noticias/feministas-pintan-y-atacan-iglesia-en-colombia-durante-marcha-del-8m-54264 (accessed 7th March 2021).

173 "Marcha de mujeres termina con daños a la catedral de Hermosillo", Proyecto Puente, 9th March 2020; https://proyectopuente.com.mx/2020/03/09/marcha-de-mujeres-termina-con-danos-a-catedral-de-hermosillo-y-palacios-de-gobierno-municipal-y-del-estado/ (accessed 7th March 2021).

174 "It's time to start solving Latin America's migration crisis with creative housing solutions", by Luis Triveno and Olivia Nielsen, World Bank Blogs, 4th February 2020; https://blogs.worldbank.org/sustainablecities/its-time-start-solving-latin-americas-migration-crisis-creative-housing-solutions

175 "Comunidades haitianas forman sus propias iglesias y los pastores podrían crear una nueva asociación", by Pamela Gutiérrez, El Mercurio, 7th January 2019; http://www.economiaynegocios.cl/noticias/noticias.asp?id=536167 (accessed 28th October 2020).

176 "Seminario 2020: Los desafíos de la libertad religiosa en el sistema interamericano de Derechos Humanos", by Dr. Carmen Asiaín, Libertad religiosa en el Sistema Interamericano: Uruguay, 24th September 2020; https://www.facebook.com/JuanPabloIIFamilia/videos/384698952560490 (accessed 10th October 2020).

177 "Two churches set on fire in Chile", UCANEWS, Updated 19th October 2020; https://www.ucanews.com/news/two-churches-set-on-fire-in-chile/89936#

178 "Amid tumult over constitution, Chile watches two churches burn", CRUX, 19th October 2020; https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-americas/2020/10/amid-tumult-over-constitution-chile-watches-two-churches-burn/

179 "Al menos un millón de personas protestan en Santiago contra Piñera y la desigualdad social", El Pais, 25th October 2019; https://www.elpais.com.uy/mundo/personas-protestan-santiago-chile-medio-estallido-social.html

180 "Chile President Pinera declares emergency as capital rocked by riots", Reuters, 19th October 2019; https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-chile-protests-metro/chile-president-pinera-declares-emergency-as-capital-rocked-by-riots-idUKKBN1WY03I?edition-redirect

181 "CIDH culmina visita in loco a Chile y presenta sus observaciones y recomendaciones preliminares," Organización de los Estados Americanos, 31st January 2020; https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2020/018.asp (accessed 28th October 2020).

182 "Valiosos vitrales, pinturas y una torre destruida: Los graves daños a las iglesias incendiadas ayer", Tercera PM, 19th October 2020; https://www.latercera.com/la-tercera-pm/noticia/valiosos-vitrales-pinturas-y-una-torre-destruida-los-graves-danos-a-las-iglesias-incendiadas-ayer/NRQNVSLWNFB4RFKSN-ZZ6V5A4YU/ (accessed 3rd March 2021).

183 "Uno de los detenidos por incendio a iglesia en Chile es un funcionario de la Armada, reconoce la institución", El Comercio/Agencia EFE, 19th October 2020; https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/iglesias-incendio-chile-protestas-armada.html (accessed 3rd March 2021).

184 "La policía se ve sobrepasada en Chile", Deutsche Welle, 19th October 2020; https://www.dw.com/es/la-polic%C3%ADa-se-ve-sobrepasada-en-chile/a-55352719 (accessed 3rd March 2021).

185 Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See, 8th February 2021; http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/february/documents/papa-francesco_20210208_corpo-diplomatico.html

186 "Extremist Groups Stepping up Operations during the Covid-19 Outbreak in Sub-Saharan Africa", Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1st May 2020; https://www.csis.org/analysis/extremist-groups-stepping-operations-during-covid-19-outbreak-sub-saharan-africa

187 Ibid.

188 "How Is Boko Haram Responding to Covid-19?", by Audu Bulama Bukarti, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 20th May 2020; https://institute.global/policy/how-boko-haram-responding-covid-19 (accessed 30th January 2021).

189 "Corona als 'Strafe Gottes für dekadenten Westen'", by Johannes Dieterich, Der Standard, 16th April 2020; https://www.derstandard.de/story/2000116913040/corona-als-strafe-gottes -fuer-dekadenten-westen (accessed 30th January 2021); "ISIS tells its followers to show no mercy and launch attacks during coronavirus crisis amid fears counter-terror efforts will be weakened by the outbreak", by Alice Cachia, Daily Mail, 2nd April 2020; https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8180683/ISIS-tells-followers-no-mercy-launch-attacks-coronavirus-crisis.html?ito=social-twitter_mailonline (accessed 30th January 2021).

190 "Mali, der Terror im Sahel und Covid-19. Das neue Bundeswehr-Mandat für die Beteiligung an MINUSMA", by Wolf Kinzel, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 27th April 2020; https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2020A27/ (accessed 30th January 2021).

191 "Burkina Faso: Entire towns and villages emptied or cut off - not because of COVID-19, but because of terrorism", ACN International, 8th May 2020; https://acninternational.org/burkina-faso-entire-towns-and-villages-emptied-or-cut-off-not-because-of-covid-19-but-because-of-terrorism/ (accessed 30th January 2021).

192 "How China's Technocracy Uses the Pandemic to Suppress Religion", by Heather Zeiger, Mind Matters News, 18th October 2020; https://mindmatters.ai/2020/10/how-chinas-technocracy-uses-the-pandemic-to-suppress-religion/ (accessed 30th January 2021).

193 "Israel predicts rise in anti-Semitism, as virus-related hate is spread online", The Times of Israel, 24th January 2021; https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-predicts-rise-in-anti-semitism-as-virus-related-hate-is-spread-online/ (accessed 30th January 2021).

194 "U.S. envoy calls out COVID-19 related harassment of minorities in India", by Sriram Lakshman, The Hindu, 15th May 2020; https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/us-envoy-calls-out-harassment-of-minorities-in-india-over-covid-19/article31591566.ece (accessed 30th January 2021).

195 "Hebei, Christians labelled 'spreaders'. The return of Nero", by Shan Ren Shen Fu, AsiaNews, 8th January 2021; http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Hebei,-Christians-labelled-%E2%80%98spreaders%E2%80%99.-The-return-of-Nero-52016.html (accessed 30th January 2021).

196 "Niger: Coronavirus pandemic - Is there a danger of renewed anti-Christian riots, as happened after the 'Charlie-Hebdo' incident?", ACN International, 5th May 2020; https://acninternational.org/niger-coronavirus-pandemic-is-there-a-danger-of-renewed-anti-christian-riots-as-happened-after-the-charlie-hebdo-incident/ (accessed 30th January 2021).

197 "Attacks on Turkish Churches as Some Blame Christians for COVID-19", Missions Box, 26th June 2020; https://missionsbox.org/press-releases/turkish-churches-attacked-as-christians-are-blamed-for-covid-19/ (accessed 30th January 2021).

198 "Oppression of Egyptian Christians worsens during COVID-19 pandemic", by Kevin Zeller, Mission Network News, 29th September 2020; https://www.mnnonline.org/news/oppression-of-egyptian-christians-worsens-during-covid-19/ (accessed 30th January 2021).

199 "ACN reaches out to Pakistan's Christians hit by Covid-19 crisis", by Robin Gomes, Vatican News, 17th May 2020; https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2020-05/pakistan-covid19-lockdown-christians-discrimination-aid-acn.html (accessed 30th January 2021).

200 "Cameroon Muslims Join Christians in Christmas Prayer for Peace", by Moki Edwin Kindzeka, VOA News, 25th December 2020; https://www.voanews.com/africa/cameroon-muslims-join-christians-christmas-prayer-peace (accessed 30th January 2021).

201 "Humanity and harmony in the time of Covid-19", by Stephan Uttom/Rock Rozario, UCA News, 17th July 2020; https://www.ucanews.com/news/humanity-and-harmony-in-the-time-of-covid-19/88809 (accessed 30th January 2021).

202 Office of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, Monthly Archives June 2020, 11th June 2020; http://www.religioustrack.com/2020/06/ (accessed 30th January 2021).

203 "Cuba #Coronavirus: Gobierno concede espacio radial y televisivo a la Iglesia", by Alina Tufani, Vatican News, 1st April 2020; https://www.vaticannews.va/es/iglesia/news/2020-04/cuba-coronavirus-gobierno-concede-espacio-radial-tele-e-iglesia.html (accessed 30 th January 2021).

204 "Supreme Court says Nevada can impose tighter virus limits on churches than casinos", by Richard Wolf, USA Today, 24th July 2020; https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/07/24/supreme-court-nevada-covid-rules-can-favor-casinos-over-churches/5454128002/ (accessed 30th January 2021).

205 "El arzobispado de Barcelona denunciará a la Generalitat por limitar a 10 personas el funeral por las víctimas del coronavirus", by José Beltrán, Vida Nueva, 26th July 2020; https://www.vidanuevadigital.com/2020/07/26/el-arzobispado-de-barcelona-denunciara-a-la-generalitat-por-limitar-a-diez-personas-el-funeral-por-las-victimas-del-coronavirus/ (accessed 30th January 2021).

Aid to the Church in Need

ACN INTERNATIONAL

Aid to the Church in Need

A Catholic aid organization founded in 1947 by Fr. Werenfried van Straaten, to help war refugees. Since 2011 recognized as a papal foundation, ACN is dedicated to the service of Christians around the world, through information, prayer and action, wherever they are persecuted or oppressed or suffering material need. ACN supports every year an average of 6000 projects in 150 countries, thanks to private donations, as the foundation receives no public funding.

ACN International
Aid to the Church in Need

Bischof-Kindermann Str. 23
61462 Königstein
GERMANY

Tel. +49 6174 291-0
press@acn-intl.org

www.acninternational.org

PONTIFICAL
FOUNDATION

Our offices around the world:

Australia
info@acn-australia.org
www.acn-australia.org

Austria
info@acn-oesterreich.org
www.acn-oesterreich.org

Belgium
info@acn-belgique.org
www.acn-belgique.org

Brazil
info@acn-brasil.org
www.acn-brasil.org

Canada
info@acn-canada.org
www.acn-canada.org

Chile
info@acn-chile.org
www.acn-chile.org

Colombia
info@acn-colombia.org
www.acn-colombia.org

France
info@aed-france.org
www.aed-france.org

Germany
info@acn-deutschland.org
www.acn-deutschland.org

Ireland
info@acn-ireland.org
www.acn-ireland.org

Italy
info@acn-italia.org
www.acn-italia.org

Korea
info@acn-korea.org
www.acn-korea.org

Luxembourg
info@acn-luxemburg.org
www.acn-luxemburg.org

Malta
info@acn-malta.org
www.acn-malta.org

Mexico
info@acn-mexico.org
www.acn-mexico.org

Philippines
info@acn-philippines.org
www.acn-philippines.org

Poland
info@acn-polska.org
www.acn-polska.org

Portugal
info@acn-portugal.org
www.acn-portugal.org

Spain
info@acn-espana.org
www.acn-espana.org

Slovakia
info@acn-slovensko.org
www.acn-slovensko.org

Switzerland
info@acn-schweiz.org
www. acn-schweiz.org

The Netherlands
info@acn-nederland.org
www.acn-nederland.org

United States
info@acn-us.org
www.acn-us.org

United Kingdom
info@acn-uk.org
www.acn-uk.org