

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE WORLD *2016*

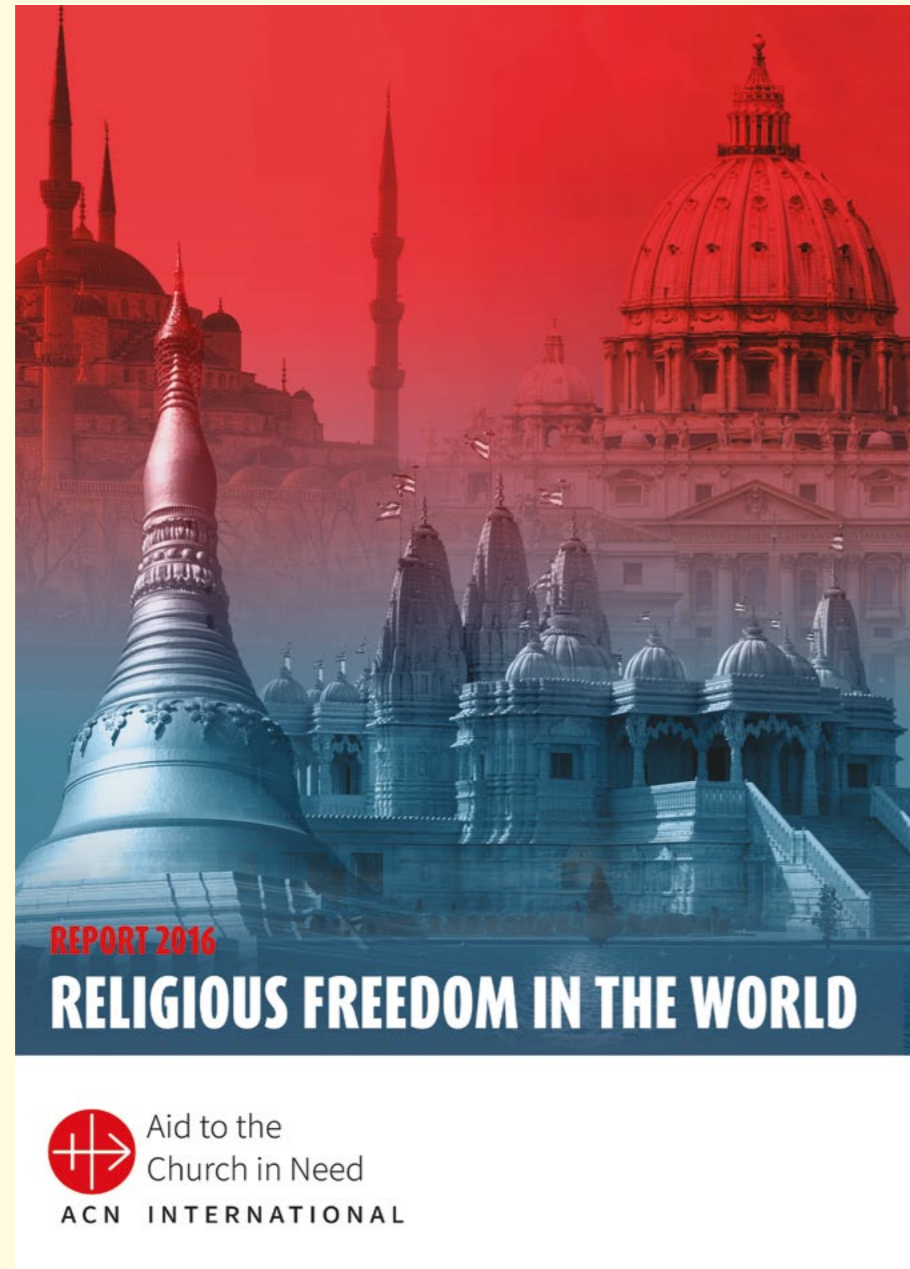
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Aid to the
Church in Need

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The 2016 report is the 13th edition of Aid to the Church in Need's Religious Freedom in the World report, produced every two years. The report assesses issues relating to religious freedom for all faith groups in 196 countries. It is published in English, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish.

Religious Freedom in the World Report

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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE WORLD

Report 2016
Executive Summary



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Cover image shows Egypt's Sheik Ahmed el-Tayyib, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque, meeting with Pope Francis for a private audience at the Vatican, on May 23, 2016. © L'Osservatore Romano

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FOREWORD

By Father Jacques Mourad

Syriac-Catholic priest Father Jacques Mourad was held by Daesh (ISIS) but escaped after five months

The importance of religious freedom is for me the difference between life and death.

I am a Catholic priest from Syria and I am devoted both to the survival of Christianity in this, our biblical heartland, and to the cause of building trust and understanding between Christians and Muslims.

On May 21, 2015, I was kidnapped in Syria by Daesh (ISIS) and was imprisoned in Raqqa, which they have made their capital.



For 83 days my life hung in the balance. I feared every day would be my last. On the eighth day, the wali [governor] of Raqqa came to my cell and invited me to consider my captivity a kind of spiritual retreat. These words had a great impact on me; I was astonished to see God was able to use even the heart of a high official of ISIS to deliver a spiritual message to me. This encounter marked a change in my inner life and helped me throughout my imprisonment. Later, I was moved back to my city, Qaryatayn, and from there was able to make it to freedom, thanks to the help of a Muslim friend from the region.

I could so easily have given in to anger and hatred for what happened to me. But God has shown me another way. All my life as a monk in Syria, I have sought to find connections with Muslims and to learn from one another.

I am convinced that over the past years, our commitment to help all the needy of the region of Qaryatayn – both Christians and Muslims – was the reason why 250 Christians and I were able to make it back to freedom.

Our world teeters on the brink of complete catastrophe as extremism threatens to wipe out all traces of diversity in society. But if religion teaches us anything it is the value of the human person, the need to respect each other as a gift from God.

So, surely, it must be possible both to have a passionate faith in one's religious beliefs as well as to respect the right of others to follow their conscience, to live out their own response to the love of God who made us all.

I am profoundly grateful to Aid to the Church in Need, the charity that continues to give so much emergency and pastoral help to our suffering people, for its commitment to the cause of religious liberty. That commitment has borne fruit in this 2016 *Religious Freedom in the World* report.

If we are to break the cycle of violence threatening to engulf our world, we need to replace war with peace. In this day and age more than ever, it is time to cast aside religious hatred and personal interests and learn to love one another as our faiths call us to do.

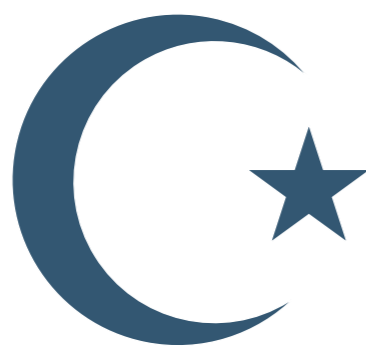
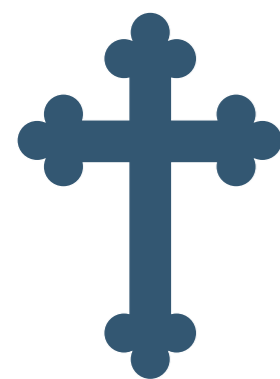
AT-A-GLANCE FINDINGS

Period under review: June 2014 to June 2016

1. This *Religious Freedom in the World* report finds that within the period under review religious liberty has declined in 11 – nearly half – of the 23 worst-offending countries. In seven other countries in this category, the problems were already so bad they could hardly get any worse. Our analysis also shows that, of the 38 countries with significant religious freedom violations, 55 percent remained stable regarding religious freedom and in eight percent – namely Bhutan, Egypt and Qatar – the situation improved.
 - a) Including co-religionists, moderates and those of different traditions;
 - b) Cruel treatment of victims;
 - c) Use of the latest social media, notably to recruit followers and to intimidate opponents by parading extreme violence;
 - d) Global impact – enabled by affiliate extremist groups and well-resourced support networks.
2. The report confounds the popular view that governments are mostly to blame for persecution. Non-state actors (that is, fundamentalist or militant organizations) are responsible for persecution in 12 of the 23 worst-offending countries.
3. The period under review has seen the emergence of a new phenomenon of religiously motivated violence which can be described as Islamist hyper-extremism, a process of heightened radicalization, unprecedented in its violent expression. Its characteristics are:
 - a) Extremist creed and a radical system of law and government;
 - b) Systematic attempts to annihilate or drive out all groups who do not conform to its outlook,

This new phenomenon has had a toxic impact on religious liberty around the world:

- a) Since mid-2014, violent Islamist attacks have taken place in one in five countries around the world – from Sweden to Australia and including 17 African nations;
- b) In parts of the Middle East, including Syria and Iraq, this hyper-extremism is eliminating all forms of religious diversity and is threatening to do so in parts of Africa and the Asian sub-continent. The intention is to replace pluralism with a religious mono-culture;
- c) Islamist extremism and hyper-extremism, observed in countries including Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria, have been a key driver in the sudden explosion of



4. There has been an upsurge of anti-Semitic attacks, notably in parts of Europe.
5. Mainstream Islamic groups are now beginning to counter the hyper-extremist phenomenon through public pronouncements and other initiatives through which they condemn the violence and those behind it.
 - d) In Central Asia, hyper-extremist violence is being used by authoritarian regimes as a pretext for a disproportionate crackdown on religious minorities, curtailing civil liberties of all kinds, including religious freedom;
 - e) In the West, this hyper-extremism is at risk of destabilizing the socio-religious fabric, with countries sporadically targeted by fanatics and under pressure to receive unprecedented numbers of refugees mostly of a different faith to the indigenous communities. Manifest ripple effects include the rise of right-wing and populist groups; restrictions on free movement, discrimination and violence against minority faiths and a decline of social cohesion, including in state schools.
6. In countries such as India, Pakistan and Burma, where one particular religion is identified with the nation-state, steps have been taken to defend the rights of that faith as opposed to the rights of individual believers. This has resulted in more stringent religious freedom restrictions on minority faith groups, increasing obstacles for conversion and the imposition of greater sanctions for blasphemy.
7. In the worst-offending countries, including North Korea and Eritrea, the ongoing penalty for religious expression is the complete denial of rights and liberties – such as long-term incarceration without fair trial, rape and murder.
8. There has been a renewed crackdown on religious groups that refuse to follow the party line under authoritarian regimes such as China and Turkmenistan. For example, in China more than 2,000 churches have had their crosses demolished in Zhejiang and nearby provinces.
9. By defining a new phenomenon of Islamist hyper-extremism, the report supports widespread claims that, in targeting Christians, Yazidis, Mandaeans and other minorities, Daesh (ISIS) and other fundamentalist groups are in breach of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

MAIN FINDINGS

By John Pontifex, Editor-in-Chief

They showed us videos of beheadings, killings and ISIS battles. [My instructor] said:

'You have to kill kuffars [unbelievers] even if they are your fathers and brothers, because they belong to the wrong religion and they don't worship God.'

This is an excerpt from a Yazidi boy's account of what happened to him when he was captured by Daesh (ISIS) aged 12 and trained for jihad in Syria. It is one of 45 interviews with survivors, religious leaders, journalists and others describing atrocities committed by the Islamist terror organization which form the basis of a landmark report issued in June 2016 by the United Nations Human Rights Council.¹ Citing evidence to show that an ongoing genocide has been taking place against Yazidis, the 40-page report makes clear that Daesh has sought to "destroy" Yazidis since 2014 and that religious hatred was a core motivation. This point is underlined in the **case study opposite**, which tells the story of teenage Yazidi girl Ekhlās, who describes how the militants killed her father and brother for their faith. And she herself watched helplessly as Yazidi women were repeatedly raped, including a girl of nine who was so badly sexually abused that she died.

Ekhlās's experience, and that of so many others like her, demonstrates the importance of religious freedom as a core human right. Increasing media coverage of violence perpetrated in the name of religion – be it by Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al Shabaab in Kenya or the Taliban in Afghanistan – reflects a growing recognition about how for too long religious liberty has been "an orphaned right."² Aided by the work of political activists and NGOs, a tipping point has been reached concerning public awareness about religiously motivated crimes and oppression, prompting a fresh debate about the place of religion in society. **The frequency and intensity of atrocities against Yazidis, Christians, Baha'is, Jews and Ahmaddiyya Muslims is on the rise, and is reflected in the volume of reporting on extremist violence against religious minorities.**

In the face of such crimes, it is arguably more important than ever to arrive at a clear and workable definition of religious freedom and its ramifications for government and the judiciary. This report acknowledges the core tenets of religious liberty as contained in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948:

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

The focus of this *Religious Freedom in the World* report is concerned with state and non-state actors (militant or fundamentalist organizations) who restrict and deny religious expression, be it in public or in private, and who do so without due respect for others or for the rule of law.

Examining the two-year period up to June 2016, this *Religious Freedom in the World* 2016 report assesses the religious situation of every country in the world. In total, 196 nations were examined with a special focus in each case on the place of religious freedom in constitutional and other statutory documents, incidents of note and finally a projection of likely trends. Consideration was given to recognized religious groups regardless of their numerical size or perceived influence in any given country. Each report was then evaluated, with a view to creating a table of countries where there are significant violations of religious freedom. In contrast to the 2014 *Religious Freedom in the World* report which categorized every country in the world, **the table on pages 32-35 and the corresponding map on pages 30-31** focus on 38 countries where violations against religious freedom go beyond comparatively mild forms of intolerance to represent a fundamental breach of human rights.

The countries where these grave violations occur have been placed into two categories – 'Discrimination' and

CASE STUDY IRAQ

A Yazidi teenager, raped by Daesh (ISIS), addresses MPs

April 2016: A teenage Yazidi girl called Ekhlās, from northern Iraq, gave personal testimony to MPs about violence and other atrocities carried out by Daesh (ISIS). Ekhlās was among many Yazidis seized by the Islamist extremists from their homes in Sinjar. Her father and brother were killed in front of her. She and every other girl in her community over eight years of age were kidnapped, imprisoned and raped.

Speaking to a select group of Members of Parliament in Westminster, London, Ekhlās described how she saw her friends raped and heard their screams. She reported knowing a nine-year-old girl who was raped so many times that she died. Ekhlās spoke of seeing a two-year-old boy being killed in front of his mother. Ekhlās was only able to escape the prison during a bombardment of the area around it.

The teenager addressed the MPs the day before the UK House of Commons debated a motion on the recognition of genocide by Daesh against Yazidis, Christians and other minorities. The motion also called on the British government to refer the issue to the United Nations Security Council to bring those carrying out the crimes to justice.

During the backbench debate on April 20, 2016, Fiona Bruce MP gave details of Ekhlās's account and echoed the teenager's plea. The MP quoted Ekhlās's words: "Listen to me, help the girls, help those in captivity; I am pleading with you, let us come together and call this what it is: genocide."

"This is about human dignity. You have a responsibility. ISIS is committing genocide because they are trying to wipe us out."

The motion was passed by 278 to 0. MPs have urged the British government to call on the UN Security Council to refer the crimes committed by Daesh to the International Criminal Court.

Sources: Hansard, Vol. 608, April 20, 2016; Aid to the Church in Need (UK) News, April 21, 2016

¹ United Nations Human Rights Council, "They came to destroy": *ISIS Crimes against the Yazidis*, June 15, 2016, p.18 http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/ColSyria/A_HRC_32_CRP.2_en.pdf

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

³ United Nations, "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights" <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>

BACKGROUND

Is Daesh (ISIS) committing genocide?

By Dr. John Newton

On February 3, 2016 the European Parliament became the first legislative body to recognize the killing and persecution of religious minorities in the Middle East as genocide. The debate came less than a week after the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe passed a resolution on the same issue. The European Parliament's motion, which was passed unanimously, noted that since 2014 about 5,000 Yazidis have been killed, and at least 2,000 enslaved. It also cited evidence that when Daesh (ISIS) advanced on the Nineveh Plains in summer 2014 more than 150,000 displaced Christians fled, of whom many were forced to hand over their belongings to the violent Islamists. In addition, the motion referred to the mass kidnapping of more than 220 Christians in northern Syria in February 2015. In making its decision, the European Parliament turned to the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide:

In the [UN] Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The UN convention – article 2 of which is quoted above – provides the benchmark against which the crime of genocide is determined. Despite popular notions of genocide only being about “the deliberate killing of a large group of people, especially those of a particular nation or ethnic group” (as the Oxford English Dictionary describes it), the UN definition in fact takes a broader view. And article 3 of the convention makes clear that not only genocide, but conspiracy to commit genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide, and complicity in genocide are also punishable crimes.

Following the US House of Representatives voting 383-0 in favor of recognizing the genocide on 14th March, US Secretary of State John Kerry declared: “In my judgment, Daesh is responsible for genocide against groups in areas under its control including Yazidis, Christians and Shi’a Muslims.”

On April 20, the UK House of Commons unanimously recognized the crimes committed by Daesh as genocide. Conservative MP Fiona Bruce, who introduced the motion, organized a meeting the evening before at which Christians and Yazidis described the terrors being faced (**See case study about attacks on Yazidis on page 8**). Mrs Bruce related how a speaker from Syria described “Christians being killed and tortured, and of children being beheaded in front of their parents. She showed us recent film footage of herself talking with mothers—more than one—who had seen their own children crucified. Another woman had seen 250 children put through a dough kneader and burnt in an oven. The oldest was four years old.” Pointing to mounting evidence in support of the genocide claims, John Pontifex, Editor-in-Chief of the *Religious Freedom in the World* report, told the meeting of fresh reports from Aid to the Church in Need colleagues who had seen desecrated churches in Syria. He spoke of Daesh attacks on a church in Qaryatayn where “bones from ancient graves were strewn among the rubble. All the Christian symbols – crosses, icons and altars – had been destroyed.” Evidence like this led to Australia's House of Representatives declaring crimes committed against Assyrian Christians as genocide on May 2, 2016.

However, there remains disagreement over the issue in some quarters. The majority of Liberal MPs voted down a motion in the Canadian Parliament in June 2016. But the same month a UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria concluded that Daesh “has committed the crime of genocide as well as multiple crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Yazidis.” The UN report *They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes against the Yazidis* also described how Daesh was seeking to eliminate the group through a combination of murder, sexual slavery, gang rape, torture and humiliation. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, chair of the commission said: “Genocide has occurred and is ongoing... ISIS has subjected every Yazidi woman, child or man that it has captured to the most horrific of atrocities.”

‘Persecution’. (**For a full definition of both categories, visit www.religion-freedom-report.org**). In these cases of discrimination and persecution, the victims typically have little or no recourse to law.

In essence, ‘discrimination’ ordinarily involves an institutionalization of intolerance, normally carried out by the state or its representatives at different levels, with legal and other regulations entrenching mistreatment of individual groups, including faith-based communities. Examples would include no access to – or severe restrictions regarding – jobs, elected office, funding, the media, education or religious instruction, prohibition of worship outside churches, mosques, etc, and restrictions on evangelization including anti-conversion legislation.

Whereas the ‘discrimination’ category usually identifies the State as the oppressor, the ‘persecution’ alternative also includes terrorist groups and non-state actors, as the focus here is on active campaigns of violence and subjugation, including murder, false detention, and forced exile as well as damage to and expropriation of property. Indeed, the state itself can often be a victim, as seen for example in Nigeria. From this definition, it is clear that ‘persecution’ is a worse-offending category, as the religious freedom violations in question are more serious, and by their nature also tend to include forms of discrimination as a by-product. Of course, many, if not most, of the countries not categorized as falling under ‘persecution’ or ‘discrimination’ are subject to forms of religious freedom violations. Indeed, many of them can be described as countries in which one or more religious groups experience intolerance. However, based on the evidence provided in the country reports reviewed, nearly all of these violations were still illegal according to the authorities, with the victim having recourse to law. None of these violations – many of them by definition low level – was considered serious enough to warrant description as significant or extreme, the two watch-words in our system of categorization. On this basis, for the purposes of this report they are listed as ‘unclassified.’

Of the 196 countries reported on, 38 showed unmistakable evidence of significant religious freedom violations. Within this group, 23 were placed in the top level ‘persecution’ category, and the remaining 15 in the ‘discrimination’ category. Since the last *Religious Freedom in the World* report was released two years ago, the situation regarding religious freedom had clearly worsened in the case of 14 countries (37 percent), with 21 (55 percent) showing no signs of obvious change. Only in three countries (eight percent) had the situation clearly improved – Bhutan, Egypt and Qatar. Of the ‘persecution’ countries, 11 – just under half – were assessed as situations where access to religious freedom was in marked decline. Among the ‘persecution’ countries showing no discernible

signs of improvement, seven were characterized by extreme scenarios (Afghanistan, Iraq, (northern) Nigeria, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and Syria) where the situation was already so bad it could scarcely get any worse. This means there is a growing gulf between an expanding group of countries with extreme levels of religious freedom abuse and those where the problems are less flagrant, for example Algeria, Azerbaijan and Vietnam.

A virulent and extremist form of Islam emerged as the number-one threat to religious freedom and was revealed as the primary cause of ‘persecution’ in many of the worst cases. Of the 11 countries shown to have worsening persecution, nine were under extreme pressure from Islamist violence (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kenya, Libya, Niger, Pakistan, Sudan, Tanzania and Yemen). Of the 11 countries with consistent levels of persecution, seven faced huge problems relating to Islamism – both non-state actor aggression and state-sponsored oppression (Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Palestinian Territories, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and Syria).

Assessing underlying themes relating to this, it emerged that a massive upsurge in violence and instability linked to Islamism had played a significant role in creating an explosion in the number of refugees. A core finding of the report is the global threat posed by religious hyper-extremism, which to Western eyes appears to be a death cult with a genocidal intent. This new phenomenon of hyper-extremism is characterized by the radical methods by which it seeks its objectives, which go beyond suicide bomb attacks – namely mass-killing including horrific forms of execution, rape, extreme torture such as burning people alive, crucifixions and throwing people off tall buildings. One hallmark of hyper-extremism is the evident glorying in the brutality inflicted on its victims, which is paraded on social media.

As witnessed by the evidence of Yazidis reported above, the violence perpetrated by militant groups such as Daesh was indicative of a complete denial of religious freedom. The atrocities committed by these aggressive Islamist groups in Syria, Iraq, Libya and by their affiliates elsewhere have arguably been one of the greatest setbacks for religious freedom since the Second World War. What has properly been described as genocide, according to a UN convention which uses that term,⁴ is a phenomenon of religious extremism almost beyond compare (**see background piece on genocide opposite**). The aggressive acts in question include widespread killings, mental and physical torture, detention, enslavement and in some extreme cases “the imposition of measures to prevent children from being born.”⁵ In addition, there has been land grabbing, destruction of religious buildings and all traces of religious and cultural heritage and the subjugation of people under a system which insults almost every tenet of human rights.

⁴ Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted by Resolution (III) A of the United Nations General Assembly on December 9, 1948 <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/genocide.html>

⁵ Op. cit., p. 1.

CASE STUDY KENYA

148 dead in attack on university

April 2015: According to reports, 148 people were killed in an assault by Al-Shabaab militants on Garissa University College in north-eastern Kenya. In the deadliest attack to date by the terrorist group, witnesses claimed heavily armed extremists singled out Christians and shot them before firing indiscriminately on students.

Four of the Islamist gunmen were eventually surrounded in a dormitory; they were killed when their suicide vests detonated as security forces opened fire. A fifth was later arrested.

According to the official Twitter account of Kenya's National Disaster Operation Center and Kenyan media reports, 587 people managed to escape and 79 people were injured.

The gunmen launched their attack, also taking hostages, during early morning prayer services.

One witness, who was on campus during the assault, said gunmen burst into a Christian service and took hostages. He said they then "proceeded to the hostels, shooting anybody they came across except their fellows, the Muslims."

The militants reportedly separated students by religion, allowing Muslims to leave and keeping an unknown number of Christians hostage.

The siege ended after almost 15 hours, with four gunmen killed by the Kenyan special forces. In the wake of the violence, Interior Minister Joseph Nkaissery told Kenyan media: "The operation has ended successfully. Four terrorists have been killed."

The town of Garissa was an obvious target. Situated just 90 miles (145 km) from the border with Somalia, the campus serving mainly Christian students was an easy target in a predominantly Muslim area.

The lack of security on campus had been a major concern before the attacks in Garissa, and in November 2014 students had held a protest to highlight the issue. Following the terror attack, students and parents questioned why the Garissa campus was guarded by just two security agents, especially after recent, widely circulated intelligence warnings of an impending attack on a university. A nearby teacher training college in Garissa sent students home just two days before the attack owing to these concerns.

Sources: *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 6, 2015; *Algemeiner*, July 7, 2015; *Guardian* (website), November 23, 2015; *Newstime Africa* (website), April 2, 2015



The aftermath of the tragedy: Paramedics assist a student injured during the attack by Al-Shabaab gunmen on Garissa University College on April 2, 2015.

CASE STUDY UK

Ahmadiyya Muslim shopkeeper killed after “Happy Easter” greeting

March 2016: An Ahmadiyya Muslim shopkeeper in Glasgow was murdered in a religiously motivated attack. The 40-year-old was brutally stabbed and found collapsed on the road outside his shop, Shah’s Newsagents and Convenience Store, in Shawlands, Glasgow. He was declared dead on arrival at Queen Elizabeth University Hospital. A Muslim man was arrested in connection with his death, which police described as “religiously motivated.”

Initial news reports connected the murder with a message on Facebook in which Mr. Shah wished people a happy Easter. In his last post to the social networking site on March 24, Asad Shah wrote: “Good Friday and very happy Easter especially to my beloved Christian nation! Let’s Follow The Real Footstep Of Beloved Holy JESUS CHRIST (PBUH)* And Get The Real Success In Both Worlds.”

But after Tanveer Ahmed admitted to the killing and was charged with murder, a statement was released in which he stated: “Asad Shah disrespected the messenger of Islam the Prophet Mohammad peace be upon him.” Mr Ahmed, 32, linked his decision to kill the shopkeeper to social media posts and videos in which Mr. Shah claimed to have received prophetic revelations from God. The statement concluded “If I had not done this, others would and there would have been more killing and violence in the world.”

Mr. Shah was originally from Pakistan. The constitution of Pakistan prohibits Ahmadiyya from referring to themselves as Muslims. A silent vigil was also held outside his shop and was attended by hundreds of people, including Nicola Sturgeon, the First Minister of Scotland.

Glasgow’s Ahmadiyya Muslim leaders issued a statement, which read: “This is deeply disturbing and sets an extremely dangerous precedent, as it justifies the killing of anyone – Muslim or non-Muslim – whom an extremist considers to have shown disrespect to Islam... It is the firm belief of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community that all people should be able to peacefully practice their faith without fear of persecution or violence.”

*Peace Be Upon Him

Sources: *National Post* (Canada), March 29, 2016; *Daily Telegraph*, April 6, 2016; BBC News (online), April 7, 2016; Asad Shah’s Facebook Page (https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1669750269966472&id=100007945443146&pnref=story)



Away from the Middle East and parts of North Africa where hyper-extremism is clearly well developed, this report confirms indications of the spread of militant ideology, with extremist movements pledging affiliation to Daesh from as far away as Bangladesh and Nigeria, the Philippines, Indonesia and Pakistan. The breakout of Islamist violence in sub-Saharan Africa was especially visible in Kenya, in multiple attacks along the border with Somalia and notably at Garissa University where extremist group Al-Shabaab killed 148 people, targeting Christian students who were separated from their Muslim classmates.⁶ (See case study on the **Kenya university attack on pages 12 and 13**). The impact of extremism was felt not least in Glasgow, Scotland where shopkeeper Asad Shah, an Ahmadiyya Muslim, was murdered over Easter 2016. Media reports immediately linked the crime to Mr. Shah’s Facebook comments wishing “Good Friday and very happy Easter especially to my beloved Christian nation.”⁷ However, Tanveer Ahmed, the man accused of the murder, later issued a statement saying the motive was Mr. Shah’s alleged claims of prophetic visions.⁸ (See case study on **Mr Shah’s murder opposite**). The destabilizing impact that this pandemic of extremism has had on the place of religion in civil society cannot be over-estimated and has been exacerbated by terrorist incidents in Brussels, Paris and Istanbul to name but three examples. **A core finding of the report, the threat of militant Islam, could be felt in a significant proportion of the 196 countries reviewed: a little over 20 percent of countries – at least one in five – experienced one or more incidents of violent activity, inspired by extremist Islamic ideology, including at least five countries in Western Europe and 17 African nations.**⁹

One key objective of Islamist hyper-extremism is to trigger the complete elimination of religious communities from their ancient homelands, a process of induced mass-exodus. As a result of the migration, this phenomenon of hyper-extremism has been a main

driver in the fundamental de-stabilization of the socio-religious fabric of entire continents, absorbing – or under pressure to absorb – millions of people.

According to UN figures, there were an estimated 65.3 million refugees by the end of 2015 – which is the highest figure on record, and a rise of more than nine percent compared to the previous year. At the time of writing, the most recent figures equate to, on average, 24 people being displaced from their homes every minute of every day during 2015.¹⁰ Although economic factors played a major part, the countries which largely accounted for the increase in refugees were centers of religious extremism – Syria (Daesh), Afghanistan (Taliban) and Somalia (Al Shabaab).¹¹ There were many people who were fleeing specifically because of religious persecution but for the most part people fled because of the violence, breakdown of government and acute poverty of which religious extremism has been cause, symptom or consequence or all three simultaneously. To this extent, extremism has been a key factor in the migrant explosion. Religious extremism has played a dominant role in the creation of terror states which are being emptied of people.

Evidence reveals that in the Middle East and parts of Africa and the Asian sub-continent, people of all faiths were leaving, but disproportionate levels of migration among Christians, Yazidis and other minority groups were raising the possibility – or even probability – of their extinction from within a region. A particularly dramatic example is Aleppo, the Syrian city at the epicenter of the civil war. The overall population declined from 2.3 million¹² to 1.6 million¹³ (30 percent) and yet leading project partners from the region told Aid to the Church in Need that in the same period the number of Christians had declined by 80 percent to barely 35,000.¹⁴ The decline shows signs of accelerating, with reports last year warning of the disappearance of Christianity from Iraq within five years¹⁵ and Yazidi groups warning of

⁶ Robyn Dixon, “Christian students at Kenya’s Garissa University foretold massacre”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 6, 2016 <http://www.smh.com.au/world/christian-students-at-kenyas-garissa-university-foretold-massacre-20150406-1mf11b.html#ixzz4B50wXQxC>

⁷ Auslan Cramb, “Man from Bradford admits killing Glasgow shopkeeper Asad Shah”, *Daily Telegraph*, April 6, 2016 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/04/06/man-from-bradford-admits-killing-glasgow-shopkeeper-asad-shah/>

⁸ Andrew Learmonth, “Man accused of the murder of Glasgow shopkeeper Asad Shah says he was killed for disrespecting the Prophet Mohammad”, *The National*, April 7, 2016 <http://www.thenational.scot/news/man-accused-of-the-murder-of-glasgow-shopkeeper-asad-shah-says-he-was-killed-for-disrespecting-the-prophet-muhammad.16042>

⁹ The review was constrained by two key factors: firstly, there had to be concrete evidence of violence, such as suicide bombs or arson attacks, as opposed to unproven reports or murmurings of extremist activity; secondly, it had to be clear that the perpetrators of the violence had acted in the name of extremist Islam, as opposed to random acts of terrorism or acts with unknown motivations.

¹⁰ Peter Yeung, “Refugee crisis: Record 65 million people forced to flee homes, UN says”, *Independent*, June 20, 2016 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugee-crisis-migrants-world-day-un-a7090986.html>

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² BBC News, “Profile: Aleppo, Syria’s second city” <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18957096www.worldpopulationreview.com>

¹³ John Pontifex, “Does Christianity have a future in Syria?”, *The Tablet*, March 10, 2016 <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/8128/does-christianity-have-a-future-in-syria-john-pontifex-visits-homs-five-years-on-to-find-out>

¹⁴ John Pontifex and John Newton, *Persecuted and Forgotten? A Report on Christians oppressed for their Faith 2013-15 Executive Summary*, p. 5.

¹⁵ Francis Phillips, “A significant study of the world’s disappearing communities”, *Catholic Herald*, January 20, 2015 <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2015/01/20/a-significant-study-of-the-worlds-disappearing-communities/>

BACKGROUND

Sunni and Shi'a Islam compared and contrasted

By Roberto Simona

Out of 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide, the Sunni embody nearly 85 percent of the Muslim population and the Shi'a around 12 percent. Saudi Arabia and Iran are champions of these two primary streams of Islam respectively.

Shi'a and Sunni share common core beliefs. They both proclaim the unity of One God, both proclaim Mohammed as the last prophet and both revere the Qur'an as their sacred book. There are essential differences, however. Understanding these is crucial to making sense of contemporary Islam.

After the death of Mohammed in 632 four caliphs – Abu Bakr, Omar, Othman and finally Mohammed's cousin Ali – succeeded Mohammed. The Islamic community – “the Umma” – embraced them as the “rightly guided” caliphs, but the election of Ali ignited a civil war, or “fitna,” among Muslims over right governance of the Umma that has divided them ever since.

The word Shi'a means partisan, from the Arabic “Shi'at Ali”, or partisans of Ali. Shi'a Muslims believe that leadership of the Islamic community properly belonged to Mohammed's cousin Ali, and must remain in the family of the Prophet with Ali's descendants. For the Sunni, the successor of Mohammed could be selected among all the Muslims belonging to the Umma, and his task consists in guaranteeing the unity of the community, but not to be a spiritual guide. For the Shi'a however, the successor has a spiritual and political charge. The assassination of Ali in 661 cemented this most important schism in Islam. The Sunni and Shi'a have since gone through successive periods of war to establish their confessional and territorial hegemony.

The 20th and 21st centuries have seen the rise of radical Sunni movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia, and al-Qaeda and Daesh (ISIS) in Syria and other parts of the Muslim world. This Sunni extremism has been countered by the ascent of the revolutionary Shi'a regime of the Ayatollah in Iran, which has indisputably exacerbated hostility between the Shi'a and Sunni.

With the recent lifting of international sanctions, Iran has become an even more serious challenger of the Sunni monarchies in the Middle East. Furthermore, many Sunni Arab countries have significant Shi'a populations that destabilize the region. This is particularly the case in Syria, where the Alawite Shi'a Assad regime is locked in a vicious civil war with its Sunni majority population, while the Assad government and Iran are the two main supporters of Shi'a Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The ongoing conflict in Iraq also has a confessional character, where the post-Saddam government is dominated by Shi'a, and the Shi'a Arab majority is locked in intermittent conflict with Sunni tribes which often support Daesh. In Bahrain, 70 percent of the population is Shi'a, while in Saudi Arabia there are two million Houthi Shi'a, all of whom are restive. In Yemen, on the southern Saudi border, a civil war has broken out between Sunni tribes and the Houthis.

Finally, the presence of huge oil reserves in Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf emirates gives all these internecine tensions international import, directly involving outside powers such as Russia, the European Union and the United States.

wipe-out in the region.¹⁶ This trend is so significant that **formerly multi-religious communities, notably in parts of the Middle East, are now becoming increasingly mono-religious environments. The rise of Islamism also represented a threat to diversity within the Muslim community, with widespread reports of moderates – including from within the same branch of Islam – being forced out in their thousands for refusing to accept Daesh and other hardline groups.**¹⁷ In fact, the threat to Shi'a Muslims from Sunni extremists was probably greater numerically speaking than for people of other faiths.¹⁸ An examination of the changing face of Islam globally suggested that in part the shift towards extremism and intolerance was fuelled by increasing factionalism and rivalry between Sunni and Shi'a Muslim communities. Until recently, such varying forms of Islam were largely able to co-exist but now violence has grown to such a devastating degree that it is dispelling all notions of religious diversity from countries and regions which until recently were noted for their plurality and levels of tolerance. The Sunni-Shi'a conflict has drawn in the world powers on competing sides of the religious divide, increasing the fall-out.¹⁹ **(See backgrounder piece on Shi'a and Sunni Islam opposite).**

With the influx of unprecedented numbers of refugees, Europe is not only faced by a humanitarian crisis of vast proportions but one with distinct repercussions as regards the religious make-up of society. Until recently Europe had been almost entirely dominated by one faith and one value system – namely Christianity, and the basic principles of equality, freedom and solidarity. A key aspect of the crisis of migration to the West was that it highlighted the increasing contrast between the countries receiving refugees, where religion for so long has been in decline, and a widespread growth in religious fervor in many other parts of the world. This applies specifically to historically Christian Europe, the USA, Canada and Australia.

With Germany absorbing 1.1 million migrants in 2015²⁰ from the Middle East, Asia and Africa, reports highlighted Muslim radicals among them pressuring fellow refugees of Christian faith to convert to Islam.²¹ The fact that the refugees were mostly Muslim escalated an already tense public debate about the place of Islam in Western society,

especially after violent attacks, including those on New Year's Eve revelers, which prompted criticism of the German government's immigration policy.²² There were reports of far-right organizations in the West responding to the threat of Islamist violence, in some cases by invoking Christianity to legitimize intolerant or potentially threatening behavior. In the UK, the Britain First group carried out “Christian patrols” in “Muslim-occupied east London” in response to the November 2015 Paris attacks.²³

Headlines about the threat of extremist and violent Islam to ‘Christian’ Europe could not entirely be dismissed as xenophobia when it emerged that a small section of the new community were radicalized. And those who did not fall into that category nonetheless felt ill at ease in a society so unlike their own, where religion plays little or no part in daily life but remains anchored in the national identity. The rise of the internet meant that religious extremism and violence were increasingly perceived as being a phenomenon without geographical borders, as was witnessed by the numbers of young Muslims, apparently radicalized online and signing up for jihad to travel to Syria to join Daesh. **In the age of new media, religious extremism has become a toxic binding agent between disenfranchised individuals and global networks of terror whose reach is elusive to the police and intelligence services.**

The report linked Islamist violence to a notable rise in violence and intolerance towards Jewish groups. The trend came to the world's attention with the January 2015 attacks on a kosher restaurant in Paris two days after the killings at the offices of the Charlie Hebdo satirical magazine. **(See case study on the attacks at the kosher restaurant on pages 18 and 19).** The B'nai Brith Canada's League for Human Rights received 1,627 incident reports in 2014 – a 21.7 percent increase over the 1,274 incidents in 2013.²⁴ In Australia, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry recorded 190 anti-Semitic incidents in the 18 months leading up to September 30, 2015. The ECAJ suggested that the attacks were related to Muslim anger over ongoing violence and instability in the Palestinian Territories, especially the Gaza strip. The rise of anti-Semitic incidents was also linked to right-wing neo-Nazi movements. In Sweden, examples of attacks included vandalism of a Jewish man's car in Stockholm

¹⁶ Francis Phillips, “A significant study of the world's disappearing communities”, Catholic Herald, January 20, 2015 <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2015/01/20/a-significant-study-of-the-worlds-disappearing-communities/>

¹⁷ ISIS launches offensive against Sunni Muslims in Iraq, June 26, 2016 <http://muslimnews.co.uk/newspaper/world-news/isis-launches-offensive-against-sunni-muslims-in-iraq/>

¹⁸ “ISIS killed more Muslims than people of other religions”, EENADU India, November 18, 2015, <http://www.eenaduindia.com/News/International/2015/11/18140154/ISIS-killed-more-Muslims-than-people-of-other-religions.vpf>

¹⁹ “Sunni v Shias, here and there”, *The Economist*, June 29, 2013 <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21580162-sectarian-rivalry-reverberating-region-making-many-muslims>

²⁰ “Cologne attacks: New Year's Eve crime cases top 500”, BBC News, January 11, 2016 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35277249>

²¹ Tom Heneghan, “In Germany, concerns about Muslim refugees harassing Christians”, *Crux*, June 7, 2016 <https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2016/06/07/germany-concerns-muslim-refugees-harassing-christians/>

²² “Cologne attacks: New Year's Eve crime cases top 500”, op. cit.

²³ https://www.facebook.com/OfficialBritainFirst/info/?entry_point=page_nav_about_item&tab=page_info

²⁴ <http://www.bnaibrithaudit.ca/>



CASE STUDY FRANCE

Hostages killed during attack on kosher grocery store in Paris

January 2015: Acting in co-ordination with the killers who attacked the offices of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo on January 7, two other jihadists staged an attack aimed at the Jewish community two days later. Four people were killed and another four critically injured in an anti-Semitic attack on a kosher supermarket in Paris, which ended when police stormed the building.

Those killed included the son of a well-known Rabbi, a retiree, a teacher and a shop worker.

Yoav Hattab, 22, Philippe Braham, 45, Yohan Cohen, 22 and François-Michel Saada, 64, were murdered by jihadist Amedy Coulibaly during the hostage situation at Hyper Cacher on January 9, 2015.

Amedy Coulibaly, 32, and his partner, Hayat Boumeddiene, aged 26, were already sought in connection with a fatal shooting of a policewoman, who was killed in south Paris the previous day.

Coulibaly was killed during the raid, which was triggered by the third terror attack in the French capital in as many days, but Boumeddiene was able to escape police forces.

France has the largest Jewish community in Europe, yet there has been a significant increase in anti-Semitic attacks in recent years.

Following these events, other violent attacks occurred for which Daesh (ISIS) has claimed responsibility. In November 2015 130 were killed and 370 injured in Paris, and in July 2016 85 people died and 307 were injured when a truck ploughed into crowds in Nice.

Sources: BBC News (online), November 27, 2015; *Le Monde*, February 17, 2015

CASE STUDY BURMA (MYANMAR)

Buddhist Monk leads anti-Muslim campaign

July 2014: Anti-Muslim riots in Mandalay, Burma's second largest city, left two people dead and about a dozen wounded. The dead were identified as a Buddhist and a Muslim. The fighting in Mandalay began on the evening of July 1, when hundreds of Buddhists attacked a Muslim-owned teashop in Chan Aye Thar Zan township, following allegations that the owner had raped a female Buddhist employee. The attacks left five people wounded and led to a second night of violence the following day.

Colonel Zaw Min Oo of the Mandalay Region Police Department told Radio Free Asia that about 40 monks and 450 lay people gathered in the streets with "sticks and knives." Witnesses reported seeing mobs of Buddhist protestors shouting anti-Muslim slogans and throwing bricks at Muslim homes.

U Wirathu (pictured), a 45-year-old Buddhist monk from Mandalay's Masoeyin Monastery, is considered by many to be stoking anti-Muslim attitudes in Burma. He gained notoriety for spreading anti-Islamic sentiments under his nationalist "969" campaign which encourages Burmese Buddhists to shun Muslim communities.

In 2003, he was sentenced to 25 years in prison for inciting religious hatred, but was released in January 2012. In October, less than a year after he was released from prison, he organized protests against the international organization of Islamic Cooperation's plan to open an office in the country.

Followers of the grassroots nationalist group, the "969" movement, believe the country, which is about 90 percent Buddhist, is under threat from what they claim is a dangerous, rapidly growing Muslim population.

Cardinal Charles Bo of Yangon (Rangoon), in his speech at the UN Human Rights Council in March 2016, urged the international community to encourage the government of Burma to uphold religious freedom. As a result of the violent events described, the government drafted the "Protection of Race and Religion Laws," which would eliminate the right to convert and to marry someone outside "their race and religion."

Sources: Radio Free Asia (website) July 2, 2014; Vice.Com (<http://www.vice.com/read/burmese-bin-laden-swears-hes-a-good-guy>) January 23, 2014; *Irawaddy*, April 2, 2013; Charles Cardinal Bo, "The Nation at Crossroads of Challenges and Opportunities," Geneva, March 15, 2016

in September 2014. All the windows were smashed and a laminated card with a swastika was placed under the windshield wiper. Rocks were thrown at several synagogues in Swedish cities, resulting in smashed windows.²⁵

Few, if any, religious groups were neither victims nor perpetrators of persecution. This report found that among Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu communities, a growing threat came from non-mainstream but vocal groups, many of them linking faith with patriotism to create a form of religious nationalism that looks on minorities as outcasts. In Burma, reports emerged that on July 1, 2014, 40 Buddhist monks and 450 lay people massed onto the streets in Chan Aye Thar, brandishing knives and sticks and laid siege to a Muslim tea shop.²⁶ (*See case study on anti-Muslim violence in Burma opposite*). In Israel, at a time of numerous religiously motivated attacks, the state's Catholic bishops made a formal complaint in December 2015 about Rabbi Benzi Gopstein. He made a statement on an ultra-Orthodox website, stating: "Christmas has no place in the Holy Land"²⁷ and calling for the destruction of all churches in Israel, adding: "Let us remove the vampires before they once again drink our blood."²⁸ In India, "the world's largest democracy," respect for minority rights has come under increasing threat from extremist Hindu groups. "Pro-Hinduisation" organizations are a source of major concern because they create a climate which leads Hindu extremists to physically attack religious minorities with relative impunity. Such a threat was demonstrated in September 2015 when Hindu extremists were reported to have brutally murdered Akhlaq Ahmed, a Muslim man who was accused of marking Eid by killing a cow and eating beef.²⁹

During the period under review, new and deeper problems emerged in some countries where one particular religion is identified with the nation-state. Governments and law makers have defended the rights of that faith as opposed to the rights of individual believers.³⁰ This is has been apparent in countries such as India, Pakistan and Burma. The UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion has

warned that governments which pass laws protecting religions from being offended risk damaging the prospects of religious liberty. The Special Rapporteur described the potential for increased segregation along religious or ethnic lines and a growing popular view that religious conversion represented a betrayal of ethnic or racial identity. **Evidence in this report suggests that countries that have adopted a State religion in recent decades show a growing tendency to develop "anti-blasphemy laws" which are open to misuse.** In Pakistan, the government's failure hitherto to alter the so-called Blasphemy Laws has met with mounting international criticism, especially as the courts have evidently come under pressure from populist groups determined to uphold the honor of Islam at all costs, arguably undermining an individual's right to fair trial. In July 2015, Pakistan's Supreme Court³¹ suspended the death sentence in the case of Christian woman Asia Bibi, who had been found guilty of blasphemy in local courts, notably the Lahore High Court.³² This prompted renewed concerns of bias in the country's legal system at the local level.³³

Examination of countries led by regimes with dictatorial or authoritarian tendencies showed that increased security and regulations infringing upon religious freedom were being justified by the threat of religious extremism. Countries including Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan³⁴ and others in Central Asia reacted to the threat by imposing new and tighter controls on religious freedom which were seen by their critics as indiscriminate, affecting not only extremist groups but Muslims of all traditions as well as people of other faiths. In Uzbekistan, a campaign of secularization prompted security forces in numerous cities to order Muslim women to remove their headscarves and men were told they would be fined for wearing a skullcap.³⁵ An Education Ministry edict banned people aged 18 and under from taking part in Friday prayers and fined their parents for non-compliance.³⁶

The data for countries with significant religious freedom violations produced for this report revealed important findings concerning the evolving impact of regimes with

²⁵ <http://kantorcenter.tau.ac.il/sites/default/files/Scandinavia%202014.pdf>

²⁶ "Anti-Muslim Riots Turn Deadly in Myanmar's Mandalay City", *Radio Free Asia*, July 2, 2014 <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/riot-07022014164236.html>

²⁷ "Israel: Bishops protest as Rabbi describes Christians as vampires", *Independent Catholic News*, December 23, 2015 <http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=29100>

²⁸ <http://en.lpj.org/2015/08/10/aochl-files-complaint-against-the-rabbi-gopstein/>

²⁹ "India's politics of beef shows its violent side," *UCAnews*, October 7, 2015 <http://www.ucanews.com/news/indias-politics-of-beef-shows-its-violent-side/74387>

³⁰ Heiner Bielefeldt, "Misperceptions of Freedom or Religion or Belief", *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 35 (2013), p. 45.

³¹ "Pakistan Supreme Court suspends Asia Bibi death sentence", *BBC News*, July 22, 2015 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-33617186>

³² Morgan Lee, "Asia Bibi's Death Sentence upheld by Lahore High Court", *Christianity Today*, October 17, 2014 <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2014/october/asia-bibis-death-sentence-upheld-by-lahore-high-court.html>

³³ "Pakistan Supreme Court suspends Asia Bibi death sentence", *op. cit.*

³⁴ "The country has recently made amendments to the law on religious freedom and fight against religious extremism, which ban people with religious education received abroad to implement Islamic rites and ceremonies in Azerbaijan." Nigar Orujova, "New religious university may appear in Azerbaijan", *Azernews*, December 8, 2015 <http://www.azernews.az/azerbaijan/90576.html>

³⁵ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, April 28, 2015 and June 14, 2015.

³⁶ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, September 24, 2015.



CASE STUDY CHINA

Symbols of faith torn down

May 2015: New rules introduced in Zhejiang province have led to the removal of symbols of faith in China. Authorities issued a draft proposal for building regulations stating the terms for color, size and location of crosses on places of worship and Church-owned buildings. According to the new directives, religious properties cannot exceed a height of 78 feet (24m) and crosses on steeples are forbidden. Instead, Christian symbols must be placed on the walls of the building but cannot exceed one-tenth of the building's length in height and must be of a color which will not stand out.

The new proposal comes in the midst of a campaign for demolition of crosses and churches which began in 2013 in Zhejiang, before spreading to the nearby provinces of Henan and Anhui. The government argued that buildings demolished during this campaign violated construction codes, though both Catholics and Protestants stressed that many of the properties were built with the permission of local officials. By March 2016 more than 2,000 churches and crosses had been destroyed.

The government in China has also made efforts to promote the process of 'sinicization', by which religions must increasingly assimilate Chinese culture and align with the core values of socialism. 'Sinicization' prioritizes loyalty to the state and to the Communist Party over religious beliefs, and aims to merge Christianity with Chinese characteristics.

Sources: UCA News, May 7, 2014; Aid to the Church in Need, *Persecuted and Forgotten?: A Report on Christians oppressed for their Faith 2013-16*.

dictatorial or authoritarian tendencies. Of the 22 countries placed in the 'persecution' category, six showed evidence of widespread and serious problems caused by authoritarian states. In two of the countries (China and Eritrea), the situation was clearly getting worse and, with regard to the other four (Burma, North Korea, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), the persecution was consistent with the 2012-14 period. In these cases, evidence showed the state re-asserting its control by targeting faith groups deemed a threat to 'order.' **An upsurge in arrests, legislation restricting religious freedom, state rhetoric against religious plurality and sporadic acts of government-inspired violence have put renewed pressure on faith groups in countries as diverse as China, Uzbekistan and the neighboring 'stans', and India, as well as in perennial high-level offenders, notably North Korea.** Evidence pointed to increasing signs that authoritarian states see religion as a force undermining loyalty to the state, a form of unwanted foreign influence coming in through the back door. In the case of Christianity, it is perceived as a Trojan Horse of Western imperialism.

In China there was a new trend to link religious minorities to groups inciting discord and disunity. The ongoing detention of bishops and other religious leaders seen as a threat to government control was combined with increasing intolerance of groups seen as outside the law. China's policy of "sinicization" by which religions are obliged to assimilate Chinese culture and root out "external influences," put increased pressure on faith groups to comply with greater state control. Failure to accept regulation had drastic consequences. Regulations introduced in May 2015 in Zhejiang specified the color, size and location of crosses and the height of religious buildings. It came in the middle of a campaign for the demolition of churches and crosses both in Zhejiang and nearby provinces, which began in 2013.³⁷ **(See case study on state-sponsored removal of Christian symbols from churches in China opposite).** By March 2016 it was reported that more than 2,000 churches and crosses had been demolished.³⁸ Pastor's wife Ding Cuimei was suffocated to death when she and her husband were buried alive after protesting over attempts to demolish their church. Both in 2014 and 2015, government efforts to rid China of "spiritual pollution" from religions including Christianity meant that "consumerist" aspects of Christmas

celebrations typical of the West were banned in certain cities – with a prohibition on Christmas parties, Christmas trees and greetings cards in schools and universities across several cities.³⁹ In Xinjiang region, civil servants, students and teachers were in June 2015 banned from fasting during Ramadan and earlier that year authorities in Shanxi Province began a crackdown on rural feudalism and superstition, primarily targeting fengshui masters and shamans.⁴⁰

The incarceration of supposedly suspect religious individuals and groups continued in China and worsened in Eritrea where 3,000 people were reportedly imprisoned on religious grounds.⁴¹

Religious prisoners are frequently sent to the most punitive prisons. North Korea still tops the global list of religious liberty violators to the extent that a UN investigation found that "there is an almost complete denial of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religions" imposed by a regime which "considers the spread of Christianity [to be] a particularly severe threat."⁴² Those caught in secret religious activities face imprisonment, torture and execution. In Burma, despite high-profile campaigns spotlighting the plight of Rohingya Muslims, they and other minority groups continued to suffer violence and state oppression. **Often referred to as the "most persecuted minority in the world," thousands of Rohingyas have been living in desperate conditions, concentrated in state-run camps without access to adequate health care or humanitarian assistance.**⁴³ Growing numbers are fleeing to Malaysia, Indonesia or Thailand, making an uncertain journey by boat on the open sea, only to find themselves "stateless" and unable to go back to their country of origin.

Tensions about the place of religion in the West pale in comparison to other parts of the world but here faith groups came under pressure from a process of increased secularisation. In the West issues surrounding faith have increasingly centred around the question of conscientious objection. In a secular society which treats religion as a private matter and choice as the foremost right, incident after incident showed the problems that arise when doctors, nurses, registrars and other public functionaries are threatened with job loss or court action if they follow their conscience by, for example, refusing to perform abortions or

³⁷ "China says religions are a threat to national security", UCAnews, May 7, 2014 <http://www.ucanews.com/news/china-says-religions-are-a-threat-to-national-security/70883>

³⁸ AsiaNews.it, May 20, 2014; AsiaNews.it, June 24, 2015; AsiaNews.it, July 24, 2015; China Aid, March 15, 2016.

³⁹ AsiaNews.it, January 14, 2016.

⁴⁰ AsiaNews.it, June 19, 2015.

⁴¹ John Pontifex and John Newton, *Persecuted and Forgotten, A Report on Christians oppressed for their Faith 2013-15, Executive Summary*, p. 23.

⁴² UN Report of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea Violations of the freedoms of thought, expression and religion (31) <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/CoIDPRK/Pages/ReportoftheCommissionofInquiryDPRK.aspx>

⁴³ "The Rohingyas: The most persecuted people on Earth?", *Economist*, June 13, 2015. <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21654124-myanmars-muslim-minority-have-been-attacked-impunity-stripped-vote-and-driven>

BACKGROUND

Religious freedom and economic prosperity

By Peter Sefton-Williams

An increasing body of research shows a close correlation between religious freedom and economic prosperity. This suggests that the more a government tries to restrict or control religious activity, the poorer and less developed that country is likely to be.

A key figure charting this link is Dr. Brian Grim, President of the Religious Freedom and Business Foundation. In a study from 2014 entitled “Is Religious Freedom Good for Business?” (co-authored with Greg Clark and Robert Edward Snyder), he found “a positive relationship between religious freedom and 10 of the 12 pillars of global competitiveness, as measured by the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Index.”

In another research paper, “The Price of Freedom” (Brian Grim & Roger Finke, Cambridge, 2011), Dr Grim backs the assertion by Harvard economist and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen that wherever religious freedom is found so too are other freedoms, including fewer instances of armed conflict; better health outcomes; better educational opportunities for women and higher levels of earned income for both women and men.

An example given by Dr. Grim of the association between religious freedom and human development is the contrast between Saudi Arabia and its near neighbor, the United Arab Emirates. He writes: “In the Emirates, where many faiths are legal, people have many ways to contribute to society both through religious associations as well as through other avenues. People tend to work hard and be involved in society.

“In Saudi Arabia, however, where all faiths but one are illegal, there is much less enthusiasm for work, and many people express no real desire to contribute to society outside of work. These experiences, reported by many in both countries, suggest a connection between the level of religious freedom in each and the economic life of the people in each.

“For instance, the 2007 per capita gross domestic product in US purchasing power parity dollars (GDP-PPP) in the Emirates is USD 55,200 nearly triple the per capita GDP-PPP in Saudi Arabia which is only USD 20,700.”

Another example he cites is China. During the Cultural Revolution all religious activity was forbidden. He writes: “From the early 1980’s China left those dismal years of complete religious repression behind. Since then, China’s economy has boomed.” While he says that the Chinese government continues to “forcefully restrict” religious groups, the contrast between the varied religious landscape in China today, and the sterile years of the Cultural Revolution, is stark. He concludes: “Some Chinese suggest that religious freedom’s further expansion can help the Chinese make even greater societal progress.”



CASE STUDY PAKISTAN

Inter-faith football match

November 2016: An initiative to tackle religious hatred in Pakistan by creating a football tournament for people of all faiths has proved so successful that it now draws more than 30 teams from across the country’s four provinces.

Started 15 years ago, the initiative was the brainchild of Catholic priest Father Emmanuel Parvez who holds the tournament in Khushpur, a mainly Christian village in Punjab.

He said: “Our aims are to create an atmosphere of peace and dialogue among the youth of various creeds and to foster brotherhood and tolerance in a society plagued by terrorism.”

Mohammed Shafiq, owner of the Sumundri Football Club, which has participated in the tournament, said: “I want to develop relations with Christian communities and this is a wonderful way to do it.”

Describing how football was a second-class sport in Pakistan and was mainly played by poorer people, Mr Shafiq said: “Father Emmanuel and I share a vision of raising the profile of football in Pakistan.”

Mr. Shafiq is responsible for Muslim-Christian relations on his local council.

Source: ACN project trip to Pakistan by John Pontifex (November 2015)

Football, faith and freedom in Pakistan: *Left to right:* Catholic Bishop Joseph Arshad of Faisalabad, Catholic priest Father Emmanuel Parvez, founder of the inter-faith football tournament, footballer Salim Bad and Sumundri Football Club owner, Mohammed Shafiq.

CASE STUDY MOROCCO

Muslim declaration seeks to protect religious minorities

January 2016: A three-day conference held in Marrakesh, Morocco, urged Muslim states to protect non-Muslim minorities from persecution. The meeting called on leaders to ensure religious freedom for all.

Muslim scholars from more than 120 countries and hundreds of religious leaders came together to publicly condemn Islamic extremists such as Daesh (ISIS) and other terrorist militia groups in an effort to encourage Islamic authorities to further develop relations with citizens regardless of religious identity.

The conference produced the so-called “Marrakesh Declaration,” a document which builds on the principles of the Charter of Medina, a constitution of the Muslim prophet that formed the basis of a multi-religious Islamic state in Medina.

Not bound by law, the declaration will be interpreted by each country individually. The document sets out the principles of “constitutional contractual citizenship,” such as freedom, solidarity and defence, as well as “justice and equality before the law.”

It also calls on educational institutions to protect their students from materials that could promote extremist views and acts of terrorism and urges “politicians and decision makers... to support all formulations and initiatives that aim to fortify relations and understanding among the various religious groups in the Muslim World”.

Sources: *Christianity Today*, January 28, 2016; *Morocco World News*, January 30, 2016

preside at civil partnerships. The overall effect was to push religion away from the public square especially in terms of employees’ rights. This is what the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion calls “the enforced privatization of religion.”⁴⁴ In the USA, the Dignity Health-Mercy Medical Center in Redding, California, a Catholic institution founded by the Sisters of Mercy, was taken to court by a coalition including the American Civil Liberties Union to force it to allow its facilities to be used to perform sterilizations.⁴⁵

Against that backdrop marked by apparently unrelenting gloom, were there any signs of hope?

Over the period under review, research emerged suggesting there were mutual benefits to be derived from promotion of business and religious freedom (*see background piece on religious freedom and economic prosperity on page 24*). Addressing academic, political and religious gatherings around the world, US-based Professor Brian J Grim of the Religious Freedom and Business Foundation has argued that promoting religious freedom within business would not only address a major social ill but also become an asset to economic recovery and growth.⁴⁶ His thesis also had a message for faith leaders and governments that oppression of religious minorities drives away possible investors able to offer much-needed jobs and opportunities. Similarly, promotion of economic opportunity can reduce unemployment and poverty which in themselves are the seed-bed of extremism and violence. Lack of freedom of religion also promotes the existence of second-class citizenry, depriving a society of crucial, and potentially valuable, contributions by individuals set aside because of their religious affiliation. The take-up of such ideas among governments, especially in countries marked by religious oppression, remains to be seen but nonetheless the widespread exposure of Professor Grim’s analysis provides hope for the future.

A second important area of engagement was the development of initiatives to bring people of different faiths together in scenarios likely to break down suspicion and hatred. Sport and employment opportunities that intentionally reach across faith boundaries have the potential for a similar effect, especially given the involvement of community leaders. One example stands out from Pakistan – a football tournament involving teams made up of both Muslims and Christians, organized with the

full cooperation of Muslim leaders and the Catholic Bishop of Faisalabad.⁴⁷ (*See case study on inter-faith football in Pakistan on page 24 and 25*).

Initiatives by the most senior leaders of the world’s religions to create opportunities for dialogue and greater understanding gave hope at a time of increasing concerns about the rise of faith-based intolerance and hatred. When Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Cairo’s Al-Azhar Mosque met at the Vatican in what was understood to be the first meeting between the leader of the Catholic Church and a foremost authority in Sunni Islam, it gave rise to hope that religious leaders could work together to counter violence and extremism.⁴⁸ (*See case study on Pope Francis’ meeting with the Grand Imam on pages 28 and 29*). Such hopes were further encouraged by increasing indications of cooperation within Muslim and other religious groups determined to stand apart from co-religionists with extremist views. They also strove to defend the role of minorities in countries increasingly dominated by one religion to the detriment of other faith communities. One important example of this came in January 2016 when Muslim scholars from more than 120 countries signed a declaration in Marrakech, Morocco, urging Muslim States to protect minorities of other faiths from persecution.⁴⁹ (*See case study on the Marrakech declaration opposite*).

As can be seen, tumultuous world events during the period under review have had a deep and far-reaching impact regarding religious freedom in many countries around the world. Forces of change were dominated by the rise of Islamist hyper-extremism which has destroyed religious freedom in parts of the Middle East and is threatening to do the same in other parts of the world. Increased awareness about the threat to religious minorities has been reflected in the actions of politicians, parties, and even some Parliaments who are doing more than ever before to speak up and act on behalf of persecuted individuals and communities. One ray of hope is the willingness of some Islamic leaders to mount a coordinated response to this toxic creed. Activities of the security services will never be able to challenge the ideology behind this threat. Only religious leaders themselves can take on that challenge. **One over-riding conclusion is the need to find new and coordinated ways so that religious plurality can return to those parts of the world where minority groups are being “threatened in their very existence.”**⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Bielefeldt, p. 49.

⁴⁵ See USA country report – *Religious Freedom in the World* report 2016.

⁴⁶ “Seminar highlights links between religious freedom and economic prosperity”, UK Baha’i News, March 7, 2016 <http://news.bahai.org.uk/2016/03/07/seminar-highlights-links-between-religious-freedom-and-economic-prosperity/>

⁴⁷ John Pontifex, “Pakistan – Persecution and faith in the future”, Aid to the Church in Need (UK), p. 2.

⁴⁸ *The Tablet*, May 28, 2016, p. 25.

⁴⁹ Karla Dieseldorff, “Marrakech Conference Urges Muslim Countries to Protect Non-Muslim Minorities”, Morocco World News, January 30, 2016 <http://www.morocroworldnews.com/2016/01/178607/marrakech-conference-urges-muslim-countries-to-protect-non-muslim-minorities/>

⁵⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, “Message to Aid to the Church in Need”, quoted on <http://www.acnuk.org/middle-east-pope-benedict-xvi-s-top-priority?handle=pope-middle-east.html>

CASE STUDY VATICAN

Pope receives leading Imam in historic meeting

May 2016: Pope Francis and Ahmed el-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of Cairo's Al-Azhar Mosque met at the Vatican in what representatives of both faiths described as an historic encounter. The Holy Father embraced his guest in a conciliatory gesture which was seen as marking renewed relations between the Catholic Church and Islam.

The first meeting between the leader of the Catholic Church and the recognized authority of Sunni Islam highlighted a significant improvement in relations between the two faiths since Francis took office in 2013. The Grand Imam had previously suspended talks in 2011 after Pope Benedict XVI demanded more protection for Christians following attacks in Alexandria. The Al-Azhar imam accused the then leader of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics of interfering in Egyptian internal affairs.

The symbolic visit of the Grand Imam, which lasted for 30 minutes, came at a time of increased Islamic extremist attacks on Christians.

During his three-year papacy, Pope Francis has made improved relations with Islam a priority. During his visit to Africa in November 2015, the Pope reminded local leaders in attendance that "Interfaith dialogue is not option, it is a necessity".

Sources: *The Tablet*, May 28, 2016; *Catholic News Agency*, November 26, 2015



Countries with Significant Violations of Religious Freedom

This map indicates those countries where there is a significant level of discrimination or persecution according to the analysis in the 2016 *Religious Freedom in the World* report. For more details, please see the table on the following pages.

Nature of persecution/discrimination

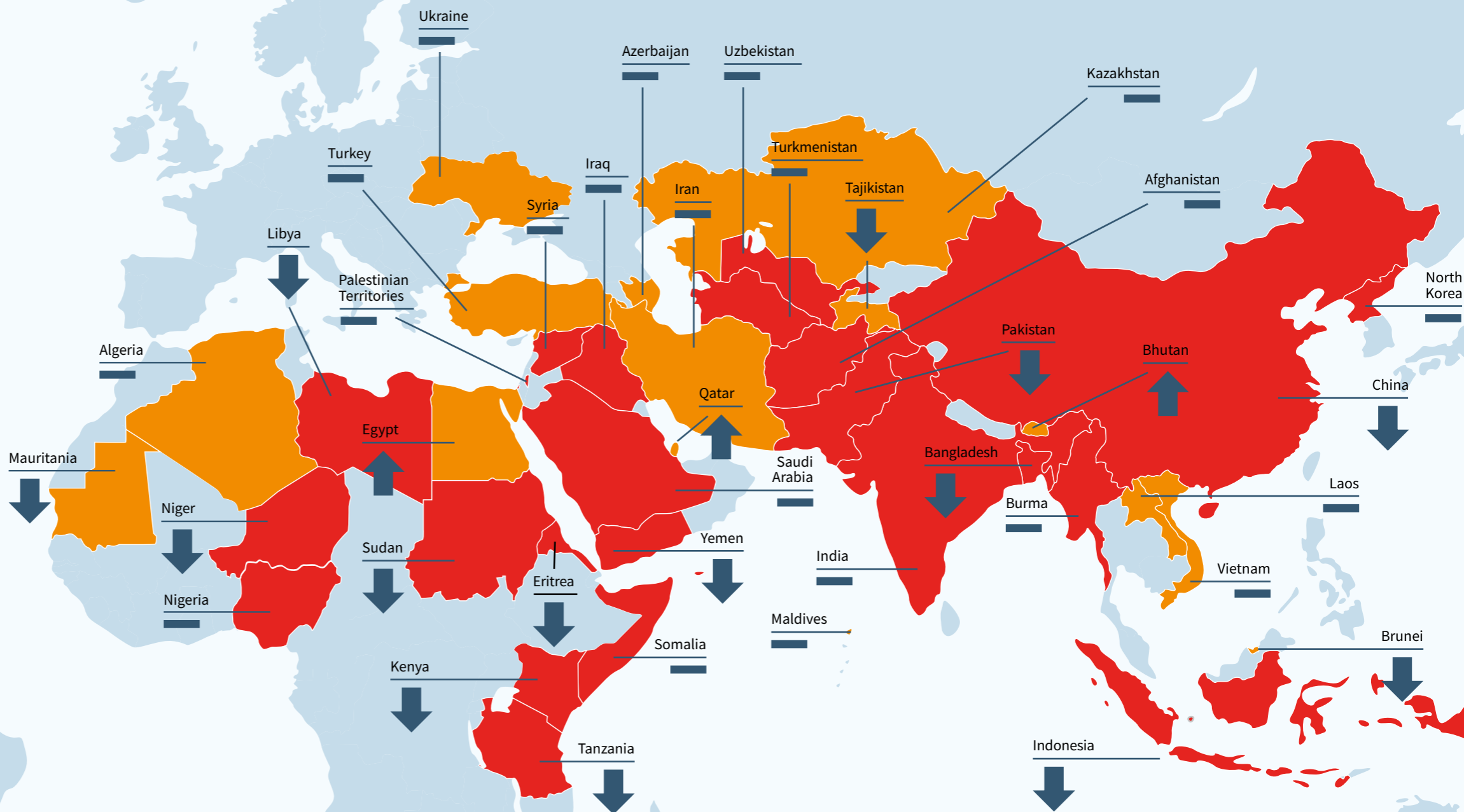
■ = Persecution

■ = Discrimination

↑ = Situation improved

▬ = Situation unchanged

↓ = Situation worsened



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Countries with Significant Violations of Religious Freedom

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This table indicates those countries where there is a significant level of discrimination or persecution according to the analysis in the *Religious Freedom in the World* report. For more details, please see www.religion-freedom-report.org

Country	Category	Compared to June 2014	Predominant violator	Key indicators
Afghanistan	●		Non-state (local)	De facto ban on conversions from Islam - threat of severe punishment; growing influence of Taliban with strict Shari'a enforcement
Algeria	●		State, Non-state (local)	Threat of fines and five years in jail for non-Muslims caught proselytising; non-Muslims not observing Ramadan condemned and arrested in numerous towns
Azerbaijan	●		State	Many mosques closed down since 2008; state refusal to grant registration to Jehovah's Witnesses who are frequently raided by police; Orthodox priests denied access to the country; in December 2015 President approves laws restricting religious freedom
Bangladesh	●		Non-state (International), Non-state (local)	48 murders within 18 months - minority faith groups are the major target; increased rate of fatal attacks on Christians, Hindus and others - with clergy and converts killed and others receiving death threats. Bishops link rise of attacks to a March 2016 High Court decision confirming Islam as the state religion
Bhutan	●		State	Non-Buddhists banned from public worship and proselytism but recent launch of Christian student movement in the capital's cause for hope
Brunei	●		State	Phased introduction of Shari'a announced summer 2014; Faith groups including Baha'i banned; five-year prison term for proselytism by non-Muslims; government offers water pumps and other incentives to converts to Shafi'i Islam
Burma	●		State	66 churches destroyed by the army since 2011; "Systematic" persecution of Rohingya Muslims
China	●		State	National Security Law (July 2015) issued guidelines for religions to follow; new rules enforce compulsory atheism for Party members; more than 2,000 churches and crosses demolished
Egypt	●		State, Non-state (local)	State clampdown on attacks on Copts and other minorities but prohibition of worship outside churches remains; sporadic Islamist attacks on Christians and others - targeting of religious buildings, kidnapping and murder

Country	Category	Compared to June 2014	Predominant violator	Key indicators
Eritrea	●		State	85 Jehovah's Witnesses jailed due to their refusal to bear arms and many have been refused government jobs; at least 3,000 Christians are among religious believers imprisoned for their belief
India	●		Non-state (local)	7,000 people estimated to have suffered persecution in 2014; March 2015, 70-yr-old Sister raped in what police described as a burglary despite desecration; Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not delivered on promises to protect religious minorities
Indonesia	●		State, Non-state (International), Non-state (local)	More than 1,000 churches closed since 2006; 147 "discriminative laws and policies" regarding religions; since 2003, 150 arrested or detained under "blasphemy laws"; Remita Sinaga, 60, became first non-Muslim to receive 30 lashes for selling alcohol; churches burnt
Iran	●		State	As of February 2016, 90 Christians were either in prison, detained, or awaiting trial because of their beliefs; non-Muslims excluded from senior political or military positions and may not serve in judiciary, security services, etc.
Iraq	●		Non-state (International), Non-state (local)	Genocide, killing, torture, rape, abduction and destruction of places of worship by Daesh (ISIS) and other extremists; massive exodus of Christian, Yazidi, Mandeian and other persecuted minority communities from their ancient homelands
Kazakhstan	●		State	Ban on non-registered religious activities including distribution of religious literature outside places of worship; restrictions tightened in response to threat from Islamist violence
Kenya	●		Non-state (International)	Garissa University massacre killed 148; Attack on shopping mall killed 67; Kenyan citizens do not feel protected by security forces; both Christians and Muslims feel consequences of religious violence
Laos	●		State	Decree 92 regulates all religious matters, imposing restrictions on the propagation of religions, and state control over religious publications, Buddhism excepted

Country	Category	Compared to June 2014	Predominant violator	Key indicators
Libya	●	↓	Non-state (International), Non-state (local)	Beheading of 21 Copts by Daesh; ban on proselytism and rising number of killings of religious minorities; due to a lack of a unified government, extremist organizations including Daesh are expanding
Maldives	●	—	State	Constitution states non-Muslim cannot be citizen of Maldives; government claims the country is 100% Muslim despite presence of up to 100,000 non-Muslims; non-Muslim proselytism forbidden; non-Islamic literature cannot be brought into the country
Mauritania	●	↓	Non-state (International), Non-state (local)	Growing influence of extremist Islamic groups opposed to non-Muslim groups; ban of distribution of Non-Islamic literature; non-Muslim groups unable to register and have to meet secretly
Niger	●	↓	Non-state (International)	Islamic fundamentalism, especially Boko Haram, coming from neighboring countries; in January 2015 10 people killed and 80% of Niger's churches (72 in total) attacked and burned in violence in response to <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> magazine furore
Nigeria	●	—	Non-state (International)	2.5 million people are displaced by Boko Haram violence ; 219 of the 279 girls kidnapped in 2014 are still missing two years on; however religious leaders publicly support gestures of peaceful cohabitation and conflict resolution
North Korea	●	—	State	Christianity is regarded as a tool of foreign intervention of the West; 60-year-old Rev'd Hyeon Lim was sentenced to hard labor for life, on charges of subversion and using religion to overthrow the state
Palestinian Territories	●	—	Non-state (International), Non-state (local)	Christian community affected by war between Israel and Hamas. In May 2016 Palestinian president stated the protection of Christians in Palestine was "a duty."
Pakistan	●	↓	Non-state (International), Non-state (local)	78 people died on Easter Sunday 2016, in a suicide attack in Lahore; in March 2015 attacks on two churches in Lahore also killed 17
Qatar	●	↑	State	Non-Abrahamic faiths cannot establish places of worship; eight registered Christian denominations are allowed to publicly worship at a government-provided area
Saudi Arabia	●	—	State	Succession of King Salman has not changed situation for minority groups; authorities shut down more than 10,000 Twitter accounts in 2014 over religious violations
Somalia	●	—	Non-state (International)	Al-Shabaab continues to attack non-Muslims; no official, non-Muslim places of worship

Country	Category	Compared to June 2014	Predominant violator	Key indicators
Sudan	●	↓	State	Ministers of religion have been arrested; Church land has been seized; penalties for apostasy and blasphemy have been made stricter by recent amendments
Syria	●	—	State, Non-state (International), Non-state (local)	Daesh attacks on religious minorities widely recognized as genocide; Daesh seized Assyrian Christian villages on the Khabur river, thousands fled, around 220 Christians were seized
Tajikistan	●	↓	State	Spring 2015, Muslim men required to shave off beards; in April 2015 state bans Muslims aged under 35 from going on Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca; women and under-18s banned from attending mosques; 2016 law banning giving babies Islamic names
Tanzania	●	↓	Non-state (International), Non-state (local)	Rising number of attacks on churches but moderate Muslims opposing the Islamists
Turkey	●	—	State, Non-state (International)	Repressive restrictions on construction of churches and other religious buildings; Daesh and other Islamist groups have claimed responsibility for violent attacks
Turkmenistan	●	—	State	Private religious instruction is forbidden; religious literature is subjected to censorship; religious believers continue to suffer frequent raids, fines, imprisonments and confiscation of religious materials
Ukraine	●	—	State	Authorities must be notified of public religious gathering at least 10 days in advance; activities of foreign-based religious groups restricted; harsher Russian laws concerning religious freedom were implemented in Crimea following annexation
Uzbekistan	●	—	State	Protestant groups have been raided for violating laws on religious meetings, been fined for possessing Bibles and other religious literature; UNHRC called on Uzbekistan to "guarantee a genuine liberty of religion and belief."
Vietnam	●	—	State	Severe restrictions on evangelization; local authorities in the high central plateaux tightly restrict religious practice; issues of threats to seize property belonging to religious groups and the recovery of properties previously confiscated
Yemen	●	↓	Non-state (International), Non-state (local)	Daesh claimed responsibility for "a series" of attacks on Shi'a mosques; March 2016: four Mother Teresa Sisters among 16 killed in Islamist attack , priest kidnapped; Israel covertly evacuated 19 Jews amid escalating violence and discrimination

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